

Zone

You're tired of this old world at last

The flock of bridges is bleating this morning O shepherdess Eiffel Tower

You've had enough of living in the Greek and Roman past

Even the cars look ancient here

Only religion has stayed new religion

Has stayed simple like the hangars at Port Aviation

O Christianity you alone in Europe are not ancient

The most modern European is you Pope Pius X

And you whom the windows observe shame forbids this morning

Your going into a church and confessing

You read the handbills the catalogs the posters that really sing

That's poetry and there are newspapers if you want prose this morning

There are dime serials filled with detective stories

Portraits of great men and a thousand other categories

This morning I saw a pretty street whose name I have forgotten

Clean and new it was the bugle of the sun

The managers the workers and the beautiful secretaries
From Monday morning to Saturday afternoon go by four times a day
Each morning the whistle wails three times
About noon a clock barks out twelve angry chimes
The words written on signs and walls
Like squawking parrots the plaques and Post No Bills
I love the charm of this industrial street
Located in Paris between the rue Aumont-Thiéville and the avenue des Ternes

That's the young street and you are still just a boy
Your mother dresses you in blue and white only
You are highly devout and with your oldest friend René Dalize
You love nothing so much as the church ceremonies
It's nine o'clock the gas is down all blue you tiptoe out of the dormitory
You pray all night in the school oratory
While the eternal and adorable deep amethyst
Turns forever the flaming glory of Christ
It's the beautiful lily we all grow
It's the red-haired torch the wind does not blow out
It's the pale and bright red son of the sorrowful mother
It's the tree with all prayers evergreen in all weather
It's the double beam of honor and eternity
It's the six-pointed star
It's God who dies on Friday and is resurrected on Sunday

It's Christ who goes up in the sky better than any pilot could
He holds the world's record for altitude
Pupil Christ of the eye
Twentieth pupil of the centuries he knows how to do it there
And changed into a bird this century like Jesus rises in the air
The devils in the depths look up to see a
Thing they say imitates Simon Magus in Judea
"If he can fly he surely flies by night!"
The angels flip and fly around the handsome acrobat
Icarus Enoch Elie Apollonius of Tyana
Glide around the first airplane
Sometimes they part for the carriers of the Holy Eucharist
Those priests who rise eternally in elevating the host
At last the plane alights but doesn't fold its wings
The sky is then filled with a million flying things
The crows the owls the falcons swirl and dive
The ibises the flamingos the marabous from Africa arrive
The roc which poets and storytellers have celebrated
Glides clutching Adam's skull the first head
Over the horizon the eagle's swooping cry is heard
And from America comes the little hummingbird
From China come the pihis long and supple
Which have only one wing and fly in couples
Then the dove spirit immaculate

With an oscillated peacock and lyrebird escort
The pyre that begets its own self the phoenix
Like glowing coals which turn back into sticks
Leaving behind the perilous straits all three
Sirens arrive singing beautifully
And all eagle phoenix and pihis from China fraternize
With the machine moving across the skies

Now you walk in Paris alone in the crowd
Herds of buses drive past mooing loud
Your throat is gripped with love's pain
As if you should never be loved again
If you lived in the past you'd enter a monastery
You're ashamed to catch yourself saying a prayer
You jeer at yourself and your laughter crackles like hellfire
The background of your life is gilded by the sparks from your laughter
It's like paintings hung in a somber museum
Sometimes you step up close to see them

Today you walk in Paris the women are all bloodstained
It was and I'd rather not remember it was beauty on the wane

Surrounded with fervent flames Notre Dame looked down at me in Chartres
The blood of your Sacré Coeur flooded me in Montmartre

I'm sick of hearing blessed speeches
The love I suffer from is a shameful sickness
And all night the agonizing image whispers in your ear
That passing image is always near

Now you hear the Mediterranean's sound
Beneath the lemon trees blooming all year round
With your friends you go out on the sea
One from Nice one Mentonasque and two from La Turbie
The octopi from the depths fill our hearts with fear
And among the algae the fish swim symbols of the Savior

You're in the garden of an inn outside of Prague
You feel so happy a rose is on the table
And instead of writing your story in prose
You watch the beetle sleeping in the heart of the rose
In the apses of St. Vitus you see a drawing of your face
It was a horribly depressing and frightening place
You're like Lazarus utterly terrified by the light of day
The hands of the clock in the Jewish quarter turn the wrong way
And you too move back slowly through your life going
Up to Hradcany and through the evening listening
To them singing Czech songs in the taverns

Here you are in Marseilles among the watermelons

Here you are in Coblenz at the Hotel Gnome

Here you are sitting under a Japanese loquat tree in Rome

Here you are in Amsterdam with a girl that you find beautiful and who is a hag

She's supposed to marry a student in Den Haag

Where they rent students rooms in Latin Cubicula Locanda

I remember it I spent three days there and three more in Gouda

You go before the examining magistrate in Paris

Like a criminal you are placed under arrest

Your travels were both sad and spectacular

Before you realized what deceit and aging are

At twenty and thirty your love affairs were cruel

I've wasted my time and I've lived like a fool

You don't dare look at your hands anymore and you constantly feel like crying

Over yourself over her whom I love over everything terrifying

These poor immigrants fill your eyes with tears

They nurse their young they believe in God and prayers

Their smell fills the hall of the Gare Saint Lazare

Like the Three Kings they have faith in their star

They hope to take on finer airs in Buenos Aires
And return successful in business affairs
One family carries a red comforter the way you carry your heart
That comforter and our dreams are equally unreal
Some of the immigrants move in here and stay
In hovels on the rue des Ecouffes or rue des Rosiers
I've often seen them taking the evening air
Like chess pieces they generally just sit there
Mostly Jews their women sit ghost white
Deep in their shops in wigs all day and night

You stand at the counter in some low-down café
With wretches you have a cheap cup of coffee

You're in a big restaurant at night

These women are all right they have their plight
Still all even her have hurt their lovers and she's a fright

She's the daughter of a policeman on the Isle of Jersey

I hadn't seen her hard chapped hands sticking out of her jersey

I feel horribly sorry for the scars on her belly

Now I humiliate to a poor girl with a horrible laugh my mouth

You're alone morning's on its way

The milkmen bang their cans in the street

Night slips away like a lovely half-breed

It's false Ferdine or attentive Lea

And you drink this alcohol that burns like your spirit

Your spirit you drink down like spirits

You walk toward Auteuil you want to go home on foot

To sleep among fetishes from Oceania and Guinea which put

Christ in another form with other inspirations

They are inferior Christs of dark aspirations

Good-bye and God keep you

Sun throat cut

—Translated by Ron Padgett