



## Miserable Miracle

*Henri Michaux , Louise Varèse (Translator) , Anna Moschovakis (Translator) , Octavio Paz (Introduction)*

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"This book is an exploration. By means of words, signs, drawings. Mescaline, the subject explored." In *Miserable Miracle*, the great French poet and artist Henri Michaux, a confirmed teetotaler, tells of his life-transforming first encounters with a powerful hallucinogenic drug. At once lacerating and weirdly funny, challenging and Chaplinesque, his book is a breathtaking vision of interior space and a piece of stunning writing wrested from the grip of the unspeakable.

Includes forty pages of black-and-white drawings.

## Miserable Miracle Details

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## From Reader Review Miserable Miracle for online ebook

### Solange te parle says

Descriptions poétiquement décousues de trips sous psychédéliques. Michaux est attendrissant et réussit à rendre compte comme personne des états de conscience modifiée. Entre extase et perte de soi-même. (Mais lecture un peu absconse pour qui n'aurait aucun intérêt pour les substances...)

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### Ryan says

The "writer takes drugs and tells the tale" summary does not do this justice, particularly if that conjures visions of Hunter S. Thompson. This reads almost more like travel writing where the space is internal and the behavioral/built culture is formed from the pharmacological/philosophical aspect of a given drug ... comparative ethnography of Mescaline and Hashish. Hardly surprising since Michaux has also written some excellent travelogues. The writing is occasionally terrifying (and terrifyingly beautiful) ... I get glimpses of Lovecraftian architecture, of Kafkaesque labyrinths, and, yes, of Burrough's more cerebral passages, but all tempered by a very modern poetic respect for the stark, the simple, the clean. Surrealist line drawing, and the drawings in the book, are apt visual metaphors. He manages to capture the infinite, uncomposed nature of Mescaline in with concision and form. No small accomplishment. And kudos for giving me my new favorite word: ruiniform.

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### David Marchese says

It's legitimately psychedelic, which is to say parts of it are intensely interesting and others super boring. I can't see why someone who didn't at least have a stoner phase would like it. I can clearly see why someone who did would get a kick out of at least a few sections.

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### Joseph says

A subjective view of the mescaline and hashish experience with some insights into the mind, being and madness. Michaux likens mescaline to madness, and was deeply uncomfortable and disturbed during the trip; he seems a bit more comfortable with hashish but still experiences hallucinations, which is a rare reaction to that drug.

There is obvious familiarity with psychology and the text is pseudo-psychological in tone; pseudo, because he is untrained, not in a pejorative sense.

From p.77:

"There is a certain temperament that longs to adore God, cannot adore God and is frightened to death by God. How many men have become atheists (above all, theophobes), in order to get back their peace of mind?"

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## Richard Wu says

Bar none the most vestigial I've read to date is the INTRODUCTION BY OCTAVIO PAZ, which in no way disqualifies the superiority, in every aspect, of his translated subject to Huxley's earlier, and by comparison relatively fraudulent treatment. Still, readers suffering aphantasia are encouraged to skip this volume entirely; the fun consists in imagining images:

*Sometimes a glass stairway, a stairway like Jacob's ladder, a stairway with more steps than I could climb in three entire lifetimes, a stairway with ten million steps, a stairway without landings, a stairway up to the sky, the maddest, most monstrous feat since the tower of Babel, rose into the absolute. Suddenly, I could see it no longer. The stairway had vanished like bubbles of champagne, and I continued my navigation, struggling not to roll, struggling against suction and pullings, against infinitely small jumping things, against stretched webs, and arching claws. [p.37]*

As you can see, Michaux's prose quality is adequate to the task of conveying psychedelic phenomena, although of course language at its best can only ever trace the shadow of experience, right? Not quite; but more than most should ask for, for who would *want* to poke a blood-drenched just-birthing fetus in a bathroom sink with a stick, even in hallucination, as our author did one page later: perhaps more horrifying when you link this scene to his earlier comments on the effects of mescaline, which for him *immanentizes linguistic reifications*, sews together mind and matter in phenomenal space, yes, he (or some part of him) wrote that baby there—and then it was.

*Endlessly broken up, our attempts at composition admit only this one constant... Very... It is very... Everything is very... [p.70]*

A fruitful syntactic analysis may be performed on Michaux's pronoun usage, as all three of "I," "we," and "he" occur throughout to refer—ostensibly—to himself; I suspect they serve as distance modifiers for (patterns of) thoughts he would prefer us more or less to associate with him, that is, his central self:

*More than anything else Mescaline demolished some of my effectual barriers, the ones that make me myself and not one of the others among my possible "me's." It took me weeks and weeks to reconstruct them and to shut myself inside them again. [p.82]*

Additionally, scanned pages from Michaux's tripping notebooks are scattered in groups, always interrupting the flow of text from the page before. From these I found "chaque foi" and "une cigarette"; but I am not here to scavenge scraps of coherence from illegibility, nor to entertain methodological conceits regarding the mechanism of conceptual access:

*Coming out of Mescaline you know better than any Buddhist that everything is nothing but appearance. [p.80]*

I am here, apparently, to mine for quotes (which I can then deploy in opportune contexts); *Miserable Miracle* is by and large a juicy vein:

*What is it in life that is most exhausting and that leads surely to madness? It is to stay awake. It is to remain too long at one's instrument panel. [p.154]*

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## Andrew Bourne says

Michaux is 57 years old. He does not drink alcohol, tea, or coffee, nor smoke tobacco. He practices moderation--abstinence really--in the use of all excitants.

So he takes mescaline, then, in the interest of comparative analysis, he tries hashish... thereafter moving on to a massive dose of mescaline, which juices the ability to write or analyze right out of his nerd's body, and ultimately results in a compulsion to push innocents into the Seine.

His thoughts on the color pink are 5-star or better:

"Like the sensitive tip of the tongue at the height of its enjoyment, if this tip of the tongue became instantaneously a big, fat pink hippopotamus replete with that enjoyment, and not only one, but a hundred big-bellied hippos, and ten thousand sows, suckling already biggish little pigs snuggling against their swollen flanks, and all this huddled together one against the other, and if the height of the enjoyment thus spread out and multiplied were solely the fact of being pink, pink, pink, stupidly, deliriously, paradisiacally pink, pink enough to make you howl, --unless you had the soul of a whore and took a flabby pleasure in yielding to it,-- that was the way I was seeing pink."

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## Mariel says

You go from little death to little death for hours on end, from shipwreck to rescue, succumbing every three or four minutes without the least apprehension, only to be gently, marvelously resuscitated once more. A deep sigh, which speaks volumes to those who know, is the only intimation of new rescues, but the voyage continues, a new death is preparing from which you will emerge in the same way. It is as though you had another heart whose systole and diastole occurred fifteen or twenty times an hour.

Homesick for himself. Three weeks in the wake of mescaline's demands of submission. Three months for the troll to get back to his under the belly goat's bridge. Michaux surrendered for a memory of stealing his wool weaving to see through. I don't have nothing but I am relishing/writhing in the envy of his born visions. I don't ever want to try mescaline, or any drug for this. I give in/pick up a sleeping pill problem. Oblivion, rather fooling myself that this time it will be possible to set down on the other side. Hibernating bears have it all. It doesn't work that way. The nothing doesn't burn on nothing. Something like in the Neverending Story and taunting wolfs offering nothing for something. I sometimes wonder what it would be like to relate to the "fun part" of drug taking instead of the rock drowning, leaving the bereft that knows me. Going under for surgery was a blackhole too. The cosmic floating happened, yet I was deaf to tastes and blind to sounds. A contextless black hole. I'm terrified of the spiritual leprosy of returning to the same cliff, anyway. Yet it is almost tempting, to think about the are they the same figments of cats. I have seen them before, on bridges. Are they the same as Anna Kavan's leopards from inside and the tigers prowling Robert Smith. Michaux's psuedo cats, long after the three months. When Russian bears break into airports for the jet fuel fumes are they communicating with their spirit animals? It's a colorblindness in the flying solo world (to hell with that. Fever dreams float over horrors and can't-tear-away-wrecks). I want to know why the mescaline colors could

be the same from one head orbit to another celestial homing pigeon. Does the mystery lose anything if you can go, oh that's just the mescaline? Or the contrasting hashish. Michaux was willing to follow hashish as he tooth and nailed the imprising of mescaline. I liked how he describes the massaging laughter in the bodies of its users. I don't believe in a tomorrow and a tomorrow and a tomorrow this way any more than I do any other drug. I see empty cages and pacing great outdoors prisons. But I liked it like this. Feed my nest. The closest to this I've ever had must have been when my sister and I were babies. My aunt said we laughed in our sleep. Must be the same tigers, under the glassy fish and spirit bears.

I didn't know about the Zilla spiders. I love Michaux for saying the psychiatrists should have tested the marijuana and urine of schizophrenics on themselves rather than on the spiders.

I also tested what he said how it is impossible to envision colors and hear music with your inner ears. The colors went sun spots (I called staring at the sun and lamps and bringing forth the popping inside out colors "my magic powers" when I was a small girl). If I do my insomniac standby of boats it's an awareness of colors more than sensual vividness of the music.... (Spiders have the highest success rate for stupors. I can't wait to get mixed up about zilla spiders.) I get the one foot in the realm of the living and the let's see if we can get it away with it experimentation. I *loved* his bridges. I want Michaux bridges. I don't know about the heat of hashish versus frozen alive of mescaline.... It has to be a hearing aid and not the big, big picture. That's how it works to do the body's own chemistry.... (There have to be the dead inside the drug robots. Laika can't always make it up above the world.)

Offer what is of little importance, mental images, little everyday ideas.

Otherwise you will be wholly uninhabitable, horrifying to yourself, your house in the torrent, an object of ridicule in your own eyes.

The illustrations reminded me of jacob's ladder on skin, your only home walled in.... I want to know the whole work, though I can't read French and all.... Michaux's I-wanted-to-say when it was happening.

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## **Eddie Watkins says**

When Henri Michaux was in his fifties he decided to try mescaline. Until this decision he was a veritable teetotaler. He didn't even drink coffee. But he was an adventurous sort, a natural psychonaut, so in the name of a worthy experiment in consciousness he took mescaline. He didn't "enjoy" it, in fact it was rather torturous, but what it helped to open up in his mind he considered a miracle, hence *Miserable Miracle*.

I have yet to read this book in its entirety – to be frank, it gets repetitive - but then it's not a beginning-middle-end type of book, so it's easy and even appropriate to dip into it at random and read at your leisure. And what you will find inside are writings which are like what a literate & extremely delicate surrealist seismograph with a dozen flexible arms (each with an extra fine tipped pen attached) might produce if it had an agile capacious mind and a preternatural ability to detect and transcribe rapidly mutating and infinitely layered "mental movies" playing on its inner eye.

And not only verbal descriptions are produced but also nervous looking drawings of delicate lines whose overall symmetry has been skewed and warped by hallucinatory mental cross winds.

[image error]

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## David Katzman says

Beautiful dwarves in skin-tight gold lamé pantsuits. Cats who scratch out dreams on your wooden leg. Pleistocene fists pounding frenetic rhythms across your naked skin. Heretic wishes left to their own devices. Soaring stories built second by second moment by moment until nothing is left but a wish a thought a syllable and a sill upon which sits the things left over, after, above and between, always between never complete, always left over, never beginning, only between the things, the shape of a shape, the crevasse where the self is/was, the outside not the inside, the space around a cup that doesn't exist that does that only exists that only does that leaves you helpless that symmetric asymptotic line drawn from your self to the outside world, the hypothetical world, the assumption, the consuming assumption that things that things where they are they go with you. Get closer get closer never reaching your destination never like Zeno suggested despite the disproof you can never reach a thing no matter how many distances you cut in half and in half because nothing touches electrons repel atoms mingle like gyroscopes fighting touching. Mescaline dreams mescaline the subject of a poetic exploration, a dissertation, a beautiful torture, a gorgeous nightmare, a shape that leaves you shattered, ego spread across the bathroom floor like blood wrists cut and bled out the victim, the deserving victim, realizing the Hindu vision, the multiplicity of oneness, the artificiality, the psychosis of psychedelia, the psychosis of

patience, my friend, have patience with the impossible. An overdose left disturbed for months, hashish for the simpler times, for the investigation, the examination, looking close closer the resolution is infinite, don't look at the subject, behind it, that figure, that ambiguity, the mountains in the distance, the sound of feet walking, the feeling of shapes and leaving a taste in your mouth of curiosity, the infinite confidence to leap into your mind and perhaps never come back, you might not come back, the fever, the speed of Mescaline, unquenchable, irresistible, to know what it's like to not be/ing able to stop your mind, to be quiet to have peace, every moment an eternity so painful so beautiful you are dying over and over you can't get off the merry-go-round, but the face of death is...later...is worth it, you touched it, you survived the terror of insanity so you know, you walked the fragile surface of consciousness, you understand, every surface is essential and simultaneously nothing, you understand

madness. It's always interruption. The indisputable concretely is disputable. During nirvana, after samsara, the challenge being can you take a piece with you and understanding the artificiality so that maybe you might just love a little bit more and live a little bit more and breath a little bit more. Or you might just be a douchebag. It really depends. 50/50 odds, I say. Everyone has to make up what's in their own mind.

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## Andreas Jacobsen says

Rating: 4.0

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## Lucy says

This is a very well-written account and simulation of mescaline. His experiences sound horrible! Maybe if he had elaborated on the insights he got on his trips it would have been better. However, the chapter on hash was great - very eloquent.

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## R.W. Spryszak says

Totally engaged. Weird. Obscure. Better than Huxley, this thing widens the frame around the doors of perception. Blows the wall away, to be more accurate. It may be difficult from one moment to the next, but that's how I like my souffles...

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## Jere says

Miraculous and miserable; maybe I'll read this book again, but I'll never take mescaline.

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## Alan says

Being a 'weekend hippy' in the early 70s I consumed quite a lot of hallucinogens/psychedelics, mostly LSD but also 'magic mushrooms', pot of course and once mescaline. I still remember that trip, maybe because it was one of my first, it was a fairly gentle one I think, due to a smaller than normal dose but still spiked with amazing hallucinations - I remember staring at the pictures I discovered in the bathroom linoleum, which seemed like a load of Polaroid pictures of several families whose histories and struggles I knew instantly, that someone had ripped up and scattered. I didn't pick them up and re-assemble but could have, I'm sure, if I wanted to. Later the air seemed to be hiding things from me, then every molecule would be visible with chemical formulae attached. Patterns emerged everywhere I looked, tessellations (?) forming and merging. Everything seemed to click into place and then fall apart. What it did was take me, a 17 year old ignorant, small town boy and destroy me, toss me aside, and open something new, the universe, the infinite. Or something.

Michaux chronicles his experiences with the drug in 1955 (the year I was born, of completely no significance), in both notes and drawings (some reproduced in the book) he makes during his 'trips' and reflections after, and also comparing the experience of hashish. I was there, remembering, as he starts off: *the world retreating in the distance, an ever increasing distance - Each word becoming more and more dense, too dense to be uttered from now on, word complete in itself, word in a nest, while the noise of the wood fire in the fireplace becomes the only presence, becomes important, strange and absorbing in its movements....*

And the 'self' being tossed aside: *I was being shoved about, I was being crumpled* . The person is absorbed into something else. In Michaux at one point: *thousands of little ambulacral tentacles of a gigantic starfish fastened to me so compactly that I could not tell if I was becoming the starfish or if the starfish had become me*

and then the visions. Sometimes the hallucinations are pleasant/intriguing: *a glass staircase, a stairway like Jacob's ladder, a stairway with more steps than I could climb in 3 lifetimes.. rose into the absolute*. More often than not though they are disturbing. Michaux sees a foetus in a washbasin - *I touched the soft bluish head of the sticky blood stained little thing*. He picks up a stick and *began energetically shoving the little body back and forth.. it opened and fell apart.. The fetus no longer existed, yet it was still there, livid, bluish, blood stained, with really delicate tones, almost iridescent..*

Mescaline puts him in touch with absolutes, with essences: *And white appears. Absolute white. White whiter*



*than all whiteness. White of the advent of white. White without compromise, by exclusion, by the total eradication of non-white. White, mad, exasperated, shrieking with whiteness. Fanatical, furious, riddling the eyeball. White, atrociously electric, implacable, muderous. White in blasts of white.*

Some of it is straightforward: *When the action of Mesclaine is at its height, it produces blinding images, or images ringed with lightning, trenches of fire, as well as , in the distance, lilliputian men whose motions are more like those of the pistons of an engine than human gestures.. sooner or later everything turns into crytals.* (that's what I remember - the images ringed by lightning, and the crystallisation of everything - pictures on the wall, a heater, a friend's face).

You have a new time scale: *With your new time, with your minutes made up of three million instants, you will never be in a hurry, with your attention superdivided you will never be outdistanced. I was in an infinity mechanism.*

I recall how *the improbable unreality of reality is obvious, violent. The swift, shining thoughts revolve like astral bodies. Coming out of Mescaline you know better than any Bhuddist that everything is nothing but appearance.*

I think you can tell I liked this book, it brought back vivid memories. Sometimes it seems a bit silly, eg talk of the pinkness of pink, and I would not recommend the ingestion of hallucinogens (especially if you are my daughter reading this): I've seen a few acid casualties in my life.

David Katzman's review brought me to this book, and you should read it if you are still interested:

<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

there is a very good thread about drugs and addiction there as well.

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