

Abstract

Guilarte, Marc Cristobal. In the City of the Lamb. (under Dr. Thomas Lisk as Thesis Director.)

The genesis of this work begun by my desire to merge the entertainment value of escapist-fantasy with narrative poetry's ability to teach by example. Much of the sound-play manifest in this work was influenced by classical Latin poetry's habit of intermeshing sound throughout the poem, rather than focusing it at the end of the line. My youthful interest in Heian-Japanese waka and poetic diaries also left its mark on my poetry. Echoes of waka and tanka form reverberate through even my more European-flavored folk-tale poems. Ultimately, I have followed my own taste and have no particular idol to credit. The oral aspect of poetry has been at the forefront of my mind, and sound plays an important role in these poems. The purpose of this work is to entertain as well as to plant a few seeds of thought in the mind of the reader.

**In The City of the Lamb:
Moments, and Fantasy Poetry**

by
Marc-Cristobal Guilarte

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Thomas Lisk
Director

Dr. John Balaban
Reader

Dr. Christopher Cobb
Reader

This is for my cats, all of my cats.

Monjour, Winkerton, Wooster, Wubie Sr., Wubie Jr., Halley, Nox.

Living blankets, what would I have done without you?

especially for Winkerton, always an older sister.

I miss you Winkerton,

please come back to me.

Autobiography

Institutions, schools, and office buildings are things, and forget you, so I won't mention them anymore. All I've written has been written under the shadows of my cats, my sister, and my parents. If only we could all stay together. I've spent the last 18 years in a comfortable tumult of consistency and familiarity, granted with its own sudden falls and ascensions. As I've aged, it's been harder to avoid the fact that we'll all die. I just hope I can capture a few moments before I, myself, die. I have something I can leave with you. Here is something.

I was born in 1976.

I don't want to die.

-- Marc-Cristobal Guilarte, October 2004

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Firm, I'm bounding

up the stairs

as I have

for many years

May my body

hold itself

above the ground

more than long

enough.

Barrow Wights

“He thought there were two eyes, very cold though lit with a pale light that seemed to come from some remote distance. Then a grip stronger and colder than iron seized him. The icy touch froze his bones, and he remembered no more.

When he came to himself again, for a moment he could recall nothing except a sense of dread. Then suddenly he knew that he was imprisoned, caught hopelessly; he was in a barrow. A Barrow-Wight had taken him, and he was probably already under the dreadful spells of the Barrow-Wights about which whispered tales spoke.”

(J.R.R. Tolkien, Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring)

Eastern-Most Mound

Seaward Greed

Crow's nest atop a hillock, an aching
ship anchored in the blank-paper grasses
down the mound-dotted fields of the wasted
and bleached barrow wights, each an ancestor
of you and me alike, buried deep in
furrows of our family trees, long ago.

Ages tucked in dust, inside a need grows:

Once sweet, a mother's son and a home's keep
twig masts, leaf sails, bark hull in a puddle
he plays in peace unwary of his sea-
ward greed, slow, silent, while growing within.

A captain forging strong and fine, his limbs
striding bright on his servants' weakened backs.
Their cracked spines and worn bones litter his tomb.

Eastern-Most Mound

Forever Hold My Evil Against Me

Post and lintel fallen aside, the latch
still clings to the gate bound by age-heaped grime
and leached to stone in knots of leafless twigs.
The lidded hole, a drain wanting water – life-
beckons, “*wait.*” For here judgment has ended
while punishment lingers, never changing.

And how – no good will do any good now.

He sits in his cage, he sits in his cage.
He looks over here, he looks over there.
nothing, life crawling by his tomb *breathing*
and he dreams of playing with a toy boat,
twig masts, leaf sails, bark hull in a puddle.
Holding his little bit of self he moans,
“*Forever hold my evil against me.*”

Choice of the Locked Mound

Held Deep by Doubt

Hold off the westward trek, the sinking sun,
for brazen in the western sky it sits
a great vault in the horizon, intact
and locked. Heavy, it weighs against the mound.

Here, an ending too early creaks within
with taps of second thoughts lost forever.

Held deep by doubt and fear of the future:

she clicked her jewels on her premature bier,
counting her prayers, "happy life, short life"
as her dog, death-companion, gnawed its leash,
yaps and tears dressed in the comforts of life.
Though firm on the litter through the threshold,
when the stone door shut, the woman rushed
the key-hole, to watch the fade of people.

Choice of the Locked Mound

Withered State

After days tumbling in the cistern-dark
batting at the white keyhole light, famished
dog croaking, pads slower slower circles.
The woman, she whines spread against the door.
She chews on her hair and on her dog's hide.
Eyes peeping, she gnaws on her nails and lips.

Held deep by doubt and fear of the future

Diminished to bone, a bit of her creeps
arcane across the shelves of her crypt, it,
dusted and webbed. She rocks in the corner,
or just at the door. She sticks her finger
to the rim of the aperture, feeling
the loss of the key, her live-burial,
and now she's lost, missed, to this withered state.

Leveled Barrow, Shallow Tomb

Scored by the sky –winds- and scraped again
 by rains, no shuttered crypt, clinched and prim,
 left behind. A *scuttled-wight* sunk, lay splayed
 strewn in silt, sifted through the earth's white rind --
 ice-laid plain in mottled rows of gray lines.
 Staggered ruins: here stood rooms, stairs fumbled there.

No visits here, just stragglers unawares --

A scuttling shrew scours through broken teeth
 and hair. Clenched! Caught, it shrieks –stretched taut it's trapped.

An unseen grasp flays it flat, face drawn-out
 like a mask. Only muffled rasps remain
 and bloodied gasps spray shuddered drops, skin frayed,
 just lungs left jumping, twitching on the ground.
 - Settling clouds rift, sparrows flock and spread.

Watermarked Mound

Soft Dome

Soft patches, a dome of water ribbons
soft mound, hollow socket of a charmed life.
Its wight: wide-eyed and playful, toys with toys --
a haunt and snuffle of a gilded child's life.
Fresh sprung leaks streak the tomb walls, swamp and bloat
books of children's rhymes and a hobby-horse.

The wight groped to save them with vapor hands.

Buried with hatred, heir to a cruel line
plays with dolls with watermarked faces
while the roots and weeds of this world wedge
their way through the dome of the mound, pouring
the sweat of charging clouds into this cradle
the wight groping to save it with vapor hands --
the march of the natural world splitting open this shell.

Watermarked Mound

Release

Undone through the thundering years, Soft Mound
yawns wide, a rotten tooth. Its hug-worn
relics wasting to thieves and time --
its wight wavering like steam slipping
over a cauldron rim, held by nothing,
lies on the skin of the earth, ready to shift.

Across shining fields under a still sky

a goat tramps along the mound's wash
into the spill of the wight-steam.

He carries the soul of the heir away
down-trot from the melted crown of the mound
and flings clover flower-heads into the pollen clouds
of the first flick of Spring with his horns --
the ground dancing, spraying beneath his hooves.

Hansel and Gretel

for my sister Gina

All work, all day, till night pressed tall thickets
of brittle forest in a narrow closet
of darkness, but for a slim crack of light
hinged to the forest edge – a lopsided,
rush-roofed hut. A lamp hangs over a table
with two children paring mold off turnips
from last year – a famine: the famished father
picking spare grains of barley from the pantry
with his thumb, placing them with tiny pings
into a turtle shell – his stomach gurgling,
mouth dripping. Turned on her side in the bed,
his step-wife works her teeth on an old leather belt,

“If not for his children, Hansel and Gretel.”

That night, the stepmother starts, “Something must
be done or we all will die,” staring at
the last of their daily bread turning to shards
on the counter, steeped in the smell of
their butchered mule’s carcass that wafts through

the crooked slats of the shutters. “Let us
leave the children in the forest; we can
always have more ... in better times,” as her teeth
cut through her lips – chew, but Hansel heard this.

He ran around in his mind for answers.

Pebbles, moonlit pebbles sprawl and trail their parched
garden. While the family wallows deep in sleep,
Hansel sneaks through the door. Moonlit pebbles,
pebbles sprawl and trail their parched garden,
shining like white suns – a silver scree.
He stuffs his pockets, stones stretching every
last stitch, and creeps back to his corner bed
and whispers to sleeping Gretel, “Don’t give up,
Gretel. Together we will make it.”
Gretel gnaws on her nails in her sleep,

dreaming of the witches and wolves which stalk the woods.

Dawn strikes, early dewy morning flecks the lids
of little Hansel, little Gretel – an eye
of the step-mother gleaming, “Wake up, children,

we must walk far into the forest...to cut wood.”

Father and Step-Mother led the children past
the bramble fence and their barren field,
but little Hansel kept looking over
his shoulder. His little days swimming away
in the little windows of the cottage
as his family slipped through the leaves of the vast
grumbling woods – little Gretel glum behind,
staring at the ground and deep inside herself.

Hansel slipped a pebble out of his pocket
and dropped, walked and dropped, and dropped looking back
home as long as he could, till Father said,

“What, boy, are you looking at? Walk. Use your legs.”

Hansel speaks, “My kitty, my white kitty mews
from the top straws of our roof... to say bye to me,
goodbye kitty, goodbye.” The stepmother speaks,

“That’s not your cat, that’s the sun beating on
the pale grass of our thatched hut. Keep walking.”

All morning long they trailed and curled deeper
into the forest, till the sun hung noon-wise,
striking down on a clearing in the woods.

where the parents made a large snapping fire.

“Wait here, children. We will come back for you.”

Father and Step-mother have left little
Hansel and Gretel with the stale bread, sweet
with the stench of the mule’s tangled ribs.

The children peered with barely a blink
into the unfamiliar corner of the forest.

Bats began to stray about in the graying
clearing as soon as the moon began to rise.
and each pebble Hansel dropped appeared through
the undergrowth. Hansel and Gretel followed
the pebbles home, with nowhere left to go.

The parents greet the children with feigned delight,

“We thought you wandered off in the forest.

What a fright you gave us.” For awhile
things went on as usual, little to eat
– the children tried to be extra good. Chores
for Father and Step-mother, churning, bending
through the calendar, but at last the father

began to struggle to feed them all,
and the children were set to trap rodents
and scrounge for roots. And the gleaming eye
of the step-mother growled with her stomach's
hunger, "If not for his children, Hansel
and Gretel." She bore on to her husband,
"We must leave the children, or we all will die.
We can always have more ... in better times."

Hansel heard this and searched his mind for answers

As soon as the moon met his shuttered window
mid-slat, he snuck to the door -- it was locked.
He returned to bed distraught, but still said
to Gretel as she chewed her nails in her sleep,
"Don't give up, Gretel. Together we will
make it." Then he wrapped himself in the sheets,
unsure of his future. "Wake up, children.
We must walk into the forest...to cut wood."

The sky was still dark, no hint of dawn.

The father and step-mother gave the children

two little rolls of blue-specked bread, Gretel
put hers in her apron. Hansel crumbled his
to crumbs in his pocket, crumbs he dropped
while he walked. All the while, he stared at the hut
as much as he could, to be sure to savor
the last image of it. Till his father said,
“What, boy, are you looking at? Walk.” The family
wound their way deep into the forest till
each hill and tree seemed unfamiliar
and strange. At last they came to a clearing.

“Wait here, children. We will come back for you.”

This time the parents went to a dead tree
and tied a log to a branch, hoping
the children would take its knocking in the wind
for their father’s chopping. “We won’t be far away,”
the parents said, “Just lie down and take a nap
by the fire.” The children did as they were told,
hoping if they were good their parents would come
back for them. As the day closed, the trees’ shadows
lengthened into black bars across the clearing.

The moon rose but no bread crumbs glowed from the ground

For the birds of the forest had eaten them.

Hansel began to cry, “How will we get home?

Now, we will be eaten by wolves or starve.”

and Gretel replied, “Don’t give up, Hansel.

Together we will make it.” They were so lost

that any direction they chose to take

was just the same. Gretel picked a way

and set out with Hansel by her side.

Gretel shared the roll she held in her apron,

the bread’s mold deepening from blue to green

in feathery splotches. After the first day

they felt things were becoming familiar.

By the second, they feared they’d be lost forever.

By the third they spied a light straining through the dusk.

Hansel and Gretel rushed forward led

by hunger, not thinking of robbers,

goblins or ghosts. And at last they reached the door.

A sugar-laced shortbread stoop, studded

with glassy strawberries. The children stopped.

Here was a house with a cake roof and bread walls,
sprayed with syrup jewels, dressed in braids of white
powder. And on its roof a gargoyle wind vane,
made from clear blue sugar, spins itself
round and round any which way, wind or none.

The children pressed against the house with wet mouths,

Hansel pulled down a bit of the ginger eave,
while Gretel picked off beads of honey
that wreathed a clear sugar window pane.

Their stomachs jumped at the fresh shock of food.

Their faces grew a little green, and at once
they looked up to the door, their ears pricked
by the creak of an old woman's spindly shanks,
her long fingers of one hand splayed against
the door, those of the other wrapped around
a pitted knobby cane so close in color
and curl to her own digits that it looked like
a sprawling sixth finger, a spider
of a woman. Her nose arched and sprung from
her face, and ended in a oily wart,
that often opened to reveal a gluey eye.

She seemed a rag knotted with sticks, spangled with hair.

Her human eyes were small and red, and saw
little better than the deadened one
at the end of her snout. She sniffed and pried
about to manage her house. “Who’s there?” she shouts,
“nibbling on my house?” With no inkling nor whiff
of anything amiss, she thinks, *“It’s the breeze, the breeze,
blows twigs and leaves against my ginger door,”*

Yet, the children won’t miss a chomp of their munching
hoping for only a little more time
to see what they can cram inside their stomachs.
Again the old woman drags and scuttles her limbs
to the door and shouts, “Who’s there nibbling on my house?”

“The breeze blows twigs and leaves against my ginger door,”

she began to think – but oh: the old woman
had caught scent of poor Hansel and Gretel.

With a sweet smile she said, “Children,
I won’t harm you. Help me with the cooking
and cleaning. I will feed you very well.”

The children, homeless, did not want to starve
to death in the forest. She fed them
pancakes shaped like little men glistening
with honey and apples. Full, they fell asleep.

“Wake up, you lazy bitch,” the old woman shrieked.

She yanked Gretel’s sheets and shook her by her shoulders,

“You must help me with my cooking. You must
fatten up your brother, that I may eat him.”

Gretel cried as she swept and gathered wood
for the deep brick oven. She soon found Hansel
caged in a chicken coop with empty bowls
around it. “She’s fattening you up to eat you.”

Hansel found a small finger-bone on the floor
of the coop and used it whenever
the near-sighted old woman would ask him
to hold out his finger to check his fatness.

Day after day the old woman shrieked, “Still too thin.”

As the weeks went by the old woman grew tired
of waiting, and prepared to eat the children.

She set Gretel to kneading the dough.
The old woman heated the oven. "Come here,
young girl and tell me if the oven is hot
enough." But the girl had divined
the old woman's design and replied,
"I don't know how hot it should be. Show me how
to tell." The old woman scoffed and spit and bent
her head into the oven. With a running start,
Gretel shoved her in and closed the door.
but just before, the woman's nose spit out its eye
which glowered at Gretel all the while
till with a sizzle and squeak it burst
as the woman spun and shrieked in the blistering heat
till her charred remains popped and spattered
in a corner. Gretel freed Hansel from his cage.

The children wandered back into the forest.

They had no idea where to go and they walked
the woods with what food they had taken
from the old woman's cake and candy house.
The first week the children joked in earned hope.
The second week they began counting

the days their stores of food would last. The third week
they had eaten their last. Tired, they soon came
to a stream. The children began to lose hope,
since they could see no means of crossing --
no bridge, no boat, and neither of them could swim.

The children lay down at the bank and fell asleep.

When they woke they saw a white duck wading.

Gretel spoke in a kind voice to the duck:

“White duck, my brother and I are stuck.

Will you take us to the other side?”

The duck replied, “Climb on my back. I’m glad
to take you across.” In what seemed a long time
for such a short distance Hansel and Gretel
reached the other side, its ground strewn with apples.

But they found they were no longer hungry.

They came to a house, a model of their own home
but beaming and strong, with candied plums,
and mums, on the kitchen table. The air swirled with hums
and hugs of their own Mom. They lay in their clean beds,

the smooth sheets beneath their fingers and soon
fell asleep both with a dream of their real mother.

My poem is done, see the rat run.

Catch it and strip off its fur.

Rip out its tail and sew up its hide,
and have a new hat for your afternoon ride.

We Will Lose Our Home

Yappy Otti slept by the hearth and woke
to crunch a crick in his neck, bend and twist
by the crackling charcoal. He cleared his throat
and spoke: "Sister Pinaa, quit your sweeping.
Gather your skirts and kneel besides me;
dust and dirt-blooms can wait till later."

I h a d a d r e a m:

Off out far, in a sweep of cooing woods,
a cloud-castle plunged deep into the ground
splintering rock as a wedge in wood,
squeezing the very worms out from the earth,
curling the leaves and trees into the sky,
like a puff of smoke from Daddy's pipe.
That's my dream, Pinaa. What's it mean, Pinaa?

White Cap

an imitation of the Icelandic legend of the same name recorded in Jon Arnason's Icelandic

Legends

A neighbor-girl, a neighbor-boy
always trick-tripping one another.
Everyday anything she see she takes
as another of his pranks.

Another day sinks, lapping at the meadows:
a late trip along a pathway to the churchyard,
little girl skip-tripping by the graveyard...
in the blue gloam on a tomb, a thin gray fellow.
Perched on his head – a little white cap.

Yellow dusk – little miss tsks,
“I’m not afraid of you...Neighbor-boy!”
swift she whisks away the little white cap
“So there!” snot-nosed trotting all the way home.

She lifts the rosy garden gate stick–pricking her finger,
and with the winds a waft of her blood wakes
like bait in water: a certain crypt gives a sniff.

She kisses her mother and father, and tumbles to her room
showing her dolly what she nicked from the tomb.

Out the fold of her apron she picks
the stiff linen hat and from it falls
earth, and maggot husks years-dead-old.
She starts, and keeps the secret in a little drawer.

Away in bed, she keeps a watch on the shadows
roaming on the walls. And riding on the winds,
a spirit makes for what it knows is its own:
“Give me back my hat, little girl.”
She piles deep beneath her quilts and snores.

On the pink dawn she yawns, and clap-snapping
locks her windows -- tightened hook and claw.
She tells mother and father about the hat,
and they say, “You must take it back.”

Neighbor-girl never again will go hat-nicking,
for each every night the same fright seethes,
“GIVE ME BACK MY HAT, LITTLE GIRL!”
Its breath-must sends up her spine -- dots of mold.

She holds her dolly ever tighter, her tears drip-dripping.

And when across her brow the early light smears
she begs the parish father, "Is there something to fear!"
and he says, "You must take the hat back."
and as the night gloomed, she took the path back.

Mother and father along, she went to right her wrong
and with her throng she shook-shivered to the tomb
and approached the thin gray fellow, "Here's your hat,
so there!" And the gray fellow replied with a slap
that dropped her dead, "So there!"

Winter Lure

Do you really want to follow outside?

Past the car-port leaning by those bushes,
just go past the back-yard garden, and you'll see
figures flashing in the darkness, skating
on the frozen creek-top wishing you there
with them in the night confusion, waiting,
seeking *you* to come to *them*, a playmate.

Put your slippers on and keep the lights off,
(you don't want to wake your parents, do you?)

slide the sliding glass door open -- Quiet.

-- Now you *do* know for sure your dog's asleep?

Tip-toe by the ice-flecked swing set – nighttime
keeps fewer friends than daytime, hates you even.

Did you forget the Darkness, dear?

She's a mother who eats her own children.

-- Walk a little closer to the forest.

Early morning rise, the police arrive

-- fingers frozen at attention -- working
wrenching from the water's powdered bank-side
tiny children's slippers -- winter stiffened.

Local Disturbance

A wrath, Raleigh, great trap threads

power lines through black lollipop pines:

A wraith takes shape, screams in sheets – rakes
through the streets, anger rearing behind,

HAS – NOT – NOTICED – YOU –YET:
rips cars, rapes priests, popping sphincters with its feet
reeking in worm-wrought shits leaking
from its teats, feeding on stillborn fetus meat.

Mouthed-claws froth, rot songbirds
with their touch, guts flushed in fury.

Botched murders gush, spurting rust.

A ghastr, horned-masts, roams free,

rends trees, crushed heads beneath its knees.

At sight from far it seems a car - no, a boulder -
no a barge, so large and you see that's just its arm
garroting a girl with her tights as it holds her.

Moldered eyes swollen, sworn to hoards
of hate-mated swarms – too late it warns
of its kindred to come heaving under curdled tons
of daughters, sons, their quivering skins shorn.

Hungered and forlorn, ill with furor,
it's fraught -- dashing buildings to dusty lots,
bursting in sores while it grows: pocked crow-pecked
thighs billowing with flies – curds of pus, trembling hot.

The Straw, the Coal, and the Bean

- from the story "Strohalm, Kohle und Bohne" collected by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

There once was a poor old woman, she cut
the hulls of beans and with her scythe she slit
a length of straw, cooking as usual.

Hands creaking, she clutched a coal from the ground
to kindle the fire, yet off Coal tumbled.
-- Startled, a bean and straw evade her grasp.

To the cold outer-hearth the coal invades,
through the bramble of ashes the straw cut
and out from the cauldron the bean tumbled,
tooting, "I saw all my brothers as she slit
their throats!" Straw whipped, "She burned mine to the ground!"

Coal thought to burn was not unusual.

Coal seared, "Our luck's better than usual.
It's the gears of death our good fortune evades.
Let's make our escape from our native ground
and go where we'll be neither burned nor cut."
In the branch-bundle fence they found a slit,

down a slope and through a field they tumbled,

and through a copse a brook's currents tumbled
with the three drawn, the sound unusual
and through a copse, the stream, a silver slit
bridgeless and rapid among rocks invades
and trudging closer towards it Straw, Coal and Bean cut
until they approached the edge of the ground.

In a flash Straw's body bridged the ground.
Coal flickered through him and in they tumbled
tossed in the waters, extinguished and cut.

But Bean was timid, tense as usual,
so hadn't boarded. He saw the end he evaded,
and laughing with shameful-joy he ripped a slit

in his side. Ill-humor teemed from this slit
leaving Bean doubled in pain on the ground.

With luck a traveling tailor invades
on Bean's track, since in the path he tumbled.

-- Startled by a sight so unusual --
the caring tailor, struck, mended the cut.

Bean evaded that in which the others tumbled.

But his side slit, leaving him rolling on the ground.

Now all beans have seams, their usual cut.

A Wig-Maker For Marie Antoinette

These marble halls, these private quarters
of the Queen Marie, these private halls
echo hundreds of muffled whispers
and the stiff clack of my wooden heels.

I hurry, looking to neither side
carrying in my hands a long tray
bearing a paper-cone powder mask
and on it, a painting of a snail
sliding along a garden trail.

My back brushes along the fabric,
golden-traced, wallpaper of Her room
in the shadows of Her dressing room
I proceed to the head chambermaid
and lay the powder mask on her tray
and she the same to the tire-woman,
and she to the under-tire-woman
who lays it on a small red table
beside a chair and a bright mirror.

Without ever having seen Her face
I back out the room as they prepare
to powder (pink) a wig curled for Her
by one of the other, more senior,
forty-seven royal wig-makers
knotting hairs, shuffling in their corners.
I am in charge of the powder-mask
and on it, a painting of a snail
sliding along a garden trail.

Cyhydedd Hir

How do you know this
is not the one tryst
for which you have wished?
-- your hands clenching
How can you stay home
silent and alone
drinking on your own?
-- your foot tapping

When that man, right there
with sweat-salted hair
waving, curling, fair
casts his slow eyes.
leaving messages
leaving packages
he waits, he ages
between your sighs.

Restaurant Porn

He's washing them cucumbers
with his mouth open,
now using both hands, kneading
a sticky-moist rag
between his red, cracked knuckles.

Storming Out

Brisk steps whip
papers and dust
in their wake.
I hate you and
want you to die.

I Want to Kill You

Clicking and chirping
on the phone,
you let me slip behind you
to take out the garbage.

Moving Away

Where it not for these ...
fragile bodies of ours,
this farewell
would not end ruined
by such hard grief.

Moving On

Expecting your call,
I stayed up for a while.
I grew tired and went to bed.
-- Why wasn't I up for your call?
I stayed up for a while.
I grew tired and went to bed.

Der Falke

Brilliant and stalwart,
a falcon of a man
strides toward me
his eyes shining like hooks
--- precise and gleaming ---
glances away from my gaze
in distaste
and kisses the hand
of a plump painted woman.

Book of Hours:

A Workday

6:41 am

Rapid-eye-movements
carry me past early light
riding an ox-cart
to marry the ash-urn king ---
this plain ordinary life.

6:56 am

Morning finds its way
around the edges of my curtains.
I look before me,
a yellow hue stains the walls
everywhere the light gets through.

7:30 am

Through my blinds I see,
between the lines, a cloud
in the wind streaming
out of sight from my window ---
leaving me here with this life.

7:33 am

Light shines behind
and in front of my window,
filtered by
grime and a cartoon sticker,
its edges peeling more each year.

7:45 am

Can I imagine me
caught in some city, fledging,
just a shadow-box
stacked in piles of others
kept in a lattice of streets?

8:06 am

Forgetting that strand of strain
and difficult office-people,
I stop for a time,
driving to work, to get mad
at rush hour.

8:36 am

--- quiet on the computer

still behind the bookcase
with papers in hand
in a room without windows
containing myself ---

8:57 am

That picture frame's glass
with leaves reflected in it,
their tips quivering,
is as close to the open air
as I might feel --- this office.

9:39 am

I sit in my chair always
and touch
things off the chair,
outside the building
and down no street in this world.

9:41 am

Though I was supposed to be ...
playing a game with those boys,

those boys who hated me,
I stayed by my Mom and asked
to touch a dead crow.

9:55 am

Boys used to bleat pop
songs at camp to annoy me
with that and their claims
the stains on the cliff were paint
and not from a young brave's blood.

10:30 am

For so long I thought of that
as having happened only
seven years ago,
though I've just learned to say ten ---
now it's been twenty years.

10:45 am

I think of that time
before this silk tie,
and what I'm to do ---

corners of my mouth squeezing
tight, till going-home time.

10:51 am

I'd wave my toy bear's paw bye,
I'd say bye too, just us two
--- facing in my room ---
another school-day in tears ...
Stalling, I'd play sick.

11:36 am

My fingers stroking my hair
like yarn in a loom
at my desk, subsided ...
thinking, weaving my locks
into tangles, knots.

12:00 pm

Lunch -- a short hour to myself,
no matter how I use it,
feels wasted.

My room shines with the light

swimming in my eyes.

12:10 pm

Still, these are my hands,
and this face, it's the same face

I had before,
but this look is not the look
with which I was born.

12:40 pm

I hate to go back
to filing and courtesies,
temporary help ---
the old one cutting me off,
the other one's strange looks.

12:45 pm

It thumps in my chest
each day when the phone rings, or
when driving my car.
I check the locks several times ---
this plain ordinary life.

1:10 pm

In the corner of my eye
I catch a glimpse of my face
plastic, distracted
pixels flashing across it
caught in my computer screen.

1:28 pm

My time hums and rings
in short bursts with a tin pang.
squealing and whining
through carpeted cubicles,
as I rub my first wrinkle.

2:03 pm

Holding these papers
tight -- the whole of my body,
all day, cupped and ceramic,
cracks as I stand
to look at my coat from home.

2:27 pm

In momentary distress
I beg my difficult bag,
“just open normal”
truly concerned with it ---
stress in my momentary job.

2:31 pm

No matter how much
I iron or tuck, my clothes
will wrap around me.
My hair gathers, as always,
in forks of sweat and tangles.

2:43 pm

I stand back, buying
Christmas trees with my parents,
and watch them pinch dead
needles from fronds, as they talk
of building a home for their retirement.

2:50 pm

“Things are like this,”
versus “this is that,” is how
I like to say things.
I know it’s like their gravestone,
that house they’ve built out there ... oh.

3:17 pm

Now the present, a pinpoint,
stops far short of the time
I’ve lived, but without it
this chain of periods
would snap and scatter.

3:41 pm

While on the adding machine
--- work --- wishing my life away
livens my memory.
I relive a childhood crush:
Jacob on the bus.

4:29 pm

My love will show me,
yellow and wild, a plum
from my childhood
and for this
I'll love him.

4:52 pm

Routed in foot traffic
to trail him closely,
his head bobs before me
with the bristles of his hair
whisking through the whistling of cars.

5:16 pm

Rather than go out,
I search my window and see
white on white blow gray
sifting through those black branches ---
this plain ordinary life.

5:26 pm

Why should I write of the sea

when it's far down I – 40,
two hours away
past that cat-food factory,
through numbers of towns?

5:30 pm

It's all inside, here, for me.
Even if those clouds do stream
with puffs in their wake,
here there's my sweet old kitty
and all the years we've spent here.

6:08 pm

The world of this day,
none other than such a loss
as time and my youth
spreads and folds over dinner
and follows me to my room.

6:20 pm

Who can say my heart
is not just as moved

as any great life
that chooses to leave its room
and roam this world?

6:32 pm

I'll always love me,
first, before anyone else.
This grave selfishness
I'll present for just myself ---
a special gift to my heart.

6:44 pm

Nothing on this earth
issues as sweet as the note
sent by me to me
feeling gentle to myself
on this ordinary day.

6:50 pm

I spent all that time
copying those foreign names
--- Amida Sutra ---

but it lies crushed, unfinished
under a bowl of popcorn.

6:53 pm

The book I have read
and lavished time on daily,
monogatari,
now it just sits there idled
by my condition, scattered.

7:04 pm

Raleigh this sunset,
I didn't see or question
the darkness outside.
Such is the thickness in here ---
happiness in my daydream.

7:24 pm

With my good old cat,
listening to the house-sounds
and those from outside ---
a primate and feline

at once alike on the bed.

8:01 pm

A mere spectacle,
that man always staying home
for his cat to watch ---
the sofa or chair-leaning,
his long television shows.

8:33 pm

When I'm not wanted
I look, without looking, out
my window thinking
of these toys --- pretend people
I place in my painted world.

8:42 pm

My parakeet goes
"Beep, beep, beep, beep," he's so cute ...,
"Oh, he's crying!"
Why is it cute when he cries?
--- as I pretend to squish him.

8:56 pm

Into the nighttime,
the evening's changing colors
show on the curtains.

In here, electronic lights
tremble throughout the bedroom.

9:20 pm

Looking in books for comfort,
I stumble upon
a familiar story
of love and anguish
all by myself.

9:58 pm

A playful fun gift
just given in jest, someday,
will bring me to tears.
I look at a children's book
I received on this Christmas.

10:53 pm

A plank creaks in the middle
of my floor, bowed in the middle
by my pacing
the same path over the past
decade and a half I've lived here.

Unicorn

The fogged spawn of a goat and jackal,
unruffled and ready,
shoots his shaggy hoof out from the forest
his horn gleaming pearled green,
netted by his mane, a cobweb
of beetles and weeds.
Wagging his gore-beaded beard,
he bellows with rows of teeth
grinning cheekless and bare to his ears.
His coat a shivering oil slick, he leaves the tree trunks
glimmering in his path. At first dark, he comes,
for there is one child, weak and weeping
alone in the streets, who will soon meet
the grooved teeth
of the unicorn.