with white silk; at his short, well-cared-for hands; and doubtful for the first time, she asked herself, "What more did she want from him?"

And as they were leaving, while Marc was paying the bill and asking for the chauffeur and about the route, she kept looking, with envy and curiosity, at the woman in white, this dissatisfied, this difficult, this superior . . . 45

Translated from the French by Matthew Ward

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How does Colette use the reflection of light to create a mood of ambiguity in "The Other Wife"? Find the different instances of light imagery.
2. What is the significance of Marc's ordering the food? Why does the author devote so much of a very short story to food and eating?
3. How does Alice's mood change when Marc says, "I don't have to. I know that look of hers." How had Alice regarded the first wife before this statement? How does she regard her now?
4. What are Alice's feelings for Marc at the beginning of the story? What are they at the end?
5. For what are eyes metaphors?

André Breton

André Breton (1896–1966) was a French poet and essayist who was the founder and chief theoretician of Surrealism. Breton began medical studies with the aim of becoming a psychiatrist, but the experience of World War I turned him permanently to literary work with the aim of using his art to create a new vision. In his theoretical essays, the Manifestos *(1924, 1930, 1942), Breton postulated that knowledge was incomplete because it previously had relied on rationalism. Art in its power to reveal the subconscious, the realm of desires, dreams, and intuitions, had an important role in expanding human understanding. The project of the surrealist artist was the discovery of the self, both collective and individual. To this end, Breton developed techniques, particularly of automatic writing and free association, by which to capture the spontaneity, the exigency, the very spirit of emotion. "Free Union" was one of Breton's most striking free association poems in which through a succession of unordered images he evoked the urgency of desire. A*

collection of Breton's poetry has been published in English, Poems of André Breton: A Bilingual Anthology *(1982), as have his major theoretical statements, in* What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings *(1978).*

Free Union

My wife whose hair is a brush fire
Whose thoughts are summer lightning
Whose waist is an hourglass
Whose waist is the waist of an otter caught in the teeth of a tiger
Whose mouth is a bright cockade with the fragrance of a star of the first magnitude
Whose teeth leave prints like the tracks of white mice over snow
Whose tongue is made out of amber and polished glass
Whose tongue is a stabbed wafer
The tongue of a doll with eyes that open and shut
Whose tongue is incredible stone
My wife whose eyelashes are strokes in the handwriting of a child
Whose eyebrows are nests of swallows
My wife whose temples are the slate of greenhouse roofs
With steam on the windows
My wife whose shoulders are champagne
Are fountains that curl from the heads of dolphins under the ice
My wife whose wrists are matches
Whose fingers are raffles holding the ace of hearts
Whose fingers are fresh cut hay
My wife with the armpits of martens and beech fruit
And Midsummer Night
That are hedges of privet and nesting places for sea snails
Whose arms are of sea foam and a landlocked sea
And a fusion of wheat and a mill
Whose legs are spindles
In the delicate movements of watches and despair
My wife whose calves are sweet with the sap of elders
Whose feet are carved initials
Keyrings and the feet of steeplejacks who drink
My wife whose neck is fine milled barley
Whose throat contains the Valley of Gold

And encounters in the bed of the maelstrom
My wife whose breasts are of the night
And are undersea molehills
And crucibles of rubies
My wife whose breasts are haunted by the ghosts of
dew-moistened roses
Whose belly is a fan unfolded in the sunlight
Is a giant talon
My wife with the back of a bird in vertical flight
With a back of quicksilver
And bright lights
My wife whose nape is of smooth worn stone and wet chalk
And of a glass slipped through the fingers of someone who has
just drunk
My wife with the thighs of a skiff
That are lustrous and feathered like arrows
Stemmed with the light tailbones of a white peacock
And imperceptible balance
My wife whose rump is sandstone and flax
Whose rump is the back of a swan and the spring
My wife with the sex of an iris
A mine and a platypus
With the sex of an alga and old-fashioned candies
My wife with the sex of a mirror
My wife with eyes full of tears
With eyes that are purple armor and a magnetized needle
With eyes of savannahs
With eyes full of water to drink in prisons
My wife with eyes that are forests forever under the ax
My wife with eyes that are the equal of water and air and earth
and fire

Translated from the French by David Antin

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Breton's use of imagery in "Free Union" and show how it conveys emotional and psychological experience.
2. What is the purpose of the poem? What does it accomplish?