

Jon Thompson

THRESHOLDS

In front of the temple there is a large bronze
gong with a long thick tassellated rope an officer looks down
into his viewfinder taking a picture of it he has approached its
threshold tentatively as a stranger beholding a strange place
without God or gods he has stopped before its dim interior
he wants to capture its foreignness for the future for
now he is still before the folding doors of the
entrance he is looking in to take away
the image of the tall brass incense tree
the story of ascending smoke which is his story a story
in which he does not exist a story in which the photographer of the photographer
does not exist a story in which the I that writes these lines does not exist
a story in which the photo fades with the smoking tree a story
in which the story gets in the way of the story that cannot be told

ABSOLUTION

What can we take from the past a past
that was never anything more than a succession
of marked and unmarked moments continuously flowing together
or flown each the ancestor to the other my ancestors purged
those deaths that death left behind so little so much
against the weight of darkness
a lifetime ago the winter light offered a kind of absolution
it drenched the stones of that city with a summery openness
in which stones could be seen as something more and less than stones
on one corner a monk and a nun stand by a building chanting
his head is shaved hers is hooded they
are swathed in long robes the woven basket at their feet
is full of alms holding onto short
paddle-drums they neither regard nor disregard the

people passing by but give witness to
those things beyond the eye
that define the complexion of each day
the vast tissue of connections that
decides each act their day nothing less than the open
acknowledgement of those unpayable debts a practice
like fully living or dying
like seeing or hearing for the first time
like the gift of giving or receiving freely
like the world suddenly
without sound or suddenly full of it

BLACK MARKET

Tokyo, 1946

In the burned-out open-air square there are
no stalls no animals cars or banners just thousands of men
some still in uniform some in partial uniforms
some in topcoats and fedoras some in chinese coats looking
for something that can't be found the disaster
evident from the piles of valuables spread on blankets
from a bird's eye view the man-clusters slowly drift
into new clusters the catastrophe has already
happened this is the post-apocalypse all the odd jumble of the past
the detritus of former lives is struggling
to be reborn in the buying and selling a new life everyone is looking
down see the one who squats on his haunches to
inspect a book see the tall man in black who refuses
to buy further back a white-hot light boils overhead
everyone is becoming less and less they are
fading not even becoming
a negative of themselves and in that bright light
the buildings are dissolving and that light
that unnatural musical light is breaking
in waves over a future which is unaware