

Train and Thirteen Mexicans: Exploring the Depths of Two Poetic Masterpieces

In the realm of poetry, two works stand out for their evocative imagery, profound themes, and enduring cultural resonance: "Train" by Robert Hass and "Thirteen Mexicans" by Gwendolyn Bennett.



C-Train and Thirteen Mexicans: Poems by Jimmy Santiago Baca

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5

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"Train" by Robert Hass

Two Poems by Robert Hass, compiled by Nathan K. Hensley

The Problem of Describing Trees

The leaf glitters in the wind
And that delights us.

The leaf flutters, turning,
Because that motion in the heat of August
Protects its cells from drying out. Likewise the leaf
Of the cottonwood.

The pine pool thins up a woody stem
And the tree danced. No.
The tree capitalised.
No. There are limits to saying,
In language, what the tree did.

It is good sometimes for poetry to imitate us.

Dance with me, dancer. Or, I will.

Mountains say,
The water doing something in the wind.

From *TIME AND MATERIALS* (Econ, 2007)

Robert Hass's "Train" is a haunting meditation on solitude, displacement, and the fleeting nature of human existence. Through vivid imagery and sparse language, the poem transports us into a desolate landscape, where a train rumbles through the night, carrying its passengers to an unknown destination.

The central image of the train is a powerful symbol of both progress and isolation. As the train speeds through the darkness, it embodies the relentless march of time and the constant movement of life. Yet, within this forward motion lies a deep sense of loneliness and alienation.

Hass uses stark and evocative language to convey the emotional isolation of his speaker. The "empty fields" and "towns with no names" suggest a barren and meaningless existence. The "faces turned away" and the "eyes that / won't make eye contact" speak to a profound lack of connection and communication.

Beneath the poem's seemingly simple exterior lies a deeper layer of existential contemplation. The train journey becomes a metaphor for the human journey itself, with its uncertainties, losses, and the ultimate inevitability of death. The poem ends with a poignant reminder of our mortality: "And one more station before the

“dark I'll step into a”

“narrow room and bed down”

“in a place where no one”

“will find me”

"Thirteen Mexicans" by Gwendolyn Bennett

Street Lamps in Early Spring

Night wears a garment
All velvet soft, all violet blue . . .
And over her face she draws a veil
As shimmering fine as floating dew . . .
And here and there
In the black of her hair
The subtle hands of Night
Move slowly with their gem-starred light.

Gwendolyn Bennett's "Thirteen Mexicans" is a powerful indictment of racial violence and injustice. Written in response to the real-life lynching of 13 Mexican workers in Los Angeles in 1931, the poem uses vivid imagery and a raw, emotional tone to convey the brutality and inhumanity of the crime.

Bennett begins the poem with a haunting refrain: "Thirteen brown bodies, swinging in the sun." This image of lynching victims left to rot in the open

serves as a stark reminder of the horrors faced by Mexican Americans in the United States at the time.

The poem goes on to describe the indifference and complicity of those involved in the lynching, from the "smiling sheriffs" to the "gay ladies" who watch the spectacle. Bennett's use of ironic language highlights the grotesque nature of the event and the lack of empathy shown towards the victims.

Through the eyes of a child, Bennett conveys the innocence and vulnerability of the victims and the profound sense of loss and grief that follows their deaths. The child's question, "Do they know, o Jesus, / That their flesh was black / When they died a-swingin'?" adds a layer of poignancy to the poem and reinforces the dehumanization of the victims.

The poem ends with a powerful call to action, urging readers to speak out against racial violence and injustice. Bennett challenges the silence and complacency that have allowed such atrocities to go unchecked. She writes:

"Let us leave this Southern town"

"And never look back again"

"Unless, O Jesus, it be to fire"

"The dry dead grass that hides their bones"

Cultural Significance and Literary Impact

Both "Train" and "Thirteen Mexicans" have had a profound impact on American literature and culture. Hass's "Train" has been praised for its spare and haunting exploration of human existence, while Bennett's "Thirteen Mexicans" has been recognized as a powerful voice for social justice and activism.

"Train" has been included in numerous anthologies and textbooks and has been hailed as a masterpiece of contemporary American poetry. It has been studied by scholars for its use of symbolism, imagery, and its exploration of existential themes.

"Thirteen Mexicans" has been credited with raising awareness of the plight of Mexican Americans and has been used as a tool for social change. It has been performed and recited at rallies and protests, and has inspired other works of art that address issues of racial injustice.

, "Train" by Robert Hass and "Thirteen Mexicans" by Gwendolyn Bennett are two powerful and enduring poems that offer a profound exploration of human experience, social injustice, and the search for meaning in life. Through their evocative imagery, skillful use of language, and timeless themes, these poems continue to resonate with readers of all backgrounds, reminding us of both the fragility and resilience of the human spirit.



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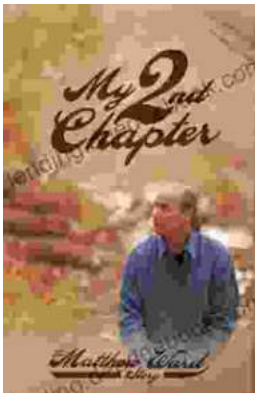
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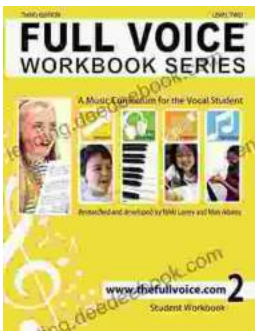
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