

from Juked #7, Spring 2010

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HARD USAGE

I.

The Yangtze River flows slower
these days. Dammed: a concrete gag

set in its mouth and the usual swell
of what might or could begins to pool

behind it. For eight years the water
has risen where much else has fallen

down or behind: by turns it streams
blue, as if to undiscern itself from sky

and then again the brown of dirt, as if
its claim on the earth could be more clear.

II.

In the late years of early time,
those who pulled boats through
the ugliest shallows came down

from the hills and stacked bones
in white towers through the craft
wrecking shallows. Now all stacks

come down, and even those now fled
uphill still descend for work: mounting
rooftops with axes and hammers

they make way for the river. Old
houses, now hazards, clear out
top down. Their shingles, doorframes,

floor mats: gone. Where water
might have spattered their books,
they have simply moved them elsewhere.

III.

I have heard of the river's blind dolphins,
Braille-ing their way upstream and down

by their beaks, fins and flukes snapping
the surface where water ran thin. I have

also heard it said that sincerity comes
from the lack of the mouth, but it may well

be the eyes: like the dolphins, who treated
their portion more frankly than most;

who understood what it meant to disappear
without remainder, without relic.