

INITIATION

*Yerba Buena (San Francisco-to-be), August 1846:
Subject to municipal hazing, like all newcomers of note,
Brannan is bid Find the Flag.*

Guffawing townsmen swathe his eyes
in sackcloth, spin him dumb, and shove, send him
careening through the Plaza's stagnant pool.
That brine-sumped stink everywhere's just the brimmed
Bay, ripe for progress, so he'll play their fool—
seems it begins like this, ambition's trick
way in—and in he wades, game for the hoots,
knowing the brackish seepage, every slip,
the stuff of profit, even leaked through boots.
But blinded, sopping, lost, doesn't it seem
the damn earth curves more than before, and spins?
Doesn't this place feel vast? It's a frontier
where we've all bellowed *Marco* for a grip
on the next It, and chortling rifferaff cheer
each lurch, wild but resourceful, of this big
blindfolded cad, for the grander the veer
and dumbfuck swagger, the surer the in.

49

So when one punch-drunk lunge goes wide
and fingers finally graze flagpole, such roars
rise up, such raucous kinship: Brannan's found
the crucial place, high spangle, and he knows
enough to close his hold. Huzzahs resound,
send him swinging around, flinging the rogue
grin, brandishing one dripping fist. He's in, now—
one wet, canny embrace and Brannan's go
is passed. The men rush him with bear hugs, crowd
in, free his eyes, all surest civics riled
up rowdy, rich, bighearted by the mud-

soaked triumph. As such savvy is the rite
behind many a rise, this slapstick trudge,
call out for drink! you rasp-rough rascals; sky
the soaked hero to shoulders, to the pub
for bubbly all around: Salute the blind
boon, fool or bluff. However the man's won
still flies.