

Nadja Study Guide

Nadja by André Breton

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Plot Summary

Nadja is a surrealist novel written by French writer Andre Breton and published in 1928. The novel is an account of the author's relationship with a woman named Nadja, over a period of ten days. The narrator, Andre Breton, believes that knowing who he is may only be determined by knowing whom he "haunts." Breton also places great importance on coincidences. The Theatre Moderne is one of Andre Breton's favorite theaters because of the absurd acting and small audiences. The only play he ever really admired is called *Les Detraquees*, which concerns a principal and teacher who murder a student at a girl's school. On the fourth day in October, Andre Breton stops at a stall outside the Humanite bookstore, buying a book. He walks towards the opera, as the offices and workshops begin to close and people head home. He sees a young, poorly dressed woman walking towards him. She tells Breton that her name is Nadja, chosen for herself because in Russian, it is the beginning of the word hope. Nadja tells Breton about her father, who was weak, and had everything handed to him easily. Her mother is a good woman but is not a good homemaker. Nadja and Breton continue walking, and he says his wife is expecting him. Nadja seems disappointed that he is married.

The next time they meet, Nadja seems to be suffering from some kind of internal conflict. The next day, Andre is worried about her and seeks her out. She tells him she is poor, and he lends her money. She tells him a male friend once had her buy cocaine to make more money. However, the police caught her, but her friend, a judge, made sure she did not have to go to jail. Nadja tells Breton about her male friends. She adds that he will write a book about her someday. Nadja gives Breton a drawing, and they discuss mythology. They decide to leave Paris and go to the train station. A drunkard comes and bothers them again but Nadja is no longer withdrawn. Breton begins to think that Nadja is not what he thought she is. Andre begins to end his direct tale of his time with Nadja. He wonders who the real Nadja is. Sometimes her stories of her past life make Breton think her dignity could not survive such things. He remembers only a few of the things she said, sentences where he best catches the tone of her voice. Breton is told that Nadja is mad. She is eventually committed to a sanitarium. Breton does not believe that being in a sanitarium makes much difference to Nadja. He feels that he did not notice anything especially alarming about her behavior when he was with her. Breton yearns to connect with her again.



Nadja, pp. 11 to 16

Nadja, pp. 11 to 16 Summary

Nadja is a surrealist novel written by French writer Andre Breton and published in 1928. The novel is an account of the author's relationship with a woman named Nadja, over a period of ten days. The narrator, Andre Breton, believes that knowing who he is may only be determined by knowing whom he "haunts." He says his relationship with others is not necessarily dark or disturbed. He sees himself moving as a ghost through life, unable to fully recognize things he should. While this signifies that his life could be considered damaged beyond repair, he should not get caught up in what his day-to-day life reveals to him as he searches for the general truths in life. Despite his prejudices, attractions, and decisions, he strives to discover his true nature apart from his choices. He wants to find out the reason he has been put on this earth. Such reflection on the soul would be more revealing than criticism of an author's work. He relates a story of Victor Hugo, a French author, and his mistress, Juliette Drouet. They would travel together every day, and as they passed a certain estate with two gates, Hugo would point at the large gate, and say "Bridle gate, Madame." Juliette would then point at the smaller gate and say, "Pedestrian gate, Monsieur." As they continued traveling, the coach would pass two trees with intertwining branched. Hugo would say, "Philemon and Baucis," while Juliette would not answer.

Andre Breton says that this daily ritual reveals more about Victor Hugo's character than any examination of his work could. The two gates, one big, one small, stand for his strength and his weakness, although it is unclear which represents which. Breton is also charmed by the rightness and proportion of Juliette's reply. He does not admire Gustave Flaubert, another French writer. However, he admires the fact that Flaubert, in his work, Salammbô, only wanted to give the impression of the color yellow; and in his work Madame Bovary, wanted to do something that had the color of moldy wood where wood lice lived. He admires the genius behind the work of several painters as well, including Gustave Courbet and Giorgio de Chirico. Breton desires to know what led Chirico to paint the way he did, and despairs that he cannot fill in the gaps. He believes the work must resemble whatever the inspiration was, but the work is always a poor copy. To truly know an artist, one must know his views on life and the objects that surround him, no matter how small.

Nadja, pp. 11 to 16 Analysis

Before Andre Breton begins to tell the tale of his relationship with Nadja, he first sets up his mindset. Understanding the way his mind works, and what attracts him to certain people and things, makes it easier to understand the nature of his relationship. Breton frequently uses anecdotes and references to some of his friends to this end. He shows that he is not attracted to the same things that most people would find worthwhile. For example, the anecdote about Victor Hugo and his mistress shows how a small thing can



be fascinating to Breton. He does not discuss any of Hugo's novels or his writing, but instead focuses on a small conversation. Therefore, it is obvious that Breton uses small elements like this to determine a person's character and worth. As for Gustave Flaubert, another famous writer, Breton does not admire his work, but instead admires Flaubert's intent in writing his novels. As a surrealist, Breton is attracted to the small, unique details he finds throughout his life and his relationship with others. He is more interested in the intent of genius of a fellow artist and writer than with the product of their work. The work can never be as pure as the intent, in Breton's mind. Breton plans to use the tale of his relationship to examine the reasons he was so attracted to Nadja, and how the relationship changed both of them.



Nadja, pg. 16 to 27

Nadja, pg. 16 to 27 Summary

Regarding the work of Joris-Karl Huysmans, Andre Breton finds he has a lot in common with the writer's way of valuing the world. They share the same manner of choosing despair among what exists, therefore the narrator feels closer to Huysmans than he does any of his friends. Huysmans was able to capture the ennui which was induced by anything he witnessed. This allows the narrator to find relief in the fact that he is not the only one who feels this, and does not have to search for a way to rectify himself. The narrator despises authors who claim to write about characters separate from themselves or people they know, when in reality they are just lightly veiled caricatures. Someone recommended to one author that he change the color of his heroine's hair, so she was not recognized. Breton insists on knowing who the real people are, on knowing their names, and is not interested in searching through the veil. He feels the days of this type of literature are numbered, mostly thanks to Huysmans. Breton says he will always live in his glass house. He feels distaste for the French poet Comte de Lautréamont, who disappears behind his work.

French poet and playwright Tristan Tzara once handed Andre Breton and Paul Eluard, another French poet, over to the police. This action is very revealing of Tzara's character, he says. Throughout the narrative has yet to begin; Breton plans to use his experiences to examine reality. The facts he determines will range from the simple to complex, to very rare or very common. Some he will know the full details about, others are just fleeting impressions. Breton will not provide an exact account of his journey, rather a recalling of the most pertinent memories. He will not discuss the memories in chronological order, instead in the order they come to his mind. His first stop is Hotel des Grands Hommes, where he lived around 1918, and then Manoir d'Ango in Varengeville-sur-Mer, where he stayed in August 1927. In the Manoir, he was able to stay in a hut that was separated from the rest of the home. He says his random thoughts may not indicate deeper meanings, such as his view of the Etienne Dolet statue in Paris, which has always fascinated him while also causing discomfort. However, this does not mean he is ready to be psychoanalyzed. During a performance of Guillaume Apollinaire's *Couleur du Temps*, he meets a young man who approaches him, mistaking him for a friend that was killed in a war. Later, Breton begins corresponding with a Paul Eluard, another poet. When he eventually meets Eluard, he realizes it is the man he met during the play.

Nadja, pg. 16 to 27 Analysis

Andre Breton has a unique view on life. He finds himself bored by the sights of things that would probably excite the common man, instead finding pleasure in the unordinary. However, he also values writers who strive to depict truthfulness in their work. He is disturbed by writers who vaguely disguise their characters based on real people,



instead feeling the real people should be shown. He seems to believe this hiding of reality only weakens the work. Breton himself always plans to be transparent with his readers about his subjects. Breton also references a poet who once turned him over to the police, as an example of truth in writing. Although Tristan Tzara may not appreciate this mention, he must be true to himself and the life he has experienced. He plans to keep this rhythm throughout his account of his relationship with Nadja. In order to color his recollection, he will use places, objects, and people that moved him in some way. However, he is writing in a somewhat stream-of-consciousness fashion, meaning he will document ideas and thoughts as they come into his head. Therefore, everything he discusses will have varying degrees of significance, although it may be up to the reader to discern which do.



Nadja, pg. 27 to 37

Nadja, pg. 27 to 37 Summary

Andre Breton sees the words Bois-Charbons, which means wood coals, appear on several shop fronts in France. The words also appear on the last page of *Les Champs Magnetiques*, a book Breton wrote with Philippe Soupault. As he walks with Philippe, Breton finds he is able to predict where the words will appear on shops they are soon to pass. He is right with every prediction, aided by a painting of logs in cross-section on the shop facade. Breton says the image continued to obsess him when he got home. The log seems to connect with a carousel tune, as well as the with the skull of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a French philosopher, writer and composer. These connections frighten him. While Breton is staying at the Hotel des Grands Hommes, a woman knocks on his door. He cannot recall her age and features, but the woman comes to recommend a person who has sent her and will soon be living in Paris. He later finds out it is Benjamin Peret. Breton feels that the French city of Nantes is the only one besides Paris where anything worthwhile can happen to him. There, he loves to visit a certain park.

Another time, Andre Breton sees Robert Desnos during his "nap period," a time when Desnos dozes but still writes and talks. Breton says Desnos is able to see what he does not. He can borrow the personality of Marcel Duchamp, a painter. Desnos is able to clarify the essence of Duchamp, making his work more pure. Breton says it is hard to describe exactly how Desnos does it, but it is something to witness. Breton, however, also spends a lot of time in Paris, frequently passing along the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle toward the end of the afternoon. He is not sure why he is drawn there, except he feels that something will happen there. He cannot fathom what draws him there, not even the Porte Saint-Denis archway, nor even a film called the Grip of the Octopus. In that film, a Chinese man multiplies himself and invades New York City. When Breton goes to see a film, he never looks to see what is playing, which gives him a weakness for absurd films. He is also not very good at following the plot of the film, but finds there are some theaters that seem to be made for him.

Nadja, pg. 27 to 37 Analysis

Andre Breton gives an example of the small details which fascinate him, and how much faith he puts in connections between seemingly unrelated things. For example, he continues to see a sign advertising wood coals at local shops. The signs are often accompanied by drawings of the ends of logs. The image stays with Breton, and calls to mind a carousel tune he once heard, as well as a skull. He seems unsure why he makes connections like this, and seems frightened by what this connection could mean for his life. He envies another writer, Robert Desnos, who is able to nap, but still write and talk. Breton seems to be jealous of the transcendental state this allows Desnos to be in. Breton is always searching for the absurd as a way of examining the true



meaning of life. To this end, he is attracted to strange films that would bore a less philosophical audience. Breton does not look at which film he goes to see, instead leaving it to fate to choose for him. In this way, he feels the connections he makes are more natural.



Nadja, pp. 37 to 51

Nadja, pp. 37 to 51 Summary

The Theatre Moderne is one of Andre Breton's favorite theaters because of the absurd acting and small audiences. In the old, downtrodden theatre, his imagination runs wild. He manages to memorize one part of a woman's song, at the expense of paying attention to the horrors of the place. Breton has always hoped to meet a naked woman in the woods. He does not believe such an encounter is beyond the realm of reality. He thinks if it had happened, his mind would have most likely stopped short. One afternoon, he does see a woman in a theatre, strolling from one row to the next. She is dead white, and Breton finds the incident disturbing, if not extraordinary, since in that section of the theatre sexual acts are commonplace. The only play he ever really admired is called *Les Detraquees*, of which he relates the plot. In a girls' school, a principal stands in her office, nervous. She says someone named Solange should be here by now. A gardener comes and tells her that Solange did not get off the train. An elderly woman comes in, saying she got a call from her granddaughter, who was begging to come home. The girl comes in, and the principal and grandmother convince the girl to stay.

The principal waits alone again, until Solange enters. The woman, a teacher at another school, is very cold and indifferent. They discuss the special friendships they have been able to make with the girls. They look out the window at one girl in particular. A balloon falls in the room, and the girl enters and walks towards it. Several hours later, a doctor is at the school because the girl has disappeared, the same one whose grandmother had come to get her earlier. The doctor is suspicious because there have been accidents like this before at the end of the year. As the search continues, the principal goes to get a drink and discovers the girl's body in a cupboard. The role of Solange is played by an actress called Blanche Derval. Andre Breton is puzzled by what happens exactly after the balloon drops, and what makes the principal and Solange predatory towards young girls. Breton also describes a dream he had about an insect taking the place of an old man, heads towards a machine and puts money in a slot. Breton is disgusted that the insect did not put two pennies in, just one, and knocks it with his cane before it starts to choke him. He thinks his disgust at this dream relates to how he feels about those parts of the play.

Nadja, pp. 37 to 51 Analysis

As Andre Breton continues to scour the theatres of Paris in search of meaning among the absurd and unusual, he comes across a play that puzzles him. His goal in most theatres is to observe, not intending to pay attention to the plot of the play or a song. However, he cannot avoid the intriguing *Les Detraquees*. The play seems to be about a principal and teacher who murder one of the pupils. However, Andre Breton is most interested by a balloon that drops on stage in the moment after the girl comes into the office and when it is discovered she is missing. Breton is puzzled by the exact meaning



of this. The play infers that the women may have sexually molested the girl before killing her. The conversation between the principal and the teacher indicates they have done this several times before. The girl's call to her grandmother indicates that she knew something bad would happen to her if she stayed at the school. Breton tries to make a connection with a dream he had to describe his feelings about the play and to illustrate the disgust he feels at the play's subject matter.



Nadja, pg. 51 to 60

Nadja, pg. 51 to 60 Summary

Andre Breton's reading of Arthur Rimbaud's poetry evokes deep emotion in him around 1915. The poems enable him to, while walking in the country in a rainstorm, meet a girl. As he walks along beside her, she recites one of her favorite Rimbaud poems. Another time, at the Saint-Ouen flea market, which Breton frequents to find items that are incomprehensible or perverse, he finds a brand new copy of a book of Rimbaud's poems. He looks through the book and discovers two pages, a copy of a poem and reflections on a philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche. The saleswoman tells him the book and the documents are not for sale. He discusses poetry and philosophy with the woman, who gives him the copy of the poem that she wrote. Her name is Fanny Beznos. Breton also remembers a proposition made to a lady in his presence. Someone asked her to present a glove to a surrealist group, Centrale Surrealiste, but this disturbs Breton, who asks her not to do it. He is not sure why, but something at the moment, the thought of the glove never being on her hand again, disturbed him. Instead, she leaves another glove, which Breton wonders over, comparing it to the other glove.

A few days ago, Andre Breton learned that a sign on a hotel saying Maison Rouge was arranged in such a way that, when viewed from a certain angle, Maison disappeared and the word Rouge turned into Police. The illusion is only important, Breton says, because the lady who owned the glove took him to see an old engraving which, seen straight on, looks like a tiger. However, when viewed from different angles, it also looks like a vase, or an angel. Breton feels a connection between the two cannot be avoided, but cannot find a rational one. Breton hopes his observation will make some men aware of the inadequacy of self-evaluation. He accepts the notion of work as a material necessity and that life makes it a necessity. However, he cannot reconcile the need to work with the use of being alive. He says we will never discover the true meaning of life and ourselves through our work. However, he believes it is this thought that makes him understand Nadja's appearance. Breton says now the tower of the Manoir d'Ango explodes, leaving dove feathers and blood across the courtyard.

Nadja, pg. 51 to 60 Analysis

Before he begins to discuss his relationship with Nadja, Andre Breton looks at his relationship with other women, and how serendipity seems to bring him together with them. The first is a woman he meets by chance walking along a road. The woman recites one of her favorite Rimbaud poems, and Breton is struck by their connection through the admiration of the same poet. The second woman is a saleswoman he meets at a flea market. The woman has a book of Friedrich Nietzsche, and inside are two poems she has written. He enjoys speaking with the woman on this common interest. He also remembers a woman who was asked to donate a glove, because he is disturbed at the thought of her not having the glove. Breton seems to feel the woman



needs to have the glove to be whole, and the loss of the glove would be devastating. Breton does not understand why the second glove she leaves is not as important. Through the connections he finds among people and objects, Breton tries to find rational reasons for the meaning of life. However, sometimes these rational reasons behind connections evade him and he finds it disturbing.



Nadja, pg. 60 to 71

Nadja, pg. 60 to 71 Summary

On the fourth day in October, Andre Breton stops at a stall outside the Humanite bookstore, buying a book. He walks towards the opera, as the offices and workshops begin to close and people head home. He sees a young, poorly dressed woman walking towards him. Breton is transfixed by her eyes, and speaks to her. The woman says she is on her way to a hairdresser, although he finds out later that this is a lie. She mentions that she is having problems with money, and they stop near a cafe where Breton continues to examine her eyes. The woman tells him she had been in love with a student but left him so as not to get in his way. She wrote to him, and eventually they ran into each other by chance in Paris. He is surprised to see her well-manicured hands, and she is surprised to see two fingers on each hand are fused together. She is surprised she never noticed this, after they had been together for some time. He is angry she never noticed, and says he is going back to where the women know how to live. She tells Breton that her name is Nadja, chosen for herself because in Russian, it is the beginning of the word hope. Nadja tells Breton about her father, who was weak, and had everything handed to him easily. Her mother is a good woman but is not a good homemaker. Nadja writes to her mother regularly. Her mother likes to ride the Metro, finding the people coming home from work interesting.

Andre Breton takes issue with this, since he does not find people and their work very interesting. He does not think serving another is a valuable use of time. Breton says that the steps one takes to get somewhere, no matter where it leads, are what is important. Nadja does not contradict his statements. She tells him about her delicate health. The doctor advises her to take a trip to improve her health, but she decided that doing manual labor might cure her as well. She tries to find a job, at bakers and butchers, and everyone only wants to play low salaries. Nadja and Breton continue walking, and he says his wife is expecting him. Nadja seems disappointed that he is married. Before he leaves, he asks her who she is, and she replies she is the soul in limbo. They agree to meet again, and Nadja asks him to bring some of his books. However, he urges her not to read them, since life is more than what one writes. She tells him that his simplicity has touched her, and Breton says this compliment moves him greatly.

Nadja, pg. 60 to 71 Analysis

As Andre Breton finally gets down to the business of discussing his relationship with Nadja, there are several changes in his style of writing. First, he begins to document the days of the relationship. Previously, the chronology of events he described were impossible to put in any kind of order. However, as he begins to talk about their relationship, he makes a point to show which day it is. His language also becomes much clearer as he begins to describe actions and events more than his inner thoughts and feelings. Like most women Breton seems to meet, there is one detail about them



that catches him. In this case, it is Nadja's eyes. He is transfixed by them and must stop her to find out more about this woman. Nadja warms to him easily, telling him about her life and background. She also charms him, and he finds himself desiring to know all about her life. In Nadja, Breton seems to find a person who represents all of the abstract connections he is always searching to make. Nadja herself is an abstraction, eager to notice the same type of obscure details that entrance Breton. Her reply that she is a soul in limbo is the final straw for Breton, who knows he must see her again and take what he can learn from her about life.



Nadja, pg. 72 to 89

Nadja, pg. 72 to 89 Summary

On October 5, Nadja arrives at the meeting place before Andre Breton. He notices she is dressed better than yesterday. Their conversation is awkward at first, until she sees he has brought a book of poems with him. She reads one of the poems, and is pleased by the choice of books he has brought her. Nadja tells him about two friends she had when she first came to Paris, one she referred to as "Dear friend," a man in his seventies. Another, an American man, called her Lena in memory of his daughter who died. She would try to remind him her name was Nadja. They leave the bar, and Nadja predicts correctly that Breton has a short, pretty wife with dark hair, a dog, and a cat. In a taxi, Nadja tells him to play a game with her, closing her eyes and saying a name or number. She says she always tells herself stories to keep herself amused. Breton notes this approaches the extreme limit of surrealist aspiration. On October 6, Breton goes out to stop in the Nouvelle France, a bar where he is supposed to meet Nadja in a little while. While strolling, he meets her in another street, and she seems embarrassed about meeting him there. As they go into a nearby cafe, Nadja keeps her distance. She admits she was planning to skip their meeting that day. They discuss an article he co-wrote that describes a search for a woman, with no results. Nadja wants him to explain the article, but he says he knows nothing about it.

Nadja prepares to leave, and Andre Breton accompanies her. He notices she seems to be suffering from an inner conflict. She tells him that he has an effect on her thoughts and words. Nadja says some of Breton's writing speaks to her, including a passage about a woman named Helene. Breton's psychic, Madame Sacco, has told Breton that his is preoccupied with a woman named Helene. Nadja sometimes says that Helene is her. She actually has the taxi driver go to the wrong place. They have dinner at a restaurant, where a drunkard roams around shouting, sometimes obscene words. The drunkard's wife, nearby, tries to get him to come. Nadja points out a black window, telling him to look hard, in a minute it will light up and be red. Breton looks, and the window lights up. There are red curtains in the window. Breton is unwilling to admit the window has become red. Breton and Nadja both begin to become frightened. Nadja feels unwell, and they leave the restaurant. They stop at a police courtyard, and Nadja seems to be babbling about going to prison. Nadja stops to stare at a house, holding onto an iron railing and refusing to leave. He gets her to leave, and tries to recite a poem to soothe her. Nadja points out how the spouts of water in a fountain are like thoughts, similar to something Breton has just read in the Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous. Nadja sees a man she believes once asked her to marry him. Eventually she feels better and they part.



Nadja, pg. 72 to 89 Analysis

Andre Breton learns that Nadja seems to have a strange effect on men. She has two men friends before Breton, an older man she calls "Dear friend," and an American man who seems to think that Nadja is his wife. Nadja does not elaborate on these relationships at this point, however it seems that she is locked into a repeating pattern, meeting older men who want to get to know her for some time, but the relationship always ends. Nadja shows Breton that she has insight into the kind of person he is by predicting what his wife looks like and details about his home life. Breton extremely admires her game of telling stories to herself using random thoughts, as this is the kind of surrealism he feels he is always striving for. Nadja seems to pull back from Breton, perhaps becoming a little scared of his intense interest in her. She plans to skip a meeting with him. Here, we get the first indication that something about Nadja is not right. She reacts strangely all through the evening, pointing out a window that she says will become red, and becoming entranced by a house. Breton tries to urge her on and take her home, but it is clear that her mind is not fully there. Nadja seems to confuse time and space, and past and future events. This is very similar to what Breton strives for in his writing. However, once she points out a fountain being like thoughts, similar to what Breton has read, he is pulled back into her world by the connections.



Nadja, pg. 90 to 102

Nadja, pg. 90 to 102 Summary

On October 7, Andre Breton has an headache after the onrush of emotions from the night before. He wishes he had made a plan to see her today. He is not sure if he loves her, but wants to be near to the things she is near. He is worried about how Nadja is doing, so he plans to go the bar where he met her before that night. He goes out with a friend and his wife, and they talk about Nadja. In the taxi, he feels that she is near, and chases after her. He finds her talking to a man, but she quickly comes with Breton. They go to a cafe, where Nadja is reserved at first. She is doing poorly financially. She tells him a friend left her money once, and told her she could triple it if she bought cocaine with it. While getting off the train with the drugs, a man stops her and takes her to the police station. She immediately turns the drugs over, and they let her go. A friend, a lawyer or judge, intervened. However, Nadja forgot to tell them about a small amount hidden in her hat, which she keeps for herself. Breton says he will lend her money the next day. He kisses her teeth, and she regards this as something like communion. On October 8, Breton receives a letter with a photograph of the painting, The Profanation of Host. Andre goes to the bar to look for Nadja to give her money, but she is not there. He finds the hotel where she is staying and leaves a letter for her.

On October 9, Nadja telephones Andre Breton when he is out, and tells the person answering, who asks how Breton can call her, she cannot be reached. Later, she invites him to the bar, where he learns he went to the wrong bar the night before. Breton gives her three times the amount of money she asked for, and she cries. A peddler comes in, selling colored prints depicting episodes from the reign of French kings. Breton is intrigued and buys some, giving the man extra money to make him go away. Nadja makes him read letters she has received from her friend G, who is the president of the Assize court. Breton is uneasy about the letters. On October 10, Breton has dinner with Nadja. Their waiter is very clumsy, but only when serving them. Nadja knows she has this power over men. Nadja tells her about her meetings with "Dear friend," and how she liked going out with him because he was respected. However, one day she sees him looking bedraggled on a train bench. She tells Breton that he will write a novel about her one day. She tries to make him understand how she lives. She met a woman last night who asked to borrow a pencil to write a note for a friend outside the shop Camees Durs. Nadja gives Breton the card the woman, Madame Aubry-Abrivard, gave to her.

Nadja, pg. 90 to 102 Analysis

Andre Breton finds himself more intrigued than disturbed by Nadja's actions the night before. He wants to make sure she is okay, so he goes to find her. His urge to see her is so great that he jumps out of a taxi when he senses she is near. Although he is riding in the taxi with his wife, he makes no mention of how she feels about his relationship with



Nadja. Although he mentions his wife in passing, and mentions friends, the bulk of the narrative is concerned with his relationship with Nadja. This illustrates that once he meets her, she begins to consume his every thought. While he seems to primarily be interested in her thoughts and activities as a student of surrealism, he also seems to care for her welfare. When he finds out she needs money, he gives her even more than she asks for. However, he seems uneasy about her friendships with other men, especially G, the judge who secured her freedom when she was caught with cocaine. Nadja tells Breton about her other male companion, "Dear friend," whom she liked because she respected him, but seems to have dropped when she saw him looking down on his luck. Nadja has an alluring affect on men, and seems to use them for what they can do for her. She knows that she has this effect, and that it can even drive Breton to write a novel about her.



Nadja, pg. 102 to 114

Nadja, pg. 102 to 114 Summary

On October 11, Paul Eluard goes to the address on the card Madame Aubry-Abrivard gave Nadja, but no one is there. A note says she will return later. Nadja and Andre Breton meet, but he is distracted by a bad mood he has, stemming from an earlier conversation. They pass the Sphinx-Hotel, Boulevard Magenta, where Nadja stayed the first night she came to Paris. On October 12, Breton asks an artist friend to paint Nadja's portrait, but Madame Sacco has warned the artist that he will meet a woman named Nadia or Natasha who will harm the woman he loves. Nadja gives Breton a drawing, and they discuss mythology. They decide to leave Paris and go to the train station. A drunkard comes and bothers them again but Nadja is no longer withdrawn. She tells Breton that people are looking at them because of the fire they have when they are together. They get on the train. While Breton is kissing her, she screams and says she saw a head upside-down in the window. Andre sees a railroad worker on top of the train. When they get off the train, several men blow her a kiss. They get on another train to Saint-Germain.

Andre begins to end his direct tale of his time with Nadja. He is not sure what the pursuit means. He wonders how, amid the stupor that most people live their lives, he and Nadja had the chance to have meaningful conversations. He knows Nadja thinks of him as a god. He says there is a room in a chateau in Saint-Germain that would be wrong to visit, but according to Nadja, there is all that you need to know about the town. He admires men who can be shut up at night in a museum to admire paintings at their leisure, and thinks that life is a puzzle meant to be deciphered. He wonders who the real Nadja is. Sometimes her stories of her past life make Breton take violently against her, because he does not think her dignity could survive such things. On October 13, Nadja tells him she was hit in the face by a man after she had refused him, and she bled over him before leaving. This makes Breton cry because he knows he should not see Nadja again. Although he has seen her since this, he sees her more clearly now and that day remains between them.

Nadja, pg. 102 to 114 Analysis

As he moves into his seventh day of knowing her, Andre Breton seems to be moving away from his close relationship with Nadja. He sends his friend Paul Eluard to Madame Aubry-Abrivard's house, but the woman will not be there until later. No more mention is made of this incident, but it seems Breton may be trying to test Nadja to see if her stories are true. Breton and his friends seem to place great fate in what the psychic, Madame Sacco, says. He also seems to disbelieve Nadja at first when she says she saw a head outside the train window. His enchantment with her seems to be breaking down. He says he admires men who can look at paintings in leisure, signifying he wishes he could stop time and take the chance to study Nadja as she was when he first



met her. He does not see how the experiences she says she has had have not broken her spirit or her sense of self, like they would for most people. He knows that most women would not react so complacently to being hit in the face. Breton begins to feel that his fantasy of Nadja as a surrealist's dream is going away. The next few times he sees her, he keeps his distance and refuses to get as deeply involved as he once was.



Nadja, pg. 115 to 160

Nadja, pg. 115 to 160 Summary

Andre Breton starts to feel that Nadja is being sucked back into ordinary life when he is not there. He remembers only a few of the things she said, sentences where he best catches the tone of her voice. Nadja has invented the Lover's flower for Breton, which she said appeared to her during a lunch in the country. It becomes the symbol of their relationship. Nadja also draws a symbolic drawing of the two of them, a siren, turned away, caught together with an eagle-faced monster. She also draws a picture entitled "the Cat's Dream," which shows a cat trying to leap, but it is tied down. Nadja also designs a cutout, of a woman's head coming from a hand, made after a vision. Other drawings are also done after visions. Nadja recognizes elements of her drawings in works of art. She uses features of the art she sees to represent herself, including using mythological figures. Nadja likes to picture herself as a butterfly with the body of a Mazda, a type of lightbulb. When Breton sees advertisements for the bulbs, he is disturbed. Breton says Nadja had never drawn at all before they met. Breton had, for some time, stopped understanding Nadja. She is frequently lost in abstract thoughts, and makes no difference between unimportant and important remarks.

Andre Breton says he sometimes fled from Nadja, until she could return to a true conception of her self worth. Eventually, they can no longer avoid violent discussions. He does not know who gained more from the relationship, but knows that love is the only thing that could have kept them together. At one point, Breton is told that Nadja is mad. She is eventually committed to a sanitarium. Breton does not believe that being in a sanitarium makes much difference to Nadja. He suspects she will not like the analysts, and small annoyances like the uniform or keys grating in the lock. He says most people do not know that madmen are made in sanitariums, since associating with others in that state can only be harmful. He does not believe in psychiatrists' power to cure such people. He says that if he was confined, he would take advantage of his madness to kill someone, preferably a doctor, so as to gain the relief of solitary. He is pessimistic about the fate of Nadja. If she was rich, he believes she would have recovered in a comfortable rest home. He believes his insistence that freedom should be enjoyed with as little restriction as possible may have hurt her. However, unlike he and his friends, she is unable to hold onto reality. He feels that he did not notice anything especially alarming about her behavior when he was with her. Breton yearns to connect with her again.

Andre Breton envies anyone who finishes a book and finds themselves interested in their faith. These last pages are his chance to make himself understood. By going over their relationship, the story has detached itself from him. He now feels that the name that rings in his ear is no longer Nadja. Throughout the novel, he has placed photographs of places that are special to him in his relationship, photographing them from the angle in which he saw them. He remembers one evening, Nadja covered his eyes and pushed down on his foot on the accelerator while they were in the car, but



Breton resisted giving into love and smashing into the trees. He says the city always changes, and he does not regret this. Breton addresses someone directly as "you," saying he has now yielded to his desire to tell the story of Nadja. He describes what the person means to him, since the reader allows him to display his love of genius. He says the reader has taken the place of the forms most familiar to him, including Nadja. Breton says he knows he will never end his search for beauty, calling beauty convulsive.

Nadja, pg. 115 to 160 Analysis

Now that Andre Breton has separated himself from Nadja, he begins to look back on their time together and cherish the most valuable moments. He uses her drawings to illustrate Nadja's state of mind, and how she begins to question reality through her drawings. This is something she had not done before meeting Breton. He learns that Nadja has been committed to a sanitarium, where he feels she will be forced to go mad if she is not already. While Breton is fond of thinking about reality and life, he does not put much faith in the practice of psychiatry. Breton can not imagine being in her position, especially having to deal with other insane patients. He would rather commit murder than go through that. However, he does not make an attempt to try to free Nadja from this fate, even though he is pessimistic about her chances of getting out of there. Although he has lent her money in the past, he feels her own finances should determine the type of care she gets. He also tries to discover why he and his friends have the same basic nature as Nadja, yet they are able to still function in society and deal with day to day affairs. Breton believes that he also may have harmed Nadja by insisting that work is not necessary and only a hindrance to enjoying freedom. He seems to have encouraged ideas that were already in Nadja's head, perhaps for the worse. Much like she uses drawings to describe their relationship, Breton uses the photographs placed throughout the novel as ways to meditate on reality.



Characters

Nadja

Nadja is the title character of *Nadja*, a novel written by French author Andre Breton. Breton is living in Paris when he comes across Nadja on the street, and he is entranced by her. The two strike up a friendship that lasts ten days. Nadja has left her parents and come to Paris. Nadja tells Breton about her father, who was weak, and had everything handed to him easily. Her mother is a good woman but is not a good homemaker. Nadja writes to her mother regularly. Her mother likes to ride the Metro, finding the people coming home from work interesting. Nadja seems to be unstable, frequently attracted to odd and unusual details about things she sees and it is this quality which attracts Breton. She tells him she has had several male friends, including "Dear friend," G, and an American man. When she is out with Breton, other men always seem to pay her special attention or get nervous in her presence. She also tells Breton that she was once arrested after a friend asked her to traffic cocaine for him. However, she was caught and taken to the police station, where she gave up the drugs. Her friend, G, a judge, was able to get her off, and she did not go to prison. As their relationship progresses, Nadja begins to become more and more disjointed in her thoughts and actions. Breton eventually begins to lose his fascination with Nadja, and breaks ties. Eventually, Nadja is sent to a sanitarium.

Andre Breton

Andre Breton is a French writer and author of the novel *Nadja*. The novel is an account of the author's relationship with a woman named Nadja, over a period of ten days. Andre Breton is a surrealist, part of a movement in the 1920s that emphasized a philosophical viewpoint, using unexpected juxtapositions in art and literature. In the novel, Andre Breton is living in Paris, and is friends with many of his artistic contemporaries. He does not appear to have a job outside writing, and in fact shuns people who do have typical employment. One day in October, he meets a mysterious woman named Nadja on the streets of Paris. He is entranced by her eyes and soon befriends her. Thus begins a romantic relationship, even though Breton is married. He finds Nadja and her world view fascinating, and makes plans to meet her frequently. They spend their time at cafes and walking around Paris, while Nadja tells Breton about her life. He finds the way she looks at the world refreshing at first; however, he eventually begins to feel disturbed at her stories and wonders if what she is telling him is true. Through his relationship with Nadja, he is able to get a new look at reality. When he finally breaks ties with Nadja, he learns she has been sent to a sanitarium. While he laments her fate, he does not seem to do anything that would change it. In the end, Breton chooses to review his favorite moments with the mysterious woman in this semi-autobiographical novel. His photograph appears as Plate 44 in the novel.



Paul Eluard

Paul Eluard is a French poet and a friend of Andre Breton's. His photograph is Plate 4 in the novel.

Victor Hugo

Victor Hugo is a French novelist. His mistress is Juliette Drouet, a French actress.

G

G is a friend of Nadja's. He is president of the assize court, and once got her released from prison after she was caught carrying cocaine.

Juliette Drouet

Juliette Drouet is a French actress and the mistress of Victor Hugo.

Gustave Flaubert

Gustave Flaubert is a French novelist, who wrote Salamambo and Madame Bovary.

Gustave Courbet

Gustave Courbet is a French painter.

Georgio de Chirico

Georgio de Chirico is a Greek-Italian painter.

Joris-Karl Huysmans

Joris-Karl Huysmans is a French novelist, who wrote En Rade and La-Bas.

Tristan Tzara

Tristan Tzara is a French-Romanian poet and playwright. The narrator says that during a performance of Tzara's play, Coeur a Barbe, Tzara handed the narrator and Paul Eluard over to the police.



Comte de Lautréamont

Comte de Lautréamont is a French poet.

Guillaume Apollinaire

Guillaume Apollinaire is a French poet, writer, and playwright.

Pablo Picasso

Pablo Picasso is a Spanish painter.

Philippe Soupault

Philippe Soupault is a friend of Andre Breton. With Breton, he co-authored the novel *Les Champs Magnetiques*.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is a French philosopher, writer and composer.

Benjamin Peret

Benjamin Peret is a French poet and Surrealist. He comes to Paris and meets Andre Breton. His photograph appears as Plate 6 in the novel.

Robert Desnos

Robert Desnos is a French surrealist poet. His photograph appears as Plate 7 in the novel.

Blanche Derval

Blanche Derval is a French actress who plays the role of Solange in the play *Les Detraquees*. Her photograph appears as Plate 13 in the novel.

Marcel Duchamp

Marcel Duchamp is a French artist.



Arthur Rimbaud

Arthur Rimbaud is a French poet.

Madame Sacco

Madame Sacco is a clairvoyant that Andre Breton visits. Her photograph appears as Plate 19 in the novel.

Solange

Solange is a character in the play Les Detraquees.

Fanny Beznos

Fanny Beznos is a saleswoman at a flea market and an aspiring poet.

Fredrich Nietzsche

Fredrich Nietzsche is a philosopher.

Madama Aubry-Abrivard

Madama Aubry-Abrivard is a woman whom Nadja meets. The woman gives Nadja her card after Nadja lends her a pencil.

Professor Claude

Professor Claude at Sainte-Anne is a psychologist in France. His photograph appears as Plate 43 in the novel.



Objects/Places

The Hotel des Grands Hommes

The Hotel des Grands Hommes is where Breton's journey starts in his narrative, where he lived around 1918. The photograph of the hotel is Plate 1 in the novel.

The Manoir d'Ango in Varengeville-sur-Mer

The Manoir d'Ango in Varengeville-sur-Mer is Breton's first stop on his journey. Breton stayed there in August 1927. The photograph of the manor is Plate 2 in the novel.

Etienne Dolet

Etienne Dolet is a statue in Place Maubert in Paris. The photograph of the statue is Plate 3 in the novel.

Bois-Charbons

Bois-Charbons means wood coals. It frequently appears on shop fronts, and is on the last page of Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault's novel, *Les Champs Magnetiques*. A photograph of these words on a shop is Plate 5 in the novel.

Porte Saint-Denis

Porte Saint-Denis is a archway in Paris, France. A photograph of the arch is Plate 8 in the novel.

The Grip of the Octopus

The Grip of the Octopus is a film that Breton has seen, about a Chinese man who multiplies himself and invades New York. A photograph of a bill for this movie is Plate 9 in the novel.

The Theatre Morderne

The Theatre Morderne is a theater in France. A photograph of pieces of paper relating to this theater is Plate 10 and Plate 11 in the novel.



The Saint Ouen flea market

The Saint Ouen flea market is a market visited by Andre Breton. A photograph of the flea market appears as Plate 14 in the novel.

The statistical device

The statistical device is found by Andre Breton at a flea market. A photograph of it appears as Plate 15 in the novel.

The Humanite bookstore

The Humanite bookstore appears as Plate 17 in the novel.

The glove

The glove is featured in Plate 16 of the novel.

The Nouvelle France

The Nouvelle France is a bar where Andre Breton meets Nadja. A photograph of it appears as Plate 18 in the novel.

The restaurant

The restaurant where Andre Breton eats dinner with Nadja appears as Plate 20 in the novel.

The fountain

The fountain is a place where Andre Breton and Nadja stop during a walk. It appears as Plate 21 in the novel.

Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous

Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous is a work that Andre Breton has read. It is Plate 22 in the novel.



The Profanation of the Host

The Profanation of the Host is a painting that Andre Breton receives a photograph of, which is Plate 23 in the novel.

The color prints

The color prints of the French kings are bought by Andre Breton in a cafe. A photograph of one of the prints is Plate 24 in the novel.

Camees Durs

Camees Durs is a shop in France. A photograph of it appears as Plate 25 in the novel.

Sphinx-Hotel, Boulevard Magenta

Sphinx-Hotel, Boulevard Magenta is a hotel where Nadja stayed when she first came to Paris. A photograph of it appears as Plate 26 in the novel.

Nadja's drawing

Nadja's drawing is a picture she gave to Andre Breton, and is Plate 27 in the novel.

A chateau in Saint-Germain

A chateau in Saint-Germain appears as Plate 28 in the novel.

The Lover's Flower

The Lover's Flower is a flower Nadja invents for Breton. It appears as Plate 29 in the novel.

A symbolic portrait

A symbolic portrait is a picture Nadja drew of Andre Breton and herself. It appears as Plate 30 in the novel.

The cutout

The cutout is made by Nadja, and shows a woman's head and a hand. It is Plate 32 in the novel.



A true shield of Achillies

A true shield of Achillies is a drawing by Nadja that appears as Plate 34 in the novel.

The postcard

The postcard shows Nadja's doodles on the back of it. It is Plate 35 in the novel.

A painting

A painting by an artist that inspired one of Nadja's drawings is Plate 37 in the novel.

A tribal mask

A tribal mask is something Nadja has seen that made her exclaim, "Goodness, Chimene!" It is Plate 39 in the novel.

The statue

The statue is something that prompted Nadja to reply "I love you, I love you," when she saw it. It appears as Plate 41 in the novel.

The Mazda sign

The Mazda sign is an advertisement for lightbulbs. It is Plate 42 in the novel.

Centrale Surrealist

Centrale Surrealist is a surrealist research group.

Salamambo

Salamambo is a novel by Gustave Flaubert.

Madame Bovary

Madame Bovary is a novel by Gustave Flaubert.



En Rade

En Rade is a novel by Joris-Karl Huysmans.

La-Bas

La-Bas is a novel by Joris-Karl Huysmans.

Les Detraquees

Les Detraquees is a controversial play written by Joseph Babiabout a young girl's murder at a girl's school by the principal and dance teacher.

Les Champs Magnetiques

Les Champs Magnetiques is a novel by Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault.

Nantes

Nantes is a city in France.

France

France is a country in Europe.

Paris

Paris is a city in France.



Themes

Surrealism

Andre Breton, the author of *Nadja*, is an acclaimed writer and pioneer of the surrealist movement. Therefore, his style of writing in *Nadja* emphasizes the primary characteristics of surrealism, primarily the use of abstract metaphors and unexpected juxtapositions. His story is a complex commentary on his relationship with Nadja, as well as his examinations of reality and memory. The primary goal of the novel is not to offer conclusions so much as suggestions of what different events mean to Breton. He offers connections between seemingly random occurrences in his search for meaning in this life. For Breton, surrealism is a revolutionary movement, and to this end he despises ordinary facets that make up most people's life, including mainstream employment. Breton focuses more on the inspiration or intent behind any give piece of work or art, rather than the finished product. He feels that the intent shows more about the artist's character than the finished product. He also believes that life is open to interpretation from all angles, no matter how small a detail might seem. By using this beliefs and these techniques in his writing, Breton creates an almost dream-like world throughout the novel.

Obsession

When Andre Breton first sees Nadja, he is immediately entranced by her eyes. He cannot help but speak to this woman, and once he does, his obsession begins. Breton believes that in Nadja, he has found a kindred soul. She is whimsical and abstract, which fits well with his dedication to surrealism. Breton wants to spend time with Nadja and get to experience the world through her eyes. He sees that like him, she makes unusual connections with every day details, and is sometimes fascinated by what most people consider mundane. Nadja seems to be a live surrealist object to Breton, more than an individual person. While he seems to care for her and gives her money, it appears that he does so primarily to keep her near to him. He insists upon meeting with her frequently. However, after he has known Nadja for several days, his obsession seems to wear off. He begins to realize that Nadja may not have any real truths about the nature of reality to offer him. He begins to suspect her stories, not believing a person could go through what she claims to go through and still retain so much self-worth. Once he ends the relationship, he learns that Nadja has been confined to a sanitarium. While he no longer sees her in person, he is now free to obsess over her best comments and the most intriguing times they had together.

Allusion

Throughout the novel *Nadja*, Andre Breton uses several allusions, references to a place, person, thing, or another literary work within a novel. Breton uses mentions of writers



and artists from this time and others to expound upon his points and allow a clearer picture of his dedication to surrealism. He uses such examples to show his belief that it is the artist's intent which is most important, not the finished work. He uses this to link concepts or ideas that may already be familiar to the reader with his own ideals and explanations. Breton also alludes to several places throughout Paris, such as the theaters where he goes to see movies and plays, as well as restaurants he visits with Nadja. By doing this, Breton grounds his tale in reality using real places. He also uses photographs to illustrate the text of the novel. Using allusions such as this allow Breton to use his knowledge of art and literature to enhance his theories. He also uses allusion to make references to literary and mythological figures when referring to characters in the novel, such as Nadja, thereby giving a clearer picture of their personality and character. By relying so heavily on allusions, Breton's novel becomes richer for those who are aware of the meaning of the works. For those who are not, it may require some research to fully understand his point at times.



Style

Point of View

Nadja is a semi-autobiographical novel, told through the point of view of the author, Andre Breton. Breton writes in a first-person narrative, allowing him to speak more directly to the reader and also relate his personal experiences and feelings in response to the things he sees. By using a first-person narrator, Breton is not only the author, but also a character in his own novel and therefore, he can directly guide the flow and action. Breton uses the novel as a means to meditate on reality and try to discover the truth behind it. As the author, he is conscious he is writing for an audience, and is upfront about his goals to dissect his relationship with Nadja to find the meaning behind it. However, as the narrator, he also gives his own opinions and viewpoints on events, not taking into account how any of the other characters in his novel feel or think. Breton frequently interchanges dream and reality throughout the novel, in keeping with his involvement in the surrealist movement. He is very defensive of the idealist movement, and sometimes lapses into speeches against issues he feels are controversial, such as typical means of employment. He also talks about his contemporaries, including writers, painters, and other artists, validating the anecdotes or opinions he has about them.

Setting

Nadja is a semi-autobiographical novel written by French surrealist writer Andre Breton, and takes place during his lifetime in Paris, France, in the 1920s. Breton is living in Paris with his wife, pursuing and fighting for the surrealist movement, when he meets Nadja, a mysterious woman. Their meetings take them all over Paris and outside the city as their relationship begins to develop. Throughout the novel, Breton mentions several places in Paris. He documents theatres where he typically goes to see movies, as well as restaurants where he meets Nadja. He uses photographs of these places to enhance and illustrate his tale, allowing readers to use them as they search for the meaning behind his relationship with Nadja. Since the novel is telling the true story of his meetings with Nadja, albeit in a surrealistic way, the use of specific places allows the novel to have some sense of reality. Using the names of real places grounds the novel for the reader, giving a better perspective on the time period as well as the mindframe Breton was in when he wrote the novel. The places are usually described in an abstract fashion when Breton chooses to get into more detail, counterbalancing the reality of them as landmarks in the city.

Language and Meaning

In the novel Nadja, Andre Breton, a French writer, documents his relationship with Nadja, a woman he meets on the street. Since the bulk of the novel takes place in Paris, France, Breton uses many French words and names to color the novel. At the beginning



of the novel, before Breton discusses his relationship with Breton directly, the language is more abstract and obtuse. Breton talks about the struggle to find an author or painter's true intent with his work when it is hard to interpret, and this is a struggle present in *Nadja*. Small details are more important than they seem, while larger issues may go ignored by Breton. As a surrealist writer, Breton is part of a movement in the 1920s that emphasizes a philosophical viewpoint, using unexpected juxtapositions in art and literature. Therefore, he uses many allusions and unexpected language throughout the novel to describe events, people, and things. He also depends heavily on metaphor, meaning the reader may need to spend some time decoding the language to discover the true meaning of a given passage. Overall, the language used throughout the novel is refined and sometimes lyrical, resulting in the text feeling more like a stream of conscious writing than a traditional novel.

Structure

Throughout the novel *Nadja*, Andre Breton generally does not waste time on dividing his work into chapters or sections, utilizing a non-linear structure for the novel. The only breaks come with blank pages between his first discussion of the way he sees the world, his tale of his relationship with *Nadja*, and his epilogue, also describing how he meditates on reality. In the first section, Breton describes several events and people, but he does not put them in chronological order. He uses phrases like "Only a few day ago," "at another time," or mentions a year in passing. He writes in a stream-of-consciousness style, sometimes switching to a new subject in the middle of a paragraph. He also employs this style of writing in the ending of the novel. When he describes his time with *Nadja*, however, he begins to use dates to document the progression of their relationship. This allows him to show exactly how the relationship progresses from day to day, and how each day changes him and *Nadja* for better or for worse. The novel is grounded somewhat by his reference to other authors, allowing the flavor of the 1920s to filter into the novel through his allusions. He also uses photographs placed throughout the novel to visually illustrate his points and his relationship with *Nadja*. By not using a defined structure for the novel, Breton is emphasizing his surrealist perspective and giving readers a genuine view of what surrealists were attempting to promote through their work at the time.



Quotes

"Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I 'haunt.'" Nadja, Section 1, pg. 11.

"Over and above the various prejudices I acknowledge, the affinities I feel, the attractions I succumb to, the events which occur to me and to me alone—over and above a sum of movements I am conscious of making, of emotions I alone experience—I strive, in relation to other men, to discover the nature, if not the necessity, of my difference from them." Nadja, Section 1, pg. 13.

"As far as I am concerned, a mind's arrangement with regard to certain objects is even more important than its regard for certain arrangements of objects, these two kinds of arrangement controlling between them all forms of sensibility." Nadja, Section 1, pg. 16.

"I insist on knowing the names, on being interested only in books left ajar, like doors; I will not go looking for the keys." Nadja, Section 1, pg. 18.

"I myself shall continue living in my glass house where you can always see who comes to call; where everything hanging from the ceiling and on the walls stays where it is as if by magic, where I sleep nights in a glass bed, under glass sheets, where who I am will sooner or later appear etched by a diamond." Nadja, Section 1, pg. 18.

"I shall limit myself here to recalling without effort certain things which, apart from any exertions on my part, have occasionally happened to me, things which, reaching me in unsuspecting ways, give me the measure of the particular grace and disgrace of which I am the object; I shall discuss these things without pre-established order, and according to the mood of the moment which lets whatever survives survive." Nadja, Section 1, pg. 23.

"Nantes: perhaps with Paris, the only city in France where I feel that something worth while can happen to me, where certain eyes burn all too brightly for their own sake..." Nadja, Section 1, pg. 28.

"I have always, beyond belief, hoped to meet, at night and in a woods, a beautiful naked woman, or rather, since such a wish once expressed means nothing, I regret, beyond belief, not having met her." Nadja, Section 1, pg. 39.

"I hope, in any case, that the presentation of some dozen observations of this order as well as what follows will be of a nature to send some men rushing out into the street, after making them aware, if not of the non-existence, at least of the categorical self-evaluation, of any action which requires a continuous application and which can be premeditated." Nadja, Section 1, pg. 59.



"Last of all, the tower of the Manoir d'Ango explodes and a snowfall of feathers from its doves dissolves on contact with the earth of the great courtyard once paved with scraps of tiles and now covered with real blood!" Nadja, Section 1, pg. 60.

"Suddenly, perhaps still ten feet away, I saw a young, poorly dressed woman walking toward me, she had noticed me too, or perhaps she had been watching me for several moments. She carried her head high, unlike everyone else on the sidewalk. And she looked so delicate she scarcely seemed to touch the ground as she walked." Nadja, Section 2, pg. 64.

"What was so extraordinary about what was happening in those eyes? What was it they reflected—some obscure distress and at the same time some luminous pride?" Nadja, Section 2, pg. 65.

"Nadja, because in Russian it's the beginning of the word hope, and because it's only the beginning." Nadja, Section 2, pg. 66.

"For myself, I admit that such steps are everything. Where do they lead, that is the real question." Nadja, Section 2, pg. 69.

"Hearing you speak, I felt that nothing would hold you back, nothing, not even me... You don't understand: it's like the heart of a heartless flower." Nadja, Section 2, pg. 71.

"About to leave her, I want to ask one question which sums up all the rest, a question which only I would ask, probably, but which has at least once found a reply worth of it: 'Who are you?' And she, without a moment's hesitation: 'I am the soul in limbo.'" Nadja, Section 2, pg. 71.

"You think I'm very sick, don't you? I'm not sick. But what do you think that means: fire and water, a hand of fire over the water?" Nadja, Section 2, pg. 86.

"When I am near her I am nearer things which are near her." Nadja, Section 2, pg. 90.

"Andre? Andre? ... You will write a novel about me. I'm sure you will. Don't say you won't. Be careful: everything fades, everything vanishes. Something must remain of us..." Nadja, Section 2, pg. 100.

"Time is a tease. Time is a tease—because everything has to happen in its own time." Nadja, Section 2, pg. 102.

"Who were we, confronting reality, that reality which I know now was lying at Nadja's feet like a lapdog?" Nadja, Section 2, pg. 110-111.

"With the end of my breath, which is the beginning of yours." Nadja, Section 2, pg. 115.

"Who goes there? Is it you, Nadja? Is it true that the beyond, that everything beyond is here in this life? I can't hear you. Who goes there? Is it only me? Is it myself?" Nadja, Section 2, pg. 144.



Topics for Discussion

Consider Andre Breton and Nadja's relationship. How does each of them benefit from the relationship, if at all?

Compare the early parts of the novel with the sections that directly concern Nadja. How do they differ in tone? Is one part more abstract than the other? Why or why not?

Andre Breton uses real events to create the novel, although they are sometimes presented in a unique, non-linear fashion. How does this enhance or detract from the story?

How do the photographs presented throughout the novel enhance or detract from the story of Andre Breton's relationship with Nadja?

Compare and contrast Andre Breton's relationship with Nadja, and what we know of his relationship with his wife? How does Nadja seem to attract him in a way his wife does not? How do you think his wife feels about the attention he pays to Nadja?

Throughout the novel, Andre Breton mentions real people he knows, including other poets, playwrights, and philosophers. Does this serve to ground the novel in reality? Why or why not? What does Breton gain or lose by mentioning these names?

Several of the characters see Madame Sacco. Why do you think this is? What do they hope to gain by seeing a psychic? How much faith do they have in her predictions?

Why and how does Andre Breton's relationship with Nadja end? Do you think the relationship is the cause of Nadja being sent to a sanitarium? Why or why not? Does Breton feel responsible for her commitment? Why or why not?