**Aragon, Louis (1897-1982)**



Louis Aragon was a member of the surrealist movement until he split with André Breton and began to devote more of his energy to the Communist Party. He is best known for his love poetry and his novel, *Paris Peasant*.

Aragon was born and died in Paris, the city that played a major role in much of his writing. Because his mother was only seventeen when she gave birth to him, Aragon was raised to believe that his mother was his sister, his grandmother was his foster mother, and his father, the French senator Louis Andrieux, was his godfather. Aragon was only told of his true parentage at nineteen, when he was leaving for service in the First World War and not expected to return. For the rest of his life, Andrieux would refuse to acknowledge paternity, a fact later thematised in Aragon’s writing.

A French stamp from 1991 showing a sketch of

Louis Aragon by Henri Matisse.

Educated as a physician, Aragon joined the army medical corps and met André Breton there. The two joined Dada in 1919 and became founding members of the surrealist movement along with Philippe Soupault in 1924. Aragon’s first two poem collections were highly surrealist in style, but he was criticized by the group after he published *Le Paysan de Paris (Paris Peasant)*, a novel and dialectical meditation on areas of Paris about to be destroyed by modernisation. This book deeply influenced the philosopher Walter Benjamin. Soon after he joined the Communist Party in 1927, Aragon was ejected from the surrealist movement.

Aragon became a journalist for the Communist Party’s newspaper, *L’Humanité*, and was chosen as founding editor of the party’s new newspaper *Ce Soir*, which he used to animate public opinion during the Spanish Civil War. Mobilized by the French army in 1939, he joined the French Resistance immediately after its defeat, committing acts of resistance as well as writing for underground presses including *Les Editions de Minuit*. In 1939 Aragon married the Russian-born Elsa Triolet, sister of Lili Brik, the mistress of Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. During the war, Aragon and Triolet co-authored Resistance articles for several underground papers, one of which they co-edited, and influenced each other’s fiction. Aragon also wrote collections of poetry inspired by Triolet, declaring her his muse. The Communist aesthetic of social realism and wartime urgency influenced him to return to a more classical style of writing and historically based subjects.

Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet

After Liberation, Aragon became a leading public intellectual and an official of the French Communist Party. Yet he was increasingly disenchanted by Stalinist repression, and distanced himself soon after the Budapest insurrection of 1956. Aragon published dissidents such as Alexander Solzenitsyn and Milan Kundera and strongly supported the Prague Spring and the student uprisings in 1968. Despite his criticisms, however, he remained an official member of the French Communist Party (PCF) until his death.

Aragon was an influential literary editor until 1972, when he closed down *Les Lettres Françaises*, the literary supplement of *L’Humanité*. He then returned to his surrealist roots, publishing several more novels. As a writer, Aragon participated in the full course of twentieth-century French literature, including dada, surrealism, socialist realism, and the nouveau roman. Countless poems of his have been set to music, and many have become popular songs, performed by artists such as Marc Ogeret. (<http://www.amazon.fr/Marc-Ogeret-chante-Aragon/dp/B0000084SQ>), Isabel Aubret, and Georges Brassens (“Il n’y a pas d’amour heureux,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ujj-F4GJ4EY).

**Chronology of all Works:**

Novels

*Anicet ou le Panorama* (*Anicet, or the Panorama*, 1921)

*Les Aventures de Télémaque* (*The Adventures of Telemachus*, 1922)

*Le Paysan de Paris* (*Paris Peasant*, 1926)

*Le Con d’Irène* (*Irene’s Cunt*, 1926)

*Les Cloches de Bâle* (1934)

*Les Beaux Quartiers* (1936)

*Les Voyageurs de l’imperiale* (1942)

*Aurélien* (1944)

[*Servitude et Grandeur des Français. Scènes des années terribles*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Servitude_et_Grandeur_des_Fran%C3%A7ais._Sc%C3%A8nes_des_ann%C3%A9es_terribles&action=edit&redlink=1) ([1945](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945_in_literature))

*Les Communistes* (6 volumes; 1949-1967)

*La Semaine Sante* (*The Holy Week*, 1958)

*Le Fou d’Elsa* (1963)

*La Mise à mort* (1965)

*Blanche ou l’oubli* (1967)

*Henri Matisse* (*Henri Matisse: a Novel*, 1971)

*Théâtre/Roman* (1974)

*La defense de l’infini* and *Les Aventures de Jean-Foutre La Bite* (posthumous fragments, 1986)

Short Story Collections

*Le Libertinage* (*The Libertine*, 1924)

*Le Mentir-vrai* (1980)

Poetry

*Feu de joie* (*Bonfire*, 1920)

*Le mouvement perpetuel* (1926)

*La Grande Gaîté* (1929)

*Persécuté persécuteur* (1930–1931)

*Hourra l'Oural* (1934)

*Le Crève-Cœur* (1941)

*Cantique à Elsa* (1942)

*Les Yeux d'Elsa* (1942)

*Brocéliande* (1942)

*Le Musée Grevin* (1943)

*La Diane française* (1945)

*En étrange pays dans mon pays lui-même* (1945)

*Le Nouveau Crève-Cœur* (1948)

*Le Roman inachevé* (1956)

*Elsa* (1959)

*Les Poètes* (1960)

*Le Fou d’Elsa* (1963)

*Il ne m’est Paris que d’Elsa* (1964)

*Les Chambres, poème du temps qui ne passe pas* (1969)

*Demeure de Malkine* (1970)

Essays

*Un vague de rêves* (1924)

*Traité de style* (*Treatise on Style*, 1928)

*Pour un réalisme socialiste* (1935)

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Source URLs for images

Figure 1. From: <http://colnect.com/en/stamps/stamp/29619-Louis_Aragon_1897-1982-Authors_20th_century-France>

Figure 2. Louis Aragon and Elsa Triolet (http://www.ajpn.org/personne-Elsa-Triolet-2663.html)