
ODE TO A HMONG DANCER

R. Joseph Capet

93

O marionette on strings of grace,
whose each turn echoes clatt'ring beads
like crashing snowflakes in wind's embrace
or fatal collisions of falling leaves,
with what skill the angels pose your hands!
Or perch your head upon your neck
as though it were not weighed with cares
as though it did not understand
the path of life's retreating trek
to sin's sure wages' silent lair.

O flitting elfin beauty dark
with feet arranged by willing fate
and eyes that shower youthful sparks
is it not, nonetheless, too late?
What sombre thoughts dog lively steps
through melancholy years' parade?
What smiling, singing, sad lament

wells up within your deepest depths?

Even young you know your age,

though tender, is not innocent.

94

But dance, doomed creature of the clay!

And pay no heed our mortal lot;

the players, though all doomed, still play

and sentenced spectators still watch,

as each exacting ankle's twist

carves from out of time and space

a swaying window on the boards,

to see through your rotating wrist—

through that snapped conduit of grace—

the motionless movement of the Lord.