

L'OXYMORE FEMININ CHEZ ROBERT DESNOS ET BENJAMIN PERET

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In this thesis, I examine the work of two male poets, Robert Desnos (1900-1945) and Benjamin Péret (1899-1959), to analyze what I shall call “the feminine oxymoron”. An oxymoron is a poetic device that combines opposites to create a brand new image. In the discursive, narrative and poetic texts written by Desnos and Péret, the “feminine oxymoron” is constituted by paradoxical images of women, linked to the poets’ complex views of gender, love and eroticism.

My study is divided into three major parts, based on distinctions of genre: discursive (Desnos : De l’Erotisme considéré dans ses manifestations littéraires et du point de vue de l’esprit moderne, 1923, Péret : Le Noyau de la Comète, 1956 ) ; narrative (Desnos: La Liberté ou l’Amour !, 1927, Péret : Les Rouilles Encagées, 1938) ; and poetic (Desnos : La Mystérieuse, 1930, Péret : Je Sublime, 1936).

I show how Desnos and Péret are both similar to other surrealists in their representation of women, but also different, with their own style and erotic vocabulary. Literary critics such as Annie Le Brun (Lachez Tout, 1977; Sade, Allers et Détours, 1989), Mary-Ann Caws (Seeing the Surrealist Woman: we are a problem, 1991) and Katharine Conley (Automatic Woman: the Representation of Woman in Surrealism, 1996) help me discover to what extent Desnos and Péret pursue the same scheme. This thesis also questions the way in which these two poets deal with eroticism and love, using works by Robert Benyaoum (L’Erotique du Surréalisme, 1965), Jean Deccotignès (L’Invention de la Poésie, 1994) and Raymond Jean (La Poétique du Désir, 1974).