

LA REINE

How cold and bitter it is!
But she will never complain
overwrought by evergreen
wishes wrapped in the wind.

At l'église Saint-Séverin
Christ said, "Follow me." Where did
he go? Did he go among
the dead and the ministering

angels? Or among lighted
candles in the baptistry
where she was baptized in
'58? Did he find her

lost in a living desert?
Did he drop her into a
well from which she rose? From
the well to the rose window?

MEMOIR

This church is more beautiful than
the cathedrals of France.
But they're a lot older
and, in Rouen years ago,
a lot grimier.
You should write your memoirs.
I'm going to:

- Ch. 1 Arrived in prison
- Ch. 2 Guards ignorant of my whereabouts
- Ch. 3 The prisoner is a fool.
- Ch. 4 What to do?

I'd like to go to the
women's room. So would I.
She'll show us the way
behind the altar
where the choir goes
and is even now
waiting to perform.

- Ch. 5 Catholic diction—a problem
“Sacred Heart”—a particular
18th century non-favorite. And
Strange sexual language:
The Immaculate Conception.
There's a Conception Abbey
and no one thinks of it.
Yet diction or no diction
I'll defend Her to the grave.

Or, if I refuse to do that,
I'll passively go along
joining the masses
and wondering why my life

seems to be heading off
in the direction
of my living room—
dark in the best of light.

THE SLEEVES OF CIVILIZATION

I am a frozen bathtub staring at a wallpaper of olive trees and dark memories.
I try to change the wallpaper but the ice is too thick.
But the sun has a strong arm and is willing to use it!
Serenity is having difficulty walking.
Exile is speaking with deceptive charm.
These people are domineering: three inches high and full of gossip.
I unzip them. Full of false gods. Zip them up.
I recreate them out of wax. If there were a wick...there is a wick!
Light them up. Beautiful.
Life is named David and can hardly breathe.
David, stop banging my head on the table.

I'm looking desperately at my jacket.
The Latin pockets are gone.
The sleeves of civilization have been cut off.
Here's my soul: a grimy shower curtain embarrassed to be seen.
Plato, listen to this! What is sex without a piano?
My laughter plays on without a doubt.
Warning signals are: I have not even arrived at the midnight of self-pity.
Fire alarms do not sound like church bells.

I can't stop laughing at the Atlantic.
It's so shallow, smooth and pale!
The egotism of would-be heroes and heroines will not be satisfied.
No one will drown in the ocean for the right reasons but for others.
Luminous passivity is deadly. I am the moon without legs.
Come to the rescue. I have made a terrible mistake and cannot admit it.
Fire truck, why are you gray?
I hate your answer and will go mad before I ever accept it!
Drone, drone, drone. Count the drones of the three million death warrants I am
carrying.
It's so quiet in the supermarket: food rotting quietly,
Truck drivers being quietly murdered, refugees quietly turned back.
I am looking for my best poems but I don't know where they are.

They have gone to the Père-Lachaise Cemetery where Apollinaire is buried.
I am lying down with my chest full of stones
Next to Apollinaire's tomb.
I wonder if Baudelaire is here too.
Is Rimbaud married or buried?
Rimbaud Verlaine wife of Verlaine
Poor prison trying to contain poets!
Wife trying to keep a poet underfoot!
There's enough poverty here for all of us!

Put the chalice on the screened porch.
Have a profane mass to which your soul returns with a joke!
We'd better drink Sanka instead. God may exist. There is always that.
Stop shaking your heads. Epicureans are shadowless men.
It was exciting in the free-style poetic swimming class
After years of icy asceticism. But the Atlantic is shallow, remember!
I wish it were an adolescent dream, a loving ladder
Stretched across the abyss.
God is unknown, which explains my behavior
And the tragedy of the Cambodians.
Who would want to go to Cambodia, except a writer
Who might live to write about it and thus achieve fame?
How can poetry, the greatest vocation, welcome hypocrites?
I use suffering, do I exploit it?
I'll write about this, I'll make it go away.
It's getting chilly now, I throw a sweater over my shoulders.
Less safe spiritually than the Cambodians,
I lose my temper and step on my son.

I am going to the Hotel de l'Université!
I have sold my soul, don't tell me!
Travel has an ideal charm but what about poverty of spirit?
Difficult for middle-aged middle-class snobs to achieve.
But there's a rose window in the oven of my soul, Ms. Potato!
Aristotle, you are wrong. I am an irrational animal!
A crazed monsignor hogging the microphone for no reason.
Christ, save us all from ever being invited

To the last social gathering of the world
For its victims
Of which I am only a glimpse
A black and white ant, larger than death, crawling indiscreetly
Across the heavenly floor of June 21st, 1979.

Mary Ferrari