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PAUL ELUARD

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INTRODUCTION

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Although Paul Eluard can be considered a poet of the intellectual twentieth century, his work, as influenced by his social environment, gives the appearance of a twentieth-century poet who has been influenced by a certain emotion or a specific condition or circumstance, is not so much a poet as a poet in the sense of Valéry in depicting the intellectual climate of his time and the life of his generation. To understand his work and to be able to understand it in some degree necessitates a thorough knowledge of the man himself and the intellectual climate in which he lived, and of his interesting life. He lived during a crucial period in history, and he reacted to his environment in a way that is not so obvious as that of the average man. This study is not a critical evaluation of Eluard, but rather a study of the man, of the milieu in which he lived and died, and of some of the poetry he wrote. However, the sources were limited as to the amount of Eluard's work available to the writer; so at this point, it should be noted that the study of Eluard's poetry is made within this limitation.

INTRODUCTION

Although Paul Eluard can certainly not be called the typical twentieth century French poet, a study of his life and writing, as influenced by historical and intellectual environment, gives an excellent picture in at least one case of a twentieth century poet in France. His poetry, a great deal of which is vers de circonstance, or poetry written under the influence of a certain emotion peculiar to a specific condition or circumstance, is extremely valuable in depicting the intellectual climate in a France suffering from two wars and occupation. To study Eluard's work and to be able to understand it in some way almost necessitates a thorough knowledge of the man himself and the intellectual climate in which he lived. His was an interesting life. He lived during a crucial time in history, and he reacted to his environment in a more sensitive fashion than would have the average man.

This study is not a critical evaluation of Eluard. It is rather a study of the man, of the milieu in which he lived and died, and of some of the poetry he wrote. Resources were limited as to the amount of Eluard's work available to the writer; so at this point, it should be noted that the study of Eluard's poetry is made within this limitation.

Errata

Footnote 22 in Chapter I should read: Jean Larnac, Littérature française d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1948), p.174.

Add to footnote 7 in Chapter II: This was an earlier attempt to destroy the academic vision of things.

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BIOGRAPHY

Paul Eluard, or to call him by his rightful name, Paul Eluard, was born in Saint-Denis (a suburb of Paris) on October 14, 1895. Both of his parents were working class; his mother was a seamstress, and his father an accountant. He spent his first years of his life and at Aubray-Auxois, near his family home in Paris, in a house on the Louis-Blanc, situated in the district of the Marais.

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Steele Brodie, *Paul Eluard: A Study in Surrealism*
New York: Newell's Editions, 1968.

1968.

Les "Écoles laïques" were organized by the
revival in the matter of religion
as a whole, intellectual
period of the Convention.
of the nineteenth century,
species of the Roman Catholic

Dictionnaire biographique
(Paris: Edition Phares, 1968)

Paul Eluard, or to call him by his rightful name, Eugène Grindel, was born in Saint-Denis (a suburb of Paris) on December 14, 1895.¹ Both of his parents were of the working class: his mother was a seamstress, and his father, an accountant.² He spent his first years at Saint-Denis and at Aulnay-sous-Bois; then his family moved into Paris, to a house on rue Louis-Blanc, situated in a working-class district in the dixième arrondissement near the Gare de l'Est and Gare du Nord. He lived there between the ages of twelve and sixteen. He attended an école laïque³ and then the Ecole Colbert, a technical collège (high school level). His studies there were interrupted by tuberculosis in 1912. The nature of his illness required that he move to the mountains, so he went to Switzerland and spent a year and a half there in a sanatorium at Davos. He spent the time reading widely of many poets: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, the "poètes maudits", and the new poets, Apollinaire and Vildrac.⁴

¹Pierre Brodin, Présences contemporaines (vol. I. Paris: Nouvelles Editions Debresse, 1955), p.105.

²Ibid.

³The "écoles laïques" are the public schools of the State. Reorganized by the Third Republic in 1883, they are neutral in the matter of religion. In fact, the teachers are as a whole, intellectual heirs of the French Revolution (period of the Convention). They have been, since the end of the nineteenth century, "leftists", unionized, and staunch enemies of the Roman Catholic Church.

⁴Dictionnaire biographique français contemporain (Paris: Edition Pharos, 1950), p.207.

While he was in Switzerland, he met Gala, his first love, whom he was to marry in 1917.

He returned, cured, to Paris in 1914, only to leave again, for the war front. He served in the army as a hospital attendant, then as an infantryman. He was badly gassed in 1917, and developed gangrene of the lungs.

After the war, he returned to Paris. There, he met André Breton, Louis Aragon, Philippe Soupault, Tristan Tzara, and Picabia, some of the future Surrealists. (He became friendly with Jean Paulhan in 1918; his friend wrote the preface to Eluard's Exemples in 1921.⁵) With these men, he participated in the Dadaist movement.⁶ Eluard had been writing poetry before the war, memories for the most part of his stay in Switzerland and accounts of his love for Gala; but his first volume, Le Devoir et l'Inquiétude, was published in 1917. "With his friends, he signed the first Surrealist tracts and manifestos...."⁷

In 1920, his Les Animaux et leurs Hommes was published. Several poems in the volume are dedicated to painters he met

⁵Brodin, loc. cit.

⁶Dictionnaire biographique français contemporain, p.207.

⁷Ibid.

after his joining in with the "Surrealists": Max Ernst⁸, Picasso,⁹ and Chirico, for example.¹⁰ His poetry written immediately after the war period is "marked by the sadness which the injustice and inhumanity in the world inspires in him".¹¹ This same despair shows through in Mourir de ne pas mourir (dedicated to André Breton), published in 1924 (and again, at times, in Capitale de la douleur in 1926). This same year, 1924, his marriage to Gala (they had had one daughter, Cécile) was broken off. He disappeared suddenly, shortly after this, and was believed dead by his friends. But he had gone on a voyage around the world by himself. Leaving from Marseille, he visited in Asia and the Far East: India, Ceylon, Malaya, Indochina, Australia, New Zealand, Java, Sumatra. After his return to

⁸with whom he collaborated on Les Malheurs des Immortels in 1932. There are poems dedicated to Ernst, one in Répétitions (1922), and one in Capitale de la douleur (1926).

⁹who has done several pictures of Eluard's second wife Nusch. Picasso was a close personal friend of Eluard. This is evident in the poem "Picasso bon maître de la liberté" in Picasso à Antibes: "Un visage de ma famille, une grande famille/Composé d'amis très sûrs, amis de jour, amis/de nuit, tous assez beaux, très différents....". (p.40)

¹⁰Brodin, op. cit., p.106.

¹¹Ibid.

Paris seven months later, he neither talked of, nor wrote about, the countries he had visited. He took up his place again with the Surrealists. "For several years, he collaborated in demonstrations, publications, scandals, and various activities of the group."¹²

1926 was "an important date in the work of the poet Eluard"¹³ with the publication of Capitale de la douleur. "Eluard regained hope. The world is lighter for him, more gay. The love poems are more numerous. The poet sings of his loved one."¹⁴ The publication of this work established his reputation.¹⁵

"Eluard's activity in the Surrealist group is marked, in 1930, by the publication of two works written in collaboration, one with Breton: L'Immaculée Conception, and one with Breton and Char: Ralentir Travaux."¹⁶ At the same time, however, Eluard entered a new period of despair, illustrated in A Toute Epreuve, published in 1930.¹⁷

¹²Brodin, op. cit., p.108.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Stanley J. Kunitz, Twentieth Century Authors (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1955), p.305.

¹⁶Brodin, op. cit., p.109.

¹⁷Ibid.

About the year 1931, the name of Nusch, his new love, began to appear in his poetry. She inspired many of his poems. (She died in 1946; they had known a very happy married life. When they were married has not been ascertained.)¹⁸

La Vie immédiate, which appeared in 1932, spoke of solitude as a "cruel enemy".¹⁹ Cries of despair appear at times in his 1936 publication, Les Yeux fertiles; but several poems in it are dedicated to Nusch and to love.²⁰ Eluard's political sentiments are clearly affirmed in the last poem of this volume, "Critique de la poésie".²¹ La Rose publique, published in 1934, contains "the most surrealist of his poems".²²

Eluard was quite affected by the Spanish Civil War, which began in July 1936. He had visited Madrid earlier that year, had made many friends, and had composed there some of the poems for Les Yeux fertiles.²³ He was very

¹⁸Very little is known of the personal life of Paul Eluard. Even his good friend and biographer, the communist Louis Parrot, warns the reader of that.

¹⁹Brodin, loc. cit.

²⁰Brodin, op. cit., p.110.

²¹Ibid.

²²Louis Parrot, Paul Eluard (Paris: Editions Pierre Seghers, 1945), p.53.

²³Brodin, op. cit., p.111.

conscious of, and sympathetic towards, the plight of the Spanish people.²⁴ From that year on, "without abandoning his personal vein and the surrealist forms, he engaged himself in writing la poésie militante".²⁵

Cours naturel, in 1938, was "witness of the poet's political occupations".²⁶ 1938 is very significant, for it was the year Eluard broke with Breton and the Surrealist influence.²⁷ Chanson complète, in 1939, "accentuates the passing from the dream to reality".²⁸ Also published that year was Donner à voir, which "contains some of the most dense, the most significant of Eluard's prose poems".²⁹

World War II broke out, and Eluard was mobilized for the second time. After the Armistice of June, 1940, he gave everything he could to the Resistance movement.³⁰ He undertook with Jean de Lescure the publication of l'Honneur

²⁴He had written in L'Evidence poétique that same year that "the time has come for poets to proclaim their right and duty to maintain that they are deeply involved in the life of other men in communal life". *Directions*, 1911, pp. cxlii-cxlv.

²⁵Dictionnaire biographique..., p.207.

²⁶Brodin, op. cit., p.111.

²⁷Cecil Arthur Hackett, Anthology of Modern French Poetry (New York: The MacMillan Co.), p.277.

²⁸Brodin, op. cit., p.112.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

des Poètes³¹ and Europe³² and helped with the edition and in the distribution of clandestine papers, and put brochures of propaganda into shape.³³ "What Eluard wrote during the trying years could...fall into two groups: the directly circumstantial verse representing the basic color of events and his subtler interpretations of disaster."³⁴

In 1942, Eluard became a member of the underground Communist party.³⁵ "His was an idealistic communism, as unpolitical as possible, which developed late...."³⁶ His becoming a member of the Communist party was

A move which seemed a natural corollary to resistance, and to which he was drawn by his intensely human feeling for the solidarity of mankind....What

³¹"A collection of poems by unknown or anonymous authors brought together" under this title. This little anthology purports to participate, in the name of all French poets, in the "struggle for national liberation and international freedom". Edouard Roditi, "Poetry is News," Poetry, 64: 53, April, 1944.

³²Louis Parrot, "The Poet and the War," Selected Writings of Paul Eluard (New York: New Directions, 1951), pp.xxiii-xxiv.

³³Brodin, op. cit., p.113.

³⁴Anna Balakian, "The Post-Surrealism of Aragon and Eluard," Yale French Studies, I(2):93, Fall-Winter, 1948.

³⁵Brodin, loc. cit.

³⁶Geoffrey Brereton, A Short History of French Literature, (London: Pelican Books, 1954), p.314.

attracted him was the theoretical purity of the doctrine....He idealized fraternity....His belief in it was a simple extension of his feeling for the human individual....³⁷

Poésie et Vérité, which contains Eluard's most famous poem "Une Seule Pensée" (or "Liberté"), was published that same year, 1942. Pierre Brodin in Présences contemporaines terms the poem--perhaps rather strongly--"a great cry of grief at the tragedy of the war, at the occupation, at the captivity of French soldiers and civilians".³⁸ Several fine patriotic poems were included in Au Rendez-vous allemand in 1944.³⁹ "The poems inform us, better than any long chronicle, of the mental state of French intellectuals during the four occupation years."⁴⁰

In February 1944, Paul Eluard returned from the provinces where he had spent several months co-ordinating liaison between the two zones and with even more ardor, again took up the struggle he had never ceased to wage. He again took up Si his perilous work in Paris. In June 1944 he created l'Eternelle Revue in which he proposed to group around himself the best of...young writers.⁴¹

³⁷Geoffrey Brereton, Introduction to the French Poets (Fairlawn, New Jersey: Essential Books, Inc., 1957), p.276.

³⁸Brodin, op. cit., p.113.

³⁹several of which are recorded by Eluard himself in the record album L'Honneur des Poètes.

⁴⁰Parrot, op. cit., p.xxi.

⁴¹Ibid., p.xxv.

Eluard and his wife Nusch had to move constantly during his Resistance work in order to escape the Gestapo.

At one point in flight...he took refuge in an insane asylum at Saint-Alban, where the misery of the inmates touched him deeply; during his months there he worked on a manuscript which was published after the war...Souvenirs de la Maison des Fous.⁴²

During the occupation, he wrote under the names of Jean du Hault and Maurice Hervent.

Eluard was in Switzerland when he received, on November 28, 1946, the news of the death of Nusch, the inseparable companion of his life and of his work for seventeen years. His sorrow was immense. It took him three years to regain his courage and leave despair....⁴³

From the sloughs of despondency after the death of his wife...it was his daughter [Jacqueline⁴⁴] who helped him overcome suicidal tendencies and look for new meanings in life.⁴⁵

The first part of Poèmes politiques, published in 1948, is dedicated to the memory of Nusch.

In the year 1948, Eluard was "very active in Communist

⁴²Kunitz, loc. cit.

⁴³Brodin, loc. cit.

⁴⁴The Dédicace to Corps mémorable reads: "Ah! mille flammes, un feu, la lumière,/Une ombre!/Le soleil me suit,/Jacqueline me prolonge."

⁴⁵Leroy J. Bénait, "Paul Eluard: Une Leçon de morale," French Review, 24:505, May 1951.

affairs, mainly from the aspect of cultural relations. He was ambassador of the new poetry and travelled extensively....⁴⁶
From 1948 to 1950, he

Took part in various congrès de la paix. At the Congrès de Mexico, in 1949, he met Dominique. This is the companion of his last days, the one who is celebrated in Le Phénix (1951), the last work of the poet published during his lifetime....⁴⁷

Eluard died of pneumonia at Charenton, near Paris, on November 18, 1952, at the age of fifty-six.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Kunitz, op. cit., p.306.

⁴⁷Brodin, op. cit., p.116.

⁴⁸"Obituaries," Wilson Library Bulletin (No.5), 27:34+, January, 1953.

Ir. R. Palmer, A History of the Modern World (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p.587.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, IX, 635.

INTELLECTUAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Dreyfus Affair, which extended over the years from 1894 to 1906, had shaken France to her roots, and had sharply divided public opinion into two violently opposing camps. The Church and the Army were both involved because of the nature of the dispute.

Dreyfus, an army officer who happened to be Jewish in religion and republican in politics, was found guilty of treason by a military court and deported to Devil's Island. Evidence accumulated showing his innocence, and indicating that another officer, an aristocrat, a Catholic and Royalist, was the true traitor. The Army and the "best" people refused to reopen the Dreyfus case because they wished to disgrace the whole republican régime. The partisans of Dreyfus stubbornly upheld him, both because they believed in justice and because they wished to discredit their adversaries. Dreyfus was finally exonerated in 1906.¹

The two opposing camps in politics were the Republicans, which included all liberals, socialists, and leftists in general; and the Conservatives, which included the Royalists and the Clericals. The Republicans finally won a signal victory over the "Réaction", to get the upper hand, with Dreyfus' acquittal and rehabilitation in 1906.

As a result of the Affair, the role of the Army in relationship to the nation was reconsidered. A strong feeling of anti-militarism, its strength indicated by the Affair², developed before World War I was even declared.

¹R. R. Palmer, A History of the Modern World (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p.587.

²Encyclopedia Britannica, IX, 635.

Anti-clericalism was evolved by atheists and agnostics. There was a thorough dissatisfaction with capitalism. Liberalism was the cult of the Revolution. The Socialists, evoking the Déclaration de l'Homme et du Citoyen from revolutionary days, demanded social reforms for the working class. This lutte sociale continued strongly up until 1914. In fact, from 1900 on, the direction of the *Partie Socialiste unifiée* in France had passed from the hands of the Reformists into the hands of the Marxists.

Anti-militarism was greatly increased by the horror at the manslaughter of the 1914 War, which eventually took from France at least one future generation of promising young men, and with them, a certain amount of hope for France herself. The war was a surprise to the French.³ It evoked indignation at first; then anger, disgust and horror. It was a "spontaneous, sudden and strongly emotional reaction, following immediately the first bewildering shock...."⁴ To many, it was just not "their" war.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 naturally caused a great amount of attention, but especially did it interest the men who had lodged the social protests. Here was a new way to get action--open, violent revolution. Of course, the Conservative element remained obdurate in their

³Albert Schinz, French Literature of the Great War (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1920), p.5.

⁴Ibid., p.1.

attitude. But among the more radical young men, there was a profound disgust for the talk and promises of the older men who governed France and who had actually glorified the war. This disgusted faction was ready to act. These men were mentally and intellectually ready for the ideas of Marxism, for the idea of a revolution. Theirs became a philosophy of destruction of all which had developed in the first fourteen years or so of the twentieth century, a philosophy of nihilism. It is small wonder that the intellectual world took up first to the Dadaist movement and then to Surrealism.⁵ Surrealism is entitled "mindless Marxism" by Thomas J. Fitzmorris in Catholic World, "an artistic parallel to Marxism". As Marxism is the enemy of capitalism, so was Surrealism the arch foe of traditionalism.⁶ Historically speaking⁷ Surrealism began as a movement about

⁵which was "born of an immense despair before the condition to which man was reduced on earth....All the violence of Surrealism came from the tension between these two poles of la vie immédiate and l'existence virtuelle." Michel Carrouges, André Breton et les Données fondamentales du Surréalisme (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1950), p.10.

⁶Thomas J. Fitzmorris, "Mindless Marxism," Catholic World, 150:420, January, 1940.

⁷But preceding this, Cubism, in painting and poetry, was the movement between 1900 and 1910 headed by Brach, Picasso, Apollinaire and Max Jacob. Their desire in poetry was "to go beyond appearance in order to attain reality". Extreme attention was paid to the exterior world of nature. The poet addresses his unconscious self, for he tries to acquaint himself with the reality which lies unknown within him. R. -M. Albérès, Bilan littéraire du XXe siècle (Paris: Editions Montagne, 1956), pp.186-187.

1920, grouped under André Breton, and composed of poets and painters.⁸

The young Surrealists of 1920 reacted nihilistically to a certain atmosphere: the smug bourgeois world whose limited logic they held responsible for war and social chaos. These young men...found no inspiration in war....To them the inefficacy of language was as responsible for the stagnation of society as the fallibility of thought and action....⁹

They reacted in like fashion against the nihilism of Dadaism and its violence and blindness and negativeness.¹⁰

As early as 1925 the Surrealists had felt that their aesthetic ideals bore a subtle relation to social consciousness. For a while they identified this desire for a better social order with the Communist Revolution....Many...soon realized that their poetic image of "revolution" was in direct contradiction with the limited sense of the word given by the Communists.¹¹

"Almost all the writers who lived in France between 1918 and 1940 were marked by the imprint, or influenced by the memory, of a victorious but ruinous war...."¹²

⁸Carrouges, op. cit., pp.14-15.

⁹Anna Balakian, "The Post-Surrealism of Aragon and Eluard," Yale French Studies, I(2):93-94, Fall-Winter, 1948.

¹⁰Carrouges, loc. cit.

¹¹Balakian, op. cit., pp.95-96.

¹²Pierre Brodin, Les Ecrivains de l'Entre-Deux-Guerres (Montreal: Editions Bernard Valiquette, 1947), pp.12-13.

¹³Carrouges, op. cit., p.15.

¹⁴Anna Balakian, Literary Origins of Surrealism (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947), p.134.

There came for those surviving intellectuals a

Period of calm philosophical consideration of all that was involved in the gigantic struggle characterized by a reconsideration of the past, a weighing of the present, and especially an effort to prepare for the future.¹³

There were reasons for World War I coming as a shock to the French. Various philosophies prevailed which were

Severally and jointly responsible for...serious apathy in France....Sentimental socialism based on a naïve belief in the brotherhood of nations... Utopian socialism which appealed more especially to the masses, assumed among the middle classes, who claim to stand on a somewhat higher intellectual level, the form of moralism...based on the assumption that there exists in all men an identical moral conscience, which...does not, and cannot vary from one man to another....Most beautiful of all... but philosophically unsound...Intuitionism [Bergsonism] ...anti-intellectualism...subjectivism....¹⁴

To do nothing, to know nothing, to think nothing, to doubt everything, which led to a denial of God, was the thesis of Dadaism, l'anarchie pure, the creation of Tristan Tzara, a transplanted pacifist Rumanian writer. The Dadaist movement reached its heights in 1919; but internal disagreement hastened its decline, and it disappeared about 1921.¹⁵ This was to "a cult of sensation"¹⁶--that is, a domination of thought by sensation and instinct, where memory is dis-

¹³Schinz, op. cit., p.1.

¹⁴Ibid., p.242.

¹⁵Carrouges, op. cit., p.10.

¹⁶Anna Balakian, Literary Origins of Surrealism (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947), p.136.

claimed. The ideal of Dada "poetry" was "the absurd as manifested by the use of the wrong word".¹⁷ Its motto was "connais pas".¹⁸ By denying logic to his mind, and by making it follow its sudden and unreasonable impulses, the "poet" arrives at "automatic writing".¹⁹ This was taken over by the Surrealists, for their work was "the expression of unconscious reactions...a spontaneous reaction, instinctive ...the only one...which is able to perceive the true truth, since it is natural, and not deformed by habit or by artificial conventions".²⁰

L'écriture automatique joue un rôle capital dans le surréalisme. Ce rôle est si essentiel que c'est la découverte de l'écriture automatique qui a constitué l'acte de la naissance du surréalisme. Elle est

¹⁷Ibid., p.138.

¹⁸Pierre-Henri Simon, Histoire de la littérature française au XXe siècle (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1957), vol.I, p.138.

¹⁹"Faites-vous apporter de quoi écrire, après vous être établi en un lieu aussi favorable que possible à la concentration de votre esprit sur lui-même. Placez-vous dans l'état le plus passif, ou réceptif, que vous pourrez... Ecrivez vite sans sujet préconçu, assez vite pour ne pas retenir et ne pas être tenté de vous relire. La première phrase viendra toute seule, tant il est vrai qu'à chaque seconde il est une phrase étrangère à notre pensée consciente qui ne demande qu'à s'extérioriser...." André Breton, Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme.

²⁰Léon Verriest, L'Evolution de la littérature française (New York: Harper & Bros. Publishers, 1954), p.214.

Ibid., p.203.

l'axe central de l'expérience surréaliste.²¹

The Surrealist looks

With contempt upon the exterior world... regards the Christian concept of the infinite and that of the Pantheist as a complete failure. According to him Christianity and pantheistic philosophy keep humanity as fully imprisoned in the external world as naturalism or realism....²²

Surrealism is not a philosophy in the academic sense of the word,

Since it matters little to it to demonstrate arguments in building up series of abstract reasonings. It is immersed right in life and not in the zone of abstractions. Yet it is a philosophy in the greatest sense of the word, for it explains a new conception of the world and it searches for possession of the universe.²³

Surrealism (known as Superréalisme before 1914) was not designed to appeal to a very wide audience, because it was "too dependent on its power to shock the bourgeoisie".²⁴

The Surrealists "attempted to loosen the gates of the subconscious in the hope that pure poetry would issue forth".²⁵

Surrealism...widened the boundaries of associations and made all types of material available, restricting the poet to no one type of reality....

²¹Carrouges, op. cit., p.126.

²²Balakian, op. cit., p.10.

²³Carrouges, op. cit., p.9.

²⁴H. R. Hays, "Surrealist Influence in Contemporary English and American Poetry," Poetry, 54:202, July, 1939.

²⁵Ibid., p.203.

It differs from symbolism in that a system of images does not stand for a concept of reality, but rather images are brought together to create something new.²⁶

An accusation against Surrealism labels it pansexual. This is in accordance with its integral connection with Freudian analysis (of dreams). This is defended:

If it is a product of Freudianism, it's also a protest against the kind of Freudian analysis which dissects every bit of spontaneity and lyricism in the interests of a search for causes....²⁷

"True Surrealists...claim an affinity to Hegel"²⁸ as well as to Freud.

Surrealism is an "explosion of the word"; just as "Romanticism exploded the verse form, Surrealism exploded the sentence".²⁹ Surrealism is neither "a school nor a form of aesthetics".³⁰ Anna Balakian, an authority on this movement, states that the purpose of the Surrealist's existence is "to seek satisfaction of both physical and

²⁶Ibid., p.207.

²⁷Paul Rosenfield, "Conversation with a Surrealist," Nation, 134:236-237, February 2', 1932.

²⁸Jacques Allamand, "The Genealogy of Lettrism," Poetry, 71:142, December, 1947.

²⁹Ibid., p.144.

³⁰Waldemar George, "New Art in France and Germany," Living Age, 334:76, January 1, 1928.

metaphysical thirst by pushing back the frontiers of reality and revealing the infinite possibilities of the concrete world".³¹ A Surrealist holds the belief that "the world is all, and there is enough here if only we develop sufficient elasticity of insight".³²

Around 1930 "l'après-guerre" was finished and a new "avant-guerre" began. A reaction began to form against Freudian philosophy and cynicism. Surrealism, having wrongly connected its destiny to the side of communism, died. Literature came out from the chaos of dadaism hungering for some order.³³

Les jeunes écrivains cherchent à concilier la Foi et la Raison, l'amour de l'humanité et l'esprit critique, à rendre aux concepts de liberté et de fraternité leur place dans la pensée et dans le coeur de leurs contemporains.³⁴

³¹Anna Balakian, "The Post-Surrealism of Aragon and Eluard," Yale French Studies, I(2):94, Fall-Winter, 1948.

³²Ibid., p.100.

³³Brodin, op. cit., p.21.

³⁴Ibid.

THE CRITICS EVALUATE ELUARD AS A SURREALIST

Eluard is considered of great significance in relationship to Surrealism, which he himself considered as a "state of mind".¹ M. D. Zabel refers to him as "a Surrealist master"² and "one of the fundamentalists of Surrealist doctrine"³ in connection with Eluard's Thorns of Thunder. Zabel claims that Eluard's images attain "a level not commonly reached by members of the Surrealist school".⁴

Wallace Fowlie considers him to be "the greatest poet from Surrealism".⁵ Henri Clouard calls him "the master of Surrealistic poetry".⁶ Geoffrey Brereton says that, "as a poet, Paul Eluard was born with surrealism," and that the poet found his "true affinities" in that movement.⁷ Eluard and Jean Cocteau are considered to be

¹Paul Eluard, L'Evidence poétique.

²M. D. Zabel, "A Surrealist Master," Poetry, 134:347, September, 1936.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p.349.

⁵Wallace Fowlie, A Guide to Contemporary French Literature (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p.241.

⁶Henri Clouard, Histoire de la littérature française (vol.II. Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1949), pp.156-157.

⁷Geoffrey Brereton, Introduction to the French Poets (Fairlawn, New Jersey: Essential Books, Inc., 1957), p.275.

"the best products of Surrealism".⁸ Simon refers to him as "le plus humain et le plus valable des poètes surréalistes".⁹

Hackett sends, at first, a note of query among all these affirmations.

Eluard is a natural poet, and it may be only a coincidence that his best poems belong to the time when he was a Surrealist. It is certain, however, that his technique was refined and sharpened and his development accelerated under this influence, and he remains their most important poet.¹⁰

According to Hackett, Eluard's "best poetry" was that written between 1918 and 1924, the period of early surrealism.¹¹

"He simplified Surrealism but never abandoned it," asserts Geoffrey Brereton. In Introduction to the French Poets¹² Brereton says that "Surrealism merely brought an increased mystery and depth to his fundamentally simple songs inspired by emotional depth".

Wallace Fowlie says of Capitale de la douleur, published in 1926,

⁸H. R. Hays, "Surrealist Influence in Contemporary English and American Poetry," Poetry, 54:208, July, 1939.

⁹Pierre-Henri Simon, Histoire de la littérature française au XXe siècle (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1957), pp.108-109. (vol.II)

¹⁰Cecil Arthur Hackett, An Anthology of Modern French Poetry (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1952), p.277.

¹¹Ibid., p.278.

¹²Brereton, loc. cit.

Even in this work, composed when Eluard was closest to the doctrines of Breton, there are very few traces of Surrealist exaggerations. The freedom with which he used words may have been encouraged by Surrealist teaching, however.¹³

"He generally retained the basic surrealist tendency, to disregard arbitrary divisions between the concrete and abstract worlds," according to Anna Balakian.¹⁴

L'évolution d'Eluard est analogue à celle d'Aragon¹⁵ mais tardive. Les poèmes de sa première manière, recueillis dans Capitale de la douleur (1926), L'Amour la Poésie (1929), La Vie immédiate (1932), La Rose publique (1934), Les Yeux fertiles (1936), illustrent par des populaires chevauchements entre le monde réel et le monde du rêve, l'attitude surréaliste. Il renonce à une inspiration uniquement subjective....¹⁶

André Rousseaux was a good friend of Eluard for some years, and is very favorable toward his work; he devotes an entire chapter to him in his Littérature du XXe siècle. Rousseaux says that "Eluard est l'un des surréalistes qui ont conduit le plus loin l'exploration lucide de l'inconscient onirique".¹⁷ In his opinion, "il n'y a guère

¹³Wallace Fowlie, Mid-Century French Poets (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1955), p.172.

¹⁴Anna Balakian, "The Post-Surrealism of Aragon and Eluard," Yale French Studies, I(2):98-99, Fall-Winter, 1948.

¹⁵"...from Surrealism to Resistance and thence to Communism. But the order, like the emphasis, was different." Geoffrey Brereton, A Short History of French Literature (London: Pelican Books, 1954), p.314.

¹⁶Pierre-Georges Castex, Manuel des Etudes littéraires françaises (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1953), p.70.

¹⁷André Rousseaux, Littérature du XXe siècle (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1955), p.61.

d'homme qui, mieux qu'Eluard, a révélé la valeur de l'homme avec une justice infinie",¹⁸ and he calls Eluard "one of the greatest poets to have written in our [sic] language".¹⁹

Les ambitions de la Révolution surréaliste, les rigueurs de sa doctrine, ont sans doute poussé à l'extrême certaines de ces réussites excessives où le génie d'Eluard tendait naturellement.²⁰

All who gave to the Resistance in the fullest sense of their words cannot forget the large part played by Paul Eluard in its organization. This man, whom nothing seemingly designated to lead a difficult and dangerous action, gave himself to it completely; at the same time that he was writing for whose publication contributed immeasurably to the spiritual resurrection of France, he helped in training a great number of young writers....

There is a distinction to be made between the writers of the Resistance and the clandestine writers. The former had a political aim; hence they consistently wrote propaganda and adopted a simple form...the pamphlet. The clandestine writer, properly so-called for its greater literary value, is rather a flourishing of style without a specific political or persuasive aim, often written quite dispassionately.

...During the years of Nazi occupation, the poets with their secret cell organization and their desperate situation as official outlaws, were highly effective participants in the Resistance.

¹⁸Ibid., p.62.

¹⁹Ibid., p.60. (translation mine)

²⁰Ibid., pp.61-62.

Justin O'Brien, "Clandestine French Literature during the Occupation," *Modern Language Journal*, 39:42, November, 1954.

RESISTANCE AND "LITTÉRATURE ENGAGÉE"

Another view of Eluard is that he was "well-known before the war [II] (more or less surrealist in tendency) but attained wider fame as a writer of "resistance" poems published openly or clandestinely during the German occupation".¹

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For example,

...during the years of Nazi occupation, the Communists with their secret cell organization and their desperate situation as official outlaws, were highly effective participants in the Resistance

¹"Notes on Contributors," Poetry, 67:55, October, 1945.

²Louis Parrot, "The Poet and the War," Selected Writings of Paul Eluard (New York: New Directions, 1951), p.xxii.

³Justin O'Brien, "Clandestine French Literature during the Occupation," Modern Language Journal, 80:442, November, 1946.

movement.⁴

Poetry was no longer considered as a means of pure aesthetic delight or of private evasion; it became a weapon against despair, as Eluard called it, "les armes de la douleur".⁵

Edouard Roditi, commenting on wartime writing at the height of the war, says,

Poetry apparently packs a wallop, and the French underground knows that poetry can strike deeply and leave a more lasting mark than many other propaganda forms.⁶

As for Eluard,

During the four years of German occupation... his writing became the poetic chronicle of the new terrorism. It was used as propaganda throughout the maquis. But for Eluard these poems were not purely propagandistic or circumstantial. They are on themes he has sung since his earliest poetry of 1918.⁷

He achieves the "heights of simple eloquence" with his poem "Liberté" ("Une Seule Pensée").⁸ Cyril Connolly thinks that this poem exemplifies the refusal of the French

⁴Don Louis Demorest, ed., French Civilization through Fiction (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1956), p.112.

⁵John L. Brown, "Poets of the Resistance," Commonweal, 42:451, August 24, 1945.

⁶Edouard Roditi, "Poetry is News," Poetry, 64:55, April, 1944.

⁷Wallace Fowlie, Mid-Century French Poets (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1955), p.172.

⁸Justin O'Brien, op. cit., p.446.

Resistance to hate.⁹

"One might say that Aragon and Eluard remain "resistance" writers, and continue to fight the battle--which for them has become the policy of the communist party."¹⁰

Les poètes "de la résistance" que Benjamin Peret, au nom du surréalisme orthodoxe, n'a pas craint d'accuser de "deshonneur" parce qu'ils avaient mis la poésie au service de leur foi patriotique, ne sont pas en peine pour trouver, dans l'histoire de la poésie, des "précédents" qui les justifient... la liste est longue des poètes qui ont tiré de la fibre civique des accents réellement poétiques.¹¹

In a review of Une Leçon de morale, there was this to be said:

In this collection, "communism" although ostensibly invoked, is never mentioned. However, its doctrines are shared by Eluard. And "fascism", which represents for the poet the curse of all humanity, is mentioned in several places in his volume. For Paul Eluard then, the lesson in morality resolves itself into the triumph of "ideal and benevolent" communistic principles over nefarious Fascism.¹²

⁹Cyril Connolly, "Paris Regained (II)," Nation, 160:651-652, June 9, 1945.

¹⁰Cyril Connolly, "Paris Regained (I)," Nation, 160:626-627, June 2, 1945.

¹¹Jean Rousselot, Panorama critique des nouveaux poètes français (Paris: Editions Pierre Seghers, 1952), p.357.

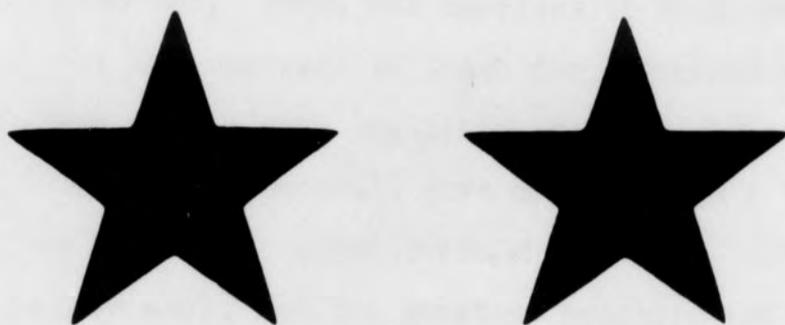
¹²Leroy J. Bénioit, "Paul Eluard: Une Leçon de morale," French Review, 24:505, May, 1951.

SUBJECT MATTER IN ELUARD'S POETRY

Eluard is essentially a lyric poet, dealing with lyric themes. His love, his essential lyric theme, plays the biggest part in his subject matter. This love is one of complete knowledge of the loved one, who yet remains a mystery. Eluard knew complete happiness as far as marital love was concerned. True, his marriage to Gala did not succeed. But his marriage to Nusch for seventeen years inspired some of the most exquisite, sensual, erotic yet innocent and not distasteful, love poetry. There is a maturity in his poetry about Nusch, which seems lacking in his earlier work, and the greatest poignancy of feeling at his loss in her death. His love is essentially a physical one. He alludes to every aspect of the body: the hands, as a form of expression; the eyelids, a delicate, tender place; the eyes, which see, and which reflect; the breasts, a refuge, and a source of delight; the mouth, which speaks, kisses, and receives kisses. There is a hunger and a thirst in his love. This seems to be illustrated best in Corps mémorable, published two years after his wife's death, in which the pent-up longing and bitter ache of his loss are made public. Wallace Fowlie offers the following, concerning the last eight lines of the final poem in Capitale de la douleur, "Celle de toujours, toute".

The mystery of the poet's song is that mystery in which love created him and liberated itself. Creation

CORRECTION



***PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN
REFILMED
TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO
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is freedom. By the fact of his existing, he knows that woman exists and surrounds him at all moments. His principle is defined by his freedom to move within woman.¹

On the death of Nusch, Eluard acknowledges this, and accepts the collapse of that freedom in her passing.

Mais la mort a rompu l'équilibre du temps
La mort qui vient la mort qui va la mort vécue
La mort visible boit et mange à mes dépens...²

Woman in his earlier poetry, whether he actually specifies her presence and addresses her directly, or just alludes to her by the agreement of his adjectives and past participles, is the material object through which he expresses every emotion, every sensation.

Elle est debout sur mes paupières...
Elle a la forme de mes mains...³

Sainte ma femme, tu es à moi bien mieux qu'au temps...⁴

¹Wallace Fowlie, Mid-Century French Poets (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1955), p.172.

²Paul Eluard, "Notre Vie," Le Temps déborde (1947).

³Paul Eluard, "L'Amoureuse," Mourir de ne pas mourir (1924).

⁴Paul Eluard, Poèmes pour la paix (juillet 1918).

Et parce que nous nous aimons
Nous voulons libérer les autres...⁵

Tu m'as ouvert un jour de plus est-ce aujourd'hui
Est-ce demain Toujours est nul Jamais n'est pas
Et tu risques de vivre aux dépens de toi-même...⁶

Eluard expresses in his poetry a sympathy and love for the masses and the down-trodden, which evolves from the different aspects of his love for "woman". He loves the humble people, animals, nature in general. In addition to these, he has a great love for his country.

Surrealism is "before everything a movement of revolt",⁷ according to Michel Carrouges in his study of André Breton. Certainly, Paul Eluard showed in his life that he took an active part in revolt, in the form of either complete nihilism or of constructive, patriotic work. He followed surrealism in its "immense despair at the condition man is reduced to on earth",⁸ but he did not participate in its violence, nor in the violence of communism. A call to arms is not the message of his surrealistic poetry. He bears out

⁵Paul Eluard, "Sept poèmes d'amour en guerre," (No.5) Au Rendez-vous allemand, 1945.

⁶Paul Eluard, "Grain de sable de mon salut," Corps mémorable, 1948.

⁷Michel Carrouges, André Breton et les Données fondamentales du Surréalisme (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1950), p.9.

⁸Ibid., p.10.

in his poetry Surrealism's affirmation of the

Superior power of poetry capable of polarizing at one and the same time the course of interior necessity in nature in order to unveil, through the toughened bark of appearances, the appearance of a new world, a hemisphere of wonders.⁹

Surrealism is "an exploration of delight",¹⁰ and Eluard certainly employs his verses to this end.

Carrouges says that the essentials of Surrealist poetry are embodied in that which is strange, quaint, marvellous, absurd, horrible, unrecognizable, disordered.¹¹ Surrealism has a tendency to "operate in the domain of language and images".¹²

Peut-être est-ce par la perfection même de sa beauté que la poésie d'Eluard parfois s'écartait du surréalisme, car celui-ci refuse aisément toute plénitude et toute beauté dès qu'elles lui paraissent de fallacieux achèvements... Il arrive cependant que par un autre excès l'esprit surréaliste se satisfasse de sa propre insatisfaction et en vienne à se repaître voluptueusement des fruits verts de l'humour noir, comme d'autres savourent les guimauves de l'académie.¹³

Eluard pushes ideas against ideas, very often compares the abstract with the concrete, and the result gives the reader a shock--mentally, for it would never have occurred to him to off-set one with the other. This is especially

⁹Ibid., p.17. (translation mine)

¹⁰Ibid., p.96.

¹¹Ibid., p.118.

¹²Ibid., p.123.

¹³Ibid.

true in Les Malheurs des Immortels, a series of connected prose poems published in 1920, which realizes the heights of Surrealism. For instance, the following passages,

In the Kingdom of hairdressers, those who are happy do not spend all their time in getting married....¹⁴

Their feet exhale the perfume of lizards. So it would be a good marriage, a marriage of good intentions....¹⁵

Today's crocodiles are no longer crocodiles... There are no real birds any more... Formerly, the good old fish wore on their fins beautiful red shoes... On my word, from now on the crocodiles are no longer crocodiles.¹⁶

would disconcert almost any reader, and lead him to reflection.

In regard to World War II and Eluard's resistance work, Le Livre ouvert I grimly ushers in his writing of the war. A good example is "Finir".

...Voici qu'un tourbillon gluant
Fixe à jamais rides grimaces
Voici que les cercueils enfantent
Que les verres sont pleins de sable
Et vides
Voici que les noyés s'enfoncent
Le sang détruit
Dans l'eau sans fond de leurs espoirs passés...

¹⁴Paul Eluard, Les Malheurs des immortels (translation by Hugh Chisholm) (New York: The Black Sun Press, 1943), p.6.

¹⁵Ibid., p.10.

¹⁶Ibid., p.40.

Même les chiens sont malheureux.¹⁷

In the second Livre ouvert in 1941, his twelve-stanza poem "Mes Heures" cites, at the eleventh hour,

Amertume écume morte
L'ombre comble le fossé
Glacé qui coupe le monde
Je défends la part gagnée.¹⁸

A feeling of hopelessness envelopes him in "Le droit le devoir de vivre".

Il n'y aurait rien
Pas un insecte bourdonnant...
Rien de chaud rien de fleuri...
Rien de libre ni de gagner ni de gâcher...
Rien d'opaque rien de visible
Rien de lourd rien de léger
Rien de mortel rien d'éternel.¹⁹

1942 produced "Une Seule Pensée"--which will never be forgotten--in Poésie et vérité 1942.²⁰ This same volume included the provocative "Douter du crime".

Une seule corde une seule torche un seul homme
Etrangla dix hommes
Brûla un village

¹⁷Paul Eluard, Le Livre ouvert I, 1940. (In Choix de poèmes)

¹⁸Paul Eluard, Le Livre ouvert II, 1941. (In Choix de poèmes)

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰An obituary notice on Eluard was concluded thus: "As even the conservative Figaro has just said, "Communist or not, Eluard's lines on liberty should be known by every child in France." Genêt, "Letter from Paris," New Yorker, 28:139, November 29, 1952.

Avilit un peuple

La douce chatte installée dans la vie
Comme une perle dans sa coquille
La douce chatte a mangé ses petits.²¹

Au Rendez-vous allemand contains poems written between 1942 and 1945. It provides a chronicle of France under occupation, describing man's emotions as he prepares for certain death, Paris trapped and held, feelings aroused by atrocities committed by the Nazis. "A Celle dont ils rêvent" is almost a prayer for relief from the horror. Eluard recorded some of the poems from this collection for the (record) album "L'Honneur des poètes" as part of his resistance efforts. His joy at the liberation of Paris is voiced in "En avril 1944: Paris respirait encore!".

Lingères légères takes him out of his preoccupation and back to his love. These lines from "Anneau de paix" are an example.

J'ai passé les portes du froid
Les portes de mon amertume
Pour venir embrasser tes lèvres....²²

After the war, in 1946, he wrote his longest poem, "Poésie ininterrompue", the pages of which are dedicated to "those who read them badly and to those who will not love them".²³

²¹Paul Eluard, Poésie et vérité 1942, 1942. (Choix de poèmes)

²²Paul Eluard, Lingères légères, 1945. (Choix de poèmes)

²³Paul Eluard, Poésie ininterrompue, 1946.

Brereton calls this "his greatest and longest single poem, which testifies to his delight in the physical life of the individual, and to its validity as the only true basis of society".²⁴

As to his subject matter of "littérature engagée",²⁵ even after Nusch died Eluard found

Certitude in that which his whole existence and his work lighted up in a single fire: love, the poetry of a couple, opens in the present and in the future, on the life of everyone....²⁶

Je n'ai rien séparé mais j'ai doublé mon coeur.
D'aimer, j'ai tout créé: réel, imaginaire,
J'ai donné sa raison, sa forme, sa chaleur
Et son rôle immortel à celle qui m'éclaire.²⁷

Pierre de Boisdeffre has summed up Eluard's worth as a poet in a most complete manner.

Eluard reste un des grands lyriques de notre temps--le plus intime et sans doute le plus vrai--le chanteur inoubliable des joies familières, de l'humble amitié des choses, des heures monotones:

²⁴Geoffrey Brereton, Introduction to the French Poets (Fairlawn, New Jersey: Essential Books, Inc., 1957), p.277.

²⁵As can be seen from the bibliography, very little of Eluard's most recent poetry has been read by the writer because of the library's limited selection of Eluard's work.

²⁶Georges-Emmanuel Clancier, De Rimbaud au Surréalisme (Paris: Pierre Seghers, Editeur, 1953), p.417.

²⁷Paul Eluard, "En vertu de l'amour (27 novembre 1946)," Le Temps déborde, 1947.

Jours de lenteur, jours de pluie,
 Jours de miroirs brisés et d'aiguilles perdues,
 Jours de paupières closes à l'horizon des mers
 D'heures toutes semblables, jours de captivité...

Des jardins:

Groseille de mendicité
 Dahlia moulin foyer du vent
 Quetsche taillée dans une valse
 Tulipe meurtrie par la lune...
 Pavot trainé par des infirmes...
 Noisette aux ciseaux enfantins...

D'un fol espoir:

Il fallait y croire il fallait
 Croire que l'homme a le pouvoir
 D'être libre d'être meilleur
 Que le destin qui lui est fait...²⁸

Eluard était, on s'en aperçut au moment de sa
 mort, la poésie même pour toute une génération.²⁹

²⁸Pierre de Boisdeffre, "Quatre Poètes français à
 l'heure allemande," Mercure de France, numéro 1128:656,
 août 1957.

²⁹Ibid., p.651.

IMAGERY

...appeals to his fellow man, "les mesaliés"
...constantly refers in a spirit of fraternity,
...and images. But what he makes of things,
...is beyond the comprehension of the

APPENDIX

Imagery.....36

Versification...40

...said himself, somewhat obscurely, that,
...objective only exists in the successive,
...together of all the subjective elements
...the poet, until the beginning of the new
...is not the master but the slave....¹

...a purity to his poetry because subject matter
...into the background in favour of word
... Geoffrey Brereton describes Eluard's language
...of simple, ordinary words by a man who gives
...literal meaning as he himself conceives it and
...is not diverted by prosodic rules.²

1. B. Cabrel, "A Surrealist Master," *English*, 43:349-350,
October, 1936.

2. Geoffrey Brereton, *Introduction to the French Poets*
Oxford, New Jersey: Essential Books, Inc., 1957, p. 276.

IMAGERY

Eluard appeals to his fellow man, "les semblables" to whom he constantly refers in a spirit of fraternity, by his language and images. But what he makes of simple, everyday objects is beyond the comprehension of the average man. It is as though he were fulfilling Rimbaud's injunction: le poète doit être voyant. But Eluard is not a symbolist. He creates a mood, with relationships already drawn up by the words. The poet has given of himself; the reader can take all that he gives, or all that he is able to take. Eluard said himself, somewhat obscurely, that,

Poetic objectivity only exists in the succession, the linking together of all the subjective elements of which the poet, until the beginning of the new order, is not the master but the slave....¹

There is a purity to his poetry because subject matter really fades into the background in favour of word importance. Geoffrey Brereton describes Eluard's language as "the use of simple, ordinary words by a man who gives them their literal meaning as he himself conceives it and whose attention is not diverted by prosodic rules".²

¹M. D. Zabel, "A Surrealist Master," Poetry, 48:349-350, September, 1936.

²Geoffrey Brereton, Introduction to the French Poets (Fairlawn, New Jersey: Essential Books, Inc., 1957), p.276.

Eluard claimed that, "if the senses approve an image even in the slightest degree, they kill it".³ That is to say, if the image is too closely a sensorial one, vulgarization of the image deprives it of evocative poetic value.

Pierre-Henri Simon says of Eluard that, "militante ou intimiste, sa poésie tend à l'expression d'une "vérité qui se dit très vite, sans se réfléchir, tout uniment".⁴ According to Eluard,

The poet's images grow out of something to be forgotten and something to be remembered. Everything he created vanishes with the man he was yesterday. Tomorrow holds out the promise of novelty. But there is no today in his present.⁵

Louis Parrot, in the epilogue to his biography of Eluard, says that La Rose publique contains "images chatoyantes d'un dialogue amoureux qui se mêle aux images d'un poème comme un lumineux filigrane".⁶

³Marcel Raymond, From Baudelaire to Surrealism (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1950), p.288.

⁴Pierre-Henri Simon, Histoire de la littérature française au XXe siècle (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1957), p.109.

⁵Paul Eluard, "Poetic Evidence" translated by George Reavey, 1936.

⁶Louis Parrot, Paul Eluard (Paris: Editions Pierre Seghers, 1945), p.210.

Eluard's imagery **evokes enough** mystery to avoid question as to whether his lines are actually poetry. This is typically Surrealistic; for to a Surrealist, obliged to follow and adapt to--however faintly--the existing forms, the difference between prose and poetry is barely established. The reader frequently finds himself up against a blank as far as a certain reference of this poet is concerned. Eluard usually **resorts** to comparison for his imagery, a comparison between something abstract and a concrete object. He jumps from one idea, through a process of association, to another distant one. The intermediate stage or steps of the thought are omitted. One is made to wonder by what thought processes Eluard arrives, by association even, at this distant idea. He achieves the ideal of Surrealism apparently, for the subconscious must direct his thought processes in these instances. The idea is to discover the meaning of the first part of the comparison, but this is often impossible, too. He attains, it would seem, the Surrealistically-desirable somnambulistic effect in his poetry. He apparently follows Mallarmé's bidding in "Tombeau d'Edgar Poe", "Donnez un sens plus pur...."

Synesthésie, the "amalgame de sensations disparates, dont l'audition colorée n'est que le type le plus répandu",⁷ is the important characteristic of Eluard's imagery. Some good examples to illustrate this are "Le parfum noir

⁷Français moderne, p.277, October, 1951.

rayonne" ("Comme une image", L'Amour la Poésie); "Mes images sont sourdes", "cris de neige" ("Amoureuses"), "les feuilles à l'ombre des parfums" (La Vie immédiate); "les herbes de ton rire" (L'Amour la Poésie).

C'est toujours vers plus de simplicité que tendra la poésie d'Eluard. Les mots et les images de tous les jours, de tous les hommes prenant de plus en plus de place dans les poèmes mais gardant l'intensité de l'imagination et du langage surréalistes. Cette ascèse coïncidera avec le nouvel amour qui redonne au poète un monde lui aussi décanté, La Vie immédiate contenait bien déjà des poèmes bouleversants de présence purifiée, directe, seulement l'agonie de l'amour simplifiait le poète en appauvrissant son univers, tandis que la naissance d'un autre amour continuera à affirmer ce choix de l'élémentaire en ramenant la vie à sa plénitude. Les objets, les êtres cessent alors d'être séparés, ils recommencent à signifier plus qu'eux-mêmes, à être porteurs d'avenir, à redevenir fertiles comme les regards que posent sur eux le poète et sa femme et que chantent Les Yeux fertiles.⁸

⁸Georges-Emmanuel Clancier, De Rimbaud au Surréalisme (Paris: Pierre Seghers, Editeur, 1953), p.411.

VERSIFICATION

Eluard employs, for the most part, the "rythme pair" or even rhythm, which consists of anywhere from six to twelve syllables. His use of the alexandrine (twelve-syllable line) is frequent but not consistent. In Corps mémorable (1948) the poem "Répétitions tout près du sommeil" is in pure alexandrine lines.

L'oeil à force d'espace et d'éclat délirants
C'est toi c'est moi nous sommes doubles dans nos songes.

There is a strong tonic accent placed upon the most important words. Thus, the accent does not fall in the same place for these two lines, nor for any other two necessarily. There is a good example of Eluard's use of the alexandrine in "Les Belles Balances de l'ennemi" (Au Rendez-vous allemand), but it does not stand for the entire poem.

Des saluts font justice de la dignité
Des bottes font justice de nos promenades
Des imbéciles font justice de nos rêves
Des goujats font justice de la liberté
Des privations ont fait justice des enfants
O mon frère on a fait justice de ton frère
Du plomb a fait justice de plus beau visage...

Eluard ignores the regular classical rhythm with the cesura coming after the sixth syllable. Instead, these lines are broken into 1-2-3/1-2-3/1-2-3-4-5-6. The rhythm achieved is an insistent one, and it serves to strengthen the meaning of the words. Eluard remains true to the "rythme pair", however; and the poem ends with two eight-syllable lines, at the end of the line of poetry.

The following illustration is typical of Eluard in his use

syllable lines:

Et nos forces nous sont rendues
Nous ferons justice du mal.

In his "Poésie ininterrompue", Eluard uses the conventional alexandrine with regular beat in the rhythm. For example:

Mon teint devient plus clair mon teint devient plus sombre
and

Mordre un rire innocent mordre à même la vie
Rien n'a changé candeur rien n'a changé désir.

But he intersperses the poem with other rhythms, both odd and even.

Some good examples of his use of "rythme impair" are in the "Sept Poèmes d'Amour en guerre" in Au Rendez-vous allemand.

Un navire dans tes yeux
Se rendait maître du vent...

with rhythmic beat of 1-2-3/1-2-3-4.

On a calculé la peine...
Un bruit de pas sous la voûte.

Eluard is careful of his rhythm in his poetry. If he changes in mid-poem, he does so for a reason. Rhythm, marked with a strong tonic accent on the most important words, is the essential element of the music of his verse.

Eluard still makes use of the masculine and feminine lines (that is, masculine rhymes end with a full sound without a mute "e", and feminine rhymes end with a mute syllable). But he does not make use of them in the conventional way, at the end of the line of poetry.

The following illustration is typical of Eluard in his use

of rhyme:

Souviens-toi des chansons que chantait pour nous plaire
La négresse au teint clair ce minuit qu'on poudra...

Eluard's poems are not at all long, with the one exception of "Poésie ininterrompue". He employs the form of the sonnet often and effectively. A good example of this is "Poèmes", written in 1914: "Le coeur sur l'arbre vous n'aviez qu'à le cueillir..." Ten of the poem's fourteen lines are alexandrines, the last lines of the first two quatrains are each eight-syllable, line five contains eleven syllables, and line thirteen, nine. One of the first poems in Les Yeux fertiles, "On ne peut me connaître...", is a sonnet, with lines of mostly six or eight syllables.

His prose poems have, of course, no rhythmic scheme, but are in regular paragraph form. There are some extremely fine, word-packed, forceful examples of this type of writing in Les Dessous d'une vie. These are somewhat longer than the prose paragraphs in Donner à voir (which are also excellent), but their poetic nature is undeniable. La Vie immédiate should also be cited for its prose poems, especially for "Nuits partagées".

Eluard's punctuation, or rather, lack of punctuation, should be noted. It would seem sensible to assume that a Dadaist and even a Surrealist would revolt--as had Mallarmé and Apollinaire--against the bothersome logic of punctuation.

Yet Eluard does not discard it completely until Défense de savoir in 1928. Up to this point, he employs commas, exclamation points and question marks in most of his poems. (In the prose poems, the expected punctuation for prose is used.) Starting with Donner à voir, he limits his punctuation to periods. Occasionally, the cesura is marked in a line by a period, even in this work.

One of Eluard's chief characteristics is his use of repetition, usually of about three words at the beginning of a line. Take, for example, his celebrated "Liberté" ("Une Seule pensée": Poésie et vérité 1942). There, each line begins "Sur..." for three lines in each stanza, and the fourth line always says, "J'écris ton nom". Another example of this repetition is the seventh poem of "Sept Poèmes d'amour en guerre" (Au Rendez-vous allemand), with the use of the phrase "au nom de". The repetition would seem to be part of his revolt and defiance, to be another manifestation of that feeling. It adds to the poignancy of the poet's message. Its incantatory nature is insistent. It builds, and leads up to the climax for which the reader is waiting. Pierre de Boisdeffre¹ likens this incantatory

¹Pierre de Boisdeffre, "Quatre Poètes français à l'heure allemande," Mercure de France, numéro 1128, 654, août 1957.

quality (by repeated nouns with different adjectives and other modifiers) to that of Péguy, citing this example:

...Ville entre nos poignets comme un lien rompu,
 entre nos yeux comme un oeil déjà vu, ville
 répétée comme un poème.
 Ville ressemblante
 Ville de la transparence, ville innocente...
 Ville durable où j'ai vécu notre victoire sur la mort.

Besides affecting the rhythmic value of the lines, the use of repetition in this way causes the mind of the reader to be hypnotized almost by the chant-like character of the language. Eluard does not overuse the technique: he seems to judge its effectiveness best accomplished by fairly infrequent usage.

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