

What will be will be

A ballet on matters of fate

Based on Gregorio Lambranzi, *Neue und curieuse theatralische Tantz-Schul*, Band 1, Nr. 13-22¹

Introduction

Gregorio Lambranzi's „New and curious dance school“ is a source of inspiration for many who practice theatrical dance today. But it has puzzled its modern readers: how are the numerous images and suggestions related to one another? Is his picture book merely a collection of cues? A colleague and contemporary of Lambranzi's, the German dance teacher Gottfried Taubert,² described Lambranzi's curious method in the following words: “The curious or graceful method makes the lazy diligent and the disheartened merry and agile.” Taubert's exuberant praise made me curious – and diligent. Obviously, there had to be more in Lambranzi's book than a random assembly of pretty pictures – if we knew how to read it.

Just as modern writers can draw on the specific education and experience of their readers, so could writers in baroque age. In the Renaissance and Baroque, it was common knowledge to read images as artificially manufactured allegories of reality. Lambranzi and Taubert claimed that the process of creating a dance could be represented in the form of such an allegory.

I followed their cue and I came up with a model for interpreting Lambranzi's graphic instructions. I used a method common in art history to dissect Lambranzi's pictures and to tap the various hints and clues hidden in them. The approach I chose was described by one of my professors as looking with an “unmoving eye”: first, you take in the totality of the image, then you examine the details and find out how they relate the total composition. And I strongly assumed that every detail was significant. We are used to believe today that the Baroque age was fond of filling every open space with superfluous, pretty nick-nacks. But if we consider the concept of the “architectura parlante”, the speaking architecture, that was prevalent in those days, it becomes clear that the details were meant to carry meaning. Or, as I will put it in the following, to actually make a statement. The details do speak, and to decipher Lambranzi's instructions I will let them speak in the following. If we take this approach and curiously and thoroughly study Lambranzi's lessons, we discover a wealth of inspiration in each image. And I will show you in a minute how that works.

As a rule of thumb, the figure in each scene declares the theme. The scenery as a whole hints at historical references. The decorations and conspicuous details in the set and in the proscenium

¹ Gregorio Lambranzi, *Neue und curieuse theatralische Tantz-Schul*, Band 1, Nürnberg 1716

² Rechtschaffener Tantzmeister oder gründliche Erklärung der Frantzösischen Tantz=Kunst, bestehend in drei Büchern, Leipzig, 1717

offer suggestions as to the dramatic execution of the theme. The melody and its recommended repetitions suggest the duration of the dance.

I have applied this method of interpretation. The text I am going to present summarizes my observations and findings. In order to show you how an interpretation in the way I find plausible and fruitful works, I have resorted to the dialectical form that was common well into the 19th century. That is, I have given the elements their own voices to show how they contribute to a discussion that is documented in images. The outcome of these discussions is open. Lambranzi does no more than to suggest to the dancer a number of options that his readers can choose from and which they may use, combine or ignore as they wish. But in order to be able to choose, we first have to understand Lambranzi's graphic language. I will now show you by a number of examples how we can do that.

The titles of the dances I'm going to present and also their combination into one great ballet are part of my interpretation.

1. Dance No 13, **The Tempest**

13

Romagniola.

Ein Romanischer Schiffer macht gewisse pas Ballonés, hinter sich, und andere pas Boures vor sich, und mischet darunter mit verdrehung und Schwingung der Arme, einige pas di Rigaudon, und Callés, nach einmahlig getantzter Aria, begeben sie sich wieder hinein.

What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show a man whom the overwhelming forces of nature push to his limits, and a little beyond.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

To realize this, why not resort to Ulysses, the legendary king of Ithaca as Homer drew him? Ulysses's wanderings are the model of everybody's odysseys.

The author's claim:

We see a skipper who has entered into troubled waters and is caught there.

The author's question of the scenery:

How is the dance to continue?

The backdrop opines:

The skipper should reach the port and get away with a fright.

The proscenic decorations, on the other hand, suggest:

The skipper should be driven back to the high seas and suffer ship wreck on some lonely island.

House stage is not too fond of the skipper:

The front tower directs a cannon at his head and should this shot fail, the back tower keeps a gallows at the ready.

The author to the composer:

I don't think a gigue would suit this tempest, we need something more heroic.

Composer: How about the romagniola?

2. Dance No14 **The Return Home**

The image is a page from a historical music manuscript. At the top, there is a musical score for a dance. The title 'Romagniola' is written below the first staff. The music is in 8/8 time, indicated by a common time signature with a small '8' above it. The score consists of two staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in a simple, rhythmic style. Below the music is a detailed illustration of a stage scene. A man and a woman are dancing. The man is wearing a hat and a long coat, and the woman is wearing a large, ruffled skirt. They are in a room with a doorway in the background. The floor is covered with a patterned rug. The scene is framed by a decorative border. At the bottom of the page, there is a block of German text in a cursive script, which describes the dance and its context.

Romagniola

Der vorge Schiffer tanzet mit seinen Weib auß der Scena her
aus und nach dem Er sie etlichmaln fangend, durch seine arme
passiren lassen wie die Figur außweist, tanzten sie hernach
Nº 13 gemelte Aria, und zwar eins gegen das andere, zu Ende der
Aria, umbarmen sie sich, und tanzten wieder hinein.

What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show a man whom neither money nor prizes can spur to labor any longer; a man who takes what he has to savor it.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

This kind of attitude is only to be aspired as long as the man returns home to find something he can savor. And as Homer reports, this cannot at all be taken for granted. Ulysses, after he had not returned in years, was believed to be dead. His wife Penelope managed only by tricks to defend his bedstead.

The author's claim:

We see a skipper who turns his wife under his arms with the same ease as he would hoist or strike a sail.

The author's question of the scenery:

How do you think the skipper feels as he is doing this?

House right believes that this is his usual way of showing his joy of returning home and that he can hardly wait to lie down beside her.

The note sheet interjects that their dancing together used to be much jollier. The couple have always used the same melody. Lately, however, they are at a loss to weave new variations.

The proscenic décor, however, is quite worried: Haven't you noticed that the man has returned earlier than expected so he could spy after his wife? Something he discovered has stung him in the heart. I believe he is out to murder her.

The backdrop chuckles at the pessimist:

He has finally promised her not to go to sea anymore. He has found a neat little cottage in the country-side and he is going to settle there.

House left refrains from commenting this time.

The author to the composer:

I believe a romagnolia would suit this dance too.

Composer: But this time the many repetitions will not represent the intransigence of the storm but questions, wishes, and desires.

3. Dance No 15 The goddesses of destiny

15.

Adagio
Rescue.

Allegro

Hier kommen zwey alte Weiber herauß, und tanzen halb gehend, halb zitterend, aus eußerste des Theatrs, wan sie gantz vornen sind kratzen sie sich an Bauch und hintern, und Drehen sich herum, dardn kehren sie sich rückwärts biß zum Anfang des Theatrs, und machen eben diese gestus, wenn sie dort angekommen, Dieses hinter und vorsich gehen, Dauret biß zu Ende der Crsten Aria, während der dieser Zeit Komt ein Jüngling aus der Scena, und da Er diese alte Weiber siehet, lachet Er sie aus, und wan die Aria der Weiber ein Ende hat, nimbt er eine nach der andern bey der hand, und zerret sie beyden armen biß seine des Jünglings Aria, 2 oder 3 mahl getantz worden Es ist aber zu merckend daß dießer Tantz in 2 Arien bestehet deren die Erste langsam andere aber lustig oder geschwind gehet.

What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show that the fact that we don't know when we are going to die has great influence on our lives and that we always want to have a say in the matter.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

You might want to choose a comic approach to this and have old widows enter the stage. They no longer know what to do with their lives, are idling away their time and out of sheer boredom have woven their shrouds three times over.

Or you might turn the scene into a turbulent burlesque/farce and plagiarize an episode from the life of young Apollo. He befuddled the goddesses of destiny, Clotho, Lachesis and Antrophas, with alcohol in order to save his friend Admetos' life.

The author's claim:

We see two old widows. They are in the habit of sweeping in front of their doors, and since they live across the street from one another, they eye each other doing this. They have nothing to say to each other, but as soon as one scratches herself, the other has to scratch too.

Comments by the scenery:

This is because they have long since stopped washing themselves, *croak the blinded mirrors in the third wings*.

How would you know that?, *lisp the mischievously lifted curtains just next to the two*. Women are women until they drop to their graves.

The author to the composer:

How would the shuffling of the old widows look on the note sheet?

Composer:

Sweeping: Adagio, scratching: Allegro.

4. Dance No 15 **The fountain of youth**

15.

Adagio
Rescue.

Allegro

The image shows a musical score for three staves at the top, with the tempo markings 'Adagio' and 'Rescue.' for the first staff, and 'Allegro' for the second and third staves. Below the score is a detailed stage illustration. It depicts three characters on a stage with ornate architectural details. On the left, an older woman in a long dress and bonnet stands with her hands on her hips. In the center, a young man in a ruffled tunic and cap is dancing, with his arms outstretched. On the right, another older woman in similar attire stands watching. The floor is marked with a large shadow.

Hier kommen zwey alte Weiber herauß, und tanzen halb gehend, halb zitterend, aus eufferste des Theatzi, wan sie gantz vornen sind kratzen sie sich an Bauch und hinterh, und Drehen sich herumb, dartin kehren sie sich rückwärts biß zum Anfang des Theatzi, und machen eben diese gestus, wenn sie dort angekommen, Dießes hinter und vorsich gehen, Dauret biß zu Ende der Crsten Aria, währendder dießer Zeit Komt ein Jüngling aus der Scena, und da Er diese alte Weiber siehet, lachet Er sie aus, und wan die Aria der Weiber ein Ende hat, nimbt er eine nach der andern bej der hand, und zerret sie beyden armen biß seine des Jünglings Aria, 2 oder 3 mahl getantz worden Es ist aber zu merckdass dießer Tantz in 2 Arien bestehet deren die Erste langsam andere aber lustig oder geschwind gehet.

What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show that our wish to do like the gods and remain young forever is an important drive in our lives.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

You must keep a cool head in this matter. The wish to remain young can simply be related to the will to survive; it may lead to gory crimes or it may appear as an amusing pastime.

The author's claim:

We see two old widows. As is their habit every morning, they have thoroughly swept in front of their houses, and there isn't a grain of dust left on the floor. But they make no move to go inside. Along comes a young man, and as he sees the two old women glued to their broomsticks like dozing hands, he can't help but laugh. The two old bats look first at each other, then at him.

Comments by the scenery:

The two old women should take heed, *opines the pristine text sheet that has been hung to dry on the proscenium ramp*, this young man is not to be fooled with.

We will yet see who should take care of whom, *the aged woven wallpapers in the scenery reply*, in this place many a lad has lost his breath. And others have seen stars in the night sky, *the right stage light seconds*.

The author to the composer:

I could fancy the same music here, only played in a lurking manner, and then furiously.

Composer:

I'll see what I can do.

16

Nouvelle Fantastique

Diese zwey Maskeren, presentiren 4 Persöhnē
 so gravitētisch, und gleichsam mit Ruhe, von einer
 zur andern Seiten, bald vor, bald hinter sich, bald in die
 runde tantzen, der gestalt daß es scheint, als ob jeder
 noch einen andern Menschen auf den rücken trüege, und
 dieses währet so lang, als es dem Tantzter gefällig

What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show people whom the war has not reduced to stupor and hatefulness.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

I see what you are aiming at. Aeneias lugged his lame father out of burning Troy on his back. Achilles treated his friend Patroklos' wounds, and he fell in love with Penthesilea whom he had struck down himself. Homer's Illias has quite a bit to offer in this vein. But this phenomenon is not restricted to the temper of brave warriors and soldiers. There are less dramatic communities of fate. The blind carries the lame and the two struggle through life. The same holds true for the antagonist and the protagonist on stage.

The author's question of the scenery:

Are all these phenomena parts of war, or is war part of a greater scheme of destruction that prompts man and his ideas to re-compose themselves ever again?

The set decoration is pessimistic:

Man has long since been reduced to an extra in a world he created. He trods down paths that generations have trailed before him. Unless we manage to pry open at least a few doors and windows, we are doomed to suffocate in the monotony of beaten paths.

The proscenic décor is more confident: A rotten tree will easily look quite dead but its roots are still alive. And after the trunk has fallen the roots will sprout again.

The author to the composer:

This dance must seem never-ending and repetitious, as life sinks down and awakens again.

Composer:

I suggest a slow march. Once the second part of such a piece is over, the audience can no longer remember how the first one opened.



What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show people who know peace and can relate its effect to us.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

The ancient Greeks described a fabulous land that was never afflicted by war. It encompasses the forests, pastures and hills at the foot of Mount Olympus and is called Arcadia. Arcadia is peopled by the nation of the Satyrs, both witty and slothful. They are half men and half beasts. They invent many things, like music, and yet they are quite forgetful.

All over the world things turn out the same as soon as enough people who know war only by hearsay come to live together. Civilization blossoms along with sloth. Even paradise knows its troubles; countless insubstantial quarrels puncture the leisurely flow of the days.

The author's question of the scenery:

I want to have the satyrian god Pan appear on stage and give him a Maenad from Dionysos' entourage to accompany him. Why on earth must this peaceful god be so unsightly?

The proscenium decor talks in half-sleep:

Only the ill-favored and ill-smelling are left in peace in this world. Peace really isn't a pleasant matter.

The backdrop amends:

Only those who present themselves as short-sighted, clumsy and as drunks are spared from serving in the army. This is true to this day.

Stage left and right chorusing:

Only the daredevils can hear the grass grow, only they know how to fire all their guns at once. They have music in the tips of their fingers and are the Maenads' untiring playfellows.

The author to the composer:

How can we render this five-finger-music in notes?

Composer:

Quite simply: five tones up, five tones down.

7. Dance No 18 **Marriage**



What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show marriage as an institution of fate because hardly anyone can escape it.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

The wishes people associate with marriage are based on stories of creation. According to the Orphics all spouses stem from the oogamous god Eros (both male and female).

Look, he looks like a pan cake with two golden wings and four heads. He will snort like a steer, then roar like a lion; he will hiss like a snake and baa/bleat like a sheep.

The author's question of the scenery:

How best to present this beautiful image with modern people?

The scenery in one voice:

Do you need prompting for everything? Think of the women of Weinsberg and their unforgettable deed.

The emperor Conrad the Third devised to punish the city, kill all the men and drive away the women. The women begged the emperor to be allowed to take with them what was dearest to their hearts. The emperor agreed and to his surprise the women carried their men out of the city in baskets made for the grape harvest.

The author to the composer:

How can I bring such a witty and bold act to the stage?


Composer:

I suggest a swift two-quarter-time meter. It will accentuate the women's full calves and their courage. And I am thrilled to see how you will present the men once they have recovered from their shock.

8. and 9. Dance **Connections**

19

Uristeo



Hier präsentirt sich ein Mann mit 2 Gesichtern. Erstlich vorwärts stäts
gen Himmel schauend, und fängt an mit Capriolen Piroleten, und an
dere Spanischen pas zutanzten hernach stelt er sich hinterwärts dar
und weist sein anders Gesicht, benehmt daß er in solcher Kleidung
wie vorwärts erscheinet, und macht ebenfalls dergleichen
verschiedene Capriolen, und gehet zu Ende
der 3 mahl gespielten
Aria hinein.

What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show good and bad relations with higher powers as motors of human fate.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

Point towards the capricious life of Aristaeos. The gods lavished good and bad luck on him in full measure.

Apollo's son and pet, he was raised on nectar and ambrose, introduced into the secrets of bees and the cultivation of vegetables. And soon he is rewired as a venerable benefactor of mankind. But his carefree days are over when he learns of his son Actaion's death. The great hunter Aktaion is turned into a deer by Artemis. His own dogs then tear him to pieces because he has seen the goddess take a bath.

Another misfortune besets him when he contests Orpheus for his lover Eurydice. On this occasion she steps on the deadly snake. Orpheus demands satisfaction from the gods. Aristaios' bees die from one instant to the other.

The author's question of the scenery:

What will be Aristaios' future be in the face of such a measure of misfortune?

The scenery in one voice:

Aristaios will not lose his mind over this onslaught of misfortune. He turns the twig of the tree of death, the myrtle, into the emigrant's walking staff, leaves Boitia and spends his days on Sardinia and Sicily.

The author to the composer:

How to translate this roller-coaster of emotions into sound?

Composer:

I would suggest a simple entré. In the first part the melody drifts fluidly and richly overbound. In the second part, the tones will stand for themselves.

10. Dance No 20 **Domestic bliss**



What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show marital quarrels as a scourge of everyday life.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

Domestic quarrels are best shown by the example of young couples who have yet to get used to one another. They stand a good chance of getting their act together and spending their autumn years together as merrily as Philemon and Baucis.

We might just as well have them live like Zeus and Hera, or as Socrates and Xant(h)ippe. In this case, their private moments only mark the calm before the storm.

The author's question of the scenery:

If we stick with the young couple, how will the scene unfold?

The proscenic decor claims:

They will have such an argument even at their first-born's cradle that you won't be able to hear the baby crying.

The backdrop is more optimistic:

Both will complain to every Tom, Dick and Harry but their child will suffer no need.

Stage left and right are in perfect unison:

Their hands have no sooner been joined than their feet make off in different directions. But this permanent bickering is so exhausting, it has to subside as time goes on. But both will be the nimbler and more considerate for it.

The author to the composer:

What melody is versatile enough to capture the action?

Composer:

I would suggest the same music as for the dance before.

11. Dance No 21 **The fledgling**

The image is a page from a historical dance manuscript. At the top, there is a musical score for two staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The second staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. The name 'Ruberto' is written below the first staff. The number '21.' is written at the end of the second staff. Below the music is a large illustration of a dancer in a room. The dancer is a man in a 17th-century style costume, including a ruffled tunic, breeches, and a large, ornate hat. He is in a dynamic pose, with one leg raised and arms outstretched. The room has a large arched doorway in the background and a patterned rug on the floor. Below the dancer is a decorative banner with German text. The text is written in a cursive script and is flanked by two small figures of women in classical-style dresses. The text on the banner reads: 'Ein Romaner macht eine Capriola vor sich, und stüß eine hinter sich, wie auch von Einer seiten zur andern, Im übrigen wird ein jeder selbst einige schöne Inventionen mit frantzöischen pas formiren, die Aria wird 3 mahl gespielt.'

21.

Ruberto

Ein Romaner macht eine Capriola vor sich, und stüß eine hinter sich, wie auch von Einer seiten zur andern, Im übrigen wird ein jeder selbst einige schöne Inventionen mit frantzöischen pas formiren, die Aria wird 3 mahl gespielt.

What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show the time of adolescence as a turning point in life.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

Should this young adult stand tall and strong as the young Zeus, as intelligent as Hermes when the first fluff sprouted above his lips and he had a childhood of inventions and pranks behind him? Or would you rather show him retarded in his development like Dionysos who was born much too early?

The author's question of the scenery:

Let us imagine him as a muscle man. What would he do first?

The backdrop twangs:

He wants to occupy his own temple and to be worshipped by everybody.

The proscenic décor interjects:

He will show himself grateful to all who have helped him along.

House left wants to shed more good light on him:

His fighting technique will be feared by giants among the gods as well as by mortals.

House right thinks this is too much of a good thing and reminds us:

His mother asked him not to marry. Even so his insatiable appetite for women will cause plenty of havoc.

The author to the composer:

What composition can capture this fullness of life?

The composer takes a minute to ponder, then replies:

I have an English dance in store. Its title is The Mad Tom.

12. Dance No 22 **Looking for a Bride**

The image contains a musical score and an illustration. The score at the top is for a piece labeled 'Corrente' in 3/4 time, spanning measures 22 to 24. Below the score is an illustration of a man and a woman in 17th-century Roman attire dancing in a room with two windows. At the bottom, a decorative cartouche contains German text.

Corrente

22

Hier werden in Romaniſchen habit,
die pas Corrente, Bouré und Ciacone
mit hüpfcher bewegung der Arme, deß
Haubts und des Leibs gedantz und die
Aria 2 mahl geſpielt.

What the author wants to illustrate:

I want to show that the search for a spouse is a moment in the life of every man and every woman when they can define their own destiny.

Hints by the patient sheet of paper:

Everyone knows the courage it takes to court a lover but every story turns out differently.

Let us take Ariadne and Dionysos as an example. Here we see two unhappy people for whom everything turns out happily.

As a counter-example let us look at the Amazon queen Hippolyta and Heracles. These two have been tested and their condition can still not afford them happiness.

The author's question of the scenery:

Let us imagine Hippolyta and Heracles in love and alone on an open field. How will their encounter unfold?

The stage remains quiet for quite some time. The wings do not make an appearance at all. But then the proscenic décor musters courage and speaks in allegories:

If sunlight aspires to mix with moonlight, this is as awkward as if one wanted to accompany a nightingale with a tambourine. Conversely, we find moonlight in the broad day out of place. Who after all would want to blow a trumpet with the breeze of an ostrich feather? Yet our heart skips a beat when we behold both heavenly bodies in the same sky.

The backdrop ventures a more concrete prediction:

As we know from the fable, the affair takes an ill-fated ending. But Hippolyta has taken a liking to the experience whereas Heracles dislikes the touch of female hands even worse than before.

The author to the Composer:

What rhythm is suited to capture the sprouting recklessness and the hardening coldness that the dance calls for?

Composer:

I'll suggest a courante.

Final remark

I have worked as a choreographer for over twenty years, and I enjoy very much to be a pupil again to Lambranzi's magic of suggestive and yet concrete instructions.

Lambranzi promises the readers that they will be able to design theatrical dances on their own after reading – and comprehending – his book. And he lives up to his promise. His eloquent silence is an encouragement to raise our voices, and that is his great skill.

Gottfried Tauber is right in claiming that the curious method is the most demanding way of teaching theatrical dance and that its proponents are as rare in this world as white ravens.

With my contribution I would like to encourage you to let the author take you by the hand so that we may in the future experience Lambranzi's work in many variations.

I believe the sceptical humor of Lambranzi's aesthetic is important for the design of theatrical dance in the 21st century.

Klaus Abromeit/February 2014