Two Words: A Wedding – By Barrie Philip Nichol (1944-1988)

The author, Barrie Philip Nichol was born in Vancouver, British Columbia. He was a pioneer in the Canadian avant-garde literary scene and made significant contributions to the development of concrete poetry. Concrete poetry is a form of poetry in which the meaning is conveyed using patterns of words or letters and other typographical devices. His use of visual or concrete poetry provided a medium for combining image and poetry i.e. the words used made more sense than just the text itself. Such poems encompass verbo-visual creations where the visual form is fluid with a focus on the textual materiality of the language. The poem fragments words into pieces, thus compelling the reader to delve more deep into the text to sift the meaning out. What is most important is that the method of interpreting varies widely.

From reading this literary text, the title jumps out at me. The word wedding meaning to combine or merge is used to signify something much larger than an actual wedding. Before building more on this, we should note that the author uses the metaphor of “words” to signify people throughout the poem. Thus, the title signifies that the smallest of relationships between two individuals leads to the creation of more relationships and experiences that define each individual independently. Going further, the fluidity of the poem makes it difficult to grasp the meaning and bpNichol uses his love for concrete poetry to cause the reader to dwell longer and be swallowed whole into the literary text to dig out the meaning as mentioned before. Beginning the poem is a juxtaposition of “words” being either full or empty representing the people we meet as we journey through life. Some we meet play huge roles in our lives and others have no effect, some we connect with as if we were long-lost siblings and others there is no spark at all. Moving on, the author uses the metaphor of “body” severally with the aim of showing that we are constantly making relationships wherever we find ourselves either as a group of friends, a family, an institution or a nation. Also, the tone used by the author shows that he is well informed of the passage through life and wishes to convey this knowledge to those on the verge of beginning or currently passing through. Our realities as the author says comprises of forging our feelings and knowledge with that of others to conceive a new reality in which we are all entwined. In creating our realities, we make decisions which inevitably affect those around us and we are also a newer version of our previous self every passing day. “Marrying the flesh to the flesh”, which is a biblical reference means the union of man and wife to become one, and is used here to describe the literal meaning of a wedding. The concept of marriage is not based on just the wedding as commonly thought, but a daily commitment to the institution of marriage, of family of working together and of love. He author also says that along the journey we will face obstacles and struggles and the only solution is to share these struggles with loved ones and overcome it together. Towards the end, bpNichol says that as a person you cannot be a 100% made of only you because we are all “wedded” to the flux of life and the reason for this is our humanity, the innate desire we are all born with to be a part of something much greater than ourselves. Finally to note, there is no apparent rhyming scheme or physical structure throughout the poem. Instead, a gradual expansion from being an individual to a family and then a community is observed. The author concludes by saying that we are one people who progress to a newer new every day.