

Q: What is Chorus? Explain the role of chorus in Oedipus Rex

The word “Chorus” derives from the Greek word “kôrās” which means “a large organized group of singers”. So chorus is a large organized group of people assembled together that performs with an orchestra or opera company. In Oedipus Rex, there are 15 male members in the chorus, divided by strophe and antistrophe, represent the senior citizen of Thebes.

The role of chorus in Oedipus Rex is very significant. They provide atmosphere, underscore the tragic action. They also play role as a character being a peace maker and instill a sense of fear or suspense in the audience. In some ways, the Chorus can represent the audience's ideal response to the play. Chorus, and its chants and songs, helped the audience better connect with the character, revealing the essence of the tragedy.

Sophocles uses the Chorus at the beginning of the play to help tell the audience the given circumstances of the play. From the first ode of the chorus, we hear all about the terrible havoc that the plague is wreaking on Thebes. People are dying and everyone is tensed

The Chorus often is in the position of the ideal spectator. Sometimes it intensifies the already existing pity and fear of the audience sitting before the stage by its ode enriched in diction. It explains the situation and evaluates characters like a good critic. We can say that the chorus fill in the gaps in the action when no other character is there on the stage. They add to it the element of melody.

The Chorus takes part in the dialogues also. When Oedipus consults them about ending the plague in the city, they express disappointment that the oracle had not guided them about the identity of Laius’ murderer. They also tell him what they know about the murder of their previous king and its circumstances. When Creon, learning that the king has accused him of treason, comes on the stage he talks to the Chorus, who tell him that the king’s “accusation was probably made in the heat of anger.” Creon asked if the king looked absolutely serious while making the charge and they rightly say “it is not for them to look into the eyes of his master when he speaks.”

The chorus play role as peace maker. When Oedipus has almost passed a sentence upon Creon, Jocasta arrives on the scene and first talks to the Chorus. The chorus requests her to “settle the difference between the two men.” we see the Chorus constantly advising Oedipus to keep cool. Most of the time in ancient tragedies choruses do a lot of lamenting of terrible events, but do little to stop them. Amazingly, though, the Chorus in Oedipus the King manages to convince Oedipus not to banish or execute Creon.

The Chorus in Oedipus Rex plays part as a distinct character. They begin by being supportive of Oedipus, believing, based on his past successes, that he's the right man to fix their woes. As Oedipus's behavior becomes more erratic, they become uncertain and question his motives. The fact Oedipus doesn't start lopping off heads at this point is pretty good evidence that he's not a tyrant. In the end, the Chorus is on Oedipus's side again and laments his horrific fate.

With the development of the play, tension grew up among the audience. We can sense that through the tension of chorus. They are worried when they see Jocasta going into the palace in a very dejected mood, and they give expression to their apprehension. They even sympathize with Oedipus when they see him after he has blinded himself.

In brief we can say that the Chorus never takes a direct hand in the action. It does not consist only of spectators but influences the action in various subtle ways.