

Cambridge University Press

0521495741 - Michel Leiris: Writing the Self - Sean Hand

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MICHEL LEIRIS

Writing the Self

This is the first full-length study in English of Michel Leiris's work. Frequently cited as a central figure in contemporary French culture, Leiris was an outstanding writer whose double career as ethnographer and creative writer places him at important points of intersection within French cultural history. Seán Hand explores Leiris's active participation in some of the most striking intellectual and artistic movements of the twentieth century: surrealism in the twenties, ethnography in the thirties and existentialism in the forties. Hand locates his writing in these different contexts in relation to the major artistic, political and philosophical concepts of the period. He goes on to argue that Leiris's multi-volume autobiography *La Règle du jeu* stands as the model form of self-enquiry in the twentieth century. More broadly, Hand explores Leiris's continuing obsession with the notion of 'presence'. Informed by recent critical theories, Hand offers a multi-disciplinary approach to this intriguing writer.

SEÁN HAND is Professor of French and Head of the School of Languages at Oxford Brookes University. He is editor of *The Levinas Reader* and *Facing the Other: the Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. He has published on Derrida, psychoanalysis and contemporary French writing.

Cambridge University Press

0521495741 - Michel Leiris: Writing the Self - Sean Hand
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN FRENCH

GENERAL EDITOR: Michael Sheringham (*Royal Holloway, London*)

EDITORIAL BOARD: R. Howard Bloch (*Columbia University*), Malcolm Bowie (*All Souls College, Oxford*), Terence Cave (*St John's College, Oxford*), Ross Chambers (*University of Michigan*), Antoine Compagnon (*Columbia University*), Peter France (*University of Edinburgh*), Christie McDonald (*Harvard University*), Toril Moi (*Duke University*), Naomi Schor (*Harvard University*)

Recent titles in this series include

JULIE CANDLER HAYES

Reading the French Enlightenment: System and Subversion

URSULA TIDD

Simone de Beauvoir, Gender and Testimony

JANELL WATSON

Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust: The Collection and Consumption of Curiosities

FLOYD GRAY

Gender, Rhetoric and Print Culture in French Renaissance Writing

ANN JEFFERSON

Nathalie Sarraute, Fiction and Theory: Questions of Difference

ALISON FINCH

Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France

TIMOTHY MATHEWS

Literature, Art and the Pursuit of Decay in Twentieth-Century France

EDWARD J. HUGHES

Writing Marginality in Modern French Literature: From Loti to Genet

JANE H. M. TAYLOR

The Poetry of François Villon: Text and Context

MICHELE LONGINO

Orientalism in French Classical Drama

A complete list of books in the series is given at the end of the volume.

Cambridge University Press

0521495741 - Michel Leiris: Writing the Self - Sean Hand

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

MICHEL LEIRIS

Writing the Self

SEÁN HAND

Oxford Brookes University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

0521495741 - Michel Leiris: Writing the Self - Sean Hand

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Cambridge University Press 2002

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Baskerville Monotype 11 / 12.5 pt *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 49574 1 hardback

Cambridge University Press
0521495741 - Michel Leiris: Writing the Self - Sean Hand
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

For Maolíosa and Dominic

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page x
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction: the deaths of Michel Leiris	i
PART I TEXTS AND CONTEXTS	
1 Unities and identities: Leiris and surrealism	15
2 Recasting the self: from surrealism to ethnography	45
3 Autobiographical frameworks: from ethnography to <i>L'Age d'homme</i>	61
4 Positional play: <i>La Règle du jeu</i>	85
5 Secreting the self: <i>Journal 1922–1989</i>	122
PART II THE QUEST FOR PRESENCE IN <i>LA RÈGLE DU JEU</i>	
6 Excess of joy: the beginnings of presence in ‘... Reusement!’	151
7 Organs of learning: sensing presence in <i>Biffures</i>	158
8 The act of union: being-in-the-world in <i>La Règle du jeu</i>	169
9 Thanatography: non-being as the limit of autobiography	185
Conclusion: locating Leiris	202
<i>Notes</i>	206
<i>Bibliography</i>	229
<i>Index</i>	255

Cambridge University Press

0521495741 - Michel Leiris: Writing the Self - Sean Hand

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

This book has been a long time in the making, and I am grateful to a great many people and institutions. The School of Languages at Oxford Brookes University, the Department of Language Studies at London Guildhall University, and the Department of European Languages at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, all encouraged my work at different stages. I have relied a great deal on the facilities of the Taylor Institution library at the University of Oxford. I have benefited from the opportunity to discuss related ideas at the universities of Kent, London, Manchester, Oxford, Paris VII and Reading. Early versions of certain sections have previously appeared in the journals *Aura*, *Paragraph* and *Romance Studies*, and in the edited volume *L'Autre et le sacré* (L'Harmattan). I am grateful to editors and publishers for permission to incorporate material in modified form. For special advice, I am indebted to Dr Vivienne Suvini-Hand. Dr Rima Dapous acted throughout as an expert and encouraging research assistant, and Helena Garnett assisted with indexing. I wish to thank everyone at Cambridge University Press, and especially the commissioning editors Dr Linda Bree and Dr Katharina Brett for unusual forbearance, the editor Rachel De Wachter for guiding the book through production, and Susan Beer for her gentle yet scrupulous copy-editing. Both Professor Malcolm Bowie and Professor Michael Sheringham, as successive General Editors of the series, were generous with their time and encouraging with their advice. Above all, this book is for Maoliosa, who has endured each stage of its intermittent formation, and for Dominic, whose continuing delight in language puts the exercise of reading Leiris into joyful perspective. They are the rule and the game of my work, the law and the love of my life.

Abbreviations

<i>A</i>	<i>Aurora</i>
<i>AF</i>	<i>L'Afrique fantôme</i>
<i>AH</i>	<i>L'Age d'homme</i>
<i>Bi</i>	<i>Biffures</i>
<i>Br</i>	<i>Brisées</i>
<i>CE</i>	<i>Cinq Études d'ethnologie</i>
<i>FB</i>	<i>Frêle Bruit</i>
<i>Fi</i>	<i>Fibrilles</i>
<i>Fo</i>	<i>Fourbis</i>
<i>GFN</i>	<i>Grande fuite de neige</i>
<i>J</i>	<i>Journal, 1922–1989</i>
<i>LS</i>	<i>La Langue secrète des Dogons de Sanga</i>
<i>LT</i>	<i>Langage tangage</i>
<i>MSM</i>	<i>Mots sans mémoire</i>
<i>N</i>	<i>Nuits sans nuit et quelques jours sans jour</i>
<i>O</i>	<i>Opératiques</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar</i>
<i>S</i>	<i>'Le Sacré dans la vie quotidienne'</i>
<i>Ž</i>	<i>Žébrage</i>