

## Two Poems · *Dionisio D. Martínez*

### DANCING AT THE CHELSEA

It is no longer a question of balance and yet  
we dance to keep from falling.

We dance because the rough  
surface of the moon has carved a hole in the dark.

We dance on the beams of our unfinished houses.  
We were dancing when our real houses

vanished and our lives became this.  
We dance because this thin European found

a piano in the hall and dragged it  
into his room and we had to celebrate

the way he dragged it in by himself  
and the way he hacked at the keys like mad.

We are still dancing, still celebrating.  
We dance with the ghost of Sid

Vicious in the elevator.  
We were dancing before the murder.

We were dancing in the lobby when we heard  
something and we all

felt a sharp pain and we thought it was only  
our tired and reluctant muscles giving

up on our bodies. Now  
we dance for the limousine driver and his family,

we dance for the genius, for the man  
with a hole in his head, for the one who has

lived here forever.

We dance for every song ever

written about these rooms.

We dance full of vertigo looking

down from any window above 23rd Street,  
we let ourselves

go like scarves in a confused wind.

We will be dancing after the man with

the hole in his head has burned  
perfect circles through the soles of his shoes.

We will dance on the broken bones  
of our feet. We think

we can go on even as ghosts, as angels looking  
down at the blessings of 23rd Street.

We climbed the stairs dancing  
the night of the blackout when the elevator

stopped. This was long before the ghost.  
We still dance when we climb

and descend the stairs. We still  
use the stairs because we like the romance of it.

We've danced through every modern war.  
We dance

each night after the last club has closed down  
like a war no one knows how to end and all  
that remains is a scratched record and someone  
humming and the inevitable piano  
and all the lost angels in the halls.  
We will be dancing when the last  
angel cuts his own wings off and tosses them  
up at the moon and jumps like another  
blessing from any window above 23rd Street.  
We dance in spite of gravity and the failure  
of perpetual motion, in spite of the sleepless  
angels of mathematics.  
We dance the dance of those who speak  
in tongues.  
We dance like the shadows  
of puppets in someone's clumsy hands. Sometimes  
we dance with our own clumsy shadows.  
We dance to keep from falling in love with  
the lives of the strangers we  
picked when the lights went out. Some  
of us lit candles. Remember? But this  
was after the fact. In the dark  
we had changed partners and now  
we found ourselves clinging to strange

new lives. We knew  
that it would be like this from here on.

We would dance  
and dance, hoping that through friction

or obsolescence or possibly even perfect  
balance we would rid ourselves

of these lives. This, at least,  
was the hope that kept us dancing.

The truth was something else. We knew  
that we would change partners again

and again like bums trading stolen  
goods by the light of the small fire they've

made in the aisle of an abandoned Pullman.

## A CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Cross yourself before you go to sleep. Sleep  
with your empty hands on your heart.  
Pray for yourself. Pray hard. Pray like hell.  
Keep your empty hands open. Tear your heart  
out with your prayers. Tear the sheets.  
Stare at the little shadows on the ceiling.  
Don't stare at the little shadows on the ceiling.  
Don't imagine anything walking out  
of the little shadows in your sleep. Don't  
touch anything. Keep your empty hands  
clean. Keep your clean hands on your heart.  
Sleep like an angel. Die in your sleep. Rise.  
You have learned how to rise by now, haven't you?