# **Classic Poetry Series**

# **Andre Breton**

- poems -

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## Andre Breton (19 February 1896 – 28 September 1966)

Born to a family of modest means in Tinchebray (Orne) in Normandy, he studied medicine and psychiatry. During World War I he worked in a neurological ward in Nantes, where he met the devotee of Alfred Jarry, Jacques Vaché, whose anti-social attitude and disdain for established artistic tradition influenced Breton considerably. Vaché committed suicide at age 24, and his war-time letters to Breton and others were published in a volume entitled Lettres de guerre (1919), for which Breton wrote four introductory essays.

Breton married his first wife, Simone Kahn, on 15 September 1921. The couple relocated to rue Fontaine # 42 in Paris on 1 January 1922. The apartment on rue Fontaine became home to Breton's collection of more than 5,300 items: modern paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, books, art catalogs, journals, manuscripts, and works of popular and Oceanic art.

#### From Dada to Surrealism

In 1919 Breton initiated the review Littérature with Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault. He also associated with Dadaist Tristan Tzara. In 1924 he was instrumental in the founding of the Bureau of Surrealist Research.

In a publication The Magnetic Fields (Les Champs Magnétiques), a collaboration with Soupault, he implemented the principle of automatic writing. He published the Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, and was editor of the magazine La Révolution surréaliste from 1924. A group of writers became associated with him: Philippe Soupault, Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, René Crevel, Michel Leiris, Benjamin Péret, Antonin Artaud, and Robert Desnos.

Anxious to combine the themes of personal transformation found in the works of Arthur Rimbaud with the politics of Karl Marx, Breton joined the French Communist Party in 1927, from which he was expelled in 1933. During this time, he survived mostly by the sale of paintings from his art gallery.

In 1935, there was a conflict between Breton and Ilya Ehrenburg during the first "International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture" which opened in Paris in June. Breton had been insulted by Ehrenburg—along with all fellow surrealists—in a pamphlet which said, among other things, that surrealists were "pederasts". Breton slapped Ehrenburg several times on the street, which resulted in surrealists being expelled from the Congress. Crevel, who according to Salvador Dalí, was "the only serious communist among surrealists" was isolated from Breton and other surrealists, who were unhappy with Crevel because of his homosexuality and annoyed with

communists in general.

In 1938, Breton accepted a cultural commission from the French government to travel to Mexico. After a conference at the National Autonomous University of Mexico about surrealism, Breton stated after getting lost in Mexico City (as no one was waiting for him at the airport) "I don't know why I came here. Mexico is the most surrealist country in the world".

However, visiting Mexico provided the opportunity to meet Leon Trotsky. Breton and other surrealists traveled via a long boat ride from Patzcuaro to the town of Erongaricuaro. Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo were among the visitors to the hidden community of intellectuals and artists. Together, Breton and Trotsky wrote a manifesto Pour un art révolutionnaire indépendent (published under the names of Breton and Diego Rivera) calling for "complete freedom of art", which was becoming increasingly difficult with the world situation of the time.

#### 1940s

Breton was again in the medical corps of the French Army at the start of World War II. The Vichy government banned his writings as "the very negation of the national revolution" and Breton escaped, with the help of the American Varian Fry and Harry Bingham, to the United States and the Caribbean during 1941. Breton got to know Martinican writer Aimé Césaire, and later composed the introduction to the 1947 edition of Césaire's Cahier d'un retour au pays natal. During his exile in New York City he met Elisa, the Chilean woman who would become his third wife.

In 1944, he and Elisa traveled to the Gaspé Peninsula in Québec, Canada, where he wrote Arcane 17, a book which expresses his fears of World War II, describes the marvels of the Rocher Percé and the extreme northeastern part of North America, and celebrates his new romance with Elisa.

#### Later life

Breton returned to Paris in 1946, where he opposed French colonialism (for example as a signatory of the Manifesto of the 121 against the Algerian war) and continued, until his death, to foster a second group of surrealists in the form of expositions or reviews (La Brèche, 1961–1965). In 1959, he organized an exhibit in Paris.

By the end of World War II André Breton decided to embrace anarchism explicitly. In 1952 Breton wrote "It was in the black mirror of anarchism that surrealism first recognised itself." "Breton was consistent in his support for the francophone Anarchist Federation and he continued to offer his solidarity after the Platformists around Fontenis transformed the FA into the Federation Communiste Libertaire. He was one of the few intellectuals who continued to offer his support to the FCL during the Algerian war when the FCL suffered severe repression and was forced underground. He sheltered Fontenis whilst he was in hiding. He refused to take sides on the splits in the French anarchist movement and both he and Peret expressed solidarity as well with the new FA set up by the synthesist anarchists and worked in the Antifascist Committees of the 60s alongside the FA."

André Breton died in 1966 at 70 and was buried in the Cimetière des Batignolles in Paris

#### Eserleri:

Mont de piété (1919) S'il Vous Plaît (1920 – If You Please) Les Champs magnétiques (1920 – The Magnetic Fields) Manifeste du surréalisme (1924 – The Surrealist Manifesto) Les Pas perdus (Breton) (1924 – The Lost Steps) Poisson soluble (1924 – Soluble Fish) Un Cadavre (1924 -- A Corpse) Légitime Défense (1926 – Legitimate Defense)

Le Surréalisme et la peinture (1926 – Surrealism and Painting) Nadja (1928 – Nadja) L'Immaculée Conception (1930 – The Immaculate Conception) Deuxième Manifeste du surréalisme (1930 - The Second Manifesto of Surrealism) Ralentir travaux (1930 – Slow Down Works) L'Union libre (1931) La Revolver à cheveux blancs (1932 – The Revolver Has White Hair) Les Vases communicants (1932 – The Communicating Vessels) Le Message automatique (1933 – The Automatic Message) Qu'est-ce que le surréalisme (1934 – What Is Surrealism) L'Air de l'eau (1934 – Looks Like Water) Point du Jour (1934 – Break of Day) Position politique du surréalisme (1935 – The Political Position of Surrealism) Notes sur la poésie (1936 -with Paul Éluard - Notes on Poetry) L'Amour fou (1937 – Mad Love)
Point du jour (1937)
Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme (1938 --with Paul Éluard – Abridged) Dictionary of Surrealism Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art (1938 -with Leon Trotsky) Fata Morgana (1940) Anthologie de l'humour noir (1940 – Anthology of Black Humor) Arcane 17 (1945 – Arcane 17) Jeunes Cerisiers garantis contre les lièvres (1946 - Young Cherry Trees Secured against Hares) Ode à Charles Fourier (1947 - Ode to Charles Fourier) Yves Tanguy (1947) Poèmes 1919–48 (1948) La Lampe dans l'hòrlogé (1948 – The Lamp in the Clock) Martinique, charmeuse de serpents (1948) Entretiens, (1952 - Discussions) La Clé des champs (1953 – The Key of the Fields) Farouche à quatre feuilles (1954 with Lise Deharme, Julien Gracq, Jean Tardieu – Wild to Four Leaves) Les Manifestes du surréalisme (1955 - Manifestoes of Surrealism) L'Art magique (1957 – The Magic Art) Constellations (1958) Le la (1961) Le Surréalisme et la Peinture (1965) Selected Poems (1969) Perspective cavalière (1970) What is Surrealism? Selected Poems (1978) Poems of André Breton (1982)

## **Always for the First Time**

Always for the first time

Hardly do I know you by sight

You return at some hour of the night to a house at an angle to my window

A wholly imaginary house

It is there that from one second to the next

In the inviolate darkness

I anticipate once more the fascinating rift occurring

The one and only rift

In the facade and in my heart

The closer I come to you

In reality

The more the key sings at the door of the unknown room

Where you appear alone before me

At first you coalesce entirely with the brightness

The elusive angle of a curtain

It's a field of jasmine I gazed upon at dawn on a road in the vicinity of Grasse

With the diagonal slant of its girls picking

Behind them the dark falling wing of the plants stripped bare

Before them a T-square of dazzling light

The curtain invisibly raised

In a frenzy all the flowers swarm back in

It is you at grips with that too long hour never dim enough until sleep

You as though you could be

The same except that I shall perhaps never meet you

You pretend not to know I am watching you

Marvelously I am no longer sure you know

You idleness brings tears to my eyes

A swarm of interpretations surrounds each of your gestures

It's a honeydew hunt

There are rocking chairs on a deck there are branches that may well scratch you in the forest

There are in a shop window in the rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette

Two lovely crossed legs caught in long stockings

Flaring out in the center of a great white clover

There is a silken ladder rolled out over the ivy

There is

By my leaning over the precipice

Of your presence and your absence in hopeless fusion

My finding the secret

Of loving you

Always for the first time

#### Freedom of Love

<i>(Translated from the French by Edouard Rodti)</i>

My wife with the hair of a wood fire

With the thoughts of heat lightning

With the waist of an hourglass

With the waist of an otter in the teeth of a tiger

My wife with the lips of a cockade and of a bunch of stars of the last magnitude

With the teeth of tracks of white mice on the white earth

With the tongue of rubbed amber and glass

My wife with the tongue of a stabbed host

With the tongue of a doll that opens and closes its eyes

With the tongue of an unbelievable stone

My wife with the eyelashes of strokes of a child's writing

With brows of the edge of a swallow's nest

My wife with the brow of slates of a hothouse roof

And of steam on the panes

My wife with shoulders of champagne

And of a fountain with dolphin-heads beneath the ice

My wife with wrists of matches

My wife with fingers of luck and ace of hearts

With fingers of mown hay

My wife with armpits of marten and of beechnut

And of Midsummer Night

Of privet and of an angelfish nest

With arms of seafoam and of riverlocks

And of a mingling of the wheat and the mill

My wife with legs of flares

With the movements of clockwork and despair

My wife with calves of eldertree pith

My wife with feet of initials

With feet of rings of keys and Java sparrows drinking

My wife with a neck of unpearled barley

My wife with a throat of the valley of gold

Of a tryst in the very bed of the torrent

With breasts of night

My wife with breasts of a marine molehill

My wife with breasts of the ruby's crucible

With breasts of the rose's spectre beneath the dew

My wife with the belly of an unfolding of the fan of days

With the belly of a gigantic claw

My wife with the back of a bird fleeing vertically

With a back of quicksilver

With a back of light

With a nape of rolled stone and wet chalk

And of the drop of a glass where one has just been drinking

My wife with hips of a skiff

With hips of a chandelier and of arrow-feathers

And of shafts of white peacock plumes

Of an insensible pendulum

My wife with buttocks of sandstone and asbestos

My wife with buttocks of swans' backs

My wife with buttocks of spring

With the sex of an iris
My wife with the sex of a mining-placer and of a platypus
My wife with a sex of seaweed and ancient sweetmeat
My wife with a sex of mirror
My wife with eyes full of tears
With eyes of purple panoply and of a magnetic needle
My wife with savanna eyes
My wife with eyes of water to he drunk in prison
My wife with eyes of wood always under the axe
My wife with eyes of water-level of level of air earth and fire

## Le Verbe Être

Je connais le désespoir dans ses grandes lignes. Le désespoir n'a pas d'ailes, il ne se tient pas nécessairement à une table desservie sur une terrasse, le soir, au bord de la mer. C'est le désespoir et ce n'est pas le retour d'une quantité de petits faits comme des graines qui quittent à la nuit tombante un sillon pour un autre. Ce n'est pas la mousse sur une pierre ou le verre à boire. C'est un bateau criblé de neige, si vous voulez, comme les oiseaux qui tombent et leur sang n'a pas la moindre épaisseur. Je connais le désespoir dans ses grandes lignes. Une forme très petite, délimitée par un bijou de cheveux. C'est le désespoir. Un collier de perles pour lequel on ne saurait trouver de fermoir et dont l'existence ne tient pas même à un fil, voilà le désespoir. Le reste, nous n'en parlons pas. Nous n'avons pas fini de deséspérer, si nous commencons. Moi je désespère de l'abat-jour vers quatre heures, je désespère de l'éventail vers minuit, je désespère de la cigarette des condamnés. Je connais le désespoir dans ses grandes lignes. Le désespoir n'a pas de coeur, la main reste toujours au désespoir hors d'haleine, au désespoir dont les glaces ne nous disent jamais s'il est mort. Je vis de ce désespoir qui m'enchante. J'aime cette mouche bleue qui vole dans le ciel à l'heure où les étoiles chantonnent. Je connais dans ses grandes lignes le désespoir aux longs étonnements grêles, le désespoir de la fierté, le désespoir de la colère. Je me lève chaque jour comme tout le monde et je détends les bras sur un papier à fleurs, je ne me souviens de rien, et c'est toujours avec désespoir que je découvre les beaux arbres déracinés de la nuit. L'air de la chambre est beau comme des baquettes de tambour. Il fait un temps de temps. Je connais le désespoir dans ses grandes lignes. C'est comme le vent du rideau qui me tend la perche. A-t-on idée d'un désespoir pareil! Au feu! Ah! ils vont encore venir... Et les annonces de journal, et les réclames lumineuses le long du canal. Tas de sable, espèce de tas de sable! Dans ses grandes lignes le désespoir n'a pas d'importance. C'est une corvée d'arbres qui va encore faire une forêt, c'est une corvée d'étoiles qui va encore faire un jour de moins, c'est une corvée de jours de moins qui va encore faire ma vie.

#### **Less Time**

Less time than it takes to say it, less tears than it takes to die; I've taken account of everything,

there you have it. I've made a census of the stones, they are as numerous as my fingers and some

others; I've distributed some pamphlets to the plants, but not all were willing to accept them. I've

kept company with music for a second only and now I no longer know what to think of suicide, for

if I ever want to part from myself, the exit is on this side and, I add mischievously, the entrance, the

re-entrance is on the other. You see what you still have to do. Hours, grief, I don't keep a

reasonable account of them; I'm alone, I look out of the window; there is no passerby, or rather no

one passes (underline passes). You don't know this man? It's Mr. Same. May I introduce Madam

Madam? And their children. Then I turn back on my steps, my steps turn back too, but I don't

know exactly what they turn back on. I consult a schedule; the names of the towns have been

replaced by the names of people who have been quite close to me. Shall I go to A, return to B,

change at X? Yes, of course I'll change at X. Provided I don't miss the connection with boredom!

There we are: boredom, beautiful parallels, ah! how beautiful the parallels are under God's ....

perpendicular.

#### **Postman Cheval**

We are the birds always charmed by you from the top of these belvederes

And that each night form a blossoming branch between your shoulders and the arms of your well beloved wheelbarrow

Which we tear out swifter than sparks at your wrist

We are the sighs of the glass statue that raises itself on its elbow when man sleeps And shining holes appear in his bed

Holes through which stags with coral antlers can be seen in a glade

And naked women at the bottom of a mine

You remembered then you got up you got out of the train

Without glancing at the locomotive attacked by immense barometric roots

Complaining about its murdered boilers in the virgin forest

Its funnels smoking jacinths and moulting blue snakes

Then we went on, plants subject to metamorphosis

Each night making signs that man may understand

While his house collapses and he stands amazed before the singular packing-cases

Sought after by his bed with the corridor and the staircase

The staircase goes on without end

It leads to a millstone door it enlarges suddenly in a public square

It is made of the backs of swans with a spreading wing for banisters

It turns inside out as though it were going to bite itself

But no, it is content at the sound of our feet to open all its steps like drawers

Drawers of bread drawers of wine drawers of soap drawers of ice drawers of stairs

Drawers of flesh with handsfull of hair

Without turning round you seized the trowel with which breasts are made

We smiled at you you held us round the waist

And we took the positions of your pleasure

Motionless under our lids for ever as woman delights to see man

After having made love.

## The Spectral Attitudes

I attach no importance to life

I pin not the least of life's butterflies to importance

I do not matter to life

But the branches of salt the white branches

All the shadow bubbles

And the sea-anemones

Come down and breathe within my thoughts

They come from tears that are not mine

From steps I do not take that are steps twice

And of which the sand remembers the flood-tide

The bars are in the cage

And the birds come down from far above to sing before these bars

A subterranean passage unites all perfumes

A woman pledged herself there one day

This woman became so bright that I could no longer see her

With these eyes which have seen my own self burning

I was then already as old as I am now

And I watched over myself and my thoughts like a night watchman in an immense

factory Keeping watch alone

The circus always enchants the same tramlines

The plaster figures have lost nothing of their expression

They who bit the smile's fig

I know of a drapery in a forgotten town

If it pleased me to appear to you wrapped in this drapery

You would think that your end was approaching

Like mine

At last the fountains would understand that you must not say Fountain

The wolves are clothed in mirrors of snow

I have a boat detached from all climates

I am dragged along by an ice-pack with teeth of flame

I cut and cleave the wood of this tree that will always be green

A musician is caught up in the strings of his instrument

The skull and crossbones of the time of any childhood story

Goes on board a ship that is as yet its own ghost only

Perhaps there is a hilt to this sword

But already there is a duel in this hilt

During the duel the combatants are unarmed

Death is the least offence

The future never comes

The curtains that have never been raised

Float to the windows of houses that are to be built

The beds made of lilies

Slide beneath the lamps of dew

There will come an evening

The nuggets of light become still underneath the blue moss

The hands that tie and untie the knots of love and of air

Keep all their transparency for those who have eyes to see

They see the palms of hands

The crowns in eyes

But the brazier of crown and palms

Can scarcely be lit in the deepest part of the forest

There where the stags bend their heads to examine the years
Nothing more than a feeble beating is heard
From which sound a thousand louder or softer sounds proceed
And the beating goes on and on
There are dresses that vibrate
And their vibration is in unison with the beating
When I wish to see the faces of those that wear them
A great fog rises from the ground
At the bottom of the steeples behind the most elegant reservoirs of life and of wealth
In the gorges which hide themselves between two mountains
On the sea at the hour when the sun cools down
Those who make signs to me are separated by stars
And yet the carriage overturned at full speed
Carries as far as my last hesitation
That awaits me down there in the town where the statues of bronze
and of stone have changed places with statues of wax Banyans banyans.

#### **Tournesol**

La voyageuse qui traverse les Halles & agrave; la tombé e de l'é té

Marchait sur la pointe des pieds

Le dé sespoir roulait au ciel ses grands arums si beaux

Et dans le sac & agrave; main il y avait mon rê ve ce flacon de sels

Que seule a respiré la marraine de Dieu

Les torpeurs se dé ployaient comme la bué e

Au Chien qui fume

Ou venaient d'entrer le pour et le contre

La jeune femme ne pouvait ê tre vue d'eux que mal et de biais

Avais-je affaire & agrave; l'ambassadrice du salpê tre

Ou de la courbe blanche sur fond noir que nous appelons pensé e

Les lampions prenaient feu lentement dans les marronniers

La dame sans ombre s'agenouilla sur le Pont-au-Change

Rue Git-le-Coeur les timbres n'é taient plus les mê mes

Les promesses de nuits é taient enfin tenues

Les pigeons voyageurs les baisers de secours

Se joignaient aux seins de la belle inconnue

Dardés sous le crêpe des significations parfaites

Une ferme prospé rait en plein Paris

Et ses fenê tres donnaient sur la voie lacté e

Mais personne ne l'habitait encore & agrave; cause des survenants

Des survenants qu'on sait plus devoué s que les revenants

Les uns comme cette femme ont l'air de nager

Et dans l'amour il entre un peu de leur substance

Elle les interiorise

Je ne suis le jouet d'aucune puissance sensorielle

Et pourtant le grillon qui chantait dans les cheveux de cendres

Un soir près de la statue d'Etienne Marcel

M'a jeté un coup d'oeil d'intelligence

André Breton a-t-il dit passe