

## Re-evaluating the Greek Chorus: Yuyachkani's *Antígona*

A drama's aesthetic form can be as political as the context in which the play is performed. In 2000, in the immediate aftermath of two decades of political upheavals and state-sanctioned violence in Peru, which resulted in more than 75,000 deaths, Grupo cultural Yuyachkani created a one-woman show based on Sophocles' *Antigone*, performed by Teresa Ralli. This *Antígona* makes a political commentary about the Peruvian historical moment not primarily by adapting the content of the original play, but, I argue, by modifying its form. Their version re-evaluates the role of the original chorus of elders by transferring it to the character of Ismene. The idle sister stands here for the citizen/witness of the events, like every person in the audience would recognize himself to be. As a result, the audience is not the *other* represented onstage--as recent scholarship has understood the ancient Greek chorus (Foley 2003). The audience rather becomes the subject who is actively reconstructing the events, thereby recognizing its own role in the tragedy as citizens.

The Greek chorus, with its problematic identity (Foley 2003) and its capacity for reflecting, from a distance, on the events taking place onstage can strike a contemporary audience as foreign and inaccessible. It is arguably one of the greatest challenges to any modern staging of an ancient Greek drama, and it is therefore often substituted or eliminated (Dunbar 2013). By changing the identity of the chorus to the character of Ismene, Yuyachkani's version recaptures the sense of the Greek chorus in a way that makes sense to the Peruvian society. Ismene transforms the chorus into the body politic that is both staging the play and seeing it from the seats in the theatre.

This brilliant change in the form came about from the group's particular creative process, "the dramaturgy of the actor" (Rubio, in conversation). The process of the staging preceded the

writing of the script, retroactively written by poet José Watanabe off stage material provided by the actress and the director, Miguel Rubio. It was in the making that the actress, the director and the writer, working closely together found a solution for the identity of the narrator (Ralli 2003), not defined since the beginning. I argue that, because the actress produced the staging material off her own place of enunciation as a Peruvian citizen, such a bottom-up process erases the boundaries among the actress as citizen, as performer, and as character. And that this erosion of boundaries is what makes their re-evaluation of the chorus so meaningful.

*Antígona* has been studied in the context of a broader theatrical phenomenon in Latin America (Diéguez 2007; Lane 2007; Taylor 2005; Salazar del Alcázar 1990), in which theatre and performance have been an important vehicle to denounce violence during the decades of dictatorships and social upheavals. Although commented by scholars, the formal and aesthetic virtues of the work have not yet been the main focus of study. In the field of classics, this notable moment of reception should enrich recent discussions about other modern receptions of the Greek tragedy (Foley and Mee 2011). This paper joins that discussion by looking at what is probably the greatest virtue and most powerful statement of this re-writing/re-staging of the Sophoclean drama: its re-evaluation of the Greek chorus.

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