

Dance as an aesthetic paradigm in Nonnus' *Dionysiaka*

Karin Schlapbach (kschlapba@chs.harvard.edu)

Nonnus, *Dionysiaka*

1.11-19:

ἄξατέ μοι νάρθηκα, τινάξατε κύμβαλα, Μούσαι, 11
καὶ παλάμη δότε θύρσον ἀειδομένου Διονύσου.
ἀλλὰ χοροῦ ψαύοντα Φάρω παρὰ γείτοσι νήσῳ 13
στήσατέ μοι **Πρωτήα** πολύτροπον, ὄφρα φανείη
ποικίλον εἶδος ἔχων, ὅτι ποικίλον ὕμνον ἀράσσω. 15
εἰ γὰρ ἐφερπύσσειε δράκων κυκλούμενος ὄλκῳ,
μέλψω θεῖον ἄεθλον, ὅπως κισσώδει θύρσῳ 17
φρικτὰ δρακοντοκόμων ἐδαΐζετο φύλα Γιγάντων·
εἰ δὲ λέων ...

1.11: Bring me the fennel stalk, shake your cymbals,
Muses, and hand me over the thyrsos of Dionysus,
whom I am going to sing!

But as a fellow dancer in your chorus set **Proteus** of the
many turns in front of me on the neighboring island of
Pharos, in order that he may appear in all his diversity of
shapes, since I compose a diverse song.

If, as a serpent, he should glide along his winding trail, I
will sing the achievement of the god, how with the ivy-
wreathed thyrsos he extirpated the horrid races of the
serpent-haired Giants. If, as a lion, etc.

Himerius, Speech 68

lines 63-68: **δοκεῖ δέ μοι καὶ ὁ Πρωτεύς σοφιστής** τις
τοὺς λόγους δεινὸς **γενόμενος**, ἐπειδὴ τις αὐτὸν
μῶμος ἐκ φιλοσόφου γλώττης ἠνώχλησεν, εἰς
πολλὰς ιδέας μερίσας τοὺς λόγους, ἵνα οὕτως
ἐλέγχι τὰ σκώμματα, περιπεσὼν δὲ αὐτὸς σοφιστῆι
δεινότερῳ, τῷ μύθῳ παρ' ἐκείνου παθεῖν ὃ κατὰ
τοὺς λόγους εἰργάζετο.

It seems to me that when some blame from a censorious
tongue fell upon Proteus, who was an able sophist in his
speech, he too arranged his discourse into many forms in
order to refute the criticism; but when he encountered an
even mightier sophist, he suffered through the latter's
mythos what he himself used to do in his discourse.

Lucian, On dance

§ 19: **δοκεῖ γάρ μοι** ὁ παλαιὸς μῦθος **καὶ Πρωτέα**
τὸν Αἰγύπτιον οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ **ὄρχηστὴν τινὰ**
γενέσθαι λέγειν, μιμητικὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ πρὸς
πάντα σχηματίζεσθαι καὶ μεταβάλλεσθαι
δυνάμενον... ὁ δὲ μῦθος παραλαβὼν πρὸς τὸ
παραδοξότερον τὴν φύσιν αὐτοῦ διηγήσατο ὡς
γιγνομένου ταῦτα ἄπερ ἐμμίειτο.

It seems to me that the ancient myth about Proteus the
Egyptian means nothing else than that he was a dancer,
an imitative fellow, able to shape himself and change
himself into anything... Mythology, however, on taking
it over, described his nature in terms more paradoxical,
as if he became what he imitated.

References

D. Gigli Piccardi, "Nonno, Proteo e l'isola di Faro", *Prometheus* 19 (1993) 230-234.