Khachaturian's ballet *Gayane* as a metaphor of happiness in a semiotic perspective

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BY: **Inna Merkoulova** and **Tigran Simyan**

ABSTRACT

One of the most famous ballets by the Armenian and Soviet composer Aram Khachaturian is called *Gayane*. The ballet was composed in 1942, and its final piece, the *Sabre Dance*, remains one of the most recognizable works in the world musical heritage. The *Sabre Dance* had a significant influence on the history of 20th-century popular music, and the theme has been repeatedly used in film, television series, and figure skating. However, Khachaturian himself considered the *Sabre Dance* an additional element, introduced into the ballet almost after the score was completed. For the composer, the ballet's inner message as a "path to happiness" was far more important. Since its 1943 premiere, *Gayane* has been successfully performed on leading stages around the world. To understand the secret of the ballet's long-standing success, we propose examining several examples of *Gayane* productions from the perspective of cultural semiotics and the Greimasian and post-Greimasian semiotics. The examples are illustrated with unique archival materials from the Aram Khachaturian House Museum in Yerevan.

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1. Introduction. On dance and happiness

The contemporary Argentine writer Jorge Asís begins his novella *Memory of Milonga* by stating: 'To be honest, the only time I've been happy, I mean truly happy, was at the milonga. Everything else brought me nothing but disappointment and boredom' (Asís 2026:110). For a writer coming from the birthplace of tango and milonga, dance is directly linked to happiness: 'My memories of true harmony and happiness (yes, don't be so afraid of that silly word) are inseparable for me from the image

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of dance. And when I dance, I want to die so I can continue dancing after death' (Asís 2026:110). But how can dance become a metaphor for happiness? In posing this question, we draw on Lakoff and Johnson, who argue that metaphor is not limited to the realm of language; thought processes themselves are largely metaphorical (Lakoff and Johnson 2004:25). Metaphors are linked to cultural background: the most fundamental cultural values are consistent with the metaphorical structure of a given culture's concepts (ibid. 48).

Conceptualizing dance as metaphor means approaching the discourse of dance as a cultural practice with a *conversation frame*. As contemporary cognitive scientists point out, dance can be construed simultaneously *in physical and dialogic terms*, as a metaphor for *danse-as-conversation* (Pascual and Brandt 2015:1). Dance is presented as a *conversation between the dancer's body and soul, as a dialogue between dancers*, as a story told to the audience, and from this perspective, the metaphor of happiness is part of the 'communicative call and response' (ibid. 9). For Asís, milonga dance becomes a metaphor for happiness thanks to its emotional components, "refuge" and "salvation," which can alleviate the feeling of lack and boredom of everyday life: dance is 'the only place that can shelter and save' (Asís 2026:113).

Should we explain why dance attracts us? Or, together with Crystal Pite, the Canadian choreographer and author of the *Message for International Dance Day 2026*, we can state that dance 'needs no justification or explanation. It is made of us but owes us nothing. It only needs to inhabit a willing body.' For Pite, dance is as natural and inseparable from a person as the concepts of life and love, and we are all dancers: 'Life moves us; life dances us […]. Like life, a dance creates and destroys itself in every moment' (Pite 2026).

To explain dance as a metaphor for happiness is to attempt to "express the inexpressible," to dissect inspiration into its parts, as Yuri Lotman does in his work *Culture and Explosion*, analyzing Alexander Blok's poem *The Artist*. Blok understands creative inspiration as the highest tension, 'tearing a person from the realm of logic into the realm of unpredictable creativity' (Lotman 2004a:27). The artist described by Blok lives in three worlds. The first is the external world, the world beyond poetry. The second world is the world of the poetic "I," its logical and meaningful part. Finally, the third world is the world of poetry itself, immersed in sleep. It awakens when it hears an "unprecedented ringing," that is, at the moment of transition from the world expressed in words to the world beyond the verbal. At this moment, a breakthrough into non-time occurs:

> The hours, bearing the world, continue.
> Sounds, movement, and light expand.
> The past gazes passionately into the future.
> There is no present. There is no weak one. (Blok 1960:145)

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Paolo Fabbri, drawing attention to Lotman's analysis of Blok's poem, notes this key moment of breakthrough, calling it *uchronia*. This time could have been 'momento fondamentale di u-cronia, di fuori-tempo' (Fabbri 2024:169). According to Lotman, Blok managed to describe with exceptional precision the inspiration considered indescribable. The entire creative process is reproduced as a tension that makes the untranslatable translatable (Lotman 2004a:29).

The concept of "inspiration" is interpreted as a transition from untranslatability to translation, so an artist can taboo the word itself, as Pushkin does in *Egyptian Nights*: 'he was a poet, and his passion was irresistible: when such a *filth* (as he called inspiration) came over him, Charsky locked himself in his study and wrote from morning until late at night. He confessed to his friends that only then did he know true happiness' (cit. in Lotman 2004a: 30).

Inspiration as 'such a *filth*' for Pushkin and happiness as a 'silly word' for Asís: the tabooing of both terms conceals the moment of a "semantic explosion" and the crossing of the boundary of unpredictability. In the following lines, Blok describes the translation of inspiration into the language of the logical verbal world as the *imprisonment* of a bird in a cage: 'And I lock in a cage a cold, light, kind, free bird' (Blok 1960:145). In the case of dance, such a translation is the moment when movement takes possession of a *willing body*, that is, the body is thought of as a "container" for being: 'I like to think of the body as a location; a place where being is held and shaped. When we dance, we are profoundly engaged in being there' (Pite 2026).

Pite's interpretation of dance as *engagement in being there* has its roots in the concept of *dance as a worldview*. This understanding was first proposed by the dancer Isadora Duncan, paving the way for 20th-century choreographic experimentation. A similar position was later expressed by the distinguished choreographer Martha Graham: 'The body is what a person lives through' (cit. in Gadas 2025: 7).

Metaphors allow us to 'understand one domain of experience in terms of another' (Lakoff and Johnson 2004:148), and in the case of dance, we are talking about natural types of experience in the form of bodily movements, constructed in a certain aesthetic way. Assuming that dance can become a metaphor for such an abstract concept as happiness, we draw attention to the connection of this concept with the spatial domain in which people live their bodily experience. As noted by Lakoff and Johnson, the fundamental values of our society are not autonomous; they are consistent with metaphors of the type associated with spatial orientation, such as "up-down." Within the framework of what is important to a person, his system of individual values is consistent with the culture's basic orientation metaphors. Types of spatial relationships do not arise randomly, but because a person is characterized by a body of a certain shape, 'interacting with the material world' (Lakoff and Johnson 2004:35).

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One of the striking examples of orientational metaphors, according to Lakoff and Johnson, is the spatial orientation of the concept of *happiness*. In English, this concept is oriented toward the "top" (*Happy is up*), which is evident in phrases like 'I'm feeling up today,' 'My spirits rose,' and 'My spirits sank.' The orientational metaphor has a physical basis: 'a bowed human posture is usually associated with sadness and depression, while an upright posture is associated with a positive emotional state' (Lakoff and Johnson 2004:36). The opposition Happy is up/Sad is down, cited by the authors of *Metaphors We Live By*, places happiness within a coherent system of metaphors, and part of the semantics of the concept of happiness is explained by its role in this system (ibid.42).

Dance can be imagined as a place of transition beyond the boundaries of unpredictability and as a translation of inspiration into the language of bodily movement. This translation lifts us from the boredom of everyday life, providing a sense of "refuge" and "salvation," ultimately leading to a feeling of happiness. As we will see below, the expression of happiness through musical and choreographic means corresponds to various types of orientational metaphor and thus leads us to the question of the role of the body in semiosis, at the moment when an elementary semiotic function is established between the perception of the external (*exteroceptive*) and internal (*interoceptive*) worlds, so that they become the expression and content of a specific semiotic object (Fontanille 2011:11).

What happens when a dance piece is initially conceived as an "expression of happiness" or a "hymn to happiness"? The work of Aram Khachaturian may provide the answer to this question.

Before going on to describe the context of the ballet and the dance text itself, it should be noted that this is how the residents of Old Tiflis lived. Khachaturian, born in Old Tiflis in 1903, found the carnival life of his city in his youth. Like *kinto* and *karachoheli*, street vendors and artisans danced *kintauri dance* while drinking wine, enjoying life, and giving themselves and others a fleeting sense of happiness. This era is represented in well-known visual texts by Pirosmani (Simyan 2026a) and is especially interestingly presented in a short story by the Armenian writer Aghasi Ayvazyan (1925–2007). In the story *Signage Tbilisi*, we learn about the artist Grigor and the "advertiser" of the era. The narrator in the story presents various carnivalized advertising signs of Old Tiflis: "Grigor painted dancing *kinto* above the door of the Kaplo tavern and below it wrote very freely and clearly, joyfully and simply: 'I DANCE // EVERYONE DANCES // IF YOU WANT, LOOK // IF YOU DON'T WANT, DON'T'" (cit. in Simyan 2026a: 158; Simyan 2026b: 151).

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2. From *Happiness* to *Gayane*: How the *Sabre Dance* was invented

One of the most famous ballets by the Armenian and Soviet composer Aram Khachaturian (1903–1978) is called *Gayane*. The ballet was written in 1942, and its final piece, the *Sabre Dance*, remains one of the most recognizable works in the world's musical heritage, along with the folk dances of the highlanders, in particular the *Lezginka*, which combines courageous masculine and tender feminine principles (Papanyan 2026:4). The *Sabre Dance* had a significant impact on the history of 20th-century popular music, with the theme being used repeatedly in films, television series, and figure skating. The opening bars of the *Sabre Dance* were featured on the reverse of Armenian banknotes in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. The *Sabre Dance* on the reverse of the Armenian banknote (in circulation from 1998 to 2004)

The ballet's two protagonists, lovers Gayane and Armen, are depicted against the backdrop of Mount Ararat, a symbol of Armenian identity. The folk figures depicted on the banknote are symmetrically intertwined against the relief of Mount Ararat (the peaks of Lesser Sis and Greater Masis). The body of the dancer Gayane rests on the body of the dancer Armen, who holds sabers, symbolizing a model of happiness: a woman seeks support in a man, and he wants to be that support for her. The semantic center of the image is Mount Ararat, which serves as a horizontal support for Armen. The happy harmony of the relationship is expressed on three levels: physical contact, choreographic movement, and the visual background: the mountain as the foundation of happiness. In other words, happiness manifests itself when the lovers support each

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other and find support in the geographical landscape: the Ararat Valley and Mount Ararat. The visual representation of the *Sabre Dance* on the banknote thus serves as an original semiotic text, conveying the idea of happiness associated with national identity. This perception is replicated at the sonorous level: a potential banknote owner can "remember" the famous melody of the *Sabre Dance* by looking at the musical bars from the score presented next to the dancers.

According to contemporary Armenian composer Tigran Mansuryan, the *Sabre Dance* represents 'a counterpoint between the Armenian wedding dance and the American saxophone, resulting in a very interesting and organic synthesis' (Mansuryan 2003). Mansuryan makes an important remark about Khachaturian's work, based on national motifs, being "transboundary." As the composer of *Sabre Dance* himself noted, 'musical language is created by the people. It creates that unique and sometimes difficult-to-define distinctiveness of the intonational structure of music, which allows us to unmistakably distinguish the nationality of a given work of musical art' (Khachaturian 1972:9). In other words, a talented musician must "hear" the deep rhythms of collective musical creativity to "present" it to their listeners, "beyond borders," as happened in the case of the *Sabre Dance*.

However, Khachaturian himself considered the *Sabre Dance* an additional element, introduced into the ballet almost after the score was completed. In the context of his entire musical oeuvre, he critically called it 'just a button on my shirt' (Khachaturian 1980:69). For the composer, the central idea of ballet as a 'path to happiness' was far more important. According to Khachaturian, dance becomes 'the emotion of thought and the thought of feelings' (cit. in Papanyan 2004:115).

In this sense, the story of the ballet's composition is quite unique. *Gayane* is an unusual case of reworking an original concept with a new title. Khachaturian originally composed a short ballet, *Happiness*, for the Armenian Art Decade held in Moscow in 1939. *Happiness* is the first Armenian national ballet; the composer used national melodies, and the choreographer synthesized classical choreography with elements of folk dance. It was in the ballet *Happiness* that Khachaturian laid down the

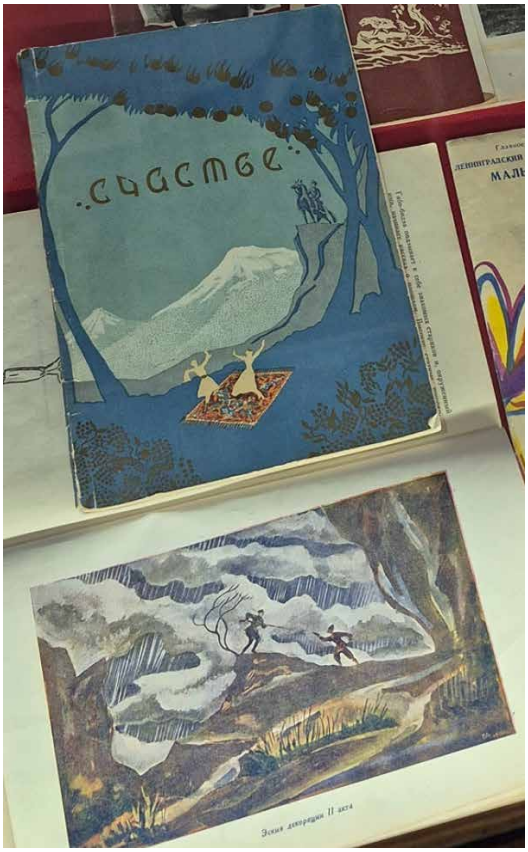


Figure 2. Ballet *Happiness* (1939). Program and sketch of the set for Act II (Khachaturian House Museum in Yerevan).

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fundamental principles of his musical and choreographic aesthetics: 'to symphonize the ballet,' that is, to write it in such a way that folk songs and melodies become an organic fabric of the work, inseparable from all the other music.

The libretto for the ballet *Happiness* was written in the spirit of the era and depicted the lives and work of Soviet border guards and collective farmers. The ballet premiered at the Bolshoi Theater to great acclaim and considerable positive press coverage, but this success was due more to the original music than to the formulaic libretto or the relatively simple choreography. We can judge the choreography today from surviving set sketches and illustrated programs: on stage, the audience witnessed a happy dance between a loving couple and a confrontation between an armed border guard and an enemy who had infiltrated the collective farm (Fig. 2).

According to contemporary music critics, *Happiness* proved to be a 'good stepping stone' or springboard for the further development of Khachaturian's ballet mastery (Fedorov 2002). Soon, the management of the Leningrad Kirov Opera and Ballet Theatre (now the Mariinsky Theatre) approached the composer with a proposal to stage *Happiness* with a new libretto. As a result, in Khachaturian's figurative expression, the entire score of *Happiness* was 'destroyed.' In place of the expanded version of *Happiness*, a new ballet *Gayane* was born, named after the main female character (Fig. 3 a, b).



Figure 3a, 3b. Ballet Gayane (1942). Poster, Gayane's costume, archival photos (Khachaturian House Museum in Yerevan).

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The revised version retained some of the plot lines, but the score became significantly more developed symphonically: the imperfection of the first dramatic version turned out to be the very 'springboard from insignificance to meaning' that Algirdas Julien Greimas described in his work *On Imperfection* (Greimas 1987:99; Greimas 2022:95). In this context, it is important to note the transition from a temporary, situationally determined plot constructed in accordance with Soviet ideology to more universal, nationally oriented content related to Armenian culture, expressed through the language of music and dance.

The composer wrote the ballet *Gayane* during World War II, while evacuated to Perm: 'I wrote about 700 pages of the score in six months in a cold hotel room with a piano, a stool, a table, and a bed' (Khachaturian 1980:70). After completing the score and beginning rehearsals, the theater management asked the composer to add one more dance to the final act. The musical masterpiece, which later became known as the *Sabre Dance*, was born 'as if by chance.' Khachaturian wrote it in just a few hours, and a day later, at the dress rehearsal, the dance became an integral part of the ballet *Gayane*. According to the composer, the starting point of his inspiration was the idea of speed and martial spirit:

> The dance had to be fast, martial. My hands, impatiently, struck a chord […]. A start has been made! Now we need contrast… In the third scene of the ballet, I have a melodious theme, a lyrical dance. I combined the martial element with this theme – the saxophone plays it – and then returned to the beginning, but in a new form. (Khachaturian 1980:71)

'Mr. Sabre Dance,' as Khachaturian would later be known abroad, later characterized the *Sabre Dance* as the 'unruly and boisterous child' in his 'musical family' (Khachaturian 1980:71). On the score of the so-called "additional" dance, Khachaturian wrote with emotion: 'Damn it, for the sake of the ballet!' and, already at the dress rehearsal, the dance immediately 'impressed the ballet, the orchestra, and those present in the hall' (Khachaturian 1980:71).

The *Sabre Dance* is based on the traditional Armenian dance *Trahag* (meaning "dance with sabres" in Armenian: թրախաղ), originally performed by men as a ritual rite to inspire courage and raise the spirits of warriors before battle.[1] In the *Trahag* dance, the dancer had to simultaneously mimic the movements of a combat encounter with an enemy and demonstrate their skill with a weapon: one or more sabers. When performed in a group, the dancers were divided into two groups: one row of dancers would attack and pursue, while the other would retreat and defend.

[1] See the book Ancient Armenian Dances for details (Lisitsian 1983).

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Figure 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e. The *Sabre Dance*. Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theater, May 2026









Figure 4g. Score by Gayane, quoted by Tigranova 1972

Punctum. International Journal of Semiotics | **12:**01**:**2026
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In Khachaturian's ballet, dance accompanies a scene in which warriors demonstrate their skill and prowess with weapons in hand. The dancers' forward and sideways movements convey an attack on the enemy, while their backward movements convey defense (Fig. 4a). The action taking place on stage during the *Sabre Dance* demonstrates Greimas's idea of comparing a simple sentence to a theatrical performance: the actors change, but the sentence-performance remains unchanged, its permanence guaranteed by the same distribution of roles (Greimas 1966:73; Greimas 2000:155). Reflecting on actantial models, Greimas refers to Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Fairy Tale* (Propp 1928) and the latter's seven-character scheme, as well as to a similar set of dramatic functions proposed by Etienne Souriau for the analysis of theatrical action. Khachaturian's *Sabre Dance* is a choreographic statement that incorporates both genres that interested Greimas: fairy tale and theatrical production. According to Greimas's typology, the communicative actants (actants of enunciation) in the *Sabre Dance* represent interlocutors participating in the structure of a 'second-level conversation, that is, a dialogue' (Greimas and Courtés 1993:3). A special role is given to the appearance of a female character in the traditionally male martial dance: the lyrical theme from the ballet's third scene, performed on the saxophone, introduces the woman onto the stage as the 'sought-after character,' according to Propp, or the 'Bearer of the Desired Good,' according to Souriau (Souriau 1943:157). Here we have the actantial class "Subject – Object," identified on the basis of the category "Desire" (Greimas 2000:159), which is further manifested in the practical and mythical form of "Search" (Fig. 4b).

The premiere of *Gayane* took place in late 1942 at the Perm Opera and Ballet Theater. According to Dmitri Shostakovich, one of the greatest composers of the 20th century, in the ballet *Gayane* Khachaturian demonstrated 'genuine nationality, enriched by the heights of world culture and making a new and valuable contribution to world culture' (Shostakovich 1972:42). The ballet brought Khachaturian worldwide fame and recognition, while the *Sabre Dance* effectively took on a life of its own.

The ballet *Gayane* has undergone several revisions: from the 1942 premiere at the Leningrad Opera and Ballet Theater with the choreographer Nina Anisimova and a libretto by Konstantin Derzhavin (Figures 3a and 3b) to the mid-1950s versions, when the ballet was staged at the Bolshoi Theater. In 1957, Aram Khachaturian rewrote more than half of the ballet score based on a new libretto by Boris Pletnev. While in the first version of *Gayane*, most of the dance numbers were devoted to the story of the harvest, the fight against saboteurs on an Armenian collective farm, and the beginning of a new working life for the main character, the new libretto emphasized the characters' storylines in search of love and happiness. Today, the Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theatre is showing Vilen Galstyan's 1974 production, in which the appearance of a woman in the *Sabre Dance* has its own history: for a tour at the Paris Olympia in the 1960s, Galstyan composed a separate performance based on the *Sabre Dance* in partnership with the Uzbek dancer Galiya Izmailova: 'I told her that I would dance the first part, she would dance

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the second, and in the third we should be together […]. We exchange blows with swords and sabers, then she throws swords, surrenders […]. Thus, a love duet is born' (cit. in Vladislavskaya 2026). In the current version of *Gayane*, the "feminine" lyrical theme of the *Sabre Dance* is duplicated by a color contrast: female and male characters in white enter the stage; they no longer exchange sword blows, but instead become a single, tense female-male center of the fragment, located within a circle of kneeling warrior-dancers.

In our opinion, the creation of the ballet *Gayane* exemplifies the semiotic phenomenon of "lost" or "alternative" paths, which interested Yuri Lotman in the context of cultural semiotics. In his programmatic article "People and Signs," he drew attention to the fact that information should be understood broadly, as any structural organization. In this sense, information should be considered not only what we have learned but also what we can learn: 'an unread book, an undiscovered star' (Lotman 2004b:9). The original ballet *Happiness* became the "seed" of the future masterpiece called *Gayane*: the schematic libretto and choreography of "*Happiness*" from 1939 already contained everything Khachaturian was able to write in 1942. The idea of the first ballet as a "path to happiness" became a message that audiences understood even without being familiar with the history of *Gayane*'s creation. Thus, the ballet evolved from a "repetition" to a creative "reproduction" (De Luca 2021a). *Gayane*, therefore, represents an example of the continuous 'search for a new cultural form' and 'true expression' within the traditional stage space (Merkoulova and Merkoulova 2022: 83; Merkoulova 2022:274).

The *Sabre Dance* is not the only movement in the ballet inspired by folk dance motifs. Among the popular dance movements, which the composer repeatedly reworked into musical suites after the production of *Gayane*, are, for example, the Dance of the Friends and the slow female dance of the bride, *Uzundara*. However, it was the *Sabre Dance*, an "additional" element "introduced at the last moment," that became the quintessence of the original concept: the search for happiness as a "suspended moment." As Paolo Fabbri writes, Lotman, reflecting on so-called "lost paths," did not become lost within the theory of "possible worlds," but managed to create a balance between uchronia and utopia: 'fa proprio il pensiero delle ucronie e delle utopie, delle strade perdute' (Fabbri 2024:172).

The *Possible World* of the first ballet *Happiness* was further developed in the second ballet, *Gayane*, and found its concentrated embodiment in the *Sabre Dance*. The choreography of the latter, as we will see below, represents an orientational metaphor of happiness. In the visual example we provided at the beginning (Fig. 1), the first musical bars of the *Sabre Dance* accompany the image of the loving couple, the main characters of the ballet *Gayane*, swords in hand. This is no coincidence: although in the musical and choreographic fabric of the ballet, the female character appears only in the second part of the *Sabre Dance*, as conceived by Galstyan, in the minds of the audience the core of the visual image is the orientational metaphor 'to be at the peak of happiness' (*Happy is up*). The male and female characters form a regular triangle

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with the sword-peak in the foreground of Fig. 1, and this plane is in superposition with the background, offering the viewer the peaks of Mount Ararat.

We all dream of happiness, even if only for a moment, within uchronia. In the original short ballet, the concept of happiness was presented as a serene working life on a Soviet collective farm, arriving after a series of trials. In the new ballet *Gayane*, happiness moves from the collective world to the individual: the main character, the beautiful girl Gayane, finds true love, and the action ends with a wedding, as it should be in a fairy tale.

Combining 'two micro-universes,' a fairy tale and a theatrical performance (Greimas 2000:159), both ballets represent the path to happiness through variations of *semiotic existence* (Greimas and Courtés 1993:138). In the ballet *Happiness*, we observe *actualized existence* (happiness is named), as well as the paths to its practical realization (*realized existence*: working life on a collective farm). In the ballet *Gayane*, the term "happiness" disappears from the title (*virtualized existence*). However, the path to it becomes the basis for the characters' behavior on stage, thus representing a *potentialized existence.* In *Gayane*, as a choreographic enunciation about happiness, modes of semiotic existence become *modalities of presence in discourse* (Fontanille 1999:64).

3. *Gayane* today: Scenography, actants, and passions

In 2026, the ballet *Gayane* is part of the repertoire of the Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theater, featuring sets designed by the distinguished artist Minas Avetisyan (1928–1975). The sets, created for the 1974 production, not only reflect the artist's unique style, at the intersection of Fauvism and Art Nouveau, but also create a unique space, simultaneously landscape-specific (the mountains of Armenia) and idyllic (a space of happiness). The rich colors of Avetisyan's sets create a world "on the border" between the real and the imaginary, the actualized and potentialized modes of existence (Fig. 5 a, b, c, d).

According to Yuri Lotman, our everyday life seems to us the only possible one. Nevertheless, what if we imagine it as *one of the possible ones*? In artistic creation and in fictional texts, such attempts are constantly made. However, Lotman notes, we fantasize, but we fantasize too little. Everything we invent about the future is 'a very, very multiplied present' (Lotman 2005:270). It is difficult to break away from the present, so our ideas about the future differ more in quantity (increased human abilities) than in quality (something completely different, unlike what we already have). Much more promising would be works that show the viewer a real situation, but at the same time present it as one of the possible. As a result, the viewer or reader gets a sense of the 'infinite variability of the world' and unpredictable creative solutions (ibid.).

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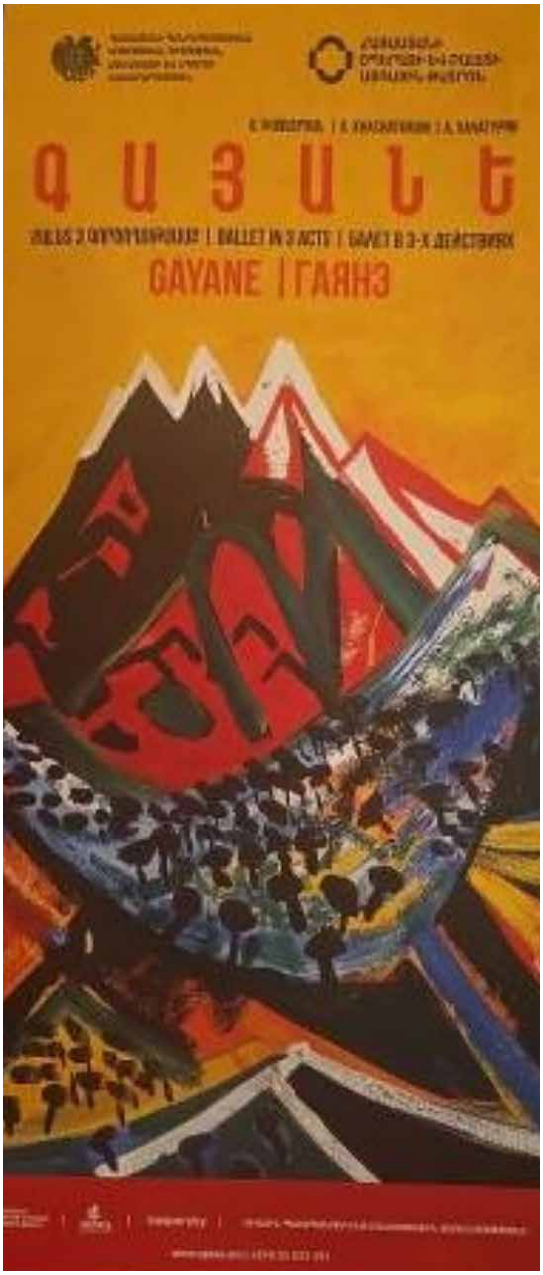


Figure 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d. Set designs by Minas Avetisyan for the ballet *Gayane* and the performance program. Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theater, May 2026

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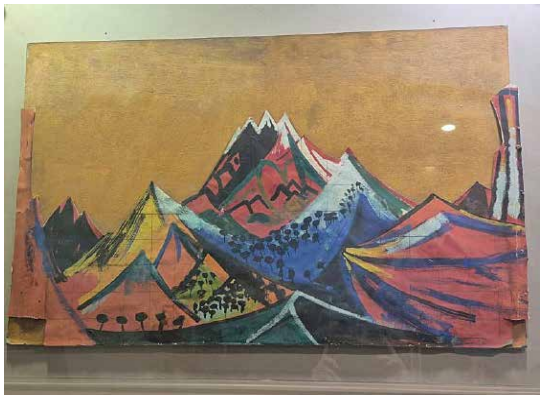




Figure 6a, 6b, 6c. Sketches of Minas Avetisyan's sets at the Khachaturian House Museum in Yerevan

The "possible" or "potential" happy space of the ballet *Gayane*, suggested by Avetisyan's sets, presents the landscape not simply as a location at the foot of the actual Mount Ararat (Fig. 6 a, b, c), as was the case with the design of the ballet *Happiness* (Fig. 2). Avetisyan' s images serve to 'camouflage the visible and reveal the invisible' (Matozzi 2010), moving, in Klinkenberg's terminology, 'from the naked eye to the equipped eye' (Klinkenberg 2010:186).

As Klinkenberg notes, one of the scientific themes that interested Algirdas Julien Greimas in the 1970s, but which was unfortunately not subsequently developed, was the *semiotics of the natural world*. In this project, Greimas proposed to interpret the world not as an absolute referent, but as a site of *manifestation* of the "sensible," which can become a manifestation of human meaning (Greimas 1970:52). In other words, objects of the natural world should be constituted as 'human objects, that is, meaningful for humans' (ibid.). According to Klinkenberg, an image is a tool that tells us as much about the sender and the recipient of the image as it does about the real

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(Klinkenberg 2010:190). In the case of the ballet *Gayane*, Avetisyan's sets are tools that transport both the senders (the artist and composer) and the recipients (the dancers and the audience) into the Armenian mountain landscape of the Shirak region. In the subsequent depiction of the ballet on the Armenian banknote, the dancers Armen and *Gayane* are depicted against the backdrop of the biblical Mount Ararat, the site of humanity' s happy salvation and the birth of new life. In other words, the cultural and musical context has given space to the biblical and sacred (Fig. 6 a, b, c).

The orientational metaphor *Happy is up* is visually represented by Avetisyan as a multi-peaked mountain landscape, simultaneously concrete and idyllic. In the collective monograph *Semiotics of Images*, Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou proposed applying Greimas's concept of isotopy to the analysis of figurative images. According to her, unlike verbal text, where isotopies *unfold gradually*, in a painting all isotopes are simultaneously present, thus creating a *visual syntax* (Boklund-Lagopoulou 2025:192). Avetisyan's sets are syntactically constructed around the main thematic isotopies of mountain vs. valley and up *vs*. down, corresponding to the orientational metaphor and the opposition *Happy is up*/*Sad is down*. We share Boklund-Lagopoulou's view that it is impossible to define pictorial signs in the same way we define words in verbal language, yet humans can *recognize* objects in the natural world. However, with visual images, the important thing is not what we recognize, but what we *learn*, culturally or socially, through these images (ibid.193).

Khachaturian's ballet in its 1974 version, according to the choreographer Galstyan, is a 'modest' version in terms of plot, free of ideological encumbrances (cit. in Vladislavskaya 2026). At the same time, it is precisely this modest version that allows the picturesque nature of Khachaturian's music to be highlighted. It is no coincidence that the renowned Armenian artist Martiros Saryan, who held the composer's work in high regard, resorts to artistic terms such as *palette*: 'What is valuable is not only that the composer nurtured his palette with the treasures of folk music […]. For me, the greatest merit of his art lies in the generalized recreation of the image of the people, in the inspiredly captured characterization of native nature and the national spirit' (Saryan 1972:37).

Thanks to Avetisyan's design, the ballet's title takes on a new meaning. While reworking the ballet score, Khachaturian abandoned the abstract concept of *Happiness* in the 1939 title and opted for the female name *Gayane* in the 1942 ballet. In the 1974 production with Avetisyan's sets, the name Gayane is no longer simply the name of the protagonist, who ultimately finds happy love. Gayane is a popular Armenian name with Greek roots, translated as "earthly" or "earth," after the Greek goddess of the earth, Gaya. There are also theories about the Latin origin of the word, which combines two meanings: "gaianus", made of earth, and the late Romance variant "gai," joyful. Gayane is also the name of a revered Armenian saint of the 4th century. Some studies link this name to folk roots meaning "home" or "family." Thus, the entire ballet *Gayane* becomes a coherent enunciation about finding happiness and love as a "homecoming" to one's native land.

Punctum. International Journal of Semiotics | **12:**01:2026
ISSN 2459-2943 | DOI: 110.18680/hss.2026.0004 | **punctum.gr**

In his articles, Khachaturian writes about the path to happiness as part of a young person's development: 'The life that surrounds us is infinitely rich […]. Furthermore, I would like to call on our youth to tirelessly strive for the new, to listen sensitively to the voice of the people, to study life, to draw inspiration from the struggle of the peoples of the world for truth, for happiness' (Khachaturian 1972:21). According to his axiology, in addition to cognitive aspirations (studying life, listening to the voice of the people), the world of youth should also be filled with the desire for happiness. From this perspective, the ballet *Gayane* occupy a special place in the composer's creative legacy.

On the one hand, *Gayane* can be interpreted through the actantial model of Greimas (2000:153) where we consider the relationships of the characters based on axes, constant relationships based on the interaction of desire, value communication and conflict. The plot of the ballet Gayane is built around the struggle to restore the disturbed order, where love becomes not only a personal feeling, but also a cultural value recognized by the team.

On the axis of desire, Armen is the central subject. It is he who is the bearer of directed action and strives to possess the object of Gayane's love and unite with her in a harmonious union. However, the object here is not limited solely to a romantic feeling. Armen and Gayane's love is semiotically encoded at the moral and social levels. That's why their future marriage will be like a sign of harmonious homeostasis. At the same time, Gayane herself partially occupies a subjective position, since her aspiration is also aimed at preserving love, freedom and inner harmony. Thus, the axis of desire acquires a mutual character, where both characters are included in the general movement towards unity.

The axis of communication and values reveals a deeper level of the work. The harmonious union of Armen and Gayane becomes the object of communication, while the recipient is not only the lovers themselves, but also the entire rural Armenian community. This is especially noticeable in the ballet's finale, where the wedding turns into a collective celebration. Songs, dances and the participation of the entire traditional Armenian village show that the happiness of the heroes is perceived as the restoration of a common order. Thus, love receives public recognition and turns into a sign of collective harmony.

On the axis of struggle and conflict, the confrontation between Armen and his rival, the jealous Giko, becomes the most important. Armen is supported by helpers, friends, and villagers. In the plot, Giko acts as an opponent and a destabilizing actor. His feelings for Gayane are based on the desire for possession. Unrequited love gradually transforms into envy, aggression, and a desire for revenge. Gayane's abduction becomes the culmination of the destruction of a harmonious order. Giko turns out to be the bearer of a chaotic principle, opposed to the village's collective ethics.

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The semiotic juxtaposition of Armen and Giko is constructed as a conflict of two value models. Armen is associated with love, honesty, teamwork, and creation, while Giko is associated with violence, selfishness, and destruction. If Armen strives for a harmonious union recognized by society, then Giko tries to appropriate the object of desire forcibly. That is why Armen's victory in the final is interpreted not only as the hero's personal happiness. In the deep structure of the ballet, a universal mythological scheme is reproduced: the initial harmony is disrupted, the world goes through a crisis and a test, after which order is restored: destruction of homeostasis / harmony – conflict – restoration of harmony / homeostasis. The final wedding of Armen and *Gayane* becomes a sign of the victory of love, collective solidarity and moral justice.

Summarizing the above, we can conclude that the ballet *Gayane* functions as a semiotic text in which the personal story of the characters becomes a model for restoring social and cultural integrity, told through music and dance.

On the other hand, we propose examining the structure of the ballet *Gayane* not only as stages of a narrative journey of trials, but also through the prism of the semiotics of passions. Each stage represents the "imprint" of dysphoric or euphoric events, ultimately leading to a happy outcome. The story of Gayane (Galstyan's version, currently performing in Yerevan) is, at first glance, a classic love triangle: a pair of lovers, the beautiful Gayane and Armen, and the jealous Giko, who unsuccessfully tries to thwart their happiness. However, as Jacques Fontanille points out, citing Lévi-Strauss's work on the jealous potter (Lévi-Strauss 1985:59), the "affective" or "family" plot may represent a "miniature" of the larger cosmic conflicts represented in the myths of a given culture (Fontanille 2010:145). The mythical dimension of Gayane's story is divided into the same two components that the authors of *Semiotics of Passions* (Greimas and Fontanille 1991) identified in their analysis of jealousy: 1. conflicts, battles, cosmic and chthonic quarrels, corresponding to the *configuration of rivalry*, 2. self-control, attitude towards one's own body and objects of desire, corresponding to the *configuration of attachment*.

The first act illustrates the configuration of rivalry: Gayane 'dances in her moments of rest' after a hard day's work, the enamored Armen 'can't take his eyes off her,' and his rival, Giko, tries to win her heart, but fails, and 'anger and despair settle in his heart.' The second act demonstrates the configuration of affection, both at the level of love and at the level of solidarity: Armen and Gayane 'enjoy love' in the mountains, Giko kidnaps the girl, but Armen manages to get her back, with the help of 'all the outraged villagers.' Finally, the third act represents the *resolution of the tension through a canonical sequence*: Giko 'cannot bear' the outrage of his fellow villagers, Gayane and Armen have a joyful wedding, and 'the whole village shares their happiness' (Libretto Gayane 2026).

Punctum. International Journal of Semiotics | **12:**01**:**2026
ISSN 2459-2943 | DOI: 110.18680/hss.2026.0004 | **punctum.gr**

Through musical and choreographic means (the conflict between lyrical and martial musical themes, the varied bodily expressions of affectivity), *Gayane* achieves one of the goals outlined in works preceding the semiotics of passions, in particular, *Fragments of a Lover's Speech* (Barthes 1977): how to talk about subjectivity without letting it slip away, how to "grasp" the vibration of emotion without falling into the trap of cognitive judgment or cultural schemas.

In the *Sabre Dance*, the idea of the path to happiness and its attainment is embodied through the orientational metaphor *Happy is up*. The fast first part of the *Sabre Dance* is the men's dance. It imitates a battle, with dancers spinning with weapons in their hands, where sabers, raised vertically, demonstrate prowess, courage, and victory over an opponent through a series of leaps (Fig. 4c). The slower choreography of the second part marks the entrance of a female character: the dancer carries the upright dancer Gayane to the center and smoothly lowers her onto the stage (Fig. 4d), where she demonstrates a series of *attitude* poses (*attitude devant, attitude derrière*: the dancer stands on one supporting leg, while the other, working leg, is raised and held in a bent position). The *attitude* pose, invented by choreographer Carlo Blasis, evokes the image of the graceful statue of the flying god Mercury by the sculptor Giambologna (1564, a version of the sculpture is housed in the Louvre).[2] The visual emphasis of the attitude pose is the creation of soft, round, and voluminous lines (Fig. 4e).

By examining this example, we recognize the so-called linguistic dimension of dance, noted by Valeria De Luca when she writes about the complex dynamic relationship between gesture and language. Postures as *dansèmes* or predetermined figures (*attitude* or elements of folk dance with weapons) are inscribed within a field of morphogenetic activity, as René Thom (1990) puts it. The latter 'constantly renews the stakes of valences and values, the salient features and the pregnancies by modulating them, by putting them into variation' (De Luca 2021b:67).

In the *Sabre Dance*, the appearance of a female dancer who "descends to the ground" embodies the orientational metaphor of *happy is up*. When dancing with sabers, Armen enters the stage with Gayane, holding her high on her head. He introduces her as a "trophy of happiness," and the continuation of individual elements of the Gayane dance steps refers to joyful movements, indirectly pointing to the *quinto* steps (Simyan 2019: 63), street vendors of the City of Tbilisi in the 19th century.[3]

As noted in several comparative studies devoted to the expression of happiness in different cultures, happiness can take the form of an anthropomorphic metaphor: it is 'an independent and autonomous agent' (Mozol 2018: 101) and 'comes from above'

[2] Mercury, attributed to Giambologna, MR 3271. Department of Medieval, Renaissance and Modern Sculpture, https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010092360

[3] About the Old Tiflis discourse, see the latest research: Simyan 2020, Simyan 2023, Mechitov 2025.

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(Bagautdinova and Bayramova 2006: 67). Classifying metaphors of happiness in relation to human actions, researchers distinguish the following vertical movements in space: 'happiness has arrived,' 'happiness has sat on my windowsill,' 'happiness stood and smiled at him' (Mozol 2018:101). '*Happiness* smiled' and 'to be born under a lucky star' are expressions known in Armenian (Sukiasyan and Galstyan 1975:221) and Russian (Larionova 2014:355). The *lucky star*, embodied by the dancer, is a reward for the valor of the saber dancers, since 'fortune favors the brave' (Bagautdinova and Bayramova 2006:64). As the authors of the dictionary *Myths of the Peoples of the World* point out, the expression 'to be born under a lucky star' goes back to the most ancient mythological form of understanding the world and the archetypal oppositions *top/bottom, heavenly/earthly* (astral myths). The image is based on a metaphor that likens good fortune to being born under a lucky star, that is, one located in the center of the sky and predetermining a happy fate (Tokarev 1980: 97). Therefore, the choice of a series of attitude poses (this particular pose of the dancer is depicted on Armenian banknotes, Fig. 1) by choreographer Vilen Galstyan alludes simultaneously to the "divine" nature of happiness and its fleeting nature (the flying god).

The choreography of the *Sabre Dance* is also reinforced by visual contrast: the dark costumes of the male warriors vs. *Gayane*'s white attire. *VERTICALITY, STRAIGHT, and BALANCE*, demonstrated by the dancers, contrastingly dressed in white, represent the primary "body-inherent schemas" that underpin the various meanings, literal and metaphorical, of the verb *stand*. These schemas have been found to combine in different ways, thus underpinning various related meanings, both literal and metaphorical, of the polysemous verb stand (Mittelberg 2018:9). In the context of the ballet *Gayane*, *to stand* is synonymous with to strive upward, toward happiness, that is, to move 'through movement toward history' (Maiorani 2022:5).

As repeatedly noted by music theorists, the musical language of the ballet *Gayane* is mainly characterized by its profound lyricism. 'Gayane is one of the most lyrical ballets of our time. In this regard, Khachaturian follows the traditions of Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev. This is evident in many ways, including in the central, pervasive role of the lyrical image, in the methods of its preparation and development, and, crucially, in the very interpretation of the danceability of the music' (Tigranova 1972:229). The music is 'permeated with the lyrical enunciation' of Gayane: we constantly hear her leitmotif, dialogic motifs from the invention, phrases from the lullaby. The ballet's final section prepares for the 'bright, major intonations' that 'fully blossom' in the final act (ibid. 237). Here, 'the idea of the inseparability of personal interests from the interests of society is finally fulfilled'; a happy life, the joy of labor, and the abundance of nature's gifts are celebrated. Gayane's fate and the happiness she finds are the *culmination of life's struggle*. In the final act, Gayane's theme is given in *Andante sostenuto* tempo (Fig. 4g): 'smooth, arpeggiated accompaniment

Punctum. International Journal of Semiotics | **12:**01**:**2026
ISSN 2459-2943 | DOI: 110.18680/hss.2026.0004 | **punctum.gr**

of the harp, octave leaps in the melody, expansion of the range, soft graceful second glides,' a gentle refrain, an unusually fresh and bright juxtaposition of major and minor (*D-dur/b-moll*) – all this creates 'a surprisingly harmonious image of unclouded happiness' (ibid. 240).

Using Tarasti's terminology, we can characterize the music of *Gayane* as *organic music*, a metaphor for happiness found in one's native land, embodied both in the title (*Gayane* means *earthly* and *joyful*) and in the natural development of the lyrical enunciation, drawing on folk elements: 'There are two kinds of music: organic and inorganic. In the former, the listener identifies music as a kind of *living organism* that imitates *natural processes*, and by such identification participates in the experience of unity. The opposite holds true in inorganic music, such as that written using serial or other "pre-programmed" techniques. Inorganic music emphasizes man's separation from nature' (Tarasti 2002: 17). Organicity, a folk basis, and symphonicity were the main principles of Khachaturian's work throughout his life: 'What is dearer to me is the principle of bold, creative handling of folk melody, when the composer uses folk melody as a life-giving seed that can be freely and boldly developed, processed, and enriched' (Khachaturian 1972:10).

The ballet invites us to immerse ourselves in the *tensivo-phoric space* of the path to happiness as the space of the *precondition of meaning* (Fontanille 2026: 6). Phoria, located at a deeper level than narrativity and semantic categorization, is polarized into euphoria and dysphoria and reformulated in terms of the modalization of existence (*desirable, possible*). Tensivity, for its part, is based on the relations of *intensity* (force, energy, affect) and extensity (quantity, deployment, space, and time: Fontanille and Zilberberg 1998).

In our view, *Gayane* offers a promising analysis in light of recent work on bodily semiotics, as an example of musical-choreographic 'testimony.' The body 'becomes necessary' as soon as we ask what unites the two planes of language into a single meaningful ensemble (Fontanille 2011: 4). The body as a substrate of profound semiotic operations, on the one hand, and the *figures of the body* that appear in semiotic objects, on the other, lead us to a *generative path of signification* that is not formal and logical, but phenomenal and embodied. The elementary semiotic function is inextricably linked to the bodily distinction between one's own and not one's own, and this distinction operates within the body itself, giving rise to the concept of the *body-actant*. The latter concept includes the actant as body (where the actant ceases to be purely formal and depends on bodily features, matter, and energy) and the body as actant (where it is either the instance of the enunciation or the narrative actant). Within the body-actant, a distinction is made, firstly, between the actant's *flesh*, a material substance endowed with transformative energy, underlying deixis and the sensorimotor core of semiotic experience. Secondly, a distinction is made between

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the *body itself*, that is, the identity that is constructed in the process of semiosis: 'The body itself would therefore be the bearer of identity in construction and becoming, and it would obey a guiding force.' (ibid. 13). In analyzing the ballet *Gayane*, we speak of bodies-actants that 'experience pressures' from the external world, contrasting this with 'identity in the process of becoming' (ibid. 17). Sensori-motricity is capable of imparting an *axiological orientation* to our relationship with the world as a whole (ibid. 18), and this is the reason why happiness as a metaphor is embodied in choreographic movement and gesture.

The ballet *Gayane* narrates the *subject's modal existence* (Greimas 1983: 93), where the two poles of phoria, namely euphoria and dysphoria, are transformed into *modalities of existence*: desired/undesired (desired love for Giko – undesired for Gayane: *vouloir-être*), necessary/harmful (labor in the village – shirking work: *devoir-être*), possible/impossible (the abduction and return of the beloved: *pouvoir-être*). The body is capable of storing, as part of its figurative memory, traces and imprints of its interactions with other bodies. Therefore, it can be assumed that every subject of enunciation, who enunciates precisely because he or she is a body-actant, can bear witness to his or her experience. This means that 'every embodied enunciation necessarily carries within itself a part of testimony' (Fontanille 2011: 119).

In the ballet, the path to happiness through trials lies through a combination of ethos and pathos. The roles of the lead dancers (Gayane, Armen, and Giko), as well as the collective *Sabre Dance*, are interpreted as 'pathetic proofs,' and their bodies as witness bodies (Fontanille 2010: 138): the co-presence on stage of living and feeling bodies that share the same experience and emotions is one of the conditions for "convincing" the audience. "To bear witness" means to convince that we "saw, heard, and felt" something. The ballet presents both a metaphor and a testimony to happiness. On stage, testimony is expressed through bodily means, accompanied by music. The experience that marked the dancers is potential and absent (happiness can be encountered, but cannot be stopped), and must be compensated, on the one hand, by the imprints preserved by the feeling body, and on the other hand, by the capacity for legitimate restitution that the expressing body receives through experience.

4. Conclusion. The imprint of happiness

At the beginning of our article, we quoted Jorge Asís about the happiness his protagonist experiences while dancing a milonga. At the end of the story, he notes that dancing isn't just a way to escape boredom, but it's vital: 'When everything around you is collapsing, you have to dance. It's uplifting, therapeutic, *vital* […]. Dance is given to us so that we can look at our lives from a distance and resolve all difficulties right there, in the dance' (Asís 2026: 126).

Punctum. International Journal of Semiotics | **12:**01:2026
ISSN 2459-2943 | DOI: 110.18680/hss.2026.0004 | **punctum.gr**

The analysis shows that in the ballet *Gayane*, happiness is not only the theme of the plot. This idea manifests itself on verbal, musical, choreographic, visual, and bodily levels. In the early ballet *Happiness,* the idea was expressed directly, as a meta-interpretation of the title. *Happiness* was associated with collective labor, the Soviet way of life, and the restoration of public order. In *Gayane*, the temporary ideological plot has given way to a more stable cultural model. *Happiness* is no longer directly named but becomes the object of a multimodal manifestation through the actions of the characters, their desires, trials, and relationships. *Happiness* becomes a value-object. Gayane and Armen strive for happiness. Their love is based on reciprocity, trust and free choice, and gets recognition from the team. Therefore, the personal happiness of the characters simultaneously means the restoration of social and moral harmony. Gico represents the opposite value model. His feeling is not based on reciprocity, but on the desire for possession. Armen's final victory and the wedding restore order. Thus, the path to happiness is modeled according to the scheme: harmony – violation of homeostasis – testing on personal and social levels – restoration of harmony.

The semiotics of passions allows us to consider this path as a movement between dysphoria and euphoria. Jealousy, fear, anger, and despair form a dysphoric pole. Love, solidarity, joy, and reconciliation form a euphoric pole. The transition between them creates an emotionally intense space of the work. Happiness does not arise as a static state. It becomes the result of overcoming emotional and plot tension.

A special role is played by the orientational metaphor of 'Happy is up' / 'happiness is at the top.' The metaphor gets a direct choreographic expression. The dancers lift their bodies, jump, and point their weapons upward. Armen holds *Gayane* high. Her body is above the stage space for a while. This movement represents happiness as uplifting, winning, and achieving a desired state. Stage decorations support the vertical metaphor. Mountain peaks create a constant opposition of top and bottom on a visual level. The image of Ararat (on the banknote) and the Shirak Mountains (Minas Avetisyan) becomes not just a geographical backdrop, but also a visual pillar of happiness associated with the Armenian mountain landscape, national memory, and cultural identity. The top of a mountain corresponds to the peak of an emotional experience.

The choreography of The *Sabre Dance* combines martial and lyrical elements. The male part expresses strength, risk, struggle, and victory. The appearance of a woman changes the emotional structure of the dance. The military tension turns into a love dialogue at the visual and tactile levels. Happiness arises through the union of opposites: male and female, strength and tenderness, conflict and harmony. Through movement, the body connects the inner experience and the outer form. It retains traces of fear, desire, struggle, and joy. In this sense, the dancing body becomes a *medium* for presenting happiness.

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The musical structure plays a vital role in presenting the ballet as a metaphor of happiness. The lyrical themes, the gradual development of the melody, and the bright intonations of the finale create an image of the inner harmony of the characters. The contrast between the militant rhythm and the lyrical theme reproduces the transition from conflict to unity. The organic nature of the music connects happiness with nature, folk tradition, and native land.

Thus, the concept of happiness in the Gayane ballet manifests itself as a complex semiotic construct at the level of visuality, tactility, plasticity, musical harmony, and actant relationships. Happiness becomes visible, audible, and functioning in the Armenian geographical, cultural context and landscape. Ballet spectators witness the embodiment of the metaphor of happiness through complex semiotic means. In Evangelos Kourdis's terms, this involves the *translation* of happiness into the language of choreography as a *transfer operation of cultural information* (Kourdis 2025a: 718; Kourdis 2025b: 746).

We also selected *Gayane* as a corpus for analysis, presented in historical and contemporary perspectives, with the aim of emphasizing so-called "empirical vocation of semiotics." By studying social phenomena and cultural facts, semiotics operates in the space between theory, empiricism and application, and ultimately describes not a 'given object,' but a field that it 'helps to configure through its own operations of observation and persuasion' (Deni and Lammardo 2026: 2).

Our movements are as much a language as an action: 'This is what the body has to say about need, defeat, courage, despair, desire, joy, ambivalence, frustration, love' (Pite 2026). When dance takes hold of a *willing body*, a process of *translation of the untranslatable* occurs: 'it can translate the ineffable; acting as an intermediary between us and the unknown' (Pite 2026).

As spectators of the ballet *Gayane* or its fragment, the Sabre Danse, we become involved in a story-testimony of happiness, both from the standpoint of the semiotics of imprint, according to which meaning can only be observed when bodies retain *traces of interaction* with other bodies (Fontanille 2011: 178), and from the standpoint of Lotman's semiotics of culture, which asserts that observable meaning arises *only in the process of translation* between systems (Lotman 2004a: 268).

Lotman analyzed the phenomenon of 'untranslatable inspiration' as a transition from untranslatability to translation; Fabbri, citing Lotman, called this translation 'turbulence' (Fabbri 2024: 168); and Khachaturian, having included the inspired and breathlessly written fragment *Sabre Dance* in the ballet *Gayane*, characterized the future advantages of music for translation into choreographic language with the laconic phrase 'For the sake of ballet!' (Khachaturian 1980: 71).

To contribute to the development of dance semiotics, we sought, on the one hand, to show dance through the heterogeneity of its constituent elements – "movement, aesthetics, sensorimotor, socio-cultural and historical dimensions" (Guellouz 2024: 3).

Punctum. International Journal of Semiotics | **12:**01**:**2026
ISSN 2459-2943 | DOI: 110.18680/hss.2026.0004 | **punctum.gr**

On the other hand, Lotman's approach to cultural semiotics and the post-Greimassian approach to bodily semiotics allowed us to emphasize 'the sensible body' (Fontanille 2026: 9) as the center of of Aram Khachaturian's organic music.

The ballet *Happiness* is present in the ballet *Gayane* as a potentialized existence, and our experience of audience interpretation and translation consists of finding traces of another experience that left an *imprint*. In this sense, *Gayane*, as the 'path to happiness,' becomes a 'springboard' (Greimas 1987: 99), leading from imperfection to perfection, to a happy moment or a *glimpse of the soul* (Pite 2026), shared with the audience.

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