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Source: *Yale French Studies*, 2006, No. 109, Surrealism and Its Others (2006), pp. 115-128

Published by: Yale University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4149289>

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GEORGIANA M. M. COLVILE

Between Surrealism and Magic Realism: The Early Feature Films of André Delvaux

Ici a commencé pour moi ce que j'appellerai l'épanchement du songe
dans la vie réelle.

—Gérard de Nerval¹

Réel et imaginaire, . . . s'affrontent sans se concilier ni se réconcilier.
De cet affrontement naît l'entre-deux: précisément l'oeuvre. . . . Ce
pays de l'entre-deux, qui ne réussit à recouvrer son unité que dans
l'imaginaire devenu langage: dans l'oeuvre, c'est le pays où je vis.

—André Delvaux²

Poetry, magic, erotic longing, and the omnipresence of death pervade André Delvaux's carefully crafted fiction films, hence their success at international film festivals, his lasting reputation with intellectual audiences in France, and his fame as the Master of Belgian cinema in his own country.³ His first feature film, the 1965 *L'homme au crâne rasé* (The Man with his Hair Cut Short),⁴ adapted from the eponymous novel⁵ by Johan Daisne, the main literary representative of Flemish magic realism, immediately struck French viewers as a revival of the

1. "Then began for me what I will call the flow of dream into reality." Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia* (1855). All translations in this essay are mine.

2. "Here the real and the imaginary confront each other [as opposites] and are never reconciled. An in-between state is born of that confrontation: precisely the work of art. . . . That country of the in-between that can only recover its unity within the imaginary as it becomes language: within the *work of art*, that's the country I inhabit." André Delvaux, "Cinéma francophone de Belgique" in *André Delvaux*, ed. Adolphe Nyssenholc (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1994), 43.

3. See "Mort du maître du cinéma belge: André Delvaux." [Obituary for André Delvaux]. A. de Baeque, *Libération*, October 7, 2002.

4. *De man die zijn haar kort liet knippen* (1965), a Belgian production, shot in Flemish, French subtitles, BW, 35mm, 1h34 min.

5. Johan Daisne, *De man die zijn haar kort liet knippen* (Brussels and The Hague: A. Manteau N.V., 1948). French translation by Maddy Buysse, *L'homme au crâne rasé* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1965).

spirit of surrealism. The film obtained prizes in seven countries, including the London British Film Institute Prize for best film of the year and the Grand Prix Khalimer at the 1966 Festival du Jeune Cinéma at Hyères, where Jean-Luc Godard “stood up in the midst of the audience to pay tribute to an unknown director’s film.”⁶

On October 4, 2002, Delvaux delivered a self-critical “testamentary” lecture at a world conference on the arts in Valencia, Spain, minutes before he died of a heart attack. It was titled “Un cinéma éclaté dans une Belgique éclatée” (A Divided Cinema in a Divided Belgium).⁷ He expressed guilt for having privileged formal and aesthetic perfectionism over sociopolitical ideology in his early films (especially concerning the Belgian language conflict) and sadly admitted his ideal of a common Flemish and Francophone (Wallon) “Belgitude” to be more myth than reality. He concluded by recommending cultural “métissage.” He had only devoted one film, *Femme entre chien et loup* (1979),⁸ to Belgium’s political split, although the language problem had been woven into the poetic fabric of *Un soir, un train* (1968). Nevertheless, Delvaux promoted a Belgian national cinema, and inaugurated and taught film classes at the Institut National Supérieur des Arts et du Spectacle from its opening in 1963.

Jacques Mandelbaum pinpoints in *L’homme au crâne rasé* the double tendency toward surrealism and magic realism that characterizes most of Delvaux’s fiction films, calling it “an impassive hymn to mad love [. . . with] a touch of surrealist cruelty and strangeness, drawn from the depths of the Flemish tradition of the fantastic, while appropriating . . . a ‘whiteness’ typical of Bresson”⁹ and, incidentally, of André Breton’s imagery in *L’amour fou*.¹⁰ As we shall see, Delvaux was a deliberate magic realist, on his own terms, and a more reluctant latter-day surrealist. In this essay, I will explore both dimensions in Delvaux’s four early fiction features: *L’homme au crâne rasé* (1965); *Un soir, un train* (1968); *Rendez-vous à Bray* (1971) and *Belle* (1973).

6. Adolphe Nysenholc, “De la vie à l’oeuvre,” in *André Delvaux*, ed. Nysenholc, 16.

7. Reproduced in its entirety in *Le monde*, November 19, 2002.

8. “Femme entre chien et loup” literally means “Woman Between Dog and Wolf” and figuratively signifies “In the Twilight Zone.” As a historical film, it stands apart from Delvaux’s other features.

9. Jacques Mandelbaum, “André Delvaux: une oeuvre liée au réalisme magique,” *Le monde*, October 8, 2002.

10. See Georgiana M. M. Colville, “Breton caresse les ours blancs: du surréalisme, du désir et des nuages,” *Mélusine* XXV (February 2005): 231–46, regarding André Breton’s *L’amour fou* (Paris, Gallimard, 1937), clouds, and the color white.

Actual surrealist films, produced by members of Breton's group, proved rare, as still do their critical assessments, none of which mention Delvaux,¹¹ whereas every book on Delvaux refers to surrealism. Henri Béhar titles his introduction to a 2004 issue of *Mélusine* on *Le cinéma des surréalistes*,¹² "L'inadaptation cinématographique." He quotes contradictory statements by a range of surrealists and film critics, from Breton, for whom Buñuel and Dali's *Un chien andalou* (An Andalusian Dog - 1928) and *L'âge d'or* (1930) were the only surrealist films, to Jean Goudal, Ado Kyrrou et al., who regarded film as the surrealist medium par excellence. Béhar also provides film historians' official top ten surrealist films (10–11).¹³ There were cult films, too, such as Feuillade's *Fantômas* series (1913–1914), Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Eisenstein's *Potemkin* (1925), Chaplin's early comedies (1915–1928), Hathaway's *Peter Ibbetson* (1935), and so on. The surrealists considered cinemas as entertainment places, where they could glean new poetic images or associations, like the flea-market. They wrote unused screenplays,¹⁴ as did Delvaux, notably "Le collier de Sybilla: Une aventure d'Arsène Lupin,"¹⁵ which emulates the *Fantômas* films. Officially surrealist Belgian films prove even rarer. Most of them revolve around Magritte, like Pierre Livet's 1929 *Les fleurs meurtries* (Bruised Flowers), and Delvaux's work is no more mentioned in that context than in the French one.¹⁶

Unlike surrealism, which Breton kept redefining in his manifestoes and elsewhere, magic realism resists precise description and remains known for its "multiplicity of imprecisions and differences,"¹⁷ partly because it "incorporates eight languages and five continents" (214).

11. Including the recent and very complete *Surréalisme et cinéma*, ed. G. A. Astre and Y. Kovacs (Paris: Minard, 2000).

12. *Mélusine* XXIV (February 2004): 9–13.

13. In addition to the two Buñuel films: René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1927), Man Ray's *Retour à la raison* (1923), Emak Bakia (1927) and *L'étoile de mer* (poem by Desnos, 1928), Germaine Dulac's *La coquille et le clergyman* (script by Artaud, 1928), *La perle* (script by Hugnet, 1928), Man Ray and Duchamp's *Le mystère du château de dé* (1929), and Michel Zimbacca and J. L. Bédouin's *L'invention du monde* (1951).

14. See *Anthologie du cinéma invisible*, ed. Christian Janicot (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1995).

15. Co-authored with Marcel Croes in 1972 and published in *Les cahiers du scénario* 2/3 (Brussels: Winter, Summer 1987): 35–111.

16. See "Cinéma et surréalisme en Belgique" in *Surréalismes en Belgique*, ed. Paul Aron, Special issue of *Textyles* 8 (November 1991): 269–81.

17. Jean Weisgerber, "Bilan provisoire," in *Le réalisme magique: roman-peinture-cinéma* (Brussels: Université de Bruxelles, L'âge d'homme, 1987), 214.

Under the influence of specific nineteenth-century Symbolist, Fantastic, or Realist authors such as “Poe, Baudelaire (“La chambre double”),¹⁸ Hispanic-American ‘modernismo,’ Henry James, Kubin, Apollinaire and Pirandello, it first takes shape in Germany and Italy in the 1920s” (Weisgerber, 214). Its main practitioners include Franz Roh and Ernst Jünger (Germany), Massimo Bontempelli and Giorgio de Chirico (Italy), Jorges Luis Borges, Bioy Casarès, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Julio Cortazar (Latin America) and, from the 1940s, Johan Daisne (Flemish Belgium).¹⁹ Fabien S. Gérard defines Belgian magic realism as an “aesthetic tendency, both pictorial and literary” (91) and inextricably bound up with André Delvaux. Furthermore, it is “in no way a revolutionary movement” (Weisgerber, 7). The term was finally coined by Daisne (Weisgerber, 17), and for his first two feature films, *L’homme au crâne rasé* and *Un soir, un train*,²⁰ Delvaux chose to adapt texts by that author.

Although Delvaux admired Daisne’s writing, his approach to the subject matter was radically different in his adaptations and he devised his own cinematic magic realism. Adolphe Nysenholc applies the expression “L’alchimie de l’adaptation” (Nysenholc 1994, 267) to Delvaux’s final feature, *L’oeuvre au noir* (1988), from Marguerite Yourcenar’s 1968 novel about a sixteenth-century alchemist, but all his fiction films (except *Femme entre chien et loup*), seem to transpose Rimbaud’s “verbal Alchemy,” a favorite surrealist concept, onto the screen. Daisne’s novel *L’homme au crâne rasé* conveys an “inner reality,” through the interminable stream of consciousness confession of his disturbed protagonist Govert Miereveld, in which reality, the imaginary, hallucinations, and delirium merge. Govert, a meek lawyer and teacher, first relates his unrequited passion for Fran, a beautiful student, and his pathetic attempts to attract her attention at graduation; next he describes a horrific autopsy he witnessed ten years later, followed by a chance encounter with Fran, then a diva, her narrative of sexual disillusion, and his shooting her at her own request (or so he believes). The story ends at the lunatic asylum where Govert tells his tale and finally finds peace after seeing Fran on television, though neither

18. “The Double Room” (1862), meaning real and imaginary, in *Petits poèmes en prose* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 28–30.

19. See Adolphe Nysenholc, *André Delvaux ou les visages de l’imaginaire* (Brussels: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1985), 91–96.

20. From the short story “De trein der Traagheid” (The Train of Inertia), inspired by another “Egbertha in der Onderweld.”

he nor the reader ever find out the date of the program, nor, consequently, whether he had killed her or not. The reader remains distanced from the deranged but harmless hero and the so-called *magic* aspect of the novel eludes us. The kindly asylum director is no Caligari²¹ and Gouvert's sad but moral story remains *realist* from within and without, as Daisne fuses both levels into one seamless reality.

Magic does emanate from Delvaux's image- and soundtracks. Far from a naïve first film, *L'homme au crâne rasé* was highly professional, Delvaux having previously produced ten educational documentary shorts.²² The sophisticated magic-realist structure he kept developing in his later fiction films after *Femme entre chien et loup*, is already present in *L'homme au crâne rasé*. Delvaux described his method in several essays²³ and Laure Borgomano has analyzed its workings in each film.²⁴ First, the protagonist's single subjective focalisation shapes the whole film; secondly, a structure specific to each feature expresses the conflict and doubling between the real and imaginary levels of the diegesis; thirdly, the presence and recurrence of various objects provide the protagonist with clues concerning the ambiguous "reality" of his adventure; fourthly, music plays an active part in Delvaux's plots and often replaces dialogue in whole sequences. Delvaux himself studied music and was an accomplished pianist. His "réalisme magique" could be termed "réalisation magique" (*magic mise en scène*), being based on structure and technique.

Concerning the impact of surrealism on Delvaux, I have detected three dimensions: the one he himself acknowledged, the traces determined by critics, and my own perception of it on the level of content. As my epigraph shows, Delvaux lived in the "other country" of his *oeuvre*, much like François Truffaut, to whom directing meant re-

21. In Wiene's 1920 film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, a mental patient tells a tale of persecution by a criminal mountebank, Caligari, who turns out to be the same person as the asylum director. Caligari, later compared to the Nazis by Siegfried Kracauer, also represents the surrealist's view of psychiatrists!

22. Later, Delvaux shot five other documentaries: *Met Dieric Bouts* (1975), about a medieval Dutch painter; *To Woody Allen, from Europe with Love* (1980); *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1984) and *Babel Opéra* (1985), about the staging of two operas; and his last movie, *1001 Films* (1989), an eight-minute short about the Brussels Cinémathèque.

23. See Delvaux's essays in *André Delvaux ou les visages de l'imaginaire* (1985), in particular Nysenholc's collage of quotes "Delvaux par lui-même" (97–113), and *André Delvaux* (1994).

24. Laure Borgomano, "Le réalisme magique," in *André Delvaux une oeuvre—un film: L'oeuvre au noir*, ed. Borgomano and Nysenholc (Brussels: Éditions Labor and Méridiens Klincksieck, 1988), 32–73.

arranging life according to his dreams or fantasies and prolonging his childhood games,²⁵ as in Freud's theory of "The poet and daydreaming."²⁶ They were of the same generation, with a similar nostalgia for the nineteenth century, a period when people had time for daydreaming or "*onirisme diurne*."²⁷ Truffaut especially loved Balzac, while Delvaux, like the surrealists, admired Nerval and Rimbaud.

Delvaux's is a cinema of synaesthesia, in which literature, music, and painting all play an important part. He related to surrealism mainly through painting. Foreign audiences who had never heard of Daisne were quick to detect the impact of Magritte and Paul Delvaux on his early work. He had known Magritte and was consciously influenced by the uncanny spatial juxtapositions in the latter's paintings, which he realized could be transposed temporally into film (Nysenholc 1994, 175–76). Delvaux was reluctant to agree with those who linked his work to non-Belgian surrealists like Breton or de Chirico (175). Incidentally, the Belgian surrealists included music in their activities, while their French counterparts followed Breton in dismissing it as an inferior art.²⁸

To my mind, Delvaux's surrealism emerges from the level of the signified or content and could be perceived as the unconscious of his work, while his carefully elaborated magic realist structures constitute its signifier and conscious. Let us now look at the first four films. The opening shots of *L'homme au crâne rasé* combine both levels. Close-ups of Govert's (Senne Rouffaer) face, eyes "wide-shut," then opening, his voice calling "Fran~!" and a reverse close-up shot of her face and elusive gaze, establish his subjective focalisation (Borgomano, 37–38). Furthermore, the eyes opening up might be read as an intertextual reference to the initial shots of *An Andalusian Dog*, when Buñuel slits a woman's eyeball with a razor as though to reveal another, surreal visual dimension, into which the viewer is being invited. Govert's voice is heard off-screen, dissociated from his silent face, while conjuring up Fran's (Beata Tyszkiewicz), so that the two levels of reality (Govert

25. François Truffaut, *Le plaisir des yeux* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), 245.

26. Sigmund Freud, *Creativity and the Unconscious* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1958), 44–54.

27. Henri Agel and Joseph Marty apply this term to the surrealists and to André Delvaux in *André Delvaux de l'inquiétante étrangeté à l'itinéraire initiatique* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1996), 22.

28. See Robert Wangermée, "Les musiciens du surréalisme bruxellois et l'esprit Dada," in *Surréalismes en Belgique*. Special issue of *Textyles* 8 (November 1991): 257–68.

waking up at home, his wife helping him dress for graduation) and imagination/fantasy (the domain of Fran and Govert's obsessive surrealist "mad love") co-exist. The same double structure prevails during graduation and especially throughout the autopsy scene, which for the doctor and his assistants is routine work, while Govert's horror at the proximity of death becomes palpable to the spectator. Delvaux uses sound and objects to achieve this double effect. The medical professor works inside a tomb, with his arms and instruments hidden from Govert and the audience, while his activity remains unpleasantly audible, for example the scraping of a shinbone. The similarity between the sets of instruments Govert encounters in what Delvaux calls the film's three blocks (Nysenholc 1985, 97–98): a hairdresser's utensils in the first part, the doctor's equipment in the second, and Govert's carpentry tools at the asylum in the third, creates an uncanny effect and reinforces the double magic realist structure. Daisne maintained that Govert had really killed Fran but was sent the merciful illusion of her survival by God (Delvaux in Weisgerber, 268), but Delvaux favors a more surrealist ambiguity or antinomy by blurring the boundary between reality and imagination visually, verbally, and auditorily. The themes of "mad love," journeys into mirror worlds of madness and death,²⁹ chance encounters (cf. Breton's "objective chance") and the circulation of objects with dissociated names, uses, and meanings, all concur toward a surrealist interpretation of the film.

L'homme au crâne rasé is Delvaux's only black and white feature and he used "a spectrum of greys within the blacks and whites rather than a contrasting chiaroscuro or the violent clashes of colour" (Nysenholc 1994, 171). Such painterly touches express Govert's limbo state, his imperceptible passages from reality into dream / imagination / hallucination and prefigure Delvaux's inclusion of plastic artworks in the next films.

Like his last feature, *L'oeuvre au noir* (1988), Delvaux's second one, *Un soir, un train*³⁰ deals extensively with death. He uses a double struc-

29. Madness evokes Leonora Carrington's autobiographical narrative, *Down Below*, first published in VVV (New York, 1944), and death points to the Orpheus legend and Cocteau's film *Orphée* (1950), 1h 52 min. BW, directed by Jean Cocteau, produced by André Paulvé, France, with Jean Marais and Maria Casarès.

30. *Un soir, un train* / One Evening, a Train . . . (1968), color, 92mn, produced by Parc Film/Fox Europa (Paris and Brussels), script by André Delvaux from the short story "De Trein der Traagheid" by Johan Daisne, with Yves Montand, Anouk Aimée, Adriana Bogdan, Senne Rouffaer.

ture, much like Breton's communicating vessels, with a twice-told story on each side of the mirror of the afterworld. The film begins in black and white, tracking across winter landscapes, to the tune of a sinister song about the fading and freezing of love with the advent of the cold season (Borgomano, 72). The image then takes on drab colors and introduces human presence with close-ups of an old woman's hands holding her son Mathias's, preceding full shots of them both in an old people's home. It is All Saints' Day, the day of the dead, and the mother wants chrysanthemums for her late husband's grave. Delvaux summed up the plot as follows:

It is a film about death, about a selfish man, about a superb, sublime and silent woman and a journey. The journey means the knowledge of death, it's a film about winter landscapes in Belgium, about people I have known: a university professor etc. But all that is what the film is about, not the film itself. The film itself is the form. (Nysenholc 1994, 99)

The film is in French, with two French stars, Yves Montand as the Belgian linguistics professor with a Flemish name, Mathias Vreeman (bilingual like Delvaux) and Anouk Aimée as his French partner Anne, a stage set and costume designer. The crisis the couple is going through reflects the social unrest and linguistic conflict surrounding them. Various disruptions and encounters with death punctuate the diegesis. Mathias interrupts his class because of a student strike and joins Anne at a rehearsal. The interpolated play is his own version of *Elkerlyk* (Everyman), and the scene shows Everyman confronting Death. The couple go home to a gourmet supper, quarrel over Death's costume and take a tense walk. Anne voices her bitterness over Mathias's refusal to marry her, merely to avoid the embarrassment of a French wife within prejudiced Flemish academe. She then disappears abruptly but later joins Mathias in the train taking him to a Flemish university for a lecture. The other passengers prevent them from communicating. Mathias falls asleep. When he awakes, Anne has vanished again and the train has stopped.

The displacement from a "real" world to a fantastic one and from the first realist part of the film to its specular oneiric double is not immediately obvious. Mathias gets off the train, obsessively looking for Anne, and encounters his former professor, Hernhutter, and one of his students, Val: his past and future selves or doubles. The train leaves without them and they wander through another deserted winter land-

scape, to a village whose inhabitants' language and behavior remain incomprehensible to them. They see a strange film (cf. the play in part I), people ignore them (cf. the hostile striking students or the strangers in the train), enter an eerie inn, presided over by Moïra (Adriana Bogdan), Death as a young woman (cf. *Everyman's Death*) and are served a refined meal (cf. Anne and Mathias's supper). People start dancing like robots. Val dances with Moïra and begins to understand her language, to Mathias's dismay. Suddenly a loud train whistle, screeching brakes, and sirens break up the scene. Mathias remains alone with Moïra. The location turns into a train crash site and Moïra becomes a nurse, in whose arms Mathias regains consciousness and learns there has been an accident. He wanders off and discovers Anne and Val among the dead. Mathias clings to his lover's corpse in desperation. The passage through the mirror of death echoes Cocteau's film on the Orpheus myth (see note 29): during the train journey Mathias had looked back at Anne-Eurydice in dream and memory flashbacks, and had realized the vital importance of love too late.³¹ His younger self, Val, had substituted Death (Moïra) for Love (Anne). Delvaux compared the uncertain passage from Eros to Thanatos, or conversely from the twilight zone to the train tracks, to Magritte's 1954 uncanny juxtaposition of night and day in *The Empire of Lights* (Nysenholc 1985, 99). Without love there can be no communication and as the film closes, Mathias is left suspended in what Breton calls the "long dominant death-drive brought on by the loss of a lover" (Breton 1937, 47).

Delvaux was about to shoot *Belle*,³² the only fiction film he wrote entirely himself, when he was asked to adapt a text by Julien Gracq. Although *Rendez-vous à Bray* precedes *Belle*, the latter comes closer in form and content to *L'homme au crâne rasé* and *Un soir, un train*, so I will discuss it first. Like *Un soir, un train*, *Belle* grew out of the opening pages of Nerval's *Aurélia* and deals with love, death, creativity, and language. The hero and focalizer, Mathieu Grégoire, is a poet. Delvaux uses alternate montage to structure the protagonist's double life (real and imaginary), represented by two women, his wife Jeanne and (prob-

31. Although some surrealists befriended Cocteau, Breton despised him and refused to let him be a member of the group. However, today the links between Cocteau's films and surrealism seem obvious and I would like to contend that the same applies to Delvaux's work.

32. *Belle* (1973), original script by André Delvaux, shot in French, color, 35mm, 93 min.

ably imagined) lover Belle, in two Belgian locations, the small town of Spa and the wild woods and marshes of the Fagne(s), Mathieu's main source of inspiration. This doubling process becomes systematic as the film unfolds. Couples proliferate, especially in the "magic" realm of dream, fantasy and (often jealous) imagination. On the "real" side are Mathieu (Jean-Luc Bideau) and Jeanne (Danièle Delorme), their daughter Marie (Stéphane Excoffier) and her fiancé John (John Dobrynine); on the other side: Mathieu and Belle (Adriana Bogdan), a foreign beauty he meets in the woods; the incestuous couple Mathieu longs to form with Marie; Belle and her compatriot "l'Étranger" (the Foreigner or Stranger)—doubles of Marie and John; and finally Mathieu's friend Victor (René Coggio) and Jeanne, whom the latter fancies.

Delvaux creates parallel patterns in both plots: Mathieu sees drops of blood in the snow after running over an animal in the Fagne and drops of coffee on the kitchen table at home, while discussing Marie's cat with her; later both Belle and Marie ask Mathieu for money. Traveling proves important again. Mathieu's white Volvo creates a link between his two worlds, as he drives it back and forth between his two erotic partners, Jeanne and Belle, just as in *L'homme au crâne rasé* the professor's black vehicle had driven Govert to the conversely morbid autopsy and (supposedly) to Fran's death.

Like Govert and Mathias, Mathieu is weathering a mid-life crisis, privately and professionally. He still loves Jeanne but cannot deal with Marie's imminent wedding, hence his flight to the Fagne and into poetry: the first produces Belle and the second Louise Labé, a French renaissance woman poet, whose erotic verses Mathieu chooses for a public lecture. Mathieu's wild Fagne life soon catches up with his respectable existence in Spa: during his lecture on Labé the camera pans down to the poet's muddy trousers and he savagely punches a spectator, mistaking him for l'Étranger. The incident precipitates legal intervention and Mathieu drives Marcel, the local police officer, to the Fagne after confessing to the murder of l'Étranger, whom he thinks Belle killed. Marcel informs Mathieu of the existence of some smugglers from across the German border (Belle and l'Étranger?). The police then drain a pond known as "Le trou noir" (The Black Hole) (significantly under a bridge), where Mathieu and Belle had allegedly thrown the body and only find a dead dog. Mathieu's Fagne adventure has come full circle, having begun with his car's hitting Belle's dog and her shooting it. L'Étranger, with his long hair and shaggy coat, could have been a hallucination at the sight of the animal (Joseph Marty suggests a connection

with *Beauty and the Beast* [99]). Belle and her dog are also a transposition of Marie and her cat. Once again, Delvaux preserves the ambiguity.

Free from adaptation, Delvaux clearly exposed his own magic realist pattern in *Belle*. Until *Femme entre chien et loup* (1979) and *Benvenuta* (1983), which have women as focalizers, Delvaux's subjects were all men, whose female objects of desire remain fascinating enigmas and poetic muses like the surrealists' "femmes-sphinx"³³: Fran, Anne, Belle, and "Elle" in *Rendez-vous à Bray*. In the latter film and *Belle*, they are doubled and mirrored by fetishized paintings. In *Belle*, Mathieu and Victor are mesmerized by a picture in the museum library of a woman, naked under an open blue kimono, her genitals exposed. The camera at one point zooms in on the middle of her body, cutting off the head, like a Freudian Witz referring to Max Ernst's *La femme sans/cent Tête(s)*³⁴ and highlighting the two men's sexual obsessions. Later Marie wears the same robe in a dream of Mathieu's and the color blue suffuses the Spa sequences (as in parts of *Un soir, un train*), while browns set the tone in the Fagne. Mathieu's long erotic dream includes a significant sequence emulating the surrealist painter Paul Delvaux's sensual twilight settings: Marie and Mathieu are seen from behind walking along the Spa train-station platform, she naked and he fully clothed, in the Magrittian glow of a red lantern. A fantasy of Breton's in *Nadja* comes to mind and links the dream of Marie with the vision of Belle: "I have always longed to meet a beautiful naked woman at night in a wood."³⁵

Rendez-vous à Bray,³⁶ a Franco-Belgian production, shot in French, is Delvaux's most romantic and aesthetic film, and the only one adapted from a non-Belgian text, by the French surrealist Julien Gracq.³⁷ Here Delvaux superimposes his individual, strictly structured magic realism onto Gracq's equally personal, almost baroque surrealism. The film consequently both resembles and remains distinct from the other three. The unique male point of view is conveyed by a

33. See Sarane Alexandrian, *Les libérateurs de l'amour* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 238–39, regarding Gustave Moreau and sphinx-like women.

34. The title of Ernst's collage novel, *La femme 100 têtes*, (Paris: Carrefour, 1929), creates a pun combining "headless woman" (sans tête) and "woman with 100 heads" (cent têtes).

35. André Breton, *Nadja* (1928) (Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 1998), 40.

36. *Rendez-vous à Bray* (1971), color, 35mm, 93mn.

37. The short story "Le Roi Cophetua," in Julien Gracq's *La presque île* (Paris: José Corti, 1970), 183–251.

younger, unattached subject. Delvaux names Gracq's anonymous narrator/protagonist Julien Eschenbach, condensing Stendhal's romantic hero Julien Sorel³⁸ with a medieval German poet, Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170–1220) who, like Julien, bore his poverty with great dignity. The film unfolds during World War I. Laure Borgomano identifies its atmosphere as Proustian (41), for like the author of *La recherche*, Delvaux uses time as a theme as well as a formal element. The filmmaker reads Gracq's story as follows: "Nothing could be simpler than a man who, having been invited by a friend (Jacques Nueil) to join him in the country during the war, goes and waits for him there and finds a young woman; the friend never turns up and he leaves the next morning at dawn" (Nysenholz 1985, 100). The film maintains Gracq's idea of a parenthesis in time and space, and Julien embarks on a long poetic meditation inspired by the penumbra of an old house on All Saints' Day (cf. *Un soir, un train*), the works of art surrounding him, his memories of Nueil and the bewitching young woman who, like Belle, appears out of nowhere. Distant drums and canons recall the war and Delvaux creates a period piece effect by using archaic irises as punctuation instead of his usual fade-outs.

Flashbacks occur not only during Julien's short train journey, as in Mathias's in *Un soir, un train*, but also while he waits for Nueil at La Fougeraie. Delvaux devises various levels of doubling, between past and present, war and peace, Julien's solitude and the joyful prewar company of Nueil and the latter's fiancée Odile. Later, real and imagined couples are confronted, as in *Belle*: Nueil and Odile (real) with Julien and Odile (Nueil's fantasy) in the past; in the present (in Julien's imagination) Nueil and Elle, the nameless woman at La Fougeraie, with Julien and Elle that night (real). As always, Delvaux increases the impression of strangeness with an international cast. The German actor Mathieu Carrière, then only twenty-one, plays a proud, romantic Julien, robbed of his innocence by a tantalizingly reserved and more mature Elle, the Danish Anna Karina, Godard's fetish actress of the 60s. The bubbly French Bulle Ogier and more mephistophelian Belgian Roger Van Hool as Odile and Jacques embody their opposites. Delvaux's Jacques and Julien pay tribute to Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (1961) and a sequence of the threesome watching a Fantômas film emulates the young surrealists.

Here, too, form and meaning overlap. Music structures the story.

38. In his most famous novel, *Le rouge et le noir* (1830).

Julien was a pianist before the war and Jacques a composer. Flashbacks show them practicing and an unfinished nocturne by Jacques awaits Julien on the piano at La Fougeraie. Like the three previous features, *Rendez-vous à Bray* begins with a song, an odd child's nursery rhyme about the death of a bird, sung by a little girl under Julien's window in Paris to a tune by Brahms. Julien later hums it or plays it on the piano. Furthermore, Delvaux explains how he based the film's "completely abstract structure" (Nysenholc 1985; 107) on the rondo form, by using alternate montage between past and present scenes; according to Laure Borgomano: "the present increasingly becomes a mirror for the past" (51). External time echoes and merges with the internal dimension Deleuze calls "*nappes de temps*"³⁹ (sheets of time), as Julien becomes aware that his stay at La Fougeraie has probably been programmed by Jacques, as a rerun of their past together: the welcome, their favorite foods and wines, the music, the consenting woman (Jacques had formerly attempted to organize Julien's sexual initiation by Odile, a scheme that works with Elle).

Recurring objects are photographs of the three friends, confronting past and present, and specular paintings, as in *Belle*. Gracq's title, "Le Roi Cophetua," is echoed by his narrator's quoting from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (II:i): "When King Cophetua loved the beggar maid," while contemplating a painting at La Fougeraie, with no mention of the artist. Delvaux shows what is unmistakably Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*,⁴⁰ and recreates the configuration of the young king at the poor girl's feet with Julien and Elle. Twelve years later he restages the scene in *Benvenuta*,⁴¹ using metatextual characters: the novelist Jeanne (Françoise Fabian), with the filmmaker François (Mathieu Carrière again, by then a favorite actor of Delvaux's) kneeling before her. The musical, temporal, and spatial rondo also applies to art and life, inter- and intratextuality, and the repetitive connections between the first four features, extending to *Benvenuta*. The most important link among these works is the music by Delvaux's staunchest collaborator, Frédéric Devreese. The latter's soundtracks highlight the ominous presence of death, emanating in *Rendez-vous à*

39. See Gilles Deleuze, *L'image-temps* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

40. Sir Edward Burne-Jones, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (1884), oil on canvas, 290 × 136 cm, London, Tate Britain.

41. André Delvaux, *Benvenuta* (1983, Belgium, France, Italy) adapted from Suzanne Lilar's novel *La confession anonyme* (1960), 105 min., with Fanny Ardant, Victoria Gassman, Françoise Fabian, Mathieu Carrière.

Bray from the peace-time flashbacks and the hypothetically testamentary quality of Jacques Nueil's invitation.

To conclude, in Delvaux's early fiction features, surrealism and magic realism dance a *pas de deux*, with the *danse macabre* as a negative mirror, traversed by an Orphean quest for love. Magic-realist doubles and surrealist antinomies prove to be closely related, though the first are deliberately constructed and the second more dependent on chance and automatism. The strong influence and heredity of Belgian surrealist painting make Delvaux's films visually surrealist and reinforce surrealist themes like mad love and desire, insanity, dreams, rêverie, Freudian fetishism (as in the frequent close-ups of hands), objects out of context, poetry as a way of life, mysterious and magical women, uncanny landscapes, and so on. Delvaux's magic realism was self-proclaimed and the fundamental expression of his "Belgitude," but strayed far afield from Daisne's more rigid and moral stance; his surrealist tendencies owe more to Magritte, Paul Delvaux, and Gracq than to Breton or even Buñuel. Furthermore, as a marginal, minor medium for both surrealism and magic realism, film allowed Delvaux more freedom and interdisciplinary scope with which to transcend the differences.

Finally, it is a pleasure to be able to announce that at long last the Belgian Cultural Services are aiding scholars to gain access to Delvaux's first four feature films. The Wallon community has recently [January 2005] produced a DVD of *Rendez-vous à Bray* including with it two of Delvaux's short films [*Met Dieric Bouts/Avec Dieric Bouts* (1975) and *1001 Films* (1989)], and Gracq's short story in booklet form. A second DVD of *De man die zijn haar kort liet knippen / L'Homme au crâne rasé* has just been commercialized [March 2005] by the Flemish community, in Daisne's original language. They should both be distributed outside Belgium within the next few months and it is to be hoped that DVD's of *Belle* and *Un soir, un train* will follow.