

‘Heroes of the Dance Floor’:

The Missing Exemplary Male Dancer in Ancient Sources

‘Why, after the reign of the dancing Sun King, was dance no longer an appropriate occupation for men?’ This is the question with which Ann Daly opened an influential intervention in the feminist debate on dance. She argued, with the support of revealing quotations from the Romantic dance critic Theophile Gautier, that in the Romantic era dance became 'less a moral paradigm and more a spectacle'; the ballerina became a reified object for scrutiny, she says, by the male gaze:

Because the connotative passivity of such overt display was anathema to the virile, strong, action-oriented control of the masculine ideology, dance came to be identified as "effeminate"...

She argues that men’s effective prohibition from engaging in this self-display during high Romanticism indicates, furthermore, 'an attempt to maintain the male's virile image-his dominance-untainted by the "feminine." ' ¹ In a nutshell, ever since Louis XIV, dance has been seen as fundamentally effeminate; since we live under patriarchy, in which the female body is the **principle** bearer for society of erotic signification, the perceived effeminacy of dance inevitably results in it becoming conceptually sexualised and vulnerable to charges of moral depravity and aesthetic decline. These connotations add up to what we understand by ‘decadence’ in the widest sense of that term, incorporating also a sense of a lapsarian fall from Edenic innocence.² To dance was and still is to run the risk of relinquishing autonomous control over the

meaning created by one's own body, and thus to relinquish all that is signified by masculinity in culture.

Daly points out that return of men to prominence in ballet in the 1970s and 1980s, with the marketing of Rudolf Nureyev, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and Edward Villella, required a good deal of 'dancing is masculine' propaganda in the press, and a spate of books that hyped them as strong, virile, heterosexual, and athletic. In the third millennium, the necessity of making the character of the outstanding dancer Troy Bolton in the *High School Musical* movies a star basketball player, with a particular penchant for noisy break-dancing in masculine settings like used car dumps, merely underlines how little has changed. Troy Bolton is played by Zac Efron, whose indeed dazzling grace and skill are far more authentically displayed in the early 1960s dances of the movie *Hairspray* (2007). But his packaging as the new icon of the strongman dancer provides just another occasional and prodigious exception that only proves Ann Daly's rule. The dangerous associations of dancing 'will never be truly destigmatized for men (and women) as long as the oppositions of masculine-feminine are maintained, because it is due to those polarities that dance is dubbed "effeminate" in the first place.'

It is incontrovertible that men who dance are inviting uneasy responses because they relinquish control over the way their body is consumed and bears meanings that are mediated by gender hierarchies. Daly's view can, however, be given historical depth and amplification by referring the argument back to antiquity, and in particular, in the second half of this essay, to Homer. This procedure not only allows the reader who is interested in the cultural presence of the ancient dancer in the modern world to review some of the earliest and most influential passages on dance in ancient literature, but also emphasises that the perceived effeminacy of dance is a strand in thinking that was not by any means a new phenomenon in the late 18th century. The thoroughgoing liberation of men, and women, from the effeminate associations of dance would need the overhaul of those constitutive constructions of gender (and the power structures

underpinning them) which happen to have been dominant not only for the last two centuries but since the earliest stages in the making of the Western cultural tradition. Although, as we shall see, apologists for dance both in antiquity and from the Renaissance onwards have seized on the two ancient exemplary figures – the Greek Socrates and the biblical David – who offered them a small amount of ideological ammunition, dance has been defined as potentially effeminating and dangerously related to sexual arousal for the entire period that comprises European cultural history. It began no more with Theophile Gautier than with the Puritans, the Early Church Fathers, or with the late pagan opponents of Roman pantomime against whom Lucian's polemic is aimed in his treatise *On Dancing*. The contentious issue of dance's threat to compromise masculinity has fluctuated in intensity and has taken different forms at different periods and in different cultural contexts. Yet we risk underestimating the importance of the perceived threat, and the difficulty in countering it, if we ignore the extent to which it informs the entire debate from antiquity through the Renaissance and beyond

Advocates of dance as an art-form, whether ancient or modern, Lucian or Ménéstrier, seem at first sight to have had rich pickings in the Mediterranean sources to which they appealed. For texts in ancient Greek and Latin are the products of a civilisation where dance by men as well as women, free as well as slave, was central to numerous dimensions of public life. These included military training and state ceremonial, religious ritual, theatrical entertainment and symposia. Ancient Greek and Roman authors make many thousands of references to dancing nymphs and maidens, and to ritual dances for either (and occasionally both) sexes, but also to properly masculine martial dances for men such as the Pyrrhic. Such references could usefully supplement the ancient discussions of the imperial-era pantomime dancer, because these discussions reveal that pantomime, which had arrived late on the ancient scene, had always been controversial and perceived by some as a sign of social degeneracy. It was therefore polemically less useful than it might have been.

The industry even of the ancient anthologists of references to dance – Plutarch and Athenaeus as well as Lucian and Libanius – is astonishing; even more so was the cherry-picking fervour of the campaigners for (and against) the social utility of dance in the Italian Renaissance, and subsequently in the 17th and earlier 18th centuries, who leapt on their ancient forerunners. The work of some of the most industrious of them was linked closely to the intensely religious form that international politics took while the Netherlands consolidated its position as a Protestant world power opposed to France:³ a helpful example is constituted by the more than one hundred classical authors (including, inevitably Xenophon on Socrates and some passages of Homer) collected by Joannis Meursius in *Orchestra; de saltationibus veterum* (1618); another is the anonymous pamphlet of 1683, the Dutch title of which translates as *A French Dancing Master Heckled and Helped* (*Dansmeester van Franequer geheekelt ende geholpen*).

Yet when the repertoire of standard examples from ancient texts are scrutinised more closely, what begins to become apparent is the severe shortage of the type of evidence that the proponents of dance so desperately needed – exemplary male dancers whose morals and masculinity were equally admirable. From the seminal sections on dance (Book iii chapters 3-4) in Ludovici Ricchieri's *Lectioinum Antiquarum Libri XVI* (Venice, 1516) and Thoinot Arbeau's *Orchésographie* (Langres, 1588) onwards,⁴ the Renaissance and Early Modern treatises tried to address this dearth by developing a canonical catalogue of dancing men in Greek, Roman and indeed Old Testament sources. But it is the main purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the material they had to work with was inherently inadequate. Unease with male dancing is built into the foundations of Western discourse, where it has always a tendency to activate associations with erotic licence, effeminacy, and aesthetic and moral degeneracy, from archaic Greece onwards.

The first group of ancient male dancers who are consistently mentioned consists of historical individuals whose fondness and aptitude for dancing were features of the manner in

which they were presented in ancient sources. But almost all of these were inherently problematic as exemplars. Some were professional dancers of which nobody knew anything beyond the fact that they were briefly named in one of the ancient treatises, which did not help advance the argument much: Telestes, a Greek theatrical dancer associated with the famously martial play *Seven against Thebes* (Athenaeus 1.22a), proudly cited, for example, in one of the dedications to Juan de Esquivel Navarro in his *Discursos sobre el arte del danzado* (1642),⁵ was scarcely a household name. Another problem was that often all the promoter of dance could find was a brief reference to this dimension of the ancient figure, with no further elaboration of where, what, with whom, or why they danced (this is the case with, for example, Alexander the Great). Much worse was the problem that several of them, if closely scrutinised, easily provided ammunition for the other side; most of the dancing Roman emperors, for example, were themselves construed as decadent and tyrannical in the ancient sources: the Emperor Nero, whose cultural antics are so memorably described in Suetonius' biography, was indeed sometimes adduced by desperate dance apologists, even though he was likely to do their case more harm than good. A more respectable figure who surfaces from time to time, for example in Thoinot Arbeau's *Orchesography* (1589),⁶ is the republican Roman politician Appius Claudius. He was said by Macrobius (*Saturnalia* 3.14) to have ordered dances to celebrate a triumph, but was an unsatisfactory exemplar since he was not a dancer himself. Dance advocates also had to deal with the infamous link between drink, insanity and dancing drawn by Cicero in his announcement, when defending Lucius Murena against the accusation that he danced when drunk, that 'nemo fere saltat sobrius, nisi forte insanit' (hardly anyone dances sober, unless he happens to be mad' (*Pro Murena* 6); this text was quoted widely by Renaissance writers, especially opponents of dancing, although even dance apologists managed to turn it to their advantage by simply saying that this fairly familiar ancient Roman had been known to dance!⁷

Yet to obscure professionals, notorious tyrants, and drunkards, the apologists could at least add Socrates, singled out as a crucial example in Lucian's *On Dancing* 25. The dedicatory sonnet by Rodrigo Martínez de Consuegra, printed at the beginning of Esquivel's treatise,⁸ is typical of the genre of pro-dance polemic in affirming that 'Socrates would have considered himself lucky in antiquity, if he could have carried out his eager desire to learn to dance, in your school.' Since Socrates provided a glimmer of hope, all the Renaissance dance historians of necessity made a great deal of him: a typical reference is Thomas Elyot's brief account in the historical section of his defence of dancing, 'Of the firsts begynnyng of daunsing and the old estimation therof' in section 20 of his *Boke named the Governour* (London, 1531):

Also the auncient philosophers commended daunsing; in so moche as Socrates, the wysest of all the grekes in his time, and from whom all the sectes of philosophers, as from a fountaine, were deriuied, was nat ashamed to account daunsinge amonge the seriouse disciplines, for the commendable beautie, for the apte and proportionate meuinge, and for the craftie disposition and facionyng of the body.

Elyot here recycles what had already become the standard fare in such apologiae, a passage in Xenophon's *Symposium*. Socrates, at a dinner party held by Callias, has partaken of gymnastic exercises before the festivities commenced (1.19), eaten, and enjoyed a performance organized by a Syracusan dancing-teacher, who has brought with him three youthful performers: a female pipe-player, an acrobatic female dancer, and a male harpist who can also dance (2.1-13). Socrates is particularly impressed by the beautiful body of the young man, and comments (2.27-8),

'while he danced no portion of his body remained idle; neck and legs and hands together, one and all were exercised. That is how a man should dance, who wants to keep his body light and healthy.' At this point Socrates surprises his companions by asking the Syracusan dancing master to teach him some steps. Everyone bursts out laughing.

In response, Socrates delivers the speech that was so repeatedly ransacked in treatises defending the dance (2.31-3):

Well, do you find it so laughable that I desire to improve my health by exercise, to enjoy my food more, or to sleep better? Or is it, rather, that what makes you laugh is the *type* of exercise that I have chosen? But I don't want, like long-distance runners, to have my legs grow muscular and my shoulders leaner in proportion; nor, like a boxer, a broad chest and shoulders at the expense of my legs. What I want is a distribution of exertion through all my limbs, in order to give an even balance to my body.

Socrates then dismisses the possible objection that he is too old to strip in public, since he can 'do gymnastics' under cover; he imagines that they think it funny that a man with a pot-belly should dance, but he has, indeed, already been practising, and was discovered in the process by Charmides only a day or two ago (2.33-9).

This complex scene sets up the idea of dance as ridiculous in a dignified man, but excusable if it is construed as a form of physical exercise, akin to and overlapping with gymnastics, performed discreetly in pursuit of muscle tone, bodily symmetry, a good appetite, and sound sleep. The laughter arises as a result of the juxtaposition on the one hand of the dancing by three young, unnamed and certainly non-citizen performers (two

of them female), where beauty and eroticized pleasure for the audience are clearly the purpose, and on the other hand the vision of the elderly, free citizen Socrates, pot-belly and all, taking dancing lessons. The dance regimen he recommends has a very different purpose from the recreational, sexualized dancing with the purpose of providing the spectators with pleasure that concluded some symposia; this is underscored by the famous danced enactment at the end of the dialogue, in which the Syracusans' beautiful slaves perform again, this time, in an erotically charged manner, the seduction of Ariadne by Dionysus (9.3-7). Even here the aphrodisiac effect on the spectators is carefully defused by containing its physical expression within marital relations: we are told that the result is that the married symposiasts leap on their horses to go back to their wives, and the unmarried ones swear to get married.

Socrates' advocacy of dance in pursuit of health, given the dearth of male exemplars of dancing in classical sources, proved vital to all subsequent apologists of dance [see **fig., the lower half of the frontispiece to l'Aulnaye**], however much the actual passage, read fully in its context, itself points to the inherent eroticism of mixed-sex dancing by beautiful bodies. This was noted by William Prynne in *Histrion-Mastix*, who shrewdly pointed out that dance advocates who cited Socrates as their exemplar had deliberately neglected 'Zenophons dancing Trull, who enamored *Socrates* and the other Spectators, with her dancing and Player-like action'.⁹ Most references to Socratic dancing did carefully distort or trim what is actually said in Xenophon, for example John Weaver's *An Essay towards the History of Dancing* (1712), which simply said that 'the best of Philosophers Socrates, and the best of Men among the Heathens learn'd to dance'.¹⁰ Xenophon's rhetorical thrust was actually better suited to the rather different

writings of the 16th-century medical humanists, such as Girolamo Mercuriale's *De Arte gymnastica* (1569), whose discussions of diet and exercise drew on ancient treatments of gymnastics in the context of the cultivation of health to a degree that virtually excluded references to contemporary practices.¹¹ Socrates was also adduced by the Protestant dietician Joseph Duchesne, who encouraged men to dance.¹² But the example of Socrates actually lent itself all too easily to undermining the case for dance as an art form. A fine expression of the tension underlying this difficult distinction can be found in the works of Claudius Deodatus, a 17th-century court physician at Basel, who was very worried about dancing because he could see its health benefits but on no account must it be performed *for pleasure*. It must be for bodily exercise, before, not after dinner, and not indecent. Dancing for pleasure is something that barbarian and pagans invented.¹³

When the promoters of dance turned to the bible, especially the Old Testament, the picture looked just a little more promising. Although critics of dancing had strong support in the incident of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), which was by far the most frequent example cited by Christians as evidence of the pagan and diabolical nature of the dance,¹⁴ there were available for citation several exemplary female dancers in the Old Testament. They included Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15, 20), Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11, 34), the women of Israel who danced to greet Saul (1 Samuel 18, 6), and Judith who led the women in the dance (Judith 15, 12, 13). These model sisters, daughters, wives and mothers are routinely offered up by dance apologists as counter-ballast to the Salome archetype. But it is much more important that there is one *man* who dances in the Old Testament. Not only did he dance, but he possessed unquestionable, indeed talismanic moral status and authority. This biblical dancer is

David, the most important King of Israel, God's chosen and anointed leader, the ancestor of Jesus Christ, who dances when introducing the Ark of the Covenant. In these third-millennial days, when close knowledge of the Old Testament can be no more assumed in any cultural historian than close knowledge of Homer, it is worth fully citing the story in the version that English-language readers will have heard it from the date of its publication by King James I in 1611. David has the Ark of the Covenant brought into the city with gladness (2 Samuel 6:13-17, 20-1):

13: And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings.

14: And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.

15: So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

16: And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

17: And they brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

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20: Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day,

who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!

21: And David said unto Michal, It was before the LORD, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel: therefore will I play before the LORD.

David, dressed in the priestly garb of the linen *ephod*, danced before the Lord with all his might.¹⁵ He dances because he is God's appointed leader of Israel. The passage has always been cited in defences of dancing, as the singular *locus classicus* for the good Jewish male dance.¹⁶ It confronted the ancient Christian anti-dance polemicists with a challenge, as can be seen from the austere third-century Roman presbyter Novatian's uncharacteristically pallid and evasive insistence that David's dance was not comparable to the pagan dances he so disliked, since it was performed in a respectable manner during the worship of God (*de Spectaculis* III.2-3):

That David led dancing in the sight of God is no excuse for the Christian faithful to sit in the theatre, for he did not distort his limbs in obscene gestures while dancing to a tale of Grecian lust. The nablas, kinuras, tibias, tympana and citharas played for God, not an idol. It is not thereby permitted that unlawful things be seen. By a trick of the devil sacred things have been transferred into illicit ones.

St. Ambrose insisted that David's singing and dancing was '*non pro lasciuia, sed pro religione*', and consequently it was obvious that he cannot have used the types of motion

that are associated with professional performers (*Apology for the Prophet David* 58.5). The Puritan John Northbrooke in his 1577 polemic against dancing and other pleasures goes further, and insists that what David actually danced was obviously warlike and indeed ‘may be called *Saltatio pyrrhica*’.¹⁷ But the reason why David, like Socrates, was ultimately difficult to develop into a full-scale model of the exemplary male dancer lies in the way that the biblical text itself develops. Any dance apologist working within Christian culture and seeking to find support in the details of the text would almost certainly be dismayed by what he found there. John Weaver was surely sensible to keep his summary of the passage to a minimalist single sentence, ‘And *David* danc’d before the Ark; his pious Zeal transporting him to this Corporeal Exultation’.¹⁸ For the biblical narrative acknowledges within its embedded differential perspectives the strong possibility that such dancing, especially in revealing clothes before people of the opposite sex, could be construed as a shameless act of a ‘vain fellow’. Indeed, it was construed as such by the kingly dancer’s own legitimate wife, Michal, even if she was firmly put in the wrong.¹⁹

A few pro-dance writers somewhat nervously quote Jesus rebuking the Pharisees in the gospel of Matthew (11.17), saying, ‘We have piped unto you and you have not danced’ (*ēulēsamen humin kai ouk ōrchēsasthe*),²⁰ which is not only clearly metaphorical but associated the dancing with the malevolent opponents of Christ. It is, indeed, possible to feel sorry for the pro-dance writers during the whole discussion between the first Renaissance treatises and the late 18th century, on the ground that they were completely unfamiliar with the apocryphal *Acts of John*, which includes the startling story of Jesus’ own dance with his disciples (chapters 94-6). According to this work of what is almost

certainly early Christian proto-monastic fiction (perhaps as early as 200 CE), the night before his arrest, Jesus told the disciples to stand, hand-in-hand, forming a ring about him. He stood in the middle, and instructed them in a call-and-response hymn which includes the lines ‘Grace danceth. I would pipe; dance ye all’, ‘The Whole on high hath part in our dancing’, and ‘Whoso danceth not, knoweth not what cometh to pass’. Jesus concluded by telling the disciples to respond in like kind to his dancing: he goes on, mysteriously, to say ‘thou that dancest, perceive what I do, for thine is this passion of the manhood, which I am about to suffer.’²¹ This may be evidence that the early Christians who enjoyed the *Acts of John* danced, although in any case their solemn bishops were within decades to put a stop to it. Yet it is revealing for us because it is such a striking example of the kind of text on which the Renaissance writers would certainly have seized had it been accessible to them.²²

The **second** group of exemplary ancient males cited in the treatises consists of mythical figures, divine or heroic, connected with dancing. Several of these were mythical bards such as Orpheus and Musaeus, whose figuring as dancers was tendentious at best, or the ethically problematic Proteus, the shape-shifting god who seemed to anticipate the art of the pantomime dancer. Even more unfortunately for the dance apologists, the divinity most associated with dancing was Dionysus/Bacchus, whose other connections with madness and intoxication severely compromised his usefulness, as noticed already by Rinaldo Corso in 1555.²³ Euripides’ *Bacchae*, indeed, provided easy cannon fodder for Prynne in *Histrion-mastix*.²⁴ But Apollo was considerably more promising. One of the most influential pictures of dancing of all time is drawn at the opening of Pythian section of the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo*, where the archer god very nearly becomes a divine prototype for the male dancer, but not quite (195-206). While his parents Zeus and Leto watch with pleasure, the Muses sing, the Graces, Seasons, Harmonia, Hebe and

Aphrodite, dance an archetypal women's chorus, 'holding each other by the wrist'. Apollo's sister sings along, Ares and Hermes 'sport' (*paizous*) amongst them, 'while Apollo plays his lyre stepping high and beautifully and a radiance shines around him as his feet and close-woven chiton flash'. But even this passage does not really offer the exemplary role model the dance apologist so desired. Apollo steps high as he plays his instrument, while the gods Ares and Hermes (often depicted as rather immature) are larking around, but the only real dancers are female.

The third group of potential exemplars were the mythical Founding Fathers of different types of military dance, especially the Pyrrhic and en(h)oplic, performed with spear and shield. There are several ancient (but non-Homeric) aetiologies for these hyper-male dances, which variously link them with Achilles, or Neoptolemus (also known as Pyrrhus), the Spartans Castor and Pollux, the semi-legendary Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus, the Theban Epaminondas, the Cretan Pyrrhichus, leader of the legendary warrior guild of the Curetes, and also with ceremonies at warriors' funeral pyres and at Athens with the chaste, intelligent goddess of war, Athena herself.²⁵ The Curetes were seen as equivalent to the Roman dancing priests of Mars, the Salii, and often coupled with them in argumentation. Some apologists for dancing try to develop the Pyrrhic dance into a legitimate forerunner of dancing recreationally or as an art-form, even though as a model for artistic dancing, since it insisted on a universal link between dance and militarism, it had obvious limitations.

The mythical founding fathers are in turn associated, in many treatises on dance, with the ethnic groups whose dancing activities were stressed in ancient sources, and which had already been seized on by pro-dance polemicists such as Lucian in antiquity: the Spartans, Cretans, and Thessalians dominate these discussions. The information about these communities that is documented in ancient sources provided a masculine, warlike model of dancing in the context of military training, in company with other men, which overlapped with public ceremonial and ritual dancing in these warlike societies.²⁶ Such sources were only marginally useful for anyone

wanting to advocate dancing by men for artistic reasons geared to the generation of aesthetic pleasure in the viewer. Other ethnic groups appear from time to time, especially the Etruscans, who were used to avoid the (correct) impression that pantomime was a relatively late invention in terms of pagan antiquity and associated with the Empire. To ensure that pantomime was provided with the desired antiquity, reaching far back into the mists of time, rather than being a true 'decadence' as a sign of deterioration from more manly Roman Republican dancing, dance apologists often claimed that it had originated much early in indigenous Italian dances of one kind and another.²⁷

The final important category of ancient authoritative figure cited in treatises in support of dancing consists of 'Homer' and some characters in his epics. The Homeric epics present dance in an ambiguous way which is nevertheless of crucial importance to dance history and cultural history. The poems were very early identified as foundational texts that offered paradigms of moral behaviour and a shared psychological currency that circulated throughout the Greek world. But they also formed the basis of the education of everyone in the ancient Mediterranean society from at least the 7th century BCE. For a thousand years, countless schoolboys living under the Macedonian or Roman empires, whose first languages were Syrian, Nubian or Gallic as well as Latin or Greek, studied Homeric epic intensively, and had committed large swathes to memory by early manhood, when they learned to be statesman, soldiers, lawyers, historians, philosophers, biographers, poets, dramatists, novelists, painters or sculptors.²⁸ All the genres and media these men produced were formed in response to the great epic *Ur*-works in the Greek language. No later author could ever again make a fresh start when shaping a narrative or a visual representation of single combat, a voyage, a funeral, or indeed a dance. It was surely partly their psychological internalization of what we shall now see was the highly ambivalent Homeric picture of the male dancer that held respectable ancient Greek and Roman men

back from recreational dancing for pleasure and outside the strictly defined arenas of military training, and, increasingly, health care.

When Homer was once again placed at the heart of the curriculum, by the Renaissance humanists, the process was continued into modern Western culture. John Ruskin was absolutely correct **when stressed** that it does not matter whether or not Homer is actually read, since ‘All Greek gentlemen were educated under Homer. All Roman gentlemen, by Greek literature. All Italian, and French, and English gentlemen, by Roman literature, and by its principles.’²⁹ The Homeric poems became widely available in accessible modern languages as well as easy Latin not long after the first printed Greek edition was published in Florence by the Cretan Antonios Damilas, in two volumes (1488). Translations made the Homeric epic dance scenes available to all who wished to consult them. Moreover, the translated vehicles which brought Homeric epics to the public often elaborated what they found in ways that interpreted quite as much as they translated. With Poliziano's Latin hexameter translation of *Iliad* books 2-5 (1472-5), composed under the patronage of Lorenzo di Medici, for example, we can see how the bedroom scene between the Homeric dancer Paris and Helen was read by the earliest Renaissance readers who encountered it; Poliziano thoroughly augmented the glamour of Alexander's personal appearance, and the erotic intensity of the episode. Where much of Poliziano's version is atmospherically Virgilian, these sequences are distinctly like the much more ‘decadent’ Roman love elegists in their diction and tone.³⁰

Through translation, adaptation, or more indirectly, Homer has shaped all our ethical and aesthetic categories. In the case of the ethics and aesthetics of *dance*, the genealogical stemma through which Homer has exerted that influence is particularly clear, even though one important branch of the tree – Aelius Aristides -- is missing. As I have outlined briefly in a previous book published by the APGRD,³¹ and as Lada-Richards explores in more detail in the present volume, the text that proved most conspicuous – indeed ubiquitous – in the discussions surrounding the

emergence and rise of ballet in the 17th and 18th centuries was the canonical defence of pantomime dating from the Roman imperial era, Lucian's sparkling apologetic treatise *On Dancing*, addressed to a Cynic philosopher named Crato. Lucian was answering, indirectly, a then still recent oration that is most unfortunately lost to posterity, an attack on the triviality and moral injuriousness of pantomime composed by the brilliant orator Aelius Aristides. Aristides' oration was perhaps composed in response to moves to include pantomime dancing in the programme of competition events at sacred festivals, a privilege previously jealously guarded by performers of recited drama and of citharody, who looked down and also envied the popularity of their new, athletic rivals.³²

The loss of Aelius Aristides' polemic is unfortunate, because it laid down the **terms** parameters within which all later antique authors, whether Christian or pagan, discussed the admissibility of the pantomime dancers in a respectable community. It is, however, possible to recover many of his arguments from those who tried to refute him, above all Libanius, who quotes him and answers him directly in his oration (no. 64) *Reply to Aristides on Behalf of the Dancers* although it dates from more than two centuries later.³³ Although this oration did not itself inform the post-Renaissance dance treatises until much later than Lucian,³⁴ it shows how the parameters of the debate in the Roman Empire had always been deeply informed by images from the Homeric poems. Lucian's treatise may also be responding less explicitly to Aristides in its profusion of references not only to Lotus-Eaters, Sirens, Proteus, Circe, and *Odyssey* 5 (3, 4, 8, 19, 85), but to the seminal passages that allude to dancing in the *Iliad* which we are about to consider in more detail.³⁵ The type of material and issue Aelius Aristides used was also still being rehashed by the patristic critics of dance (Novatian, Tatian, Tertullian and Arnobius as well as John Chrysostom) writing in Latin and Greek up to several centuries later. And it is clear from these sources – themselves, of course,

endlessly recycled by the anti-dance controversialists of more recent times -- that the Homeric poems were fundamental to the ways in which the argument had been formulated.

It is important, therefore, to look in detail at what the Homeric poems have to say about dancing, and some of the results suggest that they must have been less than wholly encouraging to people interested in *promoting* dance, at least for men. At the climax of the *Iliad*, for example, the elderly Priam has finally decided to embark, at great personal risk, on the dangerous mission into the enemy camp to attempt to recover Hector's corpse from the tent of Achilles. He launches a devastating rhetorical attack on his surviving sons (24.248-64),

...rebuking Helenus, Paris, noble Agathon, Pammon, Antiphonus,
Polites of the loud battle-cry, Deiphobus, Hippothous, and Dius.
The old man summoned the nine of them and gave them orders:
'Come to me at once, you worthless sons who cause me grief. How I wish
You had all been killed at the ships rather than Hector... I have had
The bravest (*aristous*) sons in wide Troy... yet Ares has slain them
And those of whom I am ashamed are alone left me – frauds,
Dancers (*orchēstai*), bravest (*aristoi*) at beating the ground with your feet,
Stealers of lambs and kids from your own people,
Why do you not get a wagon ready for me at once,
And stow all these things upon it so I can get on the road?

The sons who are bravest and excel on the battlefield are explicitly contrasted with the sons who are scathingly said to be bravest at their dance-steps, a contrast underlined by the repeated term *aristous/aristoi*.³⁶ There is a clear polarization in Priam's rebuke of the figure of who dies on the battlefield to save his fatherland from a foreign enemy, and the irresponsible 'hero of the dance' who commits crimes against his own people. Dance is linked with social degeneracy. Dancing is

the key trope in this most primal and definitive definition of good and bad masculinity, and around it are organized a series of other associations. The scholiasts on the *Iliad* were quite clear that the term showed that these sons of Priam were certainly not heroes where it mattered, ‘in wars’ and that it had connotations of softness.³⁷ No wonder it is not cited in Lucian’s defence of dancing.

Yet Aristides may well have quoted it, and even if he did not, its very absence may have spoken loud to Lucian’s audience. The passage was famous in antiquity and almost certainly inspired the orientalised dance movements of the Trojan chorus in the third play of Aeschylus’ Iliadic trilogy *Phrygians*, remembered by a character in Aristophanes as ‘making many gestures, in one direction, and another, and another’.³⁸ This is important because it suggests that later Greeks heard the rebuke as somehow connected with the Trojan ethnicity of the ‘heroes of the dance floor’; this in turn suggests that the text offers one of the very few indications of a cultural difference between the Achaeans and the Trojans in the *Iliad*, or at least of an ethnocentric agenda that implies that the Trojans, doomed to defeat, were over-inclined to the pursuit of pleasure. More recently, the striking image has certainly encouraged translators to adapt and extend the connotations of effeminacy and eroticization, for example in Pope’s loose paraphrase, where Priam complains that Mars had taken all his valorous sons,

And left me these, a soft and servile crew,
Whose days the feast and wanton dance employ
Gluttons and flatterers, the contempt of Troy.³⁹

The Trojans are not, as in Priam’s rhetoric, just heroes of the dance floor, but over-eat, are soft and servile, and their dance is unambivalently presented as wanton!

Unlike all his brothers, Paris/Alexander has once before in the poem been explicitly imagined as a dancer, and attentive listeners, when they heard Priam’s rebuke, will have

remembered the earlier passage: ancient commentators on the poem certainly did. They cross-referred their readers to Priam's rebuke when considering the third book of the *Iliad*, which is the part of the poem where all the key players on the Trojan side are introduced.⁴⁰ Alexander has already shown himself to be less than a perfect warrior by shrinking from facing Menelaus – whose wife he has stolen – in single combat. In consequence, Alexander's brother Hector has already chided him for cowardice. Paris has eventually agreed to fight, but has been worsted by Menelaus, who despite interventions by Aphrodite is about to kill him. So Aphrodite rescues her favourite, and whisks him away to his bedroom in the palace. She now needs to make Helen keep him from death on the battlefield, and so she disguises herself as an old slave, who grabs Helen by her fragrant robe, and speaks to her (3.390-4):

Come with me; Alexander is calling you to go home.
He is there in his chamber, on his inlaid bed, radiating beauty and
Gorgeously dressed. You wouldn't think he had just arrived from fighting
With a man (*andri*), but that he was off to the dance,
Or had just stopped dancing to sit down there.

The archetypal male lover is here visualized as a dancer, dressed for a dance or relaxing just after dancing. He reclines on his inlaid bed where he waits for his fragrant wife, rather than standing upright on the battlefield and grappling with a man. The antithesis of the warrior and the dancer/lover is crystallized and consolidated in the uneasy sex scene that follows immediately afterwards. He is full of desire, and despite chiding him for cowardice, Helen allows him to make love to her while his comrades suffer on the battlefield. One of the ancient scholia here comments, interestingly, that dancing is for young men 'who are not yet married', leading one late twentieth-century commentator to comment that in looking as though he were off to a dance, Homer implies 'just the right hint of possible decadence'.⁴¹

One of the few other passages that reference male dancing in the *Iliad* works with a similar duality between war and the dance. One the one occasion where the warrior figured as a dancer is on the Achaean side, he is a Cretan, and his dancing is associated with his particular prowess as a warrior. Aeneas taunts Meriones, who has nimbly dodged his spear, boasting that if he *had* managed to hit him, he would have made an end of him, ‘even though’ he is a dancer (*orchēstēn*, 16.617). The possibility is fleetingly envisaged here of a type of dance, with Cretan connections, which does not impugn but enhances a warrior's ability. In antiquity and subsequently it has sometimes been read as a solitary Homeric reference to the Pyrrhic dance. In Dio Chrysostom's *Second Discourse on Kingship*, for example, Alexander lectures his father Philip on the type of dancing which is should be allowed by a good king (60):

...our king should institute dance movements and measures that are not marked by reeling or violent motions, but are as virile and sober as may be, composed in a sedate rhythm; the dance should be the 'enhoplic,' the execution of which is not only a tribute to the gods but a drill in warfare as well — the dance in which the poet says Meriones was skilful...

The dance-conscious reader of the *Iliad* could only find two other enigmatic references to dance with potentially positive connotations, and they both occur in book 13. When Menelaus kills Peisander, during the long period of the Trojans' ascendancy, he addresses them in the plural: this is how they will, he threatens, be driven back from the ships (13.623-5): 'You cowardly she-dogs! (*kakai kunēs*), you did not fear the terrible anger of Zeus, avenger of violated hospitality, who will one day destroy your lofty town...'. But then Menelaus turns from addressing the Trojans to apostrophizing Zeus (13.631-9):

How can you favour the Trojans, these wrongdoers, who are so presumptuous
About their prowess that they can't get enough of the din of war?

It is possible to have too much of anything, whether sleep, sex, sweet singing or
Blameless dancing (*amumonos orchēthmoio*),⁴² although most people
Would rather have too much of these than of war. But the Trojans
Can't get enough of battle!

Here dance is yet again rhetorically opposed to war and associated with sex, and in the mouth of Paris' rival, the unerotic warrior Menelaus (who is nevertheless not always as brave as he might be and is by no means a fighter of the first rank). But the flexibility and rhetorical versatility of the topic of dance in epic discourse shine here through Menelaus' inversion of expectation. The very Trojans whose masculinity is impugned – they are cowardly she-dogs – are here also criticized for being too keen to fight, when there are things that a sensible man would rather be doing, which include dancing and sex. This is, effectively, the only passage in Homer where dance seems to be approved by a masculine hero who is also emphatically a Greek, which rather puzzled at least one ancient scholiast, who commented on the epithet 'blameless', that it showed that some dancing was blameworthy, or 'low' (*phaulon*).⁴³ Menelaus' speech was nevertheless noticed by dance advocates, but needed to be misquoted somewhat, since the notion embedded in the rhetorical context, that you could have too much dance, like too much sleep and sex, scarcely supported their arguments!

Toward the end of the same book it is the Trojan Polydamas who says to Hector that he should listen to good advice, because god has distributed gifts among men so that some are, like Hector, good at war, while others excel at dancing (*orchēstun*), some at singing, and some at thinking strategically (13.730-4). It is interesting, however, that already in antiquity the line that include dancing and singing as manly gifts, to be counted alongside fighting and thinking, were deleted by assiduous scholars as inappropriate to the tone of the poem; the line was actually omitted from most of the best ancient manuscripts. Even in Leaf and Bayfield's late Victorian commentary on the *Iliad* the line was described as 'a tasteless interpolation'.⁴⁴

This leaves the most famous Iliadic passage of obvious interest to dance historians. It is difficult to decode because it is not set in the 'here and now' of Priam's Troy and the battlefield outside it, but in a remote time depicted by a divinity on a priceless artwork. Thoinot Arbeau was followed by many when he defended dance by saying, simply, 'Vulcan engraved a dance upon a shield as a symbol of beauty',⁴⁵ referring to the last, nostalgic scene at Knossos which Hephaestus hammers onto the shield that he makes for Achilles (18.590-606):

And the famous strong-armed smith decorated it with a dance floor (*choron*)
Like the one which Daedalus once fashioned for lovely-haired Ariadne
In the wide spaces of Knossos. There youths and maidens worth many cattle
Were dancing (*orcheunt'*), holding each other by the wrists.
The girls were clothed in light linen dresses, the boys in fine-spun chitons,
Shimmering with a touch of olive oil. The maidens wore exquisite garlands
And the youths wore golden daggers hanging from silver sword-belts.
Some of the time they would run fluently on their responsive feet,
Like a potter bending to try out his wheel in his hands, to see if it will run smoothly.
At other times they would run in rows athwart each other.
And around the lovely dancing a great crowd watched with pleasure,
While in the middle two acrobats (*kubistēres*) revolved, leading
The rhythm of the performance.

This passage represents a thoroughly glamourised picture, formed in the 8th or 7th centuries BCE, of what dancing had looked like long ago in the bygone age of glorious heroes in which the *Iliad* is imagined to be set. It is an archaic Greek picture of how a god might have portrayed a human courtship dance in the already distant Mycenaean or Minoan times. Not only is it set in the remote past, when gorgeous brides were still bought with expensive gifts rather than sold off with

dowries, but it is specifically set in Knossos. 'The picture these lines create is as vivid as if the frescoes of the Minoan palace had suddenly come to life', is a typical scholar's response.⁴⁶ Another way of putting it is that it was clearly one of the text's inside Arthur Evans' head when he presented the frescoes of Knossos, especially the 'Miniature Fresco of the Sacred Grove and the Dance' to the world.⁴⁷ The most striking feature of the dance from the perspective of a historian of ancient performance practice, however, is the intermixing, or alternating, of male and female performers. The dancers on the miniature fresco are actually female. Geometric and classical Greek art shows a great number of single-sex choruses, and occasionally a female chorus led by a single man, but there is hardly a single secure instance of dancing together in what is probably meant to be understood as an alternating girl/boy pattern.⁴⁸

The physical contact between marriageable young people of opposite sexes is one of the features of the dance that can easily be construed as part of a fantasy, not of anything debauched or decadent, since the erotic overtones are carefully positioned within the context of the intention to marry, but certainly of sensuousness and luxury. The passage's effect comes over through its accumulation of details – the garlands, the fine costumes, the glistening oil, the gold and silver accoutrements, the light-footed running. But this scene of fantasy-embroidered nostalgia for a beautiful lost past does prudently locate these desirable young dancers, their minds fixed on mating, in a public, open-air place where they are supervised by a happy multitude.

Hephaestus' Knossos scene encodes an archaic Greek's imaginative responses to whatever traces Minoan and Mycenaean culture had left in the visible world or the cultural imagination several hundred years after they had disappeared. If the past is another country, most of the other great Homeric dance scenes, those in the *Odyssey*, are set in similarly liminal imagined spaces. The suitors in Ithaca are said to spend the whole evening taking pleasure in dance and song at the precise moment when the poem introduces the painful contrast between their hedonism and Telemachus' increasing seriousness of purpose (1.421). This certainly

inspired Sir John Davies to frame his poetic advocacy of ‘the authentick and laudable use of dauncing’ in his *Orchestra* (1496), published soon after the *Odyssey* had entered the cultural imagination, as a dialogue held in Odysseus’ absence between Penelope and her courtly lover, the suitor Antinous. But the most famous and most discussed Homeric dance scene is the one that takes place in Phaeacia, on the marginal island of Scherie that forms the threshold between the supernatural world of Odysseus’s wanderings and the ‘real’ world of Ithaca. After leaving the wholly super-mortal world of Calypso’s island, Odysseus is shipwrecked on the Phaeacians’ beach, and they are eventually able to transport him physically in their ship from Scherie to Ithaca. Yet Scherie is not part of the ordinary human world; it is a utopia where food grows automatically and people live in endless pursuit of pleasure through recreational activities. Its ontological and indeed its ‘ethical’ status was a prominent matter for discussion by ancient philosophers from Plato onwards. Arete, its Queen, had for ancient readers an uncomfortable degree of status: Odysseus is instructed by Athena herself as well as Nausicaa that he must supplicate her before Alcinous (which he does at 8.146-50). This lends Scherie the suggestion that in comparison with the ‘proper’ patriarchal order prescriptively described in Ithaca, it has an ‘inverted-world’ matriarchal flavour in company with the islands inhabited by Calypso, Circe, the Sirens and of course the Laestrygonians with their enormous royal females.

The young Phaeacian men are figured as dancers before Homer’s audience has met even one of them directly, in the scene where Nausicaa tells her father that she wants to do the laundry. She explains that she is anxious to ensure that her brothers are properly dressed ‘when they go to council or the dance’ (6.63-5). In Phaeacia, young men’s clothing is something to be looked upon with approval or disapproval, by women as well as men, when they are engaged in the public activities of council-chamber deliberation, or dancing. King Alcinous subsequently confirms to Odysseus that the Phaeacians are naturally gifted at certain activities (8.246-65):

‘We are not particularly remarkable boxers, nor yet wrestlers,
But we are very fast on our feet and incomparable sailors.
We love to feast incessantly, we love music and dancing
Newly washed linen, warm baths and beds. So come now, you
Phaeacians who are the best at dancing, begin the fun, so
Our guest may tell his friends, when he returns home,
How much we excel all other peoples at sailing, running,
Dancing and minstrelsy. One of you, go and fetch the sweet-sounding
Lyre of Demodocus, which I think is lying in my house.’
Godlike Alcinous finished speaking. A herald arose to retrieve
The hollow lyre from the royal household, and the nine men
Chosen to be umpires, responsible for managing the sporting events,
Presented themselves. They smoothed out the dance-floor,
Making a fine broad space, and soon the herald returned with
The lyre for Demodocus, who took his place at the centre.
And the young men in the bloom of youth who were skilled at dancing
Began to tread the sacred ground with their feet, and the sight of their
Feet flashing amazed Odysseus in his heart.

This passage is repeatedly adduced by Homeric scholars in the unceasing debates over the manner in which ancient Greek epic poetry was originally performed. The Greek does not make clear whether the dance of the young men continues while Demodocus sings his song of Olympian adultery – a dance which as late as 1947 one estimable scholar still believed could only have taken the form of ‘a kind of farcical cabaret show’⁴⁹ -- or whether they dance a separate choral prelude or hymn of some kind. Despite its

ambiguity, the passage, naturally, figures large in the studies by the scholars, most recently J.P. David, who from time to time argue that hexameter Homeric poetry was indeed originally accompanied throughout by dancing.⁵⁰

The passage is also of profound importance in cultural history because, whatever the truth of David's claim, dancers have always been prompted by it to stage danced versions of the 'Lay of Ares and Aphrodite'. One of the most significant of them was John Weaver's *The Loves of Mars and Venus* at Drury Lane in 1717, now generally held to have been 'the first *ballet d'action* in Europe'.⁵¹ Weaver described the work in his subtitle as 'a dramattick entertainment of dancing attempted in imitation of the pantomimes of the ancient Greeks and Romans', and he knew that in the ancient world the theme was often danced, indeed it was one of the few pantomimes that Lucian had described in any detail (*On Dancing* 63). But it is important to see how Weaver's updated revival took care to keep his star male dancer, the enormously tall and dignified Louis Dupré, appropriately masculine and warlike. Although Mars seduces Venus in the fourth Act, he is introduced in the first scene of all, performing a Pyrrhic dance in a military camp.

In the original scene in the *Odyssey*, whether or not we are to understand that there was dancing throughout Demodocus' performance of his sexy song about the adultery of Aphrodite and Ares, a new dance commences at its conclusion (8.370-80):

Then Alcinous told Laodamas and Halius to dance by themselves,
For no one was their equal. So they took a fine red ball in their hands
Made for them by the skill of Polybus, and one of them took to bending
Himself backwards and throwing it skywards, while the other
Leapt off the ground and caught it easily before it fell again to the floor.
When they had completed their vertical ball feat

They began dancing on the fertile earth, changing their positions
Frequently, while the other youths stood by the dance-floor beating time,
And applauding loudly.

Odysseus is awestruck by these acrobatic Phaeacian dancers (8.384), but in antiquity, they attracted a good deal of criticism from the censorious. The Christian readers of the *Odyssey* such as St Basil (*Homily 22*, 5.25-42) actually went to considerable lengths to prove that the point of the Phaeacia episode was to show that Odysseus taught a previously decadent society how to behave with more restraint!

Stoics and other moralists saw Alcinous' manifesto of the Phaeacian way of life as indicating an *excessive* love of pleasure and recreation in Phaeacia; critics include Heraclides Ponticus (quoted by a scholiast on *Od.* 13.119) and Horace, *Epistles* 1.2.28-9. It is fascinating to find Brian Hainsworth, in his late 20th-century commentary on the passage, still defending the Phaeacians from such charges by insisting that the dancing is a decorous sign of a peaceful and well-ordered society that contrasts with the 'disorderly licence of the suitors' Ithaca'.⁵² Plutarch argued that the point of the inclusion in the *Odyssey* of the ribald tale of Aphrodite and Ares was that if you paid attention to stories of this type you will end up as coarse and decadent as the Phaeacians themselves (*On How Young Men Should Listen to Poetry*, 19e-20a). Even the more liberal ancient Epicureans, who saw pleasure as the legitimate goal of life in the man who had engaged in philosophical reflection, were uneasy about the Phaeacians: Philodemus seems to have been concerned that the luxuriousness of the Phaeacian court, with its dancing to songs about adultery, needed a good deal of defending.⁵³

Lonsdale has argued out that since the Phaeacian feast is the result of Nausicaa's urge to find herself a husband, dancing in the *Odyssey* 'always occurs in the context of a wedding, real or imagined'.⁵⁴ This may be to downplay the importance of dancing on the magical, luxurious island, since there is no actual wedding in the offing, and the song to which the Phaeacians dance is about adulterous rather than conjugal sex. But perhaps the *Odyssey* taken as a whole should be seen as advocating a model of socially acceptable dancing with an erotic overtone, but exclusively in relation to marriage, just as Hephaestus' young people in the *Iliad* practice mixed dancing in relation to publicly endorsed and supervised courtship rituals. When Telemachus arrives at the court of Menelaus, for example, the Peloponnesian king is celebrating the wedding of his two children, and 'two acrobats led the measures of song and dance, revolving among them' (*Od.* 4.17-19). Yet, once again, it needs to be remembered that Menelaus' Spartan palace in the *Odyssey* is a place of fabulous wealth and opulence, and the residence of the lovely Helen, from which she once eloped with her gorgeous Eastern lover.

The final references to dancing are also wedding-related. Just after the slaying of the suitors, Odysseus orders Telemachus and the loyal slaves to wash, dress and put on their tunics, and asks that the women dress as well. The bard is to play music for a festive dance (*orchēthmoio*, 145), so that people will assume 'that we are holding a wedding' (23.130-6). When Phemius obeys (144-51),

He stirred up in them a longing for sweet singing and blameless dance⁵⁵.

The great house echoed and re-echoed to the steps of the prancing men

And fair-girdled women, and people who heard them from outside would say,

'It seems that someone has finally married the much-courted queen!

Shame on her that she did not carry on looking after her wedded husband's

Household property until he himself came home.'

Both sexes are therefore dancing here, but the dancing is a charade, and interpreted by its internal audience as somehow indicative of an inappropriate mating. The dance is laden with even more sinister overtones as an activity designed to conceal what are actually thoroughly corrupt and perfunctory funeral rites. But the dance is, another sense, a joyful accompaniment to a symbolic re-enactment of Odysseus and Penelope's wedding night, for it leads into their final reunion in their marriage bed.

The Greek epic poems' own dance-consciousness certainly goes some way towards explaining why choreographers have found them, especially the *Odyssey*, so attractive as the basis for performance texts. Ballet has had a strong relationship with the *Odyssey* from at least as early as the interludes in Badoaro and Saccati's opera *L'Ulisse errante* (1644), and Antoine Bandieri de Lava's 1729 ballet *Les adventures d'Ulysse* (performed in Paris in 1729) inaugurated a longstanding tradition of danced realizations of the epic that continues to this day.⁵⁶ An important example is the Czech ballet company Laterna Magika's epoch-making *Odysseus* (with music by Michael Kocáb), which has been revived repeatedly since 1987. The *Iliad* has also been adapted as into dance theatre, notably in Salvatore Taglioni's choreography for a Neapolitan *L'ira d'Achille* (1826). Yet Homeric poetry's commentary on dancing at the same time made too close an enquiry into the relevant passages a dangerous game for anyone seeking to advocate male dancing, at least outside the context of socially regulated sexual desire (aimed at reproduction of the household and community) which was permissible at weddings because sanctioned by the whole community. The Homeric poems and hymns provides scarcely any model for, or legitimization of, dancing for pleasure by exemplary mature males. Beautiful recreational dancing is virtually confined to Olympus (where it is performed by females accompanied by male singers and acrobats), Troy (an Eastern palace culture doomed to destruction, where it is rhetorically contrasted with masculinity and martial excellence), the suitors' decadent Ithacan banquets, and the magical isle of Phaeacia, which is a luxurious antitype to the real world of hardworking Greek peasant farmers.

If Homer was a problematic authority for advocates of male dancing, the *Aeneid* was even worse. There is one passage where Aeneas is, through a simile likening him to Apollo, mentally associated with dance at least of a ritual kind, in *Aeneid* 4.143-50. Yet here, as the gorgeous lover of the African queen, he is at his most like Mark Antony, and least like Augustus.⁵⁷ Taking the hazard of decadence out of the dance and the dancer would, it seems, mean having to rewrite the entire history of the Western curriculum. This is not to deny that some archaic and classical ancient Greek authors certainly support the view that dancing by men is acceptable, but they are always uneasy about male dancing that is not performed as part of a masculine education for appropriate reasons, such as physical health, the cultivation of self-discipline, and the consolidation of social cohesion in the community in a way that also prepared young men for war. The ancient authors did also provide a few positive images that are often developed into elaborate arguments in defence of the dance, such as that dancing originated in imitation of the movements of the heavenly bodies, a Platonic and Pythagorean aetiology that had become familiar to the Renaissance even before the translation of Plutarch's *De musica* into French in 1572 and was made much of by, for example, Corso, Esquivel and Weaver. Indeed, the dance advocates would have been well advised to look harder in Plato and Aristotle than they did;⁵⁸ they do not seem to have been fully aware of the considerable philosophical interest expressed by these foundational thinkers in dance, as opposed to the more colourful and familiar concrete descriptions of dancing and dancers, discussed above, which they constantly recycled. Unlike Homeric epic and Roman biography, many philosophical works remained untranslated into modern languages until relatively late, and therefore inaccessible to all but the highly educated and studious.

In conclusion, dance has been associated with decadent pleasure-seeking, unmanliness, and the arousal of sexual desire from its very first appearances in Western cultural history. These associations resulted from an early symbolic opposition of dancing and fighting, an opposition which paradoxically may have been partly a result of the intimate relationship and parallelism between dancing and drill-training in educational practice. The result, in any case, was that dancing for pleasure, especially for men, was an activity under a moral question mark from moment that discourse on the dance begins. Dance apologists seeking ammunition from classical and biblical sources needed to ignore many famous passages altogether, rewrite or misrepresent others, and highlight emphatically the two exemplary male non-military dancers -- the Greek Socrates and the Jewish David – who seemed to support their case. But the dancing of these culture heroes, even if it was not part of directly military training, was locked into the discourses of medicine and ritual respectively, rather than pleasure, recreation, entertainment, the performance arts or aesthetics. The ancient sources have played an important role in maintaining a situation in which, right up to the present day, the man who would dance for pleasure, his own or his audience's, is challenging some fundamental elements in society's calibration of masculinity. He still runs the risk of being accused, as Priam accused his surviving sons, of being a hero of nothing but the dance floor.

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 Cambridge

¹ Daly (1987) 22.

² In exploring the wider semantic as well as historically specific later 19th-century resonances of the term 'decadence' I have found particularly helpful the analyses of Joad (1948) 55-117 and Gilman (1975).

³ See Brinson (1966) 146-7.

⁴ On the seminal nature of Ricchieri's (also known as Caelius Rhodignius') compilation of ancient testimonia on dance, see Naerebout (1997) **** with n. 29. [Fiona – my photocopy of his book *Attractive Performances* has cut off the page numbers! It is a n. 29 quite near the beginning!]

⁵ Esquivel (1642) 4 verso, translated by Brooks (2003) 257.

⁶ Arbeau (1967) 13.

⁷ Arcangeli (1994) 147; for a later, satirical example see McLaine (1711).

⁸ 4v, translated Brooks (2003) 256.

⁹ Prynne (1633) 249.

¹⁰ Weaver (1712) 27.

¹¹ Archangeli (2000) 11.

¹² Duchesne (1606) 294-5, 300-10.

¹³ Deodatus (1628).

¹⁴ Arcangeli (1994) 145.

¹⁵ David's dance is vigorous: he 'rotated' or 'whirled' (from the verb *karar*) with all his might and 'leapt' or 'jumped' (from *pzz*). Thanks to my father Stuart Hall for help with the Hebrew and with biblical sources, and for pointing out that the strength of this language, and therefore the vigour of the dance, is, interestingly, already softened in the Greek of the early church fathers.

¹⁶ Andresen (1974) 350-1.

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- ¹⁷ Northbrooke (1577) 119.
- ¹⁸ Weaver (1712) 63.
- ¹⁹ Arcangeli (2000) 13 offers a collection of passages where David is cited in support of dancing for the promotion of health, for example in a 1550 commentary on dietetics, by the Lyon physician Jérôme de Monteux.
- ²⁰ E.g. Arbeau (1967) 13.
- ²¹ Translation by James (1924).
- ²² For further sources and bibliography on Jesus' dance with his disciples, see Elliott (1993) 307, 309. I am very grateful to Stuart Hall for drawing my attention to this fascinating text.
- ²³ Corso (1555) 8 verso. I am very grateful to Frederick Naerebout for taking the time to discuss Corso with me, and for letting me use his unpublished translation of the dialogue.
- ²⁴ Prynne (1633) 236.
- ²⁵ Borthwick (1970).
- ²⁶ Perhaps the polarity between fighting and dancing originated in not an opposition but in the close similarity between training for the steps in military drill and in dance. This, at any rate, is the argument of William MacNeill in *Keeping Together in Time* (1995). The dance/drill connection may be personified in the earlier, Sumerian tradition in the figure of the Sargonic divine she-warrior Inanna, who made her mortal troops 'dance' on the battlefield. Battle, indeed, was called 'the dance of Inanna'.
- ²⁷ E.g. L'Aulnaye (1790) 62-3.
- ²⁸ See, with further bibliography, Hall (2008a) ch. 1.
- ²⁹ Ruskin (1869).
- ³⁰ Rubinstein (1983) 55-61.
- ³¹ Hall (2008b).
- ³² See Hall (2008c) 16-17 with n. 47, written with the help of information from Professor Glen Bowersock, who argued this position in a paper delivered at a symposium on Aelius Aristides held at Columbia University, New York, on 13th April 2007 (the organiser was William Harris). The paper will be published as part of the conference proceedings.
- ³³ See Mesk (1908).
- ³⁴ The crucial event in Libanius studies was the relatively late appearance of Johann Reiske's complete *Orationes and Declamationes*, published in Altenburg between 1791 and 1797.
- ³⁵ *On Dancing* 8 (Meriones as dancer), 13 (the Cretan dancing scene on Achilles' shield), 85 (Menelaus' speech in *Iliad* 13).
- ³⁶ The use of the term *orchēstai*, moreover, may have activated ironic associations by contrast with the Homeric phrase *orchamos andrōn*, 'leader of men' (*Iliad* 2.837 etc.).
- ³⁷ See Erbse (1969-1977) vol. 5, 568.
- ³⁸ Fragment 696B.3 *KA*; see Hall (1989) 133.
- ³⁹ Pope (1783) vol. 2, 338.
- ⁴⁰ Erbse (1969-1977) vol. 1, 428.
- ⁴¹ Erbse (1969-1977) vol 1, 428; Kirk (1985) 322.
- ⁴² On the epithet 'blameless' see further below, n. 54.
- ⁴³ Erbse (1969-1977) vol. 3, 521.
- ⁴⁴ Leaf and Bayfield (1898) vol. 2, 326.
- ⁴⁵ Arbeau (1967) 13.
- ⁴⁶ Burns (1974-5) 2.
- ⁴⁷ Evans (1930) plate 18.
- ⁴⁸ Lonsdale (1995) 283 n. 27, however, argues that the lack of evidence for mixed-sex dancing in the ancient Greek world may be purely accidental.
- ⁴⁹ Stanford (1947) 338.
- ⁵⁰ David (2006); see also Georgiades (1956).
- ⁵¹ Brinson (1966) 164.
- ⁵² Hainsworth in Heubeck, West & Hainsworth (1988) vol. 1, 361.

⁵³ Asmis (1991) 36-7.

⁵⁴ Lonsdale (1995) 277.

⁵⁵ The Greek adjective for dance *her*, as in the speech of Menelaus at *Iliad* 13.631-9, is *amumōn*, a fairly common word, with positive connotations, often translated as 'excellent'. It is formed from a root meaning 'blame' or 'criticise', but with a privative alpha. It was therefore seen by some authors of dance treatises, following the discussion of the term in Lucian *On Dancing* 23, as an important adjective which could be used to argue that the Greeks saw this type of dance, at any rate, as *harm/ess*.

⁵⁶ See Reid (1993) vol. 2, 726-52.

⁵⁷ See Weber (2002).

⁵⁸ Scott (2005) 1.