

DANIEL RIFENBURGH

Requital for Fire

*Now a new generation is sent down from high heaven
—Vergil*

Silence that was golden
Is broken into miscellaneous

Coins, sounding
Where they're strung on taut

Strands of voice,
Agreeable in their variance:

A few relics of old crimes
Mixed with laughing acanthus.

Behind this is mind, playing
As with a golden abacus, toting

Pythagorean numbers. This
Particular sum: wings of the Archangel

Michael; and this: his flaming sword,
Bright brand thrust into a rain

Of ashes called History.
Here a street becomes known by

The howls of the wild dogs
Who seem always to gather there

On the morning after a war is declared.
The man walking hurriedly down it, testing

The long muscles of his legs,
They know as a soldier today

And, tomorrow, a tax collector
Or priest. Man has no set purpose,

But the divine has. Therefore,
The hounds bear no animus for him, but grin

Behind lolling tongues, unabashed,
Though he disturb with dissonant tread, a mere youth,

The debris of citadels that settled like ash
Once on the crowns of Ninevah.

—for Philip Hoy

The Catastrophe

*Dog to coyote to wolf,
The cry went forth,
Able to Baker to you.*

—Henri Coulette

It was dormant awhile, latent
In several pockets, fingered lightly,

Then it was at throats, brandished in the air,
Then slicing through clouds over water,
A drawer of knives falling out of the sun.

Now it is a bloom of fiery tulips,
A shattering of crystal,
And now a hooded viper rising in the air.

It flies off transmitters,
Flickers on tv screens, retinas
And unrolls itself from cylindrical presses.

It is quartered, chopped, bundled
And dumped from the backs
Of slowly rolling trucks.
And it grows. It sits down
To lunch with multitudes, passing the salt.

It tangles itself with music, filters down
With the sawings of ardent violins.
The yellow light of the radio dial is sweating with it.
The conductor furiously mops his brow.

And now it is a wraith of a crack whore,
Spindly and woven of silt and soot,
Advancing gamely on stiletto heels,
Stepping to a jagged tango and thrusting forth
The hollow of her open hand.

My feet are gliding towards her.
My heavy arms rise to open.

She is whispering in my ear now
And taking firmly my hand: *Look,*
We are dancing.

—after Justice