



An  
Introduction  
to French  
Verse

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ocaso press

An Introduction  
to French Verse  
Volume Three

Notes and translations by  
Colin John Holcombe  
Ocaso Press 2026

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Last Revised: March 2026

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# Introduction to French Verse: Volume Three

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## INTRODUCTION

The First World War shattered the beliefs of the old social order and cleared the way for a more experimental, sparsely worded and questioning poetry. The change was led by the intertwined coteries of Parisian avant-garde thinkers and artists that feature so prominently in French intellectual life, but the great names listed in Volume Two continued writing well into the twentieth century. Partially influenced by them, and partly independent, were the less adventurous, writing on elevated themes in elevated language. These traditionalists, as I have termed them, wrote on comparatively conventional themes, but held the affection of French reading public till the Second World War, after which the more celebrated work became decidedly Modernist, anticipating themes in our own English speaking poetry world.

Before Modernism, poetry was a comparatively straightforward matter. 'Poetry,' says the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 'is elevated thought or feeling in metrical or rhythmic form'. And the bulk of poetry learned at school (and probably still remembered) was indeed like that, striking in thought and persuasively harmonious in expression. There was hardly a need for a definition of poetry: poems were self-evidently passages of beautiful writing, shaped by rhyme and metre about a moving or uplifting theme.

But traditionalists had nonetheless assembled a detailed set of touchstones. Poems gave enduring and universal life to what was merely transitory and particular. Through

them, the poet expressed his vision, real or imaginative, and did so in forms that were intelligible and pleasurable to others, and likely to arouse emotions akin to his own. Poetry was language organised for aesthetic purposes. Whatever else it did, poetry should bear witness, should fulfil the cry: 'let not my heart forget what mine eyes have seen.' A poem was distinguished by the feeling that dictates it and that which it communicates, by the economy and resonance of its language, and by the imaginative power that integrates, intensifies and enhances experience. Poems bore some relationship to real life but are equally autonomous and independent entities that contain within themselves the reason why they are so and not otherwise. Unlike discourse, which proceeds by logical steps, poetry is intuited whole as a presentiment of thought and/or feeling. Workaday prose was an abbreviation of reality: poetry was its intensification.

Poems had a transcendental quality: there was a sudden transformation through which words assumed a particular importance. Like a bar of music, or a small element in a holographic image, a phrase in a poem had the power to immediately call up whole ranges of possibilities and expectations. Art is a way of knowing, and is valuable in proportion to the justice with which it evaluates that knowledge. Poetry was an embodiment of human values, not a kind of syntax. True symbolism in poetry allowed the particular to represent the more general, not as a dream or shadow, but as the momentary, living revelation of the inscrutable.

The poet's task was to resurrect the outer, transient and perishable world within himself, to transform it into something much more real. He had to recognize pattern wherever he saw it, and build his perceptions into poetic form that has the coherence and urgency to persuade us of its truth: the intellectual had to be fused with the sensuous meaning. Poetry could be verse or prose. Verse has a strong metrical element. An inner music is the soul of poetry. Poetry withers and dries out when it leaves music, or at least some imagined music, too far behind. The diction of poetry was a fiction, neither that of the speaker nor the audience. Without its contrivance poetry was still possible, but immensely poorer.

Modernism rejected these ideals. In the English-speaking world, through the work of Yeats, Eliot and Pound, poetry adopted a more everyday language but still retained some of its transcendental intentions and attachment to musical phrasing. In the French speaking world, through the work of Breton and his disciples, poetry brutally jettisoned such features and became a search for reality in unrealized depths of the unconscious. Dadaism was short-lived but served to clear the decks of any lingering Symbolism and nineteenth century Romanticism. Traditional styles were passé, and experimentation was favoured, indeed required. Earlier writing had been stereotyped, but now there should be ceaseless technical innovation, sometimes for its own sake. Originality was expected, and this primarily marked out the important poet.

Dadaism gave way to Surrealism, which in its earlier stages was an exploration of the unconscious, but later a

promotion of the poet's viewpoint, even at the expense of the communal consciousness. The poet was not guided by religion, nature, science, economy or social mechanisms but maintained a wary intellectual independence, often searching for the primary image that would unlock new perspectives and aggregates of experience. Poetry thus became more cerebral, more tentative, analytical and fragmentary, in time adopting and extending the doubts and insights of the new critical theory of Derrida and others. Texts largely wrote themselves and there were no underlying thoughts which we then clothed in words. Indeed the great generalities of life — love, art, wisdom, truth and the like — were empty notions. {1} Poetry should avoid them, and adopt cool observation, with viewpoints and characters detached and depersonalized. The ideal was open-ended enquiry, not finished works of art, and indeed not aiming at formal perfection at all. On looking deeper, how poems came into being was anything but clear, so that the genesis of texts in general could be valid subject matter too.

## Forerunners

Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) was the most innovative of many poets who anticipated the Modernist movement in France. Of a quixotic ancestry, part Italian and part Polish, Apollinaire spent a few months in Germany, fell in love with a young English woman, pursued her unsuccessfully to London and started his famous *Chanson du mal-aimé* (Song of the Ill-Loved, 1913), a work of great charm: simple stanzas, fluid rhythms, and elegance in word choice, a deep melancholy that reaches tragic grandeur in its repeated recollections. In *Pont Mirabeau* (The Mirabeau Bridge, 1913) Apollinaire brought back a haunting lyricism to serious poetry, and *La Jolie Russe* (The Pretty Redhead, 1918) is looking out with confidence to the modern world.

Back in Paris, Apollinaire published several collections of poetry: *L'Enchanteur pourrissant* (Enchanter Rotting, 1909), *Le Bestiaire* (Bestiary, 1911), and *Alcools* (Alcohol, 1913), the last particularly known for its free verse forms and lack of punctuation. Apollinaire enlisted in 1914, was discharged with head injuries two years later, and wrote *Calligrammes* (Calligrams, 1918), where typographical arrangement was as important as the words. He died of Spanish influenza shortly before the collections's publication.

Like Apollinaire, Max Jacob (1876-1944) led a bohemian existence amongst the writers and painters of Montmartre. He became a Roman Catholic in 1915 and in

1921 retired into monastic seclusion at Saint Benoît-sur-Loire, where he supported himself by painting. During the German occupation, he was interned in the Dracy concentration camp, where he succumbed to bronchial pneumonia and died. Among his many collections are *Le Cornet à dés* (Dice Box, 1917) a collection of Surrealistic prose poems, *Le Laboratoire central* (Central Laboratory, 1921), the so-called 'stoppered phials' of lyrical poetry; and his Breton *Poèmes de Morvan le Gaëlique* (Poems of Morvan the Gaelic, 1953). In all Jacob's work there is unrelenting self-examination, a fantasy and verbal clowning, which may have concealed the torment of a convert, longing for heaven but still fearful of damnation.

André Salmon (1881-1969) was poet and art critic, a friend of Picasso, Jacob and Apollinaire. Though born in Paris, his father had connections to St. Petersburg, and that width of background helped Salmon become one of the great supporters of Picasso and cubism by writing in the art and literary magazines that gave him his living. Salmon continued to produce articles up and through the occupation, survived a trial for collaboration, and in 1964 received the grand prize for poetry from the *Académie française*. His *Poèmes* of 1905 was followed by *Féeries* (Fairies) in 1907, the latter having a sentimental lyricism in traditional forms but also exotic fantasy.

Many collections came out in the fifty years that followed, from *Vents d'amou* (*Winds of Love*, 1922) to *Vocalises* (Vocalizations, 1959), and these works, often ambitious, show a world of fragmented and diverse tendencies steeped in a modern anxiety. Dream episodes are mixed

with those of an unaccommodating reality, and conventional alexandrines alternate with fragments of rhymed or unrhymed lyricism, as the showcased *Ronde* illustrates: lyrical but anxious and fragmentary.

Blaise Cendrars, (Frédéric Louis Sauser: 1887-1961) was the great innovator. He left his Swiss homeland at the age of 17, transferred himself to Saint Petersburg and New York, and created the persona of Blaise Cendrars — a name indicating his aesthetic goals: to *burn* and to create poetry from the *ashes* of his life. In 1913, Cendrars made his debut in Paris with an experimental travel poem, *La prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (*The Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jeanne of France*), which he self-published in vertical format with illustrations by Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979). Cendrars wrote little poetry after the 1920s, turning out novels and dubious memoirs of his life as traveler, soldier, and collaborator with artists of many sorts. As he wrote as his credo: 'All of life is only a poem. . . . I am only a word, a verb, depth, in the wildest sense, the most mystical, the most alive.' The *Îles* example is typical, valuable for its ideas more than any poetical accomplishment.

Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) was multi-talented, far more so than was good for his reputation, detractors have thought. Though more remembered now for his novels — *Le Grand Écart* (1923), *Le Livre blanc* (1928), and *Les Enfants Terribles* (1929) and stage plays *La Voix Humaine* (1930), *La Machine Infernale* (1934), *Les Parents terribles* (1938), *La Machine à écrire* (1941), and *L'Aigle à deux têtes* (1946), Cocteau was also poet, librettist actor, film

director, and painter. He left home at 15, published his first volume of poems, *Aladdin's Lamp*, at 19 and by his twenties was on familiar terms with the leading writers and artists of France and beyond. Seeming the Renaissance man, Cocteau wielded great influence on the surrealist, avant-garde, and Dadaist movements, without becoming their leading exponent, however. The poem showcased, *Plain Chant*, was perhaps the best of his early work, when he escaped from being too clever and versatile to write movingly.

Léon-Paul Fargue, (1876-1947), was Parisian to the core, being born and dying there. Initially he was a poet in the French Symbolist tradition and published several collections – *Poèmes* (Poems, 1912), *Pour la musique* (For Music, 1919), *Espaces* (Spaces, 1929), and *Sous la lampe* (Under the Lamp, 1929) – before turning to journalism and articles on Parisian life, notably collected in *Le Piéton de Paris* (The Parisian Pedestrian, 1939). Fargue helped found the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1912, which published many contemporary writers, artists and composers. Fargue's poetry has links with the Dadaists (juxtaposition of images), the Cubists (dislocation and deformation of words), and the Surrealists (for their fascination with dreams), but is best remembered for his depictions of Paris street life, especially its atmosphere thick with memories of romantic attachments.

Pierre Reverdy (1889-1960) was born in Occitanie (southern France) to a family of stonemasons and sculptors, grew up near the Montagne Noire,

and came to Paris in 1910. He wrote difficult poems that first reflected Cubist outlooks, then Surrealist, and finally Cubist again in the 1920s. His *Nord-Sud* (North-South, 1916) review had only a short life. Reverdy's poetry collections are *Étoiles peintes* (Painted Stars, 1921), *Les Épaves du ciel* (Shipwrecks from Heaven, 1924) and *Flaques de verre* (Glass Puddles, 1929). Reverdy retired to the Abbey of Solesmes in 1926, where he remained until his death. His search through solitude was for the spiritual meaning of the physical world, a vocation he expressed in the maxims of *Le Gant de crin* (Horsehair Glove, 1927) and *Le Livre de mon bord* (The Book Beside Me, 1948).

Pierre Albert-Birot (1876-1967) was an avant-garde poet, dramatist, and theatre manager. He was born in Angoulême, and came to Paris in 1892, when his mother moved there in search of employment. From the first, Birot was more artist than poet, and indeed his sculpture *The Widow* was purchased by the state for the cemetery of Issy-les-Moulineaux. Influenced by the many movements of the times, Futurism, Cubism and Surrealism, he tried his hand at most things, not over successfully. He gave up Surrealism after the war, and created a solipsistic body of work where, as he said 'I find my joy in poetic creation and I find my joy in the creations of my hands. ... All of this is just like a game, I love to play, I keep the kid alive.' That won little notice from other, avant-garde poets who took themselves seriously in France, but Albert-Birot won the friendship of Picabia and Apollinaire, and later the praise of Gaston Bachelard, who

thanked him for 'giving the body better consciousness than a philosopher'.

## Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) : Le Pont du Mirabeau

Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine  
Et nos amours  
Faut-il qu'il m'en souviene

La joie venait toujours après la peine  
Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure  
Les jours s'en vont je demeure

Les mains dans les mains restons face à face  
Tandis que sous  
Le pont de nos bras passe  
Des éternels regards l'onde si lasse

Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure  
Les jours s'en vont je demeure  
L'amour s'en va comme cette eau courante  
L'amour s'en va  
Comme la vie est lente  
Et comme l'Espérance est violente  
Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure  
Les jours s'en vont je demeure

Passent les jours et passent les semaines  
Ni temps passé  
Ni les amours reviennent  
Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine

Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure  
Les jours s'en vont je demeure

Alcools 1913 [Audio recording](#)

Apollinaire : The Mirabeau Bridge

Beneath Pont Mirabeau there flows the Seine  
And so our loves  
Must I again

Remember joy will follow on from pain  
So comes the night and hourly bell again  
The days move on, but I remain

Let's gazing hand in hand see face to face  
Beneath our arch  
Of arms how waters race  
Though waves are weary in their endless chase.

So comes the night and hourly bell again  
The days move on but I remain  
Love goes on and like the water's flow  
It goes away  
Whatever hopes we'd know  
And fiercely lives continue on and slow  
So comes the night and hourly bell again  
The days move on but I remain

There pass the days and pass the weeks and then  
That time is past  
And love won't come again  
Beneath Pont Mirabeau there flows the Seine

So comes the night and hourly bell again  
The days move on but I remain

Apollinaire (1880-1918) : La Chanson du mal-aimé  
à Paul Léautaud

*Et je chantais cette romance  
En 1903 sans savoir  
Que mon amour à la semblance  
Du beau Phénix s'il meurt un soir  
Le matin voit sa renaissance.*

Un soir de demi-brume à Londres  
Un voyou qui ressemblait à  
Mon amour vint à ma rencontre  
Et le regard qu'il me jeta  
Me fit baisser les yeux de honte

Je suivis ce mauvais garçon  
Qui sifflotait mains dans les poches  
Nous semblions entre les maisons  
Onde ouverte de la Mer Rouge  
Lui les Hébreux moi Pharaon

Que tombent ces vagues de briques  
Si tu ne fus pas bien aimée  
Je suis le souverain d'Égypte  
Sa soeur-épouse son armée  
Si tu n'es pas l'amour unique

Apollinaire : The Song of the Ill-Loved  
*To Paul Léautaud*

*I was singing this refrain  
in 1903, not knowing my  
love and phoenix were the same  
and if they fled the evening sky  
they were reborn when morning came*

One night of London fog and flame  
a ne'er-do-well resembling my  
love was passing up he came  
and showed me such a knowing eye  
it made me lower mine in shame

With that young tough I had to go  
who hands in pockets took his ways  
whistling through the parted row  
of tenements as Red Sea waves  
he the Hebrews I Pharaoh.

May waves of brick fall ton on ton  
if anyone has loved you more  
I am the king of Egypt's son  
his sister-queen his army corps  
if you are not my only one

Au tournant d'une rue brûlant  
De tous les feux de ses façades  
Plaies du brouillard sanguinolent  
Où se lamentaient les façades  
Une femme lui ressemblant

C'était son regard d'inhumaine  
La cicatrice à son cou nu  
Sortit saoule d'une taverne  
Au moment où je reconnus  
La fausseté de l'amour même

Lorsqu'il fut de retour enfin  
Dans sa patrie le sage Ulysse  
Son vieux chien de lui se souvint  
Près d'un tapis de haute lisse  
Sa femme attendait qu'il revînt

L'époux royal de Sacontale  
Las de vaincre se réjouit  
Quand il la retrouva plus pâle  
D'attente et d'amour yeux pâlis  
Caressant sa gazelle mâle

J'ai pensé à ces rois heureux  
Lorsque le faux amour et celle  
Dont je suis encore amoureux  
Heurtant leurs ombres infidèles  
Me rendirent si malheureux

At a turning of the street ablur  
with house-fronts lit in sullen flare  
and red fangs stuck in fog's thick stir  
that wailed about the buildings there  
a woman very much like her

It was that savage look above  
the neck she bared that with a scar  
I recognized there drunk enough  
in woman reeling from some bar  
the falsity of even love

The wise far-travelled Ulysses  
returning home his journeys done  
found dog came shuffling on its knees  
and wife beside the cloth she'd spun  
still waited for him over seas

And Shakuntala's royal mate  
when tired of war returned became  
enamoured of her famished state  
and saw the look in eyes the same  
caressing her male gazelle of late

I thought of happy kings whose part  
betrayed by love and yours I'd lose  
in whom all lovings ever start  
between false shadows I must choose  
that made me ever down at heart.

Regrets sur quoi l'enfer se fonde  
Qu'un ciel d'oubli s'ouvre à mes vœux  
Pour son baiser les rois du monde  
Seraient morts les pauvres fameux  
Pour elle eussent vendu leur ombre

J'ai hiverné dans mon passé  
Reviens le soleil de Pâques  
Pour chauffer un cœur plus glacé  
Que les quarante de Sébaste  
Moins que ma vie martyrisés

Mon beau navire ô ma mémoire  
Avons-nous assez navigué  
Dans une onde mauvaise à boire  
Avons-nous assez divagué  
De la belle aube au triste soir

Adieu faux amour confondu  
Avec la femme qui s'éloigne  
Avec celle que j'ai perdue  
L'année dernière en Allemagne  
Et que je ne reverrai plus

Voie lactée ô soeur lumineuse  
Des blancs ruisseaux de Chanaan  
Et des corps blancs des amoureuses  
Nageurs morts suivrons-nous d'ahan  
Ton cours vers d'autres nébuleuses

Regrets that build the hell we know  
and sky's forgetting what we swore  
A kiss the famous kings would sow  
oblivion on their riches for  
her they sold their shadow show

I winter in my past come back  
May Easter sun revive at last  
this frozen heart with warmth I lack  
far worse than forty of Sebaste  
my life is martyred on this rack

What is memory my soul  
but a vessel where we sail  
too deep to drink the waters whole  
In dawns so beautiful we rail  
against life's saddening evening stroll

Farewell false love confused with pain  
her going from me will have cost  
and also her I would not feign  
that one in Germany I lost  
and shall not ever see again

O Milky Way whose sisterly  
white streams flow on through Canaan's land  
The white of lover's bodies we  
must follow swimmers left unmanned  
and swim to further nebulae

Je me souviens d'une autre année  
C'était l'aube d'un jour d'avril  
J'ai chanté ma joie bien-aimée  
Chanté l'amour à voix virile  
Au moment d'amour de l'année

*Aubade chantée à Laetare un an passé*

C'est le printemps viens-t'en Pâquette  
Te promener au bois joli  
Les poules dans la cour caquètent  
L'aube au ciel fait de roses plis  
L'amour chemine à ta conquête

Mars et Vénus sont revenus  
Ils s'embrassent à bouches folles  
Devant des sites ingénus  
Où sous les roses qui feuilloient  
De beaux dieux roses dansent nus

Viens ma tendresse est la régente  
De la floraison qui paraît  
La nature est belle et touchante  
Pan sifflote dans la forêt  
Les grenouilles humides chantent

Beaucoup de ces dieux ont péri  
C'est sur eux que pleurent les saules  
Le grand Pan l'amour Jésus-Christ  
Sont bien morts et les chats miaulent  
Dans la cour je pleure à Paris

Memories I have recourse  
to April dawn, another year  
In happiness I sang the course  
a manly song to those most dear  
the moment love returned in force

*Aubade Sung to Laetare a Year Ago*

Come Pâquette it is the spring  
Let us walk these pretty woods  
The farmyard hens are chattering  
The dawn in pink and pleated hoods  
announces love is conquering

Mars and Venus here will prance  
and kiss about with maddened lips  
openly they take their chance  
Beneath the leaves the roses slip  
on naked gods renew their dance

Come the present time is queen  
in all its tender flowering  
Warm and touching nature's been  
with Pan through forest echoing  
and humid bullfrogs haunt the scene

Many gods are sacrificed  
it is for them the willows weep  
Great Pan love Jesus Christ  
all are dead and alleys keep  
with Paris tomcats solemn rites

Moi qui sais des lais pour les reines  
Les plaintes de mes années  
Des hymnes d'esclave aux murènes  
La romance du mal aimé  
Et des chansons pour les sirènes

L'amour est mort j'en suis tremblant  
J'adore de belles idoles  
Les souvenirs lui ressemblant  
Comme la femme de Mausole  
Je reste fidèle et dolent

Je suis fidèle comme un dogue  
Au maître le lierre au tronc  
Et les Cosaques Zaporogues  
Ivrognes pieux et larrons  
Aux steppes et au décalogue

Portez comme un joug le Croissant  
Qu'interrogent les astrologues  
Je suis le Sultan tout-puissant  
Ô mes Cosaques Zaporogues  
Votre Seigneur éblouissant

Devenez mes sujets fidèles  
Leur avait écrit le Sultan  
Ils rirent à cette nouvelle  
Et répondirent à l'instant  
À la lueur d'une chandelle

I who know the lays for queens  
and such laments for all the years  
for eels with slaves made epicenes  
and that long tale of lover's tears  
and all the songs of siren scenes

He trembles love may be untrue  
who worshipped idols all his life  
The memories of her I knew  
and dead like Mausolus's wife  
must still repine and wait for you

More faithful than the mastiff dog  
or master ivy to the oak  
or like the Cossack Zaporog  
a pious but a thieving soak  
who's bound to steppes and decalogue

My crescent like a burden bear  
the which astrologers consult  
I am the Omnipotent take care  
my Zaparogs to not insult  
the dazzling Sultan that you hear

Become my faithful subjects so  
the Sultan wrote to them but loath  
to hear they laughed and apropos  
to answering him returned and wroth  
composed this by the candle's glow

*Réponse des Cosaques Zaporogues au Sultan de Constantinople*

Plus criminel que Barrabas  
Cornu comme les mauvais anges  
Quel Belzébuth es-tu là-bas  
Nourri d'immondice et de fange  
Nous n'irons pas à tes sabbats

Poisson pourri de Salonique  
Long collier des sommeils affreux  
D'yeux arrachés à coup de pique  
Ta mère fit un pet foireux  
Et tu naquies de sa colique

Bourreau de Podolie Amant  
Des plaies des ulcères des croûtes  
Groin de cochon cul de jument  
Tes richesses garde-les toutes  
Pour payer tes médicaments

\* \* \*

Voie lactée ô soeur lumineuse  
Des blancs ruisseaux de Chanaan  
Et des corps blancs des amoureuses  
Nageurs morts suivrons nous d'ahan  
Ton cours vers d'autres nébuleuses

*Reply of the Zaporogian Cossacks to the Sultan of Constantinople*

Wretch worse than foul Barabbas was  
go sport that evil angel's horn  
as gross Beelzebub's is yours  
One fed on refuse we will scorn  
and not attend your Sabbath draws

A rotten fish of Salonika  
with nightmares necklaces impart  
to pulled out eyes besotting her  
your mother with a liquid fart  
gave birth to colic blocking her

Hangman of Podolia's lover  
who sucks off crust from rancid sores  
where mare and pig become another  
keep your riches you'll have cause  
to pay for what your ointments smother

\* \* \*

O Milky Way whose sisterly  
white streams flow on through Canaan's land  
In white of lover's bodies we  
must follow swimmers left unmanned  
and swim to further nebulae

Regret des yeux de la putain  
Et belle comme une panthère  
Amour vos baisers florentins  
Avaient une saveur amère  
Qui a rebuté nos destins

Ses regards laissaient une traîne  
D'étoiles dans les soirs tremblants  
Dans ses yeux nageaient les sirènes  
Et nos baisers mordus sanglants  
Faisaient pleurer nos fées marraines

Mais en vérité je l'attends  
Avec mon coeur avec mon âme  
Et sur le pont des Reviens-t'en  
Si jamais reviens cette femme  
Je lui dirai Je suis content

Mon coeur et ma tête se vident  
Tout le ciel s'écoule par eux  
Ô mes tonneaux des Danaïdes  
Comment faire pour être heureux  
Comme un petit enfant candide

Je ne veux jamais l'oublier  
Ma colombe ma blanche rade  
Ô marguerite exfoliée  
Mon île au loin ma Désirade  
Ma rose mon giroflier

The panther eyes I had to shun  
and beautiful but still a whore's  
those Florentine false kisses won  
in which the bitterness restores  
distaste for what we might have done

When looks across the evening brim  
with stars that tremble in their haste  
and eyes in which the sirens swim  
and kisses blooded with such taste  
to make our fairy grandfolk grim

In truth it is for her I'm sent  
and in my heart and soul's recall  
and on that bridge where life's resent  
it may not have her sent at all  
to tell her that I am content

My heart and head are emptied wide  
all heaven's flowing out of them  
and, heaped-up Danaïdes aside  
what happiness must I condemn  
to be again a little child

I'd not forget, though far I rove  
my dove upon the whitened road  
O marguerite where leaves unclothe  
my distant island Désirade  
such rose you are and tree of clove.

Les satyres et les pyraustes  
Les égyptans les feux follets  
Et les destins damnés ou faustes  
La corde au cou comme à Calais  
Sur ma douleur quel holocauste

Douleur qui doubles les destins  
La licorne et le capricorne  
Mon âme et mon corps incertains  
Te fuient ô bûcher divin qu'ornent  
Des astres des fleurs du matin

Malheur dieu pâle aux yeux d'ivoire  
Tes prêtres fous t'ont-ils paré  
Tes victimes en robe noire  
Ont-elles vainement pleuré  
Malheur dieu qu'il ne faut pas croire

Et toi qui me suis en rampant  
Dieu de mes dieux morts en automne  
Tu mesures combien d'empans  
J'ai droit que la terre me donne  
Ô mon ombre ô mon vieux serpent

Au soleil parce que tu l'aimes  
Je t'ai mené souviens-t'en bien  
Ténébreuse épouse que j'aime  
Tu es à moi en n'étant rien  
Ô mon ombre en deuil de moi-même

May satyrs and Pyraustus  
and flitting fires of Aegipans  
make destinies as damned as Faustus  
The neck in noose on Calais sands  
what holocaust of pain it cost us

Grief that doubles future mourning  
of unicorn, of capricorn  
the doubtful flesh the soul is warning  
Flee the god's flamed pyre in scorn  
as stars the flowers in the morning

Misfortune's god with ivory eyes  
and pale with mad priests still adorning  
victims dressed in dark robed guise  
vain and purposeless this mourning  
Do not misfortune trust their cries

And you who trailing after wake  
the god of my gods dead this autumn  
and measure how much dust will make  
my rights upon the earth that sought them  
you are my shadow my old snake.

In the sunlight that you crave  
to which I led you you remember  
a wife to whom I am a slave  
both mine and nothing but an ember  
burning out I cannot save

L'hiver est mort tout enneigé  
On a brûlé les ruches blanches  
Dans les jardins et les vergers  
Les oiseaux chantent sur les branches  
Le printemps clair l'avril léger

Mort d'immortels argyraspides  
La neige aux boucliers d'argent  
Fuit les dendrophores livides  
Du printemps cher aux pauvres gens  
Qui resourient les yeux humides

Mais moi j'ai le coeur aussi gros  
Qu'un cul de dame damascène  
Ô mon amour je t'aimais trop  
Et maintenant j'ai trop de peine  
Les sept épées hors du fourreau

Sept épées de mélancolie  
Sans morfil ô claires douleurs  
Sont dans mon coeur et la folie  
Veut raisonner pour mon malheur  
Comment voulez-vous que j'oublie

Les sept épées

La première est toute d'argent  
Et son nom tremblant c'est Pâline  
Sa lame un ciel d'hiver neigeant  
Son destin sanglant gibeline  
Vulcain mourut en la forgeant

Winter's dead and dressed in snow  
the beehives burned were white as well  
The gardens and the orchards show  
how singing birds on branches tell  
of April's brightness spring will know

Death of deathless argyraspids  
that carry snow on silver shields  
In white the dendrophore forbids  
the spring to poor-off people yields  
a smile to moisten brimming lids

And I who have a heart as gross  
as those fat bottoms sat upon  
by Arab women love I chose  
brought all the pain I've undergone  
the seven swords unsheathe their woes

The melancholy swords beget  
no shadowed sharpness in distress  
but plunge in folly and regret  
beyond conceived unhappiness.  
How can you ask me to forget

### *The Seven Swords*

The first sword is of silver made  
and Pensive is its trembling name  
the snowy winter sky its blade  
and Ghibelline its blooded claim  
when Vulcan made it death he paid

La seconde nommée Noubosse  
Est un bel arc-en-ciel joyeux  
Les dieux s'en servent à leurs noces  
Elle a tué trente Bé-Rieux  
Et fut douée par Carabosse

La troisième bleu féminin  
N'en est pas moins un chibriape  
Appelé Lul de Faltenin  
Et que porte sur une nappe  
L'Hermès Ernest devenu nain

La quatrième Malourène  
Est un fleuve vert et doré  
C'est le soir quand les riveraines  
Y baignent leurs corps adorés  
Et des chants de rameurs s'y traînent

La cinquième Sainte-Fabeau  
C'est la plus belle des quenouilles  
C'est un cyprès sur un tombeau  
Où les quatre vents s'agenouillent  
Et chaque nuit c'est un flambeau

La sixième métal de gloire  
C'est l'ami aux si douces mains  
Dont chaque matin nous sépare  
Adieu voilà votre chemin  
Les coqs s'épuisaient en fanfares

Named the second is Noubosse  
a joyous rainbow it appears  
which gods at weddings wield and toss  
It killed the thirty musketeers,  
and was bequeathed by Carabosse

The third is blue and feminine  
but cypriape it is not less  
Called the Puck of Faltenin  
it's carried on a cloth's caress  
become in Hermes dwarf of mien

The fourth is what is called Milady  
gold the river, green in eddies  
Shore-girls in the evening shady  
bathe in reverence their bodies  
and rowers sing there ever daily

Fifth, the Saint-Faggot is bright  
and is the fairest of distaffs  
A cypress on a tomb alight  
where four winds kneel and force their draughts  
in torches' flaming, night on night

The sixth has metal famed and glorious  
It is the friend of those soft hands  
from which the morning ever parts us  
Farewell Come roads to other lands  
The cocks grow weary of their chorus

Et la septième s'exténue  
Une femme une rose morte  
Merci que le dernier venu  
Sur mon amour ferme la porte  
Je ne vous ai jamais connue

*Voie lactée*

Voie lactée ô soeur lumineuse  
Des blancs ruisseaux de Chanaan  
Et des corps blancs des amoureuses  
Nageurs morts suivrons-nous d'ahan  
Ton cours vers d'autres nébuleuses

Les démons du hasard selon  
Le chant du firmament nous mènent  
À sons perdus leurs violons  
Font danser notre race humaine  
Sur la descente à reculons

Destins destins impénétrables  
Rois secoués par la folie  
Et ces grelottantes étoiles  
De fausses femmes dans vos lits  
Aux déserts que l'histoire accable

Luitpold le vieux prince régent  
Tuteur de deux royautes folles  
Sanglote-t-il en y songeant  
Quand vacillent les lucioles  
Mouches dorées de la Saint-Jean

The seventh one is under cover  
languishing as woman's rose  
and I am glad the latest comer  
shuts the door on all of those  
like me who never knew their lover

### *Milky Way*

O Milky Way whose sisterly  
white streams flow on through Canaan's land  
the white of women's bodies we  
must follow swimmers left unmanned  
and swim to further nebulae

The demons of our gambling earn  
a song to guide our heavenly step  
yet violins for which we yearn  
are lost and mortals dance who wept  
down slopes to which they can't return

The unknown future hides its face  
where kings may shake with folly's course  
and stars still shiver in their place  
at women slept with who are false  
that deserts histories efface

Old Regent Luitpold with rights  
made twice the guardian of mad kings  
perhaps his memory alights  
on glow-worms' pallid waverings  
or firefly gold on summer nights

Près d'un château sans châtelaine  
La barque aux barcarols chantants  
Sur un lac blanc et sous l'haleine  
Des vents qui tremblent au printemps  
Voguait cygne mourant sirène

Un jour le roi dans l'eau d'argent  
Se noya puis la bouche ouverte  
Il s'en revint en surnageant  
Sur la rive dormir inerte  
Face tournée au ciel changeant

Juin ton soleil ardente lyre  
Brûle mes doigts endoloris  
Triste et mélodieux délire  
J'erre à travers mon beau Paris  
Sans avoir le coeur d'y mourir

Les dimanches s'y éternisent  
Et les orgues de Barbarie  
Y sanglotent dans les cours grises  
Les fleurs aux balcons de Paris  
Penchent comme la tour de Pise

Soirs de Paris ivres du gin  
Flambant de l'électricité  
Les tramways feux verts sur l'échine  
Musiquent au long des portées  
De rails leur folie de machines

Near chateau lacking chatelaine  
a boat with barcaroles that sees  
with white lake softly laid upon  
by springtime's ever-trembling breeze  
a dying siren sail as swan

Upon the silvered lake one day  
the king had drowned himself His look  
was like his mouth and drifted lay  
beside the bank and sleeping took  
on what the changing sky can say

June's sun is burning as a lyre  
it hurts my fingers With an air  
of sad delirium I never tire  
of Paris beautiful aware  
I have no heart to there retire

It seems forever Sundays go  
and barrel-organs sob for these  
or whine along drab streets below  
while Paris flowers on balconies  
put out as Pisa's pictures show

And nights of Paris drunk on gin  
that crackle in electric haze  
with green the tramways flare and in  
foolhardy rides down bony ways  
mechanically will hum and grin

Les cafés gonflés de fumée  
Crient tout l'amour de leurs tziganes  
De tous leurs siphons enrhumés  
De leurs garçons vêtus d'un pagne  
*Vers toi toi que j'ai tant aimée*

Moi qui sais des lais pour les reines  
Les plaintes de mes années  
Des hymnes d'esclaves aux murènes  
La romance du mal-aimé  
Et des chansons pour les sirènes

La Chanson du mal-aimé 1909

[Audio recording](#)

Here the cafés fill with smoke  
and loves of gypsies run amok  
and snuffling siphons spurt and soak  
and waiters come in lincloth smock  
towards the words of love I spoke

I who know the lays for queens  
and such laments for all the years  
for eels with slaves made epicenes  
and that long tale of lover's tears  
and all the songs of siren scenes

Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918): La Jolie Rouse

Me voici devant tous un homme plein de sens  
Connaissant la vie et de la mort ce qu'un vivant peut  
connaître  
Ayant éprouvé les douleurs et les joies de l'amour  
Ayant su quelquefois imposer ses idées  
Connaissant plusieurs langages  
Ayant pas mal voyagé  
Ayant vu la guerre dans l'Artillerie et l'Infanterie  
Blessé à la tête trépané sous le chloroforme  
Ayant perdu ses meilleurs amis dans l'effroyable lutte  
Je sais d'ancien et de nouveau autant qu'un homme seul  
pourrait des deux savoir  
Et sans m'inquiéter aujourd'hui de cette guerre  
Entre nous et pour nous mes amis  
Je juge cette longue querelle de la tradition et de  
l'invention  
De l'Ordre de l'Aventure

Vous dont la bouche est faite à l'image de celle de Dieu  
Bouche qui est l'ordre même  
Soyez indulgents quand vous nous comparez  
A ceux qui furent la perfection de l'ordre  
Nous qui quêtions partout l'aventure

Nous ne sommes pas vos ennemis  
Nous voulons nous donner de vastes et d'étranges  
domaines  
Où le mystère en fleurs s'offre à qui veut le cueillir  
Il y a là des feux nouveaux des couleurs jamais vues  
Mille phantasmes impondérables

## Guillaume Apollinaire : The Pretty Redhead

Here I am in front of everyone a man full of sense  
Knowing life and death as a living person can know  
Having experienced the pains and joys of love  
Having sometimes imposed his ideas  
Knowing several languages  
Having traveled quite a bit  
Having seen war in the Artillery and Infantry  
Wounded in the head been trepanned under chloroform  
Having lost his best friends in the fearsome struggle  
I know the old and the new as much as a single man  
    could know of both  
And without worrying today about this war  
Between us and for us as my friends  
I judge this long quarrel of tradition and invention  
As of the Order of Adventure

You whose mouth is made in the image of God's  
Mouth which is order itself  
Be lenient when you compare us  
To those who were the perfection of order  
We who are looking for adventure everywhere

We are not your enemies  
We want to give you vast and strange domains  
Where the flowering mystery offers itself those who want  
    to pick it  
There are new lights there, colors never seen before  
A thousand imponderable phantasms

Auxquels il faut donner de la réalité  
Nous voulons explorer la bonté contrée énorme où tout se  
    tait  
Il y a aussi le temps qu'on peut chasser ou faire revenir  
Pitié pour nous qui combattons toujours aux frontières  
De l'illimité et de l'avenir  
Pitié pour nos erreurs pitié pour nos péchés

Voici que vient l'été la saison violente  
Et ma jeunesse est morte ainsi que le printemps  
O Soleil c'est le temps de la raison ardente  
Et j'attends  
Pour la suivre toujours la forme noble et douce  
Qu'elle prend afin que je l'aime seulement  
Elle vient et m'attire ainsi qu'un fer l'aimant  
Elle a l'aspect charmant  
D'une adorable rousse

Ses cheveux sont d'or on dirait  
Un bel éclair qui durerait  
Ou ces flammes qui se pavantent  
Dans les roses-thé qui se fanent

Mais riez de moi  
Hommes de partout surtout gens d'ici  
Car il y a tant de choses que je n'ose vous dire  
Tant de choses que vous ne me laisseriez pas dire  
Ayez pitié de moi

Calligrammes 1918

[Audio recording](#)

To which reality must be given  
We want to explore the goodness in a vast land where  
everything is silent  
There is also the time that we can hunt for or bring back  
Pity for us who are always fighting at the borders  
Of the limitless and the future  
Have pity on our errors and pity on our sins

Here returns summer the violent season  
And my youth is dead as is the spring  
O Sun it is the time of the passionate Reason  
And I'm waiting  
Always to follow her noble and gentle form  
Which she assumes so that I only love her  
She comes and attracts me as a magnet draws iron  
It has the charming appearance  
Of an adorable redhead

Her hair is golden one would say  
A beautiful flash of lightning that lasts  
Or those flames that parade  
In the fading tea roses

But laugh at me  
Men from all over especially local people  
For there are so many things that I dare not tell you  
So many things you would not let me say  
Have pity on me

Max Jacob (1876-1944) : Arc en Ciel

C'était l'heure où la nuit fait gémir les montagnes,  
Les rochers noirs craquaient du pas des animaux,  
Les oiseaux s'envolaient des sinistres campagnes  
Pour approcher la mer, un meilleur horizon.

Le diable poursuivait un poète en ce temps.  
Le poète fixait la mer comme une mort  
Car la mer écaillait la peau des rocs immenses.  
Mais Jésus, rayonnant de feu derrière la tête,  
.  
Portant la croix, vint à monter des rochers noirs.  
Le poète a tendu les bras vers le Sauveur  
Alors tout s'effaça : la nuit sombre et les bêtes.  
Le poète a suivi Dieu pour son bonheur.

le cubisme fantasque

[Audio recording](#)

Max Jacob : Rainbow

It was the hour when night will make the mountains moan  
The somber rocks were creaking from the tramp of beasts.  
The birds were flying darkly through the country zone  
to reach the sea, where rich horizon brightly feasts.

The devil chased the poet still, so wailed the clocks.  
The poet stared long at sea as though at one now dead  
The sea peeled off the skin from vast surrounding rocks,  
the fire of Jesus radiated from behind his head.

And with the cross he clambered up the somber rocks.  
The poet held his arms out for His forgiveness  
Then all was gone, dark night, the beasts and flocks.  
The poet followed God to find his happiness.

André Salmon (1881-1969) : Ronde

L'amour a pleuré sur ma main (J'aime la rose et le jasmin) a  
pleuré, ses pleurs me brûlent. (J'aime la rose et le jasmin,  
La jonquille et la renoncule).

Il a pleuré, ses pleurs me brûlent,  
Que va-t-il m'ordonner demain? (J'aime la rose et le jasmin).

Je l'avais chassé le matin,  
Il m'attendait au crépuscule ! (L'amour a pleuré sur ma main,  
Il a pleuré, ses pleurs me brûlent)

Le Laboratoire central 1921

[Audio recording](#)

## André Salmon : Round

Love cried on my hand (I like the rose and jasmine) cried,  
her crying burns me. (I like the rose and jasmine,  
The daffodil and the buttercup).

He cried, his crying burns me,  
What is he going to order me tomorrow? (I like rose and  
jasmine).

I had chased him away in the morning,  
He was waiting for me at dusk! (Love cried on my hand,  
He cried: his crying burns me)

Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961) : Mee too buggi

Comme chez les Grecs on croit que tout homme bien  
élevé doit savoir pincer la lyre

Donne-moi le fango-fango  
Que je l'applique à mon nez  
Un son doux et grave  
De la narine droite  
Il y a la description des paysages  
Le récit des événements passés  
Une relation des contrées lointaines

Bolotoo

Papalangi

Le poète entre autres choses fait la description des  
animaux

Les maisons sont renversées par d'énormes oiseaux

Les femmes sont trop habillées

Rimes et mesures dépourvues

Si l'on fait grâce à un peu d'exagération

L'homme qui se coupa lui-même la jambe réussissait dans  
le genre simple et gai

Mee low folla

Mariwagi bat le tambour à l'entrée de sa maison

Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques 1919

Blaise Cendrars : Mee too buggi

As with the Greeks it is believed that every good man  
must know how to pluck the lyre

Give me the fango-fango  
That I apply it to my nose  
A soft and serious sound  
From the right nostril  
There is the description of the landscapes  
The narrative of past events  
A relationship from distant lands

Bolotoo

Papalangi

The poet among other things makes the description of the  
animals

Houses are knocked down by huge birds

Women are overdressed

Rhymes and measures devoid

If we do it thanks to a little exaggeration

The man who cut his own leg was successful in the simple  
and cheerful genre

Mee low folla

Mariwagi beats the drum at the entrance of his house

Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) : Plain Chant

Je n'aime pas dormir quand ta figure habite,  
La nuit, contre mon cou ;  
Car je pense à la mort laquelle vient trop vite,  
Nous endormir beaucoup.

Je mourrai, tu vivras et c'est ce qui m'éveille!  
Est-il une autre peur?  
Un jour ne plus entendre auprès de mon oreille  
Ton haleine et ton coeur.

Quoi, ce timide oiseau replié par le songe  
Déserterait son nid !  
Son nid d'où notre corps à deux têtes s'allonge  
Par quatre pieds fini.

Puisse durer toujours une si grande joie  
Qui cesse le matin,  
Et dont l'ange chargé de construire ma voie  
Allège mon destin.

Léger, je suis léger sous cette tête lourde  
Qui semble de mon bloc,  
Et reste en mon abri, muette, aveugle, sourde,  
Malgré le chant du coq.

Jean Cocteau : Plain Chant

I do not like to sleep when your face breathes  
against my neck at night.

I think that death too promptly leaves  
us sleeping out of sight.

That I will die and you live, keeps me awake,  
or is there some new fear?

One day I shall not feel your breath's intake,  
or heartbeat in my ear.

What! This shy bird, so folded in a dream,  
will leave its nest's retreat?

That nest from which a double-headed theme  
protrudes two pairs of feet?

May joys go on, and last forever,  
or till the morning come,  
may angel of the path I take endeavour  
to lighten fate's hard sum.

Light, I'm light beneath this heavy head,  
that's from my likeness drawn,  
May that stay, be mute and blind instead,  
at roosters' sound of dawn.

Cette tête coupée, allée en d'autres mondes,  
Où règne une autre loi,  
Plongeant dans le sommeil des racines profondes,  
Loin de moi, près de moi.

Ah ! je voudrais, gardant ton profil sur ma gorge,  
Par ta bouche qui dort  
Entendre de tes seins la délicate forge  
Souffler jusqu'à ma mort.

Plain Chant 1923

[Audio recording](#)

And so this severed head is gone elsewhere,  
where other laws ensue,  
plunging sleep in deeper roots, that there  
I'm far and close to you.

Ah! I would keep that profile on my throat,  
and feel your mouth's soft sigh,  
to hear your breasts so quietly forge the note  
of breathing till I die.

Léon-Paul Fargue (1876-1947) : Les mots, les mots spéciaux

Les mots, les mots spéciaux qu'elle avait faits pour moi, je l'écoutais les dire à l'Autre.

J'entends sonner son sabre sur le bois du lit. J'entendrai toutes les paroles.

Quand il l'embrasse sur les yeux, là, tout au bord de l'île où s'allume une lampe, il sent ses paupières battre sous sa bouche comme la tête d'un oiseau qu'on a pris et qui a peur..

Il s'attarde au réseau des vaisseaux délicats comme l'ombre légère d'une plante marine..

Il caresse de tout son corps les seins qu'envenime l'amour...

J'entendrai tout, dans ce couloir aux minces cloisons, tout blanc de fenêtres, avec cette odeur fade et sucrée de la boiserie que le soleil chauffe..

Quelquefois j'attendais longtemps devant sa porte dans un décor si connu qu'il m'écoeurait. J'y frappais. J'entendais le vide bâiller derrière.. On marchait bien vite, à côté, comme pour venir ouvrir..

Léon-Paul Fargue : The words, the special words

The words, the special words that she had made for me, I heard her say them to the Someone Else.

I hear his sword against the wooden bed. All the words I'd hear.

When he kisses her on the eyes, there, at the very edge of the island where a lamp is lit, he feels her eyelids flutter under his mouth like the head of a bird that has been taken and is afraid..

He lingers on the network of delicate vessels which have the soft shadow of a marine plant.

With all his body he caresses the breasts that love envenoms...

I hear everything, in this corridor with thin partitions, all white windows, with this dull and sweet smell of the woodwork that the sun heats..

Sometimes I waited for a long time in front of her door in a setting so well known that it sickened me. I was knocking on it. I could hear the emptiness yawning behind. . We walked very quickly, next door, as if to come and open..

Une heure se plaignait quelque part. Le soir tombait par  
les baies vitrées, sur les marches..

Et puis les houles du vent d'automne, des frissons  
d'arbres sur les remparts, l'odeur de la pluie dans les  
douvees, et bien des chansons de Paris passèrent sur elle...

Poèmes 1926

An hour was complaining somewhere. Evening was falling through the bay windows, onto the steps..

And then the surges of the autumn wind, the shivers of the trees on the ramparts, the smell of rain in the moat, and many songs of Paris passed over her...

Léon-Paul Fargue : Nocturne

Un long bras timbré d'or glisse du haut des arbres  
Et commence à descendre et tinte dans les branches.  
Les fleurs et les feuilles se pressent et s'entendent.  
J'ai vu l'orvet glisser dans la douceur du soir.  
Diane sur l'étang se penche et met son masque.  
Un soulier de satin court dans la clairière  
Comme un rappel du ciel qui réjouit l'horizon.  
Les barques de la nuit sont prêtes à partir.  
D'autres viendront s'asseoir sur la chaise de fer.  
D'autres verront cela quand je ne serai plus.  
La lumière oubliera ceux qui l'ont tant aimée.

Nul appel ne viendra rallumer nos visages.  
Nul sanglot ne fera retentir notre amour.  
Nos fenêtres seront éteintes.

Un couple d'étrangers longera la rue grise.

Les voix

D'autres voix chanteront, d'autres yeux pleureront  
Dans une maison neuve.

Tout sera consommé, tout sera pardonné,  
La peine sera fraîche et la forêt nouvelle,  
Et peut-être qu'un jour, pour de nouveaux amis,  
Dieu tiendra ce bonheur qu'il nous avait promis.

La Lucarne ovale 1916 [Audio recording](#)

Léon-Paul Fargue : Nocturne

A long arm bangled with gold glides from the top of trees  
and begins to descend and tinkle in the branches.  
The flowers and leaves press and understand each other.  
I have seen the slow-worm slip into the softness of evening.  
Diane on the pond leans over and puts on her mask.  
A satin shoe runs in the clearing  
as a reminder of the sky that gladdens the horizon.  
The boats of the night are ready to leave.  
Others will come and sit on the iron chair.  
Others will see this when I am no more.  
The light will forget those who loved it so much.

No call will come to rekindle our faces.  
No sob will make our love sound.  
Nor will the windows then be lit.

A couple of strangers will walk along the grey street.

The voices

Of other voices will sing, other eyes will cry  
in a new house.

Everything will be consumed, everything will be forgiven,  
The pain will be fresh and the forest new,  
And maybe one day, for new-made friends,  
God will grant the happiness he's promised us.

Pierre Reverdy (1899-1960) : Pour le moment

La vie est simple et gaie  
Le soleil clair tinte avec un bruit doux  
Le son des cloches s'est calmé  
Ce matin la lumière traverse tout

Ma tête est une lampe rallumée  
Et la chambre où j'habite est enfin éclairée  
Un seul rayon suffit  
Un seul éclat de rire

Ma joie qui secoue la maison  
Retient ceux qui voudraient mourir  
Par les notes de sa chanson  
Je chante faux

Ah que c'est drôle  
Ma bouche ouverte à tous les vents  
Lance partout des notes folles  
Qui sortent je ne sais comment

Pour voler vers d'autres oreilles  
Entendez je ne suis pas fou  
Je ris au bas de l'escalier  
Devant la porte grande ouverte

Dans le soleil éparpillé  
Au mur parmi la vigne verte  
Et mes bras sont tendus vers vous  
C'est aujourd'hui que je vous aime

La Lucarne ovale 1916 [Audio recording](#)

Pierre Reverdy : For the moment

Life is simple and cheerful  
The clear sun tinkles with a soft sound  
The sound of the bells has calmed down  
This morning the light passes through everything

My head is a re-lit lamp  
And the room where I live is finally lit up  
Only one ray is enough  
A single burst of laughter

My joy that shakes the house  
Holds back those who would like to die  
By the notes of his song  
I'm singing wrong

Ah that's funny  
My mouth open to all the winds  
Throw crazy notes everywhere  
Who come out I don't know how

To fly to other ears  
Hear I'm not crazy  
I'm laughing at the bottom of the stairs  
In front of the wide open door

In the scattered sun  
On the wall among the green vine  
And my arms are outstretched towards you  
It is today that I love you

Pierre Reverdy (1899-1960) : L'Esprit dehors

Dans le vent qui passe  
Un cri  
Un signe  
L'ombre d'une menace  
Sur le mur qui vacille  
Le temps s'efface  
Et l'esprit s'égare  
Dans les plis de la nuit  
Un pas  
Un souffle  
Un éclat de lumière  
Qui s'éteint  
Et tout s'arrête  
Sous le poids du silence

La Liberté des mers 1959

Pierre Reverdy : The Spirit outside

In the passing wind  
A cry  
A sign  
The shadow of a threat  
On the unstable wall  
Time fades  
And the spirit wanders  
In the folds of the night  
A step  
A breath  
A burst of light  
That dies out  
And everything stops  
Under the weight of silence

Pierre Albert-Birot (1876-1967) : Admiration

J'ai été devant les maisons de la ville

Et j'ai dit

C'est admirable

J'ai été devant les roues et les machines

Et j'ai dit

C'est admirable

Et j'ai été devant les monts immobiles

Et j'ai dit

C'est admirable

J'ai été devant les mers bleues les mers vertes

Et j'ai dit

C'est admirable

J'ai été devant les arbres des forêts

Et j'ai dit

C'est admirable

Et j'ai été devant les grosses bêtes

Et j'ai dit

C'est admirable

Et j'ai été devant les petites bêtes

Pierre Albert-Birot : Admiration

I've been in front of the houses in the city

And I said

It's admirable

I've been in front of the wheels and the machines

And I said

It's admirable

And I have been in front of the motionless mountains

And I said

It's admirable

I've been in front of the blue seas the green seas

And I said

It's admirable

I have been in front of the trees of the forests

And I said

It's admirable

And I've been in front of the big beasts

And I said

It's admirable

And I've been in front of the little beasts

Et j'ai dit  
C'est admirable  
Et j'ai été devant les femmes

Et j'ai dit  
C'est admirable  
Et j'ai été devant les hommes

Et j'ai dit  
C'est admirable  
J'ai été devant l'ombre

Et j'ai dit  
C'est admirable  
Et devant la lumière

Et j'ai dit  
C'est admirable

Parce que j'ai regardé

Grabinoulor 1933

And I said  
It's admirable  
And I've been in front of the women

And I said  
It's admirable  
And I've been in front of the homes

And I said  
It's admirable  
I've been in front of the shadow

And I said  
It's admirable  
And in front of the light

And I said  
It's admirable

Because I've been watching

Pierre Albert-Birot : Aux Jeunes Poètes

Pour faire un poème  
Pardonnez moi ce pléonasma  
Il suffit de ce promener  
Quelque fois sans bouger

Regarder dehors et dedans  
Avec toutes les cellules  
De votre vous

Et voici que vous êtes riche

Mais n'en dites rien à personne  
Pour aujourd'hui  
Ne faites pas le nouveau-riche  
Apprenez les bonnes manières  
Car la fortune est peu de chose

à qui ne sait pas s'en servir

Vous voici fécondés

Travaillez façonnez polissez assemblez  
Tous ces immatériels matériaux

Maintenant  
Que vous avez reçu le monde en vous  
Portez le monde qui va naître

Pierre Albert-Birot : To The Young Poets

To make a poem  
Forgive this repetition  
Just take this for a walk  
Sometimes without moving

Looking out and in  
With all the cells  
From your you

And behold, you are rich

But don't tell anyone about it  
For today  
Don't do the newborn rich  
Learn good manners  
For fortune is little thing

for one who doesn't know how to use it

Here you are fertilized

Work shape polish assemble  
All these immaterial materials

Now  
That you have received the world within you  
Carry the world that will be born

Obéissez  
Parfois aux lois des autres  
Parfois aux vôtres  
Parfois encore et surtout

à la Loi  
Qui n'est ni des autres ni de vous

Et vous serez aimés  
Des mots des sons des rythmes  
Qui s'ordonneront pour vous plaire

Soyez triple comme un Dieu  
Ou plutôt comme une mère  
Et naîtra le poème

Mais j'aurais dû tout simplement vous dire  
Copier copier  
Religieusement  
La vérité que vous êtes  
Et vous ferez un poème

à condition que vous soyez poète.

La Lune ou le Livre des poèmes 1928

Obedient  
Sometimes to the laws of others  
Sometimes to yours  
Sometimes again and especially

to the Law  
Which is neither of the others nor of you

And you will be loved  
Words sounds rhythms  
Who will order themselves to please you

Be triple like a God  
Or rather like a mother  
And the poem will be born

But I should have just told you  
Copy copy  
Religiously  
The truth that you are  
And you will make a poem

provided that you are a poet.

## DADAISM

Dadaism aimed to contravene accepted values of society so as to jolt the public into seeing the world with keener eyes — beyond the hypocrisies, class repressions and stultifying conventions.

Tristan Tzara (born Samuel Rosenstock: 1896-1963) was an avant-garde artist par excellence; poet, essayist, performance artist, journalist, playwright, literary and art critic, composer and film director. He is best known for founding the anti-establishment Dada movement, but on moving to Paris in 1919, Tzara became interested in Surrealism, though continued his Dada vision in plays like *The Gas Heart* (1921) and *Handkerchief of Clouds* (1924). Tzara was a forerunner of automatist techniques, and eventually aligned himself with Breton's Surrealism. His support for Dadaism was outstanding, however, and his plays caused scandals and riots when performed in Zurich, to which had gone to study philosophy and the humanities. Protests continued when Tzara moved to Paris and his relationship with Breton and French Surrealism was anything but smooth.

Although Tzara was primarily a poet and writer, he painted several abstract gouaches. Tzara was a symbol of Jewish involvement in avant-garde art and left-wing politics, and was naturally a target of anti-Semitism in the 1930s. In WWII, his writings were banned in Romania, but in 1947, he received French citizenship and left Romania for good. Tzara was not a mere theoretician, moreover, but an active participant in the Spanish Civil War and in

the Resistance during the German occupation. He later distanced himself from the French Communist party but was vocal against the Algerian War. A year before his death, Tzara received a prestigious prize for his poetry.

Influenced by the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, Tzara experimented with visual poetry, trying to develop a syncretic form of art: the linear way in which a poem is written and read is abandoned; instead, the text became a form.

Dadaism was a nihilistic and anti-aesthetic movement general in the arts. Its anti-rationalistic critiques of society and its unrestrained attacks on all formal artistic conventions found no immediate inheritors, but its preoccupation with the bizarre, the irrational, and the fantastic bore fruit with the Surrealist movement. Dada artists' reliance on accident and chance are implicit in the Surrealistic artistic movement worldwide, and later the Abstract Expressionists of New York. Conceptual art is also rooted in Dada, for it was Duchamp who asserted that the mental activity ('intellectual expression') of the artist was of greater significance than the object created.

In Paris, under Tristan Tzara, the movement took on a more literary nature, which drew in many of the leading names. *Littérature* (1919–24), contained work by André Breton, Louis Aragon, Philippe Soupault, Paul Éluard, and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes.

## Tristan Tzara (1896-2063) : Chanson Dada

### I

la chanson d'un dadaïste qui avait dada au cœur  
fatiguait trop son moteur qui avait dada au cœur  
l'ascenseur portait un roi lourd fragile autonome il coupa  
son grand bras droit l'envoya au pape à rome  
c'est pourquoi  
l'ascenseur  
n'avait plus dada au cœur  
mangez du chocolat  
lavez votre cerveau  
dada  
dada  
buvez de l'eau

### II

la chanson d'un dadaïste qui n'était ni gai ni triste et aimait  
une bicycliste qui n'était ni gaie ni triste  
mais l'époux le jour de l'an savait tout et dans une crise  
envoya au  
Vatican leurs deux corps en trois valises  
ni amant  
ni cycliste  
n'étaient plus ni gais ni tristes  
mangez de bons cerveaux  
lavez votre soldat  
dada  
dada  
buvez de l'eau

## Tristan Tzara : Dada Song

### I

the song of a Dadaist who had dada in his heart  
tired his engine too much which had dada at the heart  
the elevator carried a heavy fragile king, he cut  
his great right-hand man sent him to the pope in Rome  
that's why  
the elevator  
no longer had dada in his heart  
eat chocolate  
wash your brain  
dada  
dada  
drink water

### II

the song of a Dadaist who was neither cheerful nor sad and  
loved a bicyclist who was neither cheerful nor sad  
but the bridegroom on New Year's Day knew everything and  
in a fit sent to the  
Vatican their two bodies in three suitcases  
nor lover  
nor cyclist  
were no longer either cheerful or sad  
eat good brains  
wash your soldier  
dada  
dada  
drink water

### III

la chanson d'un bicycliste qui était dada de cœur qui était  
donc dadaïste comme tous les dadas de cœur  
un serpent portait des gants il ferma vite la soupape mit  
des gants en peau d'serpent et vint embrasser le pape  
c'est touchant  
ventre en fleur  
n'avait plus dada au cœur  
buvez du lait d'oiseaux  
lavez vos chocolats  
dada  
dada  
mangez du veau

Chanson Dada 1920

### III

the song of a bicyclist who was dada at heart who was  
therefore Dadaist like all dadas at heart  
a snake was wearing gloves he quickly closed the valve put  
on snakeskin gloves and came to kiss the pope  
it's touching  
belly in bloom  
no longer had dada in his heart  
drink bird's milk  
wash your chocolates  
dada  
dada  
eat veal

Tristan Tzara (1896-2063) : Sur une ride du soleil

noyez matins les soifs les muscles et les fruits  
dans la liqueur crue et secrète  
la suie tissée en lingots d'or  
couvre la nuit lacérée par les motifs brefs

à l'horizon remis à neuf  
une draperie d'eau courante large vivante  
grince petit coefficient particulier  
de mon amour  
dans la porte soudain éclaircie

harcelée par les désirs éclipses  
pleureuse accélérée palpitante  
tu t'effeuilles en prospectus d'accords privés  
l'inconstance de l'eau glisse sur ton corps avec le soleil

Tristan Tzara : On a Ripple of the Sun

drown morning thirsts the muscles and the fruits  
in the raw and secret liquor  
soot woven into gold bars  
covers the night lacerated by the brief patterns

on the horizon remade as good as new  
a drapery of water living running wide  
squeaks the small peculiar coefficient  
of my love  
in the door suddenly brightened

harassed by eclipsing desires  
pulsating accelerated weeping  
you strip yourself of leaflets of private agreements  
the inconstancy of the water glides over your body with  
the sun

## SURREALISM

Surrealism attempted to express the workings of the unconscious by fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtaposition of content. The movement grew out of Dadaism, was orchestrated by the French poet and critic André Breton, and had important precursors in Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Lautréamont.

Depending on whom you believe, the movement drew on the troubled politics of the inter-war years, the dream theories of Jung and Freud, studies of the occult and irrational, and the usual opposition to the despised bourgeoisie.

Dadaism aimed to contravene accepted values of society. Surrealism was more positive and proselytizing — was indeed an instrument of knowledge. True reality lay in the subconscious, and Surrealism developed concepts and techniques to explore and express those depths. Painting was the most obvious arena for Surrealism to show its talents, but the movement also included important poets and novelists, initially French but later Spanish and Italian. For Breton and his followers, Surrealism had to be a clearly articulated process, almost a scientific discipline, and the aesthetic and/or political dimensions were secondary.

How did the automatism work? Writers and artists gave up conscious control of their thoughts, and then put down — rapidly, without interrupting the stream of thought or vision — whatever came to mind. Some painters — Dali

for example — were self-conscious perfectionists, but even here the canvas should slowly take shape under promptings cleared of preconceptions. French poets might or might not write under the influence of the hexameter, but any conscious filtering by technique was frowned upon. Many writers passed through the movement, or were brought to fame by Surrealism, but only Paul Eluard (1895-1952), Louis Aragon (1897-1982) and Federico García Lorca (1899-1936) created their most enduring work under its influence.

Purely automatic writing — which Yeats practised for a while with his wife — produced reams of material interesting to writer and his psychiatrist, but tedious in the extreme to the reader. Was it permissible to select and shape this material? No, said Breton, but most writers and painters fudged the issue. Surrealist techniques produced vivid raw material, which could then be further developed. Was prior artistic training required, or could anyone practice the techniques with success? Opinion was divided. Many argued that formal training provided the necessary tools of expression, and the better painters and poets did generally possess a formal mastery of their craft. But that was to put the aesthetic above the true aim of Surrealism, thought Breton (generally), and so betray its larger purpose of creating a truer reality from conscious and subconscious elements.

Surrealist approaches have today diffused into art and advertising, but did they offer French poet more than useful improvisation, a way of getting the creative juices

flowing? The difficulty centres on the subconscious. Many Surrealists, though speaking of the subconscious, actually meant the unconscious, and this entity does not exist. Certainly the brain's actions are largely hidden from us, and may well produce regularities that can be called schemas, archetypes, inter-cultural patterns of perception, but there is nothing corresponding to the id, ego and superego of Freud's or Lacan's formulation. Nonetheless, laboratory work has shown that the brain is marvellously retentive, and stores vastly more than we can easily recall. Moreover, it stores speech and perception as transcriptions of experience — i.e. not as language constructs, mental or otherwise, but as diverse guides for subsequent action. Some of these may be universal, as is suggested by occult and shamanistic practices, but most are surely individual. Dreams and trances are not always illuminating, therefore, and Surrealism is not now a royal road to the subconscious.

But the greatest drawback is the most obvious. Even if the subconscious were more interesting than the conscious world, simply portraying it will not create art. That needs selection, and a shaping for emotive and aesthetic ends. Surrealist poetry can be novel, whimsical or apocalyptic, but it is not apt to be deeply moving. Indeed it appears somewhat suspect now. When dreams and psychoanalysis were valid approaches to psychic truth, Surrealism had its part to play. But contemporary theories of brain functioning, not to mention the expensive, various and ineffective therapies of Freudian analysis, all cast doubt on what solemn word spinning can be expected to unearth. Loose, coerced and/or truncated mental

gymnastics will certainly create original material, but it is not truth as the word is generally understood.

André Breton (1896-1966) first joined the Dadaists, but declared a commitment to the Surrealism in 1924, issuing the first of three Surrealist Manifestos: Surrealism was 'psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought.' From 1927 to 1935, Breton was a member of the Communist party, and from 1941 to 1946 lived abroad in America. He was three times married and had one daughter.

Benjamin Péret (1899-1959) a Dadaist and co-founder of French surrealism led an equally colourful life. With little education he enlisted in the Cuirassiers, saw action in the Balkans, discovered Apollinaire, joined the Dada movement in Paris after being demobbed, and then became as active for the Surrealists. In 1929 Péret and his wife emigrated to Brazil, returned to France, after which Péret fought with the anarchists in the Spanish Civil War, became involved with the Spanish painter Remedios Varo, returned to Paris, was briefly imprisoned for subversion, sailed to Mexico where he was much involved in intellectual and artistic circles, before finally returning to Paris in 1947, and dying in hospital there in 1959.

Péret quickly established himself as one of the leading Dadaists of the 1920s, not only for his poetry but for his aggressively anti-establishment stance, which eventually made even membership of the Communists party impossible. Péret was exceptionally loyal to the tenets of Surrealism, angrily denouncing poets in occupied France who had made some tentative returns to traditional verse, which Péret never did. He was uncompromisingly original to the end, delighting in the unfettered products of writing under a continued hypnotic dream. The poems were often baffling and ambitious, but never dull.

Members of the French avant-garde mixed socially, promoted each other's work and happily took part in the usual spats and circles within circles. Philippe Soupault's (1897-1990) first collection was published with Apollinaire's help, for example, and in 1919 Soupault, Breton, and Aragon founded the review *Littérature*. Soupault originally adopted the automatic writing techniques of the Surrealists, but was producing carefully crafted verse by 1922 (*Westwego*), later breaking completely with Breton's dogmatic and political control. After *Georgia* (1926), Souplat turned to novel writing and journalism, but was awarded the French Acaemy's *Grand Prix de Poésie* in 1972.

Antoine Marie Joseph Paul Artaud (Antonin Artaud: 1896-1948), was a French writer, poet, dramatist, visual artist, essayist, actor and theatre director. Best known for his views on thatre, notably the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud's raw, surreal and transgressive works explored themes in

the cosmologies of ancient cultures, philosophy, the occult, mysticism and indigenous native practices. The man was born in Marseille of mixed French and Greek blood, studied at a Catholic middle and high school, read Rimbaud and similar French poets, but began to show the social withdrawal for which he was prescribed psychiatric attention. He was discharged from the French army on health grounds in 1916, and put under medical attention, starting on a lifelong addition to laudanum and other opiates. Thereafter he trained as an actor and theatre director. He changed troupes in 1923, joined another, but shortly afterwards went to work in the cinema. Artaud mailed poems to the journal *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, and, though these were rejected, there began a correspondence its editor, Jacques Rivière that were later published. The NRF also published his thoughts on the theatre.

Artuad was not easy to get on with. He quarrelled with Bertold Brecht by seeing the unconscious as the source of man's problems, rather than social conditions. He quarrelled with Breton by refusing to renounce theater as a bourgeois art form, and to join the French Communist Party as had other good Surrealists.

Pierre Unik (1910-1945) was a poet, screenwriter and journalist. He joined the Surrealism movement in Paris, and the Communist party in 1932, publishing poems, images and imaginative creations in *La Révolution surréaliste* and elsewhere. During the war he was interned as a prisoner of war in Silesia in 1940, from which he eventually escaped, but was not heard of again.

Andre Breton (1896-1966) : Moins de temps

Moins de temps qu'il n'en faut pour le dire, moins de larmes qu'il n'en faut pour mourir; j'ai tout compté, voilà. J'ai fait le recensement des pierres ; elles sont au nombre de mes doigts et de quelques autres; j'ai distribué des prospectus aux plantes, mais toutes n'ont pas voulu les accepter. Avec la musique j'ai lié partie pour une seconde seulement et maintenant je ne sais plus que penser du suicide, car si je veux me séparer de moi-même, la sortie est de ce côté et, j'ajoute malicieusement: l'entrée, la rentrée de cet autre côté. Tu vois ce qui te reste à faire. Les heures, le chagrin, je n'en tiens pas un compte raisonnable; je suis seul, je regarde par la fenêtre ; il ne passe personne, ou plutôt personne ne passe (je souligne passe). Ce Monsieur, vous ne le connaissez pas ? c'est M. Lemême. Je vous présente Madame Madame. Et leurs enfants. Puis je reviens sur mes pas, mes pas reviennent aussi, mais je ne sais pas exactement sur quoi ils reviennent. Je consulte un horaire : les noms de villes ont été remplacés par des noms de personnes qui m'ont touché d'assez près. Irai-je à A, retournerai-je à B, changerai-je à X ? Oui, naturellement, je changerai à X. Pourvu que je ne manque pas la correspondance avec l'ennui! Nous y sommes : l'ennui, les belles parallèles, ah! que les parallèles sont belles sous la perpendiculaire de Dieu.

Poisson soluble 1924

Andre Breton : Less time

Less time than it takes to say it, less tears than it takes to die; I have taken account everything; there that's it, all counted. I made a census of the stones; they are numbered among my fingers and a few others; I distributed leaflets to the plants, but not all of them wanted to accept them. With the music I was gone for only a second and now I don't know what to think about suicide, because if I want to part from myself, the exit is on this side and, I add mischievously: the entrance, the reentrance on this other side. You see what you still have to do. The hours, the grief, I do not take a reasonable account of them; I am alone, I look out the window; no one passes, or rather no one passes (I emphasize passes). Don't you know this Gentleman? It's Monsieur TheSame. This is Madam TheSame. And their children. Then I retrace my steps, my steps also come back, but I don't know exactly what they come back to. I consult a schedule: the names of cities have been replaced by the names of people who have been quite close to me. Will I go to A, will I go back to B, will I change to X? Yes, of course, I will change at X. As long as I don't miss the correspondence with boredom! Here we are: boredom, beautiful parallels, ah! how beautiful are the parallels under the perpendicular of God.

## Andre Breton (1896-1966) : Vigilance

À Paris la tour Saint-Jacques chancelante

Pareille à un tournesol

Du front vient quelquefois heurter la Seine et son ombre  
glisse imperceptiblement parmi les remorqueurs

À ce moment sur la pointe des pieds dans mon sommeil

5. Je me dirige vers la chambre où je suis étendu

Et j'y mets le feu

Pour que rien ne subsiste de ce consentement qu'on m'a  
arraché

Les meubles font alors place à des animaux de même  
taille qui me regardent fraternellement

Lions dans les crinières desquels achèvent de se consumer  
les chaises

10. Squales dont le ventre blanc s'incorpore le dernier  
frisson des draps

À l'heure de l'amour et des paupières bleues

Je me vois brûler à mon tour je vois cette cachette  
solennelle de riens

Qui fut mon corps

Fouillé par les becs patients des ibis du feu

15. Lorsque tout est fini j'entre invisible dans l'arche

Sans prendre garde aux passants de la vie qui font sonner  
très loin leurs pas traînants

## Breton : Vigilance

In Paris the leaning Saint-Jacques tower  
overburdened like a sunflower  
sometimes has its frontage touch the Seine and its  
shadow slip unseen among the tugboats  
At this tiptoe moment in my sleep  
5. I direct myself to the bedroom where I lie  
extended setting it on fire  
so that nothing remains of consent extorted from me  
The furniture gives way to animals of the same size that  
look at me fraternally  
Lions in whose manes the chairs at last burn up  
10. Sharks whose white belly absorbs the final shudder of  
the sheets  
At the hour of love and blue eyelids  
I shall see myself burning away and the solemn receptacle  
of nothing  
That was my body  
Probed by the patient beaks of the fire ibises  
15. When everything is done I enter invisibly the ark  
Indifferent to the passers-by of life who make their  
dragging footsteps sound very far away

Je vois les arêtes du soleil  
À travers l'aubépine de la pluie  
J'entends se déchirer le linge humain comme une grande  
Sous l'ongle de l'absence et de la présence qui sont de  
connivence  
20. Tous les métiers se fanent il ne reste d'eux qu'une  
dentelle parfumée  
Une coquille de dentelle qui a la forme parfaite d'un sein  
Je ne touche plus que le cœur des choses je tiens le fil

Le Revolver à cheveux blancs 1932

I see the spines of the sun  
Across the hawthorn flowers of the rain  
I hear the human linen tearing as a great sheet does  
Under the nail of the absence and the presence that  
collude together  
20. All their metiers fade until there is nothing but  
fragrant lace  
A shell of lace shaped in the perfect form of a breast  
I only touch the heart of things whose thread I hold

Benjamin Péret (1899-1959) Le quart d'une vie

I

À l'intérieur

le catalogue vendait des huîtres vivantes  
qui pleuraient et qui chantaient  
sur un air américain

II

Les feuilles qui sont tombées  
ont emporté les deux taxis  
Les taxis ont renversé les sémaphores  
Les sémaphores tombés  
le lait ne coulera plus  
car les moustaches tombées  
ne repousseront plus

III

Nous sommes plus heureux que la mousse  
la mousse n'a pas de cheveux  
et nous portons des chapeaux  
Pauvres chapeaux aux ailes couvertes de givre  
la fumée des cigarettes vous excite  
mais le pétrole  
le pétrole sournois qui vide les ostensoirs  
est plus léger à vos reins  
que les chaînes d'aluminium

## Benjamin Péret : The quarter of a lifetime

### I

Inside

the catalog was selling live oysters  
which cried and sang  
to an American tune

### II

The fallen leaves  
have swept away two taxis  
The taxis have knocked over the traffic lights  
For the fallen traffic lights  
the milk no longer flows  
the fallen moustache  
won't grow back again

### III

We are happier than the moss  
the moss that has no hair  
and we are wearing hats  
Poor hats with frost-covered wings  
the smoke from cigarettes excites you  
but oil  
the crafty oil that empties the monstrances  
is lighter on your back  
than aluminum chains

## IV

Croupissez regards des sulamites  
Il pleut Il neige  
Sous le soleil qui nous déteste  
les chiens mangent la merde  
les ceinturons s'enrichissent des sabots des vieux  
chevaux  
qui les oreilles percées  
le ventre lumineux  
vendent leurs chemises aux portes des églises  
sans se soucier des cachalots et des zébus  
Joli mois d'août c'est le mois des zébus  
Les zébus ont trop bu  
bu bu bu et boira  
boira qui voudra  
mais ce n'est pas moi qui le voudrai  
C'est trop laid le cervelet  
qui sans sourire court à la chapelle  
téléphoner aux parfumeurs

## V

C'est un jour saint un jour sacré  
un jour sacré à l'hôtel  
Vivent les atlas sous les bateaux

#### IV

Languish in the eyes of the Sulamites  
It's raining It's snowing  
Under the sun that hates us  
dogs eat shit  
the belts are enriched with the hooves of the old  
horses  
who pierced ears  
the luminous belly  
sell their shirts at the doors of the churches  
without worrying about sperm whales and zebras  
Nice August is the month of the zebra  
The zebras have drunk too much  
bu bu bu and will drink  
will drink who wants  
but I'm not the one who will want it  
It's too ugly the cerebellum  
who without a smile runs to the chapel  
call the perfumers

#### V

It's a holy day a holy day  
a sacred day at the hotel  
Live the atlases under the boats

## VI

Plutôt que périssent les cannibales  
nous démolirons les pianos  
nous interdirons les vendanges  
nous arrêterons les marées

## VII

Couverture des étoiles  
le vent roule des motocyclettes  
Il ne croit pas à l'eau salée  
et symbolise les aspirations des peuples  
comme la guerre  
comme les vêtements

## VIII

La cavalerie n'est pas loin  
et les oscillations non plus

## IX

Vers le ciel de juillet  
montent les fourrures ovipares  
Le serrurier militaire  
invente le contrepoint  
nécessaire à la nourriture des abeilles

Le Grand Jeu 1928

## VI

Rather than cannibals perish  
we will demolish the pianos  
we will prohibit the harvest  
we will stop the tides

## VII

Cover of the stars  
the wind rolls motorcycles  
He doesn't believe in salt water  
and symbolizes the aspirations of the peoples  
like the war  
like the clothes

## VIII

The cavalry is not far away  
and neither are the oscillations

## IX

Towards the July sky  
oviparous furs rise  
The military locksmith  
invent the counterpoint  
necessary for bee food

Philippe Soupault (1897-1990) : Say it with music

Les bracelets d'or et les drapeaux  
les locomotives les bateaux  
et le vent salubre et les nuages  
je les abandonne simplement  
mon cœur est trop petit  
ou trop grand  
et ma vie est courte  
je ne sais quand viendra ma mort exactement  
mais je vieillis  
je descends les marches quotidiennes  
en laissant une prière s'échapper de mes lèvres  
A chaque étage est-ce un ami qui m'attend  
est-ce un voleur  
est-ce moi  
je ne sais plus voir dans le ciel  
qu'une seule étoile ou qu'un seul nuage  
selon ma tristesse ou ma joie  
je ne sais plus baisser la tête  
est-elle trop lourde  
Dans mes mains je ne sais pas non plus  
si je tiens des bulles de savon ou de boulets de canon  
je marche  
je vieillis  
mais mon sang rouge mon cher sang rouge  
parcourt mes veines  
en chassant devant lui les souvenirs du présent  
mais ma soif est trop grande  
je m'arrête encore et j'attends  
la lumière  
Paradis paradis paradis

Rose des vents 1920

Philippe Soupault : Say it with music

Gold bracelets and flags  
the locomotives the boats  
and the healing wind and the clouds  
I just give them up  
my heart is too small  
or too big  
and my life is short  
I don't know when my death will come exactly  
but I'm getting old  
I walk down the daily steps  
letting a prayer escape from my lips  
On each floor is a friend waiting for me  
is he a thief  
is it me  
I don't know how to see in the sky anymore  
only a single star or a single cloud  
depending on my sadness or my joy  
I don't know how to put my head down anymore  
is it too heavy  
In my hands I don't know either  
if I'm holding soap bubbles or cannonballs  
i walk  
I'm getting old  
but my red blood my dear red blood  
runs through my veins  
by chasing before him the memories of the present  
but my thirst is too great  
I'm still stopping and waiting  
the light  
Paradise paradise paradise

Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) : Jardin Noir

Roulez fleuves du ciel dans nos pétales noirs.  
Les ombres ont comblé la terre qui nous porte.  
Ouvrez nos routes au charroi de vos étoiles.  
Éclairez-nous, escortez-nous de vos cohortes,  
Argentines légions, dans la route mortelle  
Que nous entreprenons au centre de la nuit.  
Ainsi le jardin parle au bord de la marée.  
Et le métal figé de vos saintes colonnes  
Ô tiges a vibré. Voici la nuit qui donne  
L'universelle clef de ses portes de corne  
Aux émanations des âmes délivrées.

Antonin Artaud : Black Garden

Roll the heavens' river in our blackest flowers,  
the shadows fill the earth that's bearing us.  
Open a pathway to your chariot of stars,  
have your cohorts lead, enlighten us,  
your silver legions on that deadly route  
on which we go and in the dead of night.  
The garden talks upon the tidal edge;  
in frozen metal of your holy columns  
the rods vibrate. Here is the night that gives  
a universal key to its gate of horn  
and emanations from delivered souls.

## Pierre Unik (1910-45) : La société sans hommes

Le matin coule sur les végétaux froissés  
comme une goutte de sueur sur les lignes de la main  
je rampe sur la terre  
bouche rugueuse et sévère  
le soleil se dilate dans les canaux des feuilles monstrueuses  
qui recouvrent les cimetières les ports les maisons  
de la même ardeur visqueuse et verte  
alors se présente à mon esprit avec une intensité  
bouleversante  
l'absurdité des groupements humains  
dans ces maisons pressées l'une contre l'autre  
comme les pores de la peau  
parmi le vide poignant des espaces terrestres  
J'entends crier les oiseaux dont on a dit autrefois qu'ils  
chantaient  
et qui ressemblent implacablement à des pierres  
je vois des troupes de maisons qui broutent la sève de l'air  
des usines qui chantent comme les oiseaux d'autrefois  
des chemins qui se perdent dans les récoltes de sel  
des morceaux de ciel qui sèchent sur la mousse vert-de-  
grisée  
un grincement de poulie annonce qu'un seau remonte dans  
un puits

Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution 1933

Pierre Unik : Society without Men

The morning flows over the crumpled plants  
like a drop of sweat on the lines of the hand  
I crawl on the earth here  
mouth rugged and severe  
the sun expands in conduits through the monstrous leaves  
that recover cemeteries ports houses  
with the same viscous and green enthusiasm  
that passes through my mind with an overwhelming fervour  
the absurdity of human groupings  
in these houses pressed against each other  
like the pores of the skin  
in the poignant emptiness of earthly spaces  
I hear the birds that were once said to sing  
and which look implacably like stones  
I see herds of houses grazing on the nutrients of air  
factories that sing like the birds of yesteryear  
paths that get lost in the salt harvests  
pieces of sky drying on the greyish-green moss  
a squeak of a pulley announces that a bucket is going up a  
well

## NEO-SURREALISTS

Aragon and Éluard passed through Surrealism in their search for social truth, but its techniques and outlooks were gradually discarded as they found their true metier. But its approach, and the fusion of conscious and unconscious, an everyday reality with dream sequences, overcame the harsh emphasis of European rationalism that led to social oppression and WWI. Imagination opened new realms in the literary and visual arts.

Louis Aragon (1897-1982) was an important poet, novelist and essayist who began writing as a Dadaist and Surrealist, but became a committed Communist after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1930. The novels indeed espoused a social realism, sometimes laced with autobiography but always expressing the class struggle of the proletariat toward social improvement. The war years were particularly hard for Aragon, and, like many Frenchmen, he turned to an ardent nationalism, now expressed traditional forms. Communism returned as his first love after the war, however, when from 1953 to 1972 Aragon was editor of the Communist cultural weekly *Les Lettres Françaises*. He was awarded the Legion of Honour in 1981.

With André Breton, Philippe Soupault, and Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard (Eugène Grindel: 1895-1952) was one of the founders of Surrealism in France, but became better known for his lyrical poetry, which still enjoys a wide appeal in France. The early collections — *Capitale de la douleur* (Capital of Sorrow, 1926), *La Rose publique* (The Public Rose, 1934) and *Les*

*Yeux fertiles* (The Fertile Eyes, 1936) — were some of the most successful Surrealist poetry in French, where Éluard experimented in new verbal techniques, mixing dream and reality, and exploring his inner thought processes.

Éluard abandoned these Surrealist experiments after the Spanish Civil War, when he joined the Communist Party, and reflected on the social issues of the day: man's search for happiness, the common brotherhood of man, and rejection of suffering and tyranny. His poems, circulated clandestinely during the War, stiffened the Resistance movement, and the two 1951 volumes after the war — *Tout dire* (Say Everything) and *Le Phénix* (The Phoenix) added in simple language and vivid imagery to the lyric resources of French verse.

Louis Aragon (1897-1982) : Richard II Quarante

Ma patrie est comme une barque  
Qu'abandonnèrent ses haleurs  
Et je ressemble à ce monarque  
Plus malheureux que le malheur  
Qui restait roi de ses douleurs

Vivre n'est plus qu'un stratagème  
Le vent sait mal sécher les pleurs  
Il faut haïr tout ce que j'aime  
Ce que je n'ai plus donnez-leur  
Je reste roi de mes douleurs

Le coeur peut s'arrêter de battre  
Le sang peut couler sans chaleur  
Deux et deux ne fassent plus quatre  
Au Pigeon-Vole des voleurs  
Je reste roi de mes douleurs

Que le soleil meure ou renaisse  
Le ciel a perdu ses couleurs  
Tendre Paris de ma jeunesse  
Adieu printemps du Quai-aux-Fleurs  
Je reste roi de mes douleurs

Aragon : Richard II Forty

My country is a boat undone  
that rowers were abandoning  
Of all the monarchs there is none  
more sad than this most saddest thing  
though of my sorrows still I'm king

Life at best is but a ploy  
our tears the wind's not comforting  
Yet what I'm hating you enjoy  
Let them have that long lost thing  
though of my sorrows still I'm king

The heart itself may cease to beat  
and blood that runs unravelling  
Two and two in four don't meet  
nor children's game be happening  
though of my sorrows still I'am king

Let sun fall dead or be reborn  
the sky has lost its colouring  
the Paris of my youth's foresworn  
and gone the spring of market flowering  
though of my sorrows still I'am king

Fuyez les bois et les fontaines  
Taisez-vous oiseaux querelleurs  
Vos chants sont mis en quarantaine  
C'est le règne de l'oiseleur  
Je reste roi de mes douleurs

Il est un temps pour la souffrance  
Quand Jeanne vint à Vaucouleurs  
Ah coupez en morceaux la France  
Le jour avait cette pâleur  
Je reste roi de mes douleurs

Le Crève-Cœur 1941

Flee the springs and forest scene  
and keep the birds from quarrelling  
Your songs are put in quarantine  
Bird-catcher be you menacing  
though of my sorrows still I'm king

With Joan then come to Vaucoleurs  
there dawned the day for suffering  
what a shredded France was hers  
the daylight had a pallid ring  
though of my sorrows still I'm king

## Aragon : Les Lilas et les Roses

O mois des floraisons mois des métamorphoses  
Mai qui fut sans nuage et Juin poignardé  
Je n'oublierai jamais les lilas ni les roses  
Ni ceux que le printemps dans ses plis a gardés

Je n'oublierai jamais l'illusion tragique  
Le cortège les cris la foule et le soleil  
Les chars chargés d'amour les dons de la Belgique  
L'air qui tremble et la route à ce bourdon d'abeilles  
Le triomphe imprudent qui prime la querelle  
Le sang que préfigure en carmin le baiser  
Et ceux qui vont mourir debout dans les tourelles  
Entourés de lilas par un peuple grisé

Je n'oublierai jamais les jardins de la France  
Semblables aux missels des siècles disparus  
Ni le trouble des soirs l'énigme du silence  
Les roses tout le long du chemin parcouru  
Le démenti des fleurs au vent de la panique  
Aux soldats qui passaient sur l'aile de la peur  
Aux vélos délirants aux canons ironiques  
Au pitoyable accoutrement des faux campeurs

## Aragon : The Lilies and the Roses

O month of flowerings months of mortal change  
that cloudless May a daggered June betrayed  
I'll not forget how rose and lilac range  
beyond the folds of spring in which they're laid

I'll not forget the tragic hopes of then  
the crowds the clamour long lines in the sun  
the gifts of love from tanks of Belgium men  
the trembling air on roads how bees would hum  
how reckless triumph primes an argument  
that blood may issue from a carmine kiss  
all those about to die on battlement  
grey people in the lilacs drunk on this

I'll not forget the gardened ways of France  
that seem the missals of long centuries past  
how enigmatic evening silences enhance  
the roses on the way we also passed  
that flowers give the lie to panic's spread  
to soldiers passing on the wings of fear  
with cannons mockingly on cycles sped  
or pitiful fake heaps of camping gear

Mais je ne sais pourquoi ce tourbillon d'images  
Me ramène toujours au même point d'arrêt  
A Sainte-Marthe Un général De noirs ramages  
Une villa normande au bord de la forêt  
Tout se tait L'ennemi dans l'ombre se repose  
On nous a dit ce soir que Paris s'est rendu  
Je n'oublierai jamais les lilas ni les roses  
Et ni les deux amours que nous avons perdus

Bouquets du premier jour lilas lilas des Flandres  
Douceur de l'ombre dont la mort farde les joues  
Et vous bouquets de la retraite roses tendres  
Couleur de l'incendie au loin roses d'Anjou

Le Figaro 1940

[Audio recording](#)

I don't know why this whirl of images  
must bring me back to this one stopping place  
at Saint-Marthe the branching forest edges  
give Norman villa there its darkened space  
no sound in shade our enemies repose  
and it's tonight they tell us Paris fell  
I'll not forget the lilac and the rose  
nor those two loves that we have lost as well

bouquets of first day lilacs Flanders' flowers  
the cheeks that death will paint a warmer hue  
in your retreats the tender rose embowers  
incendiary tints the distant roses of Anjou

Paul Éluard (1895-1952) : L'amoureuse

Elle est debout sur mes paupières  
Et ses cheveux sont dans les miens,  
Elle a la forme de mes mains,  
Elle a la couleur de mes yeux,  
Elle s'engloutit dans mon ombre  
Comme une pierre sur le ciel.

Elle a toujours les yeux ouverts  
Et ne me laisse pas dormir.  
Ses rêves en pleine lumière  
Font s'évaporer les soleils,  
Me font rire, pleurer et rire,  
Parler sans avoir rien à dire

Capitale de la douleur 1926

Paul Éluard: The Lover

She is stood on my eyelids  
and her hair is as mine  
She has a body like my hand.  
She has the colour of my eye  
She in my shade is swallowed  
as is a stone against the sky.

She has eyes always open  
and they do not let me sleep  
Her dreams in the broadest day  
make the suns but boil away.  
Make me laugh, cry and laugh,  
with naught to say on my behalf.

## Paul Éluard: La courbe de tes yeux

La courbe de tes yeux fait le tour de mon cœur,  
Un rond de danse et de douceur,  
Auréole du temps, berceau nocturne et sûr,  
Et si je ne sais plus tout ce que j'ai vécu  
C'est que tes yeux ne m'ont pas toujours vu.

Feuilles de jour et mousse de rosée,  
Roseaux du vent, sourires parfumés,  
Ailes couvrant le monde de lumière,  
Bateaux chargés du ciel et de la mer,  
Chasseurs des bruits et sources des couleurs,

Parfums éclos d'une couvée d'aurores  
Qui gît toujours sur la paille des astres,  
Comme le jour dépend de l'innocence  
Le monde entier dépend de tes yeux purs  
Et tout mon sang coule dans leurs regards.

Capitale de la douleur 1926

[Audio recording](#)

Paul Éluard: Your eyes' soft curving round

Your eyes' own curvature goes round my heart,  
when what a turn of dance and sweetness starts,  
Time's nocturnal cradle brings no hurt.  
If I don't know the lot that I've been through  
your eyes then haven't kept me close in view.

Daylight leaves and dew-kissed moss,  
is wind in reeds and fragrant smiles across.  
The wings covering the world with light  
as boats with loaded sky and sea are bright,  
So go those hunting noise and color source,

So perfumes hatching from aurora's lairs  
that lie forever on their bed of stars,  
and as the day depends on innocence  
the world itself is hung on your pure eyes  
and all my blood is flowing in their looks.

## CORROSIVE CRITICS

Desnos, Queneau and Prévert did not simply support Surrealism but brought the movement brazenly into the public arena : a movement not only for heretics, schismatics and atheists, but for everyone. The three poets did not write for the politically defined proletariat, moreover, but for the casual masses who took their reading material as it came to hand in popular magazines, paperbacks and train reading matter. The three poets indeed promoted everyday banality to the rank of poetic subject, happily mixing in clichés, stereotypes, proverbs, and ready-made turns of speech.

The style of their poems was certainly not traditional verse, but nor was it entirely everyday speech. Often the rhythm was adjusted, speeded up by sound repetition, technically alliteration, homeoteleute, paronomasia, pun, or slowed down by anaphora, epiphora, parallelism, anadiplosis. The learning was worn lightly. Desnos, Prévert and Queneau all wrote songs, either called such in their texts or later set to music. Sometimes the language itself is poetic, though the content is generally ironic if not a deliberate put-down, often with delationary word play. Poetry should appeal to the working class of France, but the poets themselves were far more astute and self-knowing.

Robert Desnos, (1900-1945) joined André Breton in the early phase of Surrealism, readily falling into a hypnotic trance, throughr which he could recite his dreams, write, and draw. Examples appeared in the Surrealist review

Littérature and in his book *La Liberté ou l'amour!* (Liberty or Love! 1928). Humour, tenderness, and eroticism pervade these early works, whereas dreams and reality merge in freely associated images in *Corps et biens* (Bodies and Goods, 1938). In 1930 he broke with Breton and for a decade wrote successful motion-picture and radio scripts.

Desnos later abandoned these Surrealism experiments and wrote more traditional verse to express his humanitarian sympathies aroused by World War II. Works of this period include *Fortunes* (Fortunes, 1942), *État de veille* (The Wakeful State, 1943), and *Contrée* (Country, 1944). He was arrested for his Resistance work, deported and died of typhus shortly after the camp was liberated.

Raymond Queneau (1903–1976) was a French novelist, poet, critic and editor, well known for his wit and cynical humour. He was born at Le Havre, moved to Paris in 1920, saw military service in north Africa and took on various jobs to survive. In 1928 he married Janine Kahn, the sister-in-law of André Breton, and later worked for the Gallimard publishing house. Queneau also became interested in mathematics as literary inspiration, but it was his novel *Zazie dans le métro* (Zazie in the Underground, 1959), with its colloquial language that caught the public imagination.

Queneau was a somewhat reluctant Surrealist, and in fact wrote more more scientific than literary reviews. He distanced himself from the cult of automatic writing, and from Breton generally after 1930. Though he took up

many left-wing and anti-fascist causes, but didn't formally join the Communist party, but continued publishing left-wing tracts during the occupation. Queneau's early poetry showed a taste for verbal juggling, black humour, and derision toward authority. His puns, sneers, spelling extravaganzas, and other linguistic contortions may have concealed a deep pessimism, and possibly an obsession with death itself. His corrosive laughter appeared even in the light verse of his childhood reminiscences in *Chêne et chien* (Oak and Dog, 1937) and in his more philosophical poems: *Les Ziaux* (The Ziaux, 1943), *Petite Cosmogonie portative* (A Pocket Cosmogony, 1950), and *Si tu t'imagines* (If You Imagine, 1952). His many novels chronicle simple people in a language that ranges from everyday slang to the loftiest poetic diction.

Jacques Prévert (1900-1977) had impeccable Surrealist credentials. He was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine, early associated with the Robert Desnos, Yves Tanguy, Louis Aragon, and André Breton, but then wrote the popular songs (Paroles), which, put to music by Josef Kosma and others reached a vast audience of the young. He lashed out at the social ills of France, sang of lovers in the street and the metro, sentimentally of the simple hearts of children. The sharp profiles used free verse, irregular verse, occasional rhymes, puns, cascades of words intentionally in disarray, enumerations, antithesis, and other dissociating devices.

Prévert had Communist sympathies: he wrote for a group of politically militant dramatists and with them visited the Soviet Union in 1933. For many years he also turned out

streams of excellent film scripts, from *Drôle de drame* (Odd Drama) in 1937 to *Choses et autres* (Things and Other Things) in 1972.

## Robert Desnos (1900-45) : Le Paysage

J'avais rêvé d'aimer. J'aime encor mais l'amour  
Ce n'est plus ce bouquet de lilas et de roses  
Chargeant de leurs parfums la forêt où repose  
Une flamme à l'issue de sentiers sans détour.

J'avais rêvé d'aimer. J'aime encor mais l'amour  
Ce n'est plus cet orage où l'éclair superpose  
Ses bûchers aux châteaux, dérouté, décompose,  
Illumine en fuyant l'adieu du carrefour.

C'est le silex en feu sous mon pas dans la nuit,  
Le mot qu'aucun lexique au monde n'a traduit  
L'écume sur la mer, dans le ciel ce nuage.

À vieillir tout devient rigide et lumineux,  
Des boulevards sans noms et des cordes sans nœuds.  
Je me sens me roidir avec le paysage.

Contrée 1944.

[Audio recording](#)

Robert Desnos : Le Paysage

I had dreamt of loving. I still love, but love  
is no longer that bouquet of lilac and rose  
filling the forest with their perfumes that glows  
at the end of paths without detours thereof.

I had dreamt of loving. I still love, but love  
is no longer that storm where the lightning imposes  
its fires on castles and routs, but decomposes  
at the long parting of ways, in the light thereof.

It is the flint on fire beneath my step at night,  
the word no lexicon can render right.  
The foam on the sea, in the sky this cloud.

Age is luminous but fixed, and lacks all hopes  
like streets without names or unknotted ropes  
rigid in a landscape of which I speak aloud.

Raymond Queneau (1903-76) : Un poème

Bien placés bien choisis  
quelques mots font une poésie  
les mots il suffit qu'on les aime  
pour écrire un poème  
on ne sait pas toujours ce qu'on dit  
lorsque naît la poésie  
faut ensuite rechercher le thème  
pour intituler le poème  
mais d'autres fois on pleure on rit  
en écrivant la poésie  
ça a toujours kék  
chose d'extrême  
un poème

L'instant fatal 1946

[Audio recording](#)

## Raymond Queneau : A Poem

Well placed well chosen  
a few words make poetry  
words sufficing that we love them  
to write a poem  
is not always to know what we're saying  
when poetry is born  
we have to search for the theme  
to entitle the poem  
but at other times we cry laugh  
by writing poetry  
it always has something kek  
something extreme  
a poem

Jacques Prévert (1900-77) : Premier Jour

Des draps blancs dans une armoire  
Des draps rouges dans un lit  
Un enfant dans sa mère  
Sa mère dans les douleurs  
Le père dans le couloir  
Le couloir dans la maison  
La maison dans la ville  
La ville dans la nuit  
La mort dans un cri  
Et l'enfant dans la vie.

Paroles 1946

[Audio recording](#)

Jacques Prévert : First day

White sheets in a wardrobe

Red sheets in a bed

A child in his mother

Her mother in pain

The father in the hallway

The hallway in the house

The house in the city

The city in the night

Death in a scream.

## Jacques Prévert (1900-77) : Les Feuilles Mortes

Oh, je voudrais tant que tu te souviennes,  
Des jours heureux quand nous étions amis,  
Dans ce temps là, la vie était plus belle,  
Et le soleil plus brûlant qu'aujourd'hui.

Les feuilles mortes se ramassent à la pelle,  
Tu vois je n'ai pas oublié.  
Les feuilles mortes se ramassent à la pelle,  
Les souvenirs et les regrets aussi,

Et le vent du nord les emporte,  
Dans la nuit froide de l'oubli.  
Tu vois, je n'ai pas oublié,  
La chanson que tu me chantais.

C'est une chanson, qui nous ressemble,  
Toi qui m'aimais, moi qui t'aimais.  
Nous vivions, tous les deux ensemble,  
Toi qui m'aimais, moi qui t'aimais.

Et la vie sépare ceux qui s'aiment,  
Tout doucement, sans faire de bruit.  
Et la mer efface sur le sable,  
Les pas des amants désunis.

Les feuilles mortes se ramassent à la pelle  
Les souvenirs et les regrets aussi  
Mais mon amour silencieux et fidèle  
Sourit toujours et remercie la vie

Jacques Prévert : Dead Leaves

Oh, how I wish that you'd recall  
us two as friends in happier days,  
with life around more beautiful,  
and sun that made a brighter blaze.

Dead leaves, how many: more it seems  
than rake collects or mind forgets.  
Dead leaves: what can they mean  
but memories and past regrets.

The cold north wind has scattered them  
to that cold night's oblivion.  
You see, I'm very much as then,  
and don't forget the song you sung.

A song of how two people were,  
when I loved you and you loved me.  
when I was loved and loving her,  
the two of us, whole-heartedly

But life will tear the two apart,  
gently and without much fuss.  
The sea effaces from the sand  
the steps of all who were as us.

Dead leaves collect in shovel fulls  
regrets and memories the same  
My love is faithful, still it pulls:  
bless life that's ever smiles at blame.

Je t'aimais tant, tu étais si jolie.  
Comment veux-tu que je t'oublie?  
En ce temps-là, la vie était plus belle  
Et le soleil plus brûlant qu'aujourd'hui

Tu étais ma plus douce amie  
Mais je n'ai que faire des regrets  
Et la chanson que tu chantais  
Toujours, toujours je l'entendrai

Les Portes de la nuit 1945

[Audio recording](#)

You were so pretty: I loved you yet:  
How could you think that I'd forget?  
Life beautiful, more dazzling still,  
the sun seemed brighter than today.

Then you were my gentlest friend  
but I care nothing for regret.  
The very song that you sang then,  
I'm always, always hearing it.

## THE GREAT TRANSPARENTS

Surrealism was a large and sprawling movement, difficult to categorise properly. The poets listed here all had some integral relationship to the visual arts, however, as though their work was looking for a living reality deeper or larger than the eye disclosed to conventional representation. That reality could be a mystical dimension, a sublimation of erotic passions, or simply what the pictorial elements created on innocent but sustained reflection.

Pierre-Jean Jouve (1887-1976) was a French poet and novelist. He was born in Arras, married Andrée Charpentier in 1910, moved to Poitiers, where Andrée took up a teaching position and Pierre sold piano players. During World War I, Jouve served as a nurse at the Poitiers Hospital, but fell sick himself, having to recuperate in the Swiss Alps. He returned to duty, but wrote articles and three volumes of poems that documented the slaughter and misery that he daily witnessed. Subsequently, Jouve fell in love with Blanche Reverchon, a psychiatrist and first French translator of Sigmund Freud's work. She established her own practice as a psychoanalyst in Paris, and married Jouve in 1925.

Jouve was a pacifist, and his early poetry was sympathetic to the serving man. Later he attacked the instigators of war: the politicians, the generals and even parents sending their sons off to slaughter. Then comes a change. Jouve repudiated his earlier work and wrote strongly influenced by his reading of Freud, poems which engaged deeply with sexuality and guilt. Fiercely anti-fascist, Jouve

joined with Louis Aragon to become one of the chief poets of the French resistance.

René Daumal (1908-44) is best known for two novels: *A Night of Serious Drinking*, and the posthumously published *Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing*, but was also self taught in Sanskrit, translating some of the Tripitaka Buddhist canon and writings of the Japanese Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki into French. Daumal died in Paris of tuberculosis, perhaps hastened by youthful experiments with psychoactive drugs.

Daumal co-founded the short-lived literary journal *Le Grand Jeu* (The Great Game), which published contributions from across the literary spectrum, though adopting an anti-Dada and anti-Surrealist stance. Much of Daumal's own poetry was published posthumously, and thus his reputation. Daumal's poetry has an intense spirituality, an individual rhythm of great beauty and an interest in matters that owed little to the twentieth-century.

Michel Leiris (1901-1990) was a Surrealist poet, novelist, art critic and anthropologist, but most notably a pioneer in confessional literature. Leiris obtained his baccalauréat in 1918 but gave up chemistry for jazz and poetry. In the following years he met the important writers and artists of the time, embraced the Surrealist movement, contributed to *La Révolution surréaliste*, published *Simulacre* (Simulacre, 1925), and *Le Point Cardinal* (The Cardinal Point, 1927), and wrote a surrealist novel *Aurora* (1927–

28, but published in 1946). In 1926, he married Louise Godon, the stepdaughter of Picasso's art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, and traveled to Egypt and Greece. In 1930 he became the secretary-archivist for Marcel Griaule's ethnographic expedition to west Africa, from which followed several books and permanent employment as an ethnographer at the Musée de l'Homme.

In his novels and many collections of poems, Leiris showed an appreciation of puns, wordplay, and the associative power of language. 'No beauty would be possible without something accidental intervening (misfortune, or contingency of modernity) which draws the beautiful from its icy stagnation,' remarked Leiris. 'What constitutes beauty is not simply the bringing into contact of opposing elements, but also their very antagonism. . . As a revolt, the poet must try to overthrow the dominant system of Western values by imposing on himself the rule of exposing himself . . .'

René Char, (1907-1988), began as a Surrealist poet but later, after his war experience as a Resistance leader, wrote a pared down verse with a strong moral overtones. Char was born and brought up in Provence, moved to Paris in the late twenties, and joined the Surrealism movement. His *Le Marteau sans maître* (The Hammer without a Master, 1934) exhibited verbal luxuriance and a free play of imagery. Char led a Resistance unit in the French Alps during the war, and afterwards published *Feuillets d'Hypnos* (Leaves of Hypnos, 1946), which drew on his journal of the war years and the unnecessary brutality he had witnessed. In later collections — *Les*

*Matinaux* (The Early Risers, 1950), *Recherche de la base et du sommet* (Search for the Base and the Summit, 1950), and *Commune présence* (Common Presence, 1964) and *Oeuvres complètes* (Complete Works, 1983) - – the poems were much terser, ellipical, and sometimes difficult to follow. Typically the poems took the form of free verse, prose poem and aphorism. Char frequently collaborated with other writers and artists, many of them well known.

Char's last residence was the Luberon Mountains of southern France, near his birthplace. He was friendly with many of the celebrated writers of the avant-garde but notably with its painters, with whom he often collaborated. For his celebrated Resistance activities in WWII he received the Medal of the Resistance, the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honor: subsequently, he became a noted anti-nuclear war activist.

Henri Michaux (1899-1984) was a Belgium born but naturalised French writer, poet and artist. His work has affinities with Surrealism but is strikingly idiosyncratic, also drawing on the arts of India, Japan and China, which Michaux visited in the 1930s. Michaux was a very private man, experimenting with psychedelic drugs and working results into several works, but remaining tight-lipped about his personal life and refusing the many literary honours that came his way.

Michaux's work is imaginative, inventive and rhythmic, lyrical in a muted and unmetaphorical way, but often hauntingly repetitive. Michaux's world is one of

strangeness and alienation, of aggression and hostility, which the poet exorcises by control and self-analysis, often through the weak but humorous *Plume*, a persona that Michaux created for himself. Some poems read as rhymed short stories.



Pierre-Jean Jouve (1887-1976) : Hélène

Que tu es belle maintenant que tu n'es plus  
La poussière de la mort t'a déshabillée même de l'âme  
Que tu es convoitée depuis que nous avons disparu  
Les ondes les ondes remplissent le coeur du désert  
La plus pale des femmes  
Il fait beau sur les crêtes d'eau de cette terre  
Du paysage mort de faim  
Qui borde la ville d'hier des malentendus  
Il fait beau sur les cirques verts inattendus  
Transformés en églises  
Il fait beau sur le plateau désastreux nu et retourné  
Parce que tu es si morte  
Répandant des soleils par les traces de tes yeux  
Et les ombres des grands arbres enracinés  
Dans la terrible  
Chevelure celle qui me faisait délirer

Matière Céleste 1937

[Audio recording](#)

Pierre-Jean Jouve : Helen

That you are beautiful now that you are no longer  
The dust of death has undressed you even from the soul  
That you have been coveted since we disappeared  
The waves the waves fill the heart of the desert  
The palest of women  
It's sunny on the water ridges of this land  
Of the landscape that died of hunger  
Who borders the city of yesterday misunderstandings  
It's sunny on the unexpected green circuses  
Transformed into churches  
It's sunny on the disastrous plateau naked and turned  
upside down

Because you're so dead  
Spreading suns by the traces of your eyes  
And the shadows of the great rooted trees  
In the terrible  
Hair the one that made me delirious

René Daumal (1908-1944) : Il suffit d'un mot

Nomme si tu peux ton ombre, ta peur  
et montre-lui le tour de sa tête,  
le tour de ton monde et si tu peux  
prononce-le, le mot des catastrophes,  
si tu oses rompre ce silence  
tissé de rires muets, — si tu oses  
sans complices casser la boule,  
déchirer la trame,  
tout seul, tout seul, et plante là tes yeux  
et viens aveugle vers la nuit,  
viens vers ta mort qui ne te voit pas,  
seul si tu oses rompre la nuit  
pavée de prunelles mortes,  
sans complices si tu oses  
seul venir nu vers la mère des morts —  
dans le cœur de son cœur ta prunelle repose —  
écoute-la t'appeler : mon enfant,  
écoute-la t'appeler par ton nom

Le Contre-Ciel 1938

[Audio recording](#)

René Daumal : All it takes is a word

Name if you can your shadow, your fear  
and show him the turn of its head,  
around your world and if you can  
pronounce it, the word of disasters,  
if you dare to break this silence  
woven with silent laughter, — if you dare  
without accomplices to break the ball,  
tearing the weft,  
all alone, all alone, and plant your eyes there  
and come blind towards the night,  
come to your death, which does not see you,  
alone if you dare to break up at night  
paved with dead pupils,  
without accomplices if you dare  
alone coming naked to the mother of the dead —  
in the heart of her heart your pupil rests —  
listen to it calling you: my child,  
listen to it call you by your name

Michel Leiris (1901-1990) : Rose des Sables

Les minimes concrétions balayées aux quatre coins  
du corps par le vent  
distributeur de gifles aux volets hoquetants de la tête  
composent la texture du cœur pailleté de micas telle la  
rose du désert  
la corolle de cristal  
aux facettes dessinées par leurs angles de souffrance  
le rosaire de la plaine  
la rosace de poussières unies par un invisible chaton  
la méduse des sables  
racornie et pétrifiée devant son propre miroir  
le pain inhumain dont j'ai faim  
ma constellation préhensible à la saveur fictive  
mais à l'éclat négateur des chaînes d'arpentage et des  
pointillés de frontières

Haut Mal 1943

Michel Leiris : Rose of the Sands

The minimal concretions swept at the four corners  
of the body by the wind  
dispenser of slaps with the nodding shutters of the head  
compose the texture of the glittered heart of micas such  
as the desert rose  
the crystal corolla  
to the facets drawn by their angles of suffering  
the rosary of the plain  
the rosette of dust united by an invisible kitten  
the sand jellyfish  
horny and petrified in front of her own mirror  
the inhuman bread I'm hungry for  
my prehensible constellation with a fictional flavor  
but to the negating brilliance of the chains of surveying  
and the dotted lines of borders

René Char (1907-88) : Congé au Vent

À flancs de coteau du village bivouaquent des champs  
fournis de mimosas. À l'époque de la cueillette, il arrive  
que, loin de leur endroit, on fasse la rencontre  
extrêmement odorante d'une fille dont les bras se sont  
occupés durant la journée aux fragiles branches.  
Pareille à une lampe dont l'auréole de clarté serait de  
parfum, elle s'en va, le dos tourné au soleil couchant.

II serait sacrilège de lui adresser la parole.

L'espadrille foulant l'herbe, cédez-lui le pas du chemin.  
Peut-être aurez-vous la chance de distinguer sur ses  
lèvres la chimère de l'humidité de la Nuit ?

Fureur et mystère 1948

[Audio recording](#)

## René Char : Taking Leave of the Wind

On the slopes that surround the village are bivouacked fields thick with mimosa. During their harvesting, but far from the place, it happens that you have an unusually fragrant encounter with a girl whose arms have been busy all day with the fragile branches. Like a lamp, but whose halo is one of perfume, she goes on her way, her back dwindling into the sunset.

It would be sacrilegious to speak with her.

The sandal trampling the grass yield her the right of way. Who knows, you may be fortunate enough to discern on her lips the phantom of the moisture of the Night.

René Char (1907-88) Mon amour à la robe de phare  
bleu...

Mon amour à la robe de phare bleu,  
je baise la fièvre de ton visage  
où couche la lumière qui jouit en secret.

J'aime et je sanglote. Je suis vivant  
et c'est ton coeur cette Etoile du Matin  
à la durée victorieuse qui rougit avant  
de rompre le combat des Constellations.

Hors de toi, que ma chair devienne la voile  
qui répugne au vent.

Seuls demeurent 1938

René Char My love in the blue-lighthouse dress...

My love in the blue lighthouse dress,  
I kiss the fever out of your face  
where the light enjoys its secrecy.

I love and I'm sobbing. I am alive  
and it's your heart this Morning Star  
enduring victorious but blushing  
before breaking the battle of the Constellations.

Out of you, may my flesh become the sail repugnant to  
the wind.

Henri Michaux (1899-1984) La jeune fille de Budapest

Dans la brume tiède d'une haleine de jeune fille, j'ai pris place.

Je me suis retiré, je n'ai pas quitté ma place.

Ses bras ne pèsent rien.

On les rencontre comme l'eau.

Ce qui est fané disparaît devant elle.

Il ne reste que ses yeux.

Longues belles herbes, longues belles fleurs croissaient dans notre champ.

Obstacle si léger sur ma poitrine, comme tu t'appuies maintenant.

Tu t'appuies tellement, maintenant que tu n'es plus.

Plume précédé de Lointain intérieur 1938

Henri Michaux : The girl of Budapest

In the lukewarm haze of a girl's breath, I took my seat.

I withdrew, I did not leave my place.

His arms don't weigh anything.

We meet them like water.

What is faded disappears in front of her.

All that's left is her eyes.

Long beautiful herbs, long beautiful flowers grew in our field.

Obstacle so light on my chest, as you lean now.

You lean on yourself so much, now that you're gone.

Henri Michaux (1899-1984): niji extrait

Ne peut plus Iniji

Sphinx, sphères, faux signes,  
Obstacles sur la route d'Iniji

Rives reculent  
Socles s'enfoncent

. Monde. Plus de monde  
Seulement l'amalgame

Les pierres ne savent plus être pierres

Parmi tous les lits sur terre  
où est le lit d'Iniji ?

Petite fille  
petite pelle  
Iniji ne sait plus faire bras

Un corps a trop le souvenir d'un autre corps  
un corps n'a plus d'imagination  
n'a plus de patience avec aucun corps

Henri Michaux (1899-1984): niji

Can no longer Iniji

Sphinxes, spheres, false signs,  
Obstacles on the road to Iniji

Banks are receding  
Plinths sink in

. World. More people  
Only the amalgam

Stones no longer know how to be stones

Among all the beds on earth  
where is Iniji's bed?

Little girl  
little shovel  
Iniji doesn't know how to make arms anymore

A body has too much the memory of another body  
a body has no more imagination  
no longer has patience with any body

Fluides, fluides  
tout ce qui passe  
passe sans s'arrêter  
passe

Ariane plus mince que son fil  
ne peut plus se retrouver

Vent  
vent souffle sur Araho  
vent

Anania Iniji  
Annan Animha Iniji

Ornanian Iniji

Vents et poussières 1962

Fluids, fluids  
all that's going on  
in the meantime, without stopping  
pass

Ariane thinner than her thread  
cannot be found again

Wind  
wind blows on Araho  
wind

Anania Uniji  
Annan Animha Uniji

Ornanian Uniji

## UNDER THE ARCH OF SURREALISM

Few French poets of the twentieth century escaped the influence of Surrealism, particularly that movement's emphasis on dreams and the unconscious, on the unchoreographed and unexpected and its willingness to challenge conventional values and norms. For most it was a liberating experience, sometimes brief and unrecognised, but extending what is always important to poets: their sympathies, settings and ranges of reference.

By now, the mid twentieth-century, French poetry had long ago lost the outlines of nineteenth-century finished forms and outlooks. Poems were often provisional and idiosyncratic, taking up thoughts as they occurred to the poet but above all searching for an individual voice, creating something that could have been written by no one else. Bonnefoy's poems are not made difficult by what they say, but by his conception of poetry, that words are given to the poet by free association, and that they should be kept free and not woven into the deep and sweeping statements once expected of them. Ponge's poems are precise descriptions, not metaphysical statements, or the random statements that poets traditionally wrote.

Maurice Blanchard (1890-1960) came from modest circumstances: he started work at the age of 12, obtained a better education in the French Naval Services, served as air pilot during WWI, and was offered a teaching position at the School of Aeronautics after the war. This he turned down to write poetry. Progress was slow but his

published works were *Solidité de la Chair* (Solidity of the Flesh, 1935), *Sartrouville* (Sartrouville, 1936), *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* (The Mysterious Barricades, 1937), *Les Perils de la Route* (The Perils of the Road, 1937) and *C'est la fête et vous n'en savez rien* (It's the Party and You Know Nothing About It, 1939). Several were published posthumously: *Les Pelouses fendues d'Aphrodite* (Aphrodite's Split Lawns, 1945), *La Hauteur des Murs* (The Height of the Walls, 1947), *L'Homme et ses Miroirs* (Man and his Mirrors, 1950), *Le Monde qui nous entoure* (The World Around Us, 1951) and *Le Pain la Lumière* (Bread and Light, 1951).

Though admired by fellow poets like René Char and Paul Éluard, his work remains relatively unknown. It employs the same Surrealism, but is more biographical, more concerned to heal the wounds of a neglected childhood. Blanchard typically writes prose poems, long free verse lines where everything is permitted and where the rhythms reflect the thought processes of the content.

Francis Ponge (1899-1988) made poems from an obsessive observation of everyday things. He was born in Montpellier, studied in Paris and worked for Editions Gallimard and Hachette publishing companies. Like so many of his literary countrymen, Ponge joined the Communist party and then the French Resistance. After the war he edited Communist journals but left the party in 1947. Subsequently, he held academic posts in France and America, but remained a recluse at his Le Bar-sur-Loup country house for the last years of his life. He was

awarded the Académie française's French National Poetry Prize in 1981 and became a Commandeur of the Légion d'honneur in 1983.

In his many collections of prose poems, Ponge sought to celebrate objects of everyday experience in a language enlightened by puns and complex words, which were not a search for novelty but more a way of restoring a Romantic appreciation of the simple things in life. The object itself, an oyster or orange, etc. had links with the human psyche, where Ponge was an epicure of language though in no way elitist, addressing the common reader more than the idle and overeducated.

Jules Supervielle (1884–1960) was a Franco-Uruguayan poet who anticipated many of the 1940s literary movements. He was born in Montevideo but moved to Paris in 1884, then married Pilar Saavedra in Montevideo, with whom he had six children. Supervielle rejected the automatic writing of Surrealism, but influenced poets like René Char, Henri Michaux, Saint-John Perse and Francis Ponge. He brought out well-regarded collections of poems and novel in the interwar years, and only briefly relocated to Uruguay during the occupation. Returning to France after the war as cultural correspondent to the legation of Uruguay in Paris, he produced his first set of mythological tales under the title *Orphée*, a play (*Shéhérazade*, 1947), an autobiography (*Boire à la source: Drink at the Source*, 1951), followed by his last collection of poetry (*Le Corps tragique: The Tragic Body*, 1959). Supervielle was three

times nominated for the Nobel prize, and elected Prince des poètes shortly before his death in Paris.

By being an acute observer to the universe around, both the outside world and the world within, Supervielle was less interested in what Surrealism might unearth from the depths of the unconscious, and more in what a disciplined control of his senses might yield.

Yves Jean Bonnefoy (1923-2016) was a prolific major poet and art historian. He was born in Tours, the son of a railroad worker and school teacher, but studied mathematics and philosophy at the Universities of Poitiers and the Sorbonne in Paris. He travelled widely after the war, in Europe and the United States, going on to study and write on art history and kindred matters. He was known for several literary translations, those of Shakespeare's plays being regarded as some of the best in French. Bonnefoy lectured on literature at several universities, in Europe and the States, becoming professor at the Collège de France from 1981 to 1993, and winning many honors and awards, including the Goncourt Prize.

Bonnefoy's association with Surrealism was short-lived, but shows in his first published work, *Traité du pianiste* (The Pianist's Treatise, 1946). Thereafter, Bonnefoy created his own style in the highly personal *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve* (On the Motion and Immobility of Douve, 1953), one marked by a deceptive simplicity of vocabulary. As he told the *Paris*

*Review*, 'What is usual for me is the desire to find myself once again within a specifically poetic idiom. For this to happen it is necessary that words come to my mind free from the conceptual network that is present and active in ordinary speech. ... So I jot down these sentences. I listen to them. I see them making signs to each other, and thanks to them I begin to understand needs, memories, fantasies which are within me. This is the beginning of the poem, which will eventually become a whole book, since it will concern all that I am.'

With Césaire, Leopold Sédar Senghor (1906-201) founded the Négritude movement, which promoted African cultural values and aesthetics over those of French colonialism and exploitation. He was born in Dakar, Senegal but studied at the École Nationale de la France d'Outre-Mer in Paris, where he became friends with Aimé Césaire and George Pompidou. On gaining French citizenship, Senghor taught at Tours and Paris, joined the army in WWII, but was captured and imprisoned by the Germans for 18 months. After representing Senegal in the French National Assembly, Senghor returned to his country of birth, where he successfully led the movement for independence, becoming Senegal's first democratically elected president, a position he held for the next twenty years.

Senghor wrote on politics, philosophy, sociology, and linguistics: He also produced several volumes of poetry, notably *Chants d'ombre* (Shadow Songs, 1945), *Nocturnes* (Nocturnes, 1961), and *The Collected Poetry*

(translated by Melvin Dixon, 1991). He co-founded the journal *Presence Africaine* with Alioune Diop, and edited an anthology of work by African poets in French colonies: *Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malagache* (Anthology of the New Negro and Malagasy Poetry, 1945).

Aimé Fernand Césaire (1913-2008) was a Martinican poet, playwright, and politician, a co-founder of the Négritude movement, but one who gradually embraced black militancy in a series of powerful plays that held out little hope for immediate change. Césaire was born in Basse-Pointe, Martinique, studied in Paris, but returned to his country of birth to join the struggle for independence. In 1945 he became mayor of Fort de France, a post he held until 2001. In 1946, Césaire became a deputy for Martinique in the French National Assembly. From 1946 to 1956 he was a member of the Communist Party, where he took as uncompromising a stand as his Surrealist poems of the period, which are laden with African imagery. The fiery poems of *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Return to My Native Land, 1939-45) and *Soleil cou-coupé* (Cutthroat Sun, 1948), which lashed out against colonial oppression, are among the best known of modern French literature.

The bulk of Césaire's work thereafter was for the theatre. *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* (The Tragedy of King Christophe, 1963), was a drama of decolonization in 19th-century Haiti, and his *Une Saison au Congo* (A Season in the Congo, 1966), was an epic of the 1960 Congo rebellion and assassination of Patrice Lumumba. The first

was an international success, but throughout the 40s, 50s and 60s, Césaire was prominent in both literature and politics.



Maurice Blanchard (1890-1960) : La poussière, les années

Il vit dans les flammes. Il ne se brûle pas, la réalité le protège. Le hasard est son maître, et la mort sa passion. La compassion, c'est la pire injure et vous ne pouvez rien, ni pour lui, ni contre lui. Surtout ne le plaignez pas, il vous tuerait ! Ce fut un enfant abandonné sur un fagot d'épines. Ce fut un adolescent sans espoir et sans lumière. Ce fut une taupe dans son royaume souterrain et la terre lui fut un refuge contre la bassesse du ciel. La cause première des orages c'est le vent qui rend les cavales folles, elles aussi. C'est le vent qui emporte les arbres au paradis. Les arbres, la fleur et la semence. Et les serpents aussi. Ceux qui font que notre cœur éclate.

Les Barricades mystérieuses 1956

## Maurice Blanchard: The dust, the years

He lives in the flames. He doesn't get burned, reality protects him. Chance is his master, and death his passion. Compassion is the worst insult and you can do nothing, neither for him, nor against him. Above all, don't feel sorry for him, he would kill you! He was a child abandoned on a bundle of thorns. He was a teenager without hope and without light. He was a mole in his underground kingdom and the earth was a refuge for him from the baseness of heaven. The primary cause of thunderstorms is the wind that drives the cavemen crazy, too. It is the wind that carries the trees to paradise. The trees, the flower and the seed. And snakes too. The ones that make our hearts burst.

Francis Ponge: (1899-1988) : L'huître

L'huître, de la grosseur d'un galet moyen, est d'une apparence plus rugueuse, d'une couleur moins unie, brillamment blanchâtre. C'est un monde opiniâtrement clos. Pourtant on peut l'ouvrir : il faut alors la tenir au creux d'un torchon, se servir d'un couteau ébréché et peu franc, s'y reprendre à plusieurs fois. Les doigts curieux s'y coupent, s'y cassent les ongles : c'est un travail grossier. Les coups qu'on lui porte marquent son enveloppe de ronds blancs, d'une sorte de halos.

A l'intérieur l'on trouve tout un monde, à boire et à manger : sous un firmament (à proprement parler) de nacre, les cieux d'en dessus s'affaissent sur les cieux d'en dessous, pour ne plus former qu'une mare, un sachet visqueux et verdâtre, qui flue et reflue à l'odeur et à la vue, frangé d'une dentelle noirâtre sur les bords.

Parfois très rare une formule perle à leur gosier de nacre, d'où l'on trouve aussitôt à s'orner.

Le parti pris des choses 1942

[Audio recording](#)

## Francis Ponge: : The oyster

The oyster, the size of a medium pebble, is of a rougher appearance, of a less solid color, brilliantly whitish. It is a stubbornly closed world. However, it can be opened: you then have to hold it in the hollow of a tea towel, use a chipped and not very forthright knife, repeat it several times. Curious fingers cut themselves there, break their nails there: it's a rude job. The blows that we give him mark his envelope with white circles, with a kind of halos.

Inside there is a whole world, to drink and eat: under a firmament (strictly speaking) of mother-of-pearl, the heavens above collapse on the heavens below, to no longer form a pond, a viscous and greenish sachet, which flushes and reflects at the smell and at the sight, fringed with a blackish lace around the edges.

Sometimes very rarely a pearl develops in their mother-of-pearl gullet, which we immediately find to adorn ourselves.

## Francis Ponge : L'Orange

Comme dans l'éponge il y a dans l'orange une aspiration à reprendre contenance après avoir subi l'épreuve de l'expression. Mais où l'éponge réussit toujours, l'orange jamais : car ses cellules ont éclaté, ses tissus se sont déchirés. Tandis que l'écorce seule se rétablit mollement dans sa forme grâce à son élasticité, un liquide d'ambre s'est répandu, accompagné de rafraîchissement, de parfums suaves, certes, -- mais souvent aussi de la conscience amère d'une expulsion prématurée de pépins.

Faut-il prendre parti entre ces deux manières de mal supporter l'oppression ? -- L'éponge n'est que muscle et se remplit de vent, d'eau propre ou d'eau sale selon : cette gymnastique est ignoble. L'orange a meilleurs goûts, mais elle est trop passive, -- et ce sacrifice odorant... c'est faire à l'oppresseur trop bon compte vraiment.

Mais ce n'est pas assez avoir dit de l'orange que d'avoir rappelé sa façon particulière de parfumer l'air et de réjouir son bourreau. Il faut mettre l'accent sur la coloration glorieuse du liquide qui en résulte et qui, mieux que le jus de citron, oblige le larynx à s'ouvrir largement pour la prononciation du mot comme pour l'ingestion du liquide, sans aucune moue appréhensive de l'avant-bouche dont il ne fait pas hérissier les papilles.

## Ponge : The Orange

As in the sponge, there is a desire in the orange to regain its shape after having undergone its compressive test. But while the sponge always succeeds, the orange never does, for its cells have burst and the tissues have torn. The rind alone is slowly recovering its shape owing to its elasticity, while a tawny liquid has spread, accompanied a refreshing and sweet smell, of course, but also the bitter consciousness of premature ejaculation of seeds.

Should we take sides in these two ways of poorly endured oppression? The sponge is only muscle and fills with air, with clean or dirty water accordingly: the gymnastics are despicable. The orange has the better taste, but it is too passive — and the fragrant sacrifice . . . it's in making its tormenter feel good that really counts.

But not enough has been said of the orange in having recalled its particular way of perfuming the air and pleasing its tormentor. We need to emphasize the glorious coloring of the squeezed-out liquid and which, better than lemon juice, forces the larynx to open wide for the pronunciation of the word as for the ingestion of the liquid, without any anxious pout of the fore-mouth whose taste buds do not appreciatively bristle.

Et l'on demeure au reste sans paroles pour avouer l'admiration que suscite l'enveloppe du tendre, fragile et rose ballon ovale dans cet épais tampon-buvard humide dont l'épiderme extrêmement mince mais très pigmenté, acerbement sapide, est juste assez rugueux pour accrocher dignement la lumière sur la parfaite forme du fruit.

Mais à la fin d'une trop courte étude, menée aussi rondement que possible, -- il faut en venir au pépin. Ce grain, de la forme d'un minuscule citron, offre à l'extérieur la couleur du bois blanc de citronnier, à l'intérieur un vert de pois ou de germe tendre. C'est en lui que se retrouvent, après l'explosion sensationnelle de la lanterne vénitienne de saveurs, couleurs, et parfums que constitue le ballon fruité lui-même, -- la dureté relative et la verdeur (non d'ailleurs entièrement insipide) du bois, de la branche, de la feuille : somme toute petite quoique avec certitude la raison d'être du fruit.

Le parti pris des choses 1942

[Audio recordings](#)

And we remain speechless of the admiration aroused by the envelope of the tender, fragile and pink oval balloon in this thick wet blotting pad whose extremely thin but well-pigmented epidermis, acerbically pleasant, is just rough enough to hold the light on the perfect shape of the fruit with dignity.

But at the end of a too short study, conducted as roundly as possible, — we must come to the pip. This grain, in the shape of a tiny lemon, offers on the outside the color of the white lemon tree wood, on the inside a green pea or tender germ. It is in it that we find, after the sensational explosion of the Venetian lantern of flavors, colors, and perfumes that constitutes the fruit-rich balloon itself, — the relative hardness and the greenness (not entirely tasteless by the way) of the wood, the branch, the leaf: in short, the very small although with certainty the *raison d'être* of the fruit.

Jules Supervielle (1884-1960 ) : Mouvement

Ce cheval qui tourna la tête  
Vit ce que nul n'a jamais vu  
Puis il continua de paître  
À l'ombre des eucalyptus.

Ce n'était ni homme ni arbre  
Ce n'était pas une jument  
Ni même un souvenir de vent  
Qui s'exerçait sur du feuillage.

C'était ce qu'un autre cheval,  
Vingt mille siècles avant lui,  
Ayant soudain tourné la tête  
Aperçut à cette heure-ci.

Et ce que nul ne reverra,  
Homme, cheval, poisson, insecte,  
Jusqu'à ce que le sol ne soit  
Que le reste d'une statue  
Sans bras, sans jambes et sans tête.

Gravitations 1925

## Jules Supervielle : Movement

Here the horse that's turned its head  
inhabiting nothing seen,  
silently it's grazing, clad  
with the eucalyptus shade.

It was neither man nor tree,  
nor likewise was it made a mare,  
no recollecting wind was there  
exercising in the leaves.

It was another horse and one  
that twenty centuries eclipsed,  
which of a sudden turned its head  
and in the instant saw itself.

So one that no one sees again,  
that man, horse, fish, insect bred,  
until the ground is nothing but  
the remnants of a stature that  
is lacking arms and legs and head.

Jules Supervielle : Les Amis inconnus

Il vous naît un poisson qui se met à tourner  
Tout de suite au plus noir d'une lame profonde,  
Il vous naît une étoile au-dessus de la tête,  
Elle voudrait chanter mais ne peut faire mieux  
Que ses sœurs de la nuit, les étoiles muettes.

Il vous naît un oiseau dans la force de l'âge,  
En plein vol, et cachant votre histoire en son cœur  
Puisqu'il n'a que son cri d'oiseau pour la montrer.  
Il vole sur les bois, se choisit une branche  
Et s'y pose ; on dirait qu'elle est comme les autres.

Où courent-ils ainsi ces lièvres, ces belettes,  
Il n'est pas de chasseur encor dans la contrée,  
Et quelle peur les hante et les fait se hâter,  
L'écureuil qui devient feuille et bois dans sa fuite,  
La biche et le chevreuil soudain déconcertés ?

Il vous naît un ami, et voilà qu'il vous cherche  
Il ne connaîtra pas votre nom ni vos yeux,  
Mais il faudra qu'il soit touché comme les autres  
Et loge dans son cœur d'étranges battements  
Qui lui viennent de jours qu'il n'aura pas vécus.

## Jules Supervielle : The Unknown Friends

You are born a fish that starts spinning  
Immediately at the blackest of a deep blade,  
A star is born above your head,  
She would like to sing but can't do better  
Than her sisters of the night, the silent stars.

A bird is born to you in the prime of life,  
In full flight, and hiding your story in its heart  
Since it only has its bird's cry to show it.  
It flies on the woods, chooses a branch for itself  
And asks itself there; it seems that it is like the others.

Where are these hares, these weasels running to,  
There is not a hunter in the country yet,  
And what fear haunts them and makes them hurry,  
The squirrel that becomes leaf and wood in its flight,  
Are the doe and the deer suddenly confused?

A friend is born to you, and now he is looking for you  
He won't know your name or your eyes,  
But he will have to be touched like the others  
And lodges in his heart strange beats  
Which come to him from days that he will not have lived.

Et vous, que faites-vous, ô visage troublé,  
Par ces brusques passants, ces bêtes, ces oiseaux,  
Vous qui vous demandez, vous, toujours sans nouvelles ;  
« Si je croise jamais un des amis lointains  
Au mal que je lui fis, vais-je le reconnaître ? »

Pardon pour vous, pardon pour eux, pour le silence  
Et les mots inconsiderés,  
Pour les phrases venant de lèvres inconnues  
Qui vous touchent de loin comme balles perdues,  
Et pardon pour les fronts qui semblent oublieux.

Les Amis inconnus 1934

[Audio recording](#)

And you, what are you doing, O troubled face,  
By these sudden passers-by, these beasts, these birds,  
You who wonder, you, always without news ;  
"If I ever run into one of the distant friends  
The harm I did there, will I recognize it? »

Sorry for you, sorry for them, for the silence  
And the inconsiderate words,  
For phrases coming from unknown lips  
That hit you from afar like stray bullets,  
And sorry for the fronts that seem forgetful.

Yves Bonnefoy (1923-2016) : Rue Traversière

Quand j'étais enfant je m'inquiétais beaucoup d'une certaine rue Traversière. Car à une de ses entrées, pas trop loin de notre maison et de l'école, c'était le monde ordinaire, tandis qu'à l'autre, là-bas... Cependant que ce nom troué de feux m'assurait qu'elle était bien le passage.

Et je regardais donc de tous mes yeux à droite et à gauche quand nous la prenions, car cela nous arrivait, à des jours, et même pour aller jusqu'au bout, comme si c'eût été une rue quelconque, mais je parvenais là fatigué, un peu endormi, et c'était soudain l'espace bizarre du grand jardin botanique. - Est-ce ici, m'étais-je dit à plusieurs moments, que là-bas commence? Ici, dans cette maison don't les volets sont fermés? Ici, sous l'îles lilas? Et dans ce groupe d'enfants qui jouent, au cerceau, aux billes, sur le trottoir déjointé par l'herbe, l'un n'est-il pas déjà de l'autre bord, ne touch-t-il pas les mains de petites filles d'ici avec des doigts de ténèbre? Notions certes contradictoires, fuyantes. D'autant que ces pavillons, ces voûtes d'arrière-cour, ne se distinguaient nullement de beaucoup d'autres de notre ville, on n'y sentait, on n'y respirait jusqu'aux dernières orbes de tôle peinte que le surcroît de torpeur des banlieues un peu potagères. Ah, que ce qui importe a peu de visage! Arrivé au jardin, qui a des noms inscrits sous chaque arbre, dans l'odeur autre, je parais en courant, soudain réveillé, je voulais aller loin, entrer ailleurs, mais les allées bordées de petits arceaux devaient bien tourner, dans l'ombre du buis, et se renouer à leur origine, car je me retrouvais vite au point de départ, cette fois encore.

## Yves Bonnefoy : Crossing Street

When I was a child I worried a lot about a certain Ferry street. Because at one of its entrances, not too far from our house and the school, it was the ordinary world, while at the other, there... However, this name full of lights assured me that she was indeed the passage.

And so I looked with all my eyes to the right and to the left when we took it, because it happened to us, for days, and even to go to the end, as if it had been some kind of street, but I arrived there tired, a little sleepy, and suddenly it was the weird space of the great botanical garden. - Is it here, I had said to myself at several moments, that over there begins? Here, in this house, whose flights are closed? Here, under the lilac trees? And in this group of children who are playing, with a hoop, with marbles, on the sidewalk laid out by the grass, isn't one already on the other side, won't he touch the hands of little girls from here with dark fingers? Certainly contradictory, elusive notions. Especially since these pavilions, these backyard vaults, were in no way distinguishable from many others in our city, we felt there, we breathed there until the last sheets of painted sheet metal only the added torpor of the somewhat vegetable-growing suburbs. Ah, that what matters has little face! Arrived at the garden, which has names inscribed under each tree, in the other smell, I seemed to be running, suddenly awake, I wanted to go far away, enter somewhere else, but the paths lined with small arches had to turn well, in the shadow of the boxwood, and reconnect with their origin, because I quickly found myself at the starting point, this time again.

Quel bien m'a fait ce nom de rue Traversiere; et ce jardin des  
essences; et ce latin végétal dans les soirs de chaleur  
humide!

*From Rue Traversiere et autre récits en rêve 1977*

What a good thing this name of Ferry street did to me; and  
this garden of essences; and this vegetable Latin in the  
humid heat of evenings!

Yves Bonnefoy (1923-2016) La maison natal

1

Je m'éveillai, c'était la maison natal,  
L'écume s'abattait sur le rocher,  
Pas un oiseau, le vent seul à ouvrir la fenêtre et fermer la  
vague;  
L'odeur de l'horizon de toute parts,  
Cendre, comme si les collines cachaient un feu  
Qui ailleurs consumait un univers.  
Je passai dans la véranda, la table était mise,  
L'eau frappait les pieds de la la table, le buffet.  
Il fallait qu'elle entrât pourtant, la sans visage  
Que je savais qui secouait la porte  
Du couloir, du côté de l'escalier sombre, mais en vain,  
Si haute était déjà l'eau dans la salle.  
Je tournais la poignée, qui résistait,  
J'entendais presque les rumeurs de l'autre rive,  
Ces rires des enfants dans l'herbe haute,  
Ces jeux des autres, à jamais les autres, dans leur joie.

Les planches courbes 2001

## Yves Bonnefoy : House of Birth

### One

I woke up. It was my house of birth,  
The foam was splashing against the rock.  
Not one bird, only the wind to open the window, fold the  
wave;  
everywhere was that horizon smell,  
ash, as if the hills concealed a fire  
which, besides, was eating up the universe.  
Going to the veranda, I found the table set,  
the water hitting the table legs and sideboard.  
She had to come in, the faceless one,  
the one I knew was shaking the door  
from the corridor, from the side of the dark stairs, but in  
vain,  
so high was the water already in the room.  
I turned the handle, which resisted me;  
I was almost hearing rumors from the other shore,  
the children's laughter in the long grass,  
the games of others, always others, in their joy.

Leopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001 ) À New-York (Pour un orchestre de jazz : solo de trompette)

I

New York ! D'abord j'ai été confondu par ta beauté, ces grandes filles d'or aux jambes longues.

Si timide d'abord devant tes yeux de métal bleu, ton sourire de givre.

Si timide. Et l'angoisse au fond des rues à gratte-ciel  
Levant des yeux de chouette parmi l'éclipse du soleil.  
Sulfureuse ta lumière et les fût livides, dont les têtes foudroient le ciel.

Les gratte-ciel qui défient les cyclones sur leurs muscles d'acier et leur peau patinée de pierres.

Mais quinze jours sur les trottoirs chauves de Manhattan –  
C'est au bout de la troisième semaine que vous saisit la fièvre en un bond de jaguar

Quinze jours sans un puits ni pâturage, tous les oiseaux de l'air

Tombant soudain et morts sous les hautes cendres des terrasses.

Pas un rire d'enfant en fleur, sa main dans ma main fraîche.

Pas un sein maternel, des jambes de nylon. Des jambes et des seins sans sueur ni odeur.

Pas un mot tendre en l'absence de lèvres, rien que des coeurs artificiels pavés en monnaie forte.

Et pas un livre où lire la sagesse. La palette du peintre fleurit des cristaux de corail.

## Leopold Sedar Senghor To New York

I

New York! At first I was confused by your beauty, these tall golden girls with long legs.

So shy at first in front of your blue metal eyes, your frosty smile.

So shy. And the anguish at the bottom of the skyscraper streets

Owl looking up among the eclipse of the sun.

Sulphurous your light and the livid souls, whose heads thunder the sky.

The skyscrapers that defy the cyclones on their steel muscles and their stone-patinated skin.

But a fortnight on the bald sidewalks of Manhattan –

It is at the end of the third week that you seize the fever in a jaguar leap

A fortnight without a well or pasture, all the birds of the air

Suddenly falling and dead under the high ashes of the terraces.

Not a child's laugh in bloom, his hand in my fresh hand.

Not a mother's breast, nylon legs. Legs and breasts without sweat or smell.

Not a tender word in the absence of lips, nothing but artificial hearts paved in hard currency.

And not a book in which to read wisdom. The painter's palette blooms with coral crystals.

Nuits d'insomnie ô nuits de Manhattan ! si agitées de feux follets, tandis que les klaxons hurlent des heures vides Et que les eaux obscures charrient des amours hygiéniques, tels des fleuves en crue des cadavres d'enfants

Éthiopiennes 1956

[Audio recording](#)

Sleepless nights o Manhattan nights! so agitated with  
wisps of fire, while the horns scream empty hours And the  
dark waters carry hygienic loves, like rivers in flood the  
corpses of children

Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) : N'ayez point pitié

Fumez marais

les images rupestres de l'inconnu

vers moi détournent le silencieux crépuscule

de leur rire

Fumez ô marais cœur d'oursin

les étoiles mortes apaisées par des mains merveilleuses

jaillissent de la pulpe de mes yeux

Fumez fumez

l'obscurité fragile de ma voix craque de cités flamboyantes

et la pureté irrésistible de ma main appelle de loin de

très loin du patrimoine héréditaire le zèle victorieux de

l'acide dans la chair de la vie - marais -

telle une vipère née de la force blonde de

l'éblouissement.

Soleil cou coupe 1948 [Audio recording](#)

Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) : Have no mercy

Smoke.

the cave images of the unknown  
to me turn away the silent twilight  
from their laughter

Smoke o marsh heart of sea urchin  
the dead stars soothed by wonderful hands  
spring from the pulp of my eyes

Smoke smoke

the fragile darkness of my voice cracks with blazing cities  
and the irresistible purity of my hand calls from afar from  
very far from the hereditary patrimony the victorious zeal  
of the acid in the flesh of life - swamp -

like a viper born of the blond force of

the glare.

## POST WAR POETRY

Influenced by critical theory, which saw all literary compositions as simply texts not wholly under the control of their author, merely sequences of words that constantly deferred to each other, French poetry from the 60s gradually changed in style and audience. It was too arbitrary and self-knowing to appeal to the general reading public, and came increasingly to be written by academic poets for other academic poets, where their explication in academic journals, translation into English and other languages, and promotion by literary institutions became a necessary part of the reading experience.

Indeed the critical commentaries, by appearing as a nebulous web of important names, tend to resemble the poems themselves, i.e. to be exceedingly difficult to pin down. Very often they are intended to be that way, resisting any single interpretation, just as language itself — from post-Modernist perspectives — is ambiguous, self-creative and independent of the writer. Clearly, this not poetry as the word was once understood: the poems do not aim for beauty of expression or strong emotive effect. They are an intelligent attempt to overcome perceived difficulties in the western literary tradition, and have gained a small but devoted following.

As in America, where contemporary poets experienced equally dwindling readerships, the literary scene naturally

ran the danger of becoming an exclusive club, entered by prestigious awards and appointments rather than any self-evident and appealing merit. But popularity was immaterial. The stress was on novelty, of thwarting or transcending boundaries, of including adventitious matter that had not previously belonged to poetry. Practitioners did not stoop to justify their work, or even explain it, but strove to be challengingly original, up-to-date and distinctive, carving out new territories in the fields of art and culture that are seen as the birthright of every educated French person.

The background to this new poetry was still Surrealism, but not a Surrealism that disclosed the contents of actual consciousness. Much of the real world was too painful to contemplate, particularly the German occupation, and the widespread settling of accounts afterwards. The Algerian War also added political division to a fractured world, one grappling with disillusionment, alienation, and diminished meaning. Post war poetry broke from traditional structures, favoring free verse, fragmented syntax, and typographical experimentation, often creating a parallel world that could be mundane and arbitrary, illusory even, but was made from fragments of life as most people saw it. As was the case with contemporary music, means were devised to find words and phrases that had no connection with previous art forms, even if the results were even more escapist and challenging to the baffled common reader.

Contemporary French poems have gained respect, but hardly a place in our everyday lives. Indeed, through Symbolism, Surrealism and now the ponderings on the nature of language, French poetry has become an over intellectualised, possibly life-denying pursuit. Outside the psychoanalysis business, few now believe in the works of the Unconscious, or the value of dreams. Nor are the concepts of the new critical theory itself, generally taken as self-evident in poems and critical articles, without their critics. Interested readers should research, through internet philosophy sites, the views of Quine, Donaldson, Kripke, Putnam, Nagal, and of pragmatism generally. {1} We are not living in the 'prison house of language', but communicating with each other in well established means, customs and learned behaviours.

Andre du Bouchet (1924-2001) was born in Paris of French and Russian blood, but in 1940 moved to America, where he taught at Amherst College. Return seemed strange, as though French were a foreign language, but Bouchet divided his time between Paris and a small village in the Drôme, where he is buried. His books of poetry include *Air* (Air, 1950), *Dans le chaleur vacante* (In the vacant Heat, 1959), *Sur le pas* (On the Step, 1959), *La Lumiere et la lame* (The Light and the Blade, 1962) *Pourquoi si calmes* (Why so Calm, 1996) and *L'Emportement du muet* (The Mute's Abduction, 2000).

Édouard Glissant (1928-2011) was born and grew up in Martinique, whose independence movement he furthered during his 1945-65 sojourn in France. After his *Un champ*

*d'îles* (A Field of Islands, 1952) and *La Terre inquiète* (The Earth is Worried, 1954) collections of poems, Glissant won the Prix Renaudot for his first novel *La Lézarde* (The Lizard) in 1958. Back in Martinique (1965-80) saw him found the Institut Martiniquais d'Études and produce essays, a novel and more poetry collections. In 1980, Glissant returned to France, becoming the chief editor of the UNESCO Courier. After 1988, Glissant served as visiting professor at several American universities and produced more poetry collections, notably *Les Grands Chaos* (The Great Chaos, 1993) and *Une nouvelle région du monde* (A New Region of the World, 2006).

Jacques Roubaud (1932–2024) was poet, novelist, mathematician, and a key figure in the Oulipo group, known for its experimental, constraint-based writing. Roubaud was born in Caluire-et-Cuire, France, earned PhDs in mathematics and French literature, and taught at the University of Paris X Nanterre. His writings blend mathematical structures with poetry, prose, and autobiography, often exploring themes of memory, loss, and form. He joined Oulipo in 1966, invited by Raymond Queneau, and co-founded the Atelier de Littérature Assistée par les Mathématiques et les Ordinateurs (ALAMO). Roubaud has published collaborative works, but his individual collections of poetry include *Quelque chose noir* (Something Black, 1986), *Le Grand Incendie: La Forme d'une ville change plus vite, hélas, que le foyer des humains* (The Great Fire: the Shape of a City changes faster, alas, than the Hearth of Humanity, 1999).

Nguyễn Hoàng Bảo Việt (1934-) is a Vietnamese poet, writer, and human rights advocate known for his poignant and socially engaged work. He studied anthropology and sociology at the University of Saigon but was imprisoned for his political views, eventually escaping as one of the boat people to Djakarta in 1979. Nguyễn and his family then moved to Geneva, Switzerland. He has published four volumes of poetry and prose poetry, which often reflects themes of justice, freedom, and human dignity, drawing from his experiences in Vietnam and his critiques of oppression. His *Dau Tich Phuong Hoang* (The Footprint of the Phoenix) was published in 2008.

Philippe Jaccottet (1925-2021) was born in Moudon, attended school and university in Lausanne, and published his first book of poetry *L'aigraie et Autres Poésies* (The Sour Patch and Other Poems) in 1953. With Yves Bonnefoy, André du Bouchet and Francis Ponge, Jaccottet belonged to the post-war generation that made a fluid, lyrical poetry from everyday observation. He was also a noted literary critic and translator from the Greek, German, Italian and Spanish, for which received the Grand National Translation Prize in 1987. He was awarded the Goncourt Poetry Prize in 2003.

Jacques Dupin (1927-2012) spent his childhood in Ardèche, and, when his father died, in Lyon, leaving the city to study law in Paris. Part of his study hours were also devoted to writing, often on contemporary art. He got to know Miró and Tàpies well, was introduced to various gallery owners, but most importantly to Char, who wrote

the preface to his his first published collection: *Cendrier du voyage* (Ashtray of the Voyage). Thereafter, Dupin was much involved in art criticism and poetry, associating with Gaétan Picon, Louis-René des Forêts, Yves Bonnefoy and André du Bouchet. He died on Paris, at the age of 85.

Michel Deguy (1930-2022) was poet, philosopher and professor emeritus of literature at the University of Paris. He founded the magazine *Poesie* in 1977, chaired the International College of Philosophy from 1989 to 1992, and the House of Writers from 1992 to 1998. Deguy is the recipient of many prestigious prizes and the author of frequent collections, including *Les Meurtrières* (The Murderers, 1959), *Fragment du cadastre* (Fragment of the Cadastre, 1960), *Poèmes de la presqu'île* (Poems from the Peninsula, 1961), *Acts* (Hearsay, 1966) *Tombeau de Du Bellay* (At the Tomb of Du Bella, 1973), *Gisants* (Lying, 1985), *Aux heures d'affluence* (At Busy Times, 1993), *L'Énergie du désespoir* (The Energy of Despair, 1999), *La Raison poétique* (Poetic Reason, 2000), *L'Envergure des comparses* (The Scale of the Companions, 2017), and *La Commaison* (Commaison, 2022). Poetry for Deguy is the surveyor of the universe, a reason for life, and yet a questioning of the Earth and its future.

Claude Esteban (1935-2006) was poet, essayist and the translator of Guillén, Paz, Borges, Quevedo, Borges and Lorca. He was the winner of many literary prizes, including the First France Culture Award and the Prix Goncourt. Esteban was of mixed French and Spanish

parentage, studied at the *École normale supérieure*, settled in Tangier and then Paris, eventually becoming friendly with Guillén, Bonnefoy and Char. He wrote numerous articles for the *Mercure de France* and the *Nouvelle Revue française*, on both poets and painters, the last helped by marriage to the painter Denise Simon. Many of his prefaces to exhibitions by Morandi, Uzac, Szenes, Vieira da Silva, Aguayo, Sima, Fernández, Assar, Braque, le Brocqy, Asse, Bazaine And Chagall were later published separately. Illuminating essays on Velázquez, Goya, Greco, Claude Lorrain, Rembrandt, Murillo and Caravaggio also came from his pen.

Roger Giroux (1925-1974) was a poet and translator of many English authors, including Yeats, Durrell, O'Brian and Henry Miller. The only poetry collection published in his lifetime, *Arbre le temps* (Tree of Time, 1964) won the Max Jacob prize, but his poems did appear in the Random House Book of Twentieth-Century French Poetry. Several collections appeared posthumously.

Emmanuel Hocquard (1940-2019) was born in Cannes, and died at Mérilheu in the Hautes-Pyrénées. He became the editor of the small *Orange Export Ltd* that produced anthologies of modern American poets. Hocquard himself translated American and Portuguese poets into French and had his own poetry translated into English. He was also the author of various essays and one novel.

Jean Daive (1941-) is a prolific poet and translator, but is also well known as a radio producer at France Culture, the president of *the centre international de poésie 'Marseille'*,

and as the founder and editor of four successive poetry journals. His first publication, *Décimale blanche* (Blank decimal), came out in 1967, and subsequent collections like *Narration d'équilibre* (Balanced Narrative), *Trilogie du Temps* (Trilogy of Time) and *La Condition d'infini* (The Condition of Infinity) have explored specific concepts in depth.

Marcelin Pleynet, (1933 -) poet, art critic, essayist and novelist, was born in Lyon, and became a key figure in the avant-garde literary scene, serving as Managing Editor of the influential magazine *Tel Quel* from 1962 to 1982 and co-editing *L'Infini* with Philippe Sollers from 1983. Pleynet's poetry is noted for its experimental style, often exploring non-referentiality and incorporating narrative discontinuities, as seen in works like *Provisoires amants des nègres* (Temporary Lovers of Blacks, 1962), which earned him the Prix Fénéon. Other poetry collections include *Le Póntos* (The Pontos, 2002) and *L'Étendue musicale* (The Musical Extent, 2014). He has also published novels like *Prise d'otage* (Hostage Situation), eight volumes of a literary journal, and many essays on 20th-century art, focusing on figures like Henri Matisse and Robert Motherwell.

Jean-Michel Maulpoix (1952 -), the author of over twenty books of poetry, was born in Montbeliard, and was Professor of French at the University of Paris X at Nanterre. He has published many studies on contemporary literature, particularly on the work of Michaux, Réda and Char. Recent collections of poetry include *l'Écrivain imaginaire* (The Imaginary Writer,

1994), *Chute de pluie fine* (Light Rain, 2002) and *Boulevard des Capucines* (2006).

Amina Said (1953- ) was born in Tunis and moved to Paris in 1978, where she still lives, giving recitals of her work and helping the careers of younger writers. She is a noted translator, especially of novels and short stories by the Philipino Fransisco Sionil José. Recent collections of Said's poetry are *La Douleur des seuils* (The Pain of Thresholds, 2002) and *Au présent du monde* (In the Present World, 2006)



André du Bouchet ( 1924-2001) : Accidents

J'ai erré autour de cette lueur.

Je me suis déchiré, une nouvelle fois, de l'autre côté de ce mur,  
comme l'air que tu vois,

à cette lueur froide.

De l'autre côté du mur, je vois le même air aveuglant.

Dans le lointain sans rupture, comme  
l'étendue même  
de la terre entrecoupée que, plus loin, je foule,  
nul ne sent la chaleur.

Nous serons lavés de notre visage,  
comme l'air qui couronne le mur.

Dans la chaleur vacante 1961 / Fata Morgana 1975

André du Bouchet: Accidents

I wandered around this glow.  
I tore myself apart, once again, on the other side of this  
wall,  
like the air you see,

to that cold glow.

On the other side of the wall, I see the same blinding air.

In the distance without a break, like the very  
expanse  
of the interspersed earth that, further on, I am treading,  
no one feels the heat.

We will be washed off our face,  
like the air that crowns the wall.

Édouard Glissant (1944-2025) : Pour Mycéa

Si la nuit te dépose au plus haut de la mer  
N'offense en toi la mer par échouage des anciens dieux  
Seules les fleurs savent comme on gravit l'éternité  
Nous t'appelons terre blessée ô combien notre temps  
Sera bref, ainsi l'eau dont on ne voit le lit  
Chanson d'eau empilée sur l'eau du triste soir  
Tu es douce à celui que tu éloignes de ta nuit  
Tel un gravier trop lourd enfoui aux grèves de minuit  
J'ai mené ma rame entre les îles je t'ai nommée  
Loin avant que tu m'aies désigné pour asile et souffle  
Je t'ai nommée Insaisissable et Toute-enfuie  
Ton rire a séparé les eaux bleues des eaux inconnues

Pays rêvé, pays réel 1985

[Audio recording](#)

Édouard Glissant : For Mycea

If the night drops you off at the top of the sea  
Do not offend the sea in yourself by stranding the old gods  
Only flowers know how we climb eternity  
We call you wounded earth oh how our time  
Will be brief, so the water whose bed we cannot see  
Water song piled on the water of the sad evening  
You are sweet to the one you keep away from your night  
Like too heavy gravel buried in the midnight strikes  
I led my oar between the islands I named you  
Far before you designated me for asylum and breath  
I named you Elusive and All-fled  
Your laughter separated the blue waters from the unknown  
waters

Jacques Roubaud (1932-2024) : Dès que je me lève

Dès que je me lève (quatre heures et demie, cinq heures), je prends mon bol sur la table de la cuisine. Je l'ai posé là la veille, pour ne pas trop bouger dans la cuisine, pour minimiser le bruit de mes déplacements.

Je continue de le faire, jour après jour, moins par habitude que par refus de la mort d'une habitude. Être silencieux n'a plus la moindre importance.

Je verse un fond de café en poudre, de la marque ZAMA filtre, que j'achète en grands verres de 200 grammes au supermarché FRANPRIX, en face du métro Saint-Paul. Pour le même poids, cela coûte à peu près un tiers de moins que les marques plus fameuses, Nescafé, ou Maxwell. Le goût lui-même est largement un tiers pire que celui du nescafé le plus grossier non lyophilisé, qui n'est déjà par mal dans son genre.

Je remplis mon bol au robinet d'eau chaude de l'évier.

Je porte le bol lentement sur la table, le tenant entre mes deux mains qui tremblent le moins possible, et je m'assieds sur la chaise de la cuisine, le dos à la fenêtre, face au frigidaire et à la porte, face au fauteuil, laid et vide, qui est de l'autre côté de la table.

Jacques Roubaud : As soon as I get up

As soon as I get up (half past four, five o'clock), I take my bowl from the kitchen table. I put it there the day before, so as not to move too much in the kitchen, to minimize the noise of my movements.

I continue to do it, day after day, less out of habit than out of refusal of the death of a habit. Being silent no longer matters in the slightest.

I pour a ground coffee powder, from the ZAMA filtre brand, which I buy in large glasses of 200 grams at the FRANPRIX supermarket, opposite the Saint-Paul metro station. For the same weight, it costs about a third less than the more famous brands, Nescafé, or Maxwell. The taste itself is largely a third worse than that of the coarsest non-freeze-dried nescafe, which is already not bad in its genre.

I fill my bowl at the hot water tap of the sink.

I carry the bowl slowly to the table, holding it between my two hands, which shake as little as possible, and I sit down on the kitchen chair, with my back to the window, facing the fridge and the door, facing the ugly and empty armchair, which is on the other side of the table.

À la surface du liquide, des archipels de poudre brune deviennent des îles noires bordées d'une boue crémeuse qui sombrent lentement, horribles.

Je pense : « Et l'affreuse crème/Près des bois flottants/. »

Je ne mange rien, je bois seulement le grand bol d'eau à peine plus que tiède et caféinée. Le liquide est un peu amer, un peu caramélisé, pas agréable.

Je l'avale et je reste un moment immobile à regarder, au fond du bol, la tache noire d'un reste de poudre mal dissoute.

Quelque chose noir 1986

[Audio recording](#)

On the surface of the liquid, archipelagos of brown powder become black islands bordered by a creamy mud that slowly sink, horrible.

I think: "And the awful cream/Near the driftwood/. »

I don't eat anything, I only drink the large bowl of barely more than lukewarm and caffeinated water. The liquid is a little bitter, a little caramelized, not pleasant.

I swallow it and I remain motionless for a moment, staring, at the bottom of the bowl, at the black spot of a poorly dissolved powder residue.

Nguyên Hoàng Bao Viêt (1934-) : Recueils de Poèmes  
"l'Espérance" Anne Frank (Extrait)

Tenant par le bras l'âme de la défunte  
Victime d'une mort douloureuse et injuste  
Inlassable, je chemine, silencieux.  
Jamais je ne me suis senti si solitaire  
Trois générations de vies humaines  
Par troupes incessantes, sont noyées sans pitié  
Dans une mer de sang !  
Aucune étoile dans la voûte céleste  
N'est donc plus minuscule que moi.

Ainsi, je vais en quête de l'Amour humain  
Non encore manifesté  
Sur les lèvres, par le sourire, dans les regards.  
L'humanité  
N'imaginez pas que ce soit une chaumière délabrée  
Et abandonnée  
Là, je n'aimerais pas me précipiter, pour y trouver refuge.  
L'humanité  
Regardez comme elle est dessinée !  
Par la voûte dorsale de la terre embrasée de feu  
Par Varsovie écrasée et détruite  
Ces wagons bondés de déportés  
Ce portrait d'Hitler  
Six millions de Juifs et compagnons de route disparus  
Ayant succombé aux travaux forcés  
Dévêtus, asphyxiés ou assassinés.  
La peste du siècle  
La candeur des enfants innocents

Nguyen Hoàng Bao Việt : 'Hope' Anne Frank (Excerpt)

Holding the soul of the deceased by the arm  
Victim of a painful and unjust death  
Tireless, I walk, silent.  
I've never felt so lonely  
Three generations of human lives  
By incessant troops, are drowned without mercy  
In a sea of blood!  
No stars in the sky  
So no one is more tiny than me.

Thus, I go in search of human Love  
Not yet manifested  
On the lips, by the smile, in the looks.  
Humanity  
Don't imagine that this is a dilapidated cottage  
And abandoned  
There, I would not like to rush, to find refuge there.  
Humanity  
Look how it is drawn!  
Through the dorsal vault of the earth ablaze with fire  
By Warsaw crushed and destroyed  
These cars crowded with deportees  
This portrait of Hitler  
Six million missing Jews and fellow travelers  
Having succumbed to forced labor  
Stripped naked, asphyxiated or murdered.  
The plague of the century  
The candor of innocent children

La médaille militaire. L'oraison funèbre  
L'ultimatum irrévocable  
La Croix-Rouge plantée sur le canon  
La famine en quarante cinq  
L'enfer de feu, Hiroshima.  
J'ose le dire sans réserve  
L'humanité a besoin d'être protégée  
Comme la bien-aimée  
Autant en pleine lumière que dans les ténèbres profondes.  
Mes compagnons, mes amis, ont péri  
Avant même de dépasser leurs vingt ans.

A chacun, soucieux du destin de la future génération  
Le séjour des morts est prévu  
Comme l'autobus, à son terminus  
Pourquoi le corps encourt-il, toute sa vie, des supplices ?  
La conscience en proie à des tourments et remords  
A chaque rappel des camps d'Auschwitz et de Bergen  
Belsen ?  
Parmi les derniers beaux jours, les derniers mois  
bienheureux  
Qu'avec tendresse, je me suis attaché à retenir  
De tous mes efforts  
Comme une fillette, plongée dans son sommeil profond  
Persistait à étreindre, avec soin, sa poupée

Il est impossible de douter de la présence d'Anne Frank.

Recueils de Poèmes 1960

The military medal. The funeral oration  
The irrevocable ultimatum  
The Red Cross planted on the cannon  
The famine in forty-five  
Hell of Fire, Hiroshima.  
I dare to say it without reservation  
Humanity needs to be protected  
Like the beloved  
As much in full light as in deep darkness.  
My companions, my friends, have perished  
Even before they reach their twenties.

To each one, concerned about the fate of the future  
generation  
Hades is planned  
Like the bus, at its terminus  
Why does the body incur, all its life, torments?  
The conscience plagued by torments and remorse  
With each reminder of the Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen  
camps?  
Among the last beautiful days, the last blessed months  
That with tenderness, I attached myself to remember  
Of all my efforts  
Like a little girl, immersed in her deep sleep  
Persisted in hugging, with care, her doll

It is impossible to doubt the presence of Anne Frank.

Philippe Jaccottet (1925-2021) : L'Ignorant

Plus je vieillis et plus je crois en ignorance,  
plus j'ai vécu, moins je possède et moins je règne.  
Tout ce que j'ai, c'est un espace tour à tour  
enneigé ou brillant, mais jamais habité.  
Où est le donateur, le guide, le gardien ?  
Je me tiens dans ma chambre et d'abord je me tais  
(le silence entre en serviteur mettre un peu d'ordre),  
et j'attends qu'un à un les mensonges s'écartent :  
que reste-t-il ? que reste-t-il à ce mourant  
qui l'empêche si bien de mourir ? Quelle force  
le fait encor parler entre ses quatre murs ?  
Pourrais-je le savoir, moi l'ignare et l'inquiet ?  
Mais je l'entends vraiment qui parle, et sa parole  
pénètre avec le jour, encore que bien vague :

« Comme le feu, l'amour n'établit sa clarté  
que sur la faute et la beauté des bois en cendres... »

L'Ignorant: Poèmes 1958

[Audio recording](#)

## Philippe Jaccottet : The Ignorant One

The older I get, the more I grow in ignorance,  
the more I have lived, the less I own and the less I rule.  
All I have is a space by turns  
snowy or shiny, but never inhabited.  
Where is the giver, the guide, the guardian?  
I stand in my room and first I shut up  
(silence comes in to put some order),  
and I'm waiting for one by one the lies to get out of the way:  
what's left? what is left for this dying man  
who prevents him from dying so well? What strength  
does he still talk within his own four walls?  
Could I know it, I the ignorant and the worried one?  
But I can really hear him speaking, and his word  
penetrates with the day, even if very vague :

"Like fire, love does not establish its clarity  
than on the fault and the beauty of the woods in ashes... »

Jacques Dupin (1927-2012) : Commencer

Commencer comme on déchire un drap, le drap dans les plis duquel on se regardait dormir. L'acte d'écriture comme rupture, et engagement cruel de l'esprit, dans une succession nécessaire de rupture, de dérives, d'embrasement.

. . .

Rompre et ressaisir, et ainsi renouer. Dans la forêt nous sommes plus près des bucherons que du promeneur solitaire. Pas de hautes traversées de rayons et de chants d'oiseaux, mais des stères de bois en puissance. Tout nous est donné, mais pour être forcé, pour être entamé, en quelque façon pour être détruit, et nous détruire.

Dehors 1971 : 165

## Jacques Dupin : To Start

To start like tearing a sheet, the sheet in the folds of which we watched ourselves sleep. The act of writing as a rupture, and cruel commitment of the spirit, in a necessary succession of rupture, drifts, conflagration.

. . .

To break up and pull yourself together, and thus reconnect. In the forest we are closer to the lumberjacks than to the solitary walker. No high crossings of rays and birdsong, but powerful cubits of wood. Everything is given to us, but to be forced, to be started, in some way to be destroyed, and destroy ourselves.

Michel Deguy (1930-2022) : Le Métronome

Qui bat là  
Une phrase de langue  
Au vent du jeu

Neume du mètre  
Le balancier confie  
Le temps à la diction

Rythme seuil il faut  
Qu'une porte en mots  
soit ouverte et fermée

Longue brève et pause  
Le temps passe  
Il repassera

Il y a du comme dans l'être  
Un air de famille un air de rien

Le courant d'airs  
tourne les pages  
ça ne fait pas un pli  
mais six

Aux heures d'affluence 1993

## Michel Deguy : The Metronome

Who beats there  
A sentence of language  
In the wind of the game

Neume of the meter  
The balance wheel entrusts  
Time for diction

Threshold rhythm it is necessary  
That a door in words  
either open and closed

Long brief and pause  
Time passes  
He will go back

There is something like in being  
A family air an air of nothing

The current of airs  
turn the pages  
it doesn't make a crease  
but six

Encore un instant  
Monsieur le lecteur  
Le temps d'un mot nu  
Entre deux tournes

Ce qui me chante  
se plie  
Aux calibres des couleurs

Aux heures d'affluence 1993

One more moment  
Dear reader  
The time for a naked word  
Between two turns

What sings to me  
folds  
into the character of colors

Michel Deguy (1930-2022) L'Iconoclast

Nous savons

Que le temps a duré des millions d'années ; que le soleil mourra ; qu'il n'y a pas d'autochtonie ; rien que de l'errance et de l'évolution.

Pas de création, pas de propriétaire, pas d'élection.

Il faut refonder sur l'Ecclésiaste — c'est-à-dire ne plus fonder.

Et de même que le singe de

K. cherchait une sortie hors du simiesque dans « l'humain », de même : l'homme se dégagerait en cherchant une sortie de secours hors de l'humain dans le non-humain.

30. Qu'est-ce que le non-humain, qui n'est certes pas l'inhumain ?

Il nous faut aller là où nous ne sommes jamais allés, sans retour.

Trans-en-danse

Le trans est la fiction

Comme si là-bas était au-delà

D'au-delà nul ne revient

Mais de là-bas comme si d'au-delà

Où il nous faut aller en connaissance de comme

Fiction tenue d'un outre-lieu

D'où le monde sera au ciel comme sur la terre

40. Je cherche par où l'être-comme n'est pas l'être-à-l'image.

Cherchant comme quoi il est et à quoi ressembler,

Michel Deguy The Iconoclast

We know

That time has lasted millions of years; that the sun will die; that there is no indigeneity; nothing but wandering and evolution.

No creation, no owner, no election.

It is necessary to recast on Ecclesiastes — that is, no longer to found.

And so did the monkey of

K. was looking for an exit out of the simiesque in the "human", likewise: the man would free himself by looking for an emergency exit out of the human in the non-human.

30. What is the non-human, who is certainly not the inliuman?

We must go where we have never been, without return.

Trans-in-dance

Trans is fiction

As if there is beyond

From beyond no one returns

But from there as if from beyond

Where we need to go in knowledge of as

The holding of an overseas

From where the world will be in heaven as on earth

40. I'm looking for where to be-as is not being-to-'image.

Looking for what he is like and what to look like,

l'homme-nous  
n'aura plus en tête cette assimilation au fac-similé de  
son simili.

Ne plus imaginer veut dire ici que la forme  
humaine qui tire en avant ne soit plus une forme pour les  
yeux qui  
nous en mette plein la vue.

Le principe est celui de l'hospitalité

La poésie est l'hôte (du poème) de la circonstance

Quelle est la circonstance,

50. Mais voici l'essence de l'hôte :

On ne sait pas

QUI c'est

— c'est la vieille

Déméter méconnaissable

Au foyer brillant de

Céléos

Qui trempe en secret l'enfant

Dans un bain de braise

Les deux hôtes recevraient

60. L'un de l'hôte une identité ?

La relation leur apprend la manière d'être

L'imagination est l'hôte de l'inconnaissable

Ayant plongé au fond de l'inconnu

the man-us

will no longer have in mind this assimilation to the  
facsimile of  
its imitation.

No longer imagining means here that the form  
human who pulls forward is no longer a form for the eyes  
that

let's get excited about it.

The principle is that of hospitality

Poetry is the host (of the poem) of the circumstance

What is the circumstance,

50. But here is the essence of the host :

We don't know

WHO it is

— it's the old one

Unrecognizable demeter

At the bright hearth of

Celeos

Who secretly soaks the child

In a bath of embers

Both hosts would receive

60. One of the host an identity?

The relationship teaches them the way to be

The imagination is the host of the unknowable

Having plunged to the bottom of the unknown

Elle en revient en poèmes chez les humains  
Leur dit avec les images  
C'est inimaginable, mais c'est comme ça.

Donnant, Donnant: cartes, airs, brevets 1981

[Audio recording](#)

It comes back in poems in humans  
Tells them with the pictures  
It's unimaginable, but that's the way it is.

Claude Esteban (1935-2006) : Quelqu'un Commence a Parler dans une chambre

je ne sais plus son nom, il lui arrivait parfois de sourire pour pas grand-chose, un nuage qui passe, mais il faut vivre avec les siens, et c'est déjà beaucoup de se souvenir et l'on serait cet homme-là qui n'intéresse plus personne mais qui ne souffre plus de son corps et ce serait déjà beaucoup,

peut-être qu'on serait mêlé dans la terre aux feuilles jaunes

et qu'on descendrait comme les fourmis au-dedans du chaud, on dormirait, on n'aurait plus de mauvais rêves, on pourrait croire que les morts sont heureux dans leurs demeures sans échos.

Quelqu'un commence à parler dans une chambre

et c'est bien tard sans doute, quelque chose a changé ou s'est perdu dans la tête de celui qui parle

et ce qu'il dit ne ressemble que de très loin à son mal, c'est peut-être que la mémoire devient plus profonde et qu'on hésite à revenir là où le cri

s'est arrêté

n'importe, il faut avancer avec toutes ces vieilles blessures,

Claude Esteban : Someone Starts to Talk in the Room  
(extract)

I don't know his name anymore, he sometimes smiled for  
not much, a passing cloud, but we must  
living with his own, and it's already a lot to remember  
and one would be that man who no longer interests  
anyone  
but who no longer suffers from his body and that would  
already be a lot,  
maybe we'd be mixed up in the earth with the yellow  
leaves  
and that we would descend like the ants inside the  
hot, we would sleep, we would no longer have bad  
dreams, we  
could believe that the dead are happy in their homes  
without  
echoes.

Someone starts talking in a room  
and it's very late no doubt, something has changed  
or got lost in the head of the one who speaks  
and what he says only remotely resembles his evil, it may  
be that the memory becomes deeper and that we hesitate  
to return to where the cry  
stopped  
it doesn't matter, we have to move on with all these old  
wounds,

la chambre est vieille aussi mais elle oublie dans le soleil  
et la table est là toute proche et qui se rassure  
quelqu'un n'a pas de nom et c'est peut-être mieux ainsi  
de ne plus rien savoir de soi et que les mots vous portent.  
Il pleut très doucement dans un poème  
et la ville est couchée là tout près comme un bon chien,  
des choses passent et puis d'autres reviennent  
il y a des mots qui sont lourds de soleil  
et qui disent très bien la fourrure secrète d'une femme  
et d'autres qui sont pleins de brume jusqu'au réveil  
il pleut si doucement que c'est peut-être un autre monde  
pareil à celui-ci mais sans hâte et sans orgueil et c'est  
dans le dedans de soi comme des gouttes de silence.  
Une lampe qui veille dans la nuit, un cœur qui n'en finit  
plus de croire  
quelqu'un invente son histoire par-delà la fureur et le  
bruit.

Quelqu'un commence à parler dans une chambre 1995

[Audio recording](#)

the room is old too but she forgets in the sun  
and the table is there very close and who reassures  
himself

someone has no name and maybe it's better that way not  
to know anything about yourself anymore and that the  
words carry you.

It's raining very gently in a poem  
and the city is lying there close by like a good dog,  
things pass and then others come back  
there are words that are heavy with sunshine  
and who say very well the secret fur of a woman  
and others who are full of mist until they wake up  
it rains so gently that it may be another world like this but  
without haste and without pride and it is in the inside of  
oneself like drops of silence.

A lamp that watches in the night, a heart that never stops  
believing

Someone invents his story beyond the fury and the noise.

## Roger Giroux (1925-74) : Decrire le Paysage

Et mes yeux n'osent plus respirer.  
L'âme perd toute connaissance,  
Et la mesure de ce pays.  
Et je me désunis.  
Visage aveugle de se taire...  
Quelle vitre pourtant ne se briserait  
D'être si lente aux lèvres!  
ô l'idée de la source, un chant  
Qui se refuse en elle,  
cette beauté  
Qu'elle n'espère plus...  
La couleur de la mer est semblable au matin.  
Le ciel est plein d'oiseaux que le vent a laissés.  
Des navires sont là, des bateaux et des barques.  
Et les fruits, calmes,  
Attendent que l'été leur donne la lumière.  
Et nous allons, par l'invisible porte.  
Et dans les grandes vallées bleues du cœur  
Où la mémoire n'atteint pas  
Une voile s'approche, entre les apparences.  
Et fait signe de taire le nom du paysage.  
Et les arbres s'éloignent dans l'automne  
Et recouvrent nos pas de leurs vagues mourantes.

## Roger Giroux : Describing the Landscape

And my eyes don't dare to breathe anymore.  
The soul loses all knowledge,  
And the measure of this country.  
And I'm disuniting.  
Blind face to be silent...  
What glass, however, would not break  
To be so slow to the lips!  
o the idea of the source, a song  
Who refuses himself in her,  
this beauty  
That she no longer hopes...  
The color of the sea is similar to the morning.  
The sky is full of birds that the wind has left.  
Ships are there, boats and boats.  
And the fruits, calm,  
Are waiting for the summer to give them light.  
And we go, through the invisible door.  
And in the great blue valleys of the heart  
Where the memory does not reach  
A sail is approaching, between appearances.  
And motioned to silence the name of the landscape.  
And the trees are moving away in the autumn  
And cover our steps with their dying waves.

Une ombre va, dans les collines,  
Et puis, que reste-t-il de ce pays, qu'un peu de neige  
Qui tombe, dans le creux de la main ?  
L'impossible silence accomplit son espace,  
Et voici, lentement, mon image détruite.  
Mes yeux perdent le souvenir,  
Et mon visage meurt, de miroir, d'absence.  
Comme, au bord de la branche, un songe dans sa fleur

L'arbre le temps 1964

[Audio recording](#)

A shadow is going, in the hills,  
And then, what is left of this country, that a little snow  
Who falls, in the palm of the hand?  
The impossible silence fulfills its space,  
And here, slowly, my image destroyed.  
My eyes are losing the memory,  
And my face dies, of mirror, of absence.  
Like, at the edge of the branch, a dream in its flower

Emmanuel Hocquard (1940-2019) : Élégie 5

I

Dehors, ni pluie, ni vent.

C'est la nuit, et ce n'est pas encore l'approche du matin.

Un temps mon au début de l'hiver : le temps des  
provisions de bord,

la part des hommes avec la part des rats,

la part des mots ;

Le temps sans amour où l'esprit en éveil

n'a plus rien à se mettre sous la dent

si ce n'est quelque chose comme

Un bruit déjà lointain et pourtant familier

De feuillages froissés dans l'ancien vent des nuits  
d'hiver.

Décembre, en descendant avec beaucoup de précautions  
ce chemin très en pente

Rendu glissant entre les murs par les pluies de la veille  
et les petites branches.

Fouillant en vain la pénombre des yeux

à la recherche de détails complémentaires

suffisamment probants pour éclairer la situation

sous un angle nouveau,

Nous n'avons rien trouvé qui ne nous fût déjà connu,  
pas même le hérisson

Emmanuel Hocquard : Elegy 5

I

Outside, no rain, no wind.

It is night, and it is not yet the approach of morning.

A wonderful time at the beginning of winter: the time of  
the ships' stores,

the share of men with the share of rats,

the share of words ;

The loveless time when the mind is awake

has nothing more to put under the tooth

if not something like

A sound already distant and yet familiar

Of crumpled foliage in the old wind of the nights  
winter.

December, going down with great care

this very sloping path

Made slippery between the walls by the rains of the day  
before

and the small branches.

Searching in vain the darkness of the eyes

looking for additional details

sufficient evidence to illuminate the situation

from a new angle,

We did not find anything that was not already known to  
us,

not even the hedgehog

qui se risquait à traverser la rue  
Ou que la grille du jardin ne grinçait pas quand il pleuvait,  
ce qui ne prouvait alors déjà rien  
Et nous inciterait aujourd'hui à conclure que l'affaire  
est classée ; que le bruit des feuilles  
est le bruit des feuilles ; et le silence  
une nécessité heureuse.

Les Élégies 1999

which ventured to cross the street  
Or that the garden gate didn't squeak when it rained,  
which then already proved nothing  
And would prompt us today to conclude that the case  
is classified; that the noise of the leaves  
is the sound of the leaves; and the silence  
a happy necessity.

Jean Daive (1941-) : Fut Bâti

regard comme enfoncement d'astres dans le temps  
par  
l'eau regard sur la mort  
après  
le monde  
signe devant ce qui continue de durcir  
l'être de mort  
dans la pensée  
la croissance des os  
qui  
s'éloigne de ce sol  
lumineux  
sur lui  
referme  
ses ombres  
solaire noire plantée de cerveaux une langue  
gonfle  
rejeta par delà le vide  
ses gorges envoûtées  
qui  
avec membranes et regards  
commençaient l'orifice des mots  
pas de nombre pas d'espace  
rien  
que la foudre dans des ciels  
d'arrêt  
(pendant l'écriture  
se détruisent les autres ciels)  
les glaces les années jaunies

Fut Bâti 1973

Jean Daive : Was Built

gaze like sinking of stars in time  
by  
water a look at death  
after  
the world  
sign in front of what continues to harden  
the being of death  
in thought  
the growth of bones  
who  
get away from this ground  
bright  
about him  
closes  
its shadows  
black solar planted with brains a tongue  
inflates  
rejected beyond the void  
her bewitched throats  
who  
with membranes and manholes  
the orifice of the words began  
no number no space  
Nothing  
that lightning in the skies  
shutdown  
(while writing  
the other skies destroy each other)  
ice cream in the yellowed years

Marcelin Pleynet (1933- ) : Hazana

L'arbre défait ses plis  
et le noir de la nuit mange  
les yeux d'une lune d'argile  
Si la mort pénètre ici dans le cours des eaux la rivière est  
sans mémoire vers l'éclat gelé de la nuit  
image du livre sans feuille où les terres s'assèchent  
Là-bas où s'étonne encore l'herbe frileuse  
Le feu que je nomme bleuit comme les bois déjà couverts  
d'encre  
Une campagne sans souffle derrière l'aboi des sapins  
accueille les dormeurs perdus dans un songe de sang  
Plus loin  
comme une fumée  
l'eau rêve sur la terre défaite

Les Lignes de la prose 1963

Marcelin Pleynet : Hazana

The tree undoes its folds  
and the black of the night eats  
the eyes of a clay moon

If death enters the course of the waters here, the river is  
without memory towards the frozen brilliance of the night  
image of the book without a leaf where the land dries up  
There, where the chilly grass is still surprising  
The fire that I name turns blue like the woods already  
covered with ink

A breathless campaign behind the barking of the fir trees  
welcomes the sleepers lost in a dream of blood

Further

like a smoke

water dreams on the earth.

Jean-Michel Maulpoix (1952-) : Le bleu ne fait pas de bruit.

Le bleu ne fait pas de bruit.

C'est une couleur timide, sans arrière-pensée, présage, ni projet, qui ne se jette pas brusquement sur le regard comme le jaune ou le rouge, mais qui l'attire à soi, l'apprivoise peu à peu, le laisse venir sans le presser, de sorte qu'en elle il s'enfonce et se noie sans se rendre compte de rien.

Le bleu est une couleur propice à la disparition.

Une couleur où mourir, une couleur qui délivre, la couleur même de l'âme après qu'elle s'est déshabillée du corps, après qu'a giclé tout le sang et que se sont vidées les viscères, les poches de toutes sortes, déménageant une fois pour toutes le mobilier de ses pensées.

Indéfiniment, le bleu s'évade.

Ce n'est pas, à vrai dire, une couleur. Plutôt une tonalité, un climat, une résonance spéciale de l'air. Un empilement de clarté, une teinte qui naît du vide ajouté au vide, aussi changeante et transparente dans la tête de l'homme que dans les cieux.

Jean-Michel Maulpoix : The blue doesn't make a sound.

The blue doesn't make a sound.

It is a shy color, without ulterior motive, omen, or project, which does not suddenly throw itself on the gaze like yellow or red, but which attracts it to itself, tames it little by little, lets it come without pressing it, so that it sinks into it and drowns without realizing anything.

Blue is a color conducive to disappearance.

A color in which to die, a color that delivers, the very color of the soul after it has undressed from the body, after all the blood has been squirted out and the viscera emptied, the pockets of all kinds, moving once and for all the furniture of its thoughts.

Indefinitely, the blue escapes.

It is not, in fact, a color. Rather, a tone, a climate, a special resonance of the air. A stack of clarity, a hue that arises from the emptiness added to the emptiness, as changeable and transparent in the head of man as in the heavens.

L'air que nous respirons, l'apparence de vide sur laquelle remuent nos figures, l'espace que nous traversons n'est rien d'autre que ce bleu terrestre, invisible tant il est proche et fait corps avec nous, habillant nos gestes et nos voix. Présent jusque dans la chambre, tous volets tirés et toutes lampes éteintes, insensible vêtement de notre vie. Jean-Michel Maulpoix

Une histoire de bleu 1992

[Graphics](#)

The air we breathe, the appearance of emptiness on which our figures move, the space we cross is nothing but this earthly blue, invisible as it is close and becomes one with us, dressing our gestures and our voices. Present even in the room, with all the shutters drawn and all the lamps off, the insensitive garment of our life.

Amina Said (1953-) : Nous sommes cendre et flamme

dans le cercle du monde  
car la flamme brûle en nous qui en sommes le souffle  
et notre lutte  
est ce tremblement de lumière  
vivace identique à elle-même  
elle est en toute chose  
nos yeux faits pour la contempler  
séparés de sa source nous nous absentons pour mieux  
nous unir à elle  
alors nous serons cendre car la mort viendra messenger  
sans message  
ses orbites de pierre  
aussi éloignées de soi que l'étoile  
de l'énigme du regard  
la vie tiendra tête disant  
je suis filtre puissant contre la mort  
demeureront quelques brins du passé dans l'herbier du  
temps quelques souvenirs entre ses pages  
quelqu'un peut-être  
sera la mémoire de notre attente  
et se demandant qui nous étions fera l'histoire de notre  
solitude  
alors se rallumeront les feux intimes qu'offre la lumière

Gisements de lumière 1998

[Audio](#) (ainsi pour avancer sur la terre)

Amina Said (1953-) : We are ashes and flame

in the circle of the world  
for the flame burns in us who are its breath  
and our struggle  
is this earthquake of light  
perennial identical to itself  
she is in everything  
our eyes made to contemplate it  
separated from its source, we are absent to better unite  
ourselves with it  
then we will be ashes because death will come messenger  
without message  
its stone orbits  
as far away from oneself as the star  
from the enigma of the gaze  
life will stand up saying  
I am so powerful against death  
a few strands of the past will remain in the herbarium of  
time a few memories between its pages  
maybe someone  
will be the memory of our expectation  
and wondering who we were will tell the story of our  
loneliness  
then the intimate fires that light offers will be reignited

## BRIEF NOTES ON THE POEMS

Older readers may remember a literary criticism that was straightforward and entertainingly written, sending us back to poems with renewed insight and enthusiasm. That of modern French poetry tends to be different, however, much more technical and challenging, written by one academic for another. It is worth reading by poetry lovers all the same, if only to understand what the poems are attempting to do, which is often so different that the common response will be, in what way is this poetry?

What follows is a short listing of internet articles. Books like Azérad and Collier give a fuller bibliography, which will need university library access and some knowledge of contemporary critical theory.

### **Guillaume Apollinaire : Le Pont Mirabeau**

A poem of simple nostalgia written by Apollinaire after the rupture with Marie Laurencin.

Vioux, A. Le pont Mirabeau, Apollinaire : Analyse. 2014.  
<https://commentairecompose.fr/le-pont-mirabeau/>

### **Guillaume Apollinaire : La Chanson du Mal-Aimé**

Long poem commemorating Apollinaire's love for Annie Playdon, whom he met in Germany in 1902. Specific references :

Stanza 7: Shakuntala is a Sanskrit play by Kalidasa.

Stanza 10: Forty of Sebaste were Christian soldiers

martyred in AD 320 by being left naked on a frozen lake.  
Aubade is a rural invitation to love.

Stanza 15: Pâquette is short for pâquerette or Easter daisy.

Stanza 22: Zaporogian Cossaks were models of fidelity to Moscow, and so hostile to the Sultan of Constantinople.

Stanza 25: Rotting fish may be an allusion to Balkan corruption under the Ottomans.

Stanza 26. Podolia is a part of Poland obtained (i.e. ruined) by the Ottomans in 1672.

Stanza 28: The Florentines had the reputation of being moneylenders and traitors.

Stanza 29: Danaïdes: Zeus impregnated Danae in a shower of gold: an allusion to emotions wasted on Annie Playden.

Stanza 32: Désirade is an island in the Antilles.

Stanza 33: Pyraustus is a fabulous insect supposed to live in fire. Aegipans is an epithet of pans and satyrs.

Stanza 39. Argyraspids, literally 'with silver shields' were Alexander's bodyguard. Dendrophore refers to certain gods, to those carrying sacred trees in processions or members of certain guilds in Roman times.

Stanza 40. French says 'arse of Damascus ladies'.

Stanza 43: Carabosse was an evil fairy that gave unfortunate gifts.

Stanza 44. Cypriape may be a conflation of 'Cypriot' and 'Priapus'. Hermes Trismegistus, or thrice great, is attributed by Neoplatonists to the Egyptian god Thoth, but has here been shrunk to a dwarf: another of Apollinaire's recondite jokes.

Compte littéraire writers. La Chanson du Mal-Aimé.  
<https://www.comptoir litteraire.com/docs/875-apollinaire-la-chanson-du-mal-aime-.pdf>

Vioux, A. Le pont Mirabeau, Apollinaire : Commentaire. 2015. <https://commentairecompose.fr/la-chanson-du-mal-aime/>

### **Guillaume Apollinaire : La Jolie Rouse**

Last poem in the Calligrammes collection, detailing how the war etc. had enriched his experience of life.

Parenteau, O. Quatre Poètes dans la Grande Guerre. Chapitre 3.

<https://books.openedition.org/pulg/2316?lang=en>

Gignoux, S. La Jolie Rouse par Apollinaire. La Croix.

<https://www.la-croix.com/Culture/Jolie-Rousse-dApollinaire-2020-11-09-1201123786>

Brnshaw pp. 88-91

### **Max Jacob : Arc en Ciel**

The rainbow is the symbol of renewal, and in this poem Jacob employs unusual wordplay and unconventional language to create a sense of surprise and extended meanings. Jacob's work typically draws on Jewish, Breton, Parisian and Roman Catholic backgrounds, and incorporates Symbolist, detached (Cubist), and Surrealist elements, all of which give a thickened meaning but defy real explication.

Plantier, R. La versification dans l'œuvre de Max Jacob. Persee, 1983. [https://www.persee.fr/doc/maxja\\_0224-3776\\_1983\\_num\\_5\\_1\\_1211](https://www.persee.fr/doc/maxja_0224-3776_1983_num_5_1_1211).

Fhimer, C. Max Jacob ou la symbiose des identités paradoxales. <https://shs.cairn.info/journal-archives-juives1-2002-1-page-77?lang=en&tab=resume>

### **André Salmon : Ronde**

Salmon received little of a formal education but associated with many well-known members of the Latin Quarter : Apollinaire, Picaso, Modigliani, etc. After his marriage to Jeanne Blazy-Escarpette in 1909, Salmon produced poems, short stories, novels and art criticism, barely surviving both world wars. Jeanne died in 1949. Salmon remarried in 1953, made a new home for himself outside Paris, supported himself with journalism, wrote his memoirs and received various prestigious awards.

Andre Salmon Official Website

<https://www.andresalmon.org/index.html>

Three poems by André Salmon. Poetry 1931.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=37&issue=5&page=56>

### **Blaise Cendrars : Mee too buggi**

The poem is a highly edited translation of John Martin's 1817 account of the Tonga Islands, a plagiarism defended

by critical theory as liberating, as indeed is the variable syllable count of the lines.

Azérad and Collier pp. 53-60

Folden, G. The Burning Phoenix, in Times Literary Supplement, No. 4769, August 26, 1994, pp. 9-10.

<https://www.enotes.com/topics/blaise-cendrars/criticism/cendrars-blaise/criticism/giles-foden-essay-date-26-august-1994>

Selected writings of Blaise Cendrars 9780313210204, 0313210209. Greenwood Press.

<https://dokumen.pub/selected-writings-of-blaise-cendrars-9780313210204-0313210209.html>

### **Jean Cocteau: Plain Chant**

Cocteau was multi-gifted, and was famous for his many homosexual liaisons with noted figures of the time. His output was staggering, and yet still of exceptional quality: novels, plays, poems, films, essays, autobiographical writings, journalism, painting, and a voluminous correspondence.

Jean Cocteau.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/jean-cocteau>

Bose, S.D., El romance mítico de Jean Cocteau y Jean Marais. Far Out. December 2021.

<https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/the-romance-of-jean-cocteau-and-jean-marais>

Jean Cocteau. <https://www.poesie.net/poeme/jean-cocteau/plain-chant>

### **Léon-Paul Fargue : Les mots, les mots spéciaux**

Fargue is not only a poet of Paris, with many distinguished names for collaborators, but also a poet of travel, in what Paul Morand called 'a universe of memory, visions, contiguous realities intended to retain indefinable feelings, regrets, foggy illusions, to fix the unsayable, wonderings before the beauty that suddenly appears at a turn in the road.'

Simpson, L. Two poems by Léon-Paul Fargue.

<https://newcriterion.com/article/two-poems-by-laon-paul-fargue/>

Loubier, P. Lettres de lave et pierre meulière : Léon-Paul Fargue publicitaire.

<https://books.openedition.org/pur/179197>

Esprits Nomades writers. Leon-Paul Fargue: L'écriture comme vie de secours.

<https://www.espritsnomades.net/litterature/leon-paul-fargue-l-ecriture-comme-vie-de-secour/>

### **Léon-Paul Fargue : Nocturne**

A nocturnal scene where the twilight envelops the natural and human presence. The long arm of gold (a tree

branch) descends and tinkles in the branches, while leaves and flowers gather around. 'A slow worm glides in the evening light, and Diane, the moon goddess, appears on the pond. A satin slipper suggests a human presence in the clearing, connecting the celestial and earthly realms.'

All poetry writers. Léon-Paul Fargue

<https://allpoetry.com/Leon-Paul-Fargue>

### **Pierre Reverdy : Pour le moment**

Written in a complete free verse lacking rhyme, metre, constant line length or punctuation, typical of Reverdy's Cubist- Surrealist phase. Only spacing and line breaks provide structure and logic.

Puff, J-F. Le travail du sujet dans la poésie de Pierre Reverdy. <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-litterature-2016-3-page-40?lang=fr>

### **Pierre Reverdy : L'Esprit dehors**

Here the poem oscillates between a simple, dispassionate inventory of a room's objects and a subjective description of an emotional state hovering between reassurance and undefined menace. There are allusions to Mallarmé's method of creation, and to the Cubist practices of breaking a familiar object into constituent elements, and then reassembling them from different view points.

Azérad and Collier pp. 81-9

Philo-Lettres writer. <https://philo-lettres.fr/litterature-francaise/litterature-francaise-20e-siecle/reverdy/>

## **Pierre Albert-Birot : Admiration**

Pierre Albert-Birot was avant-garde throughout his varied existence as poet, dramatist, editor and theater manager, from his days as a Dadaist, Futurist and Cubist to a brief flirtation with Surrealism. After WWI, he created his own movements, perhaps not too successfully, printing his own books that expressed his childlike in artistic creation, but his last work was a book of verse poems meditating on time, old age, and death.

Wikipedia writers. Pierre Albert-Birot.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_Albert-Birot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Albert-Birot)

Admiration de Albert-Birot.

[https://www.amazon.com.be/Admiration-Albert-Birot/dp/2355045011?language=fr\\_BE](https://www.amazon.com.be/Admiration-Albert-Birot/dp/2355045011?language=fr_BE)

## **Pierre Albert-Birot : Aux Jeunes Poètes**

A didactic poem presenting Albert-Birot's view of poetry as a vital and authentic act, accessible but sacred. Young poets should find inspiration in the present moment and their true selves, while still balancing tradition and innovation.

Une poème. <https://www.poesie.net/poeme/pierre-albert-birot/aux-jeunes-poetes>

Rossignot, O., Pierre Albert-Birot/ Bobi+Bobi : « Petites gouttes de poésie »

<https://www.culturopoing.com/livres/jeunesse/pierre->

[albert-birot-bobibobi-petites-gouttes-de-poesie-motus/20170303](http://albert-birot-bobibobi-petites-gouttes-de-poesie-motus/20170303)

### **Tristan Tzara : Chanson Dada**

A good example of Dadaist poetry, characterised by its absurdity, rejection of traditional artistic conventions, and playful yet subversive tone.

Tristan Tzara. <https://www.melusine-surrealisme.fr/auteurs/tristan-tzara>

Chanson Dada. <https://allpoetry.com/Chanson-Dada>

### **Tristan Tzara : Sur une ride du soleil**

'On a wrinkle of the sun' may be a reference to Tzara's poetry with its surreal images and break with traditional forms, or the way Tzara happily mixed images.

Dada Manifesto: Poèmes, délires & texts. Tristan Tzara. <https://www.qobuz.com/ar-es/album/dada-manifesto-poemes-delires-textes-tristan-tzara/3663729041005>

### **André Breton : Moins de temps**

Breton believed that the unconscious was the source of truth and creativity, and used dreamlike imagery, automatic writing and unexpected juxtapositions to map its irrational geography. The style was often fragmented

and disjointed, reflecting the Surrealist goal of breaking free from conventional expressions and social structures.

All Poetry writers. André Breton.

<https://allpoetry.com/Andre-Breton>

André Breton (1896-1966) <https://poets.org/poet/andre-breton>

André Breton (1896-1966)

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/andre-breton>

### **André Breton : Vigilance**

Well-known poem where Breton is leaving his automatic writing for the consciously composed texts he professed to find unsuccessful. The various elements woven together are readily discerned, though mysteriously purified by fire and revealed as in a dream.

Azérad and Collier pp. 98-104

Gasarian, G. André Breton : Une histoire d'eau. Presses universitaires du Septentrion / OpenEdition

Books: December 2020

Caws, M. A. "The Poetics of a Surrealist Passage and Beyond." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1975, pp. 24–36. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/440526>

### **Péret : Le quart d'une vie**

A collection of autobiographical poems retelling Péret's experiences, from childhood commitments to experiences as a resistance fighter. His reflections on freedom an

revolution are carried into the Surrealist style and its search for an original language.

Sella, R. Péret dans revues anglophones.

[https://www.academia.edu/66767044/Pe\\_ret\\_dans\\_revues\\_anglophones](https://www.academia.edu/66767044/Pe_ret_dans_revues_anglophones)

Plus reelement poet. Benjamin Péret Le Noyau de la Comete.

<https://ler.letras.up.pt/uploads/ficheiros/2585.pdf>

Goutier, J.M. Pérennité de Benjamin Péret.

<https://excerpts.numilog.com/books/9782851992475.pdf>

### **Soupault : Say it with music**

The Magnetic Fields (Les Champs magnétiques), published jointly in 1920 by André Breton and Philippe Soupault, is a foundational text of literary Surrealism and the first major work to employ automatic writing. The approach writing involved writing as quickly as possible without conscious control or revision, aiming to tap into the subconscious and unleash raw, unfiltered imagery.

from The Magnetic Fields

André Breton and Philippe Soupault.

<https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/andre-breton-philippe-soupault-the-magnetic-fields/>

## **Antonin Artaud : Jardin noir**

Poem is more structured and less overtly expressionistic than usual with Artaud. Also uses rhyme and metre. An edgy reflection of man-s place in the universe.

Jardin Noir. <https://allpoetry.com/Jardin-Noir>

Pierre Unik : La société sans hommes

Pierre Unik's poem *La société sans hommes* (Society Without Men), was published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (No. 5, May 1933). The work is rooted in the surrealist tradition, reflecting both the movement's stylistic experimentation and Unik's personal engagement with themes of alienation, nature, and the absurdity of human constructs.

Wikipdia writers. Pierre Unik.

[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_Unik](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Unik)

## **Louis Aragon : Richard II Quarante**

Poem echoes Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Act 3, Scene 3 famous couplet:

You may my glories and my state depose,  
But not my griefs; still am I king of those.

Also French poets of the Middle Ages, especially the Grand Rhetoricians with their complex rhyme schemes. The aim

in this brief return to traditional verse was to be clear and attract a wider circle of readers.

Passion lettres.

<https://www.sculfort.fr/mybb/showthread.php?tid=172>

Leclercq, A. Louis Aragon et le jeu medieval.

<https://books.openedition.org/pub/33298>

Richard II Quarante, de Louis Aragon et Colette Magny.

<https://pagestranquilles.fr/2016/10/12/richard-ii-quarante-de-louis-aragon-et-colette-magny/>

### **Louis Aragon : Les Lilas et Les Roses**

Written shortly after France's humiliating defeat by Germany. The stanzas are a chronological record of events. The 'dagged' refers not only to the lacerating beauty of the scene and weather at the time, but to the treacherous declaration of war by Italy on June 10, 1940. Aragon notes the chateaux of the Loire and their gardens that he passes, but then meets the flood of refugees (pitiful fake heaps of camping gear). The time of lilacs refers to Belgium, and that of the roses to the Loire Valley. At Sainte-Marthe, between the two countries Aragon hears about the fall of Paris. In the retreat the the purpish colour of Belgium and its cheering crowd replaced by the pink of the flowers in the gardens of Anjou and Touraine, also associated with the orange-red of the fires caused by the fighting.

Commentaire du poème 'Les lilas et les roses'  
<https://www.juin40.fr/complements/le-coin-des-poetes/commentaire-du-poeme-les-lilas-et-les-roses/>

Gensame, B. Les Lilas et Les Roses. <https://bernard-gensane.over-blog.com/article-les-lilas-et-les-roses-de-louis-aragon-112642758.html>

### **Paul Éluard : L'amoureuse**

An accessible but famous poem that emphasises the closeness of the lovers (eyelids, hair and form of my hands) in simple words. The 'To speak without having anything to say', repeats the symbiosis of the two, or of knowledge that goes beyond words.

Littérature Portes Ouvertes writers. Éluard 'L'amoureuse'  
<https://litteratureportesouvertes.wordpress.com/2021/08/24/lamoureuse-deluard-et-le-poeme-da-cote/>

### **Paul Éluard: La courbe de tes yeux**

La Courbe goes further than L'amoureuse. The whole world is experienced through the lover's existence (Le monde entier dépend de tes yeux purs) In this light the perplexing lines fall into place. What you see I also see (La courbe de tes yeux fait le tour de mon cœur). We haven't always been together (C'est que tes yeux ne m'ont pas toujours vu). What you love I also love (Et tout mon sang coule dans leurs regards).

Azérad and Collier pp. 90-97

JustAnswer ES6 writers

[https://www.bacdefrancais.net/courbe.php#google\\_vignette](https://www.bacdefrancais.net/courbe.php#google_vignette)

Vioux, A. 2014, La courbe de tes yeux Paul Éluard

<https://commentairecompose.fr/la-courbe-de-tes-yeux-eluard/>

### **Raymond Desnos : Le Paysage**

A beautiful sonnet in Alexandrines. Listen to the audio readings in French to hear the rich phonetic patternings.

Mary Ann Caws translation.

<https://www.proquest.com/openview/4e735aa88335d329accd828a91d4d41d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1821239>

Audio.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZPjmQSwQ8k>

Knowunity.

### **Raymond Queneau : Un Poème**

An over-simple but popular piece.

Many readings. [Queneau Bien Places - Búsqueda Vídeos](#)

### **Jacques Prévert : Premier Jour**

*Premier Jour* employs simple language in anaphoric structure, each line beginning with a similar prepositional phrase, which creates an incantatory effect. There is no

rhyme or metre, but an emphasis on simplicity and immediacy.

### **Jacques Prévert : Les Feuilles Mortes**

Well known through many recordings

Wikipedia

[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les\\_Feuilles\\_mortes](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Feuilles_mortes)

### **Pierre-Jean Jouve : Hélène**

After marriage to a psychiatrist nine years his senior, Jouve's work, once marked by the great Christian mystics, became grounded in the Freudian unconscious, in the conflict between Eros and Thanatos. Hélène is the story of a sixteen-year-old boy's passion for an older woman.

Helene par Pierre Jean Jouve.

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/133350363>

Jouve, Pierre Jean. Hélène et L'Ange.

<https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/pierre-jean-jouve/3-helene-et-l-ange/>

### **René Daumal : Il suffit d'un mot**

Dumal published no poetry after *Le Contre-Ciel* in 1936, possibly because he had reached the limits of the sayable.

Literary theory has subsequently found a lot to say about infinities of language.

[bacdefrancais.net/orange-ponge.php](http://bacdefrancais.net/orange-ponge.php)

The poem resembles the love poetry of Éluard, with whom Char published a volume in 1930. The language is simple and elevated: indeed the real subject is often 'beauty as elevation', here with images that link the lover with the universal emblems of the sea and sky.

Azérad and Collier pp. 147-154.

Murena, N. 2021. La poésie de René Char : entre regard lucide sur le monde & quête d'élévation.

<https://www.fabula.org/acta/document13777.php>

Burnshaw 110-111.

### **Henri Michaux : La jeune fille de Budapest**

For all his reclusive habits, Michaux was a prolific author, with many lyrical pieces, clearly Surrealist but not difficult to follow.

Henri Michaux.

<https://www.comptoir litteraire.com/docs/344-michaux.pdf>

Henri Michaux.

<https://www.artpoetique.fr/index.php?page=poetes/Michaux.php>

Adjoua N'Guessan Alice Yao. La création poétique chez Henri Michaux : formes, langages et thèmes.

Zinenberg, D. Petite étude sur Lointain intérieur

Henri Michaux, Éditions de La Pléiade, tome 1.  
<http://www.franco-polis.net/revues/MichauxHenri-LointainInterieur-fevrier2017.html>

### **Henri Michaux : Iniji**

An enigmatic piece that has attracted much academic study and explication. Generally seen as an exemplar of the poetry writing experience, of extracting meaning from silence, it nonetheless remains a gap-ridden, fragmentary poem that resists full analysis. A good deal of verse craft is worked into the text, nonetheless, which meanders repetitiously into half saying about our human existence. 'Inij' is possibly the process of creation, of literary texts and life itself. Azérad and Collier provide a word-for-word gloss of the poem, as far as is possible, and the final lines of the extract are the Sanskrit for life and breath. Anania, Annan, Animha and Ornanian are corruptions of obscure names in the Bible chapters of Chronicles, Jeremia and Samuel, evoking long-vanished peoples and languages.

Azérad and Collier pp. 116 122.

Martins, H. Inji entre Michaux, Le Clézio e Helder  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392012506\\_Iniji\\_entre\\_Michaux\\_Le\\_Clezio\\_e\\_Helder](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392012506_Iniji_entre_Michaux_Le_Clezio_e_Helder)

Montaner, M.S. Au Pays de Henri Michaux: la dielectique de la espace et du temps dans son oeuvre écrite. PhD.

Thesis.

[https://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/41671/2/02.MSM\\_2de3.pdf](https://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/41671/2/02.MSM_2de3.pdf)

## **Maurice Blanchard : La poussière, les années**

'To write a poem, you have to start your life over, all lives' said Blanchard, who had much to regret in his early life.

Pierre Reverdy – Maurice Blanchard.

<https://www.lesvraisvoyageurs.com/tag/maurice-blanchard/>

Peuchmaurd, P. Maurice Blanchard.

<https://excerpts.numilog.com/books/9782232100758.pdf>

## **Francis Ponge : L'huitre**

The subject is banal and everyday, and carries no poetic echoes. The tone is impersonal throughout, though the interior is described as greenish, viscous and sachet-like, i.e. slightly unpleasant. The poem shifts from description, through how oysters can be opened and eaten, to .

Azérad and Collier pp. 133-44.

Vioux, A. Ponge, L'huitre Commentaire.

<https://commentairecompose.fr/l-huitre-ponge/>

La langue française writers.

<https://www.lalanguefrancaise.com/litterature/huitre-francis-ponge-commentaire>

## **Francis Ponge : L'orange**

Francis Ponge often saw himself as an enabler, through whom mute objects could express themselves. As here,

Ponge wrote prose poems where, in place of traditional rhymes and metres, there is nonetheless a meaningful structure to the prose, often with iterations that return to correct the effect, and where the words have significant connotations.

Ponge focuses on the sensory and physical qualities of the orange, describing its sweet juice, vibrant color and delicate fragrance. The orange, like a sponge, resists oppression, but fails to recover its shape when squeezed due to the breakdown of its cellular structure. The orange offers a passive resistance, which offers too much comfort to the oppressor.

Azérad and Collier pp. 133-44.

La naranja. <https://allpoetry.com/l'Orange>  
L'Orange

Francis Ponge - Le parti pris des choses (1942).

[bacdefrancais.net/orange-ponge.php](http://bacdefrancais.net/orange-ponge.php)

L'orange Le Parti pris des choses, Francis Ponge (1942)

<https://www.l-etre-en->

[lettres.fr/medias/newsletter/calendrier-daivent/2-lorange-francis-ponge.pdf](http://lettres.fr/medias/newsletter/calendrier-daivent/2-lorange-francis-ponge.pdf)

## **Jules Supervielle : Mouvement**

Supervielle's themes are the nostalgia of a lonely but fraternal man for the open spaces of his south American childhood and the cosmic brotherhood of men.

Aseff, M. "Sobre a tradução de Oublieuse mémoire, de Jules Supervielle." *Cadernos de Literatura em Tradução*, no. 11 (May 1, 2010): 93–110.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.2359-5388.i11p93-110>.

Alvez Francese, F. "Traducir la pampa: sobre las versiones de L'Homme de la pampa, de Jules Supervielle." *Mutatis Mutandis. Revista Latinoamericana de Traducción* 15, no. 2 (July 29, 2022): 406–21.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17533/udea.mut.v15n2a08>.

Davaille, F. "Ces "mots qui secrètent les choses" : écriture de la présence dans la poésie de Jules Supervielle : une étude stylistique." Paris 4, 2000.

<http://www.theses.fr/2000PA040254>

### **Jules Supervielle : Les amis inconnus**

Being of independent means, Supervielle could choose what literary work he would undertake. His larger themes were the mood of the poet in the face of the continuous presence of death, cosmic reflections in search of links with the Universe to escape the absurd, a double longing for Creole and French, and the evocation of the open and wild spaces of the pampas.

Les amis inconnus

<https://cotentinghislaine.wixsite.com/website-3/supervielle-explications>

'Maelleb', La poésie-errance de Supervielle : recherche d'un lieu, recherche de soi. <https://transversales.hypotheses.org/2402>

## **Ives Bonnefoy : La maison natal**

Surrealism provides a disturbing novelty of setting, both attractive and unsettling, where life unfolds within the setting of a single room. First of a sequence, now made a school text. Surr gives the larger context. He remarks, 'To read Bonnefoy with any kind of fluency you have to enter his visionary world; you have to abandon a certain kind of logic and settle for the sway of a language that is very closely tied to the concrete but at the same time avoids referentiality, so that subject and object don't necessarily match up and the point of view is elusive and shifting.'

Sirr, P. The Lost Place: Reading Yves Bonnefoy's 'La Maison Natale'

<https://graphmagazine.wordpress.com/2013/05/16/the-lost-place-reading-yves-bonnefoys-la-maison-natale/>

La Casa Natal. Yves Bonnefoy. All stanzas in original French and Spanish translation by Arturo Carrera.

<https://es.scribd.com/doc/302225678/La-Casa-Natal-Yves-Bonnefoy>

Translation by John T. Naughton.

[https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poems/poem/103-2183\\_THE-HOUSE-WHERE-I-WAS-BORN-01](https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poems/poem/103-2183_THE-HOUSE-WHERE-I-WAS-BORN-01)

La Casa Natal read by Yves Bonnefoy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gd4OTJDTm2k>

## **Ives Bonnefoy : Rue Traversière**

Poem explores the parallel universes in which we live, one where experiences are distorted and replayed in the

realms of memory or fantasy. Detailed explications in the references below.

Azérad and Collier pp. 133-44.

Yves Bonnefoy: Rue Traversière

<https://litlove.wordpress.com/yves-bonnefoy-rue-traversiere/>

Risset, J. Ce que c'est qu'un endroit de la Terre

<https://shs.cairn.info/revue-le-genre-humain-2008-1-page-33?lang=fr>

### **Léopold Sédar Senghor : Femme Noir**

Senghor's *Femme Noire* is a cornerstone of Negritude, a literary and cultural movement celebrating African identity, heritage, and beauty. It is both a lyrical tribute to the Black woman, embodying both a specific beloved figure and a broader symbol of Africa itself—its landscapes, history, and resilience.

Azérad and Collier pp. 70-78.

Femme noir, Senghor: analyse.

<https://commentairecompose.fr/femme-noire-senghor/>

Analysis of Black Woman by Léopold Senghor

<https://afroliterary.wordpress.com/2020/03/20/analysis-of-black-woman-by-leopold-senghor/>

Analyse du poème « La femme noire » de Léopold Sédar

Senghor [https://www.verdon-info.net/2020/10/page-](https://www.verdon-info.net/2020/10/page-litteraire-analyse-du-poeme-la-femme-noire-de-leopold-sedar-senghor.html)

[litteraire-analyse-du-poeme-la-femme-noire-de-leopold-sedar-senghor.html](https://www.verdon-info.net/2020/10/page-litteraire-analyse-du-poeme-la-femme-noire-de-leopold-sedar-senghor.html)

Femme noire, Senghor : commentaire de texte  
<https://www.lalanguefrancaise.com/litterature/femme-noire-senghor-commentaire>

### **Aime Césaire : N'ayez point pitié**

The phrase "N'ayez point pitié" comes from Césaire's play *Une Tempête* (1969), which is loosely modeled on Shakespeare's of the same name, but addresses themes of colonialism, power, and resistance. It is spoken by Caliban, a character representing the oppressed, colonized subject, in his confrontation with Prospero, the so-called colonizer. Caliban's words are a call to reject subservience and to embrace defiance against oppression.

Azérad and Collier pp. 70-78

Audio <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwdTy684ioA>

### **Jacques Dupin: Commencer**

Dupin's verse is often disruptive, the words self-lacerating, and the text overall serving to explore the terms of the new (french) critical theory. Examples are deconstruction and the arbitrary nature of what can be properly drawn from texts. Everywhere is the uncertainty in any public utterance. Dupin's poems are commonly impersonal but troubling, drawing their strength from an underground universe of loneliness and depression.

*Commencer* refers to the act of writing, where we have to tear ourselves from the immediate present, and describe things as they are, without sentimentality, or even our own presence at times.

Azérad and Collier pp. 170-73.

Caws, M.A., Jacques Dupin: The Word Engraved.

<https://ojs.library.dal.ca>

N'guessan, A.K., L'esthétique de la déconstruction dans la poésie de Jacques Dupin. [https://aflash-revue-mdou.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/8-Antoine\\_vol7-1.pdf](https://aflash-revue-mdou.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/8-Antoine_vol7-1.pdf)

### **Phillipe Jaccottet: L'Ignorant**

The poet can only be sure of *not* knowing about things, increasingly so in life. The theme is expressed in a series of diffident, self-questioning and qualified statements in 16 lines of unrhymed Alexandrines. Critics have read large statements concerning life, death and purpose of poetry into these lines, but they are, in fact, straightforward statements, hardly contestable, and put in simple and modest language

The concluding two lines are enigmatic and not wholly convincing, but perhaps extend the common view of passion as a consuming fire. Love brings more heat than light, but leaves behind a beautiful if burned-out skeleton of its former condition, a theme repeated from lines 9-11.

Azérad and Collier pp. 174-80.

Malpoix, J-M, Lecture d'un poème *L'ignorant* de Philippe Jaccottet. <http://www.maulpoix.net/ignorant>.

### **Michel Deguy: Le Métronome**

A poem about poems in general, which are envisaged (controversially: poems are a good deal more) as at a half way place between language and the outside world — between a passing breeze and a painter's palette, as the poem puts it. Most importantly (and also controversially: poems grow by devious routes) a poem is a continual statement, retreat and restatement, that is repeated, regularly as a metronome.

Obliquely, there are also references to *Mallarmé's* aim to create things out of language itself (*I say: a flower! and, out of the oblivion into which my voice consigns any real shape, as something other than petals known to man, there rises, harmoniously and gently, the ideal flower itself, the one that is absent from all earthly bouquets*).

Azérad and Collier pp. 195-203.

Bishop, M. *The language of Poetry: Crisis and Solution*. 1980. Available as Brill or (cheaper) Kindle ebook.

### **Claude Esteban : Quelqu'un Commence a Parler**

The poem comes from Esteban's 1995 collection of the same name and explores memory, loss, identity, and the

fragility of language. It's a meditative and introspective piece written in free verse with a prose-like quality, a hallmark of Esteban's style, which often blends poetry and prose to capture the fluidity of thought and emotion. The title suggests an intimate, almost confessional act of speech within a confined, private space.

*Aquello que permanece a pesar de la ausencia.* A little on Esteban and Spanish translations.

<https://www.lapecerarevista.com/claude-esteban-cohen>

### **Roger Giroux : Decrire le Paysage**

An introspective and philosophical piece that explores the interplay between the self, language, and the natural world. Giroux typically sees poetry as a medium for grappling with absence, silence, and the ineffable. The poem repeatedly evokes a sense of absence and disconnection, both from the self and the landscape. The speaker inhabits a world that feels empty, where his existence is questioned or erased. The landscape becomes a metaphor for this internal desolation, a space that is both present and unattainable.

Roger Giroux. <https://www.babelio.com/auteur/Roger-Giroux/49208>

Anthologie permanente

<https://poezibao.typepad.com/poezibao/2011/04/anthologie-permanente-roger-giroux.html>

L'arbre, le temps. <https://www.babelio.com/livres/Giroux-Larbre-le-temps/1177227>

## **Emmanuel Hocquard : Élégie 5**

Part of Emmanuel Hocquard's collection of *Élégies* (1969–1989), the poem exemplifies his concept of an 'inverse elegy,' a deliberate departure from the traditional elegiac form. Unlike classical elegies, which generally use the first-person voice to express autobiographical lament, nostalgia, or personal emotion, Hocquard's work subverts these conventions, embracing a minimalist, objectivist approach influenced by American poets like Charles Reznikoff and George Oppen.

The poem opens with a stark description of a winter night, which sets a tone of stillness and absence, a dead time that aligns with Hocquard's rejection of lyrical excess. Memory is not as a nostalgic recollection but a linguistic construct, a simple reconstruction through words.

Fetzer, G. L'élégie en jeu chez Emmanuel Hocquard  
<https://journals.openedition.org/babel/1100>

De Azzopardi. Emmanuel Hocquard : Les elegies.  
<https://cahiercritiquedepoesie.fr/ccp-33-3/emmanuel-hocquard-les-elegies>

Zenetti, J.M. Écrire à la chambre - dispositif poétique et esthétique pratique d'Emmanuel Hocquard.

[https://hal.univ-lyon2.fr/hal-04512988v1/file/Article\\_Hocquard\\_Zenetti.pdf](https://hal.univ-lyon2.fr/hal-04512988v1/file/Article_Hocquard_Zenetti.pdf)

## **Jean Daive : Fut Bâti**

A complex and enigmatic work that operates within the avant-garde tradition of French poetry. The collection from which this poem comes unfolds through seven cycles — Monde à quatre verbes, Universaux, Le Palais des quatre heures, Buisson de l'inferral, Autour du rongeur, and Fut bâti — each contributing to a fragmented yet deliberate exploration of language, memory, and the body. Fut bâti is thus concerned with the act of language-making. The title suggests a process of creation, but the poem also dismantles this process. The text moves from "the cry" (le cri) to the "interrupted sentence" (la phrase interrompue), reflecting a struggle to articulate a name or find language itself.

Jean Daive, *Le Dernier mur*. Strasburg, L'Atelier contemporain, coll. "Essais sur l'art", 2024

<https://www.fabula.org/actualites/119351/jean-daive-le-dernier-mur.html>

## **Marceline Pleynet : Hazana**

Pleyne is associated with the Tel Quel group, and is known for his experimental and theoretically informed approach to poetry. That poetry is influenced by Surrealism, particularly in its use of metaphor and narrative disruption, but Pleyne often emphasizes the physicality of language and the plain sensory experience of the body. The work can incorporate fragments of earlier

poets, eroticism, orality, and a reflective stance on the act of writing itself. There is thus an interplay of form, textuality, and ideology, challenging conventional literary structures and exploring the relationship between language, the body, and socio-political contexts. The title 'Hazana' seems a variant of 'hazaña,' Spanish for 'exploit' or 'feat.'

Marceline Pleynet.

[http://www.marcelinpleynet.fr/index.php/documents/Marceline Pleynet](http://www.marcelinpleynet.fr/index.php/documents/Marceline_Pleynet) . <https://www.poemes.co/marcelin-pleynet.html>

### **Jean-Michel Maulpoix : Le bleu ne fait pas de bruit.**

The piece comes from Maulpoix's collection *Une histoire de bleu* (1992), a prose poem that explores the color blue as a metaphor for existential, emotional, and spiritual states. The text is an unbroken paragraph, creating a meditative flow that mirrors the fluid, elusive nature of blue. Philosophical musings are woven in with passages of vivid sensory imagery.

Blue is the central motif, described as a timid color, without ulterior motive, omen, or plan. Unlike vibrant colors that demand attention, blue is subtle, drawing the gaze gently and leading it to sink and drown without realizing anything, i.e. a passive, almost hypnotic pull toward dissolution or transcendence. The poem's imagery of shedding the body — after all the blood has spurted and the entrails have emptied—implies a spiritual

purification, where blue represents the essence of the soul stripped of physicality.

Azérad and Collier pp. 267-271.

Jean-Michel Maulpoix Une histoire de bleu

<http://www.maulpoix.net/bleu.html>

Jean-Michel Maulpoix : Une histoire de bleu.

<https://www.liminaire.fr/creation/ateliers-d-ecriture/article/jean-michel-maulpoix-une-histoire-de-bleu>

### **Amina Saïd : Dans le cercle du monde**

The poem comes from Saïd's *Au présent du monde* collection, which is a lyrical exploration of identity, time, and the human condition expressed in her Tunisian heritage and experience of living between two cultures. It reflects Saïd's characteristic themes of silence, exile, memory, and the interplay between the self and the world. The title is indeed a recurring motive in Saïd's work, suggesting continuity, eternity, and the interconnectedness of beginnings and endings. The speaker oscillates between belonging and alienation, but is also rooted in a specific place.

Voke, S. De l'obscurité de l'exil à la lumière de l'écriture : les mouvements d'allers et retours chez Amina Saïd.

<https://www.fabula.org/colloques/document13008.php>

Moatamri, I. Poétique de la Relation : Amina Saïd et Édouard Glissant.

<https://journals.openedition.org/trans/180?lang=It>

Le Paysage dans la Poesie de Amina Saïd. Ph D. Thesis.  
[https://www.applis.univ-tours.fr/theses/2008/ines.moatamri\\_2389.pdf](https://www.applis.univ-tours.fr/theses/2008/ines.moatamri_2389.pdf)

## VERSE MATTERS

In traditional French poetry, such as alexandrine verse, the mute e was historically pronounced to maintain the syllable count required by the meter (e.g. 12 syllables in an alexandrine). In modern French poetry, however, strict adherence to syllable counting is less common, and poets usually write in free verse (*vers libre*), where the mute e is less likely to be pronounced unless the poet explicitly intends it for rhythmic or stylistic effect. In verse set out in tabular fashion, moreover, where each line does not begin at the left hand margin, and words may be set with additional line space above and below, it is often difficult to know what the poet intends. Professional readers therefore find by trial and error what gives the most pleasing effect, often searching for some echo of traditional meter that can be half sensed beneath the seemingly haphazard arrangement of words. {2} Where possible, I have given links to professional recordings of poems, so that readers can develop an ear for French verse. Apollinaire needs the 'e' to be pronounced if his verse is to have a pleasing regularity, for example, but Senghor's *New York* does not : it's altogether a different reading experience.

Modern French poetry is increasingly an acquired taste. A few poets are well known and well liked (Apollinaire, Prévert and Éluard) but most are the preserve of a small band of enthusiasts: the readers of avant-garde magazines, academics, and fellow poets. The new poetry still exhibits linearity, but there is rarely rhyme or any

attempt at beauty of phrasing. Themes do not draw on the great commonplaces of life, moreover, but on two conceptual matters, those of surrealism and the new literary criticism, primarily in the last case a preoccupation with theories of language and meaning. If those fields are not understood, not fully assimilated in their readers' hearts, then the new poetry will seem thin, arbitrary and over-intellectual. Rhyme and phonetic patterning, those great standbys of traditional verse, are much muted, and the aim is more authenticity, a seemingly immediate and natural response to everyday matters in everyday language. There are many exceptions to so simple an aim, of course, but the sonorities of Valéry or chiselled precision of Gautier, etc. are not what modern French verse is read for, indeed are quite foreign to its nature.

Modern French poetry is written in free verse, similar to the bulk of poetry written in English today. Strictly speaking, the medium is not a verse at all, but prose, an attractive prose initially, with some repeating character or characters, but not uniformity. Beauty of expression is not wholly missing — which readers can check by slowly enunciating the French — but is certainly subordinated to an exactness of natural expression, particular to the poet concerned, a term generally called 'voice' in English. Each poet aims to achieve an original voice, distinct to themselves, which is nonetheless admirably suited to what they wish to say.

The new experimental poetry also differs in structure. Whatever its theme, traditional poetry generally exhibited three features. First were dense analogical patterns on the

phonetic, structural, and semantic levels of the poetic text (e.g. meter, rhyme, anaphora; semantic parallelism). Second was figurative language (e.g. metaphor, simile, symbol, personification). Third were diverse manifestations of semantic tension (e.g. oxymoron, paradox, irony). The new poetry was different. It rejected these features, ruling them unnecessary, indeed inhibiting. Previously, they had been seen as enabling the poet's need to create felicitously inevitable lines; now they hindered the poet's task of honest response to the world as it was, or at least as it should be.

This has become so natural a state of affairs that younger academics, readers and poets have largely lost the art of verse. It is not that they don't appreciate traditional verse, but they actually don't *hear* it, being only vaguely aware that a poem is not written in everyday living language. The sonic texture the poet has laboured so hard to achieve is unnoticed or frankly unwanted: {2-3} the poem just seems stilted, old fashioned and/or inauthentic. But the converse, an everyday sameness in everyday language, brings its own problems, not least an irredeemable flatness that is not compensated by originality or cleverness of content. Poems are works of art, and as such must have emotive content, apt expression and deep roots in our psychic natures.

This applies especially to twentieth-century French verse, which needs to be read intently, alive to its phrasing and sonic properties. Simply skimming through the original will not serve, and even less successful will be simply reading the translations. French verse is more delicately

patterned than its counterpart in English, and not to be aware of that patterning is to throw away the larger part of what makes the poem the thing it is. {4} Listening carefully to the verse while understanding the prose sense from the translations is probably the best way forward. Only rarely, unfortunately, will the translations in this volume yield the same pleasure that the original does. Free verse provides no formal structure that can be copied across and filled with effective English equivalents. The poetry here lies much more in the fabric of the French language, particularly as employed by the poet in question, and this sonic fabric is quite different from any English translation for the sense.

Sound indeed has its own dimensions, and can depart quite considerably from the experience of silent reading. Desnos's *Le Paysage* is not a particularly striking poem, indeed rather conventional, but the audio recording brings up an extraordinary patterning of sibilant consonants. Repeating, and half memorising the words of the poems here will therefore help enormously to root these sensations in the mind, and understand the continuing reverence the French feel towards their literary arts.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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### Specific

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