

Zack Rogow is the author of six poetry collections, the most recent of which is *The Number Before Infinity*. He has translated from French authors as varied as André Breton, George Sand, Colette, and Marcel Pagnol. Zack Rogow is also a playwright and teaches at California College of the Arts, and the University of Alaska.

Zack Rogow

A Map of You

You've become my map, my geography:
the Black Forest of your hair,
your alpine lake eyes,
fathom after fathom,
your mouth red as turned Carolina earth,
those shoulders like Dover's
chalk towers, your Sugarloaf breasts,
by your peninsular arms—
Baja,
Malaysian,
and your fingertips
when they touch me—
Polynesian archipelagoes. Serengeti
the temperature of your flesh.
Your Panama waist
flares to Venezuelan thighs
and between them
the Amazon, the delta, rare species
of the Galapagos, coral reefs with ultraviolet fish—
in just a few short months
you've become the other planet I inhabit.

And your legs taper
like a continent headed south,
one ending in Tierra del Fuego—
the Land of Fire—
and the other
in the Cape of Good Hope.

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Flight 000

is the queasiness
when you're about to land
and you realize that this flight
with its snow mountain geodes
and its looking-glass lakes
this flight
which could have taken you anywhere
is actually going to drum down
in one certain city
where cars ghost along the artery
and families with wounded microwaves
and actual names sleep
in those dollhouses beyond the runway
and your life is not all lives
but only the best one
you can reach
in the time you have

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Skating Lessons

I tug my six-year-old around the rink,
shocked by the ice,
how it isolates each individual—
that yellow parka,
those blue mittens,
the red-knit cap
against a backdrop white
as a photographer's studio.

My daughter flows along
next to me, learning to skate
as I hold her hand. She tightens
her grip when she's frightened
her feet will go off on their own.
Our blades draw silver lines
that criss and cross each other.

Just yesterday I told her
I was leaving her mommy.
“How do you spell HATE?”
she asked me afterwards,
scribbling a note to me
on a scroll of register tape.

But today my daughter is really skating
at my side, taking her first shaky
steps on her own,
without holding my hand. She explains
how she'll do it:
“When you're near me I'll pretend
you're not here. When you're not here
I'll pretend you are.”

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French Quarter

Wasn't that the dream that night on Bourbon Street
when we infiltrated a schmaltzy piano bar
in an old French blacksmith's forge
its walls still black from the blast of the fire
and the tipsy queen dressed head-to-toe in white
in a suit and boa
like the ghost of Tennessee Williams
gave you his river of feathers
coiling it over you
so you formed a double helix
around the lamppost on St. Philip
while you mugged for that shot

and didn't we literally
dance in the street that night
outside every Zydeco salsa Cajun fluorescent jazz bar
you swaying with that relaxed upward-glancing smile
till I knew this love would go nowhere
was completely impossible
without these moments
so incandescent
they melt down every pre-dawn doubt

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