

Acephalous

Introduction

Acephalous is a Pulp adventure for Trail of Cthulhu. In this story, the characters will be doomed to almost certain death, or worse, and must strive to save themselves and possibly humanity.

The Hook

In Bohemian Paris of the 1930s, the Investigators seek to join a secret society at a meeting in a secluded woods and are confronted with a headless corpse. Who is he and what does it mean?

The Horrible Truth

The dead man is Hank Taylor, a young American writer who has come to Europe to prove himself. He fell in with the Left Bank intellectuals and lived at Shakespeare & Co, an American bookshop run by Sylvia Beach. It's a common haunt for young 'tumbleweeds' - Sylvia is happy to give them a bed in return for help in the shop and proof that they are writing. All of the Lost Generation, Hemingway et al came through here and the shop even put out Joyce's Ulysses in 1922 when he couldn't find a publisher. Sylvia's girlfriend Adrienne Monnier owns a bookshop opposite hers, La Maison des Amis des Livres.

Hank's time in Paris is not going well. He hasn't written anything of worth and is in danger of being kicked out of Shakespeare & Co. One day he overhears Georges Bataille and André Masson, a local artist, talking about Acephalous in the Deux Magots café.

Georges Bataille is a French intellectual who is seeking to rehabilitate the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, taking his brand of nihilism back from the Right. To this end Georges has started a secret society called Acephalous, represented by a headless man. This symbolises, in Freudian terms, the destruction of the Id and thus unfettered, man realising his full potential. It's also a sly dig at brainless right wing philosophies. The society will have meetings at night in a wood near Paris and a magazine through which to spread their ideas.

André is showing Georges some sketches for the front cover of the magazine. Hank gets interested and steals one of these. Hank becomes obsessed with the idea of the headless man, seeing himself in it. He scours second hand bookshops and libraries for information where he encounters the 12th volume of the Revelations of Glaaki. Merely reading passages from this allows Y'golonac to start to possess him and he reels out into the Paris night, unconsciously attempting to realise his desires.

Hank recognises that something has gone wrong, that his desires are unreasonably coming true and he is possessed with finding out about the Acephalous. He does all the research whilst becoming more and more unhinged. He tries to cure himself using a ritual stolen from an esoteric bookshop. He uses a dog in the catacombs but it only partially works. He goes to see his sister, Diana, and tells her he has failed and implores her to help him. She is scared and doesn't know what to do.

Hank breaks into André's house to find more information but all he finds out about is a strange meeting in a forest. He goes there and waits for people to arrive, hoping to get rid of the infection by reading it to others. He is overcome before he can do so but, because he performed the failed exorcism, Y'Golonac cannot properly possess him and he dies, decapitated.

The Spine

The Investigators are friends with Georges and have been invited to the meeting in the wood. This is where they will be confronted with Hank's body and invited by Georges to investigate. They will

scour the Left Bank for clues becoming eventually aware of their possession, eventually finding a possible cure, an ancient ritual to be performed in a strange labyrinth.

The core idea

Hank has a piece of paper on him which contains a key passage from the Revelation of Glaaki. Anyone who reads the piece of paper becomes infected with Y'gonolac. This will happen to the Investigators and will be demonstrated in their desires seemingly come true in strange ways. As the game progresses this happens more frequently, more extremely and more scarily.

Examples:

- someone poor is in a bar and is hungry. The waiter brings them some food, perhaps courtesy of a kindly looking old woman. It's just a hallucination, the PC if he eats the food is eating a newspaper. The other characters can see this.
- A religious character sees a statue of Jesus bleed or the Blessed Mother smile at him
- A character is left alone with an attractive member of the opposite sex and takes advantage of them. But that's not what they remember. For example Hank's sister is only wrapped in a towel when she meets the PCs. She goes into another room and a PC follows her to talk to her. The other PCs here screaming and rush in to find him attacking her. He can't recall how this happened
- A PC needs to drive somewhere in a hurry, the traffic lights all looks green ...

Don't overdo it and try to pick different characters, develop a theme for each character, based on their drives for example. Have Stability rolls when the truth is revealed, if the PC accepts they are deluded, or there is evidence. And have little things at first, getting worse as the game goes on.

After a while, swap the PC's handout for the one which more obviously spells out Y'Gololac (**handout 2b**).

If a character's stability drops to -5, their psyche becomes too damaged to repel Y'gonolac and he will start to manifest physically in them, their hands will grow mouths. After a further **Stability check** and they will lose 1 stability per round until totally possessed. Y'gonolac can possess more than one character at a time.

Paris

Paris is one of the most exciting cities in the world in 1936. The Left Bank, also known as the Quartier Latin because the students living here all used to speak Latin, is a hotbed of intellectual and artistic development, Picasso, Joyce, Hemingway, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Fitzgerald, all were here, painting or writing, and hanging out in the famous cafés such as Les Deux Magots or Café de Flore.

This area is characterised by two wide avenues, Boulevard St Germain which runs parallel to the river Seine and Boulevard St Michel which runs uphill away from the river. The buildings here are built of white stone and all are pretty much four stories tall, with students or artists living in the garrets. There are many small roads between and around the two big avenues with shops, bars, churches and restaurants. Further up the hill are the universities including the Sorbonne, the Pantheon where Voltaire, Rousseau and Victor Hugo are buried and the Hotel de Cluny, a medieval palace housing a museum of the Middle Ages.

Street names used in this scenario are largely for flavour but you can find them on a map of Paris if you like. A few of the handouts are provided in both French and English, you can use either. There is also a table with the actual weather for Paris in April 1936.

PC background

You are friends with George Bataille a philosopher who is seeking to rehabilitate Nietzschean philosophy and has started a secret organisation to discuss matters. You have been invited to the first meeting which takes place in the forest near St Nom La Breteche, an old royal hunting ground

with a ruined castle, out to the south west of Paris. You each have an invitation (**handout 1**). You don't have to know each other. It is Monday April 6th 1936 and Good Friday is this week.

There is a train that goes to St Nom from the centre of Paris. When the characters arrive it is dark and raining. A man meets them at the station and leads them out of the small town into a forest clearing. It is dark, cold and raining. Here they can see two men talking heatedly at the back of the clearing. Nobody else is here yet but lit torches are dotted around providing some little light. They can see a big oak tree at the back too and a few bits of ruined old walls.

Scenes:

1. In the forest -

The PCs arrive first and see George who is desperately talking to someone. There is a flash of lightning. George comes running over. The man is dead, his head is missing. Can the PCs deal with it whilst he stops anyone else from coming to the meeting? Find out who he is and if he'll be missed?

The head has been cleanly severed. There is no blood leaking from it or the body. Nearby is a water filled ditch and a few bits of wall from the ruined castle that was here

Dead Man: nice suit (American tailor) but hasn't bathed in while. Dirty hands, but soft, some ink perhaps on fingers, piece of paper with strange inscription (**handout 2a**), a piece of art by André Masson (**handout 3**, core clue: **Art**, he's a well known artist from the Quartier Latin. Hangs out at the Deux Magots café with Georges Bataille), book of Ezra Pound poems with ex libris from Shakespeare & Co (**handout 4** core clue: **Library Use**, it's a bookshop at 12 rue de L'Odéon in the Quartier Latin).

The PCs need to get back to Paris. They can walk or wake the taxi driver at St Nom or even get a room in an inn for the night. There will be a train in the morning for workers.

2. Shakespeare & Co.

This is an English language bookshop run by Sylvia Beach. It is stuffed from floor to ceiling with books through tiny back rooms, over three floors and in bookcases out onto the pavement. The shop is home to Sylvia who has an apartment in the top floor as well as several young Americans. Sylvia gives them board and lodging as long as they help out in shop and they write. At the end of each week, they have to read out what they have written on the single tiny typewriter in the shop. At night they sleep on benches around the shop which are covered in books for sale during the day.

Sylvia recognises the book of poems as one that was taken by Hank. If someone buys a book she'll tell them that Hank stayed upstairs and he has a sister called Diana who lives in the rue Dante (core clue: **Credit Rating**). She'll also tell them about the little dog he had and the fact that he went down into the catacombs. Searching round where Hank had his bed you can find the reference to the Blemmyes (**handout 5**).

3. Hank's sister Diana

Diana lives in a small apartment on the 3rd floor in the rue Dante. On the ground floor, the rather fierce concierge guards the entrance to the building, keeping tabs on all comings and goings. She will be reluctant to let any mob or any single men go upstairs. Diana has three rooms, bath, bed and kitchen/sitting room. (Core clue: **Reassurance**) She tells them that Hank came to see her and he was very worried. He read something and it changed him. He was looking for something. He had a pet dog but she doesn't know what happened to it. He was looking for some kind of labyrinth in books at the Biblioteque Nationale, he mentioned a "Gondrin" maybe?

4. André Masson

André lives on the Boulevard St Michel. He has done quite well for himself and so can afford a set

of rooms on the 4th floor and a studio in the attic, well lit from many skylights. He recognises the sketch as one of several pieces he was discussing with Georges Bataille at the Cafe when it disappeared. He doesn't want to talk about it because of the vow of secrecy that he took as part of the society but is not very brave (Core clue: **Intimidation**). He was also broken into recently and although his papers were disturbed he couldn't find anything that was taken.

5. Catacombs

There is a small door next to the boiler in Shakespeare & Co that leads down some narrow steps into the catacombs (see **map**). There are traces of footprints that lead to a wall of bricks. Here there is a dead dog, it has been eviscerated and partially eaten. Also on the wall are mystic symbols, scuffed by traces of hair and blood where Hank banged his head on the wall when his ritual failed. **Occult** says that this was an exorcism. Also there is the remains of a book in Latin from an esoteric bookshop (core clue: **Occult**) the nearest shop is in the rue Monge, called Librairie Bailly.

6. Bibliotheque Nationale

This is where Georges works. "de Gondrin" will lead to Henri de Gondrin (core clue: **Library Use**). He was the Bishop of Paris and banished a demon from a man into a criminal who was then killed. **Handout 6**. The ritual took place in a labyrinth. It doesn't say which one but you also find some accounts (Core clue: **Accountancy**) reading these you find that Henri had a labyrinth built specially in the east, in Montreuil

7. Librairie Bailly

In the rue Monge, had a break and a book was stolen, a transcription of a 15th century necromancers manual containing many spells including exorcism, one where you force the spirit into a dog then kill the dog. They have another copy of the book, it's 1 Credit Rating. The spell can be used to force Y'gonolac out of someone. A dog can be used, but if there is more than one possessed, you need a person.

8. Montreuil

Handout 7 shows the "murs a peches" which were used to grow peaches. The walls keep the trees warm at night. This is where the ritual must be performed. The walls are like a brain which fools the demon into thinking there is a larger head it can inhabit.

The ritual (see rule book page XX) has stability difficulty of 5 with 10 points of inertia, flirting or athletics (sexy dancing) can be used instead of stability. It's an extended contest. One PC leads and makes the rolls anyone else must spend 1 point to join in. The PCs spend points to beat a difficulty of 5, it's best to spend 4 points which can come from any participants. Then the inertia rolls against the same difficulty i.e. Spends 4 points. In the third round, inertia only has 2 points left so must roll at least 3 to resist. If it does, it must roll 5 on following rounds to resist the players. If the PCs fail before inertia, the ritual fails and must be started again, preferably after a rest.

When the ritual succeeds, Y'gonolac possesses someone, either an indicated sacrifice or the leader if no one is indicated. If dogs are used, there must be one per participant or else Y'gonolac will possess whoever the leader designates, or the leader, if he doesn't.

Once the demon has been summoned out and into someone else (possibly a vagrant or one of the PCs), that person loses their head and becomes Y'gonolac (see rule book) each PC who sees this loses 6 stability and 2 sanity on failed stability 5 roll, lose 3/1 on a success (or faints).

A Y'gonolac possessed character gains 15 health and 12 scuffling, 2 attacks per round with hands doing d6+1 damage. It has 0 Athletics so cannot chase people very well (5 or 6 to succeed), does not tire in chasing them but cannot leave the labyrinth. If not killed, then he will leave the possessed person after a while. They might seem to have recovered but are now a Vessel of

Y'golonac. He will wait for an apposite time to repossess them and attack the remaining PCs, one by one if possible.

NPCs

Sylvia Beach

Clever and resourceful, Sylvia has been running this Shakespeare & Co for 17 years during which time many of the greats of art and literature of the inter-war years have passed through Paris and become her friend. She often wears men's clothing and has a mass of auburn dyed hair. Her girlfriend Adrienne owns the bookshop across the road.

Three mannerisms:

- Speaks slowly
- Waves her hand around and calls everyone “chéri”
- Happy to strike a bargain

Interpersonal:

Primary: Bargain

Works: Flattery

Does not work: Reassurance, Intimidation (except with violence)

Georges Bataille

Georges is 39. He served in the war but was invalided with tuberculosis and depression which haunted the rest of his life. He was interested in sex, death, degradation, and the power and potential of the obscene. He published the erotic and surreal *Histoire de l'Oeil* in 1928 before being kicked out of the surrealists by André Breton for splintering the group. His later interests were in Marxism, Nihilism and anti-facism.

Three mannerisms:

- Takes everything seriously
- Coughs and smokes, and coughs again
- Fiercely loyal to his friends, hates his enemies

Interpersonal:

Primary: Reassurance

Works: Bargain, Intimidation (in that it amuses him)

Does not work: Flattery (finds disgusting)

André Masson

40 years old, a short man with thin dark hair. Masson was badly affected by the events of the First World War being first shot and then suffering shock, fits of rage and internment.

Three mannerisms:

- Darting eyes
- Scared of losing his temper
- Distracted by art

Interpersonal:

Primary: Intimidation (he gets angry but doesn't lose control)

Works: Bargain, Flattery, Reassurance

Diana Taylor

Diana, 23, is in Paris as a junior member of the American embassy staff. She saves her salary and spends it on the latest fashion, as much as she can afford. She is fond of her brother but feels that he is wasting his life without having a proper job. In fact the family is fairly well off neither really needs to work. Diana is fairly modern in wanting to work before marriage and her parents thought that coming to Europe would broaden her outlook but she hasn't set her eye on anyone yet.

Three mannerisms:

- Enthusiastic
- Friendly
- Unselfconscious

Interpersonal:

Primary: Reassurance

Works: Flattery, Bargain, Intimidation

Weather for Paris in April 1936

		Rain	Temperature		Moon	Date
			Min	Max		
Monday	06/04/1936	12	2.3	13.0	Full	
Tuesday	07/04/1936	11	0.7	10.4		
Wednesday	08/04/1936	0	2.5	12.3		
Thursday	09/04/1936	27	4.7	17.5		
Friday	10/04/1936	26	4.6	16.1		Good Friday
Saturday	11/04/1936	7	3.3	9.0		
Sunday	12/04/1936	37	0.5	7.7		Easter Sunday
Monday	13/04/1936	114	-0.7	11.0		Easter Monday
Tuesday	14/04/1936	26	4.2	11.6	Half	
Wednesday	15/04/1936	34	3.0	9.8		
Thursday	16/04/1936	74	4.5	10.1		
Friday	17/04/1936	1	3.5	10.6		
Saturday	18/04/1936	2	3.7	11.6		la Miséricorde
Sunday	19/04/1936	9	0.2	13.8		
Monday	20/04/1936	97	2.3	13.5		
Tuesday	21/04/1936	1	3.2	10.1	New	
Wednesday	22/04/1936	7	3.1	9.1		
Thursday	23/04/1936	0	1.6	12.7		

Very light rain – 0mm – 6 mm

Light rain – 6mm – 24mm

Moderate rain – 24mm – 96mm

Heavy rain – 96mm – 384mm

Very heavy rain 384mm – 1,200mm

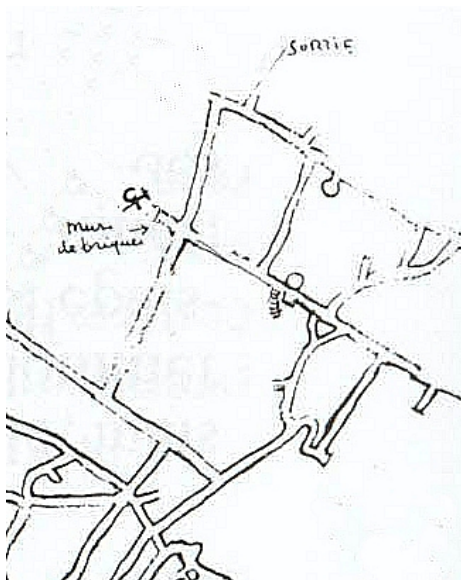
Extremely heavy rain 1,200mm+

Handout 1
Instructions

Do not acknowledge anybody, do not speak to anybody, and take a seat at some distance from other travellers. Get off the train at Saint-Nom, exit the station in the direction of the train and turn left. Follow the instructions of those who will meet you on the road, asking no questions, walk in groups of two or three at the most, without talking, until you reach the path that leads the from road, when you should walk in Indian file, a few metres apart. On nearing the meeting-place, stop and wait to be conducted to it one at a time. Then remain motionless and silent until the end. All discussions of the meeting is forbidden, under whatever pretext.

Ne reconnaissez personne, ne parler à personne, et prenez une place à une certaine distance des autres voyageurs. Descendez du train à Saint-Nom, sortez de la gare en direction de du train et tournez à gauche. Suivez les instructions de celui que vous rencontrerez sur la route, ne posant pas de questions, marchez par groupe de deux ou trois au plus, sans parler, jusqu'à ce que vous atteignez le chemin qui mène de la route, alors marchez en file indienne, à quelques mètres de distance. En approchant le lieu de réunion, arrêtez-vous et attendez d'être mené un par un. Puis restez immobile et silencieux jusqu'à la fin. Toutes discussion de la réunion est interdite, sous quelque prétexte que ce soit.

Map of the catacombs



Handout 2a

Au-delà d'un gouffre dans la nuit souterraine, un passage conduit jusqu'à un mur de briques cyclopéennes. Derrière ce mur Il se dresse, qui attend d'être servi par les créatures dépenaillées et dépourvues d'yeux qui hantent les ténèbres. Long fut son sommeil derrière le mur et ceux qui rampent sur ces briques passent sur son corps sans savoir qui est-il. Mais quand son nom est prononcé et lu, il vient alors pour être adoré ou pour se repaître et prendre l'apparence et l'âme de ceux qu'il dévore. Car ceux qui ont de mauvaises lectures et tentent de l'imaginer appellent le Mal, ainsi Il peut revenir marcher parmi les hommes et attendre que la terre soit entièrement dévastée, que Cthulhu se lève de sa tombe prise dans les algues.

Beyond a gulf in the subterranean night a passage leads to a wall of massive bricks, and beyond the wall He rises to be served by the tattered eyeless figures of the dark. Long has he slept beyond the wall, and those which crawl over the bricks scuttle across his body never knowing who He is; but when His name is spoken or read he comes forth to be worshipped or to feed and take on the shape and soul of those he feeds upon. For those who read of evil and search for its form within their minds call forth evil, and so may He return to walk among men and await that time when the earth is cleared off and Cthulhu rises from his tomb among the weeds.

Handout 2b

Au-delà d'un gouffre dans la nuit souterraine, un passage conduit jusqu'à un mur de briques cyclopéennes. Derrière ce mur Il se dresse, qui attend d'être servi par les créatures dépenaillées et dépourvues d'yeux qui hantent les ténèbres. Long fut son sommeil derrière le mur et ceux qui rampent sur ces briques passent sur son corps sans savoir qui est-il. Mais quand son nom est prononcé et lu, il vient alors pour être adoré ou pour se repaître et prendre l'apparence et l'âme de ceux qu'il dévore. Car ceux qui ont de mauvaises lectures et tentent de l'imaginer appellent le Mal, ainsi Il peut revenir marcher parmi les hommes et Attendre que la terre soit entièrement dévastée, que Cthulhu se lève de sa tombe prise dans les algues.

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Handout 3
Andre's Picture



Handout 4
Shakespeare & Co exlibris



Handout 5

Bleymmes

le centre de l'É. et la mer Baltique au N., à pour cher-
lieu Carlscrona et compte 99 000 hab. Ce pays a jus-
qu'en 1658 appartenu au Danemark.
BLEMMYES, peuplade qui au III^e siècle de J.-C.
habitait au S. O. de l'Égypte, soutint le tyran Firmus,
puis s'empara de Ptolémaïs et de Coptos au temps de
Probus. On finit par les réduire. Suivant les récits po-
pulaires, ils étaient sans tête, sans cou, et avaient
les yeux et la bouche sur la poitrine.
BLÉNEAU, ch.-l. de cant. (Yonne), sur le Loing,
arrond. et à 60 kil. S. O. de Joigny, à 47 kil. O.
d'Auxerre; 1168 hab. En 1652, Condé, à la tête des

Handout 6

Henri de Gondrin



Handout 7
Les murs a peches



Background on L'Acephale

The Secret Society of Acéphale:

Published Information about Acéphale is exceptionally scarce, usually ambiguous, and often deliberately inaccurate. Bataille's own few comments appear in his *Autobiographical Note*: [1] "With *Contre-Attaque* dissolved, Bataille immediately decided to form, together with those of his friends who were former members (among them Georges Ambrosino, Pierre Klossowski, Patrick Waldberg), a OEsecret society' which, turning its back on politics, would pursue goals that would be solely religious (but anti-Christian, essentially Nietzschean). This society was formed. Its intentions are in part expressed in the journal *Acéphale*, four issues of which appeared between 1936 and 1939 [2]. The *Collège de Sociologie*, founded in March 1936, constituted to some extent the exterior aspect of this OEsecret society' (...) Of the OEsecret society,' it is difficult to speak, but it seems that some of its members at least have returned an impression of a OEvoyage out of the world.' Short-lived, of necessity, essentially unviable; in September 1939, all of its members withdrew."

The actual activities and membership of Acéphale are still shrouded in mystery since no member of the group has ever published an account of his involvement [3]. We know something of its aims from other sources, for example, Bataille's invitation to Patrick Waldberg "announced the constitution of a secret society involving a ceremony of initiation, rites, and the acceptance of a changed way of life destined to separate adepts, although nothing would be externally visible, from a world that would be henceforth considered as profane." [4]

Two texts by Bataille give some clues as to his intentions. *The Sacred Conspiracy*, which prefaced the first issue of *Acéphale*, contained an appeal *to go beyond the world*: "It is time to abandon the world of the civilised and its light. It is too late to be reasonable and educated, which has led to a life without appeal." Furthermore: "A world that cannot be loved to the point of death, in the same way that a man loves a woman, represents only self-interest and the obligation to work. If it is compared to worlds gone by, it is hideous, and appears as the most failed of all." Acéphale is, he states, "*ferociously religious*," yet this religion is atheological: "The *acephalic man* mythologically expresses sovereignty committed to destruction and the death of God, and in this the identification with the headless man merges and melds with the identification with the superhuman, which is entirely OEthe death of God.'" (Absolute, Enthousiasme). God is the enemy of community, or a creator of false community, associated with tranquillity, absence of movement, the finished, time made finite: a prison. [5]

The second text constitutes the 11 point program given to new members. It was not published until 1970, and a few excerpts are sufficient to convey its apocalyptic message. Following the creation of a community, this programme asserts various aims, including the need to "Lift the curse of those feelings of guilt which oppress men, force them into wars they do not want, and consign them to work from whose fruits they never benefit (...) Realise the universal fulfilment of the individual being within the ironical world of animals through the revelation of an acephalous universe, a universe which exists in a state of play rather than one of obligation. (...) Assume within oneself perversion and crime, not as exclusive values, but as a prelude to their integration into the totality of humanity. (...) Participate in the destruction of the world as it presently exists, with eyes open wide to the world which is yet to be."

[6] The accomplishment of such a programme seems problematic to say the least and nothing is known of what occurred at Acéphale's meetings, although Bataille's written instructions for getting them allow one to assess their tone: "Do not acknowledge anybody, do not speak to anybody, and take a seat at some distance from other travellers. Get off the train at Saint-Nom, exit the station in the direction of the train and turn left. Follow the instructions of those who will meet you on the road, asking no questions, walk in groups of two or three at the most, without talking, until you reach the path that leads the road, when you should walk in Indian file, a few metres apart. On nearing the meeting-place, stop and wait to be conducted to it one at a time. Then remain motionless and silent until the end... [the return journey was similarly regimented, and afterwards:] All discussions of the meeting is forbidden, under whatever pretext."

Bataille then describes the meeting site: "On a marshy soil, in the centre of a forest, where turmoil seems to have intervened in the usual order of things, stands a tree struck by lightning. One can recognise in this tree the mute presence of that which has assumed the name of Acéphale, expressed here by these arms without a head. It is a willingness to seek out and to confront a presence that swamps our life of reason which gives to

these steps a sense that opposes them to those of others. This ENCOUNTER that is undergone in the forest will be of real value only to the extent to which death makes its presence felt. To go before this presence, is to decide to part the veil with which our own death is shrouded." [7]

Acéphale had other privileged places, including the Place de la Concorde, where Louis XVI was beheaded by the guillotine, but we know nothing of its rites. The most lurid speculations centre on Bataille's interest in performing a human sacrifice. Callois confirmed this project while recalling his refusal to participate: "The (willing) victim was found, only the executioner was lacking... Bataille asked me to undertake the task perhaps because while I was at college, I had written a panegyric to Saint Just, and so he imagined that I possessed the necessary severity of character." [8]

Patrick Waldberg attended the last meeting: "The war had burst upon us, Acéphale vacillated, undermined by internal dissensions, its conscience shattered perhaps by its obvious incongruity in the face of world-wide disaster. At the last meeting in the heart of the forest, there were only four of us and Bataille solemnly requested whether one of the other three others would assent to being put to death, since this sacrifice would be the foundation of a myth, and ensure the survival of the community. This favour was refused him. Some months later the war was unleashed in earnest, sweeping away what hope remained." [9]

Bataille in fact, had been deeply affected by the death of his lover, Laure, in November 1938, and seriously ill with a lung infection, he spent the war absorbed in an internal exploration which resulted in the *Summa Atheologica*. The group dispersed, some travelling to New York, others to the southern unoccupied zone of France, and yet it possessed an internal cohesion, and with the exception of Callois (by then living in Argentina), it reformed after the war, albeit in a more exoteric fashion, around the review *Critique* and now it appears, the *Da Costa*. Other contributors to *Documents* were among the founders of the Resistance; the Musée de L'Homme became one of its principal centres in Paris, the staff forming one of the first organised cells, and the underground magazine *Résistance* was printed in the museum's basement. Early in 1941 the group was betrayed, its female members were sent to concentration camps, and most of them shot (although Rivet and Rivière escaped this fate).

The exiled Acéphales, ex-members of the College of Sociology and Surrealists met frequently in New York, although their activities were constrained by their situation. Georges Duthuit supervised the publication of a selection of texts relating to the College of Sociology and Acéphale in Eugene Jolas' anthology *Vertical* (1941), and the Surrealists organised a group exhibition *The First Papers of Surrealism*, the first to take myth as its theme, and founded a new review *VVV* (four issues, June 1942 to February 1944).

Meanwhile Patrick Waldberg's work in the Office of War Information had taken him to Algeria, Ireland and London. During his isolation from the New York group he pondered past events and communicated them in a long letter to his wife Isabelle (dated 19 September 1943) [10]. An edited version of it, together with response by Georges Duthuit and Robert Lebel, appeared in the last issue of *VVV* (no. 4, 1944), under the title *Vers un nouveau mythe? Prémonitions et défiances*.

Waldberg expressed a complete disillusion with Acéphale's attempts to create a community around a new myth, which he concluded could only arise, and not be constructed. The literary and arbitrary nature of its images and rites, its lack of rigour, its Nietzschean bias, precluded its success and yet despite its mistakes he did not quite condemn Bataille, who led him through what he was now saw as a pointless labyrinth. Duthuit for his part defended Bataille's appropriation of Nietzsche and Dionysius, but refused to defend Acéphale, not having been a member. Lebel's (another non-member) response was more interesting; he viewed the problem from the perspective of promoting group action, collective activity which, he says, seems to be militated against by some general principle. Acéphale was valid if only because it succeeded in combating this principle for a while, and anyway Bataille had foreseen its failure in his essay *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. [11] He concludes by proposing that humour, systematically exploited, could provide the cohesion for renewed group action.

Paris was liberated in August 1944, and the foreign exiles began returning, among them Isabelle Waldberg in November '45, Duchamp in May '46, Breton the same month. They returned to a capital in economic and political chaos, in which polemic and accusation reached new heights, even for Paris.

Against the background of the *épuration* numerous factions exchanged abuse, formed alliances and fellout again with alarming rapidity. Sartre and the existentialists attacked both Surrealism and the Communist; the Party replied in kind, refusing to recognise either movement as "engaged" for differing reasons, ideological and pragmatic. Old fellow-travellers attacked Surrealism: Aragon, Tzara, Vailland. The Surrealist group and the revue *La Main à plume*, who had remained in Paris during the war, assumed a pro-Moscow position against Breton's group, and suffered rebuffs from all quarters. New movements, such as Isou's Lettrism, arose and attacked everyone, and Maurice Nadeu even published a *History of Surrealism*, by implication consigning it to Trotsky's famous dustbin. [12]

Both the groups originally centred around Bataille and Breton lacked a review in which to publish. The Surrealists' *Minotaure* had folded at the beginning of the war, as had VVV in 1944. The next official magazine of the group was *Néon* which did not appear until 1948. An even longer hiatus existed for the Acéphales between the closure of *Acéphale* in 1939 and the founding of *Critique* in 1946. This gap was partially filled by the *Da Costa*, particularly since *Critique* was devoted solely to critical writing.

[1] Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, Gallimard (12 volumes published between 1970 and 1988), Vol.8.

[2] In fact the *College* dates from a year later.

[3] A provisional list of members would include: Georges Bataille, Collette Peignot (Laure), Georges Amrosino, Pierre Andler (pseud. Of Pierre Dugan), Jacques Chavy, Rene Chenon, George Dussat, Jean Rollin, Pierre or Imre Keleman, Patrick and Isabelle Waldberg, Roger Callois, Pierre Klossowski, Jean Dautry, Henri Dubief and perhaps Jules Monneret. Some of these names are obscure. Dominique Lecoq was able to supply some information: Dubief and Dautry were historians, associated with Souvaine's *Cercle Communiste Démocratique* and later *Contre Attaque*; Dussat, an unpublished poet; and Keleman a Hungarian refugee and professional translator.

[4] Waldberg, Isabelle & Patrick, *Un Amour Acéphale, Correspondance 1940-1949*, Eds. De la Différence, 1992, p.8.

[5] *Propositions on the Death of God, Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoeckl, UK: Manchester University Press, 1985; USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, pp.199, 201

[6] Programme, dated 4/4/36, *Documents*, (reprinted in two volumes), Jean-Michel Place, 1991, Vo. 2, p.274

[7] Bataille, Georges, *Instructions pour la recontre en forêt*, Vol. 2, Complete Works, pp.277-8.

[8] Cited in J.P. Le Boulter, *Bataille et Callois, divergences et complicités*. According to Tatsuo Satomi, the suicide of the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima was inspired by Bataille's interest in human sacrifice, *ibid*, p.55.

[9] *Acephalogramme*, unpublished text quoted in Waldberg, Isabelle & Patrick, *Un Amour Acéphale, Correspondance 1940-1949*, Eds. De la Différence, 1992, p.9.

[10] Waldberg, Isabelle & Patrick, *Un Amour Acéphale, Correspondance 1940-1949*, Eds. De la Différence, 1992 p.84-89.

[11] Included in *Hommage à Georges Bataille* [ed. Barthes, Deguy, Foucault], special issue of *Critique*, 195-6, August/September 1963, reprinted 1991, pp.12-23.

[12] The best English account of these debates, although from a year or so later, is to be found in the six issues of *Transition* 48 (later 49 and 50). Sartre, Bataille, and Fouchet were all on its editorial board.

Like Sorel's mythico-political sects, *Acéphale* was a restricted, delimited group, into which one one was ritually initiated and whose members were sworn to secrecy. The group was bound together by the performance of rituals, such as the commemoration of the beheading of Louis XVI on the Place De La Concorde on the 21st of January.

Acéphale is most notorious for a violent ritual, albeit a ritual that was never performed. *Acéphale*'s ultimate goal was to enact a sacrifice of one of it's members. "There was another idea, hatched by Bataille, that the action of a group could be fully efficacious only if the initial pact of alliance among it's members was truly irremediable. And he was convinced that to bind their energies together, it was necessary to perform a human sacrifice. (...) I am not at all sure what transpired with regard to this projected human sacrifice. What is clear, though, is that it was easier to find a volunteer victim than a sacrificer, and so things went no further" (Callois). The activities of *Acéphale* were directed towards a total transformation of society. Through the mediation of the sacrificial victim a

means of communication would be established through not only between the members of the secret society, but also with society. Through this mythico-political act, social life would be stimulated and society reinvigorated. Human desires, passions, and mental activity would be reborn.

The activism of Acéphale must be seen in the light of the great political crisis of the interwar period: the rise of fascism. A fanatic struggle against fascism dominated Bataille's political life from the mid-nineteenthirties onwards. In September-October 1935, Bataille instigated Contre-Attaque, which can be seen as an anti-fascist movement related to Surrealism. Contre-Attaque was "virulently hostile to any tendency, whatever form it takes, that harnesses the Revolution to the advantage of ideas of nation or country." Acéphale was created when the Contre-Attaque fell apart, in the spring of 1936. The sacrifice that was at the center of Acéphale, should be seen as a strategy which was to bring about the triumph of Bataille's sacrificial Surrealism over National Socialist and fascist Caesarisms. Bataille's conception of sacrificial death as a tragedy was opposed politically to fascism, which denies what death is, turning it into a glamorous patriotic solution. Acéphale was a revolutionary ideological elite - but an elite of Surrealism, not of Socialism.

Like the political sects of Sorel, Acéphale was focused on violent action performed with a sense of impersonal consecration to the ends of a restricted, delimited group bound together in fervent solidarity and impelled by a passionate confidence in its ultimate triumph in some cataclysmic encounter.

When Surrealism proved to be unable to stem the tide of fascism and the triumph turned into a debacle, Bataille turned inwards. Mytho-political activism was replaced by inner experience.

Extra notes

Les murs de peches

Impasse Gobetue

la Société d'Horticulture, president de 1930 à 1966 M. Aubin (36 ans)

Walls warmer temperature than surrounding area, used to grow peaches

Start – given instructions, follow to clearing in forest. Find dead body with no head.

The dead man is a member of Acéphale who has been following up research into acephalia at La Bibliothèque Nationale (58 Rue de Richelieu).

This lead him to a cabinet de curiosités in the Rue Dante.

Y'golonac cannot enter into the light but he can manifest inside anyone who has read of him.

Y'golonac is shown as a blue demon in the Aurora Consurgens, 15th Century manuscript by Pseudo-Aquinas (1420)

Y'golonac was present in the mines of Paris in the 16th century. Alchemist Nicolas Barnaud tried to banish him but failed. His miroir des français exhorts vice and licence be banished in order to weaken Y'golonac.

Y'golonac was buried under Paris until creation of the catacombs freed him. He roamed about until he met some members of the IGC whom he killed. Alexis-Vincent-Charles Berbiguier de Terre-Neuve du Thym helped contain him and he was imprisoned in 1790 in a specially built labyrinth in Montreuil, underneath the murs à peches. (recounted in Berbiguier de Terre-Neuve du Thym, Les Farfadets ou Tous les démons ne sont pas de l'autre monde, À compte d'auteur, Paris, 1821.)

SYLVIA BEACH, 12, Rue De L'Odeon, Paris, VI

Dead American writer

Acephale manuscript typed on back of something from S&C.

Photographer girlfriend in Montreuil.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caf%C3%A9_de_Flore

Also dreams, burglary at store in rue beaubourg, asking sister for help - ritual has failed

Nietzschean quote and drives for PCs (optional)

Quotes and drives

He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster.

Duty

The true man wants two things: danger and play. For that reason he wants woman, as the most dangerous plaything.

Adventure

To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.

In the blood

You must have chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star

Artistic Sensitivity

Faith: not wanting to know what is true.

Curiosity

For art to exist, for any sort of aesthetic activity to exist, a certain physiological precondition is indispensable: intoxication.

Thirst for knowledge

Citations et motivations

Celui qui combat des monstres doit prendre garde de ne pas devenir monstre lui-même

Devoir

L'homme véritable veut deux choses : le danger et le jeu. C'est pourquoi il veut la femme, le jouet le plus dangereux.

Aventure

Vivre, c'est souffrir, la survie c'est de trouver un sens à la souffrance.

Dans le sang

Il faut avoir le chaos en soit pour donner naissance a une etoile dansante

Sensitivité artistique

La foi c'est ne pas vouloir savoir ce qui est vrai.

Curiosité

Pour que l'art existe, pour que toute activité ou perception esthétique existe, une certaine condition physiologique préalable est indispensable : l'intoxication

Soif du savoir

Extra Pictures

Front cover of L'Acephale



