

California Tableaux:
Tableau I – “Songs, Stories, Prayers, and A Plate of Brass”
Synopsis

To conclude the Overture, Sir Francis Drake enters the stage crooning a samba of "Immigrant Song" by Led Zeppelin. The lyrics hail the heavens for one having conquered distant lands, after which cultural misappropriation is to only follow suit. Thereafter, Drake begins to deliver an account of his visit with the indigenous coastal people, allegedly the California Miwoks. His monologue-aria is primarily accompanied by a string quartet mimicking consort music of the era, of which he did not go without while circumnavigating the globe. Drake is rapturously engrossed with his own feats, accomplishments and accolades. His intonations seem sensitive, pious, and reverent. His sentiments are echoed by a male choir that chants a prayer he penned himself, one that dreams of “wider seas,” “distant shores,” and witnessing “God’s mastery’, all set in Anglican psalmody. Yet the motifs in his consort and chorale are eerily bent, twisted, stuttered, and shunted. He is often interrupted by the galloping motifs of “Immigrant Song,” blasting him out of his revelatory anamnesis and reminding him of his duteous account. A strange radio broadcast from the future irregularly and rudely cuts in with fusion jazz as a metallurgist in the 1970s examines a brass plate found on the Marin coast in the 1930s, allegedly left by Drake. At several moments he is (and we are) haunted by Native California song recorded in the early 19th Century, creeping in like a ghostly fog from the past. In this aggregated musical pastiche and lyric montage, we witness Drake pervert the meaning of his fated and foreboding arrival. The megalomaniac finds ‘the temptation strong, like Christ’s, in that arid clime [sic.],’ as he is crowned “Hioh”, or king. Before departing, he audaciously infers that the indigenous people have bestowed their land to “HERR MAIESTY” [sic.]. In their juxtaposition and integration, the musical styles eddying around Drake are characters themselves. Contemporary and antiquated musical styles satirically rock us to and fro, ballastless, highlighting the visceral collision of cultures. They also serve as musical life preservers, pulling us back to the havens of the present. Yet, we are run aground, at the foot of stocks. As society sails into the future, Drake’s mentality is to be avoided: judging a foreign peoples’ way, ironically (here) an immigrant’s way of life or ethnicity as ‘other’ only allows our history of brutal scapegoating and mortal subjugation to repeat itself.

California Tableaux
Tableau I – “Songs, Stories, Prayers, and A Plate of Brass”
Libretto

Overture & “Immigrant Song” (Sir Francis Drake):

Ah, ah!
We come from the land of the ice and snow,
From the midnight sun where the hot springs blow.

The hammer of the gods will drive our ships to new land,
To fight the horde, sing and cry: Valhalla, I am coming!
On we sweep with threshing oar, Our only goal will be the western shore.

Ah, ah!
We come from the land of the ice and snow,
From the midnight sun where the hot springs blow.

How soft your fields so green, can whisper tales of gore,
Of how we calmed the tides of war. We are young overlords.
On we sweep with threshing oar, Our only goal will be the western shore.

(Trumpet solo)

So now you'd better stop and rebuild all your ruins,
For peace and trust can win the day despite of all your losing.
On we sweep with threshing oar, Our only goal will be the western shore.

Drake (monologue):

looking down from the ramparts of a hastily constructed title
thought it best for that time to seek the land
it pleased God to send us into a fair and good bay window
in a sunny atrium
in this we anchored

the people of the country sent a present to me
an urgent, irregular verb tense:
to be one of the liberators
a voice from the homesick dead
a lost ancestor or a god

their houses are digged round about with earth
and have from the uttermost brims of the circle
clifts of wood set upon them
joining close together at the top like a spire steeple
a natural religious symbol
that liked us well
and warmed us with echoes
of our own distant pious shore

Anglican Choir (psalmody of Drake's Prayer):

Disturb us, O Lord,
when we have arrived in safety
because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Drake:

I courteously intreated them
bestowed necessary things to cover their nakedness
mistook their liberal nature for a sinful disposition
I warned my men
not to adopt their ways meanwhile

Cyril Stanley Smith (metallurgist's report over radio waves from the future):

Had the effect
(which is rather pleasant in appearance)
been desired for aesthetic reasons
it would have been used more consistently.

Henry Newbolt, "Drakes Drum" (verse 1):

Drake: he's in his hammock an'a thousand mile away,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)
Slung atween the round shot in Nombre Dios Bay,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.
Yarnder lumes the island, yarnder lie the ships,
Wi' sailor lads a-dancin' heel-an'-toe,
An' the shore-lights flashin', an' the night-tide dashin'
He sees et arl so plainly as he saw et long ago.

Drake

they came to the top of the hill
at the bottom whereof we had pitched our tents
their worship motions confounded us
we found ourselves deified
and defied

Anglican Choir:

Disturb us, O Lord
when we are too pleased with ourselves,
when our dreams come true
because we dream too little

Drake:

the women tormented themselves
they were about a sacrifice
unseen to ourselves
but in utmost earnest

I with my company
went to reading of the Scriptures
they were attentive
and seemed greatly to be affected with it
we asked ourselves if they understood
that our purpose was to show that God
was up above
not in ourselves

amongst them the king himself
with many other tall and warlike men
advanced before us

we in our fortress
of pebbles
waited
grim and tremulous

they by signs requested me to send something by their hand
a token that my coming might be in peace
relieved of the necessity of battle
I offered instead a King James Bible

Smith:

which is extended in one direction only
and has a somewhat anisotropic texture
both when cold worked
and to a small degree
in the recrystallized metal
after annealing.

Anglican Choir:

Disturb us, O Lord
when with the abundance of the things we possess,
we have lost our thirst for the water of life

Drake:

they strove to behave with comeliness
their women were silent and quaintly cautious

a man of a goodly personage
bare the sceptre before the king
whereupon hanged two crowns
with three chains of marvellous length
emblems of servitude and fealty
to the unknown sovereignty
we represented in sounds and gestures

after them followed the naked common sort
every one having his face painted
in a most demonic manner
concealing the better side of their humanity
and leaving unconcealed the worser

Anglican Choir:

Disturb us, O Lord,
when having fallen in love with time,
we have ceased to dream of eternity,

Drake:

I gathered my men together
and marched within my fenced place
making against their approaching
a very warlike show a theatre of threatening power

Smith:

as well as other local environmental accidents
produce large differences in corrosive attack
over long periods of time: the absence

of any such spots on the present plate
is highly suspicious.

Drake:

which had been bootless bravery
had they not been well disposed
through some miracle of providence

Smith:

the sailor who cut the plate
was not necessarily literate
and may simply
have not been copying something
he could not read.
Its style cannot properly be compared
with that of

Drake:

the sceptre-bearer began a song
observing his measures in a dance
and that with a stately countenance
like the tedious courtiers known to us
for their affectations of erudition

Newbolt, verse 2:

Drake: he was a Devon man, an' ruled the Devon seas,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?),
Rovin' tho' his death fell, he went wi' heart at ease,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe,
"Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore,
Strike et when your powder's runnin' low;
If the Dons sight Devon, I'll quit the port o' Heaven,
An' drum them up the Channel as we drummed
them long ago."

Drake:

I permitted them to enter within our bulwark
they made several supplications
that I would take their kingdom into my hand
I found the strange temptation strong
like Christ's in that harsh arid clime

Anglican Choir:

Kyrie eleison!

Smith:

evidence might come from
an examination of the details
of the inscription in order to deduce
the form of the tools used
to make the letters.
They were traced (impressed)
not engraved or cut..

Drake:

they did set the crown upon my head

Anglican Choir:

Christe eleison

Drake:

and enriched my neck with all their chains

Smith:

Yet no curved punches were used

Drake:

and honoured me by the name of High

Anglican Choir:

Kyrie eleison

Kyrie eleison

Kyrie eleison

Drake:

I took the scepter into my hands
wishing that the riches and treasure thereof
might so conveniently be transported
to the enriching of her kingdom at home
as it aboundeth in the same
robbing the poor and obscure of the one thing
they could have claimed
their liberty

Smith:

Not a trace of such local effects were noted,
neither was any massive rust to be seen
in the notches cut for the spikes.

Anglican Choir:

When...in our efforts to build the new earth,
we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to grow dim.

Drake:

taking a diligent view of every person
they enclosed them about
scratching and tearing their flesh from their faces
as if striving to reveal
the hidden likeness beneath the veil
of mortal flesh
to link the soul
to its cage of bones
for once and for all

but we used signs of disliking this
and stayed their hands from force and
directed them upwards to the living God

Anglican Choir:
Deus!

Drake:
whom only they ought to worship

Anglican Choir:
Deus!

Drake:
not the heavens or the stars

Anglican Choir:
Deus!
Deus!

Drake:
but Heaven, the Star of Bethlehem

Anglican Choir:
Stir us, O Lord,
to dare more boldly
to venture on wider seas
where storms shall show they mastery

Drake (monologue):
I called this country Nova Albion
in respect of the white banks and cliffs
which lie towards the sea
and because it might have some affinity
with our country
which sometime was so called
the native candor of those shores
might else one day vanish from the earth
yet live on here
at the edge of the world
beside this vast unpeaceful ocean

Anglican Choir:
Stir us, O Lord,
when losing sight of land,
we shall find the stars.

Drake (monologue):
at our departure hence
I set up a monument of our being there
namely a plate nailed upon a fair great post
with her Highness' picture and arms
"and a piece of six pence
a pocket full of rye
four-and-twenty Indians
baked in a pie"

Smith:

It should be borne in mind
that the sailor who cut the plate
was not necessarily literate
and may simply have...

Anglican Choir:

In the Name of Him
who pushed back the horizons of our hopes
and invited the brave to follow,
even the name of Christ Jesus,
our Lord.”

Newbolt, verse 3:

Drake: he was a Devon man, an' ruled the Devon seas,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?),
Rovin' tho' his death fell, he went wi' heart at ease,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe,
“Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore,
Strike et when your powder's runnin' low;
If the Dons sight Devon, I'll quit the port o' Heaven,
An' drum them up the Channel as we drummed
them long ago.”

THE PLATE SUNG BY ALL:

BEE IT KNOWNE VNTO ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS IVNE 17 1579
BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND IN THE NAME OF HERR MAIESTY QVEEN ELIZABETH OF ENGLAND
AND HERR SUCCESSORS FOREVER I TAKE POSSESSION OF THIS KINGDOME WHOSE KING AND
PEOPLE FREELY RESIGNE THEIR RIGHT AND TITLE IN THE WHOLE LAND VNTO HERR MAIESTIES
KEEPEING NOW NAMED BY ME AN TO BEE KNOWNE VNTO ALL MEN AS NOVA ALBION

FRANCIS DRAKE

(curtain)