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Chorus and Chorality
in Early Modern English Drama

Abstract

The essay offers a discussion of the progressive divergence, in early modern English drama, of the dramatic function of the chorus from the plural and lyrical performance derived from ancient theatre. Through an analysis of the gradual reduction in number of the performers and the chorus's conflation with prologic and other framing texts in a time span of about fifty years, the essay retraces the gradual steps of the chorus's transformation into an increasingly meta-theatrical piece, depriving the play of an element of lyrical artificiality traditionally attached to it. By showing that this theatrical device does have a history of its own in the English theatre, the essay argues that the loss of its traditional features, which allowed drama to provide a collective and lyrical response to the action enacted on stage, is occasionally made up for by a new and challenging idea of polyphonic chorality dislocated to other dramatic portions. *Romeo and Juliet*, in particular, is examined as an early example of this new choral experience, balancing the meta-theatrical dimension of a lyrico-narrative solo performance of the Chorus, strategically appended to the play as a narrative voice competitive with the representational potential of (lyrical) drama.

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When in 1803 Schiller wrote his famous piece on the Greek chorus appending it as a preface to *The Bride of Messina*, British theatres had already been acquainted with this theatrical device for more than two centuries. In that piece, Schiller suggested that, had Shakespeare used the chorus, it would have given his tragedy "its true meaning for the first time" (2015: 155). This claim tacitly assumes that the choruses featuring in the Bard's plays are not choruses at all – at least according to classical standards. Indeed, Shakespeare's handling of this dramatic artifice, like his contemporaries', was not quite what Schiller

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meant by it. If, he argued, the Greek chorus provided the necessary artificiality to break the naturalistic illusion, distract from an ordinary perception of the action as common reality, and thus engage the soul in a higher poetic involvement, Shakespeare's plays, in many if not all respects, did not know it.

In the English drama of the early modern age choruses were often quite unlike their classical predecessors, although we do not fully know how they came to acquire new and multiple guises. We know, however, that from the 1590s onwards they frequently overlapped with prologues, inductions, and epilogues, thus becoming one of the many framing texts common at the time. The numerous stage directions indicating that prologues or epilogues entered as choruses testify to this confusion (see Schneider 2011: Appendix), and it is not accidental that modern critics tend to treat them as virtually interchangeable. Ann Righter, for one, groups them indifferently as "bridges between the two realms of reality and illusion" (1962: 55), and D.J. Palmer recalls that they are "commonly assumed" to share the one and the same function of both conveying "necessary and reliable information" and speaking "on behalf of the play, not at variance from it" (1986: 501). More recently, Stern has pointed out that "prologues, epilogues and choruses sometimes constituted a collection of linked scrolls, so that they were created as a group or lost as a group"; this was "indicated by the habit of writing plays first and epilogues and choruses, as a group, second" (Stern 2009: 109). Besides, they also became contiguous in function, so that they could indifferently be played by the same character (Weimann and Bruster 2004; Stern 2009: 106-7; Schneider 2011).

It is undeniable, however, that, as Schneider has rightly pointed out, "[t]he Chorus in early modern drama shifts its very nature from the Senecan model in such plays as *Gorboduc* to the highly individualized Chorus encountered in *Henry V*" (2011: 49), which is proof that the chorus does have a history of its own. If, as Schneider has remarked, "the standard prologue might be described as one that gains the audience's attention and silence, introduces the play and more or less humbly asks for the spectator's approval, or at least tolerance, for the author's shortcomings and the play's perceived imperfections" (ibid.: 13), then the formal chorus, while occasionally and increasingly sharing these features, is by all means irreducible to the prologue – at least at its inception.

Strictly speaking, choruses, originally, were not identical with prologues or epilogues or other presentational or metadramatic pieces; they conveyed an idea of collective performance, including gesture and melodic speech or song, not implied in other later framing texts of early modern drama. There are scant accounts of how often and in what diverse ways classical plays were mounted during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, but we know that they occasionally were staged. Indirect indication is contained in scattered references to what playing the chorus meant, and this points towards something quite

different from the ancient model of choral dance (χορός), song, and poetical modulations. Only by strict adherence to that model could one deem it extraordinary to hear Ophelia say to Hamlet that he is "as good as a chorus" (3.2.230) when illustrating "*The Mousetrap*" to the court: there is nothing melodious, nor choreographic or highly poetic in his solo performance; and, even before then, it may have sounded equally amazing, by classical standards, to hear Revenge say to Antonio, while sitting as spectators at 'Hieronimo's play', that they could well "serve for chorus in this tragedy" (*The Spanish Tragedy*, 1.1.91).[1] What one was expected to understand from such remarks was a commentary on the play with no actual choral performance being involved.

And yet, in the late sixteenth century formal choruses did persist both in the Senecan translations and in the plays following Latin drama, starting with the first tragedy in blank verse, *Gorboduc* (performed in 1561 at the Inner Temple), and the first amorous tragedy, *Gismond of Salerne* (performed in 1567-68 before the Queen). In such cases, formal choruses introduced a degree of artificiality similar to the one underlined by Schiller with regard to the Greek chorus (a device to erect "a living wall which tragedy draws around itself in order to guard itself from the world of reality", 2015: 149), testifying to the persistence, in a revised form, of that time-honoured classical legacy.

For some time, the two options – the formal chorus in the Senecan style and the chorus as an individual interpretative or narrative 'voice-over' – ran in parallel, at least until the chorus's own new self-aware role was definitely transferred to the threshold of action with an increasingly framing function. From that liminal position, the chorus introduced and interpreted the characters and events of the play or of a dumb show, thus partaking in authorial knowledge, actorial skill, and, in some way, the spectator's own role. This of course meant lifting the veil of fiction with new tools. As far as we know, this meta-theatrical 'in-betweenness' was not alien to the ancient comic chorus,[2] but what is exceptional here is that this is almost exclusively what early modern choruses on the English stages were gradually turned into – with different

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1. On Kyd's appropriation and re-elaboration of the Senecan chorus see Coral Escolá 2007.
2. Reference is to the so-called παράβασις, i.e. the part of the comedy (fifth-century BC) where the members of the Chorus directly addressed the audience showing authorial knowledge. Euripides's plays too present four cases of exodus (in *Hyppolitus*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Orestes*, and *Phoenissae*) where they meta-theatrically unveil their authorial awareness, although these passages are often expunged by modern editors as spurious. Cunliffe points out that, in *Phoenissae*, this piece was a "'tag' purporting to be spoken by the Chorus, not in their assumed character as persons in the drama, but in their true character as Athenians contending in a dramatic competition. The tag takes the form of a prayer to Victory, 'O mighty lady, Victory, pervade my life, and cease not to give me crowns'" (1893: 413). However, it must be remarked that this added portion can by no means be authorial.

degrees of integration –,[3] before eventually being silenced. At the same time, experiments with other types of chorality, albeit unusual, were carried out, and this is proof of a need to come to terms with an idea of collective performance which was lost in the chorus, but was vital to the development of a new drama, in several diverse ways and with various functions. At least in one early case, that of *Romeo and Juliet*, this experimentation appears cognate to a particular form of ancient choric expression revised through the filter of contemporary performative and musical paradigms.

What I am interested in here is precisely the transformation, in early modern English drama, of the idea of choral plurality of classical ascendancy into a new oxymoronic idea of choric singularity. I am also intrigued by the relocation of the lost collectiveness and artificial drive of the old chorus to different dramatic positions characterized by an equivalent degree of artificiality. Wagner once wrote that Shakespeare's drama is superior to Greek tragedy precisely because it got rid of the chorus by "resolv[ing it] into diverse individuals directly interested in the Action, and whose doings are governed by precisely the same prompting of individual Necessity as are those of the chief Hero himself" (1995: 60). Like Schiller, he disregarded that choruses do appear in Shakespeare's plays, and suggestively mentioned the Bard's transformation of the ancient chorus's plurality into singularity and multiple characterization as proof of the superiority of his tragedies. By associating this principle of individualization with the proliferation of individual characters, Wagner ignored other forms of collectivity somewhat akin to an idea of chorus (like the citizens in *Richard III*,[4] *Julius Caesar* or *Coriolanus*). Chorality as a purely performative potential was simply missed in this remark. In the following pages I will turn to a brief analysis of this potential. In particular, I will consider how chorality, while normally dislodged from the chorus proper, may occasionally be dislocated to different dramatic portions involving polyphony as a revised form of choral performance. To this end, I will offer a few preliminary notes

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3. McCaullay calls them "non-organic dramatic elements" in order to underline their being fundamentally extraneous to the plays (1917: 186; see also 186-96), a position which more recent criticism has variously revised (see for instance Schneider 2011; for a critique of McCaulley see ibid.: 3).

4. It may be worth noting, with Clemen, that the choric dimension of 2.3 derives from the fact that "the events of the drama are surveyed from a distance, [and] the specific case is seen as exemplifying a more general truth, and as standing, therefore, in some relationship to the great universal laws operative in other spheres as well (32ff.)"; yet, the opening lines of the three citizens are "informal, realistic, and therefore un-chorus-like; the opening and concluding play of question and answer suggests that they come from a workaday world to which they will return at the close of the scene. These citizens, then, occupy a place somewhere between impartial, choric figures and characters involved in the action" (1968: 108). On the function of crowds in Shakespeare see Wiegandt 2012.

on the early modern English approach to the classical chorus via Seneca and its appropriation in the tragedies of the 1560s, 1580s and 1590s. This analysis, showing how the chorus gradually came to be individualized and identified with other narrative and meta-textual as well as meta-theatrical dramatic parts, will pave the way to a final examination of *Romeo and Juliet* as one of the earliest examples of how chorus and chorality ended up being divided into two different dramatic stances: a narrative, prologic voice as opposed to other lyrical forms of chorality separate from the chorus proper.[5]

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Situated in the theatrical context of the early 1590s, *Romeo and Juliet* was one of the first amorous tragedies of the Elizabethan period to present choruses and choral parts. What is most interesting, though, is that it is likely to have been the first play to mark a neat divide between the two in a period when tragedies in the classical tradition still appended a chorus at the end of each act, and the prologue was not yet confused with choric parts. As amorous tragedy, it was preceded only by the multi-authored *Gismond of Salerne* (1567-68) and its revised version, entitled *Tancred and Gismond*, by Robert Wilmot (printed in 1591). Both versions of this play, largely derived from Boccaccio's novella of Tancredi and Ghismunda (*Decameron*, 4.1), present a formal Chorus in the Senecan tradition at the end of the first four acts: *Gismund* has a group of four Gentlemen of Salerno who speak in iambic pentameters like every other character in the play (although no performing indication is extant), and their lines constitute a distinct dramatic partition from the prologic section, played by Cupid, and from a no better specified Epilogus. *Tancred* has instead a Chorus of four maids attending Gismund, and they appear only three times in the course of the play: the first two times they speak individually in sequence, the last time we hear only the first maid. From act two on, at the beginning of each act dumb shows and music complement the action. Despite this attempt to offer dramatic variation through music and pantomime, however, these two plays, like most plays making up the panorama of English drama succeeding the vernacularization of Seneca, closely followed the Latin choric pattern. Although their later transformation into a framing text shows the influence of a number of other native sources,[6] the chorus's formal inception in English

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5. If not otherwise stated, all dates of the plays refer to the printed editions. For more details see Chambers 1923, 1930.
6. Including the religious responsorial models of the "priest and the *Te Deum* or the *Magnificat* of the mediaeval church service" (McCaullay 1917: 162), and the "prayers at the end and

drama dates precisely from the 1550s and 1560s with the translation of Seneca, a fact whose trace is clearly borne by the early classical tragedies in English.

As recalled above, Latin plays were occasionally performed on the English stages. The *Archive of Performance of Greek and Roman Drama* records twelve Latin performances of Senecan dramas between the 1540s and 1592 (plus one *Hyppolitus* in 1603-4),[7] and two performances in English by the turn of the century, starting with Alexander Neville's 1559 translation of *Oedipus* (printed in 1563),[8] followed by John Studley's 1566 *Agamennon*. Another play of classical ascendancy, *Jocasta*, supposedly drawn from Euripides (in fact a rendition of Lodovico Dolce's 1549 *Giocasta*),[9] was also performed in 1566. It too had choruses and the translation was penned by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmershe. Between 1556-57 and 1581 all of Seneca's tragedies were translated and printed several times, and finally collected in Thomas Newton's edition of *Seneca. His Tenne Tragedies* (1581). Although composed by different hands, these translations showed a general freedom compared with the original, which was not followed "word for word", as Neville wrote in the letter of dedication "To the Right honourable, Maister Doctor Wotton; one of the Queenes Majesties privy Counsayle" (Newton 1581: 76r). In fact, they were often remodelled to adjust the results to the English language and the verse adopted. The aim was, "sometymes by addition, sometimes by subtraction, to use the aptest Phrases in giving the Sense that [Neville the translator] could invent" (ibid.: 76a). The other translators made similar comments and textual interventions. Heywood, in particular, was so daring as to augment and alter the text massively, often showing the talent of a playwright rather than of a translator. De Vocht makes this point when noticing that "As the plot of *Troas*[10] is based on the apparition of Achilles Ghost, which has as necessary consequence the death of Polyxena and Astyanax, Heywood felt that a relation of this vision through Talthybius was not sufficient to point out its importance in the play, and he makes the ghost appear in a new scene (act

invocations to the deity at the beginning of, for example, Mystery plays" (Schneider 2011: 3). Evidently these influenced the development of the chorus indirectly, that is, via the other framing portions with which it gradually identified.

7. All versions and performances of *Phaedra* are under the name of *Hippolytus*, deriving from the A manuscript *recensio* of Seneca's tragedy on which the first printed editions, used by the Elizabethans, were based until 1662. See de Vocht 1913.

8. The *APRGD* attributes to a period comprised between 1550 and 1567 a performance of John Pikeryng's *Horestes* (sic), printed in 1567 and based on William Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* (translated from French in 1475; see Bevington 1962: 179ff.), or, according to Karen Maxwell Merritt, on John Lydgate's *The Book of Troy* (Merritt 1972).

9. On which see Montorfani 2006.

10. This title is present in all printed editions until Gronovius's (J.F. Gronov 1662), all based on the so-called A *recensio*.

II, sc. i)" (1913: xxx). What most attracted the translator's attention, however, were the choruses, which he increased by one (the first) and occasionally making substantial alterations. For instance he appended three stanzas at the end of the second Chorus and modified the beginning of the third Chorus in order to make it more palatable to an English readership not acquainted with all "the names of so manye unknowen Countreyes, Mountaynes, Desertes, and Woodes" there mentioned. It is interesting to observe that he justified this last change by assuming "that Chorus is no part of the substance of the matter" ("To the Reader", Newton 1581: 95b-6a).

In this regard it may be recalled that in 1567 Thomas Drant had provided a peculiar translation of a passage in Horace's *Poetics* in which he had similarly deprived the chorus of centrality by transforming it into a kind of authorial voice-over. While the original, following Aristotle's precepts on the chorus as one of the actors (*Po.* 1456a25-7), prescribed that he should "sustain the part and strenuous duty of an actor, and sing nothing between acts which does not advance and fitly blend into the plot" (Horace 1999: ll. 193-207: "actoris partis chorus officiumque virile / defendat, neu quid medios intercinat actus, / quod non proposito conducat et haereat apte"), Drant's translation turned the chorus into an ethical arbiter:[11] "The autor the Chorus must defende / or else some other one / Whose innocensie, or manhode / deserveth prayse alone. / Let them not singe twix acte, and acte/ that squayreth from the rest. / Such let their songs be, as will tune / unto the purpose best" (1567: 13). A different rendition of this passage, which agrees with current interpretations, would be published only at a later date, in 1640, penned by the neo-classical Ben Jonson,[12] but before then the chorus was indeed "no part of the substance of the matter", as Heywood put it.

This tells us something about the course that was being taken by the chorus on the English stages. Possibly through misinterpretation (as in Drant's case), but also appropriations smacking of contaminations with other autochthonous framing forms, it took on an increasingly authorial and authoritative function.

The choric part of these early versions of Seneca had a markedly literary vocation, as in the rest of the plays, something which clearly reflects an awareness of print. As Nashe's epistle *To the Gentlemen Students of both Universities*

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11. Drant must have misinterpreted the Latin "defendat", which he read as meaning 'to take sides with' rather than 'to play the part of'; see Lewis and Short (1958) *defendo* II.A.α: 'sustain', and Gaffiot (2005) *defendo* 3: 'play the part'. This interpretation is in line with Aristotle's *Poetics* 1456a25-7 ["καὶ τὸν χορὸν δὲ ἕνα δεῖ ὑπολαμβάνειν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν", "the chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors", Butcher 1907]; for a similar use see Horace *Sat.* 1.10.12: "*defendente vicem modo rhetoris atque poetae*" ["in keeping with the rôle, now of orator or poet", Fairclough 1999].

12. "An Actors part, and office too, the quire / Must manly keep, and not be heard to sing / Between the Acts a quite cleane other thing / Than to the purpose leads and fitly agrees" (ll. 276-9).

prefixed to Greene's *Menaphon* (1589) implies, these plays were mainly aimed at readers who, in Nashe's view, greatly profited from them ("English Seneca read by candle light", wrote Nashe, "yeeldes manie good sentences"; Greene 1589: **3).[13] How Seneca's choruses were thought to have been performed, however, whether chorally or not, remains unknown;[14] what is known is that the 1581 printed edition signalled these parts as distinct from the rest of the play by using a different typeface – Roman instead of Gothic. In the latter type the printer Thomas Marsh cast the monotonous fourteeners in which the rest of the characters spoke, as opposed to the iambic pentameters of the chorus. Yet no indication is added as to the number of the actual speakers and their choric performance, whether the lines were meant to be uttered collectively or only by the chorus leader, as in the chorus's dialogues with the other characters (always in fourteeners, marked in Gothic type). Nevertheless, it may be noticed that when massive alterations or additions were made, as in the case of Heywood's *Troas*, the first person singular was often the choice, and this should be kept in mind. For instance, at some point in the last three stanzas of the second Chorus of this play, added by the translator, the Chorus unequivocally mentions "mine iyes" before addressing the ladies with an invitation to cry over Hecuba. While it is not unusual for the Greek and Latin choruses to say "I" even when meant to be collective, this is precisely the English translator's choice in a piece of his own making that bears no indication of plurality.

There are several hints that chorus and chorality did not always go hand in hand already in the Englished Seneca,[15] as well as, more generally, in the Elizabethan conception of the chorus *tout court*. This fact can be indirectly evinced from a literary anecdote concerning the solo recitation of Latin drama. The current idea "from the tenth century onwards" (Cunliffe 1912: xiv) was that recitation was accompanied by a pantomime or dumb show. Such notion refers to spectacular models which did not disdain individual performance in place of plural action. The anecdote Cunliffe relates is the following: "Nicholas

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13. As de Vocht points out, "It is difficult to state in the cases where there is an influence of Seneca on the dramatic literature of Elizabeth's time, whether it has been caused by the Latin text or by the English rendering; still there are some passages amongst those that are quoted by Cunliffe [1893] as having been inspired by the Roman playwright, that have a singular coincidence with Heywood's translation" (1913: xxxiii).

14. Recent work on Seneca (see Zanobi 2010; Slaney 2013) has suggested, albeit not conclusively, the relevance of pantomime and the possibility for solo choral performances accompanied by mimes. Whichever the case, this has no bearing on early modern knowledge of ancient performances of Seneca.

15. Clear evidence is provided by Heywood's duplication of two choruses in his translation of *Troas*, one of which is evidently singular in number (this issue is part of my current work on this topic within a wider research on the Chorus in early modern drama).

Trivet or Treveth (c. 1260-1330), an English Dominican who edited Seneca's tragedies, explains in the introduction to the *Hercules Furens* that in a little house in the theatre, called *scena*, the prologue of the play was read, while a *mimus* with gestures imitated the angry Juno" (1912: xvi; see also xiv-xix). The same idea was later, and more famously, expressed in expanded form by John Lydgate in the *Book of Troy* (1412-20), where, by taking up "a remark in the *Historia Trojana* of Guido delle Colonne that tragedies and comedies are said to have been first acted at Troy", dedicated a long passage of his book 2 (ll. 842-926) to a detailed description of a performance in the Trojan palace:

> Al þis was tolde and rad of þe poete.
> And whil þat he in þe pulpit stood,
> With dedly face al devoide of blood,
> Singinge his dites, with muses al to-rent,
> Amydde þe theatre schrowdid in a tent,
> þer cam out men gastful of her cheris,
> Disfigurid her facis with viseris,
> Pleying by signes in þe peples siȝt,
> þat þe poete songon hath on hiȝt;
> So þat þer was no maner discordaunce
> Atwen his dites and her contenaunce:
> For lik as he aloft[e] dide expresse
> Wordes of loye or of heuynes,
> Meving and cher, byneþe of hem pleying,
> From point to point was alwey answering –
> Now trist, now glad, now hevy, and [now] liȝst,
> And face chaunged with a sodeyn siȝt,
> So craftily þei koude hem transfigure,
> Conformyng hem to þe chaunt[e]plure,
> Now to synge and sodeinly to wepe,
> So wel þei koude her observaunces kepe;
> (896-916)

Mehl has correctly remarked that the performance described by Lydgate "is not different from the way in which some pantomimes are commented on by a figure appearing as presenter in Elizabethan drama more than a century later" (1965: 3); nor does this practice differ consistently from the so-called mummings or disguisings, that is, "commentary on a mime performed simultaneously or subsequently", or "festive parades, usually in allegorical guise, which were frequently presented on special occasions, such as after a banquet" (ibid.).

Gradually becoming recurrent in early modern plays, this combination of a solo voice accompanying the gesture of mimes, however, was not the norm. Commenting upon the presence of a five-act distribution of *The Battle of Alcazar* with possibly five dumb shows following the speeches of the Presenter (but the 1594 Quarto has only three), Bradley has observed that "[t]here is

… very little normative evidence on which we can base an assumption of this intention to accompany them all with shows. Only five earlier extant plays are regularly equipped in that way – *Gorboduc* (1562), *Jocasta* (1566), *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* (1582), *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588), and *Locrine* (1594) – and only three of a later date: in *The Whore of Babylon* (1606) and two of Heywood's *Ages* plays, *The Golden Age* (1610) and the *Silver Age* (1611)" (1992: 217). It should be noticed, at all events, that in those early plays no formal chorus is either present or comments upon the dumb shows: in *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* and in *Locrine*, the function of the presenter/prologist is played by Mercury and Ate, respectively; in *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta* Chorus and dumb shows are dislocated quite afar from each other, at the end and beginning of each act, with no possible interaction but only occasional cross-references (see Mehl 1965: Part 2, chapter 3); finally in Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon* there is a prologue, not a Chorus, who introduces the first dumb show, and in Heywood's two plays the role of presenter is given to Homer. Apart from the *Spanish Tragedy*, whose only dumb show occurs during the fourth 'Chorus' of Andrea and Revenge, only the dramas featuring formal or actual presenters[16] – such as the *Battle of Alcazar*, or *Hengist, King of Kent* – rather than formal choruses, fit in the frame of a speaker commenting upon a pantomime. This seems to confirm that originally formal choruses had a different function from that of an individual speaker presenting or explicating the dumb show, a conjunction that seems to be attested only sparsely and at relatively later date (*The Christian Turned Turk*, 1612, and *The Bloody Banquet*, 1639). Besides, this also confirms that early choruses were not single in number, and that singularity possibly came to denote choruses only in their later overlapping with the solo prologist or the presenter.

It should also be mentioned that, as Mehl has argued with reference to dumb shows, the assumed Italian ascendancy of *intermedii*, originally proposed by Cunliffe (1912; see also McCaullay 1917), should be revised and related to a contamination of different traditions, as dumb shows "cannot be explained without reference to the Royal Entries, City Pageants and Lord Mayor's Shows" (Melh 1965: 6). This is not irrelevant to the fortune of the formal chorus in English drama, because the presence of dumb shows testifies to a practice of "employing various artistic means simultaneously"; this "also explains why rhetorical tragedies in the Senecan tradition were never really at home in England as they were in Italy and France" (ibid.: 4). Nor is it "surprising

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16. Mehl points out a few instances of the appearance of a 'presenter'; besides the one in the *Battle of Alcazar* he lists Heywood's *Four Prentices of London*, and Middleton's *Your Five Gallants* (1965: 6-7; n. 1, 18).

that the authors of even the first classical tragedies, such as *Gorboduc* and *Jocasta*, tried to relieve the monotony of the formal structure by inserting scenes of a pantomimic nature which present the moral of the play in the form of a pageant appealing vividly to the eye" (ibid.: 5). The coexistence, in the early tragic plays, of, albeit mutually unrelated, choruses and dumbs shows demonstrates, therefore, the need to experiment with different forms of theatrical performance. Their not fitting quite well with each other (ibid.: Part 2, ch. 3) proves that no real integration could be fully achieved until the chorus got closer to autochthonous framing-texts, taking over a different role from the Senecan one. Yet, the co-presence of chorus and dumb show also demonstrates the need, in these portions of drama, of an action involving a plurality of characters and actors, enlivening the play with variety and multitude.

In this respect, it should be noticed that, both in the 1560s, when playwrights "first wanted their Seneca whole in the form of complete translations and extensive imitations", and later, in the 1580s and 1590s, when they wanted him only "in parts" (Winston 2006: 30),[17] formal choruses generally included several characters, normally four in number (for instance in *Gorboduc*, *Gismond of Salerne* and *Tancred and Gismund*, but also in *The Glasse of Government*, 1575), or three (*Soliman and Perseda*, 1592), and more generally as an indefinite multitude (*The Tragedy of Antonie*, 1592, *Cleopatra*, 1593, *Cornelia*, 1594, *Octavia*, 1598, and in the early years of the seventeenth century, *Mariam*, 1602-4, *Philotas*, 1605, *The Monarchicke Tragedies*, 1607). The bare indication of 'Chorus' recurs from the late 1580s on, starting with the *Misfortunes of Arthur* (1587-88), and continuing with *Cornelia* (1594), *The Warres of Cyrus King of Persia* (1594), *Dr Faustus* (performed 23 times between 1594 and 1597), *Romeo and Juliet* (1597, 1599, but possibly composed between 1591-96), *Henry V* (1599), *David and Bethsabe* (1599), *Old Fortunatus* (1600), and *The Life and Death of Thomas Cromwell* (1602). The numerically unspecified chorus turns increasingly into the norm as the time goes by, so that in the first decade of the seventeenth century choruses, when present, are regularly unidentified in number and members (for instance *Catiline*, 1611, *A Christian Turned Turk*, 1612, *If you not know me* – chorus present only in the 1632 version –, *Alaham*, printed in 1633 but composed much earlier, *Mustapha*, 1609-33, *The Bloody Banquet*, 1639). In parallel with the gradual transformation of the plural chorus into an indistinct figure, possibly suggesting singularity (as will unequivocally be the case in *The Winter's Tale*), other changes occur: characters listed among the speakers at some point declare to be playing the part of the Chorus (as the

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17. For a reappraisal of the Senecan influence on the Elizabethans, besides Cunliffe 1893 and 1912, see Baker 1939; Charlton 1946; Kiefer 1978 and 1985; Braden 1985; Miola 1992; Boyle 1997; Coral Escolá 2007: 5-20.

ghost of Andrea and Revenge in the *Spanish Tragedy*), or suggest a gradual conflation of their own features with some of the chorus's qualities: for instance, they may be present throughout the play or may take up the commenting and interpretative function of the formal chorus, as in the case of the Presenter in the *Battle of Alcazar* (1588-89), of Gower in *Pericles* (1607-8?), or Raynulph in *Hengist King of Kent* (1615-20?). This overlapping of functions and roles is precisely the cause of critical disaccord over who does what in early modern drama, because the evidence is often contradictory and no general rule neatly to separate functions has yet been identified conclusively.

What can be safely affirmed, however, is that, in the course of about five decades, the term Chorus came to designate quite different phenomena, in both function and form, as well as the number of its components. Thus, taking for granted that the Chorus was normally played by a single speaker, dressed in a dark velvet cloak, possibly with a beard, who entered on stage after three blows of a trumpet, as was often the case with the prologue (Goussef 1962: 580-1; Weimann and Bruster 2004: 7-8), may mean to misconstrue and simplify a much more complex and fluid phenomenon. This is true also for plays not originally meant for the stage, such as the closet dramas of Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, of Elizabeth Cary, of Samuel Daniel and of Fulke Greville. They too adopted the chorus, and in following Seneca and his continental epigones, revised their models significantly,[18] offering the reader their own version of this part: plural and markedly lyrical.

Thus, in the space of a few decades, choruses, in print and on stage, came to include a wide range of different dramatic forms which evolved over time, gradually abandoning the Senecan model they sprang from, while often retaining much of the non-naturalistic, artificial, and lyrical drive that characterized their original impetus. Here suffice it to mention that, as in the Senecan translations recalled above the choric parts were identified by both metre and typeface (iambic pentameters marked in Roman type as opposed to couplets of fourteeners in Gothic type), which betrayed an ascendancy of print culture, also in the plays written in the imitation of Seneca before the turn of the century choruses were metrically contrasted with the rest of the play. They exhibited a perceptibly different lyrical pace from the monotonous base of rhyming iambic pentameters or the more discursive blank verse in which the rest of the characters spoke, often featuring rather complex stanzaic forms, or even sonnets. In these years, examples of choruses in blank verse are definitely sparse (for instance in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Soliman and Perseda*, and in Farrant's *The Warres of Cyrus King of Persia*).

Besides, choruses, like prologues, became quite fluid also in another sense

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18. On Fulke Greville see the recent Roscoe 2013.

as they could be easily added and removed depending on the occasion, being alterable "performance by performance" (Stern 2009: 109). As has been further remarked, "as prologues are generally linked to first days, choruses on occasion may, too, belong only to first or special days, not to all performances – or, rather, any 'removable' text might sometimes, perhaps often, have been removed (for any removable text can also be returned at any time)" (ibid.).

Romeo and Juliet seems to provide one of these instances of fluid choruses. Most of all it stands out as a glaring example of how chorus and chorality took two radically different paths at a very early stage in the history of early modern drama, when English dramaturgy was still striving to emancipate itself from the classical model, inaugurating a new phase of dramatic experimentation.

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It is still uncertain when *Romeo and Juliet* was composed, although critics tend to assign it to a period comprised between 1591 and 1596 (see for instance Chambers 1930: 345-6; Baldwin 1959). It has been contended (Melchiori 1983, 1994, 1999) that if Shakespeare started work on it in the early 1590s, when theatres were closed because of the plague (between 1592 and 1594), he might have wished to experiment with a new lyrical genre to be performed by a company of children for a private production. This would explain the stylization of characters, and above all the two choruses in the form of a sonnet, besides the madrigal-cast of the lamentation scene (4.5). The re-opening of theatres, however, would have prompted Shakespeare to abandon the experiment and adapt the play for a company of adult players. He would have forgotten about the choruses, apart from the two already composed, and at the end of 4.5 he would have added the comic scene featuring the famous actor William Kemp, who in 1594 had joined Shakespeare's Company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Other hypotheses have been put forward, and the presence of only two choruses has been explained in a variety of ways. For instance, on the basis of 'internal', rather than historical, premises, J.D. Palmer has reasonably contended that, after the second Chorus, the "sonnet world" it introduced "begins to come to life", so that its "preparatory function in the play has been performed, and he is needed no more" (1982: 511). Whichever the reason, what can be safely argued is that after the original composition the play underwent revision of a collaborative nature. Today there is fairly general consensus on considering Q1 and Q2 two different plays: Q1 dating from 1597 and possibly composed between the end of 1595 and the early 1596, and Q2, dating from 1599. We also know that the play was first produced at the Theatre, that in 1597 it moved to

the Curtain (Gurr 1996), that the company resorted to a practice of doubling to cover all the roles, and we may also conjecture that the second Chorus "was hardly ever performed" (Melchiori 1983: 791).

Although it was one of the first plays to experiment with chorus and chorality, *Romeo and Juliet*'s originality has often been passed off in silence or at best played down. In her long essay on early modern chorus, for instance, McCaullay significantly, and erroneously, contended that "there is one lonely chorus between the first act and the second; a chorus no better than some already considered, and worst than most" (1917: 184). Evidently referring to neither quarto edition (Q2 is ignored and Q1 is only mentioned in passing), she heavily criticized the piece with the support of Dr Johnson. His objection was that the chorus "not only reiterates what the first act has already presented, but also 'relates it without [adding] the improvement of any moral sentiment'" (ibid.; Johnson 1906: 186). Claiming that the piece she referred to was not in the first Folio and attributing it to the Folio printed in 1632, she concluded that "[i]ts omission from the version of the play printed in Shakespeare's lifetime and from the folio published by his friends and admirers after his death, might well suggest that it was added for the exigency of a later performance, to do honor to some actor or some poetaster" – possibly "a later addition by someone who had, obviously, small care for stylistic congruity" (1917: 184). The play, in fact, has more than one Chorus: Q2 has two; Q1 has a prologue reproducing, in a shorter form, the first Chorus of Q2; the first folio has a Chorus with no mention of it being a prologue (identical with the second Chorus of Q2), so that Q1 and F together have two Choruses just like Q2. It is worth pointing out that the alternative headings – "Prologue. Corus [sic]" and "Chorus" in Q2; "Prologue" alone (Q1); "Chorus" (F) – clearly suggest an overlapping of choric and prologic functions possibly for the first time in early modern drama.

Before *Romeo and Juliet*, in fact, choruses and prologues were normally kept separate. *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1587-88), which, as recalled above, is the first play to have had a Chorus with no specified characters in both identity and number,[19] presents five Choruses, one at the end of each act, different from both the Prologue, played by the Ghost of Gorlois, and from the Epilogue. Besides, the first two Choruses' elaborate metres (six- and eight-lines stanzas of iambic pentameters rhyming *ababcc* and *ababccdd*, respectively) testify to a need to distinguish these parts lyrically from the less elaborate rest of the play and the other three Choruses, all in blank verse. The four speakers (Chorus I, II, III, IV) intervene three times in sequence, thus suggesting individual

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19. At least in the list of speakers, because it clearly comprises four. The closing line of the "Argument and manner of the first dumb shewe" specifies that "After their [of the nuns in the dumb show] departure, the fowre which represented the Chorus tooke their places" (Cunliffe 1912: 225).

performances within an indistinct group, which points to a gradual thinning of the choral performance into solo speeches. Poetic experimentations were also carried out in the above-mentioned closet dramas of 1592-94, whose extremely sophisticated patterns of chorus lines reflect an awareness of the lyrical import of choral parts. There is nothing in these texts, however, to suggest that either the chorus is a one-man show, or has prologic features.

Also from 1594, though, dates an early choric example of what in fact may be interpreted as a prologue, albeit undefined as such in print. In a piece addressed "To the Audience", clearly misplaced in the middle of the second act of Robert Farrant's *The Warres of Cyrus King of Persia*, the speaker as prologist and mouthpiece of the actors claims that "needlesse antickes imitations, / Or shewes, or new deuises sprung a late" have been "exiled from [their own] tragicke stage",

> As trash of their tradition, that can bring
> Nor instance, nor excuse. For *what they do*
> *Instead of mournfull plaints our Chorus sings*,
> Although it be against the vpstart guise,
> Yet warranted by graue antiquitie,
> We will reuiue the which hath long beene done.
> (n.p.; emphasis added)

Here the "Chorus" is the individual singer ("sings") of what characters *do*, not of mournful plaints, as in the contemporary revival of ancient Latin drama. Yet no such Chorus is extant so that its actual characteristics and functions remain purely conjectural.

A few years later, in 1598, Robert Greene's *The Scottish History of James the Fourth* presents the heading "Chorus" twice in the course of the play, first at the entrance of the Scotsman Bohan between acts 3 and 4, and then at the entrance of Bohan and Oberon, King of Fairies, between acts 4 and 5. In his 1921 edition, A.E.H. Swaen extended the same heading to three other interventions of Bohan and Oberon placing the indication II Chor. and III Chor. in the margins of the text, at the beginning of acts 2 and 3, respectively (in this last case the original printed edition had "Chorus Actus 3" only after their exit and before "Scena prima"). This adds to the already befuddling set-up of the play due to the appearance of the same Bohan and Oberon also in the opening scene before act 1, thus tacitly suggesting an overlapping between what is to all effects an induction (the portion preceding the beginning of the play) and the presence of what is occasionally called "Chorus" during the play (Swaen makes it explicit in the list of speakers that Bohan and Oberon play the induction *and* the Chorus).

Finally, in his 1599-1600 *Old Fortunatus* Thomas Dekker devises two Choruses as distinct portions of the play from both the Prologue and the Epilogue, but,

again, only to suggest a possible conflation of Prologue and Chorus. The former, indeed, evidently features as a threshold speaker, meta-theatrically positioned in-between the author, the actors, and the spectators. He prologically declares dependence on the Muse's help and suggests identification with the Chorus in trying to get the meaning of the story through to the spectators:

> So some will deign to smile, where all might frown:
> And for this small circumference must stand,
> For the imagined surface of much land,
> Of many kingdoms, and since many a mile
> Should here be measured out, our Muse entreats
> Your thoughts to help poor art, and to allow
> That *I may serve as Chorus* to her senses;
> She begs your pardon, for she'll send *one forth*,
> *Not when the laws of poesy do call,*
> *But as the story needs*; your gracious eye
> Gives life to Fortunatus' historie.
> (ll. 14-24, n.p.; emphasis added)

Like the piece addressed to the audience in the *Warres of Cyrus*, this one too looks like a statement of dramatic poetics. The Chorus is not meant to be choral, he is not expected to sing a song collectively, but is an authoritative narrative voice explaining individually the dramatic action. This was what the more famous Chorus of *Henry V* (1599-1600) was accomplishing in those years by supplying between-act information on the story.

The composition, performance, and publication of *Romeo and Juliet* are located precisely in this context of gradual transformation of the Senecan-like chorus towards a new prologic and narrative form. As we have seen, through the voice of an authorized individual speaker, who retains the gravity and authority of the ancient collective chorus, without being one, Elizabethan drama gradually came to offer a fresh interlacing of action and narrative on different dramatic levels and with different degrees of authority. *Romeo and Juliet* is likely to be the play which inaugurated this new conception of the chorus. At the same time, it is also the play which, most daringly, recuperated the artificial dimension of ancient chorality in a polyphonic lamentation piece. This was exemplary of the counterpointing musical culture of the age, and offered an updated version of lyrical drama beyond the traditional autochthonous tradition of responsorial performance. I will come to this peculiar scene in moment. But before looking at it more closely, it is worth considering the transformation that the Chorus proper underwent in this play, acquiring a strikingly hybrid form: a lyrical guise vaguely reminiscent of its classical origin combined with new prologic features, accommodated to a markedly meta-theatrical and narrative stance typical of the framing texts of medieval drama, as well as of the early modern novella tradition.

The first noteworthy feature of these two Choruses is that they are in the form of a sonnet. This suggests an attempt to adjust them to the lyrical dimension appropriate to the amorous theme of the tragedy about to begin. Yet this choice proves peculiar also in other respects, since sonnets were not normally used for choruses in English drama. Those present in Gascoigne's *Jocasta* (1566) and Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra* (1593-94) – one dedicated to a fairly ordinary complaint on the fickleness of Fortune, and the other one made up of four sonnets on the late unruliness of Egypt – have no sophisticated framing function as those in *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare would use the sonnet again shortly afterwards, in the sixth Chorus of *Henry V* (1599-600), this time adjusting it to the function of the epilogue.[20] But in those years the example of *Romeo and Juliet* stands as unique. The closest parallel, as a matter of fact, is not with a play, but with the "Argument" in sonnet form at the beginning of Arthur Brooke's *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562). This helps better identify the actual contiguity between the play and the poem which so far has been considered as its more likely source as regards the plot. Set side by side, Argument and Chorus extend this contiguity to other aspects, casting light on the function of narrative in this tragedy starting from its prologic locus.

Compared to Brooke's piece, the first Chorus in either quarto version is extremely refined. Brooke squeezes the subject into the usual fourteen lines with hardly any sense of poetical subtlety, summing up the tragic action step by step, from Romeo's and Juliet's sudden falling in love and their secret marriage with the help of a friar, to Tybalt's rage after three months of their secret enjoyment of mutual love and Romeo's ban for killing him; then he moves on to the arranged marriage with Paris and Juliet's resolution to enact the show of her own death, to Romeo's fatal mistake and the two lovers' tragic suicide. No significant comment is made here, differently from the highly moralistic preface and rest of the poem, where the narrator makes unequivocal remarks on the lovers' culpability. Also in the two quartos the Chorus introduces the action and foretells the play's moral on the scapegoating function of the two lovers. Yet, it does more: it advertises the play and asks for theatrical cooperation in melodious accents, rich with alliterations and

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20. Schneider (2011: 14) correctly points out that "[t]he last speech of the play is heralded by the stage direction 'Enter Chorus', to which some later editors have added 'as Epilogue' or simply changed to 'Epilogue'. These emendations possibly recognize the speech as different in intent, tone and structure from the Chorus speeches in the body of the play. Certainly it is the only Chorus speech that is in rhyme, and it is the only one that refers to the playwright as 'our bending author'. It also begs the audience's indulgence in the last line: 'In your fair minds let this acceptance take', a characteristic plea in many epilogues. At the beginning and end of *Henry V*, therefore, the identity of the Chorus cover uncertainly before finally shading into the role of the Prologist and Epilogist".

expressive parallelisms that mark from the start the crafty presence of a speaker who negotiates the audience's attention and reflects upon the potential and limits of the stage:[21]

Q1	Q2
Two houshold Frends *alike* in dignitie,	Two households both *alike* in dignity,
(In faire Verona, where we lay our Scene)	(In fair Verona where we lay our scene)
From ciuill broyles broke into enmitie,	From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Whose ciuill warre makes ciuill hands uncleane.	Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatall loynes of these two foes,	*From forth the fatal loins of these two foes*
A paire of starre-crost Louers tooke their life:	*A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life,*
Whose misaduentures, piteous ouerthrowes,	Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
(Through the continuing of their Fathers strife,	Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
And death-markt passage of their Parents rage)	The fearful passage of their death-marked love,
Is now the two howres traffique of our Stage.	And the continuance of their parents' rage,
The which if you with *patient eares attend,*	Which but their children's end, naught could remove,
What here *we want wee'l studie to amend.*	*Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;*
	The which if you with *patient ears attend,*
	What here shall miss, *our toil shall strive to mend.*

While providing a neat viewpoint on the story, both versions show awareness of being a peculiar type of narrative endowed with the framing function of introducing the performance as a cooperative 'auditory' event, requiring the audience's attention ("What here *we want wee'l studie to amend*", Q1, l.12, "What here shall miss, *our toil shall strive to mend*", Q2, l. 14, emphasis added). But if it is made clear that "the interpretive skills of the audience are partly responsible for the significance of the play" (Hunter and Lichtenfels 2009: 112), there is no undercutting of the Chorus's own narrative authority, nor of the actors' role, entrusted with the task of getting the meaning of the action through to the audience. This hints at a peculiar balance between narrative monologism, theatrical self-advertisement (as in the medieval banns; cf. Chambers 1925; Giaccherini 2013: 164-6), and negotiation of performative collaboration. This interlacing of functions discloses the composite nature of the metamorphosis that the classical chorus undergoes in this piece. Located in a peculiar theatrical position, both in and out of the play, this Chorus fashions himself as the mouthpiece of a reliable perspective on a story presumably wellknown at the time through its novella versions, of which he retains the diegetic control over the story. From a liminal space, situated between the actors and the real world of the audience to whom he tells how to judge the events, he does not claim testimonial authority, and yet is the repository of its truth. Possibly for the first time in early modern English drama, this Chorus, engaged in a performative transaction for the success of the play,

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21. Quotations are from Shakespeare 1597 and 1599; emphasis added.

shows an attempt to accommodate the classical name he bears to an entirely new dramatic conception of the framing text.

To get back to the content of the story recounted, it should not pass unnoticed that it appears extraordinarily simplified compared to the complexities of the tragedy which will soon be shown on stage. The first eleven lines, in Q2, and the first nine, in Q1, lay emphasis on the sacrifice of the lovers which is needed "to bury their parents' strife" (Q2, l. 8). These lines take up a generic suggestion of envy contained in lines 25-32 of Brooke's poem and develop out of it a plot of unquenchable fury. Brooke's emphasis on the two families' likeness in dignity and (un)fortune is also of both Q1 and Q2, but Q2 makes their enmity more ancestral, talking about "ancient grudge" (l. 2) – Q1 has "civill broyls" – which contrasts with the allusion to a former friendship in Q1 (l.1: "two households Friends alike in dignitie"), absent in Q2 ("both alike"). The major difference between Q1 and Q2 is contained in lines 10-11 of Q2, which make the reconciliatory function of the two lovers' death central to the tragic course, drawing a direct line between civil crisis and reconciliation through Romeo's and Juliet's star-marked deaths. This passage is missing in Q1. The perspective on the story, however, is unequivocal in both texts: the lovers have no liberty to take their lives in their own hands because they are the puppets of a superior Will, be it the stars or Fortune, so that they are doomed to fall in love and die for it. And yet, the ensuing action does not smoothly adhere to this view. As a matter of fact, the tragedy risks being hardly attractive if reduced to the sole issue of civic peace sketched by this Chorus (Kottman 2012: 4), and what follows in the action fully demonstrates that something else is definitely at stake.

This point needs stressing because it is precisely in this clash that the play unveils an awareness of the singularity of drama and its extraordinary capacity for complicating and questioning the narrative it derives from, and whose authority it subtly erodes. In passing, it may be noticed that the issue of narrative authority may have been heavily underlined if the piece was recited by the actor playing the Prince, a hypothesis put forward by Melchiori (1983), for the obvious reverberations this would have had on the idea itself of authority.[22] Yet whoever may have been the speaker, the framing voice of the Chorus is no longer thematically and dramatically integrated in the play, but marks a rift between its narrative message and the actual drama

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22. "*Romeo and Juliet*, apart from the analogy of roles (the clown, the confidant), reveals subtler aspects of this use of doubling. The Prince who speaks the formal epilogue to the play must also have been cast as the Chorus, that is to say, the Prologue, since, as I tried to show, the second chorus was hardly ever performed. He is in fact the objective narrator, in contrast with Friar Lawrence (another possible speaker of the prologue) who is instead a manipulator of the action, while Benvolio-Balthasar is a witness" (Melchiori 1983: 791).

shown to the audience: between its being a voice situated on the threshold of drama encasing the action and the encased drama on stage, with its multiple voices and clashing perspectives. D.J. Palmer has correctly pointed out that the "Prologue's fatalistic view of *Romeo and Juliet* as 'a pair of star-cross'd lovers' places too much emphasis on external agency", because "[w]hile it is true that each of the lovers has at different times a premonition of disaster, they are far from being merely the passive victims of fate" (1982: 510). Their active role, which is both self-inquisitive and subversive of family rule, problematizes the Chorus's seemingly linear perspective of an all-determining, transcendental design. This is an important issue, as it suggests that the Chorus is either an accretion to the play, or a paratextual tool functional to offering a competitive representational model in respect to drama; it demonstrates how narrative and drama in fact diverge in telling and showing one and the same story. This is possibly the subtlest way in which the Chorus as prologue comes to unveil a meta-theatrical drive besides and beyond the explicit reference to the performance contained in the final couplet. At the same time, it also suggests on what the play's self-promoting strategies could rely, unveiling an awareness that doomed love and scapegoating were attractive subjects.

The second Chorus, present only in Q2 (and in the Folio), is normally positioned at the beginning of 2.1, but as these early editions have no division into acts and scenes, it has often been argued that, in a Latin-like fashion, it rather functions as an epilogue. This has been the norm at least since Samuel Johnson's already recalled famous remark that "[t]he use of this Chorus is not easily discovered; it conduces nothing to the progress of the play, but relates what is already known, or what the next scene will show" (Johnson 1906: 186; see also Blakemore Evans in Shakespeare 2003: 102). The uncertain position of this piece shows yet another possible transformation of its classical antecedent, because it neither provides a comment integrated in the action, nor is it a prologue, but a between-act piece bridging different portions of drama. It has also been argued that, although normally expunged from performances, its narration is in tune with a play often interrupted by narratives, whether of premonition or of summary and recapitulation. It also helps the spectator or the reader to concentrate on other aspects than the story, "such as emotion, circumstance, language and so on" (Hunter and Lichtenfels 2009: 113). Besides, it offers a parody of "the choral element in classical drama, and of the opening sonnet to the play", and as such it "undermines any sense of generic stability" (ibid.). Whether it can really be seen as a parody, especially of any classical choral dimension, and whether it helps to focus on aspects other than the plot, are issues that remain open to debate. What appears less questionable, though, is that this Chorus brings a step forward the evaluative teaching of the anonymous, but authoritative, voice-over of the first one, and tells us that

the fickleness of Romeo's love is not to be held guilty after all, since the two lovers have been conquered by a beyond-all-boundaries passion:

> Now old desire doth in his deathbed lie,
> And young affection gapes to be his heir;
> That fair for which love groaned for and would die,
> With tender Juliet matched is now not fair.
>
> Now Romeo is beloved and loves again,
> Alike bewitchèd by the charm of looks,
> But to his foe supposed he must complain,
> And she steal love's sweet bait from fearful hooks.
>
> Being held a foe, he may not have access
> To breathe such vows as lovers use to swear,
> And she as much in love, her means much less
> To meet her new belovèd anywhere:
>
> But passion lends them power, time means, to meet,
> Temp'ring extremities with extreme sweet.

These two examples show how the Chorus, while displaying affinity with the monological stance of the epilogue pronounced by the Prince, is clearly shifting its function towards meta-theatre and an authoritative affirmation of the ideological issues at stake, in stark contrast with the problematic dramatization of the story enacted in the course of the play. The intermodal confrontation between the narrative conveyed by these two pieces and the action (or the other narratives) they frame (and bridge) calls into question the nature of drama itself: its polyphonic and conflicting dimension as opposed to a more assertive and monological type of narrative from which the story is derived and which is absorbed and remoulded in its liminal, choric, places. Chorality is evidently redundant here and leaves room to the solo performance of an anonymous speaker retaining but the name of the ancient Chorus.

Yet chorality does remain an issue in this tragedy, although of a different kind. The orchestration of collective scenes is a case in point, with the gradual arrival of characters and citizens in the brawls taking place in the streets of Verona (see 1.1 especially). The lamentation scene in 4.5 is yet another case, and a very peculiar one. The closest model for this last piece is Hecuba and the Chorus of women in Seneca's *Troas*, where Hecuba gives them directions on how to weep over Hector's fate, and they lament and act accordingly (1.2). *Troas* presents another comparable piece in 4.4, where Hecuba, Andromache and Helen lament over Priam, Hector and Paris, respectively, with the support of the Chorus. It has been pointed out that autochthonous examples of threnody may be found in Peele's *David and Bethsabe* (10.1022ff.), in *Locrine* (3.2), as well as in Marlowe's *2 Tamburlaine the Great* (5.3), where there are at

least three characters performing their choral-like lament onstage. Mention of the "laments of the three Marys in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century mystery plays" has also been made to suggest that in this "early stage of the development of the lamentation-scene" the pattern was that of three women joining in "antiphonal lament", each "taking up and echoing the turns of phrase used by the preceding speaker" (Clemen 1968: 186).[23] *Richard III* provides yet another such instance in the famous 4.4 (ll. 9-135), where Queen Margaret, Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York participate in an "antiphonal lament" in which they "hardly seem to be individuals at all, but simply voices in a chorus" (ibid.: 180). Clemen is positive in underlining the antiphonal dimension of the performance in at least the last two examples, with particular regard to the canon structure of the last one, where "the theme is shared by several voices, now in counterpoint, now in unison" (ibid.). This description, though, is more suggestive than literal, since the pattern is definitely irregular, although occasional echoes are perceiveable in anaphoric and epiphoric position. But this echo-effect is not sufficient to make for substantial counterpoint. What we find in 4.5 of *Romeo and Juliet*, instead, appears closer to one such experimentation and the way it is carried out proves daringly and intriguingly new.

This is an extremely artificial scene, where the mourning characters show pain for Juliet's apparent death while in fact revealing a fundamental "propensity for solipsism" (Moisan 1983: 394). This piece is followed by a "[c]omically indecorous and ill-tuned" scene, with the musicians and Peter deconstructing "Edwards' *Paradise of Dainty Devices*", a collection of poems summing up "the kind of lachrymose rhetoric" just heard, which reminds us "of why we may not have felt disposed to listen closely to what was said in it" (ibid.: 402). As a matter of fact, in that scene of fortissimo lamentation, sound prevails over meaning, and, if looked at more closely, confusion over sound. As Levin has observed, discord and harmony are what seems to be produced in a scene construed as "virtually an operatic quartet" (1960: 10) significantly and innovatively making for dissonance.

Giorgio Melchiori (2007) has pointed out that Shakespeare shows here an experiment in musical patterns without music: there are no songs in the play, but human voices are sometimes used as musical instruments by relying exclusively on the sound and combination of words. In particular, what Melchiori had in mind was the Italian madrigal. Often understood as a word for a short love poem, it in fact defined "a part song for three or more voices only, without instrumental accompaniment" (ibid.: 241). Italian madrigals were collected and published in London in 1588 by Nicola Yonge in a book entitled

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23. See in particular "The Resurrection of the Lord" in the *Wakefield Cycle* (ll. 334-81), and *Play 38* in the *York Cycle* (ll. 187-234); see Stevens and Cawley (1994); Purvis (1966).

Musica Transalpina, and they must have become well known if they were ironically mentioned in Robert Greene's 1589 *Menaphon* as extremely sorrowful compositions, but with no allusion to their polyphonic quality ("If a wrinckle appear in her brow, then our sheaperd must put on his working day face, and frame nought but dolefull madrigals of sorrow"; Greene 1589: 25). Their Anglicization, though, dates from a few years later (1594), when Thomas Morely, pupil to William Byrd, published his first book of *Madrigalles to foure Voyces*, precisely "at a time when Shakespeare, after writing his two poems *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, was presumably at work on what can be considered his only truly lyrical tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*" (Melchiori 2007: 241). As Uhler has suggested, "Morley's four-voice madrigals were highly significant of the new spark in London's atmosphere of art. They are not only dramatic music in themselves, but the cause of musical drama in other artists" (1955: 330). On the same assumption, Melchiori has demonstrated that the main structural features of these two passages in both Q2 and, to a lesser degree, Q1 fall into a clearly contrapuntal pattern that suggests an operatic performance involving chorality, rather than sequential utterances.

To summarize Melchiori's contention about Q2 (2007: 247-50, see Appendix, Table 1): 1) Paris, Lady Capulet, and Capulet start off with lines having exactly the same structure, while the Nurse's "fourfould repetition" of the onomatopoeic syllable "woe" sounds like a "wailing echo to the words of the other three"; 2) in the following line, the Nurse "falls into step with the rest", who begin with "a sequence of five extremely similar syllables"; 3) in line three the Nurse again differs from the others, who close on a polysyllabic word, but "shares with them the initial insistence on alliterative iteration of words and sounds"; 4) in line four, which is Paris's last one, there is overall concord in the speakers' exclamatory impetus, featuring "interjection (O, O, O …) and repetition (love, life/ etc.)"; 5) at this point (ll. 5-6), "the impression of confusion increases", because the speakers utter "different lines, and the Nurse's last line is incomplete as if the expression of her woe could go on for ever". This supplies enough evidence to prove the potential for a choral performance of a piece which Moisan has rightly judged as displaying "a greater congruence between content and form than is commonly surmised, for the experience that does not occur is mirrored by what the rhetoric does not address, namely the reality of death in all of its immanence and importunity" (1983: 391). In his view, the characters' predilection for a rhetoric of repetition wrought on sound effects provides insulation "against the silence death brings" (ibid.). Paris's grieving comes through a proliferation of accusations as if excess could make up for the nonsense of death and the inadequacy of language to articulate it, including the mimicking of Romeo's early oxymora ("brawling love", "loving hate") in his "love in death" compound of line 4. Dis-

connectedness and reiteration feature also in the other characters' speeches, Lady Capulet's and the Nurse's especially, showing a distinct proclivity for sound over sense. Both Melchiori and Moisan are very keen on underlining the performative and semantic implications of this extraordinarily artificial scene, which, according to Melchiori, once transposed in Q1, shows the crafty hand of a reporter who does away with the Nurse's wailing "background noise" and devises five entirely new lines for the other three speeches, "which have hardly any word in common with the corresponding [ones] recorded in Q2" (2007: 246). As remarked by Erne (Shakespeare 2007: 137), these three parts "are not only of identical length but also have a similar structure, beginning with an exclamation before raising self-indulgent rhetorical questions about the speakers themselves (e.g. ll. 86, 91, 95-6) in a way Q2's do not". Compared with Q2, the lines appear more consequential: Paris addresses a personified sorrow with redundant and hyperbolic tones ("sad-fac'd", "map of misery", l. 1) and asks himself why he has wished to see this "unjust" and "impartial" (i.e. 'partial'; cf. *OED*, 3) day. Thus, hitting on the unfolding of tragic irony, he bemoans the sudden and unexpected reversal of fortune. Lady Capulet's speech is less varied and more wailing, with repeated interjections ("Alacke", ll. 3, 5) making for outright lament at the perception of nonsense and unjustice, a radical feeling which also Capulet shares and expresses with cross references to the cruelty and partiality of destiny mentioned by Paris.

The dramatic and musical quality of this piece, in either case, is all the more striking if one compares it with the corresponding lines of Brooke's poem, which, within an overall 48 lines (2.424-72), contain an eighteen-line speech by Lady Capulet, followed by the narrator's description of the other characters' grieving – Capulet's especially, struck dumb by pain –, as well as by the dismay of the whole city of Verona. Shakespeare had to render this long narrative piece dramatic by adjusting it to the requirements of stage action. He may have wanted the characters to perform their woe visually, but no stage direction stands as indication of gestures of sorrow. Yet he certainly worked on the piece aurally, and in this regard Q1 retains an especially interesting cue: a stage direction suggesting that at some point all the characters pronounce at least two lines together (or all the following lines): "*All at once cry out and wring their hands. / All cry*: All our ioy, and all our hope is dead, / Dead, lost, vndone, absented, wholy fled" (17.83-4; emphasis added). Q2, in turn, seems to allude to the confusion produced by the performance itself by having the Friar quip on the word confusion, meaning both distraction and noise ("Peace ho, for shame! *Confusion's* cure lives not / *In these confusions*", 4.5.65-6; emphasis added). This evidence is clearly suggestive of a peculiar type of chorality relying on counterpoint and simultaneous utterance.

And yet, this same evidence may also be suggestive of no less than another

type of chorality, at least as far as Q1 is concerned. The modularity of the speeches in the two cases, in fact, is not the same, since the identifiable patterns seem to hint at different performative potentials. While Q2 displays regular speech patterns both syntactically and in the number of syllables per line, as well as in rhythmical and alliterative schemes, Q1 shows reduced parallelisms in terms of word length, as well as modular syntactic and discursive units (see Appendix, Table 1). Besides, Q1's lines are more discursive and less fragmentary than Q2's, and appear to cohere less in terms of lexical and sound regularity than those in the other quarto. They also display a more elaborate form of counterpoint, bringing together the speeches through lexical or syntactic repetition alternatively two by two, as if one character were followed high on the heels by the next in taking up and variating part of his/her cue (for instance Lady Capulet's combination of "to see" and "this day" in line 2 recurs in split form in Paris's and Capulet's second lines, respectively: "... I desird to see", "To see this day, this miserable day", "Why to this day"). This creates an echo effect that reverberates from line to line and from one speaker to the next, extending to distant lines through lexical iteration (as in ll. 1, 3, 5: "unjust, impartial destinies"), thus unveiling a clearly coherent design underneath a seemingly disjointed set of speeches. This canon-like structure becomes apparent especially if each speaker pronounces each line sequentially, rather than in unison, with Lady Capulet providing an only slightly different tonality featuring an enhanced exclamatory register. Rich with alliterative effects, especially on the liquid /l/ and the plosive /d/ ("Alack the day, alacke and welladay"), her lines supply a protracted wailing effect derived from a sustained high-pitch voicing of grief that replaces the Nurse's prolonged interjections and exclamations in Q2 (see Appendix, Table 2).

This is why, contrary to a reading of the stage direction present in Q1 as proof of a collective utterance of the four lines, the stronger impression is that this direction rather concerns only the two lines immediately following, which in fact contain unequivocal indication of plurality: "All *our* ioy, and all *our* hope is dead / Dead, lost vndone, absented, wholy fled" (my emphasis). Perhaps it should not go unnoticed that, after this outburst of collective dismay, all the characters resume an individual attitude in expressing their own grief, replacing the plural pronoun with the singular "I". More could be noticed on the sound patterns and on how they affect both meaning and intention. Yet what has been pointed out suffices to suggest that there may be alternative readings to the current view that "the reporter was able to make little of the performed confusions" (Jowett in Wells and Taylor 1987: 300; see also Melchiori 2007: 245ff.), unless this means that whoever wrote this part either assisted to a different type of performance or simply devised a new and different one.

All the textual interpretations put forward to date are still largely con-

jectural (including Q1 as a reported text), and no definitive say is possible as to the degree of the testimonial quality of these texts regarding the actual or potential performance registered (or envisaged) here. However, what can be reasonably argued is that a loose thematic thread runs through Q1 and Q2, for instance in Capulet's only reference to his child and in all the speeches' consistent mention of the sadness of the time. It can also be maintained that both Q1 and Q2 show an acute awareness of the performative potential of choral polyphony, although in different ways. My opinion is that the elaborate articulation of anaphoric and epiphoric references in Q1 is neither casual nor necessarily dependent on the faulty memory of a reporter. It rather seems to suggest a different choral conception from Q2, more suitable to a sequential type of performance. This would fulfill an idea of choral counterpoint as the development of, and variation upon, a semantic or sound unit derived from a long-experimented upon antiphonal model. Precisely this model, which was passed down to the Renaissance from the medieval liturgy and through scattered instances of sixteenth-century drama, is here revised and enhanced (see Appendix Table 3, for possible speech distribution in Q2 and Q1).

Whatever option proves more tenable, discordant vocality is unquestionably prominent in both Q2 and Q1 within what appears to be a polyphonic pattern which has clearly superseded the traditional responsorial form of liturgical performance as well as the Senecan threnodic example of *Troas*. Confusion within harmony is the dramatic experimentation attempted by Shakespeare in a play that sets its lyrical tone from its initial narrative Chorus: while depriving this Chorus of chorality, it eventually recreates it musically, through dissonance, in a choral performance without a Chorus.

Appendix

Q2

	PARIS	CAPULET WIFE	NURSE	CAPULET
1	Beguiled, divorced, wrongèd, spited, slain 2 3 **2 2 1**	Accursed, unhappy, wretched, hateful day! **2 3 2 2 1**	O woe, O woeful, woeful, woeful day! 1 1 1 2 2 2 1	Despised, distressed, hated, martyred, killed! **2 3 2 2 1**
2	Most detestable death, by thee beguiled, **1 3 1 1 1 2**	Most miserable hour that e'er time saw **1 3 1 1 1 1 1**	Most lamentable day, most woeful day **1 3 1 1** 2 1	Uncomfortable time, why cam'st thou now 4 1 1 1 1 1
3	By cruel, cruel, thee quite overthrown! 1 1 1 1 1 3	In lasting labor of his pilgrimage! **1 2 2 1 1 3**	That ever, ever I did yet behold! **1 2 2 1 1 1 2**	To murder, murder our solemnity? **1 2 2 1 4**
4	O love, O life, not life, but love in death! **1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1**	But one, poor one, one poor and loving child, **1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 2 1**	O day, O day, O day, O hateful day, **1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 2 1**	O child, O child, my soul and not my child! **1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1**
5		But one thing to rejoice and solace in, 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 1	Never was seen so black a day as this! 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	Dead art thou, alack, my child is dead, **1 1 1 2 1 1 1 1**
6		And cruel death hath catched it from my sight! 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	O woeful day, O woeful day... 1 2 1 1 2 1	And with my child my joys are burièd. **1 1 1 1 1 1 2**

Q1

	PARIS	CAPULET WIFE	NURSE	CAPULET
1	O sad fac'd sorrow map of misery, 1 1 1 2 2 1 1 3	O woe, alacke, distrest, why should I liue? 1 1 2 2 1 1 1 1		Cruel, vniust, impartiall destinies, 1 2 3 3
2	Why this sad time haue I desird to see. **1 1 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 1**	To see this day, this miserable day. 1 1 1 1 3 1		Why to this day haue you preseru'd my life? **1 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 1**
3	This day, this vniust, this impartiall day 1 1 1 2 1 3 1	Alacke the time that euer I was borne, 2 1 1 1 2 1 1 1		Too see my hope, my stay, my ioy, my life, 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
4	Wherein I hop'd to see my comfort full, **2 1 1 1 1 1 1 2 1**	To be partaker of this destinie. 1 1 3 1 1 3		Depriude of sence, of life, of all by death, **2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1**
5	To be depriude by suddaine destinie. 1 1 2 1 2 3	Alacke the day, alacke and welladay. 2 1 1 2 1 3		Cruell, vniust, impartiall destinies. 1 2 3 3

The figures below the lines indicate the number of syllables

Table 1

	P	LC	C
1	O sad fac'd sorrow map of misery, a1 a2 — a3	O woe, *alacke*, distrest, *why* should I *liue?* a1 — b1 — b2 — b3	**Cruel, vniust, impartiall destinies.** c1 — c2 — c3 — c4
2	*Why* this sad time haue I desird to see. b2 — d1 a2 d2 — d3	To see this *day*, this miserable *day* d3 — d1 e1 d1 — a3 — e1	*Why* to this day haue you preseru'd my *life?* b2 — d1 e1 — b3
3	This *day*, this **vniust**, this **impartiall** *day* d1 — e1 d1 c2 d1 — c3 — e1	*Alacke* the time that euer I was borne, b1 — d2	*Too see* **my hope, my** stay, **my** ioy, **my** *life*, d3 — f1 f2 f1 — f1 — f1 b3
4	Wherein I **hop'd** *to see* **my** comfort full, f2 d3 f1	*To be* partaker of <u>this</u> **destinie.** g1 — d1 c4	**Depriude** of sence, of *life*, of all by death, h1 — b3
5	*To be* **depriude** by suddaine **destinie.** g1 h1 — c4	*Alacke* the *day*, *alacke* and well*aday*. b2 — e1 b2 — e1	**Cruell, vniust, impartiall destinies.** c1 — c2 — c3 — c4

	P	LC	C
1	a1 + a2 + a3	a1 + b1 + b2 + b3	c1 + c2 + c3 + c4
2	b2 + d1 + a2 + d3	d3 + d1 + e1+ d1 + a3 + e1	b2 + d1 + e1+ b3
3	d1 + e1 + d1 + c2 + d1 + c3 + e1	b1 + d2	d3 + f1 + f2 + f1 + f1 + f1 + b3
4	f2 + d3 + f1	g1 + d1 + c4	h1 + b3
5	g1 + h1 + c4	b2 + e1 + b2 + e1	c1 + c2 + c3 + c4

Table 2

Words first used by P, LC, and C respectively are marked as follows: P = underlined; LC = italics; C = bold. Letters indicate the first occurrence of the marked word in each line; each line corresponds to a letter (P1: a; LC1: b; C1: c etc.). Going by this count, the first two lines have new entries until LC, while the third line presents only a new word ("hope") in C's line. In l. 4 there are two new entries (LC: "To be"; C: "Depriude"), and C's line duplicates the regular rhythmical pattern of l. 3 (sequence of monosyllables depending on the initial verb/participle); l. 5 shows little variation, marked lexical parallelisms (LC and C), and no new entry. Cross references are evident to the end, with the final epiphoric emphasis on c_4, "destinie/s" (1C, 4LC, 5P, 5C).

Q2

PARIS	CAPULET WIFE	NURSE	CAPULET
Have I thought long to see this morning's face, / And doth it give me such a sight as this? / Beguiled, divorcèd, wrongèd, spited, slain / Most detestable death, by thee beguiled, / By cruel, cruel, thee quite overthrown! / O love, O life, not life, but love indeath!	Accursed, unhappy, wretched,hateful day! / Most miserable hour that e'er timesaw / In lasting labor of his pilgrimage! / But one, poor one, one poor andloving child, / But one thing to rejoice and solacein, / And cruel death hath catched it from my sight!	O woe, O woeful, woeful, woeful day! / Most lamentable day, most woeful day / That ever, ever I did yet behold! / O day, O day, O day, O hateful day, / Never was seen so black a day asthis! / O woeful day, O woeful day...	Despised, distressèd, hated,martyred, killed! / Uncomfortable time, why cam'st thou now / To murder, murder our solemnity? / O child, O child, my soul and notmy child! / Dead art thou, alack, my child is dead, / And with my child my joys are buried.

Q1

PARIS	MOTHER	ALL	CAPULET
Haue I thought long to see this mornings face, / And doth it now present such prodegies? / Accurst, vnhappy, miserable man, / Forlorne, forsaken, destitute I am: / Borne to the world to be a slaue in it. / Distrest, remediles, and vnfortunate. / O heauens, O nature, wherefore did you make me, / To liue so vile, so wretched as I shall.	O heere she lies that was our hope, our ioy, / And being dead, dead sorrow nips vs all.	*All at once cry out / and wring their hands.* / All our ioy, and all our hope is dead, / Dead, lost, vndone, absented wholy fled.	
O sad fac'd sorrow map of misery, / Why this sad time haue I desird to see: / This day, this vniust, this impartiall day / Wherein I hop'd to see my comfort full, / To be depriude by suddaine destinie.			Cruel, vniust, impartiall destinies. / Why to this day haue you preseru'd my life? / Too see my hope, my stay, my ioy, my life, / Depriude of sence, of life, of all by death, / Cruell, vniust, impartiall destinies.

Table 3

Abbreviations

APGRD   *Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama*,
         http://www.apgrd. ox.ac.uk (last access 18 October 2014).
OED   *Oxford English Dictionary* (2015, Oxford: Oxford University Press,
         online edition).

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