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The Chorus in Drama

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Introduction

For my part is the chorus, and the chorus
Is more or less a borderline between
The you and the me and the it of it.
Between
The gods' and human beings' sense of things.
And that's the borderline that poetry
Operates on too, always in between
What you would like to happen and what will –
Whether you like it or not.

Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy*

The chorus is possibly the theatrical device most deeply grounded in the European tradition: not only "[was its] predramatic (from a modern point of view) nature rooted in the tradition of archaic [Greek] choral lyric" (Bierl 2009: Introduction; Bierl 2001: 14), but also its centrality was directly mirrored by the civic structure of the Athenian Dionysian festivals. On those occasions, the actions of 'requesting, giving, obtaining the chorus' (χορὸν αἰτεῖν, διδόναι, λαβεῖν) corresponded to the poet's request to take part in the theatrical contest and to be admitted to it. Likewise, the *tragodoi* (τραγῳδοί) and the *komodoi* (κωμῳδοί), before being generically perceived as 'performers of tragedy' and 'of comedy', were more specifically identified as components of the tragic and comic choruses, respectively, precisely because they were singers (ἀοιδοί). As is well known, in the second half of the fifth century BC Herodotus mentioned the "tragic choruses" formerly devoted by the Sikyonians to "celebrate the fate" of their mythical king Adrastus, and then "given back" to the god Dionysus by the Sikyon tyrant Cleisthenes (in power between 600 and 570) within a ritual celebration of Melanippus, a mythical hero enemy to Adrastus. The expression "given back" suggests that these choruses were originally devoted to Dionysus and that they were again dedicated to him at a later stage.[1]

1. Herodotus 5.67 ("Κλεισθένης ... [τραγικοὺς] χοροὺς ... τῷ Διονύσῳ ἀπέδωκε", trans. Godley 1938), see Golder 1938: 72-5.

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According to Zimmermann, Herodotus's expression "tragic choruses" should be read in the light of the performative practices of the fifth century as "choral performances, which we can compare with our tragic choruses" (1992: 30-1; my translation). The "tragic choruses" of Sikyon are linked to Epigenes, the "first tragedian" according to *Suda*'s entry on Thespis (*Suda* θ 282 = *TrGF* 1T1). To Epigenes himself we owe the famous saying "nothing to do with Dionysus" (*TrGF* 1T18: οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον), which possibly alluded to the dithyrambic chorus's progressive move away from its Dionysian origin. Even more famous is Aristotle's, so to speak, incidental statement that tragedy originated "from the starters (*exarchontes*) of the dithyrambs",[2] namely of the choruses devoted to narrating the deeds of Dionysus. Despite its being a quintessentially diegetic lyric genre,[3] the dithyramb unveils its mimetic potential in the dialogue between an individual – likely the same chorus-leader – and the chorus who respond collectively as in an antiphony. Therefore, as regards both the genesis of the theatrical genres and the changeable mutual relations between the narrative and mimetic aspects of drama, these somehow enigmatic historical witnesses suggest that choral tradition and drama were closely related.

Although present in the tragedies and comedies of fifth-century Athens alike, the chorus is nowadays immediately and almost spontaneously linked to the tragic genre. This is true whether we deal with scholarly criticism (a case in point is Swift's remark that "[w]e must read *tragedy* not only as drama, but also as choral song", 2010: 1, my emphasis) or with philosophical perspectives, with which also popular culture aligns itself: a contemporary comic example is Woody Allen's onscreen collective narrator – and vicarious psychoanalyst – of *Mighty Aphrodite*, an overtly tragic chorus singing and dancing in a Broadway music-hall style while retaining an ancient Greek-like guise.[4] But to return to the Attic dramatic chorus, as early as the late fifth century BC it was converted into an interlude (ἐμβόλιμον, *embolimon*).[5] If originally it was to "be

2. Aristotle *Poetics* 1449a11. Archilochus (first half of the seventh century BC) provides the earliest report on the dithyramb and his own role as *exarchon* (fr. 120 West). As regards the *exarchontes* and the 'dramatic' dithyramb, see Zimmermann (1992: 19-23) and Ieranò (1997: 175-85). "In ancient texts *exarchein* seems to be an activity involving an individual facing an assembly (silent or otherwise)" (Ieranò 1997: 177). Heraclides of Cuma (fourth century BC) describes the *exarchon* as a (female) performer addressing a chorus (*FGrH* 689F2).
3. Plato *Resp.* 394c: "there is one kind of poetry and tale-telling which works wholly through imitation (ἡ μὲν διὰ μιμήσεως ὅλη ἐστίν), as you remarked, tragedy and comedy; and another which employs the recital of the poet himself (ἡ δὲ δι᾽ παγγελίας αὐτοῦ τοῦ ποιητοῦ), best exemplified, I presume, in the dithyramb", trans. Paul Shorey 1969).
4. Baelo Aullé 1999: 397. And also: "the chorus … looks like a tragic chorus of a Greek tragedy … but [it is] under the influence of metafictional jumps [: … its] being in 'defamiliarised' contexts produces the comedy" (ibid.: 399).
5. This evolution is recorded by Aristotle *Poetics* 1456a28-32.

regarded as one of the actors", and, according to Aristotle, was to "be part of the whole and share in the action" in both tragedy and comedy, at that point it displayed new performative features, including sundry forms of recitation and revelling, whose documentation, however, is to date fairly poor. It should be recalled that traditional forms of music and dance started to change at the end of the fifth century under the influence of the 'New Music'.[6] Therefore, these interludes may have included virtuoso singing, and, in a comic context, stylizations of festive drunken revelries. In any case, they supplied a distinct type of performance from the rest of the play, aimed at gaining the favour of the audience, with little or no connection with the staged action.[7] Memory of these interludes, whose librettos and music scores are now lost, is inscribed within the play texts' blank spaces separating the acts. Unlike the majority of the Hellenistic papyri which have handed down to us the choral parts of fifth-century dramas, those containing Menander's comedies do not provide the choral librettos but only the direction "chorus song" (in short: χοροῦ, *scil.* μέλος), without distinguishing between the presence of a dancing and singing *choros* or, as in comedies, of a *komos* (κῶμος: a 'band of revellers', *LSJ*; see Lape 2006). This process is also documented in the Byzantine codices containing Aristophanes's two last surviving comedies – *The Assemblywomen* and *Wealth* (datable to the first fifteen years of the fourth century) –, and in a papyrus fragment of *Wealth* 957-70.[8] A synthetic overview is provided by Csapo and Slater:

> A primary cause of the decline [of the chorus] is the growth of professionalization in the theater and the development of new standards in acting, music, and dances, rather than changes in the constitution of the chorus itself. The chorus continued to be drafted from citizen amateurs until the abolition of the *khoregia*[9] in the late 4th c. BC, while music tended to ever-greater rhythmic and melodic complexity, better suited to a single voice. In contrast with highly trained actors, the amateurishness of the chorus became an embarrassment. In addition, the growing taste for realism and more complex plots tended to favor actors over the chorus. (1995: 351)[10]

The use of the term "decline" by Csapo and Slater, in a strictly Aristotelian

6. On the 'New Music' in late fifth and in fourth centuries, see the synthesis in West (1992: 356-72) and D'Angour (2006).
7. Plato *Laws* 700d-701a complained that "with the progress of time, there arose as leaders of unmusical illegality (ἄμουσος παρανομία) poets who, though by nature poetical, were ignorant of what was just and lawful in music.... Hence the theater-goers became noisy instead of silent, as though they knew the difference between good and bad music, and in place of an aristocracy in music there sprang up a kind of base theatrocracy (θεατροκρατία τις πονηρά)", trans. R.G. Bury.
8. *P. Oxy.* 66.4521, second century AD.
9. That is, the "office ... of a *choregos*, defraying of the cost of the public choruses" (*LSJ*). It was reformed or abolished by Demetrius of Phaleron, in charge between 317 and 307.
10. For the growing social standing of the actors, see Easterling 2002.

perspective, does not lessen the fact that "[a]lthough the chorus lost its identity as an actor, it gained a new functional significance in underlining comedy's five-act structure" (Lape 2006: 90). This consideration can be extended also to tragedy: the interludes mark its five-act structure and contribute to Horace's normative description in *Ars poetica* 189-90 ("The play must not fall short of the fifth act, nor go beyond it"; "Neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu / fabula") which will condition the modern reception of the ancient models and even playwriting creativity.

In the age of the European theatrical renaissance the chorus was eventually rejected as 'unnatural', and yet, even when absent, it paradoxically continued to have an influence on spectacular forms at large. Like the remains of a building whose architecture and destination eventually appear unintelligible or, worse, alien to modern taste, the chorus occupied a privileged position within a monumental rather than historically documental conception of antiquity. Thus, although discarded for nearly two centuries for the sake of *simplicité*,[11] it continued to prompt surrogate experimentations on collective actions aimed at making up for its absence and gradually shaping a taste for choral 'greatness' and 'multitude' that was firmly to establish itself in the early nineteenth century.[12]

At that time, a re-interpretation of the chorus based upon a theoretical, when not overtly philosophical, stance was carried out with an anti-naturalistic purpose and, as will be seen, hardly, if ever, realized on stage (see below, Schiller: 135-66). In a different, yet complementary, perspective it has to be noticed that nowadays the chorus, especially if tragic, still causes some trouble to directors and audiences alike, despite its acknowledged prestige,[13] because of its flair for mythological digressions and all-too-frequent self-referential comments – to which I will return later. Both aspects may contribute to a perception of the chorus as an alien partition in respect to the dramatic action as well as to the play's tragic focus.[14] As Bierl remarks, "it must be admitted that the many choral songs of Attic drama remain peculiarly strange to today's recipients",

11. Not to be confused with the demand for realism of contemporary audiences: see Foley 2007 and below.
12. On monumentality, see below Schiller: 154. Also according to Leopardi the "multitude" brings on to the stage "the beautiful and the *great*", and the combination of music and singing in chorus, although "[condemnable] as implausible", produce "[an] impression … that was altogether *great*, beautiful, poetic" (Leopardi 2013: 2804-5; my emphasis), see below, Bissoli: 173. On the experimentations (silent choruses, processions, etc.) see Dudoyt 2013: 206-8, 221-3, 215-6.
13. On this particular aspect, see Foley (2007).
14. It is the case, for instance, of the suppression of the fourth song of the Chorus in the *orchestra* (*stasimon*) of Sophocles's *Antigone* (ll. 944-87); this happens quite frequently in Italy and with special regard to this *stasimon* (see Nicolai 2003-2005: 80-99; Nicolai 2011: 1-10). Keeping to Italian experience, in a recent production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* a *stasimon* was chanted by an

even if, "[o]nly in (post)modern staging practice … the performative potential of the ancient chorus [is] being recognized" and "[t]he interruption of the action of the play is here no longer felt as a disturbance, rather the emergence of ritual traces is now placed in the context of an overall ritualization of the theater" (2009: Introduction; 2001: 12).

Critical studies of classical drama as well as translations and adaptations of Greek plays have invariably considered the tragic chorus either as an "idealized spectator", as in August Wilhelm Schlegel's famous and often quoted definition,[15] or as "a living wall which tragedy draws around itself" (see below, Schiller: 149, and later Nietzsche 2000: 58). On account of its formal structure, that shows traditional communicative and performative features, it has often been explicitly or implicitly regarded as the privileged bearer of communal values. All together, these traditional traits, which long antedate the reorganization of the Dionysian festival in the context of the democratic polis, authorize an interpretation of the tragic chorus as a "particular collective experience", voicing "the sense of a social group, which roots in a wider community" by drawing "on the inherited stories and the inherited, gnomic wisdom of social memory and of oral tradition to 'contextualize' the tragic" (Gould 1996: 233). In perhaps oversimplified terms, they seem to favour a reading of the chorus as the privileged presenter of a kind of "running commentary on [the] *nomos* and [the] *ethos* [of the community]" (Havelock 1985: 715f.).[16] Given the collocation of the dramatic event in a ritual context, the semantic potentiality of both tragic and comic choruses actually seems to arise from the interaction between traditional cultic and performative elements and the strictly civic issues inspiring the complex organization of dramatic festivals. As Goldhill observes in his "Response to Gould", "'[r]itual' cannot be used as a category to explain away the representative function of the chorus: the festival both democratizes the ritual of choral singing, and requires that the tragic chorus is construed in the light of the culture of choral performance in Athens" (1996: 250). This statement applies to both the tragic and the comic choruses. The tragic choruses have specific gender, age, social, and functional connotations derived from the *mythos* (for instance a Theban female or male chorus in stories located at Thebes). They may also derive from specific dramatic traditions or from a precise authorial intention diverging from the *mythos*, as in the case of Euripides's *Phoenissae*, which, despite its Theban setting, has a chorus of Asian

offstage voice in ancient Greek; although acoustically suggestive, this solution merely alluded to an irreducible extraneousness of the choral element.

15. Schlegel 1996: 65.
16. I intentionally refrain from comparing the very different perspectives descending from these two formulations. Much remains to be said on the reception of Eric A. Havelock in Italy.

Maidens "[who] are only in Thebes by chance and for a brief period".[17] The comic choruses, instead, are constituted by the protagonists of the contemporary civic life, such as the Elders from the borough of Acharne or the Peasants, in Aristophanes's *Acharnenses* and *Peace*, respectively, or by 'animals', as in his *Wasps* and *Birds*, where they appear with different degrees of animality and social representativeness.[18] In either case, the chorus establishes a dual relationship. On the one hand, it associates itself with the "enduring human social drama … the drama that has its *direct* source in social structural conflict" (Turner 1982: 112), in whose respect "theatre … generally take[s] stock of [a community's] situation in the known 'world'" (ibid.: 11); on the other hand, it relates itself with the community who attend the spectacle within the ritual frame and are capable of both grasping the chorus's stylization of other cultic and 'pre-dramatic' performances and appreciating the peculiar semiosis derived from their being re-used within a different context.

Unfortunately, contemporary staging practices which tend to highlight the cultic or, in a broad sense, anthropological value of the chorus, may be no less simplistic than readings which consider it as a depositary of ethic directions *tout court*. This is particularly apparent when directors stress its cultic features, thus contrasting the artificiality of danced and sung parts and the discursiveness of spoken ones: as a result, the chorus becomes the stylized emblem of an 'absolute' rituality and is therefore denied the possibility of performing its function of "link between the cultic reality … and the imaginary religious world of the tragedies", as appropriately underlined by Henrichs (1995: 59). In other words, when examining Athenian dramaturgy we cannot separate 'civic' representativeness from cultic traditions and dramaturgical innovations. In this respect, one of the most problematic issues is the tragic chorus's self-referentiality, which surfaces when it refers to its own singing and dancing performance. This may occur in a recitative preceding the song proper, as in Aeschylus's *Eumenides* 307-11:

> ἄγε δὴ καὶ χορὸν ἄψωμεν, ἐπεὶ μοῦσαν στυγερὰν
> ἀποφαίνεσθαι δεδόκηκεν
> λέξαι τε λάχη τὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους
> ὡς ἐπινωμᾷ στάσις ἁμή.

> [Come let us join in the dance (*choros*), for we are ready to perform our grisly song and to tell how our ensemble (*stasis*) apportions lots among mortals. (trans. by Henrichs 1995: 61f.)].

17. This "highly unusual" choice of "a detached Chorus provides certain dramatic benefits", while "emphasizing the racial links between Thebes and Phoenicia" and "highlight[ing] the contrast between [the Chorus's] own experience and the chaotic situation [of Thebes]" (Swift 2009: 79-82).
18. On the animal choruses in Aristophanes see below, Imperio: 57-74.

It may also occur in individual stanzas within the choral song, yet separate from the responsional strophe-antistrophe structure, as in the two identical *ephymnia* ("refrains") following the recitative at ll. 328-33 = 341-6 of *Eumenides*:

ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ τεθυμένῳ
τόδε μέλος, παρακοπά,
παραφορά, φρενοδαλής 330=343
ὕμνος ἐξ Ἐρινύων,
δέσμιος φρενῶν, ἀφόρ-
μικτος, αὐονὰ βροτοῖς.

[Over our victim this is the chant (*melos*), striking him mad, out of his mind, harming his brain, a hymn (*hymnos*) from the Erinyes, binding the brain, lacking the lyre, withering to mortals. (trans. by Henrichs 1995: 63)].

However, it is sometimes placed within the core-part of the song itself or even occupies the larger part of the lyric-choreutic performance, as in the "little song"[19] in Sophocles's *Women of Trachis* (ll. 205-24):

ἀνολολυξάτω δόμος 205
ἐφεστίοισιν ἀλαλαῖς
ὁ μελλόνυμφος· ἐν δὲ κοινὸς ἀρσένων
ἴτω κλαγγὰ τὸν εὐφαρέτραν
Ἀπόλλω προστάταν,
ὁμοῦ δὲ παιᾶνα παιᾶν' ἀνάγετ', ὦ παρθένοι, 210
βοᾶτε τὰν ὁμόσπορον
Ἄρτεμιν Ὀρτυγίαν ἐλαφαβόλον ἀμφίπυρον
γείτονάς τε Νύμφας. 215
ἀείρομαι οὐδ' ἀπώσομαι
τὸν αὐλόν, ὦ τύραννε τᾶς ἐμᾶς φρενός.
ἰδού μ' ἀναταράσσει,
εὐοῖ,
ὁ κισσὸς ἄρτι Βακχίαν
ὑποστρέφων ἅμιλλαν. 220
ἰὼ ἰὼ Παιάν·
ἴδε ἴδ', ὦ φίλα γύναι·
τάδ' ἀντίπρῳρα δή σοι
βλέπειν πάρεστ' ἐναργῆ.[20]

[Let the house raise a cry of exultation with shouts of *alalai* by the hearth, the house soon to be united in wedlock. And therein let the collective shout of the men go up to the one of the fair quiver, Apollo the protector, while you, maidens, raise the *paian*, the *paian*-cry and call upon his twin sister Artemis the Ortygian, deer-shooter, carrier of the doubletorch, and upon the neighboring Nymphs. [215] I am uplifted, I will not spurn the flute — O you master of my heart! Behold, his ivy stirs me! Euoe! Quickly it wheels me round in Bacchus's race! Oh, oh, Paean! Look, dear lady! All is taking shape, plain to see, before your gaze. (205-15 trans. by Henrichs 1995: 79f.; 216-24 trans. by Jebb 1892)].

19. See the ancient *scholium* (μελιδάριον, *melidarion*) on l. 216 (Xenis 2010: 99).
20. I follow the text edited by Easterling 1982.

As Henrichs himself remarks, when the chorus self-referentially focus on "their own performance … not only in their capacity as characters in the drama but also as performers" they "temporarily [expand] their role as dramatic characters" (1995: 59).[21] This 'expansion' turns into an authentic *mise en abîme* foregrounding the chorus's enunciation and performance. In such cases it simultaneously involves the role of the tragic author and the function of the collective voice. This collective voice asserts its own authority, which is both linked to the traditional forms of the poetic performance, and dependent upon the assertion of a new authorial role. This is the case of the chorus of the Elders in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*: after the anapaestic recitative the ensemble intone a dactylic song, clearly alluding to the epic tradition, in which they assert their being "[entitled] to tell of the auspicious command ruling the expedition [to Troy], the command of men in authority – for still from the gods the age that has grown with me breathes down upon me persuasiveness of song to be my warlike strength" (104-6: κύριός εἰμι θροεῖν κράτος αἴσιον ἀνδρῶν / ἐντελέων· ἔτι γὰρ θεόθεν καταπνείει / πειθὼ μολπᾶν ἀλκὰν σύμφυτος αἰών).[22] The Chorus will later accredit themselves with "a chant unbidden, unhired" (979: ἄμισθος … ἀκέλευστος) and "self-taught": "but still my soul within me chants, self-taught, the lyreless dirge of the Erinys" (990-3: τὸνδ' ἄνευ λύρας ὅμως / ὑμνῳδεῖ / θρῆνον Ἐρινύος αὐτοδίδακτος ἔσωθεν / θυμός). This is stated in full accord with the autonomous way of thinking they have already avowed when they sang "but I differ from others and am alone in my thought" (757: δίχα δ' ἄλλων μονόφρων εἰμί), which goes along with their own independence from the conventions regulating the relationship between client and author/performer. Mention of the *lyra* here "recall[s] the many festal occasions on which [chant] is the delight of gods and men", but "[a] professional singer sings neither unbidden nor unrewarded" (Fraenkel 1950: vol. 2, 444). The "ritual atmosphere" – to use a current critical expression (see n. 21) – is evoked in order to be re-formulated from the perspective of a civic rituality stirred by a new authorial awareness. The pronominal and deictic markers of the tragico-choral performance as well as the allusion – either implicit or explicit, by affinity or contrast – to prior lyrical-choreutic genres define the chorus as a character endowed with

21. As regards the Chorus's self-reference in Sophocles's *Ajax*, Rodighiero argues that "Sophocles usually draws upon [his choruses'] self-reference as a counterpoint to dramatic crisis and tragic catastrophe, in order to stress the divide between their tragic incapability to understand [the events] and the manifestation of their joy, as in the *Ajax*" even though "the action depicted [by the Chorus] confirms the ritual atmosphere of the *stasimon*" (2012: 48-9; my translation). Albeit fascinating, the dramatic connection between the constellation of ritual references and the chorus's own interaction with the characters needs further elucidation based on convincing evidence.

22. Here and below text and trans. Fraenkel 1950.

peculiar performative features, regardless of its participation in the action with an autonomous design (as for instance will happen at the end of the century with Sophocles's *Philoctetes*).[23] At the same time, the fictitious dimension of the performance is not contradicted by the breaking of the 'fourth wall', as it happens with the comic chorus's and chorus-leader's allusions to the socio-political life through the *parabasis*,[24] in which "the spectators of the audience are explicitly made into spectacle [… and] the audience-spectators [are transformed] into a comic spectacle" (Hubbard 1991: 14).

However, the aim of the essays contained in this issue is neither to target the function of the chorus in the ancient Greek communities, nor to reconsider the transformations of the choral lyric tradition in relation to the origin of dramatic performances; a discussion of the relationship between theatrical and civic institutions is also beyond their scope. Their purpose is instead to highlight some distinctive moments in the development of the chorus from classical antiquity to the twentieth century that prove especially revealing of new focalizations or even reversals of the original concept of the chorus as a structural element of a dramatic performance. In fifth-century tragedy the choral element, which Aristotle would consider both as a "form" (*eidos*) composed of music and song, and as a "separable part" (*meros*),[25] drew a path which was at the same time distinct from and complementary to the one of the dramatic action from the point of view of both performance and plot. The entrance of the chorus (*parodos*), especially after a dialogic or monologic prologue, at least since Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes* (467 BC), and then their presence on stage in a space (*orchestra*) especially devoted to their dancing and singing (*stasimon*) between the acts (*epeisodia*),[26] were strictly codified and related to a system of expectations shared by the audience. Given these expectations, the audience could perceive the originality of some authorial choices: for instance, the chorus's leaving the stage during the action and then

23. In *Philoctetes* the chorus "do not provide a 'choral' voice with which the audience can associate themselves … They too participate in the intrigue" (Schein 2013: 19).
24. The *parabasis* is an extended and elaborate section of the Old Attic comedy in which the chorus and/or the *koryphaios* directly address the audience acting as the mouthpiece of the author. The grammarian Julius Pollux (second century AD) mentions a "tragic *parabasis*". Needless to say, his testimony is much disputed: "Generally, it is employed by the comic playwrights and is not to be found in tragedies; yet Euripides employed it in many dramas: in the *Danae*, for instance, he makes the Chorus address the audience on his own behalf, but he absent-mindedly designs the women composing the chorus to speak as if they were men. Sophocles instead shows his superiority by moderately using it, for instance in the *Hipponous"* (Bethe 1998: 4.111).
25. Aristotle *Poetics*, 1452b14-16.
26. Aristotle *Poetics* 1452b16ff., where a distinction is made between "parts" (*mere*) "common" (*koina*), that is typical of the fully developed drama, and "peculiar" (*idia*), belonging to definite sylistic and performative typologies, and employed following various authorial intents.

re-entering (*epiparodos*),[27] or the introduction of choral songs within each 'act', or of sung (or recited and sung) antiphonal sequences by the chorus, the chorus-leader (*koryphaios*) and one or more characters.[28] *Epiparodoi*, choral songs and antiphonal sequences – whether they were lamentations (*kommoi*), *epirrhemata* (sequences of verse recited and sung by the chorus and one actor), or 'operatic' dialogues – achieved both a thematic and a spectacular prominence, while exploring the whole range of dramatic potential of the chorus in their distancing from the ritual tradition: it is certainly not accidental that Aristotle, who read the dramatic texts of the 'tragic age' when the chorus had lost its intrinsic link with stage action, referred to the *kommos* (κομμός, originally "beating of the head and breast in lamentation" and consequently "dirge, lament", *LSJ*), without mentioning its ritual origin at all.

Before proceeding any further, it may be helpful to recall that, originally, *choros* (χορός) meant both "dance" and "place for dancing",[29] and that the latter was a circumscribed, typically circular space drawn by the movements of the chorus in a dedicated space as well as in the *orchestra*.[30] Yet *choros* also stands for a social and cultic practice, in which the dance is part of a "public religious ceremony" devoted to a divinity. It could be enacted by chosen performers, selected by age or gender, as the maidens of the *partheneia* or the male adults and boys from the ten Attic tribes in the Athenian *dithyrambs*; it could also be conceived of as a mimetic representation of the events which the choral performance had to commemorate.[31] As Peponi points out:

> [d]espite its uncertain etymology, the Greek word for chorus … appears to have quite clear semantics. In some of its earliest attested usages, especially in Homeric poetry,

27. For instance in Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, in Sophocles's *Ajax*, and in Euripides's *Alcestis*.
28. As the Chorus sang in Aristophanes's *Frogs*, "the audience [of the tragedians] … understands the clever stuff": "εἰ δὲ τοῦτο καταφοβεῖσθον, μή τις ἀμαθία προσῇ / τοῖς θεωμένοισιν, ὡς τὰ λεπτὰ μὴ γνῶναι λεγόντοιν, / μηδὲν ὀρρωδεῖτε τοῦθ', ὡς οὐκέθ' οὕτω ταῦτ' ἔχει. / ἐστρατευμένοι γάρ εἰσι, / βιβλίον τ' ἔχων ἕκαστος μανθάνει τὰ δεξιά" (Wilson 2007: ll. 1109-14) ["but if you're both afraid that our spectators lack a certain amount of knowledge, so as not to appreciate the fine points of what you say, don't worry about that, since that is no longer the case. For they are seasoned veterans and each one has a book and understands the clever stuff" (trans. Matthew Dillon for the *Perseus Digital Library*, Tufts University)].
29. As in Achilles's shield: "Therein furthermore the famed god … cunningly wrought a χορός / *dancing-floor*" (Homer, *Iliad* 18.590; trans. Murray). See *LSJ* χορός II.3.
30. The circularity of this performative space is clearly alluded to by the description of youths and maidens dancing "holding their hands upon the wrists one of the other" (*Ilias* 18.593f.); and see Hesychius, *Lexicon* χ 645: *choros* = 'circle', 'crown' (Hansen 2009). See also the recitative prelude to the first *stasimon* of the Erinyes, Aesch. *Eum.* 307 (quoted at p. 10): "the dance is to be a circular one with joining of hands" (Sommerstein 1989: 137; cf. Rodighiero 2012: 80 n61); and Euripides's frequent use of ἑλίσσω or εἰ- ('turn round') for 'dancing'.
31. As, for example, the maidens and children choruses established at Samos in remembrance of the rescue of the young hostages from Corcyra, at the end of the seventh century BC (Herodotus 3.48).

> the word denotes either public areas designated for dance or the dancing activity itself, the latter usually performed by a group. In some cases the two meanings are hard to distinguish, the communal space for dance and the dance itself appearing to be culturally, and thus notionally, interdependent. (2013: 15)

The term *choros*, however, has also other semantic nuances which prove particularly relevant in the history of the dramatic chorus and its, at time radical, transformations:
(a) it defines a "band of dancers and singers" (*LSJ*) indistinguishable from one another, *de facto* actors without being characters (this ambiguity allows for a swarm of bees to be called *choros*).[32] It is worth remembering that, according to Foley, the idea of an "undifferentiated collectivity on stage" is responsible for the disappearance of the chorus from many modern adaptations of ancient tragedies, as it seems to run "counter to modern ideas about the individual's complex and ambivalent relation to social groups and the representation of this relation in performance" (2007: 353-4).
(b) In the practice of tragedy this round "communal space" (Peponi), defined by the chorus's dance and separate from the part of the stage where the characters faced the audience, had a specific, privileged spatial orientation towards the characters, not only during the iambic dialogue between the chorus-leader and one or more characters, or the sung exchanges between the choral ensemble (or the chorus-leader) and the characters, but also when the chorus commented on the dramatic action in the presence of one or more characters on stage. All these functions are paradigmatically summarized by Horace when he gives the following directions to a chorus who, in line with Aristotle's precepts (*Po.* 1456a25-7), participates in the action:

> [a]ctoris partis chorus officiumque virile
> defendat, neu quid medios intercinat actus,
> quod non proposito conducat et haereat apte.
> Ille bonis faveatque et consilietur amice
> et regat iratos et amet pacare tumentis,
> ille dapes laudet mensae brevis, ille salubrem
> iusttitiam legesque et apertis otia portis,
> ille tegat conmissa Deosque precetur et oret,
> ut redeat miseris, abeat fortuna superbis.
> (*Ars poetica*, 193-201)

> [Let the chorus sustain the part and manly character of an actor: nor let them sing any thing between the acts which is not conducive to, and fitly coherent with, the main design. Let them both patronize the good, and give them friendly advice, and regulate the passionate, and love to appease thou who swell [with rage]: let them

32. See *LSJ* χορός II.2. This same idea of indistinctness is to be found in the "stars' heavenly *choroi*" (Euripides, *Electra* 467) and, with a more evident choreutic nuance in Sophocles, Fr. 762: "[a] *choros* of speechless fishes [that] made a din, wagging their tails [for their mistress]".

> praise the repast of a short meal, the salutary effects of justice, laws, and peace with her open gates; let them conceal what is told to them in confidence, and supplicate and implore the gods that prosperity may return to the wretched, and abandon the haughty. (trans. by Buckley 1863)].

(c) Finally, this ensemble, which has a central role in an institutionalized ceremony evidently endowed with a pronounced civic function, is entrusted with the execution of dances and songs showing metrical and rhythmical patterns different from those typical of the spoken sections or of the recitatives. These performances were carried out with the accompaniment of music, whose scores, however, are almost completely unknown to us. Besides, their language is not only connoted by a high register, but also bears nuances of the Doric dialect. As efficaciously expressed by Wiles:

> [c]horal song, dance and music were, according to the traditions of the fifth century, a *Gestalt*, and none existed in isolation. The dance, we are told, should not stray beyond the metre of the words, whilst the words should contain nothing that is not expressed in dance. In respect of the acoustical component, Dale argues that verse is merely "the incomplete record of a single creation, Song. (1997: 90)

The linguistic Dorisms, which give a distinctly non-Attic quality to the choral songs of the tragedy, enhance the performative otherness of the ensemble situated between the characters and the audience: the chorus-leader dialogues with the characters in the language familiar to the Athenian audience, yet a limited number of Doric dialectal terms punctuate the collective songs. Interpreted as a homage to the Doric tradition of the choral lyrical genre, this linguistic feature must be considered not only within the song/speech opposition contrasting a variety of sung metres as well as Doric dialectalisms with iambic and non-Attic lines, but also in relation to the semiosis produced by the "chorus singer [who] abandon[s] the song (in 'Doric') to recite *iamboi*" (Adrados 2005: 145). It is "[a] great innovation" (ibid.), whether the speaker expresses the opinion of the choral group or interacts as an actor/character with the other characters. This is particularly apparent in multi-voiced and, so to speak, 'operatic' sequences featuring a plurality of metres and the coexistence of speech and song: an example of an increasingly complex interaction is the four-voiced *kommos* between Antigone, Ismene, *koryphaios* and Chorus in Sophocles's last tragedy (*Oedipus Coloneus*, 1670-750). Defining the tragic chorus as depositary and agent of a specific semiosis connected with its own most peculiar communicative modes assumes a special relevance when contrasted with the problematic question of its social, political and ideological dimension. From a dramaturgical point of view, this question goes along, and intermingles, with other binary oppositions: between "song-composition"

(*melopoea*) and "speech-composition" (*lexis*),[33] which has already been dealt with; between mask usage, typical of the dramatic chorus, and unmasked performances in the same context of the Dyonisian festival, when the citizens performing the dithyrambic chorus are recognizable and awarded prizes precisely for being representatives of their tribes;[34] and also between an "audience overwhelmingly of adult male citizens" and "so many choruses … comprised of women – often not even free women" (Taplin 1996: 193-4).[35]

The above sketched out features of the chorus – from (a) to (c) – as fundamental performative expressions of the ancient Greek tragic theatre, draw the course it would take over time, highlighting the crucial aspects which would undergo radical change in the chorus's controversial modern revival. These changes took place also when the approach to the ancient models was one of sincere admiration. From the end of the fifteenth century, in a time span of little more than twenty years, Euripides's, Sophocles's, and Aeschylus's[36] original play texts were printed, thus implementing, and counterpoising, a classical heritage which until then had mostly pivoted on Seneca's legacy. At the same time, however, they appeared as hardly decipherable 'objects', construed according to rules upon which even Aristotle's *Poetics* (translated into Latin as early as 1498) could not shed light. As regards the chorus, the Renaissance intellectuals were coping with pieces written in a language affected by Doric dialectalisms; they did not grasp the rationale behind lyric versification, even if they could perceive the difference with the recited parts; and its pattern – mostly based on couples of stanzas in a responsional form – at first escaped them completely.[37] Even Aristotle's *Poetics* did not help. Rather than in the academic efforts of philologists and critics whose aim was to decipher Aristotle's text, this difficulty can be clearly detected in the creative work of the authors who aimed at reviving Greek tragedy, from Gian Giorgio Trissino

33. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b33-6, 1450a9ff.; reference is to Else's translation (1963: 233), according to whom "*lexis* is the composition of the *spoken* verses, the dialogue" (236). See also 1449b30-1: "I mean that some sections of the play are carried by verses alone (διὰ μέτρων … μόνον) and some the other way round, by song (διὰ μέλους)" (Else: 221).
34. This does not contradict Goldhill's position (1996: 250) as regard the authority and representativeness of the chorus, both masked and unmasked, but it simply puts the stress on the perception of stage dynamics by the audience.
35. In the surviving plays of the three major tragedians we have a high frequency of female choruses (often stranger to the main character, and/or servants): Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes*, *Supplices*, *Choephori*, *Eumenides*, *Prometheus* (5/7); Sophocles's *Electra*, *Trachiniae* (2/7); Euripides's *Medea*, *Andromacha*, *Hecuba*, *Supplices*, *Electra*, *Troades*, *Iphigenia Taurica*, *Ion*, *Helen*, *Phoenissae*, *Orestes*, *Bacchae*, *Iphigenia Aulidensis* (13/19).
36. Ca. 1494: Euripides's *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Alcestis*, and *Andromacha*; 1502 and 1503: all the extant tragedies by Sophocles and the remaining by Euripides, except *Electra*, published for the first time in 1545; 1518: all the extant tragedies of Aeschylus.
37. See the seminal works by A. Tessier (1999, 2003).

and Giambattista Giraldi Cinzio to Sperone Speroni and Ludovico Dolce.[38] Their experiments were often quite interesting, yet not because they resulted in 'archaeological' replicas, but because they reflected a peculiar interaction between the ancient models and the modern sensibility. For instance, the monumentality of Sophocles's plots was often infused with a flair for emotional expression typical of the Euripidean model. All this was cast in a variegated language meant to reproduce, to various degrees, the "adorned language" suggested by Aristotle (ἡδυσμένος λόγος: *Poetics* 1449b25 and 28), a concept which provided the battlefield upon which the translators of *Poetics* and theorists of the Italian language, such as Bembo and Trissino, crossed swords. Italian translators and imitators of the Greek tragedy adopted an undifferentiated Petrarchan *koiné*, showing little insight into the stylistic differences and the dramaturgical peculiarities of the recited parts, and the lyric and choral ones, respectively.[39] An understanding of the stylistic and performative potential of the choric sections would be made possible only by the paratexts supplied by the erudite comments, of Hellenistic or Byzantine origin, annotated in the margins of Byzantine manuscripts (*scholia*), as well as other annotations and subsidiary texts accompanying the main text in the same manuscripts. The *scholia* to Sophocles's tragedies were printed for the first time in 1518, those to Euripides's in 1534, those to Aeschylus's in 1552, and the *De metris* by Pseudo-Hephaestion in 1553. The outcome would shortly be evident: in the second half of the sixteenth century the Attic tragedies finally became comprehensible also in their lyric and choral parts thanks to the already mentioned 1553 Paris edition of *Sophocles* and to the Antwerp editions of *Euripides* and *Aeschylus*, published in 1571 and 1580, respectively. It is worth mentioning that sometimes the ancient paratexts included stage directions which allowed to grasp the theatrical specifics of the tragic text. The conscious re-appropriation of this knowledge and an understanding of the role played by music in the lyric parts notoriously favoured new experimentations. These culminated in Orsatto Giustiniani's *Edipo Tiranno*, an adaptation of Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus*, staged in 1585 at the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza with music by

38. The following list, extremely reduced when matched with the abundance and variety of the tragic Italian production of the first half of the sixteenth century, is purely exemplificative. G.G. Trissino (1478-1550), author of a *Poetica* (1529, published in 1562), writes the first modern tragedy following Aristotle's *Poetics*: *Sofonisba* (1514-1515: published in 1524 and staged for the first time in Italy in 1562); G.B. Giraldi Cinzio (1504-1573): *Orbecche* (staged in 1541 and published in 1543); S. Speroni (1500-1588): *Canace* (1546); L. Dolce (1508/1510-1568): *Hecuba* (1543), *Thyeste/Thieste* (1543, 1547), *Giocasta* (1549, vulgarisation of Euripides' *Phoenissai* after a Latin translation, see Montorfani 2006), *Medea* (1557).

39. This is a field yet to be explored, especially as regards the 'implicit' dramaturgy and inspired by the recent performance studies.

Andrea Gabrieli.[40] Yet, far more productively, these recoveries would lead to an innovative merging of "all the components of the [tragic] spectacle", as well as to Claudio Monteverdi's auroral experiment in *Orfeo* (1609), where he achieved the "free circulation of generic models, no longer segregated within mutually incommunicable grammatical and methodological fields" (Gallico 1979: 67), which provided the premise for the new operatic chorality.

Yet, the history of dramatic chorality has followed other paths and recorded other experiments. This is not the place to offer a comprehensive overview of this history; my purpose is rather to draw a succinct analysis of some significant aspects of the individual issues mentioned above. To this end, it should be recalled that both in the Italian Renaissance culture, imbued with Aristotelianism, and in the other European cultures, where direct acquaintance with Aristotle's *Poetics* was sometimes considerably delayed, Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars Poetica* were normally conflated into a single syncretic influence, or, alternatively it was the latter that prevailed.[41] The normative strength of Horace's precepts was so pronounced as to drive even such a bright scholar as Castelvetro to misinterpret Aristotle's definitions and sometimes the tragic texts themselves. After observing that "in the past poets" introduced the chorus "with no respect of the division into acts" ("[i] poeti passati [introducevano il coro] senza haver rispetto alla distinzione de gli atti", Romani 1978: 120) Castelvetro focused on the *stasima*, that is, when the chorus is "introduced … to speak as chorus[42] … and this introduction allows to distinguish the division of the acts and where they end" ("introdotto … a ragionare come choro … per la quale introdottione si riconosce la distintione, e 'l termino degli atti", ibid.: 120). The mistake is even more manifest when he later affirmed that "the chorus enter on stage only four times in order to sing … *Parodos* is the song of the whole chorus, and *stasimon* is the song of the whole chorus when they return to sing the second, the third, and the fourth time" ("non compare il choro in palco per cantare, se non quattro volte… Πάροδος è il canto del choro intero, quando il choro compare la prima volta in palco, et στάσιμον è il canto del choro intero, quando il choro ritorna a cantare la seconda, la terza, et la quarta volta", ibid.: 345). The argument to advocate the division of the play into five acts is here clearly stretched to breaking point.

40. See in this issue the contribution by Donatella Restani at p. 75-99.
41. Weinberg (1961: 1, 47): "As a result, Horace ceased to be Horace and Aristotle never became Aristotle". See also Tarán (2012: 38-40): "Unfortunately the *Poetics* was then viewed in the same light as that of the *Ars Poetica* and as a welcome supplement and complement to the latter.… There was little awareness of the essential differences between the two works, and none at all of the historical context of each and of the different purposes of the two authors". See below, Restani: 77.
42. That is, to sing and dance as a group.

As regards the evolution of the dramatic chorus, it was either reduced to a solo voice, or, contrariwise, multiplied into a plurality of minor characters such as common citizens, soldiers etc. – in other words, simply the people ("das 'einfache' Volk", Baur 1999: 38). If these several characters was identified only by their names and never achieved the status of acting individuals, the chorus 'contracted' into a solo voice only indirectly assumed some of the 'parabatic' functions of the Aristophanic chorus, "ask[ing] for the spectator's approval, or at least tolerance" (Schneider 2011: 13). In this way the chorus combined a diegetic function with an authorial voice, like the prologue/character of Roman comedy;[43] sometimes it could also retain a 'lyric' quality and accompany the exhibition of a group of mimes. In early modern English drama this transformation produced various outcomes, sometimes dependent on the translators'/adaptators' faulty interpretation of Seneca's drama following unclear indications about its dramaturgy.[44] As regards both the individualization of the chorus and its becoming the author's mouthpiece, the influence of Horace's *Ars* would be decisive (see ll. 193-201, cited above at p. 15). The main consequence was its contraction into the single figure of a confidant (Schiller would reprove the French Neoclassical theatre and its imitators for reducing the chorus to a *Vertraute*),[45] or into other figures who, like the Shakespearean fools, did not conform to moralistic commonsense, while siding with the main character.[46] Horace is also explicit about the chorus' evolution into the author's representative. This is apparent if one accepts the *lectio deterior* "actoris" (widely adopted in some of the earliest printed editions) instead of the correct reading "auctoris". As regards the chorus's fragmentation into a plurality of characters, one may turn to a famous page of Richard Wagner's *Oper und Drama*, where he describes the Shakespearean example as follows:

> Bei Shakespeare ist der Chor in lauter an der Handlung persönlich betheiligte Individuen aufgelöst, welche für sich ganz nach derselben individuellen Nothwendigkeit ihrer Meinung und Stellung handeln, wie der Hauptheld, und selbst ihre scheinbare Unterordnung im künstlerischen Rahmen ergiebt sich nur aus den ferneren Berührungspunkten, in denen sie mit dem Haupthelden stehen, keineswegs aber aus einer etwa prinzipiellen technischen Verachtung der Nebenpersonen; denn überall da, wo die selbst untergeordneste Person zur Theilnahme an der Haupthandlung

43. On this see Slater 1992 and Slater 2010.
44. See the contribution by Silvia Bigliazzi (101-33)
45. This interpretation, widespread on both sides of the Channel, seems to descend from the translation of *defendat* in "actoris partis chorus officiumque virile / defendat" (193-4) as "must defende" (Drant 1567, see below, Bigliazzi: 107), as well as from a reading of *actoris* instead of *auctoris*, which in the 1545 French rendition becomes "protecteur" (Peletier 1545: "Le Chore soit du parti de l'acteur, / Et de uertu uirile protecteur", "The chorus should belong to the actor's party and be the manly protector of virtue").
46. As the Fool in *King Lear*, commonly interpreted as "a sort of chorus" or a choric commentator at least since Draper 1937: 180.

> zu gelangen hat, äussert sie sich ganz nach persönlich charakteristischem, freiem Ermessen.[47] (Wagner 1869: 52f.)
>
> [With Shakespeare, the Chorus is resolved into divers individuals directly interested in the Action, and whose doings are governed by precisely the same promptings of individual Necessity as are those of the chief Hero himself. Even their apparent subordination in the artistic framework is merely a result of the scantier points of contact they have in common with the chief Hero, and nowise of any technical undervaluing of these lesser personages; for wherever the veriest subordinate has to take a share in the main plot, he delivers himself entirely according to his personal characteristics, his own free fancy (Wagner 1995: 60f.)]

Well in advance of Wagner, the diffraction of the choral collective had been promoted in his own practice by one of the protagonists of the reappraisal of the Greek chorus 'under German eyes': Schiller.[48] In his *The Bride of Messina* (1803), he purposely re-introduced the ancient chorus after discussing its function in the preface appended to the play, entitled *On the Use of the Chorus in Tragedy* (see below 136-66). Yet, while in his brief essay he defined the chorus as a unitary entity, in his own tragedy he dissolved it into a polyphony of characters, endowing some of them with something resembling an identity. At all events, this was not his first experiment in choral plurality since in the first part of his *Wallenstein* trilogy (*Wallenstein Lager* [*Wallenstein's Camp*], 1796) he had already split the chorus into the manifold voices of "lesser personages".[49]

Both outcomes deprived the chorus of its framing function, previously codified by its transformation into an *embolimon*, or interlude, interposed between the *epeisodia* (see above 13): the division into acts was already firmly established even without those choric interludes. Of these two lines of development, the one leading to "an individual interpretative or narrative 'voice-over' … lifting the veil of fiction with new tools" (see below, Bigliazzi: 103) conceives the chorus not only as expression of authorial intentions and preoccupations, but also as the privileged holder of the *fabula*, endowed with a reminiscing role. This competence allowed for a reliable narrative anticipation of the entire plot exactly as it happened with the ancient *mythos*, which, at least in its outline, was familiar to all Athenian, and potentially Panhellenic, audience. It is possible to surmise that also this function, exerted in an exemplary way by the

47. On the tragic chorus in the nineteenth century see Silk 1998.
48. See Goldhill 2013, Güthenke 2013.
49. Similarly, some years before Wagner, the intention to re-introduce "*das wahrhaft Volksthümliche* [the true folk element]" (Wagner 1869: 50; 1995: 58) by means of a diffracted chorality modelled after Schiller's *Wallenstein's Camp*, had lead Giuseppe Verdi to alter the structure of Act 3 of *La forza del destino* [*The Force of Destiny*] in order to follow Schiller's example, see Mossa 2001: 99-102 (letter from Verdi to Cammarano of 24 March 1849), Brumana 2011: 321, and the article by Francesco Bissoli (166-89).

prologic chorus in Q1 and Q2[50] of *Romeo and Juliet*, was somehow inscribed in the model of the ancient chorus addressing the audience and the characters alike with the narration of paradigmatic myths. These stories belonged to a time past in respect to the characters of the tragic plots, and, together with these plots, composed a commonly shared repertoire,[51] albeit with a different performative and narrative status. This diegetic function, therefore, was central to ancient drama precisely as it would be to later drama, and in the Renaissance it was only awaiting to be re-activated not as a purely narrative resource, but as the response to a more or less conscious thematization of the relationship between collective knowledge and the destinies lived and acted on stage by the various characters. If, on the one hand, the fragmentation of the chorus into a polyphony of voices endowed with an embryonic identity, that turned them into types rather than characters, points in the direction of naturalism, on the other hand, its dissolution into a single prologic figure is probably the most striking mutation it underwent. The tragic chorus was originally oriented towards the characters on stage, in both their lyrical comments and iambic dialogues. It thus well-deserved the name of "wall", as Schiller called it with a proxemic conception of theatre in mind. Yet it also deserved to be qualified as a "borderline" device, situated between "the you and the me and the it of it", as Seamus Heaney aptly suggested (see his quotation *in exergo*). It combined the traditional performative functions of commenting, narrating, and dialoguing with the 'parabatic' functions typically belonging to the comic Athenian chorus and inherited by the Latin comic Prologue.[52]

As already mentioned, the articles here collected wish to offer individual explorations of the transformation of the chorus over time by focusing upon significant instances from ancient Greece to the twentieth-century international milieu. It is not our aim to examine all the relevant reinterpretations of the chorus in the various periods of European (and non-European) theatre; nor would this be possible. Such an enterprise would entail not only a critical analysis of dramatic chorality from the sixteenth-century onwards – a task which has not been carried out even by the most recent and thorough contribution on this topic to date (Billings, Budelmann and Macintosh 2013). It would also examine to define how "an *idea* of the Greek chorus … is itself

50. Bigliazzi, this issue, 101-33.

51. Think, for instance, of the vertiginous *mise en abîme* in the already mentioned fourth *stasimon* of Sophocles's *Antigone*: the Elders, far from appraising the punishment inflicted by Creon, who is present, on his niece, comment on Antigone's exit referring to three famous mythical cases of live 'burial' (944-87; see 8 n14).

52. For the similarities and the necessary distinctions between "the self-referential parabasis [of the] Attic Old Comedy [and its] various analogues of European comic drama" see Hubbard 1991: 1-2, 231-40, 246-51.

mediated by the choruses of Roman drama, by liturgical choruses, by the *corps of ballet*, and by the visual arts (to name just a few)" (Billings, Budelmann, and Macintosh in their "Introduction": 2). Reciprocally, it would be essential to clarify to what extent the modern ideas of chorality, and its actual performance, depend on 'archaeological' and 'philological' interpretations, and if these ideas are conditioned by pre-set theoretical, or markedly ideological, perspectives. On the contrary, this Journal issue wishes to focus upon individual aspects of that dramatic chorality. In particular, it examines how the chorus's diffraction into a plurality of popular voices, typical of modern theatre, was already anticipated, and presupposed, in some Renaissance interpretations of the prologue of Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Conversely, It also investigates how the originally plural chorus has been gradually reduced to an individual extra-dramatic character entrusted with a narrative and commenting function. The essays explore how the classical models ended up being contaminated with medieval liturgical and dramatic forms, polyphonic structures, as well as with deliberate avantgarde appropriations of the Aristophanic model; finally, the Journal considers a peculiar instance of how the choral function was eventually absorbed by modern theatre and translated into the immateriality of contemporary media.

The issue starts off with two articles which concentrate upon some crucial aspects of the chorus in both the Attic tragedy and comedy; then it moves on to an exploration of the Italian and English Renaissance re-interpretations of dramatic chorality. Friedrich Schiller's famous *On the Use of Chorus in Tragedy*, positioned between these first contributions and the following ones, marks a neat divide between the controversial early modern revisions of the ancient chorus – often opposed in the name of an increasingly non-choral naturalism – and its later modern reappraisal with an anti-naturalistic focus. As regards the 'modern' chorus, it will be considered from a plurality of perspectives: from Italian melodrama to the choral experimentalisms carried out in Spain by the *Generación del '27*, by T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and by Delmore Schwartz's creative use of the radio and other media.

The first two articles are concerned with Attic drama. In "Lyric Genre Interactions in the Choruses of Attic Tragedy" Andreas Bagordo draws a typology of the ways in which Greek tragedy "echo[es] the pre-existent conventions of choral lyric genres". To this end, Bagordo provides instances of the imagery typical of different choral lyric genres, by discussing the formal aspects (lexical, stylistic, metrical, etc.) of the tragic choruses and the various dramatic situations that include the choral group as commentator, interlocutor, and propeller of the action. The *paian*, *epinikion*, *partheneion, hymenaios*, and *threnos* of the lyric tradition are considered also in their interactions as they are activated by the choral lyrics of drama: for instance between the *hymenaios* (the

song accompanying the procession of the bride to the groom's house) and the *partheneion* (the 'maiden-song') in Euripides's *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1143-52. This allows to verify that the chorus's performance frequently hybridizes different cultual practices. Yet, at the same time, a univocal "generative relationship" involving both a formal and a ritual filiation is at least in part denied. Thus, "denaturalized and deprived of the context for which they had been conceived", the traditional lyric elements are subject to the uncanny ambiguity of tragedy.

In "Men or animals? Metamorphoses and Regressions of Comic Attic Choruses: the Case of Aristophanes's *Wealth*", Olimpia Imperio starts from an analysis of the different theories on the origins of the animal choruses disseminated in the comic Attic production of the fifth and fourth centuries BC in order to concentrate upon the metamorphic potential shown by a comic chorus in the age of transition from the 'ancient' to the 'middle' Attic comedy. The focus of her investigation is the *parodos* chanted by the Chorus of the Elder Peasants in Aristophanes's last surviving comedy staged in 388 BC. Its lyric portion is extremely reduced: only forty-six out of 1209 lines. This "'minor' chorus … expresses an unexpected and unsuspected animality" – a stylized swine metamorphosis, realized "if not by actual camouflaging, by means of words, gestures, and mimetic dancing". It is modelled upon Odysseus's meeting with Circe, and has precedents in earlier instances of Attic comedy, as well as parallels with other Doric and Attic comedies of the fifth and fourth centuries (to cite the same Aristophanes: *Wasps*, 422; *Birds*, 414, and the 'secondary chorus' of the *Frogs*, 405 BC). Therefore, this animality, showing predictable consonances with the satyr genre, "confers on [*Wealth's* elder peasants] a both archaizing and atypically avant-garde patina". This experimentation stands out (especially) when compared with the part Aristophanes assigned to the Chorus in his *Assemblywomen*, a play staged only few years earlier. However minor the Chorus's part may be, especially if compared to the space allowed to the interludes, in *Wealth* Chorus and chorus-leader are often alluded to by the characters, so as to produce a peculiar "equilibrium", or rather a "formula … inspired by a daring experimentalism aimed at the future developments of the comic genre".

The following two articles shift to focus upon early modern choruses. More specifically, they deal with the experimental performance of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in Vicenza's Teatro Olimpico, on 3 March 1585, on the one hand, and, on the other, the multifarious forms of chorality and their various dramatic functions in early modern English drama. In "Theory and Musical Performance of the Chorus in Sixteenth-Century Italy. A Case Study: Vicenza 1585", Donatella Restani moves from the first vernacularization of Aristotle's *Poetics* by Bernardo Segni (1549) to examine the first modern performance of a Greek tragedy, choral scores included, mounted on stage at Vicenza, as "an interesting

case study in order to investigate how Italian sixteenth-century transmission, translation, and interpretation of ancient Greek and Latin treatises on poetry, rhetoric, and music shaped new musical theorisations and experiments". The theoretical and interpretative ground in which this experiment is rooted are the Renaissance commentaries to Aristotle's *Poetics*, from Francesco Robortello's (1548) to Lodovico Castelvetro's 'exposition' of the Aristotelian text (1576). As regards the tragic chorus's function and the dramaturgical role it played in alternative to, or in combination with, the presence of other collective characters on stage, as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, these commentators reflected the cultural milieu of the Vicenza's Olympic Academy. They were also, and more generally, influenced by the Italian cultural and intellectual panorama, which counted humanists interested in musical theories (for instance Gian Giorgio Trissino, reader of Ptolemy's *Harmonica*, and, with a weightier role, Gerolamo Mei), or in a contextualization of Aristotle's *Poetics* within his larger corpus, including *Politics* or the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*. Precisely these texts will lead to a coherent interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of ἡδυσμένος λόγος (*suavis oratio*) and favour a recasting of the choral song.

In "Chorus and Chorality in Early Modern English Drama", Silvia Bigliazzi raises the question of how the ancient plural chorus was gradually reduced to solo performances in early modern English drama, while assuming "new and multiple guises" often only nominally linking it back to its classical prototype. Bigliazzi then passes on to an analysis of the two formal Choruses present in *Romeo and Juliet*, as possibly the earliest dramatic examples of a new prologic awareness, before dealing with other forms of experimental chorality disseminated within the play. The starting point is an articulated overview of the late sixteenth-century English drama illustrating the "gradual transformation of the Senecan-like chorus towards a new prologic and narrative form" through which "Elizabethan drama gradually came to offer a fresh interlacing of action and narrative on different dramatic levels and with different degrees of authority". Despite some substantial changes, the ascendancy of classical models is traceable especially in the drama of the 1560-80s. Their living presence is witnessed by the record of the Latin performances of ancient plays, by the translations of Senecan drama from the late 1550s onwards, by the recasting of the formal chorus in early English tragedy (such as *Gorboduc*, 1561), as well as by the translation of rewrites of classical plays, as George Gascoigne's and Francis Kinwelmershe's *Jocasta* (1566). However, also in some of these examples, including *Gorboduc* and the first amorous tragedy of the age, the multi-authored *Gismond of Salerne* (1567-68, and its revised version *Tancred and Gismund* 1591), one perceives that English drama was taking a new direction, for instance by relying on the performative potential of pantomime and music. These additions varied the dramaturgic function of the chorus

in respect to the Senecan tradition, "possibly [carrying out] contaminations with other autochthonous framing forms". Bigliazzi underscores this convergence, and links it to the reception of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, which, in Thomas Drant's translation (1567), seems to adumbrate an interpretation of the chorus as a singular voice. This singularity appears coherent with the one-man prologues and epilogues cast as choruses, as well as with Jasper Heywood's own interpretation of the chorus as a part excluded from "the substance of the matter". The analysis of the two Quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* focuses upon the function of the formal Chorus, "'fluid' in the sense that the[ir part] could be alterable 'performance by performance' (Stern 2009: 109)", as well as on the diffracted chorality of the lamentation scene upon Juliet's body (4.5), as an out-and-out *kommos* with a pronounced metrical and phonic 'responsion' (to refer to classical metrics), both internal (ll. 46, 52, 58, 62), and external (ll. 49~54 and 50~52). The choral articulation in Q1, albeit different, still points to an experimental form of dissonant chorality. Thus, the "discordant vocality", attested in both Q texts, provides evidence of "a polyphonic pattern which has clearly superseded the traditional responsorial form of liturgical performance as well as the Senecan threnodic exempl[arity]".

There follows Guido Avezzù's new annotated translation of Friedrich Schiller's brief essay "Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie", appended as a preface to his *Braut von Messina* (1803), and here introduced by Stephen Halliwell. As Joshua Billings has noticed – and as Avezzù's short "Note on the text" confirms with regard to the *Braut*'s two semi-choruses – the use of the chorus in "Schiller's *Braut* is an appropriation much more than an approximation of the Greek chorus". In fact, "Schiller's choral theory … is not intended to describe the Greek chorus (as Schlegel's is), but, rather, to formulate the programme for a self-consciously modern choral practice" (Billings 2013: 148). Schlegel's well-known reference is to the chorus as "the idealized spectator" ("der idealisierte Zuschauer"), that is, in Billings' words, "a form of mediation between the spectator's empirical response and a desired aesthetic one".[53] Yet Nietzsche's approval of Schiller's idea of the Greek tragic chorus hints at a more complex evaluation of Greek tragedy as *Musikdrama*, in some measure indebted to Schiller's concept of "two, so to speak, concentric theatres: a 'natural' one, where characters speak to the choral collective 'derived from the poetical form of real life', as their immediate spectators, and an 'artificial' one, where characters and chorus play in front of their actual audience". As Halliwell has it, "reading [Schiller's] essay … is", therefore, "one valuable way of addressing the challenges which the Greek chorus poses to our understanding and imagination", and entails the affirmation of an anti-naturalistic poetics

53. Schlegel 1996: 65; see Billings 2013:143-4.

of the chorus, after the refusal of the ancient choral practice in the name of a 'natural' *simplicité* by eighteenth-century French dramatists.

In "The Chorus's 'moral effect' in Italian Opera", Francesco Bissoli illustrates how "in addition to its predominantly narrative and commenting side-role, inscribed in the dramatic frame, in Rossini's years the chorus occasionally started to perform as an acting crowd, later acquiring an extra-diegetic function or actually metamorphosing into a purely timbric component". Bissoli's analysis begins with the chorus of an almost prototypic 'rescue opera', Simon Mayr's *Lodoiska* (1796). Here, the limited space granted to the choral parts is counterbalanced by the variety of their treatments, from the addition of an exotic veneer, to the proposal of a chorus *di dentro* ('from within'), with the effect of "a broadening of the spatial horizon" or "otherwise … enriching a lyrical and introspective scene" or announcing a turning point in the action. This last aspect will feature also in the dramaturgy of several operas by Rossini. It was Giacomo Leopardi who claimed that the chorus should be characterized by a "moral effect" rather than being "of interest" only "to the eyes and ears". The attribution of an ethos to the chorus entails that, to some extent and in its own terms, it can be conceived of as a character. Leopardi underlines its dramatic success especially in the comic opera, which implicitly confirms the 'popular' dimension of a chorality that in modern theatre is more or less consciously derived from Shakespeare.[54] At the same time, Leopardi's a-systematic considerations agree with an idea of the chorus's 'plural' essence as repeatedly asserted since Schiller, and culminating in Nietzsche's notion of the "gigantic individual". At the same time, Leopardi also elaborates an idea of the chorus as mediator of "maxims of justice, virtue, heroism, compassion, patriotism", impersonal values not advocated by any individual character. In this way, the dramatic function of the chorus in the Italian opera of the Risorgimento is well defined both in its ideological traits, and in the range of its possible realizations. The chorus's central position in Italian opera is aptly exemplified by Giovanni Bottesini's *L'Assedio di Firenze* (1856 and 1860), whose musical numbers interestingly include "as many choral songs (four) as soloes and duets".

In "The Chorus in Early Twentieth-Century Spanish Theatre" Paola Ambrosi examines the recurrent use of the chorus by Spanish playwrights in the 1920s and 1930s, a device which was then adopted "almost uninterruptedly until the 1970s". Ambrosi focuses especially upon the main representatives of the so-called *Etad de Plata* ('Silver Age') of the Spanish literature: Ramón del Valle-Inclan, Miguel de Unamuno, Ramón Gomez de la Serna, José Bergamín, Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, heirs of a classical poetic tradition, but

54. See for instance the overview drawn by Baur 1999: 38-9.

at the same time also active in the European avant-gardes, and conscious witnesses of the cultural changes that were taking place in the early twentieth century. In these experiments theatrical chorality translated into the language of drama an ideological assumption: it gave voice and body to Ortega y Gasset's statement that "[t]here are no longer protagonists; there is only the chorus" (1969: 39). Besides, to use Garcia Lorca's words, it seeks to involve the spectators who do not sit in the first rows. Apart from such considerations and their having been inspired by an ambiguous millenarist pessimism or, instead, by deeply felt social stances, these experiments raise, and deal with, an issue already cropped up in the Renaissance: while the ancient chorus was a "truly homogenous mass", the modern one is "differentiated", it is the bearer of a "different individualistic stances" (1986: 86n1). In this Spanish context an awareness of the peculiarity of modern dramatic chorality entails a variety of different poetic approaches, experimented upon in both play-texts and in dance librettos including choruses, albeit destined to remain unknown for decades during Francoism. Stagecraft experimentalism is typical of the two works by José Bergamín selected by Ambrosi: *The Philologists* (1925), where it is overtly inspired by Aristophanes's animal choruses, and *Laughter in the Bones* (1973, but including texts written between 1924 and 1927), respectively. The article eventually lingers on the 'classical' characterization of García Lorca's choruses, and on the scenic and choreographic innovations carried out by Rafael Alberti – an interest he shared with Bergamín – as evidences of the diversified choral outcomes that twentieth-century Spanish theatre offered.

In "'Sordid particulars': Deixis in the Chorus of *Murder in the Cathedral*", Serena Marchesi investigates the function of the deictic markers used by T.S. Eliot's Chorus in bringing the audience to participate in the ritual slaughter of the protagonist and, more generally, in the horrors of history, with a direct reference to the 1930s. The 'classical' use of deixis, starting with the choral prologue as a sort of recasting of the Greek tragic *parodos*, is particularly significant precisely because it is carried out by the choral collective instead of a soliloquizing or dialoguing character, as was often the case with ancient drama. The collective choral voice (Nietzsche's "supernatural lungs") is distributed among the voices of 'commoners' and 'citizens'. This dissolution into single voices, rooted in the Renaissance stage tradition, as Marchesi fully acknowledges, underlines the similarity between the beginning of *Murder in the Cathedral* and the first scene of *Coriolanus* ("… hear *me* speak", *Coriolanus*, 1.1.1). However, Marchesi rightly points out that the Chorus's voice is the bearer of messages of disparate origin (for instance from Revelation), as well as of allusions "to something that [Eliot's] middle-class audience could not have failed to perceive", such as newspaper reports. In their allusion to "private terrors" as well as to the "girls … disappeared" (ll. 179-89), the Chorus would

evoke "recognisable echoes of newspapers reports": these "tales of homely horrors … perfectly fit" not only in "Eliot's Modernist poetics", but also in his "Modernist theodicy" perceptible in "all [the] graphic details" of an ordinary horrific cruelty.

"Of Men and Ghosts: Delmore Schwartz's Re-visitation of the Greek Chorus" by Alessandra Calanchi deals with the experimentalism of an author "escap[ing] canonical taxonomy": Schwartz, editor of the *Partisan Review*, wrote dramas and essays, and "anticipated in many ways the later interest – and involvement – of intellectuals in the mass media, popular arts, and the critique of consumer society". More interested in European than in American theatre, and, if anything, in the Yiddish theatre transplanted into the American Jewish culture, Schwartz produces a "typical literary cocktail of genres and styles", whose foretaste is provided by 'verse plays' such as *Coriolanus and His Mother* and *Paris and Helen*. In *Coriolanus and His Mother*, the Chorus is located among the audience and is made up of a plurality of voices (six) which evoke ghostly "stars" (four of them are former eminent people) or indefinite individuals (the author himself, or maybe his own *Doppelgänger*). In *Paris and Helen*, instead, against the backdrop of the Helen-Paris-Menelaus triangle a Chorus of Old Men recalls the presence and comments of the Old Men on the walls of Troy in *Iliad* 3. In these experiments the chorus is distributed among several voices, as often happens in modern versions of this ancient dramatic device. As Calanchi illustrates, Schwartz's following works confirm "[his] obsessive research for *another* kind of epiphany – and a really extreme one: one which could disclose existence out of the body, one which could even 'dispose' of the body more definitely than a ghost", well beyond the experimentation of *Coriolanus and His Mother*. Along those lines, the radio "represents an appropriate chorus" (Valenti: 211) in *Choosing Company* (1936, included in *Shenandoah and Other Verse Plays*): "a mechanical voice that is neither male nor female, and when it does not speak it plays jazz … [and] combines a[n] … 'oratorio' … with the social dimension of broadcasting": "the radio is poet laureate / to Heinz, Palmolive, Swift, and Chevrolet" (Schwartz 1950: 57). This strange entity endowed with a mysterious voice is invested with both authority and authorship, and its "admonition[s]" are located in the same communicative space of advertising. The contamination between a modern idea of chorality and the use of mass media is brought a step ahead in *Dr Bergen's Belief* (where the choral function is accomplished by a phonograph and some photographs), while in *Venus in the Back Room* four of its eight characters are mere dematerialized voices. *Shenandoah* (1941) provides yet another variation with the use of a telephone as the bearer of "oracular potentiality". In *Shenandoah* all these voices realize a sort of "chorus from the past" – their choral function being acknowledged by Schwartz himself (1943: vii). Finally,

the broadcast play *Kilroy's Carnival: A Poetic Prologue for TV* (1958) marks the conclusive shift from radio to television. Calanchi's discussion of the media used by Delmore Schwartz in his multifarious revisiting of the Greek chorus explains how, in his constant variety of choices, he "appropriates the spirit of the Greek chorus without forgetting his own (Jewish) American identity, thus creating a bridge between ages and cultures capable of curing 'the long illness of time and history' (Schwartz 1992: 10)".

Abbreviations

FGrH	*Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin 1923 – Leiden 1958.
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott and Henry Stuart Jones (eds) (1968), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsj; last access 19th February 2015).
P. Oxy.	*The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (1899-), London: The Egypt Exploration Society.
TrGF	Snell, Bruno (ed.) (1986), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*: vol 1: *Didascaliae tragicae*…, editio correctior et addendis aucta curavit Richard Kannicht, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

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