

Marilyn Hacker

GLOSE

*A child, I knew how sweet departure was
from having never left the skiff
of hills, split open any horizon
but the rain's when it closed off the morning*
Guy Goffette, "O Caravels"
Translated by Marilyn Hacker

Staying put provides the solidest
comfort as daylight diminishes at four:
the street becomes, again, a palimpsest
of hours, days, months and years that came before
and what is better was, and what is best
will be its distillation. In the pause
when blinds are drawn, when tea is brewed, when fast-
falling evening makes lamplight seem more
private and privileged, I can be still because
a child, I knew how sweet departure was

and planned, extravagantly, voyages,
encounters, divagations, chronicles
of travel, unpronounced truths, bright lies.
Imagined stonework of facades, and smells
not of tinned soup or ink. Gratuitous
enormities could be enacted, if . . .
Without constructing model caravels
of balsa-wood or plastic, I saw skies
between the masts, inferred a different life
from never having left the skiff

moored at a dock of dark mahogany
claw feet of overstuffed post-war club chairs
whose own piled or brocade upholstery
recalled cities that were not anywhere
inscribed in that apartment's memory.
There was only one window, opening on
an alley, garbage cans, one tree, a square
of sky on which the day's calligraphy
scribbled in slate-gray rain, anticipation
of hills, split open any horizon.

Now, even tawdry dreams turn polyglot,

suggestion of the wished-for western wind.
Two syntaxes, more tenses, alternate
merging reflections that are less than kind
(and more than kin) into a better plot
that has to do with transformation. Waking
was easy. The street outside was wet: it rained
all night. The sky's washed clean, and I am not
anticipating any leavetaking
but the rain's when it closed off the morning.