

1

Heroines - Essay - Claude Cahun ENG (extracts)

53

Heroines - Essay - Claude Cahun FR (Full edition)

82

Claude Cahun - Biography - “ A lesbian subject”

99

Photographs by Claude Cahun - 1930’

Documents collected by Celia Stroom, 2019, Tbilisi.

3

HEROINES

Claude Cahun, translated by Norman MacAfee

Andromeda to the Monster: in
memory of the *Legendary Moralities**

EVE THE TOO CREDULOUS

*You must avoid drugs of all kinds, especially those
recommended in newspapers for curing every malady.*

The Eleventh Commandment

*(Appeared in an ad recommending a certain medicine
—they were probably afraid of the competition.)*

* This refers to a work by Jules Laforgue, published in *Le Mercure de France* in 1897, which describes Ruth as the “the unfortunate and typical heroine.” *Ed.*

The “Heroines” manuscript is a very well known unknown work. Though it was never published in full during Cahun’s lifetime, excerpts appeared in *Mercury de France* and *Le Journal Littéraire* in 1925, early in her literary career. In 1992, this fictional series of monologues was mentioned, indeed described, by François Leperlier in his book *Claude Cahun: L’écart et la métamorphose*. Interested in its potential relevance for the exhibition/book *Inverted Odysseys*, I went looking for it when I visited the Jersey Museums Service archive, which houses Cahun’s personal papers. Ultimately, after much ado, I found the manuscript, missing only a few pages, buried at the bottom of a box—and it is here translated and published in its entirety for the first time. The arrangement of text on pages and decorative devices at the end of certain chapters—created using a typewriter—follows as closely as possible Cahun’s original manuscript. *Ed.*

This work, published as part of a program of aid for publication, received support from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Cultural Service of the French Embassy in the United States.

To the “Evettes,” little correspondents on the newspaper *Eve*—and in general to all young girls, past, present, and future.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY. Would you like to become stronger, to succeed at everything you do? Act now: *As soon as you eat of this fruit, your eyes will be opened and you will be LIKE GODS, knowing good from evil.* Demand the flavorful fruit. There is ONLY ONE. Ask for it now without delay! You have nothing to lose. You must be completely satisfied, or your money will be cheerfully refunded.

“Serpents in luminous rings form supple letters, then other letters for subsequent advertisements.

“I love spending the evening in the perfumed shade of the trees (are they not generous? their perfume is free), to await the metamorphosis of these marvelous promises.—It’s a distraction, and our garden has hardly any. Ah! if only Adam would give me some more pocket money!

“Let’s see, the serpents are excited . . .”

LONELY men, I have a sweetheart for you.¹

“No, that’s none of my affair! And I won’t let my guy come here. He’s so weak when it comes to women!” (She laughs.)

1. For those who don’t know English: LOVE says: Add a bowstring to your bow by learning LIVING LANGUAGES.—Eve: since languages, it’s like living color, *it’s modern*. The Tower of Babel, it’s the way things are. There are even people who say it wasn’t even built. If you ask my opinion, I prefer stucco. Stucco is very popular this year. Me, I love everything that’s new, original!

"That's not so true; it's inappropriate! We're looking for something else! . . .
Ah! here's something better . . ."

Pep—tabs²
BE A MAN
You must have pep—vigor—strength
—youth—to fully enjoy life—.
Make your sex life a joy!
—Quick results—
PEP—TABS

They positively help to build up
weakened, nervous and aging men
to such a state of thrilling,
pulsating power that they STAND
UP and shout: "I CAN! I WILL!!
I AM FIT!!!" (only two dollars a packet)

"Oh! what a pity: too expensive! I really would have loved to give him
that. He needs it so much, poor dear! . . ."

Are you reaching for TRUTH?³
I will tell you for FREE!

(only send the exact date of your
birth and enclose ten cents.)
A GREAT SURPRISE AWAITS YOU

"But what is my birthday?—I'll have to ask Father. I'm too ignorant by
half!"

BE an ARTIST⁴
EASY method. Write for terms and
list of SUCCESSFUL GENIUSES.

"Why can't I do it? Why not me?"

2. This and next thirteen lines are in English in the original.

3. This and the next four lines are in English.

4. This and next two lines are in English.

What would he say if he saw his little woman become a great painter, a great poet, the glory of Paradise?—It's strange, but these ideas are making me hungry! Don't they have anything to eat around here?..."

Quick PEP⁵
Get NEW pep in TWENTY MINUTES
Guaranteed or your money back
GIVE ONE TO YOUR FRIEND

"It's nice.—But, do you really mean we can eat it? Whatever can it taste like?..."

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY . . .

"There it goes again.—Finished for this evening.—They don't have many advertisements!—Whose can that be, the gods'? Is it pleasant? . . .—But, a fruit, it is sorely tempting! . . . They told me that after sucking seven very green sloes, one girl became a boy. But I don't believe that. . . . There's just too big a difference." (enraptured) "What? The fruit—it's an apple!—it costs only thirty-nine sous? . . . That's quite an opportunity.—I'll buy it. Where is the tree? . . . This one, in the middle of the garden? . . . But Father says it's sterile!—or else, that the fruit is sour, good only for fattening pigs!—Doubtless, Father knows nothing about it. He's no gourmand. Besides, he likes to grumble:—maybe he's got stomach troubles—he always thinks the dinner's spoiled.

"It's true: this little apple is exquisite. I want to bring Him back one fourth of it; that will do him some good (*Give one to your friend!*)—one fourth for him, one fourth for Adam, one fourth for Eve.—I'm not selfish, not me!"

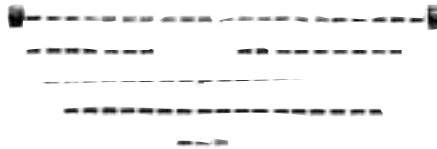
Now, no sooner had God swallowed the indigestible apple—cleverly hidden in one of the expert little dishes the Woman was making him—than he was seized by a violent anger. (Obviously he had a stomach ache.) He drove the Couple from Paradise; called them back, expelled them—he was decisive.

Such advertisements were partly true, alas!—and partly false. The Father, his children, all the apple-eaters, had learned, in fact, thanks to the fruit, that Good existed and that Evil existed—but, eternally tormented, they cannot recognize Which is Which. (Besides, as the advertisement says, one fourth is not enough.)

5. This and the next three lines are in English.

However, those who are happier but even more mischievous, who arrange objects in two distinct armies, have all bitten, each into a different flesh (of the Apple that is the apple of discord.)

(Only what is theirs is pure.) They do not tolerate the odor of another breath.



DELILAH, WOMAN AMONG WOMEN

Delilah made Samson sleep upon her knees and made him lay his head upon her breast; and having made a barber come, she had him shave the seven locks of his hair; she began then to drive him off and push him away from her because his strength abandoned him at that moment.

(JUDGES 16)

for J. G.

I have promised him to the High Priest. He is the enemy of my people, of my gods, That One—who scorned me . . . The natural enemy of woman. On him will I avenge all my sisters.—In short, I do not love men. *I know them not; nor do I desire to know them.* I am both virgin and savage.

Will it be possible to tear out his secret without paying with my flesh? . . . I fear defeat. If I were to betray my repulsion (the male does not forgive at such moments)—oh! I'd be lost! . . .

But the seduction, such a delight! Yes, that's it, my big scene. Pray that Dagon allows me a long speech and some beautiful effects. The folds of my cloak are truly eloquent. I would make wonderful gestures—and if I had to sacrifice to reality (the role is worth the pain!), now, I'm sure of it, I would know how to keep his interest to the end.

I wish he would come! That they would bring him to me: The bull for the cape!—If you love those near you, that's what matters: I am rich . . . *There he is . . . Ah!* I will succeed.

O brute! adorable brute . . . O sweetness . . .

—Awaking. Day already! *The lark? No, not the lark, the nightingale still . . .*
—These scissors! What crime will I commit? A crime, truly! What to do? . . . He took my soul—and I no longer have weapons to resist my destiny.

I am so weak this morning, and can only obey vows made before.—A slave of the past.

It's done. But perhaps, only for me? . . . Alas no! He's like a baby.

“Samson, what did you do with your strength? . . . You pretend that it is I, I who have . . . Damned, ah! damned! . . . I will remove myself from the world; *I will go to a cloister* . . . What do you say? Your religion will be mine. This evening, I swear to you, by the High Priest himself, before our reunited people, I, Delilah the infidel, I will have myself CIRCUMCISED.



THE SADISTIC JUDITH

Who
Was
Judith?

She made for herself on the roof of her house a secret chamber where she lived shut away . . .

And, wearing a hair shirt, she fasted every day of her life, except for the Sabbath days . . .

Discourse
of
Judith
to the
People

I do not want you to try to find out what I plan to do . . .

But those . . . who appeared impatient . . . They were exterminated by *the exterminating angel*, and have perished from the bites of serpents.

This is why we do not appear impatient . . .

But let us consider that these punishments are *still far less* than our sins . . .

Discourse
of Judith
to Holofernes

All the world proclaims that you are the only one whose power . . . and your *military discipline* is praised in all the nations.

(JUDITH VIII and IX)

To Erich von Stroheim

“We have to believe that he despises women, and doesn’t hide it (after all, he himself says so); that he is coarse, as only a warrior can be. After he kissed his slave, he would furtively wipe his lips. He doesn’t remove his garments for fear of soiling his body more than absolutely necessary. During nights of love, his boots are stained with the crimson in which he wallows, symbolically dyed with the red poison of his victims, tracking everywhere, according to the season, the dust or mud of the roads, or worse. But at cock crow, he has his bath, sends the girl away—and has the sheets changed (blood clotted on silk sheets).

“They also say he is the ugliest of men; and those who fear he will seduce their servants maintain that he looks like a pig.

“But I saw him, as his victorious army marched past our closed doors, for (having silently slit the throat of my dog, whose agitation disturbed me) I could peer through the keyhole:

“How he pleases me, with his receding hairline, with his dead eyes, so slow moving—his little narrow eyes, his enormous eyelids; his fleshy but not too prominent chin; his bestial mouth with its sensual lips, but with the same skin, it seems to me, as the rest of his face—the mouth, that slit of a mouth, is admirably designed, expressive, and as soon as it opens like a crown cut in half, somber, it shows off his canine teeth sharpened to a point like Judith’s fingernails!

“Ah, above all, how these fan-shaped ears please me, and this nape with its short hairs—and the superb vertical line of his cranium at the neck when it bends his head backwards, broken by reptilean folds! I love them because I recognize in them the distinctive, hateful characteristics of the enemy race.

“A woman is on the move.—Toward the camp of the conqueror! . . .

“A bird without wings, tiny, fallen from the nest, is at my feet. I kneel down (it’s alive!), I hold it in my hand. Its down is more delicate, dear panic-stricken heart, sweetness, defenseless sweetness, more delicate than the tummy of your mother, than the strands of russet moss and silk rejoined by her careful work . . .” He is almost reassured, warmer than my feverish armpit. I hold him clasped in my arms—O caress of his newborn feathers! . . .—Let’s go! . . . and I hold a bit tighter—so he doesn’t fall, to feel him burning against my flesh, to cool himself, for a spasm—then he dies! . . .

"*It is an evil omen.*—Disgusting! . . . Why disgust? Would life be as honest, more honest than death?—At least *this* cadaver is not a burden.

"Will I be strong enough to carry him all by myself—the other one—or should I dismember him, choosing the best parts? . . .

"—Oh! I've scared myself! But it means nothing; I was only thinking about it . . . joking about it.

". . . Am I truly condemned, a criminal since childhood, to destroy everything I love? No: he will prevent the infamous sacrifice. Is he not my chosen one because he's the strongest one?—Barbarian! Enslave me; at first I give myself only to your crudest body, I give what I have learned to cherish least. Beware of this mouth, this nape, these ears—beware of all that can bite, tear, and suck until your foreign blood is exhausted—delicious!

"It's your fault! Why didn't you see into me? Why didn't you free me from my executioners? I still loved you, I would have died happy. I wanted to conquer you and you let yourself be conquered! . . .

"What good are these reproaches? He doesn't listen to me; he can't listen to me . . .

"To myself: Why do I have to conquer him? (And have I therefore wanted to stop loving you, Holofernes?)—Childish, so childish! . . . Why do we eat? We ask the question only when we are no longer hungry . . .

"And then there are my brothers! They have nothing to fear, because they loathe me. Fatherland, prison of my soul! Shut away, I have at least known how to see the bars, and see between the bars . . ."

The people of Israel applaud Judith.

But she, at first more astonished than a baby whom one mistreats, lets herself be carried in triumph—as though asleep. Very soon she awakens, intoxicated with laughter and insolence, and, raised on the pedestal of human flesh, she exclaims:

"People! *What do we have in common?* Who allowed you to penetrate my private life? to judge my acts and find them beautiful? to burden me (I who am so weak and weary, eternally hunted) with your abominable glory?"

But her words were not understood, nor even heard. The joy of a crowd has a thousand mouths—and no ears.



THE TEASE

(Penelope the Irresolute)

*Still, the suitors feel guilt not toward you but toward
your mother, who truly has a treasure trove of tricks. It is
already three years, nearly four, that she has deceived the
hearts of the young Greeks; she gives them all hope; she
makes promises to each; she sends messages; but in her soul,
her thoughts are the opposite.*

Homer

for A. G.

Choose! They want me to choose among them. What a bore! Of course Antinous is beautiful, Antinous, son of Eupitheus; but Eurymachus, son of Polybus, isn't bad either. It is so hard to decide, from among the skeins of wool, which one I prefer, and what will be the weft of the fabric. Everything depends on the light. The threads change according to the day, gray or the color of honey . . . But to accept one man, and especially to send the others away—it's a terrible responsibility!

Ulysses didn't win me without cunning. There were the obligations that he had to Icarus, my father, which obliged me to marry him.—If, returned from his distant voyage, he could mingle with the suitors, be nice, without rancor—what a joy: I'd have an extra lover! But I'm unsure about his heart. And in endless doubt, better he wander the sea on pathways ceaselessly erased by the waves . . . The feel of the sea spray will make him see *the tears I have not shed*. I am careful, and salt is bad for the eyelids.

An eternal feast goes on in my palace. For they all have different customs—thanks to the skill of the goddesses who preside over our loves. I drink, I eat with them; I caress their hardened breasts—all those points that please me. I'm happy!

Only one witness somewhat cramps our revels: he holds onto his heritage. Poor suitors! Today do stepsons have terrible stepmothers? (—What did you say, Medon? Telemachus, feeling threatened, has left? Ah! so much the better, so much the better. Provided he doesn't bring his father back! . . .)

At night, I suffer from insomnia. Because of this malady, sometimes I would love to welcome someone into my bed—*Ah! if only I wouldn't have to refuse the others, and perhaps the worthiest one* . . . I suffer an insomnia sweet and less vain than a dream . . .

For my favorite of the moment I weave a tunic to fit his beautiful body, a cloak to sum up his soul. And the changing warp, *the color of time*, gives me a pretext: "It is the shroud of Laërtes," I say to them in my subtlest manner; "I will choose not to finish it."

Now, the sleep of the men is not half through when my mad preference weakens:—To embellish my plan, I want to add to it this faded purple . . . I forget! For whom did I intend the tunic? Eurynomus's skin is too pink. It

would be better for Leocritus. However it is of Cestippus I think when I undo my work; it is for him that I want to begin all over again tomorrow.

Delicious child, drunk since morning, he pursues one of my servant girls. I stop him and inquire about his tastes: "*Do you love mauve, my love? . . .*"

But the stars are not yet many in the sky when already Melanthus, the slave Melanthus, has reconquered my heart.—Mauve, it's so drab! Talk to me instead of a hot-blooded red, streaked with blue lines—a bit of gold just visible in the weft . . . I do not have any metal or silk so pure. Tomorrow I will look . . .

But tomorrow Liodus is with me. He knows what to choose. He suggests this white wool, velvety, sweet as the down of a young dove, and woven with a thread of gold, a thread of silver. How could I refuse? Of course the tunic will be for him. Proudly his pale hair and skin will compare their brilliance to the color of the moon. He will be the virgin consecrated to Diana and I will have the sacrilegious joy of initiating him and corrupting him . . .

But, returning to the feast, I hear the singer Phemios, and I am swept away by his voice. I will weave the heroic poem that he composes with such genius, which describes, which imagines the wanderings and death of the unhappy Ulysses. Most certainly, this time it really is a wedding cloak that fits my new husband! In the night I no longer undo my work. *The immense and delicate cloth* will be soon completed. My secret marriage is readied.

—All of a sudden the unhoped-for return of Ulysses, the murder of the suitors . . . Only Phemios is spared—O gods! Ulysses has returned too late! (it seems he was a bit lulled beside Calypso . . .) Now he gives me the life of Phemios. I promised. I will keep my promise: the singer will be my lover. Ulysses will know about it, but he will pretend not to.—Don't confuse Ulysses with Menelaus.—What! Did I say anything to tarnish his ill-gotten glory? Ah! if I can sully it as easily as his bed! To burn the laurels, to burn them when still green, is a pleasure unique to woman! . . . But he'll know how to keep his own safe. Sly fox! He'll exalt his most chaste wife, and like a coward violate her from behind—and make her shriek between the thick walls.

Oh gods who brutalize mortals!—To choose, to submit: words as flatterers, words as liars.

—They are the same.

HELEN THE REBEL

*. . . He wants us to be a subject of songs for ages
to come.*

.

*. . . with the desire for her first husband, for her
homeland, for her parents, she rushes from the wedding
chamber, shedding tears of tenderness.*

HOMER

for the "Actor"

I know quite well I'm ugly, but I do my best to forget it. I make myself beautiful. In everything I do, and especially in the presence of mine enemy, *I behave absolutely as though I were the most beautiful woman in the world. It is the secret of my charm.* It's a lie!—and I will end up letting myself be taken.

When Menelaus married me, I was young and, despite my birth, unknown. But I loved him. He's so blond! Already through instinct, a woman's instinct, I played for him my role of goddess: (Daughter of Jupiter and Leda.—No, not of Leda, of Venus. Venus also wanted to taste the swan.) I dazzle him. The arrows of my little brother pierce his eyes. I will swear to never belong to any mortal in the world: Helen is reserved for the bed of the gods. In short, I made her more expensive; and I knew how to place my possession at so high a price he no longer thought about haggling over my value.

Once we were married (*Why cry over spilled milk—or wine?*), it didn't take him long to understand what could be done with me: He would launch *Helen the beautiful*. Out of vanity and a bit of vengeance, he wanted to prove that there are others beastlier still than he. He won't stop until he sees all the kings in the world groveling at my feet.

My beginnings were rather difficult: as the lover of Menelaus, I reluctantly flirted with other men. I have to admit, I must have committed some notorious gaffes. I attracted the most discouraging rejections. Patroclus sent me packing: "*Don't even think about it! Go to Achilles' and ask where I am!*" I was innocent then: I believed that because of our ambitions, the catastrophe would be definitive. I wept. Menelaus reassured me. Always he had confidence in my genius. Never did he doubt his Helen.—Anyway, too bad for Patroclus: his reputation shielded mine.

Agamemnon was my first lover.—Excellent bait to attract more. Apart from that, only mediocre success; I really believe that he took me only to please his brother. He treated me like a servant. He couldn't resist the pleasure of laughing—holding my chin toward him, the greatest of men: "*It is not that you are pretty pretty . . . and yet!*" Luckily, that happened within the family! The Epic Poets, those notorious gossips, were not in the house. No matter,

Menelaus was restless. The scene could have happened again. It was time to train me. He had me given lessons in seduction.

On the pediment of the Temple, you can read in pink letters:

The ART of FASCINATION
and of MAGNETISM

Under the porticoes, you can walk while you study and count your steps, and meditate upon the maxims inscribed on these signs hung at carefully posted resting places:

Hercules said:

IMPOSSIBLE is not a GREEK word

—and another:

IMPOSSIBLE is the favorite adjective of IMBECILES

.....

Nothing succeeds

like SUCCESS:

LAUGH and the world laughs with you;
cry and you cry alone.

.....

.....

The four theological virtues
are:

CONFIDENCE in yourself,

AMBITION,

PERSEVERANCE, and GOOD HUMOR.

.....

.....

.....

Have ORDER around you, but
also IN YOUR THOUGHTS.

A place for everything
and everything in its place.

.....

.....

Don't forget that EACH MAN has A WEAK SPOT.
All you need do is find IT.

.....

We are ALL AT THE MERCY OF clever FLATTERERS
YOU SHOULD LEARN HOW TO BE ONE TOO

"When I left school (where of course they promised to teach the students professional secrets like DISCRETION and SECURITY) they handed me a precious little manual that summarizes their daily exercises and most important recommendations:

"Exercises for serenity, breathing, deportment, walking, voice, the gaze—the most irresistible way to flirt with men.

"To get angry, but harmoniously; to cry, following the rules of esthetics; to smile with the lips only; to know the exact degree of shame that suits the virgin and fits the matron; for the choice of vestments and jewels, and to know how to feign the difficult simplicity that made naive Alexander believe: 'At least that won't cost me too dearly! . . .'

"The most important beauty exercise is as follows:

"To sit comfortably in a darkened room . . . and *think of nothing*. Just that, every day, for a few minutes—gradually and indefinitely increasing the time."

With great precision, I practice the system of the Master. I possess it in letter and spirit. I have faith in him—and it is the final favor that he wishes us.

I will sign for him all the testimonials he wants. Because, Menelaus is right, "I could seduce the Sirens with my voice; I could fascinate serpents with my glance."

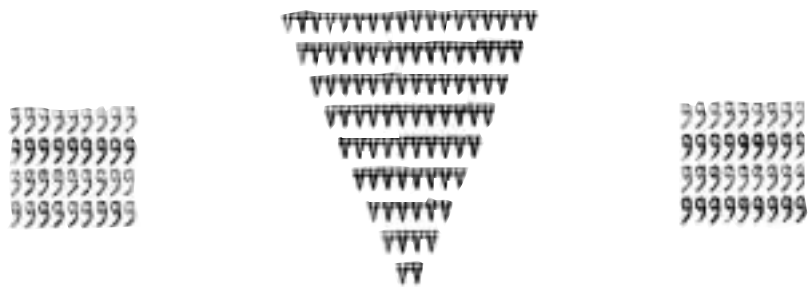
Of course I know that the subtle Ulysses recently figured us out; and that he dared say to Telemachus, who reproached him for compromising himself with me: "*Bah! It costs me so little and gives them so much pleasure. . . .*"

This crafty old man is terribly clairvoyant. Of course I know he doesn't even desire me, alas! Menelaus demands the conquest of Ulysses. (Which he himself carries out. He's so blond, so good looking, so talented.) Luckily Ulysses is one of those strange monsters whose body itself is a fabric of lies: they would make love to stones if it suited them! And he can gossip, but who believes him? Who takes the King of Ithaca seriously?

I would be living in peace if I hadn't had to follow Paris to obey my cruel husband, to procure for both of us this immortal glory, so dear to his heart—and so meaningless! . . .

Enough! Helen is rebelling. She doesn't believe in destiny, even less in the gods. *I tell you truly*, if I remove Menelaus by force—I've already slept with Priam and his sons!—I will see Lacedemon once again, and I'll even live chastely if I want!

I worked for you, dear Atrean, and now I reclaim my reward at last. You're too old now to be a procurer. We two must have, in the suburbs of Sparta, a country house, children, and peace and quiet.



SAPPHO THE MISUNDERSTOOD

*What do you want of me, daughter of Pandion,
Uranian swallow? About you who are beautiful, my
thoughts do not change: You are nothing to me. I do not feel
the effects of my anger, and I am serene of spirit.*

*—Do I still mourn my virginity? I don't know where
I'm running, for two thoughts are within me . . .*

SAPPHO

*. . . and the earth
Filled full with deadly works of death and birth,
Sore spent with hungry lusts of birth and death,
Has pain like mine in her divided breath;
Her spring of leaves is barren, and her fruit
Asbes . . .*

SWINBURNE

for Chana Orloff

To create is my joy. No matter how little it is. My great flanks would contain a people. There are some days when I imagine Pallas will burst forth fully armed from my head, like a chick from the egg. Rhythms and tunes are born easily from my lyre. The words offer themselves, and, scanned on their own, they line up in my songs:

*Spente sua carmen numeros veniebat ad aptos,
Et quod tentabam dicere, versus erat.*

*(On its own her song came fitted to numbers,
And since she was trying to speak, it was verse.)*

Alas! the soothsayers have assured me that my womb is sterile.

—Sterile? It's possible, but not for sure. How to prove it with such lovers? All of them vicious, more lesbian than Sappho herself: Never have they demanded of her *the ordinary thing!*—Whether because of one thing or another, the result is obvious:

I cannot bear a child of my flesh—merely of the soul, a breath, of air . . . I believe in immortality but not in the value of the soul.

. . . I know: They attribute to me a daughter: Cleis.—But it's a conjectural child; she's only my adoptive daughter. I might explain how, during one of Cercolas's absences, I pretended to bring her into the world to avoid being divorced (many Athenians did the same). I could say (and am I so misunderstood, it would be more plausible), that he, still virile but growing old, having married a young girl *as is the custom with our people*, we had together—as is customary—chosen little Cleis to be our little doll.

But I must be frank, there's nothing to it. The child came to me of her own accord . . . (My servants know the instructions by heart: *Send the little girls to me.*) She was nine, and already had the temper of a tyrant. It was she who demanded this adoption, ensuring that I would be more attached to her . . .

Yes, it is my misfortune: *All women chase after me.* Is it my fault? Do you really believe I enjoy it!—Do I seem to have a penchant for it? Damn my father Scamandrogynus! Damn the sacred customs of Lesbos!—Ah! . . . if I could have fled . . .

I managed to have myself exiled with Alcaeus. We went to Syracuse. I was hoping then . . . but you know what poets are like! We split up: because of shabby professional jealousies, because his vanity was disappointed when I hadn't won the prize for most beautiful woman in the Temple of Hera—especially because of his bizarre mania for despising deeds, for pretending that for beings endowed with exceptional souls, such as he . . . such as I (this in a restrained, courteous voice), everything happens in sublime words. Thus the powerless console themselves. But how do their victims fare? Only boredom changes them.

Disgusted with poets, I fell in love with a young man from a good family, newly liberated from his teacher. I hoped that his virgin semen would perform a miracle in my womb.—He wanted to travel, to visit my native isle. He was curious about my glory. He was punished well for his curiosity!

Hardly had we landed than we were assaulted by the arms of a thousand women. Each one wanted to lead me in triumph to her bed. With great difficulty, I extricated myself, and shut myself away in our house with Phaon and Cleis. But even she did not let me rest after having repeated three times every caress known to woman! Phaon, a stranger to these rituals, takes umbrage at them. Impossible to take him with me along the deserted beach. He reproaches me for wearing a chlamys, the short chiton, baring my right breast, instead of the peplos with a double sash—and leaving my head uncovered. He wants to give lessons in fashion and bearing to Sappho, *the arbiter of lesbian elegance*! I do and say whatever I like: *With me, my dear, one never points such things out*. He is intimidated; he is afraid; he leaves the country.

I give way to despair. The only thing that remains for the abandoned woman is *to leap from the Leucadian cliffs*.

All the people, amassed on the beach, saw me above, at once immense and minuscule, at the tip of the fatal rock.—I'm no fool! It was only a mannequin of hers that Cleis, hidden, pushed into the violet sea. (They do the same thing in the movies.) Atthis⁶ has good ears: Did she not hear my cry of agony as I smashed against the reefs?

While far from shore, seated in my boat, singing low, and tuning my lyre, I was peacefully awaiting the evening . . .

At night—like my sisters, the Sirens, less shameless than my mortal sisters, I lure passersby, preferably of the female variety, and drown them with my strong hands . . .

When one renounces creation, only destruction remains: For no one living can stand upright—unmoving—on the wheel of fate.

6. One of Sappho's pupils. *Trans.*

THE VIRGIN MARY*

When Joseph threatened to send me away, I was still a virgin, though already heavy with the living being, too living, which disgraced me in his eyes. I was very ignorant and understood nothing about it: Well! since our engagement, my betrothed had so often tried to make me his woman, without succeeding at anything other than reciprocal sorrows followed by a noble exchange of reproaches, and sometimes of insults. I have to believe that something in me was too hard, too rebellious toward the male—something in him too weak, too reserved around girls. We would give it up, without however changing our plans: With our situations in harmony, this would be an excellent marriage of convenience.

Soon, I realized that my belly was swelling horribly. My neighbor, taking pity on me, wanted me to have an abortion.—But where? How to manage it? Faced with my need, she remained dumfounded; I was a monster, in my place she would have gone mad . . . (Was she sent from the angels? She left the country. I asked no more. It's my life—no more submitting to the needs of others!)

Joseph stayed. It remained for him to prove that the child was truly his . . . And whose else would it be, Lord? Every woman is made to be a mother, and Mary above all (it's true, it's my vocation!)—Touched by my sterility, without our knowing, Gabriel had come to our aid: As we slept, like a honey-bee playing the go-between to fertilize the flowers, he had given to Mary what belonged to Joseph. It was not difficult . . . Here, Gabriel stopped to smile. Joseph, who had erotic dreams, blushed and grew flustered . . .

Hope returned to us. Rid of my virginity, with the child born, we could get to know one another. We could be happy. We could continue to make children . . .

First came Jesus. At the beginning he was charming. I nursed him myself and I have never forgotten his delicate sucking, already almost intelligent, that dictator with his round mouth, that gourmand with his swollen lips.

He was an extraordinary child! unbelievably precocious! At five, he could already tell a cow from a donkey in the stable, and called them each by name. At seven, he had learned all by himself to blow into a wooden pipe his father

* The missing pages of the "Heroines" manuscript are the first (title) and the last page of this section. *Ed.*

had hollowed out for him—and whistled with it like a blackbird. If he fought with his comrades, you could be sure he thrashed them; or else that he was honorably beaten. He had no fear of the water: he came to me to see how to wash his face; even better, at thirteen, he went bravely into the river, and paddled like a little fish.

I don't say this because he's my son. No, really!—*all the world agrees*—for intelligence, beauty, and courage he has no equal. And if you could see how he loves his mother! . . . He required almost no coaxing, and only jokingly, for the evening kiss. *All right* he loves his father too. He chats with him, works quietly with him. But *is it the same thing?* There is duty, and then there is pleasure . . .

At twelve, he caused me a great sorrow: he escaped from our house, and, how can I say it?, insulted the priests in the temple, then played on their towers, mocking them.—What do you want? After all, boys will be boys—and even the better ones . . .

I growled at him severely: "What were you doing there, you scamp? Son of a bitch! Ah! what a mess! But to wait for a child who to give birth to the world had to violate his own mother?" (The head especially, because of the halo . . . That wasn't funny, I assure you. All of human sorrow is a pin prick learned from my sorrows.) When I said these words to him, while lightly shaking him, I remember quite well that he cried. He had such a tender heart!

Of course, I proclaimed in the village that he had debated with very wise doctors and had totally confounded them. Perhaps that was true, after all: Since then, it has never been contradicted.

Oh well! At thirty, this heartless monster left his hearth, his country, his entire family, to wander throughout the world! . . .

I must have heard the most diverse opinions:

Certain people came to me with sad faces and a voice for the occasion, never without the bitterest condolences: "But my poor Mary! you must be suffering so! That Magdalene must have committed abominable seductions to have so alienated him from you . . . His father must be so unhappy!"—But I didn't let myself be fooled. Furious, like a she-wolf, I countered: "It's all right for you, unbelievers, to believe things like that. There's no truth to them. My son writes me regularly; and his cousin John the Baptist gives me news of him. They both went off in search of the Messiah . . . I don't doubt it . . . I am

quite alone—what else do you want, it's the destiny of mothers!—but I am very happy to see him making his way in the world!" (Nevertheless, I went to Joseph to complain: "That's what they said to me. Ah! how well he behaves, *your* son!")

On the other hand, others pretended to understand, to love Jesus better than myself! . . . That I would not tolerate! To all their ridiculous praise, and their miracles, and their parables, I responded quite simply: "Anyone can see that you don't know him! It is not you who suffered the pain of bearing him! . . . And Magdalene! and John, this curly-haired blond! . . . Ah! I know everything, get away! . . . To see him die a thousand deaths rather than . . . To think that it is I who brought him into the world! Happily the Lord gave me his brothers, my consolation . . .—A man of genius, a poet? . . . It's quite possible! . . . What is it you want me to do? Is a man ever a genius to his mother? And then, it's not at all like that—the fabrications of idlers! . . . Before being a great man, he had to be an honest man, a brave worker—look: like Joseph!" (It isn't that Joseph is perfect. He lacks tact. Often I must have said to him: "It's not my boy who would treat women like that. Ah! I envy the one that he chooses." But that does not concern other people.)

I'm going crazy. I saw him on the cross, uncomplaining—a hero. Ever so sweetly he asked for something to drink. And to be unable to do anything for him!—I who would have poured my blood drop by drop on his lips (which were so beautiful), to quench his thirst, as in times past, and rock him sweetly on my breast: my little Jesus, my favorite child . . . O criminals! executioners! assassins!

John was admirable; and *my* Jesus found the strength again in the midst of his appalling agony to commend to me this faithful disciple. Surely John will be like my own son . . .

But such a pity that a young man so well endowed should not know carpentry, and that he writes such incomprehensible things. Even the title: The Apocalypse—now who would ever want to read that? . . . Ah! If my son were still alive! what a beautiful book he would have given us to read in the evening vigil! . . .

Yes, *my* son. Joseph has nothing to do with it, I realize now, but, actually, I always thought so. And I will cry out to him, if I were crucified in my turn:*

* Her last statement is missing from the manuscript. *Ed.*

CINDERELLA, HUMBLE, HAUGHTY CHILD

*She let fall one of her glass slippers, which the Prince
carefully picked up.*

PERRAULT

My father remarried and I was very happy about it all. I'd always dreamed of having a stepmother. But heaven overwhelmed me, giving me two sisters by marriage. They were deliciously cruel. I especially loved the elder, who despised me delightfully: When she saw me always sitting in the cinders by the fireplace, whose warmth penetrated me with delight (sometimes even burning me), did her dear familiar voice not call me Kitchenella? Never was a word so sweet to my ears.

Sadly, they were pretty girls, marriageable maidens; they left us soon, leaving me with my parents, who, devoted to one another, regarded the world with a drunkard's tenderness—and included me in their superb universal indifference. I will do anything to avoid a marriage like that . . . But how would I do it? I with my loving nature, and so submissive? . . .

Moreover, I was feeling my pleasure diminishing day by day, and my feelings of ecstasy growing weak. I understood the reason for it (being devoted, for lack of anything better, to solitary reveries, I reflected a great deal on it): Such pleasures grow dull from force of habit. I was too lowly at present, too humiliated, to enjoy, vigorously, my daily humiliation. One has to climb up on the shores, on a high bank, to plunge again into the infinite sea of human pleasures. Daughter of a king, ah! *if I were queen!* . . . To wed, publicly to wed, the lowliest of my vassals, to make it seem that he forced me to abdicate, he mistreated me, he preferred the chattel of his village to me! . . . *How to make such fantasies real?*

My very wise godmother, Fairy Godmother, to whom I confessed my desires, came to my rescue. She knew our Prince very well (once upon a time, she'd assisted at his baptism), and revealed to me by which curious particularities one could seduce him:

He had a passion for women's shoes. To touch them; to kiss them; to let himself be trampled underneath their charming heels (pointed heels painted scarlet to look like splashes of blood); it is a modest joy that he has sought since he was a child. On this, though, the ladies of the court have not satisfied him: clumsy and timid, afraid of harming the heir to the throne, they dressed up in slippers. And, fearing he would kiss them in a vulgar manner, with every sign of respect they raised a foot up to his august but bitter mouth with its fixed smile . . . For this royal lover one must be the haughty mistress, the pitiless dominatrix in hard heels, someone I could be—I who understand! . . .

“Godmother, you demand the most terrible sacrifice of me! This man is the opposite of what my heart wants.”

—“I know that very well, my little one. But there's a reason. *Every sacrifice has its own reward*: You will feel in playing your part an emotion more profound than those you've so far known all too well. But blasé Cinderella, believe me: the most acute sweetness on earth (for you, the most vivid happiness) is to oppose this instinct, to violate and to chastise by turns. . . .”

Persuaded by my good godmother, I accepted her presents: three pairs of gray horses the color of cinders, a carriage, a coachman, six footmen; clothes of velvet and gold, dainty delicate slippers of squirrel fur (he adores fur) that she entrusted specially to me. . . .

She recommended that I be proud and fierce, as mysterious as the ideal, and to flee without fail on the stroke of midnight, the second night losing (but in full view of the Prince, who would be following me), my little left slipper.

(I have such small and compact feet, they seem stunted—because I regularly squeeze them into a vise of stiff linen and rigid lace, as the Chinese do. This exquisite, and habitual, torture fills me with pleasure . . .)

I obey. I saw the Prince, yesterday, and he importuned me vociferously. Alas! I guessed only too well his thoughts! and noticed the essential details . . . *He blushes at the subject of boots. He blushes*, he naively told me, *if he passes in front of a display of shoes, which seems to him the worst indecency*; but a display of flesh does not touch his tolerant and modest soul: It amazes him that anyone could complain about games so silly, and even a little repugnant.

I agree with him. And perhaps I could truly love him if he wanted sometimes to reverse our roles . . . One must not even dream of that: If I destroyed

his illusions, he would quite quickly return the cricket to the hearth!—I must deceive him to the grave.

What's important is to be Princess. When I become Princess, godmother helping it, I know quite well that I will have myself beaten by the least of my manservants.

Then I will don again my garb of the slovenly maid, those precious rags, with their color and smell of cinders, and every day, secretly, I will cover my crazy head; I will go out into the night. I will approach passersby (there's no lack of poor men or ugly men or even dishonest men), and the better I play my role for the dear Prince, the more marvelously intense for me will be this contrast and these humiliating encounters.



MARGUERITE, INCESTUOUS SISTER

Valentin

In the past, when I'd carouse with my friends, each bragged, praising his beautiful women, all vying to speak, emptying their glasses, leaning on their elbows. Me, I said nothing, and twisting my beard and smiling, I let them talk, and when they'd finished, I began: "To each according to his taste. But is there one of yours in all the land to compare to my little Marguerite, anyone who could hold a candle to my sister?" Tap, tap, kling, klang, we clinked glasses in turn, and everyone shouted: "He's right! She's a credit to her sex!" And they no longer praised anyone else. Now, I could tear my hair out, I could smash my head against the wall. Any rascal who wants can insult me. They whisper when I go by, letting me pass to the right. They sneer at me, like a worthless bankrupt!

In conversation, the slightest innuendo makes me blush! And even if I knocked them all senseless, would I have the right to call them liars? . . .

GOETHE

A sensual woman, is she truly a monster? Is it my fault? When this evil began, I was too young, much too young to understand. And, to be sure, I was never insensitive to the *eternal masculine*. I don't know when I first felt this irresistible attraction nor when I first succumbed to it. My memory was not yet formed . . . Perhaps when *very old, one evening, by candlelight*, I will suddenly recall the origins, so long searched for, of my inexplicable penchant . . . And that evening, as dried up and cold as I would by then be, I know all too well, I won't be able to stop myself: Marguerite will once more sin against body and soul!

All I can say is that he who initiated me could have been none other than Valentin: My mother, who had good reason to suspect my precocious ardors, let me play only with him. Thus, because she has a pure heart, she believed she could sleep peacefully.

Here is my first sexual memory: as soon as I was alone in my room (which I shared with my brother), I seized his lead soldiers. I laid them on my lap (which represented the battlefield). The more there were, the happier I was. I heard the moans of the wounded; I gave them drink, bandaging their wounds and, when there was not enough water, washing them with my own saliva. A noncommissioned officer, grander and more muscular than the common soldiers, in a tight dolmen of a beautiful, lucky green, was, in my dream, Captain Valentin—whom I cherished above all. . . .

(*Daughter of a former superior officer* . . . Luckily our father is dead! I'm so coquettish and coaxing that, if he were alive, I'd have surely obtained his favors. Mama, whether from indignation or jealousy, would have died at least ten years sooner.)

My brother, starting school, unknotted my long gold braids, brushing my flowing hair in the sun, disentangling it with a golden comb (at least that's what it seemed to us). Then, in my childish voice (my voice has never changed), I sang "The Lorelei" to him. And we both of us felt, the one through the other, great sensual delights.

We were model children. We were an example to all the kids in the neighborhood, because such fraternal occupations *give joy to little people and tranquility to big ones*.

When Valentin chose the military field it seemed to me all my wishes were realized. I thought only of the glory. I was forgetting about the separation. Or rather, I was so naive that I believed I would go with him, to march

at his side. The sword belt of the attendant would gird my loins most agreeably. I would be the lover of young recruits with rosy cheeks. If war were declared (it has such a good effect on the male), I would find it a stimulant . . . Yes, Valentin returned to me always more loving, his fists bloodied, with a black eye, when after his billiard games, he'd brawl in the gutter. Suffering, is it not our ally, we women, the great consolers—*the sisters of charity?* . . .

One day I saw him arrive from the barracks, *in his tight-fitting new field-gray uniform, and I felt strange pangs in my heart—so sweet that I thought I would die from them!*

(Today even the rattling of the saber of a pretty hussar will still, recalling him, give me a thrill of pleasure.)

I had not foreseen his going away.—My God! that I would be alone! . . . And how to make him faithful? In vain do I go off to confession! . . .

If I meet a young man who pleases me physically, without even knowing his name, despite my lowered eyelids, I observe him, and want him immediately. I do everything to see him again. That lasts for a while, until I meet another. *Then the earlier one is completely forgotten; and I begin again with the second what I had done with the first. How to cure myself? Who is in the same state of mind as I?* I am completely in love with sex, with *beautiful sex*.

It would be, however, very vile to cheat on someone absent, who is perhaps even in danger of death, and thanks to whom I am pregnant!

It was this last motive alone that persuaded me to give in to Faust's solicitations. Otherwise, I would have resisted him, I swear!—In any case, I would have much preferred his mysterious companion, this Mephisto, who wears a sort of misshapen uniform, about which I was more than a little curious . . . Faust realizes it: whenever Mephisto is around, I no longer have eyes only for him.—And so he keeps his distance at our meetings.

It is this forbidden pregnancy and my reputation for chastity that are the causes of everything! Unable to discover my lover, they had no other suspect than my brother. Thus I incurred a blame a hundred times worse.—Faust seems to have a nature so dreamy, a complexion so poetic—I do not despair of convincing him to marry me. I am an honest girl and am in awe of Opinion. *Not to respect public opinion is always a sign of effrontery incompatible with the reserve and the moderation that must guard all the acts of well-balanced and respectable women.*

Unfortunately, Valentin returns unexpectedly. His jealous duel causes a scandal. His death pains me—even though it was deserved. I gave birth. My duty was to smother my baby—*the child of incest*, the only formal objection. I will not recoil. *I have never recoiled in the face of Duty.* (I have the experience of having already helped kill my little sister, whose cradle, between our twin beds . . . cluttered the room.) However, this time, I was clumsy and knew not to abide by the wise commandment: *drown without a trace.*⁷

It was terrible. I seriously dreamed of hiring as my lawyer this celebrated man who promised

REHABILITATION WITHOUT ANYONE KNOWING

Mephistopheles dissuaded me, proving to me (I know not how, though it seemed to me very clear at the time) that lost honor can't be found in the judge's chambers.

Faust visited me in prison and wanted to help me escape. My soul was troubled: Suddenly I mistook him for Valentin and would have willingly followed him. But immediately after, I recognized him: the murderer of my brother!—of my only love—and I refused to budge.

I regret to say that at present they are building a scaffold.

How do men dare condemn me, especially if they have sisters? Do you know then, o Judges, *do you know what awaits you?*—if it has not already happened . . .

7. Cahun writes this in German: *Spürlos versenken*. *Trans.*

SALOME THE SKEPTIC

*. . . That evening, when he returned to his village and
they asked him, as on other evenings: Come on! Tell us:
What did you see? He answered:—I saw nothing.*

Oscar Wilde

(ANDRÉ GIDE: In Memoriam)

*Too much brain, not enough heart—this word intend-
ed even in the most physical sense, if the gods have not given
you the divine gift of feeling.*

MARCEL COULON

for O. W.

How strange they are, people who *believe that it has happened*. How can they? One thing only in life, the dream, seems to me beautiful enough, moving enough, to merit your becoming so disturbed that you have to laugh or cry.

I believed I'd found an end to my daily indifference (*the place and the formula*), a prolonging of my nights: art. (Ah, how young I was then!) Virgin, in fact, to my very soul, *I was not yet occupied with artistic questions*—this will be my excuse.

I quickly understood the horrible trap: painters, writers, sculptors, even musicians, copy life. Instead of deceiving her—this eternal spouse!—it was to her he would be the most faithful. How could I admire their color reproductions, I who never loved the originals?

However, sometimes, "failures" appealed to me, those portraits that managed to stand out from the others. I bought the rejects. At least these lovers of the real were that, *for lack of anything better: Forgive them, for they know not what they do!*

But the others, self-styled lovers of the Ideal, maintained that they purposely distorted the characteristics of the *heroine* (and of course they bragged about it!)—Put on some makeup, apply a false nose—scrape away, the grimace reappears, the woman is always underneath!—Other men pretended to create from scratch or at least reproduce that other, spontaneous life, which rises and stirs behind shut eyelids. And, proud of their revolt, they were content to piece together, without any discernment, what they found scattered in nature, or at their colleagues': stencil copies. Such works, ah! if only a god would deign to sort them out!

Believing themselves all destroyers, builders, misunderstood, *damned*, parricides, incendiaries—how they frighten each other! before what they call Glory, wise, submissive, defeated children!—how they lack boldness! . . . They believe in the Immortality of Genius (the biggest joke of all!). Some of them even think *that it has happened*, others *that it will happen*.

Perhaps it's the pain of saying it. Obviously I hardly love them. The thing was, I wished too much to love them.

My deception began in the theater, one day when they brought, on a silver plate, a head of painted cardboard, dripping with red—looking like a

piece of pork from the butcher's.—Disgusting! My religion forbids my even looking at it.

However, before renouncing the world, I will dance before Herod, because he's interested in my sleep and made me describe my dreams to him. . . .

(They say that I turn round and round, now on my palms, now on my toes, like an acrobat—because they don't know how to see: I am a siren, a serpent, standing erect on my tail; I am a bird, an angel, dancing lightly on the hardened tip of my wings.)

. . . Besides, he promised to pay me royally. I want to make a final test: to know what his ideas are on the subject of painted cardboard (because if he has any taste, it is not the question of money that will stop him).

Once, I, erotic sleepwalker, have shed my skin seven times for his pleasure, I will demand that they bring to me on a silver plate the head of the prophet Whatshisname (I forget his name; it's not important! my stepfather understands). At first, it will be funny to see his angry face. He doesn't like me to speak about the prisoner, of whom he is jealous, because that one prophesies at the drop of a hat. He brags about hearing voices—terrible voices. But Salome also fears him, and it is my mother whom he . . .

Why did I ask for that? It's even uglier, more mangled and badly made than in the theater. *It seemed* as though I could touch it, take it in my hands, kiss it . . . It's no big deal! How can an object so ridiculous frighten us? My repulsion is completely esthetic.—Touch it? yes, they always want that: admire it since it's so realistic!—But to kiss it? why? . . . Ah! . . . Yes! They imagine I'm in love with it. *My God! if it amuses them.* I did not know they had so much imagination.—Kiss it? Do they want me to do more? . . . (The Tetrarch has his crisis of nerves. What makes him hear voices? He also *believes that it has happened!*)

Look! it's soiling me with its sticky blood, less red and hotter than usual . . . blood like mine . . .

(*It is not good theater.*)

What does that prove? Simply that I was right:

Art, life: it's the same either way. It is what will be furthest from the dream—even from the nightmare. I really hope there are fools on whom it makes a big impression. Me, it leaves me cold.

If I vibrate with vibrations other than yours, must you conclude that my flesh is insensitive?

BEAUTY (OR THE TASTE FOR THE BEAST)

*Although this prince deserved all her attention, she
could not refrain from asking where the Beast was.*

MME LEPRINCE DE BEAUMONT

to the Minotaur

—“You lied to me, Beast: you’re not a monster. It already took so much out of me to get used to your ugliness that I used up all my power to love. I am too weary. No, I would not take again, even in the opposite direction, the same road—if it were to return. I do not renounce my life. I have always been frank with you, whereas you have *deceived me about your merchandise*. In short, I withdraw my hand. The fairies are my witness, it is not to you that I made my promise.

“He wanders away from my sight with those perfect hips—which horrify me. He goes toward other hearts that make you loved in the end for yourself. When one has tasted the Beast—ah! how very insipid is man! I dedicated myself to your dead rings, to the slime of the reptile.

“But before leaving, give me, I beg of you, the address of another monster—an authentic monster.”

THE ESSENTIAL WIFE
or the the Unknown Princess

*She whom I would take would want me to live
In her way, not in mine . . .*

J. DE LA FONTAINE

for R. M.

There was at that time a man who had as many lives as a good Russian whip has straps. He needed a name for each of his lives. He hoarded them, so that not enough names remained for other lives . . .

Refusing to solve it with homonyms—*That's too common!*—the reigning Queen gave up having her daughter baptized. It was understood from this carelessness that the young Princess was destined for a glory without limit, for these are words that restrict the sense of human destinies.

—Whether the Misanthrope be Alceste or Philinte doesn't matter! We need an example, a label under which to line up as many objects as it could contain, all those that won't be too recalcitrant. The vaguer, more malleable (unnameable) the head of a category is, the better it is for the sheep. I know that only a concern for precision about their useless and even inexplicable details prevents retaining this usage.—Suppress their scruples, their names, and you make them famous: They become even more representative.

The Monopolist of Names is no longer named by anyone. Memory rebels against such ambition, while our modest Princess is very well known, since she wed the intelligent Riquet à la Houppe, and by necessity took on the name of her husband.

They were very happy, with a goodness without egotism, because *they had many children* who would unite the ugliness of the father with the incorrigible beastliness of the mother.

One can believe that this couple, like so many others, right off endured little quarrels. The Fairies could do nothing: They favor only love. The couple had chosen each other out of self-interest: hoping to divert Their gift—something the Fairies are too powerful to allow.

Deformed and fine, beauty and beast, completing each other, they're recklessly mismatched, it's obvious. But habit arranges things quite well:

Who has not seen in old couples an artificial resemblance, sometimes so marked that one would think them brother and sister, so much had each sacrificed itself for the other! Thus it was with these two. And by some agreed-upon leniency, Riquet ceased making witticisms that irritated his Lady; she abandoned all coquetry and even often appeared badly groomed, so much did she fear exciting the jealousy of her Lord and Master.

One day when they invited some people to dinner, before the company arrived, rediscovering the classical gesture (made eternally new by Delilah), inspired ingenue, Beauty cut Riquet's tassel.—It seemed much less funny than intended. It was the first step toward a realignment. The husband, more and more the follower, did not delay in losing what little remained of his spirit.

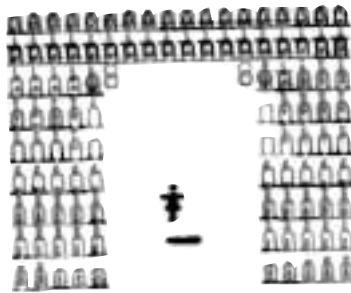
She retained her beauty much longer. The privilege of the weak: A true female is always the strongest.

If she had been contemplating her hatred and her destiny too attentively, she quickly ran to her mirror, which, sometimes ruined by a grimace, only half-way reassured her. Henceforth she avoided looking at the Prince . . .

When he died first, she was still a *fine specimen*, who even passed on into proverb.

A century was right about her.

And the entire Race of women, recognizing themselves in this dead sister, consecrated the flat stone of a symbolically empty tomb and solemn feasts in memory of the Unknown Heroine.*



*See figure 2.1 for the male equivalent. *Ed.*

SOPHIE THE SYMBOLIST

She lifted quite gently a little corner of her handkerchief, and lightly squeezed between her fingers the bee with the handkerchief, to prevent it from flying away, and pulled from her pocket her little knife. "I'll cut off his head," said she, "to punish him for all the stings he's stung." Indeed, Sophie placed the bee on the earth, all the time holding it with her handkerchief, and with a tap of the knife she cut off its head, then, because she found that this was very entertaining, she continued cutting it into tiny pieces.

.....

Then he discovered a very clever ploy: he balanced himself on his chair, and leaned so far back that he fell. Sophie rushed over to help him get up. "Did you hurt yourself, Paul?" she asked him.

PAUL

No. Quite the opposite.

MME LA COMTESSE DE SÉGUR,
née ROSTOPCHINE

Idea engenders being—and love precedes the organs that will later make it manifest. So, before the beast has its wings, it must find the equivalents of flight.

Her first doll was for Sophie both the first pleasure and first sorrow of love, both the deflowerer and the eldest child.

As soon as she took it from the trunk and put it in the daylight, it came alive—yes, fragile, delightful, and ready to break.

To make an object dead, to destroy it, is to prove that it had really lived. Sophie understood that quite well.

While she was dressing it she found it too pale . . .

SOPHIE

I want to warm up my doll, Mama, she's very cold.

THE MOTHER

Be careful, you'll melt her.

SOPHIE

Oh! no, Mama, there's no danger of that. (Does the sun hurt me? all the more reason it won't hurt her, who is much *tougher!*)

And Sophie finds her mother quite ridiculous.

The disobedient child of three was precocious only in this respect: she trusted in her own reason earlier than normal.

She had the scientific spirit.—The most attentive pigeon can give to its little ones grain by the beakful, and not as an experiment. This was for Sophie the opportunity to assist in a most exciting surgical operation—one that will be an example to her, let there be no doubt about that.

To dissect the little fishes that slip along your hands, is stranger, certainly: they're red and they move—but it's not any more dangerous since they don't cry out.

Do they perhaps suffer? A child has only a vague awareness of pain. Its spirit, always moving toward the New, full of confidence or anguish but always attentive, withdraws, rarely recalling painful sensations—always less and less numerous. They would be chains too heavy to bear.

She wanted it, Sophie can be cruel. Doubtless, she believes that the fishes suffer with the same flesh as her doll, which is dead and which also suffered. She knows the word; she does not know the meaning. She is even more intrigued by it, and will repeat the attempt in vain, without tiring, on herself, and on those she finds within reach—patient with her newborn passions.

She loves, and makes bleed only what she loves: the black chicken, the squirrel, the donkey, and her cousin Paul.

We should note in her work an admirable progression.

At first she looks for a beautiful object that might be valuable to her, and that she could torment in peace (the wax doll); soon, she delights in the risk; to better possess the property of others, in something that bustles around and defends itself a little (the red fishes); she wishes now that there had been a struggle, that the pony and the bee had wounded her in their turn; then the blood, this time, the blood of the marvelous animal, so long desired, truly great, truly terrible, which kicks, which brays, which struggles under her heels armed with pins—*with spurs!*—to feel the flanks shudder between her exhausted thighs (this would be the donkey); then the blood again, human blood—and someone who suffers consciously, willingly, *for her love!* (her cousin Paul, her innocent accomplice).

When she is twenty Sophie encounters Paul again—no longer the little boy who charmed her, not so long ago caressing, not so long ago blaming her and helping her with her *ideas*, but a man who saw, in their *ordeals*, which were so sweet, only a banal desire for marriage. You can well imagine her indifference!

PAUL

You're no longer interested in me?

SOPHIE

Even before we were five, we had exhausted all the games of love; when one began with the symbol, one had little taste for the thing itself.

SALMACIS THE SUFFRAGETTE

*. . . Yet from them something like as fire is shed
That shall not be assuaged till death be dead,
Though neither life nor sleep can find out this.*

SWINBURNE

to Claude

—*Cursed be those through whom scandal comes! but it is necessary that scandal come . . .*

Thus spake Zeus, when he had the adventure of Salmacis.

Up to then, men and women, fauns and nymphs, and even gods and goddesses, met, not joyfully and without ulterior motives, but instead to prepare for future happiness. At the edge of a harvested furrow, they were already sowing for the next season. If some grain lost its way, distracted by a perverse Zephyr, it was at least without premeditation, and almost without their knowing.

Fountain, they tell us, but more like a young torrent, wild in her will to order, impatient with her floods followed by droughts, Salmacis was the first woman to willingly make herself sterile. With slow preliminary caresses, she disarmed the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, and to make even more sure, she had her ovaries taken out.

They will not love each other any the less; but the ulterior motive, the common concern to perpetuate the species, whatever you think of that (noble or shameful—or vain, since it is imperishable), disappeared from their hearts.

Besieged on all sides, they shut themselves away and lived in the present as in the center of a citadel.

They're inseparable, and Love, which is blind, ends by merging them. Thus their fondest desire is realized: instead of three, they are one.

And the double flower of their body, sterile as rare flowers, unknown in the Park, escaped the shears and became immortal . . .

But Love, not understanding that its work is done, takes the monster as a target, makes it bristle with new desires:

Eternally unsatisfied, this strange, shameless couple assaults female and male, attracted, repelled, passive, active, across thirsts and disgusts, with horrid rifts—and jealous of itself.

Accursed lovers, the ridiculous search for their relief disgraces Olympus . . .

Out of decency, a family council accords them this disguise for their crime: Their shameless body will be destroyed (only the legend and image will be preserved, as a memory, as a phantom); their abominably variegated soul will be separated again, and the pieces thrown to the winds. On this condition, however: The spirit of Salmacis, hidden as well as possible, must

inhabit the body of a man; while that of Hermaphrodite must dwell only within the body of a woman!

Their punishment will be to submit, not daring to rebel, not daring to reveal themselves, to the unnatural desires that their presence will engender . . . or to make those males and females who want their hearts to be simple and true flee at the sight of them.

But what will happen if the banished meet again in their exile?—More often than not, Giton and Sappho get on rather badly. At best: a complicity of the most chaste. Everything happens in words.—The pleasures of gossip. (This is a common trait of theirs.) Their souls understand each other, surely! they could sympathize, become one, even—oh! platonically (Diotima with Socrates, but Alcibiades is in the wings)—the bodies are there, opposed without relief, without remedy contrary to the mutual desire of the lovers, of the cursed lovers, unpaired, with whom it is impossible to match one being in all the world.

(If Juno took the form of a bull, Europa would not have been tricked.)—When Hermaphrodite meets Hermaphrodite, it will truly find the body, this time, not at all the soul that it desires.—Bad *brothers*, false brothers!—Laughable combats of cocks without cockscombs or spurs; combats to the death, however . . . Their *sisters* are no wiser: Giton and Ganymede cannot stand one another.—Slashing claws, biting teeth, hair-pulling fights without hairdos: How Salmacis above all shuns Salmacis!

There is only one relief in the fate of Hermaphrodite, and by which he can still ridicule the gods: One body in tune with one soul is enough to make love.

Hermaphrodite can visit the house of Narcissus—and introduce himself there on my behalf.



THE ONE WHO IS NOT A HERO

*I was incapable of appreciating it—and of course
that's understandable: passionate, nearly hysterical, unwor-
thy . . . and completely without envy, absolutely hating all
the serenity of this world!*

THE ANDROGYNE

for C. de R.

In the melee of tortured bodies, arms stretched and twisted, imploring hands; in the melee of limbs, legs where a spasm flashes, near the inert heads, dull eyes, heavy lips; in the melee of dry mouths, the confusion of tongues and moans—upright, the Man passed, his face pure, his walk serene, upright, black, attentive, amid the expanse—the rattles and the surges—of naked bodies embracing.

He is sober and the others are drunk. And I? His coming sobers me up while aggravating my thirst.

Here, among the laughter and the sobbing, his smile, his calmness, his affable air, his clothes—skins from another world—cause scandal—(on that we all agree)—bringing a dissonance that up to then was missing from the feast.

Our host breaks away and greets him. Then the Man undresses.—Like us? No, not at all like us. He does not have to hide his embarrassment beneath the irritation of gestures. A gracefulness, animal and free, issues from his body—but it is of an animal so tamed by its soul that it swears allegiance only to instinct. (Like those that bring back a prey without drinking its blood, or shun the rutting dog when the Master calls.)—A terrible harmony, nobility, and simplicity for us, who cannot lay claim to it.

For us? I perceive that I am alone in sensing his malaise. Once the others were reassured that he slept in their ranks, they resumed with him their passionate occupations.

Respite for me! I look at them: Do they not believe themselves sacred Greeks and Pagans, these little Christians in revolt? Hellenistic without knowing it, the Man, who never rebels (*I hate movement displacing the lines*), smiles with the infinite smile of their lives in stone: To conquer Athens, he does not need a black mass.

Statue indifferent to their games, but happy, and full of kindnesses for all, it lends itself, it does not give itself. They themselves, without doubting it, were they not changed by it? Incapable of imitating such a natural thing in their debauchery—their gestures, exalted not long ago, collapse again, become libertine—they are afraid to seem excessive . . .

The Man looks and is amused . . . (the very idea of introducing moderation into an orgy!) And, less indulgent than he, I surprise myself by hating them!

What about it? Did I not belong to them? No, but I took them all on: This bite, I recognize in it the mark of my teeth; these bruises, my fists made them blue; under my imperious fingers, who didn't ask for mercy?

However, I remained a virgin, miraculously—or rather through the disdain that must be felt for a banal act—and because then I did not know subjective desire.

Do I know it now? No; because my first movement is to lean on the Man, on this godlike man, lean on him to see if it is still possible to increase his pride.—A slave moreover, and not even beautiful!—How could she? . . . No matter, she will do her best.

Humiliated! that's what's happened—I've been humiliated. A voice that has not changed, or weakened, that has not hesitated, that has not even lied—oh! without dreaming of hiding his pleasure (a pleasure too small to be worth so much shame), behold how he thanks me, according my hate a spasm of politeness . . .

Someone else has already seized the cadaver. It's the rules of the game. It's better: just let it be.

But (struggle short and courteous) he frees himself from the embrace; brutally—in a clinch—I throw myself on him. . . . What then was he feeling? no, I didn't cry, I didn't shudder. But harsh anguished words violated my soul irremediably: "My dear, did I hurt you?"

It is suddenly the perfect isolation in promiscuity—where so many beings however are dear to both of us—we who hardly know ourselves. One actual thing only matters to the Man: I suffered; he wishes to be responsible for it.

Would pity then be the most intense emotion for this sort of god? Pity, no. But for the strong, the full use of his strength in the crushing, and then in the protecting, of the weak.

Epilogue

—It is so unexpected, though vile, the integrity of your *foolish virgin* who touched him.

—Oh! that nonsense! Don't believe that: a minor detail, without any value to this man, I assure you; he didn't even notice it. I will gladly affirm that my foolishness was no longer virginal; it was simpler—and more plausible! But how was the Man, who is not clumsy, wounded needlessly? Now understand this: Pain too, pain itself, is extremely indifferent. That which touched him—and that alone—was the cause. It is against himself, and not for this woman that he is suddenly inflamed . . . Attached as he is to his own perfection, his only weakness, the only sensitive point in his heart.

—You present the facts, as usual, in their most unpleasant aspect. However, you did not lie when you said that he, whom you call the Man, is awfully nice, and the story, despite the decor of the orgy, consoling after so many monstrous acts.

—Doubtless. For it is not true, nor even possible. It is only the imaginings of a hysterical woman.

—Impossible? And why?

—First, because, a liar as are all heroines, this monster among monsters would not know how to be a virgin.

—Bah! we all started out as virgins.

—I admit it. *She* would not admit it. She was already caressing herself, she had already known herself, deflowered, at her mother's breast.



CLAUDE CAHUN

Héroïnes

Établissement de l'édition,
notes et postface par
François Leperlier

Couverture de
Olivier Fontvieille

ÉDITIONS MILLE ET UNE NUITS

CLAUDE CAHUN

n° 505



Inédit

Le présent volume, établi par François Leperlier, réunit l'intégralité des manuscrits et tapuscrits des *Héroïnes* de Claude Cahun. Il comprend :

- « L'Androgyne, héroïne entre les héroïnes », texte inédit dont une version remaniée constitue la première partie (intitulée « Aurige ») du chapitre IV d'*Aveux non avenues* (Éditions du Carrefour, 1930).
- « Ève la trop crédule », « Dalila, femme entre les femmes », « La Sadique Judith », « Hélène la rebelle », « Sapho l'incomprise », « Marguerite, sœur incestueuse », « Salomé la sceptique », textes parus dans « Héroïnes », in *Le Mercure de France*, n° 639, 1^{er} février 1925.
- « Sophie la symboliste », « La Belle », textes parus dans « Héroïnes », in *Le Journal littéraire*, n° 45, 28 février 1925.
- « L'Allumeuse (Pénélope irrésolue) », « Marie » « Cendrillon, l'enfant humble et hautaine », « L'Épouse essentielle ou la Princesse inconnue », « Salmacis la suffragette », « Celui qui n'est pas un héros », textes non publiés du vivant de l'auteur.

Illustration de couverture : Photomontage de Claude Cahun et Suzanne Malherbe tiré d'*Aveux non avenues*, Éditions du Carrefour, 1930. DR.

Notre adresse Internet : www.1001nuits.com

© Mille et une nuits, département de la Librairie Arthème Fayard,
mai 2006 pour la présente édition.
ISBN : 2-84205-927-1

L'Androgyne, héroïne entre les héroïnes¹

À Mlle P. du...

Je sais où je vais,
Je t'y veux conduire,
Mon dessein mauvais
N'est pas de te nuire.

Paul VALÉRY

Portrait de l'Androgyne

– Des seins superflus; les dents lourdes et contradictoires; les yeux et les cheveux du ton le plus banal; des mains assez fines, mais qu'un démon – le démon

1. Initialement prévu pour figurer dans le recueil des *Héroïnes*, ce texte fut incorporé, après de nombreux remaniements et ajouts, dans le chapitre IV de *Aveux non avendus* («Aurige»). Daté 1921-1924, il propose une méditation assez complexe sur la double inclination (hétérosexuelle, homosexuelle), à travers les images idéalisées, et conflictuelles, du Poète et du Maître, de l'Amant et de l'Amante. On doit y voir aussi un portrait de Claude Cahun elle-même : l'androgyne.

CLAUDE CAHUN

de l'hérédité – a tordues, déformées... La tête ovale de l'esclave, le front trop haut... ou trop bas; un nez bien réussi dans son genre – hélas! un genre qui donne de vilaines associations d'images; la bouche trop sensuelle : cela peut plaire tant qu'on a faim, mais dès qu'on a mangé ça vous écœure; le menton à peine assez saillant; et par tout le corps des muscles seulement esquissés...

Victorieuse!... parfois victorieuse des plus atroces gênes, une adresse tardive corrige une ombre, un geste imprudent – et la beauté renaît!

Car devant son miroir Narcisse est touché de la grâce. Il consent à se reconnaître. Et l'illusion qu'il crée pour lui-même s'étend à quelques autres.

Hors-texte

– La parole est à l'Androgyne :

«À la recherche de l'homme. Voilà où j'en suis. Mais il n'en fut pas toujours de même : Enfant, ne lui jurai-je pas un éternel amour? Comme elle était sensée déjà! Il m'en souvient très bien (la souffrance d'alors m'a formé la mémoire : une mémoire à vif), très bien, ô sagesse précocce! – car tu me répondais : « Tu as tort... et moi, non! je ne te promets rien de pareil... combien de temps? Je ne sais pas. Sais-je seulement si je t'aime... Oui, je me

marierai... Quand? bientôt, n'en doute pas...» – Franchise admirable! et perdue... J'étais incapable de l'apprécier – et cela se comprend: passionnée, presque hystérique, indigne... et bien loin d'envier, haïssant si fort toute la sérénité du monde!...

«À force d'insister j'obtins qu'elle me promît un an – ce qu'elle ne consentit pourtant qu'à regret. Elle me mit à la porte ce jour-là, s'enferma dans sa chambre – seule – pour méditer une décision si grave. Elle sortit. Je revins: Eh bien? dis-je (car j'y pensais toujours. Elle aussi d'ailleurs). Mais elle répondit: «Eh bien! quoi?... Je vais au jardin: maman réclame ses fleurs. Tu restes ici?» On ne se débarrasse pas de moi si facilement. Je m'entête: Toujours, dis, toujours? – Je marchande; et, voyant qu'elle va se fâcher, je rabaisse mes prétentions: Un an, dis, un an? Promets-moi un an, ce n'est pas grand-chose... Alors, ne pouvant plus se dérober, elle me regarde durement, réfléchie, sérieuse: «Un an, soit» – et cela, comme une aumône à un pauvre qu'on sait simulateur, pour qu'enfin je la laisse en repos.

«Pourtant cette promesse n'était point une pièce fausse; mais elle l'avait pesée, elle comptait la tenir. Elle la tint largement. Avant tout, et pour sa propre estime, elle est absolument loyale.

«Ce fut là le méchant début de nos amours. – Et voilà bientôt quinze années...»¹

1. Ce dialogue restitue les échanges entre Claude Cahun et Suzanne Malherbe au début de leurs amours, autour de 1909-1910.

CLAUDE CAHUN

Portraits psychologiques

L'Androgyne :

– Férocité, luxure, un égoïsme monstrueux... (Il y a bien des circonstances, des détails contradictoires ; on pourrait atténuer... mais à quoi bon ? Sachons ne choisir que l'essentiel.) – Enthousiasmes faciles, incessants et fidèles – mais dureté de cœur. Lâcheté physique, et parfois morale (mais de source physique). – Aucun préjugé : pas de sens social.

Le Maître de l'Androgyne :

– Méfiance envers les hommes (et soi-même) ; confiance... relative à l'égard de l'Androgyne. Une excessive pudeur mentale. Une paresse étrange – qui est plutôt l'horreur des initiatives, de tout changement, peut-être des transitions.

– Honnêteté stricte, un sens rare de la justice, le respect de la liberté de chacun. Quelques préjugés enracinés, pour ainsi dire : physiques, qui sont bien des préjugés cependant puisqu'à l'essai ils peuvent être vaincus. – Douceur, bonté sans illusion. – Une certaine lâcheté morale (effet de l'excessive pudeur et de la paresse).

HÉROÏNES

Le Poète, amant de l'Androgyne :

– *Bovarysme*. Impuissance. Aucune concentration d'esprit. Peu de logique : jugements subjectifs. Enthousiasme et générosité (non pas bonté). – Quelques préjugés, mais superficiels : de vanité sociale. Accès de témérité, puis de faiblesse morale (dépression nerveuse).

Explications

– Écoute, Androgyne ! Si c'est Lui que tu aimes, quitte-moi. Je ne le désire pas, mais je m'en console-
rai... Ne va pas te croire indispensable.

– (Que répondre à cela ?)... Ce n'est pas Lui que j'aime assez pour te quitter...

– Alors, Androgyne, puisqu'après tout c'est moi que tu aimes, il faut être honnête et cesser de mentir.

(Que répondre à cela ?)... Je ne souhaite pas mentir. C'est Lui, c'est toi qui m'y contrains. Ce n'est certes pas Lui, mais je crains que ce ne soit point toi non plus que j'aime... assez pour être « honnête ». (Existe-t-il, Celui ?... non, non ! mais plutôt : est-il bien nécessaire d'être « honnête » ?)

– Restez avec votre Maître, Androgyne, mais couchez avec moi. Il vous soignera mieux que je ne pourrais

CLAUDE CAHUN

faire... (traduisez : je n'aurai pas cette peine) – et moi je serai là pour l'Art, le Rêve, l'Amour... Il faut seulement me promettre de n'aimer que moi seul, de ne coucher qu'avec moi seul...

(En effet : quand je fais l'amour à mon Maître, le Poète s'en aperçoit et le Poète est furieux!)

– (Enfin à cela je puis répondre!)... Mais pourquoi, pourquoi?... Puisque je me sens de force à coucher avec vous deux!

Lettres de l'Androgyne au Poète (fragments)

PRÉLIMINAIRES

Que ces heures furent courtes!... Comment ai-je eu le triste courage de partir alors que vous me permettiez de rester? Cela me semble à présent surhumain – et tellement idiot! N'aurais-je pas dû attendre que l'on me chasse... ou presque...

Je me console (mal) en pensant que j'ai saisi la seule chance d'être regrettée...

*

Quoi! près d'être si merveilleux... vous auriez eu le temps de penser à moi! moi si petit...

*

HÉROÏNES

It's a mistake, but do make it still. Continuez-la-moi,
cette si douce erreur.

*

... Alors, ô précieux souvenir, peut-être viendras-tu te
réincarner dans ma vie? Car il existe aussi pour faire face
à leurs morts incessantes, des réincarnations constantes
de nos actes et de nos pensées. Poète, y avez-vous songé?

*

Et l'élève indisciplinée ne peut vous offrir en échange
qu'un peu de sa folie, dont vous n'avez pas plus l'em-
ploi qu'elle n'a de votre raison.

*

Malgré mon amitié déterminée, et bien que je sois
(ô honte!) précisément de ces gens grossiers « *who
must lay heavy hands upon life* », je puis me détacher de
vous. J'ai subi tant de renoncements dans ma vie! J'y
suis accoutumée. J'accepterai donc joyeusement tous
ceux que vous *m'imposerez*. Mais – *despite the appeal to my
beloved Plato* – (ah!... vous connaissez déjà les points
sensibles de mon esprit et vous abusez!) n'espérez pas
m'amener à *choisir* le renoncement. Il est, cette saison,
contraire à mon humeur.

CLAUDE CAHUN

*

D'autre part, je ne puis me résoudre à trouver « ridicules les gestes de la chair » – certains gestes surtout, les plus inutiles, me semblent beaux au contraire, comme l'art même, de par leur vanité, leur stérilité parfaite. – Ou bien je condamnerai tous les gestes, jusqu'à ceux de l'esprit... et la Bêtise absolue, celle qui ne peut croître ni périr, la plus invariable Erreur, la plus enracinée, sera mon idole...

*

Allons, Poète ! ne me regardez pas ainsi : Je ne suis pas aussi vicieux que j'essaye de le paraître. C'est un mauvais genre que je me donne, voilà tout.

*

Nous sommes sortis aujourd'hui dans la ville antipathique ; – elle m'a paru bizarrement changée. Les souvenirs mélancoliques de nos récentes promenades me guettaient à chaque tournant de rue, et il me semblait vous voir marcher à quelques pas devant moi.

*

HÉROÏNES

Ne vous ennuyez pas. C'est très malsain. Faites plutôt n'importe quelle folie !...

*

Je me sens affamée de toutes les drogues. C'est cette maudite chaleur évidemment. Mon Maître, prodigue de liberté dans certains cas, propose de m'acheter assez d'alcool pour me soûler. Merci ! c'est trop brutal pour moi...

*

Mais...

(Il me permet cette lecture : agréable tyran, en somme !)...

On se console comme on peut.

*

– Femme ? oui alors ! – Hélas, à qui le dites-vous ! Poète, c'est cruel. Mais vous m'écrivez des choses si merveilleusement compensatrices que vous me réconciliez presque avec moi-même. Moi ! – très modeste Narcisse. Je vous expliquerai mon self-love... C'est du faux. Pur stoïcisme, fierté peut-être... En réalité, j'ai grand besoin des autres.

CLAUDE CAHUN

*

... Et moi je suis prête à manquer sournoisement à toutes les promesses – pourvu que vous acceptiez sans mépris mon âme inaccessible aux scrupules, ou mon corps révolté, ou même l'un et l'autre... Un corps, c'est facile à refuser, mais une âme résolue !...

Ainsi, bravant votre mépris même, la mienne vous est dévouée, Poète ! – et vous n'y pouvez rien...

*

APOGÉE

Je m'exprime très, très mal. Il y a des phrases qui ne sont pas faites pour être comprises, mais plutôt senties. À quoi bon dire : « Je vous aime » ? Je voudrais seulement pouvoir le penser très fort, près de vous, dans le silence...

*

Il est un être au monde que je ne veux tromper à aucun prix – et celui-là, c'est vous.

Je me calomnierais plutôt que d'essayer de vous séduire avec une beauté simulée. Or, malgré mon

HÉROÏNES

amour de moi-même (fièvre intermittente, je vous assure), je connais mes défauts, mes laideurs intellectuelles et physiques. Je veux que vous non plus ne les ignoriez point.

*

J'ai pris ce matin mon carnet rouge, et j'ai tenté de reconstituer par le détail les moments heureux, incomplets et pourtant parfaits que je vous dois – ô mon ami ! Hélas ! je suis tout effarée de mon dénuement, des fuites cruelles d'une mémoire perverse (ah ! je suis bien punie !). La succession même de ces instants m'échappe (ô souvenirs insaisissables !)... Mais si l'analyse est perdue, il me reste, à travers la souffrance actuelle, une certaine synthèse du bonheur passé que j'oppose au jour morne.

Et je vis de cet élan, comme une machine au moteur arrêté qui cependant roule encore...

Je persiste plus que je n'existe – à la merci de votre écriture subtile, ou condamnée par votre dur silence. (Je n'y crois pas, tu sais. Tu ne me condamneras pas. J'ai confiance.) Mais si vous mesurez trop parcimonieusement l'espoir – prends garde : dans un coup de révolte ou de vitalité, je prendrai une brassée de mes souvenirs et je la jetterai en avant. Alors je me tournerai vers l'hiver où ces souvenirs seront de vigoureux espoirs. Je reprendrai courage – assez de courage pour vaincre

CLAUDE CAHUN

tous scrupules, jusqu'aux vôtres, mon jeune dieu (dont Çakya, Mouni, amant de Cybèle, n'est qu'un des prêtres, et non pas le plus fort!) jusqu'aux tiens, ô mon Poète (mais d'abord les poètes, voyons! ça n'a pas droit aux scrupules!)...

Excusez cette divagation et grondez-moi, s'il vous plaît, cher. C'est peut-être bien pour cela que j'écris : je n'ai plus qu'un désir : entendre votre voix, quoi qu'elle doive me dire. Écrivez-moi.

J'ai trouvé dans mon orgueil la pierre philosophale de l'amour. Avec elle, je puis accomplir la transmutation des joies : des signes, je ferai des sons; des sons, je ferai des parfums; des parfums, je ferai des baisers; des baisers, j'obtiendrai des caresses... Sans doute, j'ai cette puissance – pourtant embrassez-moi, comme s'il n'en était rien!...

*

Je me résigne à les suivre, ces chemins secrets, et, si je puis, je vous y pousse : il faut bien vivre, cher! – c'est-à-dire pour moi vous aimer librement. Et la liberté serait dans le mensonge? Sans doute : à sa place. Depuis des siècles elle n'a point eu d'autre demeure. Suis-je cynique? Non : l'amour au contraire m'a rajeunie. Souvent cet amour fut innocent jusqu'à la maladresse. Je

HÉROÏNES

ne crois pas que ce soit son seul charme, et c'est mon remords – mon seul remords !

*

Cependant, la perspective d'un séjour à... dangereux espoir. – Dangereux ! S'il allait être déçu. En attendant, le Maître me console avec une douceur – hélas ! bien mal récompensée. Je dois être insupportable !

... et j'aurais besoin de la mer calmante, calme qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec un oubli contraire à mon désir – et tout à fait impraticable.

*

Nous avons fait un excellent voyage... choisi dans le train les meilleures places : seuls, en face d'un très beau garçon, qui ressemblait à Léonide Massine¹, et que (Socrate sait pourquoi !) j'eusse voulu présenter à Monsieur votre père.

*

Où est restée ma belle indifférence ? L'insuffisance de cet égoïsme dont j'étais si fière est à la base du

1. Léonide Massine (1896-1979), danseur et chorégraphe d'origine russe, entré chez Diaghilev en 1913.

CLAUDE CAHUN

déséquilibre. Le supprimer tout à fait serait aussi bien – mais... Il faut donc le retrouver, intégral.

Et pourtant, en ce qui vous concerne, je ne puis ni ne veux rien reprendre de ma grande tendresse – dussé-je par elle subir de plus graves tourments. Car je les aimerais.

*

«It occurs to you that perhaps (!) I may be troubled to know you ill»?... By Joye!... et il n'est pas besoin pour cela d'avoir un tendre cœur! Je ne sais trop ce qu'est le mien – plutôt mauvais, en somme – mais je me sens absolument désemparée, si impuissante à soulager votre peine, si loin de vous irrémédiablement! – et de près que ferais-je? sinon vous importuner : je sais si mal soigner les êtres que j'aime!...

Vous devriez savoir quelle est et quelle sera mon angoisse jusqu'à ce que je puisse – bientôt, ah bientôt! – vous savoir tout à fait rétabli...

J'aurais tant souhaité venir à... sinon guérir votre mal, au moins tâcher de le distraire...

*

HÉROÏNES

CRISE

(Rupture des liens sensuels)

My one and only

Oui, vous êtes unique, mon petit dieu (chaque être l'est évidemment, mais vous plus que tout autre)...

*

Vous êtes unique, et je vous aime, et notre amitié – la dure nécessité enfin m'ouvre les yeux que vous avez si longtemps vainement voulu dessiller – peut devenir, purifiée des larmes qui la souillent, une joie extraordinaire, continue, inaltérable...

*

J'ai plaidé honteusement ma très mauvaise cause – j'ai perdu mon procès : le Maître m'offre toujours la même dure alternative – the golden cage (assez large, en somme) – ou l'univers qui me fait peur.

Continuer mon indécision, l'effroyable puérilité de ma dissimulation, amène trop de chagrins, risquerait des désastres!... Et j'ai choisi.

Pour cette vie, toutes mes valeurs sont fausses – tout à recommencer!...

Il faut me croire : je fus avec vous coupable, inconsidérée, pire peut-être... mais toujours loyale. Et quand je vous entraînaï, comme je l'ai fait si souvent, je doutais encore, malgré toute preuve, qu'il pût y avoir des hommes tels que mon Maître, tels que vous : honnêtes, plus passionnés sans doute, répugnant à tout partage – si différents de moi, exigeante, vicieuse – anormale. Je suppose qu'il faut le reconnaître enfin !

Si vous m'aimez encore après ces terribles aveux, eh bien oui, Poète ! Il faudra renoncer, comme vous m'en avez menacée si souvent, vous comparant à de G...¹ (notre Socrate national).

Mais ce ne sera pas la même chose !

Vous êtes jeune – ah ! si jeune et si beau ! – et vous ferez encore de très désirables conquêtes, vous donnerez encore de très pures passions à des êtres plus dignes de vous que moi. Je l'espère de tout mon cœur qui vous aime enfin avec un égoïsme décoloré par tant de larmes...

Mais vous me garderez peut-être une amitié simple et sûre et profonde (est-ce trop ambitieux ?) ... Je ne suis pas jalouse – il faut bien que j'aie au moins les vertus de mes vices.

Ne me plaignez pas non plus. Ma part sera la plus enviable. Je vous ai dit qu'il me fallait déifier ce que

1. Peut-être s'agit-il de Jules de Gaultier, auteur du *Bovarisme* (Mercure de France, 1902).

HÉROÏNES

j'aime. Vous m'avez répondu que, si l'amour se réalise, le jeu devient dangereux. Je serai désormais à l'abri du danger – et pourrai me saouler d'adoration, my one and only God!

Vous voyez où j'en suis : retour d'égoïsme. Mon excuse d'avoir beaucoup souffert durant ces jours tourmentés ne pourrait qu'aggraver votre peine. Je la renie. Vous me pardonneriez d'être devant vous tout à fait sans excuse.

(Oui, je croyais honnêtement (!) qu'on peut prendre ici-bas et accueillir tout objet aimé, désiré, pourvu qu'il soit seulement consentant!)

Mais je suis seule à avoir pensé ainsi. Je suis seule coupable. Dites-le, je vous en prie, criez-le – qu'on vous foute la paix! Tous devraient le savoir...

Écrivez-moi que vous comprenez, que vous pardonnez, que vous oubliez, que vous serez gai – déjà presque guéri. Ne vous inquiétez pas de moi : je suis accoutumée à regarder passer mes rêves en laissant retomber mes bras lâches d'Oriental...

*

CLAUDE CAHUN

DÉCLIN

... et pourquoi pas ici ?

Je prononce pour je ne sais quel dieu ces vaines prières. Les dieux sont bienveillants mais impuissants, je crois, à nous exaucer. À peine peuvent-ils préserver leur propre bonheur ! Tous les dieux ont l'air de souffrir plus et mieux que les hommes. C'est leur supériorité.

*

Le pays est toujours le même : extraordinairement beau. Mais, cette année, je trouve sa beauté froide, et je l'admire sans l'aimer. Encore un dieu impuissant !

Chaque journée me semble longue à vivre – le soir tellement préférable au matin ! (sauf insomnie).

*

Moi aussi j'ai et j'aurai toujours plaisir à causer avec vous, à vous écouter surtout – ô voix savante du Poète ! – et pourtant aujourd'hui à vous raconter mes joies monotones et l'angoisse étrange qui fait des jours encore non vécus de ce mois (trop de sécurité sans doute) des instants aussi chers – mélange de vague et de précis – que s'ils étaient déjà des souvenirs. Trop d'insécurité aussi : je me sens changer minute par minute,

HÉROÏNES

et cela tout ensemble avec impatience et regret. L'horloge pneumatique a-t-elle conscience de ses saccades ? Souffre-t-elle de ne pouvoir les ralentir ou hâter à son gré ?...

... Phrases ni musique. Mais un rythme supérieur me possède. L'air pur, la mer limpide, le ciel sans tache – une fatigue proportionnée, un repos bien réparti...

*

Il me faudra pour quitter ce pays de gaieté de cœur une attraction bien forte. C'est un amour plus fort que d'un pays natal – le lieu où j'ai pris conscience de moi-même, où j'ai commencé d'imaginer que je pensais ! où je me suis aimée pour la première fois.
– J'exagère !

*

Écrivez-moi des lettres comme vous savez le faire : vivantes, émouvantes, l'illusion d'une présence – mais pas comme la dernière qui m'a presque fait pleurer... oh ! de rage seulement contre vous !

Et vous n'avez aucune excuse : car les mots qui me trahissent, moi, vous sont obéissants, soumis...

CLAUDE CAHUN

Mais : je vous aime, et je vous défie de tourner cette phrase-là contre moi.

*

NOUVELLE CRISE
(Rupture des liens intellectuels)

... Et du reste le soleil, la mer, l'amour, m'occupent le corps et l'âme – disons plus modestement : l'esprit. Car d'âme, sans doute, je n'ai guère...

« *Vivre dans le Beau, dans le Vrai* » ?... La beauté, je la convoite, certes ! mais comment aurais-je la prétention d'affirmer que je la possède continûment ? Ce ne peut être pour mon être imparfait qu'un bonheur spasmodique. C'est assez pour poursuivre.

Quant à la *vérité*, vous l'avouerais-je ? je ne m'en soucie nullement. Je ne la recherche pas – je la fuis. Et j'estime que c'est là mon *vrai* devoir...

*

Vous avez dû, ces dernières semaines, en tout cas vous avez pu penser beaucoup de mal de mon amitié, sinon de moi-même...

Je ne vous ai pas écrit depuis longtemps, je n'ai pas répondu à votre dernière lettre, affectueuse pourtant et

HÉROÏNES

pleine de conseils sages – que naturellement je ne suivrai pas! Hélas! les êtres faibles n'en font jamais qu'à leur tête. Ils ne cherchent pas quel régime intellectuel – plutôt *moral*, n'est-ce pas? – doit suivre l'artiste qui produira peut-être (avec du « coaxing ») un tout petit talent mineur...

Ils vivent leurs fantaisies, se détruisent à leur plaisir et créent seulement s'il leur chante... Toujours vainement violés par le « Vrai » (avec son cortège de chagrins abrutissants ou de plaisirs sans rêve), mais conscients de leur faiblesse, ils évitent soigneusement tout sacrifice consenti à la lourde machine de Gloire qui les écraserait – si disproportionnée à ces victimes, si ridicule en somme!

Ils ont la passion du Bonheur; ils en ont la manie, bonheur si difficile pour eux si difficiles qu'ils n'hésiteront point à lui immoler leur génie nouveau-né (– déjà difforme. Société! ta perte n'est pas grande).

Seule la joie délicate et pourtant incassable des enfants les a séduits. Ils seront volontairement « puérils » et repousseront leur maturité jusqu'à la mort, s'ils peuvent.

*

Si je vous ai parlé d'art et de mensonge, cher incorrigible Poète (car c'est le poète qui s'insurge et réclame le Beau, le « Vrai », indissociables – insociables bien

CLAUDE CAHUN

plutôt! – ce ne peut être le philosophe), si je vous ai parlé d'art, comprenez qu'il ne s'agissait que de vie – vie que j'appelle art, sans doute, (sans trop de modestie) pour y donner quelque valeur. – La littérature, je m'en fous, autant que vous des...

N'allez pas croire, à cause de cette discussion qui m'est agréable...

On peut avoir une opinion différente sur la valeur du «Vrai» – et se résigner à être les meilleurs amis du monde.

*

... Vous répondez ironiquement, et je me blesse à mon tour. – *Après tout, je ne suis pas un Ange!*... Il serait si simple (semble-t-il!) de causer : épiant sur votre cher visage le reflet d'un mot maladroit, le reprendre à temps; surveiller l'interprétation des phrases, châtier les obscures, les coupables...

Bientôt, peut-être?

*

– Il faudra essayer de me convertir au «Vrai». Je ne demande qu'à vous écouter, car vous aurez, j'en suis sûre, d'admirables arguments de Poète. Et puis, si je vous écoute mal, du moins je ferai très bien semblant

HÉROÏNES

– et je vous regarderai ! Qui sait ? Plusieurs se convertirent à moins...

*

Vous avez l'art de me faire agir inconsidérément, prononcer des mots que mes lèvres réprouvent – en sorte que je reste étonnée de moi-même.

Nul autre au monde n'obtient autant de moi.

*

... Mes remords sont diminués de ce fait que vous m'avez un peu forcé la main – et que moi je vous croyais trop de perspicacité pour conserver après tant d'intimes discussions des illusions sur mon compte. Il me souvient encore mot pour mot d'une phrase de vos lettres : « Ne nie pas : je sais tout ce que tu penses... Ô Dieu ! que c'est pénible d'être aussi intelligent ! » (si perspicace ?) – par conséquent je suis excusable de vous avoir cru très sûr de vous ! (c'est-à-dire de votre choix).

*

Malgré mes « trente ans » (vous vous trompez d'ailleurs : c'est trente et un qu'il faut dire), je n'ai pu atteindre, hélas ! à la perfection d'ironie et de méchanceté...

CLAUDE CAHUN

Lettres d'Amour du Poète à l'Androgyne

Cette lettre est la plus difficile que jamais j'eus à écrire, car je vois clairement que vous ne me comprenez point, que vous ne m'avez jamais compris, qu'il est probable, hélas! que vous ne me comprendrez jamais!

Je vous ai crue sincère et loyale. Hélas! *j'ai cru* que vous aviez beaucoup de cœur et beaucoup de talent! Cela dit...

*

Quand, pour le Nouvel An, les plus jolies femmes du monde entier m'envoient des roses, il vous plaît d'envoyer les épines. À mon avis, c'est de bien mauvais goût!

*

Je suis tout à fait sans rancune, mais ne vous en flattez pas : c'est simplement que je considère tout cela comme des enfantillages, indignes de vos trente (30) ans – et sans aucune espèce d'importance...

Au contact d'autres êtres et grâce à leurs louanges, grâce à leur juste opinion de ma valeur, j'ai acquis une

HÉROÏNES

estime absolue de moi-même que votre total manque d'estime et de respect ne saurait amoindrir...

Quand quelque chose nous déplaît, il est si simple de se taire – comme je l'ai fait chaque fois que vous m'avez déplu. Les gens qui ont de la naissance et de l'éducation savent bien que c'est ainsi qu'on doit agir.

Mais je pense que chaque petit Narcisse ne peut admirer que lui-même ; pourtant il manque à sa propre beauté quand il aboie contre les autres...

Vraiment vous dépassez les bornes. Ne suis-je point à blâmer pour vous avoir trop souvent permis de m'insulter ?

J'ai écrit là-dessus un axiome admirable :

« La critique est aisée mais l'Art est difficile. »

Occupez-vous donc plutôt de faire vous-même un Chef-d'œuvre (ou tout au moins une *œuvre de Beauté*).

Enfin souvenez-vous : *le Silence est si beau !*

*

N'allez pas croire que la correspondance fut, pour si peu, rompue. Passé le temps « moral », notre Poète l'a reprise. Qu'est-ce qu'une contradiction de plus pour un poète ?

*

CLAUDE CAHUN

**Jugements des trois héros,
l'aventure une fois terminée :**

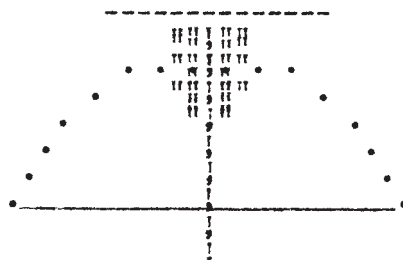
L'Androgyne s'est offerte – et je l'ai refusée. Je suis le plus vertueux des hommes !

*

Le Poète lui a fait la cour, mais l'Androgyne m'a préféré. Je suis le plus heureux des hommes !

*

Le Poète est un vaniteux, un impuissant ; et mon Maître un brutal, un maladroit – je suis bien malheureuse !... Mais, patience ! *Un jour viendra...* Je n'ai pas dit mon dernier mot !





4

THE EQUIVOCAL “I”: CLAUDE CAHUN AS LESBIAN SUBJECT

Abigail Solomon-Godeau

That *Woman* is everywhere to be found in the texts and images produced by the writers and artists who constituted the first generation of French surrealism but women artists rather less so is not surprising. The surrealists' ideals of femininity—sorceress and visionary, *femme-enfant*, incarnation of mysterious beauty, and locus of eroticism: male fantasies all—were formulations that reified Woman at the expense of women, women artists, of course, included. Consequently and with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Meret Oppenheim), women in surrealism were far more acknowledged in their roles as lovers and muses, or, in the case of those such as the anarchist Germaine Berton or the parricide Violette Nozières, celebrated as surrealist heroines—mascots, as it were, in the combat against bourgeois society and its mores. As Whitney Chadwick observed in her important study of 1985, “Surrealism’s idealized vision of woman was like an albatross around the neck of the woman artist, difficult to ignore but of no help in forging a personal identity.”¹

But while no women artists were included in the official ranks of the movement, as Chadwick also demonstrated, many women artists were actively encouraged in their work by André Breton and other members of the surrealist group, and women artists were also regularly included in the group’s exhibitions. Most of these, however (and again, Oppenheim is exceptional), were painters, although Lee Miller and Dora Maar made photographs, and Valentine Hugo and Nusch Eluard made photocollages. But as recently as 1985, when Chadwick’s book appeared, the work of Claude Cahun (1894–1954) was still largely unknown.² Aside from her polemical 1934 pamphlet *Les Paris sont*

ouverts, the photographic work as well as most of her writing, published and unpublished, remained outside the ever more intensively studied surrealist movement until a French scholar, François Leperlier, published in 1992 the first—and to this day the only—critical monograph, as well as a catalogue raisonné.³ Unlike the women surrealists discussed by Chadwick, and closer to the spirit of surrealism in the 1920s, Cahun's artistic work was in media *other* than painting and included photography, photcollage, object-making, and theatrical set design. Briefly, Cahun also performed as an actor in the short-lived, symbolist-influenced, experimental theater of Pierre Albert-Birot. Her extant writing includes journalistic essays, prose poems, and experimental literary forms such as the book *Aveux non avenus* and the unpublished "Heroines," but since her rediscovery, it has been primarily her astonishing pictures that have made her the object of critical attention, particularly on the part of feminist scholars and critics.⁴

The special interest Cahun holds for feminist critics and scholars derives from many features of her life and her work, not least from the fact of her being, as Leperlier notes, "l'une des très rares femmes qui participa activement à ce mouvement dans les années les plus critiques et les plus complexes" (one of the rare women who actively participated in this [surrealist] movement in its most critical and complex years).⁵ Moreover, because much of the photographic work that has survived, as well as "confessional" texts such as *Aveux non avenus*, seems concerned with the question of self-representation—an issue crucial to contemporary feminist theory and criticism—her work prompts numerous questions about the tensions between the autobiographical "I," the textual (or visual) "I," and the referential "I."

In this respect, it is now possible to discern—or so it has been argued—the vague outlines of a shared preoccupation among certain women artists of the period (e.g., Leonore Fini, Florence Henri, Frida Kahlo) that might be said to pivot around the question of (feminine) identity and the complexities and difficulties attending its representation. Indeed, Chadwick and other feminist scholars have hazarded the notion that the enterprise of self-representation might well constitute a kind of trope, a shared thematic, in the work of women artists extending from surrealism to the present. A similar perception informs exhibitions such as Chadwick's "Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation." In her suggestive essay, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors," which appears in the exhibition catalogue, Chadwick proposes that the exploration of the possibilities for self-representation constituted not only a discrete theme but an identifiable *difference* within the work of women artists in the orbit of surrealism:

In mobilizing the body as a primary signifier of its cultural politics, Surrealism established new parameters within which women artists might begin to explore the complex and ambiguous relationship between the female body and female identity. Women were not among Surrealism's founding "fathers." Although their significance to the movement continues to be debated, they left a collective body of self-portraits and other self-representations that in taking the artist's own body as the



Figure 4.1 Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait with Mask*, c. 1928, black-and-white photograph, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes

starting point and in collapsing interior and exterior projections of the self (regardless of how that word was/is understood), continues to reverberate within contemporary practices by women that articulate how the body is marked by femininity as a lived experience, subjectivity produced through new narratives, and the possibility of a feminine imaginary enacted. This body of work appears to have no parallel in the work of male Surrealists more inclined to project their desires outward, locating moments of rupture between conscious and unconscious, subject and object, in bodies Other to theirs, and almost exclusively in an otherness assigned to the feminine.⁶

The issue of self-representation raised by Chadwick in this essay and in other of her texts dealing with women and surrealism is a complicated one, and much depends on how one wishes to define both the terms “self” (as Chadwick herself concedes) and “self-representation.” Nevertheless, and whatever definitions are employed, it would seem to be the case that if any woman artist’s work warrants Chadwick’s characterization, it is that of Cahun. Although much of her work—literary and graphic—was lost or destroyed during the Second World War when her house on the Channel Island Jersey was requisitioned and then pillaged by the occupying Germans, and although new work of hers might yet come to light, what remains bears witness to *some* kind of project of self-representation. Self-portraits figure among the earliest of her photographs (1911) and are a consistent feature in her visual production until

almost the end of her life.⁷ In some cases, and in contrast to much surrealist photography, these are what are referred to as “straight” photographs, that is to say neither solarized nor otherwise subjected to darkroom manipulation. Their electrifying, unsettling effects are largely a consequence of Cahun’s particular staging of herself—that, and the Medusa-like ferocity of her face and gaze. Other photographic works in which she features are the photocollages reproduced in her book *Aveux non aveux* (plates 13, 14). In all cases, and contributing to the fascination—the shock—of her work, now that it has been resurrected for postmodern eyes, is Cahun’s preoccupation with the mask, the disguise, the masquerade of a mobile and unstable self (*fig. 4.1*). “Sous ce masque un autre masque. Je n’en finirai pas de soulever tous ces visages.” (“Under this mask, another mask. I will never finish lifting up all these faces.”)⁸ Whether Cahun’s project considered overall is better understood in terms of the specific historical circumstances and determinations of French surrealism in the 1920s and 1930s (and the difficult position of women artists within it), whether it should be understood as a singular body of work produced by an altogether singular artist, whether it might be considered in terms of Cahun’s lesbianism as itself constituting a specific enunciative position, or alternatively whether we might justly extrapolate from Cahun’s work something like a recurring thematic in modern (and postmodern) art by women, are by no means simple questions. That said, it is nonetheless undeniable that Cahun’s oeuvre, with its consistent play with the instability of identity, its frequent deployment of masquerade, its penchant for masks and mirrors, is startlingly close to the terms of contemporary feminist thinking about identity, gender, and sexual difference. Consequently, it requires almost more of an effort to re-situate Cahun in her actual time and milieu than it does to consider her work in the context of contemporary theoretical formulations about femininity, identity, and representation.

Almost from the beginning—that is, since the appearance of Leperlier’s monograph—Cahun’s photographic production has been aligned with the work of postmodernist feminist artists, most notably Cindy Sherman, primarily because both women photograph themselves. This linkage was first made in Leperlier’s study (“elle semble annoncer la démarche d’un Molinier, d’une Gina Pane, d’un Urs Lüthi, ou plus manifestement encore de Cindy Sherman.” “She seems to prefigure the work of a Molinier, a Gina Pane, an Urs Lüthi, or even more obviously, a Cindy Sherman”),⁹ and it has been reiterated in virtually all the subsequent writing on Cahun.

This tendency to “read” Cahun through contemporary theory and the work of contemporary artists is not, in and of itself, inimical to the critical exploration of her work (what work of the past is *not* viewed through the lens of the present?), but as I would argue, we must be as cautious about essentializing the work of women’s self-representation as we are about essentializing the historical actuality of women artists themselves. In other words, before we rush to create feminist (matri)lineages in which Claude Cahun becomes the ancestor of, for example, Francesca Woodman or Cindy Sherman, we need carefully to consider the nature of the terms, determinations, and contexts that formed and informed

Cahun's oeuvre, or, for that matter, Woodman's or Sherman's. Women artists of the twentieth century may well have consistently dealt with the problem of self-representation, but it does not follow from this that Cahun's or Deren's or Sherman's work can or should be collapsed into a "master" category of feminine self-representation even as we acknowledge the omnipresence of certain issues raised by the lives and work of women artists within predominantly male formations.¹⁰

It is, in any case, undoubtedly significant that certain of the texts that figure so importantly in contemporary feminist theory (not to mention recent writing on Cahun herself), such as Joan Rivière's much-cited "Womanliness as a Masquerade," are contemporaneous with Cahun's own work.¹¹ In this respect, it is worth remarking that Rivière was able to produce her analysis of femininity as compensatory, defensive, and staged (rather than innate, authentic, or essential) precisely as a consequence of the same social, economic, and cultural determinations that shaped the lives and work of the women artists of the period. It is, for instance, widely believed that it was Rivière herself who furnished the example of the professional woman whose femininity was a function of masquerade. Which is to say that Rivière, like Cahun, was representative of the epochal "new women" of the 1920s, and thus that both were part of the first generation of European and American women to have come of age in a period of relative emancipation. This emancipation had numerous implications and included not just the possibility of professional—including artistic—training, but also the possibility of constructing independent and sexually "free" lives outside of domesticity, maternity, and the family.

Related to the more general emancipation of women (and further contributing to the widespread cultural anxiety that congealed around the "new woman" and all she was imagined to signify) was the increasingly visible emergence in cities such as Berlin, Paris, and London of lesbian subcultures, including circles of intellectually and/or stylistically influential lesbians. Victor Margueritte's sensational, best-selling novel *La Garçonne* (published in Paris by Flammarion in 1922) announces in its very title that the "new woman" is distinguished by her blurring of gender distinctions. More scandalously still, the sexual freedom enjoyed by the eponymous heroine leads her, inexorably, to lesbian adventure, Margueritte thereby confirming the worst fears of his readers. It was, therefore, the discursive contiguity of "new woman" and "lesbian" that inflected both mainstream and popular representation and, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced at least some women's modes of self-representation.

Without, therefore, in any way minimizing the singularity of Cahun's visual or textual productions, it is worth noting that other women artists of the period—for example, Florence Henri—who might also be described as engaged with issues of self-representation, identified themselves, implicitly or explicitly, as new women, even as they more or less boldly declared themselves lesbians. In this respect, the manifest self-fashioning of Claude Cahun (born Lucy Schwob) was likely abetted and sustained by the existence of the remarkable lesbian subculture in Paris of the 1920s, with some of whose most notable mem-

bers—for example, Adrienne Monnier—she had close friendships. Although Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas are certainly the best-known lesbian couple of the period, it is further worth recalling that even as Breton categorically evicted homosexuality from the sexuality surrealism ostensibly celebrated,¹² Paris was then home to Berenice Abbott, Margaret Anderson, Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, Sylvia Beach (photographed by Cahun), the Marquise de Belboeuf, Romaine Brooks, Janet Flanner, Jane Heap, Florence Henri, and Solita Solano, as well as Monnier. Certain of these women were cross-dressers (Belboeuf, Brooks, Heap), others were fashionable socialites (Barney and her circle), but all of them could be said to represent different avatars of the “new woman.”¹³

Somewhat curiously, therefore, Cahun’s lesbianism has received far less critical and biographical elaboration than one would expect of the circumstances of her private life as they might inform the nature of her work. Although I would not go so far as to posit a “lesbian specificity” that can be read out of her visual or literary production, by the same token I consider her lesbianism as far more than a biographical anecdote, and I certainly do not consider it as a factor to be subsumed within either the extreme introversion or the narcissism that Cahun herself acknowledged as important facets of her being.¹⁴ That from her twenties until her death in 1954, Cahun lived with and was evidently inseparable from Suzanne Malherbe (“l’autre moi,” as Cahun described her), an artist and illustrator who also adopted a masculine name for her professional and artistic identity (Marcel Moore), is not incidental to Cahun’s production. On the contrary, some of Cahun’s most singular work, such as the ten photollages reproduced in *Aveux non avenus*, were active collaborations between the two women. Unfortunately, the recent scholarly and critical attention devoted to Cahun has not extended to Malherbe and her work as an illustrator, so it is still unclear how their work may have reflected upon each others’. This lacuna is perhaps due to art history and criticism’s implicit bias against collaborative art making, but perhaps also because so little is known about Malherbe herself. Nevertheless, the fact that Malherbe was not merely Cahun’s lifelong lover and companion but her half-sister as well, suggests that the themes of doubling and mirroring, as well as the play with alter egos that feature so prominently in Cahun’s written and photographic work, had some connection to the nature and terms of their unusually close relationship.

This double intimacy, which was evidently established in their childhood, takes on further significance in relation to Cahun’s remarkable photographs of herself, for Malherbe not only made the exposures, she was their first audience, the first spectator to whom—for whom?—Cahun addressed the image and for whose eyes she constructed her pose. It would thus seem appropriate to consider these pictures as consisting in part of an address to the other, rather than considering them solely within the category of self-representation in its more solipsistic sense. This more “transactional” or relational approach to the staging of her photographs is further suggested by the fact that she chose, for the most part, not to exhibit or to reproduce her pictures, although it is clear

that their fabrication required a great deal of preparation, including elaborate costuming, makeup and lighting.¹⁵ It is also evident that by the end of the 1920s Cahun had accumulated a virtual image bank of self-representations that she regularly circulated and recirculated within her own work. Thus, for example, self-portraits made in the 1920s (usually, the head or face alone) feature often in the photocollages produced with Malherbe, ten of which were reproduced in *Aveux non avenue* in 1930.¹⁶ Similarly, insofar as we wish to consider the photographs that Cahun made using herself as subject as instances of self-representation, or as self-portraits, we may well wish to consider whether Cahun "speaks" herself not only as a woman but also as a lesbian. Is there, in other words, a way in which we might wish to consider Cahun's work in terms of *lesbian*, as opposed to women's self-representation?

Supporting such an approach is the additional biographical information that unlike many other women in the surrealist orbit, Cahun appears to have been a feminist, and unlike many feminists, she was clearly conversant and engaged with contemporary discourses about homosexuality. She was, for example, the French translator of Havelock Ellis, who, among other things, theorized homosexuality as a "third sex."¹⁷ In her twenties, she had already written a journalistic account of the Oscar Wilde trial, as well as an unpublished text entitled "Les jeux uraniens." In a few of her photographs, she presents herself relatively unambiguously as a male subject: as a dandified young man with a shaved head, as a young sailor, and somewhat later as a dapperly suited, moustached man. (These photographs are among the few that might possibly be categorized as displaying her in drag.) In this latter incarnation, however, she was *literally* playing a role—the character of Monsieur in Pierre Albert-Birot's *Banlieu*—and it somewhat complicates the possible readings of her pictures when we realize that a number of them depict Cahun in the roles she played in Albert-Birot's theater, Le Plateau.¹⁸ In these instances, what began as a public appearance became in the photographs a far more private affair, shared only with Malherbe and with carefully selected friends.

Where in certain of her pictures Cahun masquerades as a man, others seem closer to the category of the Androgyne. These would include the photographs of her with her head shaved bald as an egg, bearing expressions as disturbingly predatory as they are fierce; others where she sports closely cropped hair, plucked eyebrows, and a lipsticked mouth, and a similarly unsettling gaze; and still others where, for example, as swami or yogi, sexual identity is entirely ambiguous (plate 4). Such photographs, in tandem with her writings on androgyny (as an ideal), or in her texts featuring androgynes as personages (i.e., Salmacis, the mythic origin of the androgyne, is a character in "Heroines"), constitute a category somewhat apart from the "lesbian," and although I am proposing that her lesbianism be considered as one of the shaping elements of her art, it must nonetheless be stated that nowhere in her writing (to my knowledge) does she accept or affirm the *identity* of lesbian.

This refusal of the category "lesbian" is, however, perhaps not so strange as it might seem, for insofar as a lesbian is defined, then as now, as a woman who desires women, the category "fits" only to the extent that the subject iden-



Figure 4.2 Claude Cahun, variation on Plate III, *Le Coeur de Pic*, 1936, black-and-white photograph, Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks and Projects



Figure 4.3 Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, 1932, black-and-white photograph, Jersey Museums Service

tifies herself as a woman. As Monique Wittig has argued, "The refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become man or woman, conscious or not. For a lesbian, this goes further than the refusal of the *role* 'woman.' It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of a man."¹⁹

This refusal is given perhaps its least ambiguous articulation in the manuscript of 1925 that Cahun titled "Heroines," translated and published in full for the first time in this book.²⁰ In a series of vignettes, all written in the first person, and taking as her cast of characters fifteen feminine archetypes, Cahun de-heroicizes—when she does not acidly mock or dismiss—the male protagonists featured in these tales. Thus, Cinderella's prince is a foot fetishist, Ulysses a cuckold, St. John the Baptist becomes "Whatshisname?," someone of no importance, and so forth. But even more significantly, from the very first page Cahun limns the nature as well as some of the various sources of male domination, masculine fears and anxieties included. Eve, for example, remarks that "si seulement Adam me donnait plus d'argent de poche" (if only Adam had given me more pocket money), and Holophernes is described as fearful of sexual contamination: "Après qu'il a baisé son esclave il s'essuie furtivement la lèvre. Il n'ôte point ses vêtements de peur de souiller de son corps plus qu'il n'est indispensable." (After he has kissed his slave, he furtively wipes his lips. He doesn't remove any more of his clothes than necessary in order not to soil his body).²¹ Throughout the text too, there are frequent remarks that signal Cahun's wry acknowledgment of gender ideology (e.g., "Une femme qui a des sens est-elle vraiment un monstre?" [Is a woman with sense really a monster?]). And hardly fortuitously, there is the inclusion in her cast of characters of Sappho, Salmacis, and a last, nameless androgyne. Among the object photographs she made in the 1930s (*fig. 4.2*) is one titled "le Père" a small splayed mannequin, made from debris, laid out on the beach, sprouting a stick penis from the navel and under whose legs is a vulvalike mark inscribed in the sand (reproduced also in a later self-portrait, *fig. 4.3*).²²

As "Heroines" and other works attest, Cahun is an artist for whom sexual politics, as opposed to the sexual *body*, is a domain to consciously, deliberately, indeed intellectually investigate, a far different enterprise than surrealism's celebration of the anarchic and liberating potential of eros and eroticism.

In claiming that "a lesbian is not a woman," Wittig proposes we think of *lesbianism* as entailing an *ontological* refusal of a definitional category. Whether the lesbian defines her "self" in feminine or masculine terms, whether her psychic identifications are with men or women, whether her lived sexuality is characterized by active or passive aims (or neither or both), whether she is "androgyne," "invert," "pervert," "uranian," or third sex, "woman" is what she is not. This categorical refusal might well account for the fact that the majority of Cahun's self-portraits (if we are to consider them as such) do not play with codes of femininity as such (nor, with the exception of those few photographs in which she presents herself *en travestie*, with masculinity), and in the few instances where they do, the feminine is staged in unmistakably and blatantly theatricalized terms. Moreover, Cahun's textual and visual explorations of fem-

inity or womanliness (as in “Heroines” and *Aveux*) deemphasize the body, particularly the eroticized feminine body so ubiquitous in surrealist art in general.²³ Moreover, and again in contrast to surrealist photographic practice, in the photocollages that were made to accompany *Aveux non avenues*, it is Cahun’s face and head that are most frequently represented. Even among the earliest of her self-portraits, the emphasis is usually put on her face and head, with the central focus placed on her daunting and riveting gaze. Furthermore, the costumes she designed and wears in other photographs are more unisex than anything else, and where some small details of the costume allude to the morphological, such as those that include “nipples” (plate 3), they too are unisex. Altogether, Cahun’s photographs minimize or efface the body as body, abstracting or otherwise dematerializing it, even in those in which she wears only a bathing costume, or possibly nothing.

In what ways, then, might we be able to extrapolate some notion of a lesbian subjectivity informing these photographs and photocollages? One way to approach this question is with reference to definitions contemporary to Cahun’s work. Inasmuch as it is clear that Cahun’s preferred definitions were derived from Karl Ulrichs and Havelock Ellis, lesbianism as such would not seem to be the salient term. But implicit in her embrace of definitions that discursively produced homosexuality as a positivity in itself (i.e., “uranian” or “third sex”) is a concomitant rejection of notions of female homosexuality as either deviant or imitative. This is important because lesbianism was early on defined by Freud as more or less contingent upon a “masculinity complex,” and popular discourses on lesbianism tended also to imagine the lesbian as a masculinized subject. But although there were those who were wont to consider male homosexuality as constituted by a feminine subjectivity trapped in a man’s body, this does not necessarily mean that Cahun considered herself to harbor a masculine subjectivity trapped in her own.

If, for Wittig, a lesbian is not a woman, in Freudian theory, masculinity and femininity are not only relational but relative terms, more in the nature of cultural ideals than perfectly realizable identities. Lacan goes even further to the extent that he considers the heterosexual roles designated as “man” and “woman” as themselves part of the symbolic order (and thus a social production), an ideal embodiment of the law of sexual difference. Moreover, and as Judith Butler remarks, “These symbolic positions for Lacan are by definition impossible to occupy even as they are impossible to resist as the structuring telos of desire.”²⁴ Lacan, in fact, extended Rivière’s formulation of masquerade to encompass masculinity as well: “One might even say that the masculine ideal and the feminine ideal are represented in the psyche by something other than this activity/passivity opposition. Strictly speaking, they spring from a term that I have not introduced but which one female psychoanalyst has pinpointed as the feminine sexual attitude—the term masquerade.”²⁵

This notion of gender as masquerade, like Judith Butler’s conception of gender as fundamentally performative, resonates strikingly with Cahun’s work not merely because of the recurring appearance of costumes and masks—the self as an affair of smoke and mirrors—but because it appears to enact the most

radical part of Rivière's argument. Womanliness, in Rivière's account, did not mask something beneath it (say, the pre-Oedipal, polymorphously perverse, lost continent of primal femininity) but was itself a vacancy, an emptiness. Certainly there are works of Cahun's that could function as virtual illustrations of such a model. Among a series of four photographs made in 1928, for example, all employing a feminine mask with a fringe of bangs, there is one in which both mask and "body" are manifestly empty. Works such as these echo the question posed by Judith Butler as to whether in effect there *is* anything by way of a "contents" to the self: "First, what is meant by understanding gender as an impersonation? Does this mean that one puts on a mask or persona, that there is a 'one' who precedes that 'putting on,' who is something other than its gender from the start? Or does this miming, this impersonating precede and form the 'one,' operating as its formative precondition rather than its dispensable artifice?"²⁶

But if we are to take Cahun's work as an exemplary demonstration of the fictitious nature of the "self," if we are to read her pictures as primarily an exploration of the agency of masquerade in constituting a simulacrum of a "self," and the self as isomorphic with the terms of its representation, how and in what terms do we account for her lifelong preoccupation with issues of identity at all? Furthermore, while the notion of masquerade may account for the aporias, if not the *fraudulence* of gender performance as such, it does not in and of itself "account" for lesbianism, for sexual orientation (as we would now say) has only an adventitious relationship to gender, masculine or feminine. Or, as Butler observes: "There are no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality. None of these terms captures or determines the rest. Part of what constitutes sexuality is precisely that which does not appear and that which, to some degree, can never appear."²⁷ It is perhaps in this matrix of contradiction—Cahun's consistent explorations of an identity *non avenu*—that we might wish to reconsider some of the implications of Cahun's lesbianism, particularly with respect to Butler's deconstructive approach to lesbian identity.

Taking as her point of departure the conception of lesbianism as a "derivative" of heterosexuality, a "bad copy" of a sexual norm, "a vain effort to participate in the phantasmatic plenitude of naturalized heterosexuality which will always and only fail,"²⁸ Butler argues instead for a form of primary mimeticism constitutive of *all* sexuality. Taking drag as an instance of a copy that reveals the absence of an original, and referring to Esther Newton's work, Butler frames the issue thus:

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e. an act of *expropriation* or *appropriation* that assumes the gender is a rightful property of sex, that "masculine" belongs to "male" and "feminine" belongs to "female." There is no "proper" gender, a gender proper to one's sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property. Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is



Figure 4.4 Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1911, black-and-white photograph, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes

true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and a consequence of the imitation itself. [*Italics in the original*].²⁹

The interest of Butler's formulations for a reading of Cahun's self-portraits resides in the way they complement Cahun's frequent use of quotational modes of address and self-presentation. In one of her earliest self-portraits, which Leperlier dates 1911, Cahun stages herself as the virtual double of the famously beautiful (and widely photographed) courtesan Cléo de Merode (*fig. 4.4*). Eight years later, in one of her most haunting photographs, she is the very reincarnation of her father, the writer and publisher Maurice Schwob (plate 9). That Leperlier gives the date of the photograph of Maurice Schwob as 1920—that is, a year later than Cahun's photograph, is appropriately uncanny. Be that as it may, there would seem to be operative in Cahun's works a dialectical play between mimetic and identificatory impulses, manifest, on the one hand, by the perpetual mimetic staging of herself as an "Other," and on the other hand, by her affirming, in various ways, her affiliation with her uncle, the symbolist writer Marcel Schwob, with surrealism as a project, with Malherbe as an alter ego, with her intimate friend Henri Michaux (who appears in certain of the photocollages [plate 14] in *Aveux non avenues*), and so

forth. Accordingly, the play of imitation no less than the play of identification may in some ways be facilitated, if not fostered, by a lesbian (i.e., "not woman") enunciative position, no matter how provisional, which might furnish the ground *from which* Cahun "makes strange"—to use an expression popular among Russian artists in the aftermath of the Revolution—the appearances of gender identity as such.

What "performs" does not exhaust the "I"; it does not lay out in visible terms the comprehensive content of that "I," for if the performance is "repeated," there is always the question of what differentiates from each other the moments of identity that are repeated. And if the "I" is the effect of a certain repetition, one which produces the semblance of a continuity or coherence, then there is no "I" that precedes the gender that it is said to perform; the repetition, and the failure to repeat, produce a string of performances that constitute and contest the coherence of that "I."³⁰

"What performs does not exhaust the 'I'." In suggesting that we ought not to disqualify Cahun's sexual orientation from playing a part in her work (as it obviously did in her life), I do not pretend to have answered the question "What is a lesbian?," or "Is there a lesbian specificity discernable in cultural production?" or even, pace, Wittig, "Are lesbians women?" These are very much the questions that Cahun's entire oeuvre raises, and they open out to the even larger issue of how to evaluate the relations between a life and its art. But in celebrating Cahun for in effect having so presciently prefigured feminist art of the 1970s and later, much is being precluded from discussion. In other words, there is a tendency to see Cahun first as a postmodernist feminist *avant la lettre*, but to see less well those other, different elements of her life and work that were no less determining of both. These include her material privilege (she did not have to earn her living); her famous family and the connections it enabled (no other young women, needless to say, were published in the *Mercure de France*); her politics (briefly communist, then Trotskyite, then unaffiliated but leftist); her coming of age in the 1920s; and of course her personal responsiveness first to symbolism and then to surrealism itself, which provided so many of the elements of her own idiosyncratic production. Lesbianism, as I have argued (and however crude a designation that might be to describe what Cahun "was"), is thus only one of these multiple determinations, but as such, it should neither be discounted much less banished from discussion.

NOTES

1. Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 66.

2. Two photographs of Cahun were included in the 1985 exhibition, "L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism," Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., the first exhibition devoted exclusively to surrealist photography. But as is evident, little was then

known about Cahun and even less about the range and extent of her work. See Dawn Ades, Rosalind Krauss, and Jane Livingston, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985) and especially the essays of Rosalind Krauss, which went far to reposition photography as *the* exemplary form of surrealist artistic practice.

3. François Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: L'écart et la métamorphose* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992). All biographical information in my essay is taken from Leperlier's book, which has not been translated into English. The catalogue raisonné, which reproduces in small format the nearly 300 photographs by Cahun now known, and which was also the work of Leperlier, appears at the end of the exhibition catalogue, *Claude Cahun: Photographe* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Jean-Michel Place, 1995).
4. This is not so much the case with Leperlier's monographic study, which puts much greater emphasis on Cahun's literary production and also thoroughly contextualizes it in relation to Cahun's influences and contemporaries. With respect to Cahun's photography, and in addition to Leperlier's book, the principal discussions in English include David Bate, "The Mise en Scène of Desire" in *Mise en Scène*, ex. cat. (London: ICA, 1994); Katy Kline, "In or Out of the Picture" Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 66–81; Therese Lichtenstein, "A Mutable Mirror: Claude Cahun," *Artforum*, 30, no. 8 (April 1992); Laurie Monahan, "Radical Transformations: Claude Cahun and the Masquerade of Womanliness," in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, ed. M. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 125–133; and Honor Lasalle and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Surrealist Confessions: Claude Cahun's Photographs," *Afterimage* 19 (March 1992), 10–13.
5. Leperlier, *Claude Cahun*, 13. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the author.
6. Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation," in Chadwick, *Mirror Images*, 4.
7. Limitations of language being what they are, I have little recourse but to refer to Cahun's pictures as "self-portraits" or, more awkwardly, "self-representations." Insofar as one of my arguments in this essay concerns the nonequivalence of a "self-portrait" and a "self," this is a problem, but to frame these terms each time I use them with quotation marks seems not a particularly good solution either.
8. Fifth plate of *Aveux non avenues* (Paris: Editions du Carrefour, 1930).
9. Leperlier, *Claude Cahun*, 229.
10. See in this regard the anthology *Surrealism and Women*, eds. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993) as well as Chadwick, *Mirror Images*.
11. The psychoanalyst Joan Rivière's "Womanliness as a Masquerade" was originally published in 1929 in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 10 (1929): 303–313.
12. I am referring to the notorious *enquête*, published in Breton's *La Révolution surréaliste*, in which the core group of [male] surrealists natter away on sexuality and eroticism, and in which Breton imperiously rejects [male] homosexuality. *Female* homosexuality is (unsurprisingly) not mentioned. See in this regard Xavière Gauthier, *Surréalisme et Sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
13. On this subject, see Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).
14. My emphasis on Cahun's lesbianism is very much at odds with Leperlier's own psychobiographic interpretation, which, with all due respect to his years of research on Cahun, is very much underwritten by "heterosexual presumption." Leperlier, in fact, goes to some length to "heterosexualize" Cahun, positing, for example (and with little evidence), her unrequited love for André Breton. He presumes, as well, a youthful love affair with a man, based on the first-person narration in *Aveux non avenues*. As should be clear from my essay, and even more clear from the nature of Cahun's work itself, much caution is necessary in taking Cahun's "I" at face value.
15. In her lifetime, and with the exception of the photocollages included in *Aveux non avenues*, she seems to have published only one photograph of herself, bald-headed and technically distorted so that the head becomes a monstrously extended egg shape. This was reproduced in the journal *Bifur* in 1930. Another altered photograph, composed of a double-headed bald Cahun, joined at the shoulders, was reproduced in lithographed form as the cover of Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes *Frontières humaines* (Paris: Edition du Carrefour) in 1929. The only other photographs reproduced were the illustrations made for Lisa Deharme's *Le Coeur de pic* (Paris: Edition José Corti) in 1937.
16. The title, *Aveux non avenues*, is translated in various ways, but my own preference is something like "Confessions Null and Void," or "Voided Confessions." Such a translation affirms the equivocal status of the textual "I," and militates against the tendency to take any of the contents of the book as straightforwardly "confessional."
17. Under her given name of Lucy Schwob, her translation of Ellis's *La Femme dans la Société*, vol. 1 of *L'hygiène sociale: Etudes de psychologie* appeared in *Le Mercure de France* in 1929. Discourses about homosexuality, as they emerged in the post-World War I period, were as various as the gay subcultures that existed at the time. Ellis's notion of a "third sex" was one such formulation, but also influential was Karl Ulrichs' designation of homosexuals as "Uranians," a term Cahun also employed.
18. Among some of her most striking and confrontational self-representations are those where she is made-up and costumed in the part of Elle in Albert Birot's *Barbe-Bleue* (1929). Although it is unclear whether these are the same, Cahun's "Heroines" includes the figure of Beauty among its protagonists.

19. Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born a Woman,” in Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 13.
20. Several of these vignettes were published in *Le Mercure de France* and *Le Journal Littéraire* in 1925. All are written in the first-person singular somewhat in the manner of dramatic monologues, and some are dedicated to Cahun’s friends.
21. One is irresistibly reminded of André Breton’s confession, “Benjamin Péret et moi-même avons été les seuls à déclarer que nous évitons autant que possible, hors de l’état d’érection, d’être vus nus par une femme, ceci entraînant pour nous certains idées d’indignité.” (Benjamin Péret and I were the only ones to say that we avoided, as much as possible, being seen nude by a woman when we did not have an erection, since this seemed undignified to us), André Breton, *Les Vases communicants* (Paris: Gallimard), 49.
22. From the mid-1920s on, Cahun staged and created photographs of assembled objects, and she participated in the 1936 “Exposition Surréaliste des objets.” In addition, she published an article in a special number of *Cahiers d’art* titled “Prenez Garde des objets domestiques” (Be careful of domestic objects).
23. An important discussion of the surrealist predilection for images of headless or otherwise mutilated female bodies is Mary Ann Caws, “Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art,” in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). See also the essay by Suleiman, “Dialogue and Double Allegiance: Some Contemporary Women Artists and the Historical Avant-Garde,” in Chadwick, *Mirror Images*.
24. Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 31.
25. Jacques Lacan, “From Love to Libido,” *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 193.
26. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 231. Cited in the excellent essay by Elizabeth Lebovici, “I Am in Training Don’t Kiss Me,” in *Claude Cahun: Photographie*.
27. Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” 25.
28. *Ibid.*, 20–21.
29. *Ibid.*, 21.
30. *Ibid.*, 18.

CLAUDE CAHUN

Plate 1

Claude Cahun

Self-Portrait, 1917

black-and-white photograph

Jersey Museums Service



Plate 2

Claude Cahun

Self-Portrait, c. 1921

modern black-and-white photograph from original negative

Jersey Museums Service





Plate 3
 Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1927
 black-and-white photograph
 Jersey Museums Service

Plate 4
 Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, 1927
 black-and-white photograph
 Jersey Museums Service



Plate 5
 Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1928
 black-and-white photograph
 Jersey Museums Service

Plate 6

Claude Cahun

Self-Portrait, 1932

black-and-white photograph

Jersey Museums Service





Plate 7
Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1928
black-and-white photograph
Jersey Museums Service



Plate 3
Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1929
black-and-white photograph
Jersey Museums Service

Plate 9

Claude Cahun

Self-Portrait, c. 1920

black-and-white photograph

Jersey Museums Service





Plate 10 (*top*)
 Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait covered with masks, c. 1928
 black-and-white photograph
 Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes



Plate 11 (*bottom*)
 Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1927
 black-and-white photograph
 Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes

Plate 12

Claude Cahun

Self-Portrait, c. 1925

black-and-white photograph

Collection Leslie Tonkonow and Klaus Ottmann







Plate 13 (*opposite*)

Claude Cahun (with Marcel Moore)
photomontage, 1929–1930, frontispiece for chapter 2
“Moi-Même,” in *Aveux non avenus*
Private Collection, New York

Plate 14 (*left*)

Claude Cahun (with Marcel Moore)
photomontage, 1929–1930, frontispiece for chapter 7
“H.U.M.,” in *Aveux non avenus*
Private Collection, New York

Plate 15 (*below*)

Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1928
black-and-white photograph
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes

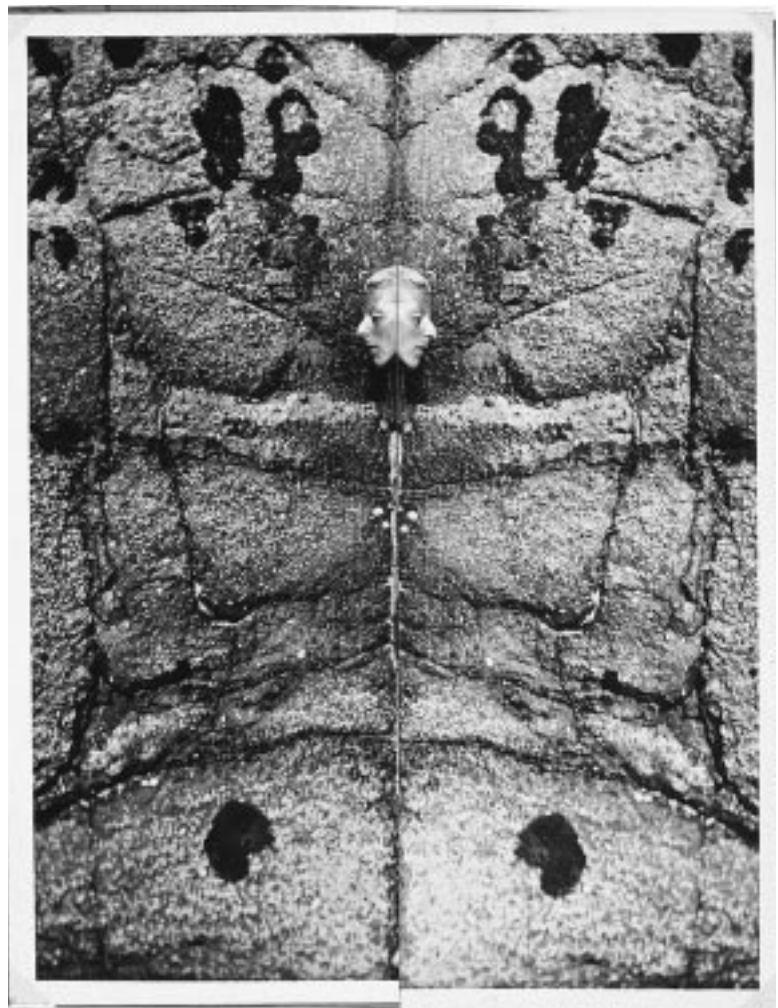




Plate 16
Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, 1930
black-and-white photograph
Jersey Museums Service

Plate 17
Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1947
black-and-white photograph
Jersey Museums Service





Plate 18
Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1939
black-and-white photograph
Jersey Museums Service

Plate 19
Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1937
black-and-white photograph
Jersey Museums Service





Plate 20
Claude Cahun
Self-Portrait, c. 1948
black-and-white photograph
Jersey Museums Service