

The House of Leaves

SAMPLER

ALSO BY NATHANIEL TARN

POETRY

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 editions, 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* (2017)
Alashka [with Janet Rodney] (first separate publication, 2018*)

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Pablo Neruda: *Selected Poems* (1968) / Victor Segalen: *Stelae* (1969)
Con Cuba (1969) / The Rabinal Achi, Act 4 (1973)
The Penguin Neruda (1975)

PROSE

Views from the Weaving Mountain:
Selected Essays in Poetics & Anthropology (1991)
Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans & Priests on Lake Atitlán (1998)
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Nathaniel Tarn

The House of Leaves

SAMPLE

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ONE

SAMPLER

SAMPLER

Letter from Leningrad to the Reason for Living

for Arnold and Dusty Wesker

Words like worms in a corpse
I cannot see them yet feel them near
they move at the tip of my fingers
their taste hovers on my tongue
they curl round my eyes inside my ears
demanding audience

Conversation done blur of bus windows
halfway from Novgorod stop in the fields
piss in a haze of huge mosquitoes
and the flat earth of Russia stretches out
from the Baltic to the Japan Sea
green here, underfoot

There is so much to understand
the fattest catkins you can imagine
Prague Bratislava the Initial Peace
but here the speeches gold on red medallions
1917 in cyphers bleeding glass
and movement petrified

I dream that I have died
I am told to walk into heaven
which is a palace of glass
I am to talk to no one
but to walk straight ahead
many others are doing the same
...after many hours
many days of walking
asking what it's all about
(my father dead before me
younger than I at that
unable to answer)

I come to a wall
on the other side of which
there is another heaven
but only a very few
highly placed persons go over
look around come back again

The resurrection crystallizes around Him
white on His white star
the curve is made straight
the circle squared
the disciples thrown on frozen spittle
 in molten sleep

A cloud of brimstone curling
assaults the sleeping Virgin
Dove rocking on a stream of blood
out of the weeping brimstone
above the angel whose wings
 span all of Russia

The fattest catkins you can imagine
tongued into patterns her lower hair
on shining thigh medusa's dial
the snake mouth opens
I enter in her namelessness
 music heard about here

I began as a pastoral poem
there was a hawk on a telephone pole
warblers in willows calling me where I could not go
new whips of growth on the pines, another green
buttercups like the galaxies of each other
a small brown flower with an earthquake heart
an eternity of birches

I lie in a field on the edges of
the long white nights of Leningrad
in the arms of a dream I have of her
and perhaps it is because of all those golden domes
the grass makes patterns on our drowning backs
willow seed raining sperm in the still, still air
from the fattest catkins you could ever imagine

The hungry land stretches out its arms
crying with all its rivers
and I cannot ever let go of her long body
imagine: and there is no more time
Penjamo sixty-two
will solve it all

Anatole talking thru the night burning manuscripts
blue-bound smell of sardines
a gifted icon rocking in my arms
Sasha showing his ring: Gräf Gräf
we are both barons

They fetch me in the cavernous hotel
addresses go flushing down the toilet
Boris minus two legs
fucks a fat blonde behind a wall of sheets
Sasha uses her mouth
his ring still glinting

Her cunt gleams in the dark
behind the golden balls of Boris
we leap on elegant horses
in pale 17th century colors
to kick out the sockets
of the mother of Russia

There is so much to understand
and I want as always to talk to you about it

stored up for you until the load of days crushes
 imagine: and there is no more time
 the ice cap spreads the world is starving
 there is ice on the silk of her thighs
 the man-made stars slip slowly from our vision

Two weeks from now Prague will fall silent

this tide shall turn...

SAMPLER

Food

for Lucien Biton

From a thousand years back
 he talks of the grass
which must be covered with salt
 from sea-spray
to make good lamb,
 the elements
of food-philosophy—

 talks of the time before
which is always better of course,
 the art of life
passage of life thru life
 and its digestion
coming together, blending of substances
 in their proper order

 taste of the world
being nothing else than taste of world
 you have under your nose
 odor of blood
 rare / medium / well
 odor of green beans
 odor of goat
the lining of the stomach
 jewelled with wine:
civilization

and a geography:
 of the city
 of the appropriate places
in which to purchase the ingredients:
 (black-legged pullet of Nantes
 blue-skinned, difficult to pluck,

small one of Bresse, made
to be worked on, to be simmered
in cream—well into Normandy
par exemple)

a demography:

But no cooking in OUR country
no working of the food / only for paupers
the complications of soup: & nothing, ever, boiled
except for once a year to please the kids
& the tail-end of peasant in our souls you see...

a memorial:

in my country, when kids left the house,
O Loire de Ronsard et la chair attendrie,
the individual soup-dish left as well
& here is my dish & here is my wife's
—charming little objects, complex, covered,—
how shall they come again ever

the good times

before she died?

Brief burst of tears
into the wine, the dilution,
memory of a hard time
the breast gone, the dug, and still needed
even at seventy
(I cry daily he says everyday)

IN THE CAPITAL, he begins again,

everything is dying,
you can't find the right ingredients
any more
yes, well, I'm sure of *my* cheeses
but the strawberries are made by engineers,
I'm sure of the string beans

but the cutlets are doubtful
 (elsewhere than in *my* shop
 the very CUT
 the structure of the piece of meat
 O Lévi-Strauss!
 gone out of memory of living men...)
Then the flood
 the encyclopaedic memorandum
 the perfection of wisdom
the brain, three times the speed of anyone I know

in the skull
 oiled by wine and cognac
 self-owned beyond all else:

THE INTELLECT!

and now go tell
those who take food
and freeze it to death
before it ever
reaches the right store
 the right street in the city
 the correct degree of the oven
 the erotic mind...

THREE PORTRAITS

1: René Magritte

for John Digby

A long time coming fame

question of levels
under the sea a forest
under the forest rooms rooms floors

the heart of mathematics
repeat repeat
call one now vary

we are responsible for this whole universe
but decide nothing in it
(save only love)

this love
this love
time walking with her legs into the picture

her back within her belly
careful to show
the prowling hair

window coming in at the seams
but did not try the buttock/breast analogy
yet must have guessed it

apple ball two balls
the semiotic liquid
in that round belly only like the Dutch painters

fish
fuckable fish
with the backdrop Tristan's

the suck of fire
the brass of it
butterflies breathing

and the eagles of Arnhem
and the egg
laid by the mountains

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