

POETRY

November 2014

TRANSLATION

MAX JACOB

The Demoniac's Mass

Placare ... Christe ... servulis ... serviculis ... beatam me dicent orifice astral

He's really too cute to be a canker.
He's really too ugly to be a cantor.
(I won't allow you to write such a thing
You'll go to Hell for daring such a thing)
Misericordia animi anima anima mea
Ma mama mea maria la grosse ma ... Maria ... Oh! Give me a break ...
There's someone bawling over the chatter.
There's someone splashing dishes with vomit splatter.
There's someone of the ones with a grainy voice.
If you think I don't see you laughing at me, think again, you choir boys!
Resurrexit homini hominum Pelléas nostrum
And in the painting in back, the guys are sinister scum.
They've lit Catherine wheels for the Black Mass.
The angels in the painting in back have no place to sit, alas.
It's night, tick tock, too crass, plutocracy.
Our Lord swells, deflates: he wants to go out.
The last statue of Mary—the one to the left,
Connects, disconnects—oh pardon me, pardon, is it a dream?
She dons a snout ... like the others,
Like all the others, in fact,
For there are no humans here.
Intumescitur anima mea, longitudinal,
Neither in the full scale of the voices, the voice in the choir stalls,
Nor in my own voice in malaise, in malady, malalaïa,
And all this for having brought a wolf or a hyena into the works.
— Oh! I saw it perfectly well! —
But God terribly takes revenge,
We eat God deliciously to make amends,
And the sacrilegious go to Hell.
What to do? That is
What's the meaning of soul, of the Mass, of the female ass
Except ... inept ... ept ...

Atlantide

A younger continent awakes:
After Bellona, we'll have Eve!
A new landscape rises from the wave:
No foam is flung yet on the rocks
The first drop bubbling from a spring
Hasn't yet washed a single field.
A giant on the Eiffel Tower's crown —
With moonlight threading through his hair —
Rejects his heavenly offspring, to give birth
To people living upon earth.
The lighthouse the tempest licked all night
Is a basket of seaweed crinkled tongues
It's tangled, and the tide brings in the heads
Of Eves pale and rumpled in their flight.
They're preparing the new continent up at Sacré-Cœur.
A young man showed off the model houses there
On a byre and our Savior's hands
By my bed on the hill where pilgrims flock all year.
Some fry eggs on a little camping stove
One's got nothing left but one shoulder and his chest
There's a Breton peasant woman.
And the young man still stays by me
In this dormitory room Our Lord is nude
He offers his wounded hands
The new continent will take work and thought
It's at Sacré-Cœur it will be wrought.

Périgal-Nohor

My azure sky surged in its market share
For my epithalamion two lions bowed
And Saint Catherine brandished aloft her blade
To trim my hedges of their honey-colored hair —
Two castles thickly pinnacled with cones —
Crawfish crawled around the turret stones.
Nothing else remained in this capital
And scraps of gardens scattered here and there
And we saw, too, your dainty *coiffes* of lace
Madame Adamensaur
Pickled-herring-color
Madame Mirabeau, Madame Mirabelle
Nebuchadinosaur, the Queen-Mama, said she.
Back toward the cathedral sailboats raced
One laden with treasure, the other with coal tar
The third caught fire, carrying Abelard
There was something vegetal about the sea
In block letters laboriously I trace
I'll always be a schoolboy in this art
Scholar foolscap collar we wear a crown that glows
The one who receives is worth him who bestows.

Translated from the French by Rosanna Warren