

## Chinatown After Hours

No sign at the entrance, no bell,  
no fancy brass door knocker.  
It is open, or it is not.

Two pair of vacant eyes lay flat on bamboo mats,  
staring up at a huge red Chinese paper lantern.  
Hemmed in by stacks and rolls of mesmerizing  
bright textiles, a fat man slowly emits a wispy  
smoke trail from a thin black cigar as his woman  
nibbles Ritz crackers and peanut butter  
from a plain white porcelain platter.

Noises escape an unlit alcove, muffled chants  
mingling with the workings of sewing machines.  
More faintly, trumpets and tinkling bells.  
He runs a hand weakly through long, stringy  
hair, grunts; she blinks, turns her head.  
They simultaneously look beyond the gilded  
arched doorway—sounds and activities  
neither encouraging nor requesting their presence.  
Aware enough not to intrude where not welcome,  
she begins to button her blouse.  
My shoes, he says. My shoes.  
Was I wearing shoes when we came in?

It is 98° outside, heating the torrential rain,  
ebony dark three hours from morning,  
no means of transportation.  
Yet they must leave.  
The fat man wipes a hand across his face,  
glistening from sweat and rain.

In the distance, lights. Headlights?

*-Gene McCormick*