

Modern Visions of Greek Tragic Dancing

Graham Ley

Contemporary perceptions that draw their strength from comparative performance studies would feel confident of identifying ancient Greek tragedy as a form of dance drama, which we find in Japanese *noh* and in the traditions that stem from Sanskrit theatre, notably Kathakali and Kutiyattam. By contrast, the most frustrating and persistent puzzle for the unreconstructed, dialogic vision of Greek tragedy in modern productions is undoubtedly the chorus. Yet as a cultural phenomenon in ancient Greece, the combination of singing and dancing, which is found in the chorus, was far more familiar, participatory, and widespread than the particular innovation that resulted in the speaking tragic actor.¹

So if we take it that perceptions should lead the way, we ought now to be expecting a reaction against the anachronistic "realism" that has concentrated attention on the spoken word, and be shifting our attention across to the dancing and the music of Greek tragedy. This kind of shift would accompany the now-emerging approaches to research that place a sharp emphasis on performance skills and investigation through practice as a means for effective discovery. In this context, which I take to be contemporary, the initiative falls to musicians and especially to dancers, and here the specific inquiry about tragic dancing might well be linked to a generic curiosity about the origins of European theatrical dance. But information about the technicalities of Greek tragic dancing is hard to find, and once found may seem obscure.

What I hope to do in this survey is to bring together some of the principal research attempts at unearthing the technicalities of Greek tragic dancing, and to provide a critical exposition of them, at the same time revealing the varieties of evidence that scholars have adduced along the way. In fact, as a general inquiry Greek dancing has,

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¹ It should probably be noted immediately that Steven Lonsdale provides an essential general context, aiming "to recover a wide range of meanings that dancing had for the ancient Greeks," but that he is little interested in performance (Steven Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993], 2–3).

from the renaissance forward, attracted only occasional scholars to its difficulties within classical scholarship, although from generation to generation interest has rarely lapsed completely.² One of the more obvious consequences of this profile is that the study of Greek dancing lacks many of the characteristic signs of progression, with sporadic contributions and distinctive methodologies more prominent than the phenomenon of adjustments to a prevalent or widely-held consensus.

Therefore, it might easily give the wrong impression to present a chronological sequence of contributions even over the last century, since this would imply the kind of progression that we tend to expect from scholarship. As an alternative, I am presenting this survey without a strict regard to scholarly chronology, although it is indicated in accompanying references and notes, and choosing instead to concentrate on the more vital matter of methodologies.

What I offer here then is, firstly, an introduction to questions of the modern ideology of Greek dancing. This is then followed by attention to two conventional methodologies of classical studies applied to the problem of conjuring a vanished dancing. Of these, the first is the kind propelled by the scholar T. B. L. Webster and is based in a relatively simplistic manner on the supposed implications of the various meters in which the surviving text of sung dances is cast. The other is reflected in the work of Lillian Lawler and is primarily a philological inquiry, but it is conducted subtly and is distinctively more sensitive and productive of insights. Finally, I have turned to an approach, which is possibly the most complex and questionable of all, but which is quite plainly a forerunner of the contemporary emphasis in performance studies on research through practice. So if I have subverted the exact chronology of scholarship in this short presentation, I have done so because I doubt that chronology would be as revealing to readers as a relatively confident sense of methods applied and of the rewards that may come from those methods.

Although tragedy certainly contained solo dancing by actors, my major focus is on dancing by the *choros* (plural *choroi*) of twelve (Aischylos) and fifteen (Sophokles and Euripides) trained but non-professional performers. In tragedy, as far as we can tell, dancing always took place while the performers were also singing, and both were accompanied by the sound of the *aulos*, a reed instrument with stops that many commentators, in the search for a working analogy, now liken to the oboe rather than the clarinet.

“The Greek Dance” and Tragic Dancing

“The Greek dance” has a weight to it, as a phrase or a concept, which places it on a level with “the Greek chorus,” and we might be advised to recognize in this a considerable admixture of our own cultural values. Greek dancing and Greek *choroi* signify to us something multiple and probably diverse, and may be the preferable terms. If we substitute the notion of Greek dancing for that of the “Greek Dance,” we are more likely to recognize the span of time involved, provided it is introduced to the argument. Specifically, dancing by a tragic *choros* in the fifth century BCE is one

² The history of inquiry from the renaissance forward is exhaustively traced by F. G. Naerebout, *Attractive Performances: Ancient Greek Dance: Three Preliminary Studies* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1997).

particular moment in what is a long continuum, even in antiquity, lasting from prehistory until well into the Roman era, and our limited understanding of it should aim to be particular as well as generic.

"The Greek dance" has also something of the syllabus of the dancing school about it, in suggesting an ethnic and geographical category that might be learned alongside others as part of a repertoire, and this should indeed serve as a warning. Antiquity has played a massive ideological role in the formation of modern European culture, and in relation to dance modern applies every bit as much to the twentieth century as to the whole post-renaissance period. In fact, modern dance as a radical break from the classical traditions of ballet cohabits the earlier part of the century quite comfortably with a revisionist and revivalist sense of ancient Greek dance.

Most readers will be aware of Isadora Duncan, but few may know of the Association of Teachers of the Revived Greek Dance, or of the publication by Ruby Ginner with the title *The Revived Greek Dance*. Ginner places this revival firmly in the context of "health and beauty," in which "we may learn much from many of the Greek ideals," and one thinks here additionally of Jaques-Dalcroze and eurhythmics, of the modern Olympian ideal, and ultimately of less attractive fixations.³ According to Ginner's racial theory, the Hellenic race was produced from the combination of an indigenous people—"short, dark-haired . . . passionate, superstitious, imaginative"—with Northern invaders, who were "blue-eyed, tall, and fair, of a magnificent physique, essentially warlike," and in addition "brave, chaste, self-controlled, and law-abiding."⁴ Despite these rather disturbing pronouncements, Ginner's exposition of the approach she adopted in her school, which she considered indebted to Duncan and analogous to that of other schools, is serious and earnest in its desire to draw upon the sources.⁵

So "the Greek dance" has its modern history, and outstanding dance scholars of antiquity such as Lawler draw attention to it, looking behind its role in modernity toward learned interest from the renaissance forwards. Indeed, it was even possible, in the period before 1945, to consider the whole history of classical ballet as a tradition founded in Greek antiquity. A popular survey of ballet, published in 1938, outlines this prestigious charter in relation to specialist dancing that belongs to the stage and is intended for a public:

Such dancing existed in the heyday of Greek culture, was known to the Roman emperors and practised by them, journeyed from Italy to France, and was, so to speak, codified by the logical French mind to become the art we know today.⁶

Ginner's assertions of "the beautiful simplicity of Greek art," her Platonic quotations, and her vision of the social value of the cult of "the Greek dance" in modern times create an entity, but her discussion is aware of the diversity within this whole. Similarly Arnold Haskell, in the charter outlined above, implies an awareness of other kinds of Greek dancing, but both writers play overtly with a conceptual abstraction

³ Ruby Ginner, *The Revived Greek Dance* (London: Methuen, 1933), v.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 and 3.

⁵ The Association was founded in 1923; Ginner's book was first published in 1933, and went through four editions, the last being published in 1947. She outlines the history and principles of the movement at 11–17, with schools mentioned 12–13.

⁶ Arnold Haskell, *Ballet* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938), 18.

that has ideological value in the present. According to these writers, the Greek dance is something that we need, and in order to be found it will embody principles, constituting a particular essence, perhaps even a Platonic ideal. That which is lost is perhaps always prey to this kind of conceptual construction, and we should be duly warned not to deduce too rapidly or with too much credulity from what evidence there is, perhaps especially where that evidence is presented in a conceptual form.

One of the largest cautions emerges conveniently in Haskell's apparently casual (and tendentious) summary above. The wording of his proposed continuity reveals that he must be thinking, primarily, of the dancing of the Greek *pantomimos* of the Roman period, about which we know a very great deal. This solo figure danced in a mask with a closed mouth, while others sang extracts from the myth, and the dancing was expressive and emotive in the extreme. Most later Greek sources, from the Roman era, discuss Greek dance in the light of their perceptions of this immensely popular form, which itself has a history of derivation from aspects of the earlier Greek mime.⁷ But the dancing of the solo *pantomimos* has little or nothing to do with the dancing of a *choros* in the theatre of Dionysos some five hundred years earlier, and constructions which overtly or covertly associate the two should be regarded with the greatest suspicion.

From the later eighth century BCE to the Roman era of the later second century CE is a period of just under a thousand years, and the ancient Greek culture for which we have some historic evidence encompasses a great diversity of original practice, and even of relatively established or local traditions. Those who have written on Greek dancing have adopted extremely diverse approaches to it, and in general scholars have rarely risked presenting a summary or overview. I shall be looking here at studies that have emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, and looking at them specifically for their insights into or commentary upon the tragic *choros*.

The Dancing of Greek Tragic *Choroi*

Webster's book *The Greek Chorus* carries a title that would place it in the forefront of any line of inquiry into the dancing of Greek *choroi*, but it is fair to say that reactions to the book are generally disappointment. Webster does not, as one might have imagined, preface his rather dry approach with any discussion of music or dancing, nor does he sketch the outlines of a cultural history of *choroi* in Greece. *The Greek Chorus* is divided into two sections, the first a survey of "The Archaeological Material," the second (and far longer) of "Literary Sources." The first section reflects Webster's interest in artifacts and monuments that he feels might "illustrate" performance. The second section aims to use the various meters or measures in which songs are composed as a means to determining a limited impression of performance. Hence, in the introduction, Webster describes his book as

⁷ The treatise by Loukianos (Lucian), *On Dancing*, from the second century CE is almost exclusively devoted to this kind of dancing. Eric Csapo and William J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), section V, 369–89 is devoted to "Mime and Pantomime," and Csapo and Slater provide a short introduction.

an attempt to trace the history of the dance of the chorus rather than its words, in so far as we can apprehend it from the meter, which controlled the feet of the dancers as well as organizing the words of the song, and in so far as we can see it on Greek vases and reliefs.⁸

Immediately following, he is dismissive of the later Greek writers on dancing, noting that they are “probably much more influenced by the solo dances of the Hellenistic and Roman *pantomimos* than by the tradition of archaic and classical choral dance.”

The introduction is promising, but the absence of illustration or drawings is soon felt, while the attention to foot or hand movements remains insistently descriptive rather than more broadly interpretative. Webster’s claim for the archaeological artifacts in the introduction, that “we can learn from them what different kinds of chorus looked like,” is not really substantiated in his presentations, unless we accept that the vision of a posture, and its possible correlation to similar postures elsewhere, will provide us with an adequate image of a kind of movement. This plainly refers in the large part to paintings on vases. But Webster, like another scholar John Green in more recent times, is also adamant that we must not see vase-paintings as photographs or films, and instead must appreciate the prevailing conventions that may be detected in the art of decorating vases.⁹ Although this advice is comprehensible as a criticism of G. Prudhommeau and the French school of reconstruction, as we shall see, it hardly proves helpful in Webster’s own short descriptions (xii).

As for tragedy in the Classical period (450–425 BCE in Webster’s periodization) there are very few examples, and what emerges from them is a quite basic descriptive method. Several figures are, reasonably, described by Webster as “running,” while another “strides” and another “dances” because she is raising her knee. In one instance, of a vase-painting taken to illustrate Sophokles’ lost tragedy *Nausikaa*, the two “running” figures justify the conclusion that there was “an agitated dance” from the *choros* at a particular moment of the action.¹⁰ In fact, Webster’s major terms of analysis prove to be categories of this kind, which he introduces quietly but retains and deploys repetitively to indicate different kinds of dancing:

It is not always easy to distinguish between walking and striding; but when one or both heels are raised, I have called the movement striding, and it must be recognized as a quicker dance movement than walking.

[6]

Later, in a particular discussion of a vase-painting, Webster writes of “striding” and then of “two other tempi, walking and running,” which are found in the Early Classical period, and we are left without help to deduce that Webster will treat these three as fundamental categories of Greek dancing (25). There are other observations, as one would expect, that some groups have linked hands, and much incidental attention to posture or gesture, but for the kinds of dance these categories remain paramount throughout his study.

⁸ T. B. L. Webster, *The Greek Chorus* (London: Methuen, 1970), xi. Subsequent references will be included parenthetically in the text.

⁹ John Green, “On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre in Classical Athens,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 32 (1991): 15–50.

¹⁰ Sophokles’ *Nausikaa* dramatized and developed the story of Nausikaa in Homer’s *Odyssey*. It may have been a tragedy or a satyr-play.

The first part ("Down to the Time of Homer") of the second, long section on "Literary Sources" draws these categories together into a theory, which Webster never really elaborates later in the book, but on which he draws repeatedly:

For singing choruses I would suggest tentatively as a theory to be tested when the evidence becomes fuller that a chorus "walks" when it has a long line to sing before it can pause in song and dance, that when a chorus "strides" it is singing a shorter line, and that when it does kicks it sings a shorter line still.

[54]

Webster's term "line" refers to different varieties of rhythmical meter or measure, fixed in a pattern of short or long syllables apparent in the words of a choral song. His immediate example is that of the dactylic hexameter, familiar from the narrative meter of epic poetry, such as that by Homer (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*) or Hesiod, which was recited by an individual singer. If and when this same measure appears in a choral danced song, in Webster's scheme it will be a measure for a walking dance. Similar interpretations of different meters or measures are offered through the sustained metrical analyses of songs in the subsequent parts of this second section, although the same meter cast into longer or shorter units may also, respectively, prompt suggestions either of dancing or of walking, which is confusing (57–58). Occasionally, Webster drifts into a wider cultural discussion of *choroi*, as he does constructively on the subject of marriage-songs, but one feels then that this is largely because he has insufficient texts to analyse metrically or to assign to the various potential categories of song (73–76). Even in this situation, the presiding terms for the discussion of movement of *choroi* are those of "walking" and "running," with the third "dancing" continuing to represent an awkward contribution in the circumstances of a general study of dancing, although some postponed clarification finally emerges in the conclusion. Here Webster writes of "three tempi," "walking or stately time, striding or dance time, and excited time," the last of which is presumably equivalent to "running" (200).

The proposals do not differ in the terms used for tragedy from those made for other *choroi*. The succession of metrical commentaries on texts in this second part on "Literary Sources" has a relentless quality, and there are times when one feels that Webster is as concerned to press on as to release anything substantially revealing from any discussion. Webster begins the analyses of tragic choral song, Aeschylus' *Persians*, but his analysis is clipped and his conclusions lacking any particular insight into tragic *choroi*. On the opening song in *Persians*, Webster comments that "the whole is probably walking tempo rather than dancing tempo," relying on the presence of "one or more long lines" throughout the parts of the song. Of the exchange between the herald and the *choros* in the same tragedy, he comments that "everything is in dancing tempo, if not excited dancing tempo," presumably because the metrical lines are short. The subsequent "wild lament" from the *choros* suffers a detailed metrical exposition from Webster, which Webster then characterized in conclusion as "a wild lament that becomes calmer and slower toward the end" (113–15). The meter or measure known as dochmiac in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* signals "excited dancing" (120), but of two vitally important and fascinating songs in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the graveside invocation in *Libation Bearers* and the entry of the Furies in *Eumenides*, Webster has virtually nothing to say, which is profoundly disappointing (127–28). Instead, he offers the concluding summary for the trilogy that "Dochmiacs are used for agitated choruses,

and dactyls for stately choruses," without explicit observations on other regular meters (18). The subsequent analyses of tragedies by Sophokles and Euripides do not set out anything more trenchant than this, and indeed in what he terms the "Free Period" of 425–370 BCE he seems almost to lose sight of dancing for tragedy, as commentary on comedy attracts his attention.

Webster's ideal would undoubtedly be to match the images of dancing on vases or other artifacts with composed texts in some manner. His compromise position in the absence of this ideal is to settle for simple descriptions of the movements on the monuments, which might arguably be applied to certain kinds of metrical line or measure. There are many incidental observations of some interest on the postures in vase-paintings, but the intensity of the analyses and argument, and their curiously concise urgency, do not result in an enhanced vision of *choroi* or a better understanding of their performances.

By far the most impressive figure in the modern study of ancient Greek dancing is Lawler, whose approach to writing about the dance is altogether different. She owes very little indeed to the use of the metric as a means to an end. Her two books, *The Dance in Ancient Greece* (DAG) and *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre* (DAGT) are written in an accessible style and provide detailed references; the first places dramatic dance in a wide context, and the second provides a more restricted study.¹¹ Both books are reliant on an extraordinary series of shorter studies of specific aspects of Greek dancing and the terminology associated with it, reflecting research stretching back over two decades. The chapter on "The Dance and the Drama" in *The Dance in Ancient Greece* is a brief survey with little technical detail, but unfortunately this is the work to which most references are given by other writers, and it seems to be more widely available, perhaps as a result of the considerations I addressed at the beginning of this section. The presentation in *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre* is, inevitably, of greater relevance to the subject here, but is still not an effective substitute for some of Lawler's specialist essays. These are meticulous in examining the sources for terms and aspects of Greek dancing, but they also contain, in varying degrees, considerable speculation.

I shall review here merely a selection of the significant terms that may affect our view of the tragic *choros* in the light of the discussions presented by Lawler, who pronounces herself wary of the reconstruction of ancient dances. As she maintains, "the exact appearance of those dances eludes us" (DAG 85), and in general she does not attempt to draw many conclusions from visual material, confining herself to a few illustrations. But this kind of caution also sits uneasily, in *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, with some unexamined assumptions about the tragic *choros*. Although we read of the entrance of the chorus "in a solid rectangular alignment," she neither provides any review of the dubious and late sources for this contention nor explains with care how subsequently "the members of the chorus may have turned their backs upon the

¹¹ Lillian Lawler, *The Dance of Ancient Greece* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964), and *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1964). I have distinguished page-references below to these two works with the abbreviations DAG and DAGT respectively. Subsequent references will be included parenthetically in the text.

audience, to face the actor who now entered" (DAG 82).¹² The comments about the appropriate qualities for modern productions of tragedy are also ill advised:

Also, in devising dances for the plays, the present-day choreographer should in general use dignified, restrained, and beautiful postures and movements, shunning those which are contorted and violent—which the Greeks regarded as 'ignoble' and at variance with the essential character of the dance of tragedy.

[DAG 85]

The note attached to this prescription refers to Plato's proposals for the dignity of *choroi* in the *Laws* and dependent valuations from the Roman period, which effectively conceals the point that Plato categorically did not regard existing tragic performances as "dignified and restrained" (DAG 151, n.17). On the previous page Lawler has written of the binding-song of the Furies in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* that "the weird dance . . . must have carried with it a breath of savagery," and has earlier referred to extreme expressions of grief in tragic songs and to "wild running, shouting, tossing of hair" in Euripides' *Bacchae* (DAG 83–84).¹³ Yet, when it comes to giving a summary and issuing guidance for the re-production of "the Greek dance," Lawler presents a conservative and conventional view of classicism, one which she does not subject to investigation, but which may still continue to be influential.

In later sources from the Roman period "the tragic dance" is characterized by the term *emmeleia*, in a contrast with the typifying comic dance *kordax*, while the dance of the satyric drama is identified as *sikinnis*. This formulation has prompted many modern speculations, particularly since Plato in the *Laws* divides dance into two categories, the peaceful *emmeleia* and the warlike pyrrhic.¹⁴ Plato is plainly creating an artificial scheme for a hypothetical society in *Laws*, but the combination of later sources with Plato's apparent authority leads to regular pronouncements, such as that by Lawler quoted above, that the tragic dance was stately or dignified. In the book from which that quotation is taken, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, Lawler has little to say of *emmeleia*, reporting merely that opinion varies between applying it solely to the entry of the *choros* in tragedy or to the whole of tragic dance (DAG 83). In *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre*, Lawler is more trenchant:

Unfortunately, we have from antiquity no clear definition of the *emmeleia*, nor have we in Greek art, so far as we can determine, any representation of the *emmeleia*.

[DAGT 59]

¹² Lawler also introduces the rectangle in *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre*, referring there (26) to the *Etymologicum Magnum*, which advances a spurious correlation between *tragoidia* (tragedy) and *tetragonon* (rectangular) in attempting to find a meaning for *tragoidia*. The supposed connection is completely contrived, since the letters *trag* in *tetragonon* are a chance combination of the phonemes indicating "four" (*tetra-*) and those indicating "angles" (*gonon*). The account of the movements of theatrical *choroi* in Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 2nd ed. (revised by John Gould and David Lewis, 1988), 239 ff. is similarly dominated and introduced (239) by this late tradition of speculation, and cannot be considered reliable.

¹³ In *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre*, despite her reference to the "rectangular" speculation, Lawler observes that "there must have been a great deal of freedom for the choreographer within the framework of the play, and striking dances of many sorts seem to have been introduced, if they fitted naturally into the plot" (26).

¹⁴ Plato *Laws* 816b, from book 7. There is a translation by T. Saunders, Plato, *The Laws* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

For “definition,” we might substitute “description” to some purpose, because what we are dealing with in the later sources, and indeed in Plato, is a schematic system which has no real interest in the substance of actual dances: in that respect, *emmeleia* as it is formulated in this tradition is undescribed and indescribable. Lawler goes on to draw attention to the fact that the *kordax* was clearly a specific dance in comedy, not *the* dance of comedy, and concludes similarly about the *sikinnis* of the satyr-play:

Just as in comedy not all the dancing represents the *kordax*, so in the satyr play there must have been dances of types other than the *sikinnis*.

[DAGT 110]

We are left, or should be, with very little impression of the *emmeleia*, whatever it may have been in the fifth century BCE. Two slight references can be added, one from Aristophanes’ *Wasps* where the threat of a “knuckle *emmeleia*” is directed at a comical vision of a tragic (solo) dancer.¹⁵ The second reference also dates from the fifth century, although it is applied to an earlier period, and comes from the historian Herodotos. In a remarkable anecdote about a member of a prestigious Athenian family, which is almost certainly derived from the oral traditions of the Athenian aristocracy, Herodotos uses both the term *emmeleia* and the verbal form of *cheironomia*, another term that later commentaries on dancing deploy. The anecdote concerns the lavish arrangements made by the tyrant of Sikyon (a city in southern Greece) in the sixth century BCE for the marriage of his daughter. Suitors arrived from around the Greek world, and trials were made of them. On the final day, the tyrant Kleisthenes laid on a banquet, and at its conclusion the suitors continued to compete with each other in *mousike* and in speaking, which presumably suggests singing to the lyre as an accomplishment. As the drinking advanced the young Athenian aristocrat Hippokleides ordered the *auletes* (*aulos*-player) to play *emmeleia* and performed a solo dance. At this, Herodotos says, the tyrant began to be dissatisfied, but Hippokleides called for a table and, jumping on to it, first danced some Spartan “figures” (*schematia*), then some from Attica, and finally placed his head on the table and performed *cheironomia* with his legs. Herodotos uses the word *orchesis* throughout, a term usually associated with solo dancing, and the outcome (as indeed the whole amusing story) is best read in full.¹⁶

Plainly, we do not need to spend time doubting that this is what Hippokleides did, if only because our faith in the historical reality of this incident is not at issue. What is obvious is that Herodotos, in writing this story, is using terms which he feels will be comprehensible to his fifth-century audience and readership, notably fifth-century Athenians. The evidence of the *aulos* in combination with solo dancing could well point to a tragic model in his mind for this *emmeleia*, although it has to be said that the Spartan figures are unlikely to be tragic. In other words, Herodotos seems to understand *emmeleia* here as a form of music accompanying solo dance (*orchesis*), and he is writing in the second half of the fifth century, contemporaneously with Sophokles and Euripides. Herodotos does not suggest how Hippokleides came to know these dances, and anachronism is vigorously at play in the story if tragic dances are being

¹⁵ Aristophanes *Wasps* 1503.

¹⁶ Herodotos *Histories* book 6, 126–30. There is a translation by R. Waterfield, Herodotus, *The Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). The term *orchesis* is regularly used for solo dance, but it may be used for dancing in general.

suggested, since tragedy was not established at Athens until the later sixth century, a generation after the time of this event. So the picture, although amusing, is extremely confusing to us, but it hardly provides support for the *emmeleia* in relation to the tragic *choros*, nor is the context explicitly "stately" or "dignified." The story told by Herodotos also offers us our best glance at *cheironomia* as a fifth-century writer and his audience might understand the term. For the fifth-century audience, *cheironomia* should be generally descriptive of the movements of the hands (and arms) in dancing, and the term is only remarkable here because Hippokleides substitutes his feet and legs. In the later sources from the Roman period *cheironomia* gains far more prominence, but once again one might expect that to be true of a period strongly affected by the *pantomimos* as a form of solo *orchesis*. Early evidence on *cheironomia*, such as it is, is for solo dancing, since that is also the context for a brief reference (a mime performance) in Xenophon's *Symposion*, a work that dates from the period just after the deaths of Sophokles and Euripides.¹⁷ But this does not prevent *cheironomia* featuring as a certainty in modern accounts of the dancing of Greek *choros*.

Lawler, by contrast, has little to say on *cheironomia* in her accounts of tragic dancing, but this is probably because she goes behind the general term to offer detailed commentaries on other ancient terms applied to dancing. Her essay "Phora, Schema, Deixis in the Greek Dance" subjects three terms found in Plutarch to close examination.¹⁸ Plutarch is writing in the Roman period, at the end of the first century CE, and Lawler believes that he is likely to have the pantomime rather firmly in view, even though one of the speakers castigates pantomime at the close of piece. In this imagined exposition by Ammonius, a "philosopher," *deixis* is an indication by the dancer of actual physical objects, and a *phora* would be expressive of an action or capacity/ability, suggesting on the one hand a predominantly gestural use of the hands or arms, and on the other an indicative movement or movements of the body. Lawler pays closest attention to the definition given to *schema*, which is said by Ammonius to be the static pose that is held in place at the end of a movement. Lawler questions this definition, since it seems to conflict with the more regular associations of the word *schema* when applied to dancing. The *schematia* of Hippokleides in Herodotos do not appear to be poses but essential, defining figures of the dance, and in Xenophon's *Symposion* the character of Sokrates contrasts *schemata* with a state of rest. The scene in this dialogue is largely occupied with the entertainments introduced by a Syracusan dancing-master to an Athenian drinking party (*symposion*) at which Sokrates is present; the entertainers include an *aulos*-player (female), a boy who dances and plays the lyre, and a girl dancer/acrobat. The word *schemata* is used repeatedly, and Sokrates responds to the boy's dance by saying that, even though the boy is attractive in himself, "he seems even more attractive with the *schemata* than when he stands still."¹⁹ He also observes that the boy's "neck, legs, hands were exercised at the same time," and that dancing is clearly a good exercise for the whole body. This would seem to

¹⁷ Xenophon *Symposion* 2.19, in E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd, *Xenophon: Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, Apology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). There is also a translation by H. Tredennick, *Xenophon, Memoirs of Socrates and Symposium* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

¹⁸ Lillian Lawler, "Phora, Schema, Deixis in the Greek Dance," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 85 (1954): 148–58.

¹⁹ Xenophon *Symposion* 2.15.

justify Lawler's comment that *cheironomia* embraces some varieties of *schemata*, and she is surely right to conclude that the word *schemata* is broadly used "to denote many features of the dance."²⁰

Many of Lawler's essays are devoted to examinations of the possible interpretation of the names for individual *schemata* that are provided by the sources, and they make a fascinating series of investigations that combines the scholarly with the speculative. But she also groups the *schemata* in two principal discussions, in the second part of the essay introduced in the paragraph above, and in *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre*, where she attempts to make some links with the texts of Greek tragedies. In the earlier discussion from the essay she provides a categorization of the *schemata* "into what we should call gestures," those that indicate a pose, others which "denote a characteristic movement or action," and those which suggest "a sustained motion or figure."²¹ The names of the *schemata* come from later sources, but some of them are fixed in quotations from earlier texts. So we are not dealing just with a late or theoretical compilation, but with a composite list, which reflects early names and possibly includes those that may have been still current in the Roman period, and perhaps might be associated with the pantomime.

Examples are interesting: from Lawler's first category ("what we should call gestures") there are "the seizing of a club," the "sword-thrust," the "snub hand," and the "hand flat-down," while from her third category ("a characteristic movement or action") there are "fire tongs, two foot, elbows out, spin-turn, whirl, slinky walk . . . split, high kick, rotating the hips, mortar, kneading trough, itch, raising the armpit, snort."²² It is likely that many of the latter have obscene connotations, and in another essay Lawler provides a commentary on one of the former list, the apparently martial and mimetic "sword-thrust." She observes here that we should envisage "a gesture of the hand, a strong extension, in the manner of a sword-thrust, often with the hand held under a cloak," and that the gesture is a characteristic of the comic *kordax* "and seems to be obscene in implication, rather than military." She also suggests links with "rotating the hips," which was an obscene feature of the *kordax*.²³ Yet much later, in *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre*, Lawler is drawn into suggesting that this same figure "originally was a mimetic sword-thrust with the hand, used in tragedy by either actors or chorus," and she offers possible contexts from a number of tragedies. Despite her earlier association of the gesture directly with the *kordax*, a dance of old comedy in the fifth century BCE, she proposes here "that in later times the gesture of the thrust of the hand, especially under the cloak, acquired an obscene significance" (DAGT 39). One might wonder, at this moment, what the *kordax* did for its obscene gestures before it had corrupted those of tragedy. So, in this same discussion devoted to embodying tragedy, "taking hold of the wood" is described as a gesture useful for *choroi* carrying staves, which pictures with difficulty an artificial gesture elaborating a physical reality over extended periods of action, at the same time as it suppresses an obvious

²⁰ Lawler, "Phora," 156 and 154 respectively.

²¹ Lawler, "Phora," 152–53.

²² Ibid., 153.

²³ Lillian Lawler, "Diple, Dipodia, Dipodismos in the Greek Dance," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 76 (1945): 69.

connection with a convincing repertoire of suggestive obscenity. The confusion that emerges here, in what seems to be an almost explicit contradiction in interpretations by Lawler of the same gesture, is undoubtedly occasioned by the desire to discover *mimesis* in Greek dancing. Yet Lawler does not argue strongly for a specifically mimetic understanding of dancing at any point, largely because her researches in detail do not primarily suggest such a conclusion.

Lawler's attitude toward images on vases in principle is guarded: she comments toward the close of *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre* that "despite innumerable conjectures, we have in art no sure portrayal of any dance of the ancient theatre" (DAGT 121). But earlier in the same work she is prepared to draft a list of ten kinds of significance that a study of vase-paintings reveals in relation to dancing (DAGT 36–37). Her judgment here avoids exciting possibility in favor of reliable indications and components, and the list, granted its originator, may well be of considerable value. It comprises muscular tension, rapidity of motion, worship or deference, surprise, marked admiration, pointing, mimetic carrying of an imaginary object, abandon, deterrence, caution or stealth. As Lawler observes, members of tragic (or dramatic?) *choroi* might well be found using these reactions to startling events or messenger speeches; this claim extends consideration of the *choros* beyond the activity of dancing. In principle, with reservations and qualifications that need to be applied, Lawler's fund of investigation—notably in the remarkable essays—is bound to fascinate anyone with a marked interest in this subject, and is nearly always rewarding, on the larger scale or in some incidental manner. Few are likely to equal the range of her attention.

One of Lawler's passing but weighty comments in another essay is that "any attempt to parallel ancient and modern dances is necessarily fraught with hazard."²⁴ This severe reservation is undoubtedly leveled against the work of Emmanuel, which was extended and developed by Prudhommeau.²⁵ This approach set about the reconstruction of Greek dancing working from two premises, summarized neatly by Naerebout:

that the movements portrayed in antique works of art are identical to the movements of contemporary French ballet . . . [and] that the classical material can be combined into analytical series, comparable to the results obtained with modern chrono-photography.²⁶

In the first premise we see shades of the interest in "the Greek dance" in the early part of the twentieth century that I sketched at the beginning of this article. In the second premise we see the effect of modernity, the application of techniques gained from photography and the filmic image, which would permit the display of separate moments in an otherwise uninterrupted movement. This analogy then encourages the reconstitution of whole movements from separate images on vase paintings. Clearly,

²⁴ Lillian Lawler, "The Dance of the Owl and Its Significance in the History of Greek Religion and the Drama," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 70 (1939): 486.

²⁵ G. Prudhommeau, *La Danse Grecque Antique* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1965).

²⁶ F. G. Naerebout, *Attractive Performances: Ancient Greek Dance: Three Preliminary Studies* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1997), 61–62.

this will always be a highly contentious attempt at reconstruction, and criticism will debate not merely a suspect method but also the nature of the images on vases. Thus, Naerebout argues that what we see are not pictures of movements in progress (or "medial moments" of a dance): "these so-called medial moments cannot be part of *movement* at all, but must be an initial or final moment or a sustained pose."²⁷ What are regularly called the "conventions" of vase-painting are actually open to debate, and it is significant that Webster in his introduction, in referring to the approach of Prudhommeau, has a different view of what we see in the paintings.²⁸ But the consensus of disapproval for reconstitution by this method is very strong indeed, and Naerebout is savage in his condemnation of Prudhommeau, under this and other headings.²⁹

In fact, there is a third principle at work in Prudhommeau's method, which is the allocation of dance steps, once determined, to particular meters and measures, and Webster's severe disapproval of this may well account for his own preference for a relatively open system of interpretation, using only walking, striding, and dancing.³⁰ The culmination of Prudhommeau's study is a set of proposals for dancing sections of choral songs from Greek tragedies. For her specific purposes, she groups the dramatic characters of tragic *choroi* into generic categories, under old men (Aischylos' *Agamemnon* 1448–54), adult males in "full vigour" (Euripides' *Alkestis* 435–45), soldiers (Sophokles' *Aias* 909–14), and women (rather curiously the Furies in Aischylos' *Eumenides* 255–69).³¹ The categorization by gender, physical, and social type accepts standard types of the characterization of tragic *choroi*, and carries some simple assumptions about appropriate movements: soldiers might jump, old men will not, women will perform turns but not jumping turns. In general, Prudhommeau's commentary assumes naturalistic gestures and the presence of *mimesis*, a principle of imitation for the expression of character and sentiment, although she admits that our knowledge of the variety or conventions of this kind of expression is desperately limited. Her reconstruction of the dancing aims to clarify the sense of each word or phrase in the given text of a song, but significantly Prudhommeau makes no attempt to incorporate or really acknowledge the idea of *schemata* or any known *schemata*. The steps for each metrical element are painstakingly outlined in each analysis, according to the premises and principles given above.

Prudhommeau's grasp of the nature of Greek meters or measures, and her combination of sources of all kinds from all periods without adequate critical or chronological assessment, into a composite vision of "the Greek dance" have both been heavily criticized. For my part, I am struck by the fact that Prudhommeau engaged in practical exploration of her methods, which she describes in sober terms in

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

²⁸ "The pictures are not films or even photographs of the performance. They are what the artist remembered of the dance. . . . When the dance was uniform, the figures could all be represented in the same position; when the dance went through a number of memorable postures, it is possible that the artist showed this by putting different figures in different postures so that his single frieze showed no actual moment but a number of different moments" (Webster, *Chorus*, xii).

²⁹ Naerebout, *Attractive Performances*, 86–88.

³⁰ Webster, *Chorus*, xi–xii.

³¹ Prudhommeau, *La Danse*, 497–524.

connection with her analysis of the short section of Aischylos' *Eumenides*. Here she writes of a "style analogue à celui des Anciens, avec des danses qui pouvaient être exécutées par eux," and I find that phrase both acceptable and defensible.³² From our own perspective, we should note that a figure such as Barba has spent considerable time and energy investigating what he believes to be common principles underlying the physical work of the performer across cultures. Although I would be critical of many of Barba's premises and conclusions, and of some of the tendencies of his theoretical writing, he suggests a context in which the second part of Prudhommeau's phrase might well be accepted.³³ We could certainly say that Prudhommeau provided a means by which a choreography of an ancient Greek tragedy might be elaborated and realized by dancers trained in ballet. If we were to see her work from this angle, as a methodical if flawed attempt to accommodate ancient tragic scripts to one of the major resources of our own dancing tradition, in order that they may be danced again, then we might choose to be less scathing about her research than many have been. We might also ask ourselves one very simple question, to which there is no answer: if ancient *choreia* (and *orchesis* in general) did not put established and so executable steps to the meter and measure of a given composition, then how did it work?

³² Prudhommeau, *La Danse*, 512–13. "A style analogous to that of the Ancients, with dances that could have been executed by them," translation mine.

³³ Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* (London: Routledge, 1991). I have given a critique of Barba's theorizing in *From Mimesis to Interculturalism: Readings of Theatrical Theory before and after Modernism* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), section 4.3, 210–48.