

Our Neighbors, Ourselves

In the backbone of the Three Gorges Dam
34 million cubic yards of cement
continue to cure while mammoth lock doors
creak slowly open and closed
and pleasure ships and generators turn
under the apprehension of cloud burst.
The 660 kilometer dragon filled its belly
with waters of the mighty Yangtze
and thirty thousand years of human culture
let go its last breath beneath rising tears.

From thousands of small villages
and thirteen modern cities
over a million people were displaced, relocated—
China on the move like a moon.
Residents of the now underwater cities
were paid by the brick to demolish
their own factories, office buildings,
homes. Swinging sledge hammers,
wheeling carts, toting woven baskets,
they leveled neighborhoods, burying

the smells of rice and fish and vegetables,
incense and sex, sharpened pencils
and cut flowers; the sound of someone saying,
“Good morning, old master,”
to a grandfather repairing a chair, the yip
of a dog following children to school, the chatter
of friends hanging laundry on the porch—
all buried in a tide of dust, submerged.

When the last gates were closed
and the waters rose over smashed temples
and forgotten cloth dolls, scientists
recorded a wobble in the earth,
the slosh of mountains, the cry
of cranes looking for their nests.