Narratives in Motion: the Art of Dancing Stories in Antiquity and Beyond

Report on an Interdisciplinary Symposium with Scholars and Performers

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Abstract

The purpose of the symposium “Narratives in Motion. The Art of Dancing Stories in Antiquity and Beyond” was to make original contributions to the thriving field of study on ancient Greek and Roman dance by tackling this issue from an angle which is both specific in that it narrows down the focus on dance narrativity across different performance genres, and inclusive in that it encompasses transcultural, transhistorical and practice-based approaches. With eleven talks by classical and dance scholars and two performances by dance artists, the symposium was able to shed light on a range of practices, genres and cultural aspects relating to narrative dance in the ancient and, to a lesser degree, modern world. The event took place on 22-23 June 2018 at the Department of Classics of the University of Vienna, and was sponsored by the FWF-Austrian Science Fund (Project V442-G25 “Aischylos’ diegetisches Drama”).

Keywords

Greek and Roman dance culture – choral dance, pantomime – narrative dance – intermedial and multimodal narratology – dance reenactment – practice-based research on ancient dance

1 Introduction

What motivated me to organize the symposium “Narratives in Motion. The Art of Dancing Stories in Antiquity and Beyond” was the detection of a research void concerning intermedial and multimodal narrative practices in Greek

and Roman performance culture, and especially narrative uses of dance and music.¹ The symposium centred on dance narrativity, that is, on the performance genres, cultural contexts and artistic challenges involved with dancing stories from the archaic until the late antique period. The focus on dance narrativity was also intended to further bridge the gap, which still exists in classical scholarship, between specialists in Greek chorality and specialists in imperial pantomime.

Throughout Greek and Roman antiquity, dance was a key medium for narrating countless stories and myths, alone or in combination with other media. Descriptions of ancient narrative dances punctuate Greek and Latin literature; for example in Xenophon (*Anabasis* 6.1.8-10, *Symposium* 9.4-7), Lucian (*On Dancing* 63), Longus (2.36.1-3), Apuleius (*Methamorphoses* 10.29-33), and Nonnus of Panopolis (*Dionysiaka* 19.136-299). Such descriptions are enlightening in that they document, on the one hand, the complexity of the plots danced, which feature many characters, abound in turning points, and also include abstract (i.e. disembodied) elements, and on the other hand the strong emotional responses which narrative dances elicited from the mesmerised spectator-narratees (by which I mean an audience who are told a narrative by means of dance).

At the same time, such descriptions are only the tip of the iceberg. From the archaic until the end of the late antique period, a wide range of performing arts resorted to dance to add power to storytelling. For example, choral poets such as Alcman, Stesichorus,² Pindar and Bacchylides composed poems full of mythical stories and also choreographed them beautifully. Attic tragedy too was fond of narratives, recounted not only by messengers but also by dancing choruses: Phrynicus and Aeschylus, for instance, as successful 'teachers of choruses' (*chorodidaskaloi*), were praised for creating many dances—"as many ... as waves on the sea in a storm"³—which remained memorable for generations (cf. Aristophanes' *Frogs*). Again, from the imperial period until the end of late antiquity solo pantomimes transposed the mythical repertoire into new kinetic vocabularies, relying very little on verbal language and leaving dance virtually alone and in charge of the storytelling.

Since dance narrativity is still a subject comparatively little studied, not only in the Classics, but also in fields such as Dance Studies and intermedial

1 Cf. Gianvittorio 2012.

2 Finglass 2017.

3 Phrynicus *TrGF* 3 T 13.

narratology,⁴ it was crucial to shed light on it from different perspectives and with different methodologies. To this end, the thematic sections of the conference deliberately juxtaposed contributions from the Classics with transhistorical, cross-cultural and practice-based approaches from the broader field of Dance Studies. On the transhistorical side, the symposium privileged contributions dealing with the reception and vibrant afterlife of ancient Greek and Roman narrative dance from the 18th century until today. On the cross-cultural side, the focus lay on Indian and South-Asian dance traditions, because comparisons with them are—not without reason—especially frequent in studies of ancient pantomime. Finally, the notion—widespread in today's re-enactment studies⁵—that re-performance, and historically informed performances in particular, can engender alternative and productive forms of scholarship, provided an additional reason to welcome practice-based approaches exemplifying the multiform engagement of today's dance and theatre artists with Greek and Roman dance. An interdisciplinary format of this kind proved to be quite stimulating: it not only facilitated the transfer of theoretical and methodological insights across disciplines which have seldom interacted thus far, but also, at a more fundamental level, it helped those present to conceive of (ancient) dance narrativity as a research topic on its own.

The papers and performances were arranged into four thematic sections: 1) Dance as a medium for narrative, 2) Pantomime and its legacy, 3) Interplay of content and form, and 4) On stage. Each section tackled its own issue by comprising contributions from the fields of Classics and of Dance Studies in order to encourage transhistorical and transcultural comparisons and to enhance interdisciplinary exchange. What follows will summarise the main outcomes of each section by relying on the materials submitted by the participants and on my notes and pictures from the symposium.

2 Dance as a Medium for Narrative

The opening section sought to underpin the issue of dance narrativity theoretically, i.e. to understand better what enables dance not only to transpose complex narratives from other (usually language-based) media, but also, on occasion, to empower them. Though present in other contributions as well,

4 For exceptions see Royce 1984, Foster 1996 and 2005, Mackrell 1997, Brandstetter 2001, Thurner 2007 and 2017; on ancient dance narrativity see Schlappbach 2009, Gianvittorio 2016 and 2019, Weiss 2018.

5 E.g. Franko 2018; Dorf 2019.

theoretical and methodological reflection on this subject was central to two papers in particular which examined case studies from the imperial period (Schlapbach) and from the 18th till the 21st century (Bührle).

In *Making Sense in Dance*, Karin Schlapbach (Université de Fribourg, Philologie Classique) addressed first the notion of narrative dance itself. She pointed out that we probably depart from the Platonic distinction between drama (1st person) and narration (3rd person) when we call dance practices involving impersonation 'narrative'. This term seems to privilege the plotline over the dancer-impersonator and is in itself revealing of how little we know about how exactly dancers tell stories. The bulk of the paper explored possible connections between non-representational forms of expression in dance and the construction of a narrative through dance. Expanding on her recent monograph⁶ and discussing texts from the imperial and Christian periods (e.g. *Acts of John*), Schlapbach argued that, just at the time when the eminently narrative genre of pantomime dominated the stages, a strong interest in non-representational dance emerged in literary sources, especially novels; such texts linger on how virtuoso and acrobatic dancers would emotionally engage the spectators, awakening their desire and sense of wonder. According to Schlapbach, this circumstance points to the ancients' awareness that non-narrative dance elements with a strong emotional impact on the spectators could be turned into tools for narrative dancing, which helped the spectator-narratees to better grasp complex or elusive contents by prodding them into embodied cognition.

While taking a different approach, Julia I. Bührle (University of Oxford, Faculty of English) enquired about the potential of dance to narrate stories with tools of its own—and she too could rely in this task on an important monograph.⁷ With her talk on *Generic Transformations: Dancing Shakespeare from the 18th Century to the Present*, Bührle posed fundamental questions about the supposed conditions and staged experiments of transposing narratives from drama into libretti and from libretti into dance, and paid special attention to the intermedial and transgeneric aspects involved. From this perspective, she examined several ballets based on Shakespeare's plays in the past three centuries, analysed the criteria according to which certain plots have been regarded as more suitable for ballet than others, and considered the significant changes made by librettists and choreographers in the face of artistic, political, and financial factors. This allowed her to explore an impressive range of choreographic strategies developed to transpose Shakespeare's plots from page to stage, and to compare different ballet versions of the same play (e.g. *Romeo*

⁶ Schlapbach 2018.

⁷ Bührle 2014.

and *Juliet* in the versions of John Cranko and of Rudolf Nureyev). Remarkably, Bührlé thus elucidated transposition and adaptation processes which are also relevant to ancient narrative dance, whose plots were often adapted from different media and genres (e.g. from epics into tragedy and from tragedy into pantomime).

3 Pantomime and Its Legacy

A section of the symposium was devoted to ancient pantomime and included insights into pantomime's legacy in the ballet reforms of the 18th century. A section on pantomime was necessary, not only given the huge popularity which this genre enjoyed from the imperial until the end of the late antique period, but also because of the comparatively recent surge of interest in it: over the past two decades, Graeco-Roman pantomime has been analysed in its religious, economical, semiotic and literary aspects, which together shed light on the dance culture of which this genre was part and parcel.⁸

In this context, the ties linking imperial pantomime and the rhetorical discourses of the Second Sophistic have been repeatedly pointed out.⁹ Marie-Hélène Garelli (Université Toulouse 11, Langues et littératures anciennes) offered new insights into them with a talk on *The Emotional, Cultural and Social Role of Narrative Dancing in the Representation of Graeco-Roman Pantomime*. This explored overlapping areas in ancient discourses about pantomime and about rhetoric, especially lingering on their points of contact at the terminological, gestural and cultural level. For example, Garelli pointed out how pantomimic performances were expected to showcase attributes which were also key to the narrative sections of ancient orations and oratorical exercises (*progymnasmata* / *praeexercitamina*), and how the plot of pantomime dances and the narrative section of orations were actually called the same, namely *διήγημα* (or more seldom *ιστορία*) in Greek and *narratio* in Latin. Libanius (*On Behalf of the Dancers* 112) may well be exaggerating when, in holding that a god “introduced dance as a form of instruction for the masses in the deeds of the ancients”, he adds that “now a goldsmith will converse not badly with someone from the schools about the houses of Priam and Laius”, yet the stories danced by pantomimes, just like those told by orators, ultimately served the double purpose of entertaining and of educating large audiences.

⁸ Pantomime has been the subject of a number of recent studies, also authored by the participants in our symposium: e.g. Garelli 2007, Webb 2008, Schlapbach 2018.

⁹ E.g. Garelli 2007, Lada-Richards 2007, Schlapbach 2008.

The active role and the education of the spectator-narratees who were to make sense of pantomimes were also central in the contribution offered by Ruth Webb (Université Lille 3, Département langues et cultures antiques), entitled *Narrative, Action, and the Role of the Audience in Ancient Pantomime*. Webb's emphasis was on the rendering of multi-character narratives through pantomime. She particularly considered ancient discourses about kinesthetic skills and techniques which allow the solo dancer not only to transform himself or herself from one character into another in full view of the spectators (e.g. Lucian *On Dance* 67, *Planudean Anthology* 289), but also, and more sophisticatedly, to allude to one character while actually impersonating another (cf. Libanius *On Behalf of the Dancers* 113-14). As to this last point, to exemplify possible renderings of multi-layered characterization, Webb called attention to Kathak dancers who portray one character (e.g. Gopi) as being in the act of thinking of another (e.g. Krishna). Here as on other occasions, the interdisciplinary format of the symposium offered a valuable opportunity to discuss comparisons between ancient pantomime and Indian dance with experts of both subjects. Webb too (cf. Garelli) remarked on the educational value of pantomime, though from a different angle: since the dancer's impersonation of, transformation into, and allusion to different characters constantly needed to be interpreted by perceptive spectators, reading through dance sharpened their minds—as Libanius claims, better than solving riddles.

Karin Fenböck (Universität Salzburg, Fachbereich Kunst-, Musik- und Tanzwissenschaft) added transhistorical depth to discussions of pantomime and of pantomimic renderings of plot and characters with a contribution on *Gesture as a Means of Portraying Characters in Viennese Mid-Eighteenth Century Ballet*. This was an investigation of how, during their productive stays in Vienna, the choreographers Hilverding (1710-1768), Angiolini (1731-1803), and Noverre (1727-1810) conceptualized and used pantomime-like gestures, attitudes and frozen poses to stage their characters and stories (which, by the way, were often inspired by classical mythology). By the mid-18th century, baroque displays of symmetry and synchronized movement had turned out to be unsatisfactory, and enlightened ballet masters choose to look not only at drama but also at ancient pantomime to revitalise dance. Increasingly complex plots began to be staged, and gestural renderings of characters—that is, the characters' actions, inner life and mutual interactions—became key to ballet. In this context, forerunners and pioneers of *ballet d'action* re-read ancient sources on dance (especially Lucian's *On Dance*) with a keen interest, regarding them as inspirational for the training of dancer-actors and for creating kinesthetic vocabularies in which the dance-encoded meanings were not only varied and detailed enough for dramatic purposes, but also clear-cut and, supposedly, immediately

understandable to the spectators. Their notions of ancient dance were to profoundly influence later theories and practices of narrative ballet.

The theoretical, historical and transhistorical reflection on pantomime was rounded off by the performance given by professional dancer Emily May, alumna of Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (London) and network member of the project Ancient Dance in Modern Dancers (TORCH-The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities, University of Oxford), which researches kinesthetic engagement with ancient literary and iconographic sources by reenacting *tragoedia saltata*. In 2017, inspired by her collaboration with the classical scholars of ADMD and by the study of ancient works of art representing body movement at the Ashmolean Museum, May choreographed the solo *Deluge*, based on the flood narrative of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. At the symposium, May introduced her own methods, explaining in particular how wearing a blank mask had influenced her proprioception and body movements in unexpected ways, and eventually re-danced *Deluge* masked and bare-footed (Figure 1). *Deluge* constantly interacts with ancient iconographic

FIGURE 1 Emily May dances *Deluge* in the Library of Classics of the University of Vienna on June 22, 2018

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

documents without attempting to conceal numerous elements from contemporary dance. It literally held up before our eyes the spell and aesthetic appeal of danced narratives as well as the challenge of encoding complex narratives in dance. It was exciting to witness the means by which May rendered abstract and disembodied aspects of Ovid's narrative and how she experimented with pantomime-like hand gestures, for example to mark the points at which the dancer's impersonation switches from one character to another (cf. Webb). For scholars familiar with the texts danced and with ancient sources about dance, experiencing performances such as May's and, later, Gilliam's as spectators almost inevitably calls to mind specific passages and elicits a richer (and more embodied) understanding of them.

4 Interplay of Content and Form

Relying on the notion, first popularized by M. McLuhan and generally unquestioned in today's media studies,¹⁰ that media tend to inform messages instead of conveying them neutrally, the third section of our symposium considered the mutual influences and coalescences between narrative contents and dance forms. While Julia I. Bührle, in considering the transposition of Shakespeare's plots into libretti and into ballet, had already provided good examples of this phenomenon, this section was to look more closely at samples of its manifestations to better understand how narrative contents and dance forms actually interacted and merged across different practices of ancient dance. Relevant questions included, for example: How would certain narratives and characters pave the way to the related choreographic renderings (Peponi)? What exactly made ancient dance 'mimetic', i.e. apt to represent specific plot events and characters (Bocksberger)? And what happens when ancient narratives are translated into non-emic dance vocabularies (Zarifi-Sistovari)?

We plunged into the issue with a talk on *Narratives of Desire and the Missing Pas de Deux*, offered by Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi (University of Stanford, Department of Classics). Peponi compared archaeological sources and literary narratives representing eroticism, privileging for the literary sources those which were either directly concerned with dance or otherwise put emphasis on body and movement. For example, she juxtaposed narratives about Boreas' abduction of Oreithyia (cf. Lucian *On Dance* 40) with a number of vase paintings and bas-reliefs (including the Nesebar Hydria found in 2010) depicting this or similar erotic narratives featuring a woman's abduction. Thanks to this

¹⁰ See e.g. Doloughan 2011.

multi-medial reading, Peponi could not only enlighten overt and covert kinesthetic aspects of the texts considered, but also argue that choral and solo dance (the two prevailing dance registers of Greek and Roman antiquity) could sideline practices of duet dancing or ancient versions of *pas de deux* to better fit erotic narratives. Indeed, the trans-historical comparison between ancient iconographic renderings of heterosexual eroticism and modern *pas de deux* of loving pairs showed unexpected similarities—not necessarily in actual poses and steps but in the exploitation of body language to represent the lovers' feelings, intentions and mutual relationship.¹¹

The contribution of Sophie M. Bocksberger (University of Oxford, Department of Classics), entitled *Pure Dance and Narrative Dance in Xenophon's Symposium*, continued the examination of lovers' duets in ancient dance and of the relationships between representational and non-representational dance (cf. Schlapbach). Of the three dance performances described in Xenophon's *Symposium*, two appear to be non-narrative, while the third vividly enacts the love story of Dionysus and Ariadne. On the basis of these and other passages from Xenophon, Aristoxenus and Aristophanes, Bocksberger re-thought the much-debated notions of *φορὰ* and *σχῆμα* to argue that while *φορὰ* connoted the dance step or pose in a general and abstract fashion, *σχῆμα* usually referred to practices of mimetic dance and character impersonation which required the actor-dancer to adjust his or her own body, bearing and movements to those of the character. This impersonation-based understanding of *σχῆμα* emphasized the quintessentially dramatic quality of ancient dance and was illustrated with striking examples from modern ballet. To mention just one example, Bocksberger looked at the *σχῆμα* of the rooster dance by Phrynichus (described in Aristophanes' *Wasps*) from an intriguingly new perspective after considering ballet renderings of chickens' movements, such as the chicken dance in Frederick Ashton's *La Fille Mal Gardée*.

The advantages of combining practice-based and scholarly approaches in the study of ancient narrative dance were fully exploited by Yana Zarifi-Sistovari, artistic co-director (with M.J. Coldiron) of Thiasos Theatre Company, which for decades now has staged Greek plays to the delight of audiences and critics alike, and honorary member of the APGRD at the University of Oxford. The lecture-demonstration *Synergies—A Cross-Cultural Approach* gave valuable insights into the artistic and research goals and methods of Thiasos

11 An expanded version of Peponi's contribution will be published as a chapter of her book in progress *Dance and Aesthetic Perception in the Greek and Graeco-Roman World*.

and also, with the help of Shelby L. Gilliam, actual demonstrations drawn from the 2018 staging of Euripides' *Bacchae*. As explained by Zarifi-Sistovari, Thiasos reinterprets Greek theatre dance by borrowing performance vocabularies from Indian Bharatanatyam, Indonesian Jaipongan¹² and others. On the one hand, such performance traditions offer living examples of the culturally motivated combination of mask, song, dance and drama, and on the other their rich dance and gestural repertoires allow us to transpose almost literally the contents and meanings of Greek tragic songs. Far from being dictated by a taste for pure eclecticism, the fusion of Indian, Indonesian and ancient Greek elements relies on cultural analogies and on a larger dance-based translation project (translation of poems into dance, of different dance vocabularies into one another, etc.). Two striking examples of this ambitious work were shown in video footage and critically discussed, namely an excerpt from Euripides' *Medea* performed by Bharatanatyam dancer Ash Mukherjee, and parts of choral odes from Euripides' *Hippolytos* set to Jaipongan.

5 On Stage

Effectively introduced by Zarifi-Sistovari, the fourth and final section of the symposium lingered on narrative dances choreographed for theatrical stages, i.e. having specific plays, plots and characters in mind. Again, cross-cultural comparisons with classical (Ganser) and modern (Purkayastha) Indian dance were privileged because they seem particularly apt to bridge our cultural distance from ancient narrative dance.

Attic tragedy was a natural starting point here. In *Imagining the Suppliants: Stage Directions and Choral Formations*, Nicole Heitzinger (Universität Salzburg, Fachbereich Kunst-, Musik- und Tanzwissenschaft) searched the text of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* for information not only about stage movements, as in the case of the choral dances by the altars and statues of the gods, but also about imagined movements, as in the case of the narratives recapitulating the offstage wanderings of the chorus and of their ancestor Io. Heitzinger argued that together, the two interacting yet never overlapping movement registers shaped an expanded and mythically interwoven tragic topography. This topography could transpose onto the Athenian stage not only the coast near Argos, where the play is set, and the city of Argos, where the offstage action takes place, but also vast geographical regions around the Mediterranean Sea, across which the pursued maidens and Io have fled in different directions. Heitzinger

¹² Jaipongan is a mixture of Balinese and Javanese dance movements.

also reflected on how changing choral formations could underline the shifting identities of the chorus, which the spectators saw turning from suppliants into threatening and potentially lethal guests, and from disoriented girls obeying their father into rebels who challenge the authority of King Pelasgus.

Of the three concluding contributions, two covered different periods in the long history of Indian dance theatre, the first re-considering classical forms of (solo) dance drama which have often been compared to imperial pantomime (Ganser), and the second analysing the dance dramas of Rabindranath Tagore (Purkayastha), whose cultural and political use of dance drama illuminated an essential aspect of ancient dance culture, namely dance politicization. Finally, performance samples (Gilliam) demonstrated the working methods of scholars, practitioners, and scholar-practitioners who are committed to transposing ancient plays into choreography and stage movement.

In *Incomplete Mimesis, or When Indian Dance Started to Narrate Stories*, Elisa Ganser (Universität Zürich, Asien-Orient-Institut) challenged the widespread assumption that traditional Indian performance genres representing plots by means of body movement were originally conceived of as forms of dance theatre. Actually, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a monumental treatise on theatre written during the first centuries of the common era, only distinguished between *nāṭya*, which encompassed the dramatic text and its stage performance through various theatrical arts (including dance), and *nṛtta*, beautiful body movement devoid of narrative or mimetic function: it therefore appears that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* does not distinguish between narrative dance and theatre. It was only in the 10th century that taxonomies of performance genres came to isolate a category called *nṛtya*, which can be conceived of as a middle-ground between the drama of *nāṭya* and the pure dance of *nṛtta*. In his monumental commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta (11th century) further conceptualized what we may today call narrative dance without adopting the new category of *nṛtya*. In the light of this and other philological evidence, Ganser reflected on the theoretical problems which emerged, especially for Abhinavagupta, when new performance practices started to modify the traditional performance landscape and genre system, and with them scholars' perception of narrative dance and its mimetic purpose.¹³

On the modern side of Indian dance, Prarthana Purkayastha (Centre for Asian Theatre and Dance, Royal Holloway University of London) gave us insights into the dramaturgic and choreographic work of Nobel laureate poet, playwright and musician Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a major representative of the Bengali performance culture, with a talk on *Nation, Woman and*

13 Cf. Ganser 2013 and Ganser (forthcoming).

Narrative in The Dance-Dramas of Tagore. Building on current postcolonial scholarship, Purkayastha examined how Tagore's dance dramas reworked subjects from traditional Indian narratives to reflect on modern concepts such as 'nation' and 'woman' through hybrid forms of dance drama and performance. This procedure, and the important role which female pupils and dancers (such as Mrinalini Sarabhai) played in it, was exemplified by three of Tagore's 'proto-feminist' dance dramas, namely *Chitrangada* (1936), *Chandalika* (1938) and *Shyama* (1939). Crucially, it was through hybrid dance forms that Tagore—in the spirit of twentieth-century Indian discourses about cultural and political nationalism, internationalism and transnationalism—staged his cultural and political resistance to the British Empire as well as to Indian nationalism and anti-colonial violence. While opening a window on dance works which are little known to classical scholars, the work of dance scholars like Purkayastha can help classical scholars enhance their awareness of the manifold political uses of dance in the Greek and Roman world,¹⁴ by demonstrating how dance and other forms of soft power contribute to political agendas.¹⁵

The fourth section, and with it the symposium, was crowned by the stunning performance given by Shelby L. Gilliam (Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices and Thiasos Theatre Company), an actor-dancer-singer who was also trained at the Gardzienice Company of Theatre Practices in the dance language of *cheironomiae* (Figure 2). Her demonstration *Essay in Maenadic Dance—Embodying Iconography* explored sounds and movement in maenadic rituals and provided glimpses into Thiasos' *Bacchae* (Oxford 2017, Gardzienice 2018). In the spirit of Thiasos, the trance phenomena to which Euripides' *Bacchantes* refer were studied from multiple cross-cultural perspectives; accordingly, their physical and acoustic expressions were enriched with elements such as influences from rituals of Afro-Brazilian Candomblé and Sardinian *launed-das* (woodwind instruments used as substitutes for the Greek *auloi*).¹⁶ Gilliam's impressive re-enactment relied on the notion that the maenadic dances performed on the Greek stage were inevitably inspired by maenadic cults, and

14 To mention just a few examples, one may think of the civic functions of ancient choruses, of the institutionalization and legislation regarding ancient theatre and dance, and of the ways in which Hellenistic, Republican and Imperial politicians resorted to dancing bodies for representational and propaganda purposes, etc.

15 For a quite recent example see Croft 2015.

16 In *The Bacchae*, as in other Thiasos productions, key features were the blend of intercultural music, which was the brilliant work of composer Manuel Jimenez, and the central role of the chorus, choreographed by Glen Snowden and Sasha Milavic-Davies and led by Shelby L. Gilliam herself. Thiasos' *The Bacchae* was enthusiastically received by audience and critics alike: e.g. Macintosh 2018.

FIGURE 2 Shelby L. Gilliam performs a tragic dance in the Library of Classics of the University of Vienna on June 23, 2018

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

at the same time on Thiasos' re-interpretation of many iconographic and literary sources about actual and imagined maenadic performances (including the *parodos* of Euripides' *Bacchantes*). This mesmerising synergy of rhythmical, musical, verbal, postural and gestural languages embodied the often elusive notion of Greek *choreia*.

6 Conclusion

The thriving field of study concerning Greek and Roman dance exhibits distinct research focuses on choral dance in classical Greece and on Imperial pantomime. *Narratives in Motion. The Art of Dancing Stories in Antiquity and Beyond* sought to contribute to this field of study by investigating dance narrativity as an element which is shared by choral dance and pantomime and relevant to the different dance cultures of which these genres partook. To this end, the symposium tried to bridge the cultural and experiential gap which separates today's Western scholars from (past and present) narrative dance with the invaluable help of dance historians, dance practitioners engaged in research on ancient dance, and experts of those performance cultures in which narrative dance is still widely practised.

Narrative dance can hardly be considered a widespread cultural practice nor as a routine experience for today's Western audiences: the forms with which most of us are familiar are limited in both number and variety, and even attending the occasional *Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake* ballet can be a rare treat for the non-specialists. Unfamiliarity may very well be one reason why two major scholarly 'turns' of recent decades, namely the narrative and the performative turn, have missed good chances to explore dance narrativity—so much so that leading experts in intermedial narratology, in apparent oblivion of yesterday's and today's practices of dancing stories all around the world, have recently minimised the narrative potential of dance altogether.¹⁷ Classical scholarship too seems to have underestimated the subject, in spite of the fortunate circumstance that Greek and Roman evidence about arts, tastes and practices relating to dancing stories abounds: it is significant, though hardly remarked upon, that the vast majority of Greek and Latin literary sources concerning dance come from or comment on forms and practices of narrative dancing—one might think for example of the frequent remarks on dance and dancers which punctuate choral and dramatic poems of the classical period, of the scholia commenting on such remarks, of the moral and religious issues raised by Christian authors with regard to mime and pantomime, and so forth. In telling contrast, and in support of the view that scholars tend to investigate phenomena they have experienced, dance scholars and practitioners of the 18th and 19th centuries, who lived during the heyday of programmatically narrative dance genres such as the *ballet pantomime* and *ballet d'action*, were quite obsessed with the narrativity of Graeco-Roman dance and pantomime.¹⁸

Dance narrativity is a little studied yet rewarding subject which allows us to do two important things at the same time, namely deepen our understanding of Greek and Roman dance cultures and look at ancient dance across traditional generic boundaries. A selection of the contributions presented at the symposium will be published in a volume edited by the author of this report and by K. Schlapbach, tentatively entitled *Choreonarratives. Dancing Stories in Graeco-Roman Antiquity and Beyond*.

¹⁷ Ryan 2014, 25.

¹⁸ See Winter 1974, 45-67; Nordera 1992; Brandstetter 2015, 38-88; Lada-Richards 2010.

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