

Six Poems by Paul Eluard (1924 - 1926)

Translated by Natalie Boucly

Mourir de ne pas mourir is the first of Eluard's major poetic works. Like a significant number of Eluard's early love poetry, it is largely inspired by his first wife, Elena Dmitrievna Diakonova, known as Gala. The couple met in 1912 in Switzerland, where Eluard spent 18 months in a sanatorium as a cure for tuberculosis. They married in 1917 and had a daughter, Cécile, in 1918. By 1921, Eluard had met Aragon, Breton and Max Ernst and became involved in the dadaist movement. In 1922, Eluard welcomed Ernst to live with him and Gala in France. A shared complex sexual intimacy developed between them but in 1924, year of publication of *Mourir de ne pas mourir*, Eluard mysteriously absconded for a period of about seven months during which he travelled round the world, using funds belonging to his father's business. Upon his return, Eluard published *Capitale de la douleur*. In 1929, Gala left Eluard to start a new life with Salvador Dalí, with whom she remained, until her death in 1981.

The translator wishes to thank Madame Cécile Eluard for her kind permission to reproduce, in the original French version, and in the English translation, four poems from 'Premièrement,' extracted from *L'Amour la poésie* (1929), 'this endless book' dedicated as such by Eluard to Gala ('à Gala, ce livre sans fin').

Paul Eluard, *Mourir de ne pas mourir* (*Dying of Not Dying*), 1924.

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.

Woman in Love

She is standing on my eyes
And her hair is in my hair,
She has the shape of my hands,
And the colour of my eyes,
She sinks into my shadow
Like a stone in the sky.

She always keeps her eyes open
And never lets me sleep
Her dreams in bright daylight
Make the suns evaporate,
Make me laugh, cry and laugh,
Make me speak without having anything to say.

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Paul Eluard, *Capitale de la douleur, nouveaux poèmes* (*Capital of Pain, New Poems*), 1926.

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 de 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.

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The curve of your eyes goes all around my heart

A circle of dance and softness,
Halo of time, safe cradle for the night,
And if I no longer remember my life
It is because your eyes were not always there
to see me.

Day leaves and dew froth,
Reeds of wind, scented smiles,
Wings covering the world with light,
Boats laden with the sky and the sea,
Dispelling noise and generating colours,

Fragrances hatched of a brooding of dawns
Still nestling on the straw of the stars,
As the day is dependent on innocence
The entire world is dependent on your pure eyes

And all my blood flows in their gaze.

Paul Eluard, *L'Amour la poésie*, XXII, XXIX, VIII and XIV – 1929.

Premièrement (fragments) XXII, XXIX

Le front aux vitres comme font les veilleurs de chagrin

Ciel dont j'ai dépassé la nuit

Plaines toutes petites dans mes mains ouvertes
Dans leur double horizon inerte indifférent

Le front aux vitres comme font les veilleurs de chagrin

Je te cherche par-delà l'attente
Par-delà moi-même
Et je ne sais plus tant que je t'aime

Lequel de nous deux est absent.

...

Il fallait bien qu'un visage
Réponde à tous les noms du monde.

Firstly (extracts) XXII, XXIX

Face resting against the window pane like a keeper
of sorrow

I have overtaken the darkness of the sky

Tiny plains in my open hands
In their two-fold horizon inert indifferent

Face resting against the window pane like a keeper
of sorrow

I look for you beyond the wait
Beyond myself
And I love you so much that I no longer know

Which one of us is absent.

...

A single face necessarily
Answers to all the names in the world.

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Premièrement (fragments) VIII, XIV

Mon amour pour avoir figuré mes désirs
Mis tes lèvres au ciel de tes mots comme un astre

Tes baisers dans la nuit vivante
Et le sillage de tes bras autour de moi
Comme une flamme en signe de conquête
Mes rêves sont au monde
Clairs et perpétuels.

Et quand tu n'es pas là
Je rêve que je dors je rêve que je rêve.

...

Le sommeil a pris ton empreinte
Et la colore de tes yeux.

Firstly (extracts) VIII, XIV

My love because you shaped my desires
Placed your lips on the firmament of your
words like a star

Your kisses in the living night
And the wake of your arms around me
Like a flame as a token of conquest
My dreams are in the living world
Clear and everlasting.

And when you are away
I dream that I am sleeping I dream that I
am dreaming.

...

Sleep coloured your imprint with your
eyes.

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