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*What is a Greek Source
on the Early English Stage?
Fifteen New Essays*

Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi and Tania Demetriou

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Classical Receptions in
Early Modern English Drama

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The Strange Case of the Singing Chorus that Was Not There.
On the Authority of Authorities[*]

Silvia Bigliazzi

Abstract

The Warres of Cyrus King of Persia, a play often attributed to Richard Farrant and published in 1594, but possibly dating from at least the previous decade, contains a curious piece addressed to the audience. Without speech heading and misplaced in the middle of act 2, it is cast in blank verse like all the dialogues and makes an obscure allusion to a chorus that does not appear in the course of the play. While this peculiar appearance has often been noted, and sometimes seen as an example of how "the prologue refers to itself as a chorus" (Wiggins, 813. *The Wars of Cyrus, King of Persia*), it remains unclear whether it belongs to this play, what happened to the chorus it mentions, and exactly what it says about it. Its praise of the ancient chorus as a singing part in the Greek fashion as opposed to the neo-Senecan wailing chorus of contemporary neoclassical drama, tells us something about what 'authentically ancient' could mean for them. Starting from this peculiar document, the essay offers reflections on the early modern understanding of the ancient chorus in relation to ideas of choral performance in contemporary English dramas. It argues that *The Warres*' strange reference to an absent singing chorus in the Greek style lets us glimpse into complex processes of construction of ancient authorities questioning monolithic views of classical tragedy.

Keywords: Richard Farrant; *The Warres of Cyrus*; ancient and early modern choruses

"Graue antiquity": a Singing Chorus

The Warres of Cyrus King of Persia, generally attributed to Richard Farrant, was published in 1594, but possibly dates from at least the

previous decade. In fact, if penned by Farrant, the play cannot have been composed after 1580, when he died.[1] James Brawner deems it to be "the only survivor exemplar of a type of plays drawn from classical sources and performed by the child actors" (1942, 20), probably "presented at the Blackfriars either late in 1576 or in 1577" (19). Tucker Brooke (1944) postdates the play to a period between the late 1580s and early 1590s on account of traces of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*'s influence (1589). If its dating is uncertain, it is instead clear that it is based on Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, a text that had been translated into English by William Bercker or Barker between 1560 and 1567. The drama unfolds two main plots: the tragic events of the captive Panthea, who remains faithful to her husband Abradatas, king of Susa, and kills herself when he dies in battle at the forefront of Cyrus' allied armies against the Assirian Anthiocus; and the war between the devious and wicked Anthiocus and the generous and valiant Persian Cyrus. However, the truly tragic plot revolves around the story of Panthea only. The play as it stands has neither choruses in the ancient fashion, nor dumb shows in neo-Senecan contemporary plays, but is interspersed with music, punctuating inter-act intervals, when, as Brawner suggests, "the chorus might have been brought forward to sing" (1942, 31). Although there is no textual evidence of this,[2] it contains several references to singing and songs not extant in the play.[3] More recently, Lucy Munro has

1 Lawrence dates it from 1578 and Chambers from around 1578, vol. 4, p. 52; Wiggins (2021) from 1580; see also Lost Plays Database, *s.v. Panthea*. https://lostplays.folger.edu/Panthea#Connection_to_The_Wars_of_Cyrus.3F.

2 Branwer's remark (1942, 31) relies on Chamber's comments that "It is apparent, indeed, that the act-intervals was of a far more importance at both Paul's and the Balckfriars than elsewhere. But this is largely a matter of degree. The inter-acts of music and song and dance were more universal and longer" (Chambers 1923, 130).

3 See the following: "PAN. *Nicasia* sings while *Panth*[e]*a* sits and sighs, / But singing, sings *Pant*[he]*as* wretchednes." (95-6); "CYR. . . . Excuse me for not comming to her tent, / Bid her be merrie with her singing maides, / And say that *Cyrus* will entreate her faire. *Exeunt. Musicke. Finis Actus primi*" (345-7); "PAN. Nicasia, commaund the musicke play; / It may be musicke will alay the fit. *Musick plaies.*" (446-7); "LIB. Then shall my song be of my *Dinons* praise. [*Sings a song.*]" (943); "PAN. First at her aulter let vs ioyntly sing, / For Musicke is a sacrifice to her. [*They sing. Exeunt.*]" (1585-1586).

discussed the relevance of the lament as showing "strong cultural associations with women in non-dramatic poetry" (2017, 101). She has also remarked that the use of songs in the *Warres of Cyrus* reflects the way in which plays in the repertoire of children's companies "represented and constructed female subjectivity and agency" (ibid.).

The play also contains a peculiar, short, misplaced prologue that supplies us, if obscurely, with intriguing insights into the role of choral singing and its relevance in the construction of ideas of classical authorities. This interpolated passage is a mysterious address to the audience, without speech-heading, located in the middle of act 2.[4] It is cast in blank verse like all the dialogues and makes an unexpected allusion to a chorus that, in fact, does not appear in the course of the play. While this perplexing speech has often been noted and sometimes seen as an example of how "the prologue refers to itself as a chorus",[5] it remains unclear whether it belongs to this play, what happened to the chorus it mentions, and exactly what it says about it. Faulty printing makes it a hard read, but it remains a revealing document about contemporary practices in choral performance.

Its strange appearance prompted Brawner to suggest that perhaps "choruses and songs were originally written on separate sheets and . . . had subsequently become detached from the principal manuscript" (1942, 13). More recently, Tiffany Stern has read it as an instantiation of the essential affinity between prologue and chorus as "additional texts, designed to be spoken together" and, therefore, not surprisingly destined to leave "the play together" because "the one refers to the other" (2009, 109). And yet, we have the prologue but not the chorus. On the contrary, Tucker Brooke has speculated that the prologue might belong to "an earlier play, constructed on classical principles", since this one "has no chorus and could not be called a revival of 'grave antiquity' in any serious sense" (1944, 121), as the address instead seems to claim. The question that follows is whether

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4 The prologic speech addressed to the audience appears on C3*r* with no previous mention of the beginning of act 2.

5 Wiggins 2021, 813 (*The Wars of Cyrus, King of Persia*). See for instance Charles Lamb's attribution of the speech to "The Chorus" in *Specimens of English Dramatic Poetry*, 1808, qtd in Brawner 1942, 125.

a singing chorus could, in fact, prompt the audience to rubricate the play under a classical heading. If we agree with Tucker Booke, "the 'mournful plaint' of Panthea" too, "preserved in manuscript at Oxford and signed by Farrant" (ibid.), might belong to a previous play, a conjecture upheld neither by Lawrence (1921), nor by Brawner (1942, 10-20) or Munro (2017, 103-4), and more recently Duffin (2021, 756). For all of them, that song was composed for this drama. Whichever the case, the audience address advocating the importance of an assumedly metrically refined singing chorus in the ancient fashion is worth quoting in full. What 'ancient' means here emerges from a comparison with other contemporary choral stagings in ways that suggest a controversy over ideas of what true antiquity was:[6]

To the audience

We gentle gentlemen deuise of late,
To shunne the vulgar and the vertuous,
Present to you worthie to iudge of vs,
Our workes of woorth and valiantnes at once.
What wants in vs imagin in the works,   5
What in the workes, condemne the writer of,
But if the worke and writing please you both,
That Zenophon from whence we borrow write,
Being both a souldier and philosopher,
Warrants what we record of *Panthea*,   10
It is writ in sad and tragicke tearmes,
May moue you tears, then you content, our muse
That seemes to trouble you, again with toies
Or needlesse antickes imitations,
Or shewes, or new deuises sprung a late,   15
we haue exilde them from our Tragicke stage,
As trash of their tradition, that can bring
nor instance, nor excuse. For what they do
In stead of mournefull plaints our *Chorus* sings,
Although it be against the vpstart guise,   20
Yet warranted by graue antiquitie,
we will reuiue the which hath long beene done.

Exit

6 The emendations in Brawner 1942 and Brooke 1944 are in bold and within square brackets.

Brawner 1942	Tucker Brooke 1944
We, gentle gentlemen, deuise of late	We, gentle gentlemen, deuise of late,
To shunne the vulgar and the vertuous,	To shun the vulgar, and the vertuous
Present to you, worthie to iudge of vs,	Present to you, **[who are]** worthy to judge of us,
Our workes of woorth and valiantnes at once.	**[And of]** Our works of worth and valiantness at once.
What wants in vs, imagin in the works;	What wants in us, imagine in the works;
What in the workes, condemne the writer of;	What in the works, condemn the writer of,
But if the worke and writing please you both,	But if **[i.e., Unless?]** the work and writing please you both.
That Zenophon, from whence we borrow, **[writ]**,	That **[i.e., That which]** Xenophon. from whence we borrow, writ, –
Being both a souldier and philosopher,	Being both a soldier and philosopher, –
Warrants what we record of *Panthea*.	Warrants what we record of *Panthea*.
It is writ in sad and tragicke tearmes	It is writ in sad and tragic terms,
May moue you tears; then you content our muse,	May **[i.e., Which may]** moue you **[i.e., your?]** tears. Then **[i.e., by weeping]** you content our muse,
That **[scornes]** to trouble you againe with toies	That seems **[perhaps "scorns"]** to trouble you again, with toys
Or needlesse antickes, imitations,	Or needless antics, imitations,
Or shewes, or new deuises sprung a late.	Or shows, or new devices sprung alate.
We haue exilde them from our Tragicke stage,	We have exiled them from our tragic stage,
As trash of their tradition that can bring	As trash of their tradition, that can bring
Nor instance nor excuse for what they do.	Nor instance nor excuse for what they do.
Instead of mournefull plaints, our *Chorus* sings;	Instead of mournful plaints our *Chorus* sings,
Although it be against the vpstart guise,	Although it be against the upstart guise;
Yet, warranted by graue antiquitie,	Yet warranted by grave antiquity,
We will reuiue the which hath long beene done.	We will revive the which hath long been done.

Brawner's interpretation of the initial lines locates the speech within the context of an anti-puritanical attack suggested by the word "vertuous" (2) as an allusion to those Puritans who "for years had been harassing the Chapel organization, along with all other play-actors, for using children in 'bawdie stage plays', and most especially for presenting them in the very house of God, even in her majesty's Chapel, and on the Lord's day" (1942, 18).[7] If this critique was implied in the speech, the address had to demonstrate both the "valiantness" (4) of the play's matter and the goodness of the performing style. The former was granted by the worthy Xenophon,[8] the latter by the prestige of an ancient tradition that had not percolated into the neo-Senecan style of contemporary plays: the Greek singing chorus. Thus, against the neo-Senecan wailing chorus of contemporary neoclassical drama the more ancient Greek singing chorus could be pitted to rely on a stronger authority not yet diluted into the "trash" of contemporary productions. Could this mean that no-one else except these children's company performed singing choruses, and to what extent was it their privilege to claim the prestige of a tradition yet untainted with contemporary "deuices"? On the other hand, it is no coincidence that this heartfelt anti-neo-Senecan claim sits somewhat awkwardly within a play that borrows the neo-Senecan five-act structure, because after all this play too is an offspring of its times. So, what is being stressed here is not the non-Greek structure, but the type of chorus it presented, as if this part of drama were the actual trademark of genuine Greek antiquity despite its dramatic articulation. In Brawner's paraphrase of the final lines, the Prologue claims that they

> have exiled all this trash for which no warrant or excuse can be found in antiquity, from our tragic stage. And instead the 'mournfull plaints' [i.e., complaining, declaiming choruses, as in true Seneca but more particularly in neo-Senecan plays which also introduced

7 "We Children of the Chapel have just devised to shun the vulgar and the virtuous [Puritan critics] by establishing our new theatre, and now present to you 'gentle gentlemen', worthy to judge of us, our works, which are at once instructive and heroic" (Brawner 1942, 125).

8 For a Herodotean reading of this play's use of Xenophon, see Dall'Olio's chapter in this volume.

dumb shows and other "trash"], we revert to the true Greek mode of the *singing* chorus. This is against the "upstart guise", but we will revive what is warranted by grave antiquity. (1942, 125)[9]

If this reading is right, the address's implication is that choruses in contemporary plays did not sing, while Greek ones did, and the innovation announced by the speech, for all its apparent anachronism, consisted exactly in reviving that ancient fashion – something that would beautifully suit the choral and singing abilities of the Children of the Chapel mentioned in the play's title-page.

Whether this musical chorus was meant to be in blank verse, like this prologue, or in a different metric line, it is hard to tell. Early modern English metres were no reliable indication of the performance as polymetric diversification was in ancient Greek tragedy (see Bigliazzi 2021a, 15-16; 2021b, 155-8). But at least this address seems to undermine conjectures about the singing of choral odes in early neoclassical plays as, for instance, recently put forward by Ross Duffin, who found the best candidate for their tunes in the repertoire of the metrical psalms. For Duffin, when in *Gorboduc* "the choruses suddenly appear with rhyme schemes and stanza organizations, they signal that something different is happening" from the normal dialogues in blank verse (2021, 18). Surely, their metrical variations mark a new pace and dramatic quality with respect to the rest of the play. But whether this change can call for musical interpretation is harder to demonstrate, as the audience address in the *Warres of Cyrus* seems to imply. After all, the anonymous reporter of the 1562 Inner Temple performance of *Gorboduc* – a rare eye-witness document of those early performances – mentions no singing chorus. Instead, it offers a brief account of how "the shadowes were declared by the *chore*", and then a longer description of the dumb shows, although he does not call them such. As Jones and White have noticed, it is clear

9 A similar comment is in Mulready 2013, 133. Stern instead reads these lines as suggesting "another viewpoint to the narrative": "As co-commentators prepared to express a different opinion from the play's and speak out 'against' the hero: 'In stead of mournefull plaints our Chorus sings, / Although it be against the upstart guise.'" (2009, 109). However, the speech does not seem to focus on alternative views on the play, but on the quality and form of the chorus' performance.

that "these sequences of elaborate visual spectacle and movement were the most engaging and therefore most memorable parts of the play", which overall was very static and full of "sententious speeches" (1996, 5). This, too, for all its brevity and ambiguity, is a likewise interesting document on which it is worth dwelling a moment.

First, let us consider the word "declare" describing what the chorus does: although admitting that it "may seem to suggest speaking", Duffin interprets it as meaning "sang" on the evidence of Sternhold's Psalm 66: "With ioyfull voice declare abroade, / and syng vnto hys prayse". And yet, if "declare" refers to the quality and force of the utterance, while "syng" to its form, the two words cannot be synonymous, but rather indicate two different aspects of the same action. The *OED* does not record any instance of their equivalence while indicating that "sing" may also mean "to be loud in laudation" (12b). Nor can the context of a psalm be taken as certain proof of the fourteener as a verse form to be sung – as Attridge notices, the Sternhold collection, which provided a template for the ballad metre, known as Master Sternhold's metre, "established the template for psalm translation to be sung, but also frequently read, memorized and recited: fourteeners, usually set out in lines of 8 and 6 syllables" (2019, 278). Thus, neither the occurrence of "declare" and "sing" within the same psalm, nor the context of the report guarantees a musical interpretation of "declare", changing its meaning from "making clear, manifesting, unfolding" into "singing".

Similar remarks may be made about the use of the word "pronounce" as a possible aural allusion to a singing chorus in a note at the end of Thomas Hughes's 1587 *The Misfortunes of Arthur*: "Besides these speeches there was also penned a Chorus for the first act, and an other for the second act, by Maister Frauncis Flower, which were pronounced accordingly" (1587, G2*r*). Duffin explains that the word "pronounce"

> was used in a musical context on 17 November 1590 (accession Day), when Sir Henry Lee retired as Elizabeth's 'Champion' at a court ceremony in the Tiltyard at Whitehall, and John Dowland's *His golden lock time hath to silver turned* was "pronounced and sung by M. Hales, her Maiesties seruant, a Gentleman in that Arte excellent for his voice both commendable and admirable." (Duffin 2021n111, 59; see also 29)

Could the combination of these two words be proof enough of their interchangeability or is it not more reasonable to think that they identify different, if related, actions? After all, the only report of one performance we know of, that of *Gorboduc*, altogether ignores the chorus, even omitting to say whether it was spoken or sung – and this is surprising, at least in view of other reports of continental performances which did not fail to record a singing chorus. See for instance the anonymous report of the 1570 performance of Lodovico Dolce's *Giocasta* at the Accademia degli Ostinati in Viterbo: [10]

> . . . il Coro di quindici persone, diuiso in tre à cinque per coro . . . , nel fine del primo atto esci in Scena . . . cominciò à cantare il primo coro, poi cantò il secondo. Poi il terzo sempre girando la Scena e fermandose poi e facendo reuerenza à Bacco, tutti insieme cantorno, che fu molto piena dolce e dotta musica, il qual canto finito, restorno sempre in scena, facendo ale di qua, e di là, & in ogni fin d'atto vsorno il medesimo modo de cantare, separatamente, e tutti insieme. (1570 Biiii*r-v*)

> [. . . the chorus of fifteen people, divided into three groups of five . . . , at the end of the first act entered the scene moving across the stage . . . the first one began singing, then the second one. Then the third one sang, always moving across the stage, then they stopped and made a reverence to Bacchus, then they sang all together a piece of very sweet and learned music. When they finished singing, they remained on the stage, moved to the sides, here and there, and at the end of each act they sang in the same way, separately, and all together.]

To my knowledge, no such report of any ancient or early modern choric performance in England is extant. Lack of mention of a singing chorus by John Bereblock as an eyewitness account of another neo-Senecan play such as Calfhill's *Progne* performed before the Queen at Oxford in 1566, is a further clue that possibly no neo-Senecan English play had one (or attracted the attention of the reporter), including a play in Latin such as this.[11]

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10 If not otherwise indicated, translations are mine.
11 For an entirely conjectural, albeit intriguing, interpretation of the play and its relation to Correr's *Procne*, see Perry 2020.

Brawner has argued that the editor's excision of all traces of a chorus in the *Warres of Cyrus* may have been dependent on his attempt "to make an old play conform more nearly to the decorum of playmaking in the year 1594" (1942, 13). However, plays with choruses as collective characters continued to be published in the following years.[12] But if Brawner is correct, when the editor "prepared the manuscript for print, he was either careless enough to overlook the illogical position of the prologue, or so unfamiliar with the play that he failed to detect the error" (ibid.). Nevertheless, if he omitted the choruses and rearranged the act division on purpose, as he possibly did, he could not have been that unfamiliar with the text.

It remains that the play we have is arranged according to the Senecan act division with a prologue claiming that its singing chorus (which is not extant) is the bearer of grave antiquity compared with contemporary plays which present a lamenting, non-singing chorus together with visual devices for spectacle alien to the ancient tradition. Brawner's comment that the prologue's target might have been Seneca's plays alongside neo-Senecan ones seems to imply that not only had the latter a non-singing chorus, but possibly that Seneca's tragedies too *were perceived* as not having one insofar as they provided a model for contemporary non-singing choruses. Thus, what this prologue seems to make a case for is the existence of a neat dividing line between two conceptions of antiquity: a truly authoritative and authentically grave one referable to the Greek choral tradition, and a less grave and prestigious one as a source for the new tragic fashion including late spectacular "trash" – the Senecan one. But if this is genuinely how the tragic chorus was perceived to the point of being treated as the distinctive trait of prestigious antiquity compared to a less authoritative one, on which grounds was it based? To get a sense of it we should turn to an often overlooked chapter in the history of classical reception.

12 For instance, Elizabeth Cary's *Mariam* (1602), William Alexander's *Monarchick Tragedies* (1603-1607), Samuel Daniel's *Philotas* (1605).

A Classical Chorus?

As Miola has aptly noticed, "the classical chorus has always provided formidable difficulties to translators and directors" (2002, 35). This is true for the Renaissance as well as for us today. An anonymous reporter of a 1568 staging at Reggio Emilia of the tragedy *Alidoro*, attributed to Gabriele Bombace, 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 from our difficulty in getting to know what precisely the ancients did".[13] This confusion is sometimes also 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" (Cunliffe1912, xlii). However, 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 argued something quite different. In no way did he claim that the ancient chorus was spoken by one actor, while noticing that the single speaker intervened individually only during the acts, as one amongst other speakers; between the acts the choruses were collective characters both singing and dancing in unison (229-30). Giraldi carefully distinguished between different uses of the 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" was "for the sake of the highest sweetness".[14] The mention of verse

13 "Una Rappresentazione tragica a Reggio Emilia. L'*Alidoro* di Gabriele Bombace (1568)": in Ariani 1977, 1001.

14 "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" (Giraldi Cinthio 1554, 229). Broken verse = 7 syllables; whole verse = 10, 11, 12 syllables; see 228.

and rhyme is relevant to how Giraldi reinterprets the chorus by way of contemporary lyrical devices, so that the addition of the rhyme (which was absent from both Greek and Latin verses) and a combination of heptameters and hendecasyllables became the necessary features for the chorus to acquire lyrical gentleness.

Giraldi apparently identified the chorus with the Greek tradition, which he thought provided two types: he called one mobile for its inclusion of singing and dancing, and the other one static as it had melody only, not number, that is rhythm. Interestingly, he referred the latter to movement rather than to diction, following, as will be seen, contemporary commentaries on Aristotle (1554, 229). But while he called this mobile chorus Greek, he oddly brought as an example the *kommos* from Seneca's *Troades* and further explained its movement as of "moresca dances which today are made to the measure of sound" (1554, 229, 230).[15] The use of a Senecan instance for the Greek model together with the reference to a non-Greek dance seem to witness a general confusion about ideas of classical antiquity, as if Greek and Roman choruses were substantially the same and a dance form used in contemporary Italian drama could be compatible with them. Such comments prompt questions about the extent to which Seneca could be authentically considered as an instance of what a Greek chorus was like even in an Italian milieu which at the time was incomparably more versed in Greek studies than the English one.[16]

Talking about Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta* (1566), Emrys Jones rightly remarked that even if this play looks more Senecan than Greek to us, despite its being advertised as an Englished Euripides, it may not have "seemed 'Senecan' to its first audiences and readers" (1977, 106). Jones' argument is that if they took Senecan qualities for granted, they may have "been all the more alert to those other qualities which were unfamiliar to them – the 'Greek' ones" (106). But in the light of the Giraldi example

15 On the tradition of the *moresca* in the sixteenth century, see Ferrari-Barassi; see also Pieri 2013, 25ff.

16 For emergent claims about the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the intellectual centres of Northern Europe and England, especially via the Wittenberg tradition, see Lazarus 2020 and references therein.

mentioned earlier, one wonders what exactly 'Senecan' meant at the time in relation to Greek and whether that meaning changed transculturally. The Italian debate over the primacy of Sophoclean or Senecan tragedy, referable to Trissino and Giraldi, respectively, is well known. But Giraldi's position about the Greek chorus exemplified by a Senecan instance recalled above shows that there were areas of overlapping that did not demand neat distinctions.

The Trissino *vs* Giraldi debate revolved around the need for the chorus always to remain present to the action in the Greek fashion or instead to go away in the Roman one for the sake of verisimilitude – this was Giraldi's argument in favour of the mobile chorus understood as moving away from the stage. Thus if Giraldi advocated the Roman fashion for the chorus entrances and exits, he referred to the Greek one for another type of mobility (his dancing).[17] After all, only a few years later (1561) Julius Caesar Scaliger would comment about the pertinence of titles in tragedy by bringing Greek and Senecan examples alike (1561, caput 97, "Tragoedia, Comoedia, Mimus"), and Antonio Minturno on speaking of the chorus would provide instances from Dolce alongside Euripides as well as Aristotle (1563, 100-1).

Despite much discussion about theories of tragedy, Renaissance writers showed a general lack of genuine understanding of the ancient chorus, although Aristotle's *Poetics* circulated widely in Europe since the early sixteenth century, at least since Alessandro de' Pazzi's, Francesco Robortello's, Vincenzo Maggi and Bartolomeo Lombardi's, and Pier Vettori's Greek-Latin editions (of 1536, 1548, 1550, and 1560 respectively). In England, in particular, theoretical reflection on classical drama and its stageability, compared to the vivacious Italian debate, lagged behind.[18] Only one edition of a Greek tragedy in Greek found its way into print in the sixteenth century, Euripides' *Troades*, published by John Day in 1575, while one comedy, Aristophanes' *Ippeis*, was printed by Joseph Barnes

17 See for instance Natale 2013, chap. 1, esp. 39-46.
18 On the English reception of Aristotle, see Lazarus 2015a, 2015b, 2016 and 2020, which beautifully support a more conscious approach to Aristotelian knowledge in sixteenth-century England. This awareness, however, did not prompt comparably relevant theoretical reflection.

in 1593. But these are peculiar editions, with neither paratexts nor commentaries, probably printed with educational aims for Greek learners (see Duranti 2021).

The question remains as to what classical antiquity meant with regard to the tragic chorus. Speaking about the English audience at the Inns of Court which attended the *Jocasta* performance in 1566, Jones further observed that "It seems unlikely that those who saw *Jocasta* performed were quite unconscious of its Euripidean qualities. They would presumably have believed that they were seeing a Greek play, and – despite the many departures from the original text – they would have been right: they would have been seeing something essentially Euripidean; they may even have been closer to the spirit of the original play than we can be" (1977, 106). What "presumably" here suggests is that mention of Euripides must have guided the spectators to recognise what was new to them – i.e. un-Senecan – as evidence of the play's Greekness. On the other hand, considering Lodovico Dolce's popularity amongst the Inns of Court and the degree of his manipulation of the Greek text in his *Giocasta* (1549), a modern reader can but be surprised by their recognition in its English version of anything in the spirit of 'Greekness' beyond its story. The play's "essentially Euripidean" quality for the audience at Gray's Inn must have relied on a combination of factors: on what they possibly considered to be 'Senecan', but also on their belief in how the play advertised itself, regardless of what they probably knew about Dolce and Italian neo-classical plays. After all, that one was doubtless a Theban tragedy.

If the play's un-Senecan qualities could presumably be mistaken for Greek in that particular circumstance, surprisingly though it may be for us, the Giraldi example shows an opposite understanding of classical antiquity: his instantiation of what he called a Greek chorus through Seneca did not foreground differences but erased them. Despite their mobile or static format in the Roman style, Giraldi placed the chorus at the core of 'classical' tragedy with an indistinct sense of unprioritised antiquity.

Considering in this light the Farrant example from which we started, the claim in *The Warres of Cyrus* that singing was the distinctive mark of Greek "grave antiquity" as opposed to contemporary choruses following the Senecan lead sounds unexpectedly clear-minded.

General knowledge about a Greek singing chorus derived from the treatises of Aristotle and Horace, as well as their commentaries. But how this form was interpreted and received in the sixteenth century, and appropriated in early modern English plays, is still blurred: did a distinction between Greek and Senecan really matter? If in certain quarters the Senecan chorus was expected to be sung and danced, as for instance Giraldi claimed, rather than spoken or recited, why did this play hold singing as relevant with regard to an implied sense of a 'classical' authority more authoritative than the one behind other contemporary plays in a different 'neo-classical' fashion?

My use of the term 'authority' here is in the sense Colin Burrow gives to it of "'[p]ower derived from or conferred by another; the right to act in a specified way, delegated from one person or organization to another' – which does not denote a blank monolith of power but a devolved and potentially plural set of forces" (2016, 32).[19] In the case of the chorus, 'classical authority' is an umbrella concept that covers diversified ideas rooted in the manifold interpretations of the ancient choral forms as well as in their early modern offspring, making for a "plural set of forces" in the sense recalled above: they are not monolithic but include the authorities of playbooks, of how they were composed and read, as well as of how they were translated and received in contemporary plays.

Reading the Chorus

Playbooks contained lists of speakers, speech prefixes, stage directions and other information concerning how a play was or could be staged. Howard-Hill (1990) has studied how the English tradition grounded in liturgical drama and recorded in the manuscripts of early modern moral plays gradually merged with the printing tradition of plays by Terence, Plautus, and Seneca, which showed very little theatrical features and a more prominent literary conception. Division into acts and scenes as well as the use of stage directions, virtually absent from print editions of classical plays, demonstrate that "playwrights became increasingly aware of

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19 See also Colin Burrow's chapter in this volume, as well as 2013 and 2019.

an alternative method of organizing a script for performance and reader alike" (Howard-Hill 1990, 138, see also 140-1). But while Howard-Hill focuses on the confluence of those two traditions in general, and Tamara Atkin (2018) extensively deals with how dramas became books to be read, specific drama portions of classical origin such as choruses have not received much attention in their way from stage to print. We know very little about how early modern choral passages were performed and to what extent they were meant to be conducive to a sense of antiquity, whether Greek or Roman, or both.

It has been pointed out that at the beginning of all the editions of *Gorboduc*, the *dramatis personae* list includes the chorus among the "Speakers" in line with what was being done in related dramas (Duffin 2021, 20). Among *Gorboduc*'s contemporary plays, including the in-quarto editions of Seneca and Newton's *Tenne Tragedies*,[20] though, only *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1587) does mention the chorus as a separate entity. Among the closet dramas of the 1590s – whose performing quality "is situated somewhere between the reading out of a long poem and the performance of a play" (Attridge 2019, 319) – Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra* and Thomas Kyd's *Cornelia*, both dating from 1594, do the same, yet not Mary Sidney's *Antonius* (1592), where the chorus is not present in the list of "The Actors" (F1*v*). Thus, what this list tells us is that the chorus' different 'dramatic quality' is only rarely visually encoded in the mise ne page. But what else do these printed editions let us glimpse in terms of the chorus' dramatic function and performative qualities?

Considering the lack of documental evidence, such as eyewitness reports of actual early modern performances, we should raise questions on how we can now read early modern editions of plays, including choruses, in the light of how 'classical' choruses could be read then. As Cunliffe has remarked, "when plays were no longer acted" information about ancient drama could derive "from the texts and from general treatises" (1912, x), and among the latter Evanthius' *De Fabula* and Donatus' *De Comoedia* were especially relevant to

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20 In the *Tenne Tragedies* collected by Newton in 1581, *Thyestes* has no list of speakers, and the *dramatis personae* list in *Oedipus* does not mention the Chorus.

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). The same can be said about early modern drama and the information we may obtain through early modern books in three main ways: via performance instructions, such as stage directions; through the visual layout and the printing features of the book; and by considering whether the metre may suggest any specific clue in relation to the other two aspects mentioned above. It is worth noting that, given the paucity of non-conjectural documents concerning the performance of early modern neoclassical choruses, modern readers of early modern playbooks find themselves in a somewhat similar position to that of early modern readers of editions of classical drama, except that we do not have treatises as they did about ancient tragedy.

In her recent study of *Typographies of Performance in Early Modern England* (2020), Claire Bourne has explored the "processes of textual mediation that made the perception of one medium (theatre) and its activity available in and via the raw materials of another medium (the book)" (9). The assumption is that in the preparation of the playbook efforts were made in order to seek textual correlatives for the "extra-lexical business" characterising the stage. Bourne claims that the book "neither records actual past performances nor provides scores for future performances" but "materializes in textual form what the title pages of early modern playbooks so often promised readers: that the printed text is the play as it has been (or is being) played" (10). However, one question that this statement raises is what *as* implies here by assuming both equivalence and difference between stage and page. In other words, the question is in what ways the book may be considered "a viable version of what audiences might have seen and heard" (10).[21]

It is hard for us to discern what early modern audiences may have *seen*, and, in turn, what readers may have thought about ancient choruses from books. All we have is the scant information that may be gained from reading early modern editions of ancient dramas,[22] and, in turn, from how printed editions of early modern

21 See also Bourne 2014 and 2021.
22 For a broader discussion see Avezzù 2021.

English choruses encode early modern receptions of Greek and Roman models they received through continental mediations. The reading of ancient drama in books was guided by knowledge that could be derived from theoretical treatises.

As recalled above, 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). In Donatus' *De comoedia* the ancient chorus was treated 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 unquestionably a singing chorus, and it was precisely for its singing that it was deemed non-dramatic and an impediment to the action ("nam postquam otioso tempore fastidiosior spectator effectus est et tum, cum ad cantatores ad actoribus fabula transiebat, consurgere et abire coepit"). Thus, when plays were recorded in book form, the chorus was first omitted, but a space was left for possible addition, as in the case of Menander ("ut primo quidem choros tollerent locum eis relinquentes"), before even that space was eventually removed ("postremo ne locum quidem reliquerunt").[23] By reading Evanthius-Donatus no-one could be mistaken about the chorus being a lyrical part in ancient comedies to be sung to the accompaniment of music.

Aristotle's prescription that the chorus should be one of the actors (Po. 1456a25-7) was unequivocal, and yet this was often

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[23] "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 get 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 another reason, as others think. At last, they did not leave them even a space, and this the Latin comedians did, with the result that in their works it is difficult to catch the partition in five acts" (Wessner 1902, 18).

misinterpreted, especially when digested through Horace. In his 1567 translation of his *Ars Poetica*, for instance, Thomas Drant significantly turned the chorus into an authorial mouthpiece taking the parts of the author ("auctoris partis") instead of that of an actor ("actoris partis"), as most commentaries on the printed editions tended either to signal or to prefer, typically Aldo Manutius Junior's (Florence, 1548; Venice, 1559; see Bigliazzi 2021b). Besides, Horace clearly stated that the chorus had to "sing nothing between acts which does not advance and fitly blend into the plot" ("actoris partis chorus officiumque virile / defendat, neu quid medios intercinat actus, / quod non proposito conducat et haereat apte"; Horace 1989 and 1999), assuming that this singing chorus had no merely entertaining function in its inter-act performance, but was closely related to the action. However, commentaries on Aristotle read the relation between the different resources of rhythm, metre and song in his *Poetics* in ways that undermined a full understanding of the part of the chorus as a singing one. By connecting its performance with rhythm, Vettori for one underlined its choreutic rather than choric function, suggesting a dancing instead of a singing chorus.[24] Instances of ignorance or misunderstanding of the ancient chorus are numerous. Here suffice it to recall that what precisely the ancient chorus did, and in what ways the Greek and the Roman ones differed, remained in most cases vague if not unknown.

In spite of Howard-Hill's claim that Greek dramatists were very little influential on English playwrights and therefore not worth examining with regard to the printing of drama (1990, 131), Euripides was perhaps the most widespread Greek author in the Renaissance, and it is likely that many first encountered a Greek chorus in a collection of his plays, whether in the original or in translation. Aldus Manutius' 1503 edition does not print separate lyrical stanzas, nor does it distinguish acted from chanted, and sung parts (either monodic or choral). The indication Xo. (Choròs) is 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 centered / new line), as in previous editions of Seneca, where scenes

24 Cf. Avezzù 2021, 54.

were marked by speech headings positioned at the centre of the page.[25] This did set the norm for later editions of Seneca as well.
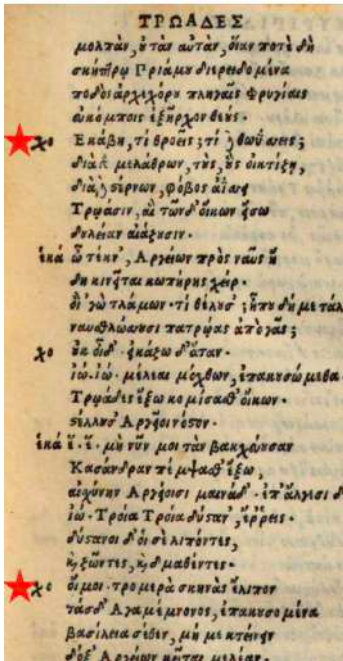
Manutius' 1503 edition of Euripides
(*Troades*, 148-82, NN5*r*)

ADILON.

CHORVS.

ANAPAESTICI.

Am rara micant sydera prono
Languida mundo·nox victa vagos
Contrahit ignes, luce renata.

Manutius' 1517 edition of Seneca
(*Hercules Furens*, 125ff., 3*r*)

Only Collinus' 1541 Latin edition of Euripides seems to follow the Senecan model, but only in the first tragedy, *Hecuba*, and with regard to the first choral ode, as 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, in this

25 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, as association later made by English dramatists, nor with localities" (134).

following Aldus' Senecan edition – but this was a parallel Greek-Latin edition and the 'Latin style' may have influenced it. Perhaps significantly, Aldus' 1507 edition of Erasmus' Latin translations of Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia Aul.* followed the printing practice of Greek dramatists, not of Seneca.

Euripides 1507
(*Hec.*, 97-8; Erasmus; only Latin)

Euripides 1541
(*Hec.*, 97-8; Collinus;
only Latin)

Euripides 1558
(*Hec.*, 97-8; Xylander;
only Latin)

Euripides 1562a
(*Hec.*, 97-8; Melanchton;
only Latin)

Euripides 1562b (Stiblinus; *Hec.*, 58-9, 15; first division into Acts)

These editions of Euripides reproduce the manuscript and slavishly adopt all its new lines. While the passages meant to be spoken could be easily recognised even without being well acquainted with Greek (the Latin senarius corresponds to the Greek dramatic trimeter), the generally short or very short versicles of the lyrical parts must have been perplexing for an early modern reader. Besides, all editions, including Stiblinus' Greek-Latin one, did not distinguish choral and monodic stanzas from the rest and therefore did not allow the reader to identify them visually as songs. Willem Canter in his 1571 edition was the first to mark up the antistrophic stanzas suggesting a responsive, yet not necessarily antiphonal, type of performance. Next to the Xo. speech prefix the rhythmic-melodic quality of the passage

was signalled by *ANTISTROPHIKA* (i.e. "responsive"), as well as by the indications *strophé I* and *antistrophé I,* with the numbering of the corresponding *kola.*

Euripides 1562b – Stiblinus, *Hec.*, 444-64.

Euripides 1571 – Canter, Hec., 444-64 (first systematic colometry)

Thus, no Renaissance edition of Euripides, including the miscellaneous Stephanus 1567 one, 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 Canter (1571) the first to foreground its melodic form based on repetition and structural response. The reading of Renaissance editions of Greek drama in Greek or in Latin could hardly allow to "read through, behind or beyond the text" (Bourne 2020, 4) and only in two cases offered visual indication of its responsive form.

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 specified. Revealingly, Badius (1514), Manutius (1517) Petrus (1529) and Gryphius (1548) printed "adilon" above "chorus", possibly a phonetic

transcription of ἀδήλων (*adélôn*), meaning indefinite, and Marmita and Badius added extensive commentary 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 take the part of the author ("Authoris partes"). Thus, Badius clearly read Seneca through Horace, who in turn was reading Aristotle on Greek tragedy.[26]

A reader of these Senecan editions would have found very little elucidation about the chorus, except long odes with occasional commentary about the metre and the content, and, as in Badius' case, massive notes in the margin, including normative references to Horace. No stage directions concerning the performance were present (the examples below are from *Hercules Furens*, 125ff. and 524ff.).
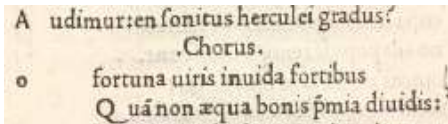
Seneca (*HF*, André Belfort 1478, 9*r*)
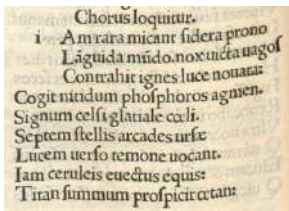
Seneca (*HF*, Marmita 1492)   Seneca (*HF*, Badius 1514, Av.*v*, Ci.*v*)
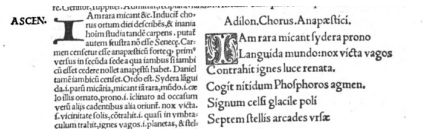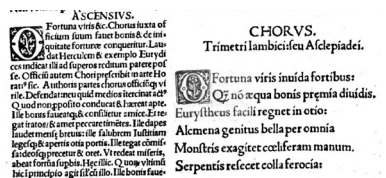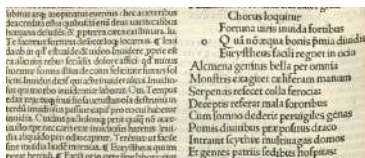
26 On the relation between Horace and Aristotle, and their reception, see e.g. Gilbert and Snuggs 1947, Stenuit 2016.
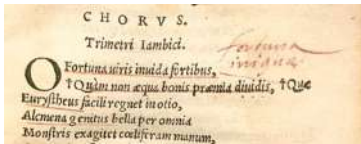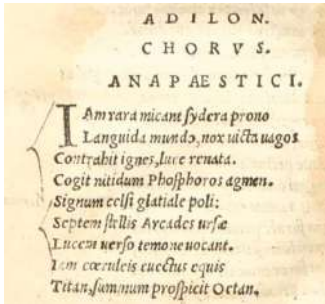
Seneca (*HF*, Petrus 1529, B3*v*, C4*r*)   Seneca (*HF*, Gryphius 1548, 11, 26)
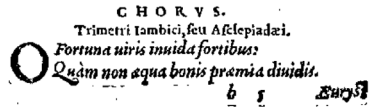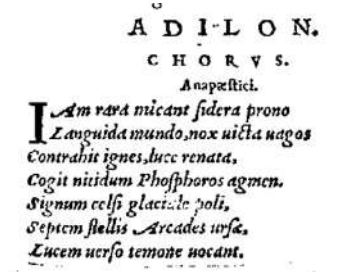
Therefore, it is no surprise that early modern readers may have been puzzled by a dramatic part which in Seneca's editions, yet not in Euripides', was separate from the rest when not involved in dialogues and remained indefinite in number. Whether the varied shorter metres were to be interpreted as songs could only be evinced from theoretical treatises on ancient drama and commentaries of Aristotle which, however, concerned Greek, not Senecan plays.

Thus, even if academic drama influenced by the Wittenberg school of Melanchton and Winshemius revived Greek plays, leaving traces of their activities on their editions, as Micha Lazarus has recently shown (2020), very little we can evince from them about *how* they interpreted those dramas. While a peculiar annotation on Camerarius' Latin version of *Ajax* in a copy of Estiennes' 1568 edition of Sophocles' *Tragōdiai hepta* (*Tragoediae Septem*) with "sigla distributing the speeches of the chorus and semichorus among three different actors" (2020, 59; see Fig. 3, 60) witnesses that the play *was* performed, it does not say whether it was sung or chanted or spoken, thus leaving out any clue about its acting peculiarities.

When we move to the playbooks of early modern dramas, we find lists of speakers, speech prefixes, stage directions, and other details

concerning how a play was or could be staged. Scant information is provided about choruses. With regard to Senecan translations, Clare Bourne has noted that in Heywood's 1559 *Troas* Tottel marked the first chorus with a backward pilcrow, and in his 1560 *Thyestes*, probably printed by Richard Payne, they were marked out by "a large fleuron" with the effect of "a clean, visual distinction between dialogue and chorus" (60). No pilcrow was used by Colwell in the octavos of *Oedipus* (1563) and *Agamemnon* (1566) for the speech heading *Chorus*, which was in italics simply positioned centre page, and the text was in black letter like the dialogues. Only in Thomas Marsh' 1581 edition of Newton's *Tenne Tragedies* was a different typeface used to visually distinguish dialogues from most of the choral odes: blackletter for fourteeners, even when assigned to the chorus, and Roman for all other odes in a different metre. After all, if it is true that the chorus was assigned a different status on the page, it is also true that that status was very opaque. Thus, what these lists tell us is that the chorus' different 'dramatic quality' is only rarely recorded on the page.

There are cases of books, though, which give us at least some instructions about how to imagine the recitation of the choral parts in terms of their vocal arrangement. One such instance is Thomas Hughes' *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, a play presented to her Majestie by the Gentlemen of Grayes Inne, at her Court in Greenewich in 1587, when it also appeared in print.

Hughes 1587 11 (B2*r*).
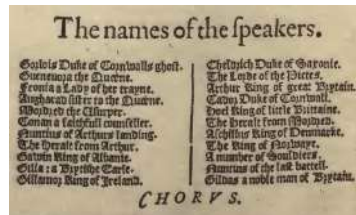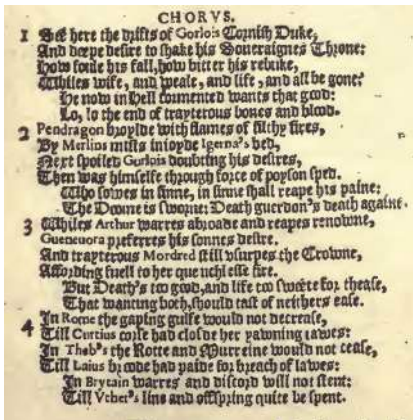
The numbers assigned to the stanzas seem to suggest an alternation of voices as in the case of the semichoruses of the above-mentioned Latin version of Sophocles' *Ajax*, although nothing more may be surmised.[27] Robert Wilmot's *Tancred and Gismund* (printed in 1591 after revision of the original *Gismond of Salerne* whose manuscripts date from 1567; see Cunliffe 1912, lxxxvi and 162) is another interesting example of how stage directions could refer to an actual performance (in this case at the Inner Temple in 1567-1568). Without these notations, it would be impossible to discern in what ways the choruses differ from the rest of the play, as the iambic pentameter with alternate rhymes and the Roman typeface are present throughout. Variations can be found only in the first and the second choral odes: the former presents 4 alternate voices pronouncing stanzas of 16 lines in blank verse printed in italics, and 12 lines of pentameters with alternate lines in Roman type, respectively; the latter has slightly more elaborate forms, with a sonnet printed in italics for "Chor. 3" and an added stanza in rhyme royal for "Chor. 1". Numbers next to "Chor." (1 to 4) suggest alternate recitation for each stanza, emphasised by the use of italics in the first two choral odes.[28]

But what is most relevant to the present discussion is that on two occasions we find curious directions about the actual singing of the chorus: the first one occurs at the end of 1.2 when the printer avows that the song is missing ("*Cantant. Qua mihi cantio nondum occurrit.* The song ended, *Tancred the King commeth out of his pallace with his guard*"; Wilmot 1591, A4*v*), indirectly saying that there was a song at that point. The second one appears at the end of act 2, where "*Cantant*" follows the last stanza of the chorus, leaving it unclear whether the indication is misplaced or the actual song is lacking. Finally, at the end of 3.2, a stage direction tells us that the chorus very sweetly repeated Lucrece's song, but being a fairly long passage of iambic pentameters with alternate rhymes one wonders whether it is that song it actually refers to. Duffin is positive in

27 For a discussion of this play's political engagement with relevant comments on the chorus see Perry 2011.

28 Also in this case Perry offers a very interesting political and contextual reading of the play but does not touch upon the choral problems I am exploring here.

claiming that "[a]ll four of the choruses – indeed, virtually all the dialogue portions too – are in pentameter quatrains with abab rhyme schemes, so they fit to Psalm 10" (2021, 26), a text he also considers as a possible candidate for chorus 3 of *Gorboduc* (23). And yet, a few remarks are in order.

The first reference to the missing song appears at the end of a long passage pronounced by Gismund who laments the death of her husband; she is accompanied by the chorus of four maidens and her last lines introduce a hymn in praise of the lost husband:

> Meane while accept of these our daily rites,
> Which with my maidens I shall do to thee,
> Which is, in song to cheere our dying spirits
> With hymns of praises of thy memorie.
> (Wilmot 1591, A4*v* [1.2.33-6])

These lines are not present in the two manuscripts of the previous *Gismund of Salerne* on which Wilmot's reworked, and it is unclear whether the expansion is due to the author or to his use of a different manuscript (see Cunliffe 1912, 170). In those earlier texts, Gismund was not accompanied by the chorus (which in that earlier version was of four men of Salerne). Whatever song may have been sung in Wilmot's revision, it can hardly refer to Gismund's lines, which are followed by the word "Cantant", not preceded by it, thus suggesting imminent singing.

The same can be noticed about the second choral ode, likewise followed by the indication of a vocal performance seemingly connected with the final mention of a "Pean" for the Virgin, not with the lines themselves, whose argument can hardly be called a 'praise'. The four stanzas are a lament for "the great decay and change of all women" compared to female examples of virtue such as the steadfast Lucrece (Chor.1), Queen Artemissa (Cho.2), and the stoic Portia (Cho. 3), finally contrasted with Gismund's sudden change after her husband's death as an instance of inconstance and a "mirror and glasse to womankind" (Cho.4). Cho. 1's conclusion appears consistent with a singing performance beginning soon afterwards:

Chor. 1. Yet let vs maydens condemne our kinde,
Because our vertues are not all so rare:
For we may freshly yet record in minde,
There liues a virgin, one without compare:
Who of all graces hath her heauenly share.
In whose renowne, and for whose happie daies,
Let vs record this Paean of her praise.

<center>*Cantant.*</center>

(Wilmot 1591, C3*v*)

The sense of a sustained musicality not entirely recorded in the printed text is finally confirmed by Lucrece's lament about Gismund's mysterious pining away with anguish and sorrow in 3.2 – a passage that in the manuscripts is assigned to Gismund's own woman, Claudia. This one too sounds like a musical blank in the book referring to a song to come:

Gismond of Salerne [Cunliffe 1912, 3.2.47-50]	*Tancred and Gismund* (Wilmot 1591, Di*v*, [3.2.60-2])
But whereupon this restlesse life is growen, sithe I know not, nor how the same t'abate, I can no more, but Ioue that knowest it best, thow shortly bring my ladies hart to rest.	I can no more but wish it as I may, That he which knowes it would the same allay, For which the Muses with my song shal pray. *After the song, which was by report very sweetely repeated of the* Chorus, Lucrece *departeth into* Gismunds *chamber . . .*

It could be argued that those choruses were, in fact, all musical and that Tancred's line "Leauing thy maidens with their harmonie" (Wilmot 1591, B2*r*), pronounced right before departing before the first choral ode, suggests a polyphonic arrangement (Duffin 2021, 34).[29] However, it remains unclear whether it is a general allusion to

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29 Duffin's argument is somewhat confused here as it assigns the line to Gismund, and refers to *Gismond of Salerne*, while the line is only in *Tancred*

their singing or refers to a four-voice performance of the following choral ode – which alternates 16 lines of blank verse and 3 quatrains with alternate rhymes – or of a song we do not have, like the one they might be singing with Gismund in 1.2. Doubtless, the choral ode following Tancred's line is not the most complex one in the play, and if any allusion to some form of melodious intonation, whether by singing or chanting, was meant to define any of their lines in the text we have, those in the second choral ode, which also includes a sonnet, are the most likely candidates, at least owing to their variety.

For all their inaccuracy and *lacunae*, the stage directions of Hughes' and Wilmot's plays let us glimpse a four-voice articulation of the choruses in ways that the printed editions of Seneca do not. Interestingly, neither Alexander Neville's *Oedipus* nor John Studley's *Agamemnon*, which, like Hughes' and Wilmot's plays, followed their stagings in 1559 at Trinity College Cambridge, and in 1566 (unknown venue; APGRD), respectively, bear traces of their performance in either their in-quarto editions (1563 and 1566) or Newton's 1581 *Tenne Tragedies*. This could be a hint that the Englished Seneca retained a more literary conception as classical drama than plays in classical fashion, and as such they probably enjoyed a different status. Fundamentally, they were books unconnected with the stage, as Renaissance editions of Greek plays and Seneca in the Latin original also were (and the annotation on Camerarius' version of *Ajax* in fact reinforces the feeling that that edition needed additional marks to point out one peculiar, circumstantial use of it). But differently from Greek and Latin conventions, English metres did not provide what Greek and Latin forms did on the printed page. They did not distinguish spoken from chanted or sung parts as most of them did not have specific generic qualities or dramatic functions. As William Webbe pointed out in his 1586 manual of poetry *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, the "natural course of most English verses seemeth to run vppon the olde Iambicke stroake" (Fiii.*v*), and all English verses may be sung or played to all manner of tunes indistinctly:

and Gismund (Wilmot 1591, B2*r*) – in the other play the chorus is not of women and Tancred's last lines before departing are missing.

> 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 classical 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 the 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, 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 with regard to choruses were needed, it would be sufficient to leaf through the pages of English theorists of versification.

Thus, when modern readers approach early modern playbooks they find themselves in a somewhat similar position to that of early modern readers of editions of classical drama as to what stood behind the text, while the text itself hardly allows for a reading conscious of its performance requirement. This is why unexpectedly encountering a critical insert about contemporary choral performances and the ancient authority they relied on in a play such as the *Warres of Cyrus* we started from remains a very intriguing experience.

Conclusion

Richard Farrant was a composer and a musician, he wrote choruses for the plays produced at Court and we also have two of his songs ("Ah, Alas, You Salt Sea Gods", and "Come, Tread the Path of Pensive Pangs"; see Munro 2017, 99-100; Brawner 1942, 47). As Brawner observes, "The esteem in which his musical talents

were held by his contemporaries is best attested by the fact that
he was appointed to the mastership of the choirs of both of the
Queen's chapels" (ibid.). Farrant's interest in serious classically
derived plays has been set against other contemporary writers,
including Richard Edwards, author of *Damon and Pithias* (1571),
who may have been his training master (48). Edward's interpolates
classical with native materials and uses varied rhymed metres as
opposed to Farrant's choice of historical narratives and preference
for blank verse (57-8). Farrant's interest in 'serious' playwriting
based on classical sources such as Livy, Xenophon, Herodotus, and
Plutarch, was in line with plays often composed for child actors,
confirming an established interest in 'grave' drama. While this has
been pointed out as marking a divide between plays for child and
adult actors as typical of those coming out of the schools across
the 1560s and 1570s,[30] what has not been sufficiently foregrounded
is the role of the chorus in establishing this difference. Brawner
only mentions that the lost singing choruses of the *Warres of Cyrus*
separate them from the "declaiming chorus as in the Italianate, Inns-
of-Court, neo-Senecan *Gorboduc*, *Jocasta*, and *Gismond*" (ibid.). But
no mention is made of what Italianate and neo-Senecan choruses
implied within the context of transcultural receptions of the ancient
chorus. Claiming the superiority of a singing chorus compared
to contemporary hybrid and declaiming ones was very likely
relevant to Farrant's own work. It also suggests that more than one
conception of antiquity was circulating at the time and could be
profitably used within circumstances that required advocating the

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30 Brawner 1942, 68; see also "In 1582 Stephen Gosson, referring primarily
to the public stages, indicated the sources of some of the plays he had seen, as
follows: 'I may boldely say it because I haue seen it, that the Palace of pleasure,
the Golden Asse, the Æthiopian historie, Amadis of Fraunce, the Rounde Table,
baudie Comedies in Latine, French, Italian, and Spanish, haue beene through-
ly ransackt to furnish the Playe houses in London.' The writers for the adult
companies were making good use, no doubts, of that flood of 'fond books, of
late translated out of Italian into English . . .' In contrast, the dramatists for the
child actors . . . developed a new type of 'classical' plays . . . The Court was the
common meeting place for the playes of the men and those of the boys; and
there they reacted upon and influenced each other in many details of dramatic
technique" (Brawner 1942, 67).

authority of a 'grave' tradition. In this sense, the singing chorus underlined the 'gravity of Greekness' as preferable to other ancient, less authoritative, traditions. If Brawner is correct, the authority of a 'truly' ancient Greek chorus[31] – no matter whether singing in a contemporary fashion and possibly not dancing – could be usefully claimed for self-promotion from a purist stance against puritanical attacks. Clearly, the singing itself was sufficient to establish that authority, no matter what 'truly grave' could mean. The authority of Xenophon as an established educational model did the rest to support that ancient moral stance. If this is true, the misplaced prologue in that play unveils what may be perceived as a latent 'battle of the choruses' in the processes of domestication of the classics in the early stages of early modern English tragedy; a battle that goes beyond purely aesthetic concerns to encompass cultural and political issues specifically supporting child playing and their singing against contemporary neo-Senecan drama. It provides a unique document of how early modern choruses were being performed and what implications their different staging styles could have. It helps us to re-consider the plurality of forces and factors in the construction of ideas of ancient authority and processes of reception. It also suggests different layers of antiquity in the perception of the Greek and the Latin chorus, turning this portion of drama into an 'authentic' mark of classical legacy, defining competitive traditions in the humanist programme of the Tudor age as well as degrees of 'authoritative authority'.

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31 See Newell 1983 and 1989; Grogan 2007 and 2014 (esp. chap. 1 and 118-19 for references to Shakespeare's *Henry V*); Humble 2017; Dall'Olio 2017 and 2022 (for references to contemporary drama).

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