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## **THE TRAGIC CHORUS IN ANCIENT TIMES AND NOWADAYS: ITS ROLE AND STAGING**

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**Abstract:** In this paper we shall try to clarify the role of the chorus in the origin and development of the ancient tragedy. We can rightly say that it represents the pinnacle of intellectual and artistic expression of the Greek civilization. We will point out historical circumstances and facts related to the existence of the chorus; the place the chorus has in Greek society and on the stage as well as its characteristics will also be discussed.

In the second part of this paper, possibilities of reviving the ancient drama, especially tragedy on the modern scene, shall be discussed. Should one aspire towards a more faithful imitation or a creative interpretation? What are the difficulties a director is facing when he has to decide what to do with the chorus? Is there only one answer or are there more?

**Keywords:** Dionysus, the ancient tragedy, staging, imitation, authenticity, tragic chorus, director.

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In the beginning of the tragedy there was the chorus. “Greek word χορός actually means: dance in its oldest meaning, and as such it has been preserved in the Montenegrin word *oro*,<sup>1</sup> while in the European vocabulary it has changed its meaning to choir, assembly of singers.”<sup>2</sup> Apart from the song itself, choreography has a distinctly important meaning. Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan describe the parallel which could be drawn between the dance of the ancient chorus and the Broadway and West End musicals.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Also in the Torlakian dialect of the Serbian language. See Milosavljević 2016: 112.

<sup>2</sup> Budimir 1969: 94.

<sup>3</sup> “But the Greek drama must have been more balletic than our modern theater. We should perhaps look to the Broadway or West End musical for a modern analog to the Greek drama. Clearly certain forms of dance will have suited certain dramatic situations – we know of a war dance, an ‘Athens-dance’, the vulgar *kordax*, and at the end of *Wasps* the main character engages in a vigorous contest with three other stage dancers. It is easy enough for us to envisage dance as part of a romantic or comic musical, but it takes more effort to imagine how the more serious form of tragedy would have incorporated dance. Scenes of mourning and lamentation would have had their own particular physical expression; we can picture the chorus in *Oedipus at Kolonos* miming the

However, tragedy, as we were informed by both ancient and modern resources, had a long and gradual development and in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC it reached its peak. It originated from the chorus poetic form, the dithyramb, a noisy and passionate song that celebrated the god Dionysus. The chorus, accompanied by the Thracian-Phrygian flute, sang that song and danced in his honor. The chorus' performance included singing as well as dancing, which was all in the context of religious rituals. Although, like the flute, it was of an Asia Minor origin, Dionysus' cult had spread rapidly throughout Hellas; vines, trees, as well as animals: bull, horse and billy goat, were all considered his incarnations. He considered himself a god of fertility, wine, inebriation, nature, life.

By transformation of the ritual the dithyramb satyr drama was created and Arion of Lesbos was considered to be its creator. His work in Corinth, at the court of the tyrant Periander, was evidenced by many ancient sources<sup>4</sup> who felt that he perfected the dithyramb and gave it a lyrical form. Arion's greatest contribution to the tragedy was that he introduced a chorus of satyrs that, in addition to the musical parts, spoke in verses. Satyrs, demons of fertility were shown in the form of billy goats and hence the tragedy got its name. The chorus was disguised in goat skin, members wore goatees, but their masks also had the elements of equine features – a mane and a tail due to the fact that satyrs were not always identically conceived and represented. Their recital was followed by coarse and indecent songs as well as obscene dancing (σίκινυς)<sup>5</sup> in accordance with the “responsibilities” of the god Dionysus. As stated by Silvio D'Amico,<sup>6</sup> one day the chorus was divided in two half-choruses, where one of each was responding to the other and since each half-chorus was conducted by a corypheus those coryphei initiated a dialog between them. The questions posed by the two coryphei and their respective half-choruses were answered by an actor – Ὑποκριτής on behalf of Dionysus. From that moment on, since lyrical calling and narration of events gave rise to the presence of the deity who speaks in the first person, an embryo of a theater play was born. Thus, the original tragedy gradually transformed from an epic lyric poem into a theater projected through characters initiated by the calling of the chorus. The chorus itself, so to speak, gave birth to tragedy; the power of its singing enable the appearance of the invoked deity.<sup>7</sup> When, later on, apart from Dionysus, began the invoking of other gods or the heroes whom he encounters or, Dionysus aside, began the invoking of any hero, he appeared and spoke during the singing which praised him and at that very point the tragedy already won its essential freedom, guidelines and content. The followers of the god of wine would soon be surprised when in tragedy there was no longer a single thing that could remind them of Dionysus: “What does this have to do with Dionysus?”<sup>8</sup> However,

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off-stage battle with movements of a martial turn, all the more effective if these were older men. In *Eumenides* the chorus of furies track and surround the fugitive Orestes, incircling him with a binding song of enchantment. We can only imagine the power that the dance of the Angry Goddesses would have evoked. There may not be much ‘action’ in a Greek tragedy, but so much of the effect was created by the emotive spectacle of dance.” See: Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan 2005: 54.

<sup>4</sup> Hdt, *Hist*, I 23; Pin. *Ol.* XIII 18.

<sup>5</sup> Among others, see Maričić 2008: 26-28.

<sup>6</sup> See D'Amico 1972: 27-28.

<sup>7</sup> Jovan Hristić wrote: “The choruses are the view ‘from below’ and gods are the view ‘from above’.” See Hristić 1998: 128.

<sup>8</sup> Departing from the Dionysian cult rituals and dances made the audience protest against such transformation at

the tragedy was still tied to the god Dionysus by place and time. On the day of the feast of Dionysia,<sup>9</sup> of course. It is believed that the first tragedy was performed by Thespis at the time of the Dionysia in 534 BC and it was more of a satyr drama. The real tragedy occurred after the fall of sons of Pisistratus and the collapse of tyranny as a result of the development of social and political circumstances in the Athenian polis and internal life of the ancient man. (Pisistratus ruled Athens until he died in 527 BC.)

Choregos was in charge of the chorus in the ancient times, and not the state. Choregos was a wealthy citizen in charge of assembling the chorus, providing for it during a period of six months of rehearsals as well as finding the best possible flute players and chorus teacher. This was a service in favor of the people, one of the liturgies<sup>10</sup>. Archon was the one who would, at the national assembly, determine by dice sortition which poet shall get to work with a certain choregos. Tragic choregia, as was the name of this service, came about after the Reforms of Cleisthenes<sup>11</sup> while previously the chorus was in the care of Peisistratus' house. However, later on, the interest for this type of service was in decline although along with the poet the choregos was the one gaining prizes and fame as well. Choregia was transferred onto people, part of the funds was provided by the state and agonotet was picked annually and he was entrusted with the care of local and state competitions. In the beginning, the chorus consisted of about fifty members and in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC during the time of Euripides the chorus had only twelve choreuts. Sophocles increased their number to fifteen and they could be divided in two half-choruses. Later on their number became constant. The chorus' sections were significant while the part of the actor/s was lesser. Over time this ratio had changed in favor of the actor and the significance as well as the role of the chorus declined as early on as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. After the prologue the chorus<sup>12</sup> along with the parodos entered the orchestra, which was arranged in rows to form a rectangular shape and the stage was to be exited with the exodos, while the stationary

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the festivities.

<sup>9</sup> There were Small or Rural Dionysia, honoring comedy, which were held in winter around November-December, and Great or City Dionysia, which were celebrated at the beginning of spring in March-April and lasted for several days. Tragedies were performed only during the Great Dionysia and Lenaia festivals, which were held in January-February and were dedicated to Dionysos Lenaios. Later at Lenaia festivals, since 440 BC, preference was given to comedy.

<sup>10</sup> Liturgy was a service for the people, a service for which the fundings were taken care of by wealthy individuals instead of the state. Some of the main liturgies were gymnasiarchy – payment of all expenses for the venue for practice, and trierarchy – outfitting and maintenance of a trireme and its crew for a year.

<sup>11</sup> Cleisthenes' Reforms were enforced in 508 BC.

<sup>12</sup> Jovan Hristić wonders in what manner the chorus entered the stage. Here is his hypothesis: "We all know that the chorus walked around the orchestra in one direction while singing the stanza and in the other direction while singing the anti-stanza, around an elevation at the centre of the orchestra which was called thyméle and for which we even do not know what it looked like, nor what was its purpose, and also that it was singing the epode facing the audience. There is quite an assumption based on – as represented by John J. Winkler in his study *Song of Efeba* – that the chorus members were all young men who passed military training and were prepared for them and that they entered the stage and circled it in a perfect order as a troupe of soldiers. Although even Plato compared the play of the chorus with the military exercise, it is hard to judge how far this similarity went, but at the same time it is also hard to deny that something like the military order in the movement of the chorus could provoke not entirely insignificant emotions, the ones which even today are triggered by the sight of a troop of soldiers parading at a military parade..." See Hristić 1998: 40.

songs were called stasimons. The first rows were reserved for the best and the best looking choreuts and the corypheus was positioned in the middle of that row, while the flute player was always in front of the chorus. The episodes (actors' performances) and exodos were the only parts that included a conversation between the corypheus and the actors. The chorus' performance could be individual – by a corypheus only or by one of the choreuts, a performance of specific groups of choreuts, then half-choruses and finally the singing of the entire chorus.

Tragedies were oftentimes even named by the choruses. Depending on the poet's idea, choreuts could represent old men, warriors, women, foreigners, slaves... Just like in comedy, according to Jacqueline de Romilly,<sup>13</sup> it is not uncommon for a tragedy to be determined by the role assigned to the chorus. That is the case with Aeschylus' *The Persians*, *The Suppliants*, *The Libation Bearers*, *The Eumenides* and with Euripides' *The Trojan Women* or *Bacchae*. Also it happened that the titles of the tragedies may have been conceived in a manner so as to hide the content of the tragedy in question: the proofs of this thesis are Sophocles' *The Trachiniae* and Euripides' *Phoenician women*.

This custom originated from the great role the chorus had in the beginning. It represented the characters closely related to the plot of the tragedy and which were crucial and vividly interested in its course. A great number of verses were given to such a chorus in the reciting and singing parts. The fate of the elder men of the chorus in Aeschylus' *The Persians* directly depended on Xerxes' victory or defeat: they trembled, shuddered and inquired what was to be of their future. Also, in *Seven against Thebes* the chorus consisted of women of Thebes, who were in a constant dread for the final outcome of the battle. They were constantly depicting the atmosphere where the city was robbed and destroyed<sup>14</sup> and they were fearful for their future (326-329): "That widowed women young and old/Should be led like horses by the hair,/And their clothes in rags about them."<sup>15</sup> Eteocles, their ruler, demanded that they compose themselves and stop the sobbing and "wild cry" instructing them to pray. Yet, the chorus of the women of Thebes could not restrain themselves (287-294): "I heed you; but my mind is alert with fear./Anxiety, neighbor to my heart,/Kindles dread of the hordes that encircle us;/As a trembling dove dreads/For the sake of the young in her nest/The snake which cruelly creeps into their bed."<sup>16</sup> These two examples indicate that the chorus was for some time a great part of the play and had the tightest bond with the actions developing on the stage. Through the chorus the poet tried to move the spectator by his verses. The chorus begged, hoped, feared and finally it was as if its emotions merged the different parts of the act into a unified drama.<sup>17</sup> With respect to the god and religious laws the chorus transferred the voice of traditional standards and universal wisdom. The tragedies ended with the "verses spoken by the corypheus and it is as though these verses drop the curtains, dividing us from what we have seen and what excited us. They are most commonly well-known phrases, almost proverbs. At the end of *Oedipus the King* the chorus says that nobody shall be called happy until the end of his life and 'he is not struck by any

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<sup>13</sup> De Romilly 1992: 27.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>15</sup> Aeschylus 1961: 98.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 97.

<sup>17</sup> de Romilly 1992: 28.

woes'. As we are informed by Plutarch, it was the famous saying of Solon<sup>18</sup> which eventually became a proverb. Euripides' *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Andromache*, *Helen* and *Bacchae* end with identical verses which tell us that no one can foresee how they shall be judged by the gods. If we knew about more tragedies and not only the thirty-one which were preserved, there is no doubt that we would have been reading something similar if not identical for at least a hundred times.<sup>19</sup> By retelling and explaining mythical stories, the choreuts helped the audience keep up with the pace of the drama; they were to assume the reactions of the audience, their emotions, as well as hidden intentions of protagonists while performing on the stage.

"During the theatrical play an interaction between the stage and the audience occurs. In the structure of the Greek drama those relations are more complex; there are three basic types of interactions: between the chorus and the main plot, between the dramatic plot and the audience, and finally between the chorus and the audience."<sup>20</sup> The chorus had a narrative, educational and intermediary function. It represented a connection between the play i.e. its plot and the audience. Not so long ago, it was presumed that the chorus also represented the ideal observer<sup>21</sup> who was, by his participation, in accordance with actors performing the story. The gap between the performers and the audience was overlapped by those actions. By approving or contesting, explaining, assuming, it acted within the whole act of performing one tragedy, which alleviated the process of recognition, understanding but also identifying with the performers on the stage. This may be attributed to the thesis that the chorus was an ideal observer. Choreuts were masked in order to achieve the sense of unity and anonymity, a general attitude. In Aeschylus' and Sophocles' tragedies it seems as if the role of the chorus was created with diligence and that it participated in the on stage acting, unlike Euripides', where the chorus parts served as a decorum in the plot with no specific involvement in the play. The female chorus was more intimate and had a more open relationship with the actors and usually the choreuts were of the same sex as the protagonist of the tragedy. Of the seventeen preserved Euripides' tragedies, the female chorus performed in at least fourteen. The presence of the chorus in Euripides' plays represented a very complex issue. In tragedies of strong passion as well as in tragedies of intrigue, an inevitable introduction of the chorus with the ideas of the heroes often interrupted the plot and destroying the authenticity of the stage presence. Due to this fact, Euripides usually divided the chorus from the plot and used it for expressing his own emotions and attitudes. In later tragedies the chorus songs became independent lyrical parts which were provoked on their own during the play. Emotions of the heroes found their musical expression within the

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<sup>18</sup> Plut. Sol. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Hristić 1998: 42.

<sup>20</sup> Kot 1969: 210.

<sup>21</sup> The interpretation where the chorus is the ideal spectator was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by August Wilhelm Schlegel, according to whom the chorus on the stage actually represents the audience. Although this hypothesis seems somewhat in order, it is noticeable that the audience knew much more than the chorus and the chorus was rarely composed of a group who had an actual authority within the society. Spectators were mostly Athenian men, while the chorus in many cases consisted of slaves, women and foreigners. If possible, read the text by Schlegel *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (translated by Ivan Ivanji). Also, see Stamenković 1985: 423-450. This manner of comprehending Schlegel in modern critique is rebutted by Guido Paduano in his *Il teatro antico*. See Paduano 2011: 16.

actors' monodies and their duets with the chorus. This introduction of the musical segment into the acting part of the drama resulted in the chorus becoming just another mere ornament within the structure of the tragedy. A further step in that direction was made by Agathon, a poet of tragedy from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. He turned chorus segments into intermezzi which were performed between certain acts of the drama and therefore were no longer included in the text of the drama. Later on, during the Baroque period, the actors' monodies developed into arias.<sup>22</sup>

The ancient chorus is difficult to define and even harder to stage. The little that we know from the ancient period about the chorus comes from Plato and, later, from Aristotle who did not spare much room for it in his *Poetics*.<sup>23</sup> The whole matter was made even harder by the fact that we do not have a single preserved tragedy from the 6<sup>th</sup> century that could lead us to the beginning and further development of the chorus itself. Our entire impression and comprehension regarding the chorus is based on knowing and analyzing three of the greatest poets of tragedy from the 5<sup>th</sup> century. If not for anything else, at least in order to praise them, we should pose questions and find some kind of answers regarding the following: "What about the tragic chorus nowadays?" One may feel that ancient tragedies are welcome in our theatres and that they attract attention of the authors and the audience time and again. They give us a sense of sublimity and morality, a feeling which can rarely be experienced nowadays. However, what to do about the chorus? This is the greatest difficulty while potentially staging a play.

We must look back again for a second at the ancient perception of the chorus. Firstly, the features of any chorus were unity and collectivism. The chorus as a group represented a larger group within the public, the chorus could even be perceived as the people. In Pericles' Greece, a person was a part of a certain polis, but deep inside he felt that he belonged to his own city-state. And whoever, according to the poet's idea, made the chorus – old men, women, citizens – in most cases it was a certain part of the Greek populous. From the earliest period participating in the chorus and, more importantly, musical education were compulsory in the Athenian society. It was considered that by regular practice one would develop a sense of collective identity and unity in addition to singing abilities. For this reason, the role of the chorus was vital for the Athenians.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, the ancient theatre was not represented only by the boards upon which the actor stood, but rather by a stage that was in the open, under the blue sky and before a huge audience<sup>25</sup>, which gave it a certain depth. A logical explanation follows that such a venue should be filled both visually and auditorily. Although the tragedy developed further and divided itself from the ritualistic

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<sup>22</sup> Taken and adapted from: Crnković 1989: 79.

<sup>23</sup> In chapter XVIII of his *Poetics* Aristotle talks about the role of the chorus. According to him, the chorus has to act as a single actor who is connected to certain tragedy by his poems and who is a segment of the dramatical whole. It is considered that the relation between the chorus and tragedy is better and more connected in Sophocles than in Euripides. See Arist. *Poet.* XVIII.

<sup>24</sup> Plato discusses this a lot in his *Laws*. See. Plat, *Leg*, 627, 653-655.

<sup>25</sup> Ancient theatre had the capacity to hold up to several thousands spectators. Dionysus' theatre in Athens was originally made of wood and according to tradition, during a play the wooden construction collapsed under the weight of the audience. A stone theatre was made afterwards which could hold up to twenty-seven thousand spectators, while the theatre in Ephesus had the capacity of forty thousand. Since the Romans extended it by twofold, the theatre in Epidaurus can accommodate up to fourteen thousand spectators even today.

nature, the chorus could not be so easily removed. It was kept within the tragedy somewhere in the middle of the road between the sacred and profane. We must remember that in the beginning there was only the chorus and the altar, bearing in mind that with the change of cult themes, the chorus itself changed its tune. Although the tradition was not easily changed, annual competitions contributed to the fact that the tragedy as such gained a firm status as an artistic form.<sup>26</sup>

We do not need to be theater experts in order to notice that tragedy did not change in its core. We have the main plot, characters – among them the protagonist – a hero of a tragedy, and the tragic guilt. The chorus is no longer present and that was to be an entirely expected development of a tragedy as an artistic form. Without a doubt it was the pinnacle of the artistic expression of the Ancient man. Nowadays we come across some difficulties in understanding the role of the chorus but even more with the problems of its staging. We can easily identify with the heroes of the Ancient tragedy and we may understand their finest and most gentle, noble feelings. We may even sympathize with the negative and destructive characters as well, whose personal traits each of us carries within ourselves and struggles with, even if this is done solely by going to the theatre or reading a drama (such a thing is naturally possible if we are talking about an enlightened person or an individual who is on the right path to become such a person).

While reading a play and especially while watching it, however, the chorus in its original form admittedly seems like an excess. As previously stated, Aristotle wrote that the chorus should function as a single actor, the unique cell of the whole which must be included into the very plot. The great thinker understood that the poet could jeopardize his role and significance in the very play by separating and removing the chorus from the plot. Nowadays in various theater interpretations the chorus is often avoided. That should not diminish the value of the staged tragedy, though it endangers its authenticity. Modernizations bring about new and different perceptions of tragedies, even the chorus itself, perhaps revealing in this way a completely new richness of the ancient drama. In the same form as well as in the attempt of authentic staging it is interesting to contemplate upon the notion of the manner in which we would stage this vocal and dance troupe.

When the director reduced the chorus to an individual, we can conclude that the idea of unity and collectivism<sup>27</sup> was put aside. Judging from the perspective of a person who perceived the tragedy with a rough analytical attitude, there would be no sharp line and conflict between the protagonist and his sense of guilt, as well as morality of the given social unit which is symbolized by the chorus. It is stated as an assumption that the strength of the main character would be diminished by a mere reduction of the chorus as a symbol of the prevalent social standard and the constant observer. The condemnation of the tragic protagonist should not be overly emphasized as it was in the antic plays since the principals of the sinful loner do not coincide with the principles of the chorus, which has the role of a moralizer. The impression of the chorus as an institution, which existed without a doubt, would be lost. However, if the chorus that was reduced to an individual became rich in

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<sup>26</sup> "What Greeks called the tragedy, as Nietzsche tells in his lecture *The Greek Music Drama* from 1870, we shall put under term 'the great opera'." See further: Hristić 1998: 39.

<sup>27</sup> See A. M. Dale 1965: 17.

character, it seems that its authoritative and educational role would not be diminished. Also, its narrative and intermediary role which created the connection between the audience and the play, but also between the acts of the play, would also be preserved.<sup>28</sup> Naturally, reduction of the chorus would not interfere with the development of the plot, since the chorus only verbally supported and shaped while not having a direct influence on the events taking place on the stage. It was immobilized both on the stage and within the main plot.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, can the ancient tragedy be successfully staged nowadays? According to the fact we found in literature as well as in some plays we have seen, (i.e. Euripides' *Electra* directed by Paolo Magelli, staged in front of a dilapidated and squalid building near a quarry in Kijevo, close to Belgrade, performed at the BITEF festival;<sup>30</sup> or the *Bacchantes* adapted and directed by Staffan Vademar Holm at the National Theatre in Belgrade in 2010) – it is worth trying! For starters, let us examine the way Jan Kott, a theoretician and practitioner, elaborated his staging of Euripides' *Orestes* in his essay *Satisfaction*: “The key issue for the theater director is to find a new spot for the Greek chorus as well as a new function in the contemporary theater. A chorus such as a ballet chorus, which originates from the opera and operetta of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has no place on the indoor stage. There is no answer, furthermore why a chorus should dance and what it should sing. All attempts to perform a rebirth of the ‘rituals’ have proven to be short-lived”.<sup>31</sup> Still, Kott states that Antonin Artaud and the birth of “theater of cruelty” from the 1960’s<sup>32</sup> could have had an influence on the Greek drama to a certain degree. He also feels that the inclusion of certain elements of “happening” as a form of direct provocation may still cause spontaneous reactions, unintentional and unpredictable.<sup>33</sup> In that sense, the Polish theatrologist can conceive the staging of *Bacchantes*, where a girl chorus, enraged and in fury, plunges at the audience and starts to attack men.<sup>34</sup> As a practitioner, Kott talks about his staging of *Orestes* in 1968 at the Drama theatre of the Berkeley University in California, performed by drama students. He placed the chorus into the “speakers”. From four sets of speakers, which he was able to turn on and off as he pleased (one at the bottom of the stage, the second at the balcony above the auditorium, the third and fourth under the seats in the auditorium); the director played

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<sup>28</sup> Simon Goldhill, the author of the book *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*, feels that one of the most important roles of the chorus is to be the link between the acts and the actors of the tragedy. See Goldhill 2007: 50.

<sup>29</sup> “The Chorus always impersonated a definite group of people; it was ‘in’ the story, not an impersonal Voice, but its anonymous collectivity tended to push it away from the centre, where things happened. This was emphasized by its physical separation from the speaking actors, in the orchestra where it had room to dance, and from which it had often to watch in silence long sequences of dramatic, even agonizing intensity. Yet it always remained within the speaking and listening contact with the actors. Thus half-in, half out of the action, the Chorus had some curious and even illogical effects on the mechanics of staging – and incidentally proves itself the greatest stumbling-block in modern productions of these plays.” See A. M. Dale 1965: 17.

<sup>30</sup> See Hristić 1996: 110-112.

<sup>31</sup> See Kott 1969: 209-210.

<sup>32</sup> The Living Theatre is a theater troupe which was established in New York in 1947 by actors Judith Mallina and Julian Beck. Since then and until 1964, the repertoire of members of the Living Theatre had plays of both classical (Sophocles, Hölderlin) and modern authors (Brecht), and so it was also at the European tour in the period 1963-1968. They broke illusion on the stage and directly communicated with the audience, evolving to the aesthetics of physical expressivity. (See Jovanović 1984: 188.)

<sup>33</sup> Kott 1969: 210.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

everything from frenetic cries and comments to chorus songs.<sup>35</sup>

Mira Erceg staged Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in the National Theatre in Belgrade in 1989. What was the solution she came up with for the chorus of the Argive elders in *Agamemnon*? Again, we shall call upon the book by Jovan Hristić about lucid and humorous critiques and try to imagine acts on the stage: "As in all modern interpretations of Greek tragedies, in this play also the chorus remained an open issue. In *Agamemnon* the chorus is composed of Argive veterans (that is to say War Heroes Union). The text has been significantly shortened and some of the invocational verses are spoken in Greek and accompanied by music. Those invocations have a powerful effect, but all the rest is diminished to mere slogans spoken by the chorus to the audience face-to-face. If the chorus is not speaking unanimously, why then can't the Argive elders try to lead a dialogue between themselves, the way that pensioners do nowadays at the Kalemegdan park while arguing about politics? I would not opt for a pensioner choir, but between pensioners' dialogue and slogans there is an entire range where Aeschylus' verses would feel far more natural".<sup>36</sup> What Dušan Rnjak wrote about the creation of yet another *Oresteia* also seems interesting. Staging Aeschylus' trilogy in the theatre Schaubühne am Leniner Platz in 1980, "weeks before the premiere he would organize get-togethers of audience with the actors that were to play in *Oresteia*. The get-togethers alone became the main event of the season. One could expect a kind of classical approach since the purpose was mainly educational. Yet, it was spontaneous conversation, comprised of immediate reactions of the audience, the director and the actors. Interesting are the associations of the audience related to some Greek names such as Apollo, Athena and others. Apollo reminded them of a pizzeria place and Athena resembled the Citroën logo. Sessions became more and more interesting the closer the premiere was. Décor was discussed as well as costumes, Hesiod's work was read and requests for reopening of the classical gymnasia were made."<sup>37</sup> Stein's procedure apparently was successful: the play became famous, it was performed for two seasons, and a light was cast on the ancient heritage in the best possible way.<sup>38</sup>

In a sea of attempts to stage an ancient drama – whose morals equally attract the attention in Europe, America, even Japan – directors achieve admirable results, but suffer artistic collapses as well. There are no recipes, the prognoses are bleak. Both success and failure can be achieved by approaching the ancient plays as accurately as possible – as much as our knowledge about them allows us – or by an entirely free and creative interpretation. Advantage should be given to the second of the two possibilities as well as the playful imagination of the director, the dramaturge and their carefully chosen associates. As always, when we talk about a serious and creative endeavor, team work is indispensable. This is especially valid in terms of the ancient drama and its moralities. The blood of the mythical stories runs down our streets even now and fills us with fear, dread and suspicion. The theater, as has been told numerous times, cannot change the world, but it can be vital in achieving harmony in it. Even for a moment. And who knows, maybe even longer.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 210-211.

<sup>36</sup> Hristić 1996: 157-158.

<sup>37</sup> Rnjak 1989: 22-23.

<sup>38</sup> On interesting contemporary staging of ancient drama see also: Bajić, *Od Eshila do naših dana*, 2011.

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**ГОРДАН МАРИЧИЋ  
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**ТРАГИЧКИ ХОР У АНТИЦИ И ДАНАС: УЛОГА И ИНСЦЕНАЦИЈЕ**

**Резиме**

Овај рад бави се улогом и значајем хора у грчком друштву и античкој трагедији. Колико је његова улога у антици била значајна за друштво, али и за самог појединца, сведоче Платонове речи да се млади, уколико пропусте да учествују у хору својих локалних заједница, сматрају недовољно образованим. Хор је током VI века са ширењем Дионисовог култа певао песме у част том веселом трачко-фригијском божанству плодности и вина, а касније се одвојио од обредне тематике издвајањем првог глумца. Теме више нису биле дионизијске и религиозне, већ, шире, митолошке и антрополошке. Развој унутрашњег, интелектуалног, али и социјалног живота у антици ставио је човека у центар интересовања друштва. Хор временом губи своју првобитну и основну функцију одавања поште богу Дионису. Он је и даље неодвојиви део трагедије, али главну радњу и мисију читавог певачко-играчког ансамбла преузимају глумци. Хор сада има споредну улогу која је врло комплексна за инсценацију било које од античких трагедија. У овом раду покушали смо да протумачимо значај хора са друштвеног и уметничког становишта. Закључак до којег смо дошли је тај да прави одговори леже у остварењима, тј. успешним и неуспешним представама. До узорног резултата може се доћи на два начина: правећи представе које треба што више да подсећају на наше поимање античког театра, али и оне које су слободне од те сличности, креативне и подобне да ствараоцу и гледаоцу пруже свепрожимајући утисак о античком миту и драми. Свој глас од срца дајемо другом начину.

**Кључне речи:** Дионис, античка трагедија, инсценација, имитација, аутентичност, трагички хор, редитељ.

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