adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet," was his first move in that direction.

"Rome & Jewels" took nothing away from hip-hop. The full panoply was there: the spoken word (in this case, a melding of Shakespeare's text with street talk); three nimble d.j.s scratching like crazy; two street gangs, the Caps (Capulets) doing b-boy moves, the Monster Q's (Montagues) doing African-based ensemble dances. At the same time, with Shakespeare behind him, Harris built on that foundation. To my knowledge, "Rome & Jewels" was the first full-evening narrative dance produced by the hip-hop world. And it took on states of mind previously remote from hip-hop, notably love and grief.

It carried them only so far, however. Just as "Romeo and Juliet" was part of Shakespeare's early period, so, in a way, was "Rome & Jewels" a product of Harris's. He couldn't really break with the subject of violence, and Shakespeare's play, in which love is defeated by gang warfare, supported him in that hesitation. (As, no doubt, did the fact that one of the members of his cast was murdered before the première.) In "Romeo and Juliet," young men sparred with swords; in "Rome & Jewels," they fought by dancing. In between, Harris gave us a love story, but one severely limited by the fact that the heroine, Jewels, was invisible throughout. (In the bedroom scene, Rome did a slow-motion love dance by himself.) In an interview prior to the New York première, Harris defended his omission of the woman, on the ground that this was true to street psychology. "Rome & Jewels," he said, was "about men's bullshit—who they think they are and how they conjure women into what they want them to be"; that is, not human beings but projections, status symbols. (Hence Jewels's name.) Actually, when Harris started work on the piece, he did have a dancer in the role of Jewels; he eventually dropped her. I think he didn't know what to do with her. But he certainly knew what to do with the "men's bullshit." "Rome & Jewels" may have been an attempt at making hip-hop more complicated, but the spine of the production, and the thing that the audience cheered for, was the gang warfare, which consisted of regular (if superlatively performed) hip-hop—young men showing you everything they had and then dying, as they do in North Philadelphia.

Was this a message? Hip-hop dancing may be young, but it is only a latter-day entry into an ancient art, the art of male self-assertion—dick-waving, basically—which is as old as the Iliad and has a lengthy pedigree in African song and dance as well. That art may be connected to things we don't like, such as war, but it also involves things we do like. When Mercutio goes up against Tybalt, and the Monster Q's against the Caps—or when rap m.c.s, in their "battles," insult each other in rhythm and rhyme—what we are seeing is not just testosterone but courage, wit, zest, resourcefulness, together with a certain existential dignity. So maybe, in "Rome & Jewels," the trumping of emotional complexity by classic hip-hop show-'em-what-you-got was the right choice? Maybe you can't, or shouldn't, take the swagger out of hip-hop?

Perhaps not, but Harris, in his newest piece, "Facing Mekka," which had its New York première earlier this month, at the Joyce (it will be shown at Jacob's Pillow in July), has tried again, and this time he has gone further. He has deleted some of the hip-hop appurtenances—the spoken word, all but one d.j. In their place is an onstage band, with a global reach: *berimbau* (Afro-Brazilian), conga drums (Afro-Cuban), tabla (Indian), cello. The dancing, too, is eclectic, incorporating moves from Brazilian *capoeira* and Japanese *butoh*. On the backdrop there's video—a tumultuous collage (by Tobin Rothlein) in which, at various times, I could make out National Guardsmen and Martin Luther King and burning crosses. Even without those images, though, it is clear that "Facing Mekka" is about more than the street. Its subject, I think, is African-American memory.

To that end, Harris's most important innovation is that half the cast is female. With their light feet and waving hips, the women supply a note of lyricism—a remembered calm and sweetness—to counteract the grim videos. But the girls aren't just nice. The most thrilling section of the whole piece is a suffering solo for a woman, Tania Isaac, in which Harris has at last achieved his goal of deepening hip-hop. In it, the b-boy dives became falls; the isolations, brokenness; the swagger, a sheer refusal to die. This was a horrifying dance, and I could have watched it forever.

Starting around the middle of its ninety minutes, "Facing Mekka" broke down into solos, but, apart from a rather lame inspirational song for the cellist-vocalist Grisha Coleman, they were very good, and all part of one story. There was an unforgettable routine by Kenny Muhammad, a.k.a. the Human Orchestra, in which he did his famous "beat-boxing," a rhythmically expert explosion of mouth sounds—clicks, smacks, gulps, honks—into a souped-up mike. (This is presumably a descendant of African mouth-singing, and perhaps of scat as well.) Then Isaac did her act. At the end, Harris came out alone and performed a dance crossing hip-hop locking with the catatonics of *butoh*, which, on his body (he's six feet two, a hundred and ninety pounds, with mile-long dreads), made for quite a show. This is the dance that was based on Harris's finding the corpse in the Schuylkill. It got most of its power from the same means as the solo he made for Isaac: a mere slowing down of hip-hop. But when robotics are slowed down they look like electrocution. In the score, meantime, we got scratching and gunshot; on the video, a house on fire. The whole thing looked like a nightmare, or a psychotic episode, and good for Harris that he didn't end on the usual we-will-overcome note.

Again and again, when black artists adapt street work to the stage, the critics say it's terrific. When it's framed as black history, it's more than terrific. Remember "Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk," which was conceived and directed by George C. Wolfe, and choreographed by Savion Glover. Everyone said it was fabulous. It wasn't. Glover's choreography was fabulous, the more so for hanging on by its fingernails to the show's shallow, accusatory libretto. In "Facing Mekka" the moral vision is broader, and, despite the videos, the means are largely abstract: music, dance. This makes it encompassing—a story not just of African-American memory but of memory itself. Shortly before the première, Harris told the *Times* that to him "Mekka" meant "self or dance." Self or dance? That's everything he has. And that's what the piece looks like. ♦