

“The Day an Elephant Walked across the River Thames (1814)” by Chris Hutchinson

cincinnatiireview.com/samples/the-day-an-elephant-walked-across-the-river-thames-1814-by-chris-hutchinson/

By Cincinnati
Review

May 7, 2019



I'm certain that morning I heard wasps droning
beneath each floating, sunlit surface.
The billowing high-peaked tents staked virgin space
as if they were the early outposts of an empire
on the rise. Here was a scene nothing in Chaucer
or Blake or my continental tours had prepared me for.
How unlike the bored bewitchment I'd glimpsed in that pigeon-eyed

Chancellor of the Exchequer, his gaze drifting out across the ice-locked Thames—now white as a mirror mildewed with steam—toward the Blackfriars Bridge where sundry Londoners miraculously stood, swilling gin mixed with wormwood inside the honeyed smoke of roasting oxen. I remember questioning my senses while testing the urge to skate along that entrepreneurial shore, to escape, as it were, the trick of my next life, how it should begin and when. In the distance, draped in icicles, St. Paul's dome appeared a popish embarrassment. In ecstasy below, the tents rippled out in faery rings, blistering against a frost that had grappled with the river god and won. At the far edge of Europe, on an island now the center of a new, unreasoning, mechanized might, the Chancellor shut his eyes to pray. Everywhere, the sun was hewing wasps from the amber of our unguarded fears and hopes. As I was pretending to be about to step onto that brittle stage—one last act of Napoleonic verve!—the morning when it happened, when what occurred, occurred.

See more poems from Issue 16.1 by purchasing a copy in our online store. Digital copies only \$5.