

## = Song Without Words =

Song Without Words : A Book of Engravings on Wood is a wordless novel of 1936 by American artist Lynd Ward ( 1905 ? 1985 ) . Executed in twenty @-@ one wood engravings , it was the fifth and shortest of the six wordless novels Ward completed , produced while working on the last and longest , Vertigo ( 1937 ) . The story concerns the anxiety an expectant mother feels over bringing a child into a world under the threat of fascism ? anxieties Ward and writer May McNeer were then feeling over McNeer 's pregnancy with the couple 's second child .

## = = Content and style = =

A woman conceives a child and suffers anguish over whether to give birth to it . She imagines one nightmare image of fascism and death after another , filled with such imagery as skulls , concentration camps , and an infant impaled on a bayonet . She ends standing defiant against the forces that threaten her , and her male partner joins her and the baby in an image of hope for the future .

Ward employs symbols much as he had in previous works , such as towering buildings representing capitalism . Vermin swarm in the pictures , heightening the expectant mother 's fears ? nightmare images of vultures , ants crawling over an impaled infant , and rats scuttering around a Nazi concentration camp filled with children .

## = = Background = =

Lynd Ward ( 1905 ? 1985 ) was a son of Methodist minister and social activist Harry F. Ward ( 1873 ? 1966 ) . Throughout his career the younger Ward displayed in his work the influence of his father 's interest in social injustice . Ward married writer May McNeer in 1926 and the couple left for Europe , where Ward spent a year studying wood engraving in Leipzig , Germany . There he encountered German Expressionist art and read the wordless novel The Sun ( 1919 ) by Flemish woodcut artist Frans Masereel ( 1889 ? 1972 ) .

Ward returned to the United States and freelanced his illustrations . In 1929 , he came across German artist Otto Nückel 's wordless novel Destiny ( 1926 ) in New York City . The work inspired Ward to create a wordless novel of his own , Gods ' Man ( 1929 ) , which he followed with Madman 's Drum ( 1930 ) , Wild Pilgrimage ( 1932 ) , and the short Prelude to a Million Years ( 1933 ) .

Ward began engraving on Song Without Words while working on his longest wordless novel , Vertigo ( 1937 ) , which took two years to complete . McNeer was pregnant with their second child and the couple were facing the same anxieties as the book 's protagonist , and having worked through these issues they carried through the birth of daughter Robin . Into adulthood Robin kept a wall of her home decorated with prints from Song Without Words .

Ward returned to the themes of Song Without Words in Hymn for the Night , a retelling of the birth of Christ in Nazi Germany . The book was to have been Ward 's seventh wordless novel , but he abandoned it in 1940 after engraving twenty blocks of it after finding the story too removed from his personal experiences .

## = = Production and publication = =

Ward produced 21 wood engravings for the book , sized 5 5 ? 8 x 3 5 ? 8 inches ( 14 @.@ 3 x 9 @.@ 2 cm ) . It appeared in 1936 in a limited edition from Random House of 1250 copies . The pages were printed from the original engravings by Equinox Press co @-@ founder Lewis F. White . The original woodblocks are in the Lynd Ward Collection in the Joseph Mark Lauinger Memorial Library at Georgetown University in Washington , DC .