
The Collaboration of Max Ernst and Paul Eluard A Surrealist Model, 1922

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Répétitions and *Les Malheurs des Immortels* were published by the artist Max Ernst and the poet Paul Eluard immediately before Surrealism was formulated as a coherent ideology. The potential importance of these works has, until recently, failed to attract much notice among historians of Surrealism. Surely it begs too many questions, and suggests a certain credulousness on the part of historians to consign to the limbo of 'miraculeuses correspondances' a collaborative effort such as *Répétitions*.¹ How may one account for the fate of these works, whose beauty is in no way obscured by their diminutive size? Several factors invite consideration.

Répétitions (21.9 × 13.7 cm) and *Les Malheurs* (25.1 × 18.8 cm) were published in 1922, when they tended to be overshadowed by the furore generated in the final schism of Dada. *Répétitions* (Fig. 1) came off the press in March, in a limited edition of 350. It was immediately absorbed into private collections and has thus escaped the retrospective attention of scholars by its relative inaccessibility. Though a number of Ernst's collage illustrations have been reproduced outside the original context and widely diffused as images in their own right, the text itself is scarcely

known. *Les Malheurs* was published only four months later, in a larger edition, samples of which have found their way into British and American public collections. Translations into German and English have recently appeared.² As opposed to the modest resources of the Librairie Au Sans Pareil, where Eluard was obliged to meet costs out of his own pocket, the financial backing of Librairie Six perhaps ensured a larger circulation for the later publication. Like its predecessor, *Les Malheurs* has had its illustrations excerpted and reproduced with little regard for the literary context. Until recently the result has been an acknowledgement merely of the iconographic significance of these works within Ernst's œuvre, in particular by Roland Penrose and John Russell.³ Despite these notable contributions, scarcity has placed *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs* deeply in the shadow of more conspicuous Dada and Surrealist products of the same epoch.

The uncertainty of knowledge surrounding these two works, at least in their integral form, also appears in large measure attributable to a dearth of primary documentation. In the absence of any surviving drafts, Werner Spies's seminal analysis in 1974 of the collaboration on *Les Malheurs* was based on conversations with Max Ernst.⁴ It is now also fairly certain that no further

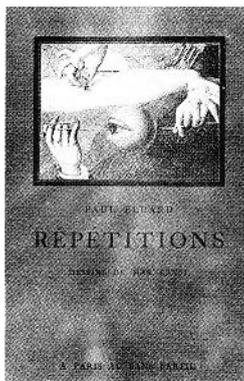


FIGURE 1. Paul Eluard and Max Ernst, Cover of *Répétitions*, 1921. (Photo: © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).

1 Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris, 1965), 363. Material contained in this article has been partially condensed from the author's M.A. thesis submitted at the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1979, entitled 'The Collaboration of Max Ernst and Paul Eluard in *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs*.'

2 The Black Sun Press announces *Misfortunes of the Immortals* by Max Ernst ..., advertisement in *View*, IV (1943), 31. Also *Les Malheurs des Immortels*, trans. Ulrich Serbser, (Cologne, 1960).

3 Roland Penrose, *Max Ernst's Celebes* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1972) and John Russell, *Max Ernst: Life and Work* (London, 1967).

4 Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Collagen* (Cologne, 1974).

documentary evidence has survived.⁵ Indeed, Patrick Waldberg, through his work in the Fonds Doucet, was able to shed only slightly more light on the nature of Eluard's contribution to the texts.⁶

The present exposition nonetheless will attempt to reconstruct the circumstances under which artist and poet collaborated. Collective, even anonymous creative activity had attained a certain prestige during the Dada period; the emphasis herein placed on collaboration is justifiable in view of the values later attached to communally inspired artistic products by the 'orthodox Surrealists.' The nascent Surrealism of *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs* can be demonstrated, in that they emerge from the nihilism of Dada and progress towards the Surrealist equation of plastic art and literature. Moreover, the most valid aspects of Surrealism were consistent with and an outgrowth of the positive characteristics of Dada. The rapid succession of *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs* can be said to illustrate this progression.

The 'collage aesthetic' inherent in these works also confers a striking unity of intention, which contrasts with the occasional incomplete synthesis of collaborative effort. *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs* are among the first fruits of simulated automatism and must be seen as decisive in later surrealist production, theory and practice. For this reason it is instructive to assess Max Ernst the versifier and *voyant* working at the side of Eluard, who was both a recognised literary figure and a distinguished amateur of the arts.

5 Letter addressed to the present author, from Madame Dorothea Tanning Ernst, dated 11 March 1979: 'I have no correspondence whatever related to my late husband's collaboration with Paul Eluard, Max Ernst did not keep letters of an inessential nature, especially as he was often obliged to change countries.' This statement is corroborated by Lucien Schéler, *Eluard: Lettres à Joë Bousquet* (Paris, 1973), 134, and by Eluard's daughter Cécile Eluard Valette, in a letter to the present author dated 9 March 1979.

6 Patrick Waldberg, *Max Ernst: Peintures pour Paul Eluard* (Paris, 1969).

7 'Lieu commun,' according to the definition given in *Petit Larousse* (1973), connotes clichés, stereotyped modes of thought and received ideas banalized through constant usage. It is useful in this context to observe that the French words *cliché* and *stéréotype* also denote printing techniques incorporated by Ernst in his 'dadamax' series of drawings, incidentally exposing the redirected potential of the verbal cliché.

8 Sanouillet, 310. This operation on language corresponds to Nietzsche's theories on the origin of consciousness in language (F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann, 2nd ed. [New York, 1974], 298-99). Nietzsche's view seems to have been adopted by Jung, in the formulation of his theory of collective unconscious imagery, which invests common figures of speech with archetypal significance.

The *lieu commun*, or commonplace,⁷ which had by 1920 been subsumed into Ernst's thought and work, infiltrated the workshop of his future collaborator through the back door, in the guise of linguistic experiments. In 1914 Eluard had published a series of poems entitled *Avant de penser, apprenez à parler*. Upon his demobilization he discovered through an exchange of letters with Jean Paulhan, who was then contributing to Reverdy's *Nord-Sud*, a common interest in linguistics. (Paulhan's study, begun in 1918 and entitled 'La sémantique du proverbe et du lieu commun,' was published in *Littérature* for July-August 1920, beside Eluard's 'Exemples.') With the aid of Paulhan, Eluard launched the single-sheet monthly review *Proverbe*, which ran for five issues between February and June of 1920. Its demise coincided with the subsidence of the public Dada spectacles. During its short life it provoked the ire of some partisans of *Littérature*; however, Tristan Tzara was particularly enthusiastic about the venture:

Paul Eluard veut réaliser une concentration de mots cristallisés comme pour le peuple, mais dont le sens reste nul...

He then gives examples of various tautologies illustrating both the semantic poverty and hypnotic mystique of commonplace comparisons.

Le proverbe dada résulte d'une sonorité aux apparences multiples, partie de toutes les bouches avec la force d'inertie... petite folie collective...⁸

Tzara perceived the similarity of Ernst's activity in Cologne and arranged Eluard's request to Ernst for material. Unfortunately the projected final issue of *Proverbe* never appeared, and the poem 'L'Invention,' intended for publication in July 1920, appeared only a year later in *Répétitions* with an illustration by Max Ernst (Fig. 2).

Tzara's commentary stresses the bruitistic Dada aspect of Eluard's linguistic inventions, where the concept of 'folie collective' is necessary for future

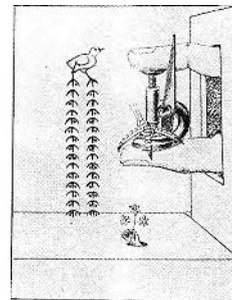


FIGURE 2. Max Ernst, *L'Invention*, 1921. Collage, reproduced in *Répétitions* (Photo: © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).

developments. Paulhan's preface to *Exemples* is more forward-looking in stressing semantics, or content, over form, and in alluding to the disorientation which became typical of Surrealist art and poetry.⁹ Eluard himself acknowledged the power of the ready-made phrase, and the creative potential generated from witticism, via epigram, to the poetic *trouvaille*:

Je n'invente pas les mots... mais j'invente des objets... des êtres, et mes sens sont capables de les apercevoir. La parole la plus banale/l'objet perdu/Force-les à battre des ailes.¹⁰

Like Ernst, Eluard dealt primarily with dialectical relationships and hallucinatory transpositions from abstract to concrete reference; however, in 1920, the poems from *Exemples* restrict themselves to a dialogue with theories of literary inspiration. They do not challenge specific anomalies of reality in the manner of, for example, Max Ernst's roughly contemporary collage, *C'est le Chapeau qui fait l'Homme*.¹¹ A number of motifs from *Exemples* became constants in Eluard's output, as is evident from the themes of metaphorical blindness and unconscious life which predominate in *Les nécessités de la vie* (1921), *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs* (1922), and *La pyramide humaine ou les dessous d'une vie* (1926). The ultimate validity of Eluard's linguistic researches – which formed one of the bases for a collaboration between Max Ernst and himself in 1921 – was proved in 1925, when Michel Leiris's whimsical 'Glossaire' appeared in the third number of *La Révolution Surréaliste* (pp. 6-7), reinforced by a characteristic Eluardian phrase: 'la douleur – bouche en cœur' on page 12. The Freudian analysis of language had already been reformulated in a surrealistic theory of literature.

By 1921 Eluard had achieved an informal and natural style, marked by a striking economy of expression and freed from *recherché* symbolist syntax even if it was conventionally punctuated and type-set. He wrote fluently on the subject of poetic reverie and the resulting perceptual disorders without, however, acceding to the automatist mode favoured by Breton since 1919. He did not even venture as far as Louis Aragon, who in the collection entitled *Feu de Joie* (1920), which is also a commonplace, composed a series of expert pastiches as laconic criticisms of poetic modes then in vogue within the international Dada movement. Eluard would tolerate abnormality, but not incoherence; this is clearly demonstrated in his contribution to the text of *Les Malheurs*. He shared with Ernst a pronounced reservation

concerning the quality of unadulterated effusions from the 'unconscious' mind. As his collaboration with Max Ernst implies, Eluard endorsed the equation of art and poetry without feeling compelled to recognize this as a logical consequence of identifying form and content as reciprocal elements.

While he participated, albeit with more circumspection than his vitriolic colleagues, in the incestuous byplay surrounding the factions attached to various avant-garde reviews, Eluard still found himself an outsider, as did Ernst for rather different reasons. His obvious poetic virtuosity, his versatility and his material stability gave him the option of choosing the direction his career would take. Association with Max Ernst temporarily absolved him from the task of dealing with unresolved convictions. (Ernst was morally equipped to deal more ruthlessly with his artistic fate, as he showed by leaving Germany on the brink of critical acceptance.)

In May 1921, André Breton arranged for the exhibition of Ernst's collages in the Librairie-Galerie Au Sans Pareil. The slogan of the exhibition – 'Au-delà de la Peinture' – evoked a response from Louis Aragon which shows his recognition of the key to Ernst's aesthetic innovation: the fusion of art and literature in a form that resembled neither. A later text by Aragon enlarges on the collage as a paradigm for poetry, referring obliquely to a principle informing the iconographical structure of *Paysan de Paris*, a work which was in progress during Ernst's exhibition:

Dans l'écriture, quand j'étais très jeune l'idée du collage, de la transposition du collage dans l'écriture me possédait assez constamment. Chez nous [Breton, Soupault, Eluard] la forme de cette obsession est le lieu commun qui est un véritable collage de l'expression toute faite... d'abord employé comme l'image, puis tendant à devenir le poème même...¹²

9 'Pour les proverbes, exemples et autres mots à jamais marqués d'une première trouvaille, combien ce vide autour d'eux les fait plus absurdes et purs, pareillement difficiles à inventer, à maintenir.' Paul Eluard, *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris, 1968).

10 Paul Eluard, *Donner à Voir* (Paris, 1939), 148.

11 Illustrated in William S. Rubin, *Dada and Surrealist Art* (New York, 1974), fig. 87.

12 Unpublished, undated manuscript in the Fonds Doucet, reproduced as 'Max Ernst, Peintre d'Illusions' in Louis Aragon, *Les Collages* (Paris, 1965). This text neither cites *Les Malheurs des Immortels* nor mistakes the date of the exhibition for 1920, as does *La Peinture au défi* (1930); therefore it is safe to assume that the text was penned between May 1921 and June 1922.

Judging by events taking place four months after the revelations of May, it can be assumed that Eluard's assessment of Ernst's work was at that time not dissimilar to Aragon's. The Au Sans Pareil exhibition may have given Eluard some inkling of his future involvement with art. At any rate, Ernst emerged from his Parisian debut as a theorist and personality of unquestionable importance to the aspirations of future Surrealists. For Eluard, this was confirmed by Breton's decision to stop in the Tyrol *en route* to a consultation with Freud in Vienna. It is worth emphasizing that Breton made his plans undeterred by knowledge of Tzara's presence in Tarrenz, so great was his desire to meet personally with Ernst, even if they had parted company over the Barrès trial. Eluard's reasons for accompanying Breton on this journey are unknown; he presumably also wished to meet Freud, whose *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (1917) had recently appeared in French translation.¹³ His friendship with Tzara, who was close to Ernst, was probably an incentive for stopping in Tarrenz; besides, Eluard was accustomed to spending time in Alpine sanatoria because of his lungs. Finally, his desire to meet Ernst could well have been motivated by the prospect of an artistically fruitful contact, by envisioning a collaboration on the scale of Soupault's and Breton's *Champs Magnétiques* (1919). Given the recent schisms involving Breton, Picabia, and Tzara, Eluard may have decided secretly that group activity was becoming impracticable, and he did not thrive on upheaval. No doubt he hoped to form an alliance with Ernst that would prove more durable than the potentially suicidal operations of the Paris Dadas.

Breton had so thoroughly alienated Ernst and Arp that they departed for their respective home towns before the Eluards could reach the Tarrenz rendezvous. Gala and Paul Eluard therefore resolved to visit the Ernsts on their return from Vienna, subsequently staying in the Ernsts' flat for six days in early November 1921. It was there that Eluard first broached his plan for publishing Ernst's collages as illustrations to a group of his own poems which had yet to appear in print. This was clearly a change in direction for both men, whose experiences in the field of illustrated books were, still and all, of a comparable nature. The partnership of Eluard and André Lhote in *Les*

animaux et leurs hommes (1918-20) was simple and conventional, while Ernst had decorated J.T. Kuhleman's nostalgic poems, *Consolamini* (1919), with drawings reminiscent of Expressionist woodcuts.

Actual collaboration, in the sense of continuous and mutual creation, does not seem to have extended beyond the six days spent together by Ernst and Eluard in Cologne. Despite the absence of correspondence pertaining to the presentation of *Répétitions*, its inelegant design and layout, coupled with the use of a glossy paper unsuitable for fine line illustrations, suggest that Ernst had no share in preparing the book for publication. All this is in marked contrast to the consistent

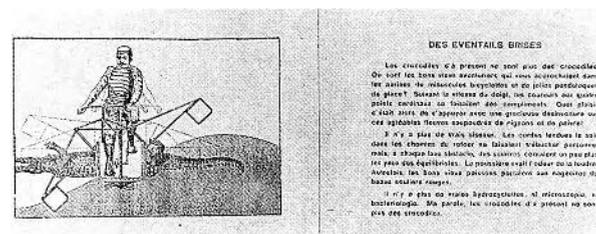


FIGURE 3. Max Ernst, *Des Eventails Brisés*, 1922. Collage, reproduced in *Les Malheurs des Immortels* (Photo: by permission of The British Library).

format and striking type-face used in *Les Malheurs* (Fig. 3). Ernst may have participated in assigning certain collages to specific poems, however, and it would be simplistic to discount his influence purely for lack of documentation. Ernst's previous collaborations with Arp and Eluard's close association with artists in Arp's milieu imply that joint work on the book was less the outcome of any 'miraculous correspondence' than the result of purposeful activities directed at the rehabilitation of the subconscious mind as the ultimate repository of poetic imagery. Critical awareness is implicit in the recognition and co-ordination of involuntary resemblances.

According to Waldberg, Eluard chose the illustrations to *Répétitions* from a selection of pre-existing collages he found in Ernst's Cologne flat. He does not specify whether or not Ernst previously was familiar with the poems destined for publication in March 1922. It is of course possible that Ernst's first viewing of the book's arrangement and literary contents occurred at this date, when the Eluards again visited him in Cologne. They brought with them copies of the just-published *Répétitions* as well as plans for a

¹³ Sigmund Freud, *Introduction à la Psychanalyse* (Paris, 1920).

second collaboration which led to *Les Malheurs*. In sum, the pre-existing and independently composed poems and images assembled in *Répétitions* offer a tempting analogy to the collage process, involving acclimatization of 'ready-made' elements.

Any analysis of *Répétitions* as a collaborative effort and proto-Surrealist phenomenon hinges on its chronology. As this is a subject of controversy in itself, let it be noted that the unique physical attributes of the handwritten *Répétitions* manuscript confirm Eluard's contention in his



FIGURE 4. Max Ernst, *Enfant*, 1921. Collage. Hannover, Kestner-Museum (Photo: © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).

letter to Jacques Doucet that the 'poems' were written over the period 1916-22.¹⁴ Most of these are unpublished fragments, either recovered from among his papers, transcribed from memory, or casually jotted down at a bedside table or café.

There has been some speculation that the collages reproduced in *Répétitions* post-date the poems in the state in which they appear in the Doucet manuscript. A cursory glance at the book's contents suggests little more than a procedural or generic correspondence between text and illustrations, but provides no firm basis for the assertion that the poems inspired the collages. It will in any case be shown in the ensuing discussion of *Les Malheurs* that Ernst tended to proceed from concrete image to the relative abstraction of language, rather than *vice versa*, and that this tendency was initiated in his 1920 Fatagaga series with Arp. There is additional evidence, based on stylistic comparisons, which favours dating the *Répétitions* collages between spring and autumn of 1921. Werner Spies, in fact, dates the collages related to the *Répétitions* illustrations to 1921 instead of 1920, as had

previously been done.¹⁵ It is necessary only to add a few qualifying remarks to his conclusions.

In neither the *Dada Vorfrühling* exhibition (Cologne, 1920) nor the *Au Sans Pareil* show of May 1921 were there any wood-engraving collages. (The prototypes used in *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs* are all composed using wood-engraved materials.) The periodical *Die Schammade*, made up in February 1920, does not reproduce wood-engraving collages either, so the first presentiment of Ernst's growing interest in wood engraving as a linear style occurs in his *Microgramme Arp*. The drawing, which appeared in *Littérature* in May 1921, simulates the engraver's linear technique so precisely that it is almost impossible to distinguish it from an actual engraving. The illusion or, if one will, confusion, is further enhanced by reproduction. Thus the appearance of the *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs* collages was unprecedented, which may account for their success in being mistaken for drawings.

It seems reasonable to conjecture that Ernst began to employ wood-engraved illustrations from mail-order catalogues (*Whiteley's* and *Magasin Pittoresque*) as well as Poyet's engravings from the late-nineteenth-century popular science journal, *La Nature*, some time after May 1921. Among the early wood-engraving collages, *Enfant* is according to this argument a work of 1921. It employs an analytic, as opposed to synthetic, method of collage, in which an entire engraved plate is used as the pictorial context, with only a few alterations caused by the superimposition of glued material extracted from other engraved illustrations. *Enfant* is stylistically in advance of the illustrations to *Répétitions* (and a few of those included in *Les Malheurs*), which confine themselves to the synthetic method of combining fragments from unrelated wood engravings and 'acclimatizing' them with hand-drawn perspectival constructions (cf. Figs. 2 and 4). They are therefore related chronologically to wood-engraving collages in the order of *Der Redner* (1921),¹⁶ formerly in Tzara's collection. This observation suggests the probability of their having been made before August 1921, when Ernst joined Tzara in the Tyrol.

¹⁴ MS of *Répétitions*, Paris, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (Pressmark 1040 A.123). Also a letter from Paul Eluard addressed to Jacques Doucet, undated but ascribed by this author to spring 1922, Paris, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (Pressmark 1040 A.123).

¹⁵ Spies.

¹⁶ Illustrated in *Max Ernst: Frottagen, Collagen, Zeichnungen, Graphik, Bücher* (Kunsthau, Zurich, 18 August–29 October 1978), 65.

So it was that, in 1921, Ernst became disposed, whether through orientation or lack of alternatives, towards using non-literary illustrative material in his 'literary' collages. He therefore treated his heterogenous motifs as literal *Bildwörter* which could interact on a semantic level, rather than seeking the scenically-linked visual correspondences more appropriate to a prose narrative. His source material, gleaned from late-nineteenth-century popular and didactic imagery, carried with it a distinctive new aesthetic. The primary sensation induced in the viewer is one of disorientation, intensified by the *trompe-l'œil/trompe-l'esprit* illusionism of these collages in which Ernst substitutes enigma of meaning and the illusion of an integral, original print.

This effect is achieved through reproducing photographically something which is already a reproduction. Ernst deliberately selected wood-engraved motifs, because their coarse outlines made them precise, contoured forms, easy to cut out and reintegrate in a context 'tonalized' by relatively uniform hatched lines. The thick lines were also more readable to the viewer, while effectively obscuring the points of juncture where one motif is glued over another. The clipping and gluing is so skillfully managed that it is almost impossible to detect, even in the collage prototypes, such as *La Parole*, destined for photographic reproduction (Fig. 5). The paradoxical valuation of the collage as a reproduction of itself numbers among the most refined in Ernst's repertory of mechanical techniques employed in order to suppress his identity as a painter in favour of that of an 'imagier.'

In view of this, Eluard must have chosen the collages to be reproduced in *Répétitions* from an even more eclectic selection of collages stored in Ernst's flat. Eluard's taste for de Chirico's *pittura metafisica* here came into play by establishing a loose standard of symmetry, a lack of elaboration in the number of motifs presented in one image, and an orthogonally-described perspective space. These characteristics match those of the short *objet-poèmes* included in *Répétitions* – monolithic with their restricted imagery and sharply curtailed in integral thematic progression. The style of the poems, which can consist of several short prose sentences or quantities of blank verse, allows for as much diversification as that of the collages.

Ernst and Eluard came together in their love for de Chirico's *pittura metafisica*, which represented for them an exemplary amalgam of artistic and poetic principles founded on the

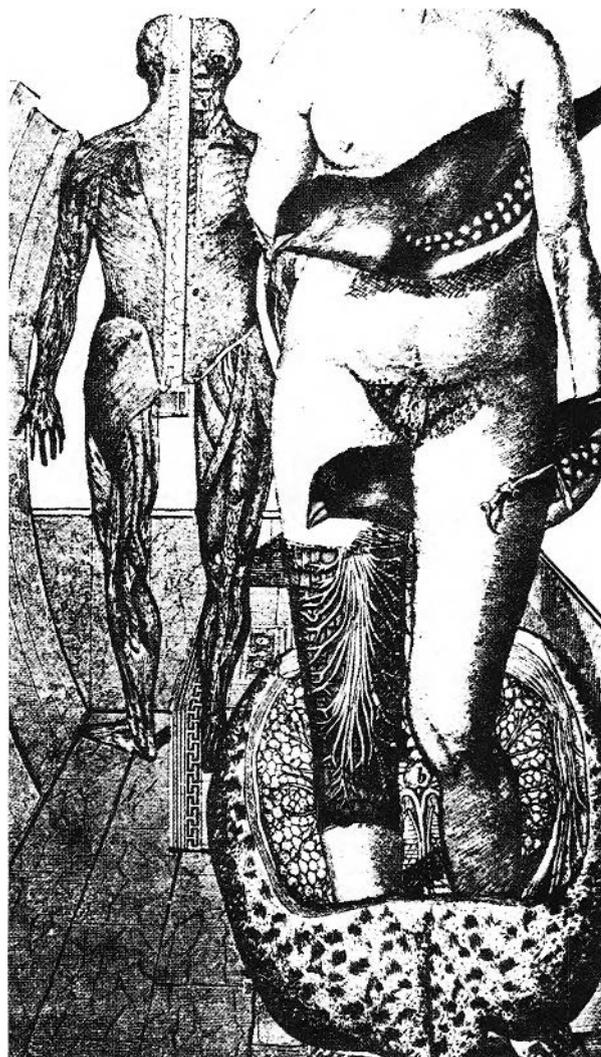


FIGURE 5. Max Ernst, *La Parole*, 1921. Collage, reproduced in *Répétitions* (Photo: © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).

dislocation of commonplaces. Ernst's celebrated discovery of collage in 1919 had everything to do with his immediately preceding discovery of de Chirico, through a copy of *Valori Plastici*. In the light of Ernst's intellectual sophistication and his apparent ingenuousness concerning his own personality, it will be necessary to qualify his account of the 'collage experience.' In minimizing the importance of the author and repudiating the criterion of talent, Ernst anticipated the Surrealist adage that poetry represents the functioning of the mind rather than controlled expression. It is, by implication, an activity open to everyone and not at all a question of manual dexterity or verbal facility. Neither Ernst nor Eluard was capable of regarding creativity in such

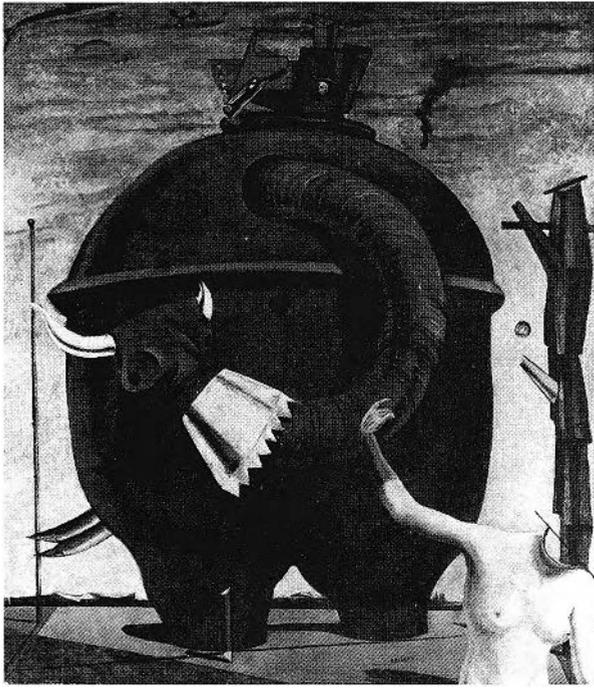


FIGURE 6. Max Ernst, *Éléphant Célèbes*, 1921. Oil on canvas, 125 × 107 cm. London, Tate Gallery (Photo: Tate Gallery).

a superficial way. Their technical procedures tended to represent a dialogue between the ordering, rational consciousness and the more chaotic, inchoate elements of the psyche.

Eluard's letter to Jacques Doucet raises the issue of automatism in connection with his poetry. It should be recalled that this letter was composed at the inauguration of the 'époque des sommeils' when automatism was considered the *nec plus ultra* of authentic expression.¹⁷ Coincidentally, one should note that March 1922, the month in which *Répétitions* was published, also witnessed the first recitals of dreams in *Littérature* (Nouvelle Série, 1).

Eluard's choice of the collage on the *Répétitions* cover (Fig. 1), and the illustrations to the poems 'L'Invention' and 'La Parole' were made in the same spirit as his coincidental purchase of Ernst's *Éléphant Célèbes* and *Oedipus Rex* (Figs. 2, 5, 6, and 7). The two paintings, which are related chronologically and iconographically to the three collages, originate in Ernst's collage aesthetic, where de Chirico's influence is discernible. In their fusion of a commonplace idiom with sublimity of scale, *Éléphant Célèbes* and *Oedipus Rex* achieve an oneiric intensity corresponding to Eluard's contemporaneous efforts in poetry.

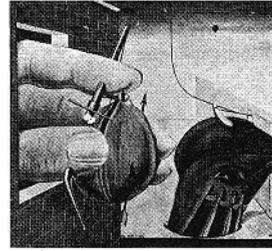


FIGURE 7. Max Ernst, *Oedipus Rex*, 1921. Oil on canvas, 93 × 102 cm. Private collection (Photo: © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).

The preoccupations expressed in *Répétitions*, reinforced by the reciprocal effects of concrete and linguistic imagery, become sublimated as a *leitmotif* in *Les Malheurs*. The 'object-language' developed in elementary form in the *Répétitions* collages is correspondingly refined and developed in the second book, where the translucency of Eluard's familiar vocabulary is shrouded by Ernst's drastically foreshortened verbal structures. Like *Répétitions*, *Les Malheurs* adheres to the typographical conservatism of *Littérature*, avoiding the sensational page design favoured by Dadaist publications.

Perhaps the most radical departure from precedent established in *Répétitions* was the compositional order of *Les Malheurs*. *Répétitions* was the result of an encounter between pre-existing poetry and pre-existing collages: thirty-three poems and eleven 'illustrations.' Its contents appear to have been decided by a unilateral process of selection. Collaboration on *Les Malheurs* was much more intensive, extending to the text itself, which was planned as an accompaniment to Ernst's collages. (There are twenty-two collages and twenty prose-poems).

Since the original draft for *Les Malheurs* apparently has perished, there is no sure method of distinguishing the one author's role from that of the other. Hence the following analysis relies on stylistic comparisons with *Répétitions* and on insights gained by Spies from Ernst's conversational recollections of the collaboration. Unlike the collaborative work of Breton and Soupault on *Les Champs Magnétiques*, which was accomplished seated side by side in a room, and which may have inspired the undertaking of Ernst and Eluard, Ernst and Eluard collaborated by means of correspondence between Paris and Cologne. Ernst, who was at the same time making collages, would invent a text for each, then send his version to Eluard for revision or additions. The authors were reunited in the Tyrol, where they completed work on *Les Malheurs* and sent it to

17 Cf. footnote 14.

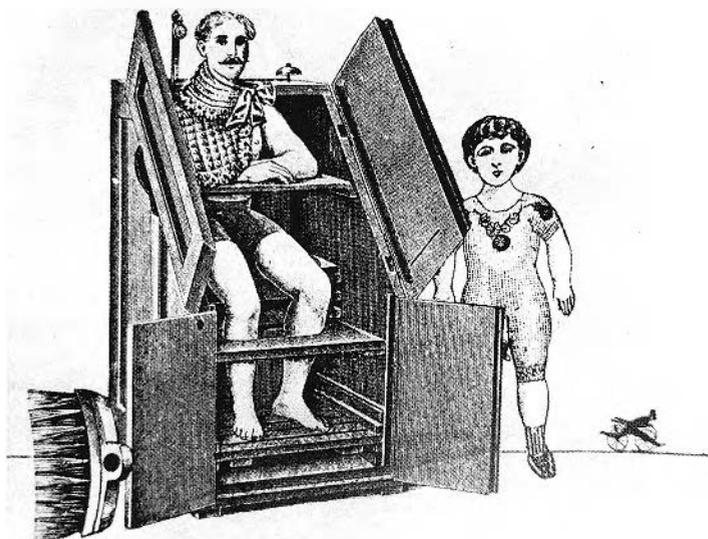


FIGURE 8. Max Ernst, *Les Deux Tout*, 1922. Collage, reproduced in *Les Malheurs des Immortels* (Photo: © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).

Innsbruck for printing. The book was published for Librairie Six and appeared on 25 July 1922.¹⁸

The prose-poem form of the text reveals Ernst's role, which was jointly agreed upon, in determining the form of the book. The rambling blank verse of his Fatagaga collaborations with Arp, used in other collage poems shown at the Galerie Au Sans Pareil in 1921, has simply been transposed into a more structured typographical and grammatical layout. In appearance, it constitutes an ostensibly more conventional, a more syntactically coherent vehicle for Ernst's poetic imagery, where the 'grammar' of representational art is simulated – and at the same time subverted – in a manner analogous to that of de Chirco's metaphysical painting. The prose style of the text also conforms, appropriately and visibly, to the more pictorially co-ordinated and implicitly narrative composition of the collages which face it (Fig. 3).

This in no way precludes an element of conscious rapprochement with historical prototypes, embodied in the style and tone of Baudelaire's collection of prose-poems, *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The connotations of malaise, ennui, and incipient mania originating in Baudelaire's 'Spleen de Paris' run parallel to Ernst's involve-

ment with the post-war Dada venting of spleen, still present beneath the veiled polemic of the poems in *Les Malheurs*. The fact that the poems and collages were jointly conceived as a cycle, in contrast to the synthetic amalgamation of their predecessors in *Répétitions*, points to an analogy with the structure of Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror* (1869), which in turn inspired the internal divisions of Soupault's and Breton's *Champs Magnétiques*. Ernst's sequentially conceived and thematically unified series of lithographs *Fiat Modes* (1919)¹⁹ gives to my mind a more immediate precedent for this aspect of the material created for *Les Malheurs des Immortels*.

Systematic decomposition of two texts from *Les Malheurs* should here suffice to demonstrate their structural resemblance to the collages, and the relative attitudes of the authors towards illustration. This analysis is conditioned by the nature of the relationship between collage and text. As in the earlier Fatagagas, the texts are conceived as 'illustrations' of the pictures! The degree to which Ernst and Eluard's definition of illustration includes the normally allied concepts of explication and demonstration must therefore be established.

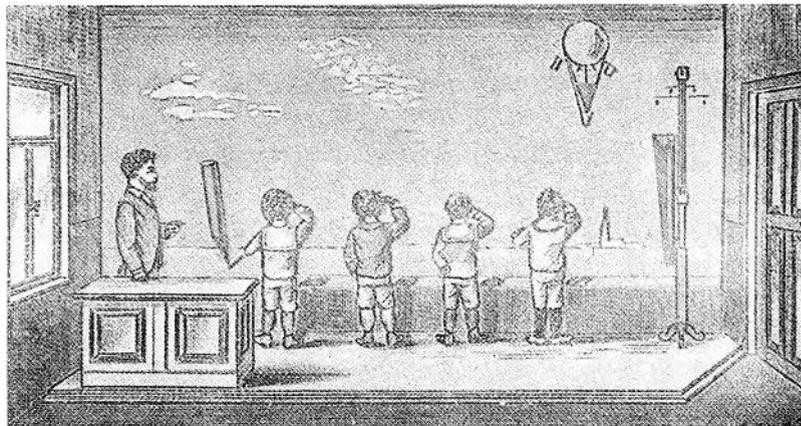
Werner Spies's sample *décollage* of 'Les Ciseaux et leur Père' can serve as a model for the decomposition of texts he does not discuss. His textual analysis, biased toward crediting Ernst with the bulk of the writing (thus casting Eluard in the role of editor-cum-proofreader), needs to be modified in view of Eluard's literary seniority and the evident pride he took in his contribution to *Les Malheurs*.²⁰ In *Les Deux Tout* (Fig. 8) Eluard's

¹⁸ Letter from Eluard addressed to Tristan Tzara, Tyrol, July 1922: 'Il fait si beau et l'on est si bien avec Max Ernst qui cherche des escargots et déränge toutes les herbes pour étaler son sourire de dentelle.' In Spies, 110.

¹⁹ Illustrated in Rubin, 98.

²⁰ In a letter to Joë Bousquet (20 December 1928), Eluard encourages him to read *Les Malheurs des Immortels*, after mentioning a recent visit from Ernst and Arp (with whom Bousquet was not acquainted). Schéler, *Lettres*, 66-67.

FIGURE 9. Max Ernst, Frontispiece of *Répétitions*, 1921. Hand-coloured collage (Photo: © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).



contribution begins in the second paragraph with the line: 'L'ébéniste est représenté jusqu'au genoux. Enfermé dans son prototype...' The sentence is then interrupted by Ernst's excursion into fanciful zoology, and only resumed in the third paragraph with 'La lenteur de ses gestes lui donne toutes les illusions. Depouillé de ses habits de verre bleu et de ses moustaches incassables...' The remainder of this text, representing Ernst's contribution, makes no reference to the iconography of the accompanying collage; in fact, the phrase 'les écoliers du vide rougissent à travers les fenêtres' seems to bear specifically on the frontispiece to *Répétitions* (Fig. 9). Ernst's synthesizing mentality produced verbalizations associable with his concrete imagery only on some metaphysical level. This tendency can be identified as a pattern in the complementarity of his earlier collages and titles.²¹

Ernst's portion of the text involves his personal stock of metaphors (fish and the ocean). As visually evocative as an actual picture, it deliberately raises questions about the collage illustrated without, however, providing any clues. The reader seeking a cause-and-effect relationship between text and illustration will be baffled and irritated by their apparent estrangement. In accordance with the 'destruction of technique' inherent in the principle of collage, Ernst foreshortens his prose to exclude circumstantial description of the subject, while narrative continuity is disturbed by convulsive eruptions of incidental imagery. Ernst's verbal metaphors free themselves from the tyranny of the subject they presumably illustrate and act, in his own words, as a form of 'musique d'accompagnement.'²² His text constitutes a truly collageist method of writing where poetry has the same relationship to the collage as the collage's *Bildwörter* to one

another. The inextricable combination of the thoughts of the two authors – to the extent that they collaborate in the composition of *single* sentences – completes the textual parallel to the visual collages.

Eluard's attitude towards the verbalization of imagery, as indicated in his contribution to the text of *Les Deux Tout*, was more objectively oriented. His aim was to clarify and reinforce the existing image, rather than to mystify the reader with parallel but distantly related verbal concretions. Eluard intercedes on behalf of the plastic image (the subject) in order to conserve a measure of thematic unity in the text. As an extension of the metaphor of musical accompaniment, it could be said that Eluard and Ernst compose a fugue in the text, the first executing the subject, the second the counter-subject. Although he definitely modulates the theme in the direction of comprehension, there can be no doubt that Eluard consciously refrained from revealing all, since he merely anchored the images in the text without explaining the 'plot.' Eluard's poetic vision was fixed in matter, and his contributions to Ernst's original text are as allusively dependent on, as Ernst's are aggressively independent of, their pictorial subjects.

Eluard's most verbally integrated evocation of collage occurs in *Des Eventails Brisés*. From the opening phrase, 'Les crocodiles,' to the second paragraph's 'les yeux des équilibristes,' the text is substantially his. The recurrent 'les crocodiles ne sont plus des crocodiles' at the beginning and end

21 'The title, carried for the first time beyond description by de Chirico, becoming with Picabia the distant term of a metaphor, took on with Max Ernst the proportions of a poem.' Louis Aragon, 'A Challenge to Painting,' in L. Lippard, *Surrealists on Art* (1970), 47.

22 Max Ernst: *Ceuvre Gravée* (Musée d'Art, Geneva, 1970).

of the text gives the reader a frame of reference and imposes a kind of thematic unity. Excerpts from Eluard's contribution to the text were later published in the *Dictionnaire abrégé du Surréalisme* (1938), while Ernst's 'il n'y a plus de vraies hydrocyclettes' was later used as the title for one of the wall paintings in Eluard's house at Eaubonne (Fig. 10). Nor are allusions to earlier works rare in *Les Malheurs*. A similar trading-off of credits appears in the poem 'Arrivée des Voyageurs,' where Ernst transposed Eluard's line from 'Nul' (*Répétitions*, p. 28): 'et il fallut fermer les volets.'

Les Malheurs des Immortels, as the title of a cycle of poems, tends to cast them in the guise of a set of myths. Almost a readymade image, the title conjures up such familiar works as *Die Götterdämmerung* (twilight of the gods). The content of these prose-poems, whose language condenses myth into allegory, is largely devoted to discrediting modern 'gods' or articles of faith, principally the Christian church and scientific positivism as they were inherited from the nineteenth century. After the war both these institutions emerged as natural targets for the radical intelligentsia, who pitted the ethics and epistemology of their poetry against the metaphysics of Christianity.²³

Eluard uses the scepticism of Sade to justify the position he shares with Aragon: 'Quand l'athéisme voudra des martyres, qu'il les désigne, et mon sang est tout prêt.'²⁴ Ernst's anti-

clericalism is of a more complex nature and revolves around his relationship with his 'père immobile.' It is enough to remark that his views on idealism of any kind, ranging from morality to religion, can be compared to those of Nietzsche: 'The greatest recent event – that God is dead, that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable – is already beginning to cast its first shadows across Europe.'²⁵

Both Eluard and Ernst had participated in the rediscovery of Lautréamont. Ernst, whose capacity for identification with the animal and vegetable worlds was at once phenomenal and amply documented in his collages and autobiography, must have experienced a revelation when he listened to Breton reading from *Les Chants de Maldoror* in summer 1921.

Lautréamont had exposed the fallibility of God (and thus the doctrine of original sin) as well as the moral fallacy connected with Darwin's counterassertion of the *ascent* of man, only to undertake a complete revision of anthropocentrism. He accordingly reorganized the living world by leveling the hierarchy of existence and leaving it bereft of any vestige of the moral supremacy of man. Lautréamont's exaltation of instinctual, amoral impulses must have appealed strongly to the authors of *Répétitions*; these attractions were redoubled by the remarkable sensuality and transforming power of his vision. *Les Chants de Maldoror* speaks the language of disillusionment, integrating extra-literary scientific jargon within a strikingly articulate style. The syntax of their incantatory rhythm defies the reader's tendency to ratiocinate and exalts, while concealing it, the displacement of notions. This process is comparable to that of *Les Malheurs*.

The anti-clericalism of both Ernst and Eluard is expressed primarily through an ironical consecration of the profane: metaphysical transcen-

23 'La poésie moderne est essentiellement athée. C'est-à-dire qu'une tache, pour elle, est sacrée – s'attaquer aux symboles. Il y a vraiment de la diablerie dans l'univers bourgeois.' Louis Aragon, 'La Peinture au Defi' *Les Collages* (Paris, 1965), 39-40.

24 *La Révolution Surréaliste*, VI (March 1926).

25 Nietzsche, 279.

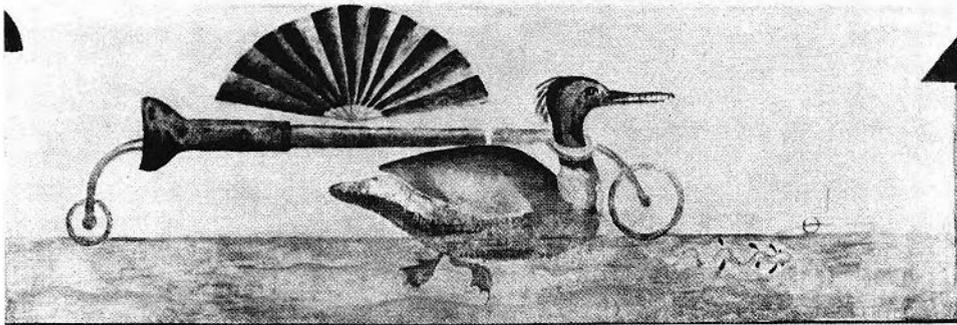


FIGURE 10. Max Ernst, *Il n'y a plus de vraies hydrocyclettes*, ca. 1922-23. Wall painting. Paris, Galerie François Petit (Photo: Courtauld Institute of Art, © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).

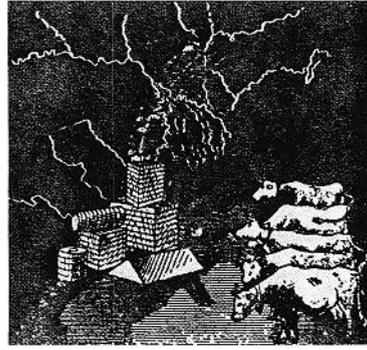


FIGURE 12. Max Ernst, *La Pudeur bien en vue*, 1922. Collage, reproduced in *Les Malheurs des Immortels* (Photo: © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).

FIGURE 11. Max Ernst, *Rencontre de Deux Sourires*, 1922. Collage, reproduced in *Les Malheurs des Immortels* (Photo: © Estate of Max Ernst, 1980).

dence is redirected into the secular and organic level of existence.²⁶ The protagonists of this process are beasts: ‘petits serpents canonisés’ (*Rencontre de Deux Sourires*, Fig. 11), canaries (*Réveil Officiel du Serin*), and even ‘une dinde et trois oies’ (*La Pudeur bien en Vue*, Fig. 12). There is a pointed allusion to Lautréamont in *La Pudeur*, where the action is shared by two doddering old angels (‘deux vieillards coiffés comme des petits anges, l’un en chemise blanche et battant ses ailes’), who respectively doze or tumble about in ‘Heaven.’ The turkeys and geese, presented as the usual clientele at this altitude (‘inséparables associés de ce lieu’), act as witnesses to the realm of ‘sodomistes dont les testicules vaporeux ondule.’ This line corresponds rather well to Lautréamont’s condemnation of the improbity of God, who after all was created in the image of man-as-beast: ‘It was a winter night. While the icy wind whistled through the pines, the Creator opened his door in the dead of dark and admitted a pederast.’²⁷

In the opening lines of ‘Rencontre de deux Sourires,’ the argument against church and state is clearly stated:

Dans le royaume des coiffeurs, les heureux ne perdent pas leur temps à être mariés. Au-delà de la coquetterie des guéridons, les pattes des canards abrègent les cris d’appel des dames blanches.²⁸

The remainder of the prose-poem, all but impenetrable in meaning, preserves an absurd unity

in its cadence and the elementary syntax maintained from line to line. Linguistic accidents resulting in minor *trouvailles* are incorporated – ‘le manche du manchot... les ongles des aigles’ – and contribute to the rhythm without disrupting the flow of thought. Ernst’s tendency towards the use of audacious portmanteau words has been disciplined by Eluard to attain the universality appropriate both to oracular pronouncements and ancient myths.

The language of *Les Malheurs des Immortels* therefore maintains a balance between the esoteric and the non-specific, avoiding the potentially schizophrenic mannerisms likely to result from a jointly-written text. The incongruity of the Ernstian ‘phallustrade’ is suppressed in favour of extending the collage principle beyond single words so as to apply to the combinative origins of the entire text. No less than two complementary structures may be seen to co-exist within *Les Malheurs des Immortels*: first, collages consisting of displaced visual elements cast in a novel pictorial

26 ‘Cette odeur de sainteté garde l’incognito des saints Pierre et Paul qui sont revenus pour voir comment va le monde. Hélas! Le gout de commerce a gagné.’ Eluard and Ernst, ‘Entre les deux Poles de la Politesse,’ *Les Malheurs des Immortels*.

27 Alexis Lykiard (trans.), *Lautréamont’s Maldoror* (New York, 1972), 159.

28 Max Ernst and Paul Eluard. ‘Le Rencontre de deux Sourires,’ *Les Malheurs des Immortels*.

interdependency; and second, a text composed of the verbal expressions of two authors, which are in several instances 'readymades' extracted from other poetic contexts.

The choice of a specific set of motifs from similar readymade sources imposes a stylistic unity leading from *Répétitions* through *Les Malheurs*. This is compounded by the systematic adaptation of motifs to a number of archetypal object-themes. Everyday images are given remoteness and become signs in a new language. Many depend on visual synonymy and are comparable to the verbal assonance and homonyms exploited in their poetry by Ernst and Eluard. Among these are the *boule magique* transformed into an eyeball on the cover of *Répétitions* and the *dame escamotée* masquerading as a bride in 'Rencontre de deux Sourires' (Fig. 11).

The very appearance of these early collages simulates the eery visual acuity of the dream state, where sight is interiorized by the simple act of closing the eyes and releasing the subconscious mind from its subjugation to waking perception. This state of metaphysical 'vision' associated with physical blindness is evoked on the cover of *Répétitions* (Fig. 1), which refers directly to the quasi-automatic techniques by which text and images were produced. In this way *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs* remain in constant dialogue with their own processes, highlighting procedure, rather than completeness of form, as the *raison d'être* behind their artistic and literary effects. This condition applies equally to text and images, which are viewed as the parts of an identical concept. Form, understood as grammar, is not so much at issue here as the use of materials, as the enrichment of the active poetic and visual vocabulary.

In *Répétitions*, these ideas are merely postulated, they are not integrated into a monolithic literary corpus. Text and illustrations form a symbol of their authors' intellectual evolution towards a defined philosophical position and, as such, remain components within a transitional work. *Les Malheurs des Immortels* represents a much more coherent synthesis of proto-Surrealist

formulæ condensed into allegories, systematically reassessing its literary predecessors. Poetry, an inspired phenomenon, is united with prose in the conscious reconstruction of reality, that is the prose-poem. Sometimes a *récit de rêve*, which appears to be the definitive written form adopted by the Surrealists in the twenties. Other fundamental precepts of Surrealism, such as the emergence of convulsive beauty from the synthesis of chaos and orderly procedure,²⁹ and *l'amour fou*, as an alternative to love and marriage, are here given full expression.

Why, then, did *Répétitions* and *Les Malheurs* fail as demonstration pieces for Surrealism? The movement was at that time pursuing its proselytizing and textually oriented phase. Therefore the amalgamation of art and literature remained unformulated until 1924 as a result of which recognition of Ernst's contribution in this field was delayed. In point of fact, the formal criteria set out by André Breton in the *First Manifesto of Surrealism* are satisfied by both of the works in question. In *Les Malheurs* especially, intellectual spontaneity and control are alternately explored; the pictorial verism of the dream image is balanced by the automatic content of the authors' visual suggestibility vis-a-vis the source materials. *Les Malheurs* is more of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* than a demonstration piece: Ernst and Eluard do not even append a preface. Because its underlying precepts are not stridently proclaimed, this work was easily overshadowed. (It must also be remembered that the work on the two books was carried on beyond the auspices of the Paris group.)

In conclusion, the Surrealist antipathy to logical explanation is partially responsible for the general lack of critical response to these books. Poetry, later considered the appropriate analogue for painting, was placed above the domain of scholarly criticism, since it presupposed the exclusion of the intellectual component characterising 'literature.' It is thus quite possible that Ernst and Eluard themselves discouraged any critical reception of their incunabula of Surrealism. Nevertheless, these two books could well have served in 1939 to illustrate Eluard's ideas about the creative process:

Les peintres n'ont cessé de s'éloigner de la description – des images n'accompagnent le poème que pour en élargir le sens, en dénouer la forme. Pour collaborer, peintres et poètes se veulent libres... une ressemblance involontaire.³⁰

²⁹ Despite his assertions in the *Premier Manifeste* (1924), Breton sanctioned the tempering of automatism by rational intervention in *Les Pas Perdus*, 158: 'Eluard, Ernst et moi, en dépit de toute notre bonne volonté, ne nous sommes pas endormis.' H.S. Gershman, *The Surrealist Revolution in France* (1964), 199.

³⁰ Paul Eluard, 'Physique de la Poésie,' *Donner à Voir* (Paris, 1939) 150-51.