

MEGAN GRUMBLING

Samuel Brannan, 1819 (Saco, Maine)–1889 (Escondido, California): Speculator in citrus, geysers, Mexico, destiny, the big Rush

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America is, in a sense, the inability to think of gold metaphorically.

—John Fowles

CHRISTENED

*Anchored off Oahu, July 1846, a month from California:
En route from New York Harbor, Brannan has presided over baptisms.*

The guy's bestowed
upon them oceans. *Oceans!* Think of that,
how sheer a trick, how wide a sweep of wrist
rinses the deck. I swear the shaggy cad's
won over everything—the Smiths, their ship
of quarreling Mormons, yielding seas, the salt-
sweet favor of the luckyborn—and brims
a gleam half gold, half goad, oracular,
a master of trajectory itself.
I christen thee, he boomed once, twice, pronounced
Pacific Horner and *Atlantic Cade*—
such sovereign scenes to dream up as he doused
them, deigned his claim, as it was Brannan called
to do the naming, naturally, in those drear months
of fro and pitch, the petty porthole squalls
from tarts and prudes all the damn way around
the Horn. Wise-ass and savior, grace and gall
ensured him favored, chosen, asked
for—this guy's got a racket on the vast
gestures, guffaws, cigars, tall crackerjack

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toasts; keeps the mood champagne, foreseen, all cash,
deliverance glimpsed up close.

See the whole show
anchored in paradise: How foreordained
everything gleams—sun strong, the women fresh

and splashing in starched whites, in harbor's green;
phaetons of brownskins bearing white jasmine,
hibiscus, ginger blooms, lime blossoms, leis
and garlands, such invincibly sweet scents.
How everything is meant—children are named;

these seas in their service, are *their kin*.
So Brannan swills the sun, yawps at the sea,
flashes the flask back, shakes his bearish mane,
lights up a Cuban. How far, his belief,
how warm, as he grins prisms in the spray,
scattering sights like light, like history.
And meanwhile—yes, his hold is flush with brass
six-pounders, powder, guns; yes, the man seeks
to blast his way with Mexico, and yea—
his eros is imperial. So goes
our story, spoils. Yet—hubris, spray, a course
so halcyon—how sensual the rogue's
lush empire, sea gleaming so green and so
agreeing. Easy, in this light, to drift
to Brannan's slantgold side, how soon his ship
will come into the world.