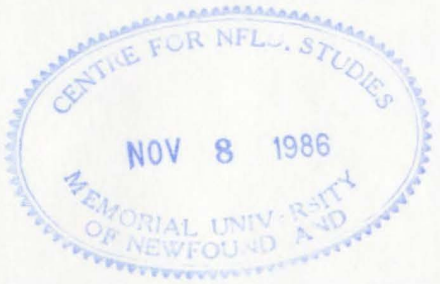
THE MISBEGOTTEN DANCER: THE IMAGE OF THE DANCE IN THE POETRY OF DOROTHY LIVESAY

VALERIE EVELYN COOMBS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THE MISBEGOTTEN DANCER:

THE IMAGE OF THE DANCE IN

THE POETRY OF DOROTHY LIVESAY.

by

Valerie Evelyn Coombs, B.A., B.Ed.

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"Yet alive! to move with the dancer
stamping within --"
(CP, 349)

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ABBREVIATION KEY

This table of abbreviations is constructed in an effort to make the footnoting throughout the thesis as simple and unobtrusive as possible. The majority of the poems analyzed are contained in Collected Poems, and only in the final chapter of the thesis is there extensive reference made to Livesay's two recent volumes of poetry, Ice Age (1975) and The Phases of Love (1983). Any untitled poem dealt with in this study is referred to by its first line placed in quotation marks. Such poems occur only in The Phases of Love (1983), for which there is no pagination.

CGF	The Colour of God's Face. Vancouver: Unitarian Church, 1964
CP	Collected Poems: The Two Seaons. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1972.
IA	Ice Age. Erin, Ontario: Press Porcepic Limited, 1975.
PL	The Phases of Love. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1983.

ABSTRACT

Behind much of Dorothy Livesay's poetry, the reader can clearly detect the rhythms and motions of the dance. Exhibiting her concern with man's inability to always articulate or share his sorrows and joys through the medium of language, Livesay employs the dance motif as an alternate, perhaps even a more reliable form of human expression. Thus the rhythms of the dance are often used to convey those human emotions which may ordinarily seem incommunicable. The repetition of the dance motif throughout her work reflects the psychological dimensions of recurring and constantly evolving themes. It reflects her search for wholeness, as well as the celebration of man's communion with the natural world around him. In its association with circular images, it reaffirms Livesay's optimism and faith in mankind. The poet's belief in the inherent goodness of man is the basis of her use of song and dance elements in her poetry. Livesay's attitude towards, and her affinity with the cyclic world of nature provides her with the impetus to celebrate through the rhythms of the dance.

For Livesay, the dance becomes an effective way to project and objectify, for the reader, the inner tensions and the complexities of life which the poet experiences.

Within the poem, the image of the dance is the poet's means of interpretation and translation. It can as easily convey the ecstatic isolation of the shy, young persona in the imagistic lyrics as it does the joyful celebration of womanhood expressed in the poet's later feminist poems.

Constantly aware of the limitations of language, Livesay uses the dance motif as a link between the thought and the poetic expression. It also allows her to transcend the world of reality or actuality and to enter that other highly illusory world -- the realm of imagination and fantasy.

As a means of personal expression, the dance allows the persona of Livesay's poems to explore her own sense of identity in order to achieve some measure of freedom and creativity in a world which often demands restraint and conformity.

INTRODUCTION

In the article entitled "Song and Dance", Dorothy Livesay states that "it is very hard to write a poem without hearing, in your mind, the music behind it".[1] In selecting and cataloguing the many different images which are repeated in Livesay's collected works, one specific image emerges which lends support to her view that "behind all poetry is the song".[2] This is the motif of the dance, and it stems from the rhythms of the music behind the poem. As Livesay says," I do not know how it is with other poets, but as far as I am concerned I am always hearing this other beat behind the ordinary spoken language and I'm always hearing the melody".[3]

The frequency with which this particular image of the dance occurs says a great deal about the development of Livesay's poetry from her earliest publication, Green Pitcher (1928), to her most recent collection of poems, The Phases of Love (1983). By examining a representative number of her poems, noting how often the image appears,

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[1]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance", Canadian Literature, #41, Summer, 1969, p. 40.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 41.

and paying particular attention to the denotations and connotations of the image, one can trace the nature of her poetic process and the phases through which the dance evolves. The repetition of the dance in Livesay's work reflects the psychological dimensions of recurring and constantly evolving themes. As well, it illuminates the various poetic techniques which she uses, and demonstrates the transitions that occur in content and technique from the 1920's to the present.

This study will trace, through a close analysis of the poems in which the image of the dance or dancer occurs, either explicitly or implicitly, the progress of Livesay's poetic vision, and in doing so, assess her work as a woman writer in what was a predominantly male literary tradition. In Right Hand Left Hand, Livesay says:

> The other Canadian artists of my era were those men born soon after the turn of the century: Raymond Knister, Earle Birney, Robert Finch, A.J.M. Smith, A.M. Klein (1909), Leo Kennedy and Irving Layton (1913). No companion women poets were born until the end of the First World War .... I always had the feeling I was struggling alone to make a woman's voice heard. I admired the men .... but I felt curiously detached from them in a literary and life-style sense.[4]

Throughout all of the changes in her work, Livesay has managed to maintain a unique style and voice of her own. One element which expresses the constantly changing and evolving nature

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[4]Dorothy Livesay, Right Hand Left Hand (Erin: Press Porcepic Ltd., 1977), p. 19.

of her poetry is that of the "song and dance".[5] Even while exploring new forms and poetic techniques, or more explicitly frank subject matter, as in her later poetry, Livesay never fails to present the rhythmic movements of the dance or the lilting melody of the song.

Other studies which have been done on Dorothy Livesay emphasize a critical overview of her work; hence there have been very few close readings or critical analyses of the poems. By tracing the development of an image motif, patterns which are not readily discernible may emerge. Fresh insights may occur from a closer, more intense look at the poems (i.e. by examining the poet's specific use of images; looking at where they occur; paying attention to other images which are associated with a central image motif).

Many general studies of the development of modern poetry in Canada, such as Munro Beattie's "The Advent of Modernism in Canadian Poetry in English, 1912-1940",[6] Peter Stevens' "The Development of Canadian Poetry between the Wars",[7] and Peter Schultz's "The Periodical Poetry of A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, Leo Kennedy, A.M. Klein and Dorothy

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[5]Livesay, "Song and Dance".

[6]Munro Beattie, "The Advent of Modernism in Canadian Poetry in English", 1912-1940, Diss. (Columbia, 1957).

[7]Peter Stevens, "The Development of Canadian Poetry between the Wars", Diss. (Saskatchewan, 1968).

Livesay, 1925-1950"[8] recognize the importance of Livesay's work in the overall development of modern Canadian poetry. However, a close analysis of poems which are representative of the spectrum of her work has not been undertaken. Charles Boylan's "The Social and Lyrical Voices of Dorothy Livesay",[9] completed in 1969, deals with the lyrical and social aspects of Livesay's poetry. Susan Wood's "The Poetry of Dorothy Livesay: 1928-1975"[10] focuses on the different phases of her work and how the poet's changes in attitudes are reflected in the subjects and style of her poems. Although some analysis of individual poems is done by both writers, they do not provide a close analysis of her works from the earliest period up to the present.

The image patterns of the dance reveal the progression of Livesay, both as a poet and woman. Tied closely to form and content, the dance motif represents the poet's development from the shy, reticent dancer of the 1920's who preferred to dance alone, unseen, to the strong, confident dancer who emerges in the poetry of the 1970's and 1980's, reaffirms

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[8]Peter Gregory Schultz, "The Periodical Poetry of A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, Leo Kennedy, A.M. Klein and Dorothy Livesay, 1925-1950", M.A. Thesis (Western Ontario, 1957).

[9]Charles Boylan, "The Social and Lyrical Voices of Dorothy Livesay", M.A. Thesis (British Columbia, 1969).

[10]Susan Jane Wood, "The Poetry of Dorothy Livesay: 1925-1975", M.A. Thesis (Concordia, 1977).

her belief in man and celebrates the joys of living and loving.

Through the use of the dance as a form of artistic expression, Livesay articulates the primal concerns which haunt the consciousness of modern man. In attempting to define her world, she is constantly confronted with the perplexing predicament of man's inability to "hear / how silence sings" (CP, 3). The distances which often exist between individuals necessitate, for the times when words fail, an alternate, more reliable mode of human expression. Through the rhythms of the dance and the harmonious interaction between dancers, Livesay finds the means to free her poetry from the rigidity of structure and form. This does not suggest that her "dance poetry" lacks form but that "the dance" allows her to explore and experiment with new forms and techniques. In the subjective freedom which the lyrical mode affords, she is freed to explore the process by which the poet articulates human concerns, how she transforms them into the rhythms of music and dance.

Besides allowing her to experiment with new as well as traditional forms, the dance becomes representative of several underlying themes sustained throughout Livesay's work. In Green Pitcher (1928) and Signpost (1932) the dance manifests itself in the longings and fantasies of the female persona. When the dancer appears in these early lyrics, she is generally alone, and there is much secrecy and reticence

associated with her movements. It is a very egocentric and private persona that Livesay uses in these imagistic lyrics. Her association with shadows and masks suggests the female's need for protection from the scrutiny of a male lover. In the safety of dark gardens, she finds the freedom to explore tentatively her relationship with the world around her. Speaking out of a woman's sense of separateness and isolation, Livesay creates in these lyrics the visions which are to continue to be important throughout her later works.

During the 1930's and 1940's there is a shift in Livesay's use of the persona. In the longer proletarian verse of this period, the poet most frequently employs a male persona or a second or third person speaker, rather than the first person, overtly autobiographical, persona of her earlier work. Symbolic of man's estrangement from nature, the dancer now moves to the harsh, unimaginative rhythms of the machine. Having lost contact with the creative and highly imaginative element of the dance, life becomes mechanically routine and predictable. The poetry of the 1930's seeks to reintegrate man into a cohesive society, where he can find meaning and satisfaction in his work and in his relationships with others. Reflecting the poet's own commitment to the socialist cause, as well as echoing the paced routines of an automated society, the dance serves the communal function of translating the experiences of

the group into rhythmic muscular movements which can be executed, as in the choral dance, simultaneously by all. In the long documentary, "Day and Night", with its pantomimic factory scene, the speechless eloquence of posture and gesture becomes more important than words or individual actions. The choral dance thus expresses a sense of fraternity or brotherhood, which is reaffirmed through the solidarity of the group. Unlike the personae of the imagistic lyrics of the 1920's, the individual does not feel alienated or alone, for there is comfort and reassurance in being part of a larger whole. The sharing of conflicts and tensions reaffirms and deepens the bonds among individuals. The rhythms of the dance also provide a cathartic function, for the communal rapture of the rhythms renews and strengthens the group.

In Livesay, the dance also emphasizes man's primitive instinct to dance in celebration of the many hallowed occasions throughout his life -- birth, death, initiation, marriage, war, etc. Besides providing an avenue for escape and for flights of fancy, the dance becomes representative of the poet's need to celebrate all the joys and pains of living which she experienced in marriage and motherhood during the 1950's. Experimenting with longer lyrical sequences and more complex patterns of rhythm and rhyme, Livesay extends the image of the dance to embrace themes of greater sophistication and complexity. Through the rhythms created

by sound patterns and by the juxtaposition of opposing images, she creates multiple tensions within a single lyric. Still concerned with her search for personal expression and identity, she now sees herself as connecting eternally with the rhythms of those around her -- husband, parents, children, friends and ancestors. Confined by her relationships with others, the dancer now moves in a more restricted sphere. Images of concealment and confinement abound in the poetry of this period, as convention and tradition impose order on the speaker's life. She is torn between the desire to transcend this world and the constraints of the needs and wishes of others.

In the lyrics of the 1960's the dance becomes more personal and erotic, rather than social or communal. Functioning as a medium of courtship, it often reflects the overtly sexual attraction between the aging female persona and her younger male lover. Livesay's use of more explicit subject matter requires her to use a more candid and direct language. Finally freed from the guilt and insecurities of her earlier years, here the persona displays a willingness to take risks in exploring the erotic and sensual aspects of womanhood. The dance becomes representative of the male's ability to transform the aging female speaker into a young girl again. The private nature of the female persona's quest for identity is reflected in the poet's increasing use of dreams and fantasies. Again the dance is associated with flight and

the possibility of escape, as well as with the process of transformation.

In Livesay's last two volumes of poetry, Ice Age (1975) and The Phases of Love (1983), the dancer and the dance become one as the female persona finally finds the freedom that she has sought for so long. Like one who has made a long and arduous journey, the dancer emerges in a rainbow of colour and light. From the visions created by experience, she has attained wisdom and maturity. Now the dance takes on a sacred or holy quality as in the poem, "The Step Beyond". Before the speaker can attain oneness, she must cease trying to possess her male lover, and, instead, join him in a harmonious and joyful dance of love. With elegance and grace, Livesay has moved from the awkward, clumsy steps of the "misbegotten" (CP, 265) dancer to those of one who is in tune with the rhythms of the universe, and at peace with herself.

CHAPTER I

SONGS OF INNOCENCE

"You did not see me dancing.
No:
I did not dance for eyes to see".

(CP, 29)

In the 1920's when Livesay begins to write in the imagist mode, she uses the dance motif to express her belief in man's kinship with nature and the intrinsic worth of the individual. In Green Pitcher (1928) and Signpost (1932), Livesay most resembles the imagist poets H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Elinor Wylie. The imagist writers who emerged during the early 1900's were influenced by Ezra Pound's manifesto. Like Pound, they were dedicated to freeing poetry from the tyranny of conventional form.[1] Imagism was essentially a reaction to the poetry of the Romantic and Victorian eras in England and America. The imagists' sources of inspiration were the ancient classical Greek and Roman poets, the Japanese, Chinese and Hebrew poets, as well as the modern French writers.

In Livesay's earliest poems, one can detect very strong elements of imagist poetry, such as a hardness of

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[1]Glenn Hughes, Imagism and the Imagist (New York: The Humanities Press, 1960), p. 6.

outline, clarity of image, freedom from metre, brevity, and suggestiveness.[2] In an interview with Doug Beardsley and Rosemary Sullivan, Livesay says that her mother, Florence Randal Livesay, who was a poet, would subscribe to the American literary magazines of the time when Livesay was a young girl:

> We had these all the time in the house. That was how, from the beginning, I was influenced by imagism and by Amy Lowell, "H.D.", Williams, Pound .... Anyhow it was the whole Imagist Movement that started me off.[3]

Influenced almost entirely by the American poets, even though she was reading the modern British writers, Livesay begins to use free verse forms in her earliest collection Green Pitcher (1928). Many of Livesay's poems could be termed imagistic lyrics, but they are far from exact replicas of the work of her American contemporaries. Livesay uses the principles of imagism to explore new forms and poetic techniques which better suit her own poetic sensibility. In the same interview with Beardsley and Sullivan, Livesay comments on her refusal to be restricted by form:

> I found it impossible to write in the stanza form. I've never been able to write a rhymed sonnet. My mother was open to all these things and moreover,

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[2] Ibid., p. 4.

[3] "An Interview with Dorothy Livesay", conducted by Doug Beardsley and Rosemary Sullivan, Canadian Poetry, 3 (Fall/Winter, 1978), pp. 88-89.

> she was very adept at all the techniques -- she just loved the ballad, the triolet, all the French forms. She did them very well but she could never persuade me to try them. I just revolted.[4]

Livesay's search for her own mode of personal expression goes back to her teen-age years. In the article "Song and Dance", she states that during the 1920's, through sexual experimentation, she searched for "the perfect dancing partner".[5] She had read Havelock Ellis' The Dance of Life and agreed with his contention that the dance was the ultimate expression of "the consummation of two bodies into one, the merging of self in other self".[6] Thus from her first book Green Pitcher (1928) to the haunting lyrics in Ice Age (1975) and The Phases of Love (1983), Livesay has constantly striven "To walk on feet made aerial" (CP, 2). The motif of the poet as dancer weaves its way throughout her works, expressing her longing for lightness and ease: "To recapture / The light, light air" (CP, 2).

The dance, which is one of the most ancient forms of magic, is "a pantomime of metamorphosis"[7] in which the dancer seeks some alternative form of existence. Livesay

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[4]Ibid., p. 90.

[5]Dorothy Livesay, "Song and Dance", Canadian Literature, 41 (Summer, 1969), p. 43.

[6]Ibid.

[7]J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 76.

uses the image of the dance as a symbol of transformation in a secretive and self-conscious manner in her earliest works. Aware of her vulnerability as a woman and as a poet, she is wary of attracting too much attention. Writing out of a male literary tradition, Livesay's voice is deliberately subdued and reserved. In Right Hand Left Hand (1977) she comments on her sense of aloneness as a woman writer in Canada during the 1920's and 1930's:

> The other Canadian artists of my era were those men born soon after the turn of the century: Raymond Knister, Earle Birney, Robert Finch, A.J.M. Smith, A.M. Klein (1909), Leo Kennedy and Irving Layton (1913). No companion women poets were born until the end of the First World War .... I always had the feeling I was struggling alone to make a woman's voice heard. I admired the men ... but I felt curiously detached from them in a literary and life-style sense.[8]

This sense of aloneness may explain the questioning quality in many of the early poems. It appears as if the poet is unsure of her own capabilities, and lacks the confidence to trust her own intuitions. There are a number of allusions in the titles of the poems to interrogation and alienation (CP, 2-50). These, then, are Livesay's few hesitant steps

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[8]Dorothy Livesay, Right Hand Left Hand (Erin, Ontario: Press Porcepic Limited, 1977), p. 19.

of the dance. They are her "songs of innocence"[9] written from "the garden of childhood" (CP, ix).

The voice of the inexperienced poet echoes with awe and wonder as Livesay endeavors, through the image of the dance, to confront nature and her own private world. Her initial attempts to explore the relationship between self and nature reflect the dualities which exist throughout Livesay's work. The female speaker displays an emotional, intuitive response to her world. Frequently using the passive voice in many of the early poems, Livesay emphasizes the reticence and hesitancy of the female speaker. The dominant use of the conditional mood is another characteristic of Livesay's earliest imagistic lyrics. Coming at the beginning of a poem, and used as a refrain in the opening line of each stanza, as in the poem "Interrogation", the conditional mood expresses the hopes or wishes of the reserved speaker. Though longing for lightness and ease, the speaker remains bound by the restrictions of the physical world (e.g. her own "clumsy" [CP, 265] body), as well as by the conventions of society. Likewise, the very real limitations of time and space arrest the poet. She must then conceal her own truths, scatter her own wishes. In The Madwoman in the Attic Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out an essential

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[9]William Blake, The Poetical Works of William Blake, ed. John Sampson (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp. 65-79.

difference between the male child's progress towards adulthood and that of the female:

> The male child's progress toward adulthood is a growth toward both self-assertion and self-articulation .... [It] implies a development of the powers of speech. But the girl child must learn the arts of silence either as herself a silent image ..., or as a silent dancer of her own woes, a dancer who enacts rather than articulates.[10]

The first poem in which Livesay explicitly employs the image of the dance is "Fantasy in May". Aside from this poem, the dance is only present implicitly in the collection Green Pitcher (1928), through the rhythms or word choice of the poet. In "Fantasy in May" Livesay, taking her images from the natural world around her, compares the mad and riotous dancing of the "tulips" to the chaste and sober light of the "candles" which try "never to dance" (CP, 4). Contrasting the wildly exuberant flowers with the steady, unflickering candles, the speaker suggests the consequences of choosing the safe, predictable route. By accepting the imposition of rules, the patterns of convention, and not daring to risk adventure, she protects herself but narrows her vision. Like the safe uneventful existence of the conformist, the "virginal candles" which are always the same can be all blown "down in a row" (CP, 5). This image of candles falling "in a row" suggests the possibility of

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[10]Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic (London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 43.

patterns breaking. The tulips on the other hand have never been restricted by patterns or space:

> But tulips!
> There is no gainsaying
> The will of the tulips,
> For the wind blows the red ones, the white ones, the yellow,
> And never a one
> Sputters out. (CP, 4)

When the speaker refuses to take risks, to dare to be different, then the dance is suspended and the most that she can wish to attain is the evanescent and transitory light of the candles.

Symbolic of the extravagance and inconstancy of spring, the "scarlet and russet" (CP, 4) tulips dare to do more than merely exist. "Swaying and flaunting" (CP, 4) their colours, they dance to the movements of the wind. In this free moving fantasia, the flamboyant flowers "totter and reel" (CP, 5) recklessly. Out of control, they dance with wild abandonment in an "ecstatic frenzy" out of the "Young prim gardens" (CP, 4) and down the wide-open streets. They demonstrate the creative impulse behind the dance as opposed to the dull inertia of the palely gleaming candles.

The use of the word "fantasy" in the title is similar to the musical term fantasia, which suggests the free play in a musical composition, or the rhythms of free verse, as opposed to the rigid adherence to set forms. It also evokes the primitive image of the dance, with its association

of springtime and fertility rites. Unwilling to be confined to "gardens" which symbolize enclosure, the tulips enact a mad dance of passionate release. Their refusal to adhere to the rules of structure or design is illustrated by the poet's use of contrasting geometric images. The riotous freedom of the tulips is seen in opposition to the shapes of the "Old grey gardens", (CP, 4) with their suggestion of permanence and stability:

> Squares and triangles,
> Ovals and quadrangles,
> Filled with riotous glory
> Of tulips mocking the wind. (CP, 4)

In this tension is implied Livesay's dissatisfaction with the restrictions of regular meter and rhyme. The poet performs, through the technique of free verse, her own mocking dance, and thus frees the lyric from a rigid and inhibiting structure.

The age old practice of dancing as a ritual of celebration is also implied through the title of the poem. In the earliest recorded lyrics in English literature, springtime, with its suggestion of regeneration, is a theme which occurs often. In her use of flower and garden imagery as well as in her reference to a "fantasy" or dream state, Livesay evokes the timelessness of the dance. Fantasy also suggests the wild and visionary element of nature which occurs in many of the poet's earlier imagistic lyrics. With its whims and caprices, a fantasy involves the idea of unfulfilled desire and the mad longings of the soul.

The tulips are referred to as dancing "harlots" (CP, 5) who mock and sway suggestively in the wind. When the dance of the tulips defeats the wind's force, it seems a supreme celebration of sexual fulfillment. The joy of physical love which the "drunken harlots" find in "each other's arms" (CP, 5) is more satisfying than the spiritual love associated with the chastity of the "virginal candles" (CP, 5) which flicker, and then go out.

Rhythmically free, the poet demonstrates in this poem what happens when an individual is permitted to follow the dictates of her own free-ranging imagination. The lines dash and dance across the page. With dashes and exclamations strewn liberally throughout, the poet creates an uninhibited lyric which conveys the exuberance and intensity of the dance. A surrendering to the rhythms of the wind and to the music of the poem has freed the speaker from her own reserves. Through the element of the dance, the unobserved speaker who appears in so many of the early lyrics has been transformed into a rainbow dancer, delighting in the "scarlet and russet / Amber and gold" (CP, 4) colors of May. From the landscape of "the grey garden" with its suggestion of safety and orderliness, the dancer romps through the open streets and finally escapes audaciously into the hills. The speaker then whirls "down the street like an / ancient Fury" and leaves "this city, accursed city" (CP, 5) behind. In classical mythology the furies are three female spirits

which combine the opposing elements of terror and benevolence. Like the Furies, the tulips are representative of man's need for balance and compromise. The dance of mortal existence cannot be based solely on rigid patterns or controlled movements. Allowances have to be made for that wilder and more creative aspect of life -- that which stems from spontaneity and impulse.

In "The Invincible", the dance which is merely implied by the poet's word choice is once again closely associated with the whirling movements of the wind. The speaker listens for the "strange rhythms / Rising and falling" (CP, 7), making sway the leafy branches of the graceful elm trees. Although alone in the darkness of the garden, the speaker recognizes, in the indomitable spirit of the trees, her own inner strength and determination: "Stronger and bolder are elms / Than blinded men" (CP, 7). Once again the speaker intimates that there is safety and strength in not being perceivable. This reflects her childhood memories of "Woodlot" in Clarkson, Ontario where as a young girl she would dance and whirl with the spring winds as they blew through the willowy birch trees. Accustomed to the unrestrained motions of the wind and her own body's rhythms, it seemed a formidable task to master the formal and technical dance steps which she was expected to conquer during her teen-age years. In the article "Song and Dance", Livesay recalls the pain of those earlier years:

> I remember vividly the agonies of a dancing class .... The formal imposition of having to memorize where your foot went next seemed to paralyze me. Only once did I get a glimpse of how music could relate to natural bodily rhythm: and that was at university when I registered for a course in Dalcroze Eurythmics. Even at that, the technical knowledge required seemed formidable .... Mostly, I remained a wallflower. Yet how I longed and longed to dance all night ... I flew around the room in my own way, alone.[11]

In order to achieve free expression and some measure of personal happiness, it seemed necessary that the speaker dance alone. In "Wraith", she leaves the intimate embrace of her lover's arms, even while she is imploring him to "Hold me, hold me" (CP, 8). The conflict of emotions is heightened by the speaker's awareness of the pain which her leaving will cause. She as well as her lover will soon know "The aching sorrow of dead leaves / Frozen by the moon" (CP, 8). The allusion in the title of the poem to the transience and impermanence of human love emphasizes the highly illusory nature of the dance as a form of personal expression. Like the changing of the seasons or the phases of the moon, the speaker will be held by a different partner; she will dance with the ghost of a forgotten lover. Depending on the rhythmic movements of the body, the dance may evoke various moods or convey a limitless range of emotions or expression. In the poem "Wraith", the speaker transforms

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[11] Livesay, "Song and Dance", p. 42.

the simple act of leaving the circle of her lover's embrace into a sadly final exit. Having decided to leave, she steps outside of the circle, and thus implicitly halts the dance.

In "The Gulls" the speaker's longing for flight from the cares of the world and her need for solitude are expressed by the gliding movements of the gulls and by the speaker's own meditative dance at the water's edge. Embracing the rhythms of the water and the motion of the gulls' wings against the grey sky, the speaker longs to be "loosened, free" (CP, 14), to become one with the elements of water and air. The tension which the speaker feels is conveyed by these lines:

> Then, as now, I seemed to be alone
> Swayed as the scraggly birches were, by wind,
> My body no longer mine, but something loosened, free,
> Yet bound forever to the rock,
> Possessed forever by the wind. (CP, 14)

Livesay's frequent use of the passive voice in the opening stanza of this poem suggests the speaker's sense of powerlessness and her hesitation in asserting herself. Observing the smooth sweep of the birds' airy ballet and the motion of the waves, she imagines herself leaping up and joining them in their dance, following "the motion of water and sky, / Of gulls' wings" (CP, 14). Again the speaker yearns for the solitary dance, her realm of private space: "Then as now, I seemed to be alone" (CP, 14).

Her description of the sound of the gulls as "human, piercing and anguished" (CP, 14) suggests that the poet recognizes in their cries the agonizing aloneness of the individual, the essential alienation of the speaker, "that grey wall of rock" (CP, 14) which she must confront both within and without herself. Ultimately, each person participates in her own private dance of sorrow. The reader wonders what circumstance of sorrow has led the speaker back to this "tiny island" (CP, 14) of the soul to meditate and seek solace with the wind, the waves and the screaming gulls.

Often when words fail to communicate the complexity of the human dilemma Livesay turns to the dance as a means of personal expression. Perhaps through the rhythms and motion of the haunting dance at the water's edge the speaker can convey her sense of alienation, yet also her hopes for communion with nature. Her plunging "away from the wind / Out with the gulls through the warm, thundering water" (CP, 14) suggests the spiritual nature of the speaker's experience. Stirred by "the voices of the gulls / ... human, piercing and anguished / As of one lost", the speaker encounters "the faint, anguished echo" (CP, 14) of her own aloneness. Unlike those unhindered creatures of flight who have found their freedom in their wild communion of sea and sky, she still remains alone. Contented, the gulls perform their eternal pantomime of light in the limitless space between water and sky. Unlike the speaker who is "bound forever

to the rock, / Possessed forever by the wind" (CP, 14), they are free of the restrictions of space which confine the speaker. Unable to soar, she chooses, as an alternative to flight, a baptism through submersion in the sea.

It is not the visual images that the speaker in this poem is attuned to. Instead she reacts instinctively to the rhythms of the world around her:

> All these I saw with my eyes closed
> And so leaped up, and danced
> And followed the motion of water and sky,
> Of gull's wings, and cried out in answer
> As the voices of gulls rose and were echoed: (CP, 14)

Diving into the limitless expanse of the sea, the speaker achieves unity and harmony with her natural surroundings.

Achieving a sense of wholeness within herself was not so easy a task. The complexity of the process of individuation and the act of becoming is tentatively acknowledged by the speaker in the short poem "Personalities". The duality of Dorothy Livesay, poet and woman, is suggested by her double, the image of "a lovely whirling girl" (CP, 20) dancing up the street. Contrasted with this free, ecstatic spirit of movement and sound is that other image of the speaker's more "sober self" (CP, 20) who plods quietly and uncertainly on. While the freedom of the dance does not come easily to that other "grave, uncertain girl" (CP, 20), her longing to master the rhythms of the dance is always with her. The dichotomy within the human psyche between freedom and

restraint is forever before Livesay, and it is reflected in the double images which dominate her work. In "Personalities" Livesay is clearly at odds with these dualities and unable to reconcile the opposing aspects of her own nature. There is first and foremost the "lovely whirling girl" (CP, 20) whom she longs to be; more realistically there is that clumsy, serious girl who trudges heavily along. The speaker can only obtain momentary glimpses of that highly elusive dancer who seems always to be just ahead of her, disappearing up a street or around a corner.

In the early lyric "Blindness", Livesay indicates, through the image of the dance, the speaker's need for privacy and solitude: "You did not see me dancing. / No: / I did not dance for eyes to see" (CP, 29). The apparent blindness of the person or persons whom the speaker addresses offers her some measure of protection and security, thus saving her "self's integrity" (CP, 29). The insistence of the speaker that she is not seen emphasizes her sense of vulnerability. The delicate and excited motion of the dancer, as if she were a shadow "Flashed with the sunlight on the wall" (CP, 29), is conveyed by the adjective "fluttering" (CP, 29). Denoting an agitated and nervous movement, the word also suggests the anxious state of the speaker. The repetition of the alliterative effect of "f's" throughout the lyric creates a hushed and slightly breathless quality in the voice of the speaker. Free from scrutiny, she enjoys

the solitary and private nature of her ecstatic dance. This need for privacy may be related to the period in which Livesay begins to write. The woman, as well as the poet, must tread carefully. It is the 1920's and both literature and society are still male-dominated. In Right Hand Left Hand, as earlier stated, Livesay confirms how isolated she felt from contemporary male writers on both a literary and social level. It was not until the end of the twenties that other female writers began to emerge and make themselves heard. Livesay's desire to transcend these social and literary bonds is evident in the earlier lyrics, but they express subdued and only half-acknowledged longings. Instead, her emphasis during this period is on experimentation with form and content. Her refusal to observe the old conventions of choice and treatment of subject matter is linked to a refusal to be bound by accepted rhymes and meters. Like the speaker in "Blindness" who "grew tall, / Taller than my own ecstasy" (CP, 29), Livesay in the 1920's broke free of the outworn conventions which held sway in much lyric poetry of the time.

The youthful exuberance of the early lyrics begins to fade at the end of the 1920's. Gone is the spontaneous sense of wonder of the young poet. The eager, intuitive joy of the dance is replaced by a more basic concern with survival. The speaker is now more often found, not in a natural landscape of woods or sea-shores, but within rooms,

confined by narrow walls and with a "little space of floor" (CP, 59), which is hardly conducive to the free spirited movement of the dance.

The act of taming or domesticating the dancer has begun. In the process, the essential spirit that once allowed her to dance on air begins to die. In several of the poems from this period, the speaker expresses a feeling of loss of self as she begins to establish an intimate relationship with another person. No longer a solitary dancer, she must learn to adapt her movements to another's rhythms.

The consequences of surrendering to the will of her male lover are now sharply felt. "City Wife" expresses the ominous tremors of dissatisfaction as the speaker waits "in my little house" (CP, 44) for her lover to come. Becoming the wife of a farmer has not brought her the joy she expected. Spring has stirred within her the longing to become one with the wind and the sun. Although the speaker seems to tremble on the brink of movement, suggested by words such as "swing", "turn", and "spins" (CP, 42), the dance itself never begins. The conclusion of this narrative poem still finds her waiting for her lover to turn away from the fields, to "forget the harvesting / Of the strong land" (CP, 45). The poem ends with a note of sorrow, rather than song, in the voice of the speaker:

> If I speak, will
> he look.
> Will he open his eyes and gaze suddenly into my face,

Starting the fire of my joy, and the sweet unrest?

I hear no answer in the quiet elm,
Still and enduring. Even as the tree, I wait
Till over the hill the horses slowly climb. (CP, 45)

The urgent need to escape the constraints of time and space soon pushes the speaker towards a desperate dance of loss and frustration. In "Song from The Multitude" the young wife says:

Simply to fight despair, I dance, I sing,
I whirl as if in joy from room to room
And try to show the chairs how gay I am! (CP, 59)

This is a mad and frantic dance of disappointment and pent-up energy which the speaker performs, as she tries desperately to convince herself, as well as the reader, of its therapeutic effect: "This is enough! I need no comfort more" (CP, 59). Both speaker and reader, however, are aware of the futility and emptiness of the gesture.

As against the hopeful optimism of the speaker in "City Wife", the speaker in "Song from The Multitude" recognizes that there is oppression and confinement in the rural landscape:

But there, behind the words, clearly as now
I see the factory chimney-stacks, I see
The red-brick farmhouse heavy under the lilacs
The gloom, the aching sweetness of June dusk
Guarded by elms ... (CP, 58)

Nature itself seems to imprison and weigh heavily on the speaker. Again she seeks escape through the movement of the dance, but it is confined to the limited space of the

House: "Then I could turn within, turn to my work / In the house" (CP, 58). She hopes that in the quiet routine of housework and home-making she will find a harmony and a quiet music to appease her. Instead she is confronted by the monotony and dullness of routine. The space of the dancer now becomes narrow and claustrophobic. Hearing not the lively melodies of wind or rain, she spends her "narrow life" listening to the "meaningless ticking of a kitchen clock" (CP, 59) with its regular, mechanical rhythms.

The effect which such a limited existence has upon the speaker is suggested by her memories of flight, "when my quick feet / Would fain run miles upon a country road / Stumbling and falling, yet flying, flying on" (CP, 59). Throughout Livesay's work, the image of flight is closely connected to that of the dance. Both are possible avenues of escape from a world of rules and conventions to a more personal realm of imagination and poetic expression.

The speaker wonders whether there will ever be that "mad impossible day" (CP, 59) when male and female differences disappear and they finally dance in time to the same music. But for now the distances remain. The speaker is advised by her lover "to be content" (CP, 59) with things as they are. Accepting the security and safety which the male offers, she makes an effort to accept the role which society has deemed proper for her. With a tremor of panic and fear at her loss of identity, she insists "This is enough! I

need no comfort more" (CP, 59). Echoing his words, she no longer has a voice of her own.

But the need for independence is stronger than the man's will, and soon she listens instead to the slow pulse of the dance humming within her. She has known "too much music" (CP, 60) to ignore the rhythms of her own heart. In a final attempt to make the man understand, she pleads for freedom and escape from the dark "prisoned place" (CP, 60) which his love has erected.

Even as she implores the male to release her, the speaker is held "by the warring of two selves" (CP, 60) within her. Besides the conflict between the sexes, she must also confront the dualities of the human psyche. Realizing that she is in fact a victim of her own passions and longings, the speaker abandons the dance:

> I am enchained, imprisoned by your words,
> Your look, and even less than these -- your coat,
> Hung upon a nail, which every time
> I pass I cannot keep from touching ... (CP, 60)

In Livesay's love lyrics of the 1960's, touching becomes an important motif, and one which enables the dance between the sexes to be completed. Across the distances and silences which exist between the male and female worlds, "touching" (CP, 297) becomes the necessary contact that leads to a perfect dance of harmony.

"Song from The Multitude" ends with the image of the male holding the speaker from "the door" (CP, 60) which

leads to the open expanse of space and time. He bids her to forsake the song and dance of the wind and be content "to sing within" (CP, 60). But the restrictions which he has placed on the speaker have left her without a voice of her own. Hushed and still, she abandons the dance. Through her surrender to and her reliance on another person, the speaker loses something uniquely hers, which is irretrievable. It is the female's loss of autonomy and her own strong sense of self: "when some far voice / Integrally my own, is hushed, is dumb" (CP, 60).

This inevitable silence is a theme which haunts and perplexes the poet. It relates to the sense of oppression she experiences as a woman and is compounded by her need to express the human condition through the medium of movement and sound. It is a cruel paradox that one who must, of necessity, deal in words can be so painfully aware of the limitations of speech and the frequent failure of language to communicate. Perhaps this is why the dance has become such an important motif in Livesay's work.

The private nature of the dance necessitates that one listen only for the music within. Ultimately it is the personal rhythms of the individual which dictate whether the dance will be one of sorrow or one of joy. Poems such as "City Wife" and "Song from The Multitude" anticipate the transition which the dance motif makes in the more socially constious poetry of the 1930's. Having abandoned the egocentric

stance of the earlier lyrics, the poet's voice becomes more impersonal. It is the public and not the private concerns which Livesay now wishes to deal with. Moving away from the intensely personal nature of the lyric, she turns to the writing of proletarian verse and the use of the documentary form. As the structure of the material becomes more controlled and the content more socially oriented, the nature of the dance changes. From the free rhythmic movements of the personal lyric, it becomes more mechanical and regular. Associated with the technological revolution and the dehumanization of society as the Depression is felt throughout Canada and the world, the dance becomes a "marching" (CP, 117). or stamping of feet, keeping time to the regular beat of the factories and the machines. No longer creative or imaginative, it exemplifies the nature of man's existence in a capitalist system which has forgotten the human joy and freedom of living.

CHAPTER II

THIS GRIM, NEW HEAVEN

"Men do a dance in time to the machines".

(CP, p. 120)

In the 1930's Dorothy Livesay realizes that the dance can be extended to include identification with a community, a nation and a world. The result of this social and political awareness is the emergence of her documentary poems[1], as well as other poems of social commitment such as the elegy "Lorca" and the short narrative "In Green Solariums". In her article "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre", Livesay suggests that the key characteristic of the documentary poem is "a conscious attempt to create a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet".[2] The result is poetry which is often ironic, and always personal. It is "based on topical data but held together by descriptive, lyrical and didactic elements".[3]

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[1]Dorothy Livesay, "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre", printed in Contexts of Canadian Criticism: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 267-281.

[2]Ibid., p. 267.

[3]Ibid., p. 269.

During the 1930's, Livesay's work displays an urgent need to turn away from the contemplations of nature and its relationship to the individual, and to focus on the concerns of a society caught in the grip of a world depression. This is an idealistic time for Dorothy Livesay. With high hopes for the promise of "a brave new world", she turns to the writing of proletarian verse, or poetry dedicated to the causes of the working class. Influenced by the modern British poets, especially C. Day Lewis and W.H. Auden, she turns to writing poetry which, she hopes, will change the world. In Right Hand Left Hand, Livesay speaks of the impact which these modern English poets had upon her:

> What was my astonishment and unbelief to find some slim volumes of English poetry -- revolutionary poetry but full of lyricism and personal passion! C. Day Lewis first, then Spender, then Auden and MacNeice. There was nothing like it in America or Canada, but it was a movement that followed exactly where I had left off with my Paris thesis -- it threw Eliot aside and proclaimed a brave new world.[4]

The political stance which Livesay takes in the 1930's is suggested by her comments in Right Hand Left Hand on her choice of a new poetic form. When Louis Kon, a Russian who came to Canada on a peace mission, accused her of writing propaganda, she reacted in this manner:

> 'But my poem Nick Zynchuk (entitled "The Immigrant" in Collected Poems) is not just propaganda!' Could

[4]Livesay, Right Hand Left Hand, p. 153.

> Louis Kon be bourgeois revisionist? Is that what he was? I told him I did not want to write lyric poetry anymore. All that was finished. My guide was Lenin.[5]

This shift from a rather private to a more public poetic expression is reflected in her use of the dance motif. From the restrictive, claustrophobic space of such poems as "The Invincible" in the 1920's, the speaker now moves into a vaster landscape and encompasses a wider vision. No longer confined to quiet country gardens or farm houses, the dancer is found in factories, cities, foreign countries and on mountain tops. However, the enlargement of the dance space only emphasizes the insignificance of the individual dancer. As the speaker in "Queen City" intimates: "When I look at the Royal York / I am a shadow under a cold wall" (CP, 85).

As the 1930's come to a close, Livesay's work becomes less propagandist rhetoric and more a sophisticated blend of lyric and narrative forms. By using various image patterns within a given poem, often in juxtaposition, she obtains multiple tensions which give the documentary poem a certain tautness. Both individual rhythms and combinations of rhythms become more complex as Livesay combines several lyrics to form a sequence or suite of poems. From the deceptively simple songs of the earlier phase, the dancer now begins

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[5] Ibid., p. 101.

to move to the rhythms of a rapidly changing world. The poet's continuous search for unrestricted forms which could encompass these changes is reflected in her use of musical and dance terms which she expands in her "songs of experience".[6]

Her experiments with rhyme and poetic form are reflected in the words she uses within the titles of the poems. Such terms are "improvisation", "variations", "suite", "serenade", "lullaby", "fantasia", and "prelude". The lyrical patterns vary from the jazzy rhythms of popular dance tunes of the period to the rhythms of Negro spirituals and the mechanical, impersonal movements of the industrial world. The unique blend of these different forms and the contrasts between them produce an energetic and exciting poetry that the common man, rather than only the egocentric individual, can relate to. It does not rely on the oftentimes ambiguous allusions employed by her British contemporaries,[7] but combines her private and public concerns to produce a direct and very honest poetry. In exploring new forms and meters, Livesay seeks, particularly in association with the dance imagery, to continue to help liberate the language, the content and

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[6]Blake, Poetical Works, pp. 81-105.

[7]Monroe K. Spears, ed., Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964). In his essay "Auden's Imagery", Cleanth Brooks suggests that the ambivalence and obscurity which characterized much of Auden's work made him essentially a far better poet than his contemporaries, who copied his use of obscure references and allusions.

the form of poetry in Canada. In the article "The Polished Lens: Poetic Techniques of Pratt and Klein", Livesay says:

> In retrospect, the language of our Post-Confederation poets is singularly conventional and dull .... In these poets there is no sense of being "seized" by language, in the Joycean way. By 1920 it was clear there was a crying need to liberate the language of poetry in Canada; and an equally urgent need to turn from the contemplation of nature to concern for the human condition.[8]

Livesay also hopes to educate her readers to the realities of the world in which they live and labor. Thus the persona in the poetry of this period shifts from predominantly female to predominantly male. The personal "I" of the lyric poems now becomes the impersonal "he" or the collective "you" or "we". The poet's commitment to a masculine consciousness illustrates her belief in the social principles which her poetry advocates. No longer expressing the egocentrism of the earlier, more private and individualistic lyrics, the dance becomes choral and representative of the masses, and of man as part of a collective group. This is poetry devoted to broader, more universal concerns, rather than to the narrower concerns of the individual. Adopting a highly idealistic view of life, her work becomes her own poetic crusade to save the world.

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[8]Dorothy Livesay, "The Polished Lens: Poetic Techniques of Pratt and Klein", Canadian Literature, 25 (Summer, 1965), p. 35.

"Depression Suite", written in the form of a musical composition in several movements, in which each lyric seems to follow a dance sequence, exemplifies the mad, frantic pace of workers who must "hammer" out "melodies" (CP, 87) fast enough to meet the demands of the boss. It is fear of reprisal which spurs the dance, not joy or pride in a task well done. The poem illuminates the far-reaching economic and social implications of a system in which things take on more significance than people, and people become more and more like automatons. Using female and male personae alternatively, the poet conveys the worker's determination not to be cowed by the exploitative nature of the capitalist system. The worker's refusal to accept society's assessment of him is clearly shown in the final movement of the suite when the poet expresses an optimistic belief that man will triumph over his oppressive conditions.

The rhythms of the first lyric in the suite suggest a languid, contemplative dance, hushed and private. The repeated use of the conditional mood in the opening lines of the first three stanzas evokes a dreamy, drowsy state. The low-keyed, melancholy tone of voice of the male speaker evokes the soft, slow rhythms of a quiet, midnight serenade. This blue, nocturnal piece uses a caesura in the beginning line of each stanza to halt and pace the rhythms of the dance. The alliterative effect of a sustained "r" sound and the poet's use of mostly monosyllabic words suggest

finality and inevitability. The "walls" (CP, 86), an image of resistance and enclosure, restrict all individual efforts of opposition or assertion. In a society which is experiencing a wide scale economic depression, the "prayers", the "tears", even the "song" (CP, 86) of the workers go unheeded. The voice of the individual remains unheard; his "hands" (CP, 86) are tied. All these images of enclosure and confinement suggest the movements of a silent and restricted dancer. Like the female speaker in "In Green Solariums," the speaker in "Depression Suite" comes to realize that acts of protest by the individual are useless and ineffective, "one lone rebel does no good at all" (CP, 74). A collective consciousness is required, for only solidarity can provide the impetus needed to produce radical change.

In "Depression Suite" the speaker's enthusiasm and zeal for the movement and his dedication and commitment to the socialist causes are conveyed by the increasing tempo of the next two movements. In the second lyric, the poet uses rhyming couplets written in trochaic tetrameter. The shortening of the meter and the end rhymes create the hot, jazzy rhythms and harmonies of the roaring twenties when jazz, which began as a social music, provided a natural response to the sorrows and oppressions, the hopes and aspirations, of the Black minority:

> Because song and dance were an integral part of the Negro way of life, jazz emerged as both an expressive and a functional music: the vocalized

> melodies of worksongs formed the basis of its instrumental style, and a combination of the dance and the march, its rhythms.[9]

It has been suggested that jazz originated primarily as a dance music, and thus it suited a period in which various dance crazes reached the level of obsessions:

> To a large degree the amazing success of jazz was undoubtedly due to the desire for distraction of a war-wearied world.[10]

Thus Livesay's jazz reference shows her sense of the popular culture of the period, of the workers' milieu, as well as perfectly suiting the mood of the poem. As the pace of the lyric quickens, the steps of the dance become more lively and sure. The "dancing whirling hours" propel the worker to produce "harmonies / Better than jazz" (CP, 87). The repetition of onomatopoetic words such as "click" and "snappy" conveys the frantic haste with which the workers move in their mechanical dance of labor. Gripped by fear and panic, the worker, controlled by the regular rhythms of the machines, moves in a frenzied dance.

In the fourth movement, the male speaker examines the female's reaction to him. She says he never seems to want to dance or have any fun. As opposed to the quickly

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[9]Denis Arnold, The New Oxford Companion to Music (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 985.

[10]Percy A. Scholes, The Oxford Companion to Music (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 539.

paced rhythms of the two preceding lyrics, this section of the suite illustrates through the use of short, heavily accented lines the heavy and cumbersome nature of the male, and through the emphatic words of the female, her scorn. Too clumsy and awkward to join her in a dance, he is compared to "a limping horse" which is capable only of "hobbl[ing] along" (CP, 87). This is not a prancing stallion but a subdued, tired workhorse. The inferiority of the worker is suggested by the female's choice of language. She ridicules the way he thinks, his manner of walking and his absence of spirit and fun, concluding that one so uncouth and lifeless could never be her dancing partner.

The reply of the male speaker illustrates the effect which the Depression and the capitalist system have had upon him. They have literally "made [him] reel" (CP, 88), while physical hunger has stunned and staggered him. As opposed to the regular rhythms of the machines, the reel suggests a very different kind of dance. The word denotes a light hearted circular dance, but it also has the negative connotation of an uncontrolled, whirling motion. Disoriented by the social upheaval which surrounds him, the worker is unable to accommodate himself or the female speaker to the technical steps which the dance demands. His reference to himself as a "turnabout" (CP, 88) suggests not only the fast, heady movements of a merry-go-round, but also the physical jostling or reversals created by the economic and

social times in which he lives. All of these undertones suggest flux and uncertainty.

As the male speaker examines the female speaker's opinion of him, he realizes that it is an opinion shared by his boss, who also said:

> You've only arms
> And legs for me
> Time in, time out --
> And then you're free. (CP, 89)

The regular rhythms of the lines parallel the mechanical action of the worker as he manually and repetitiously punches a time clock, which ironically is supposed to set him free at the end of a working day. In Livesay's earlier lyrics the motion of arms and legs would have produced the rhythmic movements of the dance. Controlled and owned by the capitalist boss who dictates how and when he is to move, the worker becomes paralyzed and polarized.

As he recognizes this, the speaker examines his alternatives and inspects more closely his options. In the last stanza he optimistically envisions men "marching / With firm tread" (CP, 89) rather than with the shuffling downtrodden steps of the earlier stanzas. Having realized the truth of the female speaker's opening statement, "You have no heart" (CP, 87), he decides to prove her wrong. The concluding lines of the fourth section emphasize the shift in the male speaker's attitude towards his situation: "'You have no heart' / That's what she said" (CP, 89).

The heart represents the essence, the very spirit of man. No longer willing to surrender to the demands of a mechanical system, the worker decides to assert himself and regain control of his actions. He recognizes that it is indeed time for change and new beginnings if mankind, as a strong and collective force, can only shoulder the burdens of all men and thus make the system work for, rather than against, them. Not without co-operation and direction can the dance free them from the tyranny of oppression. This is not "her" frivolous dance -- a light, social thing, nor the spiritual dance of Livesay's earlier lyrics. Instead it is the dance of the workers, marching in unison and solidarity.

In the final movement of the suite, the repetition of "ing" endings and the flow of symmetrical phrases (i.e. "Even although" [CP, 89]) suggest the smooth, continuous rhythms of life and a renewed sense of balance and hope. The dance is coming to a close. The speaker has moved from the blue, melodic music of the opening midnight lyric to the rollicking and confident swing of the concluding lyric with its swinging, dance song rhythms. Now as the speaker's energy wanes, the dance winds down. Juxtaposed against the long, conditional sentences of each stanza in the final movement is the short, emphatic exclamation, "You're alive; still alive!" (CP, 91). With joy and affirmation, it expresses the speaker's, as well as the poet's, optimistic outlook for a new society and a faith in man's ultimate ability to succeed. The entire

suite moves from the slow, faltering steps of the frustrated dancer in the first lyric, to the lively, animated whirlings of the jazz musician in the third lyric, and finally subsides to the slow motion of a more confident and assured dancer.

Havelock Ellis suggests in The Dance of Life that "all human work, under natural conditions, is a kind of dance".[11] He is referring to a system within which man has some control over his actions and where there is dignity and respect associated with the act of laboring. In the documentary poem "Day and Night", as in "Depression Suite", Livesay presents a social-realist portrait of what happens to man and society when the working conditions are not natural and harmonious, but harsh and dehumanizing. The result is fierce invective, denouncing a depersonalized, mechanical system which exploits men and their labor.

The poem begins with the image of a harsh, screaming industrial hell where "Men do a dance in time to the machines" (CP, 120). This very negative image strips the dance of any suggestion of grace or intrinsic beauty. One focuses instead on the cacophonic rhythms of the machines, with their harsh and jarring sounds. The regression of man to an object as part of "a moving human belt" on which the workers "Move into sockets, every one a bolt" (CP, 120), is a far cry from the quiet, natural landscape of Livesay's

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[11] Havelock Ellis, The Dance of Life (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), p. 61.

earlier lyrics. Now the music to which the speaker moves is that of the shrill, screaming factory whistles announcing the angry dawn of another work day and then, once inside the factory, the "humming, whirling drum" (CP, 120) as the assembly line begins. Man's own natural rhythms are drowned by the noise of industry, as he is forced to dance to the deafening rhythms of the machinery.

Livesay adapts the harsh industrial images of the factory to a variety of dance rhythms, combining the silent, jerky movements of the pantomime with those of a powerful Negro spiritual. The variations of forms within the poem go to make up a sequence or what she terms the documentary poem, "based on topical data but held together by descriptive, lyrical and didactic elements."[12] This particular genre allows her to combine her social concerns ("the objective facts") with the musical rhythms of the lyric and "the subjective feelings of the poet".[13] Emphasizing her concern with the oral tradition of poetry, Livesay says: "Whatever the cause, always, I believe, I hear music behind the rhythm of the words" (CP, v). Displaying her ability to incorporate various forms, Livesay combines in the documentary private and public concerns. Through the repeated use of images such as the dance, she gives unity and coherence to the long narrative

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[12]Livesay, "The Documentary Poem", p. 269.

[13]Ibid., p. 267.

poem. The image of the dance is sustained and developed throughout "Day and Night" in its association with theme (Man as a mere machine) and poetic technique (Livesay's use of simpler rhymes, as well as intricate patterns of rhythm within the poem).

In the second section of the poem, the irony (which according to Livesay is another frequent attribute of the documentary poem[14]) of the mechanical dance is expressed by the repetition of "One step forward / Two steps back" (CP, 120). The fast mechanical movements of the two workers emphasize the lack of control they exert over their work. Like the sometimes rigid movements of figures in a pantomime, their near comic-motions are described by the poet:

> While Arnot whirls
> A roundabout
> And Geoghan shuffles
> Bolts about. (CP, 120)

Cruelly manipulated they move like lifeless puppets, without any sense of natural rhythm or fluidity. The insistent regularity of the meter and rhyme in this section emphasizes the dull, nagging routine and rigidity of factory work. Always behind the rhythms of the dance is the harsh unbearable noise of industry. It is a counter-productive system in which the workers are caught up in the technological changes wrought by the twentieth century. It is counter-productive,

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[14] Ibid., p. 267.

for, sapped of energy and devoid of dignity, the workers labor only to fulfill quotas and to meet the lowest requirements of their bosses. The creative impulse of the dance, and thus of their work, is absent. They are violently abused by a system which "Sets you spinning / Two steps back --" (CP, 121). The dance takes on the circuitous movements of an assembly line merry-go-round. It becomes a vicious circle of enclosure and mindless, repetitive actions.

In the third section of the poem, the time as well as the space of the dance becomes regularized. "Night and day shift gears and slip rattling / Down the runway" (CP, 121). Man's passive acceptance of his plight is illustrated by the recognition by an individual worker that he is merely a pawn of the capitalist system. Even in the privacy of sleeping or dreaming, he moves in a subdued, controlled fashion: "We move as through sleep's revolving memories" (CP, 121). The circular image of the dance as presented in this poem, with its encompassing and restricting patterns, invades even the most private corners of his being.

The worker is also aware of the absence of "love" or "peace" (CP, 121), those elements which symbolize man's humaneness. Even that area which provides his imagination, his dreams, is penetrated by "the pounding" and "resounding" (CP, 121) world outside. The dance is considered to have been one of man's earliest forms of art, an attempt to move in an imaginary world of his own creation. The worker is

denied even this inner dance of diversion and flights of fantasy. There is a universal belief that the dance, as rhythmic art form, is a symbol of the act of creation. Dreams, too, are man's realm of inspiration and creativity. Now both dreams and the dance, as means of self-expression, are "Doors forever folding before us --" (CP, 121). Man, alienated by the society in which he lives, has no recourse but to parody the mocking movements of the machines and to abandon his "revolving memories" (CP, 121) of fantasies and dreams.

The fiery image of hell, with which the poem begins, is expanded in the fourth section. The poet's use of longer, more discursive lines emphasizes the endless miseries which the workers must endure in the "red hot" (CP, 122) furnaces of the factory. The silent, comic pantomime of the two earlier workers is replaced by an attempt by two other factory workers to come together in a pact of brotherhood. Theirs is a wordless, implied, dance in which both men rely on intuition and mutual understanding to bridge the distances between them. But the "flower[ing]" (CP, 122) or natural growth of any such bond is interrupted abruptly, and there is a sudden shift to the chant-like and looser rhythms of a powerful Negro spiritual. There is a unison of suffering and pain in the ensuing black hymn of darkness:

Lord, I'm burnin' in the fire
Lord, I'm steppin' on the coals
Lord, I'm blacker than my brother
Blow your breath down here. (CP, 122)

With her Biblical reference to "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego" (CP, 122), who were condemned to "the fiery furnaces",[15] the poet alludes to the atrocities which were commonly inflicted on black workers during this period, and the awful oppression under which they toiled. The Book of Daniel tells how King Nebuchadnezzar ordered the three Jews to be thrown "into the midst of a burning fiery furnace"[16] when they refused to worship an image of gold. The trance-like, grisly horror of the hellish scene in the poem illuminates the suffering of all oppressed people and the need for divine deliverance by a God that seems to have forsaken them.

The fifth section of the poem again shifts to the use of factory rhythms in the sound of a "crash" and "swing" of steel, quite unlike the delicate music of stringed instruments which accompanied the casting of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fire. The dance of the factory workers is enacted in a madly careening world of light and sound.

Lit sporadically by sparks, which "fly like lightning reel" (CP, 122), the nightmarish world is set ablaze by the circling torch of the welder. As an agent of transformation,

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[15]Bible, Book of Daniel, 3:21.

[16]Ibid.

the welder possesses the magic of a primitive dancer, weaving with his torch circles of fire and light. With the wild dancing of fire festivals, his dramatic motions above the heads of the other workers suggest purification and possibly the elimination of the evils of the capitalist system. Associated with fire and air, he provides the magical element in the surrealistic work world of the laborers. Later, they bear his mark:

> We bear the burden home to bed
> The furnace glows within our hearts:
> Our bodies hammered through the night
> Are welded into bitter bread. (CP, 123).

Having passed through the fiery hell, the workers, like their Biblical counterparts, are finally able to transcend the pain and misery of the human condition.

Again, it is the private thoughts of an individual worker which intrude. The images of the industrial world are, for an instant, juxtaposed against the imagery of rural life and the natural world. There is a sudden silence as in a sweeping motion "the trees bow, tense before the blow" (CP, 123) of an impending storm. This is an image of submission, not unlike the humility of the worker as he bends to the will of the foreman. Like the trees submitting to the forces of nature, "We are in storm that has no cease / No lull before, no after time" (CP, 123). This realization weighs heavily upon the workers as they "bear the burden home to bed" (CP, 123). At night, as they sleep, the "hammering"

continues, but now it is not steel but their bodies which are being fashioned, "welded into bitter bread" (CP, 123). They become the sacrament in a grieving, bitter dance.

However, there is affirmation through the act of communion, and awareness brings hope as well as anger to the workers. As the rhythms become more hushed and quiet, the noise of the factory and the storm begins to fade. The lines become short and precise, and there is a predominance of monosyllabic words. Rhetoric is not necesary. Merely simple statements of fact convince the workers that "We are mightier / In the end" (CP, 123). No longer enslaved by the frantic whirling of the machines, the men shorten their steps until they begin to take part in a harmonious dance of unity and strength. Collectively, they centre their attention on the weaknesses of the system and on the strengths of their own numbers. As long as they have "ears" to hear and "eyes" (CP, 123) to see, they are not without hope. Energy and excitement mount as the workers' commitment to the cause begins to grow. There is a healthy, productive burst of anger which spurs the men to action and a determination to turn the system around, until it works for, rather than against, them. With a surge of enthusiasm and exuberance, the mechanical movements of the industrial world are thrown out of kelter:

The page grow crazy
Wheels go still,
Silence sprawling
On the till -- (CP, 124)

In the final section of the poem, there is a brief shift to the use of the personal pronoun "I" as the speaker acknowledges his wholehearted commitment to the socialist cause: "Into thy maw I commend my body" (CP, 124). Referring still to the hellish bowels of the factory, the line evokes an indirect reference to Jesus' final words on the cross: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit".[17] Like Christ, the bodies of the workers may be defeated but the spirit will eventually triumph. This final lyric, with its promise of hope and affirmation, establishes the essential Christian element of the poem. The worker's renewed determination to fight for a better way of life is revealed in the lines "Though I am overalled and silent / Boss I'm far from dead!" (CP, 124). The optimism of the worker is also suggested by Livesay's use of natural imagery and her emphasis on regeneration: "A child's hands as a leaf are tender / And draw the poison out" (CP, 124). Perhaps it will be the children of the workers who will eventually turn the system around. The innocent idealism of a new generation may help to heal a corrupt and stricken society. For now, the workers will find strength in the bond of brotherhood and in the

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[17] Ibid., Luke, 23:46.

sense of a common goal. Soon the wheels of industry will "limp" till they "hang still" (CP, 125). The workers' jubilant attitude towards life will lead to the death of a rigid and evil system:

> Day and night
> Night and day
> Till life is turned
> The other way! (CP, 125)

Estranged from the natural world of the earlier lyrics, the speakers in "Depression Suite" and "Day and Night" represent the alienation of man as he becomes more isolated in his community and more securely chained to the monotonous work of an industrial world. The harmonious rhythms of his own body and the natural impulses of human contact are replaced by the harsh, mechanical motions of the machine. In time checks and work schedules, the rhythm of the day becomes punctuated by the clock. In its bid to economize human energy and maximize productivity, the capitalist system curbs the freedom and creativity of the dance as a means of individual expression. Instead it produces a dance which has many negative connotations. Human impulses and rhythms are pulsating rather than predictable. In other words, the incentive for the dance should come from within, and it cannot be regulated by the dictates of a machine. It is spontaneity and creativity which give the dance its vitality and freshness. Under a repressive system, man

loses contact with his own inner rhythms, as well as those which pulsate between him and other individuals.

In the poem "Lorca", Livesay, returning to the use of a more personal form, uses the elegiac mode to express her own personal reaction to the rebel's death. Written for the Spanish revolutionary poet, Frederico Garcia Lorca, the dance motif in this poem becomes an affirmation of his life and the triumph of the poetic imagination over an otherwise darkened world:

> You dance. Explode
> Unchallenged through the door
> As bullets burst
> Long deaths ago, your heart. (CP, 127)

As a standard elegy, it begins as a meditative lament for one who dared to oppose Franco's dictatorial regime. But the song of mourning very quickly becomes a passionate lyric of movement and light. With the inherent optimism of the speaker swiftly overriding the initial elegiac note of sorrow, the poet's feelings of joy far outdistance her grief. In this lyric Livesay attempts to fuse her personal feelings with her more public social concerns. With freely moving rhythms, the lyric becomes a perfect blend of form and subject matter.

As in the earlier imagistic lyrics of the 1920's, here the dance is associated with "flight" (CP, 126), the role of the poet in society and the possibility of transcending time and space. Because he has been given ears "To hear

the silence driven in" (CP, 125), Lorca, like the poet who possesses "a third / ear" (IA, 13), is able even in death to move in unison with the rhythms of the natural world. Thus what begins as a song of death is quickly transformed into a jubilant dance of life.

Representative of the revolutionary fervor in Spain, as well as of the life of the senses, Lorca becomes an image of "light" (CP, 125) and wisdom. Moving into a world of darkness, the poet joins Lorca in his descent "down from the heaven / Into earth's mould, down" (CP, 125). However, even in that final and silent world of death, the spirit of the revolutionary still shines: "While you -- / You hold the light / Unbroken" (CP, 125). He becomes, like the dancer, symbolic of the creative force or cosmic energy of the universe. With his light, he illuminates and shows the poet the way.

Associated with the natural images of the "sun", a "tree", "waves" and "gulls" (CP, 126), Lorca embraces all the movement and energy of living things. The poet's repeated association of Lorca with the sun and light may also suggest that perfect balance between spirit and matter, reality and imagination. The poet is the creator of images, the agent of transformation. The "cliffside tree / And its embracing bough" (CP, 126) evoke the encircling image of two dancers. Livesay's use of the tree as an image often alludes to the word, as a poet's main tool. This is discussed

later in the poem "Variations on a Tree", where again the dance becomes a central motif in linking the poet with the world. Thus in "Lorca", the tree provides another connection between Lorca and Livesay, poet and dancer.

The "waves" with their billowy undulating motions are connected to "organ stops" (CP, 126), or to the music behind the dance. The poet suggests that Lorca's presence would result in a continuation of the music and the dance:

> If you were speaking now
> The waves below
> Would be the organ stops
> For breath to blow. (CP, 126)

The image of "Gulls in a sickle flight" which "circle there" (CP, 126) suggests a halo effect above the head of the dead rebel. The birds, often associated with the processes of thought and immense flights of imagination, exemplify the ability of both poets to transcend physical space and time, and "make the flight / Unshaken" (CP, 126).

During this period Livesay most often derives the inspiration and motivation for her work from the natural world. Because he is her muse, the source of her inspiration for this poem, Lorca is associated with nature by Livesay.

From the poet's contemplation of the rebel's death, the tone of the elegy shifts to an exclamation of joy at his continued existence: "You are alive!" (CP, 126). There is an effusion of rhythm and movement, similar to that in the final movement of "Depression Suite", created by the

poet's use of internal, as well as end rhyme, and the use of exclamation and surprise. Short, jubilant sentences are combined with longer lines to increase or slow the tempo. Alliteration and assonance are used effectively to capture the strongly felt emotions of the speaker:

> O grass flash emerald sight
> Dash of dog for ball
> And skipping rope's bright blink
> Lashing the light! (CP, 126)

The increasing rhythms of the dance are sustained by the variations in rhyme and the use of "ing" endings within the stanza.

Evoking images of spring, the poet reaffirms her belief in the renewal of life and the possiblity of rebirth and regeneration. Connections are made as "Lovers defend their hold" and "Old couples ... / Touch in a handclasp, quivering" (CP, 126). It is a very delicate and poignant connection, and in using the images of young and old Livesay suggests the timelessness of the bonding between individuals. In the space between life and death, the sound of Lorca's voice "sang out aloud / Arching the silent wood" (CP, 127). The union between the revolutionary fighter and the speaker of the poem becomes complete in the cumulative image at the end of the lyric. "Light, flight and word" (CP, 127), the three images associated with the poet, combine in a final symbol of the poet's message to mankind.

In the final stanza, the juxtaposition of the images of war with those of nature emphasizes the impact of the poet on the world, and the imprint which the force of his words leaves. They soar as a "song outsoars / The bomber's range: (CP, 127). The dancer has finally become one with the dance: "You dance, Explode / Unchallenged through the door" (CP, 127). With a sudden burst of movement, the dead poet, Lorca, transcends the realms of death. Through the process of transformation, he makes the flight from darkness back into eternal light. Achieving light and breath, he gives voice to the poet, the word to the world.

The poet's optimism and hope for the future of humanity continue in "Prelude for Spring", written in the form of a short musical piece. Through the use of internal and end rhymes, alliteration, assonance, varying line lengths and numerous dashes, commas and exclamations, the poet creates, in lyric form, a poem which resounds with the melodies of a short musical composition. The poem begins with the short, quick movements of the dance:

> These dreams abound:
> Foot's leap to shore
> Above the sound
> Of river's roar -- (CP, 128)

The sudden awakening of the earth and the stirrings in the subconscious thoughts of the speaker are suggested by the use of monosyllabic words and staccato rhymes. In this poem, the dance is implied indirectly through the use of

rhythms and the poet's word choice, particularly her emphasis on "feet" and movement. It is an erratic, ecstatic dance linked to the motif of "dreams" (CP, 128), revealing the vision rather than the reality of the speaker's experience. The poem becomes a celebration of spring and, implied by the sexual overtones throughout the poem, the ecstasy of the poet's communion with nature. Often the sexual references are explicit: "He comes", or "Soaring unspent" (CP, 128, 130). At other times, the allusions are implied through the use of association:

> Here is the meadow where we kissed
> And here the horses, galloping
> We rode upon in spring . . . (CP, 129)

The metaphor of the horse is used throughout the poem to indicate the heightening of tension, as passion mounts:

> And hoof's away, heart's hoof
> Down greening lanes, with roof
> Of cherry blow.
> And apple puff --
>
> O green wet, sun lit
> Soaked earth's glitter!
> Down mouth, to munch
> Up hoof, to canter (CP, 129)

From the first insistent stirrings of the earth's awakening to the quickening pace of the pursuer who "comes / Noiseless" (CP, 128) through the woods, the poem follows the steps of a lively dance of spring with all its anticipation and barely concealed excitement. Musical interludes are

created by the poet's use of pauses, asides: "(Only the self is loud; / World's whisperless.)" (CP, 129), and visual spacing on the page.

As the speaker nears the moment of union with nature, the climax begins to build through the poet's repetition of "f" sounds, creating a sense of breathlessness and haste. Entering the private and enclosed world of passion, the lyric takes on a hushed and unreal quality, so that the world of reality blurs and merges with that of the imagination.

During the 1940's Livesay continues to experiment further with the lyrical, as well as other poetical forms. The dance motif is no longer limited to the representation of egocentric feelings and thoughts of the "isolate" (CP, 275) which dominate the verse of the 1920's, or confined to suggesting the rhythms of a quickly changing technological society, as witnessed in the documentary poetry. Turning to the use of more varied forms and employing new poetic techniques, her poetry reflects the fusion of personal and social concerns. In the more personal Poems for People (1947), she deals with relationships in a variety of forms. There are poems celebrating the births of her children, such as "Serenade for Strings" and "Five Poems", written for her son, Peter, and her daughter, Marcia, respectively. "Fantasia" is a freely moving impromptu composition in which flight becomes an image which explores the poetic process and the source of the poet's inspiration. Flight is an

image motif which, in her later lyrics, becomes more closely intertwined with that of the dance. In the later lyrics, particularly those of the 1960's, Livesay returns, through the use of the dance image, to the themes of silence and the ultimate isolation of the individual which haunt her earliest poems.

CHAPTER III

THE DANCER'S INTERLUDE

"I ...
dance the eternal daylight on a shaft of sun".

(CP, 203)

Dorothy Livesay's expectations for a changed world did not materialize in the post-war period of the late 1940's and 1950's. In 1937 she married Duncan MacNair, and the following years were filled with the domestic duties of caring for a home and raising her two children. In the volumes of poetry published during this post war period: Poetry For People (1947), New Poems (1955), Selected Poems (1957) and the long documentaries, Prophet of the New World (1945) and Call My People Home (1950), one can detect the poet's growing sense of dissatisfaction and despair. Her Collected Poems: The Two Seasons (1972) includes a selection of works from this period which she entitles "Poems from Exile". After the solitary dance of the early 1920's and the communal dance of the 1930's, the poet now begins what might be called the dancer's interlude.

As Livesay returns to the narrower world of the family with its emphasis on one cohesive unit, she realizes that she can no longer dance alone, or even move according

to her own individual rhythms. Her feeling of a loss of personal identity is evident in "The Three Emily's", in which the poet contrasts the freedom of women artists who have forfeited the traditional comforts of a family with those of the female persona whose "arteries / Flow the immemorial way / Towards the child, the man" (CP, 202). The dance as metaphor is present in very few poems from this period. Excluded from the spaciousness of their world, "Their kingdom was the sky" (CP, 202), the female speaker moves "as mother in a frame" (CP, 202). The rigidity and lack of freedom which she experiences are conveyed by the juxtaposition of the image of the square with the limitless space of the sky. The poet's use of space as an image of containment is important in its connection with the plight of the female persona and her ability or inability to dance. The diminution of space restricts the movement of the dancer and results in a sense of claustrophobia. The ecstasy which the dancer seeks is sadly absent in the lyrics from the late 1940's and the early 1950's. In her search for self, the female speaker realizes that, isolated from the realm of the artist by the demands placed on her by a husband and children, she is fragmented and less than whole:

> And so the whole that I possess
> Is still much less --
> They move triumphant through my head:
> I am the one
> Uncomforted. (CP, 202)

Seeking to redefine herself and her changing world, the poet turns to writing "poems for people".[1] Thus the poetry from this phase is split between that which expresses the poet's concern for the future of mankind and that which deals with her personal relationships with family and friends. The poet's growing concerns are reflected in the images of women and children which dominate the writings of this period.

From the image of the square introduced by Livesay in the poetry of the late 1930's and continuing into the 1940's, there is in the 1950's a shift to the use of the circle as a dominant image. Symbolizing a search for unity after the duality of the earlier imagist lyrics, such as "Personalities", and the multiplicity of her socialist verse, where the masses are more important than the individual, the circle now signifies the speaker's longing for completion and oneness. The image of the circle is also connected to that of the dance, as in "A Ballet of Squares", in which the poet combines the images of the circle and the square to illustrate a final union of opposites. Livesay's word choice in the title of the poem suggests that the poem may be construed as an intricate dance sequence. Within each lyric, which bears the name of a particular square having some historical, political or social significance, there

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[1]Dorothy Livesay, Poems for People (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1947).

is a tension created by opposing images. First, there is the square with its association with order and stability. Then there is the often implicit image of the circle ("wreath", "pool of park / irised with shadows", "the oval garden", "their oval eyes", "pool of silence", "the eyes" [CP, 242]). The poetic sequence culminates in the image of the circle, "The circle is complete" (CP, 244). In the final lyric of the sequence, "Mothering Sunday", the speaker optimistically expresses her hopes for a changed world, through the image of the circle:

> But what I buy --
> memento of the mesmerizing sun --
> is round
> is marigold! (CP, 245)

In the poetry of the late 1940's and the 1950's, Livesay covers a wide range of subject matter, expands and develops certain themes, and continues her experimentation with form and technique. Following the pattern which she established in the 1930's, Livesay also continues to use a less personal type of speaker predominantly until the mid 1950's. After that point, she gradually returns to a more subjective and specifically female persona, the "I" of her earlier lyrics.

Livesay begins to scrutinize more closely the dichotomy between traditional male and female roles, and between parent and child, husband and wife. She also examines the creative process, the function of the poet as an interpreter of the

world, and the tenuous link between man and nature which she felt to be particularly threatened by nuclear weapons. At this time the harmony between man and nature was in danger of being permanently halted.

During this period the structure of Livesay's poetry becomes increasingly more complex even though most of the poems are at least nominally lyrics. She continues to experiment with longer suites of lyrics, such as "Page One", nursery rhymes, such as "Abracadabra", sonnets, lullabies, chants and hymns. She also continues her exploration of the longer narrative documentary.

The dance motif becomes more subtle as the poet's concerns turn inward as they did in the 1920's. This increasingly intense exploration of her inner self is joined by a more complex use of images and symbols. Her poems contain subtler dance rhythms, and deal more frequently with the poet's own private vision.

Shifting to a subjective female speaker, her poetry becomes more personally revealing. In the article "Song and Dance", Livesay says that the 1950's was a low point in both her personal life and her poetry. She refers to it as a period of great "existential despair".[2] Although her poetry in general is not pessimistic in tone, she conveys in her poetry, during this period, an awful sense of sorrow

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[2]Livesay, "Song and Dance", p. 45.

and disillusionment. Life was not all that she had hoped it would be. The restrictions of marriage and the demands of raising a family forced her to abandon the private rhythms of the young and lonely dancer and the mass rhythms of political action, and to accept the more orderly rhythms of those in whose world she now moved. In the 1930's, the controlled rhythms of her left-wing poetry demonstrated the stultifying effects of capitalism on society. In the 1950's, the controlled rhythms of her poetry demonstrate the effects which social conventions and roles had on the speaker.

In "Page One" the movements of the dance are implied by the transition of the female persona from the rigid restrictions of her father's house to what she believes will be the more open spaces of "some other home" which "lay farther on" (CP, 159). The oppressive nature of her childhood home is suggested by the multiple images of entrapment such as "manacled" and "bondage" (CP, 158). The cold wintry landscape of ice and snow symbolizes her feelings of imprisonment. Childhood, which ideally should be a time of gaiety and freedom, is for her "an ordeal to be endured" (CP, 158).

In Section One of the poem, the third person speaker puts some distance between the reader and the persona. Here the reader is presented with the poet's view of her childhood in retrospect. The strong pattern of "f" sounds throughout the section creates an aggressive discordance.

The assonantal rhymes and varying line lengths accelerate the pace of the poem from the impatient and restless stirring in Section One to the quick movements of the birds breaking free in Section Two. In Section One there is no sense of harmony between the speaker and the natural world as there was in her earliest lyrics. Yet she still hopes to connect with the green world outside. Enclosed by the whiteness of the winter landscape, the dancer cannot move, for she is bound by "hard chains". Her fingers are "stiff with pain" (CP, 158).

The restrictions of her father's house are emphasized by "snow" (CP, 158), an image of confinement, as well as transformation. Representing the rigid structure of the speaker's childhood, the ice and snow prevent the uninhibited rhythms of a shy, yet untamed dancer. Though giving the illusion of lightness and fragility, the snow is heavy and ponderous. It has the ability to conceal and even transform physical appearances, to "make ladies out of trees / Those bare and gangling boys" (CP, 158). Evoking awkward and cumbersome images, the first stanza of the poem anticipates the more explicit "misbegotten" (CP, 265) dancer in "Ballad of Me". Moving disconcertingly through these childhood memories, the speaker unearths deeply buried feelings of alienation and isolation.

The dance image continues in the poet's direct reference to the Cinderella fairytale. Like the story book princess,

the female persona is confined "by the pattern" (CP, 158) of her life. The sheltered and privileged nature of her childhood is implied again through images of containment: "cold's glass palaces" with their suggestion of fragility and make-believe, and "corridors" and "fortresses" (CP, 158) which enclose, as well as protect the speaker with their emphasis on impenetrability and isolation. The image of "glass" and "crystal" (CP, 158) signifies the possible transition from one state of existence to another, as in the fairy tale when Cinderella is turned into a beautiful princess who dances at night with her handsome prince. "That slipper made of glass" (CP, 158) becomes emblematic of the split between reality and magic, stasis and the dance. The prevalent use of a hard "c" sound and the occasional longer line suggest the princess's attempt to break free from the rigid pattern of her life through the self-expression of the dance, with the help of a fairy god-mother who grants her three wishes. Here, the connection between the female speaker in the poem and the story book dancer ends:

> O might there always be
>
> Those wishes three
>
> That dazzling evanescent dress
> Those pearls, those tears
> That slipper made of glass --
>
> But not for me. (CP, 158)

At this point in the lyric, one detects the alienation of the speaker as the poet slips, almost imperceptibly, into the use of the first person but quickly back to third again. The lyric becomes more painfully intense and private as the speaker realizes that she must remain forever outside the stability and predictability of an ordered, patterned life. There is sorrow and poignancy in the knowledge which this realization brings. The repetition of the phrase "But not for me" (CP, 158) adds emphasis to the speaker's decision to follow her own impulses, rather than those dictated to her by society or through literature.

Stirred by the "winter wisdom of the wind" (CP, 159), with its elements of transience and elusiveness, the speaker turns to the harmonious rhythms of the wind. No longer feeling entrapped by the natural world, she becomes attuned to nature. Once again she is able to interpret the message of the wind: "The ice that bound her could not be her home / Native this land, but not / The boundary of her home" (CP, 159). Even though she was born in this particular space, she will not be bound by the physical circumstance of her birth. At this point, her sense of oneness with nature expands her horizons and makes "No one home hers, but all homes to be found" (CP, 159). The vast expanse of the natural world, the sky and air, becomes the unlimited arena for her dance.

In Section Two, the landscape is transformed as spring comes "sucking at the snow" (CP, 159). The melting of the ice and snow represents the softening of the speaker's stance. Shifting once more to third person, the poet describes the transition which the speaker begins to make. As a time of rebirth and regeneration, the spring heralds the thawing of the earth, and breaks the pattern of winter. As "icicles ... dripped" and "rivulets began to run" (CP, 159), the tempo of the poem picks up speed. The tentative rhythms of the dance become more pronounced. With a rushing of sound and movement, "Water began to make its home / To sigh and sing, to crack and swing / Its column in the underground" (CP, 159). The free, smooth rhythms of the poem are created by the caesura and internal rhyme pattern. Through the sustained use of masculine rhymes and generally longer lines, the rhythms of the poem become more forceful and vigorous.

In the transition from the simplicity of childhood to the awareness which adulthood brings, the speaker acknowledges that there is an irretrievable loss. From the wintry landscape of whiteness and cold to that of spring with its "ignominious patter", there is "all sparkle gone" (CP, 159). The result for the speaker is the loss of that illusory world of magic and innocence. The dancer has whirled from the garden of innocence into the larger realm of experience. No longer confined by the limitations of space, she has become one of the "transients, who knew / Some other home lay farther

on" (CP, 159). Seeing the flight of the geese and hearing "The sky's hallooing honking word" (CP, 159), she decides to follow her own "signpost"[3] and move according to her own natural impulses. Having decided to leave that world of frozen desires and wishes, she joins in the flight of the birds:

> She felt her feet untried
> Her wintry thongs unpried.
> She was a moving miracle of wing and sound
> No one home hers, but all homes to be found. (CP, 159)

In A Winnipeg Childhood (1973), the central figure, Elizabeth, constantly longs to escape. Watching with her father the flight of birds through the wintry spring sky, she also wishes to transcend the physical limitations of time and space and attain a similar oneness with nature. In "Preludes", the first in this loosely woven collection of short stories, Livesay describes the yearning of the young girl "to take off and break forth, free where there was only earth and sky".[4] Like the speaker in "Page One", she dreamed of dancing on the wind with the birds, those creatures of unlimited freedom.

During the 1940's, the realm of the dance, as well as its tempo, is altered by the poet's marriage and the

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[3]Dorothy Livesay, Signpost (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1932), p. 24.

[4]Dorothy Livesay, A Winnipeg Childhood (Winnipeg: Peguis Publishers Limited, 1973), p. 10.

subsequent births of her two children. Livesay seems to feel that creating and giving life in childbirth enlarges her vision, but the institution of marriage restricts her dance. The female speaker in "Song from The Multitude" warns that love and the confines of marriage would only imprison the dancer. Now the speaker must learn to pace herself according to the rhythms of her partner, rather than move independently according to her own individual impulses. In "The Husband", the voice of the female persona takes on a wry and bitter tone as she recognizes the differences between male and female perceptions of the world.

From the free-spirited dancer of the earliest lyrics, the speaker now becomes a slave of art: "I, colour's prisoner, am gardened by love's green / dance the eternal daylight on a shaft of sun" (CP, 203). The conflict then arises between the female speaker, the dancer, and her husband, who is in no sense on colour's side. Appointing himself as her "guardian angel", he makes it his "bounden duty" to ensure that all others are "banned from the garden" (CP, 203) and forbidden entry. He is banned as well. With its explicit sexual overtones ("He wears no sword" [CP, 203]), the poem presents an image of the female as possession whose very nature is sinful and sensual. On the other hand, the husband is a grim "Presbyterian" God who "paints the earth more black / the heaven more radiant white / than my plain eyes perceive" (CP, 203). The rigid distinctions between

black and white convey the narrowness of the male's perception of the female, as contrasted with her "landscape's technicolour" (CP, 203). As opposed to his bleak and colourless world, hers is a "paradise" (CP, 203) of colour and movement. Again the dance provides the speaker with an avenue of escape. Although she is limited to the confined space of the garden and made "colour's prisoner", she can find the dance within her prison. A slave to art and nature, she finds the freedom and space to dance within herself: "My freedom lies within" (CP, 203).

The space of the dance is narrowed by the natural world around her, as she dances "the eternal daylight on a shaft of sun" (CP, 203). A sense of claustrophobia is created by the opposing tensions within the poem ("black" / "white", "prisoner" / "freedom", "male" / "female", "garden" / "gates"). Juxtaposed against the many images of confinement is the image of the dancer who is both imprisoned by her art and yet freed by it. Her ability to perceive "the plummetings and plumes from colour's prism" (CP, 203) allows her to explore the space within herself, and not to be restricted by the narrow focus of the male.

In the final four lines of the lyric, the speaker directly addresses her husband in the form of a question: "What do you guard then?" (CP, 203). The inanity of his patriarchal stance is suggested by the direct reference to the biblical "Adam" and the indirect reference to "the

garden" (CP, 203) of Eden. The male's illusory view of the female speaker is suggested by the reference to "Quixote" (CP, 203), that extravagantly chivalrous and misguided knight who spent so much of his time tilting at windmills. The husband's attitude is equally unreasonable, for her "freedom lies within" herself, and thus out of his reach. Livesay returns to this theme later in "Old Song", a lyric from The Unquiet Bed (1967):

> What you will learn
> is this
> you cannot hold
> what vanishes (CP, 295)

With their inflexible concepts of ownership, the male lovers addressed in many of the poet's more personal lyrics are slow to learn this essential fact concerning interpersonal relationships. Having accepted at an early age the ultimate isolation of the individual, and having learned to dance alone, the female speaker in "The Husband" is astonished by his exaggerated sense of "bounden duties" which "staggers out of bounds" (CP, 203). "Bounds" suggests limits which the male, in his attitude towards the female, has exceeded. He "staggers," moving not with the grace of the dance but awkwardly, inexpertly. His inability to dance affects their relationship, and emphasizes the differences between them.

Livesay's penchant for using dance and musical terms is evident in the titles of many of the poems from this period. No longer content with making only general musical

references, she begins to use specific "song and dance"[5] techniques. The title of the lyric "Signature", in Selected Poems (1957), refers to the epigraph at the beginning of the poem: "LIVESAY THE NAME GOD THEM GAVE / AND NOW LIVES AYE INDEED THEY HAVE" (CP, 224). Livesay, uses this lyric to introduce her collection of Selected Poems (1957).

In "Signature", the poet repeats the image of the dance in a form quite similar to the one alluded to in "Page One":

> Flower without root.
> Dancer without feet --
> Gone in a cone of spiralled air,
> And I only wind. (CP, 225).

The figure of the dancer as wind is established in the opening stanza, and is sustained throughout the poem: "I am as wind / Playing high sky" (CP, 224). The speaker is full of high spirits and play as she reflects on the origin of her family name and connects it to her prairie birth place. She decides that she owes much to chance or caprice for the circumstances of her birth: "Born by a whim" (CP, 224). "This time" (CP, 224) implies that she believes in the possibility of reincarnation, of other lives in other times and places. The opening line "Born by a whim" also foreshadows that "misbegotten" (CP, 265) child of "Ballad of Me" who seeks to gain some measure of self-awareness through an

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[5]Livesay, "Song and Dance".

examination of her roots. It is mother earth which gives the speaker breath and life:

> So prairie gave breath:
> Child head, anemone
> Raised from wintergrass
> Pushing the mauve-veined cup
> Upward to world all sky
> Peopled with cloud. (CP, 224)

The process of birth and life is associated with the natural imagery of flowering and regeneration. The poet alludes to specific types of prairie flora such as the "violet", "anemone" and "crocus" (CP, 224). These allusions suggest that the speaker's birth is associated with nature, with the prairie landscape. In the assonance created by the repetition of vowel sounds such as "i" and "o" throughout the poem, Livesay establishes the up-lifting rhythms and quick paces of a spirited dance.

In "Signature" the poet's concern with identity develops from an individual's search for her roots to a more universal definition of man. Tracing her life back to the place of her birth, Winnipeg, the speaker goes far beyond the time of her own ancestors, and connects man's existence not merely to human ancestry but metaphorically to the ancestry of the natural world. Thus the speaker senses, through the freedom of the "wind / Playing high sky" (CP, 224), that man is timeless.

Born on the prairies in 1909, Livesay felt an early identification with the natural world around her. In the

earliest lyrics of the 1920's, the wind is an image of mystery, energy and intrigue. Referred to alternately as masculine and feminine, it has one constant characteristic -- complete, unlimited freedom. In the sonnet "Sun", from Signpost (1932), the female persona compares herself to the wind: "I am as bound as earth, yet wholly free / As the slow early wind that trails the breath / Of hidden wood-anemones" (CP, 26). In "Signature" the speaker again feels "Earthbound / Strapped to the sound / Of a Winnipeg wind" (CP, 225). But in the later poem, the speaker / wind / dancer combine in an image of lightness and escape. The wind becomes the speaker's means of transformation, just as the dance allows for her transcendence:

> Casting off skin,
> Bones, veins and eyes,
> Flower without root,
> Dancer without feet --
> Gone in a cone of spiralled air,
> And I only wind
> Sucked to the sun's fire! (CP, 225).

No longer restricted by her physical body, no longer "Earthbound", the "Dancer without feet" represents the cyclic nature of man and his world. The image of the spiral is also associated with the idea of the dance. Such spiral movements are intended to induce a state of ecstasy and to enable man to escape from the material world, to achieve transcendence. Through her association with "a cone of spiralled air", the dancer has gained oneness with the natural

elements. Having sprung from the prairie earth, she perceives herself as part of larger consciousness: "THE PRAIRIE GAVE BREATH; I GREW AND DIED: / ALIVE ON THIS AIR THESE LIVES ABIDE" (CP, 225). Livesay capitalizes these final lines to add emphasis to the message which the words contain. This is, in fact, the central theme of the poem.

The speaker in "Signature" says "stretched on the solitary sand / Of Egypt, I lay asunder" (CP, 225). She is transformed by a lover: "The flowering night / Shaped me a name / And the earth shook under " (CP, 225). The poet's word choice has sexual undertones associated with the intensely personal act of acquiring a name. As in the quaking of "the unquiet bed"[6], the tremors of the earth and the darkness of the night envelop the female speaker. The process of naming gives her a sense of identity, as Livesay herself suggests in the Foreword to Collected Poems (1972): "I delight in naming and in finding titles" (CP, v). But the process of naming also involves restrictions. It ties her to the physical circumstances of her birth. It implies limitations: "Now when I wake here, / Earthbound" (CP, 225). The speaker knows the limitations of space, but the dream of escape and flight is never far from her mind: "I dream of the next step / On into time --" (CP, 225). The dancer yearns to become like the wind, "Sucked

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[6]Dorothy Livesay, The Unquiet Bed (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967).

to the sun's fire!" (CP, 225). In the final image of the speaker as a "Dancer without feet" (CP, 225), the process of synthesis is suggested as the female speaker finally breaks the bond with earth. Livesay's word choice in the concluding stanza ("cone" and "spiralled air") and her use of capitalization for emphasis imply that she is dealing with more than personal identity in this poem. She is concerned with the "signature" of mankind and with universal evolution rather than with simple family ancestry. Setting out seemingly to explore her own individual roots, Livesay moves in the poem away from personal concerns to embrace a larger, more universal concern.

Using different rhythms and harmonies within a series of lyrics, "Variations on a Tree" explores this theme of universal evolution, particularly as it relates to the poet and the creative process. As in a series of musical variations, the poem involves the repetition of a basic theme, modified in rhythm and form, each time becoming increasingly more complex. Livesay uses multiple image patterns and the techniques of inversion and conjunction. In Section One, the image of the tree is connected to "This consciousness, the Word" (CP, 195). It is the central tool of the poet, the object which she manipulates: "Now see it roll / Lightly on my palms" (CP, 195). In Section Two the tree is the connecting image between childhood and adulthood, past and present: "An aspen bridge / The tightrope where / My childhood walks

--" (CP, 195). In the final Section, "The tree is Ego" (CP, 196), or the speaker's consciousness. It links the worlds of reality and imagination. In each of these sections, although the image of the tree is central, there are other important connecting images ("roots", "space", "bridge", "world", "sky", "pattern", etc.) which convey the poet's intent.

The techniques of inversion and conjunction are present in all three Sections. Section One contains the image of the tree inverted: "Or are there roots / Seeking to soak themselves in cloud" (CP, 195). The image of the tree as "word" is also inverted: "Invert the world: Now see it roll / Lightly on my palms" (CP, 195). Opposing images are also presented: "sun" / "moon", "now" / "eternity", "confined" / "dance", and "roots" / "branches" (CP, 195).

The first lyric in the sequence deals with the image of the tree as "the Word" (CP, 195), and the speaker identifies herself as dancer:

> And I immeasurably deep
> Wading in pools of blue
> Dance branches in eternity
> Play football with the moon. (CP, 195)

The dancer becomes representative of the poet, as one who manipulates images and creates illusions. Functioning as the poet's main means of articulation and communication, the written word becomes, like the poet, an image maker. Alive and vibrant, it can move and transform: "Now see

it roll / Lightly on my palms" (CP, 195). The association of the "word" with "palms" suggests its ability to be shaped and molded. The poet / dancer is found "immeasurably deep / Wading in pools of blue" (CP, 195). A "pool" denotes a deep, self-contained body of water. Its association with the speaker connotes the realm of the unconscious from which the poet draws many of her images and allusions. It also evokes an image of the poet as detached and introverted, not bound by the literal meanings of words or images but free to explore their connotations, to "Dance branches in eternity / Play football with the moon" (CP, 195). The dance with words enables the poet to make renewed contact, as in the game of football, with that long-forgotten magical aspect of man. She is the link or mediator between a defined reality (ie. the literalness of "the Word", as it is generally accepted) and an only sometimes glimpsed world of fantasy and imagination. It is the poet who presents images to an often unimaginative world. Possessing the ability to wade "in pools of blue" (CP, 195), the poet uses language to make these temporary flights of fancy.

For image-makers such as Livesay, language has the ambivalent function of freeing man from the limited dimensions of the physical world, in that it gives him "consciousness" (CP, 195), yet restricting him in that it defines and assigns specific meaning. Thus it confines him "to a narrow place" (CP, 195) on the page. When spoken, the words are left

hanging in air. As the speaker states in "And Give Us Our Trespasses":

> Between the impulse to speak
> and the speaking
> storms crackle
>
> Forgive us our
>
> distances. (CP, 301)

Ironically it is the "predicament" of the poet to be:

> Separate, yet joined,
> Single, yet twain,
> Twined in the ancestry of roots
> Yet roving in the upper space. (CP, 195)

It is this paradoxical nature of language which constantly perplexes the poet and forces her to turn so often to the dance as a means of human expression. In the later lyrics of the 1960's and 1970's, she relies more on the sense of touch, rather than speech, to communicate and express her thoughts. There the male, "that sweet connection" (IA, 35), becomes her silent partner in the dance of life and love.

Like the tree, which symbolizes consistent growth and regeneration, "the Word" (CP, 195) is also representative of man's immortality. As in the poem "Signature", in which the speaker seeks identity by tracing her ancestry, Livesay suggests in "Variations on a Tree" that one can search for meaning in the root, in the etymology of a given word. However, because language is a living, growing thing, the

meaning of a particular word is also forever changing and evolving. Thus, the word has the power to free, as well as to restrict the poet in the process of image-making.

In the second stanza of the first lyric, the poet inverts the image of the tree: "Or are there roots / Seeking to soak themselves in cloud" (CP, 195). Here the speaker does not focus on the negative or restrictive aspects of language, but in the freedom of words "roving in the upper space". The inversion of the tree image suggests involution, as the roots of the tree entwine themselves in the airy spaces above. The inversion implies that every process of physical growth is a spiritual opus in reverse. It becomes the function of the poet, as word-maker and manipulator, to "Invert the world: Now see it roll / Lightly on my palms" (CP, 195). The caesura creates a pause as the poet performs her feat of magic and illusion. Poet becomes dancer, making hereto unperceived connections between the unconscious connotation of a word and the literal meaning which the word expresses. The many possibilities of viewing reality which a poet presents to a reader are suggested by the transitive verb "dance" in "Dance branches in eternity".

The "moon" (CP, 195) alludes to the realm of the visionary, that space in which words become touching stones (a "football") to spheres which are normally inaccessible to the reader. Here words are the poet's tricks of the trade; they release her magical powers and allow her to

enter the realms of intuition and fancy, to bridge the gap between life and art, reality and imagination. No longer "Confined to a narrow place" (CP, 195), the poet, as word dancer, can move into the spaces of eternity. Thus the inverted image of the tree signifies the link between the literal word and its poetic function, as a key to the unconscious realms of man, his world of dreams, fantasies and visions.

In the second lyric, the poet shifts to a more regular rhyme scheme, shorter lines and a simpler diction. The physical tree represents a bridge connecting childhood and the adult world. The persona makes the transition from the state of innocence to the state of experience, but in so doing she recognizes the narrowness of the path and the delicacy of the process:

> An aspen bridge
> The tightrope where
> My childhood walks --
> No room to spare. (CP, 195)

Any process of change normally involves some sort of loss, as well as personal gain. The speaker's journey to adulthood is no exception: "But Island gained / was world well lost" (CP, 196). The capitalization of "Island" suggests the importance of the change. But it suggests too a narrowing or restricting of the persona's space.

The male lover, into whose "arms" the female speaker is "Tossed at last" (CP, 196), provides the link between the speaker's past and future. Having committed herself

to a mature relationship with this male, the speaker realizes that she is also relinquishing part of her own identity. Now like the roots of the tree, their lives become intertwined and interconnected as "Branches of silence / Consign the past" (CP, 196). Through the use of the word "consign", she conveys the act of entrusting part of oneself to another human being. From this point onward, she will no longer dance alone, but will be expected to keep in tune with the rhythms of her partner.

In the final lyric of the sequence, the tree becomes "Ego" (CP, 196), or the poet's consciousness, yet as in many of Livesay's poems, ambivalence remains. Optimistic that separate perceptions of reality or assignments of meaning can co-exist and merge into one, that "These twain are brother" (CP, 196), the speaker is still not free of doubts. The "two together go / Into the forest" (CP, 196), that dark, unsure area of experience and mystery, "with intent / To love and grow" (CP, 196). The dance provides a "Brave pattern for / World's tottering wall" (CP, 196). With its allusion to order and structure, the image of a "pattern" expresses the poet's affirmation of the ability of love to erect a new world of stability and peace, to provide harmony to a "tottering" world. Livesay ends on a half-optimistic note, suggesting that the pattern will at least provide "A roof of hands / Against sky fall" (CP, 196).

During the early 1940's, Livesay's dominant persona shifts from third person to first. This more subjective and inevitably revealing persona continues in Livesay's intensely personal lyrics of recent years, and reflects the poet's growing feelings of alienation and isolation during a period of great social and personal change. Like many artists, Livesay uses her poetry to interpret the turmoil and sense of deep frustration which she was experiencing. In "Song and Dance" she says:

> The essential remains: Song and Dance. During one period of my life I almost lost these talismen. For someone who believes in man, in his potential for growth and change, no more depressing period occurred than the 1950's .... Despair, almost an existential despair, took hold of me in those years. The resulting poems were alienated, groping .... From the gaiety of "Bartok and the Geranium" I moved to the confusion of "The Dark Runner" .... In poems such as this I came closer to mystical experience than heretofore;[7]

"Bartok and the Geranium" does reflect the essence of Livesay's poetry -- "song and dance",[8] as well as her attempt to reconcile the opposites which exist between male and female, nature and art. The tensions which the poet creates within the poem are illustrated by the title of the lyric. "Bartok" (CP, 215) refers to Bela Bartok, a Hungarian composer who influenced modern music profoundly

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[7]Livesay, "Song and Dance", p. 45.

[8]Ibid.

by his departure from traditional diatonic scale. His musical compositions are noted for their emotional intensity. In contrast with the "mad intensity" of Bartok, there is the "Geranium", a showy greenhouse flower, the "essence of serenity" (CP, 215). The poem contains most of the major tensions which exist in Livesay's poetry: "sun" / "moon", "daylight" / "dark", "heaven" / "hell", nature / art, passivity / energy, inside / outside, earth / air, male / female (CP, 215).

Written in free verse, the first stanza of the poem conveys the quiet, self-contained rhythms of the geranium:

> She lifts her green umbrella
> Towards the pane
> Seeking her fill of sunlight
> Or of rain; (CP, 215).

The passivity of the flower is suggested by her unquestioned acceptance of whatever befalls her: "Whatever falls / She has no commentary / Accepts, extends" (CP, 215). Her self-centred, egocentric nature is implied by the conceitedness of her movements. She "Blows out her furbelows, / Her bustling boughs" (CP, 215). "Furbelows" are the flounces or petals of the flower. They imply pretentiousness and showy decoration. The nature of the flower's space is restrictive, necessitated by the fact that a geranium is a greenhouse plant and thus needs the care and protection of an enclosed space in order to flourish. The use of fairly short lines and definite rhymes in the first stanza emphasizes the simple, uncomplicated

rhythms of the geranium as opposed to the whirling, exploding movements of "Bartok".

The second stanza conveys the immense energy and excitement of the music:

> And all the while he whirls
> Explodes in space,
> Never content with this small room:
> Not even can he be
> Confined to sky (CP, 215)

The image of the dance is implied by the spinning, whirling movements of Bartok as he speeds "high and higher still / From galaxy to galaxy" (CP, 215). Unlike the quiet unassuming flower, he will not accept the limitations of space. The repetition of words such as "high" and "galaxy" emphasizes the intensity of the music and his determination not to be confined or hindered by any rules or conventions. The force behind the music is suggested by the poet's word choice: "Wrench from the stars their momentary notes / Steal music from the moon" (CP, 215). "Wrench" and "Steal" imply aggression and force. Throughout this stanza "he" is referred to with words containing heavy consonants ("whirls", "high", "galaxy", "wrench", "steal" [CP, 215]) as opposed to the lighter consonant sounds used in the first stanza in referring to the geranium. There, the sounds which dominate are s's and f's, conveying a hushed and quiet atmosphere.

In the third stanza, Livesay juxtaposes the images of "he" / "she", "daylight" / "dark" and "heaven" / "hell"

(CP, 215) to suggest the coming together of opposites, which is the central focus of the poem. The effect is electrifying: "He storms and crackles / Spits with hell's own spark" (CP, 215).

In the fourth stanza there is a delicate dance of harmony and balance, made all the more remarkable by the unique combination of the partners. For an instant there is a fusion of opposites: "Yet in this room, this moment now / These together breathe and be" (CP, 215). In that one moment all differences disappear. He and she become one, the worlds of art and nature converge. The dancer becomes the dance. The poem has a curiously ambiguous ending:

> And when he's done, he's out:
> She leans a lip against the glass
> And preens herself in light. (CP, 215)

Having exhausted himself through the intensity of his passion, Bartok is spent and empty. The beauty of his art is powerful but momentary -- he cannot sustain the energy which stirred him to such vast heights. Meanwhile, the passive heliotropic flower, having exerted little or no energy, still "preens herself in light". She remains as serene and detached as before their explosive encounter, still self-contained in the confined space of the room. Here, as in many of Livesay's lyrics, the dance represents the need for harmonious relationships and a sense of balance in life.

In the poems from the 1940's and the 1950's, the smallness of the female persona's safe and structured world of marriage and child-rearing is contrasted with the "storming delight" (CP, 162) of a child's wide open spaces. In poems such as "Small Fry", "Carnival", "Abracadabra" and "Children's Camp", the persona has relinquished her role as isolated dancer to become an observer of the children and their games. Learning now how to set her pace to that of the children, the speaker seems to find personal satisfaction in their rhythmic, free-wheeling movements. In "Small Fry", the poet creates, through the use of alternate line lengths and internal rhythms, the rise and fall of the children's voices echoing through the day. Their cries, "shrill with demand" (CP, 162), demonstrate the egocentric nature of childhood.

Resembling the sharp, precise language which is the essence of the imagist poetry, the talk of the children is concise and to the point: "Their talk / Is bird brief" (CP, 162). In their haste to explore and experience their world, the children flit impatiently from one concern to another. Livesay focuses on the innocence of childhood and the purity of their language in expressing the freedom of their existence. There is a suggestion of primitivism in the line "Their song is man's / Own early voice" (CP, 162). Free of artifice or pretense, the language of the children is as natural as the "tremors of light" (CP, 162).

The image of the dance is implied throughout the lyric by the poet's choice of images which convey the rhythms of song and dance. Initially the poem evokes images of sound ("cries", "talk", and "song") which are then translated into images of movement ("Their cries / rise and recede"; "the word punched / Back like a volley ball"; and "Sun's scale from branch to branch / Storming delight" [CP, 162]). The freely moving rhythms of the poem also evoke the smooth, effortless movements of the dance which flow quite naturally from the "song" of the poem.

Livesay continues to experiment with the simple rhythms of nursery rhymes and light-hearted word play in "Abracadabra", one of her many poems about children from this period. The children represent for Livesay not only the simplicity of the past but also a hope for the future of mankind. Therefore it is the chant or sing-song rhymes of children's games which dictate the rhythms of the poem. The title, "Abracadabra" (CP, 163), evokes all the mysterious illusions of the magician, who with a sleight of hand is able to transform objects, or make them appear or disappear. A magical word or incantation, it may also allude to the nonsensical, meaningless talk peculiar to young children. Through word-play and sharp witticisms, Livesay creates a sense of fun and light-heartedness which is absent from much of her work during this period. No longer as naive or as optimistic about the nature of man or the future of

his world as she seems to be in many of her earlier poems, the poet returns to the simpler rhythms of the dance, only now it is through the energies of the children that she regains that lost sense of joy and gaiety. In several of the poems which Livesay writes specifically for children in the later collection Ice Age (1975), she refers to the child as having the unique capacity to love and to illuminate the most complex mysteries of the universe.

Having gone from innocent unaware youth to middle-age, the poet decides that without a belief in the inherent goodness of man and a continual respect for the natural world around us ("Through green leaves calling out a dance" [CP, 209]), we will never survive the deep freeze of this, the "ice age"[9] of mankind. The "circle" becomes a dominant image in the poetry of the 1950's, often associated with the world of children and the simpler rhythms of their songs and games. In "Carnival", there are repeated allusions to the circle in the image of the "winged wheels" (CP, 164) which whirl and climb, connecting the child, as well as man, to time and eternity. The dance, when it is mentioned specifically as in "Children's Camp", is, more often than not, associated with the greenness of the natural world and linked to the cyclical rhythms of the seasons and time:

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[9]Dorothy Livesay, Ice Age (Ontario: Press Porcepic Ltd., 1975).

Though gongs awaken
Summer is a season of high bells
Rung in the skies, and shaken
Through green leaves calling out a dance,
Sun's baton striking time: (CP, 209)

As Livesay apprpaches her middle years, the implications of time become increasingly important in her work. In the lyrics of the 1940's and 1950's, the poet interweaves the image of children with that of the circle to imply the rhythmic motions of the dance. Using deceptively simple rhythms and monosyllabic words, Livesay recreates the magical illusions of that lost time of childhood. However, one can detect, not too far below the surface, a tone of pessimism in such poems as "Of Mourners" and "Generation: 1955". There, the poet conveys her feelings of anguished concern for the children of tomorrow, an apprehension which never really leaves her later poetry. In the joyful lyrics of Ice Age (1975), written to celebrate birth and new life, there remains an uneasy struggle to continue the dance:

blow and burn
contrive to comprehend
survive to sway
to the will of the wind. (IA, 32)

The poet is afraid that the children of this particular age may never be given a chance to complete their "infinite song" (IA, 40) and dance. The possibility of another nuclear explosion threatens the serenity of their world, and could

eventually result in the "child's mind maimed before he learns to run" (CP, 167).

Although Livesay continues to write for and about children in the lyrics of the 1960's, her emphasis is more on the relationships between men and women. The image of the dance as a "circle" or ritualistic act, emblematic of the physical attraction between males and females, is used extensively in The Unquiet Bed (1967) and Plainsongs (1971). It suggests the female's search for wholeness through a union with a lover. Here, the dance image is nearly free of the negative connotations of enclosure or confinement which it carries in such earlier poems as "Song from the Multitude". No longer emphasizing the isolation and egocentric nature of the speaker, it becomes, in the lyrics of the 1960's, a unifying symbol in which male and female become one, dancing in unison. In the 1960's Livesay also returns to an emphasis on first person, indicating a shift away from the totally social or political themes of the 1930's and 1940's, and a move back to the personal and subjective lyricism of the 1920's. As the despair and disenchantment which appeared in her poetry in the 1950's finally begin to fade, there is a sense of growing consciousness in Livesay, as a poet and woman, and a deeper understanding of her world.

CHAPTER IV

BALLAD OF ME

"but day or night, I am undressed
dance differently".

(CP, 304)

From the tentative gropings towards awareness in the 1950's, Dorothy Livesay becomes more confident and at ease, both as a writer and as a woman, in the intensely personal lyrics of the 1960's and early 1970's. Her Unesco appointment to Zambia in 1959 and the years which she spent there led to important changes in her work and her life. She has said in "Song and Dance" that the African experience increased greatly her awareness of rhythm and dance in poetry:

> The experience of three years in Africa was so intense and fascinating it cannot be set down in a few words ..... Africa set me dancing! My students, I discovered, woke up singing; no sooner was their breakfast ... over when they would cluster in a common room, turn on the record player, and dance. Most of their dances were unsophisticated, jive and jitterbug; it was easy for my feet to catch the beat. Best of all, you didn't need a partner .... Not a dance of touch, but one where the rhythm itself created an unseen wire holding two people together in the leap of movement.[1]

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[1]Livesay, "Song and Dance", p. 46.

The documentary The Colour of God's Face (1964), which she later retitled "Zambia", reverberates with the rhythms, texture and images of an alien and exciting culture. In the music and dance of the African people, Livesay recognized a natural freedom towards which her own poetry has always aspired. In these Zambian poems Livesay uses an impersonal persona, a white outsider, in an attempt to interpret the changes which this predominantly black society was undergoing. Livesay there, as in the poetry of the 1930's, emphasizes her social concerns. She says:

> It is not a documentary in the sense that the Japanese-Canadian "Call My People Home" was: a presentation true to the "found" facts. It is rather a white outsider's appraisal, interpretation of what was happening to the blacks .... It seems to me therefore that "Zambia", written in 1964, is a freer expression of the impact of socio-political events, written in a more contemporary style. The music and dance is there, but more subtly conveyed.[2]

Through the image of the dance, Livesay continues to make her own poetic explorations with regard to form and technique. After the inner explorations of the 1950's, she reveals in the poetry of the 1960's a stronger and more confident view of herself and her work. Having regained her former optimistic outlook on life, a new immediacy and lack of restraint enter her work. Liberated from the demands placed

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[2]Ibid., pp. 46-47.

on her by family commitments in the 1950's, she gains a greater sense of poetic as well as personal freedom:

> It required a tremendous, traumatic break before I could escape from the defeatism of the Fifties. The opportunity came when I won an educational fellowship from the Canada Council .... Ironically, [it] ... was countered by deep personal loss ... the sudden death of my husband and the growing independence of my children.... for the first time in some twenty years, I was a free woman.[3]

During the 1960's, Livesay's work becomes more experimental in form. The poet begins in The Unquiet Bed (1967) to use lines with open punctuation, ceases to capitalize the first word of each line, and experiments with different spacing on the page. As well, she uses more complex sound patterns and combinations of sounds to vary the rhythms of the poems. As her poetic techniques become more experimental, so too does her subject matter become more explicit. New subject matter demands new forms of expression. Reflecting the American confessional poets' use of a highly subjective persona,[4] Livesay begins to adopt a more overtly personal presentation, as opposed to the frequently more apparently

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[3] Ibid., p. 46.

[4] M.L. Rosenthal, The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 14-15. In speaking of confessional poetry, Rosenthal says, "it has elements of the new existential subjectivity in which the poet sinks his consciousness deep into his moment-by-moment daily self ... the poet himself is always at the centre of the poem, though most often simply as a consciousness ...."

objective speaking style in her poetry from the 1930's through to the mid 1950's.

Dealing more often with such issues as female sexuality and the aging process, and making intensely personal explorations of male-female relationships, Livesay's poetry takes on a sparseness and explicitness. In the 1920's the sparseness had manifested itself in the form of the imagistic lyric with its emphasis on the world of nature. The rhythms of the poems in The Unquiet Bed (1967) and Plainsongs (1971) become more refined. In these confessional and highly personal lyrics, the imagery becomes more erotic, bared "to the bone" (CP, 302). Having fallen in love in the late 1960's with a younger man, Livesay says that "All the yearning to sing and dance revived again."[5] The outcome of this late-in-life, rejuvenating love affair is an outburst of passionate and personal love poems in which the poet expresses the feelings of a close emotional and physical relationship. In "Song and Dance", she says, "This time I spoke out of immediate experience. I disguised nothing."[6] Through the image and rhythms of the dance, these poems express Livesay's passionate celebration of life and her affirmation of intensely physical love. The rhythms of the dance also act, as in the short lyric "Sorcery", as a restraint against the effects of aging,

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[5]Livesay, "Song and Dance", p. 47.

[6]Ibid.

and thus allow for the physical transformation of the aging woman into a girl again.

In "The Second Language (Suite)", a series of lyrics which were written as a result of her stay in Africa, the symbol of the "circle dance" (CP, 255) is used in its more traditional form. As one of man's most ancient expressions of magic,[7] it symbolizes, in the first lyric of the suite, the union of a Zambian bride and groom. The presence, within this sacred marriage circle, of "a bare knife / on the gift table" (CP, 255) reinforces the ceremonial aspect of the marriage. By presenting a knife to the groom, the bride's uncle confronts him with his responsibilities, and with the penalty for failing to fulfill them.

The repetitive images of the "circle" and the "dance", in association with the knife, suggest the primacy of ritual and tradition. The "circle dance / around the tent" (CP, 255), which is performed by the wedding guests, emphasizes the traditional, ordered aspect of the institution of marriage. As well, it demonstrates the protection which the union provides.

In the second lyric of the suite, "Before Independence (Zambia)", the poet juxtaposes images of black and white, darkness and light, the cool recesses of the cathedral with the "pillared heat" outside, and the "naked" bodies of the

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[7]Cirlot, Dictionary of Symbols, p. 76.

two black martyrs with those of "the mediaeval saints, swathed in blue robes" (CP, 256). Though worlds apart in customs, traditions and ideology, the speaker and her black companion sense a oneness. Their mutual desire to communicate and share experiences is conveyed by the slow, fluid movements of an implicit dance at the end of the lyric: "Moving together, not touching / but moving together / we walked down the hill into the roaring compound" (CP, 256). The repetition of the phrase "Moving together" emphasizes the sense of harmony between them. From their initial ascent to the cathedral to their final descent to the town below, there is a sense of intimacy connecting them, bridging the distances between their so vastly different worlds.

Zambia in the 1960's was in the midst of political ferment, which led eventually to its independence, as is suggested by the image of the dance in the third lyric "Politics". Describing a woman who was addressing the village people, the poet uses the dance to refer to the volatile political scene, as well as to comment on the lady's speaking style. The image of the woman speaker / dancer suggests the fluctuations in African society at that time:

> tall, gaunt, with flexing arms
> she swayed like a dance
> from one side of the crowd to the other
> shouting in Bemba
> the language cleaving and cutting the air
> as her arms flayed. (CP, 257)

Lean and sinewy, the female speaker represents the often violent transitions which the country has had to make in its bid for independence. The alternate images of tension and freedom are contained in the movements of the dance. There is gracefulness and ease in the motion of the woman as "she swayed like a dance / from one side of the crowd to the other" (CP, 257). Her fluid movements from one side to the other suggest the powerful force or influence behind her words. She wields the language like a weapon, "the language cleaving and cutting the air" (CP, 257). "Cleave" suggests the aggression with which her words penetrate the air, and hence the minds of her listeners. Through the movements of the dance, she has captured the attention of the people. The powerful influence which the woman's message has on her listeners is implied through the poet's word choice (i.e. "flexing", "swayed", "cleaving", "cutting" and "flayed" [CP, 257]). "Flexing" and "swayed" first suggest the woman's ability to easily influence the group. As her words grow louder, as her speech gains momentum, she has the group completely in her power. The word "flayed" suggests that the smooth rhythms of the dance have also become more frenzied, as her speech becomes, perhaps, filled with scathing criticism of the present government. The reluctance of the men to take action is also implied by the word "cleave" with its opposing connotations. On one hand it suggests the act of holding fast, as to an older, more established

order. Or it may refer to a splitting, as from the acquiescence of a people who "fear authority" (CP, 257) towards a more fearless attitude, similar to that of the women who refuse to be cowards.

In the final lyric of the suite, the poet addresses her companion, Raphael, directly. In the Bible, Raphael is the name of one of God's messengers; in Livesay's poem, he becomes the speaker's guide through an unfamiliar land. The speaker in this lyric regrets their inability to move completely beyond their racial differences. Society is not yet ready to permit "such deeds done" (CP, 260). The speaker's longing to embrace Raphael remains merely a longing, but it implies, within it, the image of the dance as a means of rising above society's bias. As suggested by the confining image of "the longing arms / clamped" (CP, 259), she realizes that their dance is not yet to be:

> If in the dark
> I stumbled against your mouth would my arms stay
> pinned at my back --
>
> or shiver forward white
> flowering into black?
> (CP, 259)

The hesitation which holds them back from the embrace is conveyed in the dash and the pause created by the gradual tapering of the lines as the poet ends her question. The time of the dance will surely come, as conveyed in the poet's choice of the word "turn" in the final lines of the lyric:

"we suffer / and do not condone / we wait our turn" (CP, 260). The short lines, monosyllabic words, and simple, direct language add emphasis to her conviction.

The Unquiet Bed (1967) concludes with the documentary poem "Zambia", which is similar in theme and content to "The Second Language (Suite)". Like the earlier lyrical suite, the poem is the poet's response to the land, the people, the religion and the politics of a newly emerging nation. Published in 1964 by the Unitarian Church of Canada under the title The Colour of God's Face, the poem echoes with the resounding and powerful rhythms of Zambian music, and incorporates the sounds of both drums and the human voice. Emphasizing the oral tradition, the poem exemplifies Livesay's belief that "The living speech is shouted out / by men and woman" (CP, 262). In "Without Benefit of Tape", Livesay states that poetry exists outside of the poet and can be heard in the speech patterns of people everywhere:

> Hallooed
> across the counter, in a corner store
> it booms upon the river's shore:
> on midnight roads where hikers flag you down
> speech echoes from the canyon's wall
> resonant
> indubitable. (CP, 262)

It is this resonance which Livesay hears in the rhythms of the music which often precedes the dance. The Colour of God's Face (1964), the first version of the "Zambia" poems, has been chosen for analysis here because it is the

process involved in the writing of the initial version which is important to the change in the style of Livesay's poetry in the 1960's, rather than the subsequent organizational changes of the poetic sequence.

In Section One of The Colour of God's Face, the poet recreates the jubilant and insistent rhythms of "the land ... dancing!" (CGF, l. 15). The poem begins with the analogy of the land as an "Implacable woman" (CGF, l. 1), one who cannot be appeased or pacified. Associated with the elemental earth, this feminine land represents fecundity, sustenance and inexhaustible creativity and energy. The poet moves gradually to a longer, more languorous line, in which the land reclines, as in the hushed and static stance of the dancer waiting in the darkness of the stage for the music to begin. The image of the dry and dusty land conveys the sense of time being halted in a stillness which is about to break. The repetition of the "l" sound and the use of caesuras in the opening lines reflect the "heart of stillness mummified stillness" (CGF, l. 3) of the slowly awakening land.

The beginning of a slow, chant-like, quiet rhythm is conveyed through contrasting images, repetition of sounds, and regular metrical spacing:

> Sun rages · month on month
> and men light fires · make trees totter. (CGF, l. 6-7)

The abrupt shift from the "black" (CGF, l. 5) stillness of the opening lines to the harsh yellow brightness of the sun indicates the intensity of the rhythms. The use of a predominant "m" sound throughout these lines indicates the soft, deepening tempo of the music.

Swinging rapidly from "s" endings to the more rhythmic "ing" endings, the dance picks up pace as the dry, dusty season becomes "November" (CGF, l. 9) with its heavy deluge of rain. In the ninth lyric of another poem "Pictures at an Exhibition," Livesay relates the diversity of language to the natural sound of the rain beating on a roof:

> I hear God's dancer on the roof:
> some call it rain.
> The tower totters
> voices splinter off--
> but tongues, amazed
> sprout forth again. (CP, 252)

The land, responding to the "demanding" (CGF, l. 13) rhythms of the rain, begins to soften and yield. It moves with the regular precision of a dancer "In a green swing upwards" (CGF, l. 14), imitating a dancer's leap through the air. With bounding phrases, the land suddenly comes alive with a show of exuberance and joy, as the dry season ends and greenness and life flourish anew.

The entire first lyric of The Colour of God's Face resembles the choreography of a dance. It moves from the slow and languid stirrings of a woman half reclining in the darkness to the gradual flurry of sound and movement

as the dancer picks up tempo and quickness. The rhythms become more definite and emphatic until they are loud, "demanding" more movement of the dancer. Then, in the final leap of movement through the air, the land / the lady / the dancer come alive in a "green swing" of motion and colour.

Having found African rhythms to be a means of liberating her own poetic forms, Livesay turned, after the "Zambia" poems, back to the lyric as a more personal means of expression. Attracted to the experimental works of the American post-modernist poets such as Charles Olson and Robert Duncan,[8] Livesay includes in The Unquiet Bed (1967) several lyrics which resemble Olson's concept of projective verse, such

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[8] "An Interview with Dorothy Livesay", conducted by Doug Beardsley and Rosemary Sullivan, Canadian Poetry, 3 (Fall/Winter, 1978), pp. 95-96. In the interview Livesay says:

> "Well, I came back to Canada not having written for three or four years and I felt utterly out of the scene of poetry ... the next summer, '64 ... all that Black Mountain crowd came to Vancouver for about a month. They were reading their poetry: I think Robert Duncan, Charles Ols[o]n, Ginsberg .... It was the following winter after I'd studied the theory behind it and Ols[o]n's **Manifesto** and all those things ... I had as my advocate Ols[o]n ...."

In a later interview, "Matrona," in Alan Twigg's For Openers: Conversations with 24 Canadian Writers (B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1981), p. 132, Livesay says: "I started arranging my lines as much as I could according to the breath." This was one of the features of "projective verse", described by Olson in Selected Writings of Charles Olson, ed. by Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966).

as "Making the Poem", written for Jack Spicer, and "Soccer Game". In "Soccer Game" the poet creates, through assonance, juncture and the repetition of key words and phrases, the rapid, jerky movements of the players as they kick, lose and retrieve the ball during a soccer game. The smooth arc of the ball as it moves through the air is reflected in the repetition of specific words associated with the circle, or the shape of the ball, words often associated elsewhere with the circular motions of the dance. Such words are "wheel", "spin", "circle" (which in the poems for children from the 1950's connect the image of the dance to time and eternity), "ball", "O", "clock" (as in "Song from The Multitude" where the monotonous ticking of the clock suggests the regular rhythms of the wife as she dances within her small rooms) and "halo".

Also, through the use of short, monosyllabic words and the repetition of key words such as "bounce" and "again" Livesay conveys in the poem the rapid movements of the players as they do "round the field a dance / to the ball's bounce" (CP, 264). With the inversion of the normal word order and repetition of the "o" sound the lines indicate the delicate interplay of these athletic dancers, passing the ball back and forth between them. The dramatic movement of the dance as it reaches its finale is suggested by the abrupt shift of the lines upon the page:

round the field a dance
to the ball's bounce

Until a sudden huddle
waffles it
between fast feet --

the toe's a needle
quivering (CP, 264)

The recurring sounds and internal rhymes create a sense of rhythm and dance which is paralleled by the rapid images of movement and sound:

ball circles soars
and lunging
it is plunged
straight to the win

The crowd roars! (CP, 264)

Using punctuation and spacing to emphasize movement and to heighten the excitment of the game, the poem becomes a highly visual, as well as poetic expression.

From the dominant visual flamboyance of "Soccer Game" with its detached speaker as observer of the action, Livesay shifts in most of the lyrics in The Unquiet Bed (1967) to a very direct persona, similar to that used by the modern confessional poets of the 1960's. The use of so personal a speaker creates a feeling of direct contact between poet and reader. The central themes which she began to explore tentatively in earlier works are here developed more fully. With startling frankness she examines male and female sexuality, the effects of aging and the nature

of physical relationships between the sexes. A growing number of her poems are also concerned with the poetic process and the source of a poet's creativity. Many of the lyrics are clearly autobiographical and reflect the poet's continual search for wholeness.

In "Ballad of Me", Livesay makes the autobiography explicit: "No one remembers Dorothy / was ever here" (CP, 267). This reflects Livesay's willingness to make poetry of experience in a way which is expressly different from that of the 1920's, and 1930's. There the poet either employed a mask directly, as in "Defiance" (1928) and "Chained" (1932), or indirectly through the use of a third person, masculine speaker as occurs so often in her social verse of the 1930's. Although Livesay wrote out of her own experiences in these earlier poems, she still maintained a certain amount of reserve and distance from her readers. She was still very much the reticent dancer, not yet ready to reveal herself fully to her readers, perhaps because she still had not found her own poetic voice. The explicit autobiography in The Unquiet Bed (1967) combines with the image of the dance to represent her affirmation of love "as a stay against aging"[9] and as a jubilant celebration of life.

Livesay's cyclic theory of life, which begins to manifest itself in the lyrics which she wrote for children

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[9]Beardsley and Sullivan, p. 97.

in the 1950's, is illustrated in the poem "Ballad of Me", written in four sections. The poem moves from the time of the speaker's childhood, through the painful years of growing, and finally ends during the speaker's later years of adulthood. It is a confessional poem of intense self-scrutiny, culminating in recognition of her own individuality. Having presented the images which parents, husband and others have held of her, she moves at the end of the poem towards her own perception of "Dorothy" Livesay.

Livesay's longing for wholeness and the frustrations which she experienced as a woman and as a poet are captured in the painfully poignant image of "the abortive dancer" (CP, 266). Thwarted in her quest for understanding and self-acceptance, the poet, in confessional form, defiantly refuses to bear the guilt for the "abortionist" with "his flat perspective" and his "bleary eye", or for the "child's / 'onlie begetter' / who wanted a daughter" (CP, 266). All of the speaker's deep-seated feelings of inadequacy at her failure to measure up to her parents' and her lover's expectations are suggested by the allusions to "the abortive dancer" and to herself as a clumsy, "misbegotten" (CP, 265) child who never did learn to dance. In "Ballad of Me", the female speaker, with great strength and resolution, becomes determined to define herself for herself, rather than to accept the definitions assigned by others. In a later lyric "Of Chains", she says:

> The ideal would be to see oneself
> to see oneself
> objectively
> not Freud's view, nor
> that of redoubtable Marx
> not one's own children's
> myopic and lopsided stance
>
> But to soar
> free of the pain and fear
> and see one's early self
> groping more near
> to comprehension ... (IA, 51)

In an interview, Livesay acknowledges that she has often used flight in association with the image of the dance.[10] It allows for transcendence, which seems to be an essential factor in being able to perceive more clearly the real self, as opposed to the image which other people have of her.

A narrative ballad consisting of four lyrical sections, "Ballad of Me" echoes with the rhythms of a dance, particularly in the opening section with its tumbling, self-conscious motions of the young, awkward dancer. The first lyric, which deals with her childhood, begins on a jarring note as the poet declares that she was born "misbegotten". With its suggestion of inappropriateness, it sets the pattern of awkwardness that follows the poet into adulthood. How could anyone

> born clumsy
> bursting feet first
> then topsy turvey
> falling downstairs (CP, 265)

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[10] Ibid., p. 97.

ever learn to dance, or hope to capture the essence of air? The clumsy, self-conscious movements of the child who couldn't master the free and natural rhythms of the dance are suggested by Livesay's visual presentation of the poem. Through the use of falling, tumbling rhythms, the poet creates a sense of being off-balance as a result of her poor body co-ordination. Also by the repetition of key words such as "falling" and "catch" (CP, 265), as well as a number of words containing "ing" endings, she creates the sensation of stumbling through space in the short, varying line lengths. The reader experiences the speaker's sense of being "tossed off / left wildly / treading air / to catch up" (CP, 265). In retrospect, the poet still sees herself as a clumsy, awkward dancer, but acknowledges that it was all a problem of perception, "the eyes' fault" (CP, 265).

The word "fault" precipitates the feelings of guilt which she must contend with later as an adult:

> Everyone expected guilt
> even I --
> the pain was this:
> to feel nothing (CP, 265)

These opening lines of the second section convey the bitterness of the speaker as she states her inability to feel or experience pain. Only numbness remains, as is evident in the poet's use of short emphatic lines and simple diction. With a flat and ironic tone, the speaker berates the casual male

attitude of "the abortionist" (CP, 266) who could so easily dismiss the sacredness of conception and birth. This section of the poem expresses the poet's belief that it is the narrowness of the male "perspective" (CP, 266) which has caused her so much pain and frustration. Her attempt to redefine her world includes a rejection of the guilt others would have her bear. She must learn to reconcile inward as well as outward experiences in order to feel healthy and whole.

With an emphatic determination, the persona refuses to feel any guilt for "her", the unborn child, the speaker's "abortive dancer" (CP, 266). She will not pass on to her daughter that female legacy of guilt which was the speaker's own particular inheritance. The "Misbegotten" dancer of Section One does not want to perpetuate her clumsiness or fear of falling (not measuring up to the expectations of parents) on her unborn daughter.

The difficulty which this personal stance poses for the speaker is conveyed by the repetition of the negative: "No: Not for her / no-tears" (CP, 266), thus creating a mood of heightened emotion as opposed to the numbness of the speaker in the opening stanza of this section. The speaker has already had tears and grief enough. Instead she now chooses to reverse that painful image of "the child herself / the abortive dancer" (CP, 266) into an image of movement and life:

I held the moon in my belly
nine months duration
then she burst forth
an outcry of poems. (CP, 266)

In this peculiar twist, the speaker begins to exorcise old demons, and attempts to resolve the inner conflict between constraint and freedom, passivity and rebellion. Here the dance represents not a physical transformation but a change in attitude and a shift towards a more positive image of herself. She is beginning tentatively to accept the person she is. The possibility of wholeness is suggested by the dancer as "she burst forth" (CP, 266).

This image recalls the opening lines of the first section when the "clumsy" child" came "bursting feet first" (CP, 265), the reversal of the normal birth position, into the world. All of the poet's exuberance for living and loving is conveyed in the image of the child as "she burst forth / an outcry of poems" (CP, 266). Here Livesay suggests that the poetic process is akin to the personal act of giving birth in the exquisite pain and pleasure which both processes cause the speaker. The end of the second section is similar to the conclusion of "Lorca", where Livesay uses the image of the poet as one who dances "Unchallenged through the door" (CP, 127) in an explosion of sound and light.

The opening line of the third section suggests that the speaker's process of becoming is not, and may never be, complete. The restrictions which society has imposed

upon her have forced the speaker to escape within herself, to create "fantasies" (CP, 266) which act as avenues of flight from the reality without. As her need to escape from the constraints of marriage increases, she turns to a male "psychiatrist" who advises her to go home and "wash dishes" (CP, 266), evoking images of ritualistic atonement for her guilt. The tensions of the speaker are illustrated by the juxtaposition of opposing images -- that of her strong desire to run away from her husband versus the male symbol of authority and power sending her back home to be a dutiful wife. Here Livesay introduces a theme which she returns to in the later poetry, her perception of the male as a possible agent of transformation.

In "Ballad of Me" the image of the male as a healer is introduced, but, as yet, he is not assigned any particular magical powers. Later, as one who possesses knowledge and power, he will represent, for Livesay, the magical aspect of the dance with its highly illusory nature. The female's fragmented and split consciousness is referred to, implicitly, as a disease or dis-ease. She is the awkward child who has never been comfortable with her body or her own natural rhythms. In "Ballad of Me", the male healer, "the psychiatrist" (CP, 266), has the capacity of restoring her to mental health; in later love lyrics, such as "Sorcery" and "Auguries", he will be seen by the speaker as having the power to turn her into a girl again, to restore her youth.

It is the speaker's longing for wholeness that sends her, in the final section, back to "Woodlot" (CP, 267), the place of her childhood. Transformed physically by time, the speaker goes

> ... incognito
> in sandals, slacks
> old sweater
> and my dyed
> hair (CP, 267)

Aware of the physical changes wrought by time, the poet still has not come to a full acceptance of who she is. Still very much the "Misbegotten" dancer, she says: "I go wary / fearing to scare / the crow" (CP, 267). Exhibiting the old feelings of inadequacy and confusion about her identity, she has not yet learned to celebrate the joy of being female and gloriously alive.

In the short lyric "Sorcery", it is no longer necessary for the speaker to go in disguise, for old age has enacted its own macabre magic. With its allusion to witchcraft and the lure of enchantment, the poem voices the cry of one who has been cruelly transformed from a vibrant young girl into a wicked "witch" (CP, 318). In this lyric, the act of dancing is once again associated with the male ability to "magic" (CP, 318) the speaker back into her earlier form.

Her "breasts", which imply femininity, have now become "withered gourds" (CP, 318) with the negative implications of death and loss of sexuality. Suggesting the end of the

female's period of fertility, it implies the end of her desirability as a woman. Her "skin", with its association with birth and rebirth, "stiffens / shrinks" (CP, 318), now lacking the suppleness of youth. Her "pubic hair / bristles to an itch" (CP, 318), suggesting the anger which the female experiences at this cruel trick which nature has played upon her. Lacking the flexibility of her youth, the aging dancer has reached a stage of stasis.

There is a shift in these later lyrics away from the use of the natural world as a source of poetic expression towards the inner recesses of the poet's own mind and of her body, as well. Although age has diminished her physically, she has a clearer understanding of the workings and rhythms of her own body. What causes her the most consternation is not so much the visible transformation which age has inflicted upon her, but the absence of human contact, and particularly male contact, which is associated with that transformation:

> Not to be touched and swept
> by your arm's force
> gives me the ague
> turns me into witch (CP, 318)

The last stanza of the lyric is the speaker's plea to be transformed into her former state:

> O engineer of spring!
> magic magic me
> out of insanity
> from scarecrow into girl again

then dance me toss me
catch! (CP, 318)

Again it is the rhythms of the dance which have the power to transform the speaker. The poet's words, an "engineer of spring", have masculine overtones. As a season of rebirth and rejuvenation traditionally associated with the female, a male spring now holds the potential for the female's return to youth. Time has placed upon her a curse that may be broken only by the magic of the dance. The chanting, fairytale quality of the last stanza evokes ritualistic images of the dance in its most primitive form. Repetitive phrases such as "magic magic me" and "dance me toss me" (CP, 318) evoke the incantations of a chant, used in the breaking of evil spells. The spacing in these lines also suggests the halting rhythms of a dance, perhaps performed for the purpose of exorcism or magic. Behind the rhythms of this final section are the echoes of "The Unquiet Bed", in which the female persona warns the reader:

The woman I am
is not what you see
I'm not just bones
and crockery. (CP, 292)

Another suite of poems in which Livesay examines the female's need to achieve fulfillment without sacrificing her freedom and integrity is "The Notations of Love". In this poem, the poet explores the dominant theme of sexuality which is a major focus of both The Unquiet Bed (1967) and

Plainsongs (1971). Here Livesay describes how, even in the process of merging physically, both the male and female remain separate and undergo their transformations privately.

The term "notations" (CP, 302) refers to a preliminary, perhaps superficial tracing of the explicit facts of the male and female sexual relationship. Having begun a love affair with a younger man at this time in her life, Livesay refers to the lyrics in The Unquiet Bed (1967) as really "letters to the man".[11] As such, they are the personal correspondence of one who finds rekindled all the fire and passion of youth, and with it the longing to dance and sing. Once again her approach is confessional, revealing her most intimate and private thoughts, not only to her male lover, but also to the reader.

There is a frankness and a sense of pained acknowledgement:

> You left me nothing, when
> you bared me to the light
> gently took off all my skin
> undressed me to the bone (CP, 302)

In this completely erotic dance expressed in the union of their two bodies, the male and female enact a passionate pantomime of love. There is, however, passivity and vulnerability in the actions of one who submits so completely to another human being. In yielding completely to her lover,

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[11] Ibid., p. 97.

the speaker leaves nothing for herself. Distances still exist between them, even though they remain "bound even in flight" (CP, 303). The male lover seems remote, removed from the female. This is suggested by the speaker's refusal to assign him any identity other than "you" (CP, 302).

In the first lyric, the speaker is associated with the fundamental world of nature: "I melted down / into the earthy green / grass grew between my thighs" (CP, 302). This suggests the close connection of the female to the earth. As a compliant and submissive receptor of the male, she relinquishes her own sense of identity in order to reach the elemental life in which a new feminine consciousness can grow and "flower" (CP, 302). In her association with the "flower," which is an archetypal image of the soul or the mystical centre,[12] woman becomes the means to a possible, more heightened awareness between the male and female. This potential for a better understanding between the sexes can manifest itself in the erotic dance which their union provides.

The use of the dance image as part of the mating ritual which occurs between the sexes is also presented briefly in "Disasters of the Sun". With quiet amazement the speaker in this poem watches as the male moves silently

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[12] J.C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 90.

towards her. The need for words disappears as he glides towards her with the rhythmic movements of the dance:

> Incredibly, you move.
> You seem to dance
> and suddenly
> you stand beside me, calm
> without surprise: (CP, 357)

With its suggestion of mutual sexual attraction and natural ease, the dance becomes, as in "The Notations of Love", an exercise of love, creating harmony in the otherwise chaotic "jumbled life" (CP, 357) of the female.

The second lyric of "The Notations of Love" is centred to the right of the page and lacks capitalization at the beginning of the section, implying the distance between speaker and reader, as well as between the male and female. Perhaps now speaking privately to her lover during a moment of intimacy, her voice holds a thin thread of concealed anger. In the opening words, the speaker asks "in my mouth / no love?" to which the male's reply is "only cruelty" (CP, 302). It is important that the reader is only given the female's account of her lover's reply. Between the two lovers there remain distances which words cannot bridge. Here, in the act of loving, is where the dance could provide a vital function, enabling human communication. Like the dance, the rhythms of their love-making could exclude the need for words or language.

Despite their coming together in love, men's and women's perceptions of what constitutes a loving relationship evidently differ. For the male whom the speaker addresses, perhaps there is no expression of love in the physical union of their bodies, but merely taking. In a tone of voice reverberating with resignation and anger, the female persona insists that her lover "take love, take love / the hard way" (CP, 302), suggesting a lack of warmth and emotional involvement on his part. The differences which exist between the male and female perceptions of their sexual union is implied by the next line, "twisted and sparse" (CP, 302). In the love lyrics of the 1960's Livesay emphasizes the discrepancies which exist between the male and female views of reality. For the female, the rhythms of the dance provide the link which connects the physical act of love with that of an emotional involvement. The unyielding nature of the male "rock" implies that he must go beyond the hardness of the rock (i.e. stop resisting an emotional reaction) before he can experience the "fountain's force" (CP, 302), the power and strength of the female's love.

Through the sense of touch, which becomes a kind of dance of sensation and feeling, the male can uncover the secrets of the female psyche. His fingers dance gently on her face, tracing the patterns of age:

Crow's feet your finger follows
circling my eyes
and on the forehead's field
a skeleton of leaves (CP, 302)

Tentatively exploring her face, he discovers possible images of her future appearance. The dance of touch becomes the important means of communication between them. It is touch, his finger circling her eyes, that offers the male the secrets hidden beneath her flesh. Moving beyond words, "the tongue / unsheathes its secret skin" (CP, 303). Their union provides the dance by which they are able to penetrate the darkness and silences which formerly divided them.

Having bridged the distances by their sensual dance, an invisible bond now connects them eternally, regardless of "these absences" (CP, 303). Now the two are truly one:

our minds are twins
they circle and unite
my left arm your right arm
bound even in flight (CP, 303)

The fusion of their bodies, which is suggested by "my left arm your right arm", creates the image, not of two lovers moving harmoniously, but of one single, solitary person.

In the fifth lyric, the speaker clearly contends that in her search for unity and wholeness it is the male who completes her. In a later lyric from Ice Age (1975) entitled "Widow", the female persona refers to her male lover as "that sweet connection" (IA, 35). In recalling their nights of sensual love, she admits that neither time

nor "memory / can seal / that bond of flesh / body within body" (IA, 35).

In the final lyric of "The Notations of Love", the man is once more an instrument of transformation. Through the physical union of his body with hers, he gives the female a new sense of identity. She has lost one kind of individuality in baring herself so completely to him, but has glimpsed another dimension of herself as a consequence. Now, "day or night, I / am undressed / dance differently" (CP, 304).

Besides using the dance motif to explore her own feminine concerns, Livesay in the 1960's begins to examine more closely the often mysterious process of creating a poem. As well, she attempts in poems such as "The Emperor's Circus" and "The Dream" to identify the male, as well as the female, sources of creativity. The collection of personal lyrics entitled The Unquiet Bed (1967) contains several poems written for specific fellow artists. In these poems, Livesay deals with the selection and arrangement of subject matter, and the various techniques which poets use.

In "The Emperor's Circus", dedicated to Alden Nowlan, Livesay presents an image of a dying emperor, Franz Josef, who attempts to set "his house to rights / his papers in their proper place" (CP, 277). Putting reason and order ahead of imagination or whimsy, "duty before grace" (CP, 276), he allows discipline to destroy his natural instincts. The link between the "cold recalcitrant" (CP, 276) ruler

and the creative artist is suggested by the motif of the dance:

> ... he fifteen,
> learning now to dance
> taken by tutor to
> the Cirque français
> to see the acrobats
> watch horses prance. (CP, 276)

Intertwined with the image of the "acrobats", the dance suggests the possibility of balance and compromise, two qualities which, as emperor, Franz Josef does not possess. With echoes of the opening lines of "Ballad of Me", the acrobats, with their tumbling, falling movements, are symbolic of a process of inversion or reversal. They demonstrate the need for the emperor to turn things around. Ironically, they also demonstrate, despite their tumbling motions, the skills of balance and co-ordination which the "misbegotten" (CP, 265) dancer lacked.

Juxtaposing the rhymes of "prance", "dance" and "Franz" and making reference to the "horses" (CP, 276), animals often associated with magic, the poet subtly suggests the circular movements of the dance. Linked to the instinctive world of the unconscious, the horses stand for the intense desire and longings of an aging emperor who has nearly forgotten and lost contact with the sensitive boy of his youth. The rhythms and movements of the dance had been replaced, during his reign, by a world of rigid order. Once, as a young

man, he had possessed the power to divine, the power to create:

> his laughter caught the tumbler's leap
> the circus master, elegant with whip
> the acrobats half taken by surprise
> mastering the air
> and centred on each page
> he drew the horses . . . (CP, 277)

His art had enabled him to transfer to paper, to make visible, "the cries" of the horses, "the silence / yielding in their eyes" (CP, 277).

In this poem Livesay creates the intricate rhythms of the dance through a number of poetic techniques. Visual movement is suggested by the manner in which the poem is placed upon the page, and by the spacing within the lines. In the central section of the poem, placed slightly to the right of the page, Livesay employs varying line lengths and words ending in "ing" and "s" throughout, to convey the graceful and elaborate movements of the acrobats and horses:

> mastering the air
> and centred on each page
> he drew the horses, tossing manes
> the tremor of their hoofs, the cries
> of innocent creatures circling the dust: (CP, 277)

"Mastering", "tossing" and "circling" are all words which suggest the smooth, fluid movements of a dance.

The unconscious nature of an artist's ability to capture and recreate the frozen instant in time, either

through poetry or sketching, is suggested by the suddenness of the movement, "caught" and "half taken by surprise" (CP, 277). There is a sense of breathless wonder in these lines, as if the artist himself is not quite sure of the source of his creativity. Like the acrobats, the poet, who is a master juggler of words and images, is also "half taken by surprise". The real magic seems to lie in the mysterious capturing of "the silence" (CP, 277) in their eyes and the rendering of the experience visually on paper. Linked intimately in this poem with magic and mystery, the dance represents man's need for balance, as well as the artistic expression of his search for wholeness.

As the old ruler sits "Alone upon an empty throne" (CP, 277) surveying his life, the one redeeming feature of his youth seems to be his drawings of "mild horses leaping / in that land once captured by his lines --" (CP 277). Recognizing the importance of that youthful act of creation, he cannot bring himself to destroy the drawings of his childhood, but chooses instead to toss "them into time" (CP, 277).

Having put "duty before grace." (CP, 276), Franz Josef had allowed his reign to become static, bound by rigid rules of conduct, many of which were self-imposed. Although the accomplishment of the drawings is representative of the emperor's learning, the poet never reveals whether or not the young Franz continued to dance. The dance, had it not been abandoned, might have enabled him to upset the

rigidity of the established order, thus permitting greater personal, as well as artistic, freedom and expression. Instead he is viewed at the end of the lyric as one who never achieved the delicate balance between reason and imagination, reality and magic.

Livesay's exploration of the poet and the creative process continues, on a more intimate and personal level, in the shorter lyric, "The Dream". With unblinking candor the poem opens, "I met a unicorn" (CP, 294). She, the initiate, moves "in a meditative dance" (CP, 294) through the dark world of an enchanted wood where strange and wondrous things occur. The lyric begins with the direct simplicity of a child's fairy tale as the speaker recounts the story of her encounter with that mythical beast in a realm of magic and illusion. The dark, mysterious atmosphere and the title of the poem strongly suggest that this is the shadowy world of the unconscious. Like the rhythms of the poem, the steps of the speaker's dance are ponderous and contemplative. This is no wild or frenzied dance of passion or ecstasy. The mystic wood is the place of dreams, the realm of magical enchantment.

The function of dreams is to predict the inevitable occurrences of events, and they thus are usually perceived as omens or warnings. This particular dream becomes a mystical experience of profound intensity. Her encounter with the unicorn is illuminating, and there is a sexual implication

in the lines, "I ... bear his mark / his horn, his stabbing glance" (CP, 294). The impact of their meeting is evident in her altered vision, "eyes pierced by that confounding light / move in a meditative dance" (CP, 294). Again Livesay uses the image of the dance to communicate the process of transformation which has occurred to the female speaker.

The peculiarity of the speaker is implied by the unicorn, for it can be captured only by a virgin who, often as not, accomplishes this feat sexually. Having been rendered powerless, sightless and speechless by the strange encounter, the speaker is "dissolved" and "[sinks] down in the ground" (CP, 294). The process of disintegration is crucial in order for her to regain both innocence and awareness.

The "horn" of the unicorn becomes the instrument of transformation which leads eventually to the speaker's "meditative dance" (CP, 294). Believed to be an antidote to poison, it purifies and gives heightened consciousness to the speaker. The image of the quiet, musing dancer suggests the sacredness of the experience and the holiness of the visions which it afforded her. The repetition of the opening line in the lyric's conclusion emphasizes the impact which the experience had and the changes which resulted.

Moving from the darkness of the wood at the beginning of the lyric into a world of "confounding light" (CP, 294) implies the speaker's journey from vague confusion to supreme knowledge. Through the mystical meeting with the unicorn,

a creature not of this world, the persona becomes freed of physical limitations. Even her body "dissolves" (CP, 294), and transformed, she reaches a state of transcendence and awareness. It is the power of the dream-state or the unconscious which changes her and with "strangeness blazed [her] blood" (CP, 294). She returns after the experience to this altered state of "strangeness" (CP, 294).

The prevailing mood of "The Dream" and the tone of voice of the female speaker is similar to a lyric of the 1920's, "Chinese", with its evocation of exotic imagery. In both lyrics, Livesay emphasizes the private nature of the creative process through the images of the dance and meditation. In the solitary nature of the speaker's encounter with the unicorn in "The Dream", the poet indicates the importance of distancing herself from her surroundings in order to see with the poet's "third eye".[13] Thus the "meditative dance" (CP, 294) represents the isolation which many times is crucial to the poetic process. The fantasy world represents a transcendence of the realm of external reality for that of imagination and fancy. Through the process of creating a poem, a poet relearns man's lost magic.

In the more revealing persona of The Unquiet Bed (1967) and Plainsongs (1971), Livesay makes a significant shift from the personal lyrics of the 1920's and 1930's.

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[13]Jay Macpherson, The Boatman and Other Poems (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 7.

No longer afraid of taking risks or wary of being vulnerable, the poet reveals herself to the reader. In doing so, she, as well as the reader, is freed to explore more fully the thoughts behind the poem. The lyrics of the 1960's are those of an older and wiser poet, one who has managed to attain a better understanding of the complexity of interpersonal relationships. The result is an honesty which Livesay had not been able to express before. As she says in the Foreword to the Collected Poems: The Two Seasons (1972), there has to be "a synthesis of these two seasons, innocence and experience" (CP, v) before a poet can achieve completion in her work, as well as in her personal life.

Although the love lyrics of the 1960's are more sexually explicit than her earlier lyrics, they are very skilfully controlled. Using the same precision as that found in the earlier imagistic lyrics, Livesay produces a poetry which is more technically refined and piercingly effective.

Livesay concludes that even those who are not accomplished dancers can still make contact with their inner selves through the movements of one who expresses the latent impulses of their own beings. Having been born a "misbegotten" (CP, 265) dancer does not necessarily mean that one cannot discover the rhythms of the dance through a harmonious interaction with others. No matter how bleak man's fate

may seem, through the poet's works "Laughter heals, the dance captures, the song echoes".[14]

[14]Livesay, "Song and Dance", p. 48.

CHAPTER V

AH, SWEET DANCER

"become the dancer
in motion forever
dancing his own dream"

(Ice Age, 51)

From the affirmation which the poetry of the 1960's attests to, in the lyrics of Ice Age (1975) and The Phases of Love (1983) Livesay moves toward more specifically feminine concerns. Many of her poems are now written for or about women. With the wisdom and vision of a female seer, she speaks for women everywhere in her attempt to understand and articulate the human condition:

I am the sybil's voice
crying for knowledge:
O do not put me down
teach me to be more human (PL, "The Sybil")

From her earliest lyrics in Green Pitcher (1928) and Signpost (1932), Livesay has been involved with an intensely private and intensely female world. In as early a poem as "The Shrouding" (1928), the female persona suspects that there will come a time for accountability:

> Must we awake from this long
> quietness of sleep,
> Must we arise and find
> Beauty in wakening? (CP, 17)

In the imagistic lyrics of the 1920's and early 1930's, the speaker is reluctant to yield to her inner voices or to heed the call "for battle with the sun" (CP, 17). Preferring the safety of innocence and unawareness, she chooses to remain a virtually invisible dancer, hidden by her many protective disguises and colourless shrouds. Although greenness and fecundity run through much of Livesay's poetry, in the earlier period the dance or the lonely dancer is usually associated with muted or even nondescript colours, such as grey or black. Only in the later poetry does the dance become associated with bright, radiant colours. Finally, in the most recent lyrics, the dancer becomes a flamboyant "rainbow" (CP, 36), no longer secretive or concealed by shadows and doubts but moving "into green-gold gardens" (PL, "In Therapy: Dialogue").

Just as the space and atmosphere of the dance change, so too does the emotional state of the dancer. In the 1920's, it was essential that she dance alone to save her "self's integrity" (CP, 29). She believed concealment was necessary for her own protection, to maintain a safe distance from her male lover. Often he would misinterpret her signals, as in "Perversity" (1932), in which he fails to recognize the speaker's essential purity. Thus the female comes to

"dread the sun / For his fierce honesty" (CP, 30). His ability to penetrate her outer disguises forces her to seek the refuge of obscure and shadowy places. She decides, then, that she must dance for herself alone.

In the poetry of the 1970's and 1980's, the persona no longer dances alone in shadowy gardens but, abandoning her egocentric position, moves to the rhythms of a more universal music. With its ability to transcend the limitations of language, space and time, the poet decides that "Music exists perhaps / to take us there / without guilt" (IA, 20). The music behind the poem helps the speaker reconcile the conflicting emotions within herself -- the "desire / to escape into / the irrational" (IA, 20) and the need to be part of the harmonious music of the universe. The dance, then, represents the sense of balance which the speaker finally achieves in these later poems. Formerly the dance was associated with a desire for escape and transformation. Now the dancer and the dance become one as she decides "to re-stream / leap on that new plane / of being" and "to soar / free" (IA, 51) from the expectations of others. She has been confined by the restrictions which society has imposed upon her. In order to retrieve her lost self, she must go back into the darkness and relearn the "essence of silence" (IA, 65).

In the poet's struggle to achieve unity between nature and man, she has constantly been haunted by the paradox

of silence which surrounds her. The dance is one element which frees her from the "bondage of language" (IA, 65), allowing her some measure of wholeness when all other attempts at articulation and communication fail. No longer fighting against the isolation of human experience, she begins instead to

> pray also
> for the redeeming silence
> no words no thoughts
> blind quiet
> a touching a searching
> into the void. (IA, 65)

Only by accepting the silences and distances between herself and her world can the poet finally become "fully whole / blessedly / complete" (IA, 65).

The fusion of the dancer with the dance has been the result of a long and often painful process of individuation. As "a woman gone through drought" (IA, 65), which is often associated with a state of ascetic spirituality or vision, Livesay emerges with a deeper sense of compassion for her fellowmen, and a greater respect for the intricate balance between man and his world. She realizes that the perfect union with a male lover which she has sought for so long may never be actualized. As opposing elements, the most that man and woman can ever hope to attain is a limited harmony and balance. In "The Stoned Woman", the poet recognizes the need to reassess male and female relationships if men and women are ever to dance as one. Livesay ironically

suggests that "the stoned girl", the woman, has "become an object" (IA, 62), and thus less than human. The lack of respect which men and women afford each other has led to an advancing glacial epoch of human relationships. If man cannot alter his perceptions and attitudes, then perhaps

> It is time to go off
> the earth
> if we're not whole
> and leave it to the ravens
> or the four-footed
> who rut only in season
> but have respect
> for their kind. (IA, 62)

In the article entitled "Song and Dance", Livesay states that as a young girl she sought, through sexual experimentation, "the perfect dancing partner".[1] The persona in many of the lyrics of Ice Age (1975) is a much older and wiser woman, slightly jaded by time and experience. No longer advocating the free sexual experimentation of her youth, she is greatly concerned with the discrepancies between the expressions of love and acts of sex. In the extremely critical lyric, "The Gun", the speaker arrives at the harsh conclusion "that sex is only a ritual dance / calling down carnage" (IA, 37). The poem is loaded with images of violence perpetrated against women, which ultimately result in, as witnessed in "The Stoned Woman", a deep "hatred of" the female sex in "The minds of North Americans" (IA,

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[1] Livesay, "Song and Dance", p. 43.

37). This "hatred" has been caused by the distorted and unreal portrayal of the sexes by insensitive media.

Through the poet's choice of clinical diction ("copulation", "instruct", "projectiles" [IA, 37]) in the opening lines and harsh, discordant sound patterns, the poem evokes the cold, unemotional detachment of loveless relationships. What should be an act of supreme celebration of love between two people is here presented starkly as "copulation" (IA, 37). This suggests union solely for the purpose of procreation ("In the ecstatic thrust / child creating" [IA, 37]), the continuation of the species. Words such as "gun" and "projectiles" suggest aggressive male behavior and images of force or even physical violence. The phallic gun has the ability to maim or kill, rather than to create life. In the phrase "the ecstatic thrust" (IA, 37), the male seems to be piercing or forcibly penetrating the female. The violent nature of the act is further suggested by the final two lines of the first stanza, which describe the male as the hunter, one who will "conceive death / shoot his arrow to kill" (IA, 37).

In this poem, Livesay implies that "The minds of North Americans / have been so loaded / with guns" (IA, 37) that, bombarded with messages of aggression and violence, we have lost that sensibility which makes us human. De-evolution, rather than evolution, now seems to be man's

fate. In the poem "Unitas" (1975), the speaker confirms this belief that man is racing towards his own destruction:

> We, born to flourish
> in a heyday of sun
> and tumble to rubble
> when the ice age comes. (IA, 18)

In the lyric "Breadline", Livesay recognizes in nature a harmonious interaction which, in the world of men, is at its best tenuous and uncertain:

> I see them skydancers
> who, at the most judicious moment
> settle, mother and child
> on the boathouse roof
> and cry for food (IA, 26)

These dancers, "The two gulls doing a flypast / skimming over the waves' skip-rope" (IA, 26), move with ease between earth and air. The rhythmic movements of the dancer are suggested by the alliterative use of the "sk" sound in the lines which refer to the seagulls. The repetition of this sound captures the smooth, even rhythms of the gulls as they swoop down on the ocean's stage to enact their daily ballet. The speaker detects in their steady, fluid movements a self-control and innate satisfaction. There is none of the restless wonder of the poet who attempts to capture the essence of their mimetic dance through the rhythms and words of the poem.

The concluding lines of the lyric convey the aching emptiness which the speaker experiences as she watches the birds in motion:

> Such hunger!
> I've never felt such hunger:
> My sight is blurred
> their eyes carry the sun. (IA, 26).

The warmth of the sun suggests the constancy of their existence, as opposed to man's rapidly changing world and the rapidly impending ice age. Having failed to maintain equilibrium with the natural world around him, man has lost contact with the harmonious impulses which dictate the steps of the dance. The gulls, performing their dance of life as opposed to the dance of death which man performs in the lyric "The Gun", represent a higher state of being which man has failed to attain. The "skydancers" (IA, 26) are messengers, used by Livesay as reminders of man's potentiality, which is too often unrealized. In "Cloud Messages", the poet intimates that if man is going to survive he must learn to interpret more accurately these messages which nature presents to him. He must relearn that lost art of divining.

In "The Unquiet Dead", Livesay, seemingly light-hearted, describes the reactions of a "small group of poets" (IA, 36) to that natural phenomenon the aurora borealis, or northern lights which can be perceived so clearly on cold nights in northern Canada. They watched

as the sky swooped down
curtained the buildings
curtseyed and swayed and danced
in dazzling rainbows
wraiths of energy
flagging the universe (IA, 36)

Obviously misinterpreting the appearance of the multi-coloured lights as they "danced" across the northern sky, one cynical onlooker expresses the mass paranoia which is so prevalent in the western world: "Watch out! It's the Russians!" (IA, 36). Behind the witticism of the poem is the poet's own fear that man may eventually take part in his own destruction, if more caution is not exercised in the political arena. In the title poem "Ice Age", Livesay expresses grave doubts that man will ever remember his innate goodness in time to prevent "the supersonic planes" from raining "destruction / upon the benign" (IA, 70). Man, in his struggle for power, has become "Worse than an animal" (IA, 70):

he has ripped away
leaf
bird
flower
is moving to destroy
the still centre
heart's power. (IA, 70)

Because the assignment of meaning to any observable phenomenon is, in many ways, an individual and subjective decision, there always exists the possibility of making erroneous connections. In man's race for dominance, he has forgotten how to be "a pilot / flaming across world

sky" (IA, 52). In "The Unquiet Dead," the "skyful / of gods and goddesses / uncontrollably laughing" (IA, 36) offers a warning sign to the viewers. The red light associated with Aurora, the Roman goddess of the dawn, functions as a natural portent of an approaching disaster. Having forgotten the ancient art of divination in his loss of contact with the natural world, man is in grave danger of ending human existence. This is a theme which occurs in Livesay's earlier poetry. The image of man as a diviner is also presented in "Disasters of the Sun" (1971):

> no more lovely man can be
> than he with moon-wand
> who witches water. (CP, 357)

The need for man to relearn that lost art of magic is essential if he is to survive the "most killing / northern sun" (CP, 359). In "Disasters of the Sun", man through his association with the dance becomes an agent of transformation and a hope for change. In "The Unquiet Dead", Livesay shifts to the use of an element from nature, the Aurora Borealis, to represent the dance and thus man's potential for survival. This is a natural element like the wind, the birds, the flowers, over which man has no control. In nature, the poet sees energy, freedom, creativity and life; man has the capacity to possess all of these things but invariably they elude him. The observers of the dance are a "group of poets" (IA, 36), that select group who are responsible

for naming and interpreting all aspects of man's existence. In "The Unquiet Dead", the poets are immobilized by the sight. They "stood in a row stunned", as opposed to the northern lights which "curtseyed and swayed and danced" (IA, 36). In the image of the rainbow colours as dancing "wraiths of energy / flagging the universe" (IA, 36), the immense energy of the dance becomes merely an illusion, again emphasizing the evanescent quality of the experience. While the poets gathered inside the building to read their works, outside in the night-sky a highly creative and wholly natural poem was writing itself. The movements of the dance once again supersede the power of language to provide expression.

"Flagging" suggests growing tired and, as the dance wanes, long feathery wisps of colour drape the northern sky. Allusions to the supernatural world infiltrate the poem through words such as "wraiths", which imply otherworldly experiences. When seen shortly before or after a person's death a wraith or apparition serves as an omen of evil. Thus the appearance of the northern lights in the sky and the reaction of the poets to the phenomenon exemplify the "stunned" or speechless state of mankind; man will seemingly not act according to his natural impulses but instead seems bent on moving steadily towards his own destruction.

In "Perspectives" and "Of Chains", Livesay returns to a theme which has occupied her poetry from the time of her earliest lyrics in Green Pitcher (1928), the problem

of perspective and the search for personal identity. "Perspectives" again presents the "misbegotten" (CP, 265) dancer of the earlier "Ballad of Me", but now the speaker has come to accept, and in fact celebrate, her slightly distorted vision of the world. The poem recalls the speaker's encounter with a male carpenter who comes to inspect her house with its slanting floors. Placing a glass of water on both sides of her desk, he informs her that "the water was perfectly level. / -- And so is your house!" (IA, 23). Thus she realizes that it is herself who is "skew-gee" (IA, 23), at odds with the world. No longer bothered by her inability to adapt to the rhythms of those around her, she is quite happy to accept the limitations of the dance, as long as she can move to the rhythms dictated by her own often clumsy body:

> It is myself again, skew-gee!
> all these years tackling the world
> unbalanced: (IA, 23)

She is relieved by the recognition of her own individual worth which this personal acceptance brings. She is filled with exuberance as she asks, "what if distortion / is a better way of seeing?" (IA, 23). After "all these years of tackling the world / unbalanced", she is content to give up the struggle to alter her vision in order to accommodate the perspectives of others. The pain and suffering which being different has caused her is reflected in her use of

the word "unbalanced". It recalls the falling, tumbling rhythms of "Ballad of Me", and the image of the female:

> Misbegotten
> born clumsy
> bursting feet first
> then topsy turvey
> falling downstairs:
> the fear of
> joy of
> falling. (CP, 265)

Besides the usual denotation of lacking a state of equilibrium, "unbalanced" has the negative connotation of one who has a disturbed mind. It recalls the young, clumsy girl who tried so desperately to be like all the other "lovely whirling" (CP, 20) girls, and implies that she must have suffered inwardly at her own awkward and frustrated attempts to dance.

Ultimately it is the speaker's own distorted sense of reality which saves her:

> so when I see you thin
> lean bones vanishing behind sheets
> reality would find you huge
> spreadeagled over the whole bed! (IA, 23)

The world of imagination provides an easy escape if she can project a positive image of life and health on a seemingly ill form. But in the aside which follows these lines she abruptly confronts the reality of experience. The speaker's sense of loss is recorded poignantly in the parenthesized image of a diminishing, even disappearing self:

(while I slide off
shrink down
to the flat floor) (IA, 23)

This is the one-dimensional, horizontal view of the speaker, crumbling to the floor, with all the will to dance gone. The defeat is momentary. Undaunted, the speaker challenges the carpenter's, and thus the male's, perception of reality in the final lines of the poem, but she receives no reply. The distances between them, the discrepancies in their views, remain:

-- But what if distortion
is a better way of seeing?
I shouted.

He didn't hear me. (IA, 23)

In "Of Chains", Livesay again maintains that an individual alternative perception of self, different from that of others, might be a more correct view. Restrictions are implied by the title of the poem. But "chains" here also have the opposite connotation of strength and unity as connectors. Confused by the complexity and diversity of human relationships and of individual assessments of those relationships, the speaker decides that "The ideal would be / to see oneself / objectively" (IA, 51). Constrained by the narrow visions of others, the speaker realizes that only through flight can she attain some true sense of her own identity. She refuses to accept "Freud's view" with its psycho-sexual analysis of the sexes, or the view of

"redoubtable Marx" (IA, 51) with its socio-political interpretations of man and his society. Even the view of "one's own children" must be rejected as being a "myopic and lopsided stance" (IA, 51).

The persona in "Of Chains" faces the same dilemma as the persona in "Personalities" -- how to reconcile these varying perceptions and arrive at an accurate concept of herself. Too often the views of others lack insight. Her children are near-sighted, unable to see clearly unless they are in close proximity to her. Even then, their views are distorted. Breaking free of the bondage of opposing views of her, the speaker longs

> ... to soar
> free of the pain and fear
> and see one's early self
> groping more near
> to comprehension: (IA, 51)

Longing to regain her "early self", she acknowledges the difficulty and suffering involved in the process of becoming whole. "Groping" suggests her awkward bewilderment and feelings of alienation and despair. The colon implies that an explanation is about to follow. The speaker searches for

> ... a view
> of the soul struggling to guide
> the clumsy body; that thing
> with the poisoned darts
> piercing its side (IA, 51)

As always, the "clumsy body" betrays the dancer. The indirect reference to the suffering of St. Sebastian, the patron saint of soldiers and of archers,[2] suggests the torment of misunderstanding which the speaker has experienced in her life-long search for the approval of others and for self-approval.

In the last stanza, she concludes that rather than trying to conform to the expectations of others, perhaps she should "re-stream / leap on that new plane / of being" (IA, 51). Making an abrupt transition from the heavy, plodding movements of the earlier stanza to the quick, impulsive movements of the dancer as she flies through the air, she anticipates another "plane" or stage in her personal development. She anticipates the time when she will

> become the dancer
> in motion forever
> dancing his own dream. (IA, 51)

In the image of the dance, there is now a fusion of the personality of the speaker, "the dancer", with her "own dream". Reality and fantasy merge.

In order to arrive at an acceptable definition of her own reality, the speaker has had to learn to take risks, to no longer be intimidated by the perceptions of others. From the vital function of dancing as an expression of physical

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[2]C.P.S. Clarke, Everyman's Book of Saints (London: A.R. Mowbray and Co. Ltd., 1968), p. 31.

love in the lyrics of the 1960's, there is now a gradual shift to dancing as artistic expression of the speaker's own existence. The result is a simple, personal and passionate dance, but one which moves outside the realm of the individual (the solitary dancer of the imagistic lyrics of the 1920's) to encompass the rhythms and energies of the universe. The images of colour and movement, which are now more often associated with the dance, combine in an emotional, as well as an intellectual expression of humman existence. The speaker has evolved from the melancholy dancer whose shyness prevented her from dancing for other "eyes to see" (CP, 29) into a multi-dimensional speaker who has achieved a more confident and joyful celebration of life and love.

The Phases of Love (1983), Livesay's most recent collection of poems, traces the poet's journey from "The Garden of Childhood" (CP, ix), to her years of social protest, and through to the wisdom and resolution which age brings to her. The book is dedicated "to the women, young and old" whom the poet has known in her long lifetime, and its contents echo the stages or "phases" of Livesay's own development, both as a poet and as a woman. The three sections of the book are entitled "Adolescence", "Fire and Frost" and "Voices of Women"; each section corresponds to an important phase of the poet's life and work. A central image in the first section, "Adolescence", is the wind, which recalls Livesay's imagistic lyrics of the 1920's, and its association

with the dance throughout her work. The second section, "Fire and Frost", implies, as its title suggests, the ambivalence of the female persona and her struggle to reconcile her passionate response to life with the chilling portent of aging, with all of its negative effects. "Voices of Women", the third section, is simply that -- the multiple perspectives of the female and the supreme celebration of "three million years of being a woman / of loving a man / of creating children" (PL, "Apocalypse").

At the end of "Fire and Frost" in "The Step Beyond", Livesay's dancer moves from one realm of existence to another, "in dance with no beginning / and no end" (PL, "The Step Beyond"). The intricate patterns of the dance are woven through the lyric by the use of long, then shorter lines to suggest and sustain the slow, unhurried pace of the poem. With a dream-like motion similar to the subjective movement of a ballet, the poem depicts the inner tensions and personal conflicts of the speaker.

Before her looms a threshold which beckons her to enter. Like an apparition "The doorway appeared" as if out of nowhere; it seems "as if light were music / and music light" (PL, "The Step Beyond"). The open door represents the possibility of movement from one state of being to another, just as the dance suggests the process of transformation.

The title of the poem suggests death as "the great beyond",[3] which leads eventually to wisdom, and to an understanding of the mysteries of the universe.

Juxtaposed against these numerous images of movement and energy in the first stanza is the inertia of the persona who remains "in a confined room", unable to break free of "old patterns" (PL, "The Step Beyond"). Static, restrained by habitual behavior, she cannot yet feel the rhythms of the music or take part in the harmonious movements of the dance. The repetition of words ending in "ing" in this section creates a pattern of movement, evoking the rhythmic effect of the music and dance. In contrast with the rhythms of the dance, there is the order which the speaker has imposed upon her life, evident in the choice of images which are associated with her (i.e. "confined", "patterns", "sewing", "room"). The images of freedom and light (i.e. "music", "light", "doorway") create a tension within the first section of the poem for they emphasize the inner tensions of the speaker.

Providing a link between the room and the space through the doorway beyond, between the dancer and the dance, is "the hand outstretched / to touch" (PL, "The Step Beyond"). When words fail to provide adequate expression, the poet relies on the sense of touch to communicate. The "outstretched"

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[3] Standard College Dictionary, p. 136.

hand suggests one who seeks the accompaniment of a dancing partner.

The sound of music and "a bird's cry" break the rigid pattern of the speaker's life as the evening closes in on her. She

> saw walls give way
> and the doorway looming
> luminous
> there (PL, "The Step Beyond")

The immediacy of the experience is suggested by the words and the placement of the words "luminous / there" (PL, "The Step Beyond"). The space towards which the speaker moves is now directly confronting her. From the stasis of a small room which symbolizes the domain of private thoughts, she moves now toward the threshold; standing, she positions herself for the dance which is about to begin:

> Eventually
> was able to stand
> unswaying
> and blink away world's blackness
> to discern the vision: (PL, "The Step Beyond")

No longer enclosed by the "blackness" of the stage, the dancer awaits in an ever-widening circle of light. With a flash of colour "blue green / essence of bird flashing / his colours weaving" (PL, "The Step Beyond"), she hears the sound of "a wild song". This is the signal that the speaker is about to make a transition from one level of experience to a higher realm.

The reference to birds ("sparrows" and "thrush") and "bird song" serves a number of functions within the poem. Representative of the soul of man, the bird suggests man's potential for a spiritual flight to a higher realm of being. The swooping motion of the birds as they soar reflects the energetic movements of the dancer, unlike the stasis of the speaker sitting in her "confined" space. Thus the birds suggest that man, too, through the flight of the imagination and through the rhythms of song and dance, may make the ascent from the mundane to a realm of imagination and grace. The vibrant, extravagant colours associated with the movement mark the genesis of the speaker's dance as she moves swiftly from an enclosed and private world of darkness to a more encompassing world of music and light. No longer impeded by the ordered nature of her former existence ("I fell into old patterns / took up my sewing / in a confined room" [PL, "The Step Beyond"]), she begins a dance of wild abandonment.

Section two of the poem begins with the repetition of the poem's opening lines, "The doorway appeared / luminous", drawing the reader's attention to the importance of the threshold as the central focus of the poem. Still reluctant, the speaker realizes that she cannot have the vision she seeks unless she takes some risks:

> but never was it meant
> I'd enter in:
> for entering, I knew.

would be loss of all

my dross and dress
and need (PL, "The Step Beyond")

Unlike the solitary dancer of the imagistic lyrics of the 1920's, she puts aside her reluctance for a more positive attitude:

I would find not you
but you-ness
and no necessity
to seize possess (PL, "The Step Beyond")

The profuse use of compound words (i.e. "doorway", "outstretched", "daylight", and "backwards") is a grammatical representation of the dualities which exist, and the need for balance which the conjunction of opposites illustrates.

As the masculine element of air combines with the feminine element of water in the final stanza, so too does man unite with woman in a dance of perfect harmony. The female is no longer compelled "to seize possess" her lover:

So through me in that air
I'd feel you flow
in dance with no beginning
and no end: (PL, "The Step Beyond")

The dance of the speaker has led her on this journey which extends far beyond time and space. Now the male and female may dance as one in the realms of eternity. The use of the conditional tense ("I'd feel you flow / in dance") implies

that the dance is not absolute; tentative, it depends on a mutual agreement between the sexes. The multiple threshold, symbols such as "the step beyond" through an open door; the image of sinking in water which is expressed in the phrase "our mouths drown"; and the entry to a world of light from a room of darkness all suggest the rites of passage from the profane to the sacred realm of true innocence and understanding.

The "dance with no beginning / and no end" (PL, "The Step Beyond") implies, by its cyclic pattern, the motions of a round dance which is quite often associated with sacred places. The place of passage or transition has become holy:

> that door a mouth
> where our mouths drown
> that room no mirror
> but holy now our own (PL, "The Step Beyond")

Enclosed within the magic circle of the dance, the union of the male and female represents the speaker's regaining of a world once "well lost" (CP, 196).

In the first stanza of the poem, the speaker "sewing / in a confined room" suggests the princess Ariadne, and the associations of the dark, mysterious world of the female psyche. Just as the thread of the Cretan princess leads the hero out of the underground labyrinth, so, too, the strains of bird song lead the female speaker in the poem through the open doorway into a realm of motion and light. The holiness of the place to which the male and female have

come is suggested by the nature of their dance. This is no dance of sexual attraction, which appears so often in the love lyrics of The Unquiet Bed (1967), but a "dance with no beginning / and no end" (PL, "The Step Beyond"). The dance does not take place in the small, confined space of the opening stanza, or in the temporal or spatial world of reality. The doorway, like the "mirror", is the gateway to truth and self-realization. It provides the way of ascent for the male and female so that finally, through the image of the dance, they are "One unit, as a tree or stone / Woman in man, and man in womb" (CP, 236).

In "On Seeing 'The Day of the Dolphin'", the man longs to recapture "that more vibrant / dance of life" which he sees enacted by the frolicking movements of the dolphins. For the speaker of the poem, the dolphins represent the "Alpha", or the beginning of life's dance. In their "body action / ballet leap", the speaker recognizes a harmonious balance with nature that man has failed to achieve. She recognizes the kinship between herself and the dolphin. The dolphins connect with the woman through the imagery of water. Water's connotations of life and rebirth provide a further association with the female and the womb. The links are then completed through the assonance between delphis (dolphin) and delphys (womb).[4] In the graceful movements

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[4]Cooper, Illustrated Encyclopaedia, p. 54.

of the animals, the speaker recognizes man's own capacity for communication through the sensation of touch. This ability of the dolphins to relate to each other ensures the speaker that "loving survives / even amongst humans / always amongst dolphins". Entranced by their elegant dance, she pleads:

> O rub my shoulders
> stroke my finny skin!
> convince me
> I am next of kin (PL, "On Seeing 'The Day of the Dolphins'")

"In Therapy: a Dialogue", in the final section, "Voices of women", of The Phases of Love (1983), presents two speakers debating the nature of reality and illusion, "life and its reflection -- / art". Through the interchange of ideas between a therapist and the speaker, the poem reaffirms Livesay's belief that "both may exist", the world of the imagination and the world of reason. She maintains the possibility that

> there exists that still space
> utterly enveloping
> where I may retreat
> into green-gold gardens
> harmonious dances
> humans moving interweaving
> between thee and me (PL, "In Therapy: a Dialogue")

Here again the dance represents the speaker's flight or escape from the pain of the immediate world ("therapy" suggests the need to remedy or alleviate mental suffering) in her attempt "to distinguish / between the real / and the imitation".

There has to be a stripping away of all "false objects / images" before the secrets of the self or the universe are known, and "we become one / with its heart" (PL, "In Therapy: a Dialogue").

The title of the poem becomes paradoxical in the opening line, "Speech is of no consequence". From her earliest imagistic lyrics, Livesay has continued to emphasize the inability of language to ever apprehend reality adequately. Always there are silences to be contended with. The rhythms of song and dance do more to fill those silences, and to convey meaning, than words which should be "so much more / than the thing seen, touched" (CP, 305).

Through the dance motif, the poet pursues some sense of unity or connection, first with the natural world as in her imagistic lyrics of the 1920's and early 1930's, then with a larger consciousness, that of her fellowman, her political comrades of the 1930's and 1940's. During the 1940's and 1950's, the circle of the dance becomes more rigidly defined as she begins to raise a family and establish long lasting relationships with a husband and friends. To some degree, Livesay most perfectly finds the connection which she seeks in the births of her two children. In "Serenade for Strings", and in many of the poems which she wrote for children during this period, there is a sense of utter peace and contentment that one does not find in many of her other works. The simple act of expression which she constantly

strove for within her poetry manifests itself in the uncomplicated world of children and their games. This revelation is expressed in one of Livesay's most recent lyrics, "Apocalypse", from The Phases of Love (1983), in which the speaker identifies her own womanhood in the bones of "Lucy" (PL, "Apocalypse") excavated from the earth after three million years. In these remains of the past, the poet recognizes

> ... my desire to be human
> to evolve from hate and love
> desperation and despair
> into some marvellous connection
> three million years of being a woman
> of loving a man
> of creating children
> my desire establishes me
> inside your bones
> beside your cave and fire -- (PL, "Apocalypse")

It is within herself, her own femaleness, and not in association with a man, that she finally finds "that sweet connection" (IA, 35). Only then does she become that perfect dancer which W.B. Yeats describes in his poem "A Crazed Girl":

> That crazed girl improvising her music,
> Her poetry, dancing upon the shore,
> Her soul in division from itself
> Climbing, falling she knew not where,
> Hiding amid the cargo of a steamship,
> Her knee-cap broken, that girl I declare
> A beautiful thing ...[5]

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[5]W.B. Yeats, New Poems: By W.B. Yeats (Dublin, Ireland: Cuala Press, 1938), p. 14, "A Crazed Girl".

CONCLUSION

Through a close reading of those poems in which the dance motif appears, either directly or indirectly, certain patterns emerge in Dorothy Livesay's work. Although the thematic importance of the elements of song and dance has been noted by many critics, there has been no thorough examination of the significant link between the dance motif and the patterns of silence and isolation which occur throughout her work. Only through a critical analysis of the poems themselves does the meaning of the dance motif become clearly connected to the poet's overwhelming sense of man's inability to always articulate or share his sorrows and joys through the medium of language. Thus the dance emerges as an alternate form of human communication. This form of artistic expression becomes one of the most effective ways for the poet to project and objectify, for the reader, the inner tensions which she experiences.

In the lyrics of the 1920's the female persona finds ecstasy in the movements of the dance. Longing "To walk on feet made aerial" (CP, 2) she perceives a oneness with the world of nature. The dance becomes the link between the world of reality and the world of imagination. Through the rhythms of the dance, she can transcend the limitations of time and space:

I shall at the last
Escape defiantly
All your infallible
Laws of gravity! (CP, 46)

By the 1930's and 1940's, Dorothy Livesay's political commitments create in her poetry a shift in the perspective of the persona, as well as a change in the form of her poetic expression. As Livesay experiments with longer narrative poems and the documentary form, the dance becomes both technique and content. A poetic sequence such as "Depression Suite" contains the rhythms of popular dance tunes which were played by the big bands which dominated the music of the era. There is a fine blend of jazz, politics, lyricism and rhetoric in her poetry in this period. Through the dance motif, Livesay experiments with masculine as well as feminine personae; she uses the fast pace of jazz rhythms to convey the quick motions of the machines and the mechanical actions of the workers; and she illustrates the urgent need for change by using the image of a choral or communal dance. Though confined by the harsh, monotonous rhythms of an industrial society, man could attain freedom through the harmonious interaction of the group. By sharing the burdens of his fellow-workers, he could make the system work for him, rather than allow it to continue to control him.

During the 1950's the dancer does not appear with the same intensity or exuberance as she did in the earlier poems. This marks the end of Livesay's youthful naivete

and the beginning of her 'poems from exile'. The dance has two specific functions in this intermediate period. Firstly, in its association with images of confinement and space, it represents the narrowing focus of the poet's life. In a poem from The Phases of Love (1983), in the section entitled "Voices of Women", she celebrates the actions of women who "learn how to suffer" (PL, "The House of Winter") for larger social causes. In looking back to a more politically aware period of her life, Livesay says "Marriage and children turned me away / from friends and comrades" (PL, "The House of Winter"). Instead, the poet has to contend with the smaller sphere of husband and family. At times frustration and despair characterize the dancer of the 1950's.

Conversely, the dance functions in a more positive manner in the poems from this phase which Livesay wrote for children. If the female speaker's space is confining, the space of the child is limitless. Here the poet often makes a conscious attempt to integrate several complex image patterns within a single lyric. The image of the circle begins to appear, representing the eternal movements of the dance and the cyclic nature of man and his world. The circle motif is juxtaposed with the image of the square, which is connected to the female persona's feelings of loss of self. In "The Three Emily's", the speaker says that these three women artists had the unlimited space of the sky for their canvas, while she could only "move as mother

in a frame" (CP, 202). Yet through the process of giving birth and sharing in the games and songs of her children, Livesay regains the simplicity and innocence of her childhood. Her poems for children reflect this process, in the whimsical, nonsensical rhymes of a simpler, more uncomplicated time.

In the 1960's Livesay continues to use the dance to experiment with form and technique. In their association with the dance, the motifs of hands and touching which were present in her earlier poetry are now becoming an important feature of her work. Through touch, the dance provides the lovers of the 1960's lyrics with a means of bridging the "distances" (CP, 301) which exist between them. The result is a more intimate and erotic dance in which the female persona embraces her male lover. Also in the poetry of the 1960's and 1970's Livesay employs the dance motif as she focuses on the poetic process. In the lyric "Making the Poem", she describes the mysterious art of creating, from out of the silence, the rhythms and spacing of a poem upon the printed page.

By the 1980's, Livesay's dancer has exerted herself to reach beyond the concerns of the individual and the limitations of self. In doing so, she emerges with a deeper understanding of the human condition. In the lyrics of Ice Age (1975) and The Phases of Love (1983), the dance has an element of mysticism and holiness, suggesting that the female persona has finally achieved a sense of spiritual

oneness with her world. No longer a "Misbegotten" (CP, 265) dancer, she has learned, through the process of her own personal as well as poetic development "To recapture / The light, light air" (CP, 2).

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