

On the way back to Beijing
our embassy car rushed wildly
through a succession of hamlets, forcing
bicycles off the road, dooryard
fowl to flap and fluster, and from
grandmother, bundled in her blue jacket
to take the pale sun, such a look!

Tired? Tired was not the word.
Getting sleepy in the warm car
I considered the Wall, the scale
of enterprise. A lock of hair had fallen
across my eyes. At last my brain
convinced my hand to move it.

That night I was honored by a banquet
in a room so cold I could see my breath.

A BOY GOES INTO THE WORLD

My brother rode off on his bike
into the summer afternoon, but
mother called me back
from the end of the drive:
“It’s different for girls.”
How that stung!

He’d be gone for hours, come back
with things: a cocoon, gray-brown
and papery around a stick;
a puff ball, ripe, wrinkled,
and exuding spores; owl pellets—
bits of undigested bone and fur;
and pieces of moss that might
have made toupees for preposterous
green men, but went instead
into a wide-necked jar for a terrarium.

He mounted his plunder on poster
board, gluing and naming
each piece. He has long since
forgotten those days and things, but
I, at last, can claim them as my own.