

Classic Poetry Series

Paul Eluard

- poems -

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At the Window

I have not always had this certainty, this pessimism which reassures the best among us. There was a time when my friends laughed at me. I was not the master of my words. A certain indifference, I have not always known well what I wanted to say, but most often it was because I had nothing to say. The necessity of speaking and the desire not to be heard. My life hanging only by a thread.

There was a time when I seemed to understand nothing. My chains floated on the water.

All my desires are born of my dreams. And I have proven my love with words. To what fantastic creatures have I entrusted myself, in what dolorous and ravishing world has my imagination enclosed me? I am sure of having been loved in the most mysterious of domains, my own. The language of my love does not belong to human language, my human body does not touch the flesh of my love. My amorous imagination has always been constant and high enough so that nothing could attempt to convince me of error.

Paul Eluard

Curfew

What else could we do, for the doors were guarded,
What else could we do, for they had imprisoned us,
What else could we do, for the streets were forbidden us,
What else could we do, for the town was asleep?
What else could we do, for she hungered and thirsted,
What else could we do, for we were defenceless,
What else could we do, for night had descended,
What else could we do, for we were in love?

Paul Eluard

Five Haiku

The wind
Undecided
Rolls a cigarette of air

The mute girl talks:
It is art's imperfection.
This impenetrable speech.

The motor car is truly launched:
Four martyrs' heads
Roll under the wheels.

Ah! a thousand flames, a fire,
The light, a shadow!
The sun is following me.

A feather gives to a hat
A touch of lightness:
The chimney smokes.

Paul Eluard

Head Against The Walls

There were only a few of them
In all the earth
Each one thought he was alone
They sang, they were right
To sing
But they sang the way you sack a city
The way you kill yourself.

Frayed moist night
Shall we endure you
Longer
Shall we not shake
Your cloacal evidence
We shall not wait for a morning
Made to measure
We wanted to see in other people's eyes
Their nights of love exhausted
They dream only of dying
Their lovely flesh forgotten
Bees caught in their honey
They are ignorant of life
And we suffer everywhere
Red roofs dissolve under the tongue
Dog days in the full beds
Come, empty your sacks of fresh blood
There is still a shadow here

A shred of imbecile there
In the wind their masks, their cast-offs
In lead their traps, their chains
And their prudent blind-men's gestures
There is fire under rocks
If you put out the fire
Be careful we have
Despite the night it breeds
More strength than the belly
Of your wives and sisters
And we will reproduce
Without them but by ax strokes
In your prisons

Torrents of stone labors of foam
Where eyes float without rancor
Just eyes without hope
That know you
And that you should have put out
Rather than ignore

With a safety pin quicker than your gibbets
We shall take our booty where we want it to be

Paul Eluard

Hunted

A few grains of dust more or less
On ancient shoulders
Locks of weakness on weary foreheads
This theatre of honey and faded roses
Where incalculable flies
Reply to the black signs that misery makes to them
Despairing girders of a bridge
Thrown across space
Thrown across every street and every house
Heavy wandering madresses
That we shall end by knowing by heart
Mechanical appetites and uncontrolled dances
That lead to the regret of hatred

Nostalgia of justice

Paul Eluard

I Cannot be Known

I cannot be known
Better than you know me

Your eyes in which we sleep
We together
Have made for my man's gleam
A better fate than for the common nights

Your eyes in which I travel
Have given to signs along the roads
A meaning alien to the earth

In your eyes who reveal to us
Our endless solitude

Are no longer what they thought themselves to be

You cannot be known
Better than I know you.

Paul Eluard

La courbe de tes yeux

La courbe de tes yeux fait le tour de mon coeur,
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 de 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.

Paul Eluard

La terre est bleue

La terre est bleue comme une orange
Jamais une erreur les mots ne mentent pas
Ils ne vous donnent plus à chanter
Au tour des baisers de s'entendre
Les fous et les amours
Elle sa bouche d'alliance
Tous les secrets tous les sourires
Et quels vêtements d'indulgence
À la croire toute nue.
Les guêpes fleurissent vert
L'aube se passe autour du cou
Un collier de fenêtres
Des ailes couvrent les feuilles
Tu as toutes les joies solaires
Tout le soleil sur la terre
Sur les chemins de ta beauté.

Paul Eluard

Lady Love

She is standing on my eyelids
And her hair is in my hair
She has the color of my eye
She has the body of my hand
In my shade she is engulfed
As a stone against the sky

She will never close her eyes
And she does not let me sleep
And her dreams in the bright day
Make the suns evaporate
And me laugh cry and laugh
Speak when I have nothing to say

Paul Eluard

Other Children

"Little child of my five senses
and of my tenderness."
Let us cradle our loves,
We will have good children.
Well cared for,
We will fear nothing on earth,
Happiness, good fortune, prudence,
Our loves

And this leap from age to age,
From the order of a child to that of an old man,
Will not diminish us.
(Confidence).

Paul Eluard

The Absence

I speak to you across cities
I speak to you across plains

My mouth is upon your pillow

Both faces of the walls come meeting
My voice discovering you

I speak to you of eternity

O cities memories of cities
Cities wrapped in our desires
Cities come early cities come lately
Cities strong and cities secret
Plundered of their master's builders
All their thinkers all their ghosts

Fields pattern of emerald
Bright living surviving
The harvest of the sky over our earth
Feeds my voice I dream and weep
I laugh and dream among the flames
Among the clusters of the sun

And over my body your body spreads
The sheet of it's bright mirror.

Paul Eluard

The Deaf and Blind

Do we reach the sea with clocks
In our pockets, with the noise of the sea
In the sea, or are we the carriers
Of a purer and more silent water?

The water rubbing against our hands sharpens knives.
The warriors have found their weapons in the waves
And the sound of their blows is like
The rocks that smash the boats at night.

It is the storm and the thunder. Why not the silence
Of the flood, for we have dreamt within us
Space for the greatest silence and we breathe
Like the wind over terrible seas, like the wind

That creeps slowly over every horizon.

Paul Eluard

The Human Face

I. Soon

Of all the springtimes of the world
This one is the ugliest
Of all of my ways of being
To be trusting is the best

Grass pushes up snow
Like the stone of a tomb
But I sleep within the storm
And awaken eyes bright

Slowness, brief time ends
Where all streets must pass
Through my innermost recesses
So that I would meet someone

I don't listen to monsters
I know them and all that they say
I see only beautiful faces
Good faces, sure of themselves
Certain soon to ruin their masters

II. The women's role

As they sing, the maids dash forward
To tidy up the killing fields
Well-powdered girls, quickly to their knees

Their hands -- reaching for the fresh air --
Are blue like never before
What a glorious day!

Look at their hands, the dead
Look at their liquid eyes

This is the toilet of transience
The final toilet of life
Stones sink and disappear
In the vast, primal waters
The final toilet of time

Hardly a memory remains
the dried-up well of virtue
In the long, oppressive absences
One surrenders to tender flesh
Under the spell of weakness

III. As deep as the silence

As deep as the silence
Of a corpse under ground

With nothing but darkness in mind

As dull and deaf
As autumn by the pond
Covered with stale shame

Poison, deprived of its flower
And of its golden beasts
out its night onto man

IV. Patience

You, my patient one
My patience
My parent
Head held high and proudly
Organ of the sluggish night
Bow down
Concealing all of heaven
And its favor
Prepare for vengeance
A bed where I'll be born

V. First march, the voice of another

Laughing at sky and planets
Drunk with their confidence
The wise men wish for sons
And for sons from their sons

Until they all perish in vain
Time burdens only fools
While Hell alone prospers
And the wise men are absurd

VI. A wolf

Day surprises me and night scares me
haunts me and winter follows me
An animal walking on the snow has placed
Its paws in the sand or in the mud

Its paws have traveled
From further afar than my own steps
On a path where death
Has the imprints of life

VII. A flawless fire

The threat under the red sky
Came from below -- jaws
And scales and links

Of a slippery, heavy chain

Life was spread about generously
So that death took seriously
The debt it was paid without a thought

Death was the God of love
And the conquerors in a kiss
Swooned upon their victims
Corruption gained courage

And yet, beneath the red sky
Under the appetites for blood
Under the dismal starvation
The cavern closed

The kind earth filled
The graves dug in advance
Children were no longer afraid
Of maternal depths

And madness and stupidity
And vulgarity make way
For humankind and brotherhood
No longer fighting against life --
For an everlasting humankind

VIII. Liberty

On my school notebooks
On my desk, on the trees
On the sand, on the snow
I write your name
On all the read pages
On all the empty pages
Stone, blood, paper or ash
I write your name

On the golden images
On the weapons of warriors
On the crown of kings
I write your name

On the jungle and the desert
On the nests, on the broom
On the echo of my childhood
I write your name

On the wonders of nights
On the white bread of days
On the seasons betrothed
I write your name

d'azur On all my blue rags
On the sun-molded pond
On the moon-enlivened lake
I write your name

On the fields, on the horizon
On the wings of birds
And on the mill of shadows
I write your name

On every burst of dawn
On the sea, on the boats
On the insane mountain
I write your name

On the foam of clouds
On the sweat of the storm
On the rain, thick and insipid
I write your name

On the shimmering shapes
On the colorful bells
On the physical truth
I write your name

On the alert pathways
On the wide-spread roads
On the overflowing places
I write your name

On the lamp that is ignited
On the lamp that is dimmed
On my reunited houses
I write your name

On the fruit cut in two
Of the mirror and of my room
On my bed, an empty shell
I write your name

On my dog, young and greedy
On his pricked-up ears
On his clumsy paw
I write your name

On the springboard of my door
On the familiar objects
On the wave of blessed fire
I write your name

On all harmonious flesh

On the face of my friends
On every out-stretched hand
I write your name

On the window-pane of surprises
On the careful lips
Well-above silence
I write your name

On my destroyed shelter
On my collapsed beacon
On the walls of my weariness
I write your name

On absence without want
On naked solitude
On the steps of death
I write your name

On regained health
On vanished risk
On hope free from memory
I write your name

And by the power of one word
I begin my life again
I am born to know you

To call you by name: Liberty!

Paul Eluard

The Nakedness of Truth (I know it well)

Despair has no wings,
Nor has love,
No countenance:
They do not speak.
I do not stir,
I do not behold them,
I do not speak to them,
But I am as real as my love and my despair.

Paul Eluard

The River

The river I have under my tongue,
Unimaginable water, my little boat,
And curtains lowered, let's speak.

Paul Eluard

To Live

We both have our hands to give
Take mine I shall lead you afar

I have lived several times my face has changed
With every threshold I have crossed and every hand clasped Familial springtime was
reborn
Keeping for itself and for me its perishable snow
Death and the betrothed
The future with five fingers clenched and letting go

My age always gave me
New reasons for living through others
For having the blood of man other's heart in mine

Oh the lucid fellow I was and that I am
Before the pallor of frail blind girls
Lovelier than the delicate worn moon so fair
By the reflection of life's ways
A trail of moss and trees
Of mist and morning dew
Of the young body which does not rise alone
To its place on earth
Wind cold and rain cradle it
Summer makes a man of it

Presence is my virtue in each visible hand
Only death is solitude
From delight to fury from fury to clarity
I make myself whole through all beings
Through all weather on the earth and in the clouds
Through the passing seasons I am young
And strong for having lived
I am young my blood rises over my ruins

We have our hands to entwine Nothing can ever seduce better
Than our bonding to each other a forest
Returning earth to sky and the sky to night

To the night which prepares an unending day.

Paul Eluard