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Shunryn's Bells

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Kirm: Shunryu's Bells

SHUNRYU'S BELLS

Heather Kirm

1.

Battle-
fields belonged in
every inch of Japan.
The low, wooden beams of Shunryu's
temple

sighed the
heart sutra; *tatami*
mat still held straw and air;
but the rooms filled with the army
who beat

minions
with sticks, and the
navy who used straps. Where
Shunryu's students should meditate,
slaves slept.

2.

The war
possessed metal
and men. Women slid rings
from their fingers and mailed them to
battle,

glad they
weren't fingers or
daughters. Knives that once sliced
the carp from its skull bubbled with
bells, rings,

weapons.
War wrapped Asia
in blueprints where *hanko*
bled red on every brush-stroke
border.

And monks,
forced out of their
zendos, swept *ensos*—whole
circles—on the sky with nothing
but toes.

3.

Shunryu's
temple had sky
and now: ten monks breathing,
the mosquito's buzz, the Buddha
to kill,

green tea
in a blue cup,
thunder to shake bamboo,
silence waiting like wooden floors
beneath

a bow
in *dokusan*.
Shunryu's temple contained
what a bell does: nothing, and in
that air

rings clear.
But his temple
also owned three bells. The
military declared each theirs.

Every

priest has
his attachment.
Even the Buddha must
die. A good priest will ask you to
kill him.

4.

The monks
dismantled the
bells, the last objects in
Japan without pronouns.
Not *yours*,

not *theirs*.
Fill a bell with
shoes, food, maps: it will not
ring. Someone took a picture of
the monks,

the bells,
the soldiers, and
Japan's unwavering
flag. Shunryu posed for the photo,
then left.

5.

Shunryu
wondered, would the
metal remember what
it had been? Commands to hustle
young monks'

feet on
a wooden floor?
The call to squeeze all time
into Buddha-mind? The gong to
forget

the self
and recall the
bohdi tree, the morning
star? Propellers would not ring in
water,

would not
ring in the ears
of monks or soldiers. Their
propellers would churn the ocean
and push

a ship
forward to claim
lands with thousands of trees
under which soldiers would never
just sit.