

Top to bottom

Second storey windows.
Light for the making.
Light on rapid fingers,
twilling silk and wool.
Sharp eyes to make
best bombazine
for wealthy widows
wearing crucifixes
weighed with sorrow.

Down the staircase,
shadows sleep together.
Some will die too young
to learn the weaving,
dream of service,
inheriting a widow's
cast-off weeds,
to wear with pride
and tinplate fairings.

Ground floor – fire
when there are wages,
cold when windows flap
with sacking, darkness
lit by an open door.
In bad times, hardship
haunts the room, leaves
little for their bread,
potatoes, tea and gin.

The women call
on Spanish priests
who buy their cloth,
send whispered prayers
for 'light that shineth
in the darkness'.

Kathy Gee