

The Dithyramb of Antiquity. Theater, Music, Verse and Instrument

Alexandru NEȘ¹

Abstract: *How truthful should the stage music be, how close to the reality of the dramatic text? This is one of the most important issues facing a stage music creator. Musical creation must not compress or overshadow the meaning and musicality of words. Also, the dramatic text should not be sovereign throughout the show, because the viewer's attention is uneven, and the risk of boring him, high. If the music is to accompany the dramatic stage performance, it is as if an instrumentalist were asked to accompany a painting. She must first understand him, love him, and embrace him in order to share him. Antiquity represents, once again, the epistemological reference from which any historical or aesthetic investigation of these spectacular elements starts.*

Key-words: *Theater; Music; Spectacular; Performance*

1. Introduction

When we analyze the balance between the spectacular elements in dynamics and music, in order to correctly understand their consonance, we must return to the origins of humanity and to the oldest spectacular manifestations. At Greek Antiquity and its primordial theatrical vein, the dithyramb.

2. Methodology

The method by which we have chosen to conduct our demonstration and connect the theories of Antiquity with historical sources and ancient documents is to approach an analytical paradigm. The beginnings of the theater correspond to the beginnings of music, and the incipient formula can be identified before the appearance of the Dionysians, in the forests and on the hills around Athens, with seven or eight centuries BC.

3. Myths, legends, theater and songs

As with the Egyptians, the ancient Greeks had a ritual narrative with legendary accents that turned into a ritual representation. The first documents related to this aspect were identified in „mysteries”² namely, the *Hymn to Demeter*, which must have been composed in the second half of the seventh century B.C. and a short fragment of a Dionysian hymn, sung by the women of Elea. Dithyramb, a choir in honor of Dionysus, took shape at Arion in Corinth³ who was born, according to several sources in the period 545 - 540 BC. „The dithyram was transformed from lyric to choral (satire), from the choir came the leader of the choir, who established a

¹ Faculty of Arts, Ovidius University of Constanta, alecsandrunes@gmail.com.

² Secret religious rituals in Greece and Rome, attended only by the initiates.

³ Lyrical poet who, it seems, transformed the dithyramb into a choral composition, giving it a new, heroic content and introducing a definite subject.

dramatized dialogue with him: from here began the famous statement of Aristotle, *tragedy has its origins in the leaders of dithyramb*⁴ (indeed, the etymological meaning of the tragedy is that of „goat song”, in other words Dionysian). Pisistratus, tyrant of Athens, restored a place of honor to celebrations and processions called the Great Dionysians or the Great Dionysians and, on their occasion, instituted dramatic competitions, in which the first winner was the legendary creator of the genre, Tespis⁵, the one who, in the performances given for the villages, detached from the choir an actor, *the protagonist*, to whom Aeschylus then added *the deuteragonist*, that is, the second actor. Change began to come to life in the second half of the sixth century⁶.

Theoretically, the dithyramb is a lyrical poem in which the ancient Greeks glorified the god Dionysus. Initially it did not exceed the limits of a crude representation, even vulgar (tools were also used), of the peasants celebrating the end of the harvest and thus paying tribute to the god of wine. Gradually, however, the poets (playwrights) corrected his musical rhythm, which became more orderly, and symmetrized his lyricism, thus attenuating his old violence. His recitation became one of the most important moments in the Dionysian celebration and was performed by a choir of 15 young boys and girls, who followed a choreography (quite imprecise at first, more and more applied later) in around the altar of Dionysus. The appearance of the choir announces the imminent birth of the tragedy, and the dithyramb plays an extremely important role, because, although it had to emphasize a common state of joy, it was required to include notes of philosophical gravity, which would induce the audience a state of meditation and a seated introspection.

At first, the musical accompaniment was made of guitar, later it was replaced by flutes. The dithyramb will evolve fulminantly, the note of cheerful drunken song disappearing completely and acquiring the appearance of a lyrical lesson of morality and utilitarian thinking. The subjects also diversify, starting to mention and glorify other acts, besides those of the god of wine, Dionysus. In the development of the poem, the two characters will be better defined: the narrator and the choir. They will interrogate each other, thus transforming the recitation of the dithyramb into a dialogue, so into something very similar to a show, without disturbing the character of a religious ceremony.

However, it is difficult to identify the concrete moment when the transformation of the dithyramb into a tragedy took place. Undoubtedly, the elimination of the faunal note is an important first point of this transformation. Aristotle shows precisely that the archaic dithyramb, consisting more of a series of improvisations, had a comic and buffoonish note. „From the moment he began to differentiate himself, associating dialogued songs and more sustained mimicry, he could orient himself, with equal justification, towards tragedy, but also towards satirical play, as his manifestation was full of violence of joy. and of popular parties.

The truth is that around Dionysus evolved not only the processions of drunken satyrs and hilarious silenians, but also gathered deeper concerns about the situation of the city, its relations with other cities, as well as processes of the human soul. Or, it is clear that they could not be narrated in the broken, disordered and fanciful exits of satires; laughter and obscenity could not contain them. The Dionysian legend therefore had to associate deeper attitudes, able to comprehend and express the conflicts of will and conscience⁷.

The evolution of the dithyramb, from the short lyrical poem, full of lamentations, vulgarities or pathetic apologies, spontaneous outbursts and rudimentary declamations, to a text

⁴ Aristotel. 1957. *Poetica*. București: Ed. Științifică, pp. 10-11.

⁵ Famous poet from Attica, sec. VI BC, which introduced in the Dionysian performances the prologue and an actor, whose role he apparently played at the beginning.

⁶ Vito Pandolfi. 1971. *Istoria teatrului universal*. București: Ed. Meridiane, p. 22.

⁷ Ion Zamfirescu. 2001. *Istoria universală a teatrului*. Craiova: Ed. Aius. p. 29.

with a deep psychological motivation and perfectly architected from a dramatic point of view was achieved in time, decanting with the help the involvement of myths and their extremely special place in the axiological scale of the ancient Greeks. „The transition from worship to ritual and from ritual to spectacle - almost always by illustrating a myth - took place in India, through the Vedic and then the Buddhist religion; in China, in Tibet, in Japan, also through Buddhism; in Iran, through Islamism”⁸, Vito Pandolfi also writes.

Therefore, throughout the history of human civilization, from an anthropological perspective, the evolution of theater and music has been connected to the same mind and the same spiritual dimensions.

Moreover, the ancient Greek playwrights were those who, in addition to writing the text, dealt with music, stage movement, acting, directing, etc. Their creative versatility transformed the evolution of the two arts into a common denominator. Both from them, as well as from the Greek philosophers, remained texts in which the preoccupation for music occupies a special place in the dynamic apparatus of show creation, being one of the most important elements. „The remaining texts from Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are enough to make us understand the greatness and importance of the phenomenon, but they only partially help us to reconstruct its elements. What escapes us today from tragedy, in a way that could be called inescapable, is not only its scenic aspect, which by its very originality and complexity had, of course, a decisive role in the show, ie in the concrete expression of tragedy. , but also the relationship that had been established between the show and the respective audience”⁹.

It manifests itself, obviously, in a very special form from that of the modern spectacle, in which entertainment on its own has acquired a predominant place and in which relations with ideologies are often of an ambiguous, contradictory nature, going as far as a simple adhesion. surface. As for the Greek tragedy, the show-audience relationship is determined by the latter's view of the myth, the place that the myth occupies in its existence, the evolution of these relationships, which the tragedy seems to be able to determine a path that goes from fideism¹⁰ to the fantastic.

The spectacle of the ancient Greeks, viewed as a whole, with music as its basic element, in fact created a physiognomy for the outside world.

The Greek tragedy, derived from the myth, even, we could say, transforming it, is proved not only by the legends that accompany its appearance, but also by the structure of the tragedy, which reproduces the relationships established in the ritual, between officiating as a personification of supernatural and mythical beings and all believers. „Therefore, religiosity, which prevails in the development of tragedy, remains for this historical event the fundamental element, so we can follow the evolution of tragedy along the line of evolution of religiosity, which gradually loses its original purpose of representing the world, to it became the pragmatic instrument of social coexistence (as we move forward in our history, we will see how these relationships between spectacle and religiosity become increasingly weak in Western civilization)”¹¹.

Here, it is appropriate to have an applied discussion about the role of music, which becomes dual. On the one hand, it will continue to serve the show and, on the other hand, it will benefit from an increased respect within the religious structures, without betraying its purpose, that of emotion, it cleanses the spirit and brings it as close as possible to the meaning of the

⁸ Vito Pandolfi. *Op.cit.* p. 23.

⁹ Idem, p. 28.

¹⁰ Theological conception, disavowed by the church, according to which faith would depend mainly on feeling, being able to reach alone to higher truths, inaccessible to reason.

¹¹ Vito Pandolfi, *op.cit.*, pp. 23-24.

ceremony. In other words, the power that the tragic representation had over the spirit of the Greek spectator of those times must be clarified and explained, influencing the beginnings of consciousness, as it reflected the nature and essence of myth, as the dominant reason for the implicit finality in religious faith and its evolutionary process in contact with the transformations of society. Greek tragedy and comedy are closely connected with the cult of Dionysus and Demeter, as evidenced by the fact that they were born and developed from processions dedicated to these deities. „They are therefore related to the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries. However, especially at Aeschylus, the cults widely mentioned in Homeric poems are clearly present... The performances were offered to the masses by the upper strata (it would seem that slaves were excluded). Hence their historical purpose: to present an evolution on a religious background, expressed through dramatic means, having as object the mythical story. That is, he had to depict the myth in a poetic form by which it was defined according to the internal evolution of civilization (thus we will see it evolving from Aeschylus to Euripides). But there are also historical glorifications, which are about to become a myth - whether it refers to the Trojan War, the subject of the recited poems, or the wars of defense against the Persians, more recent and can be identified with more a lot of security”¹².

All this incipient information helped to understand the cultural phenomenon and its two basic dimensions, theater and music. They are still found today, formally or at the level of ideas in the theatrical and musical creations of mankind.

That is why a multitude of specialists have been interested in many perspectives regarding this mysterious duality. Taking a leap towards contemporaneity, some of them, researchers and theater creators, came to the conclusion that theatrical experiments, whether it is about the art of the actor or about directing techniques, actually start from a sound. Andrei Șerban, Peter Brook or Eugenio Barba are just some of the creators for whom the life of sounds is as important as the show itself. "We try to create a sound - a sound that grows and turns into a cry. We are trying to find the energy that triggers this action. We're trying to understand her. (...) We advance not only by word, but also by fragments of word, by every consonant and by every vowel charged with a specific electricity and color. (...) In an immediate, concrete relationship with sound and word, we can discover an infinite area to create rhythms, energies and impulses of a different nature ”¹³.

4. Conclusion

Tragedy and comedy, rituals and ceremonies attached to them in order to celebrate the deities of vegetation, natural phenomena, life and death, all represent the prerogative of Antiquity, its legends and myths, its archetypal soil from which feeds the entire consciousness of mankind to this day. Theater and music have built, together, the representative foundation of this consciousness of humanity, a base so strong that even today it is a point of reference for the cultural understanding of what we are and, more importantly, of what we can become.

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¹² *Idem*, p. 32.

¹³ Michaela Tonitza-Iordache. 2004. *Arta teatrului*. București: Ed. Nemira, pp. 526-527.