Notes on André Breton, Novalis, and the Absolute

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Abstract: Surrealism, like Romanticism, rejected a world disenchanted by reason, emphasizing dreams, feelings, and the irrational. Both movements shared an ethics focused on love, emancipation, and creativity. And both movements expressed a longing for the Infinite. This essay examines surrealist co-founder André Breton and his engagement with early German Romantic writer Novalis. Breton was familiar with Novalis's ideas by 1925. Yet, Breton's public acknowledgement of Novalis before 1938 was largely ambivalent, likely due to concerns about being labeled as mystical. Nevertheless, Novalis's influence persisted, particularly in Breton's poetics of the infinite, unknowable, totality: the Absolute. Beginning in 1938, Novalis became an increasingly visible source for Breton's Surrealism. But the Romantic author's imprint had been there all along.

Keywords: André Breton; Novalis; Maurice Maeterlinck; surrealism; romanticism; mysticism; the absolute.

Man has only followed nature, releasing from dust the total light smoldering in the diamond.
—André Breton, *Martinique Snake Charmer* (*OC* III 378)

Introduction

Surrealism's debt to Romanticism is plain. The movement's co-founder, André Breton (1896-1966), acknowledged as much in the *Second Manifesto* (1929), explaining that Surrealism was Romanticism's "amazingly prehensile tail" (*Manifestoes* 153; *Œuvres completes* [*OC*] I 803). But *how* and *for what* did Romantic Surrealism *grasp*?

Romantic Surrealism grasped for the unity which lay beyond discursive knowledge: the Absolute. Surrealism's use of the Absolute is a bountiful topic. This essay narrows the frame, however, to consider Breton's engagements with the ideas of early German Romantic poet, mystic, and philosopher Novalis (pen name of Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772-1801). My argument is twofold. First, while Novalis's importance for Breton is most clearly manifested in his publications from 1938 onward, the historical record shows that he was familiar with the Romantic author by 1925. Breton's early de-emphasis of Novalis (and concurrent emphasis on figures like Friedrich Hegel) should be understood as responding to Surrealism's political exigencies and its critics. Second, Breton's reading of Novalis contributed to his concept of the Absolute. The Surrealist poet's images of diamonds, geological formations, and mountains all point to a yearning

informed by Novalis's *Sehnsucht* for the infinite totality.

My plan is as follows. First, I will provide a thumbnail of Surrealism's beginnings and its connections to Romantic thought. Next, I will discuss the historical record surrounding Breton's initial, *significant* contact with Novalis's work. I will surmise the causes of Breton's early public ambivalence toward the writer. I will then consider selected instances where Novalis's ideas likely contributed to Breton's thought, especially regarding the Absolute. Finally, I will offer a sketch of Breton's later use of Novalis. This essay's focus, however, remains the period before the Second World War; scholars have admirably examined Novalis's role in later Surrealist thought.[1] My goal is to provide historical grounding and to illuminate the role of Novalis's ideas—the Romantic Absolute in particular—in Breton's pre-war Surrealism.

Surrealist Beginnings and Romantic Resonance

Surrealism emerged from the ashes of the Great War and from the explosion of Dada in Paris. The circle of the periodical *Littérature* (1919-1924) was central to that genesis. Edited by Breton, Louis Aragon (1897-1982), and Phillipe Soupault (1897-1990), the revue began conservatively. Beginning in 1920, however, its editors launched an assault on bourgeois taste and tradition under the tutelage of

[1] Scholarship is more abundant regarding Surrealism and Novalis post-1940 than prior. See, for example, Atkin, Bauduin, and Clouston.

Zürich Dadaist Tristan Tzara. For Breton, Tzara's ideas had "thrown the doors open" to new possibilities. But he soon realized that Tzara's strategy of single-minded negation "led to a corridor that turned around in circles" (*Conversations* 46-47). In 1922, Breton declared Dada dead (*Lost Steps* 75). The *Littérature* group was soon to replace Dada, however; in October 1924, Breton published his *Manifesto of Surrealism*, announcing a new, productive, utopian movement.

During the War, both Breton and Aragon had worked as medical orderlies in the psychiatric facilities of the Val-de-Grâce military hospital in Paris (Polizzotti 50-56, 67-74, 78). Greatly affected by their experiences, they made the exploration of the unconscious or irrational mind central to their practice. In his 1924 manifesto, Breton's promoted the willed eruption of the subconscious into the conscious world—creating without aesthetic, rational, or moral mediation (26). He complained against long neglect of the Dream, and he acknowledged the importance of Sigmund Freud's theories for his movement. Embracing the drives and desires that the rational mind represses, the Surrealists championed absolute creative freedom and the synthesis of conscious and unconscious life into a higher reality—a *surréalité.* Surrealist practice was a means to remake the world through a revolution of thought. The resonance between Surrealism and Romanticism is already apparent in this short description.

Arising in the late eighteenth century, Romanticism was a diffuse set of international practices, ideas, and attitudes. For all its varieties of

thought and expression, however, we might identify commonalities. Romanticism rejected the Enlightenment monopoly of reason over feeling, it celebrated the unconscious and intuition, it sought the reconciliation of antinomies, and it celebrated freedom. Moreover, in several of its incarnations Romanticism might be described using Friedrich Schleiermacher's definition of religion as "sense and taste for the Infinite" (23). This is especially true for the *Frühromantik* (early German Romantics), including Novalis. In all these aspects, including their inclination for the Infinite or Absolute, Surrealism was Romanticism's heir, as Breton recognized. These rough contours in place, we can turn to Breton's early engagement with Novalis.

A Journalist's Account: Breton Read Novalis by 1925

Here, few observers provide a better reference point than the Lorrains-American writer Eugene Jolas (1894–1952). Jolas was not a Surrealist. But he was an early ally, even if his enthusiasm faded over time. As a teen, Jolas returned to the United States (his birthplace) from his family home in Forbach (then German). In 1917, he was drafted. In the wartime army, he worked as secretary to the chief psychiatrist at Camp Lee in Virginia. There, Jolas witnessed the "spectacle of human malady" in the wards, seeing close-at-hand the effects of mental illness (Kiefer and Rumold 511; *Man from Babel* [*MFB*] 35-36). This activity parallels Breton's and Aragon's experiences at Val-de-Grâce. For all three men, the experience was formative for their poetics,

and Jolas shared their cultural references. In 1923, Jolas reacquainted himself with the French and German books he had left at his family's home in Forbach (then French)—Huysmans, Baudelaire, and the German Romantics (*MFB* 35). In nearby Strasbourg, he befriended Henri Solveen, a founder of the l'Arc group (*MFB* 60-64; Vicari 141-48). Via l'Arc, Jolas met Marcel Noll, already associated with the *Littérature* circle. Jolas joined the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune* in 1924. Soon, he became literary editor, penning a weekly literary column for the Sunday magazine (*MFB* 65-72). In that post, Jolas made inroads with the Surrealists via Noll, first meeting Paul Eluard. Eluard, in turn, arranged an interview with Breton in summer 1925 ("*AAV*" 27; *MFB* 80).[2] In the *Tribune*, Jolas chronicled the rise of Surrealism firsthand.

Jolas's connections to the Surrealists went deeper still. From 1927-38, he edited the periodical *transition*, which helped to introduce transatlantic anglophone audiences to Surrealism (including Breton's work).[3] Jolas considered *transition* to be, like

[2] In Man from Babel, Jolas indicates a 1924 date that does not correspond with his July 5, 1925 column reporting the interview.

[3] Best known for serializing James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, transition presented the major avant-garde tendencies of the day including Surrealism; Jolas printed translations of André Breton, Paul Eluard, and Robert Desnos, and art by Max Ernst, André Masson, Joan Miró, Man Ray, and Yves Tanguy. Jolas crowed about being one of the few non-Surrealists Breton allowed to publish Surrealist work in the 1920s (*MFB* 90). Jolas translated Breton's "Introduction to the Discourse on the Dearth of Reality" and the first chapter of Nadja for transition (no. 5, August 1927; no. 12, March 1928). And the final number

Surrealism, an inheritor of Romanticism ("Prolegomenon" 224). Over time, however, Jolas grew disillusioned with Surrealism—a point I shall return to, for it contributed to Breton's attitudes. Jolas's later reflections on Surrealism are key to the matter at hand. In his 1941 essay "Surrealism: Ave atque Vale," Jolas tracks the rise, growth, and (in his eyes) recent decline of Surrealism. He also recounts his first interview with Breton in a passage that (apparently) quotes from his interview notes. Jolas recalls meeting Breton at his rue Fontaine, Montmartre apartment. Breton spoke of Surrealism's revolutionary stance, insisting, for instance, "We are interested in a total metamorphosis of life and man." But their discussion of Romanticism is most instructive here. "His insistence on the word 'marvellous," Jolas explains, "stirred my curiosity,"

> for I had been a reader of the German Romantics since early boyhood, and was aware of the identity of viewpoint between the Romantics and the Dada and Surrealist tendencies. The word "wunderbar," "merveilleux," was the objective of creative

(no. 27, April-May 1938) carried an excerpt from Mad Love, translated by Maria Jolas. Unfortunately, little is known of Breton's interactions with transition. All of Jolas's office correspondence in Paris were lost during the War to a petty, pétainiste landlord. Sources: my interview with Betsy Jolas, and materials in: Maria Jolas and Eugene Jolas, Letter à écrire par les Epoux Jolas, n.d., box 57, folder 1337, GEN MSS 108 Eugène and Maria Jolas papers, New Haven Yale University, CT, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

> work posited by the Romantics a hundred years before … The dream, too, had been decidedly a romantic preoccupation. Breton spoke of this parallelism, and even repeated the dictum of Novalis that "the novel must end in a modern fairy tale." … *He said he had read Novalis in the translation by Maeterlinck . . .* ("*AAV*" 27-28; my emphasis)

Jolas establishes Breton's early awareness of a Surrealism-Romanticism connection. Breton's interest in Romanticism was not new. At age fourteen, he had spent the summer in the Black Forest improving his German and cultivating an esteem for German literature and philosophy—especially Romanticism (Polizzotti 11-12). Significantly, Jolas recalls his interviewee's appreciation for Novalis. This affinity had likely been reinforced by figures in Breton's milieu familiar with Novalis, including the poet Maxime Alexandre and artists Jean Arp, Max Ernst, and André Masson.[4]

[4] Breton's German-speaking associates seem likely connections. Breton was in contact with Max Ernst by at least 1920 (Durozoi 20-23, Camfield 95). Steeped in Romantic literature, Ernst was especially fond of Novalis, often quoting from Heinrich von Ofterdingen (Spies et al 9, 19; Camfield 18, 34; Waldberg 56-58). By 1922, Ernst was living with the Eluards outside Paris. Alongside Paul Eluard, Ernst drew even closer to the Littérature's circle (Spies and Rewald 4, 39, 286). Surely during the group's many café meetings, the issue of Novalis and their Romantic precedent arose (Durozoi 172). Similarly, Maxime Alexandre, a Franco-German-speaking member of the Surrealist group (beginning 1924), later claimed to have potentially introduced Breton to Novalis (Durozoi 649, Glorieux 414). Another possibility was Alsatian artist Jean

Jolas likely contributed to Breton's interest in Novalis as well, before relations soured; their social circles overlapped during the late 1920s.[5]

Jolas's interview provides a significant insight—one that diverges from other accounts. As editor of Breton's *Complete Works*, Marguerite Bonnet suggested that Breton first encountered Novalis meaningfully through Germaine Claretie and S. Joachim-Chaigneau's 1927 translation of *Journal intime and Hymnes à la nuit* (*OC* III 1187). Jolas, however, pointed to Symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck's earlier translations as the more likely source. We know that Breton owned copies of both *Journal intime* and a 1909 edition of Maeterlinck's *Les disciples à Saïs et les fragments de Novalis*. Both were later included in Breton's *Petite maison bibliothèque*, a Surrealist-object consisting of a box with the painted façade of a house. The object held German Romantic

(Hans) Arp who had been associated with the Zürich and Cologne Dadaists before moving to Paris in 1925 (Durozoi 650). Arp explicitly counted Novalis among his philosophical sources (Issacs 209, Arp 466). We might also consider Francophones like André Masson. Breton first met Masson in 1924 (Ades 12, Poling 5, 20, 28). In 1921, Masson had moved to 45 rue Blomet. The informal group that congregated there included figures soon associated with Surrealism, including Masson, Joan Miró, Georges Malkine, Michel Leiris, and Roland Tual, as well as Antonin Artaud, Robert Desnos, and Georges Limbour who visited often (Polittzotti 256). The group discussed the English and German Romantics, including Novalis (Rubin and Lancher 86, 212).

[5] Harry Crosby was a contributing editor and financier for transition. Breton and the other Surrealists were frequent guests at Harry and Caresse Crosby's parties at Le Moulin du soleil (Wolff 228, 242-248).

books and an engraving of Novalis (*Maison de verre* 155; AAAB). Notably, at Surrealism's founding, Breton could *only* have read Maeterlinck's volume given *Journal intime*'s 1927 publication date. Original German texts may have aided Breton's understanding. Jolas complimented his interviewee's German. Yet, Jolas underscored Maeterlinck as Breton's primary source. Given this account, we might now turn to Breton's early use of Novalis. In doing so, I will also consider Maeterlinck's translations and commentary to discover how they helped shape Breton's understanding. Before 1938, Breton's use of Novalis was rarely explicit; sometimes he is conspicuously absent. By setting Maeterlinck's mystical framing of Novalis alongside Surrealism's early political and intellectual situation, we might begin to explain Breton's early hesitations regarding the Romantic writer.

Breton's Early Ambivalence toward Novalis

German Romanticism was important to the young Breton. Yet, in *Littérature* no. 18 (March 1921) Novalis's name is absent from a list of almost two hundred writers, artists, composers, philosophers, and others whom the magazine's circle judged for individual praiseworthiness (1-7). Other German philosophers like Hegel and Friedrich Schiller appear, as do Romantics like Lord Byron, Chateaubriand, and Heinrich Heine. Similarly, in *Littérature* no. 11-12 (October 1923), on a two-page spread titled "ERUTARETTIL" ("littérature" backwards) Novalis was again omitted from a

graphic arrangement of the names of writers significant to the proto-Surrealists. Breton's first major citations of Novalis occur in 1924. Novalis's name appeared in Breton's notebook, excerpted in *Littérature* (June 1924) as "Carnet." Breton referenced an epigraph by Novalis that accompanied a tale by Edgar Allen Poe (*OC* I 456, 1434). Subsequently, Breton included that epigraph in a footnote to the *Surrealist Manifesto* (October 1924). Breton advises readers to remember Novalis's formula: "there are series of events which run parallel to real events. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of circumstances, so that it appears imperfect; and their consequences are equally imperfect." (*Manifestoes* 39; *OC* I 339). This passage points—albeit obscurely—to Novalis's belief in the ability of minds to collectively reshape reality, and to do so in a manner disharmonious with the spirit, or divine plan. Breton's source is indirect. He quotes Charles Baudelaire's translation of Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt." Whether Breton had yet read the Maeterlinck volume is unknown. By summer 1925, however, he had. And he was able to impress Jolas, whose periodical was grounded in Novalis's ideas (Sweeney).[6] Despite the favorable exchange with Jolas regarding Novalis, Breton's public opinion of the Romantic poet was less sure in the following years.

[6] Answering an inquiry from Jolas's brother about transition's future, co-editor James Johnson Sweeney said it was a mystery befitting a "magazine rooted in a background of Wackenroder, Novalis, and Kierkegaard."

Maeterlinck's presentation of Novalis arguably contributed to Breton's initial understanding of, and ambivalence toward, the author. Maeterlinck's tripartite introduction to his volume repeatedly characterizes Novalis as a mystic. Breton *would* call for the occultation of Surrealism in the *Second Manifesto* (*OC* I 821). And mysticism is sometimes grouped with Surrealism's interest in alchemy, magic, and other occult practices. Breton, however, arguably understood "mysticism" in two senses, which both ran contrary to *his* Surrealism. First, he would have taken it as a pejorative for muddled thinking. Second, he would have correctly understood mysticism as a set of esoteric practices and beliefs aimed at attaining union with the divine. Herein was an impasse for Breton. Novalis's late mysticism sought oneness with a God, be it in the guise of Nature, Spirit, or the Absolute. Religion was anathema to Breton.[7] As a case in point, his entry for "God" in the *Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism* (1938) reads: "Everything that is faltering, doubtful, vile, defiling and grotesque is communicated in this word" (9). And Salvador Dalí wrote of Breton's early Surrealist program: "any religious element was banned, *even* of a mystical nature" (11). As Mary Ann Caws explains in her introduction to his *Communicating Vessels* (1932), for Breton: "Humanity assumes the central place, and no mysticism will avail" (xiii). For Breton, mysticism's connotations were often negative, as his writing demonstrates.

In his 1933 introduction to a volume of Achim von Arnim's *Strange Tales*, Breton contrasts Arnim

[7] For a useful discussion, see The Spiritual in Art 376-77.

and Novalis, disparaging the latter. Both Romantics knew philosopher-scientist Johann-Wilhelm Ritter. Ritter, Breton insists, "as an experimenter of very high quality would enjoy much greater respect from a young man such as Arnim—enamored of rigor . . . than would the *mystical* Novalis (*Break of Day* [*BOD*] 94, My emphasis; *OC* II 346). The dichotomy makes clear Breton's understanding of mysticism as a lack of serious thought. Breton *does* praise Novalis, but in a tempered manner. For instance, he parrots Hegel's criticism of Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as conceptually brilliant, yet lacking believability (*OC* II 348). But Breton admonishes Novalis's reactionary attitude in "Christendom or Europe" (and Friedrich Schlegel's reactionism), portraying Romantic "mysticism" in negative terms. Novalis argued that the Reformation precipitated Catholicism's downfall, destroying the unity the Church had created in medieval Europe through common belief. The result was the proliferation of secular, rationalist thought and disenchantment. Lacking a spiritual community, political strife flourished (*Philosophical Writings* [*PW*] 137-152). Breton lambasted Novalis and Schlegel's ideas as "*mysticism*, naturalism, Catholicism, Caesarianism" (my emphasis, *BOD* 94; *OC* II 352). Breton's anticlericalism is unsurprising; in the *Second Manifesto*, he insisted Surrealism would "lay waste to the ideas of family, country, religion" (*Manifestoes* 128; *OC* I 785).

As I have indicated, Maeterlinck emphasizes Novalis's mysticism. The first section of his tripartite introduction begins by quoting from *The Novices of Sais*: "Various are the roads of man. He who follows and compares them will see strange figures emerge"

(3; Maeterlinck v). Maeterlinck next suggests a connection between Novalis's spiritual quest and that of Augustinian medieval mystic Jan van Ruusbroec and Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. This section introduces a key concept. For Novalis, manifold paths, whether turning inward in self-exploration, or outward in contemplation of the world, lead to the same "sacred home" —i.e., the divine unity or Absolute (17). For Maeterlinck, we are driven by hidden truths, but we are unthinking, fettered, and dumb until the moment of revelation. There are some "extraordinary beings," he declares, "who are the antennae" of the many-yet-one human soul, able to glimpse the nature of the mystery while "groping in the darkness" (vi). Maeterlinck links Novalis's philosophy to the revelatory ideas in Platonic Idealism, Swedenborg Christian mysticism, and Plotinus's Neoplatonism. *His* Novalis is a mystic genius who can see what others cannot: the unity of the truer reality hidden behind this one.

Here we might productively extend Maeterlinck's opening quotation of Novalis. Those "strange figures"

> seem to belong to that great cipher which we discern written everywhere, in wings, in eggshells, clouds and snow, in crystals and stone formations, on ice covered waters, on the inside and outside of mountains, of plants, beasts, and men … and in the strange conjectures of chance. In them we suspect a key to the magic writing, even a grammar, but our surmise takes no definite forms (3).

This passage reveals Novalis's theory of natural signs. Breton would surely be reminded of Swedenborg and Baudelaire. Swedenborg's theory of *correspondences* posited reciprocal relations between divine and mundane worlds (Lachman 4-9). And Baudelaire's inscrutable "forest of symbols" in his poem "Correspondances" suggests the unity of Nature, evident in the interrelation of the senses (11). One can imagine that despite his misgivings, Breton was rapt by Novalis's images of "crystals and stone formations," especially given his own use of geological imagery (Atkin, "Crystalline"). For Novalis, Nature was the material aspect of the divine; it developed according to Logos, but it would be completed by humankind. Over time, the language of Nature had become unintelligible, and the original (ethical) harmony between humanity and Logos, between material and spirit, diminished (*PW* 60). Humanity's ethical goal then, for Novalis, was to forge a *new* Nature with a harmonious, dynamic unity.

The second section of Maeterlinck's introduction opens as sheer paean. Novalis, he informs, stood "Among the human soul's ambassadors," a guide to the "invisible aspects of higher being . . . Religion, love, politics: all high things have connections with [his] mysticism." "Mysticism" is Maeterlinck's mantra as he continues:

> [Novalis] thinks mystically, since a thought that communicates in a certain way with the infinite is mystical thought … His teaching is quite vague …but some of his thoughts are

> truly impregnated with the refined scent of our soul … His mysticism is … "a magical idealism."[8] It seems to him that nothing is more within the mind's reach than the infinite … Perhaps he is the one who has penetrated most profoundly the intimate nature and hidden mystical unity of the universe (xix-xvii).

Maeterlinck foregrounds Novalis's attitude toward the Infinite or Absolute. He even praises Novalis's mysticism in the sciences. Yet, even this commentator, so full of praise, identifies a lack of clarity in Novalis's ideas.

Recall that Breton's introduction to *Arnim's Strange* explicitly linked Novalis's mysticism to a lack of rigor. That stance likely accords with how Breton understood Novalis via Maeterlinck. Breton's position, however, also seems to be calculated in response to the array of reprovals he faced by the early 1930s—criticisms that surely made Surrealism's unalloyed association with Novalis's mysticism seem untenable. In *Communicating Vessels*, for instance, Breton bristles at in-print accusations of Surrealist mysticism by former acquaintance Jean-Paul Samson (91). This same attitude is visible even a decade later when he

[8] Magical Idealism was Novalis's name for the cultivation of the bodily (versus the inner, soul-associated) senses so that they can be directed voluntarily, reshaping perception and reality. He suggested this magic is a sort of willed madness, and that it might become a shared experience (Beiser, German Idealism 421-434). Maeterlinck's selected fragments would have offered Breton an introduction to the concept (75, 83, 132, 210, 218).

anticipates "accusations of mysticism" in his "Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto" (1942) (*OC* III 13).

During Surrealism's first decade, Breton often acted defensively. Beginning around 1925, Surrealism's anarchism largely gave way to various degrees of Communist sentiment. Some Surrealists sought to join the French Communist Party (PCF). Others tried to reconcile Surrealist and Marxist revolutionary practices. The PCF was distrustful of the Surrealists, labeling them bourgeois in background and practice. The Communists admonished the Surrealists for producing inaccessible art (rather than didactic propaganda), and for their commitment to individual expression and liberating individual minds (rather than to collective action to change material conditions) (Durozoi 126-147; Short 18-36). The iconoclastic Surrealists' "transition from absolute idealism to historical materialism" to "relative conformity" was fraught (Durozoi 137). Explicit advocacy of Romantic mysticism by Breton would only have confirmed the Communists' accusations: Surrealism was unserious about the political cause. Ideological differences mounted, and by 1929 Surrealism's ranks fractured. Some dissident Surrealists gathered around Georges Bataille. In 1930, Bataille ridiculed Breton in "The Castrated Lion," accusing him of creating a new religion in Surrealism (of which he was head priest), of launching an impotent revolt, and of being a "mystic-mongrel …with a gift-wrapped library of dreams" (28-29). With the revolutionary efficacy and seriousness of Breton's

Surrealism under attack, openly extoling Novalis's mysticism would have seemed untenable.

Breton's outward ambivalence toward Novalis might also have been spurred by Jolas. In *transition*, Jolas too began to question Surrealism's politics, approach, and efficacy. This friction began in 1927 when Wyndham Lewis attacked *transition* in his periodical *The Enemy* (Cushing). While Jolas reproached Lewis's reactionary worldview, he answered the linking of *transition* to Breton's movement by disavowing Surrealism's politics. And he accused Breton and his circle of focusing on the inner life of the mind to the exclusion of the external world. This public disagreement continued into 1929, when Jolas explained that his "interpretation of reality" was incongruous with the Surrealists: "While they were determined to completely deny the physical world, basing themselves on a Hegelian interpretation" he explained, "I continued to believe in the possibility of metamorphosing the real" ("The Innocuous Enemy" 208).

Breton took note. In a Salvador Dalí exhibition catalog (1929), he hit back, dismissing Jolas's "revolution of the word" movement by name (*BOD* 52). Amid these confrontations, Jolas had translated selections from Novalis's *Hymns to the Night* and fragments for *transition*. His magazine increasingly claimed Novalis's Romanticism as its basis. Had Breton openly admired Novalis in that moment, he would have risked muddying the distinction between Surrealism and *transition*.[9]

[9] By the late 1930s, Jolas developed a "Romantic-mystical poetics of spiritual ascension" he called "Verticalism."

In summary, Breton's early public hesitancy toward Novalis is understandable. Surrealism's detractors would have received his unqualified embrace of Novalis's mysticism as proof of Surrealism's lack of political commitment, its dearth of philosophical rigor, or its support for Jolas's competing project. Nevertheless, behind Breton's posture resides a tacit admiration for Novalis's ideas where they aligned with, or augmented, Surrealism. Maeterlinck included a fragment that might as well have described Surrealism's practice: "poetry heals the wounds inflicted by reason" (180). Even obscured, a residue of Novalis's Romanticism permeated Surrealism.

The Surrealist Absolute and Novalis as Antecedent

I do not contest the primacy of Hegel for Breton. Jonathan Eburne's discussion of Hegel and Heraclitus relative to Surrealism's dialectics, for instance, makes the philosopher's importance plain (*Key Concepts* 19-35). Hegel is prominent across Breton's writing, and he reread the philosopher while drafting the *Second Manifesto* (Durozoi 189). The matter of Hegel's nationality, which Eburne addresses, is suggestive for Novalis as well. After the Great War, the anti-nationalist Dadaists/Surrealists

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Surrealism was again a foil. Jolas subsequently associated Novalis with his spiritually buoyant "white romanticism," while Breton's "black romanticism" wallowed in dark Romantic impulses. Breton was surely aware of Jolas's criticisms by way of intermediaries, like Masson, who relayed Breton's displeasure at reading "Surrealism: Ave atque Vale" (Cushing)

turned to the philosophies of the vanquished enemy: Germany. Before exploring German Idealism and Marxism, however, they used German Romanticism as a corrective against French positivism and nationalism (19-21). Like Hegel, Novalis's ideas shaped Breton's thinking. By way of example, this section considers Breton's transformations of Novalis's Absolute.

The Absolute, a complex and multifaceted concept, often refers to a pure form of art or the pursuit of foundational truths in twentieth-century avant-garde discourse. As Frederick Beiser explains, however, for German Idealists and Romantics, the Absolute was the unconditioned—something that exists of and for itself. Drawing on Spinoza's notion of substance, the Absolute is understood as self-sufficient, infinite, and all-encompassing, yet ultimately unknowable (*German Idealism* 351-52). The Romantic Absolute is more than a "*universe simpliciter*," however. For Beiser, it can be viewed in trifold terms. First, like Spinoza's substance, the Absolute is monistic—denying dualities. Second, it is vitalistic: it is not a static *thing* but a living organism in a state of becoming, the product of its constituent parts in their mutual relations. Third, Beiser identifies a rationalistic basis whereby the Absolute has inherent "purpose, or conforms to some form, archetype, or idea" (352). Dalia Nassar reads Beiser as understanding the early German Romantic project as a metaphysics seeking "the nature of being or Reality" (1). Manfred Frank, she contrasts, apprehends Novalis and his peers as epistemologically grounded. Nassar has addressed Beiser's and Frank's arguments by asserting that

both approaches are operative in the Romantic Absolute; it is the ground of being *and* knowing (2). Scholars have also wrestled with the issue of whether the Romantics thought the Absolute was attainable (through non-discursive intuition, through art, through feeling), or if it was simply *regulative* in the Kantian sense: an assumption meant to guide activity.[10] Jos de Mul has argued that for the early German Romantics, the attainment of the Absolute was an unending project (9). I would counter that after the death of his fiancée, Sophie von Kuhn in 1797, Novalis was increasingly mystical in his outlook, characterizing union with the Absolute as achievable.[11]

Ultimately, while these academic discussions clarify the concept, they are by no means accordant with Breton's understanding or use of Novalis's Absolute, especially given Maeterlinck's commentary. Keeping the Absolute-as-goal in mind, we might turn to the fragments Maeterlinck selected, especially Novalis's description of Romantic poetics. Novalis insists, "The world must be Romanticized." He continues,

> In that way one can find the original meaning again. To make Romantic is nothing but a qualitative raising to a higher power. In this operation the lower *self* [*moi*] will become one with a better *self* [moi] …This operation is as yet

[10] For overviews see: Alison Stone's discussion and Nassar 5-12.

[11] He wrote, for instance, "Nothing is more attainable for the spirit than the infinite," which suggests that a humanity in harmonious community with the spirit would partake in the Absolute (PW 104).

> quite unknown. By endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I am making it Romantic. The operation for the higher, unknown, mystical, infinite is the converse. (*PW* 60, adjusted; Maeterlinck 209).[12]

Maeterlinck's use of the past participle, "*romantisé*," preserved for Breton the fact that Novalis's poetics was an activity. Poetry was not an end. It was a means to transform reality into a harmonious whole, analogous to a perfect work of art, i.e., an Absolute. Romanticizing was also the work of *Bildung*; love helps us cultivate harmonies: between inner self to outer world, individual to society, citizen and state. Romantic activity spanned all creative disciplines and endeavors, including, Beiser explains, "painting, sculpture, drama, and music as well as literature" (*Romantic Imperative* 22). Romantic poetry was an inchoate, ongoing practice.

"May you only take the time to *practice* poetry," Breton advised in the *Surrealist Manifesto* (18; emphasis mine). For Breton, Surrealism was likewise a continual activity wherein manifold practices—writing, painting, playing, wandering, and more—were means for a "total metamorphosis of life," as he told Jolas. In the *Surrealist Manifesto,* Breton defined Surrealism as "psychic automatism," i.e., the activity of shepherding the material of the unconscious into

[12] I will cite the English translation followed by the corresponding Maeterlinck.

waking life. In the encyclopedia entry that follows, he insisted that Surrealism "tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving *all the principal problems of life*" (26). Like Novalis's Romanticizing, Breton's Surrealism was utopian and speculative.

For Novalis, rediscovering the "original meaning" meant restoring harmony with Logos, making Nature intelligible once again. Similar ideas underpinned Surrealism, though they became most fully realized in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly as Surrealists embraced alchemy. In 1953, Breton emphasized Surrealism's goal as the "rediscovery of the secret language," a language whose elements would no longer "float like jetsam on the surface of a dead sea" (*Manifestoes* 297). This pursuit reflects Novalis's belief in the Absolute as a means of preserving what is forgotten (but also integral to us).

In the opening pages of *Nadja* (1928), Breton ponders his subjectivity and identity, suggesting that knowing *who* he is requires knowing whom he haunts. This word, "haunt," indicates, he explains, "what I must have ceased to be in order to be who I am" (1). Breton's ghostly self-image includes conventional appearances as well as "submission to certain contingencies of time and place," which may be a "finite representation of a torment that may be eternal" (2). "Perhaps," he muses, "I am doomed to retrace my steps under the illusion that I am exploring … learning a mere fraction of what I have forgotten" (2). Breton was likely alluding to Rimbaud's statement "I is another," which posits a relation between self as subject *and* object. In Novalis's terms, however, Breton's ghost must also

cease to be one with the unconditioned to be a limited subject, the finite "*moi inférieur*" of Maeterlinck's translation.

Novalis's world-Romanticizing activity entails a poetic practice of dynamic, progressive relation between disparate aspects of reality: the familiar and "finite," on the one hand, and, on the other, "the mysterious," and "infinite." Finite reality becomes, through creative imagination, the material which permits non-discursive intuition of the Absolute. Novalis wrote elsewhere of poetry's ability to "represents the unrepresentable" (Maeterlinck 125). For the Surrealists, such glimpses of the Absolute generated a sense of marvel. In *Paris Peasant*, for instance, Aragon reports,

> I set about discovering the face of the infinite beneath the concrete forms which were escorting me, walking the …avenues.
>
> Thus incited by myself to integrate the infinite in the finite guise of the universe, I acquired the habit of referring the whole matter to the judgment of a kind of *frisson* (115).

The parallel is self-apparent. Neither Aragon nor Breton were searching for Absolute as divine Logos. But they longed for contact with the infinite totality that lay beyond the rational mind's reach. Novalis's "endowing the commonplace … with mysterious respect," is resonant with Surrealist *dépaysement*—strategies for making the familiar strange through, for instance, chance encounters and incongruous juxtapositions (*OC* II, 305). Consider the Surrealists' enthusiasm for Lautréamont's image of the chance

meeting of a sewing machine and umbrella on a dissecting table; poetic proximity renders the everyday strange. They also performed the reverse operation, matching Novalis's procedure. In *Mad Love*, Breton describes the Surrealists wandering flea markets, searching for objects attractive precisely for their unfamiliarity. For these objects, they invent new myths and functions (25-32). They encounter the mundane as marvelous and then make it familiar in a new fashion. The process is dynamic and presumptively continuous.

Romantic progress, as Novalis's fragment implies, is dialectic. A central tenet of Romanticism is the necessary reconciliation of apparent antinomies toward a third term ("apparent" since all oppositions must also be unified in the Absolute). Novalis elsewhere offers an example. "The synthesis of the soul and body," he explains, "is called the person—the person in turn relates to the spirit, as the body relates to the soul. Someday it too will disintegrate, to arise again in an ennobled form" (*General Draft* 173; Maeterlinck 238). That nobler form (a "better self"), draws nearer the Absolute—not a static totality here, but a dynamic, organic unity (Nassar 29-30).

Breton's dialectic and sense of the Absolute in his 1924 *Manifesto* is outwardly Hegelian. Yet the text also suggests a secondary Romantic source. Consider his declaration, "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality" (14). The fact that Breton's dialectic is applied to the dream is noteworthy given that, in conversation with Jolas the following

summer, he noted the "parallelism" between Surrealism and Romanticism's oneiric preoccupations, and he even framed Freud in explicitly Romantic terms.[13] The explicit goal of Surrealist poetics then was the synthesis and apprehension of a higher reality—his "absolute reality." Correspondingly, Novalis's declaration, "Poetry is the absolute real," appeared in Maeterlinck as well as in the Surrealists' *Abridged Dictionary* (185; 21). In the *Manifesto*'s encyclopedia entry, Breton calls attention to those who have "performed acts of ABSOLUTE SURREALISM" subsequently insisting "Surrealism … has focused its efforts … on reestablishing dialog in absolute truth" (26, 35). Repeatedly, Breton links Surrealism to the Absolute, and to the reconciliation of opposites—concepts at once Hegelian and *Frühromantik*.

Breton's *Second Manifesto* further blurs the distinction between Hegel's and Novalis's ideas. One key passage speaks of Surrealism's intent to reconcile not only conscious and unconscious, but to dissolve all life's antinomies into an absolute, crystalline unity:

> [T]here exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions … [O]ne will never find any other motivating force in the activities

[13] Jolas writes, "[Breton] related Freud to the Romantic movement."

> of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point… [and they are uninterested in]…anything not aimed at the annihilation of the being into a diamond all blind and interior (123-24).[14]

Breton's aim is resonant. In reading Maeterlinck's volume, he would have encountered a fragment that reads: "We *seek* the absolute everywhere and only ever *find* things" (*PW* 23, Maeterlinck 121). This sentiment would surely have struck Breton as expressing a yearning shared by Surrealism.[15] As with Novalis's Absolute, Surrealism's goal, however elusive, is a totality in which all contradictions find unity. We must seek the infinite in the finite. In one sense, Breton's diamond is a prism in reverse. In another sense, however, it is an analog for Novalis's mere *things*, separated from the whole as a condition of being, yet participating in that totality and containing its imprint.

By the time he wrote *Second Manifesto*, Breton could have also read *Hymns to the Night* in the 1927 *Journal intime* translation. At some point he also

[14] Seaver and Lane correctly translate Breton's "un brillant" as "a diamond." The term refers to a diamond with a "brilliant" cut, which optimizes the brilliance and fire of the gemstone (designed in 1919 by Marcel Tolkowsky).

[15] Breton was likely unaware that Maeterlinck had amalgamated this fragment with another. It is also unlikely that Breton grasped the complexity of Novalis's original, pithy remark, at once a restatement of Romantic goals, and, arguably, an allusion to Immanuel Kant. In dismissing empirical proofs of God, Kant similarly wrote "[O]ne is always groping about in what is conditioned and [thus] will forever search in vain for the unconditioned" (601).

obtained a 1908 edition of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (AAAB). Both texts provide further productive resonances apropos the Romantic-Surrealist Absolute. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis uses the experiences of his *Bildungsroman*'s titular character to express his longing for the Absolute. In the first chapter, Heinrich, "dreamed of immeasurable distances and wild unfamiliar regions." He travels,

> over oceans with inconceivable ease; he saw strange creatures; he lived with many kinds of people … Every sensation within him mounted to hitherto unknown heights. He went through an infinite variety of experiences (16).

In his brief dream, he lives and dies, experiences love and loss. The Absolute appears through dream logic, collapsing time and space, combining manifold experiences. Contradictions dissolve. Heinrich soon falls into a dream within a dream—an experience Novalis placed at the threshold of revelation (Maeterlinck 77). Heinrich finds himself captivated by "a tall, pale blue flower," around which were "countless others of every hue." But only that flower matters (16-17). Awakened from his nested dreams, Heinrich longs for the blue flower. The Absolute is doubly evasive here: unknowable in its true state, but also beyond waking consciousness's reach as a dream-object. The Surrealists also explored the unattainable objects of desire and the rerouting of that desire. Freud, so important to early Surrealism, theorized that dreams fulfilled wishes, answering drives and desires unresolved or repressed in our

waking life (Atkin, *Dictionary* 128-30). What is the Absolute but the ultimate unattainable object of desire?

A key work in that regard for Breton was *Hymns to the Night*, written by Novalis while grieving for Sophie. Novalis begins by praising the Light who, as allegory, reveals the "splendor of the Kingdoms of the world" (3). Soon his attention turns to Night, residing in the sunken depths. Night is a feminine figure: mother, nurse, and "world's queen." She is also a spiritual domain. Novalis leaves the Light behind, entering the spiritually pure Night. He laments, "Must the morning ever return? … Apportioned to the Light is time, but timeless and spaceless is Night's dominion. Eternal is the duration of sleep" (4, translation adjusted). Infinite, Night is a point of total resolution; as Absolute. Night cannot abide Time or Space. Life and death resolve, under the power of ethical love, into eternal life. In Night, Sophie becomes the "Beloved, lovely sun of the Night"—a contradictory image itself implying synthesis. Novalis's beloved is also Night's messenger (4). Later in the *Hymns*, Novalis stands at Sophie's grave and experiences a vision of her transformed: "In her eyes reposed eternity … Millennia passed off in the distance like storms" (5). But then Light returns, for the author is living. Novalis explains that his vision of Night has transformed him too: "whoever has stood up here on the watershed of the world and gazed … into the dwelling place of Night—truly he does not return to the doings of the world" (6). He is left longing for death and Night.

For the Surrealists Night, as Absolute or dream/unconscious, was an inexhaustible font of creativity. As Victoria Clouston argues in her discussion of Breton's *Arcane 17*, "[t]he concentration of Surrealism on love/desire as the positive, creative element springing from night/darkness [during the mid-1940s] can be directly traced back to the influence of Novalis in his *Hymns to the Night*," though, as she notes, he was discreet about using the poet while Germany was an active enemy (132). Clouston also underscores the importance of Novalis's equation of poet and seer for Breton (131). And she concurs that Novalis was a key source for Breton not only in the 1940s, but also in the mid-1920s (133).

The pursuit of the Absolute has been inherent to Surrealism from the first. Scholar Anna Balakian once insisted,

> Breton and his colleagues had an acute sense of the *mountainous peak*, i.e., the progressive and ultimate grasp of the total experience of existence … Poetic truth was always conceived as a gradation with a *supreme point*, unattainable but conceivable nonetheless (6, emphasis added).

It was not until the 1930s, however, that Novalis's Absolute became truly recognizable in Breton's writing. With Balakian's "mountainous peak" in mind, we might consider the linkage between Novalis's *Hymns*, in which love reigns supreme, and Breton's *Mad Love* (1937)—identified by Mary Ann Caws as autobiography and *ars poetica* (xiii). Clouston's observation of creative "love/desire" as "springing from night/darkness" is useful for us in

its concatenations, especially if we understand Night poetically as Absolute. Exiled in Marseilles in 1940-41, the Surrealists would create a tarot deck with new suits. The suit of Flame—associated with Love— presented Novalis as the Magus of Flame. Masson designed the card (*OC III* 708; Bauduin 138-42). The Surrealists had already associated Novalis with love/flame in their 1938 *Dictionary*. But we should look to *Mad Love* for Breton's clearest use of Novalis's Night, transfigured by love.

Mad Love's closing pages include a letter from Breton to his infant daughter Aube, wishing that she "be loved madly" (119). One passage calls to mind Novalis's *Hymns*, if through a series of affinities and reversals:

> What I have loved … I shall love *forever* … I have spoken of a certain "sublime point" on the mountain. It was never a question of establishing my dwelling on this point. It would, moreover, from then on, have ceased to be sublime and I should, myself, have ceased to be a person. Unable reasonably to dwell there, I have nevertheless never gone so far from it as to lose it from view, as to not be able to point it out. I had chosen to be this guide, and therefore I had forced myself not to be unworthy of the power which, in the direction of eternal love, had made me see and granted me the still rarer privilege of having others see (114).

The depths of Novalis's Night become a "sublime point" atop a mountain. Each is an image of the Absolute, but Novalis's immaterial, spiritual Night takes on a material aspect for Breton. While

Novalis wished to die and remain with Night, Breton's love is directed toward the living world. Unlike Novalis, Breton dismisses staying at that sublime point because the Absolute presupposes the dissolution of finite self. Rather, the Absolute must remain the object of a striving. A language of dwelling/residing resounds in both texts. Novalis gazes from the border heights down "into the dwelling place (*Wohnsitz*) of Night" (6; *Gesammelte Werke* 7). Night is caretaker to the "dwellings" (*Wohnungen*) of the "blessed, silent messenger of infinite mysteries" (5; *Gesammelte Werke* 5). Breton insists he could never establish a dwelling (*établir à demeure*) or settle himself at such a point (*m'y fixer*). While Breton relinquishes the eternal for the finite, he insists he will never lose sight of that ecstatic point of being. And, as Sophie was Night's messenger, Breton is the "guide" to the sublime point. Like Novalis's poet, Breton is a seer. In both texts, the ethics of love is *everything*. Breton's Surrealism was Romantic in its grasping not only for the Absolute, but also for perfect love. Unlike Novalis, Breton's love was for the *living* and for *life* itself. And above all in that moment, his love was for Aube, whom he had just called "*un impossible fleur aérienne*" (*OC* II 780). Being "aerial," she was free from the sordid mundane affairs of men, he explained. I cannot help but notice, however, that Breton's poetic image also lends his "impossible flower" the color of the sky.

Novalis in Breton's Surrealism after *Mad Love*

The period from the 1938 publication of the *Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism* through Breton's 1957 publication of *L'Art magigue* includes Breton's most explicit and frequent references to Novalis. The *Abridged Dictionary*, edited by Breton and Eluard with more than thirty contributors, quotes Novalis frequently. The Surrealists define "flame" via Novalis's poetic, Heraclitean explanation of *prima materia*: "The tree can become but a flowering flame, man a speaking flame, animal a walking flame" (12). Novalis used flame as an analogy for life, spirit, and love. The kindling of flame suggests the Romantic concept of *Bildung*—an ethical, aesthetic, and cultural cultivation of self and community.[16] Citation of Novalis also appear under entries for "Flower," in a manner suggesting humanity's place in the universe (12), "Eye," positioning that sense organ closer to the real than the ideal (19), "Poetry," asserting the absolute nature of poetry (21), and "Breast," elevating mystery, ethics, and poetics over anatomical matters (25). Finally, Novalis receives his own entry. Here, the *Abridged Dictionary* quotes Albert Beguin whose book *The Romantic Spirit* (1937) Breton likely read (Bauduin 141). The entry explains that Novalis advocated not full surrender to the unconscious or subjective; he directs us to search the inner self even as we perceive the exterior world anew, transforming and cultivating ourselves. For

[16] Gaston Bachelard, whom the Surrealists read, concurrently developed Novalis's connections to flame and love in his Psychoanalysis of Fire (Bachelard 21-41; Atkin, Dictionary 33).

Novalis, Beguin explains, we might *someday* attain "total consciousness" (18). This text affirms Novalis's place in the Surrealist pantheon.

In his "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto" (1942), Breton tells of a race of great invisible beings who look upon humans as lesser beings. As explanation, he quotes a fragment from Novalis's *General Draft* (written 1798-99): "[W]e live in an animal whose parasites we are. The constitution of this animal determines ours and vice versa"—an organicist image (*Manifestoes* 293; Parkinson). In 1945, Breton published *Arcane 17*, which made significant use of Novalis's notion of "Night," his philosophy of Nature, his ethics, and the idea of the Absolute (*OC* III 70-71). As with the *Second Manifesto*, Breton turns to geological imagery for expressing the Absolute *Arcane 17*. In one passage, he reflects on The Star, from the tarot deck's major arcana. Novalis's *Hymns* receive special attention here when Breton "pray[s] for the return of true night … a night that takes up residence in the frame that it fills to the breaking point with its myriad facets. It's bottomless as a *diamond*" (87). This diamond is the graphic star on the tarot card, and, intertextuality, the *Manifesto*'s diamond, all blind and interior. It is the diamond in the epigraph to the essay, smoldering with all the world's light. Geology provides Breton with *his* blue flower.

Remaining with *Arcane 17* for a moment, the opening lines of *The Novices of Sais*, with its language discernable "in crystals and stone formations," is resonant with Breton's discussion of Percé Rock on the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec, Canada. "Working my way around [the rock]," Breton recounts, "I

regretted not being able, from so close up, to discover its totality." "New arrangements of its mass," he observes, "gave rise to images different from those I had already formed." Finally, he laments, "One can only retain the last image when it's a question of picturing such complex structures" (55). Each vantage is a fragment, a natural sign pointing to the unknowable whole. The problem with the Absolute is, indeed, that one can never stand back far enough to see *everything*.

The same year he published *Arcane 17*, Breton lauded Novalis for his *youthful* genius in a speech at the Club Savoy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, comparing the Romantic to Jarry, Lautréamont, and Rimbaud—youth being the source of solutions to the world's problems (*OC* III 148-149). Not long after, in his January1946 Lecture in Haiti (organized by French cultural attaché Pierre Mabille), Breton placed Novalis at the center of a German Romantic movement that was responding not only to the fraught socio-political conditions of Europe at the time, but, to the desiccation of poetic experience. Here, Breton again cited Novalis's assertion that poetry is an *absolute real*, and he acknowledged the Romantic poet's connection of poet and seer, later echoed by Rimbaud (*OC* III 222-224). Finally, in 1957, Breton published *L'Art magique*, co-written with Gérard Legrand, in which he acknowledged Novalis as a source for his concept of "magic art"—a subject worthy of its own essay.

Concluding Remarks

Breton, as I show, was familiar with Novalis's writing by mid-1925. Notably, he was conversant enough to impress Jolas, who had known the Romantic writer's work since childhood. Through Jolas's reporting, we can trace Breton's first significant engagement with Novalis to his reading of Maeterlinck's volume, a book whose introduction casts Novalis as an unbridled mystic. During Surrealism's early years, Breton was surely wary of associating his movement with such mysticism. Critics attacked Surrealism as politically and philosophically unserious, ineffective, and quixotic—all of which the deprecating label "mystical" connoted. Concurrently, Jolas claimed Novalis as his basis, even as some critics conflated Breton's efforts with those of *transition*. These historical conditions begin to explain Breton's public ambivalence toward Novalis before 1938. Nevertheless, traces of Novalis's ideas (or transformations thereof) are evident in Breton's Surrealism before that date. In that regard, I have sketched the contours of a shared longing for the Absolute—albeit stripped of religious meaning for Breton. This Surrealist-Romantic Absolute emerges especially in Breton's geological imagery: in diamonds, rock formations, and landforms. Breton's sublime mountaintop, for instance, was a vital, life-affirming image of the Absolute as an inversion of the depths of Novalis's Night. In all its guises, the Surrealist Absolute—accessible in poetic images, dreams, and moments of marvel—was a wellspring of creative potential, and endless reserve from which

the world might be remade anew. One can imagine Breton adapting Novalis by way of Maeterlinck, declaring: *le monde doit être surréalisé*…[17]

[17] "The world must be surrealized."

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