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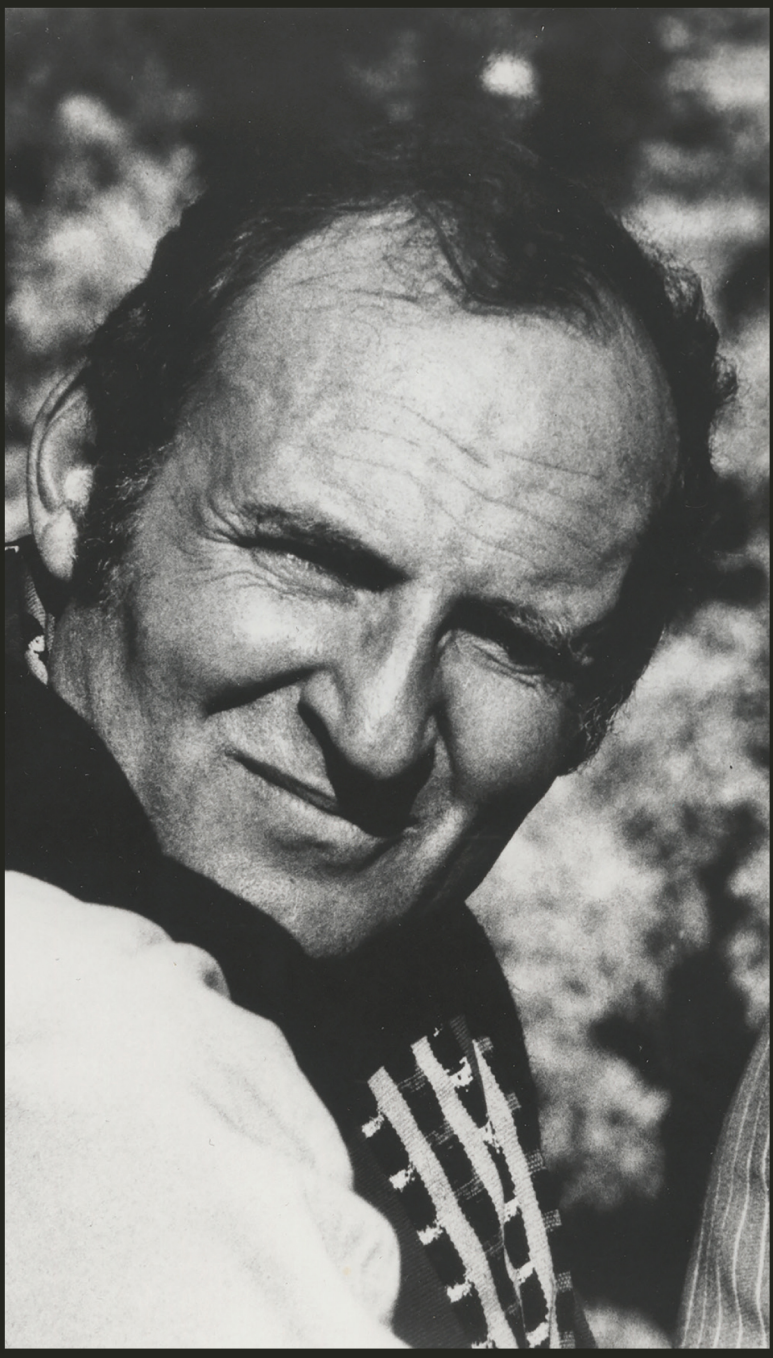

AN AUTOANTHROPOLOGY

NATHANIEL TARN

PRAISE FOR NATHANIEL TARN

"Tarn's books have inspired a wild, almost religious devotion among readers. His work is a tremendous force field in which world and perception collaborate in the construction of innovative formal 'architextures' for a sensual language that has no like. Tarn is one of the most elegant and formidably intelligent minds in contemporary poetry. His books open up a means for us to be delighted again to belong to this world."

—FORREST GANDER

"While poetry is narrowing its concerns, Tarn risks a scale epic enough to contain mountains and oceans. He keeps his lines of communication open to more than one life form, with a prophetic sureness of direction."

—GEOFFREY O'BRIEN

"Tarn, a poet in Goethe's image, has spent over fifty years writing a poetry invested in the lessons of modernism, yet informed by the disciplines of anthropology. His poems are transformations of a classifying, structuring imagination into visionary utterances."

—PETER O'LEARY

"One of the most outstanding poets of his generation."

—KENNETH REXROTH

"Anthropologist, editor, critic, and translator, Nathaniel Tarn is above all a poet. Poetry is at the center of his personality and his activity. His work, in full growth, reveals a rich temperament, a remarkable linguistic inventiveness, and a vision both original and universal."

—OCTAVIO PAZ

"Tarn's poetry redefines nature and art for human culture, bringing a genuine psychological and linguistic curiosity about the human mind, about what it means to be human."

—BRENDA HILLMAN, *Jacket*

"Catastrophe, exile, a deliberate going against: these concepts all contribute to our understanding of Tarn's late style, tense, dissociative, darkly brooding, abruptly furious, suddenly elevated to a point of dizzying sublimity."

—NORMAN FINKELSTEIN, *Poetry in Review*

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ATLANTIS, AN AUTOANTHROPOLOGY

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS Durham and London 2022

ATLANTIS,

AN AUTOANTHROPOLOGY

NATHANIEL TARN

FOREWORD BY JOSEPH DONAHUE

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Cover art: Janet Rodney, photograph of Nathaniel Tarn, Elder Principal in Cofradia Santa Cruz, Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, 1979.

TO ALL MY (M)OTHERS

I is a throng of voices.
—JANET RODNEY, *The Book of Craving*

Dites-moi à quelle heure je dois être transporté a bord . . .
—ARTHUR RIMBAUD, 1891

No, one wasn't just one. One was ten people, twenty, a hundred. The more opportunities life gave us, the more beings it revealed in us. A man might die because he hadn't experienced anything, and had been just one person all his life.
—JOSEPH ROTH, *Right and Left*

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Galleries appear after Throws 10, 20, and 30.

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FOREWORD

Nathaniel Tarn: Through the Gates of Atlantis

JOSEPH DONAHUE

On those vast shady hills between America & Albion's shore;
Now barr'd out by the Atlantic sea: call'd Atlantean hills . . .
—WILLIAM BLAKE

I

Nathaniel Tarn's *Atlantis, an Autoanthropology* is a far-ranging testimonial to the life and times of a fictional character. Our protagonist, who's been everywhere, met everybody, done more in one lifetime than might most in multiple reincarnations, is also the most prescient poet of our time. Fictional, but not. This Atlantis is not fiction but is the history of a fiction, an imagined identity made actual of a pseudonymous poet, Nathaniel Tarn, taken up, lived to the extreme, by one who wished to locate his being out of an exhausting profession into a life in poetry. The tale told is nothing less than a meditation on modern identity, an adventure in self-understanding that lays bare the social, familial, historical, and personal forces making us who we are, making us not want to be who we are, then making us want to become another. Nathaniel Tarn has lived words famed in his natal tongue: *Je est un autre.* Our author and our self-created protagonist, "Nathaniel Tarn," named thus legally on becoming an American citizen, has had such a rich life

that his very pen name would seem to have its own ontology encoded within it, never to be quite revealed, despite the disarming candor of the following pages.

II

A well-credentialed, widely published Franco-British anthropologist, Dr. E. Michael Mendelson created Tarn, all those years ago, to save his creative life from the censure of his profession. Now Tarn returns the favor. (Borges, in eternity, will decide who the ultimate author of this book is.) Let's simply note that the signatory, Tarn, has devised an exceptional way to write his double life: the Throw. These Throws create an ever-absorbing mix of time, tone, place, and narrative, all the while acknowledging the author's pervasive philosophical concern and the source of his deepest terror, arbitrariness. Tarn draws the idea of the Throw from the practice of making pottery, so alerting us, as if we need a still more erudite prompting, to see what is so pervasive through the work: his affection for craft culture of all ages and all places. While utilizing to vivifying effect this formal innovation, *Atlantis, an Autoanthropology* is also haunted by the throw, by another sort of throw, the throw of the dice of our lives: the fate set in play for us, each and every day. Tarn is tantalized by the possibility of stable, permutable forms, within which contingency can be recognized and can even provoke delight. Each Throw of Tarn's prose takes us places, returns us to places, takes up ideas, celebrates friends, documents events, spins a tale, laments a loss, sings whatever is well made. Both in form and content this book is a continuous meditation on the interrelation of freedom and fate. We begin at the beginning: our individual's story, as told by Tarn. The opening Throws move through acutely rendered accounts of early years, gracefully weaving a dense social and cultural web. It's a world full of feeling, lightened of any lugubrious dwelling on what was. Tarn, writing with his twinned capacities, those of the poet and those of the anthropological observer, can, with a single well-turned detail, catch the intersections of multiple worlds: the natural world, the world of personal feeling, and the full social fact of being alive in a time and a place.

III

Imagine a child during the Battle of Britain, holed up in a hotel, Nazi bombs falling all round. Or a Jewish refugee life in England as the war rages. Or the indignities of the classroom. Or the pain of learning to be English but never being quite English enough. Throws divide the telling of a double life into serial renditions of fate, within which myths, mountains, fabrics, temples,

money, gossip, sex, family, and portraiture take on the impromptu gravitas of tarot cards. The Tarn-to-be finds his way, through the war, through school and college, through the cafés of Paris. He finds he's not alone: Claude Lévi-Strauss, André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, and George Steiner are there. Many others whom history remembers pass through the Throws. So too, we meet and feel a fond regard for those the world has yet to hear of, but who are known to the poet, for insights, gifts, abilities, kindnesses, and in some cases, yes, slights. They all return here. Throws can tell you what a wonderful lunch on a certain day was like or can unfold brief, marvelous essays, philosophical asides worthy of Emil Cioran, Elias Canetti, or Roberto Calasso. The flow of the prose keeps us close. Museums, poetry, poetics, religious systems, love affairs, travel arrangements, the sublime, all are recurrent stations in a life lived in devotion to detecting the shapes that culture makes. At any moment in this textual Atlantis, this fieldwork from nowhere, Tarn might be finding his way to an abandoned temple, or sketching out cultural networks, or casting a cold eye on academic life, or delving into ecstasies, or sounding out despair. He might be evaluating a hallucinogen taken while driving or giving us the skinny about having been proclaimed a god.

IV

Before his birth, Tarn had two fields of expertise (the double, doubled!). He had lived two scholarly lifetimes of hands-on experience regarding two immensely complex subjects, Mayan culture and Burmese Buddhism. But then, the intrigue of identity begins at birth if not before, in 1928, in France, to a French-Romanian mother and a British-Lithuanian father. His family fled the continent of Europe for England as the war began. He-who-would-be-Tarn learned quickly how moving between cultures sharpens one's wits. Our narrator lived the discipline of anthropology long before he met Lévi-Strauss. He clearly sensed the double life ahead; he was already writing poetry in his native French, publishing poetry under yet another pseudonym. It becomes increasingly less clear who created whom in the legend of poetic vocation that this book spins out, where a French-born English poet finds in mid-century anthropology the truest singing school. In these pages, an apparently effortless lyricism arises from what in other hands would be simply the routines of fieldwork. (Fellow travelers such as Octavio Paz and Kamau Brathwaite offer equivalent examples of how a visionary poetry can draw so robustly on the intellectual disciplines of our age.) From the perspective of his immense and distinguished body of poetic work, his anthropological writings shine in a poetic light. Such works as *Scandals in the House of*

Birds or even, as Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma: A Study of Monastic Sectarianism and Leadership,* arise from a conviction that the totality of human life across time can be to a meaningful degree fathomed. They work out the logic of some of Tarn's most moving and luminous poems. (Consider his masterpiece, "Palenque.") Anthropology informs as well his landmark contribution to poetics, "The Heraldic Vision," gathered in *The Embattled Lyric*, where Blake and Victor Turner assist the poet in a critical rethinking of projective verse, ethnopoetics, and much else. His vast poetry embodies Robert Redfield's dream of fathoming different worldviews. Tarn makes cosmological empathy integral to the act of writing. Each Throw of his prose attests to a lifetime practice of notating, reflecting upon, collating, categorizing, and more, feeling the pain and delights of others. He models a deep and never-ending initiation into the human sciences, which shine with a restored heroism in his works.

V

The belief that origins and ends can be known, or at least imagined so fiercely and particularly that they can be understood to be "known," the proposal that culture at its most exalted is within reach of anyone willing to look hard for it, is embedded in the first word in the title. Atlantis gives the book its title but appears nowhere within it, which is in keeping with its nature. The science of man, and the individual life of practitioner of that science, lie on the far side of a grammatical equal sign, as if they derive from a place that never existed or certainly no longer exists. A watery abyss opens on the left-hand side of the comma. Is this the autoanthropology of a life lived in Atlantis, that most lavishly orchestrated absence in Western tradition, that place of first promise and last catastrophe? Are the rituals and daily practices of a life lived in oblivion about to be revealed? The title hints at an anthropological lineage that predates anthropology while claiming a literary historical one, where Atlantis has long been linked to America, the land where Nathaniel Tarn, who had longed for America as a wartime schoolboy, saluting a nearby stars-and-stripes flag, devouring a life of Lincoln, made a new life and career as a poet. The lost continent compels a further curiosity: Is Tarn's Atlantis not that of Plato or Bacon or Moore, or Donnelly or Guénon, but rather the last mountaintops of the sunken land located by William Blake between England and America? Did Tarn, on his way between continents, harbor in Atlantis? Lack of mention confirms the suspicion. Recall that in *America: A Prophecy* Blake can see, from the still-visible peaks of that lost land, Orc, an

initially terrifying figure of boundless creative and revolutionary fury, who, transmuted and set free to the winds, will blow from Blake's work all through the Tarn universe. *Atlantis, an Autoanthropology* shows a Tarn who shares with Blake outrage at inequity, delight in heretical religious thought, reverence for sexual love, and an acute grasp of the origins of social conflict. And more: like Blake, our narrator has a keen eye for artisanship. He can see eternity in the weave of a fabric, in the excellence of an everyday utensil, in the demeanor of a ritual mask, in any curio or icon or altarpiece. This is in keeping with the progressive political vision inherited from anthropology, from MacDiarmid, from Neruda, from his own conscience, and confirmed for him in his visit to Atlantis.

A commitment to a vision of a cosmos arising from the possibility of a just social order had already begun to delineate itself with *The Beautiful Contradictions*, written in the mountains of Wales, no doubt looking toward those bright summits from which, Blake says, we might pass into the Golden world. Atlantis is, for Tarn, the vantage from which the glories and tragedies and the still living hope of human cultures can be seen. It is also, within any culture, the point, possibly obscure, where access to the Golden world might present itself to the metaphysically driven sojourner. All of Tarn's writing, taken together, is a single initiation into what Blake would call the visionary forms dramatic, where mind, heart, eternal truths and historical contingencies contrive a life in transfigured time.

VI

The book at hand is the bright summit of a life of writing, a life that has passed though world after world, and continually finding itself reborn within a next. Passing, that is, again and again, into and out of, the gates of Atlantis, that land of forests and palaces, sometimes remembering them, sometimes not, sometimes imagining a glory beyond them where the soul reunites with the One, sometimes, and never so eloquently as in his recent poetry, despairing to ever taste transcendence, ever to feel ecstatically torn open to the cosmos. (Readers familiar with his immense poem *Lyrics for the Bride of God* will recall Tarn's long-standing interest in gnostic agonies.) Tarn's *Atlantis, an Autoanthropology* is an ode in prose, an intellectual hymn, a spiritual confession, a tall tale, a night of great talk, a warm welcome, a feast of thought, a lesson in how to look, how to think, how to endure, how to grasp the moments we ourselves enter and exit. Page after page brings worlds, some we know, some we dream about. It's a book bearing witness to a life lived, and suffered, and transformed into art.

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PREFACE

I have usually known how to finish a poem, rarely how to finish a work in prose. The temptation to see, know, and do everything—while kept at bay in poetry—is rarely overcome in prose. This book could have been written by consulting fairly voluminous diaries, kept more or less uninterruptedly since 1939, but I would never have finished. So, except for a date or two here and there, I have chosen to write it out of what sits in my memory. Should you wish to learn more, an archive exists at Stanford University.

For a variety of reasons largely connected to pressure of work, the book has been composed over a period of pretty well exactly thirty years: 1973–2003, with a few additions here and there up to 2013 and then a few more in 2019. Over such a period of time, views, opinions, and understandings may well shift their ground and even radically change. I have allowed this to happen in the writing without necessarily striving for consistency, limiting myself to indicating at times the rough date of composition of some chapters, here named "Throws" for reasons which will appear in the text.

The title has three references. The first is to the fact that I have never (yet) been able to experience the sensation of being only one person. (I do though expect that this is a possibility to be reached before departing the planet.) The second is that each one of us has rarely been able to limit himself or herself to interest in a single subject. The third is that we are profoundly "contextual"—meaning that we never seem able to think of ourselves alone

but only of ourselves in the context of the communities and societies in which we have lived at any given time.

I have left out of this book most of our domestic life. Although this runs the danger of leaving some folks feeling excluded, I wish, for the time being, to try to avoid any possible pain to others as well as to myself.

One last point. Readers will discover that I have met many people. I list as many as I possibly can. Those not mentioned are extremely likely not to have been forgotten. The heart is the place. I beg their forgiveness. I do wish, however, to record, among acknowledgments, the poets Joseph Donahue and Peter O'Leary, who have helped greatly in bringing this book about. Peter, especially, has shared the task of preparing the book for the printer. An old man's warmest gratitude to both. Bounden thanks to the two heroic outside readers who recommended so strongly that this book be published by Duke. It is very painful not to be able to thank them in person.

Fort Tarn, June 30, 2020

Throw One

1.1 05.13.1973. The spring slow, held in by rain to the south, the cold front apparently not developing fast enough, the migrations spotty. Out at 5 a.m. to confirm the miracle, to witness the birth of color again: that for which his blood streamed in the firmament, etc. If it be not here, in this ultimate land, then where? And, in fact, the ultimate land riots with color. No fauna so rich, no flora—no ornithology certainly.

The first creeps. As if he remembered the snake. You call this a warbler? Guatemala/summer/1969: at the terrace's elbow, a tree suddenly full one morning of this, closely observable, bird (others out of failing sight's range: binoculars stolen at Customs). Spats made bird. *Mniotilta varia*: black-and-white warbler. Here: song: high, a whistle, this single precursor. I can find no other: it is as if he had come alone to claim my Pennsylvania for his tribe. "Be grave: they love not to be smiled on" (William Penn, 09.30.1681. Bucks County Deed Book 1, 273). Very soon before the black-and-white came *Regulus calendula*, the royal claim. American first. Spirals discretely up a tree, a motion initiatic, resulting in a coronation of fire at the top of the conifer he is working, the head opening, the gates of the skull sliding sideways away from center to reveal the fiery eye (which would have been Toulouse, 1983). A succession of baptists to the spring: the boss not yet in sight.

A cardinal, high in the bare trees, mimics the tanager. Who could be king. Others here and there, claiming holdings, establishing homes. Building their various principalities at several different levels above the Earth: some low, some middling, some high. A hierarchy, class, or caste, but of pure form: the food and habitat both discrete, interrelated certainly, but not inter-devouring. Small eyes beading down from all points of the compass at this untimely intruder.

The loveliness of an interaction of levels. Cape May, New Jersey: migration time. Huge flocks of geese approaching the viewer from different segments of the sky, one momentary tribe over another, a great escalation into the empyrean. Wondrousness of pacified space. Any well-orchestrated choreography: ballet, say, as in Balanchine, or a great air-show team: the Blue Devils, the Red Arrows, the Patrouille de France, the Italian Frecce Tricolori.

Completion is of the effort (is of the process), thus at any time,

Initial rituals:

1.2 The intruder lies low, in a cot perhaps, looking up. In Paris, France, 1928. Pressed down by the weight of the sky: a distant sky or a mediating ceiling—impossible to know. The intruder is very small, filial, eyes tilted up at any father that might present himself. However distant he will always remain, it is always the father who seems to prime. The air is . . . yellow, appears to be yellow. White-coated men, white-bearded it may be, forming a semicircle around his feet, looking down on him. Almost as if their heads were fruit among branches. They are very clean. They might be priests, doctors, or both. It is impossible to know whether the intruder is in exile already or is going to have his exile confirmed by some drastic, irreversible action. Or whether the action about to be implemented is a sending into exile. There is nothing ominous about the situation: it is benign. Not at all like the events of ages three to six: dying every one of those years with great regularity at Easter, all doctors out of Paris for the holiday, being painfully resurrected from pus an inch away from the heart and such-like horrors, the small body full of needles in every limb. On the wall opposite the bed, the shadows of huge trees in the hospital yard hallucinating throughout a distant wind.

The beginning of the "I" who can say "I" is a selection in space and time: it may as well be here. It would be good to know in which cardinal direction the intruder's feet were pointed. At this stage, however, that datum cannot be retrieved.

The beginning is relatively simple. The end is nothing short of the world. Then the return.

1.3 Procedurally, the word in question would seem to require invention. If that be too ambitious, let us (note, for future definition, the "us") build on those seniors of ours, those predecessors, and, with their help, take off into the future. Let there be a word "informaction." The growth of this word into its meaning has interest at this juncture. Observe:

"In" for input. I am willing to adopt, of past formulations, the notion that this universe comes in at our senses—provided that the notion of senses be wide enough for this usage—and that we focus upon the incoming world an attention ever more refined. The process of attention opens the hearing to a voice that has as little beginning or end as the *Tao* or Way itself, a voice that, provisionally, we might accept as sourcing from deep within any one of us, but that deep requires further exploration. The voice, in other words, exists within us from our own beginnings: we hear it or not as we are able to or as we please to decide. The pleasure must be worked at, hard, for the noises of the world about us will do their darnedest to drown it out. The relation between an "us" and an "I" will have to do with the depth at which the voice operates in the body—or the refinement of its hearing. For the time being, let there be the mystery that the deeper the body is an "I," the more collective, the more *us-lich* or even *uns-lich*, to coin a term, will be that voice. Let there be no interference with the mysteries.

Re the Way—should anyone consider this a "mystery," let it be defined as that gigantic wall, probably made of iron, standing at the back of one who awoke from a dream knowing for certain that there was no cessation of the wall's presence in any dimension whatsoever—that it reached upward and downward beyond any conceivable measurement and sideways on both sides with an equal lack of end. The dream is of that rare same nature as the opening of the skull: events occurring once or twice in a lifetime, *nada mas*, not more. Forgive the occasional irruption of foreign tongues. I believe in more than one language.

Attention to the "in" gives that which we work on form. To inform a text means to make it—make it: the claim, the success and the holding/the plot/all in one. Upon that: Homestead. Praxis.

If it be a text or texture we work on, that text is an action brought about by the work, in-formed by it, given breath. The action of weaving in space and time brings about the poem of our day. We are familiar from our fathers in this art with the concept of a poem that includes all of history, one in which all actions are contemporaneous. And we might add that prose should be at least as well written as poetry.

In a lifetime, it is unlikely that one action will suffice. An action, a formation, inserted into the continuum as an information will serve as springboard to yet other actions, yet other textures. Information bears in it a crux: the crux of this matter becomes *informaction*. Even the alphabet aids us in this regard. Skip a middle letter *b*, and you are home.

Say now that this lurch forward bears the weight of the procession of memory. Uncertain steps, from an arbitrary point in time, move forward into their own remembrance of themselves. Remembrance is an imperfect tool at best—but, here too, refinement operates. *Summa Memoria*: a recuperation, a diving into the wreck of precision, bringing up, from time to time, as the matter arises, a leavening, ever more profound, of the selfsame existence.

A scrap left out for dogs or cats becomes a meal. Becomes a communion. A communion may or may not reveal the presence of a living deity within it and, hence, within ourselves: it is too early to say. The priesthood works on as if the divinity were present or as if, by its informactions, a divinity could be induced to breach into our lives.

Us, Durkheimianly, the possibility of that breaching.

All the ordinary, "common or garden," black whales, surrounding the white.

1.4 Nothing else I can think of at this juncture lays a greater claim to being the first American poem—for that touching all our peoples is understood—than the 435 plates of John James Audubon's *Birds of America*, the forms of which, derived from water, are now on view for the first time, but only for a while, at the New York Historical Society. In Japan, an older hand at these things, they would probably be housed in a temple and permanently on show as a "national treasure."

New York, 05.12.73. The mass of Audubon's work bears down on me for the first time, and that it all started from France! 06.30.28: beginnings of this intruder, 50 rue François Premier, Paris, France. Audubon had the advantage of a sunny disposition in the isles: my isles came much later, when I had already created them in my own head.

Let it be a detail here merely. Of the work which went into those plates, I learn now, three watercolors were absent in the purchase of 1861. One plate, the California condor, was subsequently found. Two others are still at large if not destroyed.

These two plates are of blue birds. Comment on one only. On that first, never-to-be-forgotten American day among warblers (Princeton, New Jersey: 05.10.70), two blue critters had been missing in the riot of discovery: the

cerulean and the black-throated blue. Gazed at lovingly in the pages of Roger Tory Peterson, these birds had become a haunting.

Saint John, US Virgin Islands, 06.12.70. In the dark grove high on the island above our plantation hotel, among palms and lianas, a stop for hummers. The glasses focus on a branch at random, searching the gloom for the small vibrations. Suddenly, from the multiple wings about him, a male black-throated blue enters up stage. Wintering here as the black-and-whites had wintered in Guatemala. Small, infinitesimal web in the pattern of islands—part of a spiraling return to an early voyage on the American spine.

It might have been thought that a son eventually addicted to books would receive from his progenitors more than a single volume. Of those remembered far back as emanating from a father, one alone stands out: perhaps the only one. It had not, I believe, been purchased but, rather, had been recuperated from an old hoard or found in a bin thrown out to the elements.

The book, still with me in one of the libraries deposited here and there among these wanderings, was a copy of Maurice Maeterlinck's *L'oiseau bleu* in a small paperback edition with a rather battered blue cover. Its receipt touched me for years, perhaps because it had been specially acquired. The book as object and gift: I doubt I read it.

Back of that: Michelet's *L'oiseau* with a gaudy tropical long-tailed pair on the dust jacket. Blue in their feathers certainly but also the orange of a fiery sun. Read with French-speaking mothers at an early time.

Some ten to fifteen early-childhood books somehow survived World War II and returned. One is a Fabre on insects, and there are two or three red-and-gold Jules Vernes. Not one piece of a large army, running from Roman to Napoleonic times, not one toy of any kind—not even the German Shuco toy car or the battered police helmet my brother and I used to fight over. After the war, not one of several dozen toy mini-soldiers of a second army bought during the London Blitz survived: no sandbag rows, not one airplane, nor the tanks and antiaircraft guns, nor the rising-falling barrage balloon that I recently saw in a Madison Avenue store for more than eight hundred dollars. Where did they go?

In the nineteen-nineties: there was still no closure. So, in search of such, there is now in the study one whole shelf full of collector-quality French, Scots, English, Italian, Russian, and American lead soldiers and many shelves bearing die-cast cars, planes, and ships.

1.5 Antwerp, Belgium, circa 1937. Age more or less nine. The weather is fine. The apartment sunlit. Perhaps it is raining, but the rain is illuminated.

There is a carpet. Our beds, my brother's and mine, with their wooden bookcases surrounding two sides of the room, our desk, two-sided, in the same wood—a fine piece of art deco that survives in a London house until the seventies. We are playing some game. My mother might be knitting. The interminable conflict between my brother and me (he teasing, I reacting with some violence and getting punished for same) momentarily stilled. A great peace within as if everything had suddenly been stopped and the whole far lengthier future was humming about us on all sides. For whatever reason, the distant park, a park called Park of the Nightingales, is not being visited today: but its treasures, its long lawns and odoriferous bushes, its waffles and cream-cheese-on-rye with giant radish slices and spring onions, perhaps its deer and birdsongs, stand securely a few miles away ready to be visited on the next day. As few other things stand secure in a world perpetually vanishing—a world in which nothing appears but to disappear and never be seen again.

A world in which, every morning, while the other kids rush around the playground, three eleven-year-old Jewish schoolboys perennially discuss the oncoming war. One, gawky and bug-eyed with thyroid problems, is called Steinfeld. Disappears. The other, Wiener, small and bulky, is said to have become a doctor in the United States.

In an explosion of love, remembered for all time, whether the memory be of the thing itself or the memory of the memory, I leap demonstratively toward my mother and say, over and over again, until she wonders what has bitten me, "I am so happy; I am so happy."

A woman toward whom inexplicably, despite her overwhelming beauty and unbounded kindness and sweetness, I have not been able, for a great many years now, to feel any emotion whatsoever. No doubt because, while promising her help with Father after an endless number of disagreements, she again and again always ended by taking Father's part.

Throw Two

2.1 05.15.2003: some twenty years after Throw One. "Completion" is not a word that should ever come near this book. Should it do so, you would never be quit of it short of, say, thirty volumes. An original idea had been to spend old age reviewing a diary that had begun in 1939 with records of air raids during the London Blitz and only very rarely been interrupted, also innumerable letters to and from innumerable people, also records of travel, work, and publishing activities—in short, a long and complex life. This is not feasible. Best to leave all those records to be dealt with by others, should there be any others, should they so desire, well before the Sun decides to slam into the Earth. Concentrate on whatever saliences are left in memory and leave things at that. This is what is left of a life at age seventy-seven—come June 30, 2005.

The original project for this autoanthropology in the seventies of the last century was defined as "a thematic study of a structure provisionally baptized Nathaniel Tarn." Concentration would be not on the facts of a life, day after month after year, but on some of the concerns that had worried at that life and which might have made it interesting as an aspect of its time rather than as a one-shot, and thus ultimately arbitrary, narration. A major theme in the original text was concerned above all with the sempiternally unsolved but

ever-interesting problem of the relation between a whole and its parts. Also a kindred problem: the relation of order to disorder. As a totalizer in those days—totalizer in the structuralist sense—the matter of a complete record was an aim of inestimable value. Exhaustive explanations now being regarded by most literary theorists as impossible, perhaps valueless after all, much in the original text could now be excised. Yet if some seventy-seven years are to be accounted for and some care taken over projections into however many years are left to this structure, the guiding themes of an individual's prime cannot altogether be ignored.

Perhaps a word about why the text was abandoned in the first place. As well as a poet since age five, Tarn had been an anthropologist for some thirty years, beginning with studies at the Musée de l'Homme, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes and the College de France, Paris, in 1949–50, continuing with work at the University of Chicago (including field experience in Guatemala), 1951–53; the London School of Economics and the School of Oriental & African Studies (S.O.A.S.), 1953–58; fieldwork in Burma, 1958–59; and teaching at the S.O.A.S. in 1960–67. Resigning from "the best Southeast Asia job in the world" in 1967, Tarn worked at Jonathan Cape, publishers, London, for two years (Cape Editions and Cape Goliard Press) before reentering academia in the United States and, after a spell at Princeton, teaching comparative literature at Rutgers from 1970 to 1984. "Comparative literature," it should be added, was a discipline whose existence, however legitimate it was deemed to be by its practitioners, Tarn failed to recognize.

In 1977 or 1978, Norman Hammond, a young and noticeably ambitious Mayanist, joined the Archaeology Department at Rutgers. Within a year or so, Tarn was co-teaching with him, responsible for the modern and contemporary Maya. Eventually grants from a leading anthropological research organization (the Wenner-Gren Foundation), the Social Science Foundation, and others were obtained for an impossible project defined by Tarn: "to find a language for certain kinds of cultural anthropology which would not be untrue to the scientific record while not abdicating a single aspect of its literary potential." Why impossible? Because there would be no limit to this: not even in a James Joyce, a Gertrude Stein, a Louis Zukofsky. The market would be challenged. The market would say no. The whole point of the experiment—to destroy technological jargon and make anthropology available to all—would be lost.

This project's preparation took from 1975 (the original attempt at writing the autoanthropology stopped in December 1974) to 1978, ending in participation in an archaeological dig at Cuello, Belize, in the latter year and a year's

residence in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala (the place Tarn had studied some thirty years before) during 1979. This preparation led, after too many decades, to *Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans and Priests on Lake Atitlán*, a book brought out in 1997 that had no success whatsoever and whose career was rapidly aborted by the publisher's demise two months after publication.

The point of all this? The style and texture of *Scandals* is not all that dissimilar to the style of the original seventies text of the present work. In particular, Tarn notes the dating of paragraphs, sections, and chapters; the interweaving of time periods (in *Scandals* the 1952–53 research and the 1979 research with reference, also, to another stay in 1969); and the general allegiance to thematics in both works.

Tarn's book on the Burmese Buddhist Order of Monks and its role in Burmese politics, originally designed as one of three volumes, also took many years to be completed and published. It had in fact also been abandoned during Tarn's stay at Princeton and was rescued by another anthropologist and very substantially edited and *rewritten*. All these abdications, all these deposits of "babies" at the door of post offices, libraries, convents, and orphanages were not only the result of academia's scourge but also of the impossibility of doing more than one thing at a time. Writings on *weikza*—followers of a future Buddha—and on Spirit cults remain in notes. The Burma work was seen above all as proof of the impossibility of running at least two lives at one time: something Tarn had been trying to explain to his parental generation forever without any success. It was not until much later that the ability to spend more than one life at a time was finally achieved.

2.2 One name is Nathaniel Tarn. Another is Edward Michael Mendelson. Mendelson is a Customs name given to the paternal grandfather arriving in Britain from East Europe. For Tarn this was never a real name. Edward was owed to some member of British royalty admired by father, possibly Michael as well. Edward became Teddy. After too many encounters with female voices calling "Teddy" at small dogs in the street, I became Michael at Cambridge but kept E. Michael in anthropology.

2.3 In Lithuania the name, Father had said, had been something like Taurogi, or Tauroga, or Tavrogi, or Tavroga. Now it happens that a famous historical event in Napoleonic times was an armistice at Tauroggen (aka Taurogé) signed on June 21, 1807, by Napoleon and Tsar Alexander First. An encyclopedia gives Tauragé Municipality in the Samogitia region as a Lithuanian place close to the border with Kaliningrad Oblast (that is, Königsberg: Immanuel

Kant's city). The name originates from *Tauras* (auroch) and *Ragas* (horn), hence the coat of arms. The place was known as Tauroggen in German and Tauroggi in Polish. Tauragé is very close geographically to Kudirkos Naumiestis Municipality (now named after the composer of the Lithuanian national anthem), alias Wladilawó (Polish), Neustadt-Schirwindt (German), and Nayshot Shaki (Yiddish) in Suvalki County, from which our family apparently originated. There is a bridge in the village that leads to Kaliningrad. The multiplicity of identities in that perpetually war-torn region may be germane to this autoanthropology. Some four thousand Jews were killed by the Wehrmacht near Tauroggen in 1941.

There is only small difference between the name Tavroggi (still found in a variety of forms in the Kudirkos Naumiestis annals) and the Polish city name Tauroggi. Is it possible that the family name might have been derived from neighboring Tauroggi? In any event, Tarn derived a second pen name (Michel Tavriger) from his father's sparse information while a student in Paris in 1949–50. A school pen name is lost.

2.4 As there are people in London to this day who cannot deal with anyone else but Michael, so there are also many people in Paris to this day who cannot deal with anyone else but Michel. The origin of Nathaniel is a secret of mine that I have never revealed, whereas Tarn was taken from the French river near which I spent the summer of 1963 after a disastrous love affair. N.T. was used as the definitive pen name for years before first publications and became a legal name with American citizenship. Do all that many people know that the first question you answer in the "Land of the Free" is "Under what name would you like to be known?" You go into the ceremony under an old name and come out under a new one. Thus, the republic flatters a poet's intuition that his or her first right should be to choose his or her own name.

On my return from Guatemala to London in 1953, British "social anthropologists," in the throes of the formation of an extremely fruitful but also very chauvinistic theoretical movement, were somewhat scornful of the American training I had received and absolutely candid regarding the fact that "poetry"—which had caused no trouble at the U. of C. in the Windy City—"should be deeply buried and come up as anthropology" if I were ever to amount to anything in the profession. There were also some episodes of insult and deprecation. This prompted the living of at least two lives for a good ten years, one as E.M.M., one as N.T. These two names were sometimes as inconsiderate as to force me to move alternately between two different corners

of a room on social occasions. However, holding the two lives apart became a lifelong habit. Another factor was my noticing that people very often become tediously suspicious and unwholesomely curious on hearing the faintest rumor that someone is in fact someone else. The British are especially susceptible to expressing shock and dismay at any hint of such a thing. It is, of course, an old European tradition that writers should have noms de plume or noms de guerre. In my youth there was scarcely a contemporary poet who was not, in cold fact, someone else. For reasons of this kind, great care was taken to hide all traces of the origin of certain other works written and/or published under other names that are therefore completely untraceable.

The parental generation. Mother: Yvonne Cecile Leah Suchar (originally Sucher perhaps), whose family, originally from Odessa in Russia and eventually Rumania, had been French for a time: she came to Paris as a small child and remembered seeing German zeppelins above Paris in World War I. Her mother, Jeanne, known to Tarn as Mémé, the dearest person in all of Paris. Her father, Morou, a fine singer and sculptor (said to have made one of the statues surrounding the Bucharest Opera), became very ill from a combat wound during that war. Childe Tarn saw him in bed, 17 rue de l'Arc de Triomphe, a very kind man with a sweet smile inside a white beard. Claude, Yvonne's younger brother, who left a long manuscript on the family, writes that Morou suffered agonies before dying. Morou's brother was a great ballistic expert the French Army should have used, but he was unwell and so irresponsibly killed off by being ordered to perform menial services. The family had many connections with Russia. One of the men had been director of the Black Sea merchant fleet. A cousin, Pauline, claimed to be from Odessa during Tarn's student days and spoke fluent Russian—mainly with Paris's large cadre of Russian taxi drivers. This branch of the family continues on down to this day. A story I like: Morou sitting in a café enjoying his drink. A lady with a little dog sits next to him and begins to cherish the dog in French repeatedly and very loudly. Morou mutters in Rumanian something like "Oh, go and rub your nose in it yourself!" The lady responds fairly violently in Rumanian. Morou is also said to have shaken hands with Verlaine once in a Paris cafe or restaurant—possibly the Procope.

Father: Mendel Myer, nicknamed Marcel—probably by wife, Yvonne. A family legend makes them bookbinders in a village of Lithuanian horse thieves. His father, Solomon, left for England, in the 1880s I suppose, and became, it is said, a peddler in Wales. Moving to Manchester, he transformed himself into a man of parts and, eventually, head of a synagogue in which Tarn experienced an unspeakably lonely bar mitzvah during World War II.

He was also a Mason of high degree, and so was his brother-in-law, Uncle Jack, an amiable rake. There were connections with France and Belgium in the industrial-tool business and eventually in the precious-stone business so that Father worked in Paris at one time and met Mother there, later settling in Belgium. Relatives remained in Manchester, perhaps still do: Solomon's home, on Cheetham Hill Road, ended up as a "Royal Society for the Protection of Animals" home for cats.

A cousin became professor of medicine at Liverpool University and masterminded the creation of the British National Health Service—for which deed he was made a peer of the realm. He is alleged to have bent over Tarn's cradle and to have promised the babe a great career in medicine (Tarn only met him nearly thirty years later at his own wedding lunch). There was always much speculation as to whether Tarn or his father would eventually be made a peer, at the end of which it was discovered that a *life* peerage seemed to be in question, with no available succession.

Half the family from Neustadt continued across the Atlantic to America and became the Shuberts of Broadway. Schubart had been the name of Grandfather Solomon's father's wife. The Shuberts had always pretended, somewhat fraudulently, that they were born in Syracuse, New York, where they had eventually landed up. Tarn met two of them once. No recollections. They were said to be somewhat unpleasant, quarrelsome, materialistic, and hardheaded people in reaction perhaps against their own father: a man who is said to have combined extreme religiosity with a great taste for the demon drink. Family gossip has it that Father and his younger brother Harry were entertained by the Shubert brothers in New York, with introductions to Al Jolson, with whom they shared many a good time, as well as to Barbara Stanwick (Father's date) and Sylvia Sydney (Harry's date). Tarn was unfortunate, given later circumstances, not to have been born into that branch: a sorely missed American childhood and adolescence would have been provided. In the seventies a book about the Shuberts was found to have been written by an academic person, mistaking their Neustadt completely and picking a town close to Gdansk/Danzig that must have been far larger. However, other books, notably those by Foster Hirsch and Jerry Stagg, got the origin place right. In the 1980s, Tarn tried and failed to get a modest little grant from the Shubert Foundation to help finance his trip to Lithuania and his family research.

2.5 Which was the first language: French or English? Perhaps both? No one remembers. An initial nurse was French. Dominated by jealousy, she would

stick pins into the babe and get him to howl on the phone in order to bring the parents back from evening outings. She, or a close successor, made him walk too early—so that his feet pointed inward for years afterward. Father caught her at work one evening and threw her out. Eventually, a North of England woman, Eileen Gregory, stayed with the family for ten years or so. She was strict, albeit well-loved. If "naughty," the child would be placed under a cold-water tap, after which he is alleged to have become very "amorous." Later Eileen became a famous Hollywood figure, working with the children of Charles Chaplin, Fred Astaire, Charles Boyer, Fred MacMurray, and the like. She lived in West Hollywood, holding down three charity jobs until her ninety-third year. Tarn took her to lunch a number of times when in Los Angeles, the last occasion being two weeks before her death in November 2002.

A great deal of life was taken up by being promenaded daily on the Champs Elysées, which the child was named the "king" of by a concordance of governesses because of a certain haughtiness, reserved especially for little girls. The "haughtiness" probably a product of shyness: both persisting for life. One of these girls remained "in love" for many years, sending many presents and *billets doux*. A great day came when Tarn and his younger brother, Neville, were very spontaneously collected by a maternal uncle, Edmond, and whisked off to a cinema on the avenue for an introduction to Mickey Mouse. The children were fitted for school clothes once a year by a tailor coming from London. There are various attestations concerning a craze for flowers and for the opportunity of delivering "expert" critical pronouncements insisted on at any garden the family chanced to visit.

One "social" memory regarding shyness. Being taken to a children's party and standing alone with a nurse or companion in the middle of the floor of a large sitting room. Peeing in one's pants uncontrollably out of sheer terror. Bedwetting continued well into the early teens, causing much consternation in an English boarding school.

2.6 There was a move from rue Francois Premier to no. 1 avenue du Président Wilson, a very short street at the bottom of the avenue Marceau near the river Seine. In 1936 came a relocation to Antwerp, where Father wished to join his parents and brothers. A cozy town that had changed very little by the eighties—as Tarn witnessed fifty years later, recognizing many old haunts with ease: a very strange experience, walking from the past in one's head into the present and seeing what coincided and what did not. School was the Lycée d'Anvers, a bilingual (French-Flemish) school on Nervierstraat, where three friends spent playground time discussing oncoming World War

II. There were trips to dune forests looking for mushrooms and one ride, in a fine Packard that once lost a wheel along the way, to the Dutch tulip fields. Preceded by many goldfish pets, a canary called Tino Rossi, which never sang and was probably female, as well as a red-bellied salamander: both died in an earthquake while the family was visiting friends in Brussels. This visit was memorable for my being fed an oyster for the very first time.

On tramway no. 2 from home at 33 Avenue Van Ryswick to Nervierstraat, a black tie was worn on three occasions: the deaths of King George V of England, Queen Astrid of Belgium—a passion—and Franklin D. Roosevelt. This was on Tarn's initiative. Even today, there is a portrait of the great beauty Astrid on a shelf in the study, and her black-framed memorial postage stamps are set in the Belgium albums.

Occasionally, both in summer and winter, the brothers were sent to a children's camp: the Home des Esserts in Leysin, Switzerland, run by an old couple with Nazi sympathies. Parents were ignorant of this allegiance. Skiing was discovered as a great joy—and very sadly lost during World War II as a result of rising to six foot two. Wonderful hikes in the mountains added to a passion for flowers and landscape: one day spent mostly climbing a rocky mountain stream was especially heavenly. A run across a huge field during a thunderstorm was also part of such a day. Swimming on the lake near Chillon occurred a number of times: on one occasion, Tarn felt immensely brave when clinging to a rock flooded by waves made by a passing lake steamer. There was the lick of a cow's tongue on a hand as he stood by a fence with his back to the animal. There was the swing of the great house sleigh that fetched the children at the station at the start of a winter stay. There were times playing with a toy yacht on a large pool in the garden. There was a party at the house where everyone was heaping their plates with food, while one boy—a little *nebbish* already—took only one piece of meat. For Tarn, tears almost, and an indescribable tenderness over that inexplicable poverty. The pain repeated ever since at similar witnessings of a state akin to orphancy. On another occasion, eating noodles, Tarn feared he would die laughing at the inner vision of a cross-eyed cat coming up in conversation. Unable to stop laughing, he was punished by being seated out of doors. In the great cold, while he still laughed, his noodles turned to concrete. There was also the older Japanese boy who twisted the arms of younger children behind their backs very painfully if they refused to say "Heil Hitler." One of the favorite pastimes was woodwork, and Tarn still owns a paper cutter surmounted by an edelweiss he made at Leysin. Likewise, one could make lead soldiers from molds and paint them there.

Many summer vacations were taken on the Belgian Coast at Le Zoute in a rented villa called, after Kipling's *Jungle Book*, Shere Khan. Next door was Rikki Tikki Tavi, and people would drive the boy nuts as they passed repeating that sonorous name. A favorite memory concerns a time when an evening paper (was it *Le Soir*?) offered prizes for sand castles built by the sea's edge. Tarn's was destroyed early, but it was said that there was a kink in his shoreline position, and to his astonishment, a tennis racket with blue bands was the reward. Very popular was the game of "selling and buying" paper flowers (made, often very ornately, by mothers and grandmothers) against seashells, a pastime that, astonishingly, still survived in the 1960s. The brothers, devoted cyclists, made maps of the hundreds of little cycling alleys serving as streets among the villas and trees of the dune areas. Tarn has always been nostalgic for that coast and took his own children there, at Den Haan, when they were small. An excellent location from which to visit the great Romanesque barn of the no longer extant Lissewege Abbey together with the town of Damme, and to revisit Bruges and Ghent. Mother had taken Childe Tarn to Bruges very shortly before the war to see a great Memling retrospective. A painting of the flaying alive of some saint never left his memory.

Throw Three

3.1 A sudden awakening at 03.15 hours. Gazing at the skirting of the wall on the right of the bed, wondering whether to turn on the light and read or not, and, if so, what. A strange object, out of place, near the books: large garden spider. Decisively trap it under a drinking glass, sliding a postcard under the glass—the usual gambit—and get it back into the garden. Strangely, some weeks ago, a similar sudden awakening with similar result. That spider, more or less in the same place, smaller but more repulsive: fat and hairy. A carpet under the glass is not conducive to sliding: on that first occasion, a messy business. Sleep finally achieved through avenues of frail legs bent into every angle those legs seem likely to assume.

3.2 I know now that this book was to start with a small spider which, until about three days ago, lived on the bathroom ceiling upstairs. A small, compact, elegant, almost military spider. Robert the Bruce would have loved it. In the last hours of its occupation, this spider had seemed determined to discover a small crimp in the ceiling from which, perhaps, it could fasten or cause to depend a threadway to the ground. As it began its up/down work, it was caught and deported. An intention to mark the theme of a passage