

SAMPLER

*Notebook of Last Things*

*Also by Jon Thompson*

POETRY

The Book of the Floating World

Landscape with Light \*

Strange Country \*

ESSAYS

Fiction, Crime and Empire

After Paradise: Essays on the Fate of American Writing \*

*(\* published by Shearsman Books)*

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Jon Thompson

*Notebook of Last Things*

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Come, see real  
flowers  
of this painful world.  
—Basho

Someone, he added, ought to draw up a catalogue of buildings listed in order of size, and it would be immediately obvious that domestic buildings of *less* than normal size – the little cottage in the fields, the hermitage, the lock-keeper's lodge, the pavilion for viewing the landscape, the children's bothy in the garden – are those that offer us at least a semblance of peace, whereas no one in his right mind could truthfully say that he liked a vast edifice such as the Palace of Justice on the old Gallows Hill in Brussels. At the most we gaze at it in wonder, a kind of wonder which in itself is a form of dawning horror, for somehow we know by instinct that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their later existence as ruins.

—W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

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I

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1.

The skyscraper across the street  
reflects back hundreds of wavy images  
of a high-rise hotel, but a blankness where the sky is.

2.

These skyscrapers say, I am the sum  
of your vision. Also: I am  
monument, surpassing vision.

3.

So many blanknesses. Each with its own  
indifference, its own proclamations; its own prayers. The mind  
returns to them, again & again, traveler without end.

4.

At night a siren starts up, then  
another, then others like wolves  
driven to keening. Then they slip away.

5.

Haven't seen the rake-thin Vietnamese guy  
who wheels his broken bike around as support  
for his bowed, badly-set legs, loudly addressing ghosts.

6.

In a stand of trees near some upscale stores they've set  
spheres of light high in the branches. Charm or denial,  
O brilliant fastidiousness, what we want we keep.

7.

Thought the mentally-ill man downtown  
was pan-handling, but all he wanted to do was  
bump elbows. Perhaps not even ill.

8.

In the afternoon, light retreats from Nicholson's  
Barber & Style with its faded MLK  
photo in the window & mint-green sinks inside.

9.

Darkness on the darker Tuscan Cypress, the great  
formality of its silhouette a reminder of the graver  
virtues, that somber exclamation exceeding architectural time.

10.

Redbrick warehouse district by  
the train tracks now warehouses night-clubbers,  
art patrons & gourmands.

11  
Lily-white, crimson-red and magenta  
azaleas blossoming all along  
Dixie Trail, like hypnotic, post-historic prayers.

12.

You want to prove something.  
With words, you want to prove  
something. As if naming it would do.

13.

Keep seeing the Blue Sky Farms panel truck  
round town with its logo  
of blue-bordered clouds above rolling green fields.

14.

Memorial in front of the police station:  
a dozen or so rough-cut square pillars, different  
heights, grouped in Neolithic silence.

15.

Iron-girder skeleton of the new  
train station rises up over shining train  
tracks curving into the distance.