

EDITORIAL

FRENCH WRITER ISIDORE-LUCIEN DUCASSE's 1869 novel *The Songs of Maldoror* famously describes the beauty of "the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table." In the early twentieth century this phrase inspired a movement known as "surrealism," which sought to create new realities through such odd juxtapositions. This movement was also inspired by psychoanalysis, as writers often incorporated dream imagery into their work. As French writer André Breton wrote in the first surrealist manifesto in 1924, "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, . . . into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*." Surrealists often explored their dreams using the technique of "automatic writing," or writing in a trance state, and some even performed séance-like "sleeping sessions," which were intended to facilitate lucid dreaming.

The surrealists were also inspired by the fantastic, absurd, and dream-like quality of fairy tales, which attracted the attention of Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, who was living in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1940s and 1950s he introduced surrealist writing to Latin America, where it was combined with local mythology, folklore, and mysticism. This new genre, which became known as "magical realism," thus sought not only to blur the boundary between dream and reality but also to integrate indigenous and modern belief systems.

There was another resurgence of interest in surrealism following the discovery of several new hallucinogenic substances in the 1950s and 1960s. These hallucinogens were initially seen as aids to therapy because they provided access to the unconscious, and they were also embraced by American writers like William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, who saw them as aids to creativity. Their widespread availability soon gave rise to another literary movement that had much in common with surrealism, including a desire to challenge social conventions and to explore the inner space of the psyche. Hallucinogenic visions were also frequently described as mystical experiences, which led to a growing interest in non-Western religious practices.

Psychedelic literature was often associated with the genre of science fiction, which was fundamentally based on the exploration of alternative realities. In the 1970s Yugoslavian-born literary critic Darko Suvin also developed a new definition of science fiction as “the literature of cognitive estrangement,” as it forces readers to imagine other worlds and to see the real world in a new and potentially revolutionary way. Like surrealism, therefore, science fiction was also understood as a transformative literary genre, which shows that surrealist ideas and techniques are not merely of historical importance; rather, they continue to inform and inspire contemporary writers as well.

Our spring issue features a special section of contemporary works that reflect, intentionally or unintentionally, many of the ideas and techniques associated with surrealism. For example, the opening poems by John Olson, George Kalamaras, John Bradley, Laynie Browne, and Diane Wald bear a striking resemblance to the poetic style of early surrealist writing, including the use of bizarre juxtapositions, incongruities, and non sequiturs. The stories and poems by Erica Evelyn Simmonds, John Wall Barger, Patrick Pritchett, and Jacques Moulin also reflect the surrealists’ desire to blur the boundary between dream and reality, while the stories by Robert Kostuck, David Sheskin, and Lynne Parks resemble works of magical realism by incorporating elements of folklore and fairy tales. The stories by Robert Lake and Mark Rogers also depict irrational, absurd, and darkly humorous situations that serve to critique negative aspects of the modern world. The poems by Peter O’Leary and Lynn Atkinson-Boutette also describe how the altered states of consciousness produced by hallucinogens resemble mystical experiences that seem to connect the user more deeply to the natural world. Lastly, the use of science fiction elements in Kieran Egan’s poem and Andrew Joron’s novella also produce the effect of cognitive estrangement by encouraging readers to imagine alternative realities. Like all of the works in this section, therefore, they similarly encourage readers to see the world in a new way by challenging their assumptions and expectations.

Our spring issue also features an interview with Canadian poet George Elliott Clarke as well as two new chronicles: Roberta Barker’s review of Canadian director François Girard’s recent production of Richard Wagner’s opera *Parsifal* (1882) and Jerry White’s review of British director Nick Park’s new film *Early Man* (2018).