

Surrealism

Definition of Surrealism

The term *surrealism* indicates a specific thought and movement in literature, the arts, and theatre, which tries to integrate the confused realms of imagination and reality. The proponents of surrealism endeavor to mix up the differences of conscious and unconscious thought through writing and painting by using irrational [juxtaposition](#) of images.

Initiated by André Breton (1896–1966), surrealism is a kind of artistic movement started in the French capital, Paris, during the 1920s. This movement lasted until the 1940s. Breton, a famous writer as well as a philosopher, boosted this movement further by publishing his manifesto, “The Manifesto of Surrealism.”

Although it gave new dimensions to art, it was not a political manifesto. The manifesto states that, horrified by the destruction caused by the world wars and subsequent confusion, art and literature faced numerous political challenges in resolving those confusions, the reaction of which emerged in the shape of surrealism. This movement rather aimed at preventing bloody revolutions by breaking the limitations placed on arts and literature by the politics of that time.

Examples of Surrealism in Literature

Example #1: *Freedom Of Love* (By Andre Breton)

“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.”
(Lines 1–8)

This is one of the best examples of surrealist poetry by Andre Breton. These lines have been taken from his poem “Freedom of Love.” See the irrationality in images about his wife and a wood fire, an hourglass, and teeth of a tiger. None of these images have any relation. They have been just irrationally put together to demonstrate the mind of the poet, and a situation of the reality in which he is living.

Example #2: *Dark Poet* (by Antonin Artaud)

“Dark Poet, a maid’s breast
Haunts you,
Embittered poet, life seethes
And life burns,
And the sky reabsorbs itself in rain,
Your pen scratches at the heart of life.”
(Lines 1–6)

These lines have been taken from poem “Dark Poet” by Antonin Artaud. This poem juxtaposes the poet with the breasts that is quite irrational and hence surreal.

Example #3: *A Season in Hell* (by Arthur Rimbaud)

“A while back, if I remember right, my life was one long party
where all hearts were open wide, where all wines kept flowing.
One night, I sat Beauty down on my lap.—And I found her
galling.—And I roughed her up.
I armed myself against justice.
I ran away. O witches, O misery, O hatred, my treasure’s been

turned over to you!

(Lines 1-5)

Just check the images presented in the first few lines of this poem by Arthur Rimbaud. These are contradictory and irrational images. That is why “A Season in Hell” is one of the best surreal poems.

Example #4: *Hidden Faces* (by Salvador Dali, translated by Chevalier)

“Then an unheard-of being, unheard-of beings, will be seen to rise, their brains compressed by sonorous helmets, their temples pierced by the whistling of air waves, their bodies naked, turned yellow by fever, pocked by deep vegetal stigmata swarming with insects and filled to the brim with the slimy juices of venom, overflowing and running down a skin tiger-striped and leopard-spotted by the gangrene of wounds and the leprosy of camouflage, their swollen bellies plugged to death by electric umbilical chords [sic] tangling with the ignominiousness of torn intestines and bits of flesh, roasting in the burning steel carapaces of the punitive tortures of gutted tanks.

That is man! Backs of lead, sexual organs of fire, fears of mica, chemical hearts of the televisions of blood, hidden faces and wings — always wings, the north and south of our being!”

This excerpt has been taken from “Hidden Faces,” a novel by Salvador Dali. It uses irrational images to describe a person.

Function of Surrealism

Life became topsy-turvy after two world wars. Literature and art faced the [dilemma](#) of presenting this topsy-turvy state of mind in words or colors. The artists and writers of that time tried to resolve this situation by presenting strange and shocking images in their writings and paintings. This technique of presenting images helps the readers and the audiences connect with the confused state of mind of that time, and of the people living after the two world wars. Surrealism is a representation of this

confusion. It makes people aware of bizarre reality around them. They connect themselves with this reality and become familiar with it.