



ARCANUM 17

ANDRÉ BRETON

*Translated from the French by Zack Rogow
and with an Introduction by Anna Balakian*

GREEN INTEGER 96

Arcanum 17: With Apertures

André Breton , Zack Rogow (Translation)

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Considered radical at the time, today Breton's ideas seem almost prescient, yet breathtaking in their passionate underlying belief in the indestructibility of life and the freedom of the human spirit. Andre Breton wrote *Arcanum 17* during a trip to the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec in the months after D-Day in 1944, when the Allied troops were liberating Occupied Europe. Using the huge Perce Rock--its impermanence, its slow-motion crumbling, its singular beauty--as his central metaphor, Breton considers issues of love and loss, aggression and war, pacifism, feminism and the occult, in a book that is part prose and part poetry, part reality and part dream.

Translator Zack Rogow won the PEN-Book-of-the-Month Translation Prize for his co-translation of Breton's *Earthlight*.

Arcanum 17: With Apertures Details

Date : Published April 1st 2004 by Green Integer (first published 1945)

ISBN : 9781931243278

Author : André Breton , Zack Rogow (Translation)

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From Reader Review Arcanum 17: With Apertures for online ebook

Derek Carter says

A tough read that did not age as well as it could've. Still moments of greatness and pure surrealist diss/association

Christina Packard says

Reminds me of James Joyce writings. Lots of pages of mostly single thoughts etc. Not to be read for entertainment.

Jen says

3 stars (2 for enjoyment and a bump for intelligence and wonderfully lyrical prose).

Breton's Arcanum 17 is essentially a long essay in which he muses about love, loss, war, feminism, and a number of other things. Inspired by the image of the Perce Rock in Quebec, he uses this vision as a metaphor for a range of topics. The book itself was barely larger than my cellphone and only 133 pages (with additional pages for an intro and other material) but it took me over two weeks to read. This is one of those books that I couldn't read in bed for fear of falling asleep. In fact I fell asleep reading this on my couch, in my car (with my husband driving), and multiple times in bed.

It's well written and there is no question that he is an intellectual powerhouse. I did enjoy some parts of the book but it required such intensity of focus and concentration, that it felt like a chore. He has some interesting thoughts about the rights and roles women that are quite advanced for the period in which they were written. The writing is poetic and I liked how he blended imagery form nature into his philosophical musings.

I am at a loss for why it is on the 1001 list. It is certainly not a novel but rather reads like an academic essay. I could really only read two pages at a time because I found it fairly boring albeit beautifully written.

Francesca M says

What to say? I love surrealism and André Breton in particular, so my judgement could be a bit biased. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, this was a great piece of work.

In particular Breton description of the natural landscape of Percé Rock and his reflections on the meaning of liberty, education, the role of women in the society and the absurdity of war are so modern, beautifully written and revealing that I couldn't help reading some of the pages two of three times. Wonderful!!!

Bob says

This a fluidly (un)structured hundred pages written in 1944 when the world looked pretty grim and Breton had exiled himself to North America. Combining philosophical musings on education, liberty and a rather essentialist view (repackaged by some contemporary commentators as feminist) of what women's role should be in society, with a series of poetic images, based on the tarot card of the title, the bird-covered Percé Rock, off coastal Quebec, various themes of loss and redemption, the work is a whole is kind of slog to get through. Breton-scholar Anna Balakian's introduction is quite helpful in suggesting how to read it and finding some unity in the many pieces.

Eadie says

Andre Breton is one of those deep thinkers and his writing is such that it is not easily understandable. You have to take every sentence and break it down in order to get the exact meaning of what he is trying to communicate. The only way I found out what this book was about is by reading the translator's introduction. For that reason, I am giving this book 2 stars and I doubt that I would read anything else that he has written.

Pauline says

Une (non) structure. Une écriture automatique peu évidente pour moi, heureusement cela va mieux dans la seconde partie : Des concepts ésotériques, l'étoile et toujours le surréalisme.

Andrew says

a marvelous work!

Mike says

An odd, rambling account of political liberty, womanhood, and natural beauty. Beautifully written at times, but also obscure and personal. Some sections read like a string of Joycean epiphanies loosely connected to the book's themes, while other sections read like a political manifesto. I feel as if I may have had a stronger connection to the work if I had been reading it at a certain time in my life--or perhaps if I had lived through that moment in history between the wars upon which Breton was reflecting.

Joel Ortiz-Quintanilla says

i read this years ago, when i was really knee deep in surrealism, i said to hell with american lit, it is all crap, i wanted something different, something that would make me think, and it lead me to dada and surrealism, i read mad love first, this has to be about 1995-1996, but i found a copy of this book, after i read mad love, and

i liked it, i saw a common element, that each of his books were about different women and how much he loved them, a different book on a different woman, but arcanum 17 was a great book, it went a little deeper unconsciously than his other books, but all the drugs i've done have made me forget what this book was about, but if you like breton, because you either love him or hate him, and i've met more people who hate him more than anything else, but this faggot loves him, so i read a good amount of his books
