# Introduction
## Dance, Literature, and Culture

How can you capture dance in words? The image embedded in that question is telling: it implies that dance is something wild and untamed, and figures language as a force of constraint. Writers seeking to represent and analyze dance often foreground the tension between the embodied ephemerality of performance and the fixity of the written word. The idea that dance may be just "beyond words" emerges in various ways across modern academic work on performance.[1] Acknowledging that assumptions about the relationship between movement and language are culturally specific (the notion of "capturing" anything "in words" is an English idiom), this book explores how the representation of dance – especially solo dance – poses a productive challenge for ancient Greek literature.

I am highlighting solo dance in part because it is a form nearly absent from the burgeoning scholarship on Archaic and Classical Greek performance culture, which has focused primarily on the chorus: the communal, multimedia performance of song, dance, and instrumental music in various civic and ritual contexts.[2] But in addition to illuminating the distinctive cultural discourses that surround the solo dancer in early Greek thought, this book will further argue that the representation of the individual dancing body is a valuable site for exploring the engagement between dance and literature – the complex work of attempting to capture dance in words.

In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, for example, Cassandra rushes on stage to perform a perverse version of a wedding hymn. She calls to Hecuba,

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[1] See, e.g., Foster 1986, Siegel 1988, Paxton 2001, Taylor 2003, and Manning 2006.

[2] Recent studies of Greek choral performance include Kowalzig 2007b, Csapo 2008, Bierl 2009, Peponi 2013a, Billings, Budelmann, and Macintosh 2013a, Gagné and Hopman 2013, Kowalzig and Wilson 2013, Gianvittorio 2017, Weiss 2018a, and Steiner forthcoming. Archaic and Classical Greek solo dance performance has been treated mostly through discussions of choral leaders and similar kinds of performers, e.g., Mullen 1982: 12–21. Vickers 2016 provides an important assessment of Greek acrobatic performance, which overlaps significantly with solo dance.

commanding her to "dance, mother, take up a choral dance!" (χόρευε, μᾶτερ, χορευμ' ἄναγε, 332). But Hecuba and the chorus respond with alarm and concern, leaving Cassandra alone in her dramatic performance of madness and trauma (308–52). In the sixth book of Herodotus' *Histories*, the Athenian Hippocleides offends his would-be father-in-law with a rowdy dance performed atop a table in the midst of a banquet (6.129). As solo dancers, Cassandra and Hippocleides are transgressive and disruptive. Their idiosyncratic patterns of movement are tightly bound up in their distinctive social positions – an enslaved survivor of war and sexual assault, and a disobedient banqueter thumbing his nose at a tyrant. Across Archaic and Classical Greek literature, dancing solo tends to signify vulnerability or violation within the social and political order, as the isolation of an individual dancer from the communal chorus corresponds with his or her rupture from other kinds of social, political, civic, and/or ritual structure.

Solo bodies prove disruptive on other levels as well. Representing dance is a complicated and unruly business – literary description of dance, like the literary description of music or visual art, creates productive friction between artistic media.[3] Dance poses the particular formal challenge of requiring the use of words to describe the movement of a body through space and time – a fundamentally nonverbal phenomenon. We will see that solo dancers frequently appear in Greek literature at moments of generic transgression or experimentation. At the end of Aristophanes' *Wasps*, for example, Philocleon's solo dancing rejects and dismantles the communal structure of komastic and choral performance, and thereby threatens the formal coherence of the play itself.[4] While the notion of an inherent tension between verbal and somatic expression develops in distinctive ways in different times and places, it often emerges in interesting and productive ways around the representation of solo dancers in Archaic and Classical Greek literature.

The bodies discussed in this book are thus "unruly" in two senses.[5] On one level, the pervasive representation of the solo dancer as a disruptive, marginal, or vulnerable figure is inextricably linked with the historical role

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[3] On visual art and music, cf., e.g., Goldhill and Osborne 1994, Elsner 1996, and Gurd 2016.

[4] See further Chapter 4, pp. 111–28.

[5] My title nods to the remarkably wide range of academic and creative work that picks up the term "unruly body" to refer to forms of corporeality and motion that cross boundaries, generate discomfort, or otherwise exceed the parameters of text and/or context. See, e.g., Saddik 2003, Mintz 2009, Srinivasan 2011, Neiterman and Fox 2017, and Gay 2018, as well as The California Museum of Photography's 2016 exhibit entitled *Unruly Bodies: Dismantling Larry Clark's Tulsa*.

of choral dance as a communal, socializing practice in Greek culture. On another, the conceptual unruliness of the individual, idiosyncratic dancer emerges as a way to foreground how the work of putting dance into words generates both creative opportunities and certain forms of instability and risk. This book thus explores the role of solo dance in Archaic and Classical Greece as both a cultural practice and a literary motif. In this Introduction, I will outline some of the theoretical work that undergirds my analysis and define the key terms and scope of my discussion. I will also offer a brief and selective overview of Greek dance and performance culture as a backdrop to my more focused readings of individual texts and figures in the chapters to come. Scholars have long observed that dance is an especially difficult object of study, a problem made even more acute by the limited sources available for the ancient world.[6] My approach focuses on representation rather than reconstruction, exploring how literary and cultural interests overlap and collide in the depiction of individual dancing bodies across Greek literature.

## Dance in Archaic and Classical Greek Society

In a widely cited passage of the *Laws*, Plato's Athenian Stranger suggests that "a man with no choral training" is "uneducated" (ἀπαίδευτος ἀχόρευτος, 654a). While Plato should not be taken to speak for the cultural norms of all of Archaic and Classical Greece, many of the fundamental claims about performance and society in his *Laws* can be linked with models and assumptions evident in earlier sources.[7] It is clear that *choreia*, or communal song-dance, was a major component of the social fabric of Archaic and Classical Greek life.[8] In an influential study, Barbara Kowalzig demonstrates that *choreia* played a crucial role in enabling myth and ritual to become "socially effective" – that is, to articulate group identities, instantiate communal histories, and enact a distinctive and flexible form of social power in the Archaic and Classical Greek world.[9] The typical organization of choruses by age and class has long pointed to the socializing

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[6] For a thorough appraisal of the methodological challenges of studying ancient Greek dance, see Naerebout 1997.

[7] See, e.g., Kowalzig 2013a, Kurke 2013a. Billings, Budelmann, and Macintosh 2013b: 1–2 contextualize this specific Platonic claim within an overview of Greek choral culture.

[8] Calame 1977 marks an important moment in the study of choral performance and society in ancient Greece. In this book, I cite Calame 2001, the most recently revised English translation, unless a particular point or reference may be found only in the French original. On this subject, see also Herington 1985, Kowalzig 2007a, Fearn 2010, Kowalzig and Wilson 2013a, and Naerebout 2017.

[9] Kowalzig 2007a: 393.

role of such performance in ancient Greece, but recent work nuances our understanding of how choral socialization works on both theoretical and practical levels. While choral song-dance was a fundamentally communal practice, thoroughly embedded in social, civic, and ritual contexts, it came in a wide variety of forms and made space for individual and local experience.

We also find scattered traces of performance traditions beyond *choreia*. Games and play, for example, constitute a mode of embodied expression often akin to dance, and the line between the two can be rather flexible – as in the case of an Attic practice known as *askōliasmos*, a kind of jumping or dancing on wineskins in honor of Dionysus.[10] Such movement is surely not *choreia*, yet it may well have been a kind of festive movement that featured regularly in the lives of some Attic Greeks. Likewise, Pollux tells us about a game called *ephedrismos*, which involved throwing balls or pebbles at a stone in order to overturn it. When a player failed to do so, he or she had to run to touch the stone while blindfolded and carrying the winner on his or her back.[11] The most well-studied example of a such dance-like play is the *chelichelōnē*, or "tortoise game," wherein young girls sit, run, chant, and jump in prescribed ways.[12] While Andromache Karanika convincingly demonstrates that this game inculcates girls into their social role in a way closely engaged with choral ritual, the actual game described in our ancient sources is formally distinct from a choreographed, performing chorus.[13] The traces of the game that survive thus bear the marks of a cultural and literary imagination thoroughly steeped in *choreia* and its socializing role, a topic that I will discuss further below. But at the same time, practices like *askōliasmos*, *ephedrismos*, and *chelichelōnē* may also be understood together as part of a cultural practice of playful movement beyond formal *choreia*. It is worth noting that these solo practices are often, but not exclusively, informal or spontaneous, whereas choral ritual is generally planned and choreographed. Yet this is not a hard and fast distinction, and we will see

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[10] For a survey of the testimony, see Latte 1957. Ancient references include Pl. *Symp.* 190d and scholia, Ar. *Plut.* 1129 and scholia, Eubulus fr. 8, Poll. *Onom.* 9.121, and Verg. *G.* 2.382–4.

[11] Poll. *Onom.* 9.119. The late testimony of Pollux can be supplemented by much earlier visual testimony: an Attic red figure lekanis, c. 425–400 BCE, National Archaeological Museum (Athens 17533), and two late fourth- or early third-century BCE figurines, one in the National Archaeological Museum (Athens 17311), the other in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York 7.286.4). On this game, see further Zazoff 1962: 199, Scheffer 1996, and Beaumont 2012: 132–233. While there is no music or song involved in *ephedrismos*, I include it within this brief survey of "dance-like" games because of its structured movement, akin to the more clearly performative "tortoise game."

[12] On this form, see 876 *PMG* (= Poll. *Onom.* 9.122–5), Eust. 1914, 56 ad *Od.* 21.411, Arthur 1980: 58 n. 25, Griffith and Griffith 1991, and Karanika 2012: 102 and n. 4.

[13] Karanika 2012.

that Greek literature offers us models of chaotic *choreia* (especially Dionysiac dancing) as well as carefully choreographed solo movement.

Dance also overlapped in meaningful ways with athletic training, which was sometimes conducted to the accompaniment of music and featured structured exercises and movements. For example, the practice of *cheironomia*, or "hand-dancing," seems to have occupied a complicated position between dance, play, and athletic training.[14] Jonathan Vickers offers a survey of acrobatics in ancient Greek culture that highlights the diverse contexts for this mode of performance, often closely connected with individualized forms of dance as well as athletics.[15] There are also links between dance and military training, a relationship that was essentially formalized in the institution of the *pyrrhichē*, or armed dance, which was performed both solo and choral at various points and in various contexts across the ancient Mediterranean.[16] The symposium was another important venue for the performance of solo dance.[17] Again, even if these practices are often described and contextualized with choral models, they attest to the diversity and flexibility of dance and embodied performance as actually practiced in ancient Greece. For example, the sausage-seller in Aristophanes' *Knights* declares that he "dances a *mothōn*" (ἀπεπυδάρισα μόθωνα, 697). Pollux explains that the *mothōn* was a base or vulgar dance, particularly associated with sailors (*Onom.* 4.101). This brief reference is a tantalizing glimpse into what may well have been a whole culture of dances and styles, familiar to Aristophanes' Classical Athenian audience, but largely lost to us.

Putting aside precise choreographic reconstruction, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the formal features and structural organization of dance performance in the ancient world.[18] Peter Wilson, for example, details the organization of dramatic and dithyrambic choruses in Classical Athens under the system of *chorēgia*. Paola Ceccarelli traces the diverse practices linked with the *pyrrhichē* across the Greek world. Ruth Webb and Zoa Alonso Fernández illuminate different aspects of dance and performance culture under the Roman empire. These exemplary studies all uncover traces of ancient performance practices along with the competing

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[14] See Plut. *Mor.* 997b-c and Ath. *Deipn.* 14.631c.     [15] Vickers 2016. See also Deonna 1953.
[16] On the *pyrrhichē*, see Wheeler 1982, Delavaud-Roux 1993, and especially Ceccarelli 1998. I return to the literary representation of this dance form in subsequent chapters.
[17] On dancing at Archaic and Classical symposia, see Pellizer 1990, Schäfer 1997, and Wecowski 2014: 52–5.
[18] For discussion of various attempts at choreographic reconstruction and its problems as a scholarly aim, see Naerebout 1997: 3–113, 269–73.

discourses that surround them, paying particular attention to the nature of their sources.[19] Part of my goal in this book is to use a similar methodology to describe some of the forms of solo dance attested in Archaic and Classical Greece, drawing from literature, material culture, and existing scholarship. But my primary aim in doing so is not to develop a comprehensive social history of Greek dance, but rather to outline the broader cultural practices, patterns, and assumptions that are configured and engaged in specific ways within select works of Greek literature. To that end, we now turn to the questions of dance, literature, and representation central to this study.

## Dance in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature

The term "literature" itself requires definition, especially in an ancient Greek context. On one level, I am using the term rather broadly, to refer to the range of ancient stories, songs, treatises, plays, dialogues, and narratives that have come down to us as written texts. At the same time, I will ultimately focus on a discrete set of these texts – a selection of epic, lyric, dramatic, philosophical, and historiographical works that fit comfortably within the typical confines of "Greek literature," and perhaps even "canonical Greek literature." The expansiveness of "literature" and "literary discourse" also acknowledges the formal diversity of these texts as they were originally produced and experienced: as oral poetry, as drama, as song-dance, as prose read aloud, as written texts. My project here is aligned with a growing body of work that examines significant and recurring motifs in Greek texts as a way of exploring their roles in the Greek literary and cultural imagination.[20]

The relationship between literary discourse and cultural context develops in particularly interesting and challenging ways around the representation of dance and embodied experience. As an example, let me juxtapose a study of falling in Greek epic poetry with an analysis of falling in modern American dance and culture. Alex Purves, writing on somatic resonance in Homer, observes that "the movement of falling – of feeling one's center of balance slip, one's limbs give way, and, eventually, of hitting the ground – is central to the experience of mortality in the *Iliad*."[21] She further

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[19] Ceccarelli 1998, Wilson 2000, Webb 2008, and Alonso Fernández 2011.
[20] Cf., e.g., Steiner 2001, Gagné 2013a, and Reitzammer 2016, which differ markedly in subject matter and approach but share an interest in the contact between literary texts and broader aspects of Greek culture and thought.
[21] Purves 2006: 179.

demonstrates that divine falls in Homer complicate the categories of mortality and temporality at issue in the *Iliad*. Ann Cooper Albright locates her own study of falling in a very different historical moment, tracing how anxieties about falling and descent, especially as figured through terrorist attacks and stock market volatility, permeate the cultural discourse of early twenty-first-century America.[22] She suggests that the physical practice of dance – specifically, of contact improvisation – can help us develop the resilience (physical, emotional, even economic) to "survive in this cultural moment."[23] While her primary evidence is not literary in a strict sense, her analysis focuses on verbal metaphor and imagery (collapse, crash, "fiscal cliff").

The anatomy of the human body and its relationship to gravity did not, of course, change between the eighth century BCE and the twenty-first century CE. The fundamental act of falling is the same, whether performed by a Homeric warrior or a modern dancer. Yet, as Purves and Cooper Albright reveal, the same somatic motion has different implications for different authors and audiences. For a contemporary American audience, falling is caught up in the metaphors widely used to describe economic and political change, while in Homer, falling is an act intimately associated with the constraints of mortality and time. These links are certainly not mutually exclusive. They may even suggest some enduring conceptual connections between individual somatic instability (slipping, falling, striking the ground) and a sense of powerlessness on a global scale. But focusing solely on continuity elides the value of corporeal imagery as a marker of culturally and historically specific discourses about embodiment and kinetic expression. As we will see, the discourse of dance in Greek literature is clearly engaged with the embodied practices of contemporary Greek culture.[24]

Dance, too, is a concept that must be defined. The kinds of movement that constitute "dance" differ across time and space, and as my discussion of the traces of nonchoral dance traditions in early Greek culture above indicates, dance can be closely linked with other forms of embodied action: athletics, acrobatics, gesture, and play. Because this book focuses on literary discourse, I will generally consider passages in which Greek words for dance are used to describe the action at hand. These include *orcheomai*, *orchēsis*,

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[22] Cooper Albright 2013a.      [23] Cooper Albright 2013a: 36.
[24] See Kurke 1999: 247–8, 278–83 on the interplay between literary representation and embodied practice (specifically concerning the sympotic game *kottabos*). Lada-Richards 2013 and 2016, reading Ovid in relation to Roman-era pantomime dance, develops an approach akin to the one I am outlining here. My mode of reading also has much in common with Schlapbach 2018.

*choreuō*, and *choros*, and their compounds, as well as terms like *paizō* (play, frolic) and *helissō* (whirl) that are widely used in connection with dance.[25] We will see that these actions are typically linked with music in both literature and art, and there are distinct iconographical patterns in Greek vase painting that enable us to identify the representation of dance.[26] I will also build on previous scholarship exploring the vocabulary of performance in Greek literature, which reveals how terms for particular movements and gestures are often associated with specific modes of dance.[27]

In general, the idea that dance *is* being described in the texts and passages central to this book will probably not prove controversial. But as I mentioned above, the notion that dance *can* be described in words raises other problems. Dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton, for example, suggests that dance (especially improvisatory dance) continually endeavors to escape the bonds and frameworks of language. He remarks that "improvisation is a word for something which can't keep a name; if it does stick around long enough to acquire a name, it has begun to move towards fixity."[28] While Paxton ultimately sees this process of improvising, labeling, and beginning again as a productive one, he begins his discussion with a suspicious attitude toward language and its application to dance. Specifically, he claims:

> I would bet no dancer ever reviewed, however positively, has felt their dance captured in print. Yet language, used to describe other arts, forms a very important part of what we think about a work of art. It can certainly influence our point of view and may even suggest what *can* be thought about – that is, limit our perception or experience to the form encompassed by language. It does seem to me that if we spend much time communicating with others via language about a painting, music, or dance, we accustom our minds to the language version of the experience.[29]

Paxton further observes that in our evaluation of nonverbal art forms "language is not only prominent, but it can be coercive. We may opt to disregard experiences which don't work in language."[30] Paxton's concerns about the limited ability of language to grasp the complexities of dance picks up a major thread in dance history scholarship. Even when we do

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[25] For these and other Greek terms for dance, see Naerebout 1997: 274–89.
[26] See., e.g., Naerebout 1997: 209–53 and Smith 2014. But note that Naerebout 2017: 52 highlights the challenges of differentiating an image of a solo dance from an image of a single dancer standing in for a chorus. On the value of iconography for understanding Greek conceptions of choral leadership, see Csapo 2006–2007.
[27] See especially Naerebout 1997: 174–208, 274–89 and Csapo 1999–2000.   [28] Paxton 2001: 426.
[29] Paxton 2001: 422, emphasis in original.   [30] Paxton 2001: 423.

have direct access to a performance, the academic work of describing it in words generates real challenges and imposes unavoidable limits.[31] Susan Manning argues that studying dance, chasing "the elusive and uncertain text of performance," yields its own rewards; she reveals her theoretical affinities when she suggests that dance studies, while "always . . . marginal within the New Critical academy," may "become more central within the post-structural academy."[32] Indeed, poststructuralism and related theoretical orientations have played a central role in the development of dance studies in the late twentieth century, in part because they provide a compelling framework for the analysis of culture, body, and language.[33]

The relationship between dance and literary discourse (as distinct from dance criticism) is as productive as it is fraught. In a recent appraisal, Joellen Meglin and Lynn Matluck Brooks suggest that "if we accept meaning's ambiguity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy equally in writing as in dancing, then we can believe in the capacity of text to poetically encrypt dance, and, further, in dance's embodiment of a poetic language of its own."[34] This theoretical position is borne out by studies like those of Susan Jones, who illuminates the rich and productive relationship between dance and literature in early twentieth-century modernism, and Ying Zhu and Quynh Nhu Le, who explore the choreographic resonance of twenty-first-century Southeast Asian American poetry.[35] Yet, as these projects indicate, claims about the relationship and even tension between language and the body are culturally and historically specific. Susan Foster, for example, sees the notion of dance as fundamentally and vitally "beyond words" as old-fashioned and characteristic of a worldview particular to the early twentieth-century West.[36] Felicia McCarren's analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French ballet reveals how "dance performance [becomes] symptomatic of cultural tensions surrounding women, the body, and the body's relation to the mind," drawing connections between pathology and performance connected with Romantic assumptions about language, nature, and expression.[37] Meglin and Brooks observe that "the history of concert dance in Western Europe and the United States may be seen to vacillate back and forth between aesthetic paradigms that closely

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[31] For some of the contours of this debate in dance studies, see Foster 1986, Siegel 1988, Franko 2001, and Manning 2006.

[32] Manning 2006: 12.   [33] See, e.g., Thomas 1996 and Franko and Richards 2002.

[34] Meglin and Brooks 2016: 7. Bocksberger 2017 demonstrates how deeply this claim resonates with the relationship between dance and poetic discourse in Classical Greece.

[35] Jones 2013 (see also Preston 2011) and Zhu and Le 2016.   [36] Foster 1986: xvi.

[37] McCarren 1998: 13.

integrate dance with story, drama, or poetry, and those that render dance completely independent of the literary arts."[38] On one level, the conceptualization of *choreia* as the harmonious synthesis of song, dance, and instrumental music seems to suggest that in the Greek cultural imagination, words and movement enrich, rather than oppose or undermine, one another.[39]

At the same time, Greek aesthetic discourse revels in the malleability and indeterminacy of dance. As Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi demonstrates, Greek literature from the Archaic to the Imperial periods repeatedly interrogates the mimetic power of dance, depicting it as something to be appreciated as pure form as well as something capable of prompting a complex process of analogy and comparison.[40] She highlights a hyporchema by Pindar that exemplifies what she terms the "multi-mimetic" mode of dance apprehension (fr. 107a.1–3 M):

> Πελασγὸν ἵππον ἢ κύνα
> Ἀμυκλαίαν ἀγωνίῳ
> ἐλελιζόμενος ποδὶ μιμέο καμπύλον μέλος διώκων
>
> Mimic the Pelasgian horse or the dog
> from Amyclae, whirling your foot in the contest,
> pursuing the curved song.

Peponi suggests that when Greek texts thus offer multiple ways of interpreting the mimetic referent of a dance at once, "these disjunctions challenge any kind of singularity in the perception of the viewer. They momentarily question pre-established associations between movement and mimesis."[41] I would add that they also destabilize the relationship between dance and descriptive language, calling attention to the gap between movement and meaning. They provoke a way of thinking about dance that is both rich and unsettling – rich, because it conceives of dance as deeply engaged with the possibilities of imagination and reflection; unsettling, because it reminds us that representing dance with words is not a straightforward or transparent process. I am highlighting this strand of Greek aesthetic thought because it suggests an awareness of both the challenges and rewards inherent in the work of

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[38] Meglin and Brooks 2016: 2. They further note that the relationship between dance and language is differently configured across various cultural and performance contexts, on which point see also Naerebout 1997: 183 n. 394.

[39] Ladianou 2005 and Peponi 2009.     [40] Peponi 2015: 212–14. See further Peponi 2004.

[41] Peponi 2015: 215.