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The function of the Shakespearean prologue

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Table of Contents

Foreword	p. 5
Chapter 1: What is a prologue?	p. 7
Chapter 2: A history of the prologue	p. 13
2.1. The prologue in ancient Greece	p. 13
2.1.1. The Greek Chorus	p. 14
2.2. The prologue on the Latin stage	p. 15
2.3. The prologue during the Middle Ages in England	p. 16
2.4. The prologue in early modern England	p. 18
2.5. Christopher Marlowe: the prologue to *Doctor Faustus* and its influences on Shakespeare	p. 22
Chapter 3: Understanding Shakespearean prologues	p. 27
3.1. *Romeo and Juliet*	p. 27
3.2. *Henry V*	p. 31
3.3. *Pericles*	p. 36
3.4. *Richard III*: the non-prologue	p. 43
Chapter 4: The Shakespearean prologue: 'mediator' between traditions	p. 53
Riassunto	p. 59
Bibliography	p. 67

Foreword

The focus of this dissertation is the analysis of the prologue as a paratextual device in the theatrical tradition; more specifically, the role and function that it serves in the Shakespearean plays. The theatrical experience has never failed to acknowledge the importance of the prologue: since it was first used by the ancient Greeks, the paratextual device has been the preferred instrument to accompany the audience into the reality of the play from that of the playhouse. To this end, the first chapter focuses on the prologue as a literary element and the roles it was assigned throughout the centuries. Shakespeare makes use of the device in many of his works; furthermore, an interesting point to reflect upon is the fact that the inclusion rate of the prologue and its functions in the English dramatist's works are not based on dramatic genre or time period but rather on the needs of each play. Indeed, one question led to the choice of this subject for my thesis: how does the prologue with its words and rhetorical elements affect the play? In order to answer this question, it is essential to understand first of all the influences previous uses of the prologue had on Shakespeare. There is no doubt that the prologue, like many other literary techniques, underwent an evolution when it comes to style and function. In fact, in order to understand which characteristics were considered the most important ones in the theatrical panorama prior to Shakespeare's own use of the device, it is essential to go back in time and analyse the history of the prologue: this is the core of the second chapter of this thesis. The history of the prologue and that of the theatre go hand in hand: its first appearance can be traced back to Greek and Latin dramatic works. One of the elements the English dramatists inherited from their model is the idea of the prologue as the *locus* in which to solve the issue of justification and authorization of the play. The Medieval and Renaissance English school of drama continued to build on the solid foundations of the classical tradition. Alongside an enrichment in the thematical paradigm, the dramatists managed to define even better the figure of the prologue: it started to be considered the best entity to trust with the introduction to the play and when omitted it was clearly felt. Eventually, the early modern tradition developed an even higher consideration of the device, seeing it as the mediator between the fictional reality of the play and the real world outside it,

as well as an important instrument to ensure the approval of the play and the theatrical experience as a whole. Amongst the many innovations introduced by Shakespeare, his understanding and use of the prologue are to be considered as a clear example of his dexterity with the theatrical medium.

Naturally, for the purpose of this analysis certain works have been selected as case studies for the unique characteristics they present. In the third chapter the prologues are analysed as standalones: the first prologue is that of *Romeo and Juliet*, one of the earliest plays written by Shakespeare that includes a prologue. The second prologue discussed is that of *Henry V,* chosen as it is delivered by the figure of the Chorus and in order to frame the use of the prologue in history plays. Then, the next analysis is on the prologue to *Pericles*, case in point of the Shakespearean late plays, leading to the final analysis to *Richard III*, analysed last due to its uniqueness. This prologue has been chosen to understand how what may not formally be considered a prologue still fully covers the functions and roles of the paratextual device.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis offer a comparative reading of the four prologues: this method aims to produce the most inclusive answer to the question put forward at the beginning of the analysis. Proposing a comparison between the case studies, as well as with other important dramatists that preceded or were contemporaries of Shakespeare - case in point, Christopher Marlowe – offers a plethora of possible readings to the understanding and employment of the prologue. Thus, by the end of the thesis it is possible to think of the Shakespearean prologues as a bridge between the literary traditions and methods that preceded him and those of his own time: he successfully used the basis put on by his predecessors and built a solid structure for the prologue as a literary instrument to rely upon for any future playwright.

Chapter 1: What is a prologue?

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the prologue is "the preface or introduction to a text; *esp.* a speech (usually in verse) forming the introduction to a play; a preamble, a preliminary discourse". [1] This definition offers some points to reflect upon: first, the prologue sits at the beginning of a text, introducing it to the public; second, it acts as a preliminary discourse, therefore it constitutes the first fundamental step for the understanding of the story. Broadening this definition, the prologue is a multifaced literary element that over the centuries has come to be identified with a series of roles and characteristics.

As a literary element, the prologue belongs to what is called the paratext, that is the different kind of textual and visual materials that surround and supplement the published work. The paratextual material may also include dedication, commendatory verses, "To the Reader", argument, character list, actor list, explicit, and errata. At the opposite end of this spectrum sits the epilogue: it appears at the end of the text to resolve the story. In plays the epilogue and the prologue are usually pronounced by the same entity, as it happens in the Shakespearean *Henry V* and *Pericles*. Although the absence of the prologue from the paratextual context is not rare, when present the prologue works as the story's backbone, specifically for one important role it serves: to usher the public into the story. Indeed, the prologue effectively constitutes a door between the reality of the play and that of the world: it holds the responsibility of quieting the audience to prepare for the story's beginning. The paratextual element in itself is a beginning, where its designation generally also involves the indication of a subsequent intention. In ancient drama the term *prologue* came to define everything that preceded the entrance of the chorus, since its function was to provide an exposition of the dramatic scene.[2] The function of the prologue has been conveyed in different styles throughout the centuries and according to the changes in stylistic sensibilities; for instance, it could be delivered in

[1] Oxford English Dictionary, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/152375?rskey=o7yRzC&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed 31 May 2022).
[2] Genette, Gérard, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, translated by J. E. Lewin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1997, p. 166.

the form of a dialogue or a monologue, based on the needs and desires of the author. Its paratextual function survived in many traditions, and in each it assumed its peculiar characteristics. As a case in point, the Spanish tradition relied on the use of the prologue as introduction in fictional narrative, especially for the novel, as for *Don Quijote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes.

The prologue has often been associated with the concept of liminality, which was explored for its anthropological implications by both Arnold Van Gennep[3] and Victor Turner[4]. They pointed out society's need for a *limen*, a threshold, between two different situations; in the literary world this limen is the prologue. Occupying such a peculiar place between realities, the prologue effectively holds the power of acting as a mediator between them. For its work to be effective, it is common to see a series of strategies unfold. In general, as stated above, it would start off by capturing the attention of the audience; after distancing the play from the outside world, the prologue would establish itself as *locus auctoris*, that is, the immaterial place in a text where the authority of the text and its author are established. The prologue could assert a connection to already existing works, as well as claiming its rights over the originality of the topic the work was based on.[5]

From this context, the prologue would move to its second function: explaining the matter of the play. Naturally, this would constitute the very core of the matter: here, the prologue would set what the audience could expect to see portrayed on stage, and would actively press on factors such as the importance of the use of imagination for the viewer to better understand the story, as the prologue to Shakespeare's *Henry V* clearly states:

> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:
> Into a thousand parts divide one man,
> And make imaginary puissance. (ll. 23-25)[6]

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[3]Van Gennep, Arnold, *The Rites of Passage*, translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Cafee, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 21.
[4] Turner, Victor, "Variations on the Theme of Liminality", *Secular Ritual*, edited by Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977, p. 37.
[5] Bratu, Cristian, "Prologue as Locus Auctoris in Historical Narratives: An Overview from the Antiquity to the Middle Ages", *Mediaevistik*, 28 (2015), p.48.
[6] Shakespeare, William, *Henry V*, edited by Gary Taylor, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 93. This is the edition I use throughout.

Another function strictly tied with the appeal to the audience is the *captatio benevolentiae*: the Latin expression for "winning of goodwill" is a rhetorical technique aimed to obtain the benevolence of the audience at the beginning of a speech or text; it was practised by Roman orators, and it is one of the pillars of oratory. In order to achieve it, the prologue would usually display what can be referred to as *humilitas intellectualis*, which is the tendency to diminish the work's value, and consequently that of the author, so that the performance would in the end astonish the audience. The difficulty of this rhetorical device as maintaining the delicate balance "to put a high value on the text without antagonizing the reader by too immodestly, or simply too obviously, putting a high value on the text's author".[7] This implies the need for the prologue to refrain from directly addressing the author's talent. It may be achieved by valuing the content itself, as it happens for the Shakespearean history plays, where the light shines on the historical side of the story. For instance, a display of this technique can be seen in the prologue to *Henry V*:

> On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
> So great an object. (ll. 10-11)

One can attribute high value to the usefulness of examining the matter of the play. By persisting with the *topos* of modesty, the prologue could prefer this possibility taking a different route: the paratextual device would offset the importance of the theme by claiming the inability of the orator to fully convey it.

The theatrical prologue can be identified with three different forms: the scripts and textual traces, the actor who performs it, and the performance itself. Any approach to its written form must consider that the oral performance is the ultimate objective.[8] The choice of the actor would depend on the methods of each theatrical company, as will be further examined, but it was considered a common technique to give this part to someone who would not cover a major role in the play in order to further highlight the importance of the function of the mediator. For what concerns the

[7] Genette, p. 198.
[8]Bruster, Douglas; Weimann, Robert, *Prologues to Shakespeare's Theatre: Performance and Liminality in Early Modern Drama*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 22.

identification of the prologue with its performance, one must consider how prologues belong to a constellation of techniques all set to invite the spectators in and aiming to ensure the play's success, especially on early modern English stages. This involved proper etiquette on how they were supposed to be written and eventually delivered.

As previously noted, the prologue would usually be delivered by a non-primary actor involved in the play, but it could also come to life thanks to a character of its own referred to as Chorus. In this case, the stage directions would most likely include a specification, as for the Shakespearean *Romeo and Juliet* in the Second Quarto (referred to as Q2)[9]: *"*Prologue Enter Chorus*"*. The origins of the Chorus can be traced back to classical times; it is considered a unique element, most effective in the context of the theatrical performance, with once again the purpose of keeping the audience's mind immersed in the reality of the play. However, it is important to make a distinction: whilst the prologue is the prefectorial text introducing the play, the Chorus is the instrument through which the prologue is delivered, as well as other paratextual material such as the epilogue. The Chorus would figure on the character list, it could be made up of one or multiple people according to stage directions and company policies; alongside the poetical function of maintaining the fictitious reality, it could also be used to explain something that is not going to be portrayed on stage, as it happens at the beginning of the second act in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where the Chorus fills in the public about the time gap between the end of the first act and the beginning of the second, describing the secret meetings the two lovers have had.

The last form the prologue can assume is that of a character within the story: the author can choose to use a specific figure to deliver the prologue, which often implies additional meaning. This is the case of *Pericles*,[10] one of the last Shakespearean plays, where the prologue is assigned to John Gower (c. 1330-1408), Chaucer's contemporary, who in the matter of the play becomes a character

[9] Shakespeare, William, *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Jill L. Levenson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 141. This is the edition I use throughout.
[10] Shakespeare, William, *Pericles*, edited by Roger Warren, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. This is the edition I use throughout.

and assumes the role of the Chorus. In this case, the character list shows the lettering *"*Gower, The Presenter*"*. This strategy is also present in *Richard III*,[11] where the hybrid form of prologue and monologue is delivered by the protagonist itself, the Duke of Gloucester.

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[11] Shakespeare, William, *Richard III*, edited by John Jowett, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. This is the edition I use throughout.

Chapter 2: A history of the prologue

2. 1. The prologue in Ancient Greece

In his *Poetics* Aristotle (c. 383–322 BC) states: “The prologue is that entire part of a tragedy which precedes the Parodos of the Chorus”.[1] Ancient Greek theatre, whether it be tragedy or comedy, tended to follow this convention. At the time, the prologue did not follow a specific formal pattern in the matter of style, in fact it ranged from the monological form to the dialogical one. However, it was likely to have a more rigid outline when it came to the contents: the prologue would introduce the matter of the play, plead for the audience’s pity, and praise the author. Additionally, it was delivered by a character that would not reappear again. Usually, for Euripides’ (c. 485–406 BC) theatre the prologue would assume the form of a monologue, and its purpose would be to set the action’s time and space; whilst Aeschylus (c. 525–456 BC) and Sophocles (c. 496–406 BC) preferred a narration *in medias res*, that is, “into the middle of proceedings; into the midst of affairs. Frequently with reference to a literary work (esp. in later use): in or into the middle of a narrative”.[2] Moreover, it was not rare to see in Sophocles’ prologue the first description of the play’s protagonist, a technique that resurfaced many times throughout the centuries that followed. This pattern would then be completed with the *parodos*: it “is the first undivided utterance of the Chorus”,[3] that would directly lead into the three *episodia*, which are effectively the acts of the play. An element that is key to the characterization of the Greek prologues is the invocation to the muses and gods; the authors would often choose to use the space of the prologue to justify their approach and subject choice, claiming they had been inspired and blessed by the divine entities.

Prologues also constituted an essential part of the historical narratives;[4] many authors used the space of the prologue to establish their authority on the matter of the play, a process that included highlighting their excellence, providing autobiographical information, and explaining their literary

[1]Aristotle, *Poetics*, edited by S. H. Butcher, London: Macmillan, 1922, p. 43.
[2] Oxford English Dictionary, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/53035208?redirectedFrom=in+medias+res#eid (accessed 15 June 2022).
[3] Aristotle, p. 43.
[4] Bratu, pp. 48-49.

ambitions. For what concerns historical narratives, the function of the prologue would be doubly tied with issues strictly related with the figure of the historian. For instance, Polybius (c. 200-118 BC) in his *Histories* included in his prologue a eulogy of history, whilst Thucydides (c. 460 BC–c. 395 BC) concluded his prologue with an excursus on his role as a historian.[5]

2.1.1. The Greek Chorus

The original Greek Chorus has considerably affected the role and characteristics of the Chorus as we know it today. At the beginning of the fifth century BC, it counted fifty members, and it eventually passed first to twelve and then fifteen with Sophocles.[6] It was mainly confined to the area of the stage called the *orchestra*, meaning "dancing place", which leads us to believe dancing was a major part of its role. It is recognised that the Chorus was held into remarkable consideration; a case in point is the large amount of lines it was given; Aristotle himself reflects on its importance: "The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole and share in the action".[7] The last part of this quotation points to the second important aspect of the identity of the Chorus, its participation in the matter of the play. The Chorus not only consisted of what is referred to as "a collective character",[8] but moreover its words shaped the content and unfolding of the play, something that can be traced up until its interludes in the Shakespearean *Henry V.* Another function of the Chorus was to "alienate the audience":[9] it can be considered the equivalent to the role of the prologue as a mediator between the two confining realities of the playhouse and the outside world. This particular function remained central throughout the centuries leading eventually to its theorization by the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). Known today as the Alienation Effect, it "involves the use of techniques designed to distance the audience from emotional involvement in the play through jolting reminders of the artificiality of the theatrical performance";[10]

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[5] Bratu, pp. 49-50.
[6] Weiner, Albert, "The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus", *Theatre Journal*, 32 (1980), p. 205.
[7] Aristotle, p. 69.
[8] Weiner, p. 205.
[9] Weiner, p. 211.
[10] Encyclopaedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/art/alienation-effect (accessed 20 May 2022).

on this basis, the Chorus would effectively constitute an interlude that would allow the public to process and channel its emotions, without running the risk of being overwhelmed.

2.2. The prologue on the Latin stage

The Latin theatre tended to follow a rigid structure for the construction of its acts, and the prologue was no exception. Specifically, the prologue was a standard feature for Plautus (c. 254–185 BC) and Terence (c. 190–159 BC): they would start off by asking for the audience's favour, move on to explaining the plot of the play that would be performed afterwards, and finish by warning the audience of the play's tone. A difference that encyclopaedists detected is that the poet himself would perform the prologue from the pulpit, while the Chorus sang, and actors mimed his words.[11] The fact that the author himself would be an active participant in the delivery of the prologue proves the high value placed on it by Roman authors.

The problem of authorization, that is the dependence on a previously granted authority to the playwright that was then recognised as legitimate, was inherited from the Latin theatre, particularly from Plautus. Most of Plautus' comedies, approximately 20, feature prologues, but the specific concern here is with the *Menaechmi*, in which the prologue is performed by the slave Peniculus and deals with the anxiety of the relationship between stage and audience.[12] The prologue of the comedy that would eventually become a major resource for Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* (1594), articulates its truth within the reality of the story: it urges the participation of the audience in the play's matter, directly leading to enhancing the perception of the theatre.

Nevertheless, it was probably Seneca (4 BC–65 AD) who had the biggest resonance on the English theatrical scene. The Latin philosopher, politician, and dramatist was considered the greatest tragic playwright, also ascending over the Greeks. Seneca did not include any prologue in his works, at least among those that have been collected. His *Hippolytus* was one of the firsts to be rediscovered

[11] Smith, Bruce R., "Toward the Rediscovery of Tragedy: Productions of Seneca's Plays on the English Renaissance Stage", *Renaissance Drama*, 9 (1978), p. 10.
[12] Bruster; Weimann, p. 51.

and performed on the English stage between 1543 and 1555, under Alexander Nowell (1517–1602).[13] As master of the prestigious Westminster school, he added a prologue in preparing the play for its performance, following the same scheme that Roman comedies had; he appealed to the moral benefit of the performance, pleading for the audience's favour, and then described the matter of the play. Alongside reinforcing the choice of using a third person narrator to deliver the prologue, Nowell also effectively fixes the problem of authorization, an issue that was irrelevant to Seneca. Through the voice of his prologue, he asks the spectators to be patient and magnanimous, therefore, not to judge the play and its actors too harshly.

2.3. The prologue during the Middle Ages in England

The English medieval stage saw mostly the performance of plays belonging to three main genres: morality plays, mystery plays, and miracle plays. The genre itself evolved from liturgical offices and one of their purposes was to enhance calendar festivities. The vernacular stage offered a variety of methods for the prologue to be developed, consistent with the particularity of the matter and the objective of the plays.[14] The introductory prologues were often spoken by major 'good' characters forming part of the dramatic action and that would eventually merge with the story; the *dramatis personae* in these three genres were the personification of virtues, sins, and divinities. Morality plays were usually introduced by a character participating in the plot, such as Mercy or Reason, who might also act as epilogue to the play. For mystery plays, the preferred route was to assign the prologue to an undoubtedly 'good' character, most frequently God himself. For what concerns miracle plays, as they presented real or fictitious events of the lives of saints, the prologues belonging to these cycles would be pronounced by external figures connected with the story about to be told or the saints themselves. Besides, there was an additional *dramatis persona* that could be put in charge of the delivery of the prologue, regardless of the genre; that is the more explicit presenter

[13] Smith, p. 9.
[14] Cooper, Helen, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2010, p. 72.

figure referred to as Doctor or Expositor.[15] This figure was particularly effective when the action portrayed on stage needed allegorical explanation to be fully understood by the public.

A significant example of the role of the prologue in medieval theatre, specifically in morality plays, is the anonymously authored *Mankind* (c. 1464-1471). Here, the figure of Mercy acts as the usher and directly addresses the public. He starts by telling the story of Man's disobedience and Christ's benevolence, introduces himself and admonishes the audience which effectively constitutes a delegation of all humanity. A unique characteristic of this prologue is how the reality of the prologue and that of the public are intimately connected.[16] Indeed, Mercy imagines part of them sitting and part standing, acknowledging the division based on rank that people in the playhouse had to follow when taking their seat, as the following extract shows:

O ye sovereigns that sit and ye bothern that stand right up. (ll. 28)[17]

There are two additional elements that must be taken into consideration: the reasons behind the stylistic device of choice and the relationship between the role of the prologue and its physical stage. Regarding the former, both dialogue and monologue were used in redacting the prologue for the medieval stage; specifically, the monologues were more likely to be assigned to negative characters as the Vice, an element that returns in the Shakespearean *Richard III*. As for the latter, there is very little information that describes the medieval stage; from what is known, it was most likely an open-air and dynamic one, especially in the early stages of the medieval theatrical experience, the structure upon which the actors would perform was usually the same carts on which they travelled through the country. These tended to stop in particularly public area of the cities in an attempt to reach broader audiences, therefore, one of the most important functions of the prologue was to attract the public and quieten them to ensure the success of the performance.[18]

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[15] Cooper, p. 77.
[16] Bruster; Weimann, p. 56.
[17] Quoted in Bruster; Weimann, p. 57.
[18] Johnson, Alexandra F., "An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre" in Richard Beadle, Alan J. Fletcher, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 7.

Medieval plays were not exempt from having to deal with the issue of authorization; the intrinsic instability of place did not help with the issue of legitimization, therefore the prologue sought authorization not within the history of the dramatic form, but rather invoking religious authority.[19] For what concerns the structure of the theatre, it was only with time that it started to become a semipermanent and eventually permanent one. Specifically, the Elizabethan theatre structure, with its lack of roof, elevated stage, and spectators on three sides, compelled the speaker of the prologue to maintain his dynamicity of movement to keep the public's spirit and attention up with the ultimate objective of ensuring the success of the play.

The same objectives and functions can be associated with the epilogue and intermediate commentaries. The epilogue would help the public understand what they had seen portrayed, whilst the intermediate commentaries would fill gaps in the narrative or offer clarifications.

2.4. The prologue in early modern England

The Renaissance as a cultural movement develops in England in a slightly postponed timeframe with respect to the rest of Europe: it is generally agreed that it started halfway through the sixteenth century. From the precedent traditions, the theatrical experience, and specifically the prologue, inherited and further developed two elements that came to shape it: the link between the physical stage and the delivery of the prologue and the evolution of drama as a reading experience. For what concerns the first point, although plays had been performed for centuries in the British Isles, it was only in the 1540s that playhouses started to blossom.[20] Specifically, as noted before, the new fixed structure played an essential role in the developing of the prologue's role. Being in a stable physical context, the speaker of the prologue did not need to draw spectators from the outside, and therefore partially lost this function. As for the second point, theatre as a reading experience was a relatively new phenomenon as, on the one hand, theatre in itself was considered an unworthy activity,

[19] Bruster; Weimann, p. 55.
[20] Kathman, David, "Playhouses", in Arthur F. Kinney, Thomas Warren Hopper, eds, *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, p. 211.

especially in the eyes of the Church that believed it to be sinful and corrupting, and on the other hand, due to economical and creative reasons. Many playwrights were doubtful about printing their works fearing that they would lose paying customers not interested in watching the play since they could read it, and as there was no reassurance or protection against plagiarism. This last factor must be held in consideration to understand the evolution of the prologue. Researches have been conducted on how often the prologue had been included in printed plays:[21] the reports show that in the timeframe from 1512 to 1590 about 40% percent of printed first editions included a prologue, whilst in the last decade of the century it goes down to about 10%. These fluctuations go hand in hand with a new approach given to the function of the prologue: with printed playbooks, paratexts became the privileged spot where authors could propose and criticize stylistic choices, setting this sort of commentary between the lines of the story.[22] However, it was not rare for the prologues to be omitted from print if deemed too daring for their content.

Renaissance theatre too had to deal with the problem of legitimization but mostly for a different reason, that was the logic of selling. As said before, printing and the bad reputation that theatre held did not make the production of a play run smoothly: prologues were often assigned with the role of justifying the existence of the play itself and therefore the ticket paid to view it.[23]

The Elizabethan era saw the dominance of professional theatre, developed in a more mature and sophisticated context, which encouraged experimentation of the standard conventions.[24] This is what led many dramatists of the time to explore the techniques at their disposal, involving both stylistic and rhetorical choices, as well as the use of physical space and acting modes. Indeed, for what concerns the acting etiquette of the prologue, as mentioned in the first chapter, actors who delivered the prologue would follow a specific set of rules. In fact, when the actor delivering the

[21] Massai, Sonia; Craig, Heidi, "Rethinking Prologues and Epilogues on Page and Stage", in Tiffany Stern, editor, *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England*, London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2019, pp. 92-93.
[22] Massai; Craig, p. 95.
[23] Bruster; Weimann, p. 63.
[24] Ingham, Michael, "'Admit Me Chorus to This History': How Medieval, How Early Modern?", *Neophilologus*, 103 (2019), p. 260.

prologue made his entrance on stage, he would be clearly distinguishable from the rest of the cast: he would be usually dressed in black, his hat off his head in a gesture of respect to the public, and quite likely carry a book, that would help in signalling his function.[25] Naturally, as the prologue gained popularity for its flexibility as a dramatic technique, embodying it also became a rite of passage and reason of praise for the actors themselves.

Regarding the stylistic side of the prologue, it is worth noting how it refers to the audience directly with the pronoun "you".[26] The early modern stage saw a more dynamic relationship between the prologue and the spectators: rather than only the paratextual device crossing the threshold between realities, by referring to the audience as a collective and determined entity, everyone involved in the performance became an active participant. An eloquent instance of this is the prologue to *Henry V*:

For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings (ll. 28)

On the topic of stylistic choices, there are at least two more issues to be signalled: first, the choice of rhetorical techniques, second, how the early modern prologue solved the issue of legitimization. Regarding the first, the prologue, in fulfilling its role as the usher, would embody the "principium" or "direct opening" in opposition to the "insinuation" or "subtle approach". The choice of the first over the second is based on the intention of the author to spark the interest of the public from the very beginning. This was achieved by carefully choosing and giving out a certain amount of background information on the matter of the play, in order to create the perfect balance between the interest for what the audience could expect to see and the satisfaction for what they had just been told[27]. As for the second point, it has been mentioned how the Court's approval could determine the fate of the play; this went hand in hand with the need to be supported by the other important institution of the time, the Church, a tougher and much rarer accomplishment. The Crown's support was an important political element in the picture of legitimization as plays approved by the Queen could be staged at court, which would constitute a source of pride and monetary return for the author. The prologue,

[25] Quoted in Bruster; Weimann, p. 21.
[26] Bruster; Weimann, p. 35.
[27] Bruster; Weimann, pp. 10-11.

above all the other elements constituting the play, was the diamond tip for this form of contract between writers and representatives. Thus, the speaker of the prologue would be appointed as the main advocate for a play's success.[28]

Another important element to be taken into consideration is the intersection of planes of reality in between the narration of the prologue.[29] Elizabethan dramatists developed the Tudor convention of acknowledging the presence of the public and employing allegorical or mythological presenters over which the speaker of the prologue exercised control.[30] An example of the implementation of this technique can be found in *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592) by Thomas Kyd (1558-1594). Here, the prologue is not an anonymous figure but the Ghost of Don Andrea and the Spirit of Revenge. Opening the prologue, Don Andrea explains why he is there and accompanied by the Spirit, who then interrupts him promising revenge:

> *Revenge*. Then know, Andrea, that thou art arrived
> Where thou shalt see the author of thy death,
> Don Balthazar, the prince of Portingale,
> Deprived of life by Bel-imperia:
> Here sit we down to see the mystery,
> And serve for Chorus in this tragedy. (ll. 86-91)[31]

The elements seen up until this point can be further framed by looking once again at the data collected regarding inclusion rates of the prologues in printed plays.[32] As reported above, the rate of inclusion of prologues in first editions plays dropped significantly between the 1590s and the following decade. This could be interpreted as the consequence of a partial abandonment of the representation of the prologue on stage in favour of another figure. It was in those years, in fact, that a different kind of liminal element was introduced: benefit performances. These special performances rather than replacing the lyric function of the prologue, enhanced its economical return, as the playwright would take a bigger share of the revenues for writing them.[33] However, this does not mean

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[28] Bruster; Weimann, p. 49.
[29] Palmer, D. J., "'We Shall Know by This Fellow': Prologue and Chorus in Shakespeare", *Bulletin of the John Rylands,* 64 (1982), p. 503.
[30] Bruster; Weimann, p. 22.
[31] Kyd, Thomas, *The Spanish Tragedy*, edited by Emma Smith, London: Penguin, 2012, p. 22.
[32] Massai; Craig, pp. 93-96.
[33] Massai; Craig, p. 97.

that prologues ceased to exist. In truth, the data regarding the inclusion rate of prologue in first editions in the following decades support its popularity: from 1600 to 1610 the percentage of included prologues more than doubled, passing from about 10% to 30%; additionally, by broadening the timeframe, the trend kept going upwards and by 1642 it reached the 50% mark.[34] It is clear how prologues continued to be the preferred mediator between the world of the stage and that of the public.

When reflecting upon the English theatrical experience up until his time, Philip Sidney reported in his *Defense of Poesy*: "Our tragedies and comedies (not without cause cried out against), observing rules neither of honest civility nor of skilful poetry, excepting *Gorboduc*"[35]. *Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex* was first staged in 1562 by Thomas Norton (1532-1584) and Thomas Sackerville (1536-1608). Their work was based on the Senecan model, from which they derived the organization in acts spaced out by the figure of the Chorus. The Chorus appears at the end of each of the first four acts, with the intent of moralising upon what had just been portrayed on stage. The utterances are followed by a dumb show, that is a spectacle only accompanied by music, creating an interlude between the acts. This use of the Chorus, amongst other characteristics contributing to its uniqueness, makes *Gorboduc* an example of the appreciation and application of the classical models, opening the road even more for these techniques to be used again.

Of additional interest is another paratextual element, that is the Argument: placed at the beginning of the play, it offers the outline of the tale of *Gorboduc*. Effectively constituting the starting point for the story, the Argument partially assumes the role that should have been of the prologue, here missing, as it would have been in the Senecan model.

2.5. Christopher Marlowe: the prologue to *Doctor Faustus* and its influences on Shakespeare

Recognised as one of the most important Elizabethan authors, Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) is considered to be the greatest predecessor to Shakespeare on the English theatrical scene. In

[34] Massai; Craig, p. 93.
[35] Quoted in Greenblatt, Stephen, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Sixteenth Century and the Early Seventeenth Century: Vol. Volume B*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2018, p. 579.

his works, he was able to carry on the legacy of the great traditions and masters that preceded him and join it with elements of innovation, that would later be embraced by his contemporaries and so on. This combination of legacy and modernisation starts with the very first of his plays, *Tamburlaine the Great*, organised in two parts both performed on stage by the year 1590. The tools and techniques employed in this first work would then come back in his later ones, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* and *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta.* The Database of Early English Playbooks (DEEP)[36] reports the absence of paratextual material for what concerns the publications of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*; that is, in the first two editions of 1604 and 1616, upon which further editions were based, there is no printed paratextual material included. This excludes the prologue and epilogue, considered elements living the reality between the text and the paratext. The 1604 edition, named by the critics as Text A, is 1,517 lines long, whilst the 1616 edition, known as Text B, is 604 lines longer. The amplifications in Text B are mostly elements of comedy; their absence or less lengthy presence in Text A doesn't affect the overall understanding of the play.[37]

A paratextual element that generates a disparity between Text A and Text B is the presence in the latter of an illustrated titlepage; the illustration portrays Doctor Faustus standing in the centre of a circle of astrological elements, holding his magic wand and his conjuring book, caught in the act of invoking the Devil, who, rising out of the floor, curls around him.[38] This particularly vivid image aims to activate the audience's imagination from the very beginning. Thus, the frontpage is in a way supporting and paving the path for the prologue to usher the public into the reality of the story.

The 28-lines long prologue is performed by the undetermined figure of the Chorus, that also has interludes and delivers the epilogue. The Chorus immediately frames the story, starting off with a negation and therefore acting by subtraction:

Not marching now in fields of Thrasimene,

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[36] Database of Early English Playbooks (DEEP), http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/advancedsearch.php (accessed 28 June 2022).
[37] Lawton, David, "Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus", in Thomas Betteridge, Greg Walker, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 163.
[38] Cesarano, S.P., "Performance: Audiences, Actors, Stage Business", in Arthur F. Kinney, Thomas Warren Hopper, eds, *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, p. 198.

> Where Mars did mate the Carthaginians,
> Nor sporting in the dalliance of love,
> In courts of kings where state is overturned,
> Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds,
> Intends our Muse to vaunt her heavenly verse. (ll. 1-6)

Ruling out what the play is not going to be about, the Chorus moves on to explain that the performance will focus on the narration of the fortunes and misfortunes of a gentleman called Doctor Faustus. Before reflecting on what Doctor Faustus's life had looked like up until the moment in which the play's resumes, from lines 10 to 19, the Chorus includes a ritual sentence of classical derivation:

> To patient judgments we appeal our plaud (l. 9)

With this, the prologue shows its respect for the audience's judgement, while at the same time implicitly asking for their applause in a display of *humilitas intellectualis*. At this point, the Chorus goes towards the conclusion of its speech and employs of a mythological metaphor to further describe Faustus:

> Till, swollen with cunning, of a self-conceit,
> His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
> And melting heavens conspired his overthrow.
> For, falling to a devilish exercise. (ll. 20-23)

By referring to the protagonist as a novel Icarus, who has flown too close to the sun, to be interpreted here as his act of defiance to God brought on by his wills of overachieving, Marlowe's prologue successfully creates a double connection. On a first level, the use of a renowned and understandable mythological reference helps in setting the main idea of the play, that is, how Doctor Faustus's demise is the result of his own work; on a second level, the playwright successfully ties his work with a classical and established literary background. In the last verses of the prologue, the Chorus further remarks Faustus' desires and closes by referring to him as seated in his study. Furthermore, thanks to the closing instance, the prologue directly progresses into the first scene, the soliloquy of Faustus. The content of the soliloquy is a direct continuation of what the Chorus has just explained about the protagonist, but this time, Faustus assumes the role of the usher into the play.[39] This double stress on

[39] Cooper, p. 102.

the rejection of his previous studies and on his insatiable desires reiterates the main elements of the story and allows it to start properly.

Marlowe's use of the framing devices of the prologue and Chorus displays a characteristic boldness that differs from dramatic conventions. Specifically, the audacity of omitting a moralization of the subject, but rather simply present it, is significant in framing the author himself. This element can be linked to Shakespeare's own decision on the matter in *Richard III*, where the opening monologue simply presents and justifies the mischievous plan but abstains from any form of moral judgment. Hence, the reductive use of the paratextual device was embraced again by Shakespeare with the purpose of stimulating the public's imagination by setting an inadequate frame of reference.[40]

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[40] Palmer, p. 506.

Chapter 3: Understanding Shakespearean prologues

3.1. *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy consisting of five acts, composed in the early playwriting years of Shakespeare; it includes a prologue and a choric interlude that precedes the second act. The first publication dates to 1597 in the so-called First Quarto (Q1), with the title *An excellent conceited tragedie of Romeo and Iuliet*. The tragedy was then included both in the Second Quarto (Q2) of 1599 and in the First Folio (F1) of 1623, with the new title *The most excellent and lamentable tragedie of Romeo and Iuliet.* Some differences can be found between these three editions; none of the three presents paratextual material,[1] but whilst Q1 and Q2 both have a prologue opening the play, F1 lacks it. Historians and critics have always preferred Q2 to Q1 as the Q2 version presents fewer typographical mistakes and 800 lines more than its predecessor; for this reason, most critics have come to define Q1 as "Bad Quarto".[2] As a matter of fact, the prologue in Q1 is 2 lines shorter than the one presented in Q2, which is the reference text for this analysis. As for the lack of prologue in F1, there are different opinions on why it was not included; Massai and Craig support the thesis of an accidental mistake, where the printers missed the prologue due to layout issues;[3] Bruster and Weimann believe its omission might suggest a low regard for the prologue's function in the reality of the text.[4] Nonetheless, both theses can be considered possible when linked to the overall perception one has of the prologue in *Romeo and Juliet*.

The stylistic device of choice in *Romeo and Juliet* for the delivery of the prologue is the sonnet: inherited from the Petrarchan tradition, it was the Elizabethans' preferred medium to describe love. Composed of the canonical two quatrains and a sestet, the sonnet was an unusual form to open a tragedy as its innate content, love, did not seem suitable. Indeed, Shakespeare's innovation starts with the topic: love matters were usually associated with comedy rather than tragedy.

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[1] Database of Early English Playbooks, http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/search.php (accessed 13 July 2022).
[2] *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 108.
[3] Massai; Craig, p. 105.
[4] Bruster; Weimann, p. 96.

The prologue is first presented in a stage note to the readers and actors: in Q1 the stage direction simply states, "Prologue: Enter Prologue", whilst Q2 specifically assigns its delivery to the Chorus. The first quatrain presents the audience with the setting of the play:

> Two households both alike in dignity,
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
> Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. (ll. 1-4)

The Chorus immediately introduces the main protagonists: at the core of the action there are two families, opposed to each other but with the same social status ("alike in dignity"). The clear description of the tense atmosphere in which the story is set shows the intent of the prologue to immediately set the tone of the play. Two points of reflection rise from the specification of the unity of place in line 2. First, when linked to the first line and to the overall content of the play, Verona reminds the audience of a fortified city and stresses the idea of separateness between the two parties involved in the story.[5] Second, it sets the scene in a city that Shakespeare's English audience would have heard of but unlikely visited, therefore sourcing from the exotic perception people had of the Italian peninsula. At this point, on the same line, the prologue clearly acknowledges the existence of the reality outside the play: as noted in the previous chapter, Elizabethan authors were more likely to avoid categorically dividing the reality of the play from that of the playhouse. Here, Shakespeare embraces this attitude, recognising that the stage is the world of the play and helps the audience enter this fictitious reality with a clear reference of place. At the same time, the use of the pronoun "we", on the one hand, connects the public and the performers, on the other hand, identifies the Chorus with a collective figure that cooperates with the actors. The two lines that close the quatrain help set the historical background of the dynamic that is to be seen on stage: the two households are opposed due to something that has occurred in the past, but still affects their relationship. With line 4 the repetition of the word "civil" consists both of a ploce, the figure of speech where a word is separated or repeated

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[5] Liebler, Naomi Conn, "'There Is No World Without Verona Walls': The City in Romeo and Juliet", in Richard Dutton, Jean E. Howard, eds, *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume I: The Tragedies*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p. 307.

to emphasize a concept, and hints at how the tragical ending of the story is going to affect every member of Verona's society. This could be interpreted as alluding to the dysfunctionality of Verona, portrayed as based on factions in continuous contrast where civilization itself is covered in blood.[6] The second quatrain helps to further create the bigger picture in which the story is set:

> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life,
> Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
> Doth with their death bury their parents' strife. (ll. 5-8)

The main objective of this quatrain is to point out that the dramatic ending is the result of a tragic love story: specifically, the choice of using the adjective "star-crossed" to describe the lovers sparks a whole set of images. The main idea is that the two lovers' dramatic ending was set in the stars, therefore nothing could have avoided it: their fate was already written. Secondly, stage references to astrology were incredibly popular during Shakespeare's time: therefore, the *Romeo and Juliet* audience would immediately understand that the two lovers could not be together because of the opposition between the astrological horoscopes.[7] The Chorus then highlights how the "ancient grief" (l. 3) will be ended by the two lovers' self-sacrifice, reiterating in line 7 the ill fate of the two. The sestet closes this imagery of death and misfortunes:

> The fearful passage of their death-marked love,
> And the continuance of their parents' rage
> Which but their children's end naught could remove
> Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
> The which if you with patient ears attend,
> What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend. (ll. 9-14)

The Chorus's choice of words ("fearful passage") with reference to the lovers' ending could be seen as a double-levelled metaphor: on the one hand, it recalls the idea of love as a journey, on the other hand, it may imply the idea of passing from life to death. In the bigger picture of the play, death as the ultimate destination point could be seen as a consequence of misfortunes, therefore an instance of cause-effect, and as the inevitable turn of life.[8] Lines 10 and 11 clearly state that death was the only

[6] Liebler, p. 308.
[7] Traister, Barbara H., "Science, Natural Philosophy, and New Philosophy in Early Modern England", in Arthur F. Kinney, Thomas Warren Hopper, eds, *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, p. 158.
[8] *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 142.

possible solution to the two households' rivalry. The last three lines resolve the functions of the prologue. First, with line 12 the Chorus takes the audience outside the reality of the play. At the same time, the use of the word "traffic" displays a level of *humilitas intellectualis*, as in a way it diminishes the importance of the play. Additionally, "traffic" could also be interpreted in the sense of "act of business", therefore it could be an attempt of putting emphasis on the idea of theatre as a business.[9] Second, line 13 employs the use of the pronoun "you" to refer to the audience as a collective entity participating in the performance. This is combined with attributing to the public a good characteristic, that is their patience, therefore by putting them on a pedestal the Chorus is actively inviting their benevolence. Lastly, line 14 sets an ambiguity: on a superficial level it hints at the actors' wish to provide the audience with whatever they may desire, whilst, under the surface, it could present the ellipsis of the pronoun "you" to the verb "miss" and therefore it would be as if the actors were saying they would make up for the audience's deficiency with their work.[10]

The prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* proves to be worthy of being considered as the first example of full prologue and choric figure in the Shakespearean theatrical experience, alongside *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Indeed, although lacking a formal prologue, the introduction to the characters on stage delivered by Quince in Act 1.2 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595) could be regarded as Shakespeare's first attempt to master the paratextual device.[11]

By constituting a point of departure for the play and its actors, the prologue fulfils its role as the usher between realities. It warns the spectators of the dramatic content, as well as framing the action in time and space, while at the same time protecting the author from any wicked commentary thanks to its charming words directed to the public. Its structure too, conveying a sense of circularity with the self-references to the actors in the first and last lines, encloses the story within the walls of the play's reality, that effectively become Verona's walls.

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[9] *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 142.
[10] *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 142.
[11] Palmer, pp. 511-512.

3.2. *Henry V*

The Chronicle History of Henry the fift is a chronicle play first performed in 1599 and published in 1600 in the First Quarto (Q1). Belonging to the second tetralogy, which also includes *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV*, and *2 Henry IV*, it consists of five acts, with a prologue at the beginning of the first, an interlude delivered by the Chorus for each following act, and a closing epilogue. After its first appearance in print, it was later reprinted both in the Second Quarto (Q2) in 1602 and the First Folio (F1) in 1623, but the editions present considerable differences that have mostly been linked to their historical context. The main difference is the lack of the Chorus's speeches in two of these three editions: the play was first being printed in the same year in which the Essex rebellion failed, therefore in an incredibly tense circumstance. The Chorus's intermissions, specifically the interlude that precedes the fifth act, present ambivalent references that could have been considered as an endorsement of the newly failed insurgence against the Queen. As even the doubt could cost one's life, this more likely led to the omission of the Chorus interludes in Q1 altogether, and eventually did the same for Q2.[12] This thesis is supported by circumstantial evidence that proves that Shakespeare could not have been ignorant of the dangers of dealing with political history.[13] It is then only in F1 that the Chorus appears in the printed version of the play; consistently, it is possible that the prologue and the interludes were not portrayed on stage up until the eighteenth century.[14] The prologue, although covering a different role from the interludes, was not exempted, and was omitted from Q1 and Q2 as it presented many ambiguities. It is commonly assumed that prologues and Choruses are dramatic devices that convey reliable information and therefore can't lie: if characters are allowed to hold a partially unaware point of view, the prologue has an obligation to stay true to reality, as it is the spectator's main informer.[15] However, the prologue to *Henry V* proves otherwise: the audience

[12] Bruster; Weimann, p. 116.
[13] Hadfield, Andrew, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2014, p. 16.
[14]Hadfield, Andrew, "Henry V", in Richard Dutton, Jean E. Howard, eds, *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume II: The Histories*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p. 453.
[15] Palmer, p. 502.

was most likely to be familiar with the character of King Henry from his appearances in the two-part play *Henry IV*. In the epilogue of the second part, the Chorus had promised the return of the heroes, and therefore possibly expected to see it in *Henry V*. Yet, the tone the prologue sets is completely different from that of the previous plays, as proved further on in the narration.[16] The incongruity does not stop here: overall, the Choruses tended to describe a character or an event that was about to be staged with certain characteristics, but then the public would see something very different. A noteworthy example of this discrepancy can be spotted in Act 4: here, in its speech the Chorus describes Henry going among his troops on the eve of the battle, as he

> Bids them good morrow with a modest smile,
> And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen. (ll. 33-34)[17]

Still, as the first scene of the act begins, the words of the Chorus are proven untrue, as Henry disguises himself and starts going amongst its troops, not engaging with them if not to defend his own actions as a king. This inclination to speak in "half-truths, false leads and imprecise statements"[18] had already been mastered by Marlowe in the prologue to *Doctor Faustus*. Following Marlowe's path in the tradition of the prologue's unreliability, Shakespeare is actively developing a new and more complex way of describing the reality of the play, playing with the audience's expectations.[19]

Naturally, Shakespeare learnt from his own previous works: a correlation can be drawn between Rumour, who delivers the prologue of *2 Henry IV*, and the prologue to *Henry V*. Although the thematic relevance is unequal, as the Chorus participates less in the actual development of the story than Rumour does, it is plausible that the *Henry V* Chorus grew out of Rumour as a more sustained and elaborate deployment of the framing device.[20]

The prologue to *Henry V* inherits from the Latin tradition the function of the Terentian author figure: even though the Chorus identifies with the collective "we", whilst the Terentian author

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[16] Ingham, p. 265.
[17] *Henry V*, Act 4.0, p. 205.
[18] Quoted in Bruster; Weimann, p. 123.
[19] Bruster; Weimann, p. 123.
[20] Palmer, p. 513.

introducing the play speaks only for himself, the Shakespearean Chorus assumes the role of the Expositor in order to move the audience across time and space.[21] The beginning of the prologue too sources from the classical tradition with its opening line:

> O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention:
> A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
> And monarchs to behold the swelling scene. (ll. 1-4)

As seen in the previous chapter, the invocation to the muse was a common rhetorical technique of classical tradition. Specifically, it is more frequently found in epic; its use in *Henry V* hints at the play's ambition to be considered as part of the genre of great gestures and tales.[22] Still, the muse in question is not that of poetry or music, even though she would have inspired the author of an epic poem, but rather she is the muse of one specific element of the Earth: fire. This muse is a fiery spirit that "can encompass even the empyrean, the outermost circle of fire at the edge of the universe",[23] therefore a powerful and all-embracing being. This reference to the cosmos, on the one hand, would be perfectly understandable to Shakespeare's contemporaries as it used the physical imagery they were familiar with while, on the other hand, it references the act of writing and the idea that the entire world can be represented on a stage.[24] At the same time, the appeal to the muse aims to solve the issue of legitimization: by claiming to have been inspired by such an important being, Shakespeare seems to be diverting a certain grade of responsibility from himself and assigning it to the greater entity. Lines 3 and 4 create an oxymoron between the reality of the play and that of the playhouse: the so little stage, inhabited by the actors, is "swelling" (l. 4) to welcome the magnificence of the play's subject. This idea continues along the following lines:

> Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
> Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,
> Leashed in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire
> Crouch for employment. […] (ll. 5-8)

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[21] Cooper, p. 80.
[22] Palmer, p. 514.
[23] Cooper, p. 42.
[24] Cooper, p. 43.

The protagonist of the story is here introduced and characterised as the Latin god of war Mars: this association foregrounds what is going to be the main topic of the narration, that is the glorious battle of Agincourt, one of the most important pages of English history. In addition to sourcing from the mythological patrimony, these four lines create a semantic field of violence and battle. This set of references is then tied with the Chorus's direct appeal to the audience:

> […] But pardon, gentles all,
> The flat unraisèd spirits that hath dared
> On this unworthy scaffold, to bring forth
> So great an object. Can this cock-pit hold
> The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt? (ll. 8-14)

The prologue is here using the language of *sermo humilis*, that is the topos of modesty: by being profusely apologetic for bringing "so great an object" (l. 11) on a mere stage, the prologue is recognising the limited tools at the actors' disposal to portray the play, while at the same time once again embellishing the topic represented. The rhetorical questions that occupy most of the lines of the section here presented may be an attempt to stress the liminal position covered by the prologue; if the answer to these questions is to be yes, the actors' work would prove that drama could successfully represent grandiose events and worthy of being considered on the same level as any other form of artistic expression. If the answer is to be no, the prologue would have protected itself by recognising the possibility of a negative outcome. Whatever the answer, it was in the audience's hands to decide. As for the semantic field, two elements are particularly important in setting the scene, that are the two references to the theatrical stage as "cockpit" (l. 11) and "wooden O" (l. 13). Regarding the former, for an English person of the time the word "cockpit" would evoke the pit in which cock fights were held, therefore a popular leisure activity; this way, a connection between the playhouse and social life was established.[25] As for the latter, "wooden O" could be interpreted as an allusion to the characteristic shape of the theatre.

> Oh, pardon: since a crooked figure may
> Attest in little place a million,

[25] Bruster; Weimann, p. 119.

> And let us, ciphers to this great account,
> On your imaginary forces work.
> Suppose within the girdle of these walls
> Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
> Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
> The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.
> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:
> Into a thousand parts divide one man,
> And make imaginary puissance. (ll. 15-25)

The prologue continues to display its *humilitas intellectualis*, but it is here associated with another direct appeal to the audience: the paratextual device is asking them to fill any gaps in the performance with the power of imagination. As described in the first chapter, it was not an unusual request to put forward: by asking them to actively engage with the story, this technique aims to catch the audience's attention. It is also justifying the actual inability to have certain elements on stage, such as the great numbers of an army. Moreover, these same lines are highlighting the time and space in which the action is set: "the perilous narrow ocean" (l. 22) refers to the English Channel and the two cities of Dover and Calais, stages of some of the most important events in the story. The last ten lines reinforce this idea of cooperation between the actors and the public:

> Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them,
> Printing their proud hoofs i'th' receiving earth;
> For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
> Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
> Turning th'accomplishment of many years
> Into an hourglass - for the which supply,
> Admit me Chorus to this history,
> Who Prologue-like your humble patience pray
> Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play. (ll.26-35)

After inviting once again its public to rely on creativity, the prologue sets the line that divides it from its audience. Specifically, line 28 puts emphasis on how the theatrical company follows the people's desires: it is for their entertainment that they have bended time and space. In closing the prologue, the Chorus asks the public for patience and to judge them kindly: it is explicitly recognising its existence as a literary technique and its function as mediator between realities.

As noted above, *Henry V* presents four additional appearances of the Chorus: each of these displays how Shakespeare, at this point in his theatrical experience, had mastered the choric device. In the introductions to the following acts the Chorus works as the medieval figure of the Director,

portraying what could not be represented on stage. In doing so, as recalled before, Shakespeare turns his Chorus into an unreliable source, effectively foregrounding the artificiality of the dramatic experience.[26]

3.3. *Pericles*

The Late, and much admired Play, Called Pericles, Prince of Tyre first appeared on stage around 1608, performed by the King's Men at the Globe theatre.[27] It is a tragedy consisting of five acts, or twenty-two scenes, presented by the prologue-like figure of John Gower, who also delivers interludes to several scenes throughout the play, and eventually the epilogue. It was first published in the First Quarto (Q1) in 1609, and the many reprints of the following years may be an indication of the play's success.[28] However, it was omitted from the First Folio (F1) that is considered the most authoritative edition of the Shakespearean plays:[29] therefore, the "bad Quarto" edition is the only surviving early text of the play, as the other versions derive from it.

Any interpretation of the play must deal with how dangerously indeterminate the text is. The Quarto editions present missing passages, mislineations, and general feebleness. Two main theories have been suggested to explain these issues: first, the possibility of it being a reported text, therefore put together from memory, second, it being the result of authorial collaboration.[30] Despite presenting on its titlepage the lettering "By William Shakespeare" in all Quarto versions,[31] critics have agreed that some inconsistencies in style, verse, and tone between the first two acts and the following ones could be a sign of collaboration with another author. Recent studies identify this collaborator with George Wilkins (c.1575-1618), an English dramatist who worked for the King's Men.[32] Apart from

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[26] Bruster; Weimann, p. 115.
[27] *Pericles*, p. 1.
[28] *Pericles*, p. 1.
[29] Gossett, Suzanne, "'You Not Your Child Well Loving': Text and Family Structure in Pericles", in Richard Dutton, Jean E. Howard, eds, *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume IV: The Poems*, *Problem Comedies, Late Plays,* Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p. 348.
[30] *Pericles*, p. 71.
[31] Database of Early English Playbooks, http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/search.php, (accessed 17 July 2022).
[32] Jowett, John, "Varieties of Collaboration in Shakespeare's Problem Plays and Late Plays", in Richard Dutton, Jean E. Howard, eds, *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume IV: The Poems*, *Problem Comedies, Late Plays,* Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p. 117.

working in the same environment, one element that support this thesis is Wilkins's publication in 1608 of a prose version of *The Painfull Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre*, proving his familiarity with the topic of the Shakespearean play.[33] Besides, it is worth noting that the sections that raise doubts on single authorship seem to follow the techniques preferred by Wilkins in his tragicomedy *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (c. 1607). Specifically, critics think that the first nine scenes of *Pericles* could have been written by Wilkins due to the use in the parts delivered by Gower of the assonantal rhyme, which is one of his trademarks. This feature gradually disappears in later scenes.[34] Indeed, the character of Gower showcases many aspects of the convoluted issue of authorship and sources.

As noted above, the prologue and the interludes are delivered by the spirit of John Gower, one of the greatest English medieval writers whose main work, *Confessio Amantis* (c. 1386), constitutes a starting point for *Pericles*. Indeed, *Confessio* takes the form of a collection of exemplary tales of love, many of which derive from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Among these, there is the story of Apollonius of Tyre, the Shakespearean Pericles: this is a first direct connection between Gower and the Shakespearean play.[35] Still, there are other features that help better understand the connection between the historical Gower and the fictional one. First, stylistic choices aim to make Gower stand out: the verse the poet uses to deliver his speeches is the octosyllable, the same verse used to write the *Confessio Amantis*. The intent is to recreate the atmosphere and the setting in which historical Gower lived; to this end, many archaisms appear in his speeches.[36] Secondly, considering the Shakespearean play as a whole, the octosyllable is only assigned to Gower, whilst the rest of the characters speak in decasyllables, further highlighting the poet's important role in the balance of the play.[37] As for his purpose as a character, Gower is the mediator between the two close realities of the

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[33] Cooper, p. 197.
[34] *Pericles*, p. 69.
[35] Encyclopaedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Confessio-amantis, (accessed 17 July 2022).
[36] *Pericles*, p. 31.
[37] *Pericles*, p. 91.

playhouse and the narration; by broadening the idea of touching liminal spaces, Gower can be seen as the "bridge" between the medieval tradition and the Elizabethan one.[38] In a way, the presence of Gower allows the adoption in the play of other medieval theatre characteristics as, for instance, the presence of a more formal moral compass, that had started to disappear from the Elizabethan plays.[39] An example of this can be the Chorus to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, that avoids expressing a moral judgement of the play.

The 42-lines long prologue starts with the presentation of its speaker and his purpose:

> To sing a song that old was sung
> From ashes ancient Gower is come,
> Assuming man's infirmities
> To glad your ear and please your eyes. (ll. 1-4)

Before even formally presenting himself, Gower explains his presence on stage: he is here to tell one of the oldest existing tales to please the public. To do so, he has returned from the afterlife and assumed a human body. Both line 2 and 3 have biblical resonances: "from ashes" combined with "man's infirmities" could be interpreted as a reminder of the idea of the body as perishable and weak, destined to suffer. This is the idea the Christian religion has of the human body: it may be then seen as a further attempt to portray the background of historical Gower into the fictional Gower. After having pointed out how the purpose of the play is to be at the audience's service, the prologue moves on with its argument, focusing on the content of the theatrical performance:

> It hath been sung at festivals,
> On ember-eves and holy-ales,
> And lords and ladies in their lives
> Have read it for restoratives.
> The purchase is to make men glorious
> *et bonum quo antiquius eo melius.* (ll. 5-10)

Referring to the story of Pericles, even though not yet named properly, Gower explains that it is not simply an old tale, but rather one of the most famous ones in history. Indeed, it is so popular that it was sung "on ember-eves and holy-ales" (l. 6): this reference may be a hint to the idea of the theatre as a social and collective experience. Line 7 specifies that this play, given its excellent content, is a

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[38] Ingham, p. 269.
[39] Ingham, p. 268.

favourite reading amongst "lords and ladies", therefore people belonging to the upper class: the prologue is using a common form of *captatio benevolentiae*. By noting that the tale is appreciated by members of the upper class, the prologue is praising the play itself without directly mentioning the author or actors, proving to have mastered the technique of the *humilitas intellectualis.* Line 8 continues to work in this direction: indeed, the word "restoratives" can be interpreted as "medicine", thus highlighting the play's beneficial effects.[40] Line 9 reminds the audience that this is a story of glorious events, while the whole line 10 is occupied by a proverbial saying in Latin: "And the older a thing is, the better it is". The saying is a double reference: on a first level, it hints to the fact that the story of Pericles is an ancient tale; on a second level, the use of a proverb in Latin could be read as another attempt at connecting historical Gower and fictional Gower. The prologue then continues with its *captatio benevolentiae*:

> If you, born in those latter times
> When wit's more ripe, accept my rhymes,
> And that to hear an old man sing
> May to your wishes pleasure bring,
> I life would wish, and that I might
> Waste it for you like taper light. (ll. 11-16)

Once again, Gower sets the border in time between himself, a medieval man, and his audience: in doing so, he is also recognising that the time in which the public was born is a more advanced and for this reason their intelligence is superior to his. His tone leaves space for an ironic interpretation, as a pun aimed at the Shakespearean poetical panorama that presented itself as incredibly more sophisticated than any previous one.[41] The next lines employ the language of *sermo humilis*: Gower says that the sole purpose of his renewed chance at life is to offer his services to the audience. Specifically, echoing a proverbial saying, line 16 is a metaphor picturing his words as a candle that, to be useful, consumes itself.[42] At this point the focus shifts to the subject of the play:

> This Antioch, then. Antiochus the Great
> Built up this city for his chiefest seat,
> The fairest in all Syria.
> I tell you what mine authors say.

[40] *Pericles*, p. 91.
[41] *Pericles*, p. 91.
[42] *Pericles*, p. 92.

This king unto him took a fere,
Who died and left a female heir
So buxom, blithe and full of face
As heaven had lent her all his grace,
With whom the father liking took,
And her to incest did provoke.
Bad child, worse father to entice his own
To evil should be done by none. (ll. 17-28)

The first noteworthy element is the change of verse: up until this point, Gower had used the octosyllable, but from here on the decasyllable is the verse of choice. This could be read as an attempt on behalf of the authors to shift the focus from the presentation of Gower to that of the play itself.[43] The switch between types of verses occurs again by the end of the prologue. The section presented here starts with marking the unity of place: the main setting in which the play will take place is the city of Antioch. The name would most likely sound familiar to the Jacobean audience as it is frequently mentioned in the New Testament. Line 20 deals with the issue of legitimization: by saying that he is reporting the words of his "authors", Gower is acknowledging the fact that his account of the story is based on the work of others, and therefore he is building a base of existing evidence that supports his tale. Moreover, referring to authors that had previously dealt with the discussed topic was a common medieval technique that historical Gower uses in his *Confessio Amantis*. The next lines offer more information on the story's background. Particularly interesting is the description of the daughter of King Antioch that occupies line 23, where she is described as lively, cheerful, and "full of face"; this last adjective could be interpreted both as a misspelling of the word "beautiful"[44] or, on a more literal level, it could hint at the Medieval and Renaissance popular belief that women with fuller faces and bodies were more attractive. In the last lines of the section here analysed the topic of incest is introduced: all the Shakespearean late plays deal at some point with incestual relationships and the decision of dealing with the topic could be the result of wanting to discuss its immorality. From the introduction to the theme, the main relationships in the play mirror that of

[43] *Pericles*, p. 92.
[44] *Pericles*, p. 92.

Antioch and his daughter's.[45] However, these wicked unions are usually then resolved by a cathartic moment: indeed, by the end of the tragedy, Marina's reunion with Pericles proves that healthy father-daughter relationships are possible, thus one should not doubt the possibility of redemption.[46] The description of the tale continues:

> By custom what they did begin
> Was with long use accounted no sin.
> The beauty of this sinful dame
> Made many princes thither frame
> To seek her as a bedfellow,
> In marriage pleasures playfellow,
> Which to prevent, he made a law
> To keep her still and men in awe:
> That whoso asked her for his wife,
> His riddle told not, lost his life. (ll. 29-38)

These lines are a good example of the elements that have led the critics to believe in the double authorship of the play; specifically, lines 29 and 30 echo lines 1129-1131 of Wilkins's *Miseries of Enforced Marriage* both in theme and phrasing:

> Who once doth cherish sin begets his shame,
> For vice being fostered once, comes impudence,
> Which makes men count sin custom, not offence.[47]

Additionally, both could be rephrasing a common proverb that recited "custom makes sin no sin", reiterating the idea of having lost the moral compass due to being accustomed to commit a sin. Another element reinforcing the possibility of the prologue coming from Wilkins's pen is the repetition of the same word in two consecutives lines, as in lines 33 and 34, as well as the characteristic use of "which" in line 35.[48] As for the themes described in these lines, the whole dynamic of protection implemented by King Antioch at the expenses of his daughter's admirers could hint at the idea that the men were obliged to stop their women from sinning. This is amplified by the fact that the adjective "sinful" is attributed to the "dame" in line 31 and not to the King, whose actions and morbid jealousy betray nature and God. These verses also present many ambiguities that could

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[45] McDonald, Russ, "Fashion: Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher", in Richard Dutton, Jean E. Howard, eds, *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume IV: The Poems*, *Problem Comedies, Late Plays,* Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p. 161.
[46] McDonald, p. 162.
[47] Quoted in *Pericles*, p. 93.
[48] *Pericles*, p. 93.

be further complicated by the speaker's delivery: for instance, the word "still" could both be interpreted as "always" referring to the dame's inability to leave the king due to his actions, or to "silent", therefore abstaining from action altogether.[49] Lastly, the idea of the riddle as an instrument of protection could be a reference to another mythological tale belonging to a different repertoire: the king proposing a riddle to the suitors so that they could have the princess could be mirroring the myth of the Sphynx protecting the access to the pyramids by tricking the visitors with impossible riddles. Still, the riddle as instrument of defence is also a common topos in fables. The last lines of the prologue introduce additional elements of innovation:

> So for her many a wight did die,
> *[The heads of the former suitors are revealed]*
> As yon grim looks do testify.
> What now ensues, to the judgment of your eye
> I give my cause, who best can justify. (ll. 39-42)

The main innovation is the stage direction that allows who is reading the play to fully picture the action on stage: the almost pictorial element further highlights the new consideration that authors of the time had of the prologue. By having Gower disclose in advance what would probably otherwise be something staged in the first scene, the distance between the limen of the play, that is the prologue, and the narration itself is cancelled. It is a signal that the prologue has come to be considered an indispensable part of the play. Furthermore, the direct appeal to the public through the use of the pronoun "you" aims to make the audience actively participate and understand the relationship of cause and effect that is at the base of the dynamics of the story. Lines 41 and 42 display once again a sort of *humilitas intellectualis*, with Gower admitting that the best characters to explain the story from this point on are the protagonists themselves. Lastly, as it is one of the main roles of the prologue, he asks for the audience's kind judgement on the play.

The prologue makes it clear how the story of Pericles, although having been told for centuries, is here deeply modernized. The main feature that leads to this conclusion is the choice of Gower as

[49] Oxford English Dictionary, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/190286?rskey=SUM0Vg&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed 18 July 2022).

speaker of the prologue: it must not be interpreted as simply the closeness in theme, but rather it displays the concern of "telling" the story, rather than simply reporting it.[50] With its mixture of classical, medieval, and Elizabethan references and strategies, *Pericles* clearly channels the evolution of the Shakespearean understanding of the paratextual material.

3.4. *Richard III*: the non-prologue

The Tragedy of Richard the Third was most likely written around 1592 and performed in the same period by the Lord Strange's Men company.[51] It is a chronicle play consisting of five acts; it does not present paratextual material and choric interventions. The tragedy is the last sequence of the four history plays known as first tetralogy, the others being *1 Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI*, and *3 Henry VI*. Its first appearance on print is in the First Quarto (Q1) of 1597; it was later reprinted in the following Quartos versions and eventually in the First Folio (F1) of 1623.[52] Both Q1 and F1 were redacted based on two manuscripts of the play; this gave the critics and historians important information on the process the play underwent in order to be published. Specifically, the publisher who curated the Q1 edition, Andrew Wise, entered *Richard III* in the Stationer's Register; this left a trace of the stages fulfilled to secure the play: authorization by the ecclesiastical authority, license by the Stationer's Company, and entrance in the register itself.[53] These elements may signal that the play in its entirety had received the approval to be delivered to the public, proving that the image *Richard III* offered of the Tudor dynasty was overall positive. The tragedy deals with historical events quite recent to the Shakespearean audience; indeed, the infamous rise to the throne of Richard III and his downfall allowed the establishment of the Tudor line. The forefather of the dynasty, the earl of Richmond, claimed the throne to free the English people from the tyrant Richard III and unite the houses of Lancaster and York but, as his blood claim was weak, the Tudors kept a close eye on anything that dealt with this subject. Lots of Tudor propaganda aimed to legitimate the monarch's position, and this

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[50] Cooper, p. 198.
[51] *Richard III*, p. 4.
[52] Database of Early English Playbooks, http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/search.php (accessed 19 July 2022).
[53] *Richard III*, p. 111.

issue was even more pressing for Queen Elizabeth, as it had to be added to the other challenges she faced, such as being a female monarch. The Shakespearean play seem to fit perfectly in the Tudor mapping of history also for its main sources: *The Union of the two noble and illustre Families of Lancaster and Yorke* by Edward Hall, and the *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* by Holinshed Raphael, both of which partially rely on Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*. Alongside sourcing the historical events, Shakespeare used the chronicles as inspiration to build the character of the duke of Gloucester. Specifically, More's description of Richard is that of a despotic tyrant whose corrupt and deformed physical appearance reflects his evil nature and amorality.[54] This image of deformity became the received picture: Shakespeare embraces it, as he makes Richard himself do in the opening soliloquy. The idea of linking amorality and deformity constitutes an ongoing theme throughout the play, making Richard's power of persuasion and Machiavellian techniques the result of the evil brought on by his disfigurement.[55]

Many elements inherited from the theatrical tradition were used to build the character of Richard, one amongst all the Vice. As noted in the previous chapter, medieval plays tended to assign the monologues that constituted the prologue to negative characters. The main feature that the Vice displays is its unique way of entering a conspiratorial relationship with the public, something that Richard mirrors perfectly.[56] Due to this, Richard's opening of the play could be read as a monologue, defined as "a scene in a drama in which only one actor speaks (opposed to chorus and dialogue)",[57] rather than a soliloquy, where the actor speaks to himself. By having Richard present the play, Shakespeare is already establishing that sense of conspiracy between the protagonist and the public, whose response is that of being an active participant in the theatrical experience. As will be examined

[54] *Richard III*, p. 16.
[55] Bach, Rebecca Ann, "Manliness Before Individualism: Masculinity, Effeminacy, and Homoerotics in Shakespeare's History Plays", in Richard Dutton, Jean E. Howard, eds, *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume II: The Histories*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p. 241.
[56] Connolly, Annalise, "Introduction", in Annalise Connolly ed., *Richard III: A Critical Reader*, London: Bloomsbury Arden, 2013, p. 11.
[57] Oxford English Dictionary, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121465?rskey=SWr4Vh&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed 20 July 2022).

further in this analysis, the audience watches the play from a privileged spot being aware of elements of the story that not even who was in it knew yet. The opening monologue, that from now on will be referred to as the prologue for the techniques it displays, starts with an introduction to the events that led to the moment in which the narration is set:

> *[Enter Richard Duke of Gloucester, alone]*
> Now is the winter of our discontent
> Made glorious summer by this sun of York,
> And all the clouds that loured upon our house
> In the deep bosom of the ocean buried. (ll. 1-4)

The first noteworthy element is the stage direction: it was already included in Q1 and its serves as a visual aid for the imagination of the audience, alongside being an indication for the actors.[58] By having Richard alone on stage, Shakespeare is foreshadowing one of the elements that best describe the duke: his loneliness. Indeed, throughout the play, the audience sees it portrayed on stage as Richard himself describes how he feels left out of his family, as well as the line of succession, but mostly how he is an outsider to society itself. To this end, the confidence shown by the duke of Gloucester towards the audience reflects his isolation in the reality of the play.[59] This capacity to isolate himself from the action, manipulate events and people, whilst at the same time having a continuous dialogue with the public, mirrors Christopher Marlowe's opening soliloquy to *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1590).[60] Indeed, Marlowe had confronted the challenges of having the play presented by an abstract figure when he had Machiavel introduce Barabas, the protagonist of the play; Machiavel was an already well-known figure to the public and, in presenting Barabas, he was offering a key to interpret the character, who is portrayed as an exemplum of the Machiavellian doctrine.[61] By having Richard present himself and his story, Shakespeare proves he has understood how effective and impactful the monologue and the subsequent isolation on stage can be for the whole play. The lines also establish the unity of time: Richard is describing how this is the time of peace that followed the

[58] *Richard III*, p. 147.
[59] *Richard III*, p. 28.
[60] *Richard III*, p. 27.
[61] *Richard III*, p. 27.

house of York's triumph over the house of Lancaster in the battle of Tewkesbury, that led to his brother Edward becoming king. To do so, he uses the metaphor of the "sun" (l. 2) winning over the "clouds" (l. 3). An additional level of meaning could be added to the word "sun": indeed, Q1 presented the spelling variant "sonne". This variant hints to King Edward IV being both the first son and sun, in the sense of guide, to the house of York. The theory is also supported by the fact that in *3 Henry VI* (c. 1591), Shakespeare narrates the story of Edward's vision of the three brothers as three suns, that eventually led him to have the sun as his emblem.[62] In light of these interpretations, these first lines could be read as a wider metaphor that aims to immediately oppose "winter" (l. 1), therefore Richard, and "summer" (l. 2), as in Edward. Moreover, the first line introduces another element associated to Richard: his "discontent" (l. 1). Indeed, the duke of Gloucester, despite saying that the sun has triumphed, does not share the joyous atmosphere offered by peace time, but rather he wants to change the new status quo. This is to be linked to the overall idea the audience gets of Richard as of someone hunted by a feeling of underachievement. The next set of lines continues on the same note:

> Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,
> Our bruisèd arms hung up for monuments,
> Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,
> Our dreadful marches to delightful measures. (ll. 5-8)

The anaphora of the possessive "our" aims to emphasize the idea of collective identity, yet there is an ambiguity about who it refers to: on the one hand, Richard could be referring to his family, the house of York, whilst on the other hand, if one imagines Richard speaking to its public, it could be a reference to the English people in general. Thus, the duke could be trying to reinforce his relationship with his audience. Line 5 and 6 remind the audience of two images linked with the idea of triumph; first, the idea of the head crowned with flowers, that may be read as an allusion to the laurel garland that crowned the heads of the greats in the classical tradition; second, the "bruised arms" could be a metonymy for the armours that become symbols of the achieved victory. Additionally, these lines

[62] *Richard III*, p. 147.

describe the political landscape in terms of sounds; the "stern alarums" (l. 7) and the "dreadful marches" (l. 8) aim to bring the audience back on the warfare.[63] From this sentiment of shared fate and union, the prologue switches register and starts to speak in oppositions:

> Grim-visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front,
> And now instead of mounting barbèd steeds
> To fright the souls of fearful adversaries
> He capers nimbly in a ladies' chamber
> To the lascivious pleasing of a lute. (ll. 9-13)

These lines present the first side of this antithetical relationship, that is Edward IV. Richard describes his brother as a king who has left aside his duties: in fact, instead of rising ("mounting barbed steeds" l. 10) and facing his rivals, he enjoys the comforts of his lady's chambers. With this subtle sexual metaphor, Richard wants to point out how unsuitable in his opinion Edward is for the position he is covering.[64] He then moves on to offer the other side of the equation: himself.

> But I that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
> Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass:
> I that am rudely stamped and want love's majesty
> To strut before a wanton, ambling nymph:
> I that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
> Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
> Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
> And that so lamely and unfashionable
> That dogs bark at me as I halt by them:
> Why, I in this weak-piping time of peace
> Have no delight to pass away the time,
> Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
> And descant on mine own deformity. (ll. 14-27)

This entire sequence is Richard offering the audience a self-presentation. The strong adversative particle "But" in line 14 aims to stress the differences between the two brothers: in fact, Richard, unlike his brother, is not a man made for leisure activities or "to court an amorous looking-glass" (l. 15). From line 16 to 18 Richard reiterates how he is simply not cut to entertain himself with love, but the reason for it is outside his control: it is not his choice, but rather it was Nature's betrayal that deprived him of said pleasures. From this point on, Richard starts to build up the idea that his

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[63] Levine, Nina, "The State of the Art", in Annalise Connolly ed., *Richard III: A Critical Reader*, London: Bloomsbury Arden, 2013, p. 77.
[64] *Richard III*, p. 148.

personality and his desires are the direct result of what life has made of him. Specifically, as noted above, his deformity affects not only his appearance but also his soul, thus marked by evil. Lines 19 and 20 present a set of negative characteristics: what can be considered a description per accumulation that aims to overwhelm its recipient with its negative connotation, collects all the images that were used to describe historical Richard. One amongst all is "unfinished, sent before my time" (l. 20) that hints to the legend that Richard was born prematurely, therefore something that could be deemed unnatural. The self-description offered in lines 18 to 21 also echoes the one offered in *The First Part of the Mirror for Magistrates* (1587) of the roman emperor Claudius Tiberius Drusus:[65]

> Unperfect all, begun by nature, but begot
> Not absolute, not well nor fully framed (ll. 10-11)[66]

Here, like Richard's blaming his misfortunes on Nature, Claudius faults Fortune. Line 23 stresses another popular image connected with Richard, that is the fact that he limped, as well as highlighting how even the most loyal and friendly animal, the dog, tries to push away Richard due to his monstrosity. Consistently, line 24 reiterates Richard's unfitness for courtly love, by opposing the sound of the "weak-piping", that accompanied pastoral music, to that of martial music.[67] Line 26 and 27 should be read as strictly connected to the opposition that opened the monologue, that is the adversative relationship between brothers. It was previously explained how the word "sun" could hint to both the star and Edward IV: thus, Richard seems to be saying that he lives and acts in the shadow of his brother, something he deems unfair. This line highlights once again the idea that Richard feels as if he was being obscured by his brother, and that Edward's existence in itself is stopping him from achieving what he is destined to. Furthermore, the word "descant" (l. 27) could imply a double reference: on the one hand, it may be linked to the lute of line 13, therefore continuing the initial metaphor of sound, while on the other hand, it is a musical form made by two voices that run on two

[65] *Richard III*, p. 148.
[66] Quoted in *Richard III*, p. 149.
[67] *Richard III*, p. 149.

different pitches. Thus, it could be read as a simile for the clashing relationship between the two brothers. The description is crowned by the description of his intentions:

> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determinèd to prove a villain
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days. (ll. 28-31)

These lines can be read as an explanation of how the impossibility of experiencing love directly leads to becoming a villain. Since this is his condition and fate, he cannot escape the need to put in motion his evil plan.

> Plots have I laid inductious, dangerous,
> By drunken prophesies, libels, and dreams
> To set my brother Clarence and the King,
> In deadly hate the one against the other;
> And if King Edward be as true and just
> As I am subtle, false, and treacherous,
> This day should Clarence closely be mewed up
> About a prophecy which says that "G"
> Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.
> *[enter Clarence with Brakenbury and a guard of man]*
> Dive, thoughts, down to my soul; here Clarence comes. (ll. 34-41)

Finally, after building up the oppositions at the basis of his feeling of underachievement, the duke explains his plan. He has laid down the schemes to put his brother the king against their middle brother, George duke of Clarence. Indeed, Richard was the fifth in line to the throne behind Edward's two sons, the York princes, and Clarence. The plots are based on "drunken prophesies, libels, and dreams" (l. 35): effectively, these set of surreal elements all carry specific implications. "Libels" is synonymous for "calumny"; hence, Richard is going to direct the *vox populi* according to what he needs. "Prophesies" points out to the importance that was given to superstition and the fact they could hold power over people's decision making; at the same time, the association with the adjective "drunken" makes the audience believe that Richard does not believe in their power, rather he is simply using them to his advantage. The same prophecy is then clearly noted at the end of the monologue, at line 39, specifying that someone whose name starts with the letter "G" will be responsible for the York princes' death. Here, Shakespeare is hinting again to the public's knowledge of the tale: Richard wants to make Edward believe that this prophecy is about their brother George. However, the public

is aware that the princes were captured and most likely murdered by Richard, whose title also includes the infamous “G”, as he is the duke of Gloucester. Finally, the stage direction announces the arrival on the scene of other characters, further highlighted by Richard’s self-reproach to silence these thoughts as Clearance approaches him. Noteworthy is the change of tone that follows: the way Richard speaks to his brother Clearance just a few seconds after describing how he is going to orchestrate his death, makes it obvious to the public how the Richard they are seeing now and the one who confessed his evil plan are two different Richards. This idea of not knowing which of these two Richards is on stage is reiterated by the many asides he has throughout the play: acting as choric interludes, Richard uses these occasions to explain his next move or what he truly thinks.

Through its opening act, *Richard III* proves to be a tragedy out of the ordinary: its prologue, alongside not formally being one, introduces the audience to the reality of the story in the most direct way possible, that is by having the protagonist speak it. The impact of historical drama should be considered in terms of engagement of the public between a “before” the narration of the chosen events, and an “after” them:[68] having Richard, a famous character of both history and theatre, function as the usher to the story helps to perfectly frame the play in the flow of historical narrations. The choice makes it possible to activate the audience’s previous knowledge of the infamous king, whilst at the same time it encourages the public to complete their idea of Richard with the account given in this site. Additionally, Shakespeare creates sort of a paradox by bringing to life a character who is incredibly self-aware and yet does not recognise his own wrongdoing: this is due to the fact that Shakespearean villains can rarely be defined as immoral; the most suitable adjective is amoral. They are simply not concerned with what is right or wrong, the only thing that matters is being able to achieve their goals. Thanks to this, the author further engages with the audience’s perception of good and evil, as if he was asking his public to participate in the moral judgement of the infamous king.

[68] Kewes, Paulina, “The Elizabethan History Play: A True Genre?”, in Richard Dutton, Jean E. Howard, eds, *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works, Volume II: The Histories*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, p. 178.

On a stylistic level, this prologue displays no interest in the development of the techniques seen up until this moment, such as the *captatio benevolentiae* or the *humilitas intellectualis*. Its only concern is with self-justification: this is achieved not by an external entity, such as a Chorus, but by the main motor of the narration. The prologue here is not playing on the subtle line between the reality of the play and that of the playhouse, as it is expected to. It is rather juggling between objective, recounted, and controlled historical narrative, and what could be assumed as a personal point of view of said narrative.

Chapter 4: The Shakespearean prologue: 'mediator' between traditions

At the beginning of this analysis, I explained how the prologue is the paratextual device whose most important role is that of introducing the reality of the play to the audience. The Shakespearean prologues show how this role is to be framed within a wider picture made of rhetorical techniques and their objectives. Since the origins of its inclusion as an element of the theatrical experience, the prologue's most likely deliverer has been the Chorus: amongst the Shakespearean works here discussed, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V* are the ones that rely on the use of the choric device. However, despite it being the same rhetorical instrument, it leads to two different outcomes. For what concerns *Romeo and Juliet*, the speaker of the prologue mostly relies on the classical model, with the setlist of topics described: the straightforward Chorus introduces the unity of space, time, and the protagonists, laying the grounds for the narration. Moreover, it is much shorter when it comes to the number of lines assigned than the *Henry V* one; indeed, the form of the sonnet chosen for *Romeo and Juliet*'s prologue limits the amount of information that can be given due to its untouchable length. This could also be read as the desire not to give out more than the essential information entering the play, but rather leave room for mystery. On the contrary, the Chorus of *Henry V*, performed only three years after *Romeo and Juliet*, displays already the greater confidence Shakespeare had in the instrument. The Chorus delivers its prologue employing a wider range of techniques. Alongside fulfilling its main role of setting the scene so that the audience would understand the play, it actively works to build the main character. By sourcing from the historical Henry's description, the Shakespearean Chorus paints the image that the public should have of the protagonist, if they didn't already. Additionally, both Choruses make great use of the techniques of the *captatio benevolentiae*, as well as the *humilitas intellectualis*. Another point of interest is how the two prologues fit perfectly in the dialogue between different theatrical experiences and how they are proof of Shakespeare's understanding of what came before him. A relevant element that comes in support of this thesis is how these Shakespearean prologues dealt with the issue of legitimization; as noted in the second chapter of this analysis, it was one of the main problems that an author or company had to deal with

when it came to assuring the success of a theatrical piece. For what concerns *Romeo and Juliet*, it is solved in the last lines of the prologue when the Chorus asks for the audience's benevolence. Yet, as the subject of the play did not require an in-depth examination of the reasons that led the author to write it, solving the issue of legitimization becomes here a rhetorical technique to obtain the public's benevolence. To do so, Shakespeare plays on the contractual relationship between public and theatrical company: by using the plural "we", combined with diminishing the efforts of the company in the last two lines, Shakespeare uses the sense of co-responsibility between himself and the public to ensure the good outcome of the play. A similar way of resolving said problem can be spotted in George Peele's prologue to *David and Bathsheba* (c. 1593). In fact, in his prologue Peele resorts to another kind of responsibility as the key to solve the problem of legitimization, that is the one shared between himself, author of the play, and the metaphor that identifies the writing agency with the "iron pen".[1] The worthiness of the instrument that wrote the play holds the responsibility for what was about to be portrayed on stage, and eventually for the success of the play.[2] Hence, the difference lies on who is to assume the potential blame of the play's failure. In fact, on the one hand, Shakespeare's prologue could be deemed as more sophisticated than Peele's one, as on a superficial level it accepts its responsibilities while at the same time implicitly giving part of it to the public. On the other hand, Peele's rhetoric of religious origin shifts it all on an external and incontrollable agent. This parallelism shows how Shakespeare had understood the challenges a theatrical production could have to face and acted to solve them in the most sophisticated and effortless way possible.

As previously mentioned, for both *Pericles* and *Richard III* Shakespeare does not use the choric device, but rather assigns the role to a specific character; and yet, the similarities between the two characters that deliver the prologue, respectively John Gower and the duke of Gloucester, seem to end here. Indeed, the main difference between the two is the role they play in the reality they are introducing: Gower assumes the function of the Choric device fully, as he is not an active character

[1] Bruster; Weimann, p. 84.
[2] Bruster; Weimann, p. 85.

in the development of the story, despite being perfectly framed in the matter of the play, whilst Richard is the main protagonist. The question that could come from this observation is whether this different approach is to be interpreted as a sign of Shakespeare's better understanding and mastering of the prologue as a paratextual device in light of his years as a playwright. Still, if one was to argue that the Shakespearean Richard proves to be one of the most modern prologues, it should be taken into consideration that the chronicle play was written almost a decade prior to *Pericles*. Hence, it is more likely that the difference between the two approaches to the characters is consequential to the different themes the plays present. Both plays rely on their mediators but each in their unique way: on the one hand, Gower acts as a storyteller true to his word, fulfilling the role and function of the Chorus so greatly that the play depend on his descriptions;[3] on the other hand, Richard's words do not always mirror reality, but rather what he wants reality to be. Therefore, if the audience could trust Gower, it is unlikely that the same fate could be assured to Richard. This is due mostly to the way Richard is presented by Shakespeare. Just as the Chorus to *Henry V*, Richard ends up speaking in "half-truths": his amorality makes it hard to objectively understand or condone his decisions. Consequently, the public, even though possessing the historical knowledge of the events shown, is most likely to hope for a different outcome. Thanks to how he builds Richard's discourses, Shakespeare leaves room for the public to develop an opinion and its own understanding of what they are seeing portrayed; that is another element that is to be added to the peculiar relationship the public and the protagonist hold. Thus, the way the two speakers resolve their function as introduction to the play diverges on the basis of the different needs of the theatrical works, rather than on additional experience with the prologue as a literary device.

Going back in time, it is interesting to note how the classical model on the topic of paratextual material influenced the Shakespearean plays; all the prologues here analysed, with the exception of the one in *Richard III*, take on the Latin tradition of using the techniques of the *captatio benevolentiae*

[3] Cooper, p. 204.

and *humilitas intellectualis*; just as for Terence and Plautus, Shakespeare moves to assure the plays' success by devaluating their content and his excellence as an author in order not to set too high expectations to be accomplished. For what concerns the most important Latin influence for English dramatists, the Senecan model undoubtedly impacted the play on the infamous duke of Gloucester. In fact, *Richard III* proves to be a work caught in the transition from the medieval chronicle-style history play towards the established Senecan revenge play.[4] The direct borrowing of the Latin philosopher's imagery, despite not being evident in the prologue, makes it clear how Shakespeare had welcomed the inheritance left by the great Latin dramatist[5].

The prologues analysed are additional proof of the dexterity Shakespeare had when it came to switching registers and styles; as noted in the previous chapter, the prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* uses the sonnet to draw a clear relationship between the sonnet, the preferred lyrical expression for love, and the core of the play. If on a superficial level the choice seems natural, it may not be considered so given the tragic ending of the narration; still, by foreshadowing this dramatic ending, the sonnet acquires an additional level of meaning, becoming the most excellent technique to the point that no other lyrical form could be seen as a suitable replacement. As for register and tone, both history plays here examined show Shakespeare's awareness of the impact that the right stylistic choice has on the play. In *Henry V* the intention was to exalt the matter of the play according to the public's expectations, therefore the register and semantic choices mirror the grandiosity of its subject; in *Richard III* the ultimate objective was not to glorify its protagonist, but rather to show his flaws, thus, the protagonist is built as double-faced, amoral, and unreliable. For what concerns *Pericles*, the register used in the prologue mirrors the medieval techniques and language of its presenter Gower.

It has been previously noted how the prologue was believed to be incapable of lying, and yet through the analysis of the prologues in the previous chapter, a few examples that could discredit this theory have been put forward. One question rises spontaneously: how do the words of the prologue

[4] *Richard III*, p. 4.
[5] *Richard III*, p. 23.

affect the play? Looking at the Shakespearean prologues examined up until this point, it is clear that the speeches are shaped on the needs of the play. The main obligation that the Chorus to *Romeo and Juliet* had was to explain upfront how the love story reported was going to follow an atypical path that would end in tragedy; in doing so, the speaker describes the precarious balance in which the story is set, helping the audience understand why the tragic ending cannot be avoided. This prologue does not trick its audience in any way, but rather it is one of the most straightforward here analysed. Its opposite could be that of *Richard III*: alongside the impossibility to formally categorize it as a prologue, the monologue given by the duke of Gloucester is setting the scene for the audience to better understand the development of the story, just as the Chorus in the Italian tragedy. Still, Richard does not take on the duties of the Expositor fully: the audience is supposedly aware of most of the events that are going to be portrayed on stage. Hence, Richard's omission of some information that other prologues would have deemed fundamental does not interfere with the success of the prologue's speech. The prologue to *Pericles* fulfils its role as Expositor: it establishes a unity of time, place, and action. In doing so, its speaker Gower manages to give out the right amount of information both on the tale and on his role within the reality of the story. Similarly, the prologue to *Henry V* could be deemed successful in outlining the main elements that constitute the starting point of the story. Still, its approach is closer to that of *Richard III*'s for two reasons. The first reason is that, on the one hand, as both of them are prologues to history plays, they don't need to offer too much of an in-depth explanation on the matter of the play as it is already known to the audience. The second reason, on the other hand, is the fact that the descriptions offered by the Chorus need to always be reassessed once the actual events they describe are portrayed on stage.

The prologues to the Shakespearean plays put forward a new way of understanding the English dramatic experience: it is evident how with Shakespeare the prologue as mediator between realities has come to assume a prominent function in the playscript as a whole. One of the most successful experiments carried by Shakespeare is manipulating the audience's perception of reality by being exceptionally careful with the information given: the decision to clearly state something, as

introducing the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet*'s from its very first lines or Gower's speech, is as effective as the "half-truths" spoken by the prologues to *Richard III* and *Henry V*. In the end, Shakespeare manages to escape the idea that a successful prologue depends on the amount of information given or on the complete reliability of its sources, but rather it is defined by the ability to balance on the subtle line between unspoken truths, realities set in stone, and personal understanding.

Riassunto

Nelle opere di Shakespeare, indipendentemente dal genere nel quale possono essere categorizzate, non è raro poter rintracciare elementi che possono essere ricondotti a precedenti esperienze teatrali, o che da queste trovano un punto di partenza; tra questi, risulta particolarmente interessante l'approccio del drammaturgo inglese alla figura del prologo.

Il prologo è uno strumento paratestuale, ovvero appartiene a quella categoria di elementi del testo che si trovano in apertura o in chiusura di un'opera letteraria e collaborano alla costruzione del testo stesso. In particolare, il prologo costituisce il punto di partenza di una narrazione e a questa sua funzione principale sono riconducibili una serie di ruoli volti all'ampliamento del suo impatto. Shakespeare utilizza questo strumento letterario in diverse sue opere ed è chiaro come egli conoscesse le varie declinazioni in cui era stato utilizzato dai suoi predecessori: definire quali e in che modo, così come cercare di individuare gli elementi di innovazione introdotti dall'autore, è il fulcro di questo lavoro di tesi.

Il primo capitolo si sofferma su un'analisi del prologo come tecnica letteraria. Esso nasce e si sviluppa insieme al teatro stesso: è questo, infatti, il luogo in cui raggiunge la sua più grande forma di espressione. Ciò non toglie la sua fluidità: è sempre stato considerato uno strumento unico nel suo genere e per questo si trovano numerosi esempi di prologo in altre forme letterarie, quali l'epica e la narrativa fantastica. Tuttavia, nell'esperienza teatrale, la voce del prologo riesce a esprimersi nella sua forma più totale e la sua funzione di introduzione alla storia si incastona in una serie di possibilità e scelte retoriche. Sul piano teorico, il discorso del prologo segue quella che potremmo identificare come una serie di punti obiettivo: il primo di questi è la spiegazione dell'argomento della storia. Si possono identificare vari approcci a questo compito che dipendono principalmente dal tono che si vuole conferire al prologo e all'opera teatrale stessa; volendo delineare una scuola di pensiero generale, il prologo fornisce al suo pubblico gli elementi principali perché esso possa comprendere la narrazione che sarà messa in scena. Nel far ciò fornisce indicazioni di tempo e luogo: ad esempio, il prologo di *Henry V* offre al suo pubblico una chiara descrizione del tempo attraverso il quale si

dipana la narrazione, ossia l'epica storia della conquista della Francia per mano del leggendario re, delineando, in conseguenza, i luoghi principali delle battaglie ed in particolare la campagna di Agincourt. Altro elemento che gioca una particolare funzione all'interno dello spazio paratestuale è sicuramente l'utilizzo di talune formule di rito attraverso la *captatio benevolentiae*. Questa locuzione latina indica una tecnica dell'antica retorica classica con la quale l'autore di un'opera mira a ingraziarsi il pubblico; nel teatro si mescola spesso al linguaggio della *humilitas intellectualis*, secondo cui l'autore, attraverso le parole del prologo, sminuendo talvolta le sue capacità o quelle della compagnia che avrebbe rappresentato l'opera, invita il suo pubblico a non giudicare troppo duramente il suo lavoro.

Nel teatro, il prologo può essere identificato con almeno tre differenti realizzazioni: come rappresentazione, come attore e come personaggio all'interno della storia. Per 'rappresentazione', si intende l'identificazione del prologo con la sua *performance* sulla scena; di fatto, il prologo viene redatto tenendo in mente il suo obiettivo finale, ovvero l'essere pronunciato sul palco. A tal fine, è spesso possibile rintracciare alcune tecniche molto comuni utilizzate per agevolare la trasmissione orale, come ad esempio scelte rimiche o vasto uso di anafore. Parlando di prologo come 'attore' ci si riferisce all'abitudine specifica della prima età moderna inglese di identificare il mezzo paratestuale con l'attore che lo avrebbe pronunciato; in quegli anni gli autori di teatro cominciano ad assegnare il prologo ad attori di un livello già affermato, tanto che il prologo stesso arriva a costituire un rito di passaggio nell'industria teatrale. Inoltre, si comincia a comprendere il ruolo fondamentale giocato dal prologo nella sfida per accattivarsi il favore del pubblico, per cui l'attore giusto avrebbe contribuito considerevolmente allo scopo. Infine, nei secoli, a vari tipi di *dramatis personae* è stato affidato il ruolo del prologo e, specialmente a partire dall'epoca medievale per quanto riguarda l'Inghilterra, viene assegnato con crescente frequenza a personaggi che abitano la realtà della narrazione, così come accade per *Pericles* e *Richard III*.

L'analisi sul piano storico del prologo costituisce il punto focale del secondo capitolo: come sottolineato precedentemente, questo strumento paratestuale ha assunto molte identità attraverso i

secoli. Furono gli antichi Greci i primi a riconoscerne l'importanza e ad eleggerlo, fra le altre cose, come *locus auctoris*, ossia lo spazio nel testo dedicato a rafforzare l'autorità dell'autore sull'opera. La tradizione letteraria greco-antica assegnò il ruolo del prologo a un'altra figura: il Coro. Descritto da Aristotele come un'entità collettiva ricoprente la funzione di accompagnare il pubblico nella storia, il Coro era in origine composto da una cinquantina di individui, passando poi con Sofocle a dodici. Il prologo pronunciato dal Coro constava anche di una parte cantata e il gran numero di versi che gli veniva assegnato può essere letto come un segnale della grande fiducia riposta nel mezzo letterario. Nello specifico, nella tragedia greca è fondamentale ricordare l'importante ruolo ricoperto dalla catarsi: il contenuto tragico aveva l'obiettivo finale di portare ad un'epurazione dell'anima dalle emozioni e tale ruolo era affidato anche alle parole del Coro. Questa peculiare figura letteraria costituisce un elemento essenziale anche nella tradizione teatrale latina: difatti, molti autori quali Plauto e Terenzio elessero il Coro come oratore del prologo. Tuttavia, nel prologo latino si possono determinare delle differenze in quanto a obiettivi: sorge infatti il problema dell'autorizzazione, la cui ombra giunge fino all'età moderna. La spinosa questione dell'autorizzazione consisteva nell'assicurarsi la benedizione dei mecenati e del pubblico sull'opera che si stava mettendo in scena sulla base del successo riscosso dall'autore stesso con precedenti opere letterarie. Al fine di rispondere a tale necessità, le formule atte a risolvere la questione dell'autorizzazione occupavano un posto centrale all'interno del prologo, essendo questo il biglietto da visita all'intera rappresentazione. Il teatro latino ebbe un importante impatto sul teatro inglese; in particolare, fu Seneca con le sue opere ad essere fra i primi e più apprezzati durante il Rinascimento inglese. Tuttavia, non sono stati ritrovati prologhi alle sue opere ed in molti casi venivano apposti dai letterati che si apprestavano a rappresentarle, come ad esempio fece Alexander Nowell quando portò in scena l'*Hippolytus*. Un ulteriore passo deve essere fatto in questo viaggio nel tempo per poter comprendere il punto di partenza di Shakespeare per i suoi prologhi: a tal fine, ho proceduto ad un'analisi dell'elemento paratestuale in Inghilterra attraverso Medioevo, Rinascimento ed Età Moderna fino al periodo shakespeariano. Per quanto riguarda il Medioevo, il teatro inglese vede principalmente sui suoi palchi

tre generi: *morality plays*, *miracle plays* e *mistery plays*. Le tre tipologie si rifanno al panorama tematico offerto dall'ambito religioso e morale; tendenzialmente, i prologhi a tali opere venivano pronunciati da personificazioni di vizi, virtù e divinità. Nello specifico, i *morality plays* venivano introdotti da un personaggio positivo ed attivo nello sviluppo della storia, quale ad esempio la Misericordia; i *miracle plays*, che avevano come oggetto principale le vite dei santi, venivano affidati o a una virtù o ai santi stessi; infine, per i *mistery plays* si affidava il prologo sempre a figure positive e, nella maggior parte dei casi, a Dio stesso. A livello stilistico, sia il monologo sia il dialogo erano considerate forme espressive adeguate al ruolo del prologo; si riscontra, tuttavia, la tendenza ad affidare il monologo principalmente ai vizi, scelta questa il cui eco è rintracciabile anche nel *Richard III* di Shakespeare. Il prologo fu in questi anni identificato anche con un'altra entità denominata Espositore o Direttore: questo appellativo dimostra la sempre crescente importanza riconosciuta all'elemento paratestuale.

La nascita di una struttura teatrale stabile e l'incremento di pubblicazioni delle opere teatrali sono due elementi che hanno fortemente contribuito allo sviluppo delle funzioni del prologo: per quanto riguarda il primo, fu un percorso che vide il suo coronamento nella prima età moderna e portò il prologo a doversi occupare sempre più del problema dell'autorizzazione teso a giustificare adesso anche il prezzo del biglietto; sul secondo punto, l'analisi dell'inclusione dei prologhi nelle prime edizioni in stampa delle opere durante il Rinascimento e la prima età moderna indica come il prologo abbia vissuto periodi di crescita così come di difficoltà. Tali oscillazioni possono essere ricondotte, da una parte alle necessità delle singole opere o autori e, dall'altra, alla nuova concezione del prologo come sito atto alla critica da parte dell'autore stesso verso la propria opera o altre, concorrenti. È poi lo sviluppo del teatro professionale durante l'età elisabettiana a fornire una nuova, addizionale chiave di lettura al prologo: in questi anni si sviluppa una vera e propria etichetta comportamentale per il prologo che si riflette anche sull'aspetto fisico del suo oratore. Infatti, così come sottolineato precedentemente, il prologo diventa sempre più il fiore all'occhiello dell'esperienza lavorativa di un attore e la sua riconoscibilità sulla scena partiva non solo dall'atteggiamento ma anche dal suo

abbigliamento, tendenzialmente di un elegante e misterioso nero. Allo scopo di comprendere al meglio il suo sviluppo come elemento paratestuale, è stata svolta un'analisi del prologo apposto da Christopher Marlowe al suo *Doctor Faustus*. In questo frangente vengono sottolineati, fra le altre cose, l'utilizzo sia del linguaggio della *humilitas intellectualis* sia dell'importanza giocata dall'immaginario contemporaneo sul ruolo della fortuna e come questo venga espresso dal Coro oratore del prologo. In generale, sul piano retorico dell'epoca si delineano nuove tecniche che nascono e si sviluppano in quegli anni, tra cui l'uso nel testo dell'opposizione tra "we", ovvero compagnia teatrale e autore, e "you", identificabile nel pubblico. Sono rintracciabili vari esempi di questa tecnica e tra questi, meritano di essere ricordati il prologo di *The Spanish Tragedy* di Thomas Kyd e *Romeo and Juliet* di Shakespeare.

Dopo questo necessario sguardo alla storia del prologo, il terzo capitolo della tesi si concentra su ciò che dà titolo alla tesi stessa, ovvero i prologhi di Shakespeare. Naturalmente, sono stati selezionati solo alcuni dei tanti prologhi alle opere di Shakespeare che sono stati, pertanto, eletti a casi studio. I prologhi selezionati sono quelli relativi alle opere *Romeo and Juliet, Henry V, Pericles* e *Richard III*. Il prologo a *Romeo and Juliet* è il primo ad essere analizzato: la scelta di questo paratesto deriva dalla circostanza che questo sia uno dei primi prologhi ad essere scritti da Shakespeare ma anche e per via di alcuni elementi stilistici che l'autore porta sul palco. Tra questi, è rintracciabile, *in primis*, la scelta di usare la forma del sonetto -la forma eletta dalla poesia come la più indicata a trattare la materia d'amore- motivata principalmente dal desiderio di sottolineare l'elemento amoroso sul quale si fonda la storia. L'opera *Henry V* costituisce un altro punto focale nella produzione Shakespeariana per ciò che riguarda l'uso del Coro; infatti, il prologo, così come l'epilogo e gli intermezzi, vengono tutti recitati dal Coro nella sua forma tradizionale di origine greca. L'elezione di questo prologo per l'analisi è anche motivata dal nuovo punto di vista che le parole del Coro offrono agli spettatori sul ruolo della verità nel teatro; di fatto, si riteneva che il prologo, essendo l'informatore principale del pubblico sugli eventi in scena, non potesse -per natura- mentire. Il prologo ad *Henry V*, insieme specialmente agli intermezzi, offre al suo spettatore mezze verità e

descrizioni che vengono poi contraddette dall'azione stessa all'interno della storia. Per quanto riguarda *Pericles*, il suo paratesto è stato selezionato per due motivi chiave: il primo, in quanto può essere preso come esempio delle ultime opere di Shakespeare - le cosiddette *late plays* - dove spesso si incrociano problemi autoriali; il secondo, per la peculiare figura a cui è assegnato il prologo stesso, ovvero il poeta medievale John Gower la cui presenza fornisce nuove chiavi di lettura all'opera stessa. I due motivi entrano in comunicazione riflettendosi sulla questione ancora aperta di chi abbia effettivamente scritto *Pericles*; nello specifico, il prologo e alcune scene conducono alla teoria di una doppia autorialità tra Shakespeare e il drammaturgo George Wilkins. Al fine di comprendere al meglio le sfaccettature che questo prologo offre, nel corso dell'analisi si discutono quali siano gli elementi che portano alla fondazione di questa teoria. Infine, il capitolo si conclude con l'analisi del prologo a *Richard III*, quello che si può definire come il 'prologo non-prologo'. In effetti, formalmente parlando, esso non si può definire come prologo, bensì come monologo, poiché è il personaggio di Riccardo III ad entrare in scena e aprire direttamente la rappresentazione. Sono però la struttura e le sue stesse parole ad indurre la critica a indicare nel suo discorso una forma di prologo: difatti, introduce al pubblico spazio e tempo dell'azione, sé stesso -il protagonista della storia- e spiega le sue malvagie intenzioni. L'unicità di questo monologo ha portato alla sua apposizione in chiusura del capitolo: l'interesse principale è qui delineare cosa a livello stilistico e retorico può essere ricondotto al concetto di prologo per come lo si è inteso nei precedenti casi studio.

In chiusura alla riflessione di questo elaborato si colloca il quarto capitolo che mantiene come obiettivo quello di condurre un'analisi di matrice comparativa fra i quattro prologhi esaminati e con il panorama in cui si inseriscono. Lavorando in comparazione, prendono forma alcuni importanti punti di riflessione: in particolare, nei primi tre prologhi esaminati ritroviamo l'uso di quelle tecniche nate con il teatro classico, quali le sopracitate *humilitas intellectualis* e *captatio benevolentiae*. Questi tratti sono invece assenti nell'ultimo prologo preso in esame, altro elemento questo che si aggiunge ai caratteri che lo rendono unico. Al contempo, il teatro greco vede un suo riflesso nei prologhi a *Romeo and Juliet* e *Henry V*, entrambi pronunciati dal Coro, provando così come lo strumento corale

abbia mantenuto una posizione di rilievo nella prima età moderna. È evidente come per Shakespeare il prologo assuma a pieno la sua identità di mediatore fra la realtà del mondo del teatro e la realtà della rappresentazione. I vari 'ponti' costruiti fra il pubblico e il prologo, il cui oratore viene assunto a figura rappresentativa dell'intero sistema dietro la produzione teatrale, dimostrano come Shakespeare sia stato in grado di accogliere le solide basi dell'eredità delle tradizioni teatrali che lo hanno preceduto e su di esse abbia continuato a costruire, portando a una nuova realizzazione del prologo concepito come entità autonoma, le cui funzioni non possono essere ricoperte con il medesimo successo da nessun altro strumento letterario.

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