

Day 2
Bristol
Wednesday 2nd March 1842
Wa-Set
2 (Mekhir). Peret. VI. 6 Thutmose I

Begin...

Only light
distorted by an unstill surface:
wings against a waking sky.

A wake waves through
the dawn-hued blue:
the water of the river shapes the heavens.

Sweeping – swerve (risen [fall]) –
flocks
ride mirrored breeze.
A boat moves on a river;
sunrise stops ‘n day begins.

Passing amongst the gifts it’s given, the vessel venerates the water – giving life to land ‘fore commending its spirit to the ocean. Fertile fields and pregnant plains b’yond the banks bring cultivation to the wild earth, sketching a blurred, clamping vice across th’umbilical bond to womb; to nature.

A patch of pockmarked isles spans between the boat and eastern bank, populated by white ibis on the curved and barren hills. In the ripples left by the boat’s soft passing the isles quake, their foundations rumble, the edges surface as the hills they fall; great jets snort upward as new caverns open, shim’ring red behind tall tusks.

Rising ibis flock – suspended – as the landscape shifts and clashes. They’ll settle once the isles’ve set anew.

Cracked’s the mud that’s dried upon the topmost reaches of the hull; cracked’s the rockface of the glacial gorge on either side, jagged with the green of vegetation. High-tide carries through th’uncrossed chasm keeping separate the village and the woods – a fawn astride the cliff-edge pushes loose soil to the sky; a child picks up a stone and lets it vanish.

A splash above the muddy bank, concealed by risen river, and a corm’rant leaves its settled poise, posed upon the surface. Through lush grass to branches bending downward from the canopy: it stands alone to dry its outstretched wings.

There’s a man-made fork in this spring-fed path and the boat heads to a lock-gate, its metal reflectflickering the rays of head-on sun. Behind, above, a single strand of iron lets the village dream of walking in the sky to wander through the woods of Leigh. Abutments – in red-sandstone clad – support the piled stone that makes the towers, standing there part-built: suspended.

Scaffolded by timber ‘bout the as-yet unwashed stone, up ahead, along this stretch of water ending in a haven, the newest pylon starts to rise before the most select of places; flagpoles b’yond primeval papyrus swamp.

The immensity of Karnak comes ‘to view of the white-sailed shuttle, its wooden form now oar-propelled between the lush, green gardens. The “Heave!” sounds coming closer **CLACK** of the “Drop!” construction skim the standing water’s surface **THUDDD** in the quadrilateral haven. Boats moored all about its **TUNNKK** “Woah!” edges pass off quarried stone, imported timber, fish, bread,

'n barrelled beer for sust'nance; scribes record all in/all out, meticulous accounting for the overseers of the gangs who build for gods 'n pharaoh.

The water starts to lift, to rise, between the gates that guard the entryway, keeping hid the bed of mud that traps the boats it welcomes.

Up, from beneath
the river's level.

Up, to meet
the level in the port.

The swing-bridge at the basin moves;
the vessel navigates
and enters in, on through
The Floating Harbour.

Coal-made mist makes thunderclouds in black, patched among the smog below the blue, as the sounds of **ggRRRRROOOOAAAANNNN** links of chain – pulled 'n loosed in fragile mast'ry o'er the Avon – bring back the gate behind the ent'ring vessel. Toward the lifeful, moving port of blackened hands 'n metal sails the steamboat, on its way to meet the Welsh Back.

On either side, the banks 'n walls sloped 'n dropped to water, whilst an engine pulled its weight and more; hooves heaved along beside it. The tightly-tautened woven strands strained fast against their pivot-point to lift the limestone past the scaffold and the men who chiselled from its platforms to engrave the wall with hist'ry told in pictures.

An obelisk unfinished out front marks the long road through the archway of the pylon's lower, joining centre-block: on through, the flitting frantic flutter flight flown by a lone mosquito crashed among the part-constructed shadows – breached's the long 'n central road that led the patrons of the temple (pre-Thutmose) between the sun-barge shrines; now they'll pass the cedar wood of stone.

Broad-topped reeds to last millen'ya.

Processions of human culture carried through in awenrapture: see th'inscriptions in their ochre, green, 'n blue; see them faded to the rock – wind-worn; time-travelled.

phhhhump From off the block within which sits pharaonic lion falls a chunk hewn by the hammered-chisel, chipping at the stone, e'en as a splat of **shhhlupp** colour lands adorning on the naked shoulder of the sculptor sculpting b'side the columns. Pale, part-shaded, washed stone stays cool despite the approach of the new, established morning in its throes of burning life.

The continuing construction to expand and decorate the temple will, the day, betidal-imitating dredgers pull the mud the bed accumulates, placing it in piles within the centre of the harbour for the underwater sluices to siphon out, off into the New Cut.

O v e r f a
l l by way of engineer.
l
to
u n d e r f a
d

See on down, ahead, out front the industrial sheds – L, M, N, O... – and next the living, lifting cranes – their chains a-reaching from the wall to lay upon ships' treasure – as the spires and aspiring masts make arboreal the 'arbour scene, growing anachronistic with the sunrise.

Before the basin b'side the marsh and the scenes of other stories lives 'n moves 'n breathes the shipyard in its peak, precipitous.

With each we've reached our site of grand construction.

She gazed.

"That bit?"

He looked t'ward where she pointed.

"Yup. That bit."

shhhglupp

"Ahfffffffffff!"

Laughing hard, she kicked her heels into the part-hewn block beneath her; the man, his tools loosed to air 'n ground, smeared the blue upon his dark-brown skin. Furiously furrowed at the platform up-above on the structure built about th'inscribed pillar, he flicked away the colour that had transferred to his hand and brought a relaxed scowl down upon the girl-child.

"You keep laughing. I'll turn you over to the overseer."

She brought her legs to cross beneath her, put a hand atop each knee.

"Oh-vur tuh thuh oh-vur see-ur."

"He'll" (he said, rolling his eyes) "see you one of these days."

She gave him a patronising shake-of-head as she wondered at the wonder of the scribe, sending out his messages of life and times to the space beyond the great wave of the future.

"Magic..."

"Magic?"

"Hmm?" Tilted head; unbroken gaze.

"You're magic, is that it? That's how you'll avoid getting caught?"

She beamed, then, with purest delight, eyes locked upon the writer and the writing.

"Yeah, I'm magic! A spirit. Eternal as the water of the river."

Smiling to himself as he used his rescued tools, he said:

"If you're eternal, I hope I'm not."

The girl's name arrived on the dry-heat breeze from an un-wigged source atop a wall. Shim'ring as it peered over the edge on high above, the head alerted them to th'approach of officials.

In exaggerated praise to the god-king and the gods, the sculptor pretends he's relieved she has to go. She leapt from off the seat she'd chosen, skipping over rope coiled by a bucket filled with scraps of stone; unknown to him she giggles – soundless – at the noise she catches **shhhg** before she ducks out of the scene through yet-unfinished wall.

Slipslide down a bank of sand – you see through the girl-child's eyes.

You look over a city: see the palm fronds of the date trees in the gardens of the wealthy, green canopy sporadic, as they show beside the flat-tops in their low 'n high 'n higher tessellation, textured white 'n faded-gold about before you. Look on at the alleyway that courses down from Karnak, through the courtyard squares and suburbs to the other temple-end: sandstone alone on hilltop; southern sceptre.

The girl knelt and stared at the grains, all gathered, of the hot, compacted sand, lowering her right hand slowly t'ward its canvas-surface. Placing, with such a trepidated lightness, fingertips against Seb's blank papyrus, a child of story froze in felt illit'racy.

To make immortal markings...thoughts made comprehensible...physical, in phact...carving symbols into sandstone for your voice toooo to echo out after four five thousand years what? oh ready["Yep!"]I guess In phact thuh fare-oh philters throo thuh phirmament *One. Two. Heeeaaave!*

Jesus...Watch th[“Watch that chain!”]...The iron hull[“No worries.”]first iron-hulled steamship if it works *unphhh*[“Prrrh!”]it can pass beneath Hah! the incomplected bridge *One. Two. Dowwwn.*

Placing lumber on the red-brick wall within the dry dock’s storage yard, the men who built the Great Britain breathed/leant/relaxed/looked skyward.

“Shite.”

“What?”

“Rain.”

“Maybe.”

“Def’nutlee.”

“So?”

“ So? ?”

“Yeah.”

“Pfff.”

“Ah...”

“What?”

“Rain.”

“See!”

“Shite.”

The moss mounds spread sporadic on their ships of kuhloenyul mud, moored in place by cracks in brick ‘n iron – rust-red; oxidised.

“It stinks round ‘ere.”

“Thas ‘orseshit.”

“No, it really stinks.”

“Yeah – huhorseshit.”

Look at us, in our overalls ‘n boots ‘n flat-claps, conversing...shire horses...’orses, shite...skin taut about strands of tensed, frayed rope...frayed, afraid...frayed knot; ‘fraid not...fraught ‘n tautened through our labour laying out these blocks of nature...the mind to map abstraction; the manual movement and the muscle to construct reality...

The men began to move – hoof heavy – through the drops of water – falling angels seeking something more than crowded, ‘phemeral clouds – across the way to where there sat the steam ship, immense weight on its wooden rests, the deep black iron hull without the water.

The curve up, out,
laced ‘n lined with gold;
the white-paint ribbon,
soft, along each side;
the Lion and the Unicorn
above new window fittings:
this ship’s hull shall be
adorned thus somewhen.

Somewhen in th’approaching
years anon.

With the noise (noise! (noise!!)) tuned out by familiarity, his mind sprungstreamed away. At the delta, where its currents split through sediment at land’s end, it met the vast unknown and dissipated.

“I envy you.”

"Why?"

"Your medium – it's... its form is free. Free-er."

"You wish your art weren't the written word?"

"No. See... how'd you write this scene?"

The grains and varnished-o'er folds, frozen in the stillness of the time trapped in the table, kept a coffee-yin and a milk-tea-yang – distorted and unbalanced by a metal spoon that careened into the infused pool from off a saucer – between the breaking workers/the artists two, who – iron-wearied hands – left the grey folds of their caps on the third 'n empty chair that showed its previous life by the cross carved in its backrest, and in its wordless space for storing psalms 'n dogma.

"Well, how'd you paint it? I wouldn't have any way of showing the content of this conversation, its progression. I couldn't start at one point, travel to another, visit with the end. You can."

"But with a thousand words for every gull and boat I couldn't hope to show the harbour, and with no shape of ink or type could I begin to find a way to capture the movements of the muscles in the face of a child in that moment when they see, without either even knowing, a different you to whom they'll bestow all their trust without condition."

"The more you argue your point, the more I feel you prove it wrong!"

"Pffff! I know a lot is possible with words but... one alphabet! Conceptions and cultural awareness, allusion... It relies near-wholly on a reader having already experienced visually, whether by paint or re-directed sunlight, the thing I wish to show."

Tipping back 'n backrest into the aroma of bacon-burnt 'n beans bereft the heat they'd gathered, he looked toward the open door and out, while the one he sat across from listened to the sounds that entered in.

"That sound! That seagull song. You might feel you can't do it justice, but my art is silent. Yours produces sound and image; colour and music. Yours can dictate the rhythm of a beating heart and conduct all the contours of the mind. It can change the way we speak. Even by the way that the words are placed can you resurrect your thoughts within another."

"It's the same" (he replied, without turning back) "for you with shapes, hues..."

"But silent, and without music."

"There are lots of ways to tell a story."

"And I missed my favourite!"

"The troupe from Hiku-Ptah?"

"Yeah... I spent too long by the river."

"Impossible." The woman emanated love and understanding to the girl who sat before her on the upturned vase. "You were crafting a universe by thought, were you not? Those who travelled from the House of the Soul of Ptah would understand!"

The girl: she smiled, near-wholly on the left-side of her face. With the smell of the staple bread being baked within the walls of the adjacent room, she watched her swinging feet as the woman that she trusted weaved reeds.

"I think" (she told the girl) "you could become somebody's favourite, telling stories when the troupes are absent. Your mind is fertile with pigments that we have no powder for; sounds that Thoth has not put into hieroglyphs."

The hands of the middle-aged of ancient times left their manufacture, and the woman placed her right upon the head of the girl who bloomed reluctantly.

"It was not only missing the performance that bothered you, was it, standing there in the pull of the crescent moon?"

The girl: she answered with a drop that fell, clear, onto the red dried on her finger. Torn, tear-wetted: the colour ran, seeking out the land's end and the ocean.

“It is a cleansing blood. The light upon the Ra-less night called to you, marking you for adulthood.”

Consternation at a sudden shift in the world beneath her soles played across the brow she lifted for to slip under the soothing hand. To be ‘cleansed’ of her childhood by a bloodied Nile was horror worse than an annihilation.

“It is the flowering of the khet that keeps your ka, nurturing it ‘til its many parts have coalesced in virtue. You will” (her smile was made of melancholy) “become a woman – and stay a story-teller!”

“But who will I be if I am not myself?”

The woman held the girl who held the woman.