

Like Wind Loves a Window

By Laura Sims

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Andrea Baker

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“And what if wind were a window / what if I loved / like wind / loves a window / And what if I ate a window. I could see right through you like a window” (20-21).

Baker’s work acts like a curious window, one that gives us glimpses—visually stunning, strange, haunting—of a landscape that seems both deeply interior and otherworldly at the same time. “Babies wake from their pegs” (35), “sheep dissolve into mountains” (50), and “hands [were] clinging to themselves everywhere” in this realm (3). We stand looking at the surreal images, but before we can touch anything, we are whisked away to another scene. Our guide does not allow touch—touch would bring unbearable pain, and the narrator seems newly returned from a painful place. Sight, alone, is traumatic, but at least she can look without leaving her safe perch. Her compelling journey through this foreign landscape to a (possibly) new start drives the book, and leads us deep into strange territory along with her.

From the first page we enter a kingdom ruled by stillness, as if we have been locked inside “the former yellow house” (from the poem, “House”), and like the house, we “hang / and hang” (24-5). Immobility abounds: “An echo is a mountain,” she states, but an echo should move with the air, bouncing against surfaces, staying constantly in motion. “At the park the children came running to sit in the laps of their mothers” (1); why should children sit at a park? Also: “The parking lot stood still, full of cars, the metal rising and expanding on that warm spring day”

(1). The motion that exists here is restrained—how far can the metal expand if it is trapped within the car’s frame? The narrator completes this frozen, lonely world by remarking: “...a still fan is even some form of weeping. And everything arrested must be sad” (1). She makes it obvious that the motionlessness is compulsory, and that the objects themselves mourn their frozen state.

The narrator’s childlike vision and voice persist within this claustrophobic atmosphere, bringing relief and hope:

gilda is a white-throat child
a thrown open door-child
a missing in the attic child
(6)

This could be a child speaking—her use of language is so playful and true. Her vivid imagination comes across in the following:

gilda you are a wind-sweep
you’re a hybrid monk
in a cloak

and a human head composed of leaves
(9)

This voice introduces us to Gilda, a mysterious character to whom the narrator reacts with a combination of fear, adoration, protectiveness, and ambivalence. The fear is entirely understandable; Gilda seems to be a dangerous entity, one described as a “lay assassin” with “no hands” (6), and also as a “heavy needle” (18). But she is “a white-throat child” and cherished as “a missing in the attic child,” too (6). It seems possible that Gilda is the manifestation of whatever trouble the narrator faced; Gilda may be the object of her loss and, simultaneously, the

agent of her possible transcendence of loss. The two have a symbiotic relationship; the narrator expects Gilda to transform her: “put your tongue upon me,” the narrator demands, “ghost out my sight / inside the double sided wall” (7). But Gilda herself wants transformation. Her “single-neck / remains uncolored” (14), as if she is not fully made. Although they depend on each other for existence, and possible transfiguration, neither one seems capable of helping the other.

Ultimately, Gilda disappears. One “gilda” poem begins with the line “Empty has a shell,” perhaps a twist on the saying, “empty as a shell” (28). In either case, the implication is that Gilda lacks substance; perhaps this is due to her half-formed state. The surface is there, but surface is not enough for a life in the world: “gilda is surface / collapsing / smaller / than its compartment” (30). The last line and word of that poem, “compress,” says it all—Gilda folds in on herself until she disappears from the world. Was Gilda the obstacle preventing the narrator’s progress? Was what the narrator needed from Gilda her *absence*? When Gilda is finally gone, the narrator begins inching toward a new place, however slowly and tentatively.

In the poem “Migration,” whose title implies movement and change, the narrator reveals that “something leaks me sick and does not come back as an echo,” leaving her “disquiet” (34). Does this refer to Gilda, whose disappearance just precedes the poem? The narrator’s admission is paired with hopefulness, though, when “from the smoke something is rising / past doubt and in the sure-blue / sky” (36). We do not know *what* is rising, but the upward direction and “sure-blue sky” sound promising. The narrator herself flies away at the end of this poem, and she concludes, “we never saw the day worsen,” but is this hope and transcendence, or is it merely a turning away from pain, a half-hearted flight (36)? The latter seems more probable, especially when the

act was involuntary. “I know I’m intended and I do and lift,” she says; she was merely following orders (36). Also, “we never saw the day worsen” leans in the negative direction, lending credence to the latter reading; instead of saying “we saw the day brighten,” the narrator chooses “never” and “worsen” to describe her relief.

In the final section of the book, “body,” the narrator longs for escape: “the body lunges / toward the shadow world” (42). The surfaces around her “tarnish,” the oranges “have gone / all the way to bronze,” yet she remains trapped in this stagnant environment (48). She ends up by “staring into brick / as if it were a window” (49). One could read this as her final surrender, which would put an end to all hope of transcendence. But it could also be read as the dissolution of illusion—finally, the narrator is walled off from fantasy and must look at and into *herself*. She chides herself, “as if you could leave / from my simple hands,” acknowledging that she cannot escape from herself, she will not let herself go (49). This seems to be a direct response to her body “lung[ing] toward the shadow world” in previous lines (42). Shortly after this, in “Song,” the narrator dreams (literally) of attempting suicide, “filling the pockets with stones and jumping,” but the attempt is rendered obsolete when she lands “on the oil river, gliding” (51). Something has shifted, even in her dreams, to self-preservation and survival.

The book’s tentatively hopeful concluding pages confirm this shift. “A window waits to be fed,” as if it would devour the speaker—but it is met with resistance: “we always almost / all slip open and through / but will not slip” (53). And finally, the dream world that has held her captive breaks down: “the sheep disappear... / the high window shutters and blows / out like a pilot” (56). The speaker now “walk[s] into morning from off / the bed” (56). She leaves the

darkness, the temptation to “slip through” behind, but perhaps only temporarily. The final word of the book is “bed,” not “morning,” reminding us that the morning will eventually fade to night. This is a start for the narrator, not a journey’s end, but ultimately it seems positive; even if the last word is “bed,” the final *image* is her walking into morning light.

It is easier to delineate the world of *Like Wind Loves a Window* than it is to capture its poignant beauty. One must see the sparsely placed words on the page, islands amidst the overwhelming blankness, and read the lines that resist comfort and resolution, however warmed they are by the narrator’s undeniably human voice. She compels us to feel her loss, and to understand why she resides in fantasy. Baker’s narrator speaks like a preternaturally wise child, one who struggles to put pain into words. We are reading the few phrases and fragments that have broken through, each one essential, to create a gorgeous, extraordinary space.

View an extract online here in *How2*:

http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v2_2_2004/current/baker/index.htm

Laura Sims’s first book of poetry, *Practice, Restraint*, recipient of the 2005 Fence Books Alberta Prize, was published in November. She was recently awarded a JUSFC / NEA Creative Artist Exchange Fellowship to spend six months in Japan in 2006. She has published two chapbooks: *Bank Book* (Answer Tag Press) and *Paperback Book* (3rd Bed), and her poems have appeared in the journals *First Intensity*, *26*, *How2*, *6X6*, and *3rd Bed*, among others. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin, where she teaches creative writing and composition.