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## **A wizard / witch's duel: gender power struggles and the occult in surrealism**

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# A Wizard / Witch's Duel: Gender Power Struggles and the Occult in Surrealism

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Surrealists of both genders identified themselves with occult figures such as the alchemist, the magician, the shaman and the witch in order to increase their connection with both the physical and spiritual creativity that is associated with such figures as the transformers of matter, and / or mediums to another world.

This paper will discuss the ways in which Surrealist artists used depictions of various occult figures as part of a gendered power struggle for creative autonomy. Using examples from some less well known Surrealists, it will largely focus on the male appropriation of female abilities but also demonstrate how women artists responded to this specific appropriation.<sup>1</sup>

Surrealism has often been mistakenly accused of misogyny – Hans Bellmer's sexually explicit and dismembered dolls and André Masson's violent 'Massacre' series no doubt fuelling such accusations.<sup>2</sup> In reality, the Surrealists did have a progressive attitude towards women's rights, calling for their social and sexual liberation.<sup>3</sup> Despite this however, male Surrealists still tended to divide women into two restrictive categories: the *femme enfant*, who was innocent of her sexual attraction and acted as a muse for the male artist, and the *femme fatale*, who was the highly sexual, provocative, castrating woman. Not all women artists connected to Surrealism appreciated this binary view. Perhaps it was Leonora Carrington (1917-) however, who most succinctly summarised the antithetical attitude of some women Surrealists' to the *femme enfant / femme fatale*: when asked in an interview what she thought of the concept of the Surrealist woman as muse she replied "bullshit".<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, it also seems as though some men were usurping what were seen as women's age-old legendary abilities, such as clairvoyancy and procreativity, which had given women such powerful status in primitive societies. In 1925 André Breton, the leader of Surrealism, wrote a 'letter to seers', whom he seems to categorise as being exclusively female, urging them to give up their passivity.<sup>5</sup> In 1937 in his *L'Amour Fou*, he then describes himself as a guide who is able to 'see' and enable others to 'see'.<sup>6</sup> This may suggest that Breton, and perhaps also some like-minded Surrealists, finding female seers still too passive, have taken on their role as mystical oracular beings due to this new found ability to 'see'. It also seems that some Surrealist men attempted to take over the procreative function of women for themselves. Indeed, Whitney Chadwick notes that a primary concern for some male Surrealists was the "symbolic transference of the procreative processes from the female to the male".<sup>7</sup>

Thus a battle between the sexes for power and autonomy began to be waged. This conflict was at least partially fought using occult imagery, largely from alchemy and Tarot. The male artists arguably used such imagery as part of the Surrealist quest for a new mythology; imbuing ancient occult iconography with new meanings that could only be understood by those initiated into the group. The female Surrealists used this same kind of iconography as a way of subverting this aim: by putting their

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on research made during my MPhil in History of Art, which I completed in 2006, and my current PhD research. I would like to thank the AHRC for providing the funds which has made this postgraduate research possible. All measurements are in cm unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> Two key texts frequently cited as attacking the perceived misogyny in Surrealism are: Xavière Gauthier, *Surréalisme et Sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) and Robert J. Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Mirrors: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation" in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge MA, London: MIT Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 66.

<sup>5</sup> André Breton, «Letter to Seers» (1925) in *The Sources of Surrealism: Art in Context*, ed. Neil Matheson, 347 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> André Breton, «L'Amour Fou» (1937) in *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings of André Breton*, ed. Franklin Rosemont 166 (London: Pluto Press, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> Whitney Chadwick, "Eros and Thanatos – The Surrealist Cult of Love Re-examined" *Art Forum* 14 (1975), 50. Quoted in David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst: The Bride Shared* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 83. Chadwick also notes in her *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, that women artists used the concept of the sorceress as an expression of "the sublime power of parthenogenesis or *unaided conception*" (Chadwick, 1985. Chadwick's emphasis). This suggests that women artists fought back against this male usurpation of their creative role.

own spin on this imagery they could create an exclusively female secret society, one from which all men, Surrealist or otherwise, would be excluded.

### The Wizard / Witch

Victor Brauner: *Le Surréaliste*, 1947 oil on canvas, 60 x 40, Peggy Guggenheim Collection. © ADAGP Paris and DACS, London 2009. Photography © Guggenheim Museum.<sup>8</sup>

One example of the Surrealists' identification with occult figures can be found in the Romanian artist Victor Brauner's *Le Surréaliste* 1947 in which the Surrealist artist is depicted as the 'Magician' character of Tarot's Major Arcana. Like the Tarot card, the artist has the symbol for infinity above his head and holds a baton, indicating the adage reportedly created by Hermes Trismegistus, the so-called father of alchemy, namely "as above, so below". Similarly, on the rather anthropomorphic table in front of Brauner's artist, we may note the symbolic objects representing the suits of the Minor Arcana: cups, swords and coins, just as in the original Tarot card. These Tarot suits are gendered, so that swords and batons, referenced by the baton the artist holds, are masculine, while cups and coins, or pentacles as they are sometimes known, are feminine.

The combination of male and female gendered artefacts compliments the androgyny of the figure, both in Brauner's painting and the original card. However, we may still link this image to a male conquest for power through the fact that there was a long tradition of viewing the feminised male as a positive kind of androgyne, while the masculinised female was negative, a *femme fatale*.<sup>9</sup> This tradition can be seen in the works of alchemists through their positive depiction of the androgynous god Mercury, and also in the alchemical androgyne itself, which acted as a symbol of the beginning, end or an allegory of the whole Great Work.<sup>10</sup>

In general, depictions of the nude androgyne by alchemists such as Michael Maier, show it as a two-headed figure, one male, one female, with either both male and female genitalia, or none at all. However, the body of the androgyne is anatomically masculine; there are frequently no breasts or rounded hips suggestive of femininity, so it seems as if the female head and vagina have simply been grafted onto a male body. In Maier's '*All are united in one, which is divided into two parts*' from his *Symbola aureae mensae* 1617, the female side of the androgyne does appear to have a breast, but on closer inspection, it seems that this breast has simply been added to the male pectoral, again demonstrating this 'grafted' aesthetic.<sup>11</sup> Even when the alchemical androgyne appears clothed, there is no differentiation in body shape to suggest a more complete union of male and female anatomy.

This implies that, for the alchemists, it was the male side of the androgyne which took precedent. Similarly, one may also argue that the Surrealists specifically associated the term 'magus' or 'magician' with the male. In their own card game based on Tarot, the *Jeu de Marseilles*, the normal male Jack is replaced by the male magus. Thus, even if Brauner's Surrealist magician appears to be androgynous, it is perhaps specifically oriented towards male creative power.

Remedios Varo (Spain 1908 – Mexico 1963): *Witch Going to the Sabbath*, 1957 mixed media on paper, 55 x 332, Private Collection. © DACS 2009.<sup>12</sup>

Remedios Varo does something similar in that her androgynous creator figures are often surrounded by specifically feminine imagery, notably eggs, to signify female creative power.<sup>13</sup> However,

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<sup>8</sup> The full Guggenheim Museum credit line for this painting reads: Victor Brauner, *The Surrealist (Le Surréaliste)*, January 1947, Oil on canvas, 23 5/8 x 17 3/4 inches (60 x 40 cm), The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, 1976, 76.2553.111.

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed assessment of this topic see for example A. J. L. Busst, "The Image of the Androgyne in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1933); and Frédéric Monneyron, *L'Androgyne Décadent: Mythe, Figure, Fantasmies* (Grenoble: Elug University of Stendhal, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> It is reasonable to argue that Brauner knew about alchemy, as both Jacques Beaufet and Susan Davidson note the influence of the occult on Brauner's art. See Jacques Beaufet, "Sur Quelques Aspects de l'Oeuvre Graphique de Victor Brauner" in *Victor Brauner*, ed. Catherine Carrein et al, 17 (Sainte-Etienne: Musée d'art Moderne, 1992); Susan Davidson, "Introduction: 'Vivifying Presence'" in *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Heiroglyphics* 10 (New York: Menil Collection in association with Hatje Cantz, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> This particular image appears in Gareth Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy: Alchemical Ideas and Images in Manuscripts and Books From Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (London: The British Library, 1994), a contemporary book on alchemy.

<sup>12</sup> All Remedios Varo images also appear by kind permission of Walter Gruen.

let us first of all focus on her paintings of recognisably magical characters. An interesting example of this is her *Witch going to the Sabbath* 1957. This type of portrayal of the witch is perhaps unfamiliar in Western culture as it instead utilises the beliefs of Varo's adopted home of Mexico.

Mexicans traditionally believe that there are three types of magic: black, white and red. Those who practice white and / or red magic are known as the *curanderos*, or shamans as we might call them, and they use plants and the spirit world to heal. *Brujos / as* practice the much more sinister black magic, and while *curanderos* are bound by natural and karmic law to do no harm, *brujos* follow a "darker creed".<sup>14</sup> Although in the original Spanish title of the work Varo refers to this figure as a *bruja*, the way in which this witch displays all three colours suggests she represents an amalgamation of the *curanderos* and the *brujas*; she is both dark and light.

Varo's witch is a complex being who cannot be defined by binary opposites like good and bad, *femme enfant* and *femme fatale*, thereby linking her to nature, the primal female creator, who can be both cruel and kind. Not only does Varo seem to defy her male contemporaries' polarised view of women in this work, but she also reasserts the power of female procreation. The witch holds a bird whose tail feathers trail away back inside the black egg-shaped cavity of the witch, suggesting that this bird has been produced by the witch alone, without any male assistance.

Leonor Fini: *La Vie Ideal*, 1950, 92 x 65.  
© ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2009.

A similar attitude may be noted in Leonor Fini's *La Vie Ideal* 1950, in which a female figure with Fini's characteristic mane of hair and feline eyes sits queen-like, attended by cats. Interestingly, while Gloria Orenstein has pointed out the lunar, and therefore feminine, symbolism of the cats, Estelle Lauter connects the circle behind the woman to the masculine power of the sun.<sup>15</sup> If Fini is therefore the mistress of the moon cats and the sun circle, then she is also mistress of both male and female forces, suggesting that she is capable of uniting male and female, and therefore of attaining androgyny. In both alchemical doctrine and the Surrealist cult of love, androgyny can only be attained through the sexual union of male and female, yet here Fini has accomplished this without the inclusion of a male entity, thereby implying purely female creative autonomy.<sup>16</sup>

### Androgyny and Alchemy

The battle for power and autonomy is not just limited to the depiction of explicitly male or female figures in Surrealist art, but also extends to include androgynous characters. It is the actions of these characters and the iconography that surrounds them that denotes where they fall on the male versus female conflict. We have already seen an example of this in Brauner's *Le Surréaliste*, but now it may be interesting to turn our attention to protagonists who do not seem to embody magical figures at first sight. Their occult character must be revealed through decoding the surrounding iconography – just as one must do with original cryptic alchemical texts.<sup>17</sup>

No discussion of the occult aspect of Surrealism would be complete without mentioning Max Ernst. Ernst created as an alter-ego character the hybrid bird-man Loplop. Though Loplop is frequently referred to using the male pronoun, Loplop himself appears to be androgynous, as shown by this example of him, in which he appears to be capable of impregnating himself, again suggesting masculine procreativity.

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<sup>13</sup> Eggs are frequently used in alchemy to signify the alembic vessel in which the alchemical material 'grows' (i.e. is transformed), creating a symbolic connection with the womb. For a more detailed analysis on the importance of the egg in alchemy, see Lyndy Abrahams, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 66-67.

<sup>14</sup> Dai Hynh, "Las Tuxtlas: Casting a spell in Mexico"; *Houston Chronicle*, 1<sup>st</sup> Sept., 2006, via Strange Attractor Journal, [http://www.strangeattractor.co.uk/further/archives/2006/09/witchcraft\\_in\\_m.html](http://www.strangeattractor.co.uk/further/archives/2006/09/witchcraft_in_m.html).

<sup>15</sup> The arguments of both Orenstein and Lauter are outlined in Peter Webb, *Leonor Fini: Métamorphoses d'un Art* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2007), 166.

<sup>16</sup> In an article appearing in the Surrealist periodical *Minotaure*, Albert Béguin connects the alchemical androgyny to love and sexuality: «...dans cette image de l'Homme-Femme, la dualité des sexes, est encore une célébration de l'amour, une légende de la fécondité» (Albert Béguin, "L'Androgynie" in *Minotaure* 11 (1936): 11).

<sup>17</sup> Most alchemical texts can be described as "cryptic" due to the way in which alchemists frequently used allegory and a wide variety of symbols to stand in for the scientific aspects of the Great Work. A good example of this is George Ripley's *The Compound of Alchemy* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1591) which contains phrases such as: "One in gender they be, and in number two, / Whose Father is the Sunne, the Moone the Mother.". In order to make any sense of an alchemical text, one must first decode the symbols used.

Max Ernst: *Where They Drink the Wolves*, 1932, pencil on paper, 15.8 x 11.8, Private Collection.  
© ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2009.

Max Ernst: Plate two of the 'Thursday' or 'Blackness' section of *Une Semaine de Bonté*, 1934.  
©ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2009.

In this next image, taken from Ernst's 1934 collage novel *Une Semaine de Bonté*, we see the bird-man Loplop standing over the reclining figure of a woman holding some kind of medical instrument. There are a number of glass vessels scattered throughout the room, recalling shapes of alchemical vessels, thus suggesting that Loplop / Ernst is actually an alchemist. Loplop could also be viewed here as the bird-headed Thoth – the Egyptian version of Hermes Trismegistus, the father of alchemy.<sup>18</sup> In a text attributed to Hermes, there is a quote which states that "it is the father who is the cause of children, of their birth and food".<sup>19</sup> While this may simply suggest the supremacy of male sperm in the procreative process, it could also be read as a form of male procreation. In this image it appears that Loplop is poised over the woman's abdomen. This particular placement becomes of great significance if we consider the use of the metaphor of pregnancy in alchemical texts.

The notable alchemists George Ripley, pseudo-Lull and Paracelsus all use the metaphor of pregnancy as indication of the growth of the Philosopher's Stone in the alembic vessel.<sup>20</sup> Paracelsus states that: "As soon as you see the woman take a black colour, know for a certainty that she has conceived and become pregnant".<sup>21</sup> Therefore, perhaps Loplop's placement here could be interpreted as his intention to remove the foetus to rear in the vessel over the fire next to the woman, or else to remove even the womb itself to appropriate this process for himself. This section of the novel is given the subtitle "blackness", which would certainly match with the colour of the alchemical matter associated with pregnancy, as indicated by Paracelsus' words.

Man's ability to carry a child is a concept that has a precedent in alchemy. In Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* of 1617, and of which it is possible to argue that the Surrealists knew, the figure of the wind carries a child in his belly, and similarly in the writings of pseudo-Lull and Nicholas Flamel, whom the Surrealists also knew of, man is credited with the ability to carry a child: "this is the female which he carries in his belly".<sup>22</sup> Thus it may be argued that this image of Loplop may be a depiction of the male Surrealist's appropriation of specifically female powers through his identification with the alchemist.

Max Ernst: *C'est la Vie – Marchand D'Ucel*, 1931, pencil and ink on paper, 29.4 x 22.1, accession number 1957.89, The Art Institute of Chicago. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2009. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.<sup>23</sup>

Max Ernst did not just identify himself as an alchemist – he also extended this view to include Marcel Duchamp. In Ernst's *C'est la vie – Marchand d'Ucel* 1931, while we may note the presence of Ernst's bird-man alter-ego Loplop, the titles of the work directly refer to two of Duchamp's alter-egos:

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<sup>18</sup> I am indebted to Robyne Miles and Emily Taylor for bringing up this link.

<sup>19</sup> Hermes Trismegistus, « Le Clé. Hermes Trismégiste à son fils Tat » in *Hermes Trismégiste. Traduction complète précédée d'une étude sur l'origine des livres hermétiques*, Louis Ménéard, 58 (Paris: Librairie Académique, 1866).

<sup>20</sup> George Ripley, *Compound of Alchemy* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1591), n. p.; pseudo-Lull, *Eiusdem Compendium Animae Transmutatonis...* (Coloniae Agrippinae: Ioannem Byrckmannum, 1566), 31v; Paracelsus, "Concerning the Spirits of the Planets, Third Treatise" in *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolis Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, called Paracelsus the Great* Vol. I, ed. Arthur Edward Waite (London: James Elliot & Co., 1894), 86. I use the term 'pseudo-Lull' as Ramon Lull was not an alchemist, but his name has since been attached to a number of alchemical treatises that were not written by Lull himself.

<sup>21</sup> Paracelsus, 86.

<sup>22</sup> Pseudo-Lull, 78r; Nicholas Flamel, *His Exposition of the Heiroglyphicall [sic] Figures which he caused to bee [sic] painted upon the Arch in St. Innocents Church-yard in Paris...* (London: T. S. for Thomas Walley, 1624), 105. Elizabeth Legge argues that Ernst may well have been aware of the allegorical emblems of the German alchemist Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* (Elizabeth M. Legge, *The Psychoanalytic Sources of Max Ernst* (Ann Arbor, Mich., London: MIT Press, 1989), 88). Similarly, an article in the eighth volume of the Surrealist periodical *Minotaure* used images from Maier's *Atalanta fugiens*. See Pierre Mabille, "Notes sur le Symbolisme" in *Minotaure* 8 (1936): 1-3.

<sup>23</sup> The full Art Institute of Chicago credit line reads: Max Ernst, American and French, b. Germany 1891-1976, *C'est La Vie / Le Marchand d'Ucel*, 1931 working inscr. Artist, Graphite over lithograph, on tan wove paper, 294 x 219 mm, Gift of Mr. Frank B. Hubachek, 1957.89. Reproduction, The Art Institute of Chicago.

Rose Sélavy and Marchand d'Ucel. It is interesting that the left side which references Rose specifically refers to the punning pronunciation of her surname: "c'est la vie", as the plant form crowned by Loplop's head is indicative of life. The alchemical process itself is likewise often depicted as a tree, as in the frontispiece to Valentin's *L'Azoth*, pictured below, thus this blossoming plant form may suggest the successful integration of male and female genders, embodied in the alchemical androgyne, as well as the androgynous alter-egos of Ernst and Duchamp.

The right hand image which makes up the other part of this cryptic work is a similar Loplop form, this time identified with Marchand d'Ucel, whose name may be a play on salt or on seal, both of which have alchemical significance, as salt was a key ingredient in the Paracelsian school of alchemy, while the seal may refer to the seal of Solomon which denotes the end of the Great Work.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, the German alchemist Basile Valentin suggests that salt can be used to return separated sulphur and mercury back to their original state before dissolution.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, he states that "[s]alts do not have any transmutative quality, they only serve...for the preparation of the Stone".<sup>26</sup> Is the right-hand Loplop therefore less leafy because, through its association with salt, it cannot achieve the completely perfect androgynous transformation as that on the left? This suggests a return to a more primal form of androgyny – not that of the perfected Stone, but that of *prima materia*, which contains the basic elements of the Stone: sulphur and mercury in their original state. Thus, through this identification with alchemical salt, we may see this second Loplop-plant as being gradually deconstructed or reconstructed so that it ends up looking just like its partner.<sup>27</sup> Through combining the image of the tree as symbolic of the successful Great Work, resulting in the androgyne, and the artists' alter-egos, Ernst identifies both himself and Duchamp with the successful alchemical adept, who has achieved physical and spiritual androgyny. This demonstrates their capacity for creation without the input of a female counterpart.

Frontispiece for Basile Valentin's *L'Azoth* in *Les Douze Clefs de Philosophie*, 1624. Courtesy of Glasgow University Library, Department of Special Collections.

### The Feminine Adept

Remedios Varo (Spain 1908 – Mexico 1963): *The Hermit*, 1956, oil on masonite with mother of pearl, 35 x 14<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches, Private Collection. © DACS 2009.

Varo also uses adept figures in her work, although they are not always recognisable as such. In her *Hermit* 1956 we note an androgynous figure with its body in the form of a six pointed star. Although it is the five pointed star that appears most commonly in connection with the occult, the six pointed version formed by the interconnection of two triangles is also a potent alchemical image, as suggested by the above image from Valentin. The unification of these triangles combined with the presence of the ying-yang symbol in the figure's chest cavity suggests that the adept has attained inner peace and enlightenment – they have been successful in their quest.<sup>28</sup> However, it may also be interesting to note that this figure appears to us in front of a hollow tree.

This emergence from within an opening in a wall or plant is a common motif in Varo's works and may be interpreted as referring to a kind of birth process.<sup>29</sup> This can be noted through the way in which we can see images specifically connected with fertility and procreation located inside hollow trees, such as the over-flowing chalice in *Exploration of the Sources of the Orinoco River* and the feminised Pan figure, symbolic of fertility in *Troubadour*, both of 1959. The connection to a specifically feminine birth process is underlined by the use of the tree, emphasising woman's connection with the supreme creative power of nature, which Varo continually portrays in her work, as we can see in paintings such as *Solar Music* 1955. Similarly, the concept that the adept can be located at the centre of a forest, as Varo also suggests elsewhere with her *L'Ecole buissonnière* 1962, which literally translates as 'school in the bush', implies that the adept is contained within a feminine entity through the symbolic association of the forest with a woman's genitalia.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 218-19.

<sup>25</sup> Basile Valentin, *Les Douze Clefs de Philosophie...* (Paris: Jeremie & Christophe Perier, 1624), 72.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Poisson, *Théories et Symboles de Alchimie* (Paris: Bibliotheque Chacornac, 1895), 91.

<sup>27</sup> See Hopkins, 189 for another analysis of this work.

<sup>28</sup> Janet A. Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys: The Art and Life of Remedios Varo* (New York, London: Abbeville Press, 1988), 165.

<sup>29</sup> See for example *Emerging Light* 1962 or *Rebirth* 1960 to name just two.

<sup>30</sup> Kaplan, 164.

Remedios Varo (Spain 1908 – Mexico 1963): *Solar Music*, 1955, oil on masonite, 35 ¾ x 24 inches, Private Collection. © DACS 2009.

## Conclusion

This magical dual between the sexes for creative autonomy did not end with the decline of Surrealism as an international artistic force in the 50s. Fini, Varo, Carrington and others continued to emphasise the creative, powerful and autonomous female well into the 60s and beyond. However, we must consider the question of why this battle arose in the first place, and why male Surrealists began to appropriate female reproductive powers. One reason could be that it was a response to the ever-increasing demand from women for equal rights, or an attempt to resurrect masculinity, which had been severely damaged by the horrors of world war.<sup>31</sup> But why then did some artists choose to conduct this battle using magical characters such as the witch, shaman, magician and alchemist? I would argue that, in researching iconography that they could use as part of the creation of a new, modern myth, they were influenced by the alchemists themselves; particularly as the artists most prone to this gendered appropriation, or its retrieval, are known to have a specific interest in, or at the very least, an awareness of alchemy and the occult.<sup>32</sup>

We have already noted examples of alchemists appropriating the female ability to carry a child for men in the work of pseudo-Llull and Flamel, and it seems that the Surrealists may well have been aware of this latter, as Flamel was French, he arranged for alchemical allegories to be painted in St. Innocents Church in Paris, which were widely reproduced, and he is also discussed in Breton's 'Letter to seers'.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, a number of alchemists, including Ripley and pseudo-Llull, mention a substance they call "menstruall", which, judging from their writings, can belong to men as well as women.<sup>34</sup> This view also appears in a diagram by pseudo-Llull which shows 'menstrual' as a key ingredient for both male *Sol* and female *Luna*. Also, the alchemist Basile Valentin notes that the Stone is nourished on milk and blood.<sup>35</sup> As it is the male alchemist who is doing this nourishing, he may be viewed as appropriating the role of the mother.

Diagram of the composition of Menstrual, Luna and Sol from pseudo-Llull's *Eiusdem Compendium Animae Transmutatonis*, 1566, p. 172. Courtesy of Glasgow University Library, Department of Special Collections.

Thus, in using occult iconography and in portraying magical characters, it could be argued that the male Surrealists revived an old alchemical belief, albeit prompted by contemporary social circumstances and illustrating it in their own way. The difference between the alchemists and the Surrealists was that the latter's female contemporaries were not about to take this challenge to their newly found autonomy lying down. Their specifically feminine usage of this same imagery as their male contemporaries suggests not only a rebellion against their fellow artists, but also at the patriarchal conventions within occult disciplines. However, despite recent increasing critical attention, the fact remains that many Surrealist women artists have been marginalised compared to their male counterparts, suggesting that, at the time, the wizard / witch's dual did not end in their favour.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This concept has recently been explored in detail by Amy Lyford in her book *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety and the aesthetic of Post World War I reconstruction in France* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Leonor Fini for example had books outlining the basic principles of alchemy, Gnosticism and secret societies in her studio. For a more detailed analysis of the occult interests of Ernst, Duchamp and Varo, see M. E. Warlick, *Max Ernst: A Magician in Search of a Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969) and Kaplan, 16, 18, 95-6, 163-169, 171-172 and 193.

<sup>33</sup> Breton, (1925) 2006, 346.

<sup>34</sup> Llull, 100v-104r; Ripley, n. p.

<sup>35</sup> Valentin, 150. . For a detailed discussion on Valentin as a possible source for Surrealist artists, particularly Duchamp, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in The Large Glass and Related Works* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1998), 26, 231-232, and also John Moffit, "Fin de Siècle Parisian Hermeticism: Hermetic and Alchemical Publications in the Bibliotheque St Genéviève" in *Cauda Pavonis* 14 (1995) 10-15.

<sup>36</sup> Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985) remains the quintessential survey of Surrealist women artists, however a more recent book is: Penelope Rosemont, ed., *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (London: Athlone Press; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

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