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In Quest of the Absolute
Roy Lisker
1978

One frequently encounters persons who've formed an image of themselves that has very little to do with their outward conduct. To a certain extent this is true of everybody. However, when the gulf between imagination and behavior becomes too large one recognizes the presence of a pathology. Persons in this state may in fact be driven by psychological imperatives that, by and large, are unconscious.

Sometimes close associates , friends for example , or relatives or counselors will take it upon themselves to try to penetrate this grey area, this place where spiritual need completely overshadows reason. Well-intentioned or not as the case may be, they soon come up against a solid and impregnable wall. By placing an ear against it, one may sometimes hear the faint echoes of mysteries which , as they are lodged deep within the heart, resist our most strenuous efforts at decipherment. Ultimately one can be led to speak of the presence of an exterior reality , outside of time and fixed in the cosmos , relative to which our frail notions of personal freedom, individuality or will power seem no more than ephemeral streaks of paint dripped by the movement of a trembling brush across a universal canvas.

As she stepped off the train at Manhattan's Grand Central Station, Diane Evans was greeted by her aunt and cousins. The date was June, 1970 and she was a recent graduate from dance academies in San Francisco and other places on the West Coast. She arrived in New York fired,with all the enthusiasm of a woman in her early 20s, for her chosen vocation. Within a week she'd

lined up engagements for chorus lines and dance ensembles in several Broadway musicals. From that time on there was never a week in which she was out of work . Soon she was enrolled in advanced classes in ballet and modern dance.

Her timing could not have been better, for this was the age of the great burgeoning of modern dance in America. A confluence of inspiration deriving from Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Merce Cunningham , Twyla Thwarp, Alwin Nikolais and others created a new, completely American genre in the performing arts.

In 1976 Diane auditioned for and was accepted by an established troupe known as the Terpsichore Ensemble. Eventually she would become one of its principal dancers and teachers. Terpsichore possessed its own school and rehearsal studios at 72nd Street and Amsterdam Avenue, slightly north of the area around Lincoln Square on the Upper West Side. For its own productions, directors and choreographers catered to avant-garde fashion, particularly in music: in those days, Minimalism. Among the composers who received commissions from it were included Phillip Glass, John Adams, Lamont Young, Franz Kamen and Terry Riley.

When its dancers accepted outside engagements they danced in the more conventional styles in which they'd been trained. For Diane this covered a wide range, although she'd pulled out of the Broadway circuit after about 3 years. Work in musicals hurt her technique, in addition to which she'd at last found herself in a position to support herself without having to hustle in Show Business's sweatshops.

By the mid-80's the local, national and international reputations of the Terpsichore Ensemble were secure . In the summers it combined tours across the country with master classes at colleges. It was also a regular participant in dance festivals at home and abroad.

At the time that this story opens Diane Evans had been with the Terpsichore Ensemble for about twelve years. Though the electricity of youth still emanated from an athletic physique, she had noticeably aged . She had always been slightly more stocky than the stereotype of a dancer, though never plump and certainly not fat. A broad skull rested on a strong neck. Her breasts were large without being ungainly. Her pale reddish skin was dry ; from the stage it glinted like cut glass or a shower of sequins. Whether on stage or off, jet black hair, powerful limbs and a supple frame gave her a commanding presence.

She was slightly far-sighted, although she only needed to use glasses for reading. Not all of her features were appealing. She could not be described as pretty; yet when she danced she was beautiful. Her brow was grooved with furrows , as if from continual brooding or obsession. Her face might suddenly take on the look of having been invaded by a dark cloud, overcast by a deathly pallor. An unusually hard mouth, almost to the point of being set in a grimace was accentuated by high cheekbones. This was but one of several evidences of some residue of accumulated bitterness, normal for an occupation demanding daily intimacy with unbelievable physical and psychic pain.

Diane Evans was intelligent, not intellectual. A serious gaze indicated high artistic sensitivity but little verbal ability. In some mysterious way which her friends were at a loss to explain, she

transmitted a charm that could not be traced to any source. Her moods were unpredictable, going in wide arcs from giddy elation to sudden depression. All the same, throughout all the years of her career, she'd never been known to allow her emotions to stand in the way of her work. To state that she was driven would be to misrepresent the case: Diane Evans *was* her calling, her imagination could admit no other possibility.

As a result by the early 80's, in slightly more than a decade, she'd become a name to reckon with in the world of modern dance. Talent, hard work and the indispensable element of luck : everything had worked in her favor. In the late Fall of 1982 she'd appeared in a PBS television series entitled *Great Classics of Performing Art: The Dance* . The series was premiered on Channel 13 for 6 consecutive Thursday nights. The productions, in the order of their appearance were *Coppelia* , *Swan Lake, Giselle* , *Les Sylphides* , Prokoffief's *Romeo and Juliet*, culminating in the inevitable *Nutcracker Suite* at Christmas .

Although she didn't star as *première ballerina* in any of these productions (ballet had never been her specialization) , she was the only soloist to appear in all six of them. She stole the show in the Spanish duo of the *Nutcracker Suite* with a dazzling display of virtuosity . Although her name was never destined to become a household word like "Nureyev" or "Baryshnikoff" or "Margot Fonteyn", it was frequently mentioned in the dance reviews of major American newspapers, while her photograph appeared fairly often in the pages, and sometimes on the cover of Dance Magazine. It is scarcely necessary to add that, long before the receiving the acclaim of the

public, she'd earned a far more meaningful recognition from the world of the dance itself.

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Generally speaking, Diane's friends and coworkers had reached the conclusion that she was simply too busy to allow time for cultivating love affairs and other such attachments. No-one could name anyone, male or female, with whom she'd ever become involved. It turns out that she'd worked out her own way of gratifying those carnal appetites which, in one form or another inhabit most ordinary minds (one may perhaps consider them a symptom of that ordinariness). Her increasingly sparse interludes of free time between the round of classes, teaching, rehearsals and performances, were sometimes occupied in unorthodox ways. Entering her modish Central Park West apartment suite Diane threw off and replaced her working clothes by carefully selected combinations of gaudy or chintzy items, all in very expensive and very bad taste. With the help of rouges, eyeshade, powder and lipstick applied like cake, her most appealing facial features could be transformed into crude billboards advertising the most lurid suggestion. Heavy mascara penciling around the eyes imbued them with penetration and allure. To this were added beauty spots, gold dust and other glitter, sharp points in bangs and eyebrows, whatever would enhance her presence on the street. Her hair still dripping, wet with henna dyes, garlanded by flashy jewelry and shrouded in imitation fur, Diane drove downtown to the warren of streets adjoining and abutting on Times Square. Like the hundreds, (probably thousands) , of prostitutes roaming that neighborhood, Diane Evans peddled her body.

She could not have, if asked, been able to recollect the moment of her initiation into this bizarre form of private entertainment. What has started as a brazen experiment during her early years in the City, stoked perhaps by her contempt at the infantile sexism of the Broadway musical stage, eventually developed into a congenital vice .

Who can say when she'd made the discovery that , simply by walking a few blocks south of the theater district, she could achieve anonymity by standing on 42nd Street and selling herself for money? It became her way of finding relief from the overwork in the chorus lines of musicals, commercials and other money-making professional engagements which frequently left her in a state near collapse . It also got her off the work site. This also provided a valuable function, for there the propositions were many and the maneuverability for rejecting them limited. While avoiding the unwanted, when not outright insulting, advances of managers, stage crews, drunk businessmen and macho dancers, Diane Evans would also be touching base with a kind of raw experience unavailable in her professional world.

In this avocation, as in her committed vocation, she remained the seasoned professional : her clients received what they'd contracted for and not an inch more. Her long struggle to achieve mastery of her craft had instilled habits and attitudes that, inevitably, spilled over into all her other activities. It was natural that, in the course of events, many of the johns would try to take advantage of her, demanding indulgences of perverse appetites, visits lasting beyond the agreed time periods and - how should we put it? - free - "consolations ?" - over and above those promised at the stipulated prices.

Her clients were in the market for love, and is it not in the very nature of love that it be freely bestowed ? That was a matter of personal opinion, point-of-view: it was only to be expected that, as a prostitute, Diane's theory of the ontology of love would be dramatically at variance with the more generous yet perhaps a trifle self-serving, notions of psychologists and theologians, persons not normally expected to deliver on command . In the job description of her profession it is understood that love is a transaction mediated by money: where the money stops, so does the transaction.

Nor had she ever found much reason to feel endangered by capricious outbursts of violence from some of her unduly lecherous, ill-tempered, pathologically frustrated or mentally diseased clients , who sometimes imagined they could force services from her not stipulated in advance. In almost all cases, her basic cultural and intellectual levels were pitched so far above the world of the flesh trade, that all but a handful of persons who came onto her with the intention of causing trouble were quickly humbled to states of speechless awe. The very small number of nut cases that showed persistence were then speedily tossed to the madams, pimps and corrupt local cops, for some never-to-be-forgotten lessons in civilization.

It might appear strange that Diane Evans would bring such scrupulous notions of principle to a pursuit one is tempted to dismiss as nothing more than a perverse hobby or odd sexual pathology. Yet it would be a grave error to imagine that she thought of her subsidiary profession as merely a form of diversion. To her the traffic of the streets was her tragic destiny, a fulfillment in anonymous degradation , life itself at its acme.

The shadow cast by this secondary existence rarely intersected the aura of her too visible presence on the stage. The small number of exceptions to this rule included some members of her close circle. In any great cultural center or metropolis one always finds a small core of dissolute culture vultures who, though endowed with exquisite and refined sensibilities, are so jaded in the pursuit of their higher sensibility that they find themselves impelled periodically to seek new thrills through binges of debauchery. They resemble a classical type of glutton who, weary of his steady consumption of *haute cuisine* , suddenly encounters a need to pig out on junk food destined to be vomited out in the bathrooms of McDonald's , Jack-in-the-Box, Hardees and the like .

So it did happen from time to time that Diane Evans might find herself "turning a trick" with customers drawn from this class of individuals, perhaps someone who'd recognized her from the boards of the NY State Theater or the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Such transactions involved a trip out to seedy motels on the New Jersey coast, far from the City and out of the reach of prying gossip columnists and the police.

Given the deep, albeit perverse gratification she received from these remarkable clients, she could just as well have been paying them. It aroused the full measure of her vanity, it sent thrills to the deepest recesses of her wounded psyche to imbibe their ravings, to hear them spill their lewd fantasies at the moments of climax, to learn from their own lips how they'd lusted for the supernatural creature they'd witnessed dancing on the boards, to receive, like some high priestess of the love, their

confessions, to relish hearing from them that they'd believed the realization of their fantasies permanently out of reach.

By way of explanation - to them but equally to herself - she might say things like " I have developed a perfect body". Between laughter and tears she would whisper, " Why should it not be used to give pleasure to others?"

This sort of facile rationale was sufficient for her needs. Self-analysis didn't interest her; indeed she resisted it. Dance has been called the art of inarticulates. The great dancer Anna Pavlova, herself more verbally capable than most, could have been stating the case for her entire profession when she said : " *I do not think in words. My medium of expression is movement.* "

What recognition Diane might have had of the harm she did to herself would never reach beyond certain vague feelings of unease, never to conscious articulation. In this respect she resembled most of us. Many of our private satisfactions are harmful. In the absence of any demonstrable damage we defend the right to enjoy ourselves. That Diane's collection set of vices might end up inflicting injuries on mind and body greater than those induced by excessive smoking or drinking seems never to have entered her mind.

In fact she entertained comparatively few indulgences. She had never smoked. She could not over-eat : her profession took care of that. Recently social drinking had been something of a problem, though it would never be allowed to go out of control.

There were a few close friends whom she'd either taken them into her confidence, or who had somehow divined her secrets. Without exception the revelation of her ferocious appetite for self-destruction filled them with horror. From what invisible

springs of childhood trauma arose this urge to desecrate the monument of stoic will and bodily discipline achieved only at the cost of so many years of sacrifice ?

Unpredictably, following the ups and downs of New York's political circus, the NYPD would launch raids on the Times Square hookers. On most occasions Diane easily slipped through the dragnets. Usually there were enough advance warning signs and, unlike most of the girls she worked with, she did not depend on street-walking for a living. In the course 15 years of dabbling in prostitution she was caught only once. In December of 1980 she was picked up , during a campaign mounted by downtown merchants to "clean up the Square for Christmas ". The paddy wagon took her and a dozen of her co-workers to the Woman's House of Detention, which at that time was still located on the corner of 6th Avenue and Greenwich Avenue in the West Village.

The incident almost ruined her professional career as a dancer; yet once again her luck held . A dance review in which the name of Diane Evans was prominently mentioned had appeared in the New York Times that very morning. The police sergeant in the booking area had some appreciation for modern dance and recognized her name. She saw to it that Diane avoided publicity, and led her to safely back on the streets through a side door of the jail. In compensation she received a season ticket to the performances of the Terpsichore Ensemble, and a night's use of Diane's body.

The sergeant wanted to experience the thrill of making love in the surroundings of pulchritude associated with the rich and famous. She tried to persuade Diane to receive her in her

Central Park West apartment. The suggestion was firmly, yet not unkindly, rejected. As Diane Evans explained:

" I cannot commingle the two aspects of my existence. There must be no interference with my private life, no confusion of day and night." Then , as much to herself as to the sergeant she added, "I have two souls in me." The sergeant was obliged to rendezvous at the sordid New Jersey motel where Diane Evans serviced her exactly as she would any other customer. She took it in his stride and showed no rancor. Diane was the first to learn from her when a new raid was in the offing.

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In the summer of 1988 the Terpsichore Ensemble was invited to Avignon, France to participate in the *Festivale Internationale de la Danse Moderne* . This dance festival was an adjunct to the internationally celebrated theater festival held every year in July. For three weeks the fabulous *Palais des Papes* , the charming old convents and cloisters and other performance spaces would be opening their doors to dance companies from Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Japan, Cuba, Nigeria and the United States. France's contribution, as it had been for years , would be the Béjart ballet.

With or without the theater festival, there are few venues more delightful than Avignon in the summer. Overstocked with historic architecture both grand and lovely, the Renaissance citadel is , in turn, magnificent, spiritual, melancholy and poetic: "romantic" in the best sense of the word . Cafés and restaurants stay open until late into the night. The tourists crowd is cultivated and rarely obnoxious. Making allowance for their inevitable inflation, prices are not excessive.

Of course one is far from Utopia. Neo-fascist organizations find that the terrain of the province of the Vaucluse is ideally suited for flexing their muscles. The town of Carpentras, not too far away, is frequently the venue for anti-Semitic vandalism. In and of themselves the narrow, sinuous streets laid down half a millennium past appear to beckon one to delightful strolls; yet the domination of the automobile has rendered the very prospect of doing so disgusting and dangerous. Traffic reaches catastrophe levels during the theater festival, when all of the major streets are paralyzed by gridlock throughout most of the day.

At the time the invitation was extended, Diane Evans had become the lead dancer of the Terpsichore Ensemble. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, yet the prospect of participating in a production at the Avignon Festival filled Diane's heart with trepidation . The consensus within the world of the dance maintained that Diane Evans had never before commanded so exciting a presence onstage . She alone knew of the factors that already guaranteed that her career as a professional artist was nearing its close.

Working for two decades at a craft which, uniquely, pushes body and mind to their limits of endurance , the added stress of an addiction to seeking release from its toll of suffering through unwholesome gratification had completely shattered the inner person.

A minor drinking problem that had every possibility of being irreversible , indulgence in drugs, (which for most of the years of her life on the streets she had successfully resisted) , a diagnosis of breast cancer in its early stages , (easily cured if treated immediately , save that it necessitated a leave of absence of several

months, unthinkable at this juncture in her career) - these were only the most visible signs of the nightmare that racked her psyche . The majority of her coworkers suspected nothing, so captivated were they by her excellence in an art that is so unbelievably demanding.

Diane's premonition of disaster was numbed through an ever more intense and fanatical concentration on her work. Ultimately, only the ferocious ordeal of an overloaded performance roster before highly demanding audiences (largely ignorant of the human cost of their expectations) could provide her with a drug powerful enough to block out the awareness of her relentless deterioration.

In early August Diane Evans flew to France to join the Ensemble in Avignon. She came well prepared for a sensational appearance as lead ballerina in a major world première. Behind her lay many exhausting weeks of rehearsals, consultations with the composer and chamber orchestra and interaction with the other members of the production and its choreographers. The release of tantalizing tidbits of advance publicity to the international press had been orchestrated to crest at the time of the opening of the theater festival.

In the late 80's the composer of the ballet score, Giovanni Adalbarti, had been much lionized as an up-and-coming avant-garde minimalist composer, though only a few years had passed from the time when he considered himself lucky to be able to cobble together concerts in obscure performance lofts in the Soho district of downtown Manhattan. Now he had 3 commissions from the NEA and a Guggenheim Fellowship. His orchestral compositions were being performed in San Francisco, Houston,

Minneapolis , St. Louis, Philadelphia and New York, a CD had been issued on the CRI label, and he'd been granted tenure at a prominent music conservatory. For a short time the fickle ears of the embattled (and fanatically dedicated) world of serious contemporary music acknowledged Giovanni Adalbarti as a phenomenon.

He was, in fact he still is, a good composer. His transient fame had received a boost in the mid-80's by the current vogue for minimalism, though his music is competent and memorable on its own terms. Adalbarti, like Stravinsky, has demonstrated an especial affinity to the requirements of the dance. If an Adalbarti work appears on a concert program it is more than likely that it will be one of his ballet scores. Following collaborations with Merce Cunningham and John Cage he began introducing aleatoric, or chance, techniques in his scores . Yet it would be an error to consider him a disciple of the Cage school. Apparent in his work are such diverse influences as Tschaikowsky, Satie, Stravinsky, Aaron Copland and Philip Glass .This was to be the first performance of any work by Giovanni Adalbarti outside the United States. In addition to the Avignon première , pieces written by him were on the programs of festivals in Japan , Ireland, and Portugal.

The dance was entitled *The Metempsychosis of the Duchess Damonia* . Its plot borrows ideas from sources as diverse as medieval Arab and Christian legends and Greek literature:

Damonia is the wife of a 12th century duke of Moorish Grenada . From dawn to dusk she is faithful and obedient to her lord and master. She may have been beautifu, in the past,

but has since grown homely from a decade of household drudgery and uninterrupted pregnancies .

Every night in those periods of deepest slumber Damonia's soul leaves her body to fly off to caverns and lagoons along the Mediterranean coast. There, as a participant to Bacchanales taking the form of grotesque orgies, she copulates with demons until the advent of dawn .

Damonia is still in her 30's when she dies of the Black Plague. Supernatural agents arrive to carry her soul down to Purgatory , there to await rebirth in a new body.

The judges of her past and arbiters of her future are the traditional Greek gods of the Underworld: Minos, Rhadamanthus, Persephone and Pluto . In a scenario adapted from Plato's Phaedo, Damonia is offered a choice of bodies to inhabit in her next existence. The gods advise her to accept rebirth as a mole. In this shape she will lead a short , uncomplicated life with sufficient opportunity to work off her sins and make a bid for Paradise the next time around.

Rebirth in a human shape , even as a woman , is also a possibility, though in that case she would be required to accept a body deformed from birth . Because of its appaling great ugliness, all men will regard her with undisguised loathing. However the consequence of enforced chastity would make it relatively easy to live a saintly life. Still, during her earthly existencein this form she will always be treated as a outcast , ridiculed, tormented and abused by society. As the gods point out to her, salvation never did come cheap.

Damonia is also presented with other possibilities , all more or less along the same lines; she vehemently rejects them all . She

demands nothing less than rebirth as a destructive goddess of lust, an unspeakably woman of ravishing beauty . All men who behold her will fatally succumb to her bewitching charm . Reminded of the spiritual consequences of this alternative , Damonia expresses indifference; for the delights of Paradise she feels only contempt.

The gods rail against her obstinacy. Granting this wish will earn her 1000 years of burning in hellfire. Defiant to the last , she overwhelms the gods of Hades with expletives , jeers at their sanctimonious compassion. Her many lovers, she boasts, will fight among themselves to fornicate with her at the stake.

Such insolence arouses the wrath of the gods. Persephone seizes her by the hair and hurls her back to Earth . Here she is reborn as a deformed freak, a hag with cleft palate, club feet, twisted limbs, goat-like horns and a thick jungle of facial hair.,In their desperation to get rid of her Damonia's family sells her as a slave to monsters even uglier than herself. For two decades she toils like a dumb brute for her bestial masters. Living without hope she drags herself through each day in a comatose stupor, paralyzed by the knowledge that even death will bring her no release from bondage.

Then one night she has a dream: the Demon Prince, he with whom she had known carnal relations in her previous life , appears to her in all his splendor. He has come to propose marriage . As his bride her body will be reconfigured into a shape as beautiful as his own. Installed in his castle as his queen she will rule forever over a kingdom of infinite extent deep in the reaches of Hell. The marriage contract fulfills her every desire. Though the price is eternal damnation , Damonia accepts without hesitation.

In the ballet's final scenes the Demon Prince, girded in dazzling armor, sword and shield in hand, races through the mouth of the beast cave. A pitched battle follows in which all the beasts are killed , mutilated or immobilized. In one blinding instant Damonia's body is transfigured to that of a superbeing, glorious and voluptuous, a terrifying incarnation of obscenity and evil. Together she and her daemonic husband dance through the entrance to the beast cave, on the other side of which we can behold the gargantuan towers of flame at the threshold of Hell.

The Metempsychosis of the Duchess Damonia

Act I:

1. The Faithful Duchess of Grenada

2. Deep Slumber

(a) The Flight of the Soul

(b) The Demon Lover

(c) Bacchanale

3. The Black Plague

(a) The Stricken Castle

(b) Death Agony

Act II:

1. Purgatory

(a) Descent and Arrival

(b) Processional

2. The Choice of Bodies

(a) Mole

(b) Hag

3. The Fate of Beauty

(a) Damonia's Defiance

(b) The Anger of the Gods

Act III:

1 . Beast Hearth

2 . The Dream of Damnation

(a) Entrance of the Demon Prince

(b) Battle

(c) Hell's Deliverance

For a masque steeped in the penumbra of the Middle Ages, no setting could be more appropriate that the courtyard of Avignon's Cloister of the Carmelites, the *Cloître des Carmes* . Even today it must look much the same as it did in the 14th century when, it cannot be doubted, Petrarch idled by its entrance gates desperate for a glimpse of his beloved Laura.

Inside the cloister one finds an inner courtyard encircled by pillars serving as supports for overhanging balustrades. Lofty in repose, they stand like holy anthems to that simple if convoluted God of the Age of Faith. The prefabricated wooden stage that would be used by the Terpsichore Ensemble had been brought over from the United States, then re-assembled. During their nightly performances, the elliptical construction was illuminated by batteries of klieg lights casting lurid traceries of shadow across the intricately carved stone balustrades. Such effects, both intriguing and mysterious, served to further concentrate the attention of the spectators onto the action on the stage.

The orchestration of the score of *Damonia* typifies much of what is done in contemporary music: a preponderance of

percussion, 3 violins, violas, cello, double bass, flute, clarinet, trombone, French horn , prepared electronic harpsichord and synchronized pre-recorded tapes. The chamber ensemble had been hand-picked by Adalbarti himself, and consisted of professional musicians from the New York City area with whom he'd been working for years. A novel structural element was introduced at the level of performance practice: through being displaced around the courtyard the musicians encircled the audience. Using mutes the sounds of their instruments were brought down to a level slightly above the audible threshold, then fed via pickup mikes directly into an amplification system which distributed them on the basis of chance operations between loudspeakers situated at strategic locations in the courtyard . In this way different parts of the audience experienced different combinations of natural and electronic effects. Remarkably the textures thus produced were equally effective at every location in the courtyard where the loudspeakers were set up.

The Metempsychosis of Damonia **combines classical ballet with modern dance, indeed several styles in modern dance. In addition to pre-determined routines signaled to the dancers by the choreographer under instructions from the composer, they were also given considerable freedom to work up improvisations on their own. Diane Evans' years of experience with the Broadway musical stage had developed her command of such free improvisation. As Damonia, she was the principal soloist; indeed for the first ten minutes of the dance she appeared alone on stage.**

Notwithstanding her undisputed virtuosity, (compulsively applauded as is the custom among dance audiences) , her entrance onto the stage did not augur well for the rest of the

evening. *The Faithful Duchess* came across as uninspired, tepid, even derivative. A sense of disappointment persisted through *The Flight of the Soul* and even into *The Demon Lover* , where the principal male dancer found himself at a loss to respond to a partner who appeared to be paying little attention to him, or indeed to anything going on around her.

By that time a number of the dance critics had concluded that the Terpsichore Ensemble had bombed. Several in the front row, convinced they'd seen enough to give them their copy, were rude enough to stand up in the middle of a scene and stride to the entrance. Out on the streets of Avignon they hurried to where they'd really wanted to be all along, a café terrace on the *Place de l'Horloge* , a bottle of *vin du pays* close at hand . A prominent dance critic, free-lancing for the Paris edition of the Herald Tribune, had this to say:

" .... During the first half hour of the "Metempsychosis", I couldn't help asking myself if the limited time at my disposal might not have been put to better use attending the Béjart Company's production of Berlioz's "Romeo and Juliette" at the Palais des Pape,. I may have reviewed Béjart every summer for the past 6 years , however it's my conviction that guaranteed excellence is generally a better investment than the risky business of so-called experimentation.... "

With Diane Evans fully launched into *Bacchanale* this distinguished arbiter of artistic merit traded his highly nourished yawn (redolent with much champagne and second helpings of *coquille St. Jacques*) for an equally flatulent hype. In his description of Act I he exhausted his limited stock of superlatives. The remainder of his review merely acknowledged

that the production built in power (with some lapses) right through to the conclusion of Act III. He did not stay around for the curtain calls, thereby missing what may have been the most newsworthy event of the evening.

The very manner of Diane's entrance onto the stage in *Bacchanale* put her audience on notice that things totally unexpected lay on the horizon. In a matter of minutes she had her spectators glued to their seats. Spellbound in the grip of an eroticism of horror, all sat immobilized. Audible shudders rippled through the courtyard as Diane's body projected its compelling gestures beyond the margent of the stage. Liberated by decades of disciplined training , her performance crackled with the nervous pulse and squalor of the sidewalks of Times Square . Impulsive bursts of crude violence, of despair, visceral disgust, self-loathing soared like flaming embers up from the lacerations of a tortured heart. Her body coiling in reptilian arcs, muscles and sinews agitating in obscene contractions, a heavy pall, suffocating as a shroud descended upon the audience. With a raging in her blood, mad with sexual obsession, agonizing with the perpetual thirst of the abandoned spirit in the desert of sin, she clung savagely to the ghoulish demons as they performed their rituals violations.

'Improvisation' in its customary use, fails to do justice to her achievement. In her supreme art there was no refuge for contrivance, no harbor for artifice, nothing that might be deemed fatuous, sentimental or false. It was neither uninhibited lewdness nor gutter lechery that riveted her audience, as it behld in rapt fascination the fusion of the bitter degradation of harlotry with mastery of the dance. Like diamonds on display in a jeweler's

window , she exhibited the fruits of her living hell of self-immolation, of terrifying self-sacrifice and self-despoliation. To them she must have appeared as one of those votaries of ancient Babylon, profaning their bodies in the temple porches in service to the gods.

Through the mysterious workings of those hidden mechanisms of history by which culture and civilization interact and are invigorated, modern Euro-American dance had returned to its origins forged in the chaos of World War I: all alone Diane Evans had rediscovered the road taken by Vaslav Nijinsky. Before falling into the abyss of the schizophrenia from which he would never be cured, Nijinsky presented the unique performance of *Mariage Avec Dieu* . This final testament to his immanent spiritual breakdown proved to be the prescient metaphor for a century of slaughter.

There is another comparison to be made, that of the perpetual dance of the Hindu gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; the Chakravartin; the timeless 3-personed dance that sustains the universe. Even so was Diane Evans' 3-fold dance delivered: to the world, to her psyche aflame with passion , to the religion of art. A silence more deafening than any amount of applause acknowledged her departure from the stage. Shock, revulsion, adulation mingled in the stifling air, like incense, or the palpable presences of furtive ghosts.

Diane's part in *The Stricken Castle* was negligible. Something of the wildness of *Bacchanale* returned in *Death Agony* . So realistic were the piercing shrieks torn uncontrollably from her breast, that the troupe itself became concerned. The ballet halted to allow for a prolonged intermission. Conversation

sparkled from one end of the courtyard to the other like moonlight scintillating off ocean waves. Already the *Metempsychosis of the Duchess Damonia* was the sensation of the Avignon Festival. Even the critics, the ones who'd remained, were impressed. Reviews in the international press would set off a controversy that has not abated to this day, and has kept Damonia in the active repertoire of the Terpsichore Ensemble into the next century.

Seated in a corridor of that part of the cloister set aside for the dressing rooms, Diane was anxiously attended by the managers and troupe of the ensemble. As her co-workers fussed about her, the doctor who always accompanied the company on tour gave her a routine examination and an injection to steady her nerves. His preliminary diagnosis was unfavorable, and he advised the company to set a rain date and cancel the rest of the performance. Yet apart from a brief fit of hysterical weeping and a spontaneous tantrum over some minor flaws in her costuming - one must keep in mind that these may not be as minor for a dancer as they are to an audience - she appeared had recovered.

What may have escaped the attention of the doctor and all the others was in fact the most disturbing symptom of all - an uncharacteristic state of withdrawal, a somber silence when not responding to direct questions which she maintained throughout the rest of the intermission. Given her insistence that there was nothing wrong with her the troupe was happy enough to get back on stage. None of them wanted to miss out on what promised to be a high point of their career. As soon as the scenery and trappings of the Castle were replaced by the Tribunal of Hades everybody went back to their stations.

For the *Purgatory* Diane stood in a cage, as motionless as a doll in the workshop of Dr. Coppelius. Her role was simply to watch as the spirits of the damned swirled about her. A grand processional followed, preparing for the entrance of the judges of Hades: Minos, Rhadamanthus, Persephone and Pluto. *The Choice of Bodies* turned proved to be a major disappointment . To her audience it seemed as if Diane's astonishing energy had abruptly deserted her, almost as if a mysterious paralysis had taken possession of her body .

As far as it went, this observation was not in itself incorrect; it was unfortunate that some of the spectators used the opportunity to stand up and make their exit. Even those who remained believed that there was nothing more to be had from an evening which, for one beguiling moment, had exceeded their expectations.

Yet Diane's sudden rigidity had not be due to some inherent failure of artistic inspiration. It was rather the case that she was beginning to lose the ability to separate the drama of the choice of a new body in Purgatory from the perception of her own fate here on Earth. As the judges in Hades dandled their impalatable options before the demoralized gaze of *Damonia* - with Persephone the most vindictive, and only poor Pluto pleading for a bit of mercy - it was *Diane Evans* who, in this world, was immobilized by their inescapable relevance to her own condition. Flashes of insight devastating as bolts of lightning compelled to relive the principal traumas of her recent past, as she foresaw the inexorable bleakness of a future without hope.

In performing *Mole* Diane became the mole. Gazing upon the drear procession of haggish freaks assembled with the

benevolent purpose of providing her with a path to virtue she became each of them in turn. Now she knew that *The Fate of Beauty* was her fate.

***Damonia* 's defiance, in ecstasy and ultimate retribution, became *Diane* 's defiance.**

Throughout the whole of the *Choice of Bodies* her muscles refused to respond. Slight impulses were amplified to inhuman torture, holding her phenomenal technique to a standstill; the conditioning of 3 decades as a professional dancer alone sufficed to drag her through the scene.

Her audience, unable to foresee her immanent destruction perceived only the automaton. It was not surprising than a significant percentage of the audience walked out in the intermission between Acts II and III . Those who remained as witness to the final act represented barely 50% of what had been assembled at the beginning of the evening . Yet from its commencement it was realized by all present that they'd made the wiser decision.

Indeed some strange interior transformation between *The Choice of Bodies* and *Beast Hearth* had taken Diane Evans back to the universe of *Bacchanale* . Against the background of the grotesque antics of the beasts, Diane's portrayals of abasement and despair built upon a mounting tension almost unendurable to her audience . Diane whirled off the stage to wild applause.

Upon returning Diane collapsed onto the refuse and ashes of the stones before the hearth as the beasts, one by one, shuffled to their lairs. Night descended over the scene; then, as if through some magical transformation ignited by the music Damonia/

Diane rose up, bathed in fountains of dazzling color, to embark on the final adventure of *The Dream of Damnation* .

And in fact there was *only* Damonia . Diane Evans had been extinguished, assimilated into the coruscating glow of an all- consuming hallucination. *The Dream of Damnation* had ceased to be an artistic vehicle, no longer fiction, no metaphorical path to some higher reality. Before her enraptured senses rose the Demon Prince, splendid in dazzling garments, an incarnation of more than earthly sexuality. At his beckoning Diane Evans glided insensibly towards his carnal embrace, compelled by a force beyond will or desire. Wrapping herself lubriciously about his muscular body, she swooned in genuine ecstasy in the crushing grip of his very real and powerful arms. No- one in attendance had ever experienced anything remotely comparable on any stage. To the select crowd of spectators seated in the courtyard of the *Cloître des Carmes* , the Demon Prince was simply another dancer, executing a pre-rehearsed script within a larger drama. Yet to Diane his presence had merged seamlessly into the unfolding universe of her hallucination. When he had performed opposite her in *The Demon Lover* , the male lead had been disconcerted by Diane's inexplicable apathy. Now he was equally at a loss in the face of her hysterical enthusiasm . How was he to know that she believed him to have been sent to deliver her from beasts, as real to her as he was to himself?

For indeed Diane Evans would soon to be going to her own Kingdom in Hell. There, liberated from the infinite bondage of her earthly exile she might at last assume her rightful station. Nor was it he who carried her off at the back of the stage to the right, through gates that frame the flames in the distance. Rather it was

she who dragged him back into the wings, there to collapse in delirium, her wild screams camouflaged by the grand crescendos of Adalbarti's orchestra, the taped sound effects of crackling flames, the thunderous applause rolling in volleys across the apron of the stage.

As the dancers returned in groups to receive their curtain calls the din of acclamation mounted to a veritable frenzy. Excitement reigned throughout the audience, raised to a fever pitch of anticipation, eager to bestow the supreme accolade upon the woman who for a brief moment had transfigured the stage into something more akin to a mystical experience than to art.

As the minutes went by and she did not re- appear, the crowd roared her name together with salvos of "Bravo" and "Encore". A few hisses and cat-calls came from persons - and one always finds them - quick to take resentment at her seeming lack of generosity. The growing impatience was of little avail; it soon became clear that she would not be returning.

Then the Stage Manager stepped out onto the stage, and the audience quieted down. In a voice trembling with emotion he conveyed, first in French, then in English the sad news that Diane Evans would not be returning to the stage that evening. He gave the official explanation that she'd collapsed from exhaustion. As is normal in such situations the audience was told that there was no cause for alarm. However backstage the rumors quickly making the rounds suggested the shock had permanently damaged her system, that her days as a dancer were over.

At the same time that the Stage Manager delivered his speech Diane Evans , strapped in a litter, comatose from injections and her body swaddled in a thick blanket, was being

wheeled by paramedics down the street to a waiting ambulance. For the next month she would be in the care of psychiatrists at a local hospital. They quickly settled on a diagnosis of severe psychosis (although the classifications of her disease in the catalogue of psychiatric "dysfunctions" would be the cause for bitter wrangling among them for weeks to come.) In mid-September she was flown back to the United States. An ambulance drove her directly from JFK Airport to Bellevue Hospital . Soon afterwards, thanks in part to a generous gift from some philanthropic endowment sympathetic to the performing arts, she was transferred to a private clinic.

In the early part of the 20th century Vaslav Nijinsky's tragedy was to fall into the grisly hands of Swiss psychiatrists ; it is hardly surprising that he never recovered from whatever it is that such doctors call "schizophrenia" . Diane is luckier because she is the creation of an author who wishes her well. He can and will return her to the world of sanity. As for a resumption of her career, this appears quite unlikely. Yet who knows? Even in fiction anything is possible.

It was on this occasion never to be recaptured that the triumph of the body and the abdication of reason were locked together in cruel synchronicity . The human cost was beyond calculation . Everyone involved, the Terpsichore Ensemble, Adalbarti and his musicians, members of the audience, not the least Diane herself, were deeply shaken by this miracle, for miraculous indeed it was. For many it would hover in their memories as a peak moment of ecstasy; others would recall only the catastrophe. For all it has served as a sober reminder, never to

sacrifice moral integrity at the altar of a driving aesthetic imperative.

The only victor, if any, was *The Dance* .

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