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Dance, Er

By

Ethan Alexander Munson

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirement
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Jonis Agee

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Dance, Er

Ethan Alexander Munson, M.A.
University of Nebraska, 2017

Advisor: Jonis Agee

Dancer, Er, by E. Alexander Munson, is a personal account of an extraordinary journey through names and how we find *home* within them; the narrator struggles with his identity as family, language, asthma, hero arches, hero complexes, and dreams that turn into nightmares, all spiral together to create an unparalleled trip through the social and reclusive construction of this Wanna-be-Wolf, and/or the collective unconscious run rampant. There remains a question as to whether the dreams described have been random manifestations of the ego or messages from something more on the spiritual side of things. But as the narrator explores the many manifestations of God and the self, he finds the patterns in his dreams to either be uncanny, if not prophetic, in their constant appearances and indications, but also chaotic at times, much like other miracles, or mental abnormalities, depending on who is talking. Such miracles eventually lead the narrator to find purpose as a Water Protector against the Dakota Access Pipeline and the projects that reflect it. This story is not yet realized as the future of our world and ourselves, extraordinary or otherwise, are still at stake in the battle between life and the black snake.

Dance, Er Explanation

E. Alexander Munson

I suppose I might as well begin with the title. It is a play on words, referring to the *Myth of Er* in “Book X-III” of *The Republic*. I do, at some point in the story, intend to include a synopsis of this myth, but I felt it more apt to save for closer to the end. The myth of Er, if you are not familiar, is about a man who is pulled into a sort of middle observation point between heaven and hell. There, he observes that in order to make the most appropriate decision as to what new life one might inhabit when they are reborn, or if one wishes to ultimately escape the cycle altogether, they will have to experience or understand live-cycles of sin, grace, despair, and salvation to gain greater wisdom of them, altogether, and thus be worthy of Philosopher King/Queen status. I’m going for the theme that, in order to become not only an enlightened individual, capable of rationalized and manifesting true good, while also understanding the nature of God, or the Great Question, one must know strength and weakness, truth and lies, purpose and apathy; and ultimately, empathy. This tale also draws parallels to the journey of Dante and Virgil and they travel through the spirals of both hell and heaven, beginning their journey first with descent, until betrayal is revealed as the ultimate evil and we find salvation in the sublimity of trust.

I, like many, have had to realize the “hells” of betrayal, as one who has both betrayed and been betrayed by others. And, as this piece will eventually reveal in its completeness, a single lie can be like a constant spiral into the depths of perhaps even deceiving yourself. But it is in circling between both sides, or as I will constantly put it,

spiraling through both sides of truth and lies, that we are able to realize the creative powers of the trickers, crossroads, heroes, and Goddesses. Spirals imply progression, whereas circles imply a return to stasis, and the world is certainly not static. The story that I give to you is an expression of honesty and vulnerability, as I believe that vulnerability is where we will be able to more effectively find a sense of home in each other; a united language. My desire with this piece, is for it to be simultaneous exposure of the ego and fantasies, while also exploring the idea that those fantasies, as part of the collective unconscious, are necessary to evolution, language, saving ourselves from ourselves, and getting over ourselves.

What I am submitting thus far, is, as far as I can tell, only half of what I intend when it might be all said and done (though no stories are). I remain tremendously inspired to write about and include more of my experiences at Standing Rock and with the Water Protectors of late, and I especially wanted to get to discussions about Pocahontas (because that is where the magic really begins). But I felt it was necessary that I write this first part of the story, in its complex completeness (or what I have thus far believed to be necessary to include, but who knows what are the pivotal moments are, if not all of them?). To do so has not only been a challenge to myself, but also necessary in properly laying the foundation for what is to come, and understanding the effects that these event have had on me. To tell these stories in full detail has been difficult, not only because some of these memories I have repressed, but also because it is impossible to simply say, “please believe me,” when I am presenting such extreme situations. But that discussion of trust continues to be both purposefully and, of course, naturally woven into the story. Had the events of this last year, concerning Standing Rock and the Dakota

Access Pipeline, not coaligned with my dreams or the many circumstances surrounding them, I would not have been able to write this piece with this spirit of clarity and cleansing. My dreams, as you will soon discover, understandably caused a great deal of confusion for me and those near me, and have thus been a subject of shame in many instances. But because of what I have learned while being a student at UNL, a student of Standing Rock, and a student of dance, I now feel rather empowered by what my dreams have molded me into. I'm afraid that the story thus far will not do justice to what I am describing, but I hope it reveals some unique and fascinating situations to consider in the grand scheme of mind, matter, and the relationship in between.

Again, I am very sad that I was not yet able to include my discoveries and revelations in light of Pocahontas, who also has gone by many names - a major theme in this piece. But when I include her, I wanted to make sure that I handle the discourse surrounding her with respect and articulation. Her significance first comes from my being her direct descendant. Normally, this might not be considered so significant, as there are hundreds of thousand of descendants of Pocahontas, and I am not trying to reach out for importance. But what makes my connection to her fascinating (to me at least), is how her story is also a story about extraordinary dreams and visions, tricksters, hero arches, and bloodlines. My lineage to Pocahontas, and the book that I discovered all of these connections within, came into my knowledge after my own dreams had brought me to Standing Rock. And then, after my involvement there, and other patterns that matched my dreams, my parents gave me the book on Pocahontas for Christmas. It was in this book that I found the first description to match what I saw in my dreams since I had them

fifteen years ago. Everything that has followed from that book has been remarkably harmonious with my own stream of consciousness.

What has truly been wonderful, though, in exploring the story of Pocahontas and the traditions surrounding her, has been the discovery of a whole new world, a social mindset in which my dreams may have not been branded as a stigma, as misunderstood abnormalities in personal behavior often are. As I continue writing my story, I wish to keep exploring the implicit worldview practiced by Pocahontas's people where one would have given more trust to their experiences as they experienced them, not by some standard of predisposed research. The idea of "re-search" is that which fuels the explicit worldviews that might have accompanied the ways that people viewed my dreams, or the Westerners that deemed a harmonious peoples as savage, by an explicit standard of class or civilization. How would my dreams have been interpreted in a different time and space? But then again, it is just games to imagine such things, as my dreams, as I have come to believe, happened in the time and place that they were meant to happen. Or they simply happened as they happened.

I am and will always be a dancer. And so, I think about spirals, whirlpools, helixes, the twists in our belly-buttons, and the Tower of Babel more often than not. Trying to embody spirals in my dance and in my mind did wonders in helping me realize the fluidity and simultaneity of "error" and "success," and I am certain that similar applications of spiral-based mentalities can be essential in freeing each other of the shackles of our hubris while still progressing towards the embodiment of something greater than ourselves. It is the desire for a common thread, this universally applicable narrative, that I introduce "the spiral" as an effective metaphorical tool for generating my

own story and my perception of truth. What is perhaps the most valuable aspect of the spiral that I am trying to explore, is how it can help free many of us from our fixation on the written word, ironically, as the written word can make it difficult for us to access other modes of language such as those found in Indigenous teachings, oral traditions, and the narratives of “things” that have been mistranslated into “writings.” Hence why I feel the need to explore the “languages” between me and my father, who is of limited speech. Through combination of spiral imagery, symbolism, and mythology, we are provided with catalysts where we can recognize and influence the interconnectivity of these often alienated elements, while also breaking down the barriers that perpetuate alienation. Doing so will not only instill an appreciation for interconnectivity in ourselves and each other, but it will also cause us to be ever more conscious of how we must be critical of that connectivity in order to free those who are oppressed by imbalances in the spiral, such as the Native Americans, and allowing us to join each other in the journey both outward and inward. If we become aware of the spiral energy that motivates, connects, and encompasses everything, as I have tried through my own story, we can realize that, as “I” am bound to the circumstances that create “me” from my interactions with the “we,” the molds that we create or adhere to are also so constructed and deconstructed by the constant motion and influence of the spiral and everything within it. It’s all a Great Question.