

## Meeting André Breton: An Interview with Annie Le Brun<sup>1</sup>

**Histoires littéraires:** What was the discovery or personal contact that was revelatory for you?

**Annie Le Brun:** It's very simple. When I was around 17 years old, I was so ill at ease with both the world and the path that was proposed to me. . . . The famous history of the "century for hands."<sup>2</sup> My only desire was to do nothing useful. No serious profession was seductive to me, and I was in such a state of revolt against this world that there was no question of following any of the roads that were open to me. I was famished in a certain way, and I read everything I could. And so I happened to read the Surrealist books, first the books by Breton, even though, at that moment, they were very hard to find in the provinces,<sup>3</sup> which is where I was. It was my brother who gave me a copy of *Nadja*,<sup>4</sup> and I was dazzled by it. And so, I copied out by hand *L'Amour fou* and the *Anthologie de l'humour noir*.<sup>5</sup> What fascinated me was the fact that, even if these books didn't necessarily answer all the questions that I was asking, I found in them preoccupations that appeared essential to me. What is desire? What is thinking? How to accept the "unacceptable human condition"? – In short, how to live?

**Q:** And so you were determined to leave the provinces and go to Paris.

**A:** In any case, I wanted to leave, if only to be somewhere else. Chance had it that one of my friends knew Breton and introduced me to him during a visit to Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, which is in the Lot,<sup>6</sup> where he went during his vacations. I was so intimidated that I practically didn't open my mouth. But Breton said to me, with courtesy and kindness, "If you come to Paris next year, let me know."

**Q:** When did that take place?

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<sup>1</sup> *Histoires littéraires* #16 (Oct-Nov-Dec 2003). Translated by NOT BORED! 17 January 2019. All footnotes by the translator.

<sup>2</sup> A quote from Arthur Rimbaud, "Mauvais sang," *Une saison en enfer* (1873).

<sup>3</sup> Ms. Le Brun was born in Rennes, France, in 1942.

<sup>4</sup> André Breton, *Nadja*, first published in 1928. Revised and corrected by Breton himself in 1962.

<sup>5</sup> Books written by Breton and published in 1937 and 1940, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> A department in the Occitanie region of France.

**A:** During the summer of 1963.

**Q:** So, shortly before Breton's death.<sup>7</sup> Did this encounter and the very person of Breton confirm for you the appeal that you'd felt?

**A:** As I've said, I was very impressed with Breton as a person and it was difficult to not be impressed by him. Nevertheless, although I managed to get to Paris, I did not contact Breton immediately once I was there. My revolt, which was as much social as it was intellectual, first led me towards an extremely lively political radicalism, which kept me away from Surrealism for a while. But very quickly I found that I could not tolerate the systematic concealment of the perceptible world that, in those milieus, seemed to go hand-in-hand with the search for political effectiveness. Obviously it was surely not on that side that my hunger would be satisfied. All of a sudden, I remembered Breton's invitation. I wrote to him and, two days later, he responded. Even today I am still astonished by how accessible Breton was to a very young person such as myself.

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<sup>7</sup> Breton died on 26 September 1966.