The black mouth opens in the white façade, our boat slides in, at first it’s dark in the tunnel, a motor hums, the little boat cuts the black water like a fin, we’re caught in a Moebius strip of song, closed curve, it must go on, and on, and suddenly, round the bend they come from some drenched honeycomb in which the poisoned bees are caught and spun, and now, they’re all around us, in the glowing artificial light, turning slowly on their stands, staring with the fixed and painted grin of dolls, a music box world that turns and turns, wound-up dolls and windmill blades, in a stupor of cheer and hidden gears, which hold them in a common grip, and as they spin, they seem to sing, because they’re made to seem to sing, the song is all the world they’re in—it’s a small world after all.

The walls breathe damp as our boat slides by cliché pagodas, cuckoo clocks, a Taj Mahal, grass skirts hula hula under ersatz palms—the curving tunnel moves us on, we sense dark waters churn below
as we pass the whirl of dressed-up dolls,
dressed as if for a costume ball, who spin
and sing, and sing and spin,

beguiling, infantile, and dead: each
with the same round head, wide eyes,
so clean and sweet—

as if below
the killing fields of history’s endless
wars, Elysium’s bright waterways
forever wind, filled with blissful

little dolls, androids all, in the singing
tunnels of the underworld (while
somewhere Disney’s frozen head
stares into the endless void);

a sign
reminds us to keep our heads down,
and our hands inside the boat,
as the walls close in, the dolls sing on,
dum dedum dum dum dedum,
dum dedum dum dum dedum . . .

Eleanor Wilner