



WATERLINE

Ben Wormleighton

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Preface

Transitions often seem to bring out verse. Reflections on the recent past, the near future, and the traipsing act of living in the present can all serve as and be illuminated by being subject. During this chronologically ordered collection I underwent – and am still undergoing – one of the most dramatic transitions of my life so far: in between *Tallis* and *The undesert* I flew 5375 miles from Exeter to San Francisco to begin my graduate studies at the University of California at Berkeley.

In the midst of so much newness, I appreciated any glimmer of familiarity or constancy in a heightened way. I experienced being a member of a minority (both culturally and ethnically at times) essentially for the first time. But both of these are countered, tamed even, by a constant kingdom in which I am utterly at home not because of any notion of majority or any particular familiarity (in fact, for those who have deduced what I am talking about, this place can be the most alien of all), but because I have been made so. The credit does not belong to me.

I am curious to see how all of the above influences and probes my poetic expression, along with the many inevitable, unanticipated things I have not listed here that will compose my time in the US. I hope that you can find some utility or enjoyment in it too.

Waterline

Tree tops and cloud gather at an ebbing cord –
A horizon in transpose – fringing the interplay
Of senses aerial and grounded, atoning for the
Unevenness underfoot. The outer branches
Flail serenely, preparing the waterline for an
Impact set to dispel any distorted sense of self
Sketched upon the surface. In fact, the rippling
Pursuit trumps these counterfeit advances: the
Water is distracted onto its principal reflection.
With the dissolution of ripples and their refrain
The clouds have returned to their campaign,
Gathered at the same supple cord as before
Yet now their appearance resolves the shore.

Freedom of movement

The rainclouds mass like mountebanks, posturing,
Bluffing that they control their direction and their load;
They frown over road-crossings littered with insistent
Desire to continue the procession, a desperate inertia,
Sallowed by the unresponsive concrete. The birdsong
Restarts in a moment: at the fringes of the pavement
The earth is upturned, congregated as limbs pinioned
Into motion now sample a freedom of movement to
Which they are entitled. The droplets halted in flight
By canopy, presently falling a truncated descent, have
Much greater bearing on my current state: the threats
Of an obscured sky can do little to deflect a passage
Styled upon a compass and now, surveying the fresh
Encampment, it is plain that there is nothing worth
Sparing an imburement of life, awareness of direction.

Pacific

Looking upward, the weather-front veers like a precipice,
Affronting my peace from directions I had thought of as
Well-known. The rain lashes symbolism into faces –
Of rock or flesh; it is indifferent – with glyphs dictated to
By a single force subject to manifest imperfections; it is
Surprisingly legible, even read across the gulf from summit
To base. Often lack of distance can seem like a void but here
Every yard is accounted for, each a marker for a pacific entry.
The clemency found there is peculiar given that there is no
Becoming light at all, but apt: it unsettles my self and rehouses
It where the weather is erudite, informed by its keeper.

Renewed

This is a waterline time, fitting to
Follow the fountains to the source,
Which prospers lively leaves; these
Waters are not tidal: there is full
Radiance at neap, banks uncalloused
Because they are renewed.

The aptest way is at ground-level,
Face upturned to the light, touch
Awake to the play of the single
Material and immaterial current.
One can take for granted distances
Measured along the shore, refusing
The sweep of the water – a reservoir
On the move – like a cavalcade whose
Intention is one with the pilgrims at
The head of the column. It is jealous
For its sediment, unwilling to deposit

But carefree in guiding it to feature
The lakebed. Above the surface, the
Atmosphere is shifting: it no longer
Suffices to remain temperate; the
Captivated air mirrors the flow beneath,
Bearing witness to the internal figure
Brought out of hibernation, and filled
With the volition of a thousand springs.

Concert

The time demands an encounter, all senses
Have space for response or for quiet according
To design, not mine, braced to feel and learn
In tandem: their intersection figures the
Saharan state that bases the lesson, acts as
Pedestal. At eye-level it is evergreen with
Constant investment, recently ploughed,
Reminding that the way is not to stray; there
Is no need for undecided motion when
Captivation is inevitable. The hallmarks of
The road are set aside for good reason: I am
Found, independent of my whereabouts,
In concert like a gentle storm out at sea
Clearing the foam of cloud to day from
Where he bore my latent twilight for me.

A tree in a Kensington pavement

I find your roots

Enchambered in

A cold grey surface,

This second skin

For which you did

Not ask, paving

Slabs a sheaf of

Scales for which you

See no need. Yet

Still you use an

Apt breeze as a

Chance to waft a

Salutatory leaf

Across my path.

Eve

The present current, flow of things, can only
Onrush while marked by its sombre prelude;
It is its way to receive its character from the
Air and the riverbed – it is one to the other –
Residing in adjacency. The sky calls a halt.

Its colours are alert;
I find the onrush severed
From its spring as the scape
Forces me to pause
And comprehend without mistake
That the fire is unsourced:
Captivation collated
Into a solace of direction.

Weather patterns

Chipped ceramic witnesses to its contents;
Flawed vessel with perfume whose scent
Overshadows the land around, causing
Every nearby marching troop to adopt a
Firmer standard, line by which life is drawn,
That in carrying leads faces to become upturned
To what at first was rain: in appearance forlorn,
Created into a cloud-break of your own.

Propulsion

A gentle survey, indigenous to the early hours,
Of the recent past reveals the profile of an
Incline, a collective quest for sunlight, amongst
Forested business. Their barbs can point either
Way, memories, though they do not merit
Defence; I was content to let them decline to
Iconography but now I see that their role is
Propulsion: hence this incline grants momentum,
Is part of the movement from irradiated to radiance.
They piece a mosaic designed for my tread:
My way is decorated, I am overtaken indeed.

Crumbs

For him time is measured by the passage
Of events: bursts of familiarity falling
Like crumbs as accompaniment to the
Simple process of living paired with
Ungentle streaks of newness, veins
In rock exotic like malachite
But found on home shores,
Gracing solar Hebrides with a
Fanfare of rainfall, nursery light
Illuminating cot-side reading.

This is the chapter start, one can
Tell by its signature calligraphy,
A transition gauged by the air
Litmus-like; the signal changes
To direct an end to melancholy.

Tallis

The sound moves from victory to
A wistful departure and back
To the selfsame victory through
Corridors pretending to be
Crypts; indeed to the untrained eye
Such as mine the deception is
Plausible at irregular
First glances sliding along aged
Unpolished floors filled with new air
That they demarcate, register
For inhabitants they are yet
To know. This is the crux of the noise
They host: the stillness that appears
To be resident is only
Visitorial, a backlight
To the work carried out like the
Sweep of song replacing malady
With melody, tolerating

Discord for the heathland discharged

By it; space to sustain an orchard.

The undesert

Calming the crest of its heat, everywhere
Recorded in an unexpected annal, the
Undesert is receptive to the softest of
Rains. Clothed in the garb of the moment,
It is its indentations rather than dunes
That predominate: the inexorable has
Altered, changed the slope of its ideal.

Sentences determined by their pauses,
Galleries displaying wallspace; the walls
Are kind, just as space is sought above
Instead of alongside, terracing the sky-hues
With lines the ground might deny but that
Here are real, sketched with finely feathered
Quill into likeness: I am made undesert.

Fitting

Just as journeys end in destinations
We, as stars, form unwitting constellations,
Arrive at a structure unheard of in
Earthen discourse needing a dose of leaven
To raise its ambitions to the level of
Its inspiration; just as a silent clove
Is uncovered with aroma readied
As if redemption from its preserved
State was inevitable. The mastery
Of the collection of moments as a whole,
Engraving a patent upon a soul:
The process reads like a pathway, leaving
Only strands behind to enter the weaving.

Sound

It takes position like a cedilla among
Thoughts indigenous to the sun, their
Matter hot and compressed, clasping
Each syllable so as to diffuse the fact
That it is spoken. It would have us intone
Out of step with the parade in which
We find ourselves, itself caused by
A victory intolerant to defeat and
Viewed in stolen glances at a panorama
As our concentration is unyieldingly lifted.
Then, hazel unfurls onto plateau to rim
The shore against which the sea mindlessly
Protests. From this vantage there is ample
Space convertible to any use but defeat:
Cloud, water, shape would all elect
To communicate to me
The entitled prospect
Of unwearied victory.

Flex

His majesty he has no need to flex
Even when our local troubles erupt
Into weariness and aching worldliness;
They alert us that nothing can disrupt
The victory that's always at its apex.

Depict

The front is sultry, forcing the land
To concede visibility
To the tidal clouds acting as sand
Does to cliff, suburb to city,
And foothill to range, broaching the subject
The sky would have centre stage, although
The sentiments it uses to depict
Its mournful insubstance: loss and sorrow
Encoded in atmospheric script,
Cannot but clear by tomorrow.

Edge

Promontory and cloud both act as

Aerial shoreline leading the land

In symbiosis with the sky;

The waves broker illusions

As they break over formations

Scattered across a scaly blue.

With a review of the day

The breakers cannot but fade,

Shadows reaching past clouds

Must melt into supple shade

Leaving a slender watermark

As reminder of an edge for

An ocean larger than I thought.

Sundial

The peninsula is rounded, now past
It can be read like a sundial; strata
For the hours of the day and the watches
Of the night tiered with an ordained
Set of demands moving with time
And the waves. There is a chink in the
Rocky battlements through which the tide
Is accelerated – its whispers heightened
By constriction – just as we carry an
Opening to form a shoreline with our
Words, and bridges with our thoughts.

Stages

Peace in the midst of wartime moves
Like wildfires to conquer the land,
Conflagration in order to prepare room
Amongst the jars and clutter of an
Everyday savannah. The grasses are
Chipped – the crockery of the plain
Is well-used – yet this does them no
Disservice in the face of flame;
It makes them ardent tinder,
Fuel to one day obsolete a warplane.

Halves

The glow of quiet conversation

Leaves a twinge of katharsis

Among the watching trees.

The attitude of the ground

Is twilit, the segment ahead

Indistinguishable from that

Just trodden in all except

Exposure. On one side

The contours are justified

By the light, heightened by

Indirection and yet curtailed.

It is just a phase, the appetite

For permanence unsatisfied,

And the journey still alive.

Vast

The interjection of rock and
Pavement are rune-like upon
The snow; illegible without
The lexicon of vastness to
Guide their reading and reveal
The passages authored by
Many footsteps and by wind.
This is a temporary medium:
At spring the parchment will rescind
So far inland that tidal has no
Meaning and the muddy slopes
Shall tell quieter tales of how
Scale has entered into our diction
And shall remain through fact and fiction.

Commonality

So much falls through the mesh of
Seeking commonality; data is lost in
Distortions for the sake of comparison.
The wake advertises a new wisdom-
Substitute, flavoured with fog –
The illusion of the day – and
Scented with cloud cover that
Obscures the constellations by
Night. The apparatus of
Discourse is in place, meadow-
Grown, but is in need of thawing
By merit of the space around:
Its voluminous silence.
In the midst of disparity
Awakens a surge of family:
Commonality is to be
Arrived at, celebrated
With fountains commemorating

The passing of irrelevance,

And the realisation

That nothing is indifferent.

Cycle

An intriguing idea unvisited
With outline pressed against
The snow in a frenzy of expression
Has a bit-part in the narrative
Of ferrying water from the summit
To the land along canals carved
By fingers scraping temples.
The end is irrigation; to reach it
The path swirls to avoid stillness
Like an afterthought, incubates
As an iced incline while flocks
Commute the sky overhead, and
Peters into realisation with every
Fleck of movement, every fort
Surpassed, and each reconciliation
With clear-watered stillness that
Lay unperceived at the zenith of
Its travels, but is etched into its

Identity by the foothills as to be

Evident in allusion and in each

Quivering wave's terminus.