

In the rhythm of the dance: from classical tragedy to the “tragic rhythmic movement” of pantomime dancing

Una forma spettacolare assai diffusa nel periodo tardo ellenistico e imperiale era la pantomina, una danza durante la quale un unico ballerino, in silenzio, impersonava personaggi mitici accompagnato da musica e canto. Il ritmo era fornito al danzatore da una composita orchestra e in special modo dalle percussioni che includevano il cosiddetto *scabellum*, probabilmente una ‘linguetta’ di ferro attaccata ai piedi di alcuni musicisti. Da un punto di vista ‘evolutivo’, la pantomima era vista come una sorta di genere discendente dalla tragedia greca classica: di qui il riferimento, (soprattutto) nelle iscrizioni, al genere e ai ballerini come “tragedia ritmica” (*enrythmos tragôidia*), “poesia tragica ritmica” (*enrythmos tragikê poiêsis*), “movimento tragico ritmico” (*tragikê enrythmos kinêsis*), “attore di movimenti tragici ritmici” (*tragikês enrythmou kinêseôs hypokritês*). Questo contributo analizza alcune delle modalità attraverso cui la drammaturgia pantomimica abbia realizzato il passaggio dal teatro di parola a quello del corpo, dal momento che la funzione primaria della comunicazione di “azione”, “carattere” e “passione” passa dal ritmo verbale a quello corporeo, cioè dal ritmo provvisto da metro recitato o cantato alla danza, movimento e gesti ritmicamente misurati.

One of the most sensational aesthetic attractions in the ancient world, from about the end of the first century BC to at least the end of the sixth century AD was pantomime dancing¹, a ballet-style stage entertainment in which a silent, solo, masked dancer impersonated a series of mythical characters to the accompaniment of instrumental music and sung narrative. In a volume preoccupied with “rhythm”, the “spoken word”, “images” and the “theatrical tradition” pantomime is an ideal subject to work with, since it fits with its main themes in several interconnected ways.

¹ Scholarly work of incalculable importance for the reconstruction of pantomime dancing in its performative and socio-political aspects has been carried out by JORY (1981; 1995; 1996; 2001) and SLATER (1993; 1994; 1995; 1996). Invaluable from the point of view of locating the genre into the broader context of imperial theatrical performances are: KELLY (1979); JONES (1993); EASTERLING – MILES (1999); HALL (2002). For recent contributions marking a resurgence of interest in ancient pantomime, see MONTIGLIO (1999); GARELLI (2007); LADA-RICHARDS (2003a; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008); WEBB (2008a; 2008b); HALL – WYLES (2008).

Starting with "rhythm", one of the greatest certainties concerning pantomime is that the genre was heavily dependent on rhythmically measured corporeal movement and gestures. Not only was the dance executed to the rhythm of the orchestral music (μετὰ μουσικῆς καὶ ῥυθμοῦ, Lucian, *Salt.* 6)², but the rhythm itself was further emphasised by the so-called *scabellum*, a loud percussion instrument (most often a strip of metal or wood) attached to the foot of some of the musicians³, the *scabellarii* or *scabillarii*. They operated it by stamping their foot to the ground⁴, an absolutely vital component of the whole event, since it helped preserve the rhythm for singers, players and, of course, the dancer himself who, ideally, had to be «wholly rhythmical» (τὸ πᾶν εὔρυθμον, Lucian, *Salt.* 81). The lack of synchronisation between danced movement and rhythmical beat in such a way that «the foot says one thing but the beat of the rhythm another» (ἕτερα μὲν ... ὁ πούς, ἕτερα δ' ὁ ῥυθμὸς λέγει) seems to have been one of the most notable faults of pantomime dancers — a solecism (σολοικία) and an offence to the spectacle's propriety according to Lycinus, the fictive pantomime fan in Lucian's second-century AD treatise *On Dancing* (Περὶ Ὀρχήσεως)⁵.

The "spoken word" lay also at the core of pantomime spectacles, for the dancer's dance was supposed to follow closely and «demonstrate» (*deixein*) «clearly» (*saphôs*)⁶ the mythical story contained in the *fabula saltica*, the oral equivalent of the written text traditionally accompanying an opera, a musical or ballet in the form of a *libretto*. Composed sometimes even by eminent poets⁷, the verbal narrative supporting a

² Lucian's pantomime fan Lycinus understands pantomime as an art partaking of «music», «rhythm» and «meter» (οὐ μουσικῆς μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ῥυθμικῆς καὶ μετρικῆς) (*Salt.* 35); cf. *Salt.* 71. In *Salt.* 6 the entire spectacle is said to «bring into measure» (ῥυθμίζει) «the souls of the viewers» (τῶν ὁρώντων τὰς ψυχάς).

³ Libanius (*Or.* 64, 97) describes it as «a straight rod of iron protruding from the sandal», capable of making «enough noise»; cf. Libanius, *Or.* 64, 95. On the *scabellum*, see BÉLIS (1988), a most learned piece.

⁴ See Lucian, *Salt.* 2 and 68; cf. *Salt.* 63 and 83.

⁵ See Lucian, *Salt.* 80.

⁶ The dancer «undertakes to demonstrate by means of movements that which is being sung» (κινήμασι τὰ ἀδόμενα δείξειν ὑπισχνεῖται) (Lucian, *Salt.* 62). On the importance of *saphêneia*, «clarity», as an ingredient of the pantomime's art, see primarily Lucian, *Salt.* 36; on the pantomime's *saphêneia* as bypassing the need of verbal mediation, see *Salt.* 62-64. It is essential for a pantomime «to cultivate clarity, so that everything which he presents will be intelligible, needing no interpreter» (σαφήνειαν ἀσκεῖν, ὥς ἕκαστον τῶν δεικνυμένων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ δηλοῦσθαι μηδενὸς ἐξηγητοῦ δεόμενον, *Salt.* 62).

⁷ Statius, for example, famously sold a brand new composition on the story of Agave to the pantomime Paris (Juvenal, *Satire* VII 87); Lucan wrote some 14 pantomime *libretti* (*fabulae salticae*), according to the anonymous *Life of Lucan* often attributed to Vacca. *Libretti* (other

pantomime performance would have been either recited or sung by either one single vocalist⁸ or a chorus⁹ or a combination of the two. As the author of a much-admired late epigram (*Anthologia Latina* I 1 [Shackleton Bailey] 100, 5f.) put it, «when the sweet chorus pours forth its pleasant songs, / the dancer shows in movement what the singer sends echoing through the theatre» (*nam cum grata chorus diffundit cantica dulcis, / quae resonat cantor, motibus ipse probat*).

Exactly how a pantomime was supposed to translate the verbal messages of *logos* into the visual language of the dance is impossible to reconstruct – in any case, the genre itself was exceptionally varied in its performative expressions, so much so that there does not seem to have ever been a single correct or authoritative way of staging a pantomime performance in antiquity. It is extremely likely that even within the relatively unified performative tradition represented by a master and his pupil there were several, often rival ways of conveying a word, a notion, an action. The amusing story preserved by Macrobius (*Sat.* II 7, 12-15), concerning the famous inventor of the genre Pylades and his pupil Hylas, is a case in point:

Sed quia semel ingressus sum scaenam loquendo, nec Pylades histrio nobis omittendus est, qui clarus in opere suo fuit temporibus Augusti, et Hylam discipulum usque ad aequalitatis contentionem eruditione provexit. populus deinde inter utriusque suffragia divisus est, et cum canticum quoddam saltaret Hylas cuius clausula erat τὸν μέγαν Ἀγαμέμνονα, sublimem ingentemque Hylas velut metiebatur. non tulit Pylades et exclamavit cavea: σὸν μακρόν οὐ μέγαν ποιεῖς. tunc eum populus coegit idem saltare canticum, cumque ad locum venisset quem reprehenderat, expressit cogitantem, nihil magis ratus magno duci convenire quam pro omnibus cogitare.

names for which were *mythos* or *canticum*) are also mentioned by Crinagoras (*AP* IX 542, 2), Macrobius (*Sat.* II 7, 13) and others, sometimes in the disparaging tone that reflects Roman deep-seated antitheatrical anxieties. Seneca the Elder in particular (*Suas.* II 19), famously commented on the (for us) shadowy figure of Abronius Silo's son, *qui pantomimis fabulas scripsit et ingenium grande non tantum deseruit sed polluit* («who composed *fabulae* [libretti] for pantomime dancers and not only abandoned his great talent but also polluted it»). On pantomime *libretti*, see further JORY (2008); HUNT (2008); HALL (2008a); on the possibility that a Latin hexameter poem on the theme of Alcestis' death preserved in a Barcelona papyrus is an extant pantomime *libretto*, see HALL (2008b).

⁸ So, for example, in an epigram by Leontius Scholasticus (*Greek Anthology* XVI 287), the female pantomime Helladia is said to be responding to a soloist's new song about Hector.

⁹ See, e.g., Cassiodorus, *Var.* IV 51, 9 on the pantomime assisted by harmonious choruses: *assistunt consoni chori*.

Having once begun to talk about the stage, I must not omit to mention Pylades, a famous actor in the time of Augustus, and his pupil Hylas, who proceeded under his instruction to become his equal and his rival. On the question of the respective merits of these two actors popular opinion was divided. Hylas one day was performing a dramatic dance the closing theme of which was *The Great Agamemnon*, and by his gestures he represented his subject as a man of mighty stature. This was more than Pylades could stand, and from his seat in the pit he shouted: "You are making him merely tall not great". The populace then made Pylades perform the same dance himself, and, when he came to the point at which he had found fault with the other's performance, he gave the representation of a man deep in thought, on the ground that nothing became a great commander better than to take thought for all (trans. Davies [1969]).

While Hylas decided to go along with the descriptive value of the spoken words (a «great» man is a tall man) and chose movements effecting a literal "translation" of the text into corporeal images, Pylades' performative choices urged him to unlock the deeper meanings of the poetic accompaniment, so that, on the stage, the *libretto's* «great» man was conveyed by an "absorbed" figure lost in thought. Be that as it may, our sources seem unanimous in their suggestion that in technically competent performances verbal and corporeal narratives were meant to be completely synchronised. Libanius (*Or.* 64, 118) draws attention to the difficulty of bringing dancing and singing to a halt at exactly the same time (πόνος δὲ μείζων ἔτερος συγκαταλῦσαι τῷ ᾄσματι), while Seneca (*Ep.* CXXI 6) singles out the perfect co-ordination between the verbal and the gestural as one of the strikingly attractive aspects of a virtuoso's show:

Mirari solemus saltandi peritos quod in omnem significationem rerum et adfectuum parata illorum est manus, et verborum velocitatem gestus adsequitur.

We frequently marvel that the hand of expert dancers can so readily adjust to every indication of events and emotions and the gestures match the rapidity of the words.

Even Manilius' passing reference to pantomimes in the fifth book of his *Matters of Astronomy* singles out as a hallmark of the dancer's art his ability to «match with gestures the songs of the chorus» (*aequabitque chorus gestu*, *Astron.* V 484).

A third constitutive dimension of pantomime dancing is its close affinity with "images". Not only do epigrams and a variety of other sources praise the pantomime's ability to fashion «figures (*eikonas*) of men of old with silent gestures» (*AP* VII 563, 2);

Plutarch (*Mor.* 747c) refers to the dancer's bodily configurations frozen in space and time, as if incorporated in a «picture»:

... ὅταν Ἀπόλλωνος ἢ Πανὸς ἢ τινος Βάκχης σχῆμα διαθέντες ἐπὶ τοῦ σώματος γραφικῶς τοῖς εἶδεσιν ἐπιμένωσι.

[...] when the dancers, having arranged their overall appearance in the shape of Apollo or Pan or a bacchant, retain these attitudes, like figures in a painting.

Similarly, Libanius (*Or.* 64, 118) speaks of the pantomime's transition from swift movement to a statue-like stillness that culminates in a real "tableau-vivant" on stage:

πότερον δὲ ἂν τις ἀγασθείη μειζόνως τὴν τῆς περιφορᾶς ἐν πλήθει συνέχειαν ἢ τὴν ἐξαίφνης ἐπὶ τούτῳ πάγιον στάσιν ἢ τὸν ἐν τῇ στάσει τηρούμενον τύπον ... ὥς μὲν γὰρ ὑπόπτεροι περιάγονται, τελευτῶσι δὲ εἰς ἀκίνητον στάσιν ὥσπερ κεκολλημένοι, μετὰ δὲ τῆς στάσεως ἡ εἰκὼν ἀπαντᾷ.

What would someone admire more? The continuity of their many pirouettes or, after this, their suddenly crystallised posture or the figure held fixed in this position? For they whirl round as if borne on wings, but conclude their movement in a static pose, as if glued to the spot; and with the stillness of the pose, the image presents itself.

More interestingly in the context of this paper, the pantomime's gestural alphabet amounts to an «image» (εἰκόνα) of «spoken words» (μύθων), as the late epic poet Nonnus puts it in a book of his *Dionysiaca* heavily informed by the practice and aesthetics of the pantomime genre (*Dion.* XIX 201)¹⁰. Besides, our sources refer explicitly to the intimate connection of "rhythm" and "image" in pantomime dancing, whether to stress the point that pantomime exhibits the sense of rhythm that can be found in exquisite painting and sculpture¹¹ or to define the dance as rhythmical movement which involves bodily images deployed in space¹².

¹⁰ See also Nonnus, *D.* V 104-106; XIX 210; XIX 216f.; for the ascription of a pictorial dramaturgy to pantomime as a genre and the dancer as an artist, cf. Aristaenetus, *Ep.* I 26. See further MONTIGLIO (1999, 273f.); LADA-RICHARDS (2003b; 2004; 2007, 47f.); GARELLI (2007, 357-62).

¹¹ As Lucian does in *Salt.* 35: οὐκ ἀπήλλακται δὲ καὶ γραφικῆς καὶ πλαστικῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἐν ταύταις εὐρυθμίαν μάλιστα μιμουμένη φαίνεται, ὥς μηδὲν ἀμείνω μήτε Φειδίαν αὐτῆς μήτε Ἀπελλῆν εἶναι δοκεῖν («it is not without a share in the arts of painting and sculpture, manifestly imitating their sense of rhythm above all else, so that neither Pheidias nor Apelles seems in any respect superior to it»).

¹² See Libanius, *Or.* 64, 28: φέρε γάρ, οὐ κίνησιν τῶν μελῶν σύντονον μετὰ τινων σχημάτων καὶ ῥυθμῶν τὴν ὄρχησιν εἶναι λέγεις; («come, then, would you not say that dancing is the vigorous

Last but not least pantomime is of supreme interest to anyone who wants to think of Greek theatre neither in "instalments" nor in watertight chronological and geographical compartments but as a fluid, ever-evolving organism, highly adept at re-newing itself in response to ever-changing cultural trends and audience sensibilities. Pantomime is perfect "to think with" in a volume preoccupied with the theatrical tradition, because we have solid evidence that the ancients themselves perceived the genre and its artist as very closely affiliated to the centuries-old genre of tragedy. A wealth of inscriptions, for example, from the Greek and Hellenised East designate the dancer as «an actor of tragic rhythmic movement» (τραγικῆς ἐνρῦθμου κεινήσεως ὑποκριτὴν)¹³ and the entire spectacle as «tragic (rhythmic) movement» (τραγικὴ ἐνρῦθμος κείνησις, IGR IV 1272) or even simply «tragedy set in rhythm» (ἐνρῦθμος τραγῳδία)¹⁴ and «tragic dancing»¹⁵. An inscription from Magnesia opts for the variant (not attested elsewhere) «rhythmical tragic poetry» (ἐνρῦθμον / τραγικὴν ποίησιν)¹⁶. Moreover, the vast majority of *fabulae salticae* mentioned in Lucian's *On the Dance* have a counterpart in classical tragedy (counting, of course, the fragments and the known titles)¹⁷. In other words, pantomime, for all its stunning novelty when it took Rome by storm in the age of Augustus, was by no means an "alien", a sudden intruder in the

motion of the body's limbs in accordance with certain figures and rhythms?»; for earlier periods, cf. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1447a 26-28 on the art of dancing as operating «on the basis of rhythm alone» (αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ ῥυθμῷ): (καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι διὰ τῶν σχηματιζομένων ῥυθμῶν μιμοῦνται καὶ ἦθη καὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις) («for these too [*scil.* the dancers] imitate characters, emotions as well as actions by means of rhythms translated into visual patterns»). Extremely informative at this point is RISPOLI (2000).

¹³ *Fouilles de Delphes* III (i), nr. 551 (lines 1-2), honouring the pantomime Tiberius Iulius Apolaustus; *Fouilles de Delphes* III (ii) nr. 105; *I.Ephesus* II 71; cf. *SEG* I 529 in honour of Aelius Crispus as τραγικῆς καὶ ἐνρῦθμου κεινήσεως ὑποκριτὴν; *IMagn.* 165 Kern in honour of Tiberius Claudius. In general, see ROBERT (1930).

¹⁴ In the funerary epigram in memory of Crispus, a pantomime of the second or third century AD; text in SAHIN (1975, 294).

¹⁵ Athen. I 20d: ὀρχήσεως τῆς τραγικῆς καλουμένης. A most interesting insight into the enduring public perception of pantomime's affinity with tragedy comes from the sixth-century AD historian Procopius of Gaza, who refers disparagingly to the writers of pantomime libretti as *tragôidodidaskaloi*, «tragedy teachers», and shudders at the thought that he himself might be associated with their kind: see *Secret History* 1, 4, with THEOCHARIDIS (1940, 30).

¹⁶ *IMagn* 192, 11f. ἐνρῦθμον / τραγικὴν ποίησιν. Cf. *AP* IX 248, 4 on the famous Pylades as having danced ὀρθὰ κατὰ τραγικῶν τέθμια μουσοπόλων.

¹⁷ See, most interestingly, an inscription (*CIL* XIV 4254) from Tivoli (199 AD) set up in honour of L. Aurelius Apolaustus Memphius: his successful roles listed there are adaptations of tragedies by Euripides (*Heracles*, *Orestes*, *Trojan Women*, *Bacchae*, *Hippolytus*) and Sophocles (*Tympanistae*).

performative landscape of the imperial world, but found its place quite easily in a long tradition of staged mythological performances. Despite the fact that tragedy continued to be written and performed, pantomime ought to be understood as the last recorded mutation and off-shoot of the tragic genre, the last glorious chapter in the history of classical Athenian tragedy itself. It is precisely some aspects of the journey from tragedy to pantomime that this paper hopes to consider, with a view to a) ringing some of the changes, the differences between the two genres in their way of telling a story, and b) emphasising some continuities — the fact that pantomime did not signal an abrupt new start on each and every front but worked with and within already existing representational traditions. There are several possible paths that one can take at this juncture but, restricting the inquiry to the volume's main themes of "rhythm", the "spoken word" and "images", the following broad observations can be made.

The "speech" which matters most in pantomime dancing is not the poetically composed verbal narrative, the sung or rhythmically intoned text of the *libretto*, but the silent yet eloquent speech¹⁸ of the dancer's own body. Possessing «as many tongues as limbs» (*tot linguae quot membra viro*) (*Anthologia Latina* I 1 [Shackleton Bailey] 100, 9), the pantomime spoke primarily through «the entrancing quiver of the palm» (παλάμης θελξίφρονα παλμόν) (*AP* IX 505, 17)¹⁹ and was master of a «wonderful art» (*mirabilis ars*) (*Anthologia Latina* I 1 [Shackleton Bailey] 100, 9) which downplayed verbal language as a mode of communication in favour of «conversing through gesture, nod, leg, knee, hand and spin» (*loquente gestu / nutu, crure, genu, manu, rotatu*, Sidonius Apollinaris, *C.* XXIII 269f.). Verbal eloquence gave way to corporeal eloquence, a theatre of *logos* to a theatre of the body²⁰.

¹⁸ In order to convey the marvel of the dancer's silent, corporeal eloquence, pantomime literature is full of conjunctions of contradictory terms. See e.g. *silentium clamosum* («clamorous silence») and *expositio tacita* («silent exposition») in Cassiodorus, *Var.* IV 51, 8; φωνήεσσιν ... σιωπῇν («articulate [...] silence») in *AP* IX 505, 18; Nonnus, *D.* V 105 (ἄναυδός ... φωνῆς, «of a voiceless voice»); XIX 156 (αὐδήεσσα σιωπῇ, «speaking silence»); XIX 200 (σιγῇν ποικιλόμυθον, «silence which tells many a tale»).

¹⁹ Speaking hands, palms and fingers are one of the commonest themes in pantomime literature. See e.g. Nonnus, *D.* V 106; Cassiodorus, *Var.* I 20 and IV 51, 8 (*loquacissimae manus* and *linguosi digiti*); Novatian, *Spect.* VI 4 (*verba manibus expedire*); *IG* XIV 2124, 1. The dancer's fingers are mentioned (or their expertise praised) e.g. in Nonnus, *D.* XIX 157 and XXX 111; *AP* XVI 283, 3f.

²⁰ The distinction here is merely a matter of emphasis. For it would be the greatest mistake to assume that a corporeal, body-centred dramaturgy was not crucially important in tragedy as well. Aeschylus' famous Niobe, whose veiled, mute and static presence on the stage spoke with a silence worth a million words (cf. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 907-29), demonstrates most forcefully the tragic body's wonderful ability to bear the brunt of theatrical communication. More

As far as "rhythm" is concerned, «there are three kinds of material which can be governed by rhythm», writes Aristoxenus: «speech, melody, and bodily movement» (ἔστι δὲ τὰ ῥυθμιζόμενα τρία· λέξις, μέλος, κίνησις σωματική, *Elementa Rhythmica* II 9)²¹. But, while in tragedy rhythm resided entirely in the actor's voice, that is to say in the spoken word which had to be delivered in the right alternation and proportion of short and long syllables, in pantomime rhythm resided in the dancer's body and was «made up of contrasts of speed and energy, alternating rapid movement with momentary static poses»²². Besides, in pantomime the verbal narrative of the *libretto* existed not for its own sake but in order to support the dancing body. Although verbal narrative was a powerful cementing force providing the spectacle's logic on an intellectual level, a pantomime performance's chief unifying factor was the dancer's constantly evolving, self-creating corporeal architecture. Libanius (*Or.* 64, 88) could not have made it any clearer that the narrative was a subordinate element, ancillary to the dancer's own display of virtuosity – the linchpin upon which the show's success or failure rested:

οὐ γὰρ ὡς γενναίων ᾄσμάτων ἀκουσόμενοι καὶ προσέξοντες τὸν νοῦν ἐρχόμεθα ...
τοσοῦτον δὲ ἀπαιτοῦμεν μόνον, ὑπηρετῆσαι τὴν φωνὴν τοῖς σχήμασιν. οὐ γὰρ ἡ
ὄρχησις ὑπὸ τῶν ᾄσμάτων πληροῦται, τῆς ὀρχήσεως δὲ εἵνεκα τὰ ᾄσματα εὔρεται.
καὶ τὴν ἡμέραν κρίνομεν τῷ τῆς ὀρχήσεως κάλλει καὶ αἴσχει, οὐ τοῖς τῶν ᾄσμάτων
ὀνόμασιν ἢ ῥυθμοῖς.

For we do not come (to the theatre) to listen and pay attention to noble songs [...] but we only insist on this much, that the verbal element supports the dancer's figures. For it is not the dancing that is made complete by means of the songs, but the songs have been created for the sake of the dance. And it is by the beauty and shameful ugliness of the dance that we judge the day, not by the words or the rhythms of the songs.

In tragedy, on the other hand, *logos* and the rhythm residing in *logos* was (ideally at least) ruler and king, the privileged *locus* of communication. Pantomime's emancipation from verbal rhythm can be seen most clearly in those cases where, as Libanius observes²³, the voice of the chorus is completely silenced and the dancer

precisely, the seeds of pantomime's body-eloquence are to be found in many a tragic body tortured by physical suffering or suffused with emotion. On the diachronical importance of the body in ancient drama, see ANDRISANO (2006).

²¹ See the most helpful comments of PEARSON (1990, 53f.); cf. Aristides Quintilianus, *De Musica* I 13.

²² WEBB (2008a, 50).

²³ See Libanius, *Or.* 64, 113 φροντίζουσα δὲ ἡ τέχνη τοῦ τὰς ψυχὰς ἐγρηγορέναι παύσασα πολλάκις τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ χοροῦ διὰ τῶν σχημάτων παιδεύει τὸν θεατὴν αἰρεῖν τὸ πρᾶγμα.

instructs the spectator to grasp what is happening through gestures only. The best known story in this connection is that narrated by Lucian (*Salt.* 63) regarding the sceptic who witnessed an entirely mute performance of Aphrodite's adultery with Ares and, much impressed, exclaimed:

Ἀκούω, ἄνθρωπε, ἃ ποιεῖς· οὐχ ὁρῶ μόνον, ἀλλὰ μοι δοκεῖς ταῖς χερσὶν αὐταῖς
λαλεῖν.

I hear, man, the acts you are performing; I don't merely see, but you seem to me to be talking with your very hands.

Moving now to a combination of the elements of “speech” and “images”, we can pay attention to the deeply ingrained tragic convention that important “off-stage” action becomes subsequently re-integrated into a dramatic plot by being reported verbally “on-stage” by a messenger, a “newsbringer”. Although the absence of *libretti* does not allow for large-scale comparisons between tragic and pantomimic plots, some precious hints in our sources enable us to speculate that pantomime, as a genre, loved to flip into prominence and translate into “image”, that is to say into fully acted-out spectacle, the kind of action which tragedy reserved for its “off-stage” moments, the kind of action which in tragedy was only verbally reported²⁴. To put this differently, pantomime seems to have turned tragedy's conventional way of linking “performance space” and “dramatic action” on its head: whereas in tragedy it was the “off-stage” space that featured as the space of intense and often violent physical action, in pantomime drama such action was allowed to invade, and even become the lifeblood of, the performance's “on-stage” space. We know from Lucian, for example, that Ajax's madness, which in Sophocles' play (the only extant dramatisation of the legend in Greek tragedy) was fleshed out in the audience's imagination only²⁵, was fully danced

²⁴ Further on this claim see LADA-RICHARDS (2007, 35f.; forthcoming); cf. GARELLI (2007, 167): «Là résidait la différence avec la tragédie: la pantomime exhibait ce que la tragédie dérobait aux regards en le confiant au récit».

²⁵ The Sophoclean audience's knowledge of Ajax's delusional behaviour is mediated by the narrative of those who either saw it themselves (*Ai.* 61-64; 235-44; 296-322) or heard about it, either in the form of rumour (*Ai.* 141-47) or by means of an eyewitness's report (*Ai.* 29-31). At the most, Sophocles' spectators would have glimpsed the acts of Ajax's madness transiently and intermittently through their partial evocation by the gestural language of stage-characters like Tecmessa (see *Ai.* 235-44 and 296-300). To be sure, the Sophoclean Ajax does step, still mad, into the stage when summoned by Athena (*Ai.* 91ff.), but, although he holds a heavy, blood-stained whip in hand, he only speaks of violence already accomplished (*Ai.* 94-100) or planned (*Ai.* 108-17).

by pantomimes of his time²⁶. The same can be inferred from Macrobius with respect to the full enactment of Heracles' madness and kin-killing (the subject of an astoundingly vivid messenger speech in Euripides' *Heracles* 922-1015) on the pantomime stage²⁷. It would therefore seem that the passage from classical tragedy to imperial pantomime was marked by a seismic shift in notions of aesthetic sensibility and theatrical decorum. What pantomime deemed appropriate or even welcome as a subject of visual representation run dead-against some of the most sacrosanct conventions of classical tragedy – very probably one of the points underlying Horace's famous complaint in his *Ars Poetica* 185-87:

*ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet,
aut humana palam coquat exta nefarius Atreus,
aut in auem Procne uertatur, Cadmus in anguem.*

²⁶ This is the clear inference from Lucian, *Salt.* 83f., a priceless narrative on the unfortunate performance of a pantomime dancing (*orchoumenon*) τὸν Αἴαντα μετὰ τὴν ἥτταν εὐθὺς μαινόμενον («Ajax going mad immediately after his defeat»); see further LADA-RICHARDS (2006). With respect to Ajax's legend, it is easy to see how the opportunities for a choreography of frenzied leaps and bounds across the Trojan plains (cf. Sophocles, *Ai.* 29f.) provided by tragedy's "backgrounded" space of mad action would have ignited a pantomime's imagination, offering excellent moments for self-display and self-promotion. Cf. Athenaeus' (XIV 629d) reference to μαινώδεις ὀρχήσεις, dances as furious as those of madmen, among which he includes the *thermaustris*, described by Pollux (*Onom.* IV 102) as a «strenuous» (ἐντονον) form of dance and «full of great leaps» (πηδητικόν).

²⁷ See Macrobius, *Sat.* II 7, 16f. *cum in Herculem furem prodisset et non nullis incessum histrioni convenientem non servare videretur, deposita persona ridentes increpuit: μωροί, μαινόμενον ὀρχοῦμαι. hac fabula et sagittas iecit in populum. eandem personam cum iussu Augusti in triclinio ageret, et intendit arcum et spicula immisit. nec indignatus est Caesar eodem se loco Pyladi quo populum Romanum fuisse* («When Pylades had come forward to dance Hercules the Madman and had given the impression to some that he was not observing the manner of walking appropriate for a dancer, he put aside his mask and spoke angrily to those who were laughing at him: "idiots, my dancing is supposed to portray a madman". In that same play he even shot arrows at the viewing public. And when he impersonated the same hero at a banquet, at Augustus' request, he stretched his bow and sent arrows. Nor did Augustus take offence at having been placed with respect to Pylades in the same position as the populace of Rome»). Assuming that Augustan librettists would have followed a version close to that of Euripides' play (perhaps even the Euripidean play itself), actions such as mounting a fictitious chariot (*HF* 947f.), striking imaginary horses with an (imaginary?) whip (*HF* 949), eating an insubstantial banquet (*HF* 956f.), wrestling in unreal games and proclaiming oneself victor over no opponent in front of imagined crowds (*HF* 959-62) or even attacking non-existent walls would have provided ample opportunities for dazzling displays of solo dancing. Not surprisingly, Lucian (*Salt.* 41) includes in the pantomimic repertoire Heracles σὺν τοῖς ἄθλοις αὐτοῦ ἅπασιν καὶ ἡ τῶν παίδων σφαγή.

quodcumque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.

Don't let Medea murder the children before the people's gaze or wicked Atreus cook human offal in public or Procne be metamorphosed into a bird or Cadmus into a snake. Anything you show me like that earns my incredulity and disgust.

The space and the action which tragedy allows its audience to glimpse only at a second (or sometimes third) remove through the eyes and perceptual filters of its choruses or other *dramatis personae* (primarily messengers) pantomime freely opens up to the spectator's physical eyesight.

Yet pantomime's blatant deviations from classical tragedy's conventions can only throw partial light on the vexing question of what might have happened to a myth which made the transition from the older genre to the newer. Alongside important changes, some of pantomime's representational techniques seem to exhibit deep-seated continuities with narrative patterns that lay at the core of classical tragedy itself. An anonymous, undated epigram in the *Greek Anthology* (AP 289) in honour of the dancer Xenophon from Smyrna proves particularly instructive at this point, as it mentions a messenger in connection with a pantomime rendition of the story of Dionysus and Pentheus, such as dramatised, for example, in Euripides' *Bacchae*:

Αὐτὸν ὁρᾶν Ἰόβακχον ἐδόξαμεν, ἠνίκα Ληναῖς
ὁ πρέσβυς νεαρῆς ἦρχε χορομανίης,
καὶ Κάδμου τὰ πάρηβα χορεύματα, καὶ τὸν ἀφ' ὕλης
ἄγγελον εὐιακῶν ἰχνηλάτην θιάσων,
καὶ τὴν εὐάζουσαν ἐν αἵματι παιδὸς Ἀγούην
λυσσάδα. φεῦ θεῖης ἀνδρὸς ὑποκρισίης.

We thought we were looking on Bacchus himself when the old man lustily led the maenads in their furious dance, and played Cadmus tripping it in the fall of his years, and the Messenger coming from the forest where he had spied on the rout of the Bacchants, and frenzied Agave exulting in the blood of her son. Heavens! How divine was the man's acting (trans. Paton [1916-1918])²⁸.

The *libretto* which would have accompanied that particular pantomime does not provide for a dance of the maenads themselves or for Pentheus himself being rent to pieces on the stage but for a dancer/messenger required to use his body in order to evoke, conjure, depict and demonstrate the actions and the plight of some of the story's characters. Although this dancer/messenger's gestures must lead the audience to

²⁸ For a full discussion, see GARELLI (2007, 166-68).

"see" Pentheus' final moments by "translating" them into a vocabulary of posture, movement and gesture, his body will never fully and utterly belong to "Pentheus" himself.

How common is the retention of the tragic messenger as a *dramatis persona* in pantomime *libretti* is an unanswerable question. But infinitely more important is the realisation that the element of bodily mediation, the principle of what we might term an "indirect" or "inset" bodily narration which is the linchpin of the tragic messenger's function, was well-embedded in the pantomimic range of bodily techniques as one of the many representational strategies the genre could be expected to deploy. It is an intriguing comment made by Libanius (*Or.* 64, 113) that puts us on alert:

καὶ τὸ μὲν Ἀθηνᾶς δεικνυμένης Ἀθηνᾶν ἐννοεῖν καὶ Ποσειδῶνος Ποσειδῶ καὶ Ἥφαιστου γε Ἥφαιστον οὕτω πάμμεγα, τὸ δὲ δι' Ἀθηνᾶς μὲν τὸν Ποσειδῶ, διὰ δὲ Ἥφαιστου τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν, διὰ δὲ Ἄρεος Ἥφαιστον, διὰ δὲ Γανυμήδους Δία, διὰ δὲ Ἀχιλλέως Πάριν, ταῦτα ποίωιν οὐ γρίφων ἰκανώτερα ψυχὴν ἀκονᾶν;

To form a notion of Athena when Athena is being shown and of Poseidon when he is and Hephaestus in the same manner is no big deal, but to put Poseidon in the mind by way of Athena, and Athena by way of Hephaestus, and Hephaestus through Ares and Zeus through Ganymede and Paris through Achilles – are not these things more suitable to sharpening the mind than any sort of riddle?

Quite apart from being required to impersonate by turns, in proper succession, the many *dramatis personae* involved in a single *fabula* (changing his mask to go with each and every role)²⁹, the pantomime was required to execute choreographies wherein changes of character were meant to happen "in performance" and were merely signalled by appropriate modifications in the range of his own posture, gestures and other bodily movements³⁰. In that way, all the while impersonating a given character on stage, the dancer was able to suggest any number of further figures, so that, by means of the kind of bodily quotations highlighted by Libanius, the genre could present itself as a sophisticated art of indirect corporeal evocation. In this respect then, a vital thread of continuity between tragedy and pantomime can be located in the similarities that link the representational tactics of the tragic messenger with those employed by the pantomime dancer. Just as the tragic messenger uses his voice (and to some extent his body) to give a voice to other, absent characters whose words he quotes, the pantomime dancer uses his own body to give a body (and a corporeal

²⁹ As clearly implied in Lucian, *Salt.* 66.

³⁰ This is brilliantly discussed in WEBB (2008b, 80-85).

voice) to other characters belonging to the same *fabula*, characters not meant to appear independently, in their own right, but only obliquely and partially, called forth by the performer's artistry and skill³¹. Besides, tragic messenger and pantomime dancer are joined by a further link located in the fact that both alike are required to create irresistible, persuasive vision, make the audience «visualise» (*phantazesthai*) whatever their verbal or gestural narratives are meant to represent. In the case of the dancer, few notions recur with greater frequency in our sources than *saphêneia* («clarity») and *enargeia* («vividness»)³², concepts relating to his much prized ability to transform the remote, the absent or bygone into present, tangible reality. The child destined for pantomimic excellence, writes Manilius (*Astron.* V 483-85), «will compel you to see Troy falling here and now / and Priam cut down before your very eyes» (*coetque videre / praesentem Troiam Priamumque ante ora cadentem*). The artistry in question here is comparable to that implied by Libanius, in his praise of pantomime's corporeal evocation of an entire (in this case) pastoral milieu:

ποία γὰρ γραφή, τίς λειμὼν ἥδιον ὀρχήσεως καὶ ὀρχηστοῦ θέαμα περιάγοντος εἰς ἄλσιν τὸν θεατὴν καὶ κατακοιμίζοντος ὑπὸ τοῖς δένδροισιν ἀγέλας βοῶν, αἰπόλια, ποιμνία καὶ τοὺς νομέας ἱστῶντος ἐπὶ φρουρᾷ τῶν θρεμμάτων τοὺς μὲν σύριγγι χρωμένους, τοὺς δὲ αὐλοῦντας ἄλλον ἐν ἄλλοις ἔργοις;

For what painting, what meadow offers a sight more pleasant than pantomime and its dancer, taking the spectator round into groves and lulling him to sleep under the trees, as he evokes herds of cattle, goats and sheep and the shepherds on guard over the nurslings, some playing the pipe and others the flute, as they are occupied with their diverse tasks? (*Or.* 64, 116).

As far as the tragic messenger is concerned, he too was probably expected to produce similar effects. All the while the tragic genre was maturing and evolving, its messenger parts became increasingly demanding and complex; in them were built not only exquisite *pathos*³³ but also elaborate, detailed descriptions, “pictorial” narratives³⁴ with which performers could entice their audiences to “visualise” the events reported, as if

³¹ Obviously, the continuity is infinitely clearer when the pantomime plays the specific named part of a Messenger, as in the *Greek Anthology* epigram discussed above.

³² For «clarity» (*saphêneia*) in the pantomime genre, see above, n. 6. For *enargeia* («vividness», «visualisation», «pictorialism») in pantomime, see, e.g., Aristaenetos, *Ep.* I 26, where a dancer is hailed as the «vivid picture of all nature» (φύσεως ἀπάσης ἐναργῆς ὑπάρχεις εἰκὼν).

³³ See GREEN (1999, 53): «These were the truly histrionic parts, with emotive description of amazement, terror, frustration, sadness»; cf. EASTERLING (2004).

³⁴ See HALL (2007, 282f.).

they were unfolding in their presence. No wonder that from the fourth century BC onwards messenger speeches became the roles the greatest acting stars were after³⁵. As Richard Hunter writes, in Hellenistic tragedy «it is not unreasonable to suppose that messenger-speeches were in fact viewed as particular *loci* for clarity and *enargeia* within drama»³⁶.

The precise pathways taken in the tortuous journey from the older to the newer, more flamboyant form are now irrecoverable, yet some faint traces of "in-between" stops may have been preserved in different, non-performative media, such as the figurative arts, the "images" this volume is concerned with. For I would like to believe that one of our many "missing links" between the predominantly verbal mimetic vividness of a tragic messenger's act and the uniquely corporeal, pictorial mimetic vividness or *enargeia* of the pantomime dancer can be found in the iconographic register of fourth-century BC South-Italian mythological vases, those splendid, large-scale (mostly funerary) artefacts whose pictorial narratives may have a bearing on theatrical re-performances of the Athenian classics in the fourth century BC³⁷. More specifically, it is a particular sub-category of such vases that is crucially important in the context of the present paper, namely some fifty-three vases studied closely by Richard Green³⁸. What is most interesting about them is the recurrent figure of a "little old man" standing somewhere in the picture, often in a speaking gesture, and pointing towards the iconographic representation of events which, in a tragedy bearing on the mythical theme portrayed, would have been included in the narrative of a messenger speech. The clearest example of this *schema* is a famous Apulian vase attributed to the Darius Painter and dated around the 340s BC³⁹. On its lower iconographic register Hippolytus is struggling to control his horses when the bull that is to kill him emerges beneath the horses' front hooves. Behind Hippolytus a gesticulating figure seems to be pointing to the event depicted — the subject of a virtuosic *rhêsis* in the Euripidean play (*Hipp.* 922-1015). Indeed, in Richard Green's persuasive reading of this category of

³⁵ Cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* 816f and *Lys.* 23, 4, with GREEN (1999, 53). Some acting celebrities seem to have built a reputation on their brilliant performance of messenger roles: see Eubulus, fr. 134 K.-A. and *Corpus Paroemiographum Graecorum* [ed. Leutsch and Schneidewin] I 395, on the famous Nicostratus.

³⁶ Hunter in FANTUZZI – HUNTER (2004, 443); in the most extreme of examples, the Hellenistic *Alexandra* by Lycophron consists of one messenger speech «extended to the length of an independent tragedy» (Hunter in FANTUZZI – HUNTER [2004, 439]).

³⁷ See predominantly Taplin's work: TAPLIN (1993; 1997; 1999; 2007).

³⁸ GREEN (1999); cf. CHAMAY – CAMBITOGLOU (1980); EASTERLING (2004).

³⁹ London, British Museum F279, a volute-krater; for pictures, see TAPLIN (2007, 137f.).

vases, the standing Old Man of the Apulian volute-krater is the iconographic pointer to a tragic messenger/actor, reminding us that with the aid of a talented performer classical and post-classical audiences of the Euripidean messenger speech might have been able to evoke in their mind's eye the kind of scene painted on the Apulian vase. The wild controversies raging around these "Western Greek" vases are obviously beyond the scope of this essay⁴⁰, but it can hardly be contested that midway along the path from tragedy to pantomime this and similar fourth-century South-Italian vases open a window on the aesthetic sensibilities and preferences of fourth-century viewers. Viewers who, in clear anticipation of later, Hellenistic and imperial audiences, relished the opportunity to have their imagination aroused and be skilfully guided towards the thrills of full visualisation, so that they could "see" the unseen and experience the absent as present, as pantomime spectators clearly did.

To conclude, then. Although substantially different from those of tragedy, the aesthetics of pantomime dancing can be located in a direct line of descent a) from tendencies deeply entrenched in the classical tragic tradition and b) from the powerful shifts in the sensibilities of listeners and spectators in the early fourth century and especially the subsequent Hellenistic period when, as Richard Hunter writes, aesthetic production celebrates «the extraordinary power of "the mind's eye" to envision the absent»⁴¹. As a harmonious combination of rhythm and music, speech and movement, imagery and tragic myth, pantomime mesmerised thousands of spectators all over the known world until the end of pagan antiquity, when two canons of the Council in Trullo (691/692) gave it the decisive blow⁴².

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⁴⁰ For a critical survey of the disputes, see LADA-RICHARDS (2009).

⁴¹ HUNTER (2003, 487)

⁴² See LADA-RICHARDS (2007, 25).

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