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| **Reverdy, Pierre (1889-1960)** |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Pierre Reverdy, born in Narbonne, France, on September 13, 1889, and died in Solesmes, home of the St. Peter’s Abbey, on June 17, 1960. He was the famously understated poet of cubism (‘please God let me not be well-known’, he is said to have prayed), and was associated with the cubist poets Max Jacob and Guillaume Apollinaire, with Juan Gris, and with Picasso. He had a famous, on and off again, love affair with Coco Chanel – after which he left, at 37, for the Abbey. A poem of his stands at her grave. The ‘pope of surrealism’, André Breton, called him ‘the greatest poet of our time’. |
| Pierre Reverdy, born in Narbonne, France, on September 13, 1889, and died in Solesmes, home of the St. Peter’s Abbey, on June 17, 1960. He was the famously understated poet of cubism (‘please God let me not be well-known’, he is said to have prayed), and was associated with the cubist poets Max Jacob and Guillaume Apollinaire, with Juan Gris, and with Picasso. He had a famous, on and off again, love affair with Coco Chanel – after which he left, at 37, for the Abbey. A poem of his stands at her grave. The ‘pope of surrealism’, André Breton, called him ‘the greatest poet of our time’.    Reverdy’s poems are remarkably bare of any descriptive place or figure, unlocatable except in the mind, and have often a quiet melancholy, sometimes enlivened by an image memorable in its strangeness or peculiarity. There is no plot to speak of, the narration feels hushed, and the actions are limited to entering or leaving a room, hearing a train or car pass, or then someone speaking. Yet the power of the poetry is great, and influential on American poetry as well as European. The American poet Frank O’Hara carried a small volume of Reverdy in his pocket. He is clearly the inheritor of a certain symbolism, stemming from the great Stéphane Mallarmé, felt most strongly in the suggestive and unstated atmosphere of his poems, fuller of insinuation than of statement. Voices will be heard in the next room, with only an idea of what they might be saying, often suspected to be against the narrator.    The air of sadness that pervades his poetic atmosphere is oddly echoed in his life: Reverdy retired to the monastery of Solemnes and promptly lost his faith. Among his volumes of prose and poetry, the early *Ardoises du toit* (*Roof Slates*) stands out and the later *Flaques de verre* (*Glass Puddles*), as well as the haunting and despairing observations of a book Reverdy did with illustrations by Picasso, whose red lines weave among and border the poems of wartime: *Le Chant des morts* (*The Song of the Dead*). He was closely linked to the poets of his time, in particular the Spaniard Juan Gris, with whom he collaborated in some brief poems about objects: *Au Soleil du plafond* (*To the Sun on the Ceiling*). In the Paris of 1917, he founded, together with Jacob and Apollinaire, the journal *Nord-Sud*, named for the Parisian subway leading from Montmartre to Montparnasse. Reverdy was known for his theory of the image – confronting two realities, distant but with a relation – a theory that made its way into much of the writing of that period and after.  File: cover.jpg  Figure 1.  Source: <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/600x315/a0/2d/73/a02d73385435b424a12c91ee0d5ca3c2.jpg> |
| Further reading:  (Reverdy) |