

# ANTÍGONA PÉREZ AND SENSATIONALISM: THE DISARTICULATION OF A TOTALITARIAN SYSTEM

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**Abstract** || This article focuses on Luis Rafael Sánchez's play *La pasión según Antígona Pérez: crónica americana en dos actos* (1968). The Puerto Rican author rewrites the tragic myth of Sophocles' *Antigone* by reconfiguring the dramatic core of antagonistic powers in the context of a Latin American dictatorship. The article investigates the way in which the play rejects the determining and universal worldviews contained in the structural models of Greek tragedy and Christianity, and instead centers on the question of power within a contemporary space of media and sensationalism. The purpose is to show how *Antígona Pérez* uncovers the State as a sense-producing entity and reveals its propagandistic apparatus and material limits through an act of interpretation and political difference. The article concludes stressing the protagonist's dramatic and revolutionary power in her ability to disarticulate the ideological coherence of a totalitarian system.

**Keywords** || Latin American Theatre | Sensationalism | Luis Rafael Sánchez | Antigone | Theatre and Dictatorship.

Luis Rafael Sanchez, known today as one of the most important names in the Puerto Rican literature<sup>1</sup>, has a long literary career in which *La pasión según Antígona Pérez: crónica americana en dos actos* stands out as his most famous work. Written and performed for the first time in Puerto Rico in 1968, this drama rewrites the tragic myth of Sophocles' *Antigone* in a dictatorial Hispano-American context. This article investigates the power configuration among the tyrant and the young radical to uncover the way Sanchez uses classic Greek tragedy and Christianity as structural models and to dismiss a vision of a universal and deterministic world and explore the question of power inside a sensationalist contemporary media space. Attention to the character of Antígona Pérez allows an analysis of the power construction in which the state is an instance of production of meaning and which ideological and material limits are exposed by an act of interpretation and political difference.

The plot of *La pasión* is based in Sophocles' *Antigone* but Sánchez's play exclusively develops during the period when the heroine is captive. Antígona Pérez has buried brothers Héctor and Mario Tavárez, who have unsuccessfully tried to murder the Generalísimo Creón Molina as a rebel act against his dictatorship. The tyrant decrees that the bodies of the brothers must remain exposed at the public square but Antígona disobeys the state law as a supportive gesture towards those who have joined in the subversive struggle. The dramatic action takes place at the time Creón, the Church, and Antígona's family try to convince her to confess her crime. The young girl refuses to give up against the tyrant rules and conditions. The play is solved when the Generalísimo realizes how Antígona's revolutionary idealism represents a threat to him and is forced to command her execution by a firing squad.

Historically, Antígona has been read as a symbol of struggle against tyrannical power, being this a highly relevant issue in 1960's Latin-American context and its multiple dictatorships and oppressive political systems. In the first stage direction, Sánchez informs us that the play is developed in "la imaginaria república hispanoamericana de Molina" and describes the slogans related to Latin-American political life on the stage: "DEMOCRACIA CRISTIANA, LO HARÁN LOS DESCAMISADOS, PATRIA O MUERTE, 26 DE JULIO, BOSCH PARA PRESIDENTE, YANKIS GO HOME, EL CANAL ES DE PANAMÁ, MINAS DE BOLIVIA PARA LOS BOLIVIANOS" (Sánchez, 1968: 12). A while later, Antígona—who "resume en su físico el cruce de razas en que se asienta el ser hispanoamericano" (13)— talks in her first speech about an "América dura, América amarga, América tomada" (14), bonding her condition to an American collectivity. The protagonist's connection with the Latin-American context remains through the entire text, and at the last words it specifies that she dies precisely in honor to "esta América amarga".

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## NOTES

1 | On April 30, 2013, Luis Rafael Sánchez was awarded the international award Pedro Henríquez Ureña, a very important literary award that consecrates the literary and intellectual productivity of an author throughout his life.

The connection with the Latin-American context is emphasized by accurate historical references that make even more evident the link between the play and other tyrannical and dictatorial systems in Latin America. The name Creón Molina refers to Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo Molina, while the Tavárez brothers are a reference to Manolo Tavárez Justo, a political ruler who led the Revolutionary Movement in July 14 against the Dominican dictator's regime.<sup>2</sup> Marina Bettaglio notes that the subtitle of the play, *crónica americana en dos actos*, inserts *La pasión* in the historical tradition—more than 500 years old—of the colonization chronicle, referring to topics of Spanish colonization and exploitation in America (2012: 49).<sup>3</sup> However, critics tend to center their attention in the dictatorships and Latin-American neocolonial contexts from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Angelina Morfi talks about the “carácter documental” of the play which gives credit to “al acontecer de América” (1970:199).

Such documentary nature attributes an intention of contestation and political commitment to the author, which has been persistently noted by the critics of the play. From this perspective, Antígona Pérez is regarded as the personification of Latin-American people struggling against the tyranny of dictatorship—in some cases subsidized by USA—thus building in an American symbol of freedom, and in the Republic of Molina, the sum of many Latin-American dictatorships.<sup>5</sup>

More specifically, the immediate context of the play is Puerto Rico's political situation towards the late 1960's. In 1952, Puerto Rico was declared an *Estado Libre Asociado*, thus acquiring a controversial and ambiguous political status that provides Puerto Rico partial sovereignty subject to the legislation and American power.<sup>6</sup> Focusing in this context, Alyce de Kuehne states that *La passion* criticizes Puerto Rico's ambiguous and indefinite status. Efraín Barradas expands this reading arguing that the play, in using the classic myth, overtakes the national specificity and inserts Puerto Rico in a Latin-American unit, in other words, the play uncovers “la Americanidad esencial del puertorriqueño” (1979: 15). Puerto Rican and Latin-American nature attributed to *La passion* evinces with no doubt the political and social validity of the play in its historical context; emphasizing the interpretation of Antígona Pérez as a symbol of the Latin American freedom against the dictatorial oppression. However, in some cases, critics have taken a reductionist reading, seeing in the play a direct call to revolutionary action and “lucha sincera y comprometida por la liberación” (Colón Zayas, 1985: 92).<sup>7</sup> This article takes distance from an urgent and openly combative reading and instead underscores the way the play reconfigure the power conflict between Antígona and Creón in a contemporary world of media and sensationalism. The purpose is to investigate how *La passion* enquires on power issues detailing the construction of a totalitarian ideology, the role of media as a propagandistic tool and the power structures disarticulation by

## NOTES

2 | Manolo Tavárez Justo was also husband of Minerva Mirabal, one of the famous Mirabal sisters who strongly opposed Trujillo's regime. The Mirabal sisters were judged, put in jail and finally murdered in 1960 because of their rebellious acts and political activity.

3 | The historical dimension that introduces the concept «chronicle» plays a role in the intertextual complexity of the play, which represents the play, from its title, as a dramatic, religious and historical text.

4 | The history of Latin America during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by a predominance of dictatorial regimes executed by one or several military leading figures, presidential figures or dynastic families: Argentina (1976-83), Bolivia (1970-82), Brazil (1964-85), Chile (1973-90), Colombia (1953-58), Cuba (1952- 1959), Dominican Republic (1930-1961), El Salvador (1931-79), Guatemala (1954-86), Haiti (1957-1990), Honduras (1963-71), Nicaragua (1936-79), Panama (1968-89), Paraguay (1954-1989), Peru (1968-80), Uruguay (1973-1985). For a summary of Latin America's history, see Skidmore, Smith and Green (2010).

5 | For studies from this perspective, see Albert Robatto (1985), Bettaglio (2012) and Nouhaud (2001).

6 | The relevance of the Puerto Rican context is evident if you consider that Antígona Pérez is based on the historical character Olga Viscal Garriga, a student leader of Puerto Rico Nationalist Party who was sentenced by the American federal court for refusing to recognize the political authority of the U.S. over Puerto Rico.

spaces of divergence. It is from this perspective that we can talk about Antígona Pérez as a symbol of revolutionary struggle that dismantles the power mechanisms of a totalitarian system.

The antagonistic structure between Antígona Pérez and Creón Molina copies the dialectics and power relations of Sophocle's play, and underscores its fundamental conflicts: between state and individual, between the public and private spheres, between intransigent power and staunch rebelliousness, between masculine and feminine orders, among others. G.W.F. Hegel theorized such essential conflicts of the tragedy within the framework of the dialectics of the spirit. In *La fenomenología del espíritu*,<sup>8</sup> Hegel claims that two ethic forces collide in the tragedy, and confront with partial demands that oppose the universal conscience. The tragic act is precisely the destruction of both forces because none satisfies the true essence of the ethic substance. This means that the tragic act constitutes a paradigmatic moment of combination in which the ethic substance of the spirit is reconciled and purified. The understanding of tragedy as a dialectical process of division and reconciliation is mainly based on Hegel's reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*. According to Hegel, Antigone represents the feminine order of home and gods, while Creon stands for the masculine order of the community and the state.<sup>9</sup> Disagreement between Antigone—symbol of private sphere of heavenly law—and Creon—symbol of the public sphere of human law—constitutes an unsolved conflict that ends with the complete obliteration of both ethic stances.

Hegel elevated the tragedy to a metaphysical level that gave rise to ethical, philosophical, and political arguments about the relevance of the tragedy on 20th century Western thought, which contributed to provide Antigone's character with an important political connotation, the reason why it was later explored by several authors from multiple sociopolitical contexts.<sup>10</sup> *Antigone* (1944), by Jean Anouilh, was written and represented in France during the Nazi occupation; German dramaturge and theorist Bertolt Brecht *Antigone* (1948), was released after the collapse of the Third Reich; the South African adaptation by Athol Fugard, *The Island* (1973) was written during the apartheid era, and *Antígona furiosa* (1986) by the Argentinean dramaturge Griseda Gambaro, was produced in the years after the Dirty War. In all these plays—albeit in different degrees—Antigone constitutes a symbol of struggle and resistance that gives voice to the individual and rises up against a tyrannical and oppressive order. Antígona Pérez inserts in this dramatic tradition when she rises up against the tyranny of Creón Molina and when she dies in the name of the freedom of “América dura, América amarga, América tomada” (1968: 14). Antígona Pérez stands as a model of resistance that opposes an unfair and terrible political order against which she fights for the freedom of the people.

## NOTES

7 | This interpretation is based on the important concept of “Theatre of the oppressed” by Augusto Boal, who postulates theater as medium of transformation by which actors and audiences must understand and change their social reality. Boal developed this concept in *Teatro do oprimido: e outras poéticas políticas* (1973), one of the most important and influential texts on the practice and criticism of Latin American theatre.

8 | Tragedy is a topic that deeply interested Hegel, whose theorization is scattered in several of his philosophical studies. However, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* is the text where he developed his theory more extensively. The most important synthesis of the Hegel's theory of tragedy is in “Hegel's Theory of the Tragic” (1950), by A.C. Bradley.

9 | In *Antigone's Claim*, Judith Butler postulates that the Hegelian way of thinking the confrontation between Antigone and Creón establishes the change from to matriarchal to patriarchal law; Antigone represents the feminine order previous to governmental legislation, while Creón represents the masculine order that legitimizes itself in power (2000: 1-3).

10 | See Steiner (1984) for a complete study of the production and readjustment of Antigone's myth.

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However, the story of Antígona Pérez develops in a relativistic and sensationalist world that makes impossible the understanding of her struggle in the Hegelian terms of universal confrontation and reconciliation. The relativistic nature of the world of Antígona Pérez stems from the confluence of two structural models that compete for a unique world vision in the play: the model of Greek tragedy and the model of Christianity. The juxtaposition of both models makes impossible a whole ideological framework that justifies and validates the Antígona's struggle. First, the use of the Sophocles' plot postulates the world of Greek tragedy as a first structural level; however, the political and social violation of Antígona Pérez varies significantly from the classic conflict, in which a heavenly order validates and legitimizes the heroine's acts. The gods punish the Greek Creon because he acted with arrogance against Antigone, who had disobeyed state law in the name of heavenly and natural laws. Antígona Pérez violates the state order in the name of the people's freedom but there is not an absolute ethic system that could determine her acts as naturally good, or legitimize her struggle. In other words, there is no superior power above the dictatorial power that can redeem Antígona Pérez's model and condemn the tyranny of the Generalísimo. As a consequence, no one stands up for, nor supports, Antígona's cause: her mother abandons her, once she fails to persuade Antígona to confess her crime, and Irene—Antígona's best friend—reproaches her intransigence and tells her of the relationship she has with Fernando, up to this moment Antígona's boyfriend and who has accepted a position of Lieutenant Colonel in Creón regime.

The absence of a universal ethical system that could validate Antígona Pérez acts makes impossible the concept of a tragic heroine and makes difficult to conceive her struggle in universal terms. In *La passion*, there is no categorical antagonism between a female and a masculine world, public and private spheres, or even between different law systems. For example, in the male environment of Creón's military power, we find his wife Pilar Varga, a severe woman who reminds him that he is a dictator and that he must execute Antígona as soon as possible. This powerful couple moves both in the public and private worlds, as evident in the scene in their bedroom in which they argue about Antígona. It results even more evident in the case of Antígona, a young woman who moves in the political male world and replaces the traditional female bonds with the family for those fraternal bonds with the Tavárez brothers. The relativistic world where *La passion* develops problematizes the traditional understanding of Antígona Pérez as a symbol of the struggle for justice and truth against all tyrannical power. Though it is true that Sánchez creates an Antígona that rises up against tyranny, the dictatorial order that commands the play criminalizes Antígona Pérez beyond any justification inside the dramatic world.

The struggle of Antígona Pérez imitates, in a structural way, the main political conflict of classical Antigone but her actions and death lack the universal dimension that provides transcendence to her acts.

The rejection of the tragic vision of the world in *La pasión* is related to the Christian dimension that structurally informs the play. Several elements suggest that Antígona Pérez is a model of a Christian redeemer that struggles for the salvation of her people. From the beginning, the title of the play establishes a parallelism between the protagonist and Christ, when it refers the story of Antígona Pérez as a “passion”. Such notion is emphasized in the twelve scenes that the play is divided—which allude to the twelve stations of the passion of Christ—and in which Antígona appears on the stage illuminated by a “chorro cónico de luz” (1968: 13). The suggestive power of such elements increases once Antígona Pérez presents herself as a redeemer; like when Creón threatens her with the possibility of torture:

Harán lo más terrible. Lo que rebaje mi honestidad. Lo que sacuda las raíces mismas de mi resistencia. Violarán mi cuerpo con la esperanza de que violan mi espíritu. Como si la lealtad a mis hermanos no estuviera preparada al sacrificio. Harán lo más horrible en sus términos. El cuerpo, me mancharán el cuerpo. Porque Creón sí es el amo de los cuerpos. Pero me dejarán inmaculado el corazón. El corazón es lo que importa. (47)

Antígona’s words idealize the Christian distinction between body and soul, pointing towards a construction of herself as a martyr, able to endure great physical punishments in the name of spirit. Her idealism is emphasized along the play and she conceives her death as the step towards the immortal world of ideas. Moments before she is executed, Antígona declares: “Antígona es otro nombre para la idea viva, obsesionante, eterna de la libertad [...]. Matarme es avivarme, hacerme sangre nueva para las venas de esta América amarga” (1968: 121).

Antígona—as the savior of that bitter America—is necessarily built in relation to the people that she wants to set free. First of all, her actions answer to her loyalty to Héctor and Mario Tavárez, and through them, to a collectivity that articulates in terms of a brotherhood. In her first speech, Antígona values her own situation from the meaning of her own name, explaining that when she was a child “no había aprendido que para llamarse Antígona se necesitan hermanos” (1968: 14). Despite that Antígona Pérez and the Tavárez brothers are not bonded by any biological link, there is a fraternal commitment thanks to which, according to Antígona, “Héctor y Mario Tavárez dejaron de ser mis amigos y se convirtieron en mis hermanos” (1968: 27).<sup>11</sup> The brotherhood between the three is suggested as a fellowship that extends its arms to the whole people, the oppressed people of Molina. In this idealization, Antígona

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## NOTES

11 | Their brotherhood has an ideal nature, which is why Creón never understands the nature of Antígona’s relationship with the Tavárez brothers. To explain such relationship, Creón must invent a love relationship between Antígona and one of the brothers.

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Pérez y Santiesteban renounces to her second last name, of great lineage, because it separates her from the people. On the contrary, she prefers that “común y manoseado” Pérez because it identifies her as one more among the rest of human beings. Antígona wants precisely that human level as common denominator, in the middle of that overwhelmed and suffering humanity, in the middle of that bitter America. The conceptualization of Antígona of her own struggle as a sacrifice to a tyrannized people locates her as a martyr of the Republic of Molina and, by extension, as a great redeemer model that sacrifices herself for love to humanity.

Paradoxically, although Antígona idealizes her position in Christian terms, her own attitude rejects any religious creed. Antígona discards the dogma of eternal life when Monsignor Escudero visits and warns her that if she does not regret her crime, her soul will not be saved. She boldly answers him: “Apostemos, Monseñor” (1968: 83), showing that her own idealization as a redeemer and martyr of the people does not correspond to an acceptance of the Christian faith. Lorraine Elena Ben-Ur notes that “[t]he values Antigone stoically defends have nothing to do with divine law or any type of theism. She lives in a contemporary world where gods have been replaced by other abstract entities” (1975: 20). Antígona uses Christian rhetoric and concepts but her speech responds genuinely to modern ideals within a determined political context that disables the validity inside the promise of spiritual salvation.

Antígona’s paradoxical attitude of simultaneously appropriating and rejecting Christian tradition reflects the specific condition of the play. The Church’s main exponent is the “muy reverendísimo Monseñor Bernardo Escudero”, who enters with his ecclesiastical entourage and sets a sharp critic that underscores the luxury, ambition, and corruption of the Church at the service of the tyranny of the Generalísimo. The parodic representation of the Church is intensified by Creón, who in more than one occasion affirms that Antígona’s ideology is strange and repulsive “a nuestra Cristiana manera de vivir”. The Christian way of life at Molina is empty of any religious meaning, like Monsignor Escudero and his sumptuous ecclesiastical entourage. Thus, to understand Antígona’s resistance from a religious perspective equals to see her as similarly empty way, without any transcendental meaning. Precisely Antígona’s attitude is addressed to this interpretation when she takes up a stance as a redeemer model and then discards the Christian dogma. Her fight is purely a martyr’s empty cast that cannot validate nor reach the collective relevance inside the dictatorial context that rules the world.

To this point, we have seen that the dramatic world of *La pasión* rejects both the tragic and Christian world view; the contemporary secular world of the play nullifies a deterministic and universal order

that could provides a tragic or redemptory meaning to the actions of the protagonist. The play's greatness specifically resides in using structurally both traditions in order to reject the worldviews that they provide. On the outside of both structural models, *La passion* is located in a relativistic world that reconfigures the fundamental conflict between Antígona and Creón Molina within a modern and secular world, problematizing the notion of power. We cannot talk about two universal forces that are absolutely opposed, but of two highly politicized persons that manipulate the situation to legitimate their stance in collective terms.

Generalísimo Creón uses the media as an effective power tool that allows him to control and numb the people.<sup>12</sup> The dramatic action is mediated by five anonymous journalists who have the dual function of narrating the events as well as announcing local and international news. The narrative function likens them to the choir of a Greek tragedy that comments the dramatic action, while the journalistic function shows their support to the state's ideology. The mechanical way in which the journalists broadcast the news—always talking in the same order and alternating international and national news—refers to the standardization and compulsive order that Creón has imposed to society. In the course of the play it is clear that the journalists are biased and distort the facts for the dictator's delight and convenience; thus, Antígona openly accuses them declaring that “la prensa en Molina es un comité del partido único de Creón, un comité minado de sensacionalismo (1968: 42). This sensationalism is the key instrument of Creón to control public opinion and keep the people in a numb state that defuses any kind of divergence.

The next fragment shows the way the press uses extraordinary events to keep the public's attention and neutralize any reaction:

PERIODISTA 1. Extra. Extra. Extra. Asesinan a Martín Lutero King.  
*La multitud irrumpe enloquecida congregándose en torno al periodista que grita la noticia.*  
PERIODISTA 2. Extra. Extra. Extra. Abalean al Che Guevara.  
*La multitud corre trastornada hasta el Periodista 2.*  
[...]  
PERIODISTA 5. Extra. Extra. Extra. Asesinan al Presidente Kennedy.  
*La multitud va a correr hacia el Periodista 5, pero el impacto es de tal manera terrible que se congela.* (Sánchez, 1968: 36)

The regime's strategy consists in bombarding the public with a load of disinformation that saturates and numbs the people, driving them to a state of astonishment. The stage directions illustrate perfectly the way the crowd is set aside into a passive and confused attitude as of that attitude they will not try to express nor act for any reason at all. In *Arte popular y sociedad en América Latina*, Néstor García Canclini talks precisely about the passive attitude of the consumer,

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## NOTES

12 | The media, its effects and social power are important topics in Sánchez's work, especially in his famous novel *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*. See Cruz (1985) for a study about the topic.

claiming that in the mass culture,

...no hay interacción recíproca entre consumidores y productores, y por lo tanto no puede incluir la solidaridad, en la que las necesidades reales de la mayoría son encubiertas o sustituidas en función de los objetivos mercantiles de la burguesía, y en la cual se neutraliza toda reacción crítica del consumidor. (1977: 109)

The “objetivos mercantiles de la burguesía” to which García Canclini refers, constitute the predominant commercial objectives, and in the case of the Republic of Molina, it refers to the interests of the military regime. In the play, the press, as a legitimizing tool, imposes the government interests covered by the appearance of the people’s interests. It does so by a sensationalist production that satisfies the hunger for sensation but disables any critic action.<sup>13</sup> This passive community is then turned into a manipulated and muted collectivity, unable to think over, categorize and distinguish the received information, unable to interact and establish communication channels. As Garcia Canclini notes, the most notorious effect of the press numbing power is the lack of solidarity. It is precisely that obstruction to solidarity that, at the end, condemns Antígona Pérez to a futile death.

Such condition is evident in the last scene of the play, when Antígona urges Creón to kill her. Antígona descends, for the first time, from the platform where she has stand during the whole play, and Creón commands her execution. Immediately, the journalists announce the death of “la facinerosa Antígona”, assuring that she confessed the location of the bodies of the Tavárez brothers and right away they move to news about Jacqueline Kennedy’s vacations, Pierre Cardin’s fashion and the whereabouts of Hollywood stars. The strategy of including Antígona’s death among the sensationalist machinery reduces her death to a trivial event, no more meaningful than showbiz gossip. This strategy secures the indifference of the crowd, facing the event in a saturated, astonished state, which will prevent any critical position that could value or legitimize Antígona’s sacrifice. The insignificance of her death is even more evident if we consider that this last scene constitutes a parody of the resolution of the Greek tragedy. In the exodus, the choir simultaneously laments the fall of the hero and celebrates his ennoblement, but in *La passion*, the journalists/ choir trivialize Antígona’s death proclaiming the false statement of the young girl’s surrender before Creón’s regime as if it was entertainment news.<sup>14</sup> Since the moment Antígona descends from her platform—which marks her fall as a tragic hero—until the end of the scene, a parody develops in which the journalists’ sensationalism disables any cathartic effect and deprives her subversive struggle of any value.

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## NOTES

13 | See Ortiz (1996) for a discussion of the ethical dimension of consumerism.

14 | Based on the false statements of the journalists, Dorita Nouhaud interprets them as a parody of the evangelists who, as direct witnesses of Jesus’ life, express the absolute truth. Nouhaud quotes the following passage from the Bible: “The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe [John, 19:35]” (2001: 171).

Creón's power over Antígona, beyond the legal and political dimension of judging her acts and commanding her execution, constitutes manipulation and power over the control of meaning which disables any solidarity impulse towards her. Antígona tries to counterattack her political and social isolation articulating her cause in ideological terms but no one supports her acts or even tries to continue her struggle. Even though Antígona's image as a revolutionary martyr is reduced to a lonely and futile death, she achieves to threaten Creón's totalitarian power by imposing her own truth and interpretation of the facts.

About this topic, it is necessary to note that the subjective character of the play become explicit from the title. The use of the preposition "según" [according to] assures that we are not facing an official, objective and foundational story—as the passion of Christ presumes to be—but a biased story told from Antígona's point of view. Such subjective nature is pointed out by an extended initial stage direction, which goes beyond the typical instructive function of stage directions: "Como el recuerdo es arbitrario, los personajes tendrán las más diversas entradas y salidas [...]. Como el recuerdo es inmenso, ilimitado, el movimiento de Antígona Pérez no estará confinado a area alguna, aunque ella tome el centro del escenario, frente a la plataforma, como su sitio o prisión" (1968: 12).<sup>15</sup> Antígona, therefore, remains center stage during the whole play and participates in all the scenes. Her privileged position allows her to witness everything that happens around her, including private moments between the Molinas and between Monsignor Escudero and the dictator. Antígona, as the great witness of the play, appropriates the role of the narrator and continuously mediates the dramatic action with her bitter and sharp monologues. This allows her to share with the audience her interpretation of the facts and impose her own point of view; thus, her power precisely consists in her ability of overthrow the totalitarian order of the Generalísimo with a transgressive act of interpretation.

In his important book *Otro territorio: relatos sobre el mundo contemporáneo*, Renato Ortiz points out that "el estado-nación no es solo una entidad político-administrativa, es una instancia de producción de sentido" (1996: 85). In *La passion*, the nation-state corresponds to Creón's authoritarianism but also extends the role of the church and family, as institutions that suppress any meaning contrary to the official version, and which support Molina's tyrannical regime. About this topic, Antonio Gramsci explains:

The State, is usually thought of as political society —i.e., a dictatorship or some other coercive apparatus used to control the masses in conformity with a given type of production and economy— and not as a balance between political society and civil society, by which I mean the hegemony of one social group over the entire nation, exercised through so-called private organizations like the Church, trade-unions, or schools. (1973: 204)

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## NOTES

15 | The ambiguous nature of Sánchez's initial stage directions emphasize the performative possibilities of the play, which opens a wide dramatic potential for its staging.

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A clear example about the manipulation and production of meaning by the church happens when Antígona swears to Monsignor Escudero that she has acted “por un elemental gesto de obligada fraternidad, de obligado amor” and he answers her that “[l]a acusación que se te hace excluye esos dos sentimientos. Tu delito es el robo” (Sánchez, 1968: 80). Monsignor Escudero’s words deny the human and fraternal dimension that Antígona gives to her acts, criminalizing her struggle and diminishing it as a simple violation of the legal system. The imposition of meaning by Monsignor Escudero over Antígona specifies the Church’s power to produce and manipulate what is fair and true. As Monsignor Escudero hypocritically assures: “Por nuestra boca habla el deseo sincero de que la verdad rija todo proceder” (82). This is but the regime’s truth, which must be reaffirmed openly by the different institutions and the press, which is radically established with Antígona’s punishment and silencing.

However, Antígona develops the ability of overthrow the sense and meaning imposed by the regime. She represents a rebellious voice and a reference that reveals the limits of Creón’s totalitarianism, as the following dialogue, occurring when Pilar Varga visits Antígona to inform her about her execution, makes evident:

PILAR. Antígona, nadie, nadie puede obligarte a que confieses; pero si tienes quien te ame, vive. Lo demás no importa.  
ANTÍGONA. Importa siempre que haya alguien en disposición de dar. Es el refugio que nos queda.  
PILAR. Pero dar vida, amor, nunca muerte.  
ANTÍGONA. La Primera Dama equivoca sus líneas y dice las líneas de Antígona. (117-8)

It is important to note that both characters provide an absolutely opposed interpretation of the same words. While for Pilar Varga, to love and to life is to obey Creón’s law and survive, for Antígona that is equal to give her life as a way of protest against the Creón’s law and tyranny. Antígona’s boldness in imposing her own interpretation to the tyranny official message carves a space of singularity and difference, an essentially subversive space that sabotages and threatens the totalitarian context.

We can thus state that Antígona creates a crisis of meaning that destabilizes Creón revealing the limits of his system. The young girl interprets her crime as an act of love and Creón is forced to silence her, but in a last act of rebelliousness, Antígona appropriates the meaning of the punishment imposed to her. While she descends to her execution, Antígona exclaims: “Aligera, Creón, aligera. Dame, dame la muerte” (1968: 121). Instead of succumbing to the execution command, Antígona interprets it as a personal wish and transforms her execution into her last act of sacrifice. The crisis of meaning that Antígona represents is a seed of dissidence that targets

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the disarticulation of Creón's absolute and deterministic regime. Consequently, the importance of her struggle consists in disclosing the material and ideological limits of the dictatorial system as sole entity of production of meaning and power legitimation. Her acts and words shows that truth and justice are relativistic concepts; they are not exclusively attached to the dictatorial system of signification but are open to multiple and different interpretations. Therefore, the true revolutionary act of Antígona Pérez is to impose her own world vision and to violate the ideological totalitarianism of Creón's metanarrative. From this understanding of Antígona Pérez as a sign of difference, we can understand its importance in the Latin American context of the sixties. Her ability to reveal the limits of Creón's totalitarian power and to transform her punishment into an act of sacrifice makes her a symbol of revolutionary struggle. Her fight gives hope too those involved in the many combats along the continent against dictatorships and other oppressive powers, thus acquiring the Hispano-American importance and relevance expressed by the heroine herself. But her protest achieves to surpass the continental specificity and, as Victoria Brunn notes, locates Latin America in the global imaginary of politics and international culture (2012: 38). Ultimately, the play explores the question of power inside a vertiginous media world that allow us to talk about political resistance inside the national and Latin American specific context of the play as inside the actual situation of media control and sensationalism. The classic spirit and dramatic value that Antígona Pérez retains lays in her absolute insubordination in the name of her ideals.

This article has tried to show how *La passion* uses the structural models of Greek tragedy and Christianity to reject both worldviews and instead reconfigure the traditional political conflict between Antígona and Creón in a relativistic and mediatized world. The conflict does not develop in an absolutist and universal plane of rival spheres that confront and destroy each other, but in a strictly political level where the totalitarian system is forced by an individual revolutionary act to confront its own limits. In the resulting ideological fight over sense and interpretation, Creón Molina uses the press as a sensationalist and propagandistic apparatus to refute and trivialize Antígona's revolutionary attempt, but Antígona fights back his dictatorial power by means of a crisis in meaning that exposes the material and ideological limits of the regime. The play is embedded in a Latin-American context, and perceptibly refers to the totalitarian regimes that oppressed the continent and, in this sense it must be read inside *Antigone's* dramatic tradition, that is, as a political play about the fight for the freedom. However, this article has tried to point out that a critic understanding must go beyond and recognize the sophisticated mechanisms that Sánchez uses to explore the construction of a totalitarian ideology, the social effects of sensationalism, the role of the media as a political tool, and the power of dissident voices and

spaces inside the structures and hierarchies to produce meaning. Antígona Pérez does not give us a free America, but a critical look towards our own contemporary societies, so dangerously ruled by the media and sensationalism as the Republic of Molina.

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