



# TREASON



POEMS BY TERESE SVOBODA

# Treason

Terese Svoboda

– to the constant

## **Praise for *Treason*:**

“Cool, wry surface: depth charge of cry, of outrage, language at the edge of utterance, utterly original, black-bordered, indelible as we are not.”

**– Eleanor Wilner**

“...ironical, tough-minded, refusing the "treason" of our sad human trafficking in love.”

**– Carol Muske-Dukes L.A. Times**

“Terese Svoboda is one of few contemporary American writers who possesses a global consciousness.”

**– Brooklyn Rail**

"... these poems seethe with dangers so close to home they seem to teeter on that frightening edge between comic and tragic."

**– D.A. Powell**

# Contents

Editor's Reintroduction to <i>Treason</i>	1
Play	6
I	7
Bridge, Mother	8
Statues of Women That Are Neither Angels nor Allegory	9
Harpies	11
Eurydice Abandoned in the Caves of Hades	13
Cosmo Dog	14
Sharon	15
New Girl	17
Up in Flames	19
The Morning Light and Its Rings	20
Night Bird	21
Tsvetayeva	22
Woman with God	23
Parents	28
Treason	29
II	30
A Column of Whiteness	31
Crucifixion	33
Khartoum Light	35
Ghost House	36
No Picnic	38
At the Castle	39
Discovery	41
Extremist	42
Money Can't Fix It	44
When the Next Big War Blows Down the Valley	45
Report from High School	46
Driving L.A.	47
III	48
The Listener Goes to Water	49

Red Fox in Series	50
Flesh or Fetish	53
The Cynic's Post	54
The Answers	56
Drink Beer until You're Handsome	57
The High Cost of Principle	58
The Comfort of TV	59
The Unconscious	60
Peacocked	62
The Horse in the Garden	64
The Plants Revolve	65
Curse the Fish into Wishing	67
Signal	68
IV	69
Mr. Magneto	70
On the Blown Marquee: Hurricane	72
Who Goes with Whom?	73
Marriage Boat	75
The Silence of the Tortoise	76
Aubade	77
Nipple	78
The Nickel Wife	79
Belles Lettres	81
The Common Good	82
Endymion	83
Fitting In	85
At What Cost	87
Pornography Is Good	88
Rock Polisher	89
Gone Wave	90
No Spring	92
Sex and Class and Race	93
Release the Gifts	95
Longing to Stop Longing	96
Bridges and Air	97

V	98
Pilgrim's Progress	99
Sister Love	101
Death Stayed	102
Duet	103
Land's Cape	104
Root Canal As a Venetian Idyll	105
Anticipating Grief	106
How to Simplify Fractions	107
The Rule of K	108
Mother Bleeds from the Mouth	110
Old God	111
Agrarian Myth	112
Great Circle Earthworks, Ohio	113
Destiny Manifest	115
Healing Wind	116
Bacchae	117
Acknowledgments	119
About the Author	121

## Editor's Reintroduction to *Treason*

Terese Svoboda's *Treason* was originally published in 2002 by Zoo Press, a press with a storied, though short, history of publishing some of the finest American poets. By 2004, Zoo Press had imploded publicly and scandalously, leaving *Treason* and many other titles of note stranded. A shame! A betrayal, in fact.

In 2002, the US was nursing the open wounds of 9/11. The American public was concerned with terrorism on our shores, and our political leadership, led by President Bush, was pounding the drums of war. Al Gore was issuing grave warnings about impending climate change after losing the 2000 Presidential race (while winning the popular vote). Rodney King was savagely beaten by police on video a few years earlier, and L.A. had erupted in protests against police violence. Inside America, class and race continued to increasingly divide us, in a mirror of the world as a whole. Sudan was between their first and second civil wars, the result of post-colonial insecurity and corruption, inflamed by the meddling of European and American capitalist forces. In short, 2002 needed the poetry of Terese Svoboda's *Treason* to shine a torch on injustice and betrayal inside our public and intimate institutions.

*Treason* is a book centered on betrayals, unflinchingly and with a wry and feminist eye. The poems are sometimes funny, sometimes strange, always hard-hitting. Svoboda



starts us in a landscape of classical myths and motherhood, with women who are worked hard, who are assaulted, who suffer, and who are never given a break. But there's a strength in standing witness – in refusing to stay silent. There's also treason in that; as the late Senator John Lewis would say, Good Trouble. From "Eurydice Abandoned in the Caves of Hades":

...

You light cigarettes, unnerved, defenseless  
in the blue of that smoke. You see the roots  
of trees, your sisters' hair unpinned, you see  
it leads out, The sky! Then the guide rapes you,  
steals your purse, and disappears. You really seethe

...

In the second section, the poet covers, almost journalistically but certainly poetically, the war in Sudan and its human toll. These poems are brutal and necessary. Even 20 years later, they resonate. Svoboda brings home, literally, the themes of the section with the poem "Driving L.A." about the Rodney King protests:

... I am not a person of color  
and my soul is less, but I too am liable to

conflagration. As I pass roadside golfers  
who whack at the flames that spew up the holes

fanned by police in low copters, I see  
they can't see what's collecting.

The third section circles on philosophy, reality vs. appearance. We're in *The Tempest* in all its absurdity. The ground around us shifts and twists. Section four brings us into the intimacy of sexual and family relationships, but not tenderly. Flaws of human relations are laid bare. From "Release the Gifts":

. . . Congratulations!

it would say and Bear witness! You execute  
several excellent wedding steps

and far exceed any relative's shuffle,  
we who stay put, blocking the sister

gripping her thinness. If one should prosper  
must another shrink? . . .

The poems of the fifth and final section focus on the betrayal of death and blood. There are so many ways to disappoint and betray. Svoboda shows them to us without fuss. As women have always known – there's no sense crying about it.

I don't need to draw all the parallels between 2002 and 2020 for you, do I? The betrayal, the treason, has only gotten more obvious. When reading submissions for Doubleback Books this year, *Treason* stood out as a book we needed today, for all the same reasons we did in 2002. The US continues to back strongmen and dictators for the

sake of capitalism. The effects of climate change are increasingly apparent with fires, floods, and storms. Police violence against our Black citizens is still (never-endingly!) an issue. Women's rights are being set back by the economic forces of a pandemic and lack of social support for families. We need the poems of *Treason* to again speak against injustice, to again hold a mirror to our flaws. Svoboda's topics are unfortunately timeless, the poems themselves worthy of mythology.

– Danielle Hanson, Poetry Editor, Doubleback Books

*Suspicion all our lives shall be stuck full of eyes;  
for treason is but trusted like the fox.*

Shakespeare, *Henry IV*

## Play

*It was customary in 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy  
for the condemned to play the part of Christ.*

You are not you, you are the Someone  
on this mask and we are your followers,  
we who applaud when you don't cry  
or tear it off, when the noose  
or the knife comes at last and our sins  
rise with your soul that is better  
than a beggar's, stealing butter.

I

## Bridge, Mother

Mother burns on the other side of the bridge.  
Mother burns the bridge and is safe on the other side.  
Mother is not on the bridge when it burns.  
When Mother says Burn, the bridge burns.  
We can't get to the other side –  
the bridge is burning.

Mother is the bridge that we burn.  
She is how we get to the other side.  
We can't burn the bridge without her.  
Mother burns and we burn, bridge or no bridge.  
She is the other side.  
Nothing burns the bridge, and then it burns.

## Statues of Women That Are Neither Angels nor Allegory

Relinquant omni servare rem publicam

– After Lowell and Walcott

In Union Square her breasts are so full and stiff-  
nipples surely she's nursing – or freezing.

Still she's Love. Three of my friends have no breasts.  
What they have is five years until they get to die

like the rest of us. In the Icelandic saga,  
women own as much as they can walk in a day. Every day

they walk. The Chinese say it's best to raise boys,  
like the Greeks, like the couple, hands clasped,

deciding at the sonogram. Girl bones scatter the hillside  
and yet – feel that man's touch, giving change,

hear the child's cry a foot away: *We want.*

What does Persephone say, the wheat queen's red-  
cheeked pioneer,

that compromised bitch strung out between husband and  
mother,

herself seasonless? The Chinese women unstrap

the toddlers from their backs to practice *tai chi*  
in the park at dawn. At the other end, *Red Rover, Red  
Rover,*



little girls throw themselves over,  
their arms shining with the medals of bruises.

In India, women videotape themselves working:  
buckets of concrete balanced on their heads while holding

a child's hand, or weaving slats of plastic into chairs,  
or stamping designs on silk over and over, then stop,

chapati for lunch, then stamp. The silk billows  
fabulously around the shape of wind, the shape of life

lived after infant, after mosquitoes and fire ants  
and nakedness and food. No one had ever seen them  
working.

## Harpies

*. . . the plague of Phineas  
because he mistreated  
his own children . . .  
– The Aeneid*

The darkness of the city will be winged  
and the wind rising from it will lift  
the lost lists and newspapers as if

greeting the invading women  
who will worry the smug family  
where cruelty achieves perfect apogee,

lift by the nape those unworthy  
of offspring, condemn them  
to wastes where no expert can

absolve them. They will foul  
the molester's food, use  
the inverse of the mother impulse

to starve them.  
O pagan angels,  
the children are smiling,

collecting the lost drifting feathers,  
hearing the rustling  
in the closets of you

who will not be driven off,  
whose shrieks ring the city in this  
no-less-than-primal vengeance.

## Eurydice Abandoned in the Caves of Hades

You hire a guide. See several waterfalls,  
a dock for a boat, and – why not? – a boat.  
You rock to a shore where bats rise as gulls.  
Or fall. Such silence. You keep your head low,  
wade black pools, one for each of the senses.  
You light cigarettes, unnerved, defenseless  
in the blue of that smoke. You see the roots  
of trees, your sisters' hair unpinned, you see  
it leads out, The sky! Then the guide rapes you,  
steals your purse, and disappears. You really seethe.  
Oh, god. Even Orpheus has lost it.  
You can hear him through the rock, if that *Shit!*  
is him shouting. You say, Let the stones drip  
their milk. You'll sing louder, sing till you drop.

## Cosmo Dog

The way all girl dogs talk French you'd think we  
lapped wine and jumped hoops only in Pairee.

But non. We are simply cats trapped in dogs,  
trans-special, soon to travel to Den Haag

or somewhere with specialists (a species-ist)  
who can free us from both this Gaullist

lisp and this dreadful bark for which I think  
they call us bitch. Twice I've consulted shrinks

on the subject of my name, to wit: Spot.

Run, Spot, run? they hmmm. Think TV, think Spot

on prime time, you're the actress for Milkbone  
who never ever thinks of drinking the cologne.

But it's "Out, damned Spot" over and over.  
I sigh. At least it's a good author.

## Sharon

I am the girl  
whom you thought  
would be male and muscled  
from shoving off, encountering  
cataracts, sudden shoals,  
all the other watercraft.  
Forget it. We float  
and I kick those who moan,  
those who lean so far  
toward the fading shore  
I have to pull ballast  
and protect the lines.  
We do a lot of fishing  
on the crossing – after all,  
dreams are just carp  
under the surface  
and you've got to eat –  
and eventually  
there's the singing to lead,  
the handing out of oars,  
and for some, the seasick pills,  
all of which takes time,  
what I'm here to spend,  
that last trickle down the tub  
that goes so fast.  
A girl is good for this,  
a man, trouble. He thinks what  
he sees will save him.  
It's still like that.

When the white light business  
breaks, all I say is  
we've been through a fog.  
I thrust in my pole, I pull.

## New Girl

Push me.

If I walk, it is to improve the carpet,  
to let the nap from the TV  
to the toilet rest. Ah, the *grossmutter*  
folds her wings and you think  
Travel Comportment, she behaves  
herself. No. In California, only  
the future behaves – it's fixed.  
Crime, my dog, perhaps Pomeranian  
or guinea pig, is fixed too.  
He'll show you where we're going,  
where lost gulls goof up,  
flying legs down, like here's ocean.

The *grossmutter* likes the end of the board.  
Yes, dear, where the shadow  
and the water refuse each other, where  
I like to bounce. See that palm?  
The pool tickles it underground:  
I've got seepage. Crime, fetch the rope  
that pulls the plug, that's a good eunuch.  
You'll see in a minute how the glugging  
fits into my physics, what you came for.  
Or was it Mehta-physics?  
Mehta spent too much time  
with her turban and wouldn't push me.

There's the baby. What do you get  
when you cross a palm tree with a Pomeranian?



Return it. I once wrote a sentence the length  
of that rope – it was like going underwater  
to read it, the brain holding its breath.  
A lot of German in the old *grossmutter*,  
long sentences and what? A lot of appliances.  
We Germans make a machine and make a machine.  
Who can go back and find out why?  
Smell my hands. Do old men smell like that?  
Geese, maybe, fussing over spring grass,  
pricked by chives.

Goose-Got! The old have only the young,  
the young have themselves. You wouldn't guess  
what my skirts hide. Let me lift them up  
so at least I can drain my water.  
Soon the guests will come to stare at themselves,  
no swimmers either. They'll see what you see:  
my gold afloat over blue, the Mother's colors.

## Up in Flames

It's over now –  
the little girl who wanted  
a bicycle, the one needing  
rent, the one without  
whatever you have.

A model, to be able  
not to ask. But even balls  
held underwater  
lose air

bad air  
trees change into good.

If I am not wood,  
I could be tree –  
when it is very very cold  
they bleed.

Oh, put your arms  
around me, Daphne.  
The leaves are in lit mounds  
all around.

How gorgeous the fall is!

## The Morning Light and Its Rings

I am going through my mother's rings  
in the morning light, each gem a planet

stopped on course, especially  
the opal, a dinner ring of a size

she could hide behind. But she'll not be  
found anymore, I think, tagging the ring.

If you dropped the stone in drink  
they said it would dissolve

but it was Mother instead, who swam  
so beautifully after, coif untouched.

Would I know how?  
The shore is so far off

even the connection is bad:  
I hear Failure, that whisper.

The opal goes opaque as if  
daybreak blinds it, fire on fire.

I twist it on. Against my skin  
it weeps blood and milk, all maternity.

## Night Bird

In all the pictures she is sad.  
It is as simple as this:  
light comes through to pattern her  
but she is dark.

When one of you calls,  
she turns away,  
the last gesture of hearing.

And at dusk, not night,  
there is a sound torn  
from the half-dark,  
different from the others.  
*This is the way you go back.*  
*Go back,* she says.  
And the picture is fixed.

## Tsvetayeva

*Sent her two daughters to the  
orphanage so they wouldn't starve.*

You were doing what was best.  
For whom? Who had more food?  
It took two weeks.

You would die without love.  
Did someone steal their food?  
The other wouldn't talk.

You couldn't hold a child  
that light. You axed your wedding chairs  
to bits so you wouldn't freeze,

then wept, grief good for what?  
The bones and hair you came  
to claim chained a noose

which worked wider and wider  
until where you stood  
didn't matter. Simple hunger.

## Woman with God

Just the ridged hat moving  
in the six-foot-tall grass,  
                    leaning windward,  
          making the sun into coin, making  
gold his search.

And under it, his breathing,  
and under that,  
                    the others.

Does god glance over his shoulder,  
feeling the breath of his followers?  
*Blue Eyes*, they chant,  
*White Skin*, and *Hat*, the ridged hat.

*Dios*, the man swears, falling off his horse.

She is picking beans when they ask  
                                    for virgins.

She is so young her brother picks  
the top of the pole.

But she is not so young.

She and her brother do play,  
once in a pool – twice in a pool.

Who knows? Go, they tell her.

God waits.

She goes.

Gold or god? One letter.

But who spells it, and who reads?

The lost city,  
as lost as heaven,  
as his way,  
as the river of metal hats as peaked  
as vulvas go on into the night,  
and do not  
stop for him.

A ghost march passes him  
in the dark grass,  
one man by one man,  
each possessed, after centuries,  
father after father,  
possessed by gold,  
and none of them hearing the agony of his horse.

She is made to eat  
what he eats: the curled worm, toadstool  
trapped in rotted dung, and dirt,  
*Manna* or *mañana* he calls it,  
some sound.

God food.  
The taste is not bad, she says.  
She eats it all.

The horse lies sun-swollen and bird-thick.  
He weeps before it, he bows,  
touching the hoof,  
then the shank  
where the peavine wraps it,

tripping legs as long as a man's leg and arm together.

The tail,  
bunched at the rump, shivers  
at his touch, a tendon unstrung.  
They see him, they see it,  
giant, a god's animal.

How many days do they walk after  
and around him, silent?  
*Grasshopper Head*, they whisper,  
near-blasphemy.

They put her with him,  
the near-woman, and leave the grain  
to sour,

only so much of the moon left.  
She says *Yes, this is god*  
and she swings her hips  
as if already fruited.

He is hunted – that's what he thinks.

The woman is bait.

The rustling, the whispering  
wells in the heat,  
swells like his tongue stuck  
to his cheek.

He imagines himself meat,  
his own ear  
the curl of a worm, him eating



him. But never god.

He takes what food they leave,  
washes it in the river.

Gold lights the water  
until the river's silver.

Clouds hang far off and arid,  
and a worn moon,  
the whole world's moon,  
wipes the blue.

She stands  
behind him, washing, washing,  
every move the same,  
she must learn all god's work.

Then he wades into the middle.

He lies down with his hands out  
and it isn't like the horse wheeling  
at the snake and his falling,  
the last shout of a compadre.

The death  
uncurls.

His hat floats.

And when she knows  
what he's done, she shouts and points  
to the grass

so they turn away,  
so she can say a cloud came

and strapped him to it,  
so she doesn't have to  
repeat his sinking herself,  
so she can stay  
god-filled.

Though after the first grey,  
the baby's eyes  
go black,  
her brother's.

## Parents

The gods coo, so delighted you're helpless.  
You beg to wear his boots, try on her dress.  
All right. But first, work. And when you've built  
a monument so high you think, *At last,*  
*let's negotiate* – there's only static.  
It's the stars, they say, it's your rhetoric.  
Still, you have kindness, justice, love – fun.  
They laugh behind their hands, two crows at noon.  
What about the last and best wrapped gift –  
immortality? There, my dear, you're really stiffed.

## Treason

Perhaps, we whisper.  
But who hears us? Who sees  
what we do? Who tells?

The Greeks sally forth.  
The vulture, the crow, even  
the shrike spread their wings.

The gibbet's in place.  
The beam and its triangle of support.  
It takes three for treason.

We begat. It's always that simple.

Whisper that: three, two to begat one.

The Greek goat  
and a tree and the blood.

All we have done:  
sacrifice, then betrayal,  
then justice. The cross or the gibbet?  
Squint.

Then feast on the remains,  
then cry. The Greeks with their poisons,  
their good goat.

# III

## A Column of Whiteness

I am a small African woman  
who opens her mouth and screams  
into the dense burning foliage where  
in a night made bright  
I hide

from the bucktoothed slaughter.  
Weapons click in harmony  
not far enough off. To say  
I flee suggests I know my way.  
I step over

sleeping students  
who won't survive the fire  
that, leaping in and out behind me,  
they have set themselves.  
Then I am mute

in front of an elevator which opens  
to a column of whiteness in a suit,  
and a woman less like my sex  
than a bitch is. The big guns are now  
in service

and I am not the only one  
who hears, though I say nothing:  
my jaws ache to eat death  
like a rat its litter.  
Swallowing,

I wish whiteness all over me,  
and I am all white, the man offers  
his tunnel out, the woman his hankie.  
I am about to open my mouth *Yes!*  
when what's approaching

makes them forget, leaves me  
with myself, my white, white, white,  
leaves me to the spit of the mob  
that asks only  
if I burn.

## Crucifixion

*Eighty-eight people, including two children . . .  
sentenced to death by hanging or crucifixion in Sudan.  
– AllAfrica.com, August 27, 2002*

It's nonfiction,  
a newspaper's open and shut.  
But make that "suffocation,"  
it's more genteel, the way

the limbs fail the lungs.  
You want to read "a hill  
full of crosses" but  
Khartoum has no hills,

it's flat desert.  
And it's not nails for the hands  
and feet – it's staples.  
Big staples. People prefer

the touch of technology.  
Besides, you have to be angry  
to pound, or have a lot of energy.  
Who, in this heat? They're

all just criminals anyway,  
or political prisoners,  
Shell employees. There's  
something about a post hole digger



working a cross into place  
and the cross recycled,  
the wood old-blood-sticky,  
sandy, the flies.

Only occasionally do they  
attach a footrest  
to make it last longer.  
Only occasionally

do they cut them down  
and put them up the next day.  
Only occasionally  
are there no birds.

Pollution is catching up though.  
Soon no scarlet-tailed hawk  
or owl with tinfoil claws.  
But who believes this?

## **Khartoum Light**

It's pig you have to wonder about  
I said, when venison showed. We drank  
from the café's cup and spit  
on the floor like the others.

I had no shoes so I crossed  
the mound of dead deer instead of  
the spray of glass that marked  
the souk's perimeters, shiny

as the flies coating the hides.  
Then two men threw a bomb  
and I bloodied my feet  
running farther, but stopped

where the zoo emptied out.  
Long ago all the animals had been eaten.  
What I saw I looked at long,  
as if caught by carlight.

## Ghost House

*Two million South Sudanese murdered in the last ten years.  
– Sudan Democratic Gazette*

The ghost house holds up  
walls but no roof so relief  
drops the load right into  
the kitchen, if the room  
with bones is where one  
would cook. The bones,  
I've been told, pile up  
in a ratio to the thickness  
of birds that shoulder  
each other in the shade,  
big birds with names it seems  
I made up then, long ago  
when I was a guest  
and it was roofed, the birds  
not worth eating.  
No one's eating now  
anyway, the relief drop's  
been exchanged for a women  
and when they're finished,  
the house keeps her. I hear  
they had my friend there  
as a guest and now don't,  
that they go out at night  
looking for him, they crouch  
with cigarettes  
in the dirt fissures –

not even a ditch this time  
of year – and the smoke  
they make while they wait  
is part of whatever Milky Way  
that rises over us.

## No Picnic

Beside us, oil rinses  
the river. Or blood.

If I dig in the sand  
will it drain to me?

That's foreign policy,  
you say. We stare

at pipes ready to run  
around the equator.

A hot shower  
is all I need it for.

Well, they don't need that,  
you laugh. From then on,

there's ants on the map  
you must brush off.

## At the Castle

*To say one thing when your song  
means another.*

– Ezra Pound, “Near Perigord”

I phone Geneva, thinking Africa,  
looking out the window at Italy.  
The man who answers says they’ll kill  
each other, no one can stop them,  
the UN demurs. Wine, that dark blood,  
stings my nose. I take the phone

to the cliff where Pound said  
nothing for ten years. You can’t even  
call the Sudanese, they can’t agree  
on a code. I say they’re not starving,  
the ones who are killing. You have to be  
strong to rape and burn boys, boys

who sing in the dark all night,  
troubadours wandering the savannah.  
The wind arcs around the keep  
and we both hear it. I hold  
the receiver out over the battlements  
and maybe the sound is someone

dying a European death,  
German, Visigoth, Roman, Ice Man,  
each stumbling over the bones  
of the last, bones with meat

on them, bones Pound's great  
grandson's dog fights for,

cur that he is. A paraglider hisses  
over the pears, apples, grapes  
cantilevering the slopes, taking  
an exhausted loop over the spires.  
Did you ever notice, I say,  
how a city's most crowded cafes

offer cuisines from where the food's  
most scarce? All the children under five  
have starved in a province England's  
size. Well, he says, the big boys  
who are left, what they want is guns.  
The wind falls in my silence.

## Discovery

Here's rubber. He points to the tree.  
Of course he doesn't say *rubber* –  
the guy with the ax does. Or someone  
at the Vatican, the backers. In fact,

explorers usually say *drivel*  
in the face of wonder (Great view!  
exclaimed spacemen). They smash  
their mirrors to make better bargains,

the slivers eaten by natives who are just  
homunculus unbottled to the guys-in-armchairs.  
*That they live there at all!* As in war,  
the beaters go first, to lure the lions,

then the women, so tea's ready  
when he rests from his discoveries.  
Who knows the way? He points, heavy pupae  
borne by those who are home, or nearly.



## Extremist

A train full of fire  
and people  
travel the horizon.

They say  
Allah laughed  
when he made  
this country.

A train full of fire  
travels the horizon  
to its vanishing,  
the very blue  
I stand under.

Say it is as persistent  
as a dream: I wake  
and it's gone and it's not

Africa where flat earth theory  
runs to hell – you can see  
the curve, how the clouds  
suck over, where the mind teeters.

A whole trainful burnt.  
Hear His laugh?  
Hear the soldiers'?

The land is bare now,  
nothing to interrupt the sky,  
nothing, not even dunes,  
not even death.

## Money Can't Fix It

My eyes must be open because light  
through the woof of the hut's weave  
shows my arm in pin shivers. What  
wakes me?

A howl unfolds outside,  
fear-in-the-mouth, a breathing trill  
certifying the silence after. Sheep  
in a barn as flimsy as mine

drum panic that my bones pick up,  
an arthritis of fear. I stand, or at least  
the dark and sleep leave on another level,  
that kind of attention.

My story is half-heard and resented  
in a bar where A-7 has played fierce  
as a drill since midnight, where now  
someone breaks something

and even the guy on my left  
stops with his hands. When the cry comes,  
there's this blip in the neon  
we all watch.

Money can't fix it  
says the jukebox, going on  
while the glass gets swept.

## When the Next Big War Blows Down the Valley

Flame casts the overhang in shadow  
so no one can see anyone behind the clubs  
or sharpened sticks each has made for himself  
in the boredom of the many dusks when  
the spilt blood has dried or sunk into  
the red dirt at the bottom where food  
grows and women dance and trees promise  
drums and from where no one

ever escapes but takes up  
the broken sharpened sticks and cuts  
rows into the freshened earth until all they remember  
of those from before is their small size,  
and not their own good luck.

## Report from High School

Where they sell greeting cards for jail  
and use cops to keep us in  
who've already been "in," where we write:

security is terrible but we can only spell  
food, where just the super stays  
for more than three months,

why not write about me?  
asks the teenager with few teeth  
and a smile to prove it.

There's a monster after me.  
The bathroom's on fire, the tap's all gas  
and rat guts and what I need

is a glass of water.  
Yesterday the CIA recruited.  
They want us and they'll give us

a roof to watch from.  
Suck Sambo. The fire licking the dark  
reflects us exactly. Write that.

## Driving L.A.

Gas collects in the tunnels I drive through  
until butterflies smoke on my car grill.

The gas is transparent but can find color –  
see the spill in the gutter? It's an arrangement

of atoms, a matter of excitement. Take the video  
of someone who's suddenly not transparent

but beaten and angry. I am not a person of color  
and my soul is less, but I too am liable to

conflagration. As I pass roadside golfers  
who whack at the flames that spew up the holes

fanned by police in low copters, I see  
they can't see what's collecting.

# III

## The Listener Goes to Water

The silence water makes,  
and waterfowl on their mark.

A made loneliness,  
its stream runs uphill.

The dropped stone in water,  
the cars in their circles.

Reflecting the bridge,  
a skein of doubt.

And water tumbles down.  
You had to open it.

A mad loneliness.  
You had to, you had to.

Waves die, their reach is  
not what it was, when it is.

You drive the wind  
with the windows rolled.



## Red Fox in Series

### I

A squirrel like an interruption  
of weather wets our hunter in socks,

his black lips. Red fox advances through  
primrose which shouldn't be, should be  
field or orchard with mice, shrew  
and pigeon. Red fox at least goes

on all fours, red fox looks to be  
growing out of the ground a shoot  
at a time, a change of season  
all at once,

taunt, a circuit red from eartip down,  
every animal moment spent in live histories  
of fox Rome, fox Greece  
with the arc of light the tail makes –  
not the imagined tail –  
spent and worth it.

### II

A woman  
in a courtyard  
not yet rented,  
with vines coiling over love,  
a left thing,

the woman spreads  
her things. The courtyard  
holds shadows where  
a man comes  
and has been. Rome leaves –  
dappled, bright green –  
but Rome cannot, the whole courtyard  
grown from it,  
its day fallen.

Goats charm the woman  
or seem to, she sees them on the stair  
and not  
you, seeing. Shut the house  
and rent it,

as wild as Rome, as root and vine.

### III

They fumble for a keepsake for the sake  
of a minute, of a *Do you know its name?*

of a gunnysack tight with rock bits,  
of a voice calling Delivery.

All well and good, the biblical,  
the out of touch – where's the fur?

Kids are crying *Fax, fax* when they mean

fox, when they mean they don't know

when their hand is in the bag.  
Could it be the belly, its entrails

coiling, and not wiring,  
the fur of old food

they're inside of? They know  
nothing yet, they take delivery.

## **Flesh or Fetish**

A critic is thinking up praise.  
One Narcissus, two Narcissus.

All that the mind holds atrocious,  
glory fingers – and adores Echo,

the faltering anorexic, but does  
she sing of flesh or fetish?

And what of the cloud that covers  
the deadly boring? A fine varnishing,

a fat varniska. With admiration  
for the teeth, N. yawns

in duplicate. Remember the cloak  
in the story, the cloak, the cloak?

The love bolt? The perfect  
vision? Gut vs. head?

Still drowned, the phone  
off the hook or hard rung.

## The Cynic's Post

is tall and notched  
with disappointment.

You say: with appointment.  
The cynic promotes taste

in plaid, one hot  
against another,

and a fence for the rest.  
Into the Pacific sinks

a square green sun and our post  
measures this green. It is still

a sunset, though cynic green  
isn't natural, surely the weather —

your eyes and not the sun pours  
in the appearance, it is all

appearance: a pear is the earth's  
central figure, true shape

and shadow. You squint, you see  
green swallow your hands.

The post squares the green  
as it goes down, yes, as it sinks

the unsuitable goes, with the dark  
next, making the cynic now the past,

dug in sand with doubt-shifting.  
You turn your back to all of it.

A post is a dog's, for pissing.

## The Answers

The President nauseates.

The cell gets banned, “gets”  
verbs its way into the body,  
Begets.

The President  
cuts his tongue.

Propagation.  
but phoney, that tongue,  
a million of them, wireless  
unless the President throws up  
his hands at blood.

What an explosion!  
Each cell has its say:  
each to his own, each,  
then, disposes.

The President  
makes us sick. See cells  
by the seaside? You  
call in the answers.

## Drink Beer until You're Handsome

Your life's on a stick and held up  
like a god's. No taxes for you,  
and what Death answers,  
you pickle in an egg. Growing wiser,

the stick salted but still good,  
you meddle, you pay them to keep going.  
Them is the Great Mother's dreams  
of you as a child, the spyglass

reversed, the land they discover  
while you keep going. That  
you could learn is what  
they've forgotten. Drink,

drink, don't cry at the rail  
where the body of you-know-who  
is wafered out. You will be handsome  
on that stick, then you are.



## The High Cost of Principle

Shadowed by a dog,  
    the infinite dog, mirror of all  
in all the leaves,  
    I bark faithfully  
because we are one  
    and the cherry pie offering  
that glistens in the snow,  
    organs he's left after the kill,  
the jays disagree on.

    Still I walk  
    into where the birds aren't,

with the principle wagging the dog  
    in my forebrain. If there were  
no dog, says the dog, circling,  
    making a kind of floe  
    with his prints cutting through,  
the fruits would be gathered this day  
    same as the next. Thus  
    the dog offers his neck.

## The Comfort of TV

We find the sails we are not  
looking for in the tablecloths  
too late to spread for our meals of hunger,  
the food unplanted beside the furious worm's  
weavings who alone ties the dirt down  
against wind that could not be,  
even on TV.

## The Unconscious

*Madagascar's Aepyornis Maximus, extinct in the  
16<sup>th</sup> century, was once the largest bird in the world.*

Where, in the dunes,  
is the roc shell, in shards  
the size of my mirror?

According to Marco Polo,  
these birds lifted elephants.  
Why, I wonder, pocketing

bits. Souvenirs?  
On this island, spiny things  
surround all the prizes,

pirate scapula, caterpillar, cactus.  
I hack at huge succulents  
whose thorns lace the path

of the last known longitude  
and my guide's best guess  
to heat-sense the sand

for eggs, the optimistic eggs  
that so many chickens,  
so many ostriches,

fit inside. Of course, they're empty.  
Imagine the ham-sized haunches  
running – not flying –

into fires set by whom,  
to turn on what spit,  
the last grease

licked from whose fingers,  
licked and licked.

## Peacocked

In the dusk light screams –  
no, calls

Between the prongs  
of the turnstile – spread feathers – the boy's head

Raise your arm  
Under it, that arc  
fly  
hens like turkeys  
to the boughs –  
ballast –  
then legs

Bent and reversed  
feathers break the display

Color-stumped  
oil drained from water

Fire one. Fire two. A salvo

What did you say?  
the letter's lips ripped  
those ruffles  
a stutterer's

If white isn't available  
chose multi, chose all

The turnstile turns

The spit dances on its stick leg  
screams

Please

## The Horse in the Garden

The ball leaves your hands. Ha,  
ha, ha. Levity leaves too, the sky  
is full of it. Why are we waiting  
at the gate when we could be —

we could be — The horse makes  
an effort and the rider sits  
in thrall. The airborne sky  
against the gate, the gate hit.

Ha. The ball against us,  
the game rules while we wait.  
The rider, a great Polish fellow,  
laughs, undeterred, teetering.

Don't let him in. Wait. The horse  
hoofs the sky. You don't play.  
You wait with us. Ha — you  
wait? The game gives out,

a bit here, there. A garden  
grows up, lost balls roll  
for the sure-footed, for those  
who wait. The horse takes the gate.

## The Plants Revolve

Not planets stuck on  
with gum, not space  
and its evident lack,  
its crowd of trash,  
its lit fires, cold  
cold. You think

you're a plant and me  
the sun, as mixed up  
as that, sputtering  
under a watering  
can of tears, just because  
you can't get away.

Dirt is some big magnet,  
home is where the heart  
stays buried. You twist  
on your stick, a rack  
you've made here and  
nowhere else, you twist

to the sun of the body  
(tick, tick, the organism  
contracts, not enough  
celery turgor).  
Sex surrounds you  
like the sound system



in a movie where you hear  
the polite cough  
of industry in your popcorn,  
the faux sun at your back  
projecting at you alone.  
Inside, the real inside

where space is mindless  
and attention drifts  
into great shoals of triste,  
we turn separately, fearlessly,  
non-concentrically, the blades,  
the blades almost upon us.

## Curse the Fish into Wishing

The river's in slats, the slats animate it  
as if moving in a movie, the slats are:

grocery store, prison gate, doctor car, eye lint.  
Where your eye catches you looking over the river,

the river shines all too visible to the fish, air-borne.  
You snag chinbone hooks as he flips, he wears hooks

you could lean on with big clippers. Big fish.  
The movie runs awhile, the river runs.

Food shrugs its tiny shoulders up to the fish face.  
The fish nods more into the hook but Hey

you could eat worms, you could eat that marabou tuft.  
The river still runs and the fish with you

stuck to it, your arcing line glistening a U  
over the slats, the Everglades blooming,

the movie not in the least released.

## Signal

So far as I can see, my effort continues.

Two men ride west and their buttocks,  
their mounts smooth it out.

The Go West sign suggests more than just  
a left turn for them, it suggests

my effort. They ride when I tell them.  
I am embarrassed to tell them but

it is for them that I do, I am a saint  
to tell them. It isn't so bad,

I tell them, but they don't believe me,  
they take their mounts further in than

anyone, or further out, depending on  
where I am left holding the bay

of honesty. As they venture,  
as their horses climb into that blue,

as they reach cloud and climb on,  
I watch their buttocks.

# IV

## Mr. Magneto

Mr. Magneto leads a love life: attract, repel. The fun wears out and then the wind blows and Mr. Magneto removes a clot of wax from his ear.

Of a size. Others of his ilk, inventors of glue guns and cat catchers who suffer love drive or have, with the clutch of a life slipping and their own ears rattling with wax, make their impressions.

Mr. Magneto presses the wax against his member and the wind blows.

Standing beside, or enough beside his car he cannot open it without member damage, he sees his electromagnetic field, a vision of poles in perfect line-up, legs kicking, matches crossing metal covers.

It is not so much the whole car he stands beside but important parts one thinks one would want but would soon learn to do without, in the heat of magnets, and flame.

The others who don't learn but lend themselves to learning, also stand beside the car.

The boy sliding the magnet thinks well of them, he even has one of them jump, jump at the flame like a dog.

The car comes out of the flames and he pounds it with a stick sharp with stone until it takes on a shape.

Mr. Magneto gets into the newly shaped car the way you do after it's just been detailed and herds the rogue or dumb others together.

Sirens blare, wax melts.

You don't listen, says the older person to the boy and the boy looks up, the magnet on its string swinging.

## On the Blown Marquee: Hurricane

We whimper for chips  
to quell our anxiousness. There,  
the water's lining up:  
wave, wave, skip.

We want to surf in the math,  
then the aftermath as they say  
on the tube,  
or after school  
which is closed and sluiced,  
the kids on the beach.

Mostly there's congratulation  
for the silver twitching planes  
and their touchdowns and – let me see –  
no domestic violence.  
Not on the planes, of course – no in-flight  
movies now – but under the barometer,  
the mistletoe of home as fort,  
where the windsock's shot.

So put up the blankets,  
put up the beer,  
the surf's soon surfeit  
though we ourselves  
little enervate the weather  
with our lust.

## Who Goes with Whom?

Every night, lick lip.  
Every day, suppress chest.  
I'm up to here  
with chest, with flirt —  
not too far.

They've designed a flower  
that's transparent. You can see  
the parts crossing with the *Mayday!*  
*Mayday!* of spring.

Napkins cover my lap,  
more than one, and white ones.

The pleasure is surely just Hi!  
you've got me, you don't have to  
touch that.

I'm up to here  
with something that's braided.  
If it unravels,  
color won't be lost,  
just pattern.  
(Fire's bright in the blood.)

It's a game:  
many denominations  
and colors,  
counterfeits that play



like the others. The purpose  
is who goes with whom and then

it's not over.

## Marriage Boat

Gulls ogle and swoop those in the boat,  
even those with children, even those

with eyes fixed as figureheads.  
*Flesh! Flesh!* the birds scream.

Rope is not the operative word here  
but line, as sex alone suggests

sibilant potential, not love.  
At any time the stern could disappear

back to where it came from,  
the clouds herding their foam away

from reflection. Yet it seems, on clear days  
when no one's crying, it seems

as if the boat bears both ocean and sky,  
and the bodies fly, hiked so far out.

## The Silence of the Tortoise

He has his back to her.  
She scrabbles up.  
There it is – the field,  
the double lanes.

Cutting the ears off  
hares – is this  
a sign? Left, right  
or yield? The hares

don't listen anyway,  
he says. They never care  
how a race is won. She says  
the he tortoise grows long arms

to clasp the shes.  
You're not so old, he says.  
But the silence after, the shell  
falling against the glass.

## Aubade

Sinews here and there,  
his legs twined at desk  
and all of him bare,

mousing around, click,  
so the child won't wake.  
Sinews, his sex thick

but lapped, glasses  
found then lost then  
a child flushes

and my hands on him  
count only as clothes,  
as information.

Sinews, I say, *sotto voce*,  
and he smiles into  
his screen. At me?

## Nipple

A smaller dollop of people  
and we could pass.  
But even with arms akimbo, no.  
Instead, we throw our heads clear

and there's the moon.  
You reach up and cup it.  
People push past us – they do, they do –  
and we could be leaves

filled and lifted  
among them  
except the light is  
what lifts us,

moon enough for everyone.  
But only you  
brushed it,  
so hard and full.

## The Nickel Wife

You don't hear their words  
turn dull, his third glass  
empty. You don't hear

*Hate* either, only talk  
in the cove, lust talk,  
the way you remember it.

A life of two circles  
is circling when you show,  
the nickel wife. More drink

is thus necessary  
to throw the coin and still  
see it, unspent, at the bottom

of all this. But the water grows  
darker, the talk too, it grows  
out of anything anyone says,

a cloud but no stars. You drive  
her home – no – she does the long  
alcohol exhale and time

evaporates, the island  
rocks as never before, the seals  
swim across and back,

the little bird  
just not coming  
to the top.

## Belles Lettres

Slowly, slowly, so as not to awaken  
himself, he scratches his ear.

The sun is out, that is, not.  
Sheets and her tucked-up slip

line his back in canals (a misunderstood  
Martian) where sprout and curl hairs

as rogue as he is, shrugging off  
the phone call assault,

the covers coming over in waves.  
Does he growl: *Nice night*

*in bed, or, sniffing, It could rain?*  
He's reading her instead.



## The Common Good

Imagine democracy believed in,  
as common as a cold, not washing  
your hands so it will spread,

the man in your bed so democratic  
he's another people, watching you  
insert your contacts and a horror

surfaces and he enters you  
to hide it, with a lack of  
tenderness you could not expect.

You see now the effect of democracy,  
this man you love abstract suddenly  
in his so fascinating fear of

your eye going in, and a desire  
that makes you common shakes  
the two of you, unbelievable.

## Endymion

*A thing of beauty is a joy forever –*  
– Keats, “Endymion”

The moon keeps the man young  
by keeping him sleeping.

Coma is a moon word: she  
is the moon of his eyes,

that close. Keats pursued  
the Indian maiden

who must not be caught  
for she is “Immortal Love

like Brain-Flies/leaving us  
fancy-sick.” The young man

runs between the trees  
with unexposed paper,

hot for moon-stroke. Soon  
she is fixed in the bath forever.

Yet night after night,  
his children tumble as he tumbled,

in search of some blonde.  
A thing of beauty is just as

described. But not the Indian Maiden.  
They see their father ahead

with his art, deaf to the cry  
in the dark that it's over.

## Fitting In

In Saudi Arabia  
the plane is not late, the taxi  
is and all these children I have  
will not fit in.

Say they are blossoms and reasonable-sized  
and lizards from such deserts as this  
fork them – petals all over the place.

Our luggage gets chalked in swirls.  
I think cloud patterns, what we're in for,  
or sand. A sandbox with sides this  
isn't. The plane leaves a syrup  
of fuel where it can't take off,

then it does. Once on the walkway,  
the children stalk the lizards.

The lizards have petal-shaped scales  
and one eats his, loosening the fit  
around the mouth, tonguing the scaly  
transparency inside.

The children see this as good,  
a silicon chip breakfast, smart food smarter  
than pumpkin pie for hackers, their heroes.

They bloom while I  
give out shovels  
from the trunk of the taxi

and – what do you think?

They hit each other over the head,  
quarrelling.

Then they fit.

## At What Cost

Bosomed-boy-my-own, old  
as the hormone flush which is  
eight, no more, the TV beloved  
is too high to be doused its light,  
given the height of the terminal  
we can't leave these seven hours,  
all unslept and fretting. At no cost

will I let you go, will I will it,  
yet the plane will be fixed,  
my tears dried, your bosoms  
flattened. Run me over  
with your toothy front tire,  
oh Chapter 11 Boeing, we can't  
afford this or a new ticket.

But we can and do, in darkness,  
the cry queen bolted ceilingward  
summons a preacher's voice  
from a deeply downcast place  
like the stewardess'  
when she closes the gate  
before my lingering, my long stare.

## Pornography Is Good

His side has its points,  
all researched. Winning, he says,  
means money, beer if whoever's brother will buy it.

If the sides come up equal, what tips  
the balance? Right is might, he says.  
You're hiding the car keys.

Where do you stand on this, with the absolutes  
firing their unison guns? Pleasure  
is a principle, like math. Welcome to the wiring

of say vs. do, where the glass elephant trumpets  
and salvos hit the unseen side of the moon.  
He walks a nice line, drunk on all those knows.

## Rock Polisher

A worm  
inside this one, he says.

Over and over he grinds it,  
an unclear oval of brown,

its edges rough and grit.  
The polisher echoes.

Hollow perhaps, he says.  
Except for the worm.

Among the rubies

it lies, among smooth gravel.  
We think dragon  
but he means

anger. What else do boys  
conquer?

Held to the light so,  
and away,  
the tail flicks.



## Gone Wave

The wet sand, scoured, shows  
plant-green hair I could swim through  
but not save.

I could dream this  
as prophecy. I could forget.

I suction  
my sand-heavy suit  
off the surf floor.

The next wave,  
lens-clear, holds  
the boy up in more  
light than wave,

each eyelash  
separate, the arm-bend  
not right.

I spit foam, press water  
with my hands.

He rises again,  
just about to be born, to be borne —  
Mother —

now and no more.  
The last wave a looking away  
in so much water.

## No Spring

Let me die when I do  
in dead winter so  
you'll be sorry while  
it's dark and cold while  
I'm ditto.

He died on the year's first day  
of no coats, of running  
to the window to look  
out below. Nothing  
much saved him and

no thick fur or sweater  
will save me these shivers,  
just season on season.  
So what if spring's  
new. A bird

falls on the walk I make  
to warm up. I squat to it.  
Chick, chick, chick, it says  
from its broken neck,  
no spring left.

## Sex and Class and Race

Books say parents  
didn't mourn their children

in previous centuries, that  
nose-wipes and infants

died as eidelweiss on a granite face,  
so much sex in excess.

But at the very least, the poor  
had their need for labor.

Perhaps the rich left children  
to wolves or footmen,

perhaps they saw a child  
as a purse divided.

Perhaps.

But even their women ran  
into the snow, not to return,

or cut something again and again  
so it wouldn't mend.

Yet people do forget.  
Even I forget,

blind in the dark passage,  
bent as the Victorian foliage

that screens me from them,  
so sepia-dark in their sullen

photos they might be another race  
if color is all it takes

to dodge such sorrow.

## Release the Gifts

—for J. and A.

The fumbled Yes, as all your life  
passes before you, quick-time, the expedient

shore looming, means Why not? Your complicated faces  
we could put on a card. Congratulations!

it would say and Bear witness! You execute  
several excellent wedding steps

and far exceed any relative's shuffle,  
we who stay put, blocking the sister

gripping her thinness. If one should prosper,  
must another shrink? Friends screen the answer,

rallying with the remnants of the bouquet,  
and drink so you can take flight as one.

We're just fuel, fossils all, you youngest.  
There's plenty of gravity to go around.

## Longing to Stop Longing

— for Elizabeth

The dog chases the rabbit  
and the rabbit leaps;

it doesn't turn to check its dog.  
Memory chases.

“Still mourning” reads the sign  
in the yard after the hams stop

coming. It's God dressed in a peasant blouse  
atop steep clouds who rains down

another storm of sand. Are you sure?  
*Shshshshsh*, the rabbit's stopped,

ears up, and a white  
shapes its waves around it.

## Bridges and Air

Once we wove two trees'  
boughs into bedsprings  
to meet over a river.  
Once in a desert

caravan, two weeks passed  
while Who Goes First?  
got talked out and tried.  
Once we pulled up our feet

and held our breath.  
The fret can't fail, can.  
Every bridge has its child  
ghosts in the supports,

their pipes wavering  
as the bricks set,  
new shoes and hat added for luck,  
whatever they never lived to get.

The strongest bond,  
the biggest sacrifice.  
In a moment of bridge,  
that blue yawns wide.



V

## Pilgrim's Progress

You run toward a light.  
A cartoon idea?  
Running forces its burning,  
fuels its whiteness.

Such light capitalizes:  
All Good as in a café.  
Each lifted sole  
is a moon left on.

No one said you had to run  
or that the race raised money  
but if, by running,  
you actually arrived —

the dead light of stars  
wink and go out.  
Still, your organs swell  
as you run, you want

and want but you can't stop.  
Your side aches,  
your head aches,  
your heart.

Friends wave slick magazines  
that read Relax,  
friends with a capital F,  
in the plural, but not the humble,

declarative friend  
whose hand you slap  
as you pass — he's hunched,  
he's just laced up.

## Sister Love

I'm underground and there's a drip.  
It could be calcium, it could be sorrow.  
The dark, though, suggests self-pity.  
Who's breathing?

My brother on his blue satin.

It's as if all my life I waited  
and the wait did it. Here, it's underground  
and cold and

I'm driving and mist breaks around me  
so I have "something to show,"  
meaning my body. It's not  
that I put on those rubber gloves  
backwards, Orphée in Cocteau,  
or even get out of the car —  
fire explodes in the slick  
as I pass.

Surely he puts on his gloves  
and goes to work, as clumsy as ever.

The way sugar sets hunger is enough  
to imagine what sets death. Imagine  
the cave alive, lava surging,  
an excited sorrow

because I said so.

## Death Stayed

It feels like creation,  
walking in on dogs  
in their caged life and

pointing, that spark  
ordained, "God  
and man joined as animals,"

when we pick. Clouds  
roll up and down the lot,  
enchantment really,

as the dog jumps at my wrist  
to kiss or tear. You open up  
and tell me what it feels,

the third that makes the drama,  
the queer addition  
animals offer, our motion

of picking life off a seesaw  
up now above the clouds,  
the car climbing home,

our corporal selves  
writ again,  
with death stayed in a dog.

## Duet

The dolphins  
only twice in real life  
bumped boats in warning.

The emptiness of the water  
means they're hiding, not  
that the dolphins can't see us.

If they look like sharks,  
imagine what we resemble.

Lay your ear to the water.  
Are those pleas for a human Lassie?  
The sound cuts through our splashing.

With no one to define what life is,  
let alone real, you sing along,  
a *karaoke*, you sing  
for someone to save you.

## Land's Cape

Think water, its diamonds  
on the brink of sinking,  
a pleasure boat, Pleasure  
painted – *ital.* – midhull,  
a cold glass thrust up  
to shore – highball at sunset –

its bubbling fast,  
    the short life of ice,

the sand, with its hilly secrets,  
a rug of weed thrown over  
backyard trash, and a spigot  
of leaves screening what  
the sun might do  
to a lettuce plume.

## Root Canal As a Venetian Idyll

The exhausted dream I live in  
    is scattered with teeth, the little  
        tombstones of Freud that,  
plowed under,  
        grow up warriors.

    My son buries his  
between pillow and case so no one  
    can exchange them for  
founding dollars –  
        he wants to string them together,  
        the miser.

The rule is you lose a tooth for every child.  
    The new baby grinds,  
        gnashes, butts  
at the inexplicable ache inside –  
        the dog that won't shake off.

    Yet he gums prettily between howls.  
So smile! repeats his jack o'lanterned brother,  
        as I do, falsely,  
        as Death does.



## Anticipating Grief

It is both the coffin-worn hammer  
and the hassle we walk under,  
sans spouses, those shields  
and mirrors of the family fantasy.

It is both, and we cry as if truth  
changes when wet. When we speak  
into the long tunnel ahead, we are heard  
but the hearing takes time, maybe

we will die first. Oh, who can  
die first? It's another family game,  
each with his own blank screen.  
When some echo of triumph

leaks back to where the spouses  
wait, it's mixed with  
an Esperanto of guilt  
they invent, feet tapping.

## How to Simplify Fractions

Put the big one  
over the small one  
and what do you get?  
Don't tell.

He was a big man  
and the first time  
the boy cried.

Sometimes the wounded  
use their scars.

Pull up the small one's  
sleeves now, see all  
the lines,  
fine white  
at the wrist,  
where the answer goes.

## The Rule of K

*Give someone a name beginning with K if you want a hero.*

– Neil Simon

In the dead body:

my brother, doppelganger.

Look over

my shoulder:

he too was paranoid.

But what's

*natural cause* at forty?

At night he'd open

the first volume and read:

*Aardvark*, earth pig, 3 ½ feet long,

then read to K,

then sleep.

K's the vitamin

they give you if you bleed.

I had K in Africa,

miscarrying like a pig,

some other lady

dead without it,

the double.

What divides me from him –

eleven months

eighteen days –

will never close.

But who was that fat Karen  
after his money and why  
did he keep a crippled cat  
he couldn't catch?

The sound of K multiplies.  
Christ, another paranoid,  
with a name you can hear  
from every pew, was born again  
in the month he died.

I need a hero.  
Hear the cat  
he couldn't catch,  
crying for liverwurst?  
What's worse than liverwurst?

My brother ate it  
to prove he wasn't me.  
Now, surely, he's not.

## Mother Bleeds from the Mouth

The ocean laves one long line  
where the sun sets how red?

My hand waves at it,  
all meaning wry

since no one's around.  
Around and around a scarf

beats in the sunset wind,  
DNA against cloud.

Maybe my hand waves for that.  
Maybe I should speak.

The ocean closes and closes.

## Old God

Ah, to be old and rage uncontrollably,  
to command the sun and moon to stop  
and yet be treated like a dog,  
house training at ten and two  
or we'll weight your walker. Flatline

the sun does daily, and the dog  
howls anyway. I read where men's bodies  
can be made twenty years younger,  
only men's – we're so simple. I totter  
toward a diamond of yellow light,

where the same geese snatch bread  
ad nauseam. No one wants to see them  
past their prime – they fly elsewhere  
for their duplicate unsexed deaths.  
Why feed them? I parade,

leg by leg, back to my barracks,  
my rage rising over a horizon  
of sleeping nieces. Weep wombs,  
for what you hold is  
not yourself, over and over.

## Agrarian Myth

—for J.S.

Father says Come. A hundred years  
of fathers, hundreds. You stand  
on the flat of yourself, not the cornfield  
or the half acre in rotation.

You can hear him, you've taken

psychology, you have watched  
him tip the 4-wheel drive.

Aren't my feet yours? he says.

He says, Look at the land underneath.

But you succor a whirlwind

that lifts and lifts.

Whatever's on your hands won't  
wash off into the dirt.

It could come from dirt.

A spider crosses your father's

letter, the acrobat's answer.

When you cartwheel into the air —  
no land at last — Father will take off  
his cap in time to the music  
and money will fill it.

## Great Circle Earthworks, Ohio

*Remnant of prehistoric Ohio nearly 1200 feet in diameter, used as a vast ceremonial center.*

I could be a teen,  
thinking Mystery, that delicious  
void, or I could be older,  
puzzling out life in a light rain  
and why it won't wash.

This Circle is no Cheops  
nipple, just displaced dirt,  
a sculpture too cheap to steal,  
protected by huge trees  
lightning-drawn like Woodlawn's.

Another race built walls  
two stories higher in Hawai'i.  
Or do the walls just seem taller,  
height so relative to my own age and wear?  
I look out from the center toward

Hopewell, the nearest settlement,  
where the mutt American's plow erases  
every planting, god so much on his side  
he doesn't need history. Knock, knock?  
is what his mounds repeat.



A white horse gallops  
the Circle's rim, only a few tricks left.  
The shape of the future's in an hourglass —  
the shape of god? We moon him  
with a mound.

## Destiny Manifest

Your fence meets your fence,  
the sawtooth borders contiguous.  
You can't even see it all.

Shade moves its bars like latitudes  
across the no-tree, no-cow plain.  
Land is plain, unwrit and lasting.

You long to envelop the map  
with circumference.  
I have seen you look down and

look up like that, in such lust.  
Your binoculars pick out antelope  
that move no closer than  $x$  power,

that canter back as if there's a line.  
Like the concentrics of the eagle  
a thermal over. Like water after a stone.

## Healing Wind

--that's upwind, where  
genealogy has swept its O's  
and X's beyond

hugs and kisses.

This week is not  
the last, your sister implores.  
We stand at the tap, pails

filled, the wind in ruffs  
so no reflection  
shows. She's not especially

cold but the chill index says it all:  
worse than you think.

No one cries.

Why  
tempt sisterliness  
when there's loss to carry back, lots  
of it?

We heft and tuck our heads.

## Bacchae

The horns of the barbarians  
review their scales.

Again.

She could gather and crush berries,  
brew  
to soothe her exile, but no.

Her small cry  
disturbs no butterfly,  
no wind rises, no echo pretends  
an answer from elsewhere.  
Sorry.

She drank and debauched,  
she tore her own son  
into quarters with just her hands,

her feet on his neck. Women do this.  
A drink at four, loud ice,  
then trick him  
up a tree, shake the trunk.

When she hears him fall,  
she runs to catch him —  
but you cannot both birth and catch.

She bears up, a queen even.  
She bears him. She unbears him.  
The head, with its roots raining.

Sanity blinks.

The barbarians play.

Elsewhere

in the day room

women weave a song

of small cries

into patterns,

into a kind of plaid

that a schoolgirl would wear

wrapped too short,

the kind of girl who prays

that no one

will see the spot in that plaid

when she rises,

that the blood will somehow

get back inside her,

a wound

she understands she must

smile through

until that's all anyone sees,

the miracle of motherhood.

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## About the Author



The author of 19 books of poetry, fiction, memoir, biography, and translation, Terese Svoboda will publish her eighth book of poetry, *Theatrix: Play Poems* (Anhinga Press) in 2021. *Anything That Burns You: A Portrait of Lola Ridge, Radical Poet* appeared in paper in 2018, and *Great American Desert*, a book of stories, in 2019. A Guggenheim fellow, she has been awarded the Bobst Prize in fiction, the Iowa Prize for poetry, and NEH grant for translation, the Graywolf Nonfiction Prize, a Jerome Foundation prize for video, the O. Henry Award for the short story, and a Pushcart Prize for the essay. Her opera WET premiered at L.A.'s Disney Hall. "Terese Svoboda is one of those writers you would be tempted to read regardless of the setting or the period or the plot or even the genre." – Bloomsbury Review.



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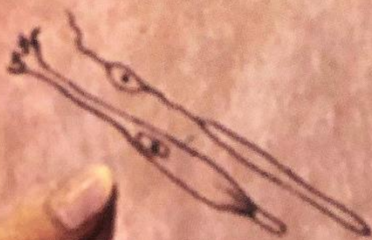
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# TREASON

EYES



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