

1.2 Sidi Gaber (1993)

Sidi Gaber, essence of the essence of
the ages and the western world.

Evening, *point de depart*,
garlanded, bright-bathed your quays
as I await the impending train,
air-conditioned warrior
of the desert rail:
Kafr el Zeyat, Tanta , down –
without arrest you'd fall
through all of Africa.

Something happened.
The stalls were stacked and terraced
high, around obscured and shouldered hulks,
an eyeless audience:
and ranks of heavy clouds had come
to see me off, spectating blankly –
the whole imbued by evening,
illuminated epitaph of day,
then suddenly enlivened
by the stern imposing call to prayer.

Rustling wheat,
murmur of the centuries.
The city's sons and daughters
all were here for me as well –
that second Ptolemy, Arsinoe his
sister-wife, and Amr the conqueror who,
when heaven lay close upon the earth
and he between them both,
breathed through the eye of a needle. All, all.
I glimpsed the little Greek,
leaning, with his pre-war suit,
lunettes and bony nose,
at an angle to the universe –
went towards him, but he'd gone.
All gone.

Trembling of the ground,
overwhelming eye of light.
Night.
Immortal Sidi Gaber.

Sidi Gaber, Alexandria - August 1993.

The value of the Sidi Gaber train station for protesters cannot be overemphasized the train station was built in the 1850s. It is the oldest train station in Egypt, predating even Cairo's Ramses Station. It was the first train station constructed outside Europe, and would eventually seep into the popular imagination. For revolutionaries, it is symbolic of its connection to the Cairo state and its ability to inhibit a good section of the economy when shut down. Jadaliyya (Amro Ali – July 2013)