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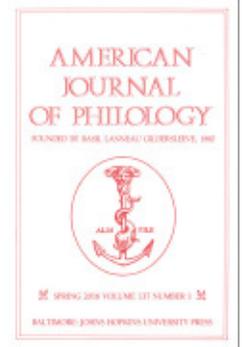
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DANCING TREES: OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES* AND THE IMPRINT OF PANTOMIME DANCING

ISMENE LADA-RICHARDS



Abstract. This article argues that Ovid's arborization narratives in the *Metamorphoses* would have been more meaningful, enjoyable, and rich for imperial readers able to visualize them off the page, against the cultural back-cloth of the contemporary stage, that is to say, the pantomime stage, where arboreal transformations were part of the routine repertoire of the star dancers. Ovid's tales of tree-metamorphosis may well have been informed, even if subliminally, by his active recollection of or subconscious familiarity with real-life, danced choreographies for pantomimic transformations into trees.

AN INCREASINGLY VISIBLE STRAND OF SCHOLARSHIP ON OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES* reads the poem side by side with the corporeal dialects of pantomime dancing,¹ the ballet style form of stage entertainment that took the Augustan world by storm in the last decades of the first century B.C.E. All the while Ovid was crafting and polishing his verses,² Pylades from Cilicia and Bathyllus from Alexandria—dancers and choreographers of prodigious talent, entrepreneurial astuteness, and bold artistic vision³—were busy turning the manifold traditions of dancing already in existence in the capital⁴ into a lavish, multimedia extravaganza that

¹The seeds for a pantomime-inflected reading of the *Metamorphoses* should be sought in Galinsky's voluminous work on Ovid and Augustan culture (see primarily Galinsky 1975, 68; 1996, 265; 1999, 104). For brief pointers in the same direction, see Habinek 2002, 47, 52, 53; Garelli 2007, 313, 354; Lada-Richards 2007, 54; 2010, 255–56. For more substantial contributions, see Richlin 1992; Ingleheart 2008; Lada-Richards 2013.

²Ovid may have begun the composition of the *Metamorphoses* even before the completion of his amatory works, that is to say before 2 C.E. At the time of his exile (8 C.E.), Ovid claimed (*Tr.* 1.7.13–14) that the poem was unfinished.

³See Ath. 20d; Jer. *Chron.*, on the year 22 B.C.E. (*PL* 27. 553–54); Zosim. 1.6.1; entries in the *Suda* under “Athenodorus,” “pantomime dancing” and “Pylades.” Ancient sources for the career of Pylades and Bathyllus are listed in Bonaria 1955–56, 50–55; 1959, 231, 237–39; for the sources with a brief discussion, see Leppin 1992, 217–18, 284–85.

⁴The first century B.C.E. in particular experienced an ever-increasing visibility of dancing, ranging from the kind of social dancing castigated in Cicero's orations as the

welded orchestral music, sung narrative, *hypokrisis*,⁵ and dance into an organic whole.

However, the link between Ovid's poem and Augustan pantomime extends far beyond mere synchronicity.⁶ As I have shown in recent work, Ovid's epic shares with danced drama "not just a fixed concentration on the body but also the time span its narratives cover⁷ and, above all, a world of ever-morphing, fluid forms and shifting, transient, labile identities" (Lada-Richards 2013, 117). Indeed, stories of *metamorphosis* held a special position in both the pantomime genre's thematic repertoire⁸ and Ovid's epic which, just as much as pantomime, tells of bodies changed or changing into novel shapes.⁹ The present article focuses on one particular subset of Ovid's narratives of bodily change in the *Metamorphoses*, the thematic cluster centering on human transformation into vegetative nature. It sets out to explore the proposition that for many among Ovid's

climax of debauchery (e.g., *Mur.* 13) to stage dancing as a topic of fashionable sympotic talk (Hor. *Sat.* 2.6.71–72) to the expressive, seductive and possibly lascivious swaying of the so-called *emboliariae*, "entr'acte female dancers," either soloists or *corps de ballet* girls performing in dance interludes on stage or in private functions (see Wiseman 1985a, 26–53; Starks 2008). On first century B.C.E. mimetic dancing in Rome involving mythical figures and themes, see Wiseman 2008a, 214; 2014 (examining neglected scraps of evidence on the early history of pantomime in Rome).

⁵See, e.g., Luc. *Salt.* 65: ἡ δὲ πλείστη διατριβὴ καὶ ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς ὀρχηστικῆς ἡ ὑπόκρισις ἐστίν ("the chief preoccupation and the aim of dancing is impersonation").

⁶Although pantomime dancing had a remarkably protracted period of gestation in both the east and west of the Mediterranean basin (for a historical sketch, see Garelli 2007, 147–208, and briefly Lada-Richards 2007, 19–28), the watershed moment of a decisive crystallization of aesthetic dancing into a distinct, self-conscious art seems to have taken place in Augustan Rome (cf. Lucian, *Salt.* 34; see primarily Jory 1981). Whatever the landmark innovations of Pylades and Bathyllus consisted in (cf. Jory 2004), they were certainly catalytic for the formation of a genre of immeasurable artistic power.

⁷According to Lucian, the scope of pantomime's subject matter extends chronologically "from chaos and the first beginnings of the world . . . to the story of the Egyptian Cleopatra" (*Salt.* 37), a time span "startlingly similar to Ovid's *primaque ab origine mundi ad mea . . . tempora* (*Met.* 1.3–4)" (Galinsky 1975, 68–69); cf. Habinek 2002, 53; Ingleheart 2008, 209–10.

⁸Lucian stipulates that the well-equipped dancer "will not ignore the totality of mythical metamorphoses, as many as changed into trees or beasts or birds and those women who turned into men, I mean Caeneus and Teiresias and their like" (οὐκ ἀγνοήσει δὲ καὶ τὰς μυθικὰς μεταμορφώσεις ἀπάσας, ὅσοι εἰς δένδρα ἢ θηρία ἢ ὄρνεα ἠλλάγησαν καὶ ὅσαι ἐκ γυναικῶν ἄνδρες ἐγένοντο, τὸν Καυνέα λέγω καὶ τὸν Τειρεσίαν καὶ τοὺς τοιοῦτους, *Salt.* 57).

⁹Scholars have nevertheless commented on the "undervaluation of the thematic centrality of transformation" in studies of the *Metamorphoses* (Feldherr 2002, 164; cf. Martindale 2005, 200–217). According to Hardie 2002, 4, the move of metamorphosis "to centre stage as a dominant trope of Ovidian criticism" is a recent phenomenon.

ancient readers his narratives of arborification felt infinitely more palpable because they were “enriched”¹⁰ by such readers’ conscious or subconscious memory of magical metamorphoses taking place on the pantomime stage, where arboreal transformations were part of the routine repertoire of pantomime dancers. The significance of reading the hybrid, “generically uncategorizable”¹¹ poem that is Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* through the lens of pantomime dancing is incalculable. Not only does it open up fresh possibilities for the appreciation of Augustan poetry, it also urges us to radically rethink and re-examine our assumptions regarding the convergence of art forms as well as the vigorous interbreeding between elite and popular culture taking place in Augustan Rome. To the extent that the *Metamorphoses* prove hospitable to pantomime-inflected readings, the dancer’s “marvelous art”¹² may yet prove an inextricable part of the intellectual history and literary production of early imperial Rome.

DANCING TREES: THE PANTOMIME’S REPERTOIRE

Five transformations of humans into trees in Ovid’s poem are described at significant length and in what Richlin 1992, 165, calls the poet’s “favorite tactic,” namely, “to trace the metamorphosis step by slow step”—*paulatim*. With persistent, “slow motion” focusing on body parts as they undergo their momentous changes, Daphne (*Met.* 1.548–56), the Heliades (2.346–66), Dryope (9.349–93), Myrrha (10.489–502), and the Thracian women (11.67–84) can be seen to evolve into laurel, poplar, lotus, myrrh, and oak trees, respectively.¹³ The element of codification in this thematic cluster is striking. All the metamorphic subjects share a similar experience: feet growing rigid (*deriguisse pedes*, 2.348), taking root and being immobilized in the ground (*haeserunt radice pedes*, 9.351);¹⁴ skin changing into bark

¹⁰I borrow the notion of “enrichment” from Taplin 2007, where it is used to refer to the enhancement of an addressee’s experience of a work of art by means of his or her prior familiarity with sources of information that lie outside it; although not indispensable for the addressee’s primary act of comprehension, such information adds further depth and layering to the work’s enjoyment and appreciation.

¹¹So Feeney 2004, xxiv; cf. Kenney 1986, xciii; 2009, 148.

¹²*Latin Anthology* I.1 [Shackleton Bailey] 100, 9; *mirabilis ars*.

¹³To these may be added, at a lesser scale, Philemon and Baucis (*Met.* 8.714–20); Cyparissus (10.136–40); Clytie (4.266–70). The charming little interlude in Book 1.687–712, narrating the story of Syrinx, the beautiful Naiad transformed into marsh-reeds in her attempt to escape the lecherous advances of Pan, deserves separate treatment.

¹⁴See *Met.* 1.551 (Daphne); 2.346–49, 351 (Heliades); 4.266 (Clytie); 9.351 (Dryope); 10.490–91 (Myrrha); 11.69–72 (Edonides).

(10.494) which gradually surrounds or encases the body, with waist, breast and shoulders becoming inch by inch wooden¹⁵ and lips falling silent;¹⁶ arms lengthening into branches (*in ramos brachia crescunt*, 1.550)¹⁷ and fingers into twigs (10.494); hair changing into leaves (*in frondem crines*, 1.550) that cover the entire head (*frondes caput omne tenebant*, 9.355);¹⁸ and, testifying to Ovid's sensitivity to the innermost voices of the body, blood changing into sap (*sanguis it in sucos*, 10.493). Moreover, as is the case with a great number of the stories told in the *Metamorphoses*, there is an identifiable link to pantomime *fabulae* in three (possibly four) of the transformation narratives mentioned above,¹⁹ with the stories of Daphne and Phaethon in particular providing some of the best known and most enduring pantomime topics in antiquity.

Starting with Daphne, the story of Apollo's chase and the nymph's arboreal transformation is pre-Ovidian, although the earliest extant source, Parthenius' *Sufferings in Love*, takes us no further back than the first century B.C.E. (Lightfoot 1999, 471). Here, Daphne is said to have "fled with great alacrity" (μάλα ἐρρωμένως ἔφευγεν) and to have asked Zeus to be allowed to divest herself of her mortal frame. Parthenius concludes with the information that the girl was said to have become (γενέσθαι) the tree named after her, the laurel (δάφνην; Parth. *Amat. Narr.* fr.15.4). Whether Parthenius himself ever versified this love-cum-transformation tale in his own *Metamorphoses* we will never know.²⁰ Most important in the context of this article, however, is the fact that Daphne's transformation was still danced on pagan stages at the turn of the sixth century C.E., as emerges very clearly from the *Homilies* of Jacob of Sarugh. All the while fulminating against the stage and its devilish distractions, this fiery bishop of Batnae on the upper Euphrates provides us with gems of

¹⁵ See *Met.* 1.549 (Daphne); 2.353–55 (Heliades); 9.352–53, 388–89 (Dryope); 10.495–96 (Myrrha); 11.82–83 (Edonides).

¹⁶ See *Met.* 2.363 (Heliades); 8.718–19 (Philemon and Baucis); 9.388 (Dryope).

¹⁷ See *Met.* 2.352 (Heliades); 10.493 (Myrrha); 11.83–84 (Edonides); cf. 10.137: Cyparissus' limbs started (*coeperunt*) to turn green.

¹⁸ See *Met.* 1.552 (Daphne); 2.350–51 (Heliades); 9.354–55 (Dryope); cf. 10.138–40 (Cyparissus).

¹⁹ Daphne: Luc. *Salt.* 48 (Δάφνης φυγή); Liban. *Or.* 64.67; *AP* 11.255 (Palladas); Jacob of Sarugh (see p. 135 below). Phaethon: Luc. *Salt.* 55. Myrrha: *Salt.* 58 (Καὶ ἐν Φοινίκῃ δὲ Μύρραν . . . εἴσεται, regarding the range of mythological knowledge required by an aspiring pantomime). The story of the Edonides might have been included in the mythological cluster of Orphic themes (e.g., Orpheus' dismemberment) mentioned in *Salt.* 51 as "essential" to the aspiring dancer.

²⁰ For a brief survey of the different versions of Daphne's tale, see Forbes-Irving 1990, 261–63.

information concerning the kind of spectacles that were popular towards the end of the pagan world in the eastern regions. In *Homily 5*, pouring venom over the “worthless spectacles which are mimed in dancing” (Folio 21 verso a), he singles out for special vituperation the loves and transformations of the gods, lingering the most on Apollo’s amatory chase and Daphne’s arborification. The pantomimic *fabulae* Jacob has in mind must have been conflating metamorphosis with the more widely attested version of the myth which had Daphne swallowed up by her mother, Earth, in response to her appeal for help,²¹ so that the tree becomes “a *substitute* for the vanished Daphne, not Daphne in another form” (Otis 1966, 351; trans. Hall and Wyles 2008, 418):

And this very god [Apollo] loved a maiden [Daphne], and his lust was poured out after him . . . [Folio 22 recto b] . . . because she would not do his bidding. And the god, they say, was running, but was not overtaking the girl; and when she was fleeing from before him, he was not able to catch her. But perhaps he was weary and was [therefore] unable to overtake her. According to their tale, a maiden was beating the gods at running. And afterwards, they say, the earth defeated [the intention of] the god so that she was transformed. And he [sc. Apollo] was pursuing her; for he came and drew near to the tree. On account of his lust, which had not ceased, he [sc. for the first time] crowned his head with its branches [i.e., of the laurel tree]. Shall these things be called virtuous? But if they are not, why are they mimed? For it is on these things that the mimer of lying things meditates.

Not only are the pantomimic silhouettes of Libanius’ fourth-century C.E. “Daphne fleeing” (τὴν Δάφνην φεύγουσαν) and “Apollo pursuing” (τὸν Ἀπόλλω διώκοντα; *Or.* 64.67) very much alive in these heavily antitheatrical lines; Jacob of Sarugh’s narrative feels also remarkably “Ovidian,” especially in its sequencing of the tale and its focus on the moment of Apollo’s surrogate union with his *puella*’s new arboreal self. Furthermore, a noteworthy link in the line that takes us from Ovid to Jacob of Sarugh can be found in the imperial Greek novel, where the story is reportedly sung by a household slave in Phoenician Tyre (Ach. Tat. *Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.5; trans. Whitmarsh):

τὸ δὲ ἕσμα ἦν, Ἀπόλλων μεμφόμενος τὴν Δάφνην φεύγουσαν καὶ διώκων ἄμα καὶ μέλλων καταλαμβάνειν, καὶ γινομένη φυτόν ἢ κόρη, καὶ Ἀπόλλων τὸ φυτόν στεφανούμενος.

²¹See further Forbes-Irving 1990, 262; Knox 1990, 188. Ovid’s version, based on transformation, is in the minority among our sources.

He sang Apollo's reproach to Daphne for resisting his advances, and of how he pursued her, and was on the point of seizing her when the girl metamorphosed into a shrub, and of how Apollo wreathed himself with the shrub's leaves.

Writing in all probability in the second century C.E. and in the eastern part of the empire, where pantomime had entered festival culture formally as an agonistic spectacle by at least 180 C.E.,²² Achilles Tatius is thoroughly conversant with subliterary entertainment culture (Morales 2004, 60–77), both mime and pantomime, and a significant part of his writing may well be mediated by live performances.²³

Beyond the written word, an invaluable aid for gauging the vibrancy of any given myth is the perspective provided by the figurative arts. Across the corpus of artistic evidence, the virgin's metamorphosis is conveyed by means of laurel sprigs growing from head, shoulders, arms, hands, and torso; legs tapered together and congealed into a trunk; or, occasionally, by means of her garment's hem which, in the case of an Antiochene mosaic in the House of Menander, "seems to have assumed the hardness of the bark of the tree into which the girl is about to be transformed."²⁴ An uncontroversial artistic link of this particular story to the stage is provided by a Coptic textile from the fourth or fifth century C.E., where a theatrical mask is held by a Muse who appears in company with Apollo and a partially transformed Daphne.²⁵ But it is equally significant that "Apollo and Daphne" was a popular artistic subject in two cities which, at different times, were renowned centers of pantomime entertainment, namely, star-struck Pompeii of the first century B.C.E. and dance-crazy, wealthy, cosmopolitan Antioch of the second and fourth centuries C.E.

A city boasting two stone theatres by 79 B.C.E. (the earliest dating as far back as the second century B.C.E.), Pompeii found it easy to attract star dancers of the standing of Pylades and L. Domitius Paris; their command performances were tipped not only to enthrall but also to divide,

²²Our earliest evidence on pantomime competitions can be dated somewhere between 176 and 180 C.E., most probably in connection with the sojourn of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus in Asia during the summer of 176 C.E. See Slater 1996 on *I. Magnesia* 192.

²³Interestingly, the reference to Apollo and Daphne is followed by a comment (1.5.5) on the power of erotic tales to inflame the soul and kindle the listener's appetite, offering incitement for imitation: the narrative here reads very much like the typical hostile view of pantomime spectacles as "fanning the sparks of lust" (*scintillas libidinum conflabellant*) in the auditorium (Tert. *De Spect.* 25).

²⁴Levi 1947, 211; cf. n. 32 below.

²⁵Palagia 1986, 347, n. 40a.

so much so that a wealth of inscriptions and graffiti commemorating visiting dance troupes record the activities of their rival fan clubs operating in the city, such as the *Paridiani* (fans of Paris, in *CIL* 4.7919) and the *Anicetiani* (fans of Anicetus, in *CIL* 4.2413d). Pride of place among Pompeian epigraphic evidence²⁶ holds the funerary inscription of the magistrate A. Clodius Flaccus (*CIL* 10.1074d, 2 B.C.E.), who chose to highlight for posterity the fact that the Apollonian games he financed in his first duoviral year had included “every entertainment and all the pantomimes (*pantomimisque omnibus*) and Pylades (*et Pylade*)” (lines 6–8). Magnificent wall-paintings and mosaics from the rich houses around the city, replete with the very same mythological subject-matter that was the lifeblood of pantomime performances, raise the fascinating possibility that if, as Beard 2008, 255, puts it, “painting made a theatre out of a house,” theatre was primarily local and pantomime dominated. Apollo’s pursuit of Daphne is the subject of frescoes in the Casa dei Dioscuri, Casa dei Capitelli Colorati, Casa dei Vettii, and Casa del Camillo,²⁷ all dating from the first century C.E. According to Levi 1947, 212, the Pompeian paintings constitute “the most conspicuous group of monuments preserving this subject.” Antioch, for its part, was not only a metropolis of theatrical life in imperial and later antiquity, but also a real magnet for dancers and their closest siblings in the entertainment industry, the mimes.²⁸ Referring to Antioch as “a city most astute and holding pantomime in the greatest esteem” (εὐφροεστάτη πόλις καὶ ὄρχησιν μάλιστα πρεσβεύουσα), Lucian also commends its people, for paying “so much attention to everything said and done [sc. in pantomimes] that nothing at all escapes a man of them” (*Salt.* 76). He probably composed his dialogue *De Saltatione* concurrently with the eastern sojourn of Lucius Verus, the pantomime mad co-emperor of Marcus Aurelius, who made Antioch his seat for the greatest part of the Roman campaign against the Parthians (162–66 C.E.).²⁹ Moreover, it was first and foremost the popular theatrical culture of Antioch that St John Chrysostom lambasted in his *Homilies* of the fourth century C.E. and Libanius defended in his treatise *On Behalf of the Dancers* (*De Saltatoribus*), the second extant ancient apology for the pantomime genre and

²⁶ On which see Franklin 1987; Starks 2008, 130–37.

²⁷ See Palagia 1986, 345, nn. 9–12; nn. 30–33, all first century C.E. wall-paintings from Pompeian houses, are also centering on Apollo and Daphne but without the chase motif, in static postures.

²⁸ For a good survey of the markedly theatrical profile of Syria and Antioch (which boasted two theatres in itself), see Leyerle 2001, 13–19; Pasquato 1976; Casella 2007.

²⁹ See Robertson 1913; Robert 1930; Jones 1986; Lada-Richards 2007, 158.

its artists.³⁰ It is certainly no coincidence that the “Apollo and Daphne” mythical cluster has a high profile in Antioch’s lavish mosaics. Daphne’s story has particular (aetiological) relevance in Daphne, the luxurious Antiochean suburb and summer resort named after her near the falls of the river Orontes and boasting a celebrated sanctuary of Apollo.³¹ Here an excellent example of Daphne’s transformation in mid-flight is a well-preserved third or early fourth-century C.E. mosaic at the northern end of the sumptuous and theatrically decorated House of Menander.³²

No straightforward, unequivocal indicators of theatricality (e.g., masks or costumes) in the “Apollo and Daphne” painted corpus can provide a secure link to contemporary performances, hence the mediation of the pantomime stage in the conception and the making of these pictures, either on the wall or on the floor, becomes exceptionally hard to prove. However, the ongoing discovery of mosaics with clearer allusions to pantomime performances,³³ combined with the ever-increasing awareness of pantomime’s absolute centrality in imperial urban life and cultural imagination, has prompted more researchers to think in the direction of a fruitful reciprocity between the figurative arts and the pantomime stage in imperial and later antiquity.³⁴ With commissioners and artists breathing the same cultural air as theatre-goers did, mythological clusters such as that of “Apollo and Daphne” cannot be dissociated from the aesthetic experience, preferences and sensibilities of society at large. Far from being illustrations of specific “Apollo and Daphne” pantomime performances, they are nevertheless a good barometer for what audiences found attractive on the contemporary stage and provide invaluable

³⁰ See Molloy 1996.

³¹ Pausanias 8.20.2 mentions the Syrian version, substituting the river Orontes for the Arcadian Ladon or the Thessalian Peneios, as a distinct tale; cf. Philostr. *VA* 1.16. In his encomium of Antioch (*Or.* 11), Libanius includes the tale of Apollo’s erotic pursuit of the girl (94) along the river Orontes to explain the Antiochene founder Seleucus’ dedication of the area around Orontes’ falls to Daphne and the erection of the famous Apolline temple there (94–100). See further Kondoleon 1995, 170–74; 2000, 75.

³² Palagia 1986, 346, n. 20; see further Levi 1947, 211–13.

³³ See, e.g., the “Theonoe” mosaic from the House of Poseidon at Zeugma (with Görkay et al. 2006; Dunbabin 2010) or the late antique mosaic floor from a villa in Noheda, in Spain (with Uscatescu 2013).

³⁴ Cf., e.g., Bowersock 2006, 54: “It is worth asking now whether we may be seeing in the mythological mosaics generally some kind of reflection of the immensely popular mime theater of late antiquity”; Dunbabin 2014, 228: “The question, therefore, is whether there is a connection between the scenes chosen for representation on the mosaics and the performances of the contemporary stage, and what form such a connection might take.”

insights into the range of creative and imaginative responses that dance performances could elicit in the post-classical world.³⁵

Besides Daphne, Phaethon, too, the *sine qua non* element of the “Heliades” tale, keeps a high profile as a stage presence throughout antiquity. His story is the first to come to Tertullian’s mind when he wishes to excoriate the foulness that *histrionum litterae* (Tert. *Apol.* 15.2), the literature used by or belonging to performers on the stage, ascribe to the gods. The Sun’s “lament[ations] over his son hurled from the sky”³⁶ was clearly part of what a theatre-goer would have been able to see as a danced spectacle in the early third century C.E. In the second part of the fifth century C.E., invaluable insights into the gestural and emotional dynamics of a Phaethon choreography are afforded by Nonnus, the late epic poet who presents the legend as the speciality of a certain Phlogius, a pantomime (ὄρχηστήρα, *Dion.* 30.109) adept at “weaving” with his corporeal eloquence the ill-starred youngster’s fate (30.110–16):

... ἀδακρύτοιο παρ’ εἰλαπίνησι Λυαίου
 ἀντιτύπων ἐλέλιξε πολύτροπα δάκτυλα χειρῶν,
 καὶ θάνατον Φαέθοντος ἐχέφρονι χειρὶ χαράσσω³⁷
 δαιτυμόνας ποιήσεν ἀήθεα δάκρυα λείβειν,
 ψευδαλέου Φαέθοντος ἐπικλαίοντας ὀλέθρω·
 καὶ νέον αἰθαλόεντα καὶ αὐτοκύλιστον ὑφαίνων
 λευγαλέον πόρε πένθος ἀπενθήτῳ Διονύσῳ.

in the banquets of Lyaeus who does not shed a tear
 he whirled round the versatile fingers of his imitative hands
 and, while engraving Phaethon’s death with a knowledgeable hand,
 he induced the symposiasts to shed tears out of place,
 as they wept in response to the demise of a fictitious Phaethon.
 And as he depicted (lit. “wove”) the youth, all-sooty and hurtling down,
 he brought dismal grief to Dionysus who is unused to grieving.³⁸

The obvious delights of a choreography enacting Phaethon’s dizzy fall from Helios’ chariot, hurtling down, half-burnt, all the way into the river,³⁹

³⁵ Positive on the link between Pompeian painting and pantomime are: Bieber 1961, 232; Bergmann 1996, 212; Beard 2008, 255. On the impact of pantomime performances on the iconography of Antiochene mosaics, see Rotolo 1957, 71–76; Huskinson 2002–03.

³⁶ Tert. *Apol.* 15.2: *Luget Sol filium de caelo iactatum.*

³⁷ Vian’s emendation of the manuscript’s τινάσσω.

³⁸ Unless otherwise attributed, translations are my own.

³⁹ See Nonnus *Dion.* 38.91–93; 38.410–11.

must have been responsible for turning this particular myth—which also narrated the rider’s mad course through stars and planets, from South to North and East to West—into a virtuosic showpiece, loved by dancers eager to display their talents. But Lucian’s reference to the Phaethon legend as a pantomime topic includes the transformation of his sisters into mourning and amber-weeping (θρηνοῦσαι καὶ ἤλεκτρον δακρῦσαι) poplars (*Salt.* 55),⁴⁰ making it extremely likely that the normative version of a Phaethon *fabula* would have concluded with the enactment of an Ovid-style arborization. Interestingly, the Heliades are included in most of the Phaethon related compositions adorning sarcophagi of the second and third century C.E.⁴¹ For Turcan 1978, 1720–35, who notes the very significant overlap between pantomime themes and the themes of Roman imperial funerary art, such compositions indicate theatrical influence.⁴² The gist of such a libretto ending in the sisters’ arborification may be reflected in another part of Nonnus’ epic, where the story, deployed in some four-hundred-thirty lines (*Dion.* 38.105–434), takes the form of a “just so” narrative, meant to explain (38.99–102):

πῶς Φαέθων κεκύλιστο δι’ αἰθέρος, ἧ πόθεν αὐταὶ
 Ἥλιάδες παρὰ χεῦμα γοήμονος Ἠριδανοῖο
 εἰς φυτὸν ἡμείβοντο, καὶ εὐπετάλων ἀπὸ δένδρων
 δάκρυα μαρμαίροντα κατασταλάουσι ῥεέθροις.

how Phaethon tumbled over through the air or how it came that the daughters of Helios themselves were changed into plants by the stream of mournful Eridanus, dropping sparkling tears into the river from the beautiful leaves of their trees.⁴³

Not only did Nonnus compose an epic steeped in pantomime vocabulary and imagery;⁴⁴ his place of origin was the Egyptian Panopolis near Alexandria, a thriving center of pantomime performances throughout

⁴⁰The spotlight had been turned on the Heliades as early as in Greek tragedy, with Aeschylus’ *Heliades* (*TrGF* III F68–73a).

⁴¹See Baratte 1994, 351–53, nn. 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 19. The transformation of two among the Heliades into poplars is included in the representation of the entire drama of Phaethon’s fall on a Roman sarcophagus (n. 15) dating from about 300 C.E.

⁴²Pantomime is only mentioned in passing as a possible influence on Roman sarcophagi in Zanker and Ewald 2012, 32.

⁴³These lines summarise the tale Dionysus is eager to hear from Hermes. The tale concludes with three lines devoted to the sisters’ arborification and precious tears (*Dion.* 38.432–34).

⁴⁴Cf. Miguélez Cavero 2009.

antiquity,⁴⁵ to the extent that, as the Byzantine chronographer Malalas testifies (*Chronicle* 17.12), it was often exempt from the periodic empire-wide bans on pantomimes.⁴⁶ It is therefore very likely either that Nonnus' extended narrative followed the general thrust of a real-life Phaethon choreography and its libretto or, conversely, that it could have provided the literary basis for a dance libretto itself—or even both.

Specific *fabulae* aside, however, the recurrent equivalence between trees and human bodies underpinning Ovid's narratives as a *sine qua non* element of this particular metamorphic cluster can be amply illuminated through the writings of both Columella and Pliny. Talking of vines, Columella lays out the analogy of roots to feet, trunk to "the upright carriage and appearance of a [human] body," branches to arms, stems and shoots to hands.⁴⁷ Pliny too generalizes that "the bodies of trees as of other living things have in them skin, blood, flesh, sinews, veins, bones and marrow. The bark serves for a skin" (*corpori arborum ut reliquorum animalium cutis, sanguis, caro, nerui, uenae, ossa, . . . medullae. pro cute cortex, HN* 16.72.181).⁴⁸ It is the existence of such a shared vocabulary of body parts and their vegetative analogues that would have enabled a pantomime to tell a story of arborification with the genre's prize qualities of precision (*akribeia*),⁴⁹ clarity (*saphēneia*), and vividness (*enargeia*).⁵⁰ Instructing his

⁴⁵ Further pointers to Egypt's connection with dancing in Lada-Richards 2007, 177, n. 21; for a full-scale study of professional dancers in Roman Egypt, see Vesterinen 2007. On the thriving cultural life of Panopolis itself, assiduously supported by the local élite, see Miguélez Caveró 2008, 191–263. Among the library texts in use in Panopolis (see Miguélez Caveró 2008, 220) was the so-called "Barcelona *Alcestis*," a Latin hexameter poem, possibly of the fourth century C.E., and suspected pantomime libretto (Hall 2008).

⁴⁶ Aelius Aristides (*ap. Liban. Or.* 64.80) posits Egypt as "the first to bring into the world the pantomime evil."

⁴⁷ Columella *Rust.* 3. 10.11: *eadem ipsa mater ac parens primum radices uelut quaedam fundamenta iecit, ut iis quasi pedibus insisterent. Truncum deinde superposuit uelut quandam staturam corporis et habitus; mox ramis diffudit quasi bracchiis; tum caules et pampinos elicuit uelut palmas*; See further Sharrock 1996, 120–21.

⁴⁸ Cf. Plin. *HN* 16.73.184, 17.37.224. The equivalences are explored in detail in Perutelli 1985; with reference to Ovid's Philemon and Baucis tree-faction, see Gowers 2005. In Greek literature, an important text is Luc. *Ver. Hist.* 1.8 which, taking as a point of departure the typical "Apollo and Daphne" iconography (see below, p. 158), associates human finger-tips with vine branches, human hair with tendrils, leaves, and clusters.

⁴⁹ See primarily Luc. *Salt.* 81. The notion of "precise dancing" (*akribēs orchēsis*) is meant to be a golden standard of artistic excellence in Libanius (*Or.* 64.107; cf. *ibid.* 117) just as much as in honorific inscriptions. Tiberius Iulius Apolaustus, for example, is hailed, *inter alia*, for the "precision of his art" (δία τε τὴν τῆς τέχνης ἀκριβειαν) in line 29 of a Delphic inscription in his honor (see *FdD* III, 1, 551, with Slater 1995, 264–66).

⁵⁰ For *saphēneia* and *enargeia* in pantomime, see primarily Luc. *Salt.* 36, 62, 63, 64; cf. Aristaenetus *Ep.* 1.26.

“eloquent” hands to follow the veins up the calf and thigh in slow motion, a dancer would have signaled the progressive ascent of the bark and his own immobilization; threading his fingers through his hair in a bemused gesture, as a painted Daphne does on a Pompeian fresco of the first century C.E.,⁵¹ he would have been able to signal that he had suddenly discovered leaves. The popularity of metamorphic tales on the pantomime stage combined with the pivotal role played by hair in the system of conventions underpinning the sub-category of tree-metamorphosis may well be one of the choreographic reasons why long hair was a trademark of professional *pantomimi*. Not only does Claudian in the late fourth century C.E. use the expression “a long haired youth” (*crinitus ephebus*, *In Eutrop.* 2.404) as a shorthand designation of pantomimes in general; Libanius, too, records that dancers’ hair is never meant to be cut except as an offering to Dionysus (*Or.* 64.50), while hair “hanging down in exceptionally long and straight locks down the side of the face and onto the shoulders” is worn by the figure of Theonoe on the so-called “Theonoe Mosaic” discovered in the *triclinium* of a Roman house in Zeugma; with “pale complexion contrasting with the darker colored neck,” “large black eyes and . . . small closed mouth,”⁵² Theonoe’s face is covered, in all probability, by a pantomime mask, opening thus a wonderful vista on connections existing between popular forms of theatre and the figurative arts in the imperial east.⁵³

Was pantomime connoisseurship as developed in the genre’s early period as it came to be at the time of Plotinus, when a seasoned pantomime viewer (τὸν ἔμπειρον ὀρχήσεως) could be considered capable of appreciating both the technique and rationale behind each particular movement or position of the dancer’s limbs and body?⁵⁴ It is certainly futile to speculate whether any among the Roman *plebs* rehearsing on the banks of the Tiber the songs they had picked up at pantomime and mime performances⁵⁵ were in a position to discuss how “in order to fit a particular figure one limb [of the dancer] is raised, another bent together,

⁵¹ Richardson 1955, pl. xxvii.2, from the Casa dei Capitelli Colorati.

⁵² Görkay, Linant de Bellefonds and Prioux 2006, 20.

⁵³ On Theonoe’s mask-like face, see also Dunbabin 2010, 418–19.

⁵⁴ See Plot. *Enn.* 4.4.33, on the experienced viewer realising that “the dancer does not choose to make these movements for no reason, but each part of him as he performs the dance has its necessary position in the dancing of the whole body” (οὐκ ἄλλως τοῦ ὀρχηστοῦ προελομένου τοῦτο ποιεῖν, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῇ τοῦ ὄλου σώματος ὀρχήσει θεῖσιν ταύτην ἀναγκαίαν ἴσχοντος τοῦδε τοῦ μέρους τοῦ τὴν ὀρχησιν διαπεραίνοντος; trans. Armstrong 1984).

⁵⁵ Ov. *Fast.* 3.535–38, on the festival of Anna Perenna.

one is hidden, another lowered.”⁵⁶ Yet, even if the stockpile of “technical” knowledge possessed by Roman pantomime fans of the Augustan period was smaller than the corpus of dance knowledge wielded by appreciative dance audiences of later antiquity in the imperial east, pantomime appears to have saturated, from very early on, the mental and emotional topography of its devoted fans, intent on watching, as Columella (*Rust. 1. Praef. 15*) puts it, “in stunned admiration” (*attonitique miramur*). It is entirely conceivable that Ovid’s remarkable foregrounding of the morphing subject’s doubleness as both human and plant at the moment of transition was heavily indebted to a pantomime aesthetic *en vogue* at the time of composition.

As no narrative of arborization that could be securely identified as pantomime-inflected exists to offer ground for comparison with the *Metamorphoses*, the suggestion of pantomime interference is not subject to either empirical corroboration or falsification. The closest we can get to a choreography of plant metamorphosis is through the poetry of Nonnus. Drawing on the same cluster of conventions underpinning Ovidian tales, Nonnus describes the boy Ampelos’ self-transformation from a “lovely corpse” to the vine plant, with fingers growing into tendrils, feet taking root, and curls becoming grape clusters (*Dion. 12.173–84*). Yet, if Lucretius’ dreams could have been haunted by the memory of pliant dancing bodies with supple arms / branches (*bracchia*) moving to the rhythm,⁵⁷ Ovid’s *ingenium* could have been similarly ignited by the intoxicating concoction of elegance and sensuality, flamboyance and sophistication, exquisite technical skill and sheer bodily drama that was his contemporary stage when populated by the dancers.

DANCING TREES: THE PARATACTIC OR SEQUENTIAL MODEL OF PANTOMIME PLOT CONSTRUCTION

Having established the pantomime credentials of some of Ovid’s arborification stories throughout antiquity and drawn attention to the strong conventions facilitating the “reading” of the moment of metamorphosis in this particular thematic cluster, we can now inquire further into the way such stories worked both in the pantomime idiom and Ovid’s

⁵⁶ See Plot. *Enn. 4.4.33*: ὥστε τὸν ἔμπειρον ὀρχήσεως εἰπεῖν ἄν, ὡς τῷ τοιοῦτῳ σχηματισμῷ αἴρεται μὲν ὑψοῦ τοδὶ μέλος τοῦ σώματος, συγκάμπτεται δὲ τοδί, τοδί δὲ ἀποκρύπτεται, ταπεινὸν δὲ ἄλλο γίνεται. Cf. Liban. *Or. 64.57*.

⁵⁷ See Lucr. 4.769 (*bracchiaque in numerum iactare*); cf. 4.788–93, 4.978–80.

pantomime-inflected narrative. For literary and archaeological evidence indicates the possibility that pantomime libretti conformed to what we might call a paratactic model of plot construction, which could accommodate up to four or five parts to be performed by a dancing soloist in consecutive scenes, “the submerging of the dancer’s ‘real’ identity behind successive masks constitut[ing] a major part of the medium’s appeal” (May 2008, 346). So, for example, a first century B.C.E. epigram by Crinagoras encourages the (otherwise unknown) vocalist and librettist Philonides to take advantage of both his own (vocal) and Bathyllus’ (somatic) versatility in order to compose a multi-character dance piece (*AP* 9.542):

Θάρσει καὶ τέτταρσι διαπλασθέντα προσώποις
 μῦθον, καὶ τούτων γράψαι ἔτι πλέοσιν·
 οὔτε σὲ γὰρ λείψουσι, Φιλωνίδη, οὔτε Βάθυλλον,
 τὸν μὲν ἀοιδάων, τὸν δὲ χερῶν χάριτες.

Fear not, Philonides, (go ahead and) compose a story shaped for four parts of even more; for grace shall not abandon either you, Philonides, or Bathyllus, the one in the songs the other in the (movement of the) hands.⁵⁸

In stark contrast to a tragic plot where *dramatis personae* are divided among (a maximum of) three speaking actors, the workings of pantomime are such that normally all parts are performed by one and the same dancer who, as Manilius (*Astron.* 5.480b–81) puts it, “will assume every role himself, one after another” (*solusque per omnis / ibit personas*). Take a supposed *fabula* based on the pantomime-friendly story of Apollo and Daphne. Given this particular story’s concentration of emotional energy on only two main characters,⁵⁹ it is perfectly conceivable that a common pantomime rendition would have followed the kind of diptych construction Lucian seems to consider typical of the genre: the sequential movement of the plot from a given subject-position to a strongly contrasting one which the dancer would have been required to adopt in close succession, traveling as it were between the “frenzy” of an Athamas in hot pursuit and the “terror” of an Ino in full flight (ἄρτι μὲν Ἀθάμας μεμηνώς, ἄρτι δὲ Ἰνώ φοβουμένη δείκνυται, *Salt.* 67).⁶⁰ Much more complex in real

⁵⁸ Cf. *AP* 16.289 where the dancer, Xenophon, dances several distinct roles: Dionysus, Teiresias (possibly), Cadmus, the Messenger, Agave. Cf. Garelli 2006, 122.

⁵⁹ Secondary roles would have been apportioned to Daphne’s father and possibly to Cupid.

⁶⁰ The juxtaposition of different and even diametrically opposed characters/roles is characteristic of pantomime related narratives; see, e.g., Cassiod. *Var.* 4.51.9. Had the

performative terms would have been the danced arborification of the Heliades. In addition to the star role it allocates to Phaethon, it provides for three separate subjects—his sisters—morphing into trees and even makes room for two further parts: the Sun, as the reasoning and subsequently grieving father and, most importantly, Clymene, the mother who, distraught with sorrow, engages in actions well worth a skilled choreographer's attention. Lacerating her breasts, roaming the world in search of her boy's limbs and bones, thrusting herself upon the ground, fondling Phaethon's tombstone and drenching it with tears, Clymene as a *mater dolorosa* would have provided the supreme emotional focus of the dance. Faced, subsequently, with the horror of the young girls' metamorphosis, the dancer in the role of Clymene would have been darting frantically from one transforming daughter to another, either kissing the remainder of their human forms or trying, in vain, to strip the bark away from their morphing bodies. Despite the structural complexity, however, arising from the greater number of functional parts involved in the tale, a pantomime version of this episode⁶¹ could still have followed the sequential model of libretto construction aiming to showcase the versatility of the dancing soloist who, as Lucian's Lycinus marvels (τὸ γοῦν παραδοξότατον), a single man himself (εἷς ἄνθρωπος) and in the time-frame of a single day (τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας), incarnates now Atreus, a short while later, Thyestes, then Aegisthus or Aerope (*Salt.* 67).

How do Ovid's arborization narratives compare with such (by necessity hypothetical) reconstructions of the performance layout of pantomimic *fabulae*? If Ovid's descriptions of tree-transformations were either "enriched" by memories of pantomimic arborifications or of supreme interest to librettists who turned them into pantomime *fabulae*⁶² or (more likely) both, do they bear the narrative vestiges of any structural

libretto based on Vergil's episode of Turnus survived, the *fabula* Nero had allegedly vowed to perform (Suet. *Ner.* 54: *saltaturumque Vergili Turnum*) but never did, audiences would have seen a dancer required to incarnate Turnus and Aeneas in succession, with all the rich symbolism implied in such a paratactic sequence (see Connors 1998, 97–98).

⁶¹ Ovid's narrative in *Met.* 2.334–63 would have been a wonderful inspiration to a librettist with respect to such actions (cf. p. 156 below). A bilingual schoolbook of (probably) the third century C.E. attributed to ps. Dositheus puts pantomimes on a par with school teachers and painters as end-users of the kind of mythological narratives found in Hyginus' *Fables* (text in Cameron 2004, 230, n. 68).

⁶² See primarily Ingleheart 2008, who makes a comprehensive case for Ovid's *Met.*; without particular reference to Ovid's epic, I, too, had suggested that Ovid's poems might have "lent themselves to easy adaptation (by professional librettists?) for the pantomime stage" (Lada-Richards 2007, 204, n. 4). See below, p. 156.

arrangements that can be identified as strongly characteristic of (even if not exclusive to) the pantomime genre? Although the material that would have enabled us to tackle this question with any semblance of confidence eludes us, it is still a question worth asking, given its obvious implications for the way we read our text of the *Metamorphoses*.

At first glance, there seems to be a problem inherent in the nature of Ovid's artistic medium. Since literature allows all characters to be deployed concurrently on a synchronic level, there can be no visible narrative marker of the kind of sequential arrangement which, in the course of a real-life pantomime, would have required the dancer to "exit" from his role as Daphne at the point of transformation and "enter" the role of Apollo, her pursuer, in order to present the story from the male god's diametrically different angle. Yet we can indeed imagine Ovid's arborification narratives indebted to the paratactic progression logic of pantomimic *fabulae*, for there is still a very strong sense of a double-focus construction in the *Metamorphoses*, with two entirely separate, starkly conflicting viewpoints and the narrator's lens zooming now on the predator snatching at his prey, now on his helpless victim (see esp. 1.525–52).⁶³ Similar is the case of the Heliades. Despite the fact that none of Phaethon's sisters disappears from view while the narrator comments on the other two, the sequential moving of Ovid's lens over the reactions of the three mourning sisters,⁶⁴ before focalizing them collectively in their vain struggle against the invasiveness of the ascending bark (2.353–55), bears affinities with the characteristically pantomimic mode of narrating a story from the viewpoint of all the *fabula's* characters consecutively, so that the dancer would merge with the "I" and the body of all mythical heroes or heroines in turn (cf. Feldherr 2010, 19). Thus in Manilius' brief reference to the professional dancer's calling, a pantomime is said to appropriate in his single person and draw upon his own limbs "the aspect of fortune's every vicissitude."⁶⁵

Most importantly, however, the synchronic visibility, albeit with different degrees of emphasis, of Ovid's literary characters is not without equivalent in the corporeal practices of pantomime dancing—on the

⁶³ More generally on Ovid's ability to grant his readers "access to the victim's point of view," see Feldherr 2010, 43.

⁶⁴ Phaethusa: *Met.* 2.346–48; Lampetie: 2.348–49; third sister, unnamed: 2.350–51; lines 351–52 return to two of the sisters, involving once again, a change of focus: *haec . . . teneri, / illa dolet*.

⁶⁵ Manilius *Astron.* 5.480b, 483: *omnis fortunae uultum per membra reducet*, with Wiseman 2008b, 149.

contrary, it might have been a special feature of it, at least in some of its manifold performative variants. As Wyles 2008, 70, suggests in her study of pantomime costume, changes of role signaled by mask changes may have been taking place in full view of the audience, without the need of either the soloist's temporary retreat offstage or the physical removal of the masks already used. Such an arrangement may be implicit in the Lucianic anecdote regarding a barbarian's surprise at the sight of "five masks prepared for the dancer" and corresponding to the equal number of acts or scenes the *fabula* comprised. The barbarian is told that one soloist will "act and dance them all," whereupon he realises that, although master of a single body, a dancer possesses a multitude of souls.⁶⁶ It would have added to the fascination of the dance if those "souls" were put on and laid aside swiftly without the dancer's exit, as is perhaps implied in Lycinus' remark that dancers of his day "may be seen changing swiftly at the cue" (ἴδοις τ' ἄν οὖν αὐτοὺς πρὸς τὸν καιρὸν ὠκέως διαλλαττομένους, *Salt.* 19).⁶⁷ Once again, certainty is unwarranted by the meagre evidence that we possess. It is entirely conceivable, however, that, in some types of pantomime performances at least, the pantomime spectator, like Ovid's reader, would not have been led to lose sight of the presence of other characters but would have been directed to concentrate instead on the one that was, at any particular time in the course of the *fabula*, specifically foregrounded.

DANCING TREES: DRYOPE OR THE MODEL OF "EMBEDDED" ROLES

Not all mythical stories, however, would have been viable in danced form by means of the pantomime's consecutive adoption of all the roles available in a given *fabula saltica*. Some *fabulae* seem to have demanded more sophisticated performative arrangements that would have made a one-to-one correlation of mask to *dramatis persona* impractical, not to say impossible. It is primarily Libanius who alerts us to the existence of an alternative mode of pantomimic structuring of roles, all the while

⁶⁶ See *Salt.* 66: Ἐθέλω γοῦν σοι καὶ ἄλλου βαρβάρου ῥῆσιν ἐπὶ τούτοις εἰπεῖν. ἰδὼν γὰρ πέντε πρόσωπα τῷ ὀρχηστῇ παρεσκευασμένα - τοσοῦτων γὰρ μερῶν τὸ δράμα ἦν - ἐζήτει, ἓνα ὀρῶν τὸν ὀρχηστὴν, τίνες οἱ ὀρχησόμενοι καὶ ὑποκρινόμενοι τὰ λοιπὰ προσωπεῖα εἶεν· ἐπεὶ δὲ ἔμαθεν ὅτι αὐτὸς ὑποκρινεῖται καὶ ὑπορχήσεται τὰ πάντα, «Ἐλελήθεις,» ἔφη, «ὦ βέλτιστε, σῶμα μὲν τοῦτο ἔν, πολλὰς δὲ τὰς ψυχὰς ἔχων.»

⁶⁷ Cf. Liban. *Or.* 64.66 (albeit with a specific focus on swift gender change).

marveling at the intellectual challenge thus presented to the viewer (*Or.* 64.113; trans. Molloy 1996):

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 ποίων οὐ γρίφων ἰκανώτερα ψυχῆν ἀκονᾶν;

For to get 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 soul than any sort of riddle?

From a performance point of view, the implication cannot be overestimated. The compositional arrangement of some at least of the libretti circulating in the ancient world seems to have been such that a dancer “could take on a primary role and somehow through that role alone evoke the presence and actions of other characters” (Webb 2008b, 83). In such cases, the pantomime’s skilful navigation through the totality of roles inscribed in a given *fabula* would not have been an openly advertised, flamboyant affair but would have necessitated subdued and understated negotiations, such as the meaningful tilting of the head or torso or a codified leap or spin to signal the moment of character change. To draw upon Libanius again, he uses the verb *apopēdaō*, “to leap off from” or “turn away from,” in a context relating to the dancer’s speedy evocation of a broad range of characters: “before demonstrating a female figure clearly he’s jumped away into the role of a man” (πρὶν δεῖξαι τὴν γυναῖκα, καθαρῶς ἀπεπήδησεν εἰς ἄνδρα, *Or.* 64. 66). As Webb 2008b, 82, points out,

His use of the verb may well be entirely metaphorical, but it may reflect a conventional movement—a leap or a spin—used by dancers to change position on the stage and to indicate a change of person, as in Kathak.

Among the corpus of Ovid’s arborifications examined in this article, it is primarily the story of Dryope’s transformation in *Metamorphoses* 9 that lends itself to further exploration as regards its possible performance in the guise of a *fabula saltica* on stage. The storyteller is Iole, sister of the morphing subject, who “writes” herself “into” the tale both as a helpless onlooker (*spectatrix aderam*, 9.359) of the unfolding metamorphic sequence as well as a participant, trying to the utmost of her strength

(*quantumque ualebam*) to stay the progress of the growing trunk (360–61) and wishing for a share in her beloved sister's fate (362). Her emotional involvement extends to the narrative present of the tale, her tears of sorrow frustrating her ability to speak (328–29). Not only is Ovid's text remarkably dense with strands provided by all the players in the tale (Iole, Dryope, baby Amphissus, Dryope's husband and father), but these strands are also markedly somatic, enabling us to meet some of the characters by means of their bodily actions, reactions, and emotions.⁶⁸ Dryope's father, for example, introduced, alongside her husband, with the dramatic "*ecce*" (363), is in utter distress (*miserrimus*, 363) and both men are said to be "searching" for the girl (*quaerunt Dryopen; Dryopen quaerentibus*, 364), with all the intimations of agitated, expressive movement implicit in the verb. Dryope is ultimately revealed to them by that quintessentially pantomimic action of *deixis* / *ostentatio*, as Iole points to (*ostendi*) the lotus tree, whereupon husband and father are seen to indulge in the eloquent actions and gestures of prostrating, kissing, and embracing (9.365–66).⁶⁹ The relevance of *deixis* is hard to overestimate in relation to a genre understood as a discipline (ἐπιστήμη) of imitation (μιμητική) and demonstration (δεικτική) (Luc. *Salt.* 36). "Generally speaking," Lycinus asserts, "pantomime promises to demonstrate and enact character and passion" (τὸ δὲ ὄλον ἦθη καὶ πάθη δεῖξειν καὶ ὑποκρινεῖσθαι ἢ ὄρχησις ἐπαγγέλλεται, 67), the dancer himself "promising" to "demonstrate" (δειξεῖν) the chorus' sung narrative in such a way that "each of the things demonstrated (τῶν δεικνυμένων)" would need no further interpretative intervention (62). Similarly, for Plutarch (*Mor.* 747c), *deixis* is the third constituent element of *orchēsis* as an art and performs the function of "showing," revealing, the dance's subject matter. Plutarch's speaker Ammonius goes on to explain that "by pointing (ταῖς δὲ δεῖξεσι) the dancers indicate properly the very objects, the earth, the sky, themselves, those standing nearby" (747e). When *deixis* is mastered well, that is to say, when it is done "with precision" and "timing" (747e) and not lacking in "plausibility," "grace," "dignity," and "simplicity" (748a), its clarity and evidential value correspond to that of proper names in poetry (747e).

Now, Dryope's arborification does not feature in our lists of popular pantomime topics. All mythical material, however, lends itself

⁶⁸ In the case of Dryope herself, however, the reader is also granted a most intimate look into her soul by means of her speech (9.371–91).

⁶⁹ Such expressive actions occur in the "Barcelona *Alcestis*" (above, n. 45): prostration at mother's feet in supplication (43), marital embracing (121). See Hall 2008.

to pantomime performance (Luc. *Salt.* 61; cf. 67) and it is perfectly possible that in a putative pantomime version of this tale all the characters involved would have been introduced serially, whether with or without a change of mask, so that the dancing virtuoso would have incarnated Dryope first, in the full sequence of her transformation, then the other *dramatis personae* in succession. If that were the case, the descriptive role of Iole would have been fulfilled either by the singing choir or by a recitalist/solo singer providing not only the unifying narrative thread but also, as in Ovid's text, the "running commentary" on the dancer's actions and intense, lacerating emotions.⁷⁰ This is a technique that Ovid's poem can be said to share with Seneca, whose tragedies often employ the third-person description of a character's physical appearance, actions, and emotional state,⁷¹ possibly, as has been recently argued, under the direct influence of pantomime aesthetic, supremely popular in Seneca's time.⁷²

Much more in line, however, with the complex layering of Ovid's poetic narrative would have been the considerably more intricate choreographic structure and the more demanding mode of signification intimated by Libanius' praise narrative in *Or.* 64.113 (above, p. 148). In a staged version of Dryope's arborification, it is very likely that the dancing soloist would have taken upon himself as his primary role the part of Iole and would have proceeded by evoking all the other characters by means of the "speaking . . . silence" (*AP* 9. 505,18) of his gestures, steps, and movements alone. Guided by the verbal component provided by a narrator/singer or a choir,⁷³ he would have been able to display his versatility by "embedding" in his body-narrative both the somatic adventure of Dryope herself in the course of turning into a tree (349–58, 367–69, 388–93) and the intensely emotional reactions of her nearest and dearest (see above, p. 149), perhaps not wildly dissimilar to the responses described in Ovid's text. In an alternative arrangement, albeit in a similar vein, the star dancer could have chosen the role of Dryope herself, somatically "quoting" father, husband, and Iole, with the chorus providing the accompanying narrative. A third possibility might have seen a secondary performer or supporting dancer (cf. Luc. *Salt.* 83) in the role of Iole, with the double

⁷⁰See *Met.* 9.336–58 and 367–93 on Dryope, including the reporting of Dryope's own words which would not have been spoken by the dancer himself; 363–66 on Dryope's husband and father.

⁷¹As, e.g., in Sen. *Med.* 849–78; *Ag.* 710–19; *HF* 1082–92 for onstage characters commented on by the chorus; see Zanobi 2008, 232–38.

⁷²Zanobi 2008; Zimmerman 2008.

⁷³See, e.g., *AP* 9.542; Luc. *Salt.* 30, 63, 68, 72.

bill of providing the story line as well as intervening in the *fabula* in danced response to Dryope's predicament.⁷⁴

Be that as it may, the invariable principle in such a structure would have been that "each scene would require the pantomime to embody one main role, with the others implied . . . through the protagonist's gestures" (Webb 2008b, 80). Indeed, I contend that these "implied" and "embedded" roles necessitated by the pantomime stage and being highly peculiar to the genre can be seen as the bodily equivalent to Ovid's highly individual narrative economy, replete with "internal" narrators and intricately interlaced "inset" narratives, whose complexity, "the maximum . . . ever reached in a classical narrative," is "something of a scandal in the ancient epic tradition" (Barchiesi 2002, 189). Even if we are wrong to assume that a dancing Dryope could have influenced Ovid's account, the important conclusion remains that, irrespective of correspondences with a particular *fabula*, the Ovidian Dryope's arborization may have preserved traces of fashionable performance languages that could have been seen in action on Ovid's contemporary pantomime stage.

MYRRHA'S ARBOREALIZATION: A DANCE FOR A PREGNANT TREE?

Even the most casual of Ovid's readers would notice that, although the transformations belonging to each metamorphic cluster (e.g., into animals, birds, stones, trees) exhibit an array of similar characteristics, they are also unmistakably individual. As Buxton 2009, 6, writes, "the Roman poet manages, by a supreme paradox, to make such changes seem both routine, in virtue of their sheer quantity, and consistently astonishing, in virtue of their prodigious variety." Ranging from a difference as minor as conceptualizing the movement of transformation in a different direction⁷⁵ to the addition of unique details, such as lactating breasts growing stiff (*rigescere*) in the case of Dryope (9.357), Ovid's arborealizations acquire often distinctive individuality even at the precise moment of metamorphosis. But no tree-metamorphosis is so unmistakably unique as that of Myrrha, which deserves a more concentrated look with an eye to pantomime dancing. Once again, a woman is transformed into a tree,

⁷⁴Hall 2008, 259, believes that such subsidiary performers could "speak significant passages of direct speech."

⁷⁵Myrrha, e.g., sinks down to the ground to meet the advancing bark herself, instead of waiting for the bark to catch up with her (*Met.* 10.497–98).

only this time the newly formed wood preserves not merely the morphing subject's human agency and subjectivity but, more specifically, its female gender with everything that this entails: swelling in the middle to accommodate the pregnant girl's burden of sin, Myrrha-as-tree goes into labor. An exquisitely detailed description brings before our eyes this doubly marked body straining, being ravaged by pain, until it finally splits open, delivering its "living load," the child named Adonis, searching for a way out of its enclosure (10.503–13; trans. Melville):

At male conceptus sub robore creuerat infans
 quaerebatque uiam qua se genetrice relicta
 exsereret; media grauidus tumet arbore uenter.
 tendit onus matrem, neque habent sua uerba dolores,
 nec Lucina potest parientis uoce uocari.
 nitenti tamen est similis curuataque crebros
 dat gemitus arbor lacrimisque cadentibus umet.
 constitit ad ramos mitis Lucina dolentes
 admouitque manus et uerba puerpera dixit;
 arbor agit rimas et fissa cortice uiuum
 reddit onus . . .

The child conceived in sin had grown inside
 The wood and now was searching for some way
 To leave its mother and thrust forth. The trunk
 Swelled in the middle with its burdened womb.
 The load was straining, but the pains of birth
 Could find no words, no voice in travail call
 Lucina. Yet the tree, in labour, stooped
 With groan on groan and wet with falling tears.
 Then, pitying, Lucina stood beside
 The branches in their pain and laid her hands
 Upon them and pronounced the words of birth.
 The tree split open and the sundered bark
 Yielded its living load . . .

A pantomime *fabula* by Lucian's time (see n. 19), the story had certainly become popular dance entertainment in the first century C.E. According to Josephus (*AJ* 19.94), the drama danced in Rome on the day of Gaius Caligula's assassination (41 C.E.) bore the title *Cinyras* and the action clearly centered on the ill-starred story of father and daughter, albeit with a non-metamorphic ending:

ὁ τε ὀρχηστῆς δρᾶμα εἰσάγει Κινύραν, ἐν ᾧ αὐτός τε ἐκτείνεται καὶ ἡ θυγάτηρ
 Μύρρα, αἰμά τε ἦν τεχνητὸν πολὺ

and the pantomime dancer presented the drama entitled *Cinyras*⁷⁶ in which both he himself and his daughter Myrrha were killed and there was a profusion of artificial blood

Even by Ovid's time, however, in the first century B.C.E., the incestuous girl and her arboreal transformation had enjoyed a prosperous career as poetic subject,⁷⁷ "collector's item" for mythographers,⁷⁸ and, above all, as an illustrious example of the Hellenistic and neoteric predilection for illicit, morbid, hopeless love with a disastrous ending. Her greatest moment in the limelight was undoubtedly her starring role in Helvius Cinna's *Zmyrna*, the famously obscure Neoteric product which took nine years to complete⁷⁹ and was hailed by Catullus (*C.* 95) as a masterpiece destined to endure the ravages of time. In fact, "barely two decades after the poem was written" (Kaster 1995, 200), it became the subject of a formidably learned commentary famous in its own right, authored by Lucius Crassicius Pansa.⁸⁰

Why is this particular footnote in literary history of any import to the relation of Ovid's poem to the stage? Suetonius' entry on Crassicius tells us that this supremely erudite teacher-turned-commentator⁸¹ had started his professional career as a helper to mime writers: *hic initio*

⁷⁶Unlike Josephus, Suetonius (*Calig.* 57.4), who identifies the pantomime in question as Mnester, one of Caligula's favorite dancers, does not name the *fabula* danced. He does nevertheless state that "Mnester the pantomime danced the tragedy which some time in the past the tragedian Neoptolemus had acted, at the games during which Philip, the king of Macedon, had been assassinated" (*et pantomimus Mnester tragoediam saltavit, quam olim Neoptolemus tragoedus ludis, quibus rex Macedonum Philippus occisus est, egerat*). Suetonius' information dovetails with Josephus' positioning of Caligula's murder on the anniversary of Philip's assassination. If the two performances had actually been linked at least thematically, the link would testify to the free flow of mythological matter between the *saltatio* of a *pantomimus* and the *actio* of a *tragoedus* over the centuries.

⁷⁷Primarily in Cinna's *Zmyrna* (see main text above). Myrrha's transformation is referred to in Prop. 3.19.16 and early Ovid: *Ars Am.* 1.286; *Rem. Am.* 100; see Hollis 2007, 33. Among Cinna's possible Greek poetic antecedents and sources one might count Panyassis, Antimachus, Lycophron, Eratosthenes, Nicander, and, of course, Parthenius: see Hollis 2007, 34; cf. Wiseman 1974, 49.

⁷⁸Theodorus' *Metamorphoses* (*SH* 749–50), a (possibly poetic) mythographic text predating Ovid, preserved a version of the Myrrha myth.

⁷⁹Catull. 95, 1–2; Quint. *Inst.* 10.4.4; Serv. Verg. *Ecl.* 9.35.

⁸⁰This much can be inferred from Suet. *Gram.* 18.2; see further Hollis 2007, 37.

⁸¹Suet. *Gram.* 18.2: *deinde in pergula docuit, donec commentario Zmyrnae edito adeo inclaruit ut haec de eo scriberentur* ("he thereafter taught in a building annex that served as a lecture room, until he published his commentary on the *Zmyrna* and gained such renown thereby that the following lines were written about him"; trans. Kaster 1995, 23). On Crassicius Pansa and his career, see Wiseman 1985b.

circa scaenam uersatus est dum mimographos adiuuat (“At the start of his career he was active in the theatre, assisting the writers of mimes”; trans. Kaster 1995, 23). Looking into Cinna’s *Zmyrna*, then, is more than an issue of *Quellenforschung* for Ovid’s narrative. Suetonius’ intriguing scrap of information on the (presumably unorthodox) career of the single man who managed to prise *Zmyrna*’s well-guarded secrets open⁸² grants a fleeting yet invaluable glimpse into the kind of “traffic” taking place between the “low” culture of the stage and the meteoric heights of intricate, allusive literary production in the first century B.C.E. Did Cinna’s poem ever travel the distance between the lofty grounds of an exquisitely crafted epyllion and the popular stage? Might some learned boundary-crosser, affiliated to the pantomimes in the way Crassicius Pansa was connected to the mimes, have brought Cinna’s epic from the heights of refined neoteric poetry to the popular and popularizing stage? If that were the case, might Ovid have witnessed (and been inspired by) some pantomime’s Myrrha in the course of being transformed into a tree on stage?⁸³ Might he even have witnessed Adonis’ birth, whether from a human mother *parturiens* or from an arboreal womb?

Such questions are obviously unanswerable and, in any case, our knowledge of Cinna’s epyllion is far too fragmentary to be of any help.⁸⁴ They are nevertheless worth asking, especially as some pieces of the overall puzzle do point in the direction of a stage-enacted birth at the root of Ovid’s imagination. A Pompeian wall-painting from the Neronian period depicts Adonis’ birth from an already transformed Myrrha, her human nature fully merged with her arboreal destiny. Possibly “one of the most effective representations of metamorphosis in ancient art” (Sharrock 1996,

⁸² Suet. *Gram.* 18.2: “Zmyrna has agreed to give herself to one man—Crassicius: / Leave off wooing her, you ignorant crowd. / She has stated her wish: she’ll wed only Crassicius, / Since only Crassicius knows her secrets” (*uni Crassicio se credere Zmyrna probauit: / desinite, indocti, coniugio hanc petere. / soli Crassicio se dixit nubere uelle, / intima cui soli nota sua extiterint*; trans. Kaster 1995, 23).

⁸³ For the traffic “upstream,” from the lower towards the higher registers of culture, see most importantly Horsfall 1979; McKeown 1979; Fantham 1989; Wiseman 1999; 2008a; May 2006; 2008; Panayotakis 2008.

⁸⁴ In particular, although “it seems likely that there was a detailed account of Smyrna’s arboreal transformation, in a style which we would call Ovidian” (Hollis 2007, 32), the possibility that Cinna’s line at *scelus incesto Smyrnae crescebat in aluo* (fr. 7 Courtney 1993 = fr. 9 Hollis 2007) refers to the womb of the girl *after* her transformation would be no more than a guess. It is therefore impossible to ascertain whether the woman/tree in labor is Ovid’s conflation of arborealization and Adonis’ birth or Ovid’s pickings from either Cinna or the Hellenistic tradition upon which he drew. On a possibility of an earlier treatment of the story by Parthenius, see Lightfoot 1999, 183.

117), the painting comes from the Casa dei Dioscuri (room 30) which bears some of the clearest marks of the city's pantomime infatuation in the form of graffiti in honor of pantomime superstars.⁸⁵ Were the owners of the house pantomime-struck enough to fill the rooms with paintings either inspired by the stage or at least depicting stories popular on the pantomime stage? If so, the arboreal birth may well have been a welcome choreographic variant, making Myrrha's arborification unmistakably distinct from any other in the same metamorphic cluster.

But whether woman or woman/tree in labor, a pantomime rendition of Myrrha's birth-pangs would have been fully in accord with the genre's obsessive focalization of the female perspective and its systematic privileging of the female experience, not stopping short of the most corporeal, intimate and gender-defining female act of all, that of giving birth. The distance traveled from mainstream aesthetic positions of other performative genres is immediately obvious. Even when allowing for the distorting lens of Plato's extreme hostility to *mimesis* when he prohibits the representation of women in sickness or love or childbirth (*Resp.* 395e), we can safely assume that pantomime took the representation of female emotional and bodily trauma to new heights. The average pantomime of Lucian's time would have included in his repertoire "the birthpangs of Leto" (*Salt* 38), "the double birth of Dionysus" (39), even "the birth of Zeus" (80), perhaps indulging in the kind of expressive choreographies that earned him throughout antiquity the opprobrium of moralists and Fathers of the Christian Church, who saw in him a body emasculated and a soul yearning to actually become female.⁸⁶ It therefore seems that a major site of convergence between the corporeal poetics of pantomime dancing and the "embodied" poetics of Ovid's epic was their shared fascination with the representation of the female form in the convulsive agonies of childbirth and physical pain. For Myrrha's story is not the sole example of Ovid's exploration of gestation, birth, and motherhood in the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid loves exploring "the unstable ontological and phenomenological status of pregnancy, its conflation of the boundaries of the body, of self and other,"⁸⁷ on occasion even offering his reader

⁸⁵ See, e.g., *CIL* IV. 1294 from the house's main doorway, celebrating the legendary Paris II, "darling and sweetheart of the city" (*urbis deliciae*, Mart. *Epigr.* 11.13.3): Richardson 1955, 93.

⁸⁶ Christians in particular never tired of troping the dancer's body as deeply deviant from the dominant cultural parameters defining masculinity. See, e.g., St. Cyprian *Ad Don.* 8; Novatian *Spect.* 6.6; St. John Chrysostom *PG* 57.426.

⁸⁷ McAuley 2012, 137.

“a personalized, first person account of the pain and physical processes of childbirth, unparalleled in surviving latin poetry.”⁸⁸

The tangible materiality of pantomime’s pregnant and birthing bodies may have sparked Ovid’s fertile *ingenium* and Ovid’s own “lurid sensationalism” (Lightfoot 2009, 230) to explore grounds hitherto uncharted. Irrespective of whether Ovid himself was or was not inspired by a danced Myrrha, however, it is important to acknowledge that his own text is arranged in such a way as to provide material almost as good as “ready-made” for those intent on composing libretto scenes for dancers. Myrrha’s emotional turmoil, as she oscillates between shame and illicit passion (10.298–367); her nocturnal suicide attempt intercepted by the Nurse (368–430); the incestuous act itself, repeated often in Cinyras’ bed-chamber (431–68); the revelation of Myrrha’s identity and her aimless wanderings until she falls upon the ground exhausted by the burden of her womb and prays for deliverance (469–87); finally, the metamorphosis itself and the birth of baby Adonis tenderly looked after by the Naiads (488–518) amount to the kind of short, self-contained yet carefully articulated “monodramas” that would have been the *sine qua non* of a well composed *fabula saltica*. When Ovid intriguingly asserts from his place of exile that his poems (*poemata/carmina*) have often been danced (*saltata/saltari*) “in a full house” (*pleno . . . teatro*)⁸⁹ yet he himself has “composed nothing for the theaters,”⁹⁰ far from renouncing his own tragedy *Medea*, he simply clarifies that he never entered the (possibly lucrative) business of providing libretti for the dancing stars himself. The adaptation of his verses for the stage was carried out by others and was, by Ovid’s own admission, a resounding success.

We can now move swiftly towards a conclusion. While the mediation of pantomime dancing in the crafting of Ovidian tales of arboreal transformation lies beyond the power of empirical proof, the categorical exclusion of danced drama from the emotional and cognitive processing of such poetic narratives by imperial readers is equally unjustifiable. As demonstrated in this piece, the signs of confluence between the liter-

⁸⁸ McAuley 2012, 136, on Alcmena’s narration of her own labor in *Met.* 9.

⁸⁹ *Ov. Tr.* 2.519–20: *et mea sunt populo saltata poemata saepe, / saepe oculos etiam detinuere tuos* (“my poems too have often been danced in public, often have they captivated even those eyes of yours”); *Tr.* 5.7.25–26: *carmina quod pleno saltari nostra teatro, / uersibus et plaudi scribis, amice, meis* (“you write to me, my friend, that my poems are being danced in a full house, and that my verses draw applause”).

⁹⁰ *Ov. Tr.* 5.7.27–28: *nil equidem feci (tu scis hoc ipse) theatri, / Musa nec in plausus ambitiosa mea est* (“Nothing, indeed, have I composed (you know this yourself) for the theaters, nor is my Muse ambitious for applause”).

ary and the theatrical are strong enough to corroborate the suggestion that the poet's writing was vibrantly alert to the plots and gestures, the emotional and bodily dynamic inherent in the expressive mode of pantomime dancing. In fact, we can go further still. Ovid, whose poetry takes frequent, explicit notice of the stage and its idioms,⁹¹ was nothing short of fascinated by the emergent dance form. The gestural, corporeal languages of the Augustan stage captured his imagination, quickened his artistic pulse and set his poetic sensibilities aflame—so much so that, as Richlin 1992, 175, put it, “perhaps this transformative poem derives its poetry from motion, the motion of the dance.” Over and above the well-known literary affiliations to Hellenistic and Neoteric poetry and the creative mixing of the genres represented in his poem,⁹² the single most pervasive, indeed the catalytic, influence on the composition of the *Metamorphoses* should be sought in the haunting aura of the dancing body and the aesthetic predilections of the newly fashionable theatrical venture. Even irrespective of one's readiness to accept the possibility that pantomime resonated deeply and profoundly with Ovid's poetic sensibilities, what I hope to have shown in this article through the example of tree-metamorphosis is that Ovid's narrative lends itself to powerful readings through the lens of pantomime dancing; if it did, as is almost certainly the case, inspire libretti for the use of dancers, we can easily appreciate why. Most importantly, whether pantomime-inflected or simply congenial to the pantomime aesthetic, Ovid's metamorphic narratives provide invaluable insights into the manifold, creative ways in which one of the foremost poets of the Augustan period engaged with a theatrical attraction set clearly, from early on, to be a highly successful enterprise. By taking such insights seriously enough we can, at long last, accord mimetic, representational dance the centrality and prominence it most certainly deserves in the study of imperial literature and culture.

⁹¹ Important references to the stage can be found, e.g., in *Fast.* 4.326 (“I shall tell you marvels, but marvels attested also by the stage,” *mira, sed et scaena testificata, loquor*) (with Wiseman 2008a, 230); *Fast.* 3.535–38 (reference to the Roman plebs on the banks of the Tiber, rehearsing during the festival of Anna Perenna songs they have picked up at pantomime performances); *Met.* 3.111–14 (detailed reference to the effect created by the raising of the *siparium*, the painted theatrical curtain which, unlike its modern counterpart, rises from the bottom up, instead of falling); *Rem. Am.* 751–55 (a wonderful insight into the complexity of the male viewer's response to the pantomime dancer's rhythmical configurations); *Tr.* 2.497–514 (a most accurate synopsis of the typical “adultery-mime” scenario).

⁹² On the poem's generic polyphony and aspects of its diverse affiliations to epic, elegy, Hellenistic/neoteric epyllion, tragedy, pastoral, see (among a vast corpus) Kenney 1976, 2009; Knox 1986; Hinds 1987; 1998, 107–19; Solodow 1988; Farrell 1992; Keith 1992; 2002; Myers 1994; Jouteur 2001; Fantham 2004, 119–32; Lightfoot 2009, 228–35; Wray 2009.

APPENDIX

Dancing Trees: A Choreographic Note

As this piece has not shied away from the speculative and the unknown, I will end with an even more speculative attempt to draw out the latent choreographic potential of Ovid's arborealization narratives. My starting point is yet again Daphne, the epic's first tree-transformation, which I will now consider through the lens of the figurative arts. A glance at paintings, reliefs, and other artefacts reveals how artists love bringing to the fore the inherently dynamic nature of this myth.

Although the static nature of all painting is unable to convey actual development in time, some representations are nevertheless particularly effective at creating an impression of diachronicity by foregrounding the process of change, metamorphosis "in the making." This feeling of an unfolding, evolving, progressive sequence can be evoked in art by means of representing the metamorphosis as unfinished, incomplete,⁹³ as Lucian believes is the artistic norm in the iconography of the "Apollo and Daphne" story: "such is the picture of Daphne as our artists paint her, in the process of turning into a tree (ἄρτι . . . ἀποδενδρουμένην) while Apollo is trying to catch her" (Luc. *Ver. Hist.* 1.8). Thus on an early third-century C.E. white glass ewer from Kerch in the Crimea region,⁹⁴ what is still left of Daphne's human body above the loins emerges quite vividly from within a tree trunk (its lower part being formed by the girl's legs tapered together) which opens up into side-branches with sprouting twigs. The viewer is given the impression that any moment now the fork of the tree trunk is about to close, enveloping and merging with the human form inside it. A similar pictorial logic in the representation of metamorphosis is at work on a sixth-century C.E. Coptic ivory relief, probably from Egypt: the girl's slender, graceful body emerges from the open fold of a tree trunk, with whose lower part her feet have already merged.⁹⁵ Equally connotative of incremental change is an early third-century C.E. mosaic from Tebessa (Theveste),⁹⁶ where the artist has turned the lower part of

⁹³For an excellent discussion of the problems of representing metamorphosis in visual art, see Sharrock 1996, who singles out the representation of incompleteness as a means of evoking the diachronicity of literary narrative (107).

⁹⁴Palagia 1986, 347, n. 39; the vase was probably made in and imported from Antioch.

⁹⁵Palagia 1986, 347, n. 35.

⁹⁶Palagia 1986, 346, n. 18.

Daphne's arms and hands into shapeless stumps with sprouting twigs and where the full coalescence of human and plant nature feels imminent. On a third-century C.E. mosaic from the House of Dionysus in Paphos (Palagia 1986, 347, n. 37), Daphne's left leg only is encased by twig-sprouting wood up to her upper thigh, while the lighter color on the other leg may indicate its incipient transformation. The fact that Ovid's verses display a remarkable affinity with these most vivid pictorial representations of progressive, incremental change throws sharply into relief the "theatrical" and "visual" quality of the *Metamorphoses*. What Barkan 1986, 9, writes on Philostratus' description of a Neapolitan painting, which includes the metamorphosis of the Heliades (*Imag.* 1.11), is also true for Ovid: "The words make us read the figures moving gradually upwards, as though the metamorphosis were actually taking place as we read."

Moreover, far from seeming fixed and static, many "Apollo and Daphne" pictorial compositions convey the impression of movement and action. Hands stretched sideways in fear, as the fleeing maiden is desperate to keep the predator at bay, or extended forwards or upwards in supplication; torso twisting, tilting, or rotating, as she looks over her shoulder in alarm; spine arching backwards in a last attempt to break free from Apollo's grasp: the expressiveness of Daphne's postures amounts to gestural dynamics that bring to mind professionally executed dance moves. Particularly reminiscent of dance idioms are: (i) a Pompeian fresco from the Casa dei Dioscuri where Daphne, down on her knees, head tilted backwards, wards off Apollo's embrace with one arm while thrusting the other high in the air (Palagia 1986, 345, n. 9); (ii) a wall painting from Stabiae, with Daphne semi-kneeling, one leg bent, the other thrust out and extended to the front, twisting her upper body to push off an eagerly embracing Apollo (Palagia 1986, 345, n. 13); (iii) a late second century C.E. mosaic from El Djem, with both Daphne and Apollo seemingly choreographed in matching postures, right arm gently undulating to the side over the chest, one leg extended backwards in a run (Palagia 1986, 346, n. 16); (iv) a badly preserved Pompeian fresco, with Daphne almost falling over backwards, overpowered by Apollo's body bent over hers (Palagia 1986, 347, n. 34); and (v) a limestone relief of the second or third century C.E. built into the outer wall of a church in Ristissen. Here, both figures are barely contained by the fixity of the stone. Daphne's body, twisted sideways and with graceful arms half-changed into branches, seems to be flowing on air, while the figure of Apollo is ready to fly straight at her (Palagia 1986, 346, n. 24). Similarly, the pictorial Apollo's eager stride or ardent lunge, on occasion seizing his beloved by the hair, as on an early

third-century C.E. mosaic from Thessaloniki (Palagia 1986, 346, n. 17), or by the arm, as on a Neapolitan wall-painting (Palagia 1986, 345, n. 13), is the eloquent counterpart of his literary pursuit in Ovid, where he is said to give his victim no respite but to press on, hot on her heels, his hands almost on her shoulders, his breath ruffling her flowing locks (1.541–42). As for Ovid’s description of the very moment of metamorphosis, it is so markedly replete with gestural and bodily notation that the feeling of its close affinity to stage representation modes becomes almost palpable (cf. Ingleheart 2008, 213). Placing a hand on the bark, Apollo feels the girl’s still-fluttering heart (1.553–54), throws his arms around the newly formed branches, as if they were human limbs, and plants kisses on the wood (1.555–56). One cannot help bring to mind at this point Quintilian’s well-known disparagement of similar imitative actions in oratory, such as the suggestion of a sick man by means of imitating the action of the doctor taking the pulse or the indication of a harpist by means of moving one’s hands as if they were plucking strings (*Inst.* 11.3.88). The fact that this unwelcome style of mimetic language is projected onto the *saltator* (11.3.89) speaks volumes about the concrete semiotics of the pantomime stage. In any case, Ovid’s version in itself, with its effusive display of passion and its clear delineation of somatic action, can adequately explain why this particular story proved to be one of the most enduring love tales in the medium of dance.

Is there any hope then that we might be able to move backwards from Ovid’s text to real-life choreographies regarding the stories we know securely to have been pantomime matter? The answer is unequivocally negative. Even if we were in a position to confirm with absolute certainty that intimate commerce between pantomime and the *Metamorphoses* had in fact existed and impacted on the poem’s gestation, it would still have been methodologically foolhardy to treat Ovid’s metamorphic narratives, for all their gestural and physical expressiveness, as windows on real-life pantomime choreographies. We can nevertheless endeavor to unlock the choreographic potential inherent in his stories, along the lines already suggested here with respect to the “Apollo and Daphne” scene. Moreover, we can explore the possibility that Ovid’s narrative choices in metamorphic scenes are not merely influenced by a pantomime aesthetic but, more specifically, have preserved the traces, even if faded and distant, of real-life choreographic trends and patterns. So, for example, with respect to the particular metamorphic cluster of tree-transformations that is the focus of this article, it may be possible to detect at least two “signature” dynamic moves concerning the process of arborization itself—the distillation of techniques more at home on the stage.

In the first place, there is the recurrent motif of the morphing subject's sudden immobility and rooting to the ground,⁹⁷ a trope infinitely more impressive when the dissolution into stillness follows a sequence of breathtakingly swift movement, as in the case of Daphne, whose transformation begins in mid-flight: "her feet but now so swift were anchored fast / In numb stiff roots" (*pes modo tam uelox pigris radicibus haeret*, 1.551; trans. Melville). We are fortunate to have Libanius' informative comment on the marvel that resides in the dancer's trajectory from fluid, virtuosic motion (*Or.* 64.117) to absolute fixity, as dancing freezes into a veritable *tableau-vivant* emerging on the stage (*Or.* 64.118):

πότερον δὲ ἂν τις ἀγασθεῖη μειζόνως τὴν τῆς περιφορᾶς ἐν πλήθει συνέχειαν ἢ τὴν ἑξαίφνης ἐπὶ τούτῳ πάγιον στάσιν ἢ τὸν ἐν τῇ στάσει τηρούμενον τύπον; ὡς 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 crystallized 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 (i.e., takes shape, emerges).

Watching gravity-defying leaps or fast pirouetting melt into poses and postures frozen into stillness seems to have been one of the particular thrills of pantomime dancing. Given the centrality of this sequence in the kinetic patterns of the pantomime genre,⁹⁸ it is entirely conceivable that its memory seeped into the narrative patterns of Ovid's verse, informing and enhancing the contemporary reader's appreciation of poetic arborifications.

⁹⁷ See *Met.* 1.551 (Daphne); 2.349 (Phaethon's sisters); 9.351 (Dryope); 10.490–91 (Myrrha); 11.69–72 and 76 (Thracian women). In the iconography of Apollo's pursuit of Daphne it is possible that the fleeing maiden's sudden halt is indicated by the arch that her *himation* forms right above her head, as if it, too, had stood still and grown stiff: see Kondoleon 1995, 167, on the Apollo and Daphne mosaic in the House of Dionysus in Paphos. The *himation*/arch is very typical of the fleeing Daphne iconography in general.

⁹⁸ For the speed of the dancers' floating on the *orchestra*, their pirouetting velocity and nimble feet, see, e.g., Liban. *Or.* 64.117, St. John Chrysostom *PG* 49.195; for the dancers' freezing into attitudes like figures in a painting, cf. Plut. *Mor.* 747c (see further Lada-Richards 2003; 2004; 2007, 46–48); for the alternation of rapid movement and statuesque configurations, cf. *Latin Anthology* I.1 [Shackleton Bailey] 100.7: *uertitur, adstat* ("he spins around, he stands still"), with Webb 2008a, 50.

A second recurring pattern potentially of interest for a choreographically inflected reading of tree-metamorphoses in the epic is the progressive enveloping of the morphing body by the circular movement of the ascending bark: as it slowly winds its way up a human's limbs and trunk,⁹⁹ the experiencing subject struggles in vain to break free from an embrace which smothers all signs of independent movement or even speech.¹⁰⁰ The most powerful evocation of this notion of the overwhelming of one's self by alien matter gathering pace and strength as it advances we find in the description of Myrrha's transformation, where in the short space of two verses the poet piles up verbs of tying (*praestringere*), burying (*obruere*), and covering (*operire*).¹⁰¹ In Book 11, too, after having signaled Bacchus' chaining action (*ligauit*, 11.70), which fastens firmly each of Orpheus' frenzied killers to the ground, Ovid has recourse to a highly charged simile to convey the agony and the despair of pointless struggle. With a sensitivity every bit the equal of the great hunting similes of the *Aeneid*, each of the morphing agents, the women of Thrace, is compared to a helpless trapped bird, flapping and flaying around to set itself free yet tightening its bonds even further in the process (11.73–78; trans. Melville):

utque suum laqueis, quos callidus abdidit auceps,
 crus ubi commisit uolucris sensitque teneri,
 plangitur ac trepidans astringit uincula motu,
 sic, ut quaeque solo defixa cohaeserat harum,
 exsternata fugam frustra temptabat; at illam
 lenta tenet radix exsultantemque¹⁰² coercet.

And as a bird, its foot held in a snare
 Hidden by a clever fowler, feels it's caught
 And flaps its wings and by its flutterings
 Tightens the trap, so each of them was stuck

⁹⁹ On the progressive advancement of the bark, see above n. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Struggle, as e.g., in *Met.* 9.351–55 (Dryope), 11.80–82 (Edonides); futility of struggle: e.g., 11.77 (quoted in the text below).

¹⁰¹ See *Met.* 10.495–96: *iamque grauem crescens uterum praestrinxerat arbor / pectoraque obruerat collumque operire parabat* (“And now the growing tree had tightly swathed / Her swelling womb, had overlapped her breast, / Ready to wrap her neck”; trans. Melville).

¹⁰² Interestingly, the verb *exsultare* has strong dancing connotations in Latin authors, most crucially by means of its connection with the vigorous, thumping, ecstatic bodily performance of the Salian rite (see, e.g., Festus 334L: *in Saliorum exultationibus*, the exultations of the *Salii*). Further sources and discussion in Habinek 2005, 28–33, who also notes (31) that “*Exultatio* is a form of mimesis.”

Fast in the soil and struggled, terrified
 In vain, to escape as she jerked away,
 The lithe root held her shackled.

Our sources themselves cannot support the suggestion of pantomimic value associated with the repeated Ovidian motif of resistance against a constraining force. Yet we can learn a great deal from a landmark work of early modernism in dance, Martha Graham's haunting *Lamentation* (1930), whose choreographic centerpiece (and innovation) is precisely the human body's struggle against the stifling fixity of matter that seeks to smother and repress the merest quiver of a nerve or vein. In Graham's work, feelings of utter grief and helplessness are conveyed by means of the dancer's entanglement in a tightly fitted shroud, an elastic tube of jersey-wool fabric worn in such a way as to sheath and encase the body almost entirely: only the extremities are meant to be in plain view (and occasionally the face and neck); all the while the dancer's feet are firmly rooted to the ground, her body as good as tied to a bench. By means of pulling and tugging in opposite directions until the fabric becomes twisted into the most distorted shapes and asymmetrical lines, the dancer is able to release wells of locked-up energy. As dance critic Marcia Siegel 1985, 39, writes:

What she achieved by restricting herself in this fashion was an unnaturally intense concentration on the body's dynamics . . . the minute she starts to move, the tube gets pulled into diagonals that cross the center of her body; as she tugs asymmetrically in opposition to the rounded forms of her back, her head, her arching rib cage, the jersey converts the energy of stress and distortion into visible shapes and lines.

A piece of fabric was all the American choreographer needed to convey the impossibility of escape and even the futility of putting up resistance. Did any ancient pantomime dancer ever think of using his emblematically versatile mantle (the *pallium*)¹⁰³ to underscore the notion of fixity

¹⁰³Our informant is Fronto (*De Orat.* 5, p. 154 Van den Hout), who indicates that thanks to their skilful manipulation of this single piece of clothing, pantomimes can represent "a swan's tail, the tresses of Venus, a Fury's scourge" (*caudam cycni, capillum Veneris, Furiae flagellum*). The *himation* shown in some pictures as wrapped around Daphne's legs (examples are: Palagia 1986, 345, n. 10, from the Casa dei Capitelli Colorati in Pompeii; Palagia 1986, 346, n. 19, a third century C.E. mosaic from Lillebonne) might be something encouraging us to think in this direction, although inevitably all such thoughts are speculative only. On the early third century C.E. mosaic from Tebessa (Palagia 1986, 346, no. 18; cf. p. 158–59 above), the transforming Daphne's legs are clearly draped.

and the constraint imposed by the ascending bark? As far as ancient testimonies go, we are completely in the dark. Yet it is still instructive to consider the dancing figure's fight to liberate herself in the *Lamentation* as the choreographic partner to the jerky, agonising movements of Ovid's morphing figures, as they strive to tear away the bark enveloping their limbs. Perhaps such narrative moments bring us as close as we can ever hope to get to an impression of tree-metamorphosis in-the-making in early Augustan Rome.

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