

any native dancer

any native dancer,
street man,
may be challenged,
questioned,
taken a back
by the assertive presence of others,
ready and willing
to take their own
aggressive turn
at toe and foot
and heel scuffling
in the dust of dance;
and he may wonder
if there is
all that much difference
all that much to hope for
in some new land,
some eden, some utopia,
where equipoise can be trusted,
or even in some old one
where codification
the entrenching rigidity
of the ballet company
freezes a native dancer
in his own lamentable prison-image
leaving him wide open

any native dancer (2)

to challenge/assault.

Perhaps it is in this land,
ours for the moment
in lieu of others,
that we should learn to dance anew
no longer trusting
the doctrines of the academy
but enlarging the circle
and admitting to our shared mortality

what can ever be hoped for
in those dreams of other countries
when there is the denial here
of this dream?

Perhaps in that other country
of myth and swan lake
all of the ballerinas
are truly lovely
and we are only quarrelling
with the muscle-bound beauties
on the home frontier.

But any place in the sun
is chance-ridden
as untrustworthy



any native dancer (3)

as footlights
which may ebb, flicker, vanish,
as dangerous as the proscenium arch
which may no longer serve
as happy and necessary barrier
between the private dream
of one lonely native dancer
and collective public aspiration
denied far too long

With its plush red velvet
the old opera house
can become as intolerable,
as untenable,
as irrelevant
as a country square dance,
as much a prison for conformity,
as much an echo
to a mythic past,
and all the circling, rounding
excluding
which celebrates and elevates
an utterly false privilege

how limited, ultimately,
is the sociology of any dancer
which only describes
and remains,

any native dancer (4)

up to a point,
self-congratulatory:
rewarding, praising and reassuring
one native dancer
for his tribal loyalty
in dancing only
for some of his fellow natives?

How do we get to the natives
who are beyond the immediate magic circle
of the native dancer?
and how does he escape
from the encompassing circle of image/of ego?

Will it occur,
this liberation,
when the chandelier
of the old opera house
comes toppling down,
appropriated by diggers,
sharp in their contempt
for property, possessions,
when the extravagant decor
is assaulted and raped
by inhabitants of cold-water flats,
an expensive mirror shattered
and the elite elegance
of the ballet

any native dancer (5)

limps to a halt?

Perhaps at such a time,
even other tests are being made:
of muscle, stance,
tendon,
tension,
the multiple meanings of articulation
spokesmanship
elevation into shared humanity
and side-taking
in a time of riot, destruction
and rebirth...

any sensate walking dancing man

any sensate walking dancing man
circling in his own rounds
involuntary and unchosen
in which he becomes
a spokesman for containment
the propriety of a beginning,
a middle, an end,
the necessity for boundaries and limits
and a little accidental exclusion,
invites the corrolary antagonist,
sometimes simply another street man,
walker, dancer,
excluded,
verbal,
ethnic,
aware,
suspicious of older schemes of order
all too often a masking of privilege
believing in dialogue, debate,
turn taking,
the healing attributes
of challenge dancing;
and any sensate walking dancing man
may learn,
sadly, wisely, competitively,
if not by inevitable degrees,

any sensate walking dancing man (2)

that any dancer
in the articulation of muscle
can speak out,
or be spoken out against,
sometimes even
in self-betraying moment,
in ache, in straining tendon,
one body, one vessel,
self-effacing, self-denying;
in that inadvertent forced dialogue
which becomes his
where there is the discovery
that his own chance writing
and dancing and acceptance of history
on the grand scale
can tangle
squarely and immutably
with his own history,
his chosen "gnavish" role
of native dancer,
with his own illusions,
his own circling movement.

Those old exercises,
the old lessons,
the postures of the past,
so painfully learned, practised,
so briefly reassuring,

any sensate walking dancing man (3)

once accepted, crystalized,
may prove to be
a rude route
to self-betrayal,
the betrayal and denial
of other native dancers.

How imperiled, how threatened,
how lost, how mislead
is the native dancer
who looks
to the Bolshoi for approval?
applause? acclaim?
love?

for the narcissist

for the narcissist

there are many tribal mirrors:

bar-room

graduate seminar

symposium on the dance

shopping center,

all glaring, distorting,

mirror-illusion-complacency-inviting

and even grass-root applause

and praise

for a native dancer

may sometimes confuse,

fix and arrest

an image,

prove treacherous

and leave him

without root or sustenance

for growth,

as much, in the long run,

as the socially approved race

where there are goals and prizes and awards

and opportunity for a little manipulation

and chicanery

of and with

the image of a native dancer

for the narcissist (2)

what native dancer,
what narcissist,
has ever been changed
altered
illuminated
or even been seriously dislocated
either by the image in the mirror
the local press
or by the wound and womb
which he mirror-seeks?

In any new land, wherever,
or in any old one,
corrupt, corroded, corrosive,
a native dancer,
street man,
may find
that it is no longer
possible
to bypass
the over-denied
the over-avoided
anarchistic dreams and ego-aspirations
of others

form and structure, often,
have a way of existing
only to be challenged and altered.

for the narcissist (3)

on the Coney Island express
or the Brighton local
there are many riders
and a native dancer
may find there
less the image of himself,
however rationalized sociologically,
than the necessary image of others,
requiring and insisting upon recognition,
demanding form
statement
structure
with which to move
into the motion of native dance

Considering the precarious line,
sometimes little more
than a cracked and less than trustworthy mirror,
between subject and object,
how many share
the responsibility
in the inevitable
tarnishing,
challenging,
corrupting
of the image
of any one native dancer?

through the dance of history

through the dance of history
the history of dance
boys and others
impatient with passive assigned roles
have thrown rocks and stones
smashing mirror, window, glass,
establishments' image of self:
sometimes for fun,
self-expression,
for self-effacement on Sunday afternoons,
for rediscovery, assertion,
and, sometimes,
during any long hot summer
out of a turbulent frustration
and sensing of betrayal.

Sad is the native dancer,
torn between direct engagement
and suspecting that the action
may well be elsewhere,
that it is the others
who are riding the train of history
himself, trembling, wanting to cast the first stone,
fearful of being and becoming its target,
left behind at some forgotten whistle-stop.

through the dance of history (2)

splintered, fragmented,
divided, corrupted,
made dizzy by the circling limits of dance,
the outer limits of any circle,
history as we have thought it was
or should be for us,
we can all ache to throw a stone,
break a window,
shatter a pane of glass,
challenge and destroy
rituals of the past:
including a native dancer's image
and know,
in the simultaneous trembling
the fear as willed and vulnerable target
that any native dancer can know

Perhaps
for all of the perils
of dancing through and on and around broken glass,
there can be a hope,
the clearing of a way,
a brutal short-cut,
a new vision,
a fresh assault
on the old tribal lies
in the over-due interruption
of codified dance,

through the dance of history (3)

the fractured, splintered, demolished
challenging of tradition...

There are occasions and circumstances
when a native dancer
needs a little restructuring
of image and himself
if both are to belong to his fellow natives.

Only the wise choreographer
of the dance of history
turns to Sicily and Mexico
(poverty can trigger
either crime or revolution)
incorporates the social reality
and knows the meaning and movement and motion
and direction of the new ballet.

Other criminals sustain poverty.

And one wonders
why the alternate choreographic reading
wasn't made earlier.

Reality was there, all along.
Native ritual can be revitalized
by a little astute reading
in its sources.

through the dance of history (4)

The evaluation,
the alternate version,
the variant synthesis,
could have been made,
acted upon,
and danced out,
before the decadent house of cards
comes toppling down
on the troubled ambivalences
spinning around
within the person of a native dancer.

spinning dust under his feet

spinning dust under his feet,
sharing in the weaving and fabricating
of the inevitable proletarian myth,
addicted to the permanency of laurels,
how reflective is any native dancer,
how trustworthy the mirror image,
of his own true and wholefolk idiom?
how trapped,
constricted,
encircled

within his dust

his turf

his terrain

his own whirling circle?

a walking circling man of the street

may jeopardize his role

by acquiescing to limitation,

bowing to tradition and the past,

playing hell with the larger production

by wondering,

if he does or dare to,

just why the dust

underfoot, set swirling, spinning,

ambling into electric (and electrifying) motion,

differs from dust anywhere,

elsewhere,

in and out of danced time

spinning dust under his feet (2)

all locomotion is political:

locomotion remains locomotion

on the picket line of protest

or around it,

circling, ambling,

in still another

wary form of protest,

the protest of denial of issue

belonger,

insider,

street man,

native dancer,

the man who saw the circle enlarge,

with round dance

becoming carol,

may find

in the circular motion/movement

the rounding and enlarging of self,

himself becoming

hero, spokesman,

villain, priest,

tragically flawed,

critic,

target and object of criticism,

envious of the boy with a stone for throwing...

in this drama of locomotion danced

in this drama of locomotion danced

there is

either in the beginning

or at some point

the discovery

of more roles

than were allocated,

parcelled out,

or bargained for

in the original

choreography of privilege

for some,

swan lake is always frozen,

inaccessible,

less than relevant

sometimes

in the intense training,

by degrees,

with the ritualized illusory moving ahead,

the locomotion of dream and drama,

there has been only accommodation,

adjustment,

homage and deference to the past,

with progressive and meaningful motion

more encompassing, imprisoning

in this drama of locomotion danced (2)

sharper at circumventing and limiting and denying
than liberative or freeing

Not all of us have been
to the same school
we may not have been admitted
or may have lacked tuition
and may not have learned
the same ground rules:
our experiences
with parallel bars
may have varied enormously.
We may not have belonged
or danced
or played the folk-dance-game
traditionally (and appropriately)
with one eye out
for the inevitable
umpire of dance

Always, in this drama of locomotion danced,
there are other dancers,
collision prone,
of necessity assertive,
the inadvertent, unchosen companions,
fellow-travellers on the Coney Island line,
members, equally, of the larger tribe,
delimited by another "ethnic" stance,

in this drama of locomotion danced (3)

but just a little out of step
as defined by the dancing academy

there are dancers
who move
like ambulatory psychopaths
and the movement
like any motion
becomes key and clue enough:
lumbering denial
in the guise of a Russian bear,
the dancer who refuses
to animal-identify himself;
another
over-embracing
the happy velvet gazelle role
selected so long ago
in the progressive school
where choices were numerous and wide-open
and it was only society
which was
less permissive
less tolerant
in the continuing acceptance
of the danced-out life role
of the velvet gazelle;
another stumbling toward ego
by a very private route:

in this drama of locomotion danced (4)

creating a new animal
for self-identification
may be uniquely helpful
in this instance,
while still another
whirls like a top,
the toy soldier
whose mechanism has come unsprung
and some fall down,
as anachronistic
as dancers of older native marathons,
cheered on by a sadistic audience
until they are exhausted,
spent, torn:
knowing nothing
of the religious ecstasy
of a dancing hassidic rabbi

a little gnavish, perhaps

a little gnavish, perhaps,
that first movement into dance,
and perversely so,
if the choice was his,
but then he could
have been apprenticed
at a tender, vulnerable
and less than knowing age
by parents
themselves gnavish
footlight loving
willing to let a son
chance and know
the precariousness of applause;
and there could easily have been
long unquestioning years
with motion
in and out of time
and no undue concern
about the curriculum
which shapes and molds
a native dancer's image,
making him harbinger,
vessel-container of motif,
inadvertent symbol, statement,
weather-vane spinning and whirling

a little gnavish, perhaps (2)

as the wind blows
helter-skelter
among the uncertain
folk-mores,
as available for tilting at
as any windmill...

however contained, groomed,
assured,
what native dancer
hasn't known
a little tribal conflict,
that occasional moment of angst
with image,
with elders, with peers,
the dissident audience;
and begun to wonder
about the boundaries
and tributaries
of ritualized dance,
the fixing of motion,
the place where definition
began, ended,
started or stopped

as we mechanically
move into motion,

a little gnavish, perhaps (3)

after hearing two bars of music,
why must it always be
the Missouri waltz
which does the trick?

or can the music
occasionally come
from a happy raid
on the storehouse
or heritage
of another tribe?

any native dancer
weary of red wing
or black hawk
may wonder
just when
he pledged allegiance
and what the commitment
was to:

a boundary strip,
a territorial flag,
a place of entry,
some succinct line of demarcation
what port, what call

how valid or tenuous
are the passports of dance

a little gnavish, perhaps (4)

and where are the sustaining frontiers
of dignity
which can keep
an adventuresome native dancer
alive, vital, free?

must there always be terminal points,
boundaries beyond recall, return?

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