

# **Selected French Poems of the 20th Century**

Translated by A. S. Kline © 2011 All Rights Reserved  
This work may be freely reproduced, stored, and transmitted, electronically  
or otherwise, for any non-commercial purpose.

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
<b>Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918)</b> .....	7
Autumn Crocuses ( <i>Les colchiques</i> ) .....	7
Merlin and the Old Crone ( <i>Merlin et la vieille femme</i> ) .....	8
Autumn ( <i>Automne</i> ).....	11
Diseased Autumn ( <i>Automne malade</i> ) .....	12
Engagements ( <i>Les fiançailles</i> ) .....	13
Always ( <i>Toujours</i> ) .....	14
<b>Jules Supervielle (1884-1960)</b> .....	15
The Wake ( <i>Le sillage</i> ).....	15
High Seas ( <i>Haute mer</i> ).....	16
I Dream of You... ( <i>Je vous rêve...</i> ) .....	17
You Disappear ( <i>Vous disparaissiez</i> ).....	18
Regretting the Earth ( <i>Le regret de la terre</i> ).....	19
<b>Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961)</b> .....	20
Orion .....	20
<b>Pierre Reverdy (1889-1960)</b> .....	21
Nomad ( <i>Nomade</i> ).....	21
Corridor ( <i>Couloir</i> ).....	22
Live, Flesh ( <i>Chair vivre</i> ).....	23
<b>Pierre-Jean Jouve (1887-1976)</b> .....	24
To Himself ( <i>A soi-même</i> ).....	24
We Have Astonished... ( <i>Nous avons étonné...</i> ) .....	25
<b>André Breton (1896-1966)</b> .....	26
Free Union ( <i>L'Union libre</i> ).....	26
Vigilance ( <i>Vigilance</i> ) .....	28
No Proof ( <i>Non-lieu</i> ) .....	29
On the Road to San Romano ( <i>Sur la route de San Romano</i> ) .....	30
<b>Philippe Soupault (1897-1990)</b> .....	32
Sports Goods ( <i>Articles de sport</i> ).....	32

Life-Saving Medal ( <i>Médaille de sauvetage</i> ) .....	33
<b>Tristan Tzara (1896-1963)</b> .....	34
The Death of Apollinaire ( <i>La Mort de Guillaume Apollinaire</i> ) .....	34
Way ( <i>Voie</i> ) .....	35
Volt ( <i>Volt</i> ) .....	36
Poem for a Dress ( <i>Poème pour une robe de Madame Sonia Delaunay</i> ) ..	37
<b>Paul Eluard (1895-1952)</b> .....	38
‘The arc of your eyes...’ ( <i>La courbe de tes yeux</i> ) .....	38
‘My forehead against the glass...’ ( <i>Le front aux vitres...</i> ) .....	39
The Invention ( <i>L’invention</i> ).....	40
Georges Braque.....	41
Second Nature ( <i>Seconde Nature</i> ).....	42
The Deaf and the Blind ( <i>Le sourd et l’aveugle</i> ) .....	43
Keeping Alive ( <i>Faire vivre</i> ).....	44
<b>Antonin Artaud (1896-1948)</b> .....	45
Invocation to the Mummy ( <i>Invocation à la Momie</i> ) .....	45
Plates of Sound ( <i>Vitres de son</i> ).....	46
Who am I? ( <i>Qui suis-je?</i> ).....	47
<b>Louis Aragon (1897-1982)</b> .....	48
The Rose of the New Year ( <i>La rose du premier de l’an</i> ).....	48
Elsa at the Mirror ( <i>Elsa au miroir</i> ) .....	49
The Lilacs and the Roses ( <i>Les lilas et les roses</i> ) .....	51
The Red Poster ( <i>L’affiche rouge</i> ) .....	53
The Free Zone ( <i>Zone Libre</i> ).....	55
<b>Robert Desnos (1900-1945)</b> .....	57
The Zebra ( <i>Le Zèbre</i> ).....	57
Under Cover of Night ( <i>A la faveur de la nuit</i> ).....	58
If You Knew ( <i>Si tu savais</i> ).....	59
The Voice of Robert Desnos ( <i>La Voix de Robert Desnos</i> ).....	61
The Great Days of the Poet ( <i>Les grands jours du poète</i> ) .....	63
The Landscape ( <i>Le Paysage</i> ).....	64
Reclining ( <i>Couchée</i> ) .....	65
Epitaph ( <i>L’épitaphe</i> ) .....	66
Last Poem ( <i>J’ai tant rêvé de toi</i> ) .....	67

<b>Jacques Prévert (1900-1977)</b> .....	68
Summer ( <i>La Belle Saison</i> ) .....	68
Permission to Leave ( <i>Quartier libre</i> ).....	69
Song ( <i>Chanson</i> ) .....	70
To Paint a Picture of a Bird ( <i>Poure faire le portrait d'un oiseau</i> ) .....	71
The Dunce ( <i>Le Cancre</i> ) .....	73
Breakfast ( <i>Déjeuner du matin</i> ) .....	74
The Speech About Peace ( <i>Le discours sur la paix</i> ).....	75
The Message ( <i>Le Message</i> ).....	75
Picasso's Stroll ( <i>La promenade de Picasso</i> ) .....	76
<b>Francis Ponge (1899-1988)</b> .....	78
Rhetoric ( <i>Rhétorique</i> ) .....	78
Ripe Blackberries ( <i>Les Mûres</i> ) .....	79
The Orange ( <i>L'Orange</i> ) .....	80
Vegetation ( <i>Végétation</i> ).....	82
<b>André Frenaud (1907-1993)</b> .....	84
I Have Never Forgotten You ( <i>Je ne t'ai jamais oubliée</i> ) .....	84
<b>Jean Follain (1903-1971)</b> .....	85
Dog and Schoolboys ( <i>Chien aux écoliers</i> ) .....	85
Life ( <i>Vie</i> ).....	86
Eve ( <i>Ève</i> ).....	87
<b>René Char (1907-1988)</b> .....	88
Evadne ( <i>Evadné</i> ).....	88
The Lords of Mausanne ( <i>Les Seigneurs de Mausanne</i> ) .....	89
Every Life ( <i>Toute vie</i> ).....	90
To the Brother-Tree of Numbered Days.....	91
( <i>Vers l'arbre-frère aux jours comptés</i> ).....	91
Faction of the Dumb ( <i>Faction du muet</i> ) .....	92
The Rampart of Twigs ( <i>Le Rempart de brindilles</i> ) .....	93
The Woods by the Epte ( <i>Le Bois de l'Epte</i> ) .....	95
Play and Sleep ( <i>Joue et Dors</i> ).....	96
Antonin Artaud ( <i>Antonin Artaud</i> ).....	97

## **Introduction**

This is a purely personal selection of French 20th century poetry, covering the early to mid-century, and is not intended to be fully representative. I have only chosen to translate poems which I particularly like, and which I consider of permanent value. Though Surrealism and the two World Wars between them determined the nature of French poetry in this period, these poems also reveal individual quality through a distinctive personal voice, distinctive content, or a distinctive approach on the part of the poet.

**Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918)**

Autumn Crocuses (*Les colchiques*)

The meadow is venomous but lovely in autumn  
The cows graze there  
And are slowly poisoned  
The colchicum colour of shadow and lilac  
Flowers there your eyes resemble that flower  
Violet shades like their shadow that autumn  
And slowly your eyes empoison my life

The children arrive from school, what a fracas,  
Dressed in smocks and playing harmonicas  
They gather the crocuses that are like mothers  
Daughters of their daughters your eyelids' colour  
That beat as the flowers beat in the wild breeze

The herdsman sings and sings quite softly  
While slowly, mooing, the cows abandon  
Forever this wide field flowered by autumn

Merlin and the Old Crone (*Merlin et la vieille femme*)

The sun that day stretched taut a maternal  
Womb that bled slowly under the sky  
The light is my mother o bloodstained light  
The clouds a menstrual flux flowed by

At the crossroads where no flower but the Compass  
Rose, without thorns, flowered in winter  
Merlin considered life and the primal cause  
By which the whole universe dies and recovers

A crone in a green cape, riding a mule,  
Followed the bank of the river downstream  
And aged Merlin there in the empty plain  
Beat at his breast crying out: Rival

O my frozen being through whom fate drowns me  
Through whom this sun of flesh shivers would you  
See Memory appear, and my mirror-self love me,  
And see the fine hapless son that I'd own

His gesture made cataclysmic pride crumble  
The dancing sunlight quickened her womb  
And sudden the spring of love and the hero  
Led a young April day forth from the tomb

The paths that ran out of the west were covered  
By skeletal weeds weighed with fate and by flowers  
By gravestones trembling beside green corpses  
While the winds blew there the seeds of ill hours



Leaving the mule his love stepped towards him  
The wind gently smoothing her finery  
Then the pale lovers joined feverish hands  
Interlaced fingers sole signs of love's mastery

She hung there enacting a rhythm of being  
Crying: For a century I awaited your call  
Your stars had power over my dancing  
Morgana gazed up at the heights of Gibel

How sweet to dance when a mirage appears for you  
In which everything sings and the winds of terror  
Feign the peal of the moon's hilarious laughter  
And frighten away the presaging phantoms

I gestured palely deep in the solitude  
Ghosts scurried to populate nightmares, apart  
My whirling movements expressed the beatitudes  
Which are nothing but pure effects of my art

I gathered nothing but flowers of hawthorn  
Fading in spring that would lose their white bloom  
While the birds of prey were crying their plunder  
Stillborn lambs, child-gods longing for doom

And I've aged you see during you lifetime I dance  
But I would soon have wearied and hawthorn in flower  
This April would have shown little assurance  
But that of some ancient corpse sadness devours

And their hands were raised like a flight of doves  
Brightness on which night swooped like a vulture  
Then Merlin strode East saying: Let him rise  
The son of Memory matched with the Lover

Let him rise from the mud or be human shade  
He shall be my eternal work truly my son  
His brow haloed with fire on the road to Rome  
He will travel alone with a sky-ward gaze

The woman who waits for me is named Viviane  
And come the spring's new dolorous hours  
Couched amongst coltsfoot and sweet marjoram  
I'll dwell ages deep in the hawthorn flowers

Note: The characters are from the Arthurian Legends. The sorceress Morgana or Morgan le Fay is associated with the mythical Mount Gebil. Viviane or Nimue eventually imprisoned Merlin in a hawthorn bower (see the Burne-Jones painting *The Beguiling of Merlin*.)

Autumn (*Automne*)

Through the mist a shambling farm-hand goes,  
Slowly, with his ox, through the mists of autumn  
Which hide the villages, their poverties and woes

And as he goes along the farm-hand sings a tune  
A song of love, a song of infidelity  
About a ring about a heart breaking yet

Oh! Autumn, autumn, summer's fatality  
Through the mists go two grey silhouettes.

Diseased Autumn (*Automne malade*)

Autumn diseased and adored  
You'll die when the storm-wind blows through the roses  
When it has snowed  
In the orchards.

Sad autumn  
Die with the whiteness and richness  
Of snow and ripe fruit  
In the heights of the sky  
Hawks glide  
Over naive sprites with dwarfish green locks  
Who have never loved

At the forest's far edges  
The stags have sounded

How I love oh season how I love your murmurs  
The fruit that falls and that no one culls  
The wind and the forest that weep  
All their tears in autumn leaf by leaf

Leaves  
Trampled as one  
A train  
That rolls on  
Life  
Is gone

Engagements (*Les fiançailles*)

*For Picasso*

Spring allows perjured fiancés to wander  
Blue feathers to be long covered with leaves,  
Where the bluebird nests and the cypress heaves

A Madonna at dawn took all the hedge-roses  
Tomorrow the wallflowers she'll gather complete  
For the doves' nests destined, as she supposes,  
For the pigeon who tonight seemed the Paraclete

They fell in love in the lemon-tree grove  
With the love that we the late-comers love  
Like their eyelids the far-off villages rove  
And their hearts among lemons hang from above

Always (*Toujours*)

*For Madame Faure-Favier*

Always

We will go further without ever progressing  
And from planet to planet

From nebula on to nebula  
Don Juan of comets 'a thousand and three'  
Without even leaving the Earth  
Search for new forces  
Take phantoms seriously

And in this world so many forgotten,  
Whoever they are, the great forgetters  
Who will know how to make us forget some part of the world or other  
Where is Columbus to whom we owe a continent's forgetting

To lose

But to lose in truth  
To make place for the newly known

To lose

Life to find Victory

**Jules Supervielle (1884-1960)**

The Wake (*Le sillage*)

We saw the wake, but nothing of the boat,  
Because it was happiness that had passed by.

They gazed at each other, deep in their eyes  
A perception at last of the promised clearing,

Where great stags were running in all their freedom.  
No hunter entered that country without tears.

It was the next day, after a night of cold,  
We recognised them as those who are drowned for love.

But what we might have taken for their grief  
Signalled to us it was not to be trusted.

A shred of their sail still floated in the air  
Alone, free to take the wind at its pleasure,

Far away from the drifting boat and its oars.

High Seas (*Haute mer*)

Among the birds among the moons  
That haunt the underside of seas,  
Those sensed at the surfaces  
In the wild waves of spume,

Among the blind witnesses  
And the underwater glide  
Of a thousand faceless fishes  
Whose course is hid inside,

The drowned man stirs his head  
Seeks the song of youth again,  
And listening to the shells in vain  
Lets them fall to their dark bed.



I Dream of You... (*Je vous rêve...*)

I dream you equally, whether far or near,  
But you are exact, without replica always,  
You become music beneath my tranquil gaze,  
As if with a glance, I see you through the ear.

You can be in me as though beneath my eye,  
So melodious your heart, that heart open wide,  
And I hear you beat in my forehead secretly  
When you flow in me in order to disappear.

You Disappear (*Vous disparaissez*)

Already clothed in mist you disappear  
Now we must row as through the evening air  
Towards your exile in the devouring year,  
The last hope cradled in your frail arms there,

There are dead leaves all along your track,  
Stirred by the dying breath of loves that fade,  
Moonlight steals your strength behind your back;  
Your pallor waxes towards your dying day.

Yet what remains and keeps your heart alive  
Can still penetrate your bitter candour,  
And sometimes in sudden radiant surprise  
Awaken, in your night, the owls of splendour.

Regretting the Earth (*Le regret de la terre*)

One day, we shall say: 'That was the time of sunlight,  
Remember how it illumined the slightest twig,  
The old woman as brightly as the astonished girl,  
How it gave a colour to things as soon as it fell,  
Kept pace with the galloping horse; halted with him.  
It was the unforgettable time when we were on Earth,  
Where sound resulted if something was dropped,  
We looked about with the eyes of connoisseurs,  
Our ears comprehended every nuance of air  
And when a friend's footsteps approached we knew,  
We gathered a flower or picked up a polished pebble.  
That time when we could never take hold of smoke,  
Ah! That's all our hands know how to take hold of now.'

**Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961)**

Orion

It's my constellation  
It's shaped like a hand  
It's my own hand high in the sky  
All through the war through a gap I saw Orion  
The Zeppelins that came to bomb Paris always came from Orion  
Today it's above my head  
The long pole pierces the palm of the hand that must suffer  
As my severed hand makes me suffer pierced constantly by a spear

**Pierre Reverdy (1889-1960)**

Nomad (*Nomade*)

The door which opens not  
The hand that passes  
    Far off a breaking of glass  
    The lamp that fumes  
The sparks that light  
    The sky is darker  
    Over the roofs

Various creatures  
Without shadows

    A look  
    A sombre speck

The house one enters not

Corridor (*Couloir*)

We are two  
    On the one line where all's continuous  
    In the meanders of night  
A word's in the middle  
    Two mouths not seeing each other  
    A sound of steps  
One light body gliding towards the other  
            The door quivers  
A hand passes  
    One would wish to open  
    The bright ray stands erect  
    There before me  
    And it's the fire that parts us  
In the shadow where your profile slips away  
    A moment without breathing  
Your breath has burned me in passing

Live, Flesh (*Chair vivre*)

Rise up corpse and walk  
Nothing new under the yellow sun  
The last of the last of the coins of gold  
The light that flakes away  
Under the layers of time  
The lock on the breaking heart  
A thread of silk  
A thread of lead  
A thread of blood  
After these waves of silence  
Signs of love's black mane  
The sky more smooth than your eye  
Neck twisted in pride  
My life behind the scenes  
From where I see harvests of death undulate  
All those eager hands kneading balls of smoke  
Heavier than the poles of the universe  
Empty heads  
Bare hearts  
Perfumed hands  
Monkey tentacles aimed at the clouds  
In the furrows of those grimaces  
A straight line stretches taut  
A nerve twists  
*La mer* the sea sated  
*L'amour* love  
*L'amer* the bitter smile of death *la mort*

**Pierre-Jean Jouve (1887-1976)**

To Himself (*A soi-même*)

Write now for the sky  
Write for the arc of the sky  
And may no black lead letter  
Veil your literature

Write for the scent and the breeze  
Write for the silvery leaves  
May no human ugliness  
Find sight consciousness breath.

Write for the god and the fire  
Write for love of place, desire  
That nothing of Man's contained  
In the void chilled by a flame.



We Have Astonished... (*Nous avons étonné...*)

We have astonished by our great suffering  
The inclination of indifferent stars  
We have gazed at the blood of the wound  
With harsh external eye, we have kissed  
Clandestinely through the false back-door,

We have become those iron-clad systems  
Which stray distance-less caterpillar horsemen  
Of the last judgement, a vast funereal ennui  
Bears us toward your hooves of consummation  
Red Horse black Horse yellow Horse white Horse.

**André Breton (1896-1966)**

**Free Union (*L'Union libre*)**

My wife with hair of burning splinters  
With thoughts of summer lightning  
With hour-glass waist  
My wife with the waist of an otter between the tiger's teeth  
My wife with mouth a cockade and cluster of stars of greatest splendour  
With teeth the prints of a white mouse on white earth  
And a tongue of stroked amber and glass  
My wife her tongue a pierced wafer  
The tongue of a doll that opens and closes its eyes  
A tongue of incredible stone  
My wife with eyelashes marks of a child's pen  
Eyelashes rims of a swallow's nest  
My wife with brows of slate on a greenhouse roof  
And steam on the panes  
My wife with shoulders of champagne  
And a dolphin-head fountain under the ice  
My wife with her matchstick wrists  
My wife with fingers of chance and the ace of hearts  
Fingers of mown hay  
My wife with armpits of sable and beechnut  
Of Midsummer Night  
Of privet and angelfish nests  
With arms of foam of sea and the locks  
And the mingling of wheat and the mill  
My wife with her spindled legs  
With movements of clockwork and despair  
My wife with calves of elder-tree pith  
My wife with feet carved of initials  
With feet of bunches of keys of caulkers that drink  
My wife with a neck of pearl barley

My wife with a throat of Valley of gold  
Of rendezvous in the very bed of the torrent  
With breasts of night  
My wife with her submarine molehill breasts  
My wife with breasts of the ruby's crucible  
With breasts of phantom of roses under dew  
My wife with the belly of an unfurled fan of days  
With the belly of a giant claw  
My wife with the back of a bird in vertical flight  
With a back of quicksilver  
A back of light  
With a nape of rolled stone and moistened chalk  
And the fall of a glass from which one has just drunk  
My wife with her cradling hips  
Hips of lustre and arrow-fletches  
And the stems of white peacock feathers  
Of imperceptible balance  
My wife with buttocks of sandstone and mineral asbestos  
My wife with swan's-back buttocks  
My wife with buttocks of spring  
With gladiolus sex  
My wife with her sex of rich sandbanks and platypus  
My wife with her sex of seaweed and old boiled sweets  
My wife with her sex of the mirror  
My wife with eyes full of tears  
With her eyes of violet panoply magnetic needle  
My wife with savannah eyes  
My wife with eyes of water to drink in jail  
My wife with eyes of wood always under the axe  
With eyes of water-gauge air-gauge earth and fire

Vigilance (*Vigilence*)

The tottering Saint Jacques tower in Paris  
In the semblance of a sunflower  
Strikes the Seine sometimes with its forehead and its shadow glides  
Imperceptibly among the riverboats  
At that moment on tiptoe in my slumbers  
I turn towards the room in which I lie  
Setting it alight  
So that nothing's left of that acquiescence wrung from me  
Pieces of furniture change then to identically-sized creatures  
Which gaze fraternally towards me  
Lions whose manes serve to consume the chairs  
Sharks whose white bellies incorporate the last quiver of the sheets  
At the hour of love and blue eyelids  
I see myself burn in turn I see this solemn hiding place of nothingness  
That was my body  
Probed by the patient beaks of fiery ibises  
When all is over I enter the ark invisibly  
Heedless of passers-by whose dragging feet sound far away  
I see the ridges of sunlight  
Through the rain of hawthorn  
I hear the human fabric tear like a large leaf  
Beneath the claw of conspiring presence and absence  
All looms fade away leaving only a scented lace  
A shell of lace in the form of a perfect breast  
I touch only the heart of things I grasp the thread

No Proof (*Non-lieu*)

Art of days art of nights  
The balance-scales of injuries called Pardon  
Red scales sensitive to the weight of a wing  
When the women riders with snowy collars and empty hands  
Drive their chariots of mist over the meadows  
Those scales forever quivering I see them  
I see the ibis with delicate manners  
That returns from the lake laced into my heart  
The wheels of a lovely dream their splendid ruts  
That rise high above on the sea-shells of their robes  
And astonishment bounding wildly over the sea  
Depart my darling dawn forget nothing of my life  
Seize those roses that climb the wells of mirrors  
Seize the tremors of every eye-lash  
Seize everything down to the threads that sustain  
The steps of rope-dancers and water-drops  
Art of days art of nights  
I am at the distant window in a city full of terror  
Outside men in opera hats flow by regularly spaced  
Like the raindrops I loved  
When the weather was fine enough  
'God's Fury' is the name of the club I visited last night  
It's written on the façade in paler letters  
But the sailor-girls who glide round behind the windows  
Are too happy to be afraid  
Here never a corpse always a murder without proof  
Never the sky always the silence  
Never freedom except for freedom's sake

On the Road to San Romano (*Sur la route de San Romano*)

Poetry is made in bed like love  
Its unmade sheets are the dawn of things  
Poetry is made in the woods

It possesses the space it needs  
Not this but the other that's governed by  
    The eye of the falcon  
    The dew on snake-grass  
    Memories of a misted bottle of Savagnin Blanc on a silver salver  
    A tall pillar of tourmaline over the sea  
    And the path of intellectual adventure  
    Which climbs vertically  
    One pause and it's instantly overgrown

It doesn't proclaim itself from the rooftops  
It's not appropriate to leave the door open  
Or summon witnesses

    The shoals of fish the hedges of blue-tits  
    The rails at the entrance to some large station  
    The reflections of either shore  
    The wrinkles in bread  
    The bubbles on water  
    The calendar days  
    The St John's wort

The act of love and the act of poetry  
Are incompatible  
With reading newspapers aloud

The direction of the sunlight  
The blue glint that connects the lumberjack's axe-blows  
The string of the heart-shaped or keep-net shaped kite  
The rhythmic beating of beavers' tails  
The industriousness of lightning  
The hurling of sugarplums from the top of old stairways  
The avalanche

The Chamber of fascinations  
No, gentlemen, is not the eighth Chamber  
Nor the fumes of the barracks some Sunday evening

The figures of dance executed transparently over the ponds  
The outlining of a woman's body by daggers thrown at the wall  
The bright coils of smoke  
The curls of your hair  
The curve of a sponge from the Philippines  
The lacings of serpent coral  
The ivy's entry among the ruins  
It has all of time before it

The poetic embrace like that of the flesh  
While it lasts  
Forbids every glimpse of the poverty of the world

**Philippe Soupault (1897-1990)**

**Sports Goods (*Articles de sport*)**

Brave as a postage stamp  
He went his way  
Gently clapping his hands  
To count his footsteps  
His heart as red as a wild boar  
Beat beat  
Like a butterfly, pink and green,  
From time to time  
He planted a little flag of silk  
When he had marched enough  
He sat down for a rest  
And fell asleep  
But since that day there are lots of clouds in the sky  
Lots of birds in the trees  
And heaps of salt in the sea  
There are lots of other things too



Life-Saving Medal (*Médaille de sauvetage*)

My nose is long like a knife  
And my eyes are red from laughing  
At night I collect the milk and the moon  
And run without looking round  
If the trees are afraid behind me  
I don't care  
How beautiful indifference is at midnight

Where are they going these folk  
Pride of the cities  
Village musicians  
The crowd wildly dance  
And I'm only this anonymous passer-by,  
Or someone else whose name I've forgot

**Tristan Tzara (1896-1963)**

The Death of Apollinaire (*La Mort de Guillaume Apollinaire*)

We know nothing  
We know nothing of grief  
The bitter season of cold  
                    Ploughs long furrows in our muscles  
He would have rather enjoyed delight in victory  
    We wise beneath calm sorrows caged  
                    Unable to do a thing  
    If the snow fell upwards  
If the sun rose among us during the night  
                    To warm us  
    And the trees hung there in a wreath  
                    – The only tear –  
    If the birds were among us to be mirrored  
In the tranquil lake above our heads  
                    WE MIGHT UNDERSTAND  
    Death would be a long and beautiful voyage  
And an endless holiday for the flesh for structure for bone

Way (Voie)

What is this road that separates us,  
Across which I extend the hand of thought?  
A flower is written at the tip of every finger  
And the end of the road's a flower that walks beside you

Volt (Vlt)

The inclined towers the oblique skies  
The cars descending into the void of roads  
The creatures along the country lanes  
Branches covered with hospitable virtues  
With leaf-shaped birds at their crowns  
You walk but another walks in your footsteps  
Distilling her spite through fragments of memory and math  
Enveloped by a robe almost mute the clotted sound of capitals

The seething city dense both with proud cries and lights  
Overflows the saucepan of its eyelids  
Tears flow away in streams of wretched population  
Over the sterile plain towards the smooth flesh the lava  
Of shadowy mountains the apocalyptic temptations  
Lost in the landscape of a memory and a darkened rose  
I roam the narrow streets around you  
While you too roam different wider streets  
Round something other

Poem for a Dress (*Poème pour une robe de Madame Sonia Delaunay*)

The Angel has slid his hand  
Into the basket the eye of fruits  
He halts the wheels of automobiles  
And the vertiginous gyroscope of the human heart.

**Paul Eluard (1895-1952)**

‘The arc of your eyes...’ (*La courbe de tes yeux*)

The arc of your eyes makes the rounds of my heart  
A circuit of dance and gentleness,  
Halo of time, cradle nocturnal and sure,  
And if I no longer know all I have lived  
It is because your eyes have not always seen me.

Leaves of daylight and moss of dew,  
Reeds of the wind, perfumed smiles,  
Wings covering the world with light  
Boats charged with the sky and the sea,  
Hunters of sounds and fountains of colour,

Scents hatched from a clutch of dawns  
That rest forever on the straw of stars,  
As daylight depends on innocence  
The whole world depends on your pure eyes  
And all my blood flows through their gaze.

'My forehead against the glass...' (*Le front aux vitres...*)

My forehead against the glass like the watchmen of grief  
Sky whose night I have surpassed  
Plains so small in my open hands  
In their double horizon inert indifferent  
My forehead against the glass like the watchmen of grief  
I look for you beyond all expectation  
Beyond even myself  
And no longer know loving you so  
Which of us two is absent.

The Invention (*L'invention*)

The right hand allows a trickle of sand  
Every transformation is possible

Far off, on the stones the sun whets its eagerness to be gone  
The description of the landscape matters little  
Merely the pleasant duration of harvests

Clear to my two eyes  
As water and fire.

What is the role of the root?  
Despair has broken all bounds  
And holds its hands to its head  
A seven, a four, a two, a one  
A hundred women in the street  
Whom I'll not see again.

The art of loving, liberal art, the art of dying well,  
The art of thought, incoherent art, the art of the smoker,  
The art of pleasure, of the Middle Ages, decorative art,  
The art of reason, the art of reasoning well, the art  
Poetic, mechanical art, erotic art, the art  
Of being a grandfather, the art of dance, the art of seeing,  
The art of being accomplished, the art of caress, Japanese art,  
The art of play, the art of eating, the torturer's art.

I have never yet found what I write in what I love.



Georges Braque

A bird flies off  
It discards the clouds like a useless veil,  
It has never feared light  
Enclosed in flight  
It has never owned shadow.

Shells of harvests shattered by the sun.  
All the leaves in the woods say yes,  
They only know how to say yes  
Every question, every reply  
And dew trickles in the deeps of this yes.

A man with wandering eyes describes the sky of love,  
He gathers in its wonders  
As leaves do in a wood,  
As birds do with their wings  
And men in sleep.

Second Nature (*Seconde Nature*)

In honour of the mute the blind the deaf  
To the great black stone on their shoulders  
The vanishings of world without mystery

But also for the others at the roll-call of things by name  
The searing pain of all metamorphoses  
The unbroken chain of dawns in the mind  
All the cries that conspire to shatter words

And crease the mouth and crease the eyes  
Where furious colours dispel the fog of vigil  
Setting up love against life the dead dreaming  
The living-depths divide the others are slaves  
Of love as one may be the slave of freedom.

The Deaf and the Blind (*Le sourd et l'aveugle*)

Will we reach the sea with bells  
In our pockets, with the sound of the sea  
In the sea, or are we really the bearers  
Of a purer more silent water?

The sea scouring our hands sharpens knives.  
The warriors have found weapons in the waves.  
And the sounds of their blows are like those  
Of rocks shattering the boats at night.

It's the tempest and thunder. Why not the silence  
Of the flood, for we have in us all the space dreamed  
For the greatest of silences and we will breathe  
Like the wind over terrible seas, like the wind

That slowly clambers over every horizon.

Keeping Alive (*Faire vivre*)

There were some who lived in the dark  
Dreaming of the sky's caress  
There were some who loved the forest  
And believed in blazing wood  
The odour of flowers enchanted them even from afar  
The nakedness of their desires clothed them

They fused in their hearts the breath measured  
By that slip of ambition in the life of nature  
That flourishes in summer like a richer summer

They fused in their hearts hope for the dawning age  
That hails another age even from afar  
With love more stubborn than the desert

The briefest of slumbers  
Delivered them to the future sun  
They endured they knew that life perpetuates

And their shadowy needs gave birth to clarity.

They were only a few  
Then suddenly a crowd

So it is in every age.

**Antonin Artaud (1896-1948)**

**Invocation to the Mummy (*Invocation à la Momie*)**

Those nostrils of bone and skin  
Where shades of the absolute start,  
And the colour of those lips  
That you close like a curtain,

That gold that in dream slips you  
The life that strips you of bone,  
And the flowers of that false gaze  
With which you greet the light,

Mummy, those spindly hands  
With which to recall your entrails,  
Those hands where appalling shadow  
Adopts the forms of a bird,

All this with which death adorns itself  
As if in an aleatory rite  
This idle chatter of shades, and gold  
Where your dark entrails swim

Are the means by which I greet you  
Through the calcined path of your veins  
And your gold is like my sorrow  
The worst and best testament.

Plates of Sound (*Vitres de son*)

Plates of sound where stars veer,  
The glass where brains are brewing  
Sky seething with immodesties  
Devours the nakedness of stars.

A milk, bizarre and vehement,  
Seethes in the deep firmament;  
A snail ascends and disturbs  
The placidity of clouds.

Delight and fury, sky's immensities  
Launched above us like a cloud  
A whirlwind of wings, wild shroud  
Torrential with obscenities.

Who am I? (*Qui suis-je?*)

Who am I?  
Where am I from?  
I'm Antonin Artaud  
And since I speak  
As I know  
In a moment  
You'll see my present body  
Shatter to pieces  
And gather itself  
In a thousand notorious  
Aspects  
A fresh body  
In which you'll never  
Be able  
To forget me.

**Louis Aragon (1897-1982)**

The Rose of the New Year (*La rose du premier de l'an*)

Do you know the moon-rose  
Do you know the time-rose  
One resembles the other  
In water's mirror glows  
As one the other shows

Do you know the bitter rose  
Made of brine and refusal  
That flowers on the ocean  
In tidal ebb and flow  
As after rain the rainbow

The dream-rose the soul-rose  
Sold in posies in the street  
The gamut-rose the game-rose  
Those of forbidden loves  
The rose of wasted moves

Do you know the fear-rose  
Do you know the night-rose  
Both of which seem painted  
As sound is painted on lips  
As fruit is hung among leaves

Every rose that I sing  
Every rose of my choice  
Every rose I invent  
I voice their praise in vain  
Before this rose I proclaim.



Elsa at the Mirror (*Elsa au miroir*)

It was in the very middle of our tragedy  
And during a long day seated at her mirror  
Combing her golden hair I thought I saw her  
With patient hands quenching an incendiary  
It was in the very middle of our tragedy

And during a long day seated at her mirror  
Combing her golden hair it seemed to me  
It was in the very middle of our tragedy  
Playing an air on her harp without a tremor  
During all that long day seated at her mirror

Combing her golden hair it seemed to me  
She was martyring memory at her pleasure  
During all that long day seated at her mirror  
Reviving the flowers no end to the incendiary  
Without saying what another there might seek

She was martyring memory at her pleasure  
It was in the very middle of our tragedy  
The world resembled that mirror cursedly  
The comb divided the fires of silken treasure  
And those fires lit the corners of memory

It was in the very middle of our tragedy  
As at the week's heart is set a Thursday

And during a long day seated before memory  
She saw them dying far off in her mirror

One by one the actors of our tragedy  
Who are the best in this world cursedly

You know their names without hearing them from me  
And what flames signify as the nights grow longer

And her hair rendered gold as she seeks to linger  
Combing an incendiary reflection wordlessly

The Lilacs and the Roses (*Les lilas et les roses*)

O months of flowering months of metamorphosis  
May without a cloud and June lacerated  
I will never forget the lilacs or the roses  
Nor those spring's folds have consecrated

I will never forget the tragic illusion  
The procession cries crowd the sunlit clarity  
The tanks laden with love the gifts from Belgium  
The air that quivers the road this buzzing of bees  
The rashness of victory that primes a quarrel  
The red blood that a carmine kiss prefigures  
And those about to die at the turrets, mortal,  
Covered in lilacs by intoxicated watchers

I will never forget the gardens of France  
Seeming the missals of vanished centuries  
Nor the uneasy twilights enigma of silence  
The roses all along the route of our journeys  
The denial by flowers of the winds of panic  
Of the soldiers passing by on wings of fear  
Of the mad bicycles of the cannon, ironic,  
Of the fake campers' pitiable gear

Yet why does this tempest of images  
Return me forever to one point of rest  
At Saint Marthe A General Dark branches  
A Norman villa the forest's furthest edge  
All's quiet the enemy at rest in shadows  
They say that Paris surrendered tonight  
I'll never forget the lilacs or the roses  
Nor the twin loves we have lost outright

The first day's bouquets lilacs lilacs from Flanders  
Shadowy softness whose face death paints anew  
And bouquets of the retreat roses tender  
The colour of fire far roses of Anjou

The Red Poster (*L'affiche rouge*)

You did not ask for glory or for tears  
Organ peals or the prayer for the dying  
Eleven years so swiftly past eleven years  
You were simply handed your weapons  
Death does not dazzle Partisan eyes

Your faces were posted on our city walls  
Dark, bearded menacing dark as night  
Those posters like pools of blood,  
The names awkward to pronounce,  
Seeking to instil fear in the passer-by

No one seemed willing to view you as French  
People went past without seeing you by day  
But when curfew sounded then errant fingers  
Wrote on the walls THEY DIED FOR FRANCE  
And so the dismal morning was transformed

Everything was the one colour of frost  
At February's end to greet your passing  
Yet it was then Manouchian you wrote calmly:  
Joy to all, joy to those who survive,  
I die without hatred for the German people

Farewell the rose, farewell pain or pleasure  
Farewell life and light and the breeze,  
Marry, be happy, and think of me often  
You who'll be there amongst life's beauties  
In Armenia some day when this is over

A swollen winter sun lights the hillside  
How lovely nature is, my breaking heart,  
Justice will follow our victorious footsteps,  
Mélinée oh my love my orphaned one,  
I tell you to live and bear children

There were twenty-two when the guns fired  
Twenty-three who died before their time  
Twenty-two strangers yet our brothers  
Twenty-three lovers of life in their passing  
Twenty-three who called to France as they died.

Note: The poem [commemorates](#) the execution of twenty-two members of Missak Manouchian's resistance group (which comprised Armenians, Hungarian Jews, Poles, Italians, a Spaniard, a Romanian, and three Frenchmen) on the twenty-first of February 1944, and the infamous [Red Poster](#) in which the Nazis portrayed them as terrorists. It also commemorates the later execution of the twenty-third member Olga Bancic on the tenth of May 1944, and the prior deaths during combat of three other members of the group. Mélinée Assadourian was Manouchian's companion.

The Free Zone (*Zone Libre*)

The fading of sadness forgotten  
The throb of the torn heart lessened  
The ashes grown colourless  
I drank the sweet summer wine  
I dreamt through that August time  
In a pink chateau in Corrèze

What created that sudden  
Aching sob in the garden  
The dull reproach in the air  
Oh, too soon, don't wake me so,  
A moment, no more, the *bel canto*  
Demobilises despair

For an instant it seemed  
I heard in field and stream  
Rumours of war, unclear,  
Whence came that deep grief  
Neither pink nor rosemary  
Had retained the scent of tears.

Who knows why they chose to relent  
Those dark secrets of my torment  
In turn the shadows dismember  
I no longer sought release  
From that pain without memory  
When dawn brought in September.

My love in your arms that day  
Outside someone murmured away  
At an old ballad of France  
I knew my illness at last  
That refrain like a bare foot splashed  
Stirring the green depths of silence.

Note: The *zone libre* was the ‘unoccupied’ southern sector of France, in the Second World War, established under the terms of the Second Armistice at Compiègne in June 1940. It was administered by Pétain, from his base in Vichy, until the 11th of November 1942 when southern France was freed by the Allies.



**Robert Desnos (1900-1945)**

The Zebra (*Le Zèbre*)

The Zebra, horse of twilight,  
Lifts its hoof, and shuts its eyes  
Sets its backbone resonating  
With joyful neighs and cries.

From its stable it emerges  
To bright suns of Barbary,  
And on the prairie grazes  
The herbs of sorcery.

But on its coat the prison scars  
Remain, the shadows of the bars.

Under Cover of Night (*A la faveur de la nuit*)

Glide into your shadow under cover of night  
Follow your footsteps, your shadow at the window.  
That shadow at the window is you, no one but you.  
Don't open the window behind whose curtains you stir.  
Close your eyes.  
I'd like to close them with my lips.  
But the window opens and the wind, that strangely moves  
The flame and the flag, surrounds my flight with its cloak.  
The window opens: I know  
It is not you.

If You Knew (*Si tu savais*)

Far from me like the stars and all the tokens of poetic myth,  
Far from me and yet present without knowing,  
Far from me and more silent still because I imagine you endlessly,  
Far from me my sweet mirage eternal dream you cannot know.  
If you knew.  
Far from me and perhaps more so still through not knowing and still not  
Knowing  
Far from me because doubtless you do not love me or, what is the same,  
Because I doubt it.  
Far from me because you carefully ignore my passionate desires.  
Far from me because you are cruel.  
If you knew.  
Far from me, o joyful as the water-lily that dances on its stalk in the river,  
O sorrowful like seven in the evening in the mushroom beds.  
Far from me silent still as though in my presence and joyful still  
Like the hour in the shape of a stork that swoops from on high.  
Far from me in the moment when alembics sing, when the sea silent  
And sounding falls back on the white pillows.  
If you knew.  
Far from me o my present, present torment far from me in the magnificent  
Crackle of oyster-shells crushed beneath the night-owl's feet at daybreak  
As he passes in front of restaurant doors.  
If you knew.  
Far from me, a wilful material mirage.  
Far from me, an island that turns aside at the passage of ships.  
Far from me a calm herd of oxen wanders from its track, halts  
Obstinately at the edge of a steep precipice, far from me, o cruel.  
Far from me, a shooting star falls into the poet's bottle one night.  
He swiftly corks it and then watches the star trapped by the glass,  
Watches the constellations born on the walls, far from me,  
You are far from me.  
If you knew.

Far from me a house is finally finished.  
A bricklayer in a white shirt on the scaffolding sings the saddest little song,  
Suddenly the house's future appears in his bucketful of mortar: the kisses  
Of lovers the double suicides the nakedness in the rooms of unknown  
Beauties their dreams at midnight and the voluptuous secrets surprised  
By parquet floors.  
Far from me,  
If you knew.  
If you knew how I love you, and though you don't love me, how joyful  
I am, how strong and proud of stepping out with your image in my head,  
Stepping out of the universe.  
How joyful to the point of death.  
If you knew how the world is subject to me.  
And you, rebellious beauty too, how much you are my prisoner.  
O you, far from me, to whom I am subject.  
If you knew.

The Voice of Robert Desnos (*La Voix de Robert Desnos*)

So like to the flower and the current of air  
And the watercourse with its fleeting shadows  
And the smile glimpsed that special night at midnight  
So like everything like joy and sadness  
It is midnight gone lifting its naked chest above belfries poplars  
I summon those lost in the fields  
The ancient corpses the young felled oaks  
The tatters of fabric rotting in the ground and the linen drying round farms  
I summon tornados and hurricanes  
Tempests typhoons cyclones  
Tidal waves  
And earthquakes  
I summon the smoke of volcanoes cigarettes  
Smoke rings of luxurious cigars  
I summon love and the amorous  
I summon the living and dead  
I summon the gravediggers summon assassins  
Summon the executioners pilots stonemasons architects  
The assassins  
I summon the flesh  
I call to her I love  
I call to her I love  
I call to her I love  
Triumphant midnight deploys its satin wings and lands on my bed  
Belfries and poplars bend to my desire  
The former crumble and collapse  
Those lost in the fields find each other in finding me  
Ancient corpses revive at my voice  
Young felled oaks are covered with foliage  
The tatters of fabric rotting in the ground and on the ground  
Flap at the sound of my voice like banners of rebellion  
The linen drying round farms clothes adorable women I do not adore

Who come to me  
Obey my voice and adore me  
Tornadoes whirl in my mouth  
Hurricanes if it is possible redden my lips  
Tempests roar at my feet  
Typhoons if it is possible ruffle my hair  
I receive the ecstatic kisses of the cyclone  
Tidal waves die away at my feet  
Earthquakes do not shake me but shatter things at my command  
The smoke of volcanoes clothes me in vapour  
And cigarette smoke scents me  
The smoke rings from cigars wreath me  
The lovers and love so long pursued find refuge within me  
The amorous listen to my voice  
The living and dead submit and salute me  
The one coldly the other intimately  
Gravediggers abandon barely dug graves and declare  
I alone command their nocturnal toil  
The assassins hail me  
The executioners invoke the revolution  
Invoke my voice  
Invoke my name  
Pilots steer by my eyes  
Stonemasons have vertigo listening to me  
The architects depart for the desert  
The assassins bless me  
The flesh trembles at my call

She I love does not hear me  
She I love does not listen  
She I love does not reply.

The Great Days of the Poet (*Les grands jours du poète*)

The disciples of light invented nothing  
But semi-transparent shadows.  
A woman's small body is rolled along by the river  
Which means the end is near.  
The widow in a wedding gown takes the wrong train;  
We shall all arrive late at our grave.  
A vessel of flesh sticks fast on a little beach.  
The pilot invites the passengers to fall silent.  
The waves wait impatiently nearer to Thee o my god.  
The pilot invites the waves to speak. They speak.  
Night seals her bottles with stars  
And makes a fortune from exports.  
Large stores are built to sell nightingales.  
But they fail to satisfy the desire of the Queen of Siberia  
For a white nightingale.  
An English commodore swears he'll never again be caught picking sage  
By night between the feet of statues of salt.  
Apropos this a small Cerebos salt-cellar rises with difficulty  
On slender legs. It pours into my dish  
What's left of my life.  
Enough to salt the Pacific Ocean.  
You'll place a lifebelt on my grave  
Because one never knows.

*(They're Seven League Boots those words 'I see myself' 1926)*

The Landscape (*Le Paysage*)

I had dreamt of loving. I go on loving but love  
Is no longer that bouquet of lilacs and roses  
Charging the forest with their fragrance where  
A flame rests at the end of branchless pathways.

I had dreamt of loving. I go on loving but love  
Is no longer that storm whose lightning imposes  
Its funeral pyres on castles, disturbs, distorts,  
Lights in departing the parting of the ways.

It's the flint sparking under my feet at night  
The word no dictionary in the world's translated  
The foam in the sea, that cloud there in the sky.

In ageing all becomes rigid and luminous  
Avenues without names ropes without knots.  
I feel myself grow inflexible with the landscape.



Reclining (*Couchée*)

On the right, the sky, on the left, the sea.  
In front of your eyes, the grass with its flowers.  
A cloud, it's the track, pursues its vertical way  
Parallel to the horizon's plumb-line,  
Parallel to the rider.  
The horse gallops towards its imminent fall  
While the other climbs interminably.  
How simple and strange it all is.  
Reclining on my left side  
I am detached from the landscape  
And only think of things extremely vague,  
Extremely vague and pleasant,  
Like the weary gaze promenaded  
Through this lovely summer afternoon  
On the right, the left,  
Here, and there,  
In the delirium of the useless.

Epitaph (*L'épitaphe*)

I lived in that age and for a thousand years  
Am dead. I lived, not deposed but hunted.  
All human nobility being imprisoned  
I was free among the masked slaves.

I lived in that age yet I was free.  
I gazed at the river the earth the sky  
Turning round me, keeping their equilibrium  
And the seasons yielded their birds and their honey.

You who live what have you made of those treasures?  
Do you miss that age in which I struggled?  
Have you worked for the common harvest?  
Have you enriched the city where I lived?

You living, have no fear of me, I am dead.  
Nothing survives of my spirit or my corpse.

Last Poem (*J'ai tant rêvé de toi*)

I have dreamed so deeply of you that you lose reality.

Is there still time to reach that living body and kiss  
On those lips the birth of the voice so dear to me?

I have dreamed so deeply of you that my arms so used  
While embracing your shade to cross themselves on my chest  
Would not shape themselves perhaps to the lines of your body.

So deeply that faced with the true apparition  
Of what haunts and governs me for days and years  
I doubtless would become a shade myself.

O balance-scales of feeling

I have dreamed so deeply of you doubtless  
There's no time left for me to waken.  
I sleep upright, my body exposed to all  
The apparitions of life and love and you,  
The only one who matters to me now,  
I could no more touch your brow and lips  
Than the brow and lips of the first passer-by.

I have dreamed so deeply of you  
So walked, so talked, slept so with your phantom  
That all that is left for me now perhaps,  
Is to be a phantom among the phantoms  
A hundred times more shade than the shade  
That moves and will move with joy  
On the sun-dial of your life.

**Jacques Prévert (1900-1977)**

Summer (*La Belle Saison*)

Lost, starving, frozen  
Alone, and penniless  
A sixteen-year old girl  
Standing motionless  
Place de la Concorde  
August fifteenth, noon, more or less.

Permission to Leave (*Quartier libre*)

I put my cap in the cage  
And went out with the bird on my head  
So  
One no longer salutes  
The officer said  
No  
One no longer salutes  
Replied the bird  
Oh good  
Pardon me I thought that one saluted  
The officer said  
You are fully excused we all make mistakes  
Said the bird

Song (*Chanson*)

What day are we  
We are all the days  
My friend  
We are all of life  
My love  
We love each other, we live  
We live, each other we love  
And we don't know what this life of ours is  
And we don't know what this day of ours is  
And we don't know what this love of ours is

To Paint a Picture of a Bird (*Poure faire le portrait d'un oiseau*)

First you paint a cage  
With it's door open  
Then paint  
Something nice  
Something simple  
Something lovely  
Something useful  
For the bird  
Then set the canvas against a tree  
In a garden  
In a grove  
Or in a forest  
Hide behind the tree  
Without speaking  
Or moving...  
Sometimes a bird arrives quickly  
But equally it may take many years  
Before it chooses to  
Don't be discouraged  
Wait  
Wait many years if needed  
The speed or tardiness of its arrival  
Has nothing to do  
With the success of the picture  
When the bird arrives  
If it arrives  
Observe the most profound silence  
Wait till the bird enters the cage  
And when it has  
Gently close the door with your brush  
Then  
Erase all the bars one by one

Taking care not to touch a feather of the bird  
Then paint a picture of the tree  
Choosing the loveliest branches  
For the bird  
Paint the green leaves too and the wind's coolness  
The dust in the sunlight  
The sound of insects, in the grass, in the summer heat  
Then wait for the bird to choose to sing  
If the bird won't sing  
That's an adverse sign  
A sign that the painting is bad  
But if it sings it's a good sign  
A sign you can sign your name  
Then very gently you'll detach  
A feather from the bird  
And write your name in a corner of the painting.



The Dunce (*Le Cancre*)

He says no with his head  
But his heart says yes  
He says yes to what he loves  
He says no to the teacher  
He is on his feet  
To be is questioned  
Asked all the problems  
Suddenly wild laughter shakes him  
And he effaces  
The numbers and words  
The dates and names  
The sentences the nets  
And despite the master's threats  
Amidst the jeers of the child prodigies  
With the coloured chalks no less  
On the blackboard of distress  
Draws the face of happiness.

Breakfast (*Déjeuner du matin*)

He put the coffee  
In the cup  
He put the milk  
In the cup of coffee  
He put the sugar  
In the café au lait  
With the coffee spoon  
He stirred  
And drank the café au lait  
And he put down the cup  
Without speaking to me  
He lit  
A cigarette  
He blew rings  
Of smoke  
He put the ash  
In the ashtray  
Without speaking to me  
Without looking at me  
He stood up  
He put his  
Hat on his head  
He put his  
Raincoat on  
Since it was raining  
And he left  
In the rain  
Without a word  
Without looking at me  
And I, I put my head  
In my hands  
And wept.

The Speech About Peace (*Le discours sur la paix*)

Near the end of a very important speech  
The great statesman stumbling  
Over a beautiful hollow phrase  
Falls silent  
And bewildered, with gaping mouth,  
Breathes,  
Shows his teeth  
And the dental decay of his peaceful discourse  
Lays bare the nerve of war  
The delicate question of money

The Message (*Le Message*)

The door someone opened  
The door someone shut  
The chair someone sat in  
The cat someone stroked  
The fruit someone bit on  
The text someone read  
The chair someone toppled  
The door someone opened  
The road someone ran down  
The wood someone crossed  
The pool someone leapt in  
The ward someone died in

Picasso's Stroll (*La promenade de Picasso*)

On a truly round plate of real porcelain  
Sits an apple  
Facing it squarely  
A Realist painter  
Tries in vain to paint  
The apple just as it is  
But  
It won't allow him  
The apple  
Has a mind of its own  
And several tricks in its pomiferous bag  
The apple  
And there it turns  
On a real plate  
Slyly round itself  
Blandly installed  
And like a Duke de Guise disguised as a jet of gas  
Because they want to paint his portrait despite him  
The apple disguises itself as a lovely fruit  
And it's only then  
That the Realist painter  
Begins to realise  
That the apple's appearances are all against him  
And  
Like a wretched beggar  
Like the indigent pauper who suddenly finds himself at the mercy  
Of some philanthropic and charitable foundation  
Formidable in its philanthropy charity and formidableness  
The unfortunate painter of reality

Suddenly finds himself the pitiful prey  
Of an endless crowd of associations  
And the apple rotating evokes the apple tree  
Terrestrial Paradise and Eve then Adam  
The watering can the espalier and Parmentier and the stairway  
Canada and Hesperides Normandy Pippins and Ladies  
The snake in the Tennis Court grass the Oath of the Cider Glass  
And original sin  
And art's origin  
And the Swiss with their William Tell  
And even Isaac Newton  
Winning full recognition at the Universal Gravity Exhibition  
Till the bewildered painter loses sight of his model  
And falls asleep  
It's then that Picasso  
Passing by, there as everywhere,  
Every day, as if at home,  
Sees the apple the plate and the sleeping painter  
Imagine painting an apple  
Picasso says  
And Picasso eats the apple  
And the apple says Thanks a Million  
And Picasso shatters the plate  
And goes off smiling  
And the painter torn from his sleep  
Like a tooth  
Finds himself all alone, in front of his unfinished canvas,  
With, in the very midst of the broken crockery,  
The terrifying pips of reality.

**Francis Ponge (1899-1988)**

Rhetoric (*Rhétorique*)

I imagine it's about rescuing a few young men from suicide  
And a few others from being policemen or firemen.  
I think of those who commit suicide from disgust, because  
They find '*the others*' own too large a share of them.

One could say to them: at least grant *the word* to the minority  
Within you. Be poets. They'll reply: but it's then, always then  
I sense the others within me, when I seek to express myself and can't.  
Words are all pre-made and express themselves: they never  
Express me. Then, once more, I am stifled.

That's when revealing the art of *resisting words* is useful, the art  
Of only saying what one wishes to say, the art of doing them violence  
Forcing them to submit. In short to create a rhetoric, or rather teach  
Each the art of creating their own rhetoric, is a visible act of salvation.

It saves those few, those rare individuals who ought to be saved: those  
Who show awareness and concern and disgust for the others inside them.

Those who can advance the human spirit  
And, literally speaking, change the face of things.

Ripe Blackberries (*Les Mûres*)

On the typographic bushes constituted by the poem beside a road  
That neither leads beyond things nor to the spirit,  
Certain fruits are formed of an agglomeration of spheres  
Each one filled with a drop of ink.

Black, red and brown, together on the bunch, they seem to offer  
The spectacle of a family swollen with pride at various ages  
Rather than a keen temptation to go collecting.  
Given the disproportion of pips to fruit birds value them little  
So little remains in the end for them  
When the traverse is made from beak to anus.

Yet the poet in the course of his professional excursion  
Extracts from them the seeds of meaning: 'So then,' says he,  
'The patient efforts of a quite fragile flower in extensive numbers  
Succeed while protected by a rebarbative tangle of briars.  
Lacking many other qualities – *ripe* blackberries they are, perfectly ripe –  
Just as this poem is complete.'

### The Orange (*L'Orange*)

In the orange as in the sponge there's an aspiration to regain face  
After enduring the ordeal of expression.

Yet the sponge always succeeds, and never the orange:  
Since its cells are burst, its tissues are torn apart.  
Whereas the peel alone sluggishly regains its shape  
Thanks to its elasticity, an amber liquid has spread,  
Accompanied by coolness, sweet fragrance, true – but often  
By bitter awareness too of a premature explosion of pips.

Must one take sides between these two ways of failing  
To withstand oppression? – The sponge is only muscle  
And filled with wind, with clean or dirty water as may be:  
Its gymnastics are ignoble. The orange has better taste,  
But is too passive – and that odorous sacrifice...  
It truly concedes too much to the oppressor.

But not enough has been said about the orange in recalling  
Its particular way of perfuming the air and delighting its torturer.  
The glorious colour of the resulting liquid must be stressed,  
That, more than lemon juice, compels the larynx to open as wide  
For the articulation of the name as for the ingestion of the liquid,  
With no apprehensive pout at the front of the mouth  
The papillae of which it fails to stir.

And what's more we lack the words to show our merited admiration  
For the envelope of this tender, fragile, reddened oval ball in that  
Moist dense blotting-pad whose epidermis extremely thin though  
Highly pigmented, acerbically sapid, is just wrinkled enough  
To capture the light nobly shed on the perfect form of fruit.



Yet at the end of all too short a study, carried out as roundly as we can –  
We must come to the pip. This seed, in the shape of a tiny lemon,  
Presents, externally, the colour of the lemon-tree's pale wood,  
Internally, the green of peas or of tender shoots. Within are united,  
After the sensational explosion of this Chinese lantern of colours,  
Flavours and scents that constitute the ball of fruit itself,  
The relative hardness and greenness (by no means wholly insipid)  
Of the wood, the branch, the leaf: small, admittedly,  
Though certainly the *raison d'être* of the fruit.

### Vegetation (*Végétation*)

The rain does not describe the only hyphens connecting the ground  
And sky: another kind exists, less intermittent and more tightly woven,  
Whose fabric is not torn away, by the wind, however hard it's shaken.  
If sometimes in a certain season the wind succeeds in dislodging  
A fragment or two, which it then seeks to grind to dust in its whirling,  
We perceive that in the final reckoning it has dissipated nothing at all.

Looking at it more closely, we find ourselves at one of the thousand doors  
Of a vast laboratory, bristling with multi-form items of hydraulic apparatus,  
All much more intricate than the simple columns of rain, and endowed  
With original perfection: at once retorts, filters, siphons, alembics.

It's precisely these pieces of apparatus the rain first encounters,  
Before it meets the ground. They receive it in a mass of little bowls.  
Disposed en masse at every level of a greater or lesser depth,  
And emptying one to another down to those at the lowest stage,  
By which at last the earth is directly moistened.

So they slow the inundation in their fashion, and retain its liquid  
And the benefit to the ground for a long time after the meteorological  
Event has vanished. They alone have the power to make the forms of rain  
Shine in the sunlight, to display in other words from the perspective of joy  
The premises as religiously acknowledged as they were precipitately  
Formulated by sorrow. Curious occupation, enigmatic characters.

They grow in stature in proportion to the rainfall; but with more  
Regularity, more discretion; and, by a kind of acquired force,  
Even when it no longer falls. Finally water can still be found  
In certain vessels that they form and wear with a blushing  
Affectation, which we call their fruits.

Such, it seems, is the physical function of this kind of three-dimensional Tapestry that we have given the name of Vegetation because of the other Characteristics it presents and in particular because of the kinds of life That animate it...yet I'd wish above all to insist on the following point: That though the ability to realise their own synthesis and seed themselves Without being asked (for example between the individual paving stones Of the Sorbonne), connects the vegetative apparatus to the animals, that is To say, to all sorts of wanderers, yet in many places they form a permanent Fabric, and this fabric belongs as one of its foundations, to the world.

**André Frenaud (1907-1993)**

**I Have Never Forgotten You (*Je ne t'ai jamais oubliée*)**

Nameless now, and faceless,  
No trace of your eyes left or your pallor.

Released from the assault of desire  
In your lost image,  
Voided by the false vows of time,  
By the counterfeit coins of love redeemed,  
By all that lost profit,  
Freed from you now  
Free like the dead,  
Living my lonely sweated life,  
Toying with stones and with leaves.

When I slide between gentle unloved breasts  
I rest once more on your absence,  
On the living corpse you make  
Through your power ordained to undo me  
To the very end of my silence.

**Jean Follain (1903-1971)**

Dog and Schoolboys (*Chien aux écoliers*)

The schoolboys crack the ice for fun  
Along the path  
Beside the railway tracks  
They are warmly clothed  
In old dark wool  
With belts of polished leather  
The dog that follows them  
No longer has a bowl to eat from  
He's old  
Since he's their age.

Life (Vie)

A child is born  
Into a vast country  
Half a century later  
He's only a dead soldier  
And this was the man  
We saw appear  
And place on the ground  
A whole heavy sack of apples  
From which two or three rolled  
Sound amongst that of a world  
Where the bird sang  
On the sill's stone.

Eve (Ève)

A book claims that the name Eve  
Comes from the Hebrew root *haya*  
Which means *to live*  
While creatures  
Certain of their existence  
Pass on to girls the knowledge  
Of human passion  
Though the youngest  
Holds a golden apple  
On a worn threshold  
Doing nothing else  
Before she sleeps.

**René Char (1907-1988)**

Evadne (*Evadné*)

We had sole tenancy of our life and summer  
Landscape consumed the colour of your fragrant dress  
Eagerness and restraint were reconciled  
The Chateau de Maubec sank into the clay  
Soon its crescendo on the lyre would fade  
The violence of plants made us vacillate  
A dark rook sculling that had left the throng  
On the muted flint of quartered noon  
Accompanied the tender moves of our accord  
Everywhere the scythes were forced to rest  
Our rarity had begun its reign  
(The insomniac wind wrinkling our eyelids  
Turning the agreed page every night  
Wishes each part of you I hold extended  
Towards a land of famished age, giant tear-ducts)

It was the beginning of delightful years  
The earth loved us a little I remember.

Note. Maubec is a village in Provence, in the Vaucluse near Cantaloupe. The second and most notable Chateau de Maubec, the thirteenth century Chateau des Roches, fell into disrepair and was ultimately razed during the French Revolution.



The Lords of Mausanne (*Les Seigneurs de Mausanne*)

One after another, they wished to predict for us a fortunate future,  
With an eclipse like theirs and the anguish appropriate to us!  
We disdained such equality,  
Answered no to their assiduous words.  
We followed the stony road that our hearts traced  
Up to the plateaux of air and the unique silence.  
We made our exacting love bleed,  
Our happiness contend with every pebble.

They say now that beyond their vision,  
Hail frightens them more than the snows of the dead!

Note: Mausanne les Alpilles is sited in the valley of Les Baux, in Provence, the territory in the Middle Age of the powerful Seigneurs of Southern France, who ruled over seventy-nine towns and cities. The famous ancient village and ruined fortress of Les Baux de Provence on its limestone hilltop overlooking the valley has been claimed as the inspiration for Dante's description of the Mount of Purgatory.

Every Life (*Toute vie*)

Every life that must dawn  
Finishes off one of the wounded.  
Here is the weapon,  
Nothingness,  
You, me, interchangeably  
This book  
And the enigma  
You in turn will become  
In the bitter caprice of the sand.

To the Brother-Tree of Numbered Days  
(Vers l'arbre-frère aux jours comptés)

Brief harp of the larch-trees,  
On the spur of moss and sprouting stone  
– Facade of the forest on which cloud breaks –  
Counterpoint of the void in which I believe.

Faction of the Dumb (*Faction du muet*)

Stones huddled on the rampart and men lived on moss from the stones.  
Midnight carried a rifle and women no longer gave birth.  
Dishonour's aspect was that of a glass of water.

I was linked to the courage of other beings, I lived violently,  
Growing no older, my mystery among theirs,  
I shuddered with the existence of all the others  
Like an incontinent boat over thinly-divided depths.

### The Rampart of Twigs (*Le Rempart de brindilles*)

The aim of poetry being to exalt us by impersonalising us, we achieve through the grace of a poem the fullness of what was only suggested, or parodied in the ravings of the individual.

Poems are those fragments of imperishable being we hurl into the vile jaws of death, tossing them so high that they rebound and fall back into the world of creative unity.

Lacking a dream, we have lost our way, but there is always a candle flickering in our hand. So the dark we enter is our sleep to come, growing less and less.

When we are fit to ascend the ladder of nature towards some initiatory peak, we leave the lower rungs behind us, yet when we descend we bring back with us the topmost rungs. And we bury the summit in our rarest most hidden depths, beneath the lowest rung, but among greater riches and treasures than our venture retrieved from the furthest tip of the quivering ladder.

Don't search out the boundaries of the ocean. You contain them. They are shown you with your vanished life in the one instant. Feeling, as you know, is the child of matter, its marvellously subtle eye.

Young men – go choose the dew of women, their mad cruelty to which your love and violence can respond, rather than the dead ink of the 'murderers with a pen'. Be quick vibrant fish, stick to the rapids.

We live tied to the base of a clock that watches helplessly as the sun ends and begins its course. But the clock bends time and the earth towards us; that is our victory.

Though an endless storm desiccates my shores, far out my waves are tall, complex, and vast. I anticipate nothing *finite*; I am resigned to scudding between two unequal dimensions. Yet even so, my buoys are of lead not cork, my trail is of salt not smoke.

To escape the shameful constraining choice between obedience and madness, to evade again and again the stroke of the tyrant's axe against which we have no defence though we fight on forever: that is the justification of our role, our destination and our tardiness. We must vault the barrier of the worst, run the dangerous race, search on beyond it, cut the evil one to pieces, and finally disappear without too much fuss. A vote of thanks given or received, faintly, that is all.

The Woods by the Epte (*Le Bois de l'Epte*)

That day, I was only two legs walking.  
Eyes blank, at the empty centre of my face,  
I set out to follow the stream through the vale.  
Flowing slowly, that dull hermit failed to intrude  
On the formlessness through which I journeyed.

From the angle of a ruined wall scorched by fire  
Two wild briars full of gentle inflexible will  
Plunged suddenly into the grey water.  
They seemed like a communion of vanished beings  
At the moment of proclaiming themselves again.

The hoarse blush of a rose striking the water  
Reawakened the first face of the sky  
With an ecstatic questioning,  
Woke the earth in the midst of loving words,  
Thrust me into the future like a famished and feverish tool.  
Further on the Epte woods followed a further bend.  
But I did not have to traverse them, the dear seed-store of increase!  
I breathed, on the heel of a half-turn, the musk of meadows  
Into which some creature merges.  
I heard the gliding of a timid snake;  
I felt – don't think harshly of me – I was fulfilling all your wishes.

Note: The Epte joins the Seine not far from Giverny. In 911 the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte established the river as the historical boundary of Normandy and Île-de-France.

Play and Sleep (*Joue et Dors*)

Play and sleep, dear thirst: our oppressors here are not severe.  
Willingly they joke or take our arm.  
To get through the dangerous season.  
Doubtless the poison's dormant in them.  
To the point of freeing their barbaric humour.  
Yet how they pursued us here, my thirst,  
Forced us to live in abandonment of our love  
Reduced to our mortal welfare!  
Herbs, is this for you? Or all plants struggling under a wall of drouth  
Is it for you? Or clouds in the great expanse, taking leave of the column?  
In the immensity, how to tell?

What can we do to give those tyrants the slip, o my friend?  
Play and sleep, while I estimate our chances.  
But if you come to my aid, I'd have to take you with me,  
And I don't wish to endanger you.  
So, let's rest again...And who could call us cowards?



Antonin Artaud (*Antonin Artaud*)

I lack the voice to sing your praise, great brother.  
If I bent over your body the light would scatter  
Your laughter would thrust me back.  
The spirit between us, during what we improperly call  
A fine outburst,  
Plunges about several times,  
Kills, digs, and burns  
Then is reborn later in mushroom softness.  
You don't need a wall of words to exalt your truth,  
Nor a conch-shell to anoint your profundity,  
Nor that feverish hand your wrist flails round you  
And leads you lightly on to fell a forest  
With our entrails as the axe.  
Enough. Re-enter the volcano.  
And us,  
Let us weep, let us assume your exaltation or demand:  
'Who is Artaud?' of this stick of dynamite  
From which not a sliver has been lost,  
For us, nothing has changed,  
Nothing, except this chimera wholly hellishly alive  
That takes leave of our anguish.

