ARCTOS

ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

VOL. XXV

HELSINKI 1991 HELSINGFORS

INDEX

"NOW I HAVE THE MIND TO DANCE" THE REFERENCES OF THE CHORUS TO THEIR OWN DANCING IN SOPHOCLES' TRAGEDIES*

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Introduction

There are several instances in Greek tragedy where the chorus refer to their own dancing which either is taking or will take place on the stage or outside it.[1] Though these passages have been noted by many scholars they have never been studied systematically. In her book on dance in the Greek theatre Lillian Lawler mentions some passages in which the chorus speak about their own dancing.[2] She analyzes the character of several of these dances rather convincingly but offers no coherent picture of the function and importance of the passages she cites. The place of the chorus' references to their own dancing in the dramatic totality remains therefore obscure.

This has been the defect also of some other accounts that have given attention to the chorus' physical activity on the stage. One of the latest articles on

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* I wish to thank Distinguished Professor T. Rosenmeyer, in whose seminar at the Ohio State University the first version of this article was written, Professor M. Kaimio and Professor B. Heiden for many valuable comments and suggestions. All errors remain mine.

1 Aesch. Eum. 307, Eur. Herc. Fur. 761; Bacch. 1153; El. 864–5, Soph. Aj. 701; Trach. 216–20; Antig. 151ff.; O.T. 896; 1093.

2 L. Lawler, The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre (1964) 47.

the subject, J.F. Davidson's "The Circle and the Tragic Chorus",[3] conveniently lists the references made by the chorus to their own dancing but does not offer any further analysis. Burton's recent study of the Sophoclean chorus is also disappointing in this respect.[4] He mentions choral dances only a few times without analyzing their meaning and function in the drama.[5]

Burton makes a very interesting point, however, when he stresses the function of choral dances to express a wide range of emotion combined with voice and musical accompaniment.[6] If the choral dances were intended to enhance the emotional content of choral songs we would like to know how this was achieved in practice. This involves several difficulties. Firstly we must be very careful in assessing the emotional content of a given passage. It is often hazardous to assume certain type or intensity of emotion if the chorus do not mention it specifically. Secondly, since the choreographies of choral dances have perished – if they were ever put in writing at all – we cannot say what the precise movements were in a given dramatic context.[7] We have several references to different tragic and comic dance types and figures in ancient commentaries and in the scholia, but how these were executed is debatable.[8] Furthermore, it is almost impossible to assign any of these dance types or figures to any passage unless the passage itself suggests such an identification.[9]

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3 G & R 33, 1986.

4 R.W.B. Burton, The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies (1980).

5 See his short description on p. 3.

6 Burton 1980, 28.

7 Several attempts have been made to reconstruct choral choreographies but with little success. For references see Davidson 1986, 38 with note 4. Cf. C. Gardiner, The Sophoclean Chorus. A Study of Character and Function (1987) 7ff.

8 For major ancient sources on dance types and figures in drama, see A. Pickard-Cambridge, The Dramatic Festivals of Athens (2nd ed., 1968) 249ff. with bibliography. He rightly emphasizes the sketchy and uninformative nature of the evidence.

9 The clearest example of such suggestion in drama is in Aristophanes' Wasps 1503ff. Where "ἐμμέλεια of the knuckles" is suggested. L. Aylen (The Greek Theater [1985] 118f.) has suggested, among others, that certain movements could be identified by the metre of the choral song, but this is doubtful. A rythmic pattern can be expressed with a variety of movements and our sense of which movements would be fitting to a given rhythm does not necessarily coincide with that of the Greeks.

Our practically only first-hand source for choral dances in Greek drama remain the plays themselves. Perhaps the most important problem is the very existence of references to the chorus' dancing in the choral passages. It is universally supposed that all choral songs were accompanied by dance.[10] Why then mention that dances were either being or about to be performed? It can be suggested that the mention of dancing other than drawing attention to the dance contained information that was essential for the understanding of that dancing. As Shisler accurately noted in her article "The Technique of the Portrayal of Joy in Greek Tragedy" even the best observers cannot recreate emotion on the stage without a definite consciousness of the means by which it can be created.[11] In fact characters of drama sometimes mention their own or other persons' gestures or stage action either to explain them like Pythia in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* 34ff. when she crawls out of temple in horror, or to induce someone on stage to physical action as Hecuba does in Euripides' *Hecuba* 59ff.[12] Pythia in *Eumenides* well illustrates how apparently unexpected action could be rendered understandable for the audience as to its content and motivation. As shall be argued below, a similar technique was used by Sophocles in some choral songs. Even if the mention of dancing by the chorus did not contain information on the character of those dances, the mentioning of dance underlines its significance in the dramatic context. To find out why the poet thought it necessary to point out the dancing in some contexts we need to look more closely at the actual passages. By means of studying such passages in the tragedies of Sophocles I shall try to

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10 For references, see Davidson 1986, 39. Recently Gardiner 1987, 7 has argued that dance would have been dramatically inappropriate and inconsistent with the chorus' character in many passages. She therefore concludes that not all choral songs were accompanied by dance and that dances appeared mainly in religious and celebratory contexts or when the chorus expressly mention that they are dancing. The difficulty with this theory is that we often cannot say what the Athenians thought was appropriate for a scene or consistent with the chorus' character. Nor can we say that the choruses always danced according to their character. Our idea of consistency of character might not be the same as that in fifth-century Athens.

11 TAPA 73 (1942) 277.

12 More references and discussion in F.L. Shisler, "The Use of Stage Business to Portray Emotion in Greek Tragedy", AJP 66 (1945) 377ff; Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 171ff; O. Taplin, Greek Tragedy in Action (1979) 58ff.

show that the chorus' mention of their dancing could be a specialized artistic device of importance in his dramatic technique.

1. *Ajax*

If we accept the traditional chronology of Sophocles' plays the earliest reference of the chorus to their own dancing is preserved in the second stasimon of *Ajax*. The stasimon also contains the clearest statement in Sophocles that the chorus are either performing or just about to perform certain dances. Pan is invoked to lead the chorus to dance and the reason of the invocation is given in line 701: νῦν γὰρ ἐμοὶ μέλει χορεῦσαι, "now I have the mind to dance". The second stasimon and its context have been extensively studied by modern research. It is universally recognized that the second stasimon presents the chorus' reaction to the famous "Trugrede" by Ajax that preceeds it.[13] In the "Trugrede" Ajax leads the chorus to believe that his mood and intetions have totally changed: he has abandoned the thought of suicide that has possessed him since he realized how he had been deceived by Athena and is now determined to live.

Ajax' change of mind results in a radical break in the preceding gloomy atmosphere of the play. Unexpectedly there is hope. At least this is how the chorus choose to interpret the new situation. The first line of the second stasimon echoes the chorus' overflowing joy at the apparent fact that Ajax is going to be saved. This is in fact what Ajax has led the chorus to believe by his speech: in line 692 we read the assertion of Ajax that his woes would soon be over: καὶ τάχ' ἄν μ' ἴσως πύθοισθε, κεἰ νῦν δυστυχῶ, σεσωμένον. To this the chorus respond: ἔφριξ' ἔρωτι, περιχαρὴς ἀνεπτάμαν: "I thrilled with joy, I flew up with joyous rapture". Burton has observed that Ajax' deception speech introduces a περιπέτεια into the play, according to the ideal model of

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[13] On the "Trugrede" see J.C. Kamerbeek, The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries. Part I: The Ajax (2nd ed., 1963) 146, U. Parlavantza-Friedrich, Täuschungsszenen in den Tragödien des Sophokles (1969) 7ff. (with bibliography). Cf. Burton 1980, 27. For the view that Ajax' speech is really not a "Trugrede", see B. Knox, Word and Action. Essays on the Ancient Theatre (1979) 135ff. Ajax' intentions do not affect the issue here: The chorus are deceived regardless of whether Ajax wanted them to be or not.

περιπέτεια in Aristoteles' Poet. 1452 a 22.[14] It needs to be emphasized that it is not Ajax' speech as much as the chorus' reaction to it that constitutes the change of the mood in the play. This suddenly puts the chorus in the center of attention as the creator of dramatically efficient contrast. Gellie sees their role in the following way: "They are being used... to make an adjustment to the emotional rhythm of the play".[15] As for dance, the νῦν stresses the peculiarity of χορεῦσαι for the present and contrasts it with the preceding. The mention that the chorus make of their dancing contributes to the function of the stasimon in the play: the new and exceptional character of the second stasimon rests not only in its language but also in the extraordinary celebrations in dance that accompany it.

As is immediately evident to the audience who knows the inevitable course of events, the chorus' joy is premature: Ajax will perish and the high hopes entertained by the chorus will be crushed. The chorus' joy thus can appear in an ironic light to the audience because it stands in sharp contrast to what is to follow.[16] Even if the audience could not foresee the ultimate fate of Ajax, the irony of the passage would have become evident in retrospect when Ajax perishes.

The chorus – or rather the poet – regard it as necessary to define more accurately the dances they are about to perform or are already in the process of performing. As they invoke Pan to lead them to dance they specify the dances as Μύσια Κνώσι' ὀρχήματ' αὐτοδαῆ. It is necessary for the understanding of the passage to ask what function this definition has and what the implications, if any, such dances could have for the Athenian audience. Are the dances just general expressions of joy, do they contribute to characterize the chorus as sailors, as Lawler has suggested,[17] or do they have other connotations?

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14 Burton 1980, 27.

15 G.H. Gellie, Sophocles: A Reading (1972) 230.

16 Kamerbeek 1963, 146, Parlavantza–Friedrich 1969, 89 both emphasize the function of the stasimon as a contrast to the following. Burton 1980, 27 speaks of double περιπέτεια in 160 lines constituted by the chorus' delusion and the ultimate realisation of their error.

17 Lawler 1964, 50. Note the epithet of Pan ἁλίπλαγκτε "roaming by the sea". Pan is most often associated with mountainous regions such as Arkadia. See W. Burkert, Greek Religion (1985) 172.

To comment on Lawler's interpretation first, it is immediately apparent that the chorus' dances do not necessarily have the character of mariners' dances that she suggests. Lawler thought that such dances were Delian dances of probably Cretan origin but fails to submit any real proof to connect Delian and Cretan dances. Although Apollo Dalios is invoked by the chorus there is no evidence that the chorus actually performed Delian dances. The only dances that are specifically mentioned are the Μύσια Κνώσι' ὀρχήματα the leader of which is not Apollo but Pan.

The exact meaning of Μύσια and Κνώσια is a vexed question. Their association with Pan apparently does not clarify them much. Pan is styled in the passage as θεῶν χοροποί' ἄναξ, i.e. he is the divine leader of dance whom one might expect to appear, in other words he is generally associated with dance. There are also textual problems. The codices have Νύσια but editors prefer Μύσια which is supplied by P. Oxy. 1615 and the Suda s.v. Νύσια. This possible corruption of the text (although Νύσια is still to be preferred as a universal reading of the mss.) and the impossibility of localizing Nysa, which Kamerbeek points out,[18] make it hazardous to interpret Νύσια with any certainty. In the cited passage Kamerbeek maintains on the basis of a scholion that Νύσια associates Pan with Dionysus and that it brings out the connection between Dionysus and Crete.[19] There is, however, hardly sufficient evidence that connects Dionysus with Crete in the way suggested by Kamerbeek. We have more evidence on the connection between Dionysus and Νύσα. According to one tradition Hermes carried the infant Dionysus to Nysa to be reared there. Some stories call the nymphs that took care of Dionysus Νύσιαι or Νυσαίδες.[20] This story might have been what Suda drew on interpreting Νύσια as Dionysiac dances. Suda is somewhat confused as to the origin of these dances and calls them also Βερεκύντια. It is doubtful if the writer of this passage in Suda had much more information on Νύσια than is available for modern research. Although Dionysos can be connected with Νύσια the evidence is inconclusive since the

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18 Kamerbeek 1963, 147ff.

19 Similarly, with equally slim evidence, R.C. Jebb, Sophocles. The Plays and Fragments, Part VII: The Ajax (1896) 109.

20 M.P. Nilsson, Geschichte der Griechischen Religion, Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 5.2.1 (1955) 567. Cf. O.T. 1105ff.

textual problems remain.

The Suda distinguishes Nysian dances from Cretan dances and associates the latter with Knossos. The Suda also states that Knosian dances were in fact corybantic dances because Corybantes protected the infant Zeus in Crete. The Suda's explanation seems at fist a suspect case of false etymology, but there might be more to it than would appear. The Corybantes are most often found as the retinue of Magna Mater (Cybele) and were like the goddess herself native to Phrygia.[21] The Corybantes, however, were already in antiquity confused with Kouretes, who were of Cretan origin and were said to have guarded Zeus as well.[22] That the sources assign both the Corybantes and the Kouretes the protection of the infancy Zeus is indicative of their relationship. In effect Cybele became so closely associated with the infant of Zeus that she aquired the epithet Ἴδαια from the grotto in mount Ida where Zeus was guarded by her followers. She was also the mountain-goddess as the Kouretes were mountain-spirits, ὀρειβάται.[23] Also the goddess Rhea, with whom the Kouretes had a privileged relationship, is thought to have been a mountain-goddess.[24]

Both Corybantes and Kouretes were known for their warlike dances in which brandishing shields and other armour played a prominent part. With that noise they managed to conceal the cry of the infant Zeus, as e.g. Ovid tells us.[25] Weapons figured also in the corybantic processions which were known for their noisy and orgiastic character.[26] The problem now is if the word Κνώσια in the second stasimon of *Ajax* refers to these dances or if some other Cretan dances were meant. It has been suggested that we could here have a ὑπορχήμα, which

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21 On the function of Corybantes Diod. 5.49.3. On Cybele, see Burkert 1985, 177ff.

22 Burkert 1985, 261ff. Immisch "Koureten und Korybanten", in Ausführliches Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie, ed. W.H. Roscher, Vol. 2.1., 1594. See also Strabo 466.1. for the the assimilation of both with δαίμονες. The wealth of evidence connects the Kouretes with Crete, see Eur. Bacch., Strabo 468.11, Diod. 5.65.1, Dion Hal. 2.61, Apollodorus 1.1.6. For more, Immisch 1601f.

23 Burkert 1985, 178. Immisch 1594 (with citations of the ancient sources) and 1613.

24 Immisch 1613: Ῥείη = ὄρειη.

25 Fast. 207ff: *ardua iam dudum resonat tinnitibus Ide, tutus ut infanti vagiat ore puer. Pars clipeos sudibus, galeas pars tundit inanes.*

26 Aristoph. Lys. 558. Immisch 1613.

as a dance form is said to be of Cretan origin.[27] Yet the definition of ὑπορχήμα as a Cretan dance is a relatively late tradition and ὑπορχήμα itself a very flexible concept, as Lawler notes.[28] There was also a tradition which associated ὑπορχήμα with Delian dances in honor of Apollo,[29] so it might be hazardous to classify Κνώσια in this passage under hyporchematic dances because of the geographic reference.

Taking the fact that the dance of the Kouretes-Corybantes was the best-known of Cretan dances and the evidence we have in Suda, it can be assumed with Jebb that the chorus in *Ajax* refer to these weapon dances with the word Κνώσια.[30] The fact that we have Pan coming from high mountains could also indicate that the Cretan dances in which he is going to lead the chorus are also such as were performed in the mountains. Although Pan is coming from the mountain Kyllene, the mountain-imagery would in connection with Crete suggest the dance of the Kouretes-Corybantes, who, as was indicated above, were in many ways associated with mountainous regions. It is interesting to note that Pindar frg. 95 mentions Pan as choral dancer in connection with Cybele. Moreover, although Pan is invoked as the god generally concerned with leading the dance, we do not meet him in this capacity in other passages in Greek tragedy. His invocation might therefore have had a special significance in the second stasimon of *Ajax*.[31]

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27 On this hypothesis, see A.M. Dale, The Lyric Metres of Greek Drama, 200. On ὑπορχήμα in general, Lawler 1964, 30ff.

28 Lawler 1964, 31.

29 Luc. De Salt. 16. Cf. Diehl, RE 9, s.v. ὑπορχήμα, 341–2. Dale in fact thought that hyporchematic dances were of Spartan origin and did not constitute a particular dance but rather a way of performing. She therefore concludes that it would be erroneous to hold the dances in *Ajax* 699ff. hyporchematic. See her Coll. Papers (1969) 39.

30 Jebb 1896, 110. His suggestion that the corybantic dances celebrated Apollo and Zeus is untenable. See also Ph. Borgeaud, Recherches sur le dieu Pan (1979) 255ff. for a similar interpretation. The chorus' noted helplessness at other instances in *Ajax* is not impaired by their active role here. Like the celebrants of Cybele's cult were thought to abandon their true nature (ἔκστασις) the chorus are out of character in their blind optimism.

31 Gardiner 1987, 66 thinks that Pan and Apollo are invoked because they were the well-recognized gods of celebratory dancing. This suggestion does not take the fact into account that Pan is invoked to lead the dance, which is uncommon. Jebb 1896, 109 sees Pan as a domestic

Suda distinguished between Cretan dances and Nysian ones which it called Βερεκύντια. From Statius we know, however, that *Berecyntia mater* was associated with Kouretes.[32] It would be tempting to suggest that the Nysian Βερεκύντια were dances related to the dances of Knossos in *Aja*x. Suda is evidently speaking about the second stasimon in *Ajax* but might have misunderstood the relationship between Nysian and Knossian dances contrasting them while they were in fact related if not in fact one and the same dance. The cult of Dionysus seems to have established a relationship with the Kouretes-Corybantes rather early and Plutarch speaks about the association between the ὄργια of Pan, Cybele and Dionysus.[33] Certainty is impossible because we do not know how reliable Suda's sources were.

What significance, then, could the introduction of weapon dances have had in the second stasimon of *Ajax*? Firstly these weapon dances were linked to the noisy celebrations mainly of Cybele, where their scope was to induce the celebrants into ἐνθουσιασμός, a state of mind similar to the boundless joy the chorus expresses in the first line of the stasimon.[34] The mentioning of corybantic dances thus adds a new dimension to how the audience could understand the emotions of the chorus. Secondly weapons are mentioned very often in *Ajax*.[35] In line 19 Ajax is called σακεσφόρος (shield-bearing) by Odysseus, and Ajax was in fact known for his shield, which appears again in line 576 as his legacy to his son. It is worth noting that the shields of the Kouretes or rather the noise from them was what protected the infant Zeus. Perhaps the shield dances re-enacted for the chorus the protective function that the shield had for Ajax. Ajax himself stressed the power of the shield to protect him by saying (576) that it was ἄρρηκτον, unassailable. In fact at 565 Ajax called the chorus shield-

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deity of the Salaminians, but the text does not support his interpretation. Rather the text brings out Pan's character as a mountain deity. Pan's epithet ἁλίπλαγκτε (roaming by the sea) does not conflict with this since the chorus have a connection to the sea in their capacity as sailors.

32 Stat. Theb. 4.782ff.

33 Plut. Amat. 16,31. Cf. Borgeaud 1979, 249ff.

34 Aristophanes Vesp. 8 speaks of corybantic μανία, which with ἐνθουσιασμός and ἔκστασις was a speciality also of Dionysus. See Burkert 1985, 109f.

35 See e.g. at 10, 19, 30, 95, 100, 147, 231, 287, 565, 576.

bearers, ἄνδρες ἀσπιστῆρες.[36] The chorus probably did not have any actual weapons on stage: at least none are mentioned. The lack of weapons could be made good, however, by actual movements, whose content in turn was explained verbally. It is also interesting to note that the noisy dance of the Corybantes may have had an apotropaic character since it hid the ill-bringing cries of pain that the dancers inflicted upon themselves.[37] One might suggest that the chorus with their dance tried to cover the desperate cries of Ajax, which he from line 333 onwards repeats several times.[38]

What escapes the chorus but could have been already here evident for the audience were the sinister implications of weapon dances. Ajax' misery had been caused by the quarrel over Achilleus' armor, as Athena tells Odysseus in line 41. His sword which he had used to kill the sheep ultimately caused his shame and, in the end, his death. Segal in fact thinks that the sword was prominently placed on stage.[39] Ironically, the chorus directly refer to the sword as the means Ajax has caused his misery in lines 147 and 231. The weapon dances could therefore have a double significance for the drama: they could act to widen the emotional dimension of the stasimon and to link its dances immediately to Ajax. But they could also anticipate the immediate fall of Ajax thus underlining the fact that the chorus' joy would be deceptive and short-lived. That the chorus' judgement of Ajax' situation is impaired may have been subtly hinted at by the very nature of corybantic dances: Plato calls their participants οὐκ ἔμφρονες, not in their senses.[40] Sophocles makes for dramatic irony not only by contrasting the joyous chorus to the destruction of Ajax' but also by letting the chorus unknowingly allude to his fate by their words and gestures.

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36 This also goes to show that for Ajax the chorus were not just mariners but fellow-soldiers as well.

37 See Immisch 1615.

38 Ἰώ μοί μοι in 333 and 385, ἰὼ παῖ παῖ in 336, ἰώ in 348, 356, 379 and 412, αἰαῖ in 370 and 430. Note that the chorus in lines 694 and 707 take up the ἰώ-cry, the first ἰώ after Ajax' cries and thus easily connected to them by the listener. Considering the pain Ajax uttered in his cries the chorus' repetition of the same cries to express joy sounds rather ironic.

39 Ch. Segal, Interpreting Greek Tragedy, Myth, Poetry, Text (1986) 115ff.

40 Plat. Ion 534a.

2. *Antigone*

In the parodos of Antigone the chorus are seen to enter triumphant. After the death and destruction of war there is finally peace. In their song the chorus re-enact the scenes of the battle where Polyneikes was killed and describe how Nike appeared on the side of the Thebans that defended the city and gave them a resounding victory. The chorus see in this a hope for better times and intend to leave to celebrate the victory with all-night dances at the sanctuaries (152ff.): θεῶν δὲ ναοὺς χοροῖς παννύχοις πάντας ἐπέλθωμεν, ὁ Θήβας δ' ἐλελίχθων Βάκχιος ἄρχοι. It is not clear if the chorus performed the actual dances on the stage: their words seem to refer to future dancing. At any rate the chorus refer to dance as a means to express joy as was the case in the second stasimon of *Ajax*. Similarly the choral dances in the parodos of *Antigone* express relief from distress and gratitude for salvation. The faithful sailors of *Ajax* felt themselves saved with their master whereas the Theban elders strongly identified their fate and happiness with their native city. In both *Ajax* and *Antigone* a new element of hope and change is introduced. The contrast to the preceding is in *Ajax* the contrast between the depressive mood and grim events before the second stasimon. In *Antigone* the chorus produce the contrast between the rage of war and joys of peace within the chorus themselves, although the exultant mood of the chorus stands in contrast to the gloomy atmosphere of the prologue.

As in *Ajax* the chorus' joy is premature. The victory over Polyneikes instead of bringing peace and harmony to the Thebans precipitates new and grave disaster. The reason for the chorus' joy thus contains the seeds of future hardships and the parodos acquires an ironic character. The celebrations that the chorus instigate make for the contrast to the following events. Even in this respect the parodos is similar to the second stasimon of *Ajax*.[41]

The function of the reference to dance is clearly to emphasize the joyous mood and add a physical dimension to it. It is also to be noted that the mention of dance that is about to take place in temples outside the stage serves to connect the chorus' celebrations to the community as a whole. If the dances were not actually

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[41] This aspect has been often noted by the research. See e.g. H. Rohdich, Antigone, Beitrag zu einer Theorie des Sophokleischen Helden (1980) 51ff.

performed on the stage the mention of dance is even more necessary to describe the chorus' emotional state and intentions. Furthermore, the poet regards it as necessary to let the chorus describe the intended or actual dances in more detail. In the passage cited above the chorus invoke the Bacchus "that shakes Thebes" to lead the dance. The invitation for Bacchus is usually interpreted as a characterization of celebrations which with Bacchus have the enthusiastic character of Dionysiac processions.[42] It could of course be said, as Winnigton-Ingram points out,[43] that Dionysus enters a Theban play in his own right as the protector of the city, but a similar connection with Bacchus and dances of joy in *Trachiniae* 219ff. suggest that the appearance of Bacchus in the parodos of *Antigone* is not only because the events take place in Thebes. Of course the tenor of the choral song in *Antigone* is more contemplative and similar to a prayer.

The chorus' Bacchic celebrations, somewhat restrained or not, contain also less happy implications. Winnington-Ingram rightly notes that the Bacchic madness that possessed Polyneikes when he attacked Thebes (135: μαινομέναι ξὺν ὁρμᾳι βακχεύων) sheds an influence on the second mention of Bacchus, who is referred to as "the shaker" (154: ἐλελίχθων).[44] Rohdich sees the connection between the two allusions to Bacchus but interprets them as a contrast where the second springs from the first. To Rohdich both bring out the ecstatic nature of the emotion, but only the first has sinister implications, i.e. the destruction of the haughty Polyneikes.[45] It is, however, dramatically more convincing to see the reference to Bacchus the Shaker tainted with ambiguity by Polyneikes' madness and as an ironic expression of the false hope of the chorus. Not only will Bacchus shake the chorus in dance, the whole city, which the chorus included in their nocturnal revel, will be shaken when the violent Bacchus that possessed Polyneikes reappears. Unknowingly the chorus make an allusion to the immediate catastrophe. As Polyneikes βακχεύων crossed the limits set to

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42 Rohdich 1980, 51 maintains that the political dimension of choral celebrations gives them a less ecstatic character, but as R.P. Winnington-Ingram (Sophocles. An Interpretation [1980] 110) points out, Sophocles was perhaps less restrained in his presentation of emotions on stage than has often been supposed.

43 Winnington-Ingram 1980, 111.

44 Winnington-Ingram 1980, 115.

45 Rohdich 1980, 50.

men, so will the chorus' patron and hope Creon. The hopes the chorus see in him (156–7: νεοχμὸς ταγὸς νεαραῖσι θεῶν ἐπὶ συντυχίαις) will prove to be as false as the joy the chorus express in the dances led by Bacchus.

It can now be seen that the reference the chorus make to their own dancing contains in its setting and function striking similarities to the mention of dance in the second stasimon of *Ajax*. Both create and emphasize a sudden rush of joyous emotion and a contrast to the preceding and following events. They also add an element of tragic irony by implying the fatal course of the events, although the audience's understanding of the implication is conditioned by their knowledge of the story. It may be noted that in the fifth stasimon the chorus sing a joyous hymn to Bacchus and in their delusion create a strong contrast to the following disaster. The chorus do not here speak of their own dancing, but at 1151f. mention the companions of Bacchus who in madness (μαινόμεναι) dance in his honor. Winnington-Ingram has suggested the reference might be to the madness of Haemon which is about to reveal the madness of Creon and thus makes for the messenger scene.[46]

3. *Trachiniae*

At the beginning of *Trachiniae* the mood of the play is determined by anxiety about Heracles' fate. The situation changes radically at 180 as a messenger appears bringing the good news that not only is Heracles safe but will return victorious. Deianeira and the chorus are jubilant and rejoicing follows. As Burton notes, the effect is intensely dramatic after the mood of anxious doubt and fear which pervades the opening of the play.[47] The chorus express their joy by turning to Bacchic dances. Their description of their movements suggest the frenzy of Bacchus' followers, the maenads. The chorus are shaken by the ivy

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[46] Winnigton-Ingram 1980, 112. See also G. Müller, "Überlegungen zum Chor der Antigone", Hermes 89 (1961) 418. The characterization of the dances at 1151 as παννύχοι produces instant reflection back to the same expression at 153. Perhaps we are supposed to connect even the μαινόμεναι to the chorus at 153 through this reflection, which like the reference to Polyneikes' μανία in line 135f. would again point out the ambiguity of their bacchic revel.

[47] Burton 1980, 50.

wreath that makes them whirl around in Bacchic contest (217–20): ἰδού μ' ἀναταράσσει, εὐοῖ, ὁ κισσὸς ἄρτι Βακχίαν ὑποστρέφων ἅμιλλαν.[48] This outburst of joy stands – as the audience again knows or will find out in the course of the events – in blatant contrast to the cruel fate of the protagonists and the ensuing sorrow of the chorus. The dramatic effect of the stasimon and the dances is thus similar to the second stasimon of *Ajax* and the prologue and fifth stasimon of *Antigone*. Especially striking is the similarity to *Ajax*, since both choruses have a function as part of a περιπέτεια.

The cited mention of choral dances in *Trachiniae* brings out their ecstatic character and doing so expresses the nature of the chorus' emotional state. But it seems that the mention of choral dances has also other implications. The chorus have a good reason to dance Bacchic dances because of the close relationship between Heracles and Bacchus. This is stated later expressly by the chorus in line 510, where Heracles is called ὁ Βακχίας ἄπο Θήβας, the man from Theba, the city of Bacchus. This could be interpreted so that the Bacchic dances the chorus perform are not only a general expression of joy but stand in close relation to Heracles whose imminent arrival has occasioned the dances in the first place. Ironically, the shaking and whirling, the whole state of frenzy in which the chorus find themselves, also characterizes the agony of Heracles to whom the deadly robe clings.[49] In fact Heracles refers to his state of mind as τοδ' ἀκήλητον μανίας ἄνθος.[50] As was indicated above, μανία has besides the meaning "frenzy" the special connotation of a frenzy caused by Bacchus.[51] The ambiguity of joy and madness inherent in μανία has already been mentioned. In *Trachiniae* the ambiguity of Bacchus as a god of joy and life but also of madness and destruction is most clearly put in evidence by Deianeira at 701f. She compares the bubbling of the deadly liquid that she had smeared to Heracles' robe to wine poured to the earth from the grapes of Bacchus (704: βαχίας ἀπ' ἀμπέλου). If the pouring of wine is a libation to the souls of the dead, as Heiden

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48 For an interpretation of the passage, see J.C. Kamerbeek, The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries, Part II: The Trachiniae (1970) 73.

49 See Hyllus' description of Heracles' woes from line 770 onwards.

50 The Oxford-edition (Sophoclis Fabulae, recc. H. Lloyd-Jones – N.G. Wilson [1990]) places this expression to line 998b f. For textual problems, see the *apparatus criticus* of the edition.

51 Nilsson 1955, 577.

has suggested, the sinister aspect of things connected with Bacchus appears all the more clearly.[52] It could thus be suggested that the chorus in their ἐνθουσιασμός unknowingly anticipate the frenzied agony of Heracles. One might object to this interpretation that only women took part of the Bacchic orgies as we see e.g. in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Yet it is to note that in lines 1070ff. Heracles speaks of himself as crying like a girl (ὥστε παρθένος... κλαίων) and in line 1075 states that he is turned into a woman (θῆλυς) by the pain. As was briefly noted above, in Dionysiac feasts the salient feature was the ἔκστασις caused by the dancing. This meant losing one's own particular nature and assimilation with the divine power. Similarly the pain has transformed Heracles' nature but instead of bringing him near the gods caused unimaginable suffering. This sinister implication of the chorus' words is akin to those suggested above for *Ajax* and *Antigone*. If the audience is to understand the implication either immediately or through reflection from Heracles' suffering it is necessary for the poet to define the dances the chorus are performing. The mention of dance is therefore both dramatically effective and indispensable for the rendering of the dramatic irony in the passage.

4. *Oedipus tyrannus*

There are two passages in *O.T.* where the chorus refer to their own dancing. In line 896 the chorus seeing the dismal state of the affairs ask why they in face of such impiety should dance at all: τί δεῖ με χορεύειν; Kamerbeek suggests that the chorus intend to refrain from the worship of the gods, because such pursuit is worthless considering the situation in which the chorus find themselves.[53] Considered with the second passage where the chorus speak of their dancing (1093), where the chorus celebrate Apollo, the dances the chorus do not want to perform appear as dances expressing gratitude and joy. This definition of the meaning of the dances in line 896 would correspond to the mentions of dances in

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[52] B. Heiden, Tragic Rhetoric: An Interpretation of Sophocles Trachiniae, Hermeneutic Commentaries, vol. 1 (1989) 104f.

[53] J.C. Kamerbeek, The Plays of Sophocles, Commentaries, Part I: The Oedipus Tyrannus (1967) 172.

the passages of Sophocles discussed previously. In these passages the dances of the chorus were characterized by joy and praise. The function of dance as worship was especially clear in *Antigone* in which the chorus' dances took place at sanctuaries.

The chorus resume their dances of worship in the stasimon starting at line 1086. Oedipus has led the chorus to believe – what he himself also wants to believe – that his birthplace is in the mountains and Merope cannot be his mother. Hope is rekindled in the chorus and in form of dance they offer their praise to Apollo and mention also Bacchus.[54] As in the other cases discussed where the chorus mention their dance, the choral dances mentioned in *O.T.* in line 1093 appear in a passage the mood of which stands in deep contrast to both what already has happened and especially to future events.[55] Here the mention of dance neatly brings out the gratitude and joyous mood of the chorus. The mention of Apollo links the dances to previous anxieties: it was Apollo's order to punish Laius' murderer. Now Apollo appears placated and propitious.[56] Yet even here a touch of cruel irony can be seen: in their dance the chorus thank for the salvation of their king the god whose oracle will cause the king's fall. Thus the mention of choral dance in honor of Apollo serves a clear dramatic purpose: it deepens the contrast between the chorus' hopeful prayer and Oedipus' ultimate fate and imbues the chorus' words and actions with implications that suggest tragic irony.

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54 Cf. Burton 1980, 172.

55 Note how the chorus disregard Iocasta's ominous words at 1068 and 1071–2 and instead choose to echo Oedipus' hopeful mood. The chorus' misreading of the situation is akin to the naive reaction of the chorus in *Ajax* 693ff.

56 Apollo remains a crucial figure throughout the play: Apollo has announced how the city could be saved (305f) and has revealed Oedipus his fate (787f). When the chorus at 896 denounces dance, they also refrain from honours to Apollo (897ff). Iocasta, however, prays to Apollo to end the plague (919f). When she loses hope the chorus resume their worship of Apollo (1086f).

Conclusion

In this survey of the references of Sophoclean choruses to their own dancing I have tried to show that such passages have their own peculiar purpose and function. I believe that the examination of the actual passages has allowed us to see a pattern into which those passages fall. This pattern may be summarized as follows:

1. The mentions of dance appear in passages of high emotional content and express the joy and gratitude the chorus is feeling. Exception that proves the rule: *O.T.* 896.

2. These references produce on their part a contrast to the preceeding and subsequent action by emphasizing and explaining the physical aspect of the emotional content in the stasimon to which they are attached.

3. The joyous dances are expressions of false hopes and represent the chorus' misconception of the proceedings.

4. The descriptions of dances serve to point out the dramatic irony and/or allusions to future calamities. The unsuspecting chorus are not aware of the ambiguity of their dances. The descriptions are likely to have been necessary for a proper understanding of the dances, although the audience might gain this understanding first in the light of subsequent events. Because of the uncertainties in the interpretation of the expressions the chorus use to describe their dancing this conclusion will remain perhaps more tentative than the others.

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