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Going to China Girls, The Agit-Prop Train V.I. Lenin No. 1, Not Everybody Loves a Uniform

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Three Poems

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Going to China Girls

1. Those wishing to sell their daughters Please consult us. 600 yen For six years service. The famine of 1934 sent many girls To entertainment, China, California or the cities, Sake server, Geisha, brothel worker. To become a prostitute shows filial piety.

2. I don’t think it’s wrong to sell our daughter Whom we raised ourselves. Other people Use the money for excursions to famous sites So we feel we shouldn’t be ashamed. We sold her to pay debts. Some even travel to hot springs.

3. It is better than eating yams And doing hard physical work. You can make money and lead a sedate life.

4. Only the rough hands Slapping our buttocks, the smell Of gun oil on their arms, Men who want to raise Their whole fist inside us Which is now allowed As if law exists here.
They claim our powder sweetness,
Our sex-sweat makes them feel alive.
Iron hands, tongues, erect guns.
At times the crippled and amputees come,
War’s great clay.
They need comfort, we’re told.
But they cannot forget how to be killers,
Sucking our toes and crying.
We squeeze pleasure from some stories,
Ridiculing the boy-men whose arousal
Stems from baby days.

The Agit-Prop Train V.I. Lenin No. 1

Women in skirts the gray of achievement,
boys and girls in cotton caps and scarves
stand in the frozen cusp of mud.
Political work, typhus, civil war
have weeded the railyard workers.
The women from the work brigade organize
a queue out of the wind to marvel
at the V.I. Lenin train, painted
like a baby’s wail that promises
a future of full plates, not dreams
so much as daylight’s future dazzle.
Think of the art school team on boxes
scaling heavenly orbs, massive workers
grasping shovels, storming every crevice
of consciousness, as if white blocks
stood for reactionary ideas
that could be cancelled out by color.
The art students drank tea and smoked,
those near the paint fumes dizzy,
shivering in the night lit by bulbs
stolen from the station manager’s office.
Their painted workers are not the grime-faced
testy fathers and brothers, or husbands
whose sweat these women breathed or feared,
not wife-beaters, not the ones who swiped
the savings for drinks or pamphlets. *

These figures stand square, convinced to hold that flag so when the train races east to Jaroslav or Tashkent the flag flys backwards toward its western source.

What should they have known—that tracks are laid on the levelest ground, that when art is shaped its message will freeze and crack. And *I was there, chatting in the line of waiting women or I painted wedges and bulky hands with joy.*

In a season of dry bread, in another Moscow winter, death and promises the size of peas, like stars now to the bare eye, we worked or waited in the windy breath of river. This was the world we’d married.

History, in a cloth coat and a sable hat, took a seat somewhere on that train, served water and oranges by a young red waiter.

**Not Everybody Loves a Uniform**

Not every man loves another man
In uniform, or he doesn’t love
Guys in fashion, padded shoulders,
Peg-top trousers reaching to
The armpits. So the servicemen
Stationed or passing through
San Diego, zillions of these
Anglo hot-to-trotters, when they’ve quit
Bobby-soxers who open to them
At Walgreens or in off-zone bars,
They see Mexicans done up in zoot suits—
How a local boy wages fun
In Mexicantown, the dames blackhaired,
Deer brown, with half-bared necks waiting
For the *chicos* in those big animal suits.
*Hey boy, come here,* Arkansas or Detroit commands.
Hey shrimp, hey lady's man, why you got
Those balloon pants on if your dick's
So small. Hey shit on a shingle.

Mad Mexico, mad clothing binge,
I'm going to hurt you, Spic,
You fruit-stooper, cotton-hauler,
Dockyard loader, officer's boy,
This is what the Mexican men hear.
So the spit begins, marines, sailors,
Khakis opening warfare on a curb
Until all Browntown is besieged.
And guapas waiting at the corners
With babies are killed, the babies
Crushed or chucked into fires,
And the men in zoot suits cut or slashed
To the ground, then clubbed.
Workers who pick grapefruit and cukes
Or clean houses, who twist bolts,
Who rake the dust of the military bases,
Mobbed through the night.
The MPs lance out justice,
The he-men go off to war or home.
Oblivion salts the tears, women's
Zoot-suit wails dance the dead to sleep.