

# BLACK SUN CROWN

**Brian Teare**

[ an eye born with the lid closed ]

Sleep begins at the pinhole  
I put my eye to. Its aperture  
opens and the scene sighs

into whiteness, sulfur  
whiff that finishes a match.  
Slowly the street develops

gray scale : paper dropped  
on the waters that put out  
the fire : and floats, a city

scene seized by what moves it.  
Not water. Nor wind.  
Nor the winds that precede wildfire.

What is this other  
weather in the trees.

\*

[ other weather ]

People seem to speak—  
and move. The cars seem to.  
Under a bench sparrows

and pigeons seem still  
to seek the pith in seeds.  
Without sound the wind

carries the cast-off hulls,  
soft under foot, from general  
to specific, the way sleep moves :

the woman touches the sore  
above her lip, bright blood

she lifts to her mouth. And back again.  
She seems to bleed. What else.

\*

BLACK SUN  
CROWN  
*Brian Teare*

[ And back again. ]

A dog at the door  
whimpers—high-  
pitched—as if hurt

or lonely. Gathered  
in its mouth : hard to see.  
I can't say stick

or pinecone, pigeon or  
rag stiff now with dried—  
what. The dog drops it,

sits. Whose black dog.  
Who called it what name.  
And why its head tilted.

Why does it stay at the door  
expectant. I'm not awake.

\*

[ I'm not awake. ]

The image won't come clear :  
a photographer's cloth falls  
over noon. Its stifling calm was  
meant to soothe the panic

induced by the immense pretense  
of everyday life, each shadow  
continuing to fall from its origin  
as though crisis weren't immanent,

as though the eye will remain  
open to receive the last image  
vanishing. The dog whimpers

again into paws it's crossed  
beneath its chin : it waits  
at the border of the ordinary.

\*

[ the ordinary ]

Then the light lifts high  
and it seems I need  
something. I'm walking.

BLACK SUN  
CROWN  
*Brian Teare*

Over-bright and precise  
the scene at the bus stop  
a series of frames

as regular as sidewalk :  
first the neat seams of crow's feet  
in the white-blue waxy skin

of the elderly man,  
then his ill-fitting toupee,  
then his immaculate executive briefcase.

His bus pulls up, hissing  
in its cicatrix of wire.

\*

[ cicatrix ]

The dream offers a choice :  
to resist the knots  
is to tighten them oneself.

But I know what will happen :  
eros wears an embroidery  
of flames on its sheer shirt,  
its skin a ridge of goose flesh.

Beneath lights of three hues  
the men will hang the slap  
of wet leather from the ceiling.

I know what will happen :  
my body above the bed. Cold  
air. How'd I get up here?  
*We ask the questions now they say.*

\*

[ my body above the bed ]

Then the rain arrives. It moves in  
and opens its cardboard suitcase  
smell. At all hours a grammar's  
racket, it hammers hardest  
at degrees : *wet, wetter, wettest.*

Up to the pinhole I put my eye :  
the sleep I read there won't shut.  
Against its covers pages swell  
illegible, irreparable and cold.

BLACK SUN  
CROWN  
*Brian Teare*

I get up and open the suitcase,  
put on the heavy regalia of pajamas  
braided with silver rivulets.  
My shoulders just fit. I lie down in  
the river where my mind meets the sea.

\*

[ I lie down ]

The scene returns first  
to consolation, then  
to the inconsolable :  
I've lost something,  
I search the plaza,  
a hand scatters seed  
in concentric rings,  
ever-dilating, ever-  
thinking *I need it*

what. The sonnet,  
the way a sleeper leans  
harder into a dream,  
turns : toward what  
evidence of need.

\*

[ what evidence ]

I don't have a black dog.  
Bus stop, plaza, wide street  
and palms; sore whose blood  
she carries on a fingertip  
to her mouth—the scene  
never leaves me. Even when

I turn the pillow over,  
find its thick fur fragrant,  
warm against my cheek.  
The scent never leaves me.  
Even when the rain begins.  
Even when the fear :

a handful of wet hair  
falls through the mail slot.

\*

BLACK SUN  
CROWN  
*Brian Teare*

---

[ a handful of wet hair ]

At the pinhole I see  
other weather moves  
a hand over my mouth.

Hard wind steals a series  
of cues : an umbrella  
blows out, a hat reels across  
the street, the scene tips  
all the grocery carts  
against parked cars.

Alarms mean nothing  
except it's my dream  
of a knife : cut an "x"  
to release steam : cook it :  
cool it : peel it later.

\*

[ alarm means nothing ]

Then a voice says :  
I'm the traveler  
who calls at night  
to the gods.

Under the surface of stone  
they lie down, or seem to,  
and all the people.

The sleep I dream  
I've kept locked  
like the open gates  
of the great city—

but this is myth when I wanted  
justice. The judgment seat sits  
empty, no gods still at work.

\*

[ no gods still at work ]

But the feeling repeats itself :  
the salt of the hand that seals  
my mouth, the wet breath  
at my ear. My own sweat  
curls around the ribs of what  
if I could see it I would scream

BLACK SUN  
CROWN  
*Brian Teare*

I think later. Now cold water  
stings the nest of worked nerves  
that crowns my head. A circuit  
of vervain lobed and toothed,  
spiked with mauve blooms  
opening : this is prescribed for

what I thought, my mind  
the scald the hot cup held.

\*

[ what I thought ]

Night again : wet, windy.  
Back across the plaza I walk  
thinking : Now I'm meeting  
the old devil. He's got his spine  
through waves of rain, but  
he doesn't know years of fear  
make an anvil. He's never seen

the face I've hammered out on it.  
His cold white lights ride out  
over the street—then vanish.  
To wait for the bus, under  
the great palms I stand :  
eyes of fire, nostrils of air,  
mouth of water, beard of earth.

\*

[ eyes of fire ]

Now I see it for what it is, now  
I recognize its familiar scent.

I could call its name, say :  
Your leash is here, and your ball,  
and here is your bed. Instead

I trick it in front of a car :  
through the pinhole I see  
its black fur slick with blood,  
a gesture it can't comprehend.

But I could never injure it.  
The ghost stirs in the animal  
and I have made its bed. I have  
had no choice : a real ghost opens  
an eye born with the lid closed.

\*

BLACK SUN  
CROWN  
*Brian Teare*

---

## [ Envoi ]

Sleep begins at the pinhole.  
The image won't come clear.  
When the light lifts high,  
I see it for what it is; now

the scene returns : first  
a dog at the door;  
people seem to speak;  
then the rain arrives; it moves in.

At the pinhole I see  
the dream offers a choice  
then a voice says :

the feeling repeats itself :  
night again : wet, windy.  
I don't have a black dog.

*Thanks to:* Willis Barnstone's *The Gnostic Bible*, William Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Robin Blaser's translation of Nerval's *Les Chimères*, Hans Jonas' *The Gnostic Religion*, Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Jane Miller's *Midnights*, N.K. Sandars' *Poems of Heaven and Hell from Ancient Mesopotamia*, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, and Virginia Woolf's *Diaries*.

The recipient of Stegner, National Endowment for the Arts, and MacDowell Colony poetry fellowships, Brian Teare is the author of *The Room Where I Was Born*, *Sight Map*, and *Pleasure*, as well as the chapbooks *Pilgrim* and *Transcendental Grammar Crown*. On the graduate faculties of Mills College and University of San Francisco, he lives in San Francisco, where he also makes books by hand for his micropress, Albion Books. He maintains a web presence at [www.brianteare.net](http://www.brianteare.net)