

The union". it had  
important precursors  
in baudelaire,

[Environment](#), [Air](#)



The poem " Free Union" is written by the surrealist poet Andre Breton.

It is great in many ways: as a free verse, for its complex nature, and is great for the unconventional ideas with which the female anatomy is depicted in the poem. Therefore, the title is to be seen as having different ideas and meanings. " Free Union" can be seen as the free union of the two sexes in general, between the poet and his wife, or between the poet and the ultimate woman living in his imagination. It can also indicate the free union of various heterogeneous images lying compressed in the poem, the images which otherwise would have remained unrelated in the outside world. It must also be taken as the free union of the strange and paradoxical words in the poem set with their utmost freedom. This paper is an analysis of the poem to see its surrealistic qualities, to highlight the beautiful way in which the poet depicts the female body, and also to examine how various images used in the poem help the poet in bringing out the central idea contained in it.

Surrealism began as a movement in arts and literature. It attempted to express the workings of the unconscious mind in art by strange imagery and unfamiliar juxtaposition of content. Though the movement was influenced by Dadaism, its originator is Andre Breton, the author of " Free Union". It had important precursors in Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Lautreamont. It also embraced Marxism for its revolutionary ideas. It believed in looking at the world with keener eyes and wanted to go beyond the conventions.

Surrealism was more positive and was indeed an instrument of knowledge. Andre Breton's poems must be read with these artistic and literary changes in mind.

For him true reality lay in the subconscious, and he developed concepts and techniques to explore and express those depths. Therefore, in "Free Union" when he looks at the female body, his subconscious eye is active and it also has a Freudian approach to reality. The opening line can be taken as an illustration of it: "My love whose hair is woodfire her thoughts heat lightning her waist an hourglass" (Breton). Like Donne, he juxtaposes various images, but to get a proper meaning of the quoted line the reader has to go through the entire poem.

The readers may get perplexed as they move through the diverse images in the poem, and for a coherent idea they have to be yoked together. They may get confused as the poet describes the same part of the body with several different, if not opposing, images. For example, Breton describes the tongue of his beloved as "smooth as amber and as glass/ my love her tongue a sacred host stabbed through/ her tongue a doll whose eyes close and open/ her tongue a fantastic stone" (Breton). This must be because her tongue has not just created one memory or one experience in the poet, but several. They bubble up from the unconscious mind in such a surprising way that a single image from the outside world is not enough to highlight what that female tongue had been to the poet in his life.

Its passive nature, its erotic power, and its wounding power are juxtaposed in one line with various images. Similarly the poet moves on to the other parts of the body of his beloved with mixed memories and feelings. The readers have to delve deep into their unconscious, as the poet does, to knit a coherent meaning of the poem. As Keith points out, "The poem moves to an

apparent climax in the evocation of the sex in terms of successively a gladiolus, a placer (deposit where precious metals such as gold or platinum may be found), a duck-billed platypus, seaweed, old sweets, and a mirror" (Keith). It is with the skilful manipulation of words that the poet is able to do this. A close observation of the poem, " Free Union", reveals the way images are arranged and also the way they associate with each other or one another. The lines describing the lower part of the body, " my love whose legs are fireworks moving like clockwork and despair/ my love her calves of elder tree marrow/ my love whose feet are initial letters/ are keyrings and sparrows drinking" are an example of this.

The tone is not only persuasive, but authoritative too. The reader's attention moves from the leg to the images which stand for the leg. The poet is engaged in exploring something through these images and in these observations intuition has more importance than reasoning. The conventional way of using images with established relationship is replaced with new and strange ways. The real gives way to the surreal in Breton's poems. Everyone is familiar with a lady's back and its beauty, with its erotic curve, but when Breton says that his lady's " back is a bird's vertical flight/ whose back is quicksilver/ whose back is light" (Breton), the reader is compelled to view the back of the fair sex again in a new light. He is sure to remember its " vertical flight" and its lightness, but it demands a thorough search into the past associations with one's beloved.

Mathews observes that " The more we read his verse, the more we perceive that it is the fugitive, fragile quality of the imaginative revelation that gives

his poetry its special mood" (Mathews). One object in the poem either overlaps upon the other or is transformed into a new one. For Breton objects become subjects. In other words, what one has conceived as an object is turned into a subject in the poem when it is used as an image to represent an intimate experience.

What looks as mere appearance is penetrated into by the poet and he makes it a familiar one. The ordered classification is upset and the surrealist poetry creates a new order in the minds of the reader. Initially the poet describes how the eyelash, the eyebrow, and the temples of his beloved are, but it is in the last lines he reveals how her eyes really are: " my love of savannah eyes/ my love her eyes of water to drink in prison/ my love her eyes of wood always to be chopped/ eyes of water level earth and air and fire" (Breton). The images juxtaposed in these lines push the readers from the facade of outer reality into the realm of surrealism. It is not the description of mere body but that of the soul too. The duality of body and soul, and the concept of time and place are altogether upset in the poem. Though Breton uses art as an artifact, he moves beyond in order to express his philosophical ideas and to show what surrealist techniques in poetry can achieve.

In the words of Martin Seymour-Smith and Andrew C. Kimmens: " His influence has been so wide as to be almost incalculable: on psychoanalysis and feminism through Jacques Lacan; on politics via Herbert Marcuse, as well as anarchist thinkers; on criticism through Roland Barthes and countless others; on British and American poetry via David Gascoyne, Robert Duncan, and, again, countless others" (Martin). The poem, " Free Union", is great as a

free verse, as a surrealist poem, and above all for its content. It teaches the power of the metaphor and ignites the readers' imagination. Breton kept on pursuing the quest for freedom; he followed its course without thinking of the consequences. The greatness of Breton as a poet and the enduring literary significance of him can be traced in this fact.

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