

3-1-2021

Objects/Slow Hours

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

OBJECTS/SLOW HOURS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Camila E. Saavedra

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Camila E. Saavedra, and entitled Objects/Slow Hours, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Anne Castro

Denise Duhamel

Julie Marie Wade, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 1, 2021

The thesis of Camila E. Saavedra is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

DEDICATION

for Ili, Dash & all the other pieces

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thefts:

lines from “A Halo Over the Hospital”

— Maggie Nelson, Something Bright, Then Holes

language from “The brain within its groove”

— Emily Dickinson

p. 26 “we do not even have a common word for this deprivation”

— Rosemary Garland-Thomson, Staring: How We Look

Thanks:

to Iliana (who is always living), Irma, Julio, Esther, and Adrian;

to Alex, Krista, and Michael for such deep, distinct loves;

to Jeanne, Eric, and Peggy; to Julie, a phenomenon;

and to Dashiell for being the most insistent creature I know.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

OBJECTS/SLOW HOURS

by

Camila E. Saavedra

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Julie Marie Wade, Major Professor

OBJECTS/SLOW HOURS is a collection of experimental poetry that aims to illustrate the reconfiguration of identity post-trauma. Using spatial play and non-linear storytelling, these poems follow the experiences of a chronic cancer patient through various cycles of illness and recovery. This narrative is told in three interwoven parallel structures, allowing the speaker to project consciousness into objects and animals, while simultaneously revisiting instances of isolated suffering and reflecting on medical treatment procedures.

OBJECTS/SLOW HOURS's literary influences include Maggie Nelson, Lisa Glatt, and Audre Lorde, whose illness narratives have similarly confronted ideas of embodiment, subjectivity/objectivity, and social (in)visibility. In this collection, the speaker addresses major tenets of disability theory, such as materialism, the cost of the medical commitment to healing, and the role of disability in the larger fabric of society.

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INEVITABILITIES/SELF-PORTRAIT

Some things can't be helped: the length of hallways;
waiting; plants when they're fake, or worse, real;
the slow stir of hours; glass disturbing heat; doors
like wings on the spines of buildings; constructing;
shadows merging; beeping; breaking; thinking
of loneliness; curtains; chairs in a row; windows;
the kind of silence that rumbles; chemo; stasis; stair-
wells; floors again; staring or looking; faces; bodies;
neuropathy; discerning objects; weakness; waking;
mirrors; showers; sweating.

TELLING IT/ANAMNESIS

I.

To figure out what really happened,

I must admit I was barely there.

It happened how everyone else says it did.

In that bit of living,

there was no sound

since there was no one to hear it.

Some endured.

I know this, skeptically,

asking for evidence.

Those things happened

in the same air that suspends pennies,

in the seconds

that precede anemic questions.

For a whole year, I rarely held. And later, became forgetful.

I took it as a tick—an overreliance.

Fear can be known,
but not from the comfort of standing beside it,

from its tranquilizing thumb-strokes to the palm,
picking up sweat brewed between fingers.

All hands, I figure, are like that—
tightly gripped.

II.

To pick out truth is to decipher dreams.

In one, the house burns down. The dog and I had gone walking.

My mother tells me this is favorable.

Death dreams make us live longer. I'd imagined into someone's body

idle breath

just by sleeping.

III.

Later, I'd collect cancer.

Ripening

seeds in apomixis.

We do not stare on purpose. We seek the invisible.

And it takes years

to lose the shadow of baldness.

I became intolerant of wonder,

offers of sympathy, parallelisms.

Doesn't "I'm happy to" defeat the purpose?

There are also records keeping track of what I can't talk about.

The body withholds so much sometimes you can see it:

in 10-inch scars that run down chests,

knotting around the bellybutton like baited hook;

in the catheter line popping out of my neck like a vein enraged.

It's true, I'm always angry.

Is that something the port did?