

Through An Hour-glass Lightly: Valentine Penrose and Alice Rahon Paalen

by

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Unik – Pourquoi Breton trouve-t-il
colossal de demander l'avis de la femme?
Breton – Parce que ce n'est pas de mise.
Unik – Le contraire peut n'être pas de mise.
Breton – Je m'en fous.

La Révolution Surréaliste (1928)¹

Clandestine de rêves je deviens
cette inconnue qui passe et ne
sait plus appartenir je dérobe
la mémoire je démasque j'outrepasse
je suis d'une dernière colère

Hélène Marcotte (1988)²

What of the woman poet? What does/did she want? Why is she so hard to find, so rarely mentioned by the critics, ancient or modern?

After reminding us that: 'Platon n'accorde pas droit de cité au poète,'³ Blaise Cendrars, in a 1914 poem about the poet's position in life, leaves 'woman'/la femme' suspended in mid-text, traversed by a long reference to the Nietzschean dance:

La femme, la danse que Nietzsche a voulu nous apprendre à danser
La femme
Mais l'ironie?

Today Cendrars' dangling image evokes the uncertain, neglected position of the woman poet. Sara Mills appropriately titled a recent article on Gertrude Stein 'No Poetry for Ladies'⁴ a phrase taken from James Joyce (but, irony?) applied to 'this poetry for (and by) ladies and perhaps unfit for ladies' (Mills, p.87). In Alicia Ostriker's words, in turn borrowed from Hélène Cixous and Claudine Hermann, 'Women writers have always tried to steal the language.'⁵

There is no lack of poetry by women, at any period, in any culture, as the various anthologies of women poets which grew out of the women's movements of the 1970s have shown. Women are, however, still treated as lack, neglected in theoretical works on poetry, slighted in reviews and underrepresented in anthologies. Whereas

there have been various recent efforts to remedy the situation in England and the United States, women poets in France seem to have been nearly forgotten since the sixteenth century. Georges Pompidou's currently much used *Anthologie de la poésie française* (Hachette 1961, re-edited in 1978) contains verse by sixty-two poets, of which only two are women: Louise Labé and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. In his anthology *La Poésie Surréaliste* (Seghers 1964, 1970), Jean-Louis Bédouin lists fifty-seven, including a mere three women: Marianne van Hirtum, Gisèle Prassinos and Joyce Mansour. On the other hand, although her introduction now reads as essentialist and old-fashioned, Jeanine Moulin's little-known *Huit Siècles de Poésie féminine 1170-1975* (Seghers 1963, 1981) contains no fewer than 113 French women poets, without being at all exhaustive. Where did they all come from? Why had they been silenced? As Nicole Brossard and Lisette Girouard wrote in the introduction to their 1991 *Anthologie de la poésie des femmes au Québec*: 'Nous avons appris à nous familiariser avec les grandes zones de silence qui entourent les oeuvres féminines' (p.11). Trinh Minh Ha sees that silence as internalized and caught in a kind of surrealist antinomy with the (muffled) cry of the oppressed: 'The Scream inhabits women's writings. Silence is heard there' (p.138).⁶

Surrealism can be considered as the major poetic movement in twentieth-century France, which 'legitimized an art in which personal reality dominates, one in which the images of the dream and the unconscious are at least as valid, if not more so, as those derived from "reality" ' (Chadwick, p.236)⁷ and hence, paradoxically, liberated the creative drives of the very women it was reducing to objects or muses, who were often the wives and companions of male Surrealists. Finally, because the numerous talented women connected with Surrealism are gradually becoming internationally known (though more for their achievements in the plastic arts or for their prose writing), I will focus this essay on two major Surrealist poets in the French language: Valentine Penrose, née Boué (1898-1978), and Alice Rahon Paalen, née Philippot (1904-1987). Neither figures in the aforementioned anthologies or in any others. Of the same generation, both were French-born; Penrose joined the Surrealist movement in the late twenties and Rahon in the early thirties; both wrote in French away from France, after following their painter husbands abroad, Penrose to England with Roland Penrose and Rahon to Mexico with Wolfgang Paalen. After their marriages broke up, neither ever returned to France on a permanent basis. Rahon was also a painter and Penrose a collage artist.

My approach to their work will be somewhat eclectic. Other critics have tended to avoid women's poetry and Surrealist poetry derived from automatic writing as subversive of any norm to which they could apply their various grids. I have, however, retained a few relevant meta-texts, which will enable me to situate Penrose and Rahon in the double context of Surrealism and women's poetry. The biographical

element proves to be important, given women's strong tendency to weave their own bodies into the fabric of the text treated as mirror. In a book about modern American women poets, Cheryl Walker claims that:

We need to consider how a poet lived, what books she read, what race and class she belonged to, how living in the city affected her ... how she experienced a world torn apart by war, whom she loved.⁸

Which Craft? The Fairest of Them All: Valentine Penrose: (1898-1978)

Replie-toi à l'intérieur de ton ombre, le
miroir qui s'est chargé de refléter tes
moindres frissons se brise et les morceaux
s'incrument dans tes yeux.

Jean Pierre Duprey⁹

Frontispieces can hold a peculiar fascination, an iconographic anticipation of the text, adding to the reader's curiosity and desire. Alice Rahon began one of her early poems with the mysterious line:

Frontispice de ton sourire¹⁰

For *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Whitney Chadwick used not one but three frontispieces: the first one, a small photograph of a woman, backview, unidentifiable, centered on a full black page, followed by two more familiar surrealist images, would easily go unnoticed, were it not anchored, two pages later, by the caption: 'Valentine Penrose, 1934'. The photograph of a young woman with long hair and a tall, lithe body, resolutely striding off into an empty landscape, barefoot, in a backless dress, provides a paradigm for Chadwick's evocation of the 'young, beautiful and rebellious' (p.9) first generation of women Surrealists and further seems to incarnate the escaping dream woman of Calvino's *Invisible Cities*: 'she was seen from behind, with long hair and she was naked,'¹¹ re-inscribed by Teresa de Lauretis as the absent sign of male desire, text and pure representation (de Lauretis, p.13). The scholar searching for information on Valentine Penrose's poetry will encounter this unyielding image again and again. In his memoirs (see Note 16), Roland Penrose refers unspecifically to 'the originality of her talent' (p.32); in the *Dictionnaire général du Surréalisme et de ses environs*¹², she is described as 'un poète dont l'importance dépasse grandement la notoriété'. The catalogue of the Lausanne exhibition *La Femme et le Surréalisme*¹³ apologetically states that 'Son oeuvre poétique ... mériterait d'être mieux connue ...'

Although her five verse collections are now out of print, Valentine Penrose was quite a prolific poet from 1926 to 1975. Her first three plaquettes, *Herbe à la lune* (1935), *Sorts de la lueur* (1937), *Poèmes* (1937), were published by the Surrealist Editions G.L.M., *Dons des Féminines* (1951), which included a series of collages, by Aux Pas Perdus, and *Les Magies* (1972) by Les Mains Libres. She also produced three

prose works, the most famous and the only one still available being *Erzsébet Bathory la Comtesse sanglante* (1962). In 1977, Roy Edwards, her translator, published a bilingual volume,¹⁴ now also out of print, composed of excerpts of all her writings, except for *La Comtesse sanglante*.

Although Penrose did not produce actual collages until *Dons des Féminines*, her whole corpus contains visual elements and, at a very early stage, as Renée Hubert remarks, 'she had obviously become cognizant of the very nature of the collage and mastered all its techniques' (p.122).¹⁵ Sara Mills, in discussing the collage-like aspect of Gertrude Stein's poetry, so close to the deliberately fragmented art of the Cubists, further deconstructs the term 'collage' 'which in French means a couple living together' (Mills, p.96), in connection with Stein's socially disruptive lesbian lifestyle. Penrose's poetry only resembles Stein's insofar as she constantly deviates from arranging her chain of signifiers in any conventional, linear pattern and that her texts become more and more recognizably lesbian from 1937 onwards. Regarding Penrose, 'collage' reads as interchangeable with 'déchollage' (in the manner of 'heimlich' and 'unheimlich'): she was able to 'décoller' (take off, both literally and in her work) in 1936, when she drifted away from Roland Penrose, whom she had married in 1925, and returned to India (she had found *ashram*-living very appealing on a previous trip) instead of following him back to England from France. Their separation ('déchollage') undramatically arose from an inability to agree on their respective priorities or reach a satisfactory *modus vivendi*.¹⁶ Her 'loved but irritating'¹⁷ family background had made Valentine Boué into a rebel:

Born a Gascon in 1898, into ... a military, orthodox yet eccentric world, she was educated at a Légion d'Honneur school but her earliest *poem* was an aborted flight to Paris in order to join the Folies Bergères. *Edwards*, p.2

Mills' references to Kristeva regarding Stein could just as well be applied to Penrose. Kristeva's definition of the 'thetic', which 'marks a threshold between two heterogeneous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic,' (p.102)¹⁸ seems to point to the place from which both Penrose and Rahon often wrote, where meaning remains 'in process' and

poetic mimesis maintains and transgresses thetic unicity by making it undergo a kind of anamnesis, by introducing into the thetic position the stream of semiotic drives and making it signify. *Kristeva*, p.112

Both the visual and the feminine function as disruptive semiotic forces in Penrose's work. From the beginning, in addition to the 'collage effect', her verses bear traces of techniques used by her Surrealist painter friends, such as Max Ernst's *frottage* and Wolfgang Paalen's *fumage*. The first consisted of 'irritating' a surface in order to reveal unexpected shapes and patterns; the second, on the contrary, blurred and distorted a preliminary image with smoke. On the one hand, Penrose's poetry tends toward the hermetic (she studied alchemy and oriental philosophy and was fascinated by an unusual guru, 'the strange eremitic Spaniard Count Galarza de Santa Clara, a master of arcane studies' [Edwards, p.2], whose teaching she followed in India) and, on the other, it opens doors with a 'jouissance plurielle', pre-figuring 'écriture féminine', onto intertextual worlds of myths, legends, fairy tales and other literary or historical sources, while inscribing a private quest for 'other' mind-spaces, not unlike the Surrealist search for alternative states.

Three early poems, under the title 'Imagerie d'Epinal' (Edwards, p.6-11)¹⁹, weave together images of distant lands (Canada, Easter Island), ports, boats, maps and French explorers:

I. Jacques Cartier

[...]

Les feuilles et les écorces grandissent,
massifs à l'ombre des îles de médecine.

François le doux compagnon
tient sa main sur l'air, les pignons
et la transparence des pigeons de Chinon.

Les caravelles amazones,
et les vierges, dans l'eau qui dansent
sous les palmes, épaisses barques. [...]

Trinh Minh Ha recently defined poetic language as the opposite of stereotype or stasis and as destabilizing meaning.²⁰ Here the collage-like imagery's disruptive effect suggests automatic writing, the basis of most Surrealist poetry in the twenties. Penrose's mainly nominal structure freely combines words for words' sake, subordinating logic to recurring sounds ('pignon', 'pigeons', 'Chinon'), erotic associations and a feminization of meaning: 'la transparence des pigeons' ('pigeonner' implies the protuberance of breasts). In the next line, 'les caravelles amazones', 'caravelles' means 'boats' but ends in *elles* and finds a feminine echo in 'amazones' and 'vierges'. The two lines 'et les vierges, dans l'eau qui dansent / sous les palmes, épaisses barques' take back the metamorphosis which links 'caravelles' to 'amazones' and 'vierges' to 'barques' / 'boats' again and reformulates the earlier line 'Les feuilles et les

écorces grandissent'. Les palmes' are equivalent to 'les feuilles', 'épaisses' the result of 'grandissent' and 'barques' is a development of 'écorces', reinforced by the English translation of both into 'bark(s)'. References throughout the poem to Chinon, Saint-Malo, archers and the arrival of spices: '(les épices aux ports du Nord)' recall French medieval or Renaissance history and legends. 'François le doux compagnon' and the indication 'vers la France' condense into the old expression 'Douce France' while simultaneously evoking Louis Hémon's Québécois hero François Paradis (*Maria Chapdelaine*, 1916), in the context of a poem titled 'Jacques Cartier'. The textual frame 'Mer Atlantique' and 'dix chefs indiens tournaient la tête', together with the visual images: 'profils sur voiles, toiles boréales' and gestures or attitudes: 'François ... tient sa main sur l'air ...' / '... les archers ouvraient la bouche' suggests a rêverie in front of a quaint old engraving or illustrated map. In the second poem, 'Emigrants', Penrose refers to: 'les mappemondes, et les cartes d'ancien monde.' Nevertheless, the metonymic juxtapositions of ideas and images is so heterogeneous and at times uncanny, subverting time and space (for example, in poem III, 'La Pérouse', boats and crews are combined with Adam in his nakedness, a botanist from Easter Island and a Queen's servants at Versailles in charge of her perfumes and carriages), that when the 'mappemondes' reappear at the end of the final poem, they seem more like a metaphorical mise-en-abyme for the verbal journey just accomplished and its innovative geography.

Penrose's first collection, *Herbe à la lune* (1935), is even more experimental. Eluard, who was a close friend of hers, wrote in the preface:

Il n'y manque pas un mot et pourtant à chaque mot, le mot précédent s'efface. L'oubli, l'écran magique, sans couleur, devant lequel toute couleur, toute nuance, toute idée est nouvelle.

Je pense que Valentine Penrose n'hésite jamais à écrire un mot à la place d'un autre, le mot immédiatement accessible au lieu du mot rebelle. D'où un langage poétiquement clair, un langage rapide, qui échappe à la réflexion. Un langage déraisonnable, indispensable.²¹

Eluard was a lyrical poet at all stages of his career, including his early experiments in automatic writing. In Valentine Penrose, he recognized another such lyrical poet who, while playing havoc with semantics, remained true to Verlaine's 'De la musique avant toute chose'. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron distinguishes Breton's approach to the poetic image, which in itself creates meaning, from Eluard's:

Chez Breton, l'image fait s'évanouir toute préoccupation d'un sens; elle crée du sens; les *termes* mis en présence ... définissent l'insolite. Chez Eluard, l'insolite vient de la syntaxe par laquelle les termes sont mis en présence.²²

Penrose definitely comes closer to Eluard, with her complicated inversions and open-ended sentences, although she also chooses 'uncanny' words and word combinations like Breton. An example of the former from *Herbe à la lune*: 'S'ouvrira, fleurira unique enfin de toi' (Edwards, p.26), and of the latter from *Sorts de la lueur*: 'La coupe le croissant le dauphin du ciel blanc' (p.38).

Whitney Chadwick quotes part of the following poem from *Herbe à la lune* in her chapter 'Women artists and the Hermetic Tradition' (p.181):

Il est le feu il brûle et je suis l'eau je noir
 ô froide fille.
 La terre est mon amie
 la lune aussi sa servante
 ainsi nous visitant au fond de nos cavernes
 nos repos nos langueurs loin de tout accoudées
 nous passons longuement les nuits à nous connaître
 autour de nos trois feux mystérieux et frères

J'ai les plus belles fleurs
 j'ai le plus beau mirage
 j'ai le plus beau miroir
 je suis l'eau qui se chante. *Edwards*, p.20

This romantic evocation of sorcery assimilates the poet's craft to the stirring of a witch's cauldron and the words she uses to the ingredients of a magic potion. According to Chadwick:

(Penrose) liked to think of herself as a witch [...] and references to mysticism, alchemy and the occult pervade her poetry. p.181

Her treatment of the esoteric is always feminized and, as the title *Herbe à la lune* indicates, is performed under the sign of the moon.

Here the form is typical of Penrose: her lines, in modern fashion, do not rhyme, whereas the rhythm remains fairly conventional, each line being either an alexandrine or a multiple of one, composed of four or six syllables, for example. The abundance of assonance and alliteration perpetuates Romantic and Symbolist techniques and the proliferation of liquid consonants stems both from traditional

lyricism and from Breton's method for propelling automatic writing.²³ Characteristically intertextual, the opening line parodies Louise Labé's famous love sonnet: 'Je vis, je meurs, je me brûle et me noie.'²⁴ As the first-person voice in Penrose's text identifies with one of the three witches in *Macbeth*, appropriating the full elemental powers of earth, fire and water, Labé's passive victim is turned into an active potential victimizer.

The incantatory, anaphoric last four lines, like some of Leonora Carrington's tales, show traces of fairy-stories, myths and legends heard or read in childhood. They also point to the poet's personal myth, mask and mirror. The double myth associated with woman, formulated by Alicia Ostriker: 'It is thanks to myth we believe that woman must be either "angel" or "monster"' (Ostriker, p.316), takes shape more clearly in Penrose's later writings but already surfaces in various images of *Herbe à la lune*:

Tous les astres ont pris le large
Voici la ligne et voici l'ange p.24

Les reines ont pétri la lueur engloutie p.26

femme bruissante de feuillages p.28

A votre écorce d'ange
Mes sept filles de l'ogre

...

Touchera le serpent touchera le rocher
la fille de la terre p.18

These two 'imagos', as in Lacan's 'mirror stage', are simultaneously self and other. Penrose undoubtedly found her monster in the horrific figure of Erzsébet Bathory, the subject of *La Comtesse sanglante*,²⁵ which can be best described as a romanced historical narrative. Penrose rose to the challenge voiced by Bataille in *Les Larmes d'Eros* (1961):

S'il avait connu l'existence d'Erzsébet Bathory, sans nul doute, Sade aurait eu la pire exaltation. Ce qu'il sut d'Isabeau de Bavière l'exalta, Erzsébet Bathory aurait tiré de lui un hurlement de fauve.²⁶

Bataille gives no information on the powerful sixteenth-century Hungarian countess who dabbled in witchcraft and cruelly tortured, killed and bathed in the blood of over six hundred innocent girls for her own perverse pleasure. She was also obsessed with mirrors and an eternally youthful complexion which she believed the blood baths could bring her. The Surrealists were fascinated by female monsters, and Valentine Penrose

outdid them all, to the extent that for many years her name was mainly associated with her book on Bathory. The two-page entry under Penrose's name in *Obliques* 14-15 (1977, pp.204-205) consists of a full-page reproduction of Bathory's portrait and, opposite it, a few lines of bibliographical notes, Bataille's text on Bathory and Roland Penrose's *Portrait de Valentine* (1937), executed in collage style, blotting out her eyes and mouth with birds, leaves and butterflies. The picture, although a tribute of love, objectifies Valentine and merges her with nature in typical surrealist fashion. The editors of *Obliques* obviously condoned this attitude, since their choice of texts and iconography excludes Valentine's own work. As Renée Riese Hubert puts it:

La Comtesse sanglante presents us with a wager: its heroine must surpass all male protagonists who, in other novels or even historical events, have reached the heights of villainy! *Hubert*, p.134

For this purpose, Penrose retains and develops Bataille's comparison between Bathory and Gilles de Rais, revealing her to be worse because she felt no remorse for her crimes. Yet Penrose's undertaking goes deeper. Erzsébet's fascination: 'Quand elle paraissait, elle séduisait et faisait peur' (p.62); her narcissism: 'elle vivait devant son grand miroir sombre' (p.21); her satanism: 'Louve de fer et de lune, Erzsébet, traquée au plus profond d'elle-même par l'antique démon, ne se sentait en sûreté que bardée de talismans, que murmurant incantations, que résonnant aux heures de Mars et de Saturne' (p.73) all contribute to a defiant self-portrait of the woman poet, seen through a glass darkly. The alchemical process is reversed, returning to brute matter, exacerbating male fear of women beyond Medusa or Melusine, exploring the lowest depths of female abjection and subjecting all readers to a ritual of purification through evil. Erzsébet's magical beauty and her lesbianism link the monster to her reverse image, 'the angel', in this scene:

Au soir d'une fête, elle fut fascinée par une de ses cousines ... tout les poussa l'une vers l'autre. La nuit s'avançant, elles ne se quittèrent pas ... Que révéla à Erzsébet cette ébauche d'amour avec une autre elle-même, réplique parfaite de sa propre beauté? p.87

The 'angel' figure is also specular, same and other. She is an object of the woman poet's sapphic desire, defined as follows by Alicia Ostriker:

A muse imagined in one's own likeness, with whom one can fornicate with violence and laughter, implies the extraordinary possibility of wholeness and joy, as against the poetry of the 'age of anxiety'. p.320

Just such a muse appears in *Dons des Féminines* (1951) under the Spanish name of Rubia. The lesbian love affair between the two Victorian ladies Rubia and Emily was already the principal theme of the neo-gothic short fiction piece *Martha's Opera* (1945), which Hubert calls a 'fragmented horror story' (p.123). Both books read as a celebration of lesbian love. Eluard, in the preface of *Dons des Féminines*, recognizes the beloved angel figure:

J'aurais aimé, avec Valentine Penrose, passionnément rejoindre,
reconnaître l'inconnue, celle qui entre dans ce livre et qui en sort,
toujours distante, toujours lointaine et, ne fut-ce qu'en rêve, me
confronter à elle, au prix de toutes les métamorphoses.²⁷

Dons des Féminines, which is especially interesting for its iconographic component, sports an appropriate frontispiece by Picasso representing the tangled embrace of a female couple. Each short poem is preceded by a collage.

J. Chénieux defines collage as the plastic equivalent of the poetic image (p.96). Those of *Dons des Féminines* transgress proportion, perspective and present a strange display of victoriana and other kitsch. When a connection can be established with the written text, it is often so literal as to produce a humorous effect, as in the poem which begins:

A la fête de la Tête Où
Mon bouquet est passé je le réclame. E 81

the collage shows a large male head in the foreground, topped with a dunce's cap, face on, taking up a whole carriage, as three pretty women tower over the background. One of the few male forms in the collages, the head appears as a castrated caricature. The relation between the visual and the verbal texts in *Dons des Féminines* is not one of illustration but of uncanny juxtaposition of elements, such as characterizes Surrealist poetic images. In the first poem, a link is created by Spanishness and a double female presence:

Au Pic d'Anie au temps qu'il fait au Pic d'Anie
Après les Arabes et ceux qui boivent dans du bois était Rubia.
Rubia ton odeur est celle du buis d'Espagne
Du fer rouillé où les amoureux ont pleuré
Des jalousies aux grilles des villes d'Espagne
Des oeillets de cendre qui disent l'amour quand ce n'est pas la célosie.

Chaude et d'un pied sévère elle est l'orpheline des montagnes. E 75

The absurd arrangement of words plays havoc with meaning: who knows whether Anie is a woman or a mountain and whether the woman in the last line is Rubia, Anie or a third person? Two large women frame a small landscape in the collage, echoing the poem like a Freudian *witz*: one is in Spanish dress, the other at the foot of the mountain, a tiled building evokes the Arabs, whereas the seaside resort in the centre could be in Spain or almost anywhere. The main impression derives from the two women dwarfing everything and everyone else.

Penrose's last volume of poetry, *Les Magies* (1972), remains her masterpiece. It reassembles all the best traits of her previous work, the lyricism of *Herbe à la lune*, her nostalgia for French folklore, legends and songs, classical mythology; words have been carefully picked, like precious stones. The stories of Gilles de Rais and Erzsébet Bathory have been re-inscribed, in the purified language of traditional French verse:

Jamais étoile du berger
Ne montra du si féérique
Il n'était plus soir ni jour.

Au long battant à la longue aile
Terrifiant
Toi l'aîné le seul le lierre.

'Gilles de Rais I', *Edwards*, p.124

The poems are constellated with stars, signs of the Zodiac, characters real and legendary from the knights Templar to Jean Rhys. Some of her favourite symbols are the salamander, the rabbit or hare and ivy, which appears amongst others in 'Gilles de Rais' as well as being the subject of a whole poem, 'Au lierre'. Ivy is a feminine symbol, revealing a need for protection; the aphrodisiac used by Bacchus/Dionysos to provoke a mystical delirium in women who refused to worship him, it also represents the eternal cycle of death and rebirth. The rabbit is a mysterious nocturnal animal, connected with the moon and the old Mother Earth Goddess. The salamander in different cultures can either be a fire creature or, conversely, a sign of deathly cold. For the alchemists it represented the red-hot stone.²⁸ The lady love is still present: 'O brune belle de fleur bleue' (138), in conjunction with the sadness pervading *Les Magies* and the colours blue and green:

L'arbre refuse de s'orienter. L'émeraude
Tient son poing fermé. S'il est
Une pierre de tristesse j'y suis assise.

'Demeter', *Edwards*, p.106

Travaille chagrin travaille
 La lanterne filait le ferment faiblissait le gâteau bleuissait

Il est vrai: tu me donnas dans la joie
 Une robe couleur de temps
 De quel jour de quel temps zéphir ô pluie ô nuit

Peau d'Ane', *Edwards*, p.108

Finally, Penrose inscribes life itself as a female principle in her mystic essay on the Spanish painter Tappiès²⁹:

Life herself, dumb and hidden woman, never inert in the most confused of her aspects; Life herself: crawling, swarming, thickening essences, wastes which would appear to have abandoned the struggle. Before Adam, duly begotten after the Sixth and after all other succeeding, void days, like herself: a feminine essence named Hachaya (Lilith).
Edwards, p.197

One of her last poems, perhaps the very last before Valentine Penrose died, addresses the beloved woman again, as 'Sleeping Beauty':

Que me devais-tu de ce pourpoint rose
 Quand j'aimais encore respirer
 Au bout du temps entre les piliers des ormes du lit.
 Tu as traîné dans la forêt toutes tes branches
 J'écoutais ton sang dans tes cheveux doux
 J'écoutais le vent à des milliers d'années.

1975, *Edwards*, p.178

II

Petroglyphs in Wonderland: Alice Rahon (1904-1987)

Her smile and her expression are
dazzling, dazzling with spirit, wit, life ...

Her paintings are completely drawn
from subterranean worlds, while her
descriptions of Mexico are violent with color,
drama, and joy.

Anaïs Nin³⁰

Perhaps we have seen the Emerald City
in some faraway dream that belongs to the
common emotional fund of man. Entering by
the gate of the Seven colors, we travel along
the Rainbow.

Alice Rahon (Mexico, 1951)³¹

Alice Rahon's poetry and painting emanate enchantment. The few people who have written about her (Anaïs Nin, Lourdes Andrade, Nancy Deffebach) knew her and were equally spellbound by the person. The most fascinated of all, as I will attempt to show later, was Valentine Penrose.

Born in 1904, at Chenecey-Buillon, Doubs, Alice Marie Yvonne Philippot grew up in Paris. She frequented the Surrealists in the early 1930s with the Austrian painter Wolfgang Paalen, whom she married in 1934.³² Under her married name, Alice Paalen, she published her three collections of poetry, the first two in Paris: *A Même la terre* (Editions Surréalistes, 1936) and *Sablier couché* (Editions Sagesse, 1938), and the third, *Noir Animal*, in Mexico (Editions Dolorès La Rue, 1941). Although she was noticed by Breton's group for her beauty and her poetry (Deffebach, p.177), her writing sank into total oblivion in France from 1938 to 1986, when a few unpublished later poems and one from *Noir animal* appeared in *Pleine Marge*.³³ She is better known as a painter, especially in Mexico, where she and Paalen settled in 1939. Whereas Valentine Penrose's collages merely added an extra dimension to her poetry, the poet Alice Paalen went through a looking glass into Mexico, to become and remain the painter Alice Rahon. The rich hour-glass image inscribed in the title of Rahon's second poetry collection, the short plaque *Sablier couché*, predicts her passage from one art to another and the correspondence maintained between them, much like Breton's 'communicating vessels' of dream and reality:

Rahon's transition to the visual arts was less of a change in profession than a change in medium, for the essential qualities of her poetry flow without interruption into her painting. Color had always been a salient feature of her poetry. *Deffebach*, p.179

In addition to a few later poems, an overlap occurred between the two arts from 1939, the year the Paalens travelled to Alaska and down the Pacific Coast before journeying to Mexico, until 1945. In 1942-45 appeared the six issues of Wolfgang Paalen's avant-garde 'Review of Art and Literature', *Dyn*, to which Alice contributed poems, prose texts, paintings and drawings, including a hybrid entry, listed in the contents as 'Tableau-poème' and reversibly titled: 'Poème-tableau' (Fig. I).³⁴

The gouache, first painted and exhibited in 1939, displays a 'primitively' etched face against an ochre background, with two blue circles for eyes; black dots evoke nostrils, the wide blue and green brushstrokes framing it suggest hair, and half the visage has been smeared with a blood-like red. A second, connotative level has been superimposed over the rough features, as described by Jacqueline Johnson à *propos* some of Rahon's paintings of the period:

In other paintings, done in a manner that has affinities with child and primitive drawings and with Klee, appear unknown hieroglyphics, pictographs of men and animals, symbols, marine and terrestrial vegetation that again cover the surface with many focal points.³⁵

Rahon's life-long fascination with cave-paintings and petroglyphs is already quite apparent. Here the black shapes resemble little men getting in and out of a boat (the smiling mouth). The oxymoronic grinning face of death captures the macabre humour of Mexico and combines it with Breton's notion of 'humour noir', very present in *A même la terre*, in which Rahon had already published the three-line poem part of 'Poème-Tableau':

Le sourire de la mort
couché sur le chemin
inattendu comme le visage du retour

The poem's disembodied, Cheshire Cat smile becomes a boat or vehicle of passage in the picture, whose unfinished face reverberates in these lines of *Noir animal* dedicated to Valentine Penrose:

... j'ai existé
d'un alphabet inachevé
à un jeu d'osselets au bord d'une lagune

The smile of death is 'couché', like the hour-glass. It may also perhaps indicate the fine line separating the image from the written message and/or life from death. Death itself is portrayed as unexpected, like the face of someone returning (from another world?), both familiar and unknown, as in 'unheimlich/uncanny'. The humour is conveyed through the picture, 'hors-texte', confirming that:

The one way in which Rahon's visual work departs significantly from her verse is that her paintings are happier, brighter and less troubled by war and broken love-affairs. *Deffebach*, p.180

The 'Poème-tableau' assemblage magically marks almost the exact middle of Rahon's life and the transition of her main work from verse to painting. A passage from an early poem already reads visually, like a self-portrait:

tu es le jouet de tes yeux
je ne peux presque rien pour toi
passive comme ce portrait ovale
d'une jeune fille devenue un fruit

A Mème la terre, p.74

It is difficult to separate Rahon's poetry from her life; her verses are so much more intimate and personal than her plastic art. The above portrait as a 'femme-fruit' recalls the work of Pablo Picasso, with whom she became passionately involved in 1936 (*Deffebach*, p.178). A poem titled 'Désespoir' in *Noir animal* is dedicated to him, after Paalen had engineered their break-up. The theme of mourning for lost love, so universally prevalent in women's poetry, recurs again and again in Rahon's writing. Some of the later poems, revealed to the world in 1986 (*Pleine Marge*, p.4), nostalgically address Paalen after his 1959 suicide, even though they had been divorced for years. 'Le Pays de Paalen', also the title of a Rahon canvas, reads like a pictorial poem, a 'poème-paysage', as well as a tribute to Paalen and to the 'country' of his imagination and art:

Le Pays de Paalen

le pays de Paalen
le pays de l'azur
de l'eau vive sous les bois
et des bêtes de nuit
le pays des totems
et des phares de l'esprit
le feu, l'amour
l'ambre d'éternité

ton passage ici-bas
ton château étoilé.

à Wolfgang, d'Alice, 1960

The poem is structured in the manner of Breton's 'L'Union libre', composed of a series of verbless, interchangeable, nominal phrases. Like the smile of death, it remains unfinished and even at this later date seems typically Surrealist in its form. Several of the relations attributed to Surrealist poetry by Richard Stamelman³⁶ apply here, such as 'elaboration and repetition' and the magic use of a 'mot clé', here, 'pays', phonetically related to Paalen's name as well as anaphorically repeated and incorporated in a chain of extended metaphors, of the type pointed out by Riffaterre.³⁷ The 'pa' of 'Paalen', 'pays' and 'passage' simultaneously inscribes a paternal 'papa' and a negative 'pas'. Interestingly, the absence or lack figured here is masculine. The poem builds up like the condensation of Freud's dreamwork, containing Paalen's passions in a few lines: nature, totems, intellectual challenge, the love they once shared and his passage into another world or 'starlit castle'. Past present and future fuse together and, at another level, the poem groups several themes and elements recurrent in Rahon's own painting, such as her favourite background blue ('azur'), animals, fire, water and a magic atmosphere of metamorphosis.

'Le Pays de Paalen', the last poem to be published, is as surrealist as the first, the opening text of *A Même la terre*, beginning with an uncanny self-portrait:

Une femme qui était belle
un jour
ôta son visage
sa tête devint lisse
aveugle et sourde
à l'abri des pièges des miroirs
et des regards de l'amour

The fragmentation of the body and fantastic erasure of the face situate the poem in a more general surrealist corpus alongside Hans Bellmer's 'Doll' and Leonora Carrington's story 'La Débutante', while pointing to the paranoid hallucinations of the body in bits and pieces discovered by Lacan in connection with the mirror stage. It further deplors the dependent condition of woman and her lack of identity, so evident in Roland Penrose's cluttered portrait of Valentine and in Toyen's 'Seules les crécerelles' (1939), Chadwick's third frontispiece, representing a woman's long hair, arranged around a black/blank non-face.

Throughout *A Même la terre*, Rahon's lyrical sadness, against a background of varied colours, exotic places and surrealist bric-à-brac, produces a feeling of musical

disconnectedness and an all-pervading sense of loss. The subject herself hovers between detached body parts and a disembodied voice, as the following poem clearly states:

Je lime des barreaux invisibles
 Je souffle comme les chevaux
 J'enveloppe des langes
 J'offre des coeurs et des mains
 Je tourne la tête vers moi
 Je vois les branches comme les oiseaux
 leur face est blanche vers le ciel
 Je sonne des heures inconnues
 J'arrive sans partir
 Je tiens je lâche les fils
 Je dors sur mes cheveux
 Je ne regarde pas en arrière
 mes yeux n'obéissent pas
 mon corps n'obéit pas
 mes mains ces étrangères
 Je compte les sillons dans la paille
 jusqu'à ce que l'or s'ensuive

A Même la terre, p.42-43

The last line inscribes a search for gold; Rahon's verbal alchemy surfaces through colours, especially in *Noir animal*. The title poem ends as follows:

... ses grains du sable d'os
 d'os jumeaux de l'ambre
 qui répond dans l'or
 à la mort.

In these lines, 'os' refers to an unexpected meaning of the title:

The book was named after a color of black paint, a shade that Rahon described as 'the blackest kind of paint you can get ... It's made from burning bones.' *Deffebach*, p.178

Black is of course also the colour of death and the first stage of alchemy, that of gold in maceration.³⁸ Here amber and gold defy the blackness of death.

Another interpretation of 'Noir animal' can be found in *Dyn* 4-5, a special 'Amerindian number', containing Indian myths, legends, photographs, and sketches

(often executed by Alice) of artwork gathered during the Paalens' Pacific North West expedition. According to Amerindian lore:

black is for harmony and color, ... the West is the Traditional home of the Bear on the Medicine Wheel. The color of this direction is black ... the ability to go within and to introspect is the female energy, which is receptive.³⁹

A beautiful black, red and white mask (the three colours of alchemy and the Moon Goddess – see note 35) reproduced in *Dyn* portrays 'The Grizzly Bear Woman'. The caption reads: 'wooden mask, Kwakiutl, collected by Paalen in 1939 in Vancouver Island.' This negative animal, which could be perceived as Rahon's 'monster' mask or totem, is the opposite number of the positive 'Black Bear Woman' ('Noir animal'), whom the grizzly eventually kills. Rahon was strongly influenced by 'primitive' art, mythology and magic, especially when applied to the representation of animals.

Alice Rahon's 'angel' figure, more narcissistic than Penrose's, can also be seen as a girl-child or the male Surrealist concept of the 'femme-enfant', which she seems to have found acceptable. As Deffebach writes:

Almost every woman artist associated with the Surrealist movement eventually denied being a Surrealist; but Alice Rahon did not ... she continued to think of Surrealism as her roots. p.181⁴⁰

Her own name, Alice, was an obvious incentive to identify with Carroll's child-heroine, one of the Surrealists' favourite fetish figures. Lourdes Andrade depicts Rahon as an imaginative child at play in her own fairy tale 'wonderland':

Pour Alice, la réalité s'intègre à partir d'interactions poétiques entre les êtres. Sa perception de la nature, intense et affectueuse, conserve le regard de l'enfance. Je ne suis pas la première à dire qu'Alice travaille avec des doigts de fée. Pareille à une petite araignée, elle établit des liens et avec les couleurs, les lumières et les textures, elle tisse un univers dont l'existence est justifiée par l'irrévocabilité de son efficacité magique.⁴¹

Three pictures further testify to Rahon's affinities with her fictive namesake. First, the frontispiece to *Noir animal*, a pen-and-ink sketch of the poet by Wolfgang Paalen, which looks more like an evocation of Carroll's overgrown little girl, with long hair and sensual features, than like Alice Rahon. Secondly, Rahon's 1951 self-portrait, probably the only one (this lack of self-images again differentiates her from most of the other women Surrealists, in particular from her close friend Frida Kahlo). Here she

ludically 'casts herself in the role of Alice in Wonderland, constructing her Alice out of flat patches of bright colour and adding a pink and yellow tint to her White Rabbit' (Deffebach, p.183). The third, Max Ernst's *Les Amis d'Alice* (1957),⁴² not only reiterates that artist's well-known fascination with Carroll's Alice but also has every appearance of a tribute to Rahon. This large oil (115 x 90cm) is executed more in her style than his. Against a blurred blue background, animals have been prolifically etched, as though in a Mexican jungle, mostly birds, including a toucan (Rahon was to paint one ten years later); the largest and most centered one is a cat, more reminiscent of Rahon's unusual exhibition of cat pictures the same year in Mexico City⁴³ than of Carroll's Cheshire feline.

With this triple pictorial 'Looking-Glass', I have returned full circle to my title image, taken from the plaquette *Sablier couché*, which conveys the fluidity and correspondences of Rahon's visual verses and poetic iconography.

Deffebach mentions Breton's use of the hour-glass image: 'for him the curvacious timepiece suggests the female body' (p.178). It occurs in 'L'Union Libre': 'Ma femme ... à la taille de sablier.' Jacqueline Chénieux notes a similar line by Eluard: 'Le sablier d'une robe qui tombe' (p.91). In *Dyn 1*, two texts by Alice Paalen re-create this erotic image: 'The Sleeping Woman' and a prose text preceding her poem 'à l'Ixtaccihuatl' from *Noir animal*, in which she refers to the mountain as 'la femme endormie' and 'miroir magique à l'échelle des plus grands rêves où l'homme s'est miré' (*Dyn 1*, p.44).

In his book on dreams, *Les Vases communicants*,⁴⁴ Breton recalls a favourite oneiric 'passage' image from Murnau's film *Nosferatu the Vampire* (1922):

... la phrase que je n'ai jamais pu, sans un mélange de joie et de terreur, voir apparaître sur l'écran: 'Quand il fut de l'autre côté du pont, les fantômes vinrent à sa rencontre.' On découvre ici [in a dream he's recounting] le pont, d'ailleurs symbole sexuel des plus clairs ... p.50

Alice Rahon refers to that very text in *Noir animal*:

Parfois j'ai jeté des ponts jusqu'à l'autre bord
 mais ma vie de fantôme
 je l'ai quittée aux portes de l'enfance

The erotic bridge image in Rahon's poetry is reinforced by her repeated use of Mercury. Three poems from *Noir animal* are respectively titled 'Mercure éteint', 'Mercure sublimé' and 'Mercure natif'. Mercury is the mineral most frequently associated with Gemini, Rahon's volatile sign. No mineral substance can be more fluid and free-flowing. A universal alchemical symbol, it connotes passivity, humidity and the feminine sexual juices; its corresponding element is water. In India it is perceived as a form of semen and of solar energy, which can bring immortality and/or deliverance (Chevalier/Gheerbrandt). The quicksilver of Rahon's poetry often seems, like Penrose's, to be following a female principle or trying to capture the fleeting image of a female lover, a specular self:

Maintenant près de la source, mon Aimée
 tu peignes tes cheveux de soleil
 ton miroir est l'envers de l'eau
 un buisson d'étoiles diurnes ta main
 cachée par la lumière quotidienne

1945, *Pleine Marge* 4, p.24

III

Indian Summer 1936

... belle engloutie de bleu joyeux et disparu
tes *santals* ont séché dans leurs voyelles d'eau.

Valentine Penrose⁴⁵

Alice Paalen smells of *sandalwood* and wears
a Hindu shawl.

Anais Nin 60

Quand frottée de *santal*
mon trésor mon amour
la lèvre du beau jour,

Valentine Penrose⁴⁶

When I started this project, information was less than scant on both Penrose and Rahon. As material appeared, it wore a strange aura of secrecy. Valentine Penrose travelled to India several times. Alice Rahon went there once, in 1936. According to one source: 'A 1936 trip to India left a profound impression on her.'⁴⁷ Anais Nin mentions a Hindu shawl, and finally a third book said: '1936: ... Voyage en Inde avec Valentine Penrose' (Lausanne Catalogue, p.336). Later, a photograph jumped out of the second, uncut version of Nancy Deffebach's article⁴⁸ 'Valentine Penrose and Alice Rahon in India in 1936' (p.179), two lovely young women looking relaxed and radiant, shoulder to shoulder, cheek to cheek and holding hands, Alice has her arm protectively wrapped around Valentine. There is a twin-like air about them. Such a picture of two French girls need indicate no more than close friendship. Deffebach, who devotes a whole paragraph to the trip (p.177), provides their itinerary: Bombay-Goa-Mirtola (Almora) and indicates that Penrose was learning Sanskrit and stayed on in an ashram after Rahon returned to Europe, not without regret: 'Rahon became so enchanted with India that she was reluctant to part from Penrose in Bombay.' It is also crucial that:

During the return voyage, Rahon began a second, smaller collection of poetry, *Sablier couché*, which was inspired by the journey to India.
Deffebach p.177

Sablier couché was by far the most difficult to obtain of Rahon's three books. As it turned out, it is composed of a mere six poems, just one of which, 'Muttra', seems to refer to India.

Interestingly, only two of Valentine Penrose's plaquettes are almost entirely absent from Roy Edwards' otherwise very complete collection *Poems and Narrations: Sorts de la lueur* and *Poèmes* (both published by G.L.M. in 1937). Edwards includes one short text from *Sorts de la lueur* and three pieces from *Poèmes*. He mentions that the long poem 'A une Femme à une route' (*Poèmes*) was translated into English in 1936 but never quotes from it. Whether this has anything to do with the overtly lesbian content of the two plaquettes is difficult to determine. Edwards' omissions explain Renée Hubert's remark that 'Lesbianism, so important in *Dons des Féminines* (1951) and *La Comtesse sanglante* (1962), emerges in *Martha's Opera* (1945) in the exchange of letters between Emily and Rubia' (p.123). Nevertheless, Penrose first coins the phrase 'Les Féminines' on the opening page of *Sorts de la lueur*, juxtaposed with a bridge image of passage, such as Rahon might use:

Au bout du pont de fer voici les féminines
se glissant en pistils dans les veines de dieu
la plus blanche attelée à la mare est restée
béante du troupeau léger sans rien tâcher

ouvre la bouche
ma fleur pour ne pas chanter.

These lines inscribe, in a veiled manner, a female couple's desire and recent separation.

The notion that Penrose and Rahon were lovers in India arose not so much from the circumstances that took them there (Alice Rahon-Paalen was presumably trying to get over Picasso, while Valentine Penrose had just chosen solitude and independence over marriage) or even from the lesbian eroticism of their poetry as from the extraordinary osmosis between their texts of the period. In the days of Automatic Writing, Breton had quite seriously declared that 'words make love' ('Les mots font l'amour'),⁴⁹ but he was not referring to the human component, so crucial here.

India could no doubt have been conducive to another kind of relationship, far from the madding crowd:

Sur un lit de bois sur un lit de camp
voici mai mon amour.

wrote Valentine Penrose in *Sorts de la lueur*.

Although I have now been encouraged by reliable sources to believe that such a love-affair *did* take place, I do not wish to confirm it here beyond what the *poetry* speaks.

First there appears a whole network of intertextuality 'à deux'. As early as *A Môme la terre* Rahon alludes to Penrose's title *Herbe à la lune*:

[...] t'apporter la mer la lune
les vents et l'herbe p.35

and conversely, as late as *Les Magies*, Penrose inscribes Rahon's title *Noir animal*: 'Il y a dans l'air une odeur de *noir animal*' (Edwards, p.120). The most striking examples of mutually mirroring verses occur between Penrose's *Poèmes* and *Sorts de la Lueur* and Rahon's *Sablier couché* and *Noir animal*. In this context, the Surrealist view of the hour-glass as a woman's body becomes meaningful.

'A une Femme à une route' seems obviously to address Alice Rahon and the Indian journey; Valentine Penrose appears clearly in *Noir animal*: the last poem bears an epigraph by her, the seventh is dedicated to her and mourns for the freedom of India:

Fougères en creux d'absence⁵⁰
astres d'or fin irradiant aux blocs de l'ambre nomade
[...]
j'ai tiré de mes mains mal fermées
et lâchées grosses d'éternité comme des ballons d'enfants
des journées libres hors du temps débile

Throughout 'A une Femme à une route' Penrose weaves the lamented lover into a lush exotic landscape, using fairly graphic sexual metaphors:

Ce corps ici féminin qui pend comme une goutte lointaine
vers l'autre ici cette fois féminin
...
Qui traversera des plaines avec ses hanches ...

(The last line reads like a reference to the opening of Breton's poem 'Tournesol', which he retroactively links to the magic of his encounter with Jacqueline Lamba in *L'Amour fou*: 'La voyageuse qui traversa les Halles à la tombée de l'été.'⁵¹)

Penrose inscribes the other woman's body through spatial, topographic and plant metaphors:

lames de feuilles ses yeux plats clous dans le bois
à la forêt toutes ses dents
rocher doux crâne de fougères. (see note 50)

The two poets wrote a kind of duet, even though one was in India and the other first in Paris, then in Mexico by way of the American West:

- Penrose: Vers cet échafaud de fruits murmurés
Je pends comme un lis
 'A une femme'
- Rahon: Un coeur vert pendant comme une mangue
 Noir animal
- Penrose: ô ma tourterelle
allée se poser
 Sorts de la lueur
- Rahon: ... la colombe
à la robe usée de captivité
en cage d'osier à la fenêtre
 'Sablier couché,' *Sablier couché*
- Tourterelle par terre
cherchant le corail pour sa lampe
 'Muttra,' *Sablier couché*
- Penrose: Le corail dans la main
le corail dans le sein
loin des pelouses heureuses de mon pays
 'Seville,' *Poèmes*
- ta chambre de corail ma douce mousseline
 Sorts de la lueur
- Rahon: Toutes les voix femelles à l'orée de la forêt
 'Muttra'
- Penrose: Telle tu brilles ondules ma dorée d'osiers
je tiens ta main de dalle et de palais mouillé
...
forêt de mes épées sous signe entier tu dors
sous arbre total j' aime.
 Sorts de la lueur
- Rahon: La forêt aimantée part à la dérive

la forêt des fruits aux sexes confondus
 aux lentes amours des mimétiques dans les lianes
 'Muttra'

Penrose: Prise de seins de mains et de cheveux
 'A une Femme'

Comme tes seins sont des soleils voient sur ton corps
Poèmes

Rahon: Seins délivrés qui volent et chantent
 'Muttra'

Valentine Penrose wrote more prolifically, more sensually:

je t'ai tournée tu m'as tissée
 Ta cave importait comme des montagnes

Poèmes

tes crins éparpillés servent ton centre étroit

Sorts de la lueur,

creating a fragmented narrative in 'A une Femme, à une route':

Sur un air indien
 tenant mon tablier

 me voilà finie
 me voilà nouée ...

with Rimbaldian memories:

et deux enfants d'extase tombant tout le temps

dreams:

tandis que chevelures à d'entières ténèbres
 et la forêt que j'ai rêvée

and the terrible longing after separation:

Ce miel bref il est parti avec la fuyante
 au détour d'une allée une mousse a tourné
 ah qui me donnera debout et triste et blanche
 et pure sous ses yeux les mains croisées de l'ange
 Mille batailles ont glissé sous les délices
 lointains d'anciens oiseaux à l'horizon des branches
 partez loin roses et ces tiges féminines
 ces langueurs et les gorges trop âpres pour vivre

Intertextuality also includes references to other poets the two women loved. For example they both quote from Apollinaire's 'Zone':

Rahon: *L'oiseau qui n'a qu'une aile
 est entré dans la maison
 A Même la terre, p.18*

Penrose: *Cous coupés je danse comme un oiseau
 Poèmes*

Their alchemical nostalgia for a lost Shangri-La echoes Rimbaud's 'vert paradis des amours enfantines':

Rahon: *De l'autre côté tu trouveras
 le chemin de ces prairies dont j'ai parlé
 A Même la terre, p.85*

Penrose: *Dormons sur les bois et les monts drapés
 du côté sans fleurs où ne sont plus là
 les rideaux de lune où bouge l'aimée
 [...]
 et ta joue qui jamais ne connut le voyage
 pétale de là-bas qui penchait comme un pré
 Sorts de la Lueur*

Valentine Penrose and Alice Rahon never saw each other again after India. Penrose's long poem 'Downshire Hill' about World War II in England was published in Mexico (*Dyn* 3, 1942). They exchanged letters, and another kind of correspondence was perpetuated in their later work, as I have attempted to show, particularly through the colours blue and green, constant background hues of Rahon's painting: blue the deepest of all colours, the colour of dreams and the other side of the mirror, green the

female colour of water, the colour of spring, the colour of emeralds, which in India confer immortality:

Penrose:

La verte

Mousse herbe et toi graminée fleur sa feuille
 Monde de masse verte où s'avance la dame
 [...]

Ta robe de septembre et ta robe de mai.

Les Magies, Edwards, p.144

Rahon:

revenue des naissances d'émeraudes
 clé de vert clé de fer
 chevelure des foudres
 je t'ai peignée sur mes épaules.

Noir animal

For both artists poetry and painting remained an eternal Baudelairian 'chambre double' of correspondences, synaesthesia and occultation of memories, a never-ending 'invitation au voyage' to a land whose language is one of feminine analogy and where woman's body weaves a ceaseless poem.

Notes

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4. Sara Mills. 'No Poetry for Ladies: Gertrude Stein, Julia Kristeva and Modernism', ed. David Murray, *Literary Theory and Poetry/Extending the Canon*, London, Batsford Press, 1989) pp.85-107.
5. Alicia Ostriker. 'The Thieves of Language/Women Poets and Revisionist Myth-making', ed. Elaine Showalter, *Feminist Criticism/Essays on Women, Literature, Theory*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1985, pp.314-38.

6. Trinh Minh Ha. 'L'innécriture: Unwriting/Inmost Writing', in *When the Moon Waxes Red/Representation Gender and Politics*, New York, London, Routledge, 1991, pp.119-45.
7. Whitney Chadwick. *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1985.
8. Cheryl Walker. *Masks Outrageous and Austere/Culture, Psyche, and Persona in Modern Women Poets*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, p.1.
9. Jean Pierre Duprey. 'La Femme au miroir', Poèmes retrouvés, *Pleine Marge* 10, 1990, p.7.
10. Alice Paalen (she was not yet using the name Rahon, her mother's maiden name, which she adopted later, in Mexico, but her husband's name. She was née Philippot. For details concerning her name changes see Nancy Deffebach, 'Alice Rahon/Poems of Light and Shadow, Painting in Free Verse', *On the Bus* 8 & 9 Los Angeles, Bombshelter Press, 1991, pp.176-96), *A même la terre*, Paris, Editions Surréalistes, 1936, p.14.
11. Quoted by Teresa de Lauretis in *Alice Doesn't*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984, p.12.
12. *Dictionnaire Général du Surréalisme et de ses environs*, sous la direction d'Adam Biro et de René Passeron, Paris, P.U.F., 1982.
13. *La Femme et le Surréalisme*, catalogue de l'exposition, Lausanne, Musée des Beaux Arts, 1987.
14. Valentine Penrose. *Poems and Narrations*, trans. Roy Edwards, Manchester, Carcanet Press & Elephant Trust, 1977.
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16. Roland Penrose. *80 Ans de Surréalisme 1900-1981*, trans Joëlle Guyot and Robert Marrast, Paris, Editions Cercle d'Art, 1983, p.53.

17. Roy Edwards. Introduction to *Poems and Narrations*, p.2.
18. Toril Moi, ed. 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986, pp.88-136.
19. Originally published in *Les Cahiers du Sud* 82, Marseille, Août-Septembre 1926. These were the first poems Penrose ever published.
20. Lecture delivered at the University of Colorado at Boulder, February 7, 1992.
21. Paul Eluard. Preface to *Valentine Penrose. Herbe à la lune*, Paris, Editions G.L.M., 1935.
22. Jacqueline Chénieux Gendron. *Le Surréalisme*, Paris, P.U.F., 1984, p.96.
23. 'If silence threatens to settle in if you should ever happen to make a mistake – a mistake, perhaps due to carelessness – break off without hesitation with an overly clear line. Following a word the origin of which seems suspicious to you, place any letter whatsoever, the letter 'l' for example, always the letter 'l,' and bring the arbitrary back by making this letter the first of the following word'. André Breton. 'Secrets of the Magical Surrealist Art', excerpt of *The First Manifesto*, ed. Lucy Lippard, *Surrealists On Art*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970, pp.21-22.
24. Louise Labé. *Oeuvres* (1555) ed. Jeanine Moulin, *Huit Siècles de Poésie Féminine*, Paris, Seghers, 1963, p.63.
25. Valentine Penrose. *La Comtesse sanglante*, Paris, Gallimard, Mercure de France, 1962.
26. Georges Bataille. *Les Larmes d'Eros*, Paris, J.J. Pauvert, 1961, 163. The following note follows Bataille's statement: 'Un ouvrage de Valentine sur Erzsébet Bathory paraîtra prochainement au Mercure de France.'
27. Paul Eluard. Preface to *Valentine Penrose. Dons des féminines*, Paris, 'Les Pas Perdus,' 1951.
28. See Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrandt, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, Paris, Laffont, 1982, revised edition.
29. 'Tapiès the Innominate Sources' (1972). Edwards, 197-201.

30. Anaïs Nin. *Diary, Vol. IV. 1944-1947*, New York and London, Harvest Books, HBJ, 1971, 58.
31. Text for the catalogue of an exhibition of Alice Rahon's paintings, Willard Gallery, New York, Dec. 4-28, 1951.
32. For correct biographical details, see Nancy Deffebach, 'Alice Rahon/Poems of Light and Shadow, Painting in Free Verse', *On the Bus* 8 & 9, Los Angeles, Bombshelter Press, 1991, pp.171-96. Alice Rahon probably lied about her age, because there were several versions of her birthdate, until Nancy Deffebach obtained access to her birth certificate. Rahon also liked to claim that she was a Celt from Brittany, when in fact she was from Eastern France, (see Deffebach, p.186). Anaïs Nin writes of Rahon: 'She was born in France, Brittany', Nin p.58.
33. 'Alice Rahon Poèmes et peintures', *Pleine Marge* 4, December 1986, pp.19-28.
34. *Dyn* 1, April-May, 1942, Mexico City and New York, p.35.
35. Jacqueline Johnson. 'Exposition Alice Paalen', *Dyn* 6, 1945, p.7: 23.
36. Richard Stamelman. 'The Relational Structure of Surrealist Poetry', *Dada/Surrealism* 6, 1976, pp.59-78.
37. Michael Riffaterre. 'La Métaphore filée dans la poésie surréaliste', *Langue française* 3, September 1969, pp.46-60.
38. See Georgiana Colvile. 'Beauty and/is the Beast: Animal Symbology in the Work of Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Leonor Fini', *Surrealism and Women*, eds. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg, Boston, MIT Press, 1991, pp.159-81. These women Surrealists all used the principles of alchemy in relation to the Celtic and Mayan myths of the Moon Goddess.
39. My source regarding Indian folklore in this context is Jamie Sams. *Sacred Path Cards: The Discovery of Self Through Native Teachings*, New York, Harper Collins, 1990, v, pp.101-105, 132-33.
40. Deffebach also connects the 'femme-enfant' with Rahon's self-portrayal as Alice in Wonderland: 'Rahon was forty-seven when she portrayed herself as Alice in Wonderland, which suggests that she never rebelled against the role of the *femme-enfant*. This is in sharp contrast with many of the other women associated with

Surrealism who eventually found this role untenable for a mature artist', p.183.

41. Lourdes Andrade. 'Le Mythe de l'histoire, l'histoire du mythe/La Femme et le Surréalisme au Mexique', Catalogue of the Exhibition *La Femme et le Surréalisme*, Lausanne, Switzerland, Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 1987, p.88.

42. Catalogue of the Exhibition *Max Ernst a Retrospective*, London, The Tate Gallery, 1991, p.268, fig. 242: 'For Alice's Friends' (Pour les amis d'Alice). Regarding Ernst's preoccupation with Carroll's Alice, see Sarah Wilson, 'Max Ernst and England', in the catalogue, pp.363-71.

43. See Deffebach, 184-85 and also Margarita Nelken, 'Los Gatos' de Alice Rahon', *Alice Rahon Exposición Antológica*, Catalogue, Mexico City, Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, 1986, p.8.

44. André Breton. *Les Vases communicants* (1933), re-edition, Paris, Gallimard, 1955.

45. Valentine Penrose. *Sorts de la lueur*, Paris, Editions G.L.M., Repères 19, 1937, no pagination.

46. Valentine Penrose. 'A une Femme, à une route', in *Poèmes*. Premier cahier de *Habitude de la poésie*, Paris, G.L.M., 1937, no pagination.

47. Exhibition Catalogue, *La Mujer en Mexico/Women in Mexico*, New York: National Academy of Design, 1990, p.12.

48. A much shorter version was published in *Latin American Art*, Summer 1990, p.43-47.

49. André Breton. 'Les Mots sans rides', in *Les Pas perdus*, Paris, Gallimard, 1924, pp.138-41.

50. Both Rahon's and Penrose's repeated references to 'fougères' (ferns) in connection with the female body, undoubtedly allude to Breton's use of 'Ses/les yeux de fougère' in *Nadja*, 1928, pp.126-128.

51. André Breton. *L'Amour fou*, Paris, Gallimard 1937, p.64.