HAWTHORNS

At the Temple of Heaven
old men with tightened faces
sell sticks of small red haw-apples, pierced
by the dozen and glazed over fires. I buy them
like beads with my newly-changed money, fumbling
in cold, counting out coins and mixing
white breath with incense
of charcoal. My Chinese
cousins watch as I bite
the sweet skins, the tart fruit, full of seeds
hard as mahogany, clinging to each other
in carved families. Nini, the eldest,
looks into my face as we climb
the temple’s great stair and says in her soft
syllables: Those were the favorite
fruits of your aunt, our mother,
when she was still
with us. Do they grow in America
where you live, where once she lived as a girl?
Here, the same hawthorns bloom white in spring,
and when their petals fade, the harsh yellow
wind from the desert blows them
over our rooftops like fine ashes that fly
almost as far as the sea.