

PLACES

There are large places
where no one lives.
A sad dust covers like pollen
and no mirror can reflect
such vast silences.

Time becomes a miser here,
a gray cloud hanging,
giving no answer, no rain.
Even stars have deserted
and birds send no messages.

Maybe the flies remember.
Maybe worms or drying weeds.
Maybe only mice
have dreams here.

Now strangers pass by
and their eyelids flicker
sensing lost biographies.

-- Leslie Woolf Hedley

Novato CA

ARRIVING AT MANDALAY

As we leave the boat
between the infantrymen and the stevedores,
our pretty white man's faces
draw all the horsecart drivers
as if by magic.

We choose two of them, delicately scarred.
They lead us to an enamel'd gypsy cart,

pink roses on black.
The stink of sweat and shrimp meal fades. Night parts
its drapes, plush as painted-tongue.
The city behind it loafs,
block after block: parks,
mansions, markets, villages in parts.
Lights give way to candles, candles to pitch dark.

When the cart speeds up,
the door claps. When it reels, it sounds like a bar
being dragged, its flaps swinging.

The air is oversweet champagne.
Soon we are drunk on it.
We pretend we are falling out and laugh.
Suddenly I realize we are running out of map;

the city blocks sprawl
but they quarter orchards and fields. We are out
in the country. The laughter
has moved to the front of the cart.
They are taking us
to a tract where they will rob us and flee.
This fear is a silly fear but it is real.

"How far is it?" we shout,
for different reasons. There, there around the bend,
they point, as frightened by our force
as I was frightened of them.

After we have dined,
I am fired by wine to confess my fear.
The fear is gone but the power lasts; I savor it.

TOURISTS SEE HIM SHAVE

Our apartment is at the head
of Memorial Bridge. Bay windows lean
out over traffic, Virginia leans its shores
against the bellies of the windows.
The batiks he bought in Baltimore
have turned the room into a tent;
creatures carved from jade and flowers with gold veneers

contend from backgrounds of wild
disagreeable colors. The patch
that overlooks the Potomac's palmy fronds
is always open; only the walls
have curtains. We are painting the bathroom
purple. It is pure oil paint
dries slowly. He shaves in the front room. He stands

at the fireplace, shaving mug
on the mantel, and consults his face
in the overmantel mirror. The second floor
is eye-proof. A double-decker bus
rounds the bridge and forty tourists gorged
on cherry blossom views stare
at a naked half-god throned in lacquerware.