

## The Room

Outside, the Asian night ripens. Staying  
fresh here is defiance of nature. Your allocated  
flat, air-conditioned, with standard fittings,  
seals you in. You fake freshness

in the big room lit for this moment  
by one bedside lamp, only a room, to which  
your lives retreat only at night. You  
coast toward sleep, hair

flounced on the pillow. Undeniable  
age fingers you and this pedlar  
of British culture to foreign parts with whom  
you threw in your lot: he goes

to bolt the doors (against  
the suppurative and bladed Asian night), replace  
a blanket over a child's thoughtless sleep, returns  
to this room your lives can't fill.

Above the racket of the air-conditioner  
owls or some night-things  
exchange loneliness, dogs disturb.  
He looks out: lights break the abrupt dark

from a hospital, and, at sea, fishing-boats.  
You two have your salary and allocated lives  
to seal you off from the hopeless Asian world.  
The light out, you stranded in sleep

the indestructible cockroach,  
lover of darkness, rasps at its forage; flitting on walls  
in its vertical element the gecko's tongue, unhurting,  
(he imagines) lightfingers its prey, and him,  
awake at your side, his longings crumble about him.

HUGH UNDERHILL