

## Research Article

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# Transmediality in Symbolist and Surrealist Photo-Literature

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**Abstract:** The *fin de siècle* period throughout Europe undoubtedly cultivated the “interdisciplinary principle of *la fraternité des arts*” (Genova 158). Literature, poetry, visual art and music superseded former hierarchical structures favouring the painterly. Correspondence between intellectuals would cross-fertilise between disparate realms through publishing in interdisciplinary cultural journals that were distributed internationally across cosmopolitan cityscapes. The ability for the photograph to be mechanically reproduced, postulated by Walter Benjamin in 1936, allowed for one of the first transmedial aesthetics, to become known as photo-literature. Previously, reproduction had been confined to the textual realm. *Bruges La Morte* by Georges Rodenbach was the first ever work of photo-literature to commingle these respective art forms, sixty-five years after the invention of photography in 1827. Rodenbach’s novella was first published in 1892 at the height of the symbolist movement which spanned literature, painting, photography and more. Its pseudo-progeny, Andre Breton’s surrealist text *Nadja* was published in 1928 depicting the author’s meandering through the Parisian cityscape. In these works, text and image engender a sense of cosmopolitanism through the function of transposition.

**Keywords:** Surrealism; Symbolism; Photo-Literature; Transmediality; Cosmopolitanism.

## Introduction

Georges Rodenbach’s novel *Bruges La Morte* was published in 1892 and comprised the first ever work of photo-literature. The novel charts the vicissitudes of the widowed Hugues Viane, who desperately attempts to cling to the memory of his deceased wife. He dedicates a room to her where he cherishes her clothes, locks of her hair and her letters in a sort of personalised museum. Consumed by depression, he rarely leaves the house until one day he meets a dancer called Jane at a theatrical revue. She bears a distinct likeness to his former wife, and an affair ensues. The cityscape of Bruges reflects the aggrieved psyche of Viane and cultivates the sense of an omnipresent morbidity. Viane lives near a church and has a pious servant who incessantly reminds him of his duties. Religion encroaches upon his ill-fated love affair, and after an argument Viane brutally strangles Jane. In Andre Breton’s *Nadja* (1928), the story of the author’s ephemeral love affair with a Russian psychiatric patient named Nadja is revealed. The story tells of their chance happenings wandering around Paris alongside Breton’s encounters with fellow surrealists. The relationship soon ends, and Breton finds out that Nadja is committed to an asylum. In both novels, the cityscapes of Bruges and Paris play a vital role, assuming the form of a third character in their photographic presence, entangled between two love affairs doomed to failure.

In both works, text and image symbiotically engender a sense of cosmopolitanism through the function of transposition. *Bruges La Morte* envisions cosmopolitanism in the religious realm whilst *Nadja* charts its permeation into the streetscape of Paris. While transmediality is often associated with postmodern thinkers

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such as Deleuze (1983) and his concept of the “affection-image” we must also acknowledge historical imbrication. Historically, it takes time for diverse forms of cultural media to coalesce as *Bruges La Morte*'s invention of photo-literature came 65 years after the invention of photography. Transmediality operates in both works as a *mise-en-abyme*. *Nadja*'s automatic drawings are photographed, and the artistic museum space is evoked in *Bruges La Morte* adding further forms of media into the interpretative realms of both texts. Ultimately, the intermixing of media mirrors the cosmopolitan intermixing of peoples. Hence, the rapport between cosmopolitanism and transmediality is to be further explored.

First of all, word-image relations in both texts are interrogated from a theoretical perspective, noting the importance of transposition. Then, the symbiosis between the concepts of cosmopolitanism and transmediality is postulated, considering the photograph as a mobile resource to disseminate different forms of media. Next, how the gothic tone of both novels segues between photograph and text is explored. The trope of mirroring is subsequently interrogated before considering how text and photograph stand respectively for private and public space. The iconography of religion is then treated alongside textual descriptions. Non-western spiritual artefacts in *Nadja* are contrasted with religious reliquaries in *Bruges La Morte*. Finally, the boundless potential for transmedial analysis in a three-pronged discussion of text, photography and sculpture is advocated before ending on one of the most hidden of transmedial phenomena which both texts address, only obtainable within the individual psyche—the hallucination.

## Word-Image Relations

Whilst the aim is not to dwell on the technical aspects of transmediality, it is useful to briefly postulate how theoretical processes of this phenomenon occur before engaging with concrete examples from both texts. Interestingly, no article-length readings of photo-literature as transmedial have been made, nor has an in-depth comparison of the images in *Bruges La Morte* and *Nadja*. However, a useful stepping stone is Eric Vos' schema of word-image relations displayed below. Analysing the highlighted column in his chart, he notes that photo-literature should be considered transmedial, given that it enacts a transposition of content between the two forms of media. Vos demonstrates that the transposition element is unique to transmediality. Different forms are not simply juxtaposed with each other but work together to produce the same meaning instead of engendering a deliberate contrast like multimedia works. A sense of reinforcement is apparent. Unlike intermediality, the photograph and the text are easily distinguishable from each other. The separate art forms do not symbiotically rely on each other for coherence; in fact, they are both comprehensible when distinct from each other. In other words, *Bruges La Morte* and *Nadja* do not need photographs to be understood, but they would lose a layer of deeper meaning without transmedial relations. Unlike other forms of word-image relations, photo-literature has a high level of polytextuality meaning that the plot is set to two art forms simultaneously. These features abound in both *Bruges La Morte* and *Nadja*, especially transposition, which will frequently be referenced in relation to specific examples. Thus, I will now demonstrate how transmediality aligns with cosmopolitanism to complete the hermeneutic framework for these two texts.

## Cosmopolitanism and Transmediality

A paucity of literature investigates the rapport between cosmopolitanism and transmediality and yet there is a symbiotic relationship between the two concepts. Gremels comments “Cultural translations go hand in hand with medial transpositions that include forms of rewriting, recomposition, and revisualization” (1). She also highlights “the diasporic dynamics of movements across media and cultures” (7). Indeed, transmedial forms mirror the effects of cultural diaspora through their transpositions between art forms. Within *Nadja* and *Bruges La Morte*, the universal “gothic” traverses both literature and photography. Furthermore, in *Nadja* photographs of oceanic artefacts create a diasporic migration of culture. As such, for Radjewsky, transmediality can be defined as “phenomena that are not specific to individual media” (47). In terms of a working definition of cosmopolitanism, perhaps the most appropriate explanation in these circumstances

SCHEMA OF WORD- IMAGE RELATIONS	transmedial relation [relation transmédiale]	multimedia discourse [discours multimédial]	mixed- media discourse [discours mixte]	intermedial discourse [discours synchrétique]
distinctiveness [séparabilité]	+	+	+	–
coherence/self- sufficiency	+	+	–	–
polytextuality	+	–	–	–
simultaneous production	–	–	+	+
simultaneous reception	–	+	+	+
process	transposition	juxtaposition	combination	union/fusion
schematized text-image relation	text > image image > text	image   text	image + texte	itmeaxgte
examples	ekphrasis art criticism photonovel	emblem illustrated book title of painting	poster comic strip postage stamp	typography calligramme concrete poetry

**Figure 1.** Eric Vos. “The Eternal Network. Mail Art, Intermedia Semiotics, Interarts Studies.” (Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling 326-327).

is that of Hannerz. He defines it as “cultural competence . . . a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings and meaningful forms” (103). In other words, to be a successful cosmopolitan, you must also be well-versed in transmedial forms to navigate one’s way through the cultural realm. Indeed, Jansson creates the concept of “transmedial textures” which can “enable us to move more freely in geographical space . . . In geographical terms this points to a *centrifugal* dynamic, providing new opportunities for spatial exploration and flexibility” (289-290). Hence, the photograph provides us with a means of visual transportation to the cityscapes of Bruges and Paris. The technology of photography “enables us to realise our cosmopolitan ambitions” (290). Ultimately, the mobility of the photograph portends to a cosmopolitan opening unto diverse cultures.

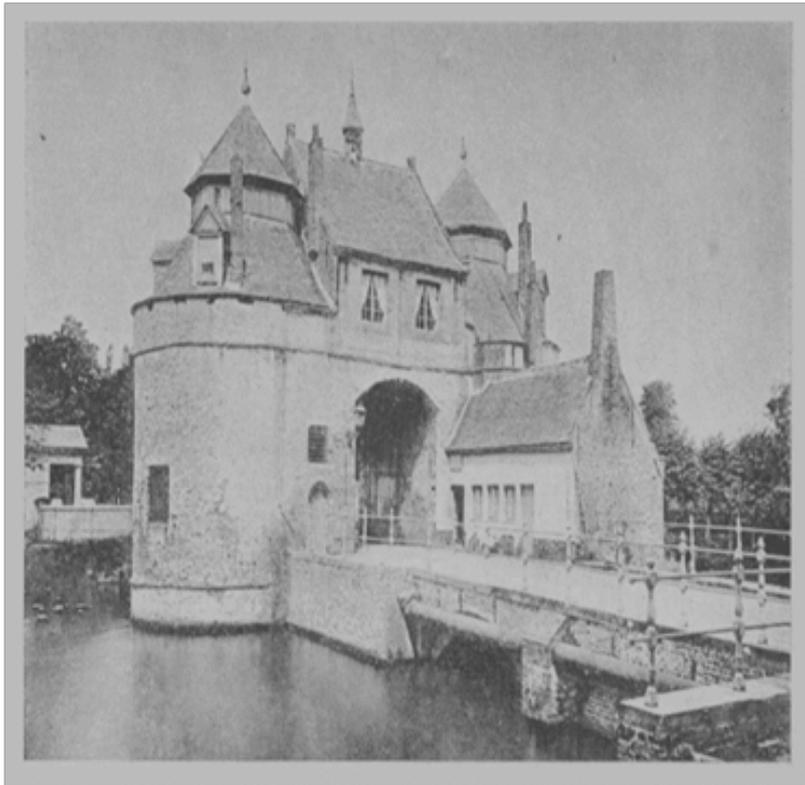
Transmediality is highly integral to the plotlines of both works, set in the cosmopolitan cityscape. As stated briefly beforehand, Georges Rodenbach produced the first ever photo-literary text *Bruges La Morte* in 1892. The protagonist, Hugues Viane, mourns the death of his wife and strolls around the eponymous city, his perambulations reflect the movement between two different forms of media. He courts a dancer who resembles his dead wife and a series of tragic events ensue. Photo-literature of the cityscape is a technique appropriated by Andre Breton in *Nadja* often hailed for its originality, yet there seems to be a striking element of intertextuality with *Bruges La Morte* which was originally published as a serialized novel in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, an outlet where both photography and text, of course, had a pre-

established relationship. James Elkins notes that “Although it needs to be said there is no proof that Breton knew Rodenbach’s book in its original version . . . There is a family resemblance of images and themes in *Bruges-la-Morte*, *Nadja*.” This is the rapport I intend to interrogate in its transmedial wholeness.

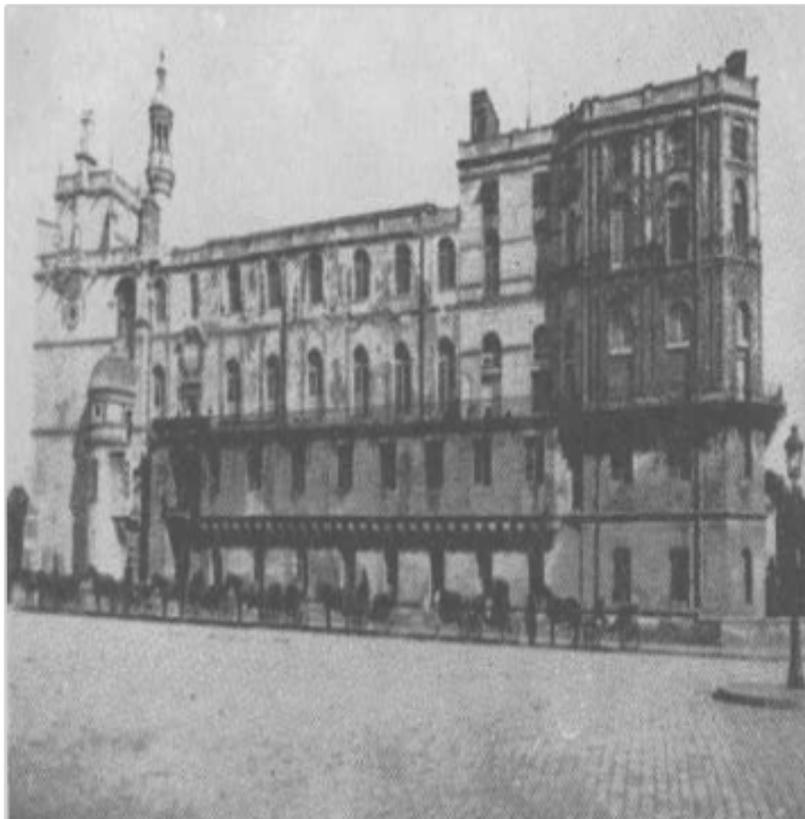
In *Nadja*, the story of another amorous encounter is told of Breton’s brief relationship with a psychiatric patient which too ends in her tragic demise. Most of Rodenbach’s photographs faithfully depict the gothic architecture of Bruges. In turn, this creates a consuming ambience against which we learn of a protagonist whose wife has passed away. The novella culminates in him killing both his new lover and himself. We learn from Breton that the eponymous *Nadja* passes away in a mental health facility. In both texts, transmediality foreshadows death through the gothic undertones of both literature and photography combined. In this way, the photographs serve as *memento mori* in the works paralleling Roland Barthes’ assertion that photographs are “agents of death” (Barthes 92). Ultimately, the cityscape is where the collision of cosmopolitanism and transmediality occurs. As the third character of both texts, the cityscape is both literary and aesthetic whereas the human characters are only developed in prose. The cityscape is where the commingling of different nations and ethnicities is enabled. It is a place of mobility engendering international encounters. In Paris, Breton meets an Arabian fortune teller, buys African and Oceanic products from flea markets and dates a Russian psychiatric patient. In Bruges, Viane dates an English Dancer, used to live in Paris while references to England’s Shakespeare and Doctor Faustus alongside the Buddhist principle of Nirvana punctuate the narrative. Viane’s English lover could indeed reference the British “colony” in Bruges which was established in the 1840s. Indeed, gothic buildings renovated by British Architect A. W Pugin are contained in the photographs. Thus, through the mobility acquired by combining literature and photography, the cityscape’s cosmopolitanism becomes omnipresent.

## Transmediating Style

The gothic is a transnational aesthetic which testifies to its global permeation within the cityscape. Indeed, the Gothic revival catalysed by Pugin created a sort of religious cosmopolitanism which is highly tangible in *Bruges La Morte* and in certain photographs in *Nadja*. The premise behind the Gothic revival was that churches and cathedrals of the Middle Ages represented the pinnacle of beauty and should be the aesthetic of choice for religious buildings. Thus, Gothic style symbolises the international omnipresence of the Catholic Church which is something that surrealism decries on multiple occasions. This does not mean that the accompanying architectural legacy can be easily erased and we see many examples of gothic architecture adorn the pages of *Nadja* as well as *Bruges La Morte*. The castle is a secular gothic trope that both novels pay homage to as we can see in Rodenbach’s photograph thereof (Figure 2). Breton’s photo subtitled “Là, tout en haut du château dans la tour de droite” [here, high in the chateau in the right-hand tower] (Howard 110) shows a similar regard for a secularised building. As Matheson puts it, surrealism had a “gothic sensibility: generating ‘castles of the interior’” (1) (Figure 3). If we view style from a transmedial perspective, we witness a direct transposition from a word to an image. The international nature of gothic style becomes immersive as the black and white images of impenetrable edifices foreshadow the impending doom lurking at the end of both novellas. Indeed, perhaps transmediality evokes Homi Bhaba’s sense of the unhomey whereby he asks “Can historical time be thought outside fictional space?” (143) Here the photographs provide a spatiotemporal challenge to the narrative. The permanency of the buildings jars with the *flânerie* of both Breton and Viane as they struggle to understand their surroundings. In this case, transmediality serves to instigate a tension and introduce a languorous third character into two tales between two lovers. In the case of Breton’s tale, he adds a footnote to explain the history of the photographed castle, and, by proxy, of the cityscape: “C’est Louis VI qui, au début du XIIe siècle, fit bâtir dans la forêt de Laye un château royal, origine du château actuel et de la ville de Saint-Germain” (Breton 112) [it was Louis VI who, at the beginning of the twelfth century, built a royal castle in the forest of Laye, the origin of the present chateau and the town of Saint-Germain] (Howard 112). In this tale of two-lovers, historical fact is subordinated to the psychological drive of the narrative. The medieval castle is predicated on a modernist universe creating a fictional same-ification of temporal epochs.



**Figure 2.** Anonymous. Photograph of *Ezelpoort* in *Bruges La Morte* (1892)



**Figure 3.** Anonymous. *Là, tout en haut du château dans la tour de droit* in *Nadja* (1928)

## Transmediating Reflections

Another trope apparent in both works is that of mirroring. Breton constructs a serigraphy of Nadja's "yeux de fougère" (108) [her fern-coloured eyes] (Howard 111) (Figure 5), whilst reflections and shadows of the city abound in *Bruges La Morte*, (Figure 6). Rodenbach's Bruges abounds with watery reflections as this is where Viane often hallucinates images of his dead wife whilst he wanders the streets alone. Viane cries "l'eau n'est plus nue, le miroir vit!" (58) [the waters were no-longer stagnant, the mirror lived] (Duncan 142). Both Breton and Rodenbach equate their respective lovers to an eternal symbol which in turn defies mortality via the perennial nature of photography. Indeed, after Nadja's death, she remains present in essence. Representation is key and Rodenbach enacts a *mise en abyme* (Lowrie 157) by constantly referring to, but never visually depicting portraiture of Viane's deceased wife. The city is the only visually concrete character, transmediality evoking absence as well as presence. Lowrie also views the décor described in *Bruges La Morte* as the *mise-en-abyme* of the character's souls (157). In *Nadja*, perhaps, a different aesthetics is in operation. Objects are not perceived as being owned by someone but as someone's creation and a transactional item. Breton includes a photograph of the cosmopolitan *Marché aux Puces* (Flea market) which heavily influenced the surrealist exhibition style. Naturally, objects emanating from all over the world could be found there and many ended up in Breton's personal collection which would later be auctioned for significant sums of money. Breton also takes photographs of Nadja's automatic drawings which assume the form of artefacts that have emanated directly from her psyche. These are rapidly drawn onto paper before being photographed by Breton for posterity. The cosmopolitan human being is very much alive and well in *Nadja* whereas in *Bruges La Morte*, Viane, a culturally literate museum-goer, is literally cloistered by the universal religious norms of the nunnery; A woman is not allowed to penetrate the walls of a widowed man. Hence, cosmopolitan existence is private rather than public which leads to the tragic denouement of the novella.

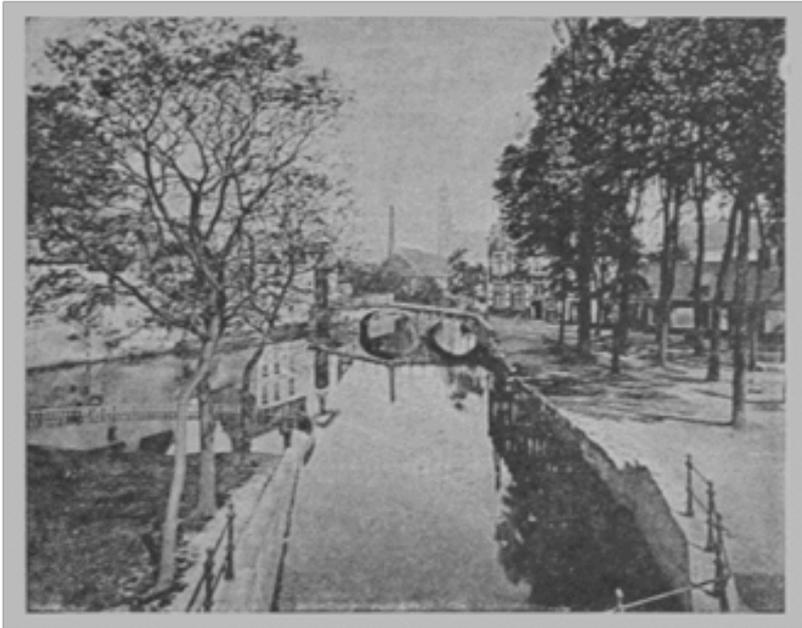


Figure 4. Anonymous. Photograph of Vineyard square and Begijnhof Bridge in *Bruges La Morte* (1892)

The mirroring of photograph and text shows that transmediality does not always serve to evoke a tension, as commonly espoused by many transmedia thinkers. As Breton comments in his preface to *Nadja* "l'abondante illustration photographique a pour objet d'éliminer toute description" (8) [the abundant photographic illustration has as its objet to eliminate all description] (Howard 6). Breton uses transmediality to delegate work to another complementary art form which disturbs the conventional usage of narration. On the other hand, Rodenbach enacts a more direct reflection of what occurs in the text to heighten what Cairoil terms

the “phantasmagorical cityscape” of Bruges (482). It would seem that Rodenbach is subverting Walter Benjamin’s criticism of photography as lacking “aura” and heralding a reproductive age. Indeed, the same hallucinatory scene is being reproduced, but the change of media enforces the agency of the narrative function, visualising and objectifying the interpretative written word through photography’s indexical relation to the real. The factuality of photography adds an element of documentary realism into a narrative that depicts inner psychological torment.

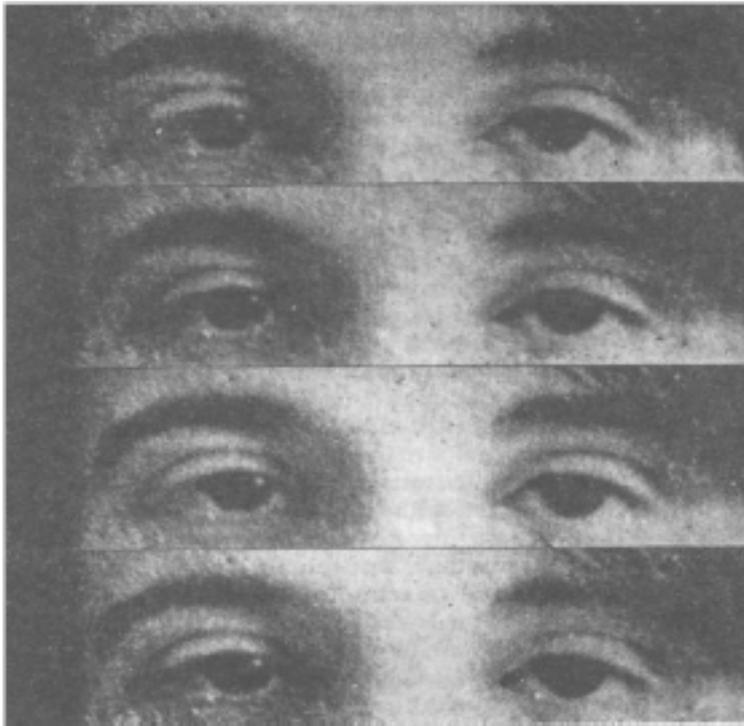


Figure 5. Anonymous. *Ses yeux de fougère* in *Nadja* (1963)

## Transmediating the Public/Private space

For the surrealists, the cosmopolitan is often most apparent in meeting places. There is an abundance of communal spaces present in *Nadja*: Hotels, cafés, restaurants, shops and further commercial entities. As Tiersten notes in the *fin de siècle* began the burgeoning trend for commerce to depict a “civic vision of the republic” (4). Indeed, chance encounters such as happening upon an Arabian fortune teller affirm the cosmopolitan dynamic of Paris which is reflected in the photography by Boiffard subtitled “*Boulevard Magenta devant le Sphinx-Hôtel*” (Figure 6). Conversely, the only place in *Bruges La Morte* which depicts a place of congregation is the church (Figure 7). All of the seats are arranged for a service but the lofty chamber and vaulted ceilings remain eerily empty. This perhaps constitutes a sign of the surreptitious *fin de siècle* disenchantment with God and the nascent secularization of society. However, Ledger notes that during the *fin de siècle* “The language of public life, of public institutions and of public behavior was grounded in the ethics of Christian doctrine” (184). Instead of the encounters that drive the narrative of *Nadja*, whilst wandering around Bruges the plot thickens due to a purely internal psychological disposition. Ultimately, it is the disdain of Jane, Viane’s lover that seals her fate. She makes snide remarks about the portraiture of Viane’s deceased wife which provokes his rage, transgressing his private space. She comments that one of the photographs resembles her and begins to touch all of the preserved items belonging to Viane’s deceased wife. This morbid fascination with items from fashion to photography that represents Viane’s dead wife is unbearable for the protagonist who brutally strangles Jane in order to rid himself of this horrific hybridity. After the brutal deed is accomplished further sonorous transmedial intrusions from a Christian

procession outside can be heard. Rodenbach writes: “Et, dans le silence, arriva un bruit de cloches, toutes les cloches à la fois, qui se remirent à tinter pour la rentrée de la procession à la chapelle du Saint-Sang” (188) [through them again floated the clamour of the bells, all resounding in unison to celebrate the return of the procession from the chapel of the Holy-Blood] (Duncan 367). By metonymy, the spilt blood of Jane is reflected in the holy chapel of the same name.

Naturally, *Nadja* has many psychological elements but these are based around the interaction of two beings rather than solitude compounded by a purgatory state of existence where mourning never ceases. It is clear from the reaction of the nunnery that it would not be socially acceptable for Viane to take another lover. Of course, the Christian religion is transnational in scope and following, yet the supranational laws that Christianity can impose upon a citizen, exceeding that of the nation-state demonstrates that cosmopolitanism in Robert Fine’s words must not be viewed “as a doctrine or fixed idea” (6) and room for individual subjectivity is sacrosanct. It would seem that 1920s Paris *flânerie* was more conducive to individuality rather than the spectral canals of fin de siècle Bruges. Indeed, no human being pervades the photographic element of *Bruges La Morte* whilst we are granted access to Nadja’s eyes through photographs added by Breton.

In both novels, the privacy of the textual narrative and emotions expressed therein is undermined by the public, outward facing nature of the photograph. Here a transmedial aesthetic serves to create a sense of mobility between these two worlds. As a reader, we are both privy to the internal psyche of the protagonists and narrator but also to an external world via photography that reflects both societal constraints and societal freedom. In these two photographs below we see people strolling down the street where commercial signs depict the quotidian existence of a consumer, the banality of the architecture is perversely striking in a city such as Paris abounding with cathedrals and spires. In stark contrast, the vaulted ceiling of the aforementioned cathedral in Bruges is contrasted with the distinct lack of congregation therein. It would seem then that whilst the edifice of religious buildings continues to leave their mark upon the cityscape, their inner sanctum is void of a public.



Figure 6. Boiffard, J. *A Boulevard Magenta Devant “Le Sphinx Hotel”* © Mme. Denise Boiffard in *Nadja* (1928)



Figure 7. Anonymous. *Interior of the Saint Saviour's Cathedral in Bruges La Morte* (1892)

## Transmediating Religion

Whilst *Bruges La Morte* very much focusses on *fin de siècle* contemporaneity and the hold of religious dogma, *Nadja* does indeed make historical references to religion, and many punctuate the narrative intermittently. These references allow for further transmedial elements to penetrate the novel. Whilst Nadja and Breton are sitting at a café a beggar persistently attempts to sell pictures and commentaries upon French history specifically Louis VI and VII. Christianity is omnipresent in the pictures, and the religious zealotry of the era is accurately depicted despite their poor quality. Indeed, during the reign of Louis VII, the Abbot Sugét ordered the development of French Gothic architecture, centralisation of the state and the construction of Notre Dame Cathedral. Upon receiving money from Breton, the beggar, in turn, invokes God imploring “Dieu vous bénisse, dieu vous bénisse” (Breton 97) [God bless you, Sir] (Howard 97). It is very telling that the only religious references in *Nadja* are purely historical. Anything pertaining to Christianity is completely removed from the contemporaneous cityscape whereas it continues to infiltrate every crevice of Bruges. This metaphysical aspect of *Bruges La Morte* lies in the interstitial zone between text and photograph. Another religious reference is made in *Nadja*, this time to the middle-ages. The anti-semitic, anti-cosmopolitan legend of “*La profanation de l’hostie*” is pictorially captured by Paolo Uccello in 1469. The piece charts the demand of sacramental bread from a woman as payment to a Jewish debt collector which would render the bread profane. The bread is taken to be deconsecrated and the obliging woman is burnt on a pyre. The legend is clearly spread in a transmedial manner (the transposition of story to painting) to discourage the commingling of peoples espousing different faiths. Louis Aragon sends Breton a photographic reproduction of the work to ponder over (Figure 8), and he comments that the work is of an

“interprétation très délicate” (94) [quite difficult to interpret] (Howard 94). Indeed, the ritualistic nature of the punishment and the second scene of the predella, which Breton displays, depicts the emotional reaction of innocent children to the purge. Despite the subject matter of this particular instance, a photograph of a painting within a textual narrative is a testament to the cross-fertilisation of media within cosmopolitan society.

Whilst the yoke of the church has clearly diminished in *Bruges La Morte*, the fact Viane’s servant Barbe left her master in protest at his new lover is the crux of the plot. Religion allows for the master-servant hierarchy to be overturned. Barbe can now legitimately snub Viane due to his unchristian lasciviousness. This most definitely curdled the rage of Viane and is the first catalyst for his violent persona to emerge. Adherence to Christian mores certainly played a part in the madness of the protagonist as he struggles to copulate whilst a Christian procession is audible beyond a bridge outside his castle (Figure 9). In *Bruges La Morte*, the transmedial aesthetic of text and photograph serves as a metaphor for the omnipresence of God and religious mores. The secular nature of the photographed castle is infiltrated by religious intrusion in the textual narrative. Contrastingly, in *Nadja* a photograph of a painting, a sort of double transmediation lends a sense of distance to the previous hegemony of religious morality. In *Bruges La Morte*, Rodenbach makes us hear, read, and see the private sexual sin of Viane which is juxtaposed with the public view of the castle. One of the leitmotifs of Rodenbach’s narrative is the constant sonorous intrusion of the Church bells which sound at key narrative junctures. The bells almost become a device of synesthesia as sound is transferred into colour by Rodenbach: “le passage des cloches eussent influencé, par leur alliage, la couleur de l’air - et aussi, en cette ville âgée, la cendre morte du temps” (99). [the sheddings of the bells; that there is evolved the colour of the air. Slumbering together also within this ancient town, united by the sympathy of a common abandonment, repose the ashes accumulated by the centuries] (Duncan 75). Whilst the practical role of the bells is to signify the passage of time, in Rodenbach’s narrative they also serve to intensify the religious atmosphere of Bruges, the third character, reminding Viane and the reader of their religious duties which are ultimately forsaken.

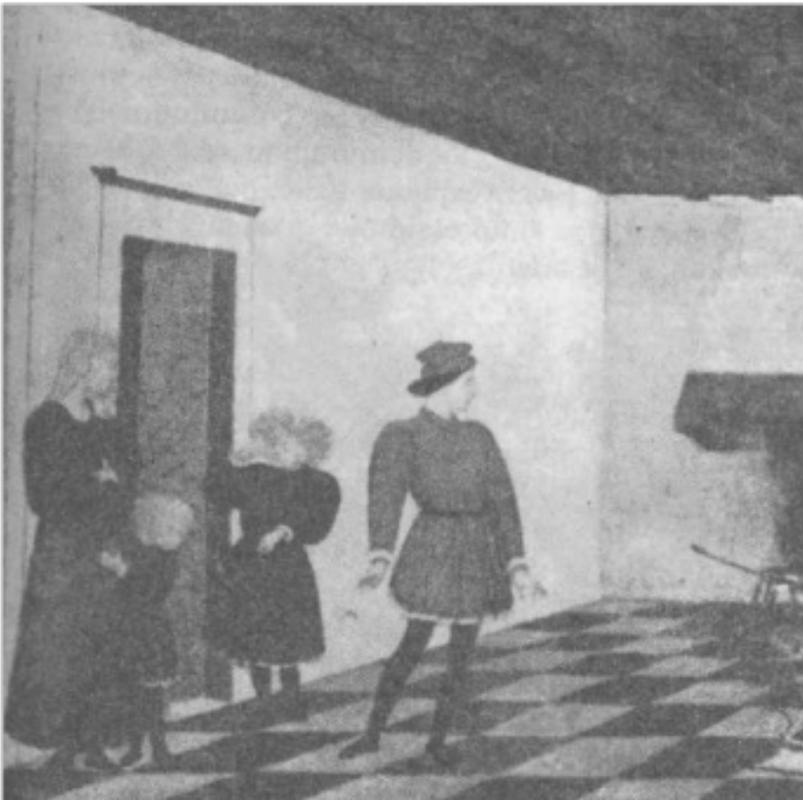


Figure 8. Anonymous. *La Profanation de L'Hostie* in *Nadja* (1928)

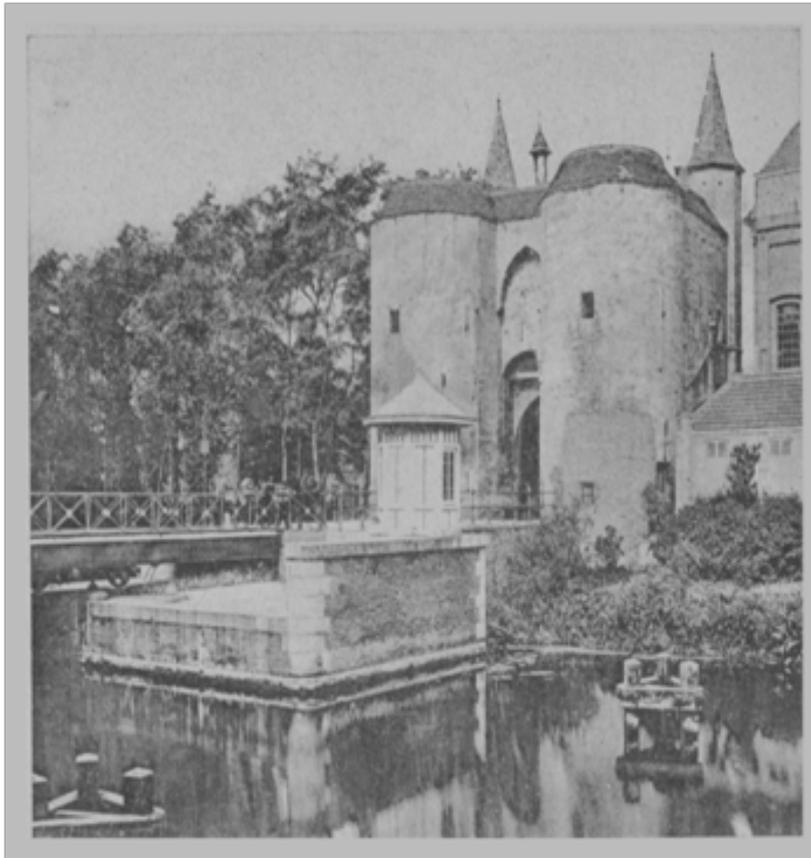


Figure 9. Anonymous. Photograph of *Gentpoort* in *Bruges La Morte* (1892)

## Transmediating the Exotic

Both texts also make use of photographed artefacts. In *Nadja*, a photograph of an Easter Island fetish draws attention to the cosmopolitan nature of the Parisian art-market and the worldwide dissemination of Oceanic sculpture. Indeed, Breton was an avid collector of Oceanic art and was even buried with his favourite piece in 1966. Breton focusses upon Nadja's reaction to this exotic object as stimuli as she spontaneously cries "Je t'aime, je t'aime" (132) [I love you, I love you] (Howard 129). Breton's cosmopolitan collection of art induces romantic feelings via an exoticism that appears quite intentional. The object is a proxy for Breton's psyche which is unbound by European traditions. She also comments upon a conical mask from New Brittany which makes her cry "Tiens, Chimène" (132) [Goodness, Chimène] (Howard 129). These reactions typify the surrealist precept of convulsive beauty. The primitive object acts as an intermediary to stimulate emotion between Breton and Nadja. By inscribing alterity upon his persona, Breton becomes more of an attractive proposition to Nadja. In other words, Breton creates a corporeal cosmopolitanism around his being. The exotic and transmediality seems to situate text and photography as a cosmopolitan resource. Through photography, Breton is rendering widely accessible the Polynesian statue, canonising its aesthetic. The photograph distributes a certainty and materiality of another culture that mere description cannot. Furthermore, it would be a misnomer to state that *Nadja* is a completely secularised novella. Whilst Christianity is no longer pervasive as it the case in *Bruges La Morte*, the presence of Oceanic objects are intended to resemble gods from other traditions. The sculptures also invite a discussion surrounding myth whereby Nadja "s'est aussi maintes fois représentée sous les traits de Mélusine qui, de toutes les personnalités mythiques, est celle dont elle paraît bien s'être sentie le plus près" (Breton 132) [Nadja has also represented herself many times with the features of Melusina, which of all the mythological personalities is the one she seems to have felt closest to herself] (Howard 129). Melusina was a folkloric female god represented

by a spring of fresh water with a mermaid-like form from the waist-down. Thus, Nadja almost becomes an ethereal phenomenon. Through transmediation, the form of the human being oscillates between text and image, finally ending up as an ineffable essence in a liminal zone between these two entities. Much like the resemblance of Jane to Viane's dead wife, Nadja tries to emulate herself in the form of Melusina by having her hairdresser style her hair in the same way as the mythical goddess.

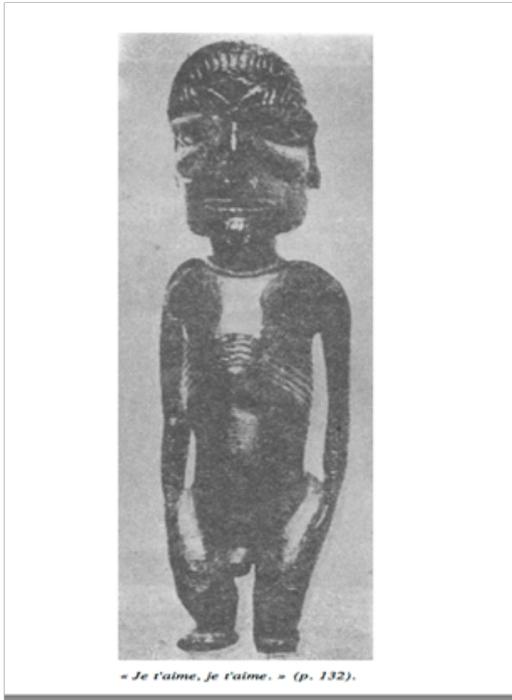


Figure 10. Anonymous. *Photograph of Easter Island Sculpture in Nadja (1928) (1928)*

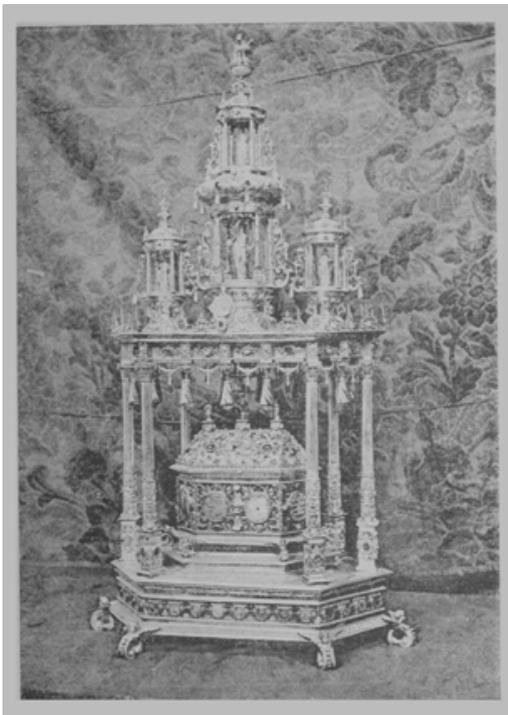


Figure 11. Anonymous. *Photograph of Conical Mask from New Brittany in Nadja (1928)*

## Transmediating History

In stark contrast, the photographed artefacts in *Bruges La Morte* exclusively pertain to religious reliquaries. Two such items are photographed, namely, *The Reliquary of the Holy Blood* and the *Shrine of Saint Ursula* by Hans Memling. This is situated in the museum section of the Old St John's hospital. Viane, being a cultural aesthete himself, states "parmi ses pèlerinages à travers la ville, Hugues adorait surtout l'hôpital Saint-Jean" (Rodenbach 131) [among all his resorts, however, that which he loved most was the Hospital of Saint-John] (Duncan 266). This, in turn, evokes what the surrealist would term *flânerie*, but this time as a religious ritual. Again, the international gothic style permeates Bruges' cityscape from architecture to object. The Old Hospital is described as a "Sanctuaire d'art" (133) but unlike *Nadja*, art has not yet been fully secularised. The shrine of Saint Ursula depicts the massacre of these virgin martyrs and surreptitiously precludes Viane's own murderous capabilities. Death is transposed into poesis "le sang coule mais si rose!" (134) [though the blood flows, it is in the colour of rose] (Duncan 269-270). Rodenbach uses one of the most ancient transmedial techniques to create a sense of foreboding: ekphrasis. Rodenbach poetically describes the artwork thusly: "Par ces fines subtilités, l'artiste avait exprimé que l'agonie, pour les Vierges pleines de foi, n'était qu'une transsubstantiation, une épreuve acceptée en faveur de la joie très prochaine" (Rodenbach 188) [the artist has given expression to the mystic conception that the joyousness of the virgin is only a species of transubstantiation and a harbinger of the bliss which in Paradise awaits the redeemed] (Duncan 271). The textual description of the artwork pictured in the photograph enhances the increasing sense of metaphysicality that pervades the narrative as the omnipresence of religion transcends different forms of media.

Whilst Oceanic art stirs the passions of *Nadja*, Viane is emotionally moved by the Shrine and "ces grands artistes de Flandres . . . qui peignaient comme on prie" (136). [these great Flemish artists, who have bequeathed to us pictures which might be described with an equal degree of appositeness either as votive-offerings or incarnations of prayer] (Duncan 272). His latent piety comes to the fore through art whilst he is prepared to transcend Christian morality in his own private love life. Despite the international transcendence of religion, Viane evokes a quasi-nationalist sense of pride in Flanders and conflates the universal nature of religion with a nationally-specific art-historical movement. Here the transmediality functions to embody the object and, in contrast to *Nadja*, preserve the history of religion in a positive light.



**Figure 12.** Anonymous. *Reliquary of the Holy Blood in Bruges La Morte* (1892)

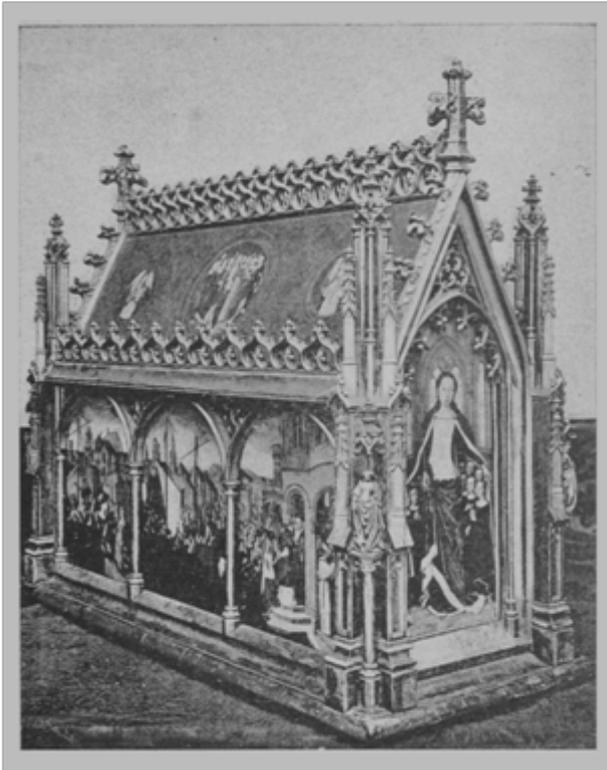


Figure 13. Anonymous. *The Shrine of Saint Ursula by Hans Memling in Bruges La Morte* (1892)

## Triple Transmediations: Text, Photography and Sculpture

Statues of historically significant figures also pervade the cosmopolitan cityscapes of both *Nadja* and *Bruges La morte*. Breton features a statue of the controversial figure Etienne Dolet. Dolet questioned the monopoly of the Catholic Church and was eventually burnt for heresy, after fleeing to Italy but deciding to return to France. This cements the surrealists' ardent secularism. Dolet was a cosmopolitan by nature, able to converse in several languages. Nevertheless, Breton alludes to his Janus-faced character. He was also accused of homicide for which he was controversially pardoned as a means of self-defence. Breton chooses a deliberately morally complex character to muse over. He comments: "la statue d'Etienne Dolet, place Maubert, m'a toujours tout ensemble attiré et causé un insupportable malaise" (24) [the statue of Etienne Dolet on its plinth in the Place Maubert in Paris has always fascinated me and induced unbearable discomfort] (Howard 25). Given that statues and other forms of public art are officially approved by governmental departments, it would seem that French officialdom itself is undoing its religious past and promoting intellectual engagement instead. Indeed, it appears that secularism was in fact converted into a source of national pride.

In *Bruges La Morte*, the statue of early Netherlandish painter Jan Van Eyck stands in the photograph of an eponymously named square. He painted both secular and religious imagery as well as serving as a diplomat arranging marital allegiances between Bruges and Portugal. Furthermore, he frequently received many foreign commissions making the artist a highly transnationally mobile figure in the still sequestered era of the Renaissance. He was also dispatched by the King to paint religious iconography of the Holy Lands, this time travelling to maintain Christianity's universal hegemony at the time. It would seem that Van Eyck is an interstitial figure between transnational freedom and universal religious duty. Thus, a seemingly nationalistic commemoration belies latent cosmopolitan hues.



Figure 14. Anonymous. *Jan Van Eyck Square in Bruges La Morte* (1892)



Figure 15. Anonymous. *La Statue d'Etienne Dolet in Nadja* Coll. Georges Sirot (1928)

In terms of art form, sculpture is perhaps the medium that has the most historic resonance, their subjects eternally ensconced in a hardened, fortified substance. So, what does photographing sculpture achieve in a transmedial context? The photography of sculpture mediates layers of memory which are organised by accompanying textual information. In other words, the text narrates the significance and time of the person; the sculpture casts the figure into cultural memory. In turn, the photograph distributes this cultural memory, preserving it from being forgotten. Indeed, in her work on the photography of sculpture, Bergstein cites the rather begrudging *paragone* of Leonardo, “the one advantage that sculpture has [over painting] is that of offering a greater resistance to time” (475). Another interesting observation has a Kantian Cosmopolitan ilk. Kant advocates in favour of a federation of states, which, some say, has been achieved through the inauguration of the modern-day United Nations in the aftermath of World War Two. This is the thrust of Kant’s argument in the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* written in 1784. Bergstein cites a publication of the UN’s cultural branch UNESCO from 1950 entitled “International Directory of the Photographic Archives of Works of Art” (479). Sculpture from all over the world had been transmedially distilled into one volume. Indeed, Bergstein comments “the UNESCO repertoire seems to have presented the photography of art, packaged and indexed as a cultural prelude to the political unification of the world” (479). This shows the capacity of transmedia to synthesise complex ideas, photographing mixed media from different cultural contexts provides a cosmopolitan synthesis. This phenomenon is clearly at work throughout *Bruges La Morte* and *Nadja*.

## Transmediating Hallucinations

Perhaps the most complex iteration of transmediality to analyse is that of the hallucination. Photographic theorist Paul Edwards describes *Bruges La Morte* as “un roman symboliste, un roman fantastique dans la mesure où il fait intervenir l’animisme sur un fond toujours réaliste pour mieux ressortir les sujets qui touchent à l’hallucination” (39) [a symbolist novel, even a fantasy novel to the extent that animism intervenes against a profoundly realist backdrop. This contrast further emphasises themes that gesture towards hallucination—my translation.] Indeed, the hallucination is itself a transmedial phenomenon whereby extraneous soundscapes and images envelop the individual psyche. Jane herself acts as a hallucination of Viane’s late wife, she is a mere substitution, unreal enough to be killed by Viane without remorse. Edwards also ponders over “La théorie des spectres.” Indeed, the unpopulated cityscape of Bruges grows more and more ominous as if the city has been deprived of its population, ultimately it will outlive the ephemeral lives of its inhabitants. Examples of hallucination are also present in *Nadja*. Whilst Breton was partial to Freudian psychoanalysis he launches a tirade against the corruption of psychiatry. In particular, he parodies the diagnostic techniques of “le professeur Claude à Sainte-Anne, avec ce front ignare et cet air buté qui le caractérisent” [like Professor Claude at Saint-Anne, with his dunce’s forehead and stupid expression on his face] (Howard 139). The professor uses a primitive process of elimination method: “Vous entendez des voix, eh bien, est-ce que ce sont des voix comme la mienne?—Non, monsieur.—Bon, il a des hallucinations auditives” (139) [you hear voices, do you? Well, are they voices like mine?”—“No, Monsieur.”—“You see he has auditory hallucinations] (Howard 139). Breton includes a photograph of the Professor to accompany his characterisation and transmediates the panoptic gaze of officialdom. Indeed, the photograph has a haunting sense of the “establishment” within the pages of an avant-garde text whilst *Nadja* ends up in a psychiatric ward. Viane hallucinates, left alone to wander Bruges to commit murder whilst *Nadja* commits suicide. For Breton, in an asylum “on y fait des fous” (139) [madmen are made there] (Howard 139) just as one writes a text.



Figure 16. Manuel, Henri. *Le Professeur Claude à Sainte-Anne* in *Nadja* (1928)

## Conclusion

Transmediality has a long history with tangible political goals. There is a necessity to move beyond the terminology of networks, flows and convergence and grasp how transmediality impacts upon meaning. Transmediality often operates in specific cosmopolitan circumstances to align the commingling of different peoples with the commingling of different media. Indeed, many new photographic techniques and textual innovations were the products of avant-garde émigrés. Transmediality fights against Benjamin's tropes of lack of "aura" and serial copying by aligning the visual with the textual in a hybrid, revolutionary manner. The transmediality of photo-literature grants a narrative reader more agency and a plethora of possible explanations whilst delegating the task of description to visual means. The transmediality of literature and photographs complicates the spatiotemporal dimension of the narrative, creating a sense of visual stillness against mental anguish and continuous *flânerie* across the cityscape. Transmediality can both engender a sense of immersion or a sense of distance, for example, the double mediation of a photograph of a medieval painting renders religion a thing of the past in *Nadja* whilst the immediacy of narrative and photograph in *Bruges La Morte* renders God omnipresent. Transmediality also enables symbiotic relations between different art forms. *Nadja* shows the power of photography to distribute non-western sculptural knowledge whilst the presence of statues in both texts highlights a triple transmediation between text, photograph and sculpture. In sum, transmedia operates in both works to create a cosmopolitan memory of the cityscape. Transmediality and cosmopolitanism are extremely entangled concepts that merit further critical analysis as to the meanings they engender.

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