

February 4, 1899 and Other Poems

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i.

What were our brown souls saying against the timbre of their foreign voice?
While being hacked to pieces to their deaths,
What were the hymns that Willie's friends intoned?

Ours were aghast at their betrayal: *twenty million* -- the going dollar rate!
A treaty echoed while headlines blared: American Benevolence Now Reigns!

Stay down (Benevolent Men insist), stay down!
We need your corpses (not freemen) to serve as stepping plates!

"Hurry! Before the darkness combs the hills! Before the mountains waken!
"We'll wipe their barren culture out!
"Then seal our graven claim!"

ii.

Now see the self-crowned heroes pose (before the grinding reels),
While battle-weary boys unpack the plundered souvenirs.

"*Christ*, were they little, were they brown! Some were Sambo-black!
"We burned them out of bushes, and most could not fight back!"

"Go! Dig 'em shallow! Dig 'em deep!
"And if you please, just dump the heap! Now, hurry, lads!
"Strike down your spades upon this curséd blackened turf!"

iii.

Where are our somber rites? Where are the sticks to mark our hallowed bones?
Not even graves, but trenches stacked with nameless “bandit-drones”

Our weeping widows stream and search beyond the fading light.
They tarry, pass . . . they linger where beneath the dirt we mutely cry.
The fate of all forgotten bones—drudged in forgotten battles,

Shhhhhhh!

Who brought them here? We brought them here . . .
Old bones and ancestry survive.

Three million immigrant-strong we stand abreast
Their hopes are silt now slaked upon our souls
—we are their filial home.

For justly here they can—those dead brown souls—bestir their final quest:
To fan their ashen history; to chant and search and roam—

Here to meet their resurrection among their very own.

Jitneytropolis

Iscariot struts his stuff here.
Not with you, Sin Jin.
Nor there, Sao Paolo.

Ay Santissima! is not a saint caressed
But a spewed invective by a fawning lola
Riding out mean streets.

Get used to it!
Here jaywalkers reign supreme! Here blips
and honks converse in tune with revving engines.

Crazy Merkana, stay home ...
Don't give away your balikbayan status
By a quest for dirty ice cream!

I lost my stateside flip-flops boarding
a Blumentritt racer, saw them float away:
Noah's pair escaping the ark.

What's fare,
what's pocket change?
Seat's wet, dare I—

"GodknowsHudasnotpay."

Hidden Tracks Through Autumn Woods

1.

Like a ghost familiar in its haunts,
I move about in wistful ways
on board yet another train
remembering
how foolishly certain we were
(as we roamed the aisles)
that a seat would plug us
and a laptop for a nine-hour segment
of this ride, the many train rides

during one summer that didn't swelter
as it did in previous ones because
I wasn't where I used to be.

I was there. With you. Riding trains.
Cutting through flatlands and marshes,
time and endless tunnels, Climbing
upwards and across the map of all good things:

Here in the Center of the Americas
passing backwoods and littered yards.
Then rising, awed at twilight
beneath the quiet fall of evening snow in June.

2.

I travel now through Autumn woods,
wistful here without you . . . but I was lonelier then
than I am now, remembering how I pushed myself
towards the viewing car, while you slept—
unaware that I left your side to let my eyes
meander on the moving pin-lit darkness,
sorting through questions

for answers that arrive today . . .

3.

There is no distance. Not for us.
Nor a swathe of unaccounted time.
There is a Kindness hovering
And insisting that we Simply Be.
There is a fullness that we toyed with
so that every sound and jolt
of this solo ride echo days that used to be,
“Last call” reminders of the mischief
we exchanged. And oh, the missing warmth
in every tuck warding away the cold
oblivious then of all that would unfold.

All that Has . . .

Here in the Afterwards . . .

4.

So why was it that I tried so hard
to never make my anguish known?
When all I ever wanted was to say,
before that train returned us
to our separate ways:

that we might love,
 only that we might love.