

The Implications of Ancient Pantomime for Latin literature

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-Brought to Rome by Pylades and Bathyllus?

1) Lucian, *On Dancing* 66 [all translation of Lucian taken from Harmon (1925)]

In that connection I should like to tell you something that was said by another barbarian. Noticing that the dancer had five masks ready—the drama had that number of acts since he saw but the one dancer, he enquired who were to dance and act the other roles, and when he learned that the dancer himself was to act and dance them all, he said; ‘I did not realise, my friend, that though you have only this one body, you have many souls.’

2) Lucian, *On Dancing* 67

In general, the dancer undertakes to present and enact characters and emotions, introducing now an angry person, one man afflicted with madness, another with grief, and all within fixed bounds. Indeed, the most surprising part of it is that within the selfsame day, at one moment we are shown Athamas in a frenzy at another Ino in terror; presently the same person is Atreus, and after a little Thyestes; then Aegisthus, or Aerope; yet they all are but a single man.

3) Lucian, *On Dancing* 63

This is what he did; enjoining silence upon the stampers and the fluteplayers and upon the chorus itself, quite unsupported, he danced the amours of Aphrodite and Ares, Helius tattling, Hepaestus laying his plot and trapping both of them with his entangling bonds, the gods who came in on them, portrayed individually, Aphrodite ashamed, Ares seeking cover and begging for mercy, and everything that belongs to this story, in such wise that Demetrius was delighted beyond measure with what was taking place and paid the highest possible tribute to the dancer; he raised his voice and shouted at the top of his lungs: ‘I hear the story that you are acting, man, I do not just see it; you seem to me to be talking with your very hands!’

4) Cassiodorus *Variae* 4.51.9 [trans. S. J. B. Barnish (1992)]

Again, there is the pantomime actor, who derives his name from manifold imitations. When first he comes on stage, lured by applause, hands of musicians, skilled in various instruments, support him. Then the hand of meaning expounds the song to the eyes of melody, and, by a code of gestures, as if by letters, it instructs the spectator's sight; summaries are read in it, and without writing, it performs what writing has set forth. The same body portrays Hercules and Venus; it displays a woman in a man; it creates a king and a soldier; it renders an old man and a young; you would thus imagine that in one man there were many, differentiated by such a variety of impersonation.

5) Lucian, *On Dancing* 64

Since we are under Nero in fancy, I wish to tell the remark of a barbarian concerning the same dancer, which may be considered a very great tribute to his art. One of the barbarians from Pontus, a man of royal blood, came to Nero on some business or other, and among other entertainments saw that dancer perform so vividly that although he could not follow what was being sung—he was but half Hellenised, as it happened—he understood everything. So when it came to be time for him to go back to his own country, Nero, in saying good-bye, urged him to ask for anything that he wanted, and promised to give it him. ‘If you give me the dancer,’ said he, ‘you will please me mightily!’ When Nero asked, ‘What good would he be to you there?’, he replied, ‘I have barbarian neighbours who do not speak the same language, and it is not easy to keep supplied with interpreters for them. If I am in want of one, therefore, this man will interpret everything for me by signs.’ So deeply had he been impressed by that disclosure of the distinctness and lucidity of the mimicry of the dance.

