

Zoa Alonso

Departamento de Filología Latina  
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

## CHOREOGRAPHIC VERSIONS OF PURCELL'S *DIDO & AENEAS*: MARK MORRIS AND SASHA WALTZ

VERSIONES COREOGRÁFICAS DE *DIDO & AENEAS* DE PURCELL:  
MARK MORRIS Y SASHA WALTZ

En este artículo se lleva a cabo una revisión del mito de Dido y Eneas en el ámbito coreográfico y se estudia la importancia que ha tenido la partitura de Henry Purcell (ca. 1688) entre bailarines y coreógrafos de la danza contemporánea. Las versiones de Mark Morris (1989) y Sasha Waltz (2005) constituyen, en concreto, dos ejemplos ideales para percibir ciertos matices en su relación con el mito virgiliano a partir de unos intereses bien diferenciados.

Dido, the mythical queen of Carthage, has been a paradigm of the neglected lover in Western culture, embodying the qualities of dignity and seriousness of a woman who recognizes her own mistakes and the unavoidable consequences of her acts. A victim of her fate as well as of the fate of Rome, the character was masterly modelled by Virgil and constantly reshaped by other writers, painters, musicians, and also dancers<sup>1</sup>. In fact, even if the heroine's fortune was originally linked to the poetic sphere of the spoken language, the physicality implied in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, the expressiveness of Dido's *pathos* (so well concluded by Ovid in the *Epistles*<sup>2</sup>), the versatility of her emotions and the dramatic power of her fatal sui-

<sup>1</sup> For a general approach of the myth's fortune in art and literature, cf. M. T. Graziosi, F. Piccirillo and M. Sala (1985), *Dido. Fortuna letteraria. Fortuna artistica. Fortuna musicale* in: „Enciclopedia Virgiliana”. Vol. 2, Rome, p. 57–63 and M. Burden (ed.) (1998), *A Woman Scorn'd: Responses to the Dido Myth*, London. For a recent revision of this topic, see also J. Farrell and M. C. J. Putnam (eds.) (2010), *A Companion to Vergil's Aeneid and its tradition*, Malden.

<sup>2</sup> See P. E. Knox (2000), *Ovid. Heroides. Selected Epistles*, Cambridge, p. 19. He argues that Ovid begins with his characters as they have already been constituted in the works of his

cide provided exceptional material to the Graeco-Roman dancers of the imperial period who, according to Panayotakis, found a source of inspiration in the Virgilian topic<sup>3</sup>. As exemplified in the following lines (Virg. *Aen.* 4.300–304), Dido's Bacchic portrait reflects, among other passages, specific notions of a large space (*totamque per urbem*), the frenetic rhythm of an incessant mobility (*incensa, stimulant*) and a well defined altered state of mind transferred into her body (*bacchatur*):

saeuit inops animi totamque incensa per urbem  
 bacchatur, qualis commotis excita sacris  
 Thyias, ubi audito stimulant trieterica Baccho  
 orgia nocturnusque uocat clamore Cithaeron.

“Mind now out of control, all ablaze, she screams through the city, Bacchic in fury, resembling a Thyiad frenzied by brandished Thyrsus and loud Bacchic cries when Thebes' biennial orgies madden her soul, when Cithaeron's voice howls shrill in the night-time”<sup>4</sup>.

Ancient writers like Lucian (*Salt.* 46) or Macrobius (*Sat.* 5.17.5) inform us about the pantomimic re-enactments of the love story between the queen and Aeneas, and report their familiarity with these kinds of choreographic versions. But the truth is that Dido has been more increasingly danced in the modern world, especially during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when, after Weaver's idealization of Graeco-Roman pantomime<sup>5</sup>, the masters Gasparo Angiolini and Jean Georges Noverre offered their personal revisions of the myth in the so-called *ballet d'action*, a hybrid genre of dance, mime and music that, according to Nye, constitutes one of the few examples in art or literature of heroic muteness<sup>6</sup>. The former premiered his *Didone Abbandonata* in St. Petersburg (1766), based on the well-known text by Pietro Metastasio; the latter presented in Wien *Énée et de Didon* or *Les Amours d'Énée et de Didon* (1768–73). These two examples of danced mythical narratives belong, of course, to the cultural tradition of ancient pantomimes and constitute without any doubt

predecessors. On the relationship between the *Heroides* and the pantomimic genre, see the discussion in: J. Ingleheart (2008), *Ovid and the Pantomime*, in: E. Hall and R. Wyles (eds.), *New directions on Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford, p. 198–217.

<sup>3</sup> See C. Panayotakis (2008), *Virgil and the Popular Stage*, in: E. Hall and R. Wyles (eds.), *New Directions on Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford, p. 185–197.

<sup>4</sup> Translation by F. Ahl (2007), *The Aeneid / Virgil*, Oxford, p. 86.

<sup>5</sup> For a reprint of Weaver's *Essay towards an History of Dancing* (1712), cf. R. Ralph (1985), *The Life and Works of John Weaver*, New York. On Weaver's interest in ancient pantomime, cf. I. Lada-Richards (2010), 'Dead but not extinct': *On Reinventing Pantomime Dancing in Eighteenth-Century England and France*, in: F. Macintosh (ed.), *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World*, Oxford, p. 19–38.

<sup>6</sup> E. Nye (2011), *Mime, Music and Drama on the Eighteenth-Century Stage*, Cambridge, p. 9.



the modern enactment of Virgil's physicality<sup>7</sup>. However, there is a previous version that is also in debt to the danced medium and whose characteristics will be determinant to the later choreographic adaptations of the myth.

Composed to a libretto by Nahum Tate, *Dido and Aeneas* was Henry Purcell's most significant dramatic piece, apart from some other "minor" theatrical works, incidental music and semi-operas<sup>8</sup>. The work was probably written in the late 1680's<sup>9</sup> and fused the tradition of English Masques with foreign contemporary styles from Italy and France<sup>10</sup>, in particular the structure in three acts and, what interests us now, the substantial inclusion of court and pantomimic dances in the libretto (like *The Triumphant dance*, *Echo dance of Furies*, *a Dance to entertain Aeneas by Dido's women*, *The Sailor's dance*, *The Witches dance* or *Jack of the Lanthorn*, and *Cupid's Dance*, among others)<sup>11</sup>.

That the choreography was a fundamental element of the play can be proved by the fact that the opera was once performed in a boarding school for girls run by the dancer master Josias Priest; it took place in 1688 and was the only known performance during Purcell's lifetime. In this regard, if we jump to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and focus on the modern and contemporary dance, which is the core of this article, we will see that many dancers of the last four decades have been captured by

<sup>7</sup> For a general approach to the dancing role of Dido, cf. R. S. Duerden and B. Rowell (2009), *Fantastic Geographies: dancing Dido across continents, centuries and genders: From Ancient Rome, through Enlightenment London to Modern America*, in: *Proceedings of the SDHS 32<sup>nd</sup> annual Conference*, Stanford University, p. 75–80.

<sup>8</sup> On Purcell's Theatre Music, cf. P. Holmann and R. Thompson (2001), *Henry Purcell*, in: S. Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Oxford, p. 604–630.

<sup>9</sup> See R. Shay (2000), *Purcell Manuscripts: The Principal Musical Sources*, Cambridge, p. 232. Since none of the extant sources include precise information on the opera's origin - the earliest surviving score (GB-Ob MS Tenbury 1266, from the mid-eighteenth century) and the original libretto (the so-called 'Priest' libretto) -, the date of composition is still under debate. According to the *Epilogue*, included by Thomas D'Urfey's in his *New Poems* (1689), scholars have determined that it was performed that year. The recent discovery of a letter from 1689, however, has stirred up Purcell scholarly with the assumption of a previous date, in 1688. See B. White (2009), *Letter from Aleppo: Dating the Chelsea School Performance of Dido and Aeneas*, in: „Early Music” 37, p. 417–428. The most recent discussion of this question is held between C. Price and A. R. Walkling (2011), *Communications*, in: „Journal of the American Musicological Society” 64.1, p. 266–274.

<sup>10</sup> For the characteristics of these Masques, cf. B. Ravelhofer (2007), *English masques*, in: M. Kant (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, Cambridge, p. 32–41. On the music style of the opera, cf. C. Price (1992), *Dido and Aeneas*, in: S. Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, London, p. 1169.

<sup>11</sup> See P. Holmann and R. Thompson *op. cit.* 2001, 604–630, recalling the prominent role of the chorus. See also E. T. Harris (1987), *Henry Purcell's Dido and Aeneas*, Oxford, p. 64–68, who mentions that the 1689 libretto contained indication for 11 dances, whereas in 1700 only six were indicated. Apart from the typical court or figure dances, the music implied a sort of pantomime actions, related to situations of great pathos.



the idea of a choreographic pre-eminence in Purcell's opera, and have worked on the notion of body movement through this specific score:

The choreographer Wayne McGregor, for example, who was entrusted with the direction of the opera in 2006, selected some specific passages of the libretto to introduce fleeting variations of an extremely agile and precise modern technique<sup>12</sup>. In contrast to the most traditional pantomime scenes included in the play – like those arranged by Balanchine and Cosaro for the New York City Opera in 1979 – the Scottish director establishes a distinction between action, interlude and subplot, but mostly between singers and dancers, who wear only a short leotard and seem to be out of the play's core, but always connected to the narrative development of the sequences. Thus, he plays with the function of modern dance, which is perceived by his audience as the *chaconnes* and triumphal dances were seen in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Likewise, the Japanese dancer Saburo Teshigawara (2010) has presented his personal approach to the myth in a recent version of the opera directed by himself<sup>13</sup>: here the symbolic style of his dancers accompanies and complements the main parts of the *mise-en-scène*, not as an alternative to the singers' performance but to the music itself.

Other dancers have been attracted by the heroine's passions, so well transmitted by Purcell<sup>14</sup>, and have offered their own vocabulary (images, speeches or even flashes) to translate some passages of the music and the tragic love story. In a brilliant piece of the Wuppertal Tanztheater, "Café Müller" (1978), Pina Bausch<sup>15</sup>, for instance, managed to touch several generations of spectators with her blind performance of the famous Dido's lament (*When I am laid in earth*), looking inward and expressing through her movements and her closed eyes an incomparable sympathy with the heroine's feelings. Alternatively, in "New Work by Édouard Lock" (2011), the director of *La, la, la, Human Steps* has compared Purcell's version with Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and has deconstructed the two operas in order to present an abstraction of these tragic love affairs<sup>16</sup>.

But apart from these great operatic productions or the individual approaches to the music score, there are two important performances that stand out for their overall integrated use of choreography. Mark Morris (1989) and Sasha Waltz (2005) offer global approaches to the opera through the medium of dance and evoke the

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.randomdance.org/productions/past\\_productions/dido\\_and\\_aeneas](http://www.randomdance.org/productions/past_productions/dido_and_aeneas). Conducted by Christopher Hogwood. Teatro alla Scala, Milano, 2006 and The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> <http://st-karas.com/en/news/2010.html>. Conducted by Attilio Cremonesi, Teatro La Fenice, Venezia.

<sup>14</sup> See H. Eastman (1989), *The Drama of the Passions: Tate and Purcell's Characterization of Dido*, in: „Musical Quarterly” 73.3, p. 364–381.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.pina-bausch.de/stuecke/cafe\\_mueller.php](http://www.pina-bausch.de/stuecke/cafe_mueller.php).

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.lalalahumansteps.com/new/>. Music arranged by G. Bryars and B. Hargreaves.



communicative power of this myth in the most physical way. The two artists have their personal motivations for selecting Purcell's play and the results they obtain are drastically different from each other but, before analysing their versions, it is necessary to remember the characteristics of the original score, as well as the most significant differences between Tate's libretto and the Latin sources.

### Structure, characters and meaning

According to the manuscripts, the first version of the opera consisted in three acts with five scenes altogether (the palace, the cave, the grove, the quayside and, again, the palace). The so-called 'Priest' libretto, however, printed in 1688 for a school performance, includes a prologue where Phoebus and Venus lead a troupe of Nereids and Tritons in an allegorical picture that has no surviving music<sup>17</sup>. Apart from this prelude, the opera begins when the Trojan hero arrives in Carthage and is received at the queen's palace (Act I). Dido is encouraged by her attendant Belinda (Anna in the *Aeneid*) to express her love for Aeneas and despite her initial reticence she gives in. Thus, without the divine intervention, which was key to the Roman poet, Dido and Aeneas fell in love and the courtiers celebrate their union.

In a nearby cave (Act II), a wicked Sorceress who hates Dido and wishes her ruin, plots the lover's destruction: she plans to send one of her attendants in the shape of Mercury and urge Aeneas to sail away. Again, instead of the Roman gods, we find a modern variant that might have been connected to the *sacerdos* of the *Aeneid* (4.483) but which, in any case, seemed to be more easily accepted by the 17<sup>th</sup> century audience, already accustomed to these characters<sup>18</sup>. The Sorceress, was either interpreted by a tenor (as in the manuscript) or a soprano.

The opera continues with a hunting party that, according to Price, is "the only moment of repose in the drama"<sup>19</sup>. Here the couple has already consummated their love and enjoys a sort of private masque where the Second Woman recounts the myth of Actaeon and Diana, an innocent tale which the queen interprets as an omen. Suddenly, a storm breaks out and everybody runs towards the palace, except for Aeneas, who is confronted by the false Mercury. The differences between this scene (or, in general, the whole act) and the epic tale are quite significant, not only because the storm takes place after their union but also because the trick has

<sup>17</sup> See C. Price and A. R. Walkling *op. cit.* 2011, p. 269–273, where they discuss the prologue's real meaning. Walkling, indeed, suggests that this could be a post-Revolutionary addition explicitly changed after an earlier production and referred to the new kings William and Mary.

<sup>18</sup> On the role of the Sorceress and other precedents of witches in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, cf. C. Price (1986), *Henry Purcell Dido and Aeneas. An Opera*, New York and London, p. 8–10.

<sup>19</sup> See C. Price, *op. cit.* 1992, p. 1170.



a direct consequence in the reconfiguration of Aeneas' role, his attitude and his further reactions.

In contrast to this painful news, the third act begins at the quayside, where a bunch of sailors praise Aeneas' decision to leave. Right after them, the witches celebrate their triumph with a dance that advances the tragic end of the story. Finally, Aeneas faces Dido in the most important recitative of the play, after which the queen dismisses him and announces her death in the passionate lament *When I am laid in earth*.

Unlike the epic queen, Purcell's Dido never appears as frenzied or desperate, reproaching Aeneas for his decision and begging him to stay in Carthage (see above, *Aen.* 4.300–304). Neither is she the voluble and changeable character from the Roman sources, the one who chides him for her misfortune and sees herself as another victim of his constant injuries (*omnia mentiris, neque enim tua fallere lingua incipit a nobis, primaque plector ego*, *Ov. Epist.* 7.81–82). Here, the heroine is a consistent woman, who is not disappointed with Aeneas, but with herself. Since the first scene, she is reluctant to express her feelings, she shows respect for her royal duties and, indirectly, she honours her dead husband ("I am press'd with torment not to be confess'd", Act I). Likewise, when she notices that Aeneas is determined to sail, she regrets her loving attitude (certainly foreboded by Actaeon's account) and, despite the Trojan promise to stay, she sends him away with a great air of dignity<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, Dido dies after her deepest lament, but the audience does not see her death on stage.

Aeneas, too, is far from being like his epic counterpart. In this case, the character is not an embodiment of the Roman virtues but, rather than blaming Tate for the underdevelopment of this role<sup>21</sup> and considering him as a ridiculous puppet manipulated by the Sorceress, we could assume that the character is slightly more humanised. Purcell's Trojan prince is no more the *pius Aeneas*, the epic hero that has to fulfil a divine task (*sed iubet ire deus*, *Ov. Epist.* 7.139) *sed nunc Italiam magnam Gryneus Apollo, Italiam Lyciae iussere capessere sortes*, *Verg. Aen.* 4.345–346), but a devote lover that would forget his piety and disobey Jupiter. In contrast to the Roman *certus Aeneas* (*Verg. Aen.* 4.554; *Ov. Epist.* 7.7–9), who is determined to sail and even reproaches Dido for assuming false promises of marriage (*nec coniugis umquam praetendi taedas aut haec in foedera ueni*, *Verg. Aen.* 4.338–339),

<sup>20</sup> Reshaped as a proud and upright character, Dido is somehow similar to the version presented by Virgil in book VI (450–476), the shadow that flees from Aeneas and ignores his unwise speech (*illa solo fixos oculos auersa tenebat / nec magis incepto uultum sermone mouetur / quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia caute*). On Dido's sympathetic and dignified treatment by Purcell and Tate cf. D. Daolmi (2006), *Da Didone a Purcell e Ritorno*, in: *Teatro alla Scala. Dido & Aeneas. Stagione 2005/2006*, Milano, p. 59–70.

<sup>21</sup> See C. Price, *op. cit.* 1992, p. 1171.



the modern character expresses his weakness<sup>22</sup> and breaks down by promising that he will stay in Carthage (“In spite of Jove’s command I’ll stay”, Act III).

This sort of ‘role reversal’ might be explained by looking at the political and moral allegories implied in the libretto. Although it is quite difficult to offer an exact motivation for the masque, mostly because we ignore the date of composition, there are several readings that connect the story with the years leading up to the Glorious Revolution. Thus, the Sorceress and witches will be the papists who want the heroes’ destruction whereas Dido and Aeneas should be linked to the British people<sup>23</sup>. Neither Mark Morris nor Sasha Waltz revisit explicitly this sort of allegorical meaning, but its narrow relationship with the characters’ development in the opera gives us interesting clues to understand their new functions in the choreographic plays.

Mark Morris conceived his *Dido and Aeneas* in 1989, when he was the Director of Dance at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels. Those days he was deeply concerned about the AIDS epidemic, which had attacked many of his friends and acquaintances, so he decided to relate a story of “love, sex, and death”, a performance that perfectly matched with the Roman account. In the words of Morris, “I wanted the sound and dance to be the same”, therefore he found in Purcell’s Baroque score exactly the kind of work he wanted to present<sup>24</sup>. The choreographer thought, at first, that he could dance this piece alone, conceived as a sort of personal love letter, an epistle in which he would become the abandoned Dido, like in Ovid’s *Heroides*. But the idea of a solo-performance implied certain difficulties that had to do with the music and the libretto (especially with the recitatives and the sexual relationship he intended to develop). Consequently, he added eleven more characters and included Guillermo Resto in the role of Aeneas<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> See S. Leigh Foster (2007), *Dido’s otherness. Choreographing race and gender in the ballet d’action* in: S. Franco, M. Nordera and S. Leigh Foster (eds.), *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Discourse*, London & New York, p. 121–130. Here she argues, “never given a singer solo, Aeneas functions more as the prop or vehicle through which Dido meets her own inevitable tragic destiny”.

<sup>23</sup> Although there is no agreement on the meaning of this allegory, cf. C. Price, *op. cit.* 1986, p. 11 and A. R. Walkling (1995), *Political allegory in Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas*, in: „Music and Letters” 76, p. 540–571, according to which Dido would be England and Aeneas the king, James II. My lack of sufficient knowledge of this field prevents me from offering a more concrete interpretation of these precise readings.

<sup>24</sup> On the origins of the play, cf. J. R. Acocella (1994), *Mark Morris*, Middletown, p. 96–101. On Morris’s idea of his work as an opera, see the thorough article by S. Jordan (2011), *Mark Morris Marks Purcell: Dido and Aeneas as Danced Opera* in: „Dance Research” 29.2, p. 167–213.

<sup>25</sup> *A conversation with Mark Morris and Jean Acocella on Dido and Aeneas* at the International Festival of Arts and Ideas, Shubert Theatre, Boston, 2009 (<http://vimeo.com/41992302>).



Morris presented the opera with singers placed in the pit and the stage given over to the dancing<sup>26</sup>. Without interval, the dancers had no time to change clothes, so they all wore long black sarongs that they hitched up on stage (bare-chested, Aeneas was the only one who dressed in a different manner). They also wore earrings, nail polish and bright lipstick, a very basic makeup that allowed them to perform different characters from one scene to another (the chorus members played both male and female roles). The set consisted of a central bench, a balustrade across the back of the stage and a simple backdrop representing the sea from which Aeneas had come and where he would sail before Dido's death<sup>27</sup>.

As for the structure of the performance, Mark Morris followed the original score and excluded the prologue, as well as many of the additional dances printed in the libretto. The only thing he added was a brief scene, right before the hunting party, in which the couple consummated their love, a fleeting mute performance that recalls Virgil's succinct approach to the sexual encounter (4.165–171)<sup>28</sup>. In less than one minute the dancers were able to reproduce the general ideas that underlie these six fundamental lines:

prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno  
dant signum; fulsere ignes et conscius aether  
conubiis summoque ulularunt uertice Nymphae.  
ille dies primus leti primusque malorum  
causa fuit; neque specie famaue mouetur  
nec iam furtium Dido meditatur amorem

"Earth gives the sign that the rites have begun, as does Juno, the nuptial Sponsor. The torches are lightning, the shrewd sky's brilliance is witness, hymns for the wedding are howling moans of the nymphs upon high peaks. That first day caused death, that first day began the disasters. Dido no longer worries about how it looks or what rumour says and no longer thinks of enjoying a secret liaison"<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> There is also a different filmed version of this production, directed by B. Willis Sweete in 1995.

<sup>27</sup> See S. Preston (2000), *Echoes and pre-echoes: The displacement of time in Mark Morris's 'Dido and Aeneas'*, in: *Proceedings of the SDHS 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Conference*, Washington, p. 344–348, who recognizes the allusions to Ancient Rome made by the costumes and set.

<sup>28</sup> See the description of this passage in: Acocella, *op. cit.* 1994, p. 98: "Dido and Aeneas stand alone at the back of the darkened stage. Aeneas is gazing out at the Mediterranean. Dido lies down on the floor and pulls him toward her. He lies down on top of her, has one brief spasm, and then gets up again and resumes gazing at the sea. There it is, in miniature – the whole story: her love, his destiny, her abandonment. And there is the consummation, at the exact center of the opera".

<sup>29</sup> Translation by F. Ahl (2007), *The Aeneid / Virgil*, Oxford, p. 83.



In this play, every dancer interprets its character to a corresponding vocalist, in such a way that words and movements fuse in a single code. The two groups of characters implied in the story – courtiers and witches – display their own particular dancing style, totally consistent with the score's movements<sup>30</sup>. For the royal scenes, Morris combines techniques of the American modern dancing with baroque gestures, oriental poses and Indian “mudras”, as well as angular images (in the manner of ancient friezes) that provide an archaic air of solemnity. Besides, the performers move their arms and hands in a very expressive manner that includes signs of the American Sign Language<sup>31</sup> and develop a particular body speech that could not be closer to the codes of ancient pantomimes, made, as Plutarch claimed, by “movements, poses and indications” (*Quaest. Conv.* 747a).

One of the clearest scenes in which these poetical movements are used as a direct translation of the libretto is the tale of Actaeon, performed by the Second Woman in the grove as a private masque for the royal couple<sup>32</sup>. This myth, in fact, had already constituted a common topic for mimes and pantomimes who found it quite simple, expressive and suitable to mute enactments. In the *Satires*, for instance, Varro (*Men.* 513) argues that without the story of Actaeon, “the dancers would not have topics for the theatre”<sup>33</sup>; thus, we could intend this treatment of the myth as a modern pantomime developed inside the play, a little show that both recalls the style of Ancient Roman dancing and complements the whole system of the opera conceived by Morris.

The witches, on the other hand, dance in a very spasmodic way, agitated and certainly more theatrical, with movements that are not just different from the court ones but parallel, as suggested by many scholars<sup>34</sup>, expressing negative and ironic images that mirror the scenes of the palace. In this way, it is essential to remember

<sup>30</sup> S. Preston *op. cit.* 2000, p. 345: “Morris reflects the inner musical structures of Purcell's score and thus is able to draw on Purcell's interpretation of both the Virgil original and Tate's contemporaneous version”.

<sup>31</sup> For a deeper analysis of Morris's dance and its meanings, cf. S. Preston *op. cit.* 2000, p. 344–348 and S. Jordan *op. cit.* 2011, p. 174 ff. They both offer a complete panorama of the signs and gestures implied in the choreography as a choreomusical interpretation of the whole play.

<sup>32</sup> For this scene as a Masque inside the opera, cf. A. R. Walkling (2010), *The Masque of Actaeon and the Antimasque of Mercury: Dance, Dramatic Structure and Tragic Exposition in 'Dido and Aeneas'* in: „Journal of the American Musicological Society” 63.2, p. 191–242. Curiously, signs and mimetic gestures are also employed in McGregor (2006–2009) and Waltz's (2005) versions of this episode.

<sup>33</sup> See M. H. Garelli (2007), *Danser le mythe. La pantomime et sa réception Dans la culture antique*, Louvain, p. 109–115, who links this reference to a genre between mime and pantomime.

<sup>34</sup> J. Acocella *op. cit.* 1994, p. 99–101, S. Preston *op. cit.* 2000, p. 344–348, S. Jordan *op. cit.* 2011, p. 169 and C. Price *op. cit.* 1986, p. 9, who recognises this aspect also in Purcell's treatment of the Sorceress (“one could argue that the villainess represents not ‘the gods of destiny’ but the dark side of the queen”).



that Morris himself played the two female parts – Dido and the Sorceress – considered the two sides of the same character<sup>35</sup>, so he managed to homogenize the heroine's role, to reproduce the anxieties and fears that Dido expressed in the Roman sources and to exaggerate the opposed attitudes. Morris's versatile and remarkable performance retakes some of the ancient hints that had been obscured by Tate, while his evident intention to show more than a dignified queen brings his "timelessness"<sup>36</sup> work closer to the Ancient Rome: when Dido slaps him on the face (Act III), she assumes the heroine's indignation as well as her wishing to hear about Aeneas' destruction both implied in the *Aeneid* (7.99–100) and in Ovid's *Epistles* (7.99–100). The Sorceress, in turn, embodied by the same dancer<sup>37</sup>, is capable to transmit through her movements all the Latin adjectives (*incensa*, *auersa*, *accensa*, *conlapsa*, *infelix*, *furientem*, *trepida*, *effera*, *furibunda*, etc.) that were absent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century libretto, demonstrating the choreographer's awareness of the Roman sources and his inclination towards a more Virgilian Dido.

The most astonishing fact of Mark Morris's production is that, even if he is a man interpreting a woman, the audience does not reject his ambiguities<sup>38</sup>. Rather, the public understands this piece as a common love story and, despite some negative reactions after the premiere in 1989, Morris's performance has been compared to Martha Graham's impersonations of mythical female characters<sup>39</sup>. As for his relationship with Resto, the double perspective proposed by Morris implied the creation of a new epic Aeneas<sup>40</sup>, reshaped as the *pious* hero even in the final recitative: his distracted distance of the loving scene (Act II), the glorious attitude of

<sup>35</sup> Morris danced these two roles until the year 2000. After that Dido and the Sorceress were cast as two separate roles, performed by different dancers. Today the female dancer Amber Star Merkens has assumed the two parts, being acclaimed by critics and public alike.

<sup>36</sup> On the notion of 'timelessness' in this production, cf. S. Preston *op. cit.* 2000, p. 344. S. Jordan *op. cit.* 2011, p. 174 refers to it as a 'pan-cultural' or 'trans-historical' vocabulary.

<sup>37</sup> Notable is the parallelism between the Sorceress' first position in the bench and Dido's final pose, after her lament. See S. Preston *op. cit.* 2000, p. 346.

<sup>38</sup> On gender approaches, cf. G. Morris (1996), *Styles of the Flesh: Gender in the Dances of Mark Morris*, in: G. Morris (ed.), *Moving Words. Re-writing Dance*, New York, p. 141–158, A. Frantzen (1998), *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from 'Beowulf' to 'Angels in America'*, Chicago, p. 53–67 and S. W. Schwartz (2012), *Bad Language: Transpositions in Mark Morris's Dido and Aeneas* in: „Dance Research Journal” 44.2 p. 71–94.

<sup>39</sup> A. Stanger (2010), *Striking a Balance: The Apolline and Dionysiac in Contemporary Classical Choreography* in: F. Macintosh (ed.), *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World*, Oxford, p. 350–351. See Also C. Martin (1999), *Mark Morris's Dido and Aeneas* in: J. Adshead-Lonsdale (ed.), *Dancing Texts. Intertextuality in Interpretation*, London, p. 135–138, who highlights some explicit references to Martha Graham and other Dance Intertexts.

<sup>40</sup> See J. Accocella *op. cit.* 1994, p. 110. Resto is heterosexual but he had maintained a very close friendship with Morris when they lived together in Brussels. Without any doubt, such a complicated intimate relationship was determinant to the configuration of the characters and their function in the play.



his movements or the energetic gestures at the quayside (Act III) are certainly far from the operatic portrait.

Thus, the American choreographer chose not to give another allegorical interpretation of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and focused on the most human and, especially, carnal aspects of the myth, not an innocent coincidence, as Acocella suggests<sup>41</sup>, given the year in which he created his *Dido*.

Almost two decades after Morris's premiere, Sasha Waltz presented her own version of what she called a "choreographic opera" (Berlin, 2005). In coproduction with Staatsoper Unter den Linden, Théâtre de la Ville de Luxemburg and Opéra National de Montpellier, the German choreographer collaborated with the Akademie für Alte Musik of Berlin and the Italian conductor Attilio Cremonesi, who used Purcell's incidental music in order to reconstructed the missing music of the prologue and other dances, such as the *guitar's chacony* (Act I). Unlike Mark Morris, who was more interested in creating a personal piece, related to his own concerns, Waltz conceived her work as a metatheatrical approach to the operatic genre, using the Baroque score as a starting point for renegotiating its principles<sup>42</sup>. In the previous years, Sasha Waltz had been working on the idea of an overall experience of audience and performers (*Gesamterlebnis*), a total perception of the senses (*Wahrnehmung*) and not just limited to the visual aspects<sup>43</sup>; thus, when she was entrusted with the direction of *Dido and Aeneas*, she found an opportunity to re-map the acting, singing and dancing conventions of the *mise-en-scène*. After that, we realize that the love story between Aeneas and the queen of Carthage is indirectly connected to her artistic ideas and ideals since, as Roesner argues, "they are inspired by the story itself"<sup>44</sup>.

In this case, the opera is a little bit longer, since Waltz includes the prologue of the 'Priest' libretto. Here, Venus and Phoebus join the rest of the dancers in a huge aquarium-like pool that is gradually emptied as the music goes on. Like the backdrop in Morris's set, these waters represent not just the Nereids' marine habitat but also the hero's arrival. Right after the prologue, a number of intricate scenes follows, extended by acrobatic performances of dancers who hung in harnesses, instrumental sections, projections, beautiful dance solos and spoken sequences.

<sup>41</sup> J. Accocella *op. cit.* 1994, p. 96 considers *Dido and Aeneas* the most sexually blunt of all Morris's works.

<sup>42</sup> On these aspects cf. D. Roesner (2007), *Singing Actors and Dancing Singers. Oscillations of genre, physical and vocal codes in two contemporary adaptations of Purcell's 'Dido and Aeneas'* in: „Studies in Musical Theatre” 1.2, p. 123–137.

<sup>43</sup> Taken from the interview with Sasha Waltz zdf/arte, 27.8.2011 (<http://vimeo.com/27189178>).

<sup>44</sup> See D. Roesner *op. cit.* 2007, p. 125: "the other (Aeneas) – i.e. the guarantor of difference – enters the self-contained and pre-reflective world of Dido and disrupts her 'state of innocence'". So, by means of this cultural alterity between Dido and the Trojan hero she creates theatrical alterity.



The choreographer intends to develop a piece for those who never go to the Opera House, so the rapid changes from one set to another meets the needs of giving them a whole range of perceptive experiences.

In fact, if Morris's 'timelessness' style can be considered as 'Mannerist' in a certain extent (it is elevated, methodically technical and intends to surprise the intellect), the performance created by Sasha Waltz would be, without any doubt, completely 'Baroque': in this choreographic opera the most complex situations seem to be spontaneous, and the taste towards the sensual aspects of the performance, the variety and contrasts create, indeed, an experience of integration<sup>45</sup>. For example, apart from the pool of the prologue, the first act displays a court party where singers and dancers perform a sort of carnival masquerade, throwing their clothes away and creating a multicolour rain of blouses, dresses and picturesque hats. Afterwards, in the scene of the cave, while the witches (three male vocalist, this time) prepare their plot the dancers appear almost naked and dusty, as in 'butoh' dance, and crawling across the ground. However, the most outstanding scenes of the play correspond to the final recitative between the two lovers and the subsequent lament, where Dido appears in a nightdress, wearing a floor-length hair wig in which she gets completely tangled up as she sings the aria.

Compared to Morris's version, this performance offers a drastically different approach to the myth, where the notions of 'spectacular' and 'complexity' evoke the ambience of the Roman amphitheatre (scaffoldings, pools, acrobats, plastic devices etc.)<sup>46</sup>, and although it gives prominence to the choreography, the connexions between dance and music are certainly more complicated. In fact, Waltz intends to put singers and dancers at the same level in "parallel artistic universes that merge in a texture of interwoven activities of dancing, singing and acting"<sup>47</sup>. Thus, the singers (or even the musicians) can dance, the dancers talk, and they all together participate at the different images that the German choreographer creates. In contrast to Morris's fusion of text, movement and score, a direct translation of the music and words into the body, Waltz proposes an intermingled performance, where a number of single actions (sometimes connected, sometimes free) form the whole spectacle.

In this way, the role distribution of dancers and singers is not as simple as in other productions, since there are two Aeneases or two Belindas (a singer and a dancer) but three different Didos (two dancers representing the dual character of

<sup>45</sup> P. Cañizares (2007), *La estética barroca en la literatura grecolatina*, in: *Barroco*, Madrid, p. 173–174. See also D. Roesner, *op. cit.* 2007, p. 123–137, who recalls the importance of the four elements (water, fire, air and earth) along the play.

<sup>46</sup> Not by chance, the opera has been successfully performed outdoors in Lyon at the Roman amphitheatre, and in Berlin at the Waldbühne, among other places.

<sup>47</sup> D. Roesner, *op. cit.* 2007, p. 125.



the queen and a vocalist) that cannot be easily characterised. Paradoxically, this (triple) 'split personality' does not allow the performers to define the different sides of the character, as Morris did, and their performances are enough to confuse the audience. As for Aeneas, he is presented, again, as a suffering lover, more concerned with his emotional state than with his royal duties. Perhaps the feminine perspective proposed by Sasha Waltz has consciously overlooked the archaic qualities of an epic hero that are beyond her interests.

The German choreographer proposes, then, a spectacular reading of the myth, which hardly evokes the ancient literary tradition of the epic episode. She takes unconventional liberties to adapt the original work and renegotiate the performative aspects of the play<sup>48</sup>, but she also puts her characters in a new stage where she begins to work with them. Unlike Morris's protagonists, the characters of this piece are more similar to the Baroque version; however, it is undeniable that Sasha Waltz works, as claimed by E. Hall, "in a cultural tradition that without any doubt traces its conceptual roots all the way back to the stars of ancient dance"<sup>49</sup>:

Dido's fortune has been equally reshaped in dance as in any other artistic field and it is thanks to these adaptations that we are able to experience the myth from the most corporeal perspective. Purcell, in turn, has offered invaluable material to modern and contemporary choreographers, who make the story proceed in words, music and dance. Thus, the spectator who assists to one of these performances will not be able to forget the physicality of *Dido and Aeneas* and will probably miss it if it is gone.

<sup>48</sup> D. Roesner, *op. cit.* 2007, p. 123.

<sup>49</sup> E. Hall (2008), *Ancient Pantomime and the Rise of Ballet*, in: E. Hall and R. Wyles (eds.), *New Directions on Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford, p. 376–377.