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Blanket Dance

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Blanket Dance

Abstract

Lloyd Milburn's poem "Blanket Dance" depicts a memorial dance at a Seneca Ganondagan Festival, and has just been published in The New Guard literary review Volume VIII, Fall 2019. The poem illustrates shared grieving, and music's tension and resolution to help the process.

Keywords

fsc2020

Disciplines

English Language and Literature

Comments

Knightville Poetry Contest finalist.

Blanket Dance

In the thick of a Seneca festival, a hay-colored áhsire unfolds
clan stories lived. A rattle lifts. Spectators hear the purpose:
a name sent into the air. Eight feathered young approach
to hold the frayed weave just above the ground.
Four drummers in a circle, Peter Jemison stands at the end.
". . . Ögwe'öweh k:aa."

The drumbeats move the dancers through the tent
around the edge. The drums' sticky echoes
taste like my earliest sound-smells, but I cannot grasp
the rhythms as they wrap around the crowd.
The singing leaps upward *before* the drumbeat falls.

Then a clear stop; the children loosen their grip,
and slowly the round design rests on the grass.

O, this action they must do together.

Everyone hears the pause, sees the blanket
touch the same ground as our feet,
all touching this ground,

and we know.

Slowly, the drums resume, build louder than before
to a wallop that seems to sing of a long journey
away from the silence. The drummers push their arms
to grow stronger, to be ready to help someday

if the folded blanket gets too heavy for someone.

The rhythm grabs me in an unfamiliar way,
lifts my feet with pulses, and I realize
how fitting this is: I sat still during the life dances,
but suddenly I am part of this somber dance
that allows its middle to bow, touch the ground,
to make music that pauses to acknowledge

what has happened,
takes time to show the children
how to pick up the blanket,

then let it go,
and hear the song continue after.

Before the dance ends I try to go back
to being a mere spectator, not ready to face
this earthiness in public without my clan,
hiding green eyes that so needed
a blanket dance like this my whole life.

I find my chair too late as the blanket passes,
brushing against my aching shoulder as I turn.

-Lloyd Milburn

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