Dream-like Narration and Imagery in David Gascoyne's Surrealist Poetry: "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis"

David Gascoyne'un Sürrealist Şiirinde Rüya Benzeri Anlatım ve İmgeleme: "Ve Yedinci Rüya İsis'in Rüyasıdır"

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Abstract

The centenary year of 2024 marked a milestone for Surrealism, one of the 20th century's most influential movements, initiated by André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* in 1924. David Gascoyne's *"And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis"* (1933) is considered the first surrealist poem in English. It employs dream-like narration and imagery to reflect Surrealist ideas. The use of dream-like motifs, and the juxtaposition of the real and unreal, the arcane and modern, the religious and obscene, and the natural and bewildering, creates a surrealist effect in the poem. Its disjointed imagery blurs the boundaries between dream and reality while reflecting the devastating effects of World War I and the epidemics prevalent at that time on individuals and society. In this way, Gascoyne aims to awaken the modern individual's unconscious, emphasising the impact of this movement that emerged between the World Wars. Gascoyne positions the surrealist poet as a visionary capable of uncovering hidden truths within the depths of the unconscious and invites the reader to explore it. The poem also incorporates female representations, such as mother, priestess, queen, virgin, and Isis, the Egyptian goddess, to portray the feminine unconscious. This article argues that the unconscious, embodied by the feminine, is both destructive and transformative. Drawing on the theories of Breton and Freud and through mythological and feminist analyses, this study explores how Gascoyne's narrator constructs a disorienting yet deeply symbolic surrealist narrative. Thus, it aims to revitalize the surrealist movement, and underscore its lasting impact, both on its 101st anniversary and beyond.

Keywords: David Gascoyne, surrealist poetry, dream-like narration and imagery, the unconscious

Öz

2024 yılı, 20. yüzyılın en etkili hareketlerinden biri olan ve 1924'te André Breton'ın *Sürrealist Manifesto*'su ile başlatılan sürrealizm hareketinin yüzüncü yılı olarak bir dönüm noktasıydı. David Gascoyne'ın *"Ve Yedinci Rüya İsis'in Rüyasıdır"* (1933) adlı eseri, İngilizce yazılmış ilk sürrealist şiir olarak kabul edilir. Bu şiir, sürrealist fikirleri yansıtmak amacıyla rüya benzeri anlatım ve imgeler kullanır. Rüya benzeri motiflerin kullanımı ve gerçek ile gerçek dışı, kadim ile modern, dini ile müstehcen, doğal ile şaşırtıcı olanın karşıtlıklarının yan yana getirilmesi, şiirde sürrealist bir etki yaratır. Parçalanmış imgeler, rüya ve gerçek arasındaki sınırları bulanıklaştırırken, I. Dünya Savaşı ve dönemin salgın hastalıklarının bireyler ve toplum üzerindeki yıkıcı etkilerini yansıtır. Bu şekilde, Gascoyne, modern bireyin bilinç dışını uyandırmayı ve dünya savaşları arasında ortaya çıkan bu avangart hareketin etkisini vurgulamayı amaçlar. Gascoyne, sürrealist şairi, bilinç dışının derinliklerindeki gizli gerçekleri ortaya çıkarabilen öngörülü biri olarak konumlandırır ve okuyucuyu da bilinç dışını keşfetmeye davet eder. Bu şiir, aynı zamanda dişil bilinç dışını betimlemek için anne, rahibe, kraliçe, bakire ve Mısır tanrıçası İsis gibi kadın temsillerini de içerir. Bu makale, dişil bilinç dışının bedenselleşmesinin hem yıkıcı hem de dönüştürücü olduğunu savunur. Breton ve Freud'un teorileri ve mitolojik ve feminist analizlerden yararlanarak, bu çalışma, Gascoyne'un anlatıcısının, bu karmaşık ancak derin sürrealist anlatısını nasıl oluşturduğunu ele alır. Böylece, bu çalışma, sürrealist hareketi yeniden canlandırmayı ve onun kalıcı etkisini 101. yıl dönümünde ve sonrasında vurgulamayı amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: David Gascoyne, surrealist şiir, rüya benzeri anlatım ve imgeleme, bilinç dışı

Introduction

The year 2024 marked the centenary of Surrealism, the most influential avant-garde literary and aesthetic school in the culture of the twentieth century. Of all the movements that emerged in the early twentieth century, Surrealism is the only one that continues to endure today, representing not just a revolution in form but also in thought. As Michel Remy, a leading authority on British Surrealism, noted, "Surrealism in Britain has been, and continues to be, a road wider than long – at times contracting, at times expanding, but a road that will continue to follow its own inimitable course" (Remy, 2013, p. 6). Surrealism should therefore be seen not merely as an artistic or literary form, but, as a revolutionary way of thinking that remains vibrant today. Its original aim was to provide a flexible platform for the individual's purest and unfiltered identity, stimulating the imagination to express unrestrained thoughts and ideas. Thus, delving into the authentic identity, surrealist thinking opposes established conventions and rational, embracing the limitless potential of the unconscious mind. Surrealist works, by serving as a catalyst for self-discovery and introspection, foster a boundless creativity between the "surrealist product" and the "surrealist interpreter." Dreams, in this context, offer a rich source for unlocking the unconscious, guiding the human mind on a transformative journey.

David Emery Gascoyne (1916–2001) was a British poet and translator, closely associated with the British Surrealist Group. A prominent figure in the avant-garde, he was closely affiliated with the leading members of the Surrealist movement, such as André Breton, Max Ernst, Paul Éluard, and Salvador Dalí, who undoubtedly shaped his poetic style. Gascoyne infused his early poems with surrealist narrative and imagery, playing an intermediatory role between French and British surrealism.[1]. His use of dream logic, where meaning emerges through metaphor and symbolic connection rather than linear reasoning, illustrates his surrealist politics.

Gascoyne's early works, produced during the inter-war period, bridge the surrealist movement and post-war British poetry. His first two poetry volumes were *Roman Balcony and Other Poems* (1932) and *Man's Life is This Meat* (1936). His only novel, *Opening Day* (1933), one of the earliest surrealist prose works in English, was followed by *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1935), the first comprehensive English manifesto on Surrealism. That same year, Gascoyne penned the "First English Manifesto of Surrealism: A Fragment," published in *Cahiers d'Art,* where he expressed agreement with André Breton's principles: "We declare ourselves in total agreement with the principles of surrealism as they were first stated by André Breton" (as cited in Remy, 2013, p. 19). Gascoyne also translated literary works by canonical French surrealists, including Breton's *What is Surrealism?* (1936). Although he published less poetry after 1956, his later works focused on lectures, reviews, essays, and translations. His notable later publications include *A Vagrant and Other Poems* (1950), *Night Thoughts* (1956) and *The Sun at Midnight* (1970). In *On the Thirteenth Stroke of Midnight: Surrealist Poetry in Britain*, Gascoyne defined poetry as "an act through which man reaches the most complete knowledge of himself" (2013, p. 18). For him, the aim of surrealist poetry was "to abolish the formal distinction between dream and reality, between objectivity and subjectivity" (Gascoyne, 1935, as cited in Remy, 2013, p. 18), advocating for "automatic writing and the experiments on the nature of automatism" (Gascoyne, 1935, as cited in Remy, 2013, p. 18).

Surrealist poetry encourages poets to take a risk to reveal the power of language. Gascoyne employed automatism, using free association to unfold hidden mental territories and subvert clichéd metaphors and arbitrary word combinations. He viewed the poet's role as one of risking madness, despair and death to redeem existence through the secret power of the word: "The poet's destiny is to risk madness, despair and death for the sake of a possibility of redeeming existence by means of the secret power of the Word" (Gascoyne, 1938, CJS, p. 199). His works influenced many surrealist writers, and his use of fragmented imagery and the unconscious continued to shape modernism, postmodernism, and experimental poetry.

Gascoyne's engagement with surrealist techniques and ideas is evident in "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis," which Michael Remy called "the first English Surrealist poem ever published" (1935, p. 14). The poem is a dream-like exploration of the unconscious, rich with surrealist imagery, psychological and historical symbolism and femininity. Written

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[1] The David Gascoyne collection, including his manuscripts, notebooks, artworks, audiocassettes and translations of French poetry into English, is preserved at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. New Haven, Connecticut (Call number: GEN MSS 529). https://archives.yale.edu/repositories/11/resources/754.

when Gascoyne was seventeen and published in Geoffrey Grigson's[2] *New Verse* in October 1933, it reflects the psychological, political and cultural tension of the World War I and the epidemics of the time. Despite its significance, little research has focused on this poem. Grigson described it as "a purely automatic Surrealist poem" (as cited in Scott, 2002, p. 45). Later, Gascoyne noted that "'And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis' was the result of my first attempt to produce a sequence of lines of poetry [in parallel with] the words of André Breton, instigator of the Surrealist movement" (Gascoyne, 1988, p. xiv). Drawing from Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious, Gascoyne blends everyday objects with the fantastical to address the wartime society, the impact of epidemic diseases and the modern individual. The dream-like motifs and contrasts between the real and unreal, ancient and modern, religious and obscene, create a surrealist effect, aiming to awaken the modern individual's unconscious and highlight this inter-war avant-garde movement and the global effects of World War I.

Few studies have been conducted about this poem in the existing literature. The limited but insightful studies on the poem reveals a growing interest in Gascoyne's complex use of surrealist techniques. Roger Lindsey Scott, in his dissertation entitled *David Gascoyne From Darkness into Light: A Study of his poetry 1932-1950*, described it as "Gascoyne's more self-conscious use of the Surrealist technique" (Scott, 2002, p. 20), underscoring it as a more self-aware application of the surrealist movement and highlighting the poet's engagement with methods of the poem.

José-Luis Moctezuma, in his article "Negotiations with the Infinite: David Gascoyne's Surrealist Mode," characterised this poem as "purely automatic," emphasising its automatic origin through the repetition of words within a process, "which seems to signal a purely chance-based, supposedly 'unconscious' process of literary production" (Moctezuma, 2017, p. 7). He also remarked on how Gascoyne managed flow of mental images, allowing the unconscious mind to generate imagery freely and spontaneously, stating: "Gascoyne controlled the flow of images that sprang up in his mind through a reciprocal process of regulating their non-semantic emergence (…) [and] he gave free reign to the mechanism of his own 'unconscious' to produce images of its own accord" (Moctezuma, 2017, p. 6). Liudmyla Pradivlianna, in her article "Dream and Reality in the Poetry of David Gascoigne," further focused on analysing this poem from a linguistic perspective and explored the poet's dedication to the French version of surrealism, stressing the visual intensity of the poem and its connection to a subconscious, dream-like mode of expression. According to her, "The streams of arbitrary visual images, deep emotionality, the artistic use of the word, [and] semantic increments of meaning make Gascoigne's texts open to interpretation" (Pradivlianna, 2018, p. 36).

In her doctoral dissertation, Christina E. Heflin characterised the poem as "the first Surrealist poem written in English…which is described as being 'rife with beautiful sinister disquiet'" (Heflin, 2021, p. 246). Regarding the poem's bizarre and disturbing imagery, Heflin further argued that such imagery aligns more with the transgressive aesthetics of George Bataille, saying, "while [Robert] Fraser attributes the references *to Un Chien Andalou*, I see the 'white curtains of tortured destinies' as ocular violence, ruined cathedrals, milk, genitals, excrement, virgins, eggshells, churches and unfrocked priests pointing directly to Bataille" (As cited in Heflin, 2021, pp. 246-247; in Fraser, 2012, p. 96).[3] These insights deepen the perception of the poem's symbolic complexity and its engagement with both physical and metaphysical disruption.

While previous studies have primarily focused on the poem's linguistic features and surrealist techniques, this study extends beyond those earlier analyses by offering a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary interpretation. It examines the poem not only through a linguistic and surrealist perspectives but also from psychoanalytic, mythological and feminist lenses. By integrating these additional aspects, the study reveals deeper layers of meaning in Gascoyne's work, uncovering how the poem engages with unconscious processes, archetypal symbolism, and representations of the feminine. This multidimensional approach not only enriches our understanding of the poem itself, but also underscores its broader cultural and psychological significance within the surrealist tradition and beyond.

Ultimately, this article examines how Gascoyne contributed to the foundations of British surrealist poetry through dream-like narration and rich symbolic imagery. Drawing on Bretonnian and Freudian theoretical frameworks, alongside mythological allusions, this study investigates how these elements function to access and articulate the workings of the

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[2] British poet, literary critic and editor Geoffrey Edward Harvey Grigson is known as the founder-editor of the influential poetry magazine *New Verse* (from 1933 to 1939). https://www.britannica.com/art/poetry

[3] As Zeynep Direk commented, "Violence is perhaps one of the most difficult concepts in George Bataille's thought." (Direk, 2004, p. 29).

unconscious mind. The poem suggests a psychic realm that leads to alternative realities and invites the reader on a transformative journey of self-discovery. In addition, this article explores how the feminine unconscious is revealed through female representations, such as the "mother," "virgin," "queen" and "Isis," the Egyptian goddess. The analysis begins with a focused exploration of surrealist techniques from both Bretonnian and Freudian perspectives, with particular emphasis on psychic automatism and the dynamics of the unconscious.

The Foundations of Surrealism: Bretonnian "Psychic Automatism"

Today, scholars are revisiting Surrealism, particularly after its centennial last year, to explore its lasting influence on individuals and the modern world. By delving into the unconscious mind and human perception, Surrealism has inspired researchers in art, literature and psychoanalysis. Drawing on Freudian ideas of the unconscious and dream-like visual and textual depictions, Surrealism seeks to bypass the logical mind. Emerging in the early 20th century after World War I, it developed in Europe as a response to Dadaism,[4] which emerged in the 1920s. Influenced by Dadaism's rejection of conventional art forms, Surrealists aimed to challenge traditional forms through spontaneity, imagination and unexpected associations.

The term "Surrealism" was coined by French poet and artist Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917. "In the programme for the ballet *Parade,* which was performed on 18 May 1917, [Apollinaire] used the word '*sur-réalisme*' in print for the first time" (As cited in Alexandrian, 1970, p. 27). In a letter to Belgium poet Paul Dermée, Apollinaire suggested that the term "surrealism" was a better term than "supernaturalism, which he had previously used: "All things considered, I think in fact it is better to adopt surrealism than supernaturalism, which I first used" (Apollinaire, 1917, as cited in Clébert, 1996, p. 17). Peter Stockwell described Surrealism as an attempt "for accessing the true nature of human perception" (2012, p. 49). German-French artist and poet Jean Arp remarked that surrealist poets and artists "often relied on spontaneous process of automatism to break free from conventional constraints" (Arp, 1972, p. 45). Michael Benedikt noted that "surrealism's uniqueness can be traced to a paradox" (Benedikt, 1983, p. ix) as it blends contradictory components to create a distinctive form.

After André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*, Breton and his followers began contributing to *La Révolution surréaliste.*[5] Breton argued that surrealist practices could only be achieved through language, stating, "Language has been given to man so that he may make surrealist use of it" (Breton, 1924, p. 32). The Surrealist coterie centered around Breton included prominent poets like Louis Aragon, Antonin Artaud, Paul Éluard, Robert Desnos, and Tristan Tzara.[6] Other journals, such as *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930–33) and *Minotaure* (1933–39), helped spread surrealist ideas. Despite ideological and personal conflicts, Surrealism left a lasting impact, with scholars like Willard Bohn, noting its universal relevance. In the introduction of *One Hundred Years of Surrealist Poetry*, Bohn remarked, "Surrealism was not just a French phenomenon but one that eventually encompasses much of the world" (2023, para. 2). Andre Breton defined Surrealism in two different ways. In the first one, Breton highlighted that psychic automatism, though seemingly nonsensical, possesses a deeper meaning:

> Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. (Breton, 1924, p. 26)

Breton described surrealism as psychic automatism, where ideas flow freely without control, bypassing aesthetic, logical and moral judgements. While this initially unsettles the reader, its uniqueness gives it deeper significance. His second definition focuses on the power of dreams and their free flow of ideas:

> Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the

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[4] Dadaism, a short-lived revolutionary art movement, was launched by Tristan Tzara's *Dada Manifesto* in 1918. The movement mainly used humour and absurdity to depict creative concepts as a response to the modern age.

[5] *La Révolution surréaliste* was a magazine published by the Surrealists in Paris, with twelve issues published between 1924-1929. The cover page of its final issue features René Magritte's 1929 artwork, *Hidden Woman*. See the cover page from http://www.mattesonart.com/1111111111111111111111new-page.aspx

[6] See more on the canonical figures of Surrealism in Paris, led by André Breton, from https://ldnmuseum.wordpress.com/surrealism-discomfiting-dreams/ and https://www.theartstory.org/movement/surrealism/

omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. (Breton, 1924, p. 26)

Breton believed that dreams possess limitless power over the human mind and reality, capable of dismantling conventional mental mechanisms and offering new solutions to humanity's essential problems. In his *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929), Breton highlighted the significance of dream compositions through "automatism" as a pathway to unlock the unconscious, urging poets and artists to embrace a new understanding of human perception and modern life. James A. Carroll defined automatism as not just allowing words to flow, but as opening up to language in a way that liberates the writer's mind to make associations: "Automatism (…) is not just a style of writing where you allow words to come to you, but it is also a style where, having opened the gates of language, your conscious brain may begin to make associations" (Carroll, 2022, p. 3). This approach enables words to shape the writer's thoughts rather than forcing words to fit a predetermined meaning. Carroll added, "Given the range, or depts, which we could define as 'conscious' or 'unconscious' writing, it is possible to compose a text with a mix of both" (Carroll, 2022, p. 1). Surrealist artists and writers often crafted dream-like, abstract scenarios using disturbing imagery as a form of automatic expression, aiming to unlock the unconscious and repressed aspects of the human psyche.

Unlocking the Surreal Landscapes through the Unconscious

The unconscious mind is central to Surrealism, as it is the source of the irrational, repressed and fantastic. Freud's conception of the unconscious laid the foundation for surrealist works. He believed that dreams reveal hidden aspects of the psyche, offering insight into suppressed desires and fears. Freud argued that repressed emotions and unresolved conflicts surface in dreams, often through symbolic imagery. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud described dreams as the "royal road to the unconscious" (Freud, 1900, p. 603) and argued that they consist of multiple associations, creating an illogical yet meaningful flow of thoughts. He also noted that "the individual dream-thoughts are represented by in the dream by several elements. The path of association leads from one element of the dream to several dream-thoughts; and from one dream-thought to several dream-elements" (Freud, 1900, p. 216). This chain of associations may seem absurd, but within its absurdity, logic can still emerge unconsciously.

Dream-thoughts are fluid, moving between various elements and associations, allowing for a complex interplay between thoughts and their symbolic meanings. While some details may seem nonsensical, the dream maintains an underlying logic. Based on Freud's views, Peter Barry noted that "The basic reason (…) is that the unconscious, like the poem, or novel, or play, cannot speak directly and explicitly but does so through images, symbols, emblems, and the metaphors…psychoanalytic interpretation of literature is often controversial" (Barry, 2009, p. 98). Leonard Jackson also underscored Freud's view in the interaction between consciousness and the unconscious: "Consciousness, for Freud, is not self-determining. And the unconscious part of the mind does not wholly determine the conscious part. They interact. Our mental life is determined by the interplay of unconscious and conscious elements." (Jackson, 2000, p. 34). This dynamic interplay shapes our mental lives. Freud further explained the relationship between the unconscious and dreams, stating: "Unconscious processes can only be observed by us under the conditions of dreaming of neurosis" (Freud, 1963, p. 135). Therefore, dreams make the unconscious process accessible, blending fantasy and reality for both the narrator and the reader. He suggested that,

The dream-work can also do something else with the [e]ffects of the dream-thoughts besides admitting them or reducing them to zero. It can turn them into their opposite (…) every element in a dream can also represent its opposite as well as itself. One never knows in advance whether to assume the one or the other; only the context will decide. (Freud, 1900, p. 308)

For Freud, dream-work has a bidirectional quality, where each element in a dream can represent both itself and its opposite, reflecting and negating the impact of dream-thoughts while suggesting an opposite meaning. In contrast, Carl Gustav Jung, in his influential 1912 book, *The Psychology of the Unconscious*, departed from Freud's model, suggesting that the unconscious contains not only repressed desires but also elements shared by all humanity, which he termed the "collective unconscious." Jung identified universal symbols as archetypes, which appear in stories, dreams, myths and poems. Both Freud's and Jung's theories emphasise the tension between the conscious and the unconscious mind. In his "Introduction" to Gascoyne's *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, Michael Remy explained how Surrealism connects to the unconscious mind,

describing surrealist poetry and art as a natural flow of irrational thoughts within the human psyche:

> Surrealism, profiting from the discoveries of Freud and a few other scientific explorers of the unconscious, has conceived poetry as being, on the other hand, a perpetual functioning of the psyche, a perpetual flow of irrational thought in the form of images taking place in every human mind and needing only a certain predisposition and discipline in order to be brought to light in the form of written words (or plastic images), and on the other hand, a universally valid attitude to experience, a possible mode of living. (Remy, 2000, p. 24)

As Remy suggested, Surrealism views poetry as an ongoing flow of thoughts and images, which can be achieved through the proper discipline and mindset. This why surrealist art emerged as a universal portrayal of the unconscious, transforming the symbolic essence of dreams into visual imagery.

Surrealist Art: Visions of the Imaginary Landscape

Surrealist art vividly represents the unconscious, displaying the elusive imagery and symbolic nature of dreams. Surrealist techniques such as *Exquisite Corpse*[7] helped the movement spread around the world. Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch is considered one of the earliest surreal artists, often using images of devils, mythical beings and half-human creatures, in bizarre settings to evoke horror and disorder in the viewer's mind. His tryptic *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490–1510), based on the biblical story of *The Garden of Eden*, is regarded as the first surrealist iconography. The first panel portrays an ideal paradise before the Fall, the central panel represents a sinful paradise on Earth, and the final panel represents the torments of Hell. The enigmatic setting, filled with fantastical creatures and nude figures, exhibits surrealist features, reflecting the unconscious minds of the figures. Bosch's complex surrealist iconography has influenced artists like Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró. Although analysed from biblical, mythological, heretical and astrological perspectives, the dream-like imagery reflects surrealist features, such as free-flowing connections to the unconscious and depictions of the hidden depths of the human soul. Bosch's idiosyncratic surrealist work can be seen in Figure 1:

Figure 1.
***The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1490–1510) by Hieronymus Bosch**

Source: Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain. https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-garden-of-earthly-delights-triptych/02388242-6d6a-4e9e-a992-e1311eab3609

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[7] *Cadavre Exquis*, or *Exquisite Corpse* is a collage game, collaboratively played by several players. The game was invented in Paris in 1925 by André Breton, Yves Tanguy, Marcel Duchamp and Jacques Prevért, in which they wrote: "The exquisite corpse will drink the young wine." The aim was to construct intuitive and bizarre images by passing the game sheet to the next player. Breton developed the game along with his friends. See, for example, *Nude*, crafted by Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise and Man Ray in 1926–27, from www.moma.org/collection/works/35701.

Surrealist art is typically divided into two main directions: veristic surrealism[8] and automatism. Veristic surrealism involves a realistic depiction of dreamlike scenarios, aiming at portraying dream visions within a real-world context; it combines real objects with absurd imagery to bridge spiritual and maternal realms.[9] In contrast, automatism is more abstract and emotion-driven, focusing on spontaneous and unconscious expression. Breton defines automatism as "the fundamental procedure" (Breton, 1924, p. 268) of surrealism, highlighting its role, liberating the unconscious. As Öztürk and Misman defined it, automatism "is the unconscious automatic reflection of the unconscious on the work by the artist by focusing on a kind of trance while the work is being produced" (Öztürk & Misman, 2022, p. 279). VandenBos described automatic writing as "the act of drawing a picture or object in hypnotic trance or distracted state [while] [i]n hypnotherapy" (2007, p. 91).

In surrealist aesthetics, objects serve as tools to challenge reality and conventional norms. As defined by Dalí, a surrealist object is "an object which lends itself to a minimum of mechanical functions and is based on phantoms and representations liable to be provoked by the realization of unconscious acts" (as cited in Breton, 1935, p. 276). These objects blend the imaginary and the real, provoking mental discomfort and creating a sense of absurdity. The "ready-made"[10] is a surrealist object, linked to both Dadaism and Surrealism. While Dadaist ready-made works aim to challenge aesthetic norms, surrealist ones connect to the human psyche. Artists like Pablo Picasso, Meret Oppenheim and Man Ray[11] experimented with ready-made objects. Salvador Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory* (1931)[12] is an iconic epitome of surrealist artistry. The melting clocks symbolise the fluidity and dynamism of time, transporting viewers into a dream-like universe where soft and hard objects coexist. Notable surrealist artists experimenting with automatic painting include Yves Tanguy, Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, Max Ernst, René Magritte, Giorgio de Chirico, and photographers Alfred Stieglitz and Man Ray.

Surrealist Poetry: The Language of Dreamscapes

Surrealism began as a 1920s Parisian movement and soon evolved into a literary genre, inspiring poets. Surrealist poetry is characterised by figurative interpretations, dream-like representations, hallucinatory objects and unsettling dreamscapes**.** It has roots in the works of Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud and Isidore Ducasse. *The Songs of Maldoror*,[13] by Ducasse, under the pseudonym Comte de Lautréamont, is one of the earliest examples, featuring violent and absurd imagery. Surrealists were influenced by various poetic methods, such as Calligrammatic Poetry, used by Stéphane Mallarmé and Guillaume Apollinaire and Echo Poem.[14] André Breton and Philippe Soupault's *The Magnetic Fields* (1920) is considered the first surrealist text for its use of automatic writing.

Michel Remy noted that "Compared with painting, writing has not been the main activity of the surrealists in Britain" (2013, p. 7). For surrealists, poetry engages the reader's psyche, blending the real through juxtaposed elements. Breton argued that "It is common knowledge that true poetry and art are a function of two essential things, that they bring into play in man two special means, the power of emotion and the gift of expression" (Breton, 1924, p. 221). Carl Jung, in *Man and His Symbols*, defined surreal elements as "dreamlike transpositions of reality, which arise as visions from the unconscious" (Jung, 1968, p. 293).

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[8] The word "veristic" is derived from the Latin "*verus*" meaning "true". https://everythinglatin.co.uk/2024/07/01/verism-portraying-power-and-ancestry/

[9] Max Ernst was a key figure in "Veristic Automatism." See, for example, *Europe After the Rain II, 1940-42* by Max Ernst at https://www.max-ernst.com/europe-after-rain.jsp. It is an allegorical depiction of the destruction of European civilization after the World War II. The work combines the dark reality of physical exhaustion with the dream-like emotional desolation.

[10] "The only definition of 'readymade' published under the name of Marcel Duchamp ("MD") appears in *Dictionnaire abrégé du Surréalisme* [*Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism*] by Andre Breton and Paul Éluard: 'An ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist'" (As cited in Obalk, 2000, para. 2).

[11] See, for example, Sotheby's for famous ready-made works by Man Ray from https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/7-things-you-need-to-know-about-man-rays-readymades

[12] See, for example, *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) by Salvador Dalí from MoMA, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79018

[13] See the original French version of *Les Chants de Maldoror* at Gutenberg from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12005/12005-h/12005-h.htm

[14] *Echo Poem* is a surrealist poetry game that was invented by Aurélien Dauguet in 1971. The aim is to write a poem in two halves, laid out in two columns that echo one another. See, for example, Fred Chappel's "Narcissus and Echo" (1983), from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=142&issue=6&page=14

Dreams, as symbols of the unconscious and human desires, have been significant in poetry since ancient times. British surrealist poets, like their French counterparts, used the unconscious to access hidden meanings, with their verses as written forms of surrealist artistry, often called dream poetry. Dream poetry gained prominence in the Medieval Age, with poets like Geoffrey Chaucer and William Langland. Though less popular today than in medieval times, dream interpretation still continues to thrive in contemporary literature. Freud suggested that,

> The best poems (…) are those where we do not notice the intention to find the rhyme, but where from the outset each thought has induced the other to choose the verbal expression that with a little adaptation will allow the rhyme to emerge. (Freud, 1900, p. 256)

A surrealist poem is an aesthetic documentation and interpreting it is a performative act, inviting the reader to see beyond the real and perceive the surreal; it is a complex quest to deconstruct and reconstruct meaning. Surrealist poetry, therefore, serves as a universal lens for perceiving the world and human existence, offering an alternative perspective on life. This is especially evident in Gascoyne's ground-breaking poem, "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis."

Exploring Gascoyne's "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis"

Gascoyne's "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis" is a pivotal example of British Surrealism. To better understand the poem, it is important to consider the historical and political context of the 1930s; it was a decade marked by global social and political turmoil that culminated in the Second World War, which shaped individual mental states and societal structures. The poem reflects the chaos of the time, mirroring the psychological effects of sudden changes, such as World War I and the tuberculosis epidemic. The surrealist narrator crafts a world where the boundaries between the conscious and unconscious, the tangible and the intangible dissolve. With a fragmented narrative, the poem features automatic writing and symbolic imagery to reveal the unconscious mind.

The poem is composed in free verse, without thematic boundaries, and has no punctuation. Divided into three parts with a total of 84 lines, it features an inconsistent stanzaic structure—three stanzas in the first part, two in the second, and one long stanza in the third—each representing a different aspect of the inner and outer worlds. The language is rich in metaphor and symbolic imagery, with devices like assonance, alliteration and repetition enhancing the poem's musicality. The omniscient narrator shifts between intimacy and distance, delving into the hidden spaces of the psyche, where boundaries between the conscious and unconscious blur. The poem suggests that true awakening comes not from avoiding the unconscious, but from engaging with it and integrating its hidden truths. Central to the poem is the symbolic progression from external forces to the feminine, with the narrator revealing the feminine unconscious to critique societal structure through figures like mother, virgin, queen and Isis. The poem also serves as a historiography of the interwar period, referencing geographic locations, like "america," "yorkshire," "france" and "spain," where lowercase letters liberate them from traditional punctuation. Gascoyne's dream-like narration and imagery can be interpreted through both Bretonnian surrealist theories and Freudian theories of the unconscious and dreams.

The poem begins with an unusual title, introduced *in media res*,[15] stimulating curiosity by hiding its background. The title metaphorically suggests irony, offering multiple interpretations. Linguistically, the linker "And" implies a continuation from a previous narrative, but it also indicates that this is the final part of the dream series, the "seventh dream." Isis[16] is "an ancient Egyptian symbol of eternal life (…) symboliz[ing] the dynamic perfection of a complete cycle" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 859). In mythology, Isis was accompanied by seven giant scorpions, who protected her son Horus from her brother Set. "These [scorpions] were her protectors" (Mackenzie, 1907, p. 18). The "seventh" also evokes "the day on which God rested from the task of Creation (…) The seventh day's rest marks a compact between God and humanity" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 862). Biblically, "the seventh dream" "refers to the Christian prayer of grieving Virgin

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Mary, who had a prophetic dream of the crucifixion and death of her son" (Pradivlianna, 2018, p. 34). Thus, "the seventh dream of Isis" signifies a radical transformation, binding the previous dreams to the final one. The surrealist nature of the poem emerges as these linguistic, symbolic, mythological, and biblical elements seem disconnected. Produced during the tumultuous interwar period, the poem's multi-dimensional imagery depicts a setting filled with decay, corruption, wars, epidemic illnesses and sexual perversion. As Pradivlianna (2019) suggests, "erotic and violent contexts are typical for surrealist practices" (p. 82). The first stanza of the first part captures this atmosphere vividly:

> white curtains of infinite fatigue[17]
> dominating the starborn heritage of the colonies of St Francis
> white curtains of tortured destinies
> inheriting the calamities of the plagues
> of the desert encourage the waistlines of women to expand
> and the eyes of men to enlarge like pocket-cameras
> teach children to sin at the age of five
> to cut out the eyes of their sisters with nail-scissors
> to run into the streets and offer themselves to unfrocked priests
> teach insects to invade the deathbeds of rich spinsters
> and to engrave the foreheads of their footmen with purple signs
> for the year is open the year is complete
> the year is full of unforeseen happenings
> and the time of earthquakes is at hand (Lines 1-14)

The opening stanza presents surreal images of corruption and decay, depicting a world distorted by the war. Gascoyne's narrator introduces a dream-like setting where reality and abstraction blend in a fragmented flow. The imagery of "white curtains of infinite fatigue," "tortured destinies" and "calamities of plagues" creates an overwhelming sense of suffering and death and suggests exhaustion and the repression of unconscious desires. Freud argued that "People repress, or drive from their conscious minds, shameful thoughts that, then, become unconscious" (As cited in Billig, 1999, p. 1). Donald Carveth suggested that "Psychoanalysis teaches us that the unconscious exists and that the repressed returns in disguised forms" (Carveth, n.d., para. 1). So, the "curtain" image depicts the narrator's unconscious mind, symbolising a veil that hides trauma. The dual meaning of "white" is also significant. While the word "white" signifies light and purity, it also evokes the "White Death" or "Great White Plague," often associated with "Tuberculosis" (TB), prevalent in the 19th and 20th centuries. "It was during [the 19th] century that tuberculosis was dubbed the White Plague" (Madkour & Warrel, 2004, p. 20) due to the excessive anaemic pallor it caused in those who were affected. The "colonies of St Francis" blends religious and colonial imagery, suggesting an inheritance of worldly burdens. These metaphorical images imply that "destinies" and "calamities" are fated for humanity, shaped by external forces.

Feminine unconsciousness enters the surrealist stage via images of pregnant women "[whose] waistlines [are] encourag[ed to expand]," "sisters" and "spinsters," offering dualities and multiple interpretations. On the literal level, the "expand[ing] waistlines of women" invokes pregnancy and fertility, representing motherhood's nurturing qualities. The pregnant figure represents the female unconscious, surrounded by "white curtains of tortured destinies." However, the surreal context, marked by "calamities of the plagues," complicates motherhood, suggesting that the pregnant woman brings both life and suffering. This reflects the darker side of the maternal image, as the grotesque phrase "expanding waistlines" represents a corrupted form of femininity. The images of "sisters," "spinsters" and "virgins" ironically evoke ordinary religious women serving God and leading mundane lives, but these figures are also distorted. The image of the "rich spinsters" on decaying "deathbeds," invaded by "insects,"[18] signifies the loss of unfulfilled feminine power and the decline of sacred institutions. The phrase "eyes of men" growing like "pocket-cameras" implies men's fixation on observations, detached from deeper

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[17] The poem is quoted from *On the Thirteenth Stroke of Midnight: Surrealist Poetry in Britain*, Remy, 2013, pp. 91-93. The original punctuation marks have been preserved as per this source throughout the article.
[18] Insects are often used in surrealist works. See, for example, Salvador Dalí's *Hallucinogenous Bullfighter* (1969-1970), from https://www.artchive.com/artwork/hallucinogenous-bullfighter-salvador-dali-1969-1970/. Insects and butterflies are used to depict the breakdown of reality.

connections with the feminine. Disturbing scenes, like "children [taught] to sin at the age of five to cut out the eyes of their sisters with nail-scissors" subvert societal norms, violating childhood innocence and distorting the concept of "sisterhood." This echoes Freud's ideas of the primal unconscious, where repressed violent forces emerge.

The act of "cut[ting] out the eyes" represents an invasive force. From a Freudian perspective, these images represent a confrontation with the unconscious. The phrase "cut[ing] out the eyes" evokes *Un Chien Andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*), (1929), a French silent film by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. The film's opening scene, where a man slices a woman's eyeball with a razor, reflects the surrealist use of shocking imagery. "The image of a knife cutting through the moon, 'like a razor blade slicing through an eye,' was one that Buñuel had dreamed and even told Dalí about" (Greenberger, 2024, para. 4). The grotesque imagery of decay and destruction, such as the "children [being taught] to sin at the age of five," the "eyes [being] cut out with nail-scissors," and "the streets (…) full of hearses" evokes a nightmare-like narration of societal breakdown and corruption.

The image "unfrocked priests" adds to the corruption of religious structures. While the "priest" is typically a masculine figure of the sacred authority, the expression "unfrocked priests" complicates this, suggesting a loss of purity or sacredness and symbolising the fall of traditional divine authority. From a psychoanalytical aspect, the "unfrocked priest" may be linked to Jung's concept of the "anima"[19] and "animus."[20] Alternatively, it might evoke the image of "priestess" since the word "frock" refers to a woman's dress. Robert Hopcke notes that the Jungian concept of the animus is the "unconscious feminine side" (1999, p. 84). As Jung defined it, the "animus" is "the figure of a man at work in a woman's psyche" (Jung, 1991, as cited in Samuels et al., 1986, p. 23). This interpretation highlights the deceptive nature of gendered religious authorities, and the shifting, complex relationship the unconscious mind has with corruption, guilt and death. The "earthquake" represents the eruption of repressed emotions as a destructive yet transformative force breaking through the psyche's surface, mirroring Freud's idea of the unconscious, where chaotic forces exist outside of conscious control.

In the second stanza of the poem's first part, death comes out and everything collapses. This represents the surrealist theme of blending death with everyday life:

> today is the day when the streets are full of hearses
> and when women cover their ring fingers with pieces of silk
> when the doors fall off their hinges in ruined cathedrals
> when hosts of white birds fly across the ocean from america
> and make their nests in the trees of public gardens
> the pavements of cities are covered with needles
> the reservoirs are full of human hair
> fumes of sulphur envelop the houses of ill-fame
> out of which bloodred lilies appear. (Lines 15-23)

"Today is the day" refers to mourning as well as the liminal space between life and death. Death, a recurring motif in the poem, portrays both transformation and the end of a life stage. References to "streets that are "full of hearses," "ruined cathedrals," "reservoirs full of human hair," and "bloodred lilies" evoke both physical and mental transformation. In this sense, death is not just literal, but also a symbolic change for personal and collective individuation.

From the feminine perspective, women's commitment to marriage is surrealistically subverted when "women cover their ring fingers with pieces of silk." The "ring finger," traditionally signifying marriage and the expression is disrupted by the image of "pieces of silk [covered on the] ring fingers," which evokes women's dedication in relationships. However, the poem complicates this by alluding to male-dominated societal roles and creating a surreal flow of threads. The phrases "pavements of cities (…) covered with needles," "the reservoirs (…) full of human hair" and "fumes of sulphur" embody grotesque images, suggesting a breakdown of social order while alluding to death and suffering. The "bloodred lilies" are associated with both birth and death, as flowers often represent new life and blood is linked to violence. The "fumes of sulphur" and

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[19] The term "Anima" in Latin means "soul" and represents the feminine aspect of a man's unconscious.
[20] The term "Animus," meaning "mind" or "spirit," symbolises the masculine side of a woman's unconscious.

"needles" symbolise pain or destructive side of women, where nurturing turns into harm, and creation coexists with destruction. The phrase "needles (…) full of human hair" suggests decay and the loss of vitality, evoking nature's regenerative forces. The second part of the poem begins with a couplet that extends the theme of death to reflect physical deformity, decay and discomfort, creating a surreal scene:

> across the square where crowds are dying in thousands
> a man is walking a tightrope covered with moths (Lines 24-25)

The narrator begins with portraying the suffering of a solitary man, who symbolises all of humanity and struggles to maintain balance in the face of destruction. The phrase "crowds (…) dying in thousands" and the image of "a man walking [on the] tightrope covered with moths" create a dissonant juxtaposition. While the "tightrope" walker represents the balance between life and death, the image of the "moths" represents death, as the moths will eventually consume the tightrope on which he walks. The "square," a public space, evokes a scene where large groups gather and the metaphor "dying in thousands" suggests chaos and loss. The next section continues by merging beauty and the grotesque in an unsettling atmosphere, creating a surreal juxtaposition:

> there is an explosion of geraniums in the ballroom of the hotel
> there is an extremely unpleasant odour of decaying meat
> arising from the depetalled flower growing out of her ear
> her arms are like pieces of sandpaper
> or wings of leprous birds in taxis
> and when she sings her hair stands on end
> and lights itself with a million little lamps like glowworms
> you must always write the last two letters of her christian name
> upside down with a blue pencil (Lines 26-34)

The "ballroom of the hotel" is also a public space, but this time a more formal setting for dancing. It contrasts with the image of an "explosion," where bombs explode while some people continue dancing. The juxtaposition of the "geraniums" and the "unpleasant odour of decaying meat" further heightens the sense of unexpected intensity. From the feminist perspective, the comparison between the woman's arms, resembling "pieces of sandpaper" and "leprous birds," evokes a sense of bodily decay and social alienation.

The final two lines introduce an ironic imagery with a bizarre and sacred tone. The reference to the "christian name" is intriguing, particularly given the biblical, mythological and symbolic nature of the poem. The action of flipping the final two letters of the "christian name (…) with a blue pencil" represents an artistic gesture that disrupts the traditional understanding of identity. It could metaphorically refer to any identity that is being reversed, questioned, or transformed. The color "blue" signifies the "blue pencil doctrine," a legal rule which is used in agreements.[21] Thus, this argument represents the idea of modifying or adjusting a document without changing the whole.

Isis transcends conventional goddess roles, evolving from the grieving wife and sister of Osiris into a deity that embodies both healing and destruction. Although Isis is not a Christian name, the poem's reference to her "christian name" may be a symbolic inversion. She represents a cosmic figure with access to the divine and unconscious realms, guiding the narrator throughout the unconscious landscape of the poem. Isis represents both nurturing and overwhelming forces, often representing transformation, particularly via her role in the myth of Osiris.[22] In the myth, she resurrects her husband, Osiris, after his death, signifying the cycles of life and death, and personal reinvention. According to the legend,

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[21] "Blue pencil rule" is "a [legal] term that comes from the concept of the court striking out the offending portions of the contract with a copy editor's blue pencil" (n.d., para. 2). https://www.lawdistrict.com/legal-dictionary/blue-pencil-rule
[22] See, ancient illustrations of *Isis and Osiris* from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Isis-Egyptian-goddess#/media/1/295449/96121

Isis is depicted searching for her murdered brother and husband Osiris, whom she restored to life with her breath, suckling her son, Horus;[23] or in funeral processions protecting the dead in the shadow of her wings and bringing them back to life (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 544).

As a figure of transformation, death, and rebirth, Isis serves as a symbol of change. The reference to her "christian name" is less about literal identification and more about subverting conventional identities, particularly those associated with the feminine and the divine. Writing her name "upside down" evokes Isis' subverted identity, suggesting that female identity is fluid, not fixed. The second part concludes with a stanza that represents the feminine unconscious:

> she was standing at the window clothed only in a ribbon
> she was burning the eyes of snails in a candle
> she was eating the excrement of dogs and horses
> she was writing a letter to the president of france (Lines 35-38)

From a feminist perspective, this stanza critiques societal expectations imposed on women. The anaphoric use of "she" amplifies the female figure, while the image of the woman "standing at the window" and barely "clothed except for a ribbon" evokes both fragility and exposure. The ribbon, often linked to femininity, innocence and romantic commitment, contrasts with her exposed state, suggesting duality of vulnerability and empowerment. Her actions, "burning the eyes of snails in a candle" and "eating excrement of dogs and horses" are disturbing and surreal. While snails are typically harmless and slow-moving creatures, their violent treatment represents a distortion of perception or a loss of innocence. These grotesque and ritualistic acts tap into Freud's concept of the unconscious as a repository for taboo desires, symbolising the violation and suppression of the feminine by societal norms. The "dogs and horses," domesticated animals, further emphasise women's rejection of traditional roles. By means of these violent and taboo acts, the woman figure exists outside societal norms, challenging both morality and the roles that confine her, ultimately revealing the feminine unconscious.

The surreal and symbolic nature of the poem suggests a deep engagement with the feminine and the transformative power of Isis, representing a femininity that transcends fixed gender structures. "Eating excrement" is a taboo act, but within the context of mythology, it could represent both nurturing and destructive forces, as well as the sacred reversal of forms. Mythologically, Isis functions on several layers, often associated with wisdom, magic, and the cycle of life and death. Her role as a powerful female figure empowers her maternal and reproductive identity. Her subversive force crosses boundaries between life and death, creation and destruction, suggesting that the feminine divine Isis is being reversed, subverted, or altered. Isis' association with the mystical also symbolises deeper, often hidden aspects of transformation. Metonymically, Isis represents a universal figure rather than an individual one. Martin Bommas described Isis as a deity who speaks most with the other deities, highlighting her universal role:

> In ancient Egyptian texts, no deity speaks more that Isis. The goddess was depicted as interacting with other deities. (…) Her verbal communication was a pivotal factor in the development of her cult as the world's first universal religion (…) Isis, companion of the god Osiris and mother of their child, Horus, is a prime example of the eloquence of the Egyptian gods (Bommas, 2022, paras. 1,3).

The "Christian name" might symbolically refer to Isis or another mythic female figure, challenging and transforming conventional identities. In this context, the feminine unconscious evokes imagery tied to mythological, feminine and religious figures. These images reject traditional Christian gender roles and embrace more ancient, primal feminine powers**.** The actions, like "burning snail," "eating excrements" and "writing a letter" seem disconnected, representing a realm of instinct, chaos and irrationality. The image of "writing a letter to the president of france," a figure of authority, seems out of place after the chaotic and disturbing imagery. However, this act might evoke women's desire to communicate with external authority. Yet, this woman's bizarre behaviour reveals a reaction. She embodies both personal and social rebellion, suggesting the tension between the maternal and the political.

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[23] See, the bronze sculpture of *Isis nursing Horus* from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Isis-Egyptian-goddess#/media/1/295449/136925

This section resembles a visionary dream, similar to the previous part, filled with bizarre and grotesque imagery. The images "dying crowds," the "tightrope" walker, and the "moths" create a surreal blend of life and death, fragility and decay, weakness and power. The third part of the poem is the longest and can be divided into three sections. The first section begins with the image of "through microscopes," blending everyday objects with the grotesque to create a dream-like setting:

> the edges of leaves must be examined through microscopes
> in order to see the stains made by dying flies
> at the other end of the tube is a woman bathing her husband
> and a box of newspapers covered with handwriting
> when an angel writes the word TOBACCO across the sky
> the sea becomes covered with patches of dandruff
> the trunks of trees burst open to release streams of milk
> little girls stick photographs of genitals to the windows of their homes
> prayerbooks in churches open themselves at the death service
> and virgins cover their parents' beds with tealeaves (Lines 39-48)

The poem offers a surreal mix of absurd images, apocalyptic visions, and a sense of the collapse of order, subverting traditional structures of sex, knowledge, morality and death. Descriptions like "the edges of leaves" being examined under microscopes, and "the sea [turning into] patches of dandruff" reflect a world where physical and symbolic structures disintegrate into chaotic imagery. The "microscope" signifies the unconscious, revealing hidden realities, while "dying flies" represent death and decay. The reference to an angel, writing "TOBACCO" across the sky, alongside images of decay and plagues, suggests a cycle of cosmic ruin, possibly signifying the intrusion of desire, overwhelming the civilized self. The surreal collapse of order mirrors the breakdown of repression, with "stains made by dying flies," evoking unconscious forces, breaking through conscious control.

From the perspective of the feminine unconscious, the phrase "the trunks of trees releas[ing] streams of milk" evokes maternal imagery, symbolising life-giving sustenance that could be both nourishing and overwhelming. "Streaming milk" reflects both care and the excessive nature of the maternal figure, while the phrase "bursting trees" represents the release of repressed unconscious forces, possibly maternal instincts or destructive feminine energies. In surrealist works, religion and sexuality often converge, representing repressed desires and the unconscious mind's attempt is to break free from constraints. The symbolic connection between sexual and religious imagery, such as "little girls stick[ing] photographs on genitals," subverts societal taboos and reveals hidden unconscious forces. The word "virgins" typically represents purity, while "cover[ing] beds" suggests an intimate or caretaking act. The inclusion of "tealeaves" introduces a ritualistic element, often associated with comfort, healing, and protection in some cultures. The "virgins" may be considered as caretaker, almost taking on a protective role for their parents. Alternatively, there may be a sense of cyclical life, where virgins—on the brink of adulthood or sexuality—care for their parents' personal lives or intimate spaces. Thus, "cover[ing] beds with tealeaves" represents a caretaking gesture and a tribute to familial connections. The juxtaposition of "virgins" with a domestic task blends innocence with the mundane, symbolising their transition from childhood to adulthood, as they undertake a more mature role.

Putting it all together, the first section of the third part combines ritual and innocence with the grotesque, suggesting deeper layers of meaning that could be explored within the larger context of the poem. This section can be interpreted as a surreal exploration of the idea that after decay, plague and war, something new will emerge, much like Isis's resurrection of Osiris and the ongoing cycles of life and death. This represents the dawn of a new era, potentially marking the rise of Modernism. The second section of the third part opens with the depiction of the tuberculosis epidemic:

> there is an extraordinary epidemic of tuberculosis in yorkshire
> where medical dictionaries are banned from the public libraries
> and salt turns a pale violet colour every day at seven o'clock
> when the hearts of troubadours unfold like soaked mattresses
> when the leaven of the gruesome slum-visitors
> and the wings of private airplanes look like shoeleather

shoeleather on which pentagrams have been drawn
shoeleather covered with vomitings of hedgehogs
shoeleather used for decorating wedding-cakes
and the gums of queens like glass marbles
queens whose wrists are chained to the walls of houses
and whose fingernails are covered with little drawings of flowers
we rejoice to receive the blessing of criminals
and we illuminate the roofs of convents when they are hung
we look through a telescope on which the lord's prayer has been written
and we see an old woman making a scarecrow
on a mountain near a village in the middle of spain
we see an elephant killing a stag-beetle
by letting hot tears fall onto the small of its back
we see a large cocoa-tin full of shapeless lumps of wax (Line 49-68)

This section is filled with fragmented and unsettling images, depicting the chaotic and dehumanizing aspects of war and epidemics, turning the narrative into a nightmarish reality. The portrayal of tuberculosis is followed by the banishment of medical knowledge, symbolising the ignorance and repression of this chaotic period. The image of "tuberculosis" illustrates society's blindness to confronting the reality of terminal illness and its sufferings. The epidemic, much like war, is destructive, affecting the community at large, while the banning of "medical dictionaries" represents the suppression of knowledge or truth. The epidemic is not only biological, but also represents how societal norms and institutions become tainted by suffering and trauma. This was argued earlier in the poem, with references to "white curtains of infinite fatigue" and "white curtains of tortured destinies." "For centuries, tuberculosis was one of the major causes of illness (morbidity) and death (mortality) in human beings (…) the experience [of tuberculosis] in interwar England and Wales" (Bowden & Sadler, 2015, p. 101), which was also prevalent in Yorkshire in the 1930s, both psychologically and physically affected individuals and society.

The "soaked mattress" evokes heaviness, representing the collapse of emotional and physical defences. The "private airplanes look[ing] like shoeleather" and "drawn pentagrams" suggest the toll of war, while "vomitings of hedgehogs" evoke the turmoil of plague. The expressions "decorat[ing] wedding-cakes" and "the gums of queens like glass marble" symbolise the decay of aristocracy. From the feminine unconscious, "queens whose wrists are chained to the walls of houses" symbolically portray the restriction of the feminine spirit, highlighting women's powerlessness. Their "fingernails covered with little drawings of flowers" could be seen as fragility and the loss of the hope in the midst of war and illness. The "roofs of convents" are typically sacred spaces where nuns reside, but they become a corrupted setting, where holy people "are hung." The "written prayer of the lord," viewed through a "telescope," represents the futility of religious practices in a rotten world. The image of the "old woman making a scarecrow" symbolises age and fragility, while the mention of "a village in the middle of spain" invokes the Spanish Civil War occurred in the 1930s. The expressions "elephant killing a stag-beetle," "hot tears fall[ing]" and "large cocoa-tin full of shapeless lumps of wax" evoke the massive scars left on both the people of Spain and the landscape, metaphorically implying that the effects of the war and plague are even felt in rural areas. Overall, this section merges the imagery of plague, war and the feminine unconscious, critiquing the breakdown of societal and moral structures. The final section of the third part begins with a medical figure:

there is a horrible dentist walking out of a ship's funnel
and leaving behind him footsteps which make noises
on account of his accent he was discharged from the sanatorium
and sent to examine the methods of cannibals
so that wreaths of passion-flowers were floating in the darkness
giving terrible illnesses to the possessors of pistols
so that large quantities of rats disguised as pigeons
were sold to various customers from neighbouring towns
who were adepts at painting gothic letters on screens
and at tying up parcels with pieces of grass
we told them to cut off the buttons on their trousers

but they swore in our faces and took off their shoes
whereupon the whole place was stifled with vast clouds of smoke
and with theatres and eggshells and droppings of eagles
and the drums of the hospitals were broken like glass
and glass were the faces in the last looking-glass. (Lines 69-84).

The "dentist walking out" is described as "horrible" in the narrow "ship's funnel," subverting the typical role of a medical figure. The image of the dentist becomes unsettling, merging medical imagery with violence, as his presence disrupts the atmosphere with "footsteps which make noises." "Discharged from the sanatorium" due to "accent," the dentist is linked with cannibalism, evoking brutality. His dismissal due to his accent suggests the marginalization of the outsider, indicating how war and illness often lead to the exclusion of certain groups. The reference to "examining the methods of cannibals" ties the dentist to savagery, marking a cruel relationship between medical authority and violence in times of war, where care is replaced by dehumanization. The phrases "wreaths of passion-flowers (…) floating in the darkness" and "terrible illnesses to the possessors of pistols" intertwine the themes of the plague and the war, with the flowers taking on a darker role. Traditionally, flowers represent love and beauty, but from the perspective of the feminine consciousness and within the surrealist context, the "passion-flowers," embodied by the "possessors of pistols," symbolise the eruption of the repressed feelings, distorting the feminine experience, which brings suffering, disease and destruction.

The phrase "rats disguised as pigeons" illustrates how societal structure pressures, particularly during times of war and illness, force women to adopt false roles. These roles disguise their true identities as patriarchal structures often limit the roles women can take on. The image of "large quantities of rats" represents decay and societal rot, embodying the pervasive fears that emerge in times of upheaval. The phrase "adepts at painting gothic letters on screens" represents a loss of reason, compounded by the rebellious act of "cut[ting] off the buttons on their trousers," which evokes defiance against oppressive gender roles. Similarly, the act of "sw[earing] in our faces" evokes the feminist reclaiming of identity and autonomy in response to restrictive forces. The grotesque imagery of "the whole place was stifled with vast clouds of smoke" and the "[broken] the drums of the hospitals" deepens the sense of violence and chaos brought on by war, representing the collapse of societal structures—social, political and medical—evoking disintegration and upheaval. The expression of the space "stifled with vast clouds of smoke" and the "[broken]drums of the hospitals" signify the suffering of the plague and the violence of the war. It suggests the collapse of the established social, political and medical structures. The expressions "broken like glass" and the "faces in the last looking-glass" powerfully represent the disintegration of identity and the fracturing of the self in a world turned "upside down," echoing an earlier imagery in the poem, where Isis's feminine identity is subverted. The "last looking-glass" marks the end of rigid gender roles, with the breaking of the "glass" representing the shattering of these roles, leading to the emergence of the unconscious feminine, challenging the established order. To summarize, the poem presents a chaotic view of war, illness, and the feminine unconscious, and depicts the collapse of societal, political and medical structures, which eventually transform to a new reality. It portrays the unconscious not just as a site of repression, but also a powerful force necessary for individual, societal, feminist and collective change.

Conclusion

David Gascoyne's "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis" is a seminal work in British surrealist poetry, blending fragmented imagery, mythological allusions, fragmented imagery, and dream-like narration to explore the depts of the unconscious. The poem portrays the psychological, political and cultural aftermath of World War I and the epidemics of the time, suggesting that true growth and transformation—whether personal, collective, or mythological—emerges through confrontation with chaos, decay and the unconscious. Drawing on Bretonnian "psychic automatism" and Freudian psychoanalysis, Gascoyne reimagines the unconscious not as a repressed force, but as a site of renewal. The poem also navigates the dual nature of the feminine unconscious, portrayed as both creative and destructive—a dynamic that mirrors the surrealist pursuit of the deeper layers of meaning and truth.

The poem's fragmented form, irregular stanzaic structure and erratic rhythm reflect the nonlinear nature of the unconscious, inviting intuitive and symbolic interpretation. Its use of free verse and shifting imagery enhances its surreal, dream-like quality, embodying the psychic instability associated with transformation. Blending ancient and contemporary, real and surreal and religious and obscene, the poem functions as a metaphorical journey through unconscious desires, apocalyptic

visions, and the feminine unconscious in a world on the brink of war. Female figures, such as the "mother," "priestess", "virgin," "queen" and the Egyptian goddess Isis guide the narrator through this psychic landscape, each embodying both life-giving and destructive forces. The myth of Isis serves the poem's central symbol, embodying themes of death, rebirth, nurturing and chaos and drawing attention to the cyclical nature of life and death.

While previous studies have mainly focused on the poem's linguistic characteristics and surrealist techniques, this study offers a broader interdisciplinary analysis by incorporating psychoanalytic, mythological, and feminist perspectives. Through this multifaceted methodology, it uncovers deeper layers within Gascoyne's work, highlighting its engagement with the unconscious, archetypal symbolism and representations of the feminine.

David Gascoyne's "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis," stands out as a pioneering work of British surrealism, offering a profound exploration of the unconscious, feminine representations, and the mythological cycles of creation and destruction. By situating the poem within broader cultural and psychological contexts, the study displays its enduring relevance within the surrealist movement and its ongoing legacy. The poem captures the complexity of human existence and the collective trauma of the post-World War I era, including the devastating impact of the epidemic on society and the individual psyche. Through fragmented and surreal imagery, this article charts a symbolic journey of psychic rupture and eventual renewal. The breakdown of gendered, societal and personal structures signals the end of an old order, making way for a new era, Modernism. Surrealist works like Gascoyne's continue to resonate today for their psychological depth, innovation, complexity and imaginative power. Viewed through the lenses of Breton, Freud, Jung, mythology and feminism, this study reaffirms the lasting significance of "And the Seventh Dream is the Dream of Isis," revitalizing Surrealism and marking its relevance both in the centenary and beyond.

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