



Capital of Pain

Paul Éluard , Mary Ann Caws (Translator) , Patricia Terry (Translator)

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Capital of Pain, is considered one of the key texts of surrealism. This is the first new translation into English of this work in over 30 years and the only edition available in the English language. This edition presents the text in its entirety in a bilingual format and includes an extensive essay on Eluard's works by Mary Ann Caws. This book has had a lasting effect on poets and readers since it exploded onto the literary scene in 1926 and has never been out of print in Europe since.

Capital of Pain Details

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From Reader Review Capital of Pain for online ebook

Sarah Elizabeth Chitwood says

Of all the four sections (Repetitions, To Die of Not Dying, The Little Just Ones, New Poems), I like them all the most. From To Die of Not Dying the words deigned to be rewritten, renewed in memory. New Poems holds gems. Birds fly through the poems, which is one way to say the poet concerns himself with metaphor. Beauty and truth adequately expressed arrive from harmony in moments of syntactic peculiarities. Love and loneliness inundate the poems. This adds to their quality. So many favorites in this collection. To name a few: "Nakedness of the Truth," "Giorgio de Chirico" "She Who May Not Speak," "Broad Daylight," "Inside the Cylinder of Tribulations," "Among Few Others," "One," both the "Max Ernst" poems, "Hidden," and "In the Dance".

I'll soon have Capitale de la douleur in my hands. I look forward to reading it again in its original form.

mwpm says

Paul Éluard's *Capital of Pain* may not be "the key to grasping what Surrealist texts are like" (as if such a key exists), but it is a key text of the French Surrealists, and a remarkable text in any context. Its poems and prose poems capture the ecstasy of the early Surrealists. Indeed, the ecstasy of having survived the First World War (*The birds that ruffle their murderous feathers*, "Paris During the War", pg. 108), of having survived the Nihilism that followed in its wake; the ecstasy of building a new god to replace the dead one. In fact, many of the poems are named after, or dedicated to, Éluard's fellow Surrealists...

A wall reveals another wall
And the shade protects me from my fearful shadow.
O tower of my love around my love,
Every wall spun out white around my silence.

What have you protected? Sky unfeeling and pure,
Trembling you shielded me. Light in relief
Against a sky the sun's mirror no longer,
Stars by daylight among the green leaves,

The memory of those who spoke without knowing,
Masters of my weakness and I am in their place
With eyes of love and hands too loyal
To depopulate a world I am absent from.
- **Giorgio de Chirico** (pg. 61)

Devoured by feathers and obedient to the sea,
He let his shadow pass through the flight
Of the birds of freedom.
He left
The ramp to those who fall in the rain,
He left their roof to all those who prove themselves true.

His body was in order,
The body of others came to disrupt

This arrangement he kept
When his blood first marked the earth.

His eyes are inside a wall
And his face is their heavy ornament.
Another lie by day,
Another night, there are no more blind men.
- **Max Ernst** (pg. 114)

His Eyes are all one sky of tears.
Neither his eyelids nor his hands
Are a night sufficient
For his pain to hide in.

He will go ask
The Council of Faces
If he is still able
To hunt his youth

And to be in the plains
The wind's pilot.
It's a matter of experience:
He takes his life by the middle.

Solitary, the pans of the balance . . .
- **Among Few Others**, to *Philippe Soupault* (pg. 119)

Sun of prey my head's prisoner,
Remove the hill, remove the forest.
The sky is more lovely than ever.
Dragonflies from grapes
Give it the precise shapes
I scatter with a gesture.

Clouds of the first day,
Insensitive clouds which nothing sanctions,
Their seeds burn
In the misfire o my gaze.

Finally, the sky must be as pure as night
To cover itself with a dawn.
- **Joan Miró** (pg. 126)

Additionally, many of the poems are named after, or dedicated to, influences appropriated by the Surrealists...

The man flees, the horse falls,
The door does not open,
The bird is silent, dig its grave,

Put to death by silence.

A butterfly on a branch
Waits patiently for winter,
Its heart is heavy, the branch bends,
The branch folds up like a worm.

Why cry over the dried flower
And why cry over the lilacs?
Why cry over the amber rose?

Why cry for the tender thought?
Why look for the hidden flower
If there is no reward?

- Well, for this, that, and the other.
- **The Building Game**, to *Raymond Roussel* (pg. 59)

The weapons of sleep have plowed into the night
The marvelous furrows that separate our heads.
Through the diamond every medal is false,
Beneath the bursting sky the earth is invisible.

The heart's face has lost its colours
And the sun looks for us and the snow is blind.
If we leave it, the horizon has wings
And our sights in the distance scatter mistakes.
- **Pablo Picasso** (pg. 97)

On the fatal slope the voyager profits
From the day's favor, sleet and no pebbles,
And the blue eyes of love, discovers his season
Wearing great stars like rings on each finger.

The ocean has left its ear on the shore
And on the furrowed sand the scene of a fine crime.
Punishment is harder for the hangman than the victim
The knives are signs and the bullets tears.
- **Paul Klee** (pg. 106)

A bird flies away,
It flings back the clouds like a useless veil,
It has never feared the light
Enclosed in its flight,
It has never owned a shadow.

Shells of harvest smashed by the sun.
All the leaves in the woods say yes,
They know only how to say yes,
Every question, every reply
And the dew flows in the depths of this yes.

A man with roving eyes describes the sky of love,

He gathers its wonders
Like leaves in a wood,
Like birds in their wings
And men in their sleep.
- **Georges Braque** (pg. 121)

My favourite passages...

The eyes of singing animals
And their songs of boredom or anger
Have forbidden me to leave this bed.
I will spend my life here.
- **In the Heart of My Love** (pg. 52)

Smiles and sighs, insults rot
In the mouths of mutes and the eyes of cowards.
Take nothing: this burns, that flames!
Your hands are made for your pockets and brows.
- **No Hard Feelings** (pg. 68)

A handsome weightless bird more lively than a speck of dust
Drags a headless corpse across a mirror
Balls of sunshine soften its wings
And the wind from its flight drives the light insane
- **Mascha Laughed at the Angels** (pg. 73)

Why am I so lovely?
Because my master washes me.
- **The Little Just Ones, II** (pg. 78)

She is always unwilling to understand, to listen,
She laughs to hide her fear of herself.
She has always walked beneath the arches of nights
And wherever she went
She left
The mark of broken things.
- **The Little Just Ones, VIII** (pg. 85)

She plays the way no one plays and I am alone to watch her. It
is her eyes which bring her back into my dreams. Almost
motionless, aimless.
And this other one that she grabs by the wing of his ears has
kept the shape of his haloes. In the embrace of her hands, a
swallow with straight hair flutters hopelessly. It is blind.
- **The Ace of Clubs** (pg. 101)

Caress the night's horizon, look for the heart of jet the dawn
covers over with flesh. It would place in your eyes innocent
thoughts, flames, wings, and verdures the sun did not invent.
It is not the night you lack, but its power.
- **Night** (pg. 124)

Etienne Mahieux says

Un sonnet surréaliste, est-ce possible ? Oui, répond Éluard. Intraitable sur la création d'images neuves, surprenantes, irrationnelles, telles que les aimait le jeune surréalisme des années 20, à la recherche de l'expression directe de l'inconscient, il ne s'en montre pas moins, dès "Capitale de la douleur" ou "L'Amour la poésie" (qui fait la deuxième partie du recueil), un maître du vers français, fût-il libre. Ses allitérations vous font des frissons dans le cou. Un maître, c'est un maître, même à trente ans, même engagé dans un étrange combat contre une littérature qu'il croit morte et qu'il revivifie.

Paolo says

I adore Eluard to no end, but this awful transl(ite)ration of 'Capital of Pain' is a huge disappointment. I'd buy this edition solely for the original French work, which is included in full.

metaphor says

To sleep, with the moon in one eye
and the sun in the other,
Love in your mouth,
a lovely bird in your hair,
Adorned like the fields,
the woods, the routes, the sea,
around the whole world so lovely and adorned.

Flee across the landscape
Through branches of smoke and all the fruits of the wind,
Stone legs with sand stockings,
Held by the waist, all the river's muscles,
And the last concern on a face transformed.

I. says

I need guidance for this kind of poetry. Most of it goes right over my head. Some gorgeous lines like 'elle chantait les minutes sans s'endormir' but ...

Miriam says

Etchings by John Thein.
(not the cover; that's Picasso)

And also some color plates, maybe by other artists.

A solid but rarely amazing or moving collection of short poems.

Eluard is pretty old-school regarding women, which some readers may find tiresome.

Knar says

Such a gorgeous editions. &, of course, the poems.

Yaren Altun says

'My whole life listens to you and I cannot refuse The terrible leisure your love creates for me.' / Your Mouth
With Lips of Gold

Daniel Schechtel says

Finalemnt j'ai fini ce livre. Je l'ai détesté. Ce poète, d'ailleurs aimé par beaucoup des gens, ne me parle pas, à moi. Il ne sait rien me dire... Ou moi, je ne l'entend pas. Des images sans signification, des mélanges de registres, des répétitions à l'infini (il y a des oiseaux partout...), des descriptions très abstraites et vagues et universelles, déjà rebattues. Il se peut aussi que mon français n'en soit pas à la hauteur. Mais j'en doute. Mais j'espère.

A peine j'en aimé un ou deux, déjà oubliés.

Reem Rafei says

My fav is "Pablo Picasso"
I got introduced to this book while reading Milan Kundera's "Life is Elsewhere"

Marion says

Beautiful insight into a broken man's thought, a stellar path onto which he embarks on the journey to healing his wounds. I love Eluard's poetry, no matter how ambiguous, which surprised me since I'm not usually one to take a fancy in Surrealism... I've been proved wrong. One of the best school reads I've completed, and now a favourite of mine!

Manel Hedhili says

Quand la Mélancolie et l'Amour s'enchevêtrent ... Un recueil écrit par Paul Eluard, un surréaliste fou amoureux de son épouse Gala, sa Muse. Le jeu de langage, les 'techniques' surréalistes voire même dadaïstes sont présentes dans ce chef-d'œuvre. André Breton, le chef de file du mouvement surréaliste, parle souvent des "mouvements du cœur" dont Eluard a bien su produire par le biais de la langue. Une oeuvre à lire et à relire.

Celestia says

Faure says

Mais tu n'as pas toujours été avec moi. Ma mémoire.
Est encore obscurcie de t'avoir vu venir.
Et partir. Le temps se sert de mots comme l'amour.

Je t'ai saisie et depuis, ivre de larmes,
je baise partout pour toi l'espace abandonné.

Jsavett1 says

I can't give this collection enough praise or stars or words. There are some books which change the way you see things and there are some rare books which change the way you see yourself. Eluard's famed collection of poems does both, but like a lightning bolt for ME, he accomplishes the latter with zeal.

This is a book of surrealist poetry which people in the 1920s carries around in their backpacks, argued about in cafes, and read to each other when they were in love and in pain. It's not until you read these poems that you understand why it had such drastic effects.

Honestly, you need not know very much about surrealism or surrealist poetry, though Mary Ann Caws's essay at the end of the collection is very helpful indeed. You simply need to approach each poem with fresh teeth, with an open mouth, and with a heart willing to be taught how to read all over again. That sounds like a pretty tall order right? Well, as Darwish famously said "Extreme clarity is a mystery." That's a way of

saying that though you don't need to be a surrealist poetry lover to appreciate how profound Eluard's poems are, I would argue that you DO need some experience in reading poetry where the center is intuition, analogue, association, "aboutness." In some weird way, it's as if these poems are perfect for children and then for seasoned poetry readers who have returned to reading like children. To insist on meaning or structure or form in the traditional ways we use those words would be to miss Eluard completely.

In any case, if you're ready, by all means, enter the capital. I know that I nor my writing will ever be the same after reading Eluard. In my own reading and writing, I naturally found myself peering down the path of the surreal and the unconscious...I would imagine every good poet at some point does. Eluard's poems (and to some extent, Caws's essay) have quickened in me the spirit to rush that path with my arms ablaze.

SmallToothedSmile says

Oh, man-- a beautiful read. I became curious of Eluard because of Godard's Alphaville, in which lines were frequently quoted.

Semazen says

« Dormons mes frères.

Le chapitre inexplicable est devenu incompréhensible. »-Silence de l'Évangile (p 60)

P.E. says

- *Graff in Le Port du Légué, Saint-Brieuc, France*

(...)

*Je chante la grande joie de te chanter,
La grande joie de t'avoir ou de ne pas t'avoir,
La candeur de t'attendre, l'innocence de te connaître,
Ô toi qui supprimes l'oubli, l'espoir et l'ignorance,
Qui supprimes l'absence et qui me mets au monde,
Je chante pour chanter, je t'aime pour chanter
Le mystère où l'amour me crée et se délivre.*

(...)

Celle de toujours, toute - Paul Éluard

Fede says

Éluard's works are possibly the best introduction to Surrealism, even though he lacks the ideological commitment of Breton and the daring experimental tendencies of Louis Aragon. Éluard represents the sunny side of Surrealism, a most intimate dimension of the spirit, in which poetry still focuses on feelings and impressions rather than an intellectual conceptualization of them. It is more expression than analysis of the self.

This collection of poems is centred on the melancholic celebration of Gala, Éluard's wife, who will soon betray him and marry the Spanish painter Salvador Dalí. This charming woman becomes the personification of Desire, both physical and sentimental, both frustrated and fulfilled. The poet is perfectly aware of her adulterous affairs, and this knowledge sharpens his feelings to the utmost: her naked body is a living monument to passion and beauty, almost melting with the warm atmosphere of sunset or the soft light of dawn ("L'unique"). No hatred, no regret. Her elusiveness is the spell under which he keeps falling:

'My whole life listens to you and I cannot destroy
The terrible pleasures your love creates for me.'
("Nouveaux Poèmes", New poems)

He knows one day she will leave him. And yet, a sweet melancholy - even stronger than pain - makes him look ahead with tenderness and hope:

'If we were to start again, I would meet you without looking for you.'
("Au cœur de mon amour", At the core of my love).

Gala awakens in him opposite bursts of joy and sorrow. She masters his body as well as his soul: 'Am I anything else than your strength?' the poet asks in "Ta foi", Your faith. Gala is not a woman anymore, she has become the Feminine whose power goes far beyond the merely erotic attraction. He feels her tantalising power as a sweet burden he cannot get rid of, lest he loses part of his own enchanted self; so that Gala is finally identified with the truest source of his poetry:

'The shape of your heart is chimerical
And your love resembles my lost desire
Oh whispers of amber, dreams, glances.'
("Nouveaux poèmes")

These short poems are delicate glimpses, dreamy psychological landscapes, photographs of intimate moments of joy and meditation. A deserted beach in the warm light of a summer sunset, a bedroom in the cool glow of a winter starry night: Gala, bathing in the sea or lying naked in bed, is the core of all poetic contemplation, the world in which the poet lives and the source of his inner light.

To be read sitting on a beach at dawn, listening to the surf and watching the gulls flying over the sea; or lying in bed, looking at your lover's closed eyes in the first light of the day.
