

Essay on slow dance by matthew dickman

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The popular group "The Eagles" in their hit song "Hotel California" has a line " . . . some dance to remember, some dance to forget." This to a given extent helps define Matthew Dickman's "Slow Dance" which seeks out an active oblivion of forgetting within a moment of transcendence that is graced with novelty and rareness. The tonality of the poem hints that ghosts past, relationships past, mistakes, repetitions, mundane trivialities need to be forgotten within this "opportunity to dance with really exquisite strangers. (3-4)" Indeed this need is more important than scientific progress, personal resolutions, or empty actions like "to bring the car around because it's begun to rain. (7-8)" This moment of time is irrelevant, frozen in the moment where the body speaks its own language which is non-rational. Only the timeless moment of the slow dance exists and even ". . . the stars in the sky are dead. (17-18)" "This moment where "my body is talking to your body slow dance. (18-19)" The slow dance brings fantasy, pleasure (to knock it out of the park) and "It's a little like cheating. (13)" We have all made mistakes of course, yet Dickman assures us "The slow dance doesn't care. It's all kindness like children before they turn four. (24-25)" So the slow dance of active oblivion is graced with innocence. The slow dance is not gender specific as evidenced within the poem and takes on protean shapes and odd pairings: the slow dance of siblings, of what's to come, of insomnia, of ritual. Within these dances of forgetfulness, "There is no need to save us because there is no need to be saved. (38-39)" This seems to imply that the slow dance is prior to what we think, more important than what we have done. It bears an ontological status in itself. The slow dance is --possessing being. The slow dance is the ZONE. Getting in a zone.

The Slow Dance is in-between, intermezzo in this joyful moment of oblivion and transcendence. The dance itself has odd pairings of this relationship evidenced in the similes which at first could be considered rough and incongruent: couch and dining room table, two people rocking-buoy, hips unfolding-paper napkin, insomnia pouring – bath water, stranger – over-sexed chandelier, and finally the intriguing and seeming random pairings of the last line (48): The haiku and honey. The orange and orangutan slow dance. These are comparisons through irony which disassociate any associations except for the alliterative roots of the words and a tricky swerve of a popular cliché. What does a haiku have to do with honey? A facile answer would be “ they both are sweet.” This would be a rather hackneyed response. Similarly, comparing oranges to orangutans seems like a poorly aimed joke designed to thwart meaning. Before the clincher we are told we should be “ Scrappy for joy.” We should be happy with not understanding this moment, not over-rationalizing it, enjoying the Slow Dance on its own terms. We should feel joyful, as if a post-modern turn of Keats’ negative capabilities, in being perfectly comfortable with unknowing, yet still experiencing.

Although not as effective as the general theme and the use of literary devices, Dickman’s form is choppy and fragmented. Read aloud, it is like one of Alan Ginsberg’s poems after a nice jog, a half-breath, then on to the next line. Stylistically, this poses problems. The poem calls attention to its own form. In addition, his various readings found online betray the consistency of the form as if a narrative, but has an aesthetic appeal on the written page. Yet our lives are fragmented, at times. We do disassociate from much of

what life has to offer us. Like T. S. Eliot, in these dances “ we can shore our fragments against the ruins,” the heartbreaks, the suffering, the repetitions and banality of mundane existence offering ourselves up to the slow dance of joyful forgetfulness.