

Spring Comes to the Ming Tombs

The persimmons are gone,
those soft suns with
astringent skins and sweet
slippery meat that held
summer past first frost.

The trees are still bare,
though sparrows and finches--
singers of early green--
keep chorus there.

Along the road
peasants sell Chinese pears,
sallow skinned from cellars
dark as tombs.

Beyond the vermilion walls
acacias scatter buds,
and the forsythia blossoms
in tiny yellow butterflies.

Here where royalty once rode
in golden coaches, stone
horses and elephants keep vigil.

In their winter caves
the emperors and empresses
sleep on.