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| Desnos, Robert Pierre (1900-1945) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Robert Pierre Desnos (1900-1945) was a surrealist French poet whose diverse work included scripts for film and stage; journalism; essays; advertisements; cantatas; children's fables; and political tracts. His principle works are of experimental poetry and prose, though after breaking with the Surrealists he often employed more classical forms and produced commercial works for radio and newspapers. His preferred themes include dreams, mythology, voyages, eroticism and love. Desnos died in an internment camp in 1945.  From 1922-1927 Desnos contributed regularly to *La Révolution Surreáliste* and co-signed collective Surrealist tracts*.* He showed a gift for hypnogogic sleep and automatic writing, leading André Breton to call him the poet ‘closest to surrealist truth’. His longer surrealist works (*Deuil pour deuil (Mourning for* Mourning, 1924) and *La Liberté ou l'amour! (Liberty or Love!*, 1927) combine narrative prose and lyric poetry, and involve extensive linguistic play, such as puns and homonyms. He often illustrated his own works, or collaborated with artists like André Masson, Joan Miró, and Pablo Picasso. |
| Robert Pierre Desnos (1900-1945) was a surrealist French poet whose diverse work included scripts for film and stage; journalism; essays; advertisements; cantatas; children's fables; and political tracts. His principle works are of experimental poetry and prose, though after breaking with the Surrealists he often employed more classical forms and produced commercial works for radio and newspapers. His preferred themes include dreams, mythology, voyages, eroticism and love. Desnos died in an internment camp in 1945.  From 1922-1927 Desnos contributed regularly to *La Révolution Surreáliste* and co-signed collective Surrealist tracts*.* He showed a gift for hypnogogic sleep and automatic writing, leading André Breton to call him the poet ‘closest to surrealist truth’. His longer surrealist works (*Deuil pour deuil (Mourning for* Mourning, 1924) and *La Liberté ou l'amour! (Liberty or Love!*, 1927) combine narrative prose and lyric poetry, and involve extensive linguistic play, such as puns and homonyms. He often illustrated his own works, or collaborated with artists like André Masson, Joan Miró, and Pablo Picasso.  In the 1920's Desnos wrote for many newspapers, including *Paris-Soir.* He also increasingly wrote in traditional forms like alexandrines. In the *Second Manifesto* (1929)the Surrealists rejected him for refusing to join the communist party and the ‘inexcusable failure to understand the current ends of poetry’.  Desnos believed in the total freedom of the poet: ‘Poetry can be this or that. It does not necessarily have to be this or that...except delirious and lucid’. Eroticism and love were central to his understanding of poetry, and he devoted many collections to the singer Yvonne George, and later to his wife Youki. Many of these can be found in two major collections of poetry: *Corps et biens (Body and Goods,* 1930) and *Fortunes* (1942).  Through the 1930's he cultivated his interest in popular culture, finding inspiration in music, advertising jingles, nursery rhymes, and street slang. Film scripts like *L'Étoile de mer (The Starfish,* 1928), directed by Man Ray, and numerous successful radio programs also attest to his enthusiasm for new media.  During World War Two Desnos worked for the anti-censorship review *Aujourd'hui (*Today, 1940-44). In 1944, he was arrested by the Gestapo for his affiliation with the resistance network ‘Agir’ (‘Act’), and deported to Nazi work camps. Desnos died of typhoid in a camp in Terezín, Czechoslovakia, on June 8, 1948. List of Works *Desnos: Œuvres.* (1999). Ed. Marie-Claire Dumas. Paris: Gallimard.  *Mourning for Mourning.* (1924) Trans. Terry Hale. *The Automatic Muse.* London: Atlas, 1994. 7-59.  *Liberty or Love!* (1927). Trans. Terry Hale. London: Atlas, 1993.  *The Selected Poems of Robert Desnos.* Trans. Carolyn Forché and Williams Kulik. New York: Ecco, 1991. |
| Further reading:  (Breton)  (Caws)  (72Eu) |