

Three Poems by Nancy G. Westerfield

The Dissolution of the Marriage

How he decided:

While blood-donoring, stiffed prone
With hands out for anchor-ends at arms' length
Cupped imploringly, he asked for charity,
From the hung ampule some little letting in of love.
But starched and prehensile tinkerers
Drew swift's flow instead, enough of it
To bend the donee down with its grief,
With want of charity, want of love;
Leaving him swift's flow back from being airborne
And semi-detached, now jettisoned again
With all its woe unrelieved
By such simple surgery. He thought of other;
And after that amputation, what heal?

How she decided:

While blowing forty birthdays,
The cake posh, and the icing looping in pink festoons
Around a crown of candles that mark
Not only herself who owned the years, but burn
For all her by-now dead in theirafter
Whose years are coming undone; they tunnel
Her cake with graveworms, and the burnt pits
Of candles upsnout like nostrils wasted
Of their grace of air. Made in nature
To be a mourner, she, after throwing abandon
To the winds, had grown staidly scoped
Within her house and mourned a life
Wholly incisions. She thought of other;
And after this amputation, what heal?

Ship's Garbage

The sea is calm tonight; every breath
 Of ship drawn with the bosoming swell
 Of the deep, discharges down the cleavages
 In its wake jewels of refuse: the narrow tumult
 Takes float of paper and peelings, the sink
 Of the hard excreta, brine-castles built
 Of foam in the ice-green trashing of waters.
 A gavotte of fish eating leaves
 Plankton and prawn for ship's scraps:
 Dolphins like crescent moons leaping
 To the cast, and one of them caught
 By the screws underneath, backward washed
 In the school of his blood, gaily left
 And gone again into that castled past.

Nothing of waste or death catches us up
 At these knots: all that lives
 In that element dies in that element
 Fathoms off, far off as the essential thrust
 Of the earth at sea's heart — the dead
 Of us all as well vanished obliquely
 In transitus, ditched to that cloven trough
 Like our garbage, lost to the dance
 Of small bobbins in engine rooms.

Half-moon of lighted ship scooping up waves,
 Luminous and delicate you cross
 This infinitely garbaged universe,
 This calm sea, partnered with scavengers;
 And we, not yet dead enough to be voided
 And scavenged, we too passage nebulous in our element,
 Waste into that element, defecate phosphorescences
 Throughout the watches of the night.

Inside the Wooden Horse

Now not room among us
For even a whisper or curses,
The floor slats splintered to the soles
Of standing shifted feet
Or to knees, the cramped eyes
Slotting the stars and the white towers,
The walls white as beaches,
Watching for poke of moonset through the boards,
The hour when we hang like entrails
Roping bauchily down to the ground.
Meanwhile this cylinder of steed bowels
Its bellyful of Hellenes, Aphrodite
And the divided gods war nightlong,
The sea rolls and calls undiminished,
And we whinny softly, jostling for space aboard
With elbows, the small frugalities of souls
Pressed to their utmost diminishment:
Ourselves coiled within ourselves
Against walls within walls. The moonlight
Picks the chink of an eye in a gilt helmet,
A soldier but thinking how like a vaulter
In a circus, thinking this Cretan mummery
All over, thinking siege, battle,
Killing done, Troy fallen, thinking
Telling it afterward like a poem
In the shape of a stallion, or a girl.