

Alashka

Janet Rodney was born in Washington D.C. in 1941. Her father was killed in the Pacific War in 1942. At the age of nine she moved with her mother to Paris; there followed a lot of travel, learning languages, different schools. About half of her school education was in French. Her mother remarried; they moved to Taipei, then Spain. In Madrid she worked as a reader for publishers, as translator, interpreter, editor and journalist. She left Spain in 1974 to go to graduate school, where she met Nathaniel Tarn. They married in 1983 and later moved to New Mexico. In 1987 she founded The Weaselsleeves Press. Her work as a letterpress printer is in fine print and art book collections across the USA. Her publications include *Moon on an Oarblade Rowing* (2005), which brought together three previous collections, and *Terminal Colors: Selected Poems 1974-2005*.

Franco-Anglo-American poet Nathaniel Tarn was born in 1928 and educated in France, Belgium and England, obtaining degrees from Cambridge, the Sorbonne and Chicago; he emigrated to the United States in 1970, where he taught at American universities until his retirement. He now lives just outside Santa Fe, New Mexico. Although he is perhaps best known these days as a poet and essayist, he is also an anthropologist, with a particular interest in Highland Maya studies and the sociology of Buddhist institutions, and is also a translator of the highest order (see above all his versions of Neruda's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* and Victor Segalen's *Stelae*). His first collection of poetry was *Old Savage/Young City* (London: Cape, 1964), which was followed the next year by his appearance in the seventh volume of the Penguin Modern Poets series. Three more collections followed in London, during which time he also became editor of Cape Goliard and founder-editor of the remarkable Cape Editions series of seminal modern texts: poetry, prose, anthropology, drama, many of them in pioneering translations. After he emigrated, only two more collections—the important volume *A Nowhere for Vallejo* and the ambitious book-length poem *Lyrics for the Bride of God*—were to appear in the UK. Thereafter, with the exception of his Shearsman publications and one other volume, all of his work has appeared in the USA, most significantly: *The House of Leaves*, *Atitlán/Alashka* (with Janet Rodney), *At the Western Gates*, *Selected Poems 1950-2000*, *Ins and Outs of the Forest Rivers* and the recent *Gondwana*. There is also a significant volume of essays in *Views from the Weaving Mountain*. Tarn's work is remarkable for expansiveness and its willingness to absorb material from very disparate sources—in this, it owes something to the examples of Pound and Olson, but also a lot to the author's own anthropological training, his knowledge of other languages and his interests in areas such as archaeology.

ALSO BY JANET RODNEY

Atitlán / Alashka (Alashka with Nathaniel Tarn) (1979)
Crystals (1979)
Orphydice (1986)
The Book of Craving (1997)
Moon on an Oarblade Rowing (2005)
Terminal Colors: Selected Poems 1974–2005

ALSO BY NATHANIEL TARN

Old Savage/Young City (1964)
Where Babylon Ends (1969)
The Beautiful Contradictions (1969; 2nd edition 2013)
October (1969)
The Silence (1969)
A Nowhere for Vallejo (1971)
Section: The Artemision (1973)
The Persephones (1974; revised edition, 2008, 2016)
Lyrics for the Bride of God (1975)
The House of Leaves (1976; 2nd edition 2018 *)
The Microcosm (1977)
Atitlán / Alashka (Alashka with Janet Rodney) (1979)
Weekends in Mexico (1982)
The Desert Mothers (1984; 2nd edition 2018 *)
At the Western Gates (1985; 2nd edition 2018 *)
Palenque: Selected Poems 1972–1984 (1986) *
Seeing America First (1989)
Home One (1990)
The Army Has Announced That Body Bags... (1992)
Caja del Río (1993)
Flying the Body (1993)
The Architextures (2000)
Three Letters from the City: The St. Petersburg Poems (2001)
Selected Poems: 1950–2000 (2002)
Recollections of Being (2004)
Avia (2008) *
Ins & Outs of the Forest Rivers (2008)
Gondwana and Other Poems (2017)

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& Janet Rodney

Alaska

SAMPLE

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(*this address not for correspondence*)

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Acknowledgments

Despite any kind of appearances, every single poem in this geography is a jointly created fiction and any resemblance between the voices you hear and real, flesh & blood authors is purely coincidental.

The fictional voices offer these poems to the real voices of several people, among whom they especially remember: Larry Ahvakana, Fred Anderson, Harry Bremner, Nora and Richard Dauenhauer, Ernie Frankson and his family, Andy McKinley, Dwight Milligrook, Albert Ningalook, Melvin Olanna, John Oktollik, Simeon Ootillian, Jim Pepper, Ron & Joe Senungetuk, Willy Willoya, Rosita & Bob Worl.

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Some of these texts appeared in the following periodicals:
Bezoar, Credences, Handbook, New Directions Anthology, New Wilderness Newsletter, New World Journal, Paper Air and Raven's Bones, Survival International.

The Ground of Our Great Admiration of Nature was first published by Robert Vas Dias at the Permanent Press, London & New York, 1978.

Twelve poems from *Forest* were first published by Walter Hamady at the Perishable Press Ltd., Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin, 1978.

As we drove West, wasting the miles behind us willingly, putting great space between ourselves and anything that bound us to a place: the stubborn refusal of sentences to form, of the land to take shape, of the future to obey our will, as it had obeyed it up till now, the great land desiring to remain open, and unexperienced, refusing definition from the start, to be worked thru and thru, mile by mile, without complicity...

Unless, overbearing all other sound, conscious only of impending disaster, lost in its clouds and mountains: that insistent call, that name, howl in the winds rushing from pole to pole, the immense continent not impeding, a voice, woman's perhaps, a huge lamenting voice crying for no known thing:

SAMPLER

CITIES

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NT, Paris, to JR, New Hope: 5/17/76

Remember the morning
after the tourists had whooped it up all night
making a ruin of Pennsylvania

we sat in our forest
the one we pretend to own
(until about noon
when the tourists come back to claim it)
and we listened to the birds
with our eyes closed

making time together
outside of history?
It's the poetry going thru us matters I believe
not ourselves as poets
same as the life, bird to bird, season to season,
not the bird itself.

Remember in future:
when you can't see the birds
close your eyes and listen—
then they will unfold their major gifts.
As they work, going about survival,
they offer, for whatever purpose of their own,
those astonishing sounds
which give us meaning.

We heard that concert then
which had been kept from us all season
by our "responsibilities,"
day of invisible music
rustling up summer,
opening the road.
"Thank God" we said, "we are going back
to everything that matters."

Time of patience now, testing out
our memory of roads once traveled
further than night
in an air of crystals where the breath
is multi-faceted as thought.
Patience hunts the poem.
The poem surrenders, opening
a two-way mirror. Each life answers the other.

JR, New Hope, to NT, Paris: 5/18/76

Answer a poem.
Only this one
wasn't dialed.
The door opened
I stepped inside
& found your message
on the floor.
Answer.
I mean, a half
of what I say to you
comes from you.
& I trust you
to make the connection
when I don't, I rely
on your intelligence.

People used to write letters.
They would get up early and write.
While their minds were fresh.
Set the day straight in writing.
Wire the day with words.
A diary for someone other.

SAMPLER

They would give away
their best mind
and still have time.

Just as
there's light
at both ends
of a tunnel
& we carry this bulb
from one end
to the other,
I thought,
when I picked up yr. note
this is a light
transmission:
moves so fast
it's invisible,
moves so slow
it's invisible,
a feather passing
over skin,
the gradual brightening
of male plumage,
the order of seasons.
What are you doing now?

Each summer I
start to record
my dreams.

We were
sitting in a chair
back to back
with a double face
& through our mind
a movie flashed
of changing shadows,

we both could see light
but at different ends.
I turned to say—
but you weren't there,
you were
at the back of my mind,
eyes staring out
of my crown,
pulling me
towards the light.

NT, Paris, to JR, New Hope: 5/20/76

I sit at one of the crossroads of the city
which is itself all one crossroads of the universe.
Born here: so as to speak.

No stone has moved, n.b.,
the spirit-city still
in essence
inviolable.

First station of the cross,
morning after arrival
gas-chambers monument
at the tip of Notre Dame:

“They went unto the ends of the earth and they
did not return.”

I had waited years to see that.

We have been, returned,
and are going again soon.

Later, at the *Laboratoire* for social anthropology,
fall nose to spine with the British Columbia collection.
Lévi-Strauss has seen at last, I am informed,
the Skeena's mist-skirts.

I fly the Alashka flag among crowds
half of which carry the flags and patches of other nations
and are far too busy doing that to care about AK.

I meet with Jacques Roubaud
who will walk three months from Minnesota to Louisiana
setting his spine on Mark Twain's rock.

We might send him a postcard as we cross?
The correspondences cannot end, not if they tried to.
The center is just another margin of another center
bound by whale bones and beach ridges
stretched like time's bow
behind the arctic sea.

Giddings, Louis:

homage to that man who dug us in
thousands of years into the past, back of
first tattle of trekkers hunting land
when all they had to do was stand still.
And did. So as to speak

The girl at lunch gets up, over and over,
stoops on her lover
so as to show the breasts in her open blouse.
I eat her breasts, among my salad, which is what she wants
and miss your body language.

(Besides which, it is all good cannibalism, within custom.)

Tonight, the Deutsches Requiem at Notre Dame
with my lady mother, city-born also,
who comes here to wake her own mother
lying between death and sleep,
the small, cold waves
bearing the birds of life
on the swell of the Bering Sea.

Tomorrow, I read my poems on the French radio
in this language I first spoke—
chatting with dear Deguy and Claude Royet-Journoud
about Alashka.

And, of course, every night, the Seigle, my second parents
who love me from my twenties. My fellow student Chiva too,
and Lucien Biton, cook to the mortal mind,
cousins and uncles also: Claude, Daniel, Marion.
While my mother's mother dies at one end of Paris
and at the other end, another of her sons.

Meanwhile I recommend
our Pennsylvania to you as you wake
since you still sleep there
six hours behind me on the waves of May
among our wrens and orioles.
Until our bones can buck the thaw
and freeze again in old
yet still so virgin summer ice
and feel no pain, life draining out,
as we return outside of human time,
to the great bow
which draws the earth, and every nature in it,
backwards to origin...
I travel hard, with little company,
shuttle between the living and the dead,
being of ice now, in my inmost thoughts,
and tho the world beats here with all its blood.

JR, Madrid, to NT, Paris: 5/24-25/76

Above the Atlantic
many miles high
imagine me
flying backwards
to that place between the ribs,
that warmest of

all hearts,
where they
bury their dead.
I suppose
the priest
told them to put up
a picket fence:
they took their slats
from the biggest tree.
& what better place
than a grove of
whalerib.
Different from this cage
skimming the tops of clouds
while somewhere below
you walk thru a door
or sit at the crossroads
where you have been lounging
these past days in my mind
in that last masque
you painted
of vegetable family,
packed in quilts
of ice.

SAMPLER

JR, Madrid, to NT, London: 5/27/76

To be idle rich
not my wish
nor idle poor
but somewhere between
something parasitic maybe
unclaimed by gods or men

with time to do nothing,
or not.
As one chooses.
To engage the world
with time
to live & die
in doses
chosen at will
or letting either come
as it will
to do me in
or out,
to glide over
the mind's cities & woods
stepping through
the broken lights on pavements
or clearings
between your eye and mine
walking under the rains
within that fall,
leaving us dry as winter
ageing in our frames,
but with words to say it
& let them rise around us,
the words, and think:
"how they rise like a city around us"
or, "how they rise like a forest in our middle"
and watch them grow,
and watch us grow.

SAMPLER

NT, Paris, to JR, Madrid: 5/26/76

This morning I heard a
bird among stars
Egypt was singing
in the dark,
the king's
childhood sat under the falcon's shadow
who had descended from the sun,
down ladders from the sun
and become, in the lower world,
darkness.
—They

made these stones
last some 3000 years
solid and earth-bound
like his grandfather (Ramses?)
who writes the earth down:
birds, all the names of
birds & all the trees around.
Fish in blue pools.
Heat / heat. Far from
the ice-cap, bringing down the pole
over the golden faces
of women longing at stars
bulls, geese, hares
plaited in their tresses...

Do you know
how OLD we are
to
speak to each other
one in Paris / one in Madrid
(under Velázquez light,
London between, later Pennsylvania

and later still
 departure in the dark
 again towards that pole?

 Old with the world behind us
enough to have made ourselves
 in our separation
cry to each other
 taking in hand our sexes
 each creating
from the rush of it
 (brother & sister holding free hands)
 an independent world...

 And a world created from that.
 My that and your this.
From the mixing of. My this and your that
Nor woman/nor man. Bird. Fish.
 Hinted at in former times.
 Never more.

SAMPLER

JR, Madrid, to NT, London: 5/30/76

This was my piece of Eden once,
the clear Velázquez air
& sky so close
to old stones,
rainworn tiles
sloping streetward,
lines clear
as your eye,
bells contrapuntal
music of the night,

clear, as your mind
among stars,
marking another time,
the falcon's,
his laser eye (like yours)
slept and woke
to sound of steps
going down
rung by rung
to darkness,
wings spread out like hooks
to draw up the fish.

But there's nothing
of innocence
here now, goes back
to a sound of laughter,
like water,
a hand churning
deep inside the pools
as fish leapt up
the ladders of fountains,
sun glinting off their scales
they hit the sky
dazzling in their flight,
their migration north.

Now the Eden lies
like sun behind the rain,
when it comes,
revealing all the splendors
of darkness, its colors...