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Für: Town and Country.

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Mann, Klaus

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Adresse: Maria-Theresia-Straße 23, 81675 München

E-Mail: monacensia.literaturarchiv@muenchen.de

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people. Soon enough they found out that Breton's obstreperous devices were, in their own way, as trite and arbitrary as the formulas of any academic school. The capital of France has witnessed and survived innumerable patterns of pretentious eccentricity. So here was another.

It is the pattern of absurdity, the convention of ugliness, the cliché of paranoia—"thought's dictation, all exercise of reason and every esthetic or moral preoccupation being absent," to quote Breton's own definition of surrealism. He might define it, more truthfully, as a cocktail of Freud and the Apocalypse, Marxism and music hall, practical joke and commercial enterprise.

As for their "practical jokes," they may have seemed mighty bold but actually were just insipid or brutal. There was hardly much of a risk when Breton counterfeited an interview with André Gide, the greatest writer of France. ("Tout ce que me fait dire André Breton dans sa fausse interview, ressemble beaucoup plus à lui qu'à moi-même...") with these words Gide opens a revealing diary note, under the date of January, 1925. Nor did it require much pluck to parody a sickly poet, namely Jean Cocteau, whom the surrealists had picked out as one of their pet aversions. When his old mother was dangerously ill, he received a telephone message to the effect that "Madame votre mère est morte." All in tears, Jean rushed to his mother's house, only to be greeted by the guffaw of the relentless gang.

Their anti-religious cracks and exhibitions involved no serious danger: the Church was in no position to protect the symbols of Christian faith from their obnoxious insults. How easy it is to be daring in a liberal country! How cheap!—to curse capitalism when one is pampered and kept by the rich. The surrealists, while clamoring for the revolution, accepted substantial help from Charles de Noailles, the wealthy son of one of France's oldest, most aristocratic families. An American society woman, Mrs. Garesse Crosby, whose late father-in-law was connected with the House of Morgan, financed the Black Sun Press, where Max Ernst's picture book, *La Femme Cent Têtes*, and many another surrealist item were published. And what was the "revenge" those playful rebels took on their supporters? They gave a party for their elegant friends and decorated the reception room as a lavatory.

Dali, with his peppy instinct for publicity, was the first one to sense that you cannot get away with this type of gag—not in the long run and in a milieu already fed up with such antics. In search of new hunting grounds, he discovered the United States. His American career, started under the auspices of the Julien Levy Gallery, developed on a large scale and in a remarkable tempo. The dashing young man from Catalonia proved a master in amusing scandal and curiosity. Whatever he does, it is the talk of the town. His experiments in window-dressing and window-smashing, his Dream Pavilions and fantastic films, his ballets, *Bacchante* and *Labyrinth*, both produced at the Metropolitan Opera House, and his jewelry—"designed in collaboration with the Duke de Verdura"—all his poses and paradoxes somehow catch the imagination of a naively responsive public. At the same time, however, his solid craftsmanship is widely recognized and highly paid for by the most exacting collectors. From a financial point of view, Salvador Dali is one of the most successful artists of our epoch.

Dali's inordinate popularity in the United States got gradually on the nerves of the real surrealists, those who remained in Paris. At first they had thought it a good idea to let him popularize surrealism in Hollywood and New York. But the Catalan went too far when he posed as the representative, as, indeed, the inventor, owner, and embodiment of the surrealist movement. Breton felt that his former pal and pupil was on the point of stealing his own show. He turned mad at Dali. The High Priest of Surrealism excommunicated the insubordinate disciple. (The faithful members of the Surrealist Church unleashed an avalanche of abuse against the dissident. They called him a traitor, a counter-revolutionary, an agent of General Franco, a dilettante, a stinking Don Quixote, and—using the most scathing invectives in their arsenal—an anti-surrealist. Dali, meanwhile, continued with unabated gusto, not only to employ the vocabulary he had picked up from Breton, but also to capitalize the publicity value inherent in the surrealist trademark.)

Can message

Now they move into the assembly of the group

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Argumentation

It was just when Dalí staged and exploited the surrealist vogue in this country—about 1938 and 1939—that Breton's position in Paris became increasingly gloomy. His most devoted friends let him down. The first to desert was Philippe Soupault, who abandoned the surrealist cause for professional journalism. René Crevel, the purest spirit and most lovable character of them all, committed suicide, leaving on his chaotic desk this terrible note: "*Je suis dégoûté de tout*"; his cruel farewell to the Movement and to the world. Louis Aragon renounced all apocalyptic eccentricities and joined the disciplined family of Little Father Stalin. So did Paul Eluard, the poet, whom his surrealist friends had called "the nurse of stars."

The High Priest of the crumbling organization, André Breton—the more isolated, the madder—had recourse to the ghosts. As the living surrealists made themselves rare, he capriciously picked out some late celebrities and appointed them "Pre-Surrealists." The bizarre party includes, among others, Victor Hugo ("Surrealist when he is not stupid," according to the *Surrealist Pocket Dictionary*), Marco Polo ("Surrealist in tourism"), Jonathan Swift ("Surrealist in malice"), Friedrich Hölderlin ("Surrealist in his madness"), the Socialist Friedrich Engels ("Surrealist in his conception of love"—whatever conception that was), the individualist Friedrich Nietzsche ("Surrealist in his concept of Love"—in contrast to Engels' "conception" and his non-capitalized "love"), the philosopher Pythagoras, the showman Barnum, and the sadist Marquis de Sade.

While the founder and poet of the Surrealist movement was frantically trying to build up a nonsensical cult and muddled philosophy around the Marquis de Sade, an organized gang of sadists did a far more effective job in devastating Europe. As the Nazi hordes invaded Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, the Netherlands, the Master continued to gush paradoxes, insults, and enigmas. The approach of chaos convulsed our civilization, but the unflagging parlor-anarchists stuck to their pernoct devices, clamoring for even more chaos.

They were going to get it. The French authorities, weak toward their enemies but brutal toward their guests, interned Max Ernst along with thousands of German and Austrian anti-Fascists. The Maginot Line proved as chimerical as are the specters made up by Ernst or Dalí. France, the most civilized country on earth, assumed the nightmarish aspect of a surrealist canvas. The situation looked grim—even for those spoiled *enfants terribles* of a cosmopolitan café society. Indeed, it almost seemed as though tragedy were in the offing. But no! The surrealists dodge the tragedy, consistently, cleverly, under all circumstances. To them, it's always time for comedy.

In fact, their good luck is surreal. Thousands will die, but the Breton coterie will be carried to safety and prosperity by the wings of benevolent angels. In this particular case the friendly genius is called Mrs. Peggy Guggenheim. Her wings are powerful and spacious enough to shelter not only the surrealist Messiah and his prophet—i. e. André Breton and Max Ernst—but also a number of friends, including the American writer Kay Boyle, her husband, Laurence Vail, an artist and poet who happens to be also the former husband of *la* Guggenheim; two children of the Vail-Guggenheim ménage, and four children of Kay Boyle. The party occupied most of the seats and beds available in one trans-Atlantic clipper. Shortly after Marshal Pétain had signed his ignominious agreement with Hitler, Mrs. Guggenheim signed a check and the surrealist family rose into the skies. "Wander!" proclaimed M. Breton, untrudging in quest of a new Myth, his own. "The wings of augury will attach themselves to your heels."

The surrealist rodomontades remind me of a crack made by a late German humorist à propos of Count Hermann Keyserling's philosophy. Said the irreverent joker: "The reading of Keyserling's books impresses on me the idea that there is but *one* adequate solution for the cosmic enigmas: to marry a wealthy girl."

The surrealists are realistic enough to grasp the wisdom of this simple tenet and to act accordingly. Max Ernst, the handsomely gray-feathered old bird, conquers the heart of *la* Guggenheim. He becomes her husband and thus puts one of America's greatest fortunes at the disposal of the surrealist cause.

The new Myth may be launched; it has solid backing. Deplorably *passé* in Montmartre and Montparnasse, it has a new chance on the Hudson. No doubt we are going to witness a glamorous revival of all the familiar gags: the fancy publications and riots, the libelous pamphlets with judicial epilogues, the lies, the scandals, the divorces, the complicated intrigues, the whole blare and bustle. Barbara Hutson and Brenda Frazier will have the time of their lives when the surrealists receive the *crème de la crème* in a Ritz-Carlton suite all transformed into a veritable morgue, with real death's-heads to sip the champagne out of and Nicolas Calas cursing Salvador Dalí in a very cute surrealist ceremonial.

You don't know Nicolas Calas? No idea who he is? But you ought to acquaint yourself with such fundamentals of the current season! Nico is, of course, that Greek journalist whom Master Breton has recently mentioned as one of the few French poets who maintain "the great modern tradition inherited from Baudelaire." He is a scream, Nico. Wherever he shows up—and he seems able to attend five cocktails simultaneously—he's the life of the party. Every hostess is only too pleased to have him, although his sparkling presence proves sometimes dangerous to the furniture. For he is fond of fighting: in the most civilized surroundings, Nico will start a scrap. First he crows and then he be-

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gins to strike out. It's a surrealist tradition; you have to get used to it. The other day, at Mrs. Guggenheim's house-warming party, he had a terrific fight with his best friend, Charles Henri Ford. It was quite a spectacle, a surrealist sensation in the grand old style. Everybody wondered as to the consequences this episode might have for the literary life of Manhattan. Is *View* Magazine going to turn anti-surrealist? *View*, as you probably know, is a vanguard sheet edited by Ford, who founded it under the auspices, and thanks to the social contacts of his friend, the Russian-French painter Pavel Tchelitchew. But under the influence of that dynamic and mercurial young man, Nico Calas, *View* was gradually transformed into a publicity organ of the surrealist clique. Would the bloody collision in *la* Guggenheim's brand-new house change the picture again?

Don't be afraid! *View* remains faithfully surrealist. Looking at the world "through the eyes of the poet," the inspired editors discover a surrealist significance in the sturdy antics of W. C. Fields and the empty loveliness of Hedy Lamarr, whom, for some shady reason of their own, they call the "enchanted wanderer." A special number of *View* is devoted to "the legendary life of Max Ernst"; another to the surrealist movement in general, with Mr. Calas signing as the guest editor. The leading feature is an interview M. Breton granted to his devoted young man. Mr. Calas assures us that M. Breton assured him that both Messrs. Breton and Calas are eminent poets. Moreover, M. Breton is very eloquent in arraigning and disparaging his former friends, Louis Aragon and Paul Eluard, both of whom lost ostensibly all their talent after they betrayed the Cause. As for Salvador Dali, he has become so utterly contemptible that the Master wouldn't even mention his name but refers to him, with scathing sarcasm, as *Avida Dollars* (an anagram meaning dollar-hungry). The rest of the interview deals mostly with the "truly surrealist flora" of the New York countryside. All of us will be pleased to learn that the Master likes "monomously" what he has seen of the Hudson and, in fact, has already begun his "initiation into the mysteries of American butterflies." Mr. Calas' last question is whether Mr. Breton thinks a Third Manifesto of Surrealism in order? Whereupon the butterfly-inoxicated High Priest gives this succinct and confident answer: "Absolutely!"

We must not lose our sense of proportion. If the surrealist boom is a storm in the teacup—as it undoubtedly is—you may call this paper much ado about nothing or *tant de bruit pour une ondette*. There will be another magazine, a sort of hyper-*View*, called *VVV*, with Breton, Ernst, and the Chilean painter Matta acting as editorial advisers. Nine hundred people, or even a thousand, are going to read some more poetry by Nicolas Calas. So what?

Peggy Guggenheim—so what?—announces *Art of this Century*, an anthology of non-realistic painting, *all majorem Ernsti gloriam*. Those in the know whisper about her generous project to found a new museum devoted to the surrealists, and those painters okayed by them. Why shouldn't she? There are much more unpleasant ways to spend money. She'll have fine pictures (Breton has undeniably a keen instinct for artistic *valeur*); and she'll have poor stuff (Breton's views are biased and obfuscated by personal resentments and prejudices).

Some of the surrealists are indeed accomplished and serious artists—Yves Tanguy, for instance, whom I consider the greatest talent among them. His vision has a true poetic quality, a dreamlike spell which Dali commands only in exceptional cases. Despite the obvious limitation of his images, Tanguy seems to me far superior to Matta, who is now one of the attractions of the Pierre Matisse Gallery, or to Max Ernst, whose recent show at Valentine's was a disappointment. Besides a few arresting canvases like "Swampangel" and "La toilette de la mariée," there was a good deal of flimsy, pretentious stuff. The "new Myth" ape and integrates the whole repertoire of tricks and mannerisms conceived and worn out throughout the centuries—from the weird caprices of Bosch and Breughel over the playful devices of the Italian pre-Baroque down to the precious dandyism of Aubrey Beardsley.

Be this as it may it is up to American connoisseurs to evaluate the artistic achievements of surrealism. Experts like J. J. Sweney and Sidney Janis apparently think very highly of Ernst, Matta, and Juan Miro (who is usually counted among the surrealists, although his style differs in many respects from their rigid and whimsical patterns). What prompts me to come out against the surrealists has little to do with the quality of their painting or writing. It is neither the talented eclecticism of Max Ernst nor the untalented dilettantism of Nicolas Calas that irritates and perturbs me; it is the frivolous and shocking attitude of their clique. Indeed, the paranoiac clowneries of Salvador Dali seem innocuous and unassuming compared with the rampant arrogance of the Breton coterie.

It strikes me as shockingly frivolous when Mr. Calas, in his capacity as publisher of *View*, in an American publication (*New Directions*) recommends surrealism as the "revolt against beauty," the revolt against intellectual responsibility ("To responsibility the surrealists oppose revelation"), and as the revolt against Humanism ("Once again Humanism is coming to an end. I cannot but agree again with Ezra Pound").

Of course, why shouldn't he agree that Mussolini's Lord Ga-Ga?—to use the pertinent nickname given to Ezra Pound by his old pal and sagacious antagonist, William Carlos Williams. But now I see Dr. Williams lined up with the surrealists. Doesn't he realize they are fakes?

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