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"Well-Staged Syllables":
From Classical to Early Modern English Metres in Drama

Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi

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Silvia Bigliazzi*

Introduction[1]

1. Well-Staged Syllables

The title of this special issue alludes to Sidney's lines in his famous *Defence* about the two ways of versifying in poetry, the ancient and the modern. The music of verse is a major concern in his discussion and it is surprising to read his equal praise of both "the traditional English manner of writing verse and . . . the imitation of classical metres" (Attridge 1974, 1). Although Sidney believes that the ancient way is "more fit for music, both words and tune observing quantity, and more fit lively to express diverse passions, by the low or lofty sound of the well-weighed syllable", he also claims that the modern approach – the English in particular – can achieve "a certain music to the ear" by way of rhyme. Thus, Sidney continues, "though we do not observe quantity, yet we observe the accent very precisely, which other languages either cannot do, or will not do so absolutely". The conclusion is that "the English, before any other vulgar language . . . is fit for both sorts" (Sidney 1989, 248). As Attridge rightly observed, in the light of the actual achievements of quantitative experiments compared to traditional accentual poetry, this statement sounds astonishing (1974, 1). And yet, in order to grasp the full meaning of Sidney's view, it should be situated within the context of "Renaissance humanism, and in particular its educational programme" (3). It was precisely the inevitable decline of that experiment, alongside an awareness of the shortcomings of quantitative verse at the end of the century that allowed the English manner to flourish. Thomas Campion's claim in his *Obseruations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602) that quantitative verse was successful when accentual is in

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[1] This introduction and the whole monographic section dedicated to *Well-Staged Syllables. From Classical to Early Modern English Metres in Drama* are part of the 2017 PRIN *Classical Receptions in Early Modern English Drama* research project (Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Verona).

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fact the final evidence of the necessary failure of that enterprise (Attridge 1974, 228). Daniel's comment that the iambic line is only "the plain ancient verse, consisting of tenne sillables to fiue feet, which hath euer beene vsed amongst vs time out of minde" (1603, H*v*) is the natural response to Campion's strenuous attempt to defend the classical style. After all, as Stephen Orgel argues in this issue, "'reserving the Quantitie to the Verse' means that English in verse is not English as it is spoken" and "quantity in verse is a purely visual matter, to be read and not pronounced aloud. Poetry is a different language" (pp. 28). Not surprisingly, Orgel also points out that "Shakespeare never wrote quantitative hexameters, not even for the pedantic poets in *Love's Labour's Lost*, where they would certainly have been appropriate – perhaps his small Latin and less Greek did not extend so far but even if they were not beyond his abilities, quantitative metrics were not adaptable to the spoken English of the stage" (pp. 22).

This special issue on "Well-Staged Syllables" makes a foray precisely into the realm of early modern English drama, which does not always mean the stage. Thus, Sidney's altered quotation, with its implied reference to the 'ancient way', is meant to evoke what being classical sounded and looked like in early modern England (Orgel 2019, 2021) with regard to versification in drama. In this respect, the relevance of a language that must be spoken remains crucial whether we refer to drama in a theatre or to closet drama, that is, drama intended for private settings and possibly declamation (Attridge 2019, 319). It remains relevant because the drama discussed in the articles collected in this issue is inspired by classical models that entail different parts and verse forms in ways that make language constitutive of both its sense and performance as originally in Greek tragedy. In other terms, whether we deal with Neo-Latin translations of Euripides and Sophocles, or with vernacular translations of Seneca, or with Milton's adoption and challenge of Greek prosodic schemes, verse forms are essential components of the dramatic structure in ways that drama less connected with classical models is not. This does not change whether we consider translations for teaching purposes and/or for individual reading, although with different effects. In all cases the divergence between written and spoken language, spelling and pronunciation affects the sense and function of metre. As Orgel again reminds us, "by the sixteenth century spelling had not kept pace with pronunciation, and the written language had long ceased to be an adequate guide to speech" (32). Thus, "when Hamlet urges the visiting actors to 'Speak the speech . . . as I pronounced it to you' (3.2.1-2) he is concerned with principles of declamation, but he also testifies to the disjunction between the written text and the way it is spoken" (ibid.). Use of Latin in this period is not unaffected by how it was pronounced, as pronunciation varied greatly at the time, and, as is often recalled, English Latin was often incomprehensible to continental listeners (Attridge 1974, 23).

The following articles are not primarily concerned with this particular problem, while being aware of it; nor are they intended to offer a history of dramatic versification in the Tudor age and beyond. Rather, they are concerned with the ways in which drama responded to the humanist programme that also promoted quantitative experiments in poetry by dealing with ideas of lyric metre in drama, in view of different forms of performance, as well as in processes of confluence between different ancient and English traditions. They raise questions about what a Greek tragedy meant for an early modern reader; about schooling in classics; about Neo-Latin and vernacular translations of Greek and Latin drama; about metrical devices conceived of as being representative of how to be classical; but also about how to invoke and at the same time to challenge ancient formal metrical models. Selected case studies span from the Tudor age to Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671), and pay particular attention to some of the most problematic parts of plays: lyric forms and the performance of the Chorus.

2. Reading and Performing Lyric Verse: the Case of the Chorus

As Cunliffe has remarked, "when plays were no longer acted" in the course of the Middle Ages, information about ancient drama could derive "from the texts and from general treatises" (1912, x). Among the latter, Evanthius' *De Fabula* and Donatus' *De Comoedia* were especially relevant to the early modern reception of classical drama for their inclusion in many editions of Terence (see esp. 3.1 and 3.5 in Wessner 1902, 18, 22), but of course Aristotle and especially Horace were as well. Interestingly, as Guido Avezzù elucidates in his article (36ff.), a peculiar Renaissance misinterpretation of a passage from the *Poetics* concerning the use of *rhythmos*, *metron*, and *melos* contributed to blurring the differences between the main parts of tragedy. Yet another misreading, this time of a line from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, produced a distorted image of the function of the Chorus, which contributed to weakening the sense of lyric parts in drama connected with singing (see below Bigliazzi, 144ff.). As Orgel points out, "drama in *The Poetics* [of Aristotle] is language, logic, a form of argument; in short, a text, literature" (2015, 63). And as Bruce Smith remarks, in Cicero's treatises plays are rhetorical events (1988, 16). Although theoretical writings on the continent were copious, the debate in England lagged behind and knowledge of classical plays was earned mainly through direct access to the texts of Greek and Latin drama. It was conveyed through teaching syllabuses in schools, Universities and Inns of Court, where plays were also put on. However, as Marco Duranti shows in his article on the metres of Greek drama in early modern English schooling, the study of Greek versification was very rare and notions of classical prosody were almost entirely restricted to Latin forms. Thus, while editions of Greek plays are limited to two fairly late publications (Euripides' *Troades*, 1575, and Aristophanes' *Equites*, 1593; also presumably designed for teaching purposes: see Duranti 2021), Neo-Latin drama included translations from Greek. Two Euripidean plays and one by Sophocles which were Latinised in the course of the sixteenth century are very attentive to metre and show heavy influence of continental models. Buchanan's *Medea* (1544) and *Alcestis* (1556) were carried out and published in France; both of these as well as Thomas Watson's *Antigone* (1581) were produced with a students' performance in mind. These translations are especially interesting when they come to render the lyric parts of the choral odes. As Angelica Vedelago carefully illustrates, they are reproduced in Latin by experimenting with quantitative measures. And as Francesco Dall'Olio suggests, Buchanan's treatment of the metrics of the *stasima* betrays a different approach to Euripides in the two plays: *Medea* was carried out "almost exclusively through the eyes of Seneca", *Alcestis* by tailoring Seneca's verse more to the Greek forms, possibly in view of publication and under the influence of contemporary French poetry and the reception of Greek tragedy.

But what was exactly meant by translating Greek tragedies in terms of their performance into comparable verse forms remains conjectural. Vedelago recalls that the choruses of Justus Caesar Scaliger's 1587 translation of *Ajax* are accompanied by a musical score. It may also be remembered that the Choruses of Sophocles' *Oedipus* in the Italian translation of Orsatto Giustinian were set to music by Andrea Gabrieli for the famous 1585 performance at the Vicenza Olympic Theatre in 1585 (see Restani 2015); and that Buchanan's *Medea* was performed in Strasbourg at the end of the sixteenth century with choruses set to music by Christophe Thomas Walliser (Young 1962, 136). But Vedelago is right in very cautiously raising the possibility that the choruses of Watson's *Antigone* might have been accompanied by music – a question that has recently been suggested by Duffin with regard to some neo-Senecan plays in English (2021). Surely, if read and rightly interpreted, Aristotle's *Poetics* alongside the scholia were unequivocal that certain combinations of *rhythm*, *metre* and *melos* in certain parts of tragedy were meant to be sung, chanted or recited, thus indirectly imbuing verse with specific performative qualities. More precisely, it can be deduced that rhythm and metre corresponded to spoken parts, while the combination of the three elements caracterised sung parts. One would therefore expect that any recreation, or translation, or imitation of those parts and verse forms in a different language would convey the same sense of the parts of the original tragedy and the performative resources immanent to metre. And yet things were not so simple as this, and, as Avezzù elucidates, it was not only because of interpretative flaws.

It should be recalled that access to ancient drama occurred through books which retained scant information about their performance, including that of verse. Comments like the following one about early modern playbooks of contemporary drama can hardly be applied to the editions of ancient plays:

> By the 1590s, the particular design characteristics of playbook *mise en page* evoked many of the extra-lexical, meaning-making effects of theatricality, most of which we assume to have been lost or erased or ignored in the process of repackaging playtexts made for one media environment (the theatre) to suit a different medium: the printed book. Typographic arrangements that accounted for the visual, sonic, and emotional 'energetics' of performance . . . were vital to the legibility of printed matter specifically as *play-matter*. These arrangements activated generic recognition, making it possible for readers (before reading a word) to know that what they were looking at was a play. (Bourne 2021, 195; see also Bourne 2020)

Greek and Latin drama were not as easily recognisable as plays on the page in ways that Renaissance drama was. The function of their verse forms was something that could be found in the commentaries in the margin or because marked before each part, but a real sense of how they were to be performed remains confined to the page. However, in spite of Howard-Hill's claim that Greek dramatists had very little influence on English playwrights and they were therefore not worth examining with regard to the printing of drama (1990, 131), Euripides was perhaps the most widespread Greek author in the Renaissance. Therefore it is likely that many readers first encountered a Greek Chorus and other parts marked out as lyric in a collection of his plays, whether in the original or in translation. Aldus Manutius' 1503 edition does not print separate lyric stanzas, nor does it distinguish between acted, chanted, and sung parts (either monodic or choral). The indication *Xo.* (*Choròs*) is placed in the margin like any other speech prefix. Interestingly, Manutius' edition of Seneca's tragedies (1517) indicated CHORUS not only as a speaker, but also as a wholly separate section (new line / CHORUS centred / new line), as in previous editions of Seneca, where scenes were marked by speech headings positioned at the centre of the page.[2] This set the norm for later editions of Seneca as well. Only Collinus' 1541 Greek-Latin edition of Euripides seems to follow the Senecan model, but just in the first tragedy, *Hecuba*, and as regards the first choral ode, since in all the other odes of the same tragedy and the following ones the speech prefix is like that of any other character, positioned on the left. In 1562 Stiblinus was the first to divide Euripides' plays into Acts corresponding to the ancient episodes, and also to distinguish the Chorus from the rest, thus following Aldus' Senecan edition – but this was a parallel Greek-Latin edition and the 'Latin style' may have had an influence. Perhaps significantly, Aldus' 1507 edition of Erasmus' Latin translations of *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia Aul.* on the other hand followed the printing practice of Greek dramatists, not Seneca's. Consequently, no Renaissance edition of Euripides, including the miscellaneous Stephanus one (1567), collecting a selection of Euripides', Sophocles' and Aeschylus' tragedies, indicated the number of speakers within the Chorus. Stiblinus (1562) was the only one to separate the Chorus from the other sections, and Turnèbe (1553) and Canter (1571) the first to foreground its melodic form based on repetition and structural response, in Sophocles and Euripides, respectively.

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[2] See also Howard-Hill 1990, esp. 133-4: "The most readily apparent distinction is that the classical plays employed act and scene headings. At the beginning only scenes were indicated and only by the provision of speech-headings when the groupings of characters changed as they entered or left the stage. Scenes therefore had no invariable connection with stage clearance, an association later made by English dramatists, nor with localities" (134).

If we move to the Renaissance editions of Seneca, we notice that the Chorus was signalled by centred speech-headings, had no divisions into stanzas, nor was the number of speakers identified. Revealingly, Badius (1514), Manutius (1517) Petrus (1529) and Gryphius (1541) printed "adilon" above "chorus", possibly a phonetic transcription of *ἀδήλων* (*adḗlôn*), meaning indefinite, and Marmitta and Badius added extensive commentaries with metrical notation, stressing the literary quality of the plays as objects for learned exegesis. In one note on the second Chorus of the first tragedy, *Hercules Furens*, Badius also repeated Horace's prescription that the Chorus should sing nothing irrelevant to the action between the Acts, and should take the part of the author ("authoris partis") – a reading present in most of the authoritative manuscripts of his *Ars Poetica* and normally adopted in the early editions since the end of the fifteenth century in place of the correct "actoris partis" (see Horace 1999, 193-5; and Bigliazzi in this issue). Thus, Badius clearly read Seneca through Horace, who in turn was reading Aristotle on Greek tragedy.[3] A reader of these Senecan editions would have found very little elucidation about the Chorus and the function of verse, except for long odes with occasional commentary about the metre and content, and, as in Badius' case, massive notes in the margin including normative references to Horace. No stage directions concerning the performance of verse was present. So, it is no surprise that early modern readers may have been puzzled by a dramatic part which in Seneca's editions, yet not in Euripides', was separate from the rest when not involved in dialogues, and remained indefinite in number. Whether the varied shorter metres were to be interpreted as songs could only be evinced from theoretical treatises on ancient drama.

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[3] On the relation between Horace and Aristotle, and their reception, see e.g. Gilbert and Snuggs 1947, Stenuit 2016.

As Miola has aptly noticed, "the classical chorus has always provided formidable difficulties to translators and directors" (Miola 2002, 35). An anonymous reporter of a 1568 staging at Reggio Emilia of the tragedy *Alidoro*, attributed to Gabriele Bombasi, candidly avowed the common ignorance of how the chorus was sung in the ancient times, whether by one singer only or by the multitude in unison or in a mixed way. Thus, he concluded, "it is manifest that the diversity of these manners derives only by our difficulty in getting to know what precisely the ancients did".[4] This confusion is sometimes also true of modern readers of Renaissance authors. For instance, it has been suggested that Giraldi Cinthio's choruses "were not sung, but recited by one member, the others merely standing in view of the stage" and that "even here Giraldi claims the support of an ancient Greek usage" (Cunliffe 1912, xxx). In fact, in his discussion of the form and function of the Chorus among the ancients in his "Discorso intorno al comporre delle comedie, et delle tragedie" (1554), Giraldi Cinthio says something quite different. First, he neatly distinguishes it from the Prologue, remarking the different uses in Greek drama and Roman comedy, where a Prologue is a clearly separate portion of the spectacle divided from the main action: he either introduces the argument (as in Plautus) or speaks on behalf of the poet (as in Terence):

> Nelle Tragedie Greche, et Latine, et Volgari insino ad hora scritte, non è altro il Prologo, che quella parte, ch'è posta innanzi al primo Choro. . . La onde non imitando il Prologo, l'attione, riman chiarissimo, ch'egli della favola non è parte, ma è una giunta postavi da Romani per disporre gli animi de gli spettatori alla attentione, o per conciliare insieme beniuolenza al Poeta: il che mostra il uoltar del parlare, che fa colui del Prologo a gli spettatori, la qualcosa non si può fare ne gli atti della fauola . . . (1554, 246, 247-8)
>
> [In the Greek, Latin and Vulgar tragedies written up to now, the Prologue is no other part than that which is placed before the first Chorus. . . Inasmuch as the Prologue does not imitate the action, it is very clear that he is not part of the fable, but is an addition placed by the Romans in order to dispose the minds of the spectators to attention, or to elicit their goodwill to the Poet: which is demonstrated by the Prologue's address to the spectators, which cannot be done in the acts of the fable. (My translation)]

While the Prologue speaks ("Però che nel Prologo non ha luoco senone il parlare", 205), the first Chorus sometimes performs a "melody" ("melodia"), sometimes "the numbers" ("numero"), meaning rhythm and song, respectively. In the first case, Giraldi continues, the Choral ode is called by Aristotle "Commo" (*Kommos*), that is, a wailing or lament, and consists in a rhythmical performance including a dance assimilable to the contemporary Moresque. This type of Chorus is like Seneca's opening one in his *Troades* where the Trojan women sing and dance with Hecuba a mourning song for Priam. Because of the movement involved, Giraldi calls it "mobile" (229). The Chorus that has no movement, or "number" (230), as is typical of the Choruses following the first one, and simply uses verse and melody is instead called "stabile" (static). What is relevant in this explanation is that Giraldi believes that the verse and the melody were common to all choric parts.[5] Thus, in no way did he claim that the ancient Chorus was spoken by one actor, while rather noticing that the single speaker intervened individually only during the Acts, as one amongst other speakers; between the Acts the Chorus was a collective character both singing and dancing together.

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[4] "è cosa manifesta che la diversità di queste maniere non viene se non dalla difficultà che si truova a conoscer quel che precisamente intorno a ciò si facessero gli antichi" (in Ariani 1977, 1001).

Giraldi also carefully distinguished different uses of rhyme, underlining that it was not only "appropriate to some parts of the tragedy when the characters reason with each other", but also and "especially in the Choruses" where "mixing broken and whole lines [broken verse = 7 syllables; whole verse = 10, 11, 12 syllables; see 228]" was "for the sake of the highest sweetness".[6] The mention of verse and rhyme is relevant to how Giraldi reinterprets the contemporary Chorus by way of current lyric devices, so that the addition of the rhyme (a trait absent from both Greek and Latin verses) and a combination of heptameters and hendecasyllables become the necessary features to confer upon the Chorus a lyric gentleness the Prologue and other parts of tragedy were not meant to have. These remarks are relevant to the present discussion insofar as verse patterns and performance in drama cannot be disjointed. In this respect it is curious to notice that similar arguments were put forward in different countries. Puttenham, for instance, a few decades later was to approve the use of rhyme to approximate Greek and Latin gentleness in terms similar to both Giraldi and Sidney:

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[5] "Nel primo choro alle volte la melodia et il numero: il quale choro fu detto Commo, ciò è pianto da Aristotele. Agli altri chori conviene solo il verso et la melodia. La onde si può vedere, che solo il verso è commune a tutte le parti della tragedia" (1554, 229). Incidentally, this distinction should not be confused with that between choruses that in the contemporary debate bore the same names of "mobile" and "static" but identified their presence on or absence from the stage, not the quality of their performance – in his Letter to Hercule II D'Este appended to his *Didone*, Giraldi advocated a "mobile" Chorus, with entrances and exits (1583, 143-4), while Angelo Ingegneri, in his "Sui modi di rappresentare i cori, gli intermezzi, gli echi e le ombre", a static one (1598, Part 1, 17ff.).

[6] "Per lo contrario possono haver luoco le rime in qualche parte della Tragedia tra le persone, che ragionano, et ne i Chori, prencipalissimamente, mescolando insieme per piu soavita i rotti con gli intieri: intendendo pero per gli Chori quelli che dividono uno atto dall'altro, et non de Chori, che si pongono tra gli interlocutori; perché allhora una sola persona ragiona, et non tutto insieme" (1554, 229; my translation).

> For wanting the currantnesse of the Greeke and Latine feete, instead thereof we make in th'ends of our verses a certaine tunable sound: which anon after with another verse reasonably distant we accord together in the last fall or cadence: the eare taking pleasure to heare the like tune reported, and to feele his returne. (1589, Book 2, "Of Proportion in Concord, called Symphonie or rime", 63)

In this way, Giraldi sounds closer to Puttenham, Sidney or Daniel than to other Italian writers who advocated rhymeless drama, from Trissino to Speroni – a question that also proves relevant with regard to the use of enjambment in rhymed and rhymeless plays, as Emanuel Stelzer shows in this issue.

If we turn to Evanthius-Donatus' *De comoedia*, it is clear that the ancient Chorus was perceived as the cradle of ancient comedy, which by the gradual addition of characters was turned into a new form, later divided into five acts ("Comoedia uetus ab initio chorus fuit paulatimque personarum numero in quinque actus processit"). It was also known as a singing Chorus, and it was precisely for its singing and verse forms related to it that it came to be perceived as boring and useless because it hindered the action ("nam postquam otioso tempore fastidiosior spectator effectus est et tum, cum ad cantatores ad actoribus fabula transiebat, consurgere et abire coepit"). This was the reason why it was not introduced when the text was recorded in book form, and a space was left for possible addition, as in the case of Menander ("ut primo quidem choros tollerent locum eis relinquentes"). At a later stage even that space was erased ("postremo ne locum quidem reliquerunt").[7] Thus, following Evanthius-Donatus, Renaissance readers could not be mistaken about the Chorus being a lyric part in ancient comedies, and its verse being destined to a performance with music; nor could they confuse it with the Prologue, since the latter identified the first of the four parts into which the comedy was divided. In other words, it was not a character the Chorus could overlap with because of its dramatic function and because of the Chorus' unquestionably lyric metrical forms.[8]

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[7] "3.1 The ancient comedy was at first a chorus, and little by little, because of the number of characters, it developed into five acts. And so, little by little, by a sort of reduction and shrinking of the chorus, it arrived at the new comedy, in which not only is the chorus not made to appear, but not even given any space. In fact, since the spectator became more and more hostile because of the passing of time without action and, as soon as the representation passed from the actors to the singers, he began to stand up and leave, this advised, at first, the poets to eliminate the choruses leaving them a space, as Menander did precisely for this reason, and not for other reasons, as others think. Finally, they did not leave them even a space, and this the Latin comedians did, with the result that it is difficult to divide their works into five acts" (Wessner 1902, 18; my translation).

These two examples coming from a sixteenth-century Italian interpretation of ancient drama in view of its modern revival, and from a well-known fourth-century commentary on Terence, respectively, show no hesitation in taking for granted that the ancient collective performance of the Chorus involved singing and occasionally dancing. In contemporary times its lyricism could be translated into rhyme. Endorsing this view meant taking a stand between the factions of the pro-rhyme and rhymeless drama advocates, the latter striving to eradicate traces of traditional barbarism in language. As Orgel again remarks in his article,

> the larger assumption behind Ascham's and Harvey's proposals for the reform of English poetry was that the "barbarous" England of the time could be rectified by the application of classical rules. A return to the classics held out the promise of culture and civility – not only in poetry, of course, but poetry seemed a particularly clear example. Nobody thought the transformation would be easy; a hectoring and bullying tone is common throughout the discussion. But a good deal of energy in the Elizabethan age went into the devising of strategies for becoming the new ancients, strategies of translation and adaptation, and the invention of appropriately classical-sounding models for vernacular verse, the domestication of the classic. (22)

Rhyme could alternately be seen as the instrument for achieving the music of ancient quantitative verse or as a barbarous stigma.

3. Confluences

As different from Greek and Latin conventions, English metres in drama and for the stage did not distinguish spoken from chanted or sung parts. They did not define specific portions of tragedy and comedy nor had they neatly defined performative functions. Above all, very little was said about verse in drama. In his 1586 manual of poetry *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, William Webbe pointed out that the "natural course of most English verses seemeth to run vppon the olde Iambicke stroake" (Fiii.*v*), and all English verses might be sung or played to all manner of tunes indistinctly, with no specific mention being made to drama:

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[8] "The comedy consists of four parts: prologue, exposition (*protasis*), development (*epitasis*), and catastrophe. The prologue is in a sense a preamble to the story, only there it is possible to address the audience to the advantage or the poet, or the play itself, or the actor" (3.5, 22; my translation).

> There are nowe wythin this compasse, as many sortes of verses as may be deuised differences of numbers: wherof some consist of equall proportions, some of long and short together, some of many rymes in one staffe (as they call it) some of crosse ryme, some of counter ryme, some ryming wyth one worde farre distant from another, some ryming euery thyrd or fourth word, and so likewyse all manner of dytties applyable to euery tune that may be sung or sayd, distinct from prose or continued spéeche. (Fiii.*r*)

When, in response to Thomas Campion's classically-oriented view about refusal of rhyme in his *Obseruations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602), Samuel Daniel applied his argument to drama, he conceded that tragedies should use blank verse, but admitted rhyme for "the Chorus and where a sentence shall require a couplet" (1603, Hvi.*v*). Neither Campion nor Puttenham before him dealt with the Chorus or other lyric forms in drama, except for Campion's brief mention of an instance from a Chorus in tragedy (1602, 17) to illustrate the dimeter "as a part of the Iambic", which, he noticed, "is our most natural and auncient English verse" (16). If confirmation of theoretical paucity about dramatic verse were needed, it would be sufficient to leaf through the pages of theorists of versification. And yet, as Avezzù points out in his article, Theodore Goulston, in his 1623 translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* into Latin, would unusually show "a clear perception that the parts of drama are characterised by stylistic resources which are different and differently combined with each other" (59).

However this may be, the point, as noticed above, is that English metres were not performance indicators as Greek ones were. Some stanzas may be connected to certain genres, as in the case of rhyme royal, whose moralising tone is reminiscent of the native tradition of the *Fall of Princes* and the *Mirror for Magistrates*, but was also used for Prologues and Epilogues in interludes and was to be adopted in Heywood's translation of Seneca's *Troades*, alongside the fourteener (see Bigliazzi in the present issue). Nevertheless, before the regular adoption of blank verse in dramas following *Gorboduc*, "anything that approximated serious plays, that is, morality plays, presented for dialogues a variety of different forms, including 'cantilevered verse, ballad eight, three-beat couplets, rhyme royal stanzas using Alexandrines, seven-line stanzas of four-beat lines in monorhyme, and six-line stanzas with two-beat lines'" (Hardison 1989, 156; Bigliazzi, 155). And as Orgel remarks, the fourteener couplet, albeit essentially the ballad metre, "was also the verse adopted by George Chapman for his translation of the Iliad, published in 1598". Therefore, although "all these translators were serious classicists . . . English fourteeners sounded right to them" (25-6). They sounded right to Heywood as well, who used them for the iambic trimeter of Seneca.

What we find here is the sense of a confluence Bruce Smith discussed in his 1988 seminal study on *Ancient Scripts & Modern Experience on the English Stage 1500-1700*, underlining what Orgel rightly calls the "domestication of the classics":

> Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century playwrights, actors, and audiences may have given classical comedy and classical tragedy increasing sovereignty over how characters speak and how events fall out, but playwrights, actors and audiences alike were disposed to understand ancient drama in their own anachronistic terms, even when supposedly "classical" ideas held sway after the Restoration. "Influence" is perhaps a less apt term for this state of affairs than "confluence." Since the Renaissance itself, critics have been pointing out the marks that ancient drama has left on modern; this book looks at the matter from the opposite direction as well and considers the marks that modern drama has left on ancient, particularly on the first stage productions of Greek and Latin scripts in modern times. (1988, 6-7)

Smith's notion of confluence suggests a flexible two-way relation between ancient and modern traditions to be viewed in both progressive and regressive terms. It changes the more traditional linear conception of 'influence' into one that also shows the effects of the modern upon the ancient and the relevance of contemporary mediations. This aspect has rarely been investigated with regard to versification in drama, and this is what this issue attempts to do. The sometimes evoked comparability of verse patterns in translations and dramatic experiments should be considered beyond the description of verse-for-verse correspondences. Thus, in his reading of Buchanan's reworking of Euripides' *Alcestis*, Francesco Dall'Olio suggests that in the increasingly elaborate metric pattern of the Choruses we can perceive a dynamic of confluences concerning ways of reading the ancient through the mediation of what Senecan lyric prosody sounded like in the Renaissance, as well as through the more complex metrics French scholars began identifying in Greek tragic Choruses. Likewise, Heywood's emulative approach to the translation of Seneca's *Troades*, in my reading of it, shows a design behind the radical rewriting of the choral odes, manifest in Heywood's apparently random choice of English verse forms for the Senecan lyric verses, at the same time suggesting awareness of different metric paces in the original, and the need to reinvent them. The adoption of the fourteener and the rhyme royal stanza in conjunction with a new metaspectatorial and narrative stance of the Chorus bring verse and sense to converge towards a new understanding of the tragic core of the play, eventually eradicating it from the female collective and its original singing voice. What this reflects goes beyond a purely formal use of prosody to suggest metrical patterns imbued with a larger political and cultural meaning in ways that Crawforth too shows in her article on Milton's irregular approach to the versification of the Choruses in *Samson Agonistes*. On a different note, Emanuel Stelzer innovatively demonstrates that the use of enjambment since its earliest appearance in the first English tragedy in blank verse, *Gorboduc* (1561), is a semantic and syntactic device connected with a sense of classical *gravitas*. Derived from Greek and Latin epos and drama as well as from contemporary Italian epos and drama *in versi sciolti*, it proves especially effective in rhymeless verse, but can also be encountered in rhymed fourteeners, as it occasionally is in Senecan translations. Stelzer offers a fresh discussion of how run-on lines came to identify a classical-like elevated style in the Senecan fashion, as well as providing a supple device to make lines flow more naturally. Apparently in contradiction with its sententious tone, enjambment shows both adherence to ancient dramatic and epic models, and a non-insular character of Elizabethan verse-making for drama. Thus, when we read in Hannah Crawforth's article on Milton's *Samson Agonistes* that the final Chorus is in the form of a metrically unusual sonnet eschewing the traditional final couplet, we sense a syncretic approach also perceivable in the examples discussed in the previous articles. Milton here employs a Euripidean "language echoing that which served as a stock conclusion to *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *The Bacchae*, *Helen*, and *Medea* (among other tragedies)" (207). In Crawforth's words, this Chorus represents "an Englishing of Euripidean verses that might stand as a synecdoche for Greek tragic form" (ibid.). Overall, this last article ideally sums up a whole tradition of prosodic domestications of the classics, a question we started from with Orgel's study of the reform of Elizabethan poetry, unveiling how metric irregularities may acquire a larger meaning. In Milton's case, tension between freedom and constraint "stands in for the whole literary and political system to which ancient Greek tragedy belongs" (216), Crawforth argues. More generally, the metrics examined in the articles collected in this issue can hardly be considered formal exercises inviting a purely technical description. What the metrical patterns discussed here show is a persistent conceptual and variously cultural *agon* with the ancient past. Through fortunate errors, to borrow Avezzù's felicitous expression, misreadings, translations, imitations, emulations, as well as implicit challenges, early modern verse-making for drama was also a way to face what being classical meant in the humanist programme. Refashioning the classics was a way to fashion the modern.

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