

POETRY

Antoinette Tidjani Alou

Breath 1

Everybody needs
An Angel
so you naughty boy
have become
my elect

For you
I pour myself out
A trickle
My libation
Given not spilt
Blessing your name
O Angel mine.

Breath 2

I had long been strangled
When you poet breathed
A full green breath
Straight down
into me

And verily, I rise again.
Sigh after sigh.

Breath 3

For three years I had killed God
And my song
Until your dawning

When a blue butterfly rode
My plumbago blooms
Then lifted

I send a prayer up
Pursuing the spirit
Defend me, it's dark inside
And it's cold out there
Where the poets are hated

Breath 4

Dear Angel-friend

I once loved a boy who loved a girl
who loved him not, nor loved he me
Neither did I love him.

The girl was sleek and lustrous-haired
And he was wrong for her
As she knew

it had been written
she was obedient
and he was poor

And not handsome either
she was not to blame
Nor was I who did not love him

I now know
He was the spring
that propelled my Jack beyond her box.

So out she flew
ejected

She orbited
She landed
Hot shards and blinding light
Fit only
for the company of Angels.

Breath 5

Abruptus then I
Too breathe godness to you Star
Courting salvation

In out in-out in-out
Not *ad aeternum* gladly
Mortal praying to mortal

What shall I do now?
This you ask of me
Ignorance is my secret

I pronounce noonday's
Providence in customary
Awe I am Goddess:

Do this and it shall be well.

Breath 6

Morning is rising now
Arcing deep throat to new sky
Blue pink tender shy

A sweet knife kisses
Soft flesh shivers o neck beat
Thirsty day I must meet.

Fear not
Fear not
Break pace
Break pace
Fall out of line
Break things
Break bent reeds, break lovers' hearts,
break rules,
break babies even
Smash every single violent thing
that steals your breath

Then stand by moonlight on a high sea of sand
And release your dune song.

Let it be sweet and long long long.
Please, o please
Please
Your Angel.

Breath 7

Beat beat beat beat beat
Beat head beat toe beat
Furled pink meat

repeat

Fleshy treats
Flowers and sweets
Pulp and Pulse Beat

Wings hot burden bequeath
Annunciation
made to random fools
Even angels who fail
To fly may flourish still
Somehow
Stepping modestly
Two by two
mortal-like on twinned and muddy feet.

Cochlea cochlea cochlea
Conduct
Such music to my ears!

About the Poet

A bi-national citizen of Jamaica and Niger, Antoinette Tidjani Alou is a professor, translator, writer and promoter of the arts and culture in Niger where she co-founded, directs and secures non-public funding for the Arts and Culture Programme of Abdou Moumouni University. She served several terms at the helm of the International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa (ISOLA): as Vice-President from 2006 to 2010 and as President from 2014 to 2014. Her research focuses on identity construction and the poetics and politics of memory in literature and film. Tidjani Alou's also writes autofiction, poetry and short stories in English and French. A self-defined "transwriter and (cultural) passeur", her work explores hybrid identities, exilic experiences and the quest for a new ground of self and community.

She was a Writer in Residence at the 2017 Fall Residency of the IWP (The International Writing Program). Her literary works include *On m'appelle Nina* (2017), shortlisted for the Prix Ivoire and *Tina Shot me Between the Eyes and Other Stories* (2017) and *Mano, de l'autre bord* (forthcoming, Spring 2023).