

*Antigone in the Southern Cone of Latin America*¹

Antígona no cone sul da América Latina

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Abstract: This paper analyzes five Latin American versions of *Antigone*, not frequently considered. The plays exhibit significant differences with regard to the original, most of them related to painful events in the recent history of the continent. However, the plays have in common with Sophocles' original the permanent anthropological features that have made *Antigone* a classic, expressed in five fundamental ideas: place, time, transcendence, conflict of legal codes and the Antigone's psychological state.

Keywords: Antigone; Sophocles; Latin America; Forced disappearance; Leopoldo Marechal; Griselda Gambaro; Jorge Huertas; Daniela Cápona; Juan Carlos Villavicencio.

Sophocles' *Antigone* may well be considered one of the foundational works of western culture. Like other literary and philosophical works of the fifth and fourth century B.C., its origin can be traced to the intellectual disputes which took place between the Sophists, characterized by their moral relativism and critique of religion, and those authors who defended the existence of permanent moral principles and a religious conception of life, among whom Sophocles occupies a privileged place. Therefore, his *Antigone* may be regarded as one of the milestones of that which would later be called the "Central Tradition" of the West. In effect, this tradition includes among its key theses the idea that there exists a suprapositive legality which, among other functions, constitutes an impassable limit on political power.³

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³ See Leandro Pinkler, "El problema de la ley en la *Antígona* de Sófocles": *Persona y Derecho* 39 (1998) 165-172. Aristotle himself, in the *Rhetoric*, makes explicit reference to *Antigone* when he alludes to unwritten laws: "It will now be well to make a complete classification of just and unjust actions. We may begin by observing that they have been defined relatively to two kinds of law, and also relatively to two classes of persons. By the two kinds of law I mean particular law and universal law. Particular law is that which each community lays down and applies to its own members: this is partly written

Antigone is not only a fundamental element in the history of that tradition, but also a source of numerous human types which have been taken up again and again in literature and philosophy, as George Steiner has shown in his celebrated study: *Antigones*⁴. In that sense, Sophocles' work meets all the requirements to be catalogued as a classic. Furthermore, if it has not achieved the fame of *Oedipus the King*, it has been the object not only of multiple performances, but also of innumerable versions, such that the theme of *Antigone* seems to be more widely diffused than that of *Oedipus* since authors as varied as Kirkegaard, Anouilh, Brecht, and María Zambrano have adapted it. In fact, it has even been the subject of a rock opera (Milan Steigerwald and Pavla Forest).

However, Steiner's work, its numerous merits notwithstanding, suffers by an important lacuna, as it completely omits the Hispanic-American versions of Sophocles' tragedy. This is a very serious defect for someone who deals with the reception of a classic theme of European culture across history, for Latin America is in great degree a European creation, and it is well worth the effort to step back and show how a mestizo continent receives the patrimony of one of its progenitors, Europe. There are numerous Spanish-American versions of *Antigone*, from Gambaro to Watanabe. However, for our purposes we will examine some of those which were written in the Southern Cone of South America: from the Argentine side, *Antígona Vélez*, by Leopoldo Marechal⁵, *Antígona Furiosa*, by Griselda Gambaro⁶ and *AntígonaS, linaje de hembras*, by Jorge Huertas⁷;

and partly unwritten. Universal law is the law of Nature. For there really is, as every one to some extent divines, a natural justice and injustice that is binding on all men, even on those who have no association or covenant with each other. It is this that Sophocles' Antigone clearly means when she says that the burial of Polynices was a just act in spite of the prohibition: she means that it was just by nature. Not of today or yesterday it is, /But lives eternal: none can date its birth" (I 13 1373b4-12, vv. 456-7).

⁴ George Steiner, *Antígonas. Una poética y una filosofía de la lectura* (Barcelona 1987).

⁵ Leopoldo Marechal, *Antígona Vélez* (Buenos Aires 2000).

⁶ Griselda Gambaro, "Antígona furiosa": *Teatro* 3 (2001) 195-217.

⁷ Jorge Huertas, *AntígonaS. Linaje de hembras* (Buenos Aires 2002).

from Chile, *Antígona (historia de objetos perdidos)*, by Daniela Cápona Pérez⁸ and *Antígona en el espejo*, by Juan Carlos Villavicencio⁹. Needless to say, this present work approaches these plays from a textual perspective rather than from an examination of particular stagings.

The plays we will analyze have in common with Sophocles' original — in a greater or lesser degree — the permanent anthropological features that have made *Antigone* a classic. Yet, at the same time, some of them make very specific references to painful events in the history of Latin America, a fact which the authors emphasize in their plays. This makes them omit other fundamental elements in Sophocles' work.

I. Antigone on the Pampas

Antígona Vélez, staged in 1951, is undoubtedly the best-known Hispanic-American version of the Greek myth. In general terms, it follows the original plot, but incorporates new elements. From the outset, in terms of time and place, the new tragedy is set in the Argentine pampas some time during the second half of the 19th century. The action does not take place in a palace, but rather in the houses of a ranch. The chorus is not composed of ancient Thebans, but is divided in two groups: one of men and the other of peasant women; furthermore, in certain passages the intervention of witches is added, which Marechal indicates “contra lo convencional, serán tres mujeres jóvenes, espigadas y bellas a lo maligno” (Cuadro primero, 42). The soothsayer, Tiresias, does not appear, nor is the motive for the discord which leads to the brothers' mutual deaths made clear. On the other hand, in contrast to Sophocles' plot, here the enemy has not been defeated before the action begins, but rather constitutes a vague menace hovering over the protagonists, because Ignacio Vélez, the indignant brother who corresponds to Polynices, had joined forces with the natives of the Pampas, who continue to watch the ranch after his death. Ignacio remains unburied by order of Don Facundo, the “patrón”. Ultimately,

⁸ Daniela Cápona, *Antígona, (historia de objetos perdidos)*: Cecilia Calderón González, Carolina Jiménez Vilches, and Loreto María Rossel Santander (coord.), *Lenguaje IV Educación Media* (Santiago 2002) 182-83.

⁹ Juan Carlos Villavicencio, *Antígona en el espejo* (unpublished).

the punishment of Antígona consists not in being enclosed in a cave to starve to death, but rather to be sent off on horseback, which meant certain death in a place surrounded every side by the natives.

The attitude of the Argentinean Antigone in contrast to that of her Greek counterpart can also be seen in her relation with Lisandro, the son of Don Facundo who corresponds to Haemon. Marechal endeavors to detail the history of a love that took root when they were teenagers. Sophocles' Antigone has often been reproached for her relative coldness towards the fate of her betrothed. She goes to her death crying because she won't have children, not because she has lost her beloved. Not so with Marechal's heroine who cries less but is more human. In this way, giving special importance to their love, Marechal introduces "a second dramatic conflict, of the Shakepearian type"¹⁰.

Despite these and other differences, the theme of disobedience of a law that is unjust because it transgresses the limits of human power is present throughout the story and not just on the lips of Antígona. For example, an exchange between an old man and two other men is depicted in the first scene:

Viejo — (pensativo) *Oigan, hombres. Yo soy tan viejo como esta pampa y tan duro como ella: he visto mucha injusticia, y siempre dije amén. Pero lo de esta casa no me gusta.*

Hombre 2º — *¿Qué cosa, viejo?*

Viejo — *Que un hermano esté aquí, entre sus cuatro velas honradas, y el otro afuera, tirado en el suelo como una basura. Leyes hay que nadie ha escrito en el papel, y que sin embargo mandan.*

(Cuadro primero, 40)

We see this also in the first exchange between Antígona and Don Facundo. She reproaches him for the unequal treatment the brothers have received, while he justifies himself by insisting on the justice of his decision:

Don Facundo: — *Lo castiga una ley justa.*

Antígona: — *Mi padre sabía dictar leyes, y todas eran fáciles. Murió sableando pampas junto al río.*

Don Facundo: — *Las leyes de tu padre voy siguiendo.*

Antígona: — *¡No, señor! él no habría tirado su propia carne a la basura.*

Don Facundo: — *¡También él supo castigar!*

¹⁰ Graciela Maturo, *Marechal, el camino de la belleza* (Buenos Aires 1999) 169.

Antígona: — *¡Jamás lo hizo por encima de la muerte! Dios ha puesto en la muerte su frontera. Y aunque los hombres montasen todos los caballos de su furia, no podrían cruzar esa frontera y llegarse hasta Ignacio Vélez para inferirle otra herida.*

(Cuadro segundo, 49-50)

Ultimately, although, basically, the conflict in Marechal's work is the same as that in Sophocles' tragedy, there are marked differences between the two plays. On the one hand, Antígona Vélez shows herself to be much more understanding of the ruler than her Theban antecedent. She argues with as much decision against her sister Carmen, who does not dare accompany her in the labor of burying their brother who has been punished by having his corpse exposed, as she does in her exchanges with Don Facundo, who has succeeded the father of the Vélez family in the administration of the estate.

Don Facundo: — *Mujer, ¿sabías cuál era mi voluntad?*

Antígona: — *Yo seguí otra voluntad anoche.*

Don Facundo: — *¡En esta pampa no hay otra voluntad que la mía!*

Antígona: — *La que yo seguí habló más fuerte. Y está por encima de todas las pampas.*

(Cuadro tercero, p. 58)

Nevertheless, Antígona Vélez understands her opponent's reasoning. She acknowledges the justice of Don Facundo's reasoning, which leads him to "agarrarse a este suelo y no soltarlo" (Cuadro segundo, 50), although she thinks it poorly applied. At the same time, she adds:

Él quiere poblar de flores el sur! Y sabe que Antígona Vélez, muerta en un alazán ensangrentado, podría ser la primera flor del jardín que busca. Eso es lo que anda sabiendo él y lo que yo supe anoche, cuando le tiré a Ignacio Vélez la última palada de tierra y subí cantando a esta loma.

(Cuadro quinto, 70)

In contrast, the attitude of Don Facundo, her rival, towards the end of the story is quite distinct from that of Creon in the original. As there is no intervention by Tiresias, there is nothing in this version to cause the powerful one to reflect, change his opinion so as to try and avoid a tragic destiny. Don Facundo Galván never sees things in any way other than his own, not even when he discovers that his own son, Lisandro, has ridden away with Antígona and died at the hands of the Pampean natives. He simply orders that they be buried together, and when told that the death

of Lisandro and his beloved will leave him without any heirs, he denies it. His grandchildren will be “Todos los hombres y mujeres que, algún día, cosecharán en esta pampa el fruto de tanta sangre” (Cuadro final, 78).

It has been said that Europe is the continent of history, while America is that of geography. In *Antígona Vélez*, there are not only human disputes, whether between siblings or between creoles and natives, but there is also a very characteristic element present in the struggle of man to subjugate a wild land, the great work of peopling it, an endeavor that unites the most disparate wills: “Alguna vez he pensado que llorar es como regar; y que donde se lloró algo debe florecer” (Cuadro quinto, 69), says Antígona Vélez full of hope to one of the women who takes pity upon her. The land, here too, is in its way a protagonist.

The natives themselves appear as parts of the natural environment. They completely lack any individuality and are little more than an obstacle to be overcome. Many decades would have to pass after the staging of Marechal’s *Antígona* before the studies of Meinrado Hux¹¹, Jorge Luis Rojas Lagarde¹² and other historians would describe the authentic frontier life in which, together with a perpetual state of war, relations between creoles and aborigines were constant. Pampas, Pehuenches, Huilliches and other tribes were not simply an obscure and unknown adversary, but rather very concrete persons with whom the creoles did business, negotiated the exchange of captives and even discussed the education of their children in Buenos Aires.

In contrast to Creon, Don Facundo understands Antígona’s reasoning and is not indifferent to the fate of Ignacio Vélez, “el Otro”, as he calls him in order to avoid mentioning his name, but he understood his own political decision in the context of the much broader human task of subduing the earth, which, like Antígona, he believes can only be accomplished through the shedding of blood. A foreman informs him that the young woman says that “la mitad de su corazón está perdida en el barro”, to which he responds:

¹¹ Meinrado Hux, *Memorias del ex cautivo Santiago Avendaño* (Buenos Aires 1999).

¹² J. L. Rojas Lagarde, *Malones y comercio de ganado con Chile. Siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires 2004); “Viejito porteño”: *Un maestro en el toldo de Calfucurá* (Buenos Aires 2007).

*¡Bien sé yo en qué anda su corazón mañero! ¿Lo del Otro le duele? ¡A mí también!
¿O de qué madera estaría yo hecho? Este pedazo de tierra se ablanda con sangre y
llanto. ¡Que las mujeres lloren! Nosotros ponemos la sangre. (Al Coro) ¿No es así,
hombres?*

Capataz — *Así nos enseñaron, desde que supimos jinetear un potro y manejar una
lanza.*

(Cuadro segundo, 48)

The fundamental obstacle which separates them is not, as in Sophocles, the arrogance of Creon nor his preoccupation with the good of the polis. Here it is the land, with which the rural American man maintains a nuptial relationship that prevents one from doing things which would imply its abandonment.

Don Facundo. — *Ahí está mi razón. Por eso me agarré yo a esta loma y no la
suelto. La tierra es del hombre cuando uno puede nacer y morir en ella.*

Capataz. — *Y plantar amores y espigas que ha de cosechar uno mismo y no la
mano sucia de un bárbaro.*

Don Facundo. — *Mi razón es esa. Y no la soltaré aunque lloren las mujeres y
sangren los hombres. Para eso estamos aquí: para sangrar y llorar.*

(Cuadro segundo, 48)

As it is seen, Marechal's *Antígona* is completely American; it is the story of men and women whose destiny is to fight until the day comes when in that land there will live "hombres que no sangran y mujeres que no aprendieron a llorar" (Cuadro segundo, 48). Marechal's play takes up Sophocles' story and introduces it into the magnificent epic of the conquest of the American land. That is to say, in spite of all the tragedy, the characters maintain an optimistic vision of the future. The later *Antígonas* endeavor to refute such a vision.

II. Todo es siempre

Staged in 1986, *Antígona furiosa*, by Griselda Gambaro, has been widely performed and extensively analyzed, above all from gender studies. Significant analyses also include those emphasizing its political dimension, which is of undeniable hermeneutical importance given the context of its

production¹³. We, however, would like to propose a somewhat different reading.

The play has only three characters: Antígona, Corifeo, and Antinoo (Antigone, Coryphaeus, and Antinous). However, a margin note tells us that “una carcasa representa a Creonte. Cuando el Corifeo se introduce en ella, asume obviamente el trono y el poder” (196). This occurs, in fact, many times in the play. Moreover, in an episode towards the second half, Antígona assumes the voice of Haemon for a few moments.

Organized as a single scene, *Antígona furiosa* possesses great dramatic intensity and is fast-paced. The original progression of events is altered and everything flows towards the same unique theatrical moment. From the technical point of view, this economy of measures favors unity of action; from the dramatic point of view this way of presenting the story sets up an “always” in the tragedy, in terrible circular logic, which is consistent with its ultimate meaning.

In fact, the play begins with the death of Antígona, but it also ends with it. She comes onstage “ahorcada”, fitting herself, like Ophelia, with a crown of wilted flowers (this will certainly not be the only reference to *Hamlet*). Shortly thereafter, she loosens the cord around her neck and begins to sing pitifully. All this evokes Polonius’ daughter, although it is not her father for whom she cries, but rather her brother Polynices; but she also cries for herself, for Haemon and for the unspeakable fate which looms over them all and which overcomes death itself.

Antígona furiosa is set in a contemporary city. The same initial note tells us that, “sentados junto a una mesa redonda, vestidos con trajes de calle, dos hombres toman café” (196): it is Corifeo and Antinoo¹⁴, who speak

¹³ Thus, Annette Wannamaker: “I believe that any theorizing about the text must first be grounded in the historical background of the Dirty War and the Protests of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo”. Annette Wannamaker, “‘Memory Also Makes a Chain’: The Performance of Absence in Griselda Gambaro’s *Antígona Furiosa*”: *The Journal of Midwest Language Association*, 33/3 (2000-2001) 74.

¹⁴ Here, Antinoo is a singular “intertext”. Does this refer to the most arrogant of Penelope’s suitors, Antinous, who would try to eliminate Telemachus and was finally killed by one of Odysseus’ arrows through the throat? Or are we, extemporaneously, in the presence of the supposed lover of the emperor Hadrian? Although we incline

in an animated colloquial Argentinean. Given, moreover, the horizon of expectations of the reader/playgoer by the date of the play's premiere and certain subtle allusions, everything indicates that we are in post-dictatorship Buenos Aires.

When Antígona makes her appearance on stage — she first appears dead, as we noted — she is the object of Corifeo and Antinoo's jokes. In fact, they themselves compare her sarcastically with Ophelia. The complaints and arguments of the woman contrast with the coldness and distance of the male characters. However, a few moments later, a battle occupies the stage — "irrumpe entrechocar metálico de espadas, piafar de caballos, gritos y ayes imprecisos..." (199) —, where Eteocles and Polynices return to die. Again, the jests of Corifeo and Antinoo are contrasted while Antígona walks among the dead: "Antígona: ¡Cadáveres! ¡Cadáveres! ¡Piso muertos! ¡Me rodean los muertos! Me acarician... me abrazan... Me piden... ¿Qué?" (200).

Antígona seems to be in a different place (or, at least, in another disposition). She returns from death to contemplate the death which took her life, in a "forever" that never ends. Moreover, she says, "mi madre se acostó con mi padre, que había nacido de su vientre, y así nos engendró. Y en esta cadena de los vivos y los muertos, yo pagaré sus culpas. Y la mía" (201); reinforcing the same idea. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the figure of Oedipus, although he is never onstage, mysteriously haunts the play, like Hamlet's ghost...

Next we have a moving scene, both in words and actions: Antígona with the dead Polynices — represented by a shroud —: "Hermano, hermano. Yo seré tu cuerpo, tu ataúd, tu tierra" (202). Antígona has come back to life not only to contemplate Polynice's death and experience all the

towards the first of these options, both are suggestive, if in contrary directions and senses. At any rate, in *Antígona furiosa* Antinoo is a strange although vigorous mixture of coward, gossip, buffoon *factotum* and a type of sublimated Polonius. A similar conclusion is reached by Irmtrud König; who, although she considers it "difficult to determine his symbolic representation [...], based on his name it does not seem arbitrary to recall [...] Antinous, the leader of Penelope's suitors, who stands out in *The Odyssey* for his insolence, opportunism and cowardice". Irmtrud König, "Parodia y transculturación en *Antígona furiosa* de Griselda Gambaro": *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, 61 (2002) 12, n. 23.

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attendant suffering, but also to die again in an attempt to give him a proper burial (and to try and revive Haemon, as we will see). The key to this dialectic is given by the selfsame daughter of Oedipus, when she says that “los vivos son la gran sepultura de los muertos”, for “también se encadena la memoria. Esto no lo sabe Creonte ni su ley” (202). The paradox seems to be that the living suffer for the dead, thus assuring that the dead remain so but with such vitality that the living can hardly endure it. Antígona is “always” dying, as she “always” wants to bury Polynices who certainly “always” dies (or is dying). This is a horrible dialectic, with neither beginning nor end. But one which greatly transcends the “law” of Creon¹⁵.

¹⁵ From a political perspective, and establishing a relationship with the drama lived by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina in terms of their dead/disappeared children, as we ourselves took note of further back, Annette Wannaker has commented thus: “Within the context of the Dirty War, this circularity and lack of closure remind audiences of the thousands of bodies that have not yet been accounted for, recovered, or buried. Just as the Mothers continue to circle the Plaza each Thursday, even though “reason” dictates that their children must be dead, Antigona’s (and Antigone’s) act of giving up her own life in order to bury a dead brother also is beyond “reason”. Gambaro’s Antigona never leaves the stage and the play ends with her hanging herself, her body in full sight of the audience in the same position as when the play began. This circularity implies that Antigona will reperform her act over and over again, just as the play will be reperformed over and over again [...]. Antigona, as a fictional, theatrical character, as a representation, relives her narrative each time she is rehearsed and performed in a production. Her mourning, just like the mourning of the Mothers, does not end with the performance of it”. *The Journal of Midwest Language Association*, 33/3 (2000-2001) 77-78.

In a similar analytical vein, M. Florencia Nelli says: “In this version Antigone’s words possess rich implications and allusions. To begin with, references to earth, grass and stone, on the one hand, and to the grave, on the other, reappear constantly all through the play. They represent not only a clear allusion to the lack of a proper burial as in the original version, but they also emphasize the tangibility and corporeality of these elements as opposed to the insubstantiality and immateriality of the bodies of the desaparecidos. The body the Argentine Antigone is trying to bury is not even there; that is the reason of the emphasis Antigone places on her own body. Thanks to her memory of the missing, she will become her brother’s grave; he will be inside her mind/heart/thoughts forever. Not surprisingly Antigone never leaves the stage: the play starts with her onstage and finishes with her onstage, visible and tangible. Like a defying counterpart to those desaparecidos, she stands onstage furious, refusing to disappear”. And she adds: “The chain the two characters refer to is a chain of death, hatred and

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In effect, that law “no fue Dios quien la dictó ni la justicia”, as Antígona twice exclaims. She does so with reason. The political philosophy of Coryphaeus/Creon is made evidently clear in this play: “Despreciable es quien tiene en mayor estima a un ser querido que a su propia patria” (202). However, the fatherland is identified not with the common good or some superior ideal, but with whosoever wields power. And between that person and the law there is no distinction: “Quien es más fuerte, manda. ¡Esa es la ley!” (204). Similarly, “la anarquía es el peor de los males” (206), exactly because “el poder es inviolable para quien lo tiene” (211).

Gambaro presents us the arbitrary elevated to the supreme norm, supreme truth and supreme well-being of the nation and people. For this reason, Creon in *Antígona furiosa* only trusts those who obey him, those who quietly accept his implacable and indisputable will. Its source is itself; its weight and its value, what is more its very legitimacy, is based upon pure will to power. It is not trivial, then, that it appears here as a carcass: pure mask, form, figure..., such that there is no other reality to serve as a support for that will closed in upon itself.

Antígona is a prisoner of fear. She fears for herself and her fate, for the fate of her unburied brother, for Haemon and Ismene. Moreover, she suffers from an immense sadness for going as a virgin to her date with death, when she could have and should have contracted marriage with Haemon. She also feels rage for the tremendous cowardice of her sister, who is “odiosa”.

In *Antígona furiosa* Creon’s law is only that which sets in motion the great machinery of death, but which is itself transcended by something else, something the true horror of which lies elsewhere, out of reach.

Antígona: Que las leyes, ¡qué leyes!, me arrastran a una cueva que será mi tumba. Nadie escuchará mi llanto, nadie percibirá mi sufrimiento. Vivirán a la luz como si no pasara nada. ¿Con quién compartiré mi casa? No estaré con los humanos ni con los que murieron, no se me contará entre los muertos ni entre los vivos. Desapareceré del mundo, en vida (210).

terror. But the same chain can be one of memory and love”. Florencia Nelli, “Identity, Dignity and Memory: Performing/Re-Writing *Antigone* in Post-1976 Argentina”: *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies* 4 (2009) 75.

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This time Antigone's suffering, her tragedy, is the suffering and tragedy of consciousness, of one who is aware. Aware of what? Not only of that which has occurred and will be repeated, but of that which, unavoidably, transcends the arbitrary machinery of death. Thus, Corifeo (Creon in the carcass), after ordering Antigone's enclosure in the cave says: "Que sea abandonada en esa tumba. Si ella desea morir allí, que muera. Si desea vivir sepultada bajo ese techo, que viva. Quedaremos puros de su muerte y ella no tendrá contacto con los vivos" (211). To which Antinoo exclaims: "¡Qué sabiduría! Está y no está, la matamos y no la matamos" (211).

The passage suggests that there exists something worse than death, something more horrible: the uncertainty with respect to the destiny of those who are its victims.

Antígona: ¿Qué ley he violado? ¿A qué Dios he ofendido? ¿Pero cómo creer en Dios todavía? ¿A quién llamar si mi piedad me ganó un trato impío? Si esto es lo justo, me equivoqué. Pero si son mis perseguidores quienes yerran, ¡yo les deseo el mismo mal que injustamente me hacen! ¡El mismo mal, no más ni menos, el mismo mal! (212).

All this contrasts with the terrible pragmatism of Corifeo: "¡Hay algo que se llama arrepentirse! No sirve de mucho, pero consuela" (212). According to what will unfold, this character does have a certain rationality: it is the consolation of forgetting, of letting go, "to unleash memory". As we come to the end, Gambaro presents us with an impressive episode: huge birds hurl themselves at Antigone, while dropping "inmundicias" and "porquerías" upon Corifeo and Antinoo, "la peste" according to the latter.

Antígona (aparta alas inmensas): ¡Fuera! ¡Fuera! (Gime de terror, intentando protegerse. Con esfuerzo, se domina) ¡No! ¡Está bien que me cubran con sus alas hediondas, que me rocen con sus picos! (Se ofrece, feroz, con los dientes apretados) ¡Muerdan! ¡Muerdan! ¡No me lastimarán más que Creonte! (213).

These apparitions are the starving birds that "arrancaron jirones del cadáver de Polinices" (214). For a moment, the dead seem freed from the chains of memory (or come back to life thanks to them) and fall in pieces upon the living, like a plague. It is a beautiful and terrible metaphor for consciousness, perhaps of guilt as well, and of the uncertainty regarding eternal destiny. As in Sophocles' *Antigone*, it is the birds, "pájaros

hambrientos”, who rain down the plague upon the living. As Antigone says, “el mal permitido nos contamina a todos” (214).

The word “peste” is used and shouted here several times by all the characters. It seems we have returned to *Oedipus the King* or to Book I of *The Iliad*. Be that as it may, in the illuminating dialogue that follows between Corifeo as Creon and Antígona as Haemon, even the former will be overcome by this force that lies beyond the events due to the destructive machinery earlier referred to. Moreover, Haemon’s death is relived in him, and again we have the circularity which channels everything together into a singular theatrical moment. We know that Antigone went to her tomb to be joined with him. Corifeo parodies the pain of Creon, while, in a strict synthesis of events, it is made clear that all is death and the dead. Then Corifeo places himself in the carcass to say, again circularly:

Corifeo: *¡Hemón, oh desdichado! ¿En qué desgracia querés perderte?*

Antígona: *Erró el golpe contra Creonte y se arrojó sobre su espada. Respirando todavía enlazó mis brazos y murió entre olas de sangre... olas de... sangre... en mi cara... (Bruscamente grita) ¡Hemón, Hemón no! ¡No te des muerte! No hagas doble mi soledad.*

Antinoos: *Todos estos problemas por falta de sensatez. ¿O no?*

Corifeo: *¡Ay, yerros de estas mentes! Matan y mueren las gentes de mi linaje. ¡Ay, hijo, hijo! ¡Todas las desgracias que sembraron en mi familia y sobre esta tierra! Y ahora yo, ¡culpable! Contra mí, ¡todos los dardos! Sufriré en esta prisión, ¡a pan y agua! (Solloza, sinceramente).*

Antinoos (desconcertado): *Aún tiene poder, ¿prisión? ¿A qué llama prisión? ¿Pan y agua los manjares y los vinos? ¿Las reverencias y ceremonias?*

Corifeo: *¡Sufriré hasta que comprendan!*

Antinoos: *Posee un gran corazón que indulta fácilmente...*

Antígona: *Sus crímenes.*

Corifeo: *Mío fue el trono y el poder. (Vergonzante) Aún lo es...*

Antinoos: *A pesar de su terrible dolor goza ¡perfecta felicidad! ¡Como nosotros!*

Antígona: *(lanza un gemido animal)*

Corifeo: *¡Los perdono! ¡No saben lo que hacen! Pretenden condenarme, a mí, que di mi hijo, mi esposa, al holocausto. Antígona, que atrajiste tantos males sobre mi cabeza y mi casta, ¡te perdono!*

Antinoos (teatral): *¡Bravo!*

(Sale el Corifeo de la carcasa, saluda) (215-16).

In surprising fashion, all the characters begin to unite around the same type of fatality, the same disgrace. All are, as is said, “salpicados”

by it, as they were by the putrid droppings of the birds. And, once again, it is not the same death, but rather something which is found beyond it, which transcends it.

In the cited dialogue, a brief episode between the dramatic and hysterical, the *Leitmotif* of the play is emphasized: Antígona, as being bathed and bathing in the blood of Haemon, touches her face and body, screaming because he comes to life in her. She bitterly laments his death which has doubled her solitude. And she asks herself, again bitterly, why Haemon preferred “la nada y no la pena. La huida y no la obstinación” (216).

Thus, in spite of the pardon she has received, she again says fatalistically: “No. Aún quiero enterrar a Polinices. ‘Siempre’ querré enterrar a Polinices. Aunque nazca mil veces y él muera mil veces” (217). Half mockingly, half seriously, Antinoo tells her: “Entonces, ‘¡siempre’ te castigará Creonte!” (217). And Corifeo adds: “Y morirás mil veces” (217).

In this way, everything goes back to the beginning. At the end, Antígona, after declaring, as in Sophocles, that she was born to love rather than hate, acknowledges that it is the latter which commands. Furiously, she says with Hamlet: “¡El resto es silencio!” (“The rest is silence” [5.2.342]), and dies a prisoner of her own rage.

As we said, the entire play leads toward the same theatrical moment. This occurs not only through technical and structural means, but also and above all, through other elements of a dramatic nature: in *Antígona furiosa* everything is “forever”. Not just “now”, but “always”. Hence, the tragedy of the play transcends the event of death and the sacred duty to bury the dead and is found in the question of the destiny of the victims, the fate of the dead. The author suggests a causal answer in the curse of Oedipus (inherited from Laius). In that sense, references to Hamlet are apparent. However, another question of a more material nature opens before us, and one which we may summarize with the word “uncertainty”:

Hamlet: [...] *there's the rub:*
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil...

(3.1.65-67)

III. In Buenos Aires

The next version we will look at is also Argentinean, but is set neither in the pampas of the nineteenth century nor in an unnamed city; rather, the scenes unfold explicitly in Buenos Aires sometime at the end of the twentieth century. *Antígona S. Linaje de hembras*, by Jorge Huertas, staged in 2001, is an urban and tango-like *Antigone*. Its basic continuity with the works of Sophocles and Marechal is notable: it maintains a clear religious undertone, and the confrontation between divine and human legality is presented in full relief, in contrast, for example, to its presentation in Gambaro's *Antígona Furiosa*, in which the conflict appears in a more secularized manner, certain allusions to the divine laws notwithstanding. At the very outset of the play, a chorus of women laments the loss of the sacred, in a manner very much in line with that found in *Antigone* (and even in *Oedipus the King*: "Now are thy oracles falling into contempt, and / men / Deny Apollo's power. / Worship of the gods is passing away" [905-910]):

*Hay desayunos de trabajo
sobre el altar sagrado de otros tiempos* (21).

The foundation of the justice defended by Antígona has an explicitly transcendent character: "Llevo en la sangre un tango, un sentimiento de justicia que se baila. Dios mío, no soy nadie pero qué importa. Cuando abra yo la boca, vos hablarás por mí" (27).

In Huertas' play, the characters keep their original names and there exists a multitude of details that demonstrate an effort to adhere closely to the original. But in this very endeavor a most important part of the work's originality resides, that of maintaining these external details and placing them in the heart of Buenos Aires produces a very special contrast between the traditional elements and the contemporary context in which the events unfold. The author fully exploits the freedom afforded him by the vanguardism of the last century: he makes the River speak, a *bandoneón* (a large accordion) plays a part, almost as if it were a character itself, and he employs various other devices, such as having the corpse of Polynices abandoned in the *Riachuelo*, that is to say, on the outskirts of the city, and then having Antigone render the funerary honors in the very heart of Buenos Aires. On the other hand, while the preceding *Antigones* are solitary

characters, in Huertas' version women from throughout history may be found. For this reason, it is called *AntígonaS*, with final capitalized "S", to remind us that a collective history is told. This notion is further reinforced by the subtitle *Linaje de hembras (Lineage of Females)*. In fact, with the exception of Creon, the characters are represented by women. The play also incorporates an omnipresent feminine figure in Argentinean history: the Embalmed Pilgrim (*Peregrina Embalsamada*), a clear allusion to Evita Perón, whose preserved body, after a lengthy journey that included time spent in the Milan cemetery, rests today in the Recoleta Cemetery in Buenos Aires. This *Embalsamada* represents the presence of the death that knows no grave, as the corpse of Evita was not conceded a spot of earth in which to repose: she was transformed into an object of veneration and her embalmed body had to suffer the love and hate which she inspired while she lived, with the difference that, once dead she could no longer respond, run away or do anything; like Polynices, she was not allowed to rest in peace. In terms of the vocabulary employed, it is classical and contemporary at the same time, such that Huertas simultaneously achieves a representation and a recreation of the tragedy of Sophocles.

The conflict between the two legal codes, the divine and the human, appears as much in the dialogue between Antigone and Ismene as in her clash with Creon. To her sister, who is docile to the dictates of power, she says: "Yo también soy obediente, pero a leyes eternas que no dictan los hombres" (27). And she reminds her uncle that he is not capable of decreeing eternal laws: "Solo dictás leyes que duran un suspiro en la arena del tiempo. [...] Yo obedezco la ley de Dios, que no es para hoy o para ayer, sino para siempre" (39). Shortly afterwards she asks him defiantly: "¿Podés hacer que los que amás no mueran nunca? No. Entonces no dictás leyes fundamentales" (39).

The differences between the *Antigones* of Huertas and Marechal are due not only to the distinct literary styles of the authors. Huertas endeavors to introduce into his work a certain and deliberate confusion, which often perplexes the reader. Some of the devices employed by the author not only assume that the reader knows the original story of Antigone and perhaps one or more of its other versions, but also that he/she is familiar with the

recent history of the Southern Cone of South America such that the image of the unburied dead takes on even greater significance.

The parallels between literature and life are evident. In the decade of the 70s, there were those who, like Polynices, chose the path of violence and fought against their city. Obviously, a challenge such as this could not go unanswered. In fact, a segment of the civil society begged for an armed response¹⁶. The events which followed are well-known, although the interpretation and assessment of them are anything but agreed upon. The war, here, was unlike those imagined by Sophocles and Marechal in that it was not a case of enemies surrounding the city or ranch from without, hoping to break down its walls and occupy it. It was an urban war, in which the attackers did not wear uniforms nor could they be distinguished from the rest of the citizenry by any external sign. This made the work of the defenders of the established order very difficult, although, in the end, they did win. Their task was exceedingly hard and not only because of the difficulties in identifying the enemy, which resulted in some horrible mistakes as well as abuses. It happened that, in defending the city, they thought that, at the same time, they were preserving the culture which it had built. But, as Sophocles' *Antigone* shows, that culture is characterized by the upholding of certain fundamental convictions, among which is the idea that all human activity, including that of defending the city from armed aggression, is subject to certain limits.

The dilemma which is presented is as follows: Is it licit to transgress the limits established by tradition in defense of that tradition itself? The tradition in question, far from being pacifistic, admits the possibility of a just war. But that which made a war just was not simply that it be defensive in nature and that it be brought to a good conclusion, but rather that the acts of war themselves must be subject to reason. Thus, in *Ajax*,

¹⁶ The most telling example of this in Argentina is seen in the evolution undergone by the famous newspaper *La Opinión*, a left-leaning journal which began by expressing sympathy for the revolutionary groups only to later encourage the military intervention which toppled Estela Martínez de Perón's government, which had shown itself incapable of confronting the subversion. See Fernando Ruiz, *Las palabras son acciones. Historia política y profesional de 'La Opinión' de Jacobo Timerman. 1971-1977* (Buenos Aires 2001) 83-97 & 189 ff.

Sophocles depicts a notable dialogue between Odysseus and Agamemnon, who favored leaving the body of Ajax unburied as punishment for his transgressions. Odysseus, who had been the greatest enemy of the dead man, responds: “Yes! I hated him when it was honourable to hate him” (v.1346); by which he shows that war knows at least that limit, respect for the dead. In forgetting that, the respect due the corpse, you would do no harm to the dead, “for you would be destroying not him, but the laws of the gods” (vv.1343-4).

A similar debate occurred in the 1940s between those who, like Leo Strauss in philosophy and Harry Truman in politics, thought that what was licit in war depended entirely upon the actions of the enemy, such that, if the enemy was a totalitarian power without scruples, then the range of action open to the defenders of order was very broad¹⁷, and those, like Elizabeth Anscombe, who maintained that there were limits which, even for extraordinary reasons, could never licitly be violated¹⁸. Without delving more deeply into philosophical considerations, the customs and protocols of the armed forces in the Southern Cone inherited from the Hispanic and Prussian traditions indicated the manner in which to proceed against unconventional forces and, in addition to prescribing severe penalties for guerilla acts, established very clear procedures regarding the conditions which must be met in order for an execution to take place and, of course, the treatment that must be accorded the dead enemies. We know, however, that in the training received by those responsible for the anti-guerilla struggle at the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s, those strict criteria were replaced, which definitively indicated that there was no criteria other than obtaining the desired results (the history of how this change came about and on what it was based, which was not that different from the French experience in Algiers, and its adoption by US military forces is a topic worthy of further study).

In the wake of the reports by the Sábato and Rettig Commissions, in Argentina and Chile respectively, among other documents emanating from

¹⁷ See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago 1953), 157 ff.; also “On Natural Law”: *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago & London 1983) 140.

¹⁸ G. E. M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy”: *Philosophy* 33 (1958) 1-19.

the Southern Cone, the consequences of what has been called the “Dirty War” are widely known. Very soon it was established that the fate of the individuals involved in the armed struggle (and, incidentally, those of others who had little or nothing to do with it) was uncertain; one of the practices of the antiradical effort was precisely to make them disappear, whether by dropping them into the sea or through whatever other means. In Huertas’ play, the River, witness to many of these events, says:

*El Pentotal [suero de la verdad], el aire, el vuelo, el chapuzón.
Gracias al hombre (43).*

The allusion to the “Ode to Man”, by Sophocles, is well-known, but at that moment our history, which exhibited great parallels with that of Antigone, diverges from hers in that the Argentinean dead suffered a fate unlike that of Polynices. For that reason, Huertas’ Antigone is able to utter an unprecedented reproach to Creon: “Festejás la victoria escondiendo cuerpos. Cajas vacías que esperan los ritos para volver a ser nada” (40). Incidentally, there is also a severe criticism of the witnesses to this tragedy, represented in the play by the Chorus, which sings:

*Yo no vi nada
no pensé nada
no escuché nada
A mí nadie me dijo nada.
No averigüé
ni contesté
ni pregunté (44).*

And when the chorus learns that Antigone will be punished by death, their spontaneous response is: “Por algo será. Por algo será” (45).

The problem is not simply that someone rebels, justly or unjustly, and that their rebellion puts the entire city in danger. That is what the two stories have in common. The issue here is that now there is no decree by Creon prohibiting the burial of enemies for the simple reason that there are no bodies to bury. And since there is no corpse to bury, neither is there an Antigone to do the burying. The tragedy in this situation can be found in the fact that there is room for neither tragedies nor heroics.

Let it be understood that the problem is not the physical reality of what to do with a corpse. From time immemorial, people who die at sea

have been buried at sea and nobody objects because the dead person is, so to speak, "buried". The waters may serve as the grave for the most noble among us. Furthermore, funerary rites vary greatly in that there are some cultures which bury their dead, others which burn them, and even, as Herodotus related, others, such as the Calatians, who eat them (Herodotus, *The Histories*, 3, 38). The issue is that mankind has always distinguished between the treatment that is given to the dead and that given to, for example, rubbish. Thus, when a dead sailor is lowered into the sea, it is not done in a cavalier fashion, but rather in a manner which expresses our conviction that we are burying a person. For this reason, it is done publicly and according to certain norms. In our history, on the other hand, a procedure was deliberately chosen which erased the distinction so clearly acknowledged in several *Antigones*, including that of Anouilh, in which the dead bodies of the two brothers are so mangled after having been ridden over by Argos' cavalry that it is impossible for Creon to distinguish Eteocles from Polynices. And so he arbitrarily chooses to honor as the first that body which was in the better state and to make the other the object of his wrath.

But it still may be said that a body is being left in an inappropriate place and that Antigone does well to try and bury it. On the other hand, the extra-literary circumstances of recent decades disorient us so, such that our disorientation inevitably influences the manner in which the story of Antigone is told in our countries. In the face of all this horror, nothing remains but to question, along with the Argentinean Antigone who asks Creon: "¿Quién te sopló al oído esta locura? ¿Quién te absuelve con bendiciones? Te vendieron la guía del terror como si fuera el mapa del cielo" (40).

And so the background of Huertas' version is inseparable from the history of Argentina and its neighboring countries, despite the fact that the author avoids the simplistic course of explicitly placing Antigone in the sphere of Argentinean politics of the last forty years. His characters are those of Sophocles, but in Buenos Aires, and a good portion of the story is not told because we already know it. One of the characteristics of this story is that it sounds very different depending upon who tells it, which makes it

necessary to have recourse to an impartial and omniscient observer, which can only be divine:

Antígona. — *Lo que para unos es trapo, para otros bandera. Las cosas de Dios no están atadas al vencedor. ¿O los derrotados, los humillados no tienen leyes divinas? Los vencedores de ayer son los derrotados de hoy. Y los vencedores de hoy son los derrotados de mañana: todo cambia. La tierra y el cielo pasan, pero la palabra de Dios no pasa* (45).

And so, not only do we have different versions of our history, but we play and will play different roles in it, which in fact is a call to set aside any arrogance. Towards the end of the tragedy, a Tiresias figure appears, who is Jorge Luis Borges, and he warns that the city is contaminated by the injustice of Creon and that this stain has even made the Río de la Plata a nauseating sewer. The city to which Creon has dedicated his life, the “sueño de plata” (49) which has inspired its citizens to resist invasions and adversities, is no longer the same: “Tiresias. — “*Buenos Aires es eterna como el agua o el aire, pero hoy está manchada*” (54). Confronting Creon, unable to mince words, the prophetic figure makes him see that: “*La memoria, señor, también es el olvido*” (55). We cannot deny our history nor the person we have been, with all its conflicts, but time goes by and we are more than just the sum of our past actions. Along with Tiresias we can say: “*Soy el mismo y el otro*” (55). *AntígonaS* by Huertas opens the way to reconciliation. In so doing, he follows Marechal’s lead.

IV. Brussels and something more

Antígona, (*historia de objetos perdidos*), is a short play written by the Chilean actress and dramatist Daniela Cápona Pérez. It consists of just two characters, He and She, and on stage it should last no more than thirty minutes. Nevertheless, it is a work rich in hermeneutical possibilities, suggesting many (possible) readings. Here the textual takes priority over the staging, which confirms the prior assertion.

The events take place in three scenes which represent three different cities: an unnamed first, the second is simply referred to in parentheses as “La Ciudad” and a third which is Brussels. However, from the perspective of unity of action, this structure based in cities is important (apart from the evocations and echoes of Corinth, Thebes, and Colonus respectively in

Sophoclean tragedy): each scene is one present but is transformed into past in that which follows. That is to say, the events advance, but it is always today. As we will see, near the conclusion She will ask herself: “Recuerdo el odio, las ganas de morir y de matar. ¿Cómo es posible que pase el tiempo por encima de algo así? ¿Cómo es posible que el mundo no se detenga y se rompa para siempre?” (183).

This version opens with a speech by He, with no stage directions whatsoever¹⁹, which summarizes the plot of the tragedy. This speech, taken in light of the play as a whole, will serve as a preface or intertextual introduction, rendering the interpretation which is to come in a much more rich and complex way. She then comes on stage interrupting He with the following words:

Ella. – *Existen mil maneras de estar muerta,
partida en dos por las veredas.
De mil maneras me ando muriendo
sin pensar siquiera
en lo mucho que te pierdo.
Cierro los ojos del dolor
que me rompe la boca y el adentro
y así rota de los ojos, muerta y callada,
pueden comenzar uno a uno,
todos los minutos del mundo* (182).

Although He will continue speaking, quickly we will have a change and he will begin to speak in the first person: “... me lo había dicho, era su destino morir así. Llegué a odiarla por eso. A mí se me moría todo el mundo, los amigos, mi padre, la novia...” (182). We understand, then, that He is Haemon and She Antigone. He tells us that one day, having thought he had lost her, She came to him in bad shape and said: “Ya no quiero morirme, no tengo porqué morirme yo, que se muera otra, aunque sea mi destino, no tengo ganas de morir hoy. Vámonos” (182). The scene closes

¹⁹ Rómulo E. Pianacci refers to a setting featuring the projection of old family photos, “ideally they should be of the actors’ family members”, a stage direction that is not mentioned in the version which we cite. Certainly, and given what is said, this is a very significant detail. See Rómulo E. Pianacci, *Antígona: Una tragedia Latinoamericana* (Irvine 2008) 113.

with He and She saying in unison: “Entonces me fui con ella, me llevó como si yo fuese una novia raptada” (182).

There are suggestive bits of information in this scene which allow us to go on with a sense of the plot. In the first part of his relation, He says that Antigone does not accept Creon’s orders so “es su deber enterrar a su hermano, a sus *dos hermanos* dignamente” (182; our emphasis). And, later, He emphasizes that Antigone accepts in principle her sentence of death — we’ve already noted that later she will have a change of heart—,

porque es inevitable escapar a la tragedia si te llamas Antígona, si eres hija de un hombre que se llamó Edipo, finalmente se debe ceder, aceptar, ser un héroe, frente a eso no es posible rebelarse (182).

Who is Antigone here? What does she represent? Perhaps the following scene, parenthetically referred to as “La ciudad”, might shed some light. It opens with a speech by She, in which she complains of having bad dreams. In them, her fingernails fall out without her knowing why:

*Aquí nadie.
Aquí nunca.
Aquí nada* (182).

She suspects that “... hay cosas terribles entre la ropa tendida, cinturones, cuellos, zapatos, niñas lanzándose desde los balcones en silencio” (182). In her grief, the only thing that seems to relieve her pain is the smell of roasted chestnuts. The memory of men roasting chestnuts on each corner of the first city...

Then He speaks and complains that he always knew that there was something strange about She, something that he would never understand. At first he thought to place the blame on her days in prison, thinking that therein lay the reasons for the change. As nobody came looking for him because She had protected him by not divulging his name, the reasons for her transformation are most likely related to the price she had to pay for her silence. Similarly, not only did He not have the right to ask, nor “debía cuestionar lo extraña que se fue poniendo después de la huida. Como intocable, como animal peligroso” (182). Movingly, He assures She that he would have preferred her sad so that he could try to make her happy.

The dialogue which follows between the two protagonists, clarifies for us the true cause of the change in She (hints of torture and other humiliations appear between the lines in this exchange):

(Él se acerca a Ella con una frazada o un chaleco.)

Ella. – *No gracias.*

Él. – *Póntelo.*

Ella. – *No tengo frío. ¿Para qué te preocupas tanto?*

Él. – (Pausa.) *Si no fuera por ti yo no estaría vivo, ¿cierto?*

Ella. – *¿Qué?*

Él. – *En la cárcel, no dijiste nunca mi nombre...*

Ella. – *No. No lo dije.*

Él. – *... ¿qué te hicieron?*

Ella. – *Nada.*

Él. – *Por favor, dime. Necesito saber.*

Ella. – *¿Para qué?*

Él. – *¿Aguantaste por mí? ¿Por no nombrarme?*

Ella. – *No. Nadie te buscaba a ti.*

Él. – *Dime qué te hicieron.*

Ella. – *No me hicieron nada.*

Él. – *¿Te pegaron?*

Ella. – (Pausa.) *Un poquito. (Comienza a reírse cada vez más intensamente, él comienza a reír también) (182).*

The speech suggests something beyond violence. Her body was not only wounded but “olvidado y abierto”. It will be impossible to relegate to some obscure corner of her memory the “total abandono de tus piernas desnudas, sobre una arena áspera y cualquiera” (182). The image is reinforced later, when She comes on stage rummaging through clothes. Shivering with cold, she wraps herself up. What’s more, the cold hurts her and is driving her crazy, so mucho so that:

Yo, por muerta o por ajena, jamás seré madre de nadie... Mírame, ¿qué me pasó que me quedé así?, demasiado angosta, morena y helada. Cualquiera niño se moriría de frío en mí dentro, se pondría azul... todos nos vamos a poner azules (182).

The third scene takes place in Brussels and again it is set in a present where we appreciate the consequences of the past. She says that at one time the city seemed to her the perfect mix of strangeness and solitude. But, “me fui porque no quería ver morir a nadie más, y porque yo sabía que se iban a seguir muriendo” (183). What’s more, and in keeping with our suggestion above, Antigone will say:

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De hoy en adelante han dejado de gustarme los hombres morenos. No quiero más amar a un hombre moreno en esta ciudad de hombres rubios. De hoy en adelante quisiera un hombre rubio en mi cama, que me calme esta negrura de hembra desaparecida (183).

It is a scene as short as the first, but more intense and obviously conclusive. The circle closes with the perennial pain of Antigone, which haunts her relentlessly. But a question, too, haunts her: “¿Cómo es posible que el mundo no se detenga y se rompa para siempre” in the face of so much hate and death, “ganas de morir y de matar”? (183). He and She will repeat the words from the prior scene, about the wounds that flourish and the total abandonment of “tus piernas desnudas, sobre una arena áspera y cualquiera” (183). The pain and memory not only persist, but do so in a deadly fashion, negating life or at least its possibilities. But at the time, it is temporary; or, at least, not as terrible as it once was. That is to say, despite all the agony and desolation, it could have been worse: in the end, both Haemon and Antigone are still alive. It is no accident that the references to the possible states of widowhood are so repetitive and constant. In this sense, Rómulo E. Pianacci has written that

*la separación [final] de la pareja se presenta como inevitable. Son demasiados dolores acallados y la presencia del otro no hace más que reactualizarlos constantemente. Esta nueva separación no hace más que reiniciar un proceso circular, con precios que se seguirán pagando inexorablemente.*²⁰

Antígona, (historia de objetos perdidos) is a moving image of the pain experienced through contemporary political persecution, exile, plundering and death, of fear in the face of all these evils, of the dissolution of identities in a sea of uncertainty. In sum, it is a fear that takes the form of Antigone in order to endure.

V. In Thebes

The last of our *Antigones* is still unpublished. It is the work of the Chilean poet Juan Carlos Villavicencio and is set directly in Thebes. It is the most faithful to Sophocles' plot, and there are no apparent attempts to root it in the reality of Latin America. It is based upon a translation done by the

²⁰ Rómulo E. Pianacci, *Antígona: Una tragedia latinoamericana* (Irvine 2008), 115.

Chilean philosopher Genaro Godoy, from which it even borrows literal passages. Furthermore, owing to the vocation of the author, it is a version in which the writing is as important as the plot (especially in the stanzas in which the Chorus intervenes and certain notable paradoxes).

Where does its originality lie? *Antígona en el espejo* is a sort of final Antigone, which attempts to bring together the prior versions and, as far as possible, melt them into a single text, where “text” is a key word here. Thus, it begins with a passage from Anouilh’s *Antigone* and continues drawing in, time and again, texts from the original — taken from the translation mentioned above — at times as written and at other times adding small but significant additions. That is to say, the author endeavors to improve a work that has been disintegrated by the passage of time. The mirror in which Antigone is reflected is broken, and the author constructs his plot helped by the pieces which remain. He also alludes to an unknown poet and to Sophocles himself, who intervenes in the plot, as we will discuss later. On the other hand, in various passages adopts the orthography of Andrés Bello, current in nineteenth century Latin America and now fallen into disuse, which reinforces the indeterminate character of the time in which the events unfold.

There are some important changes with respect to the Sophoclean *Antigone*. The conflict between the two laws appears, but with less force than in the other versions examined. Moreover, the celebrated “Ode to Man” is transmuted, because now we are not dealing with a being which is “Full of resource against all that comes to him” (360), whose power extends throughout the earth, but rather with an isolated, rootless individual:

*Bajo los vientos de la noche sólo
una criatura camina abandonada
cargando la miseria de su nombre.
Navega los siete mares
lejos del Sur i la nostalgia
de las olas que no permiten olvidar;
busca en la tierra la salida
para esconder los cansancios,
terrible esclavo de su propia ley.*

(Primer Canto Alrededor del Ara, Estrofa 1)

As is seen, little remains of the proud enlightened man proclaimed by the Sophists in the Periclean Age. He still has, of course, the capacity to impose his will upon nature, but is unable to escape his own fate:

*Atrapando el aire, encerrando bestias.
Trampas i mentiras como garras
tiene el hombre en su condena
ante el espejo de las noches i los días.*

(Primer Canto Alrededor del Ara, Antiestrofa 1)

Just as Sophocles warns the Sophists that no matter how powerful man is, he will never be able to escape the encounter with Hades, the god of death. Here too we sense his unavoidable presence, and so the man

*Ha evitado el frío del invierno
que renace ahora en las miradas
por los vientos i la lluvia que ha perdido.
La muerte persiste en lamentar
el hombre que su fuego ha enterrado
bajo el pie, su cabeza i el polvo.*

(Primer Canto Alrededor del Ara, Estrofa 2)

Here man is powerful but not wise. At the beginning of Act 5 an author's note indicates: "No es la historia la que rige, sino el miedo". Hence, man lives before a deceitful mirror, and, far from constituting an ultimate source of morality, walks fearfully between good and evil, prisoner to the doubts regarding his own future:

*La sabiduría no alcanza allá en alturas,
pero el fuego es arte en su mirada.
Entre el Bien i el Mal temeroso camina,
acatando o diciendo no a las leyes:
aún cuando jure frente a altares
persiste equivocado ante su espejo.
No entrará al Reino i las Esferas
el muerto respirando tal miseria.*

(Primer Canto Alrededor del Ara, Antiestrofa 2)

This characterization of man inevitably has repercussions upon the figure of Antigone herself. As she says to Ismene, "sólo sirvo a carne muerta y a los que nos ven repetirnos" (Act 3). She does her duty and is conscious of having followed the laws of the gods, but she does so with less decisiveness and is slow to realize that it has been she who tried to bury her

brother. Her own fate is completely out of her control, such that when Haemon finds her in the cave where she is imprisoned and they share a moment of happiness, a shadow mysteriously appears and slits her throat.

On the other hand, and before repenting, Creon has arranged everything to catch her *in fraganti*. However, it is not the tyrant's freedom that sets in motion the machinery of death, but rather a foreordained destiny. In fact, the power of Creon is the same destiny, so much so that he even says to Haemon: "¿No entiendes que yerro porque es necesario mantener mis palabras?" (Act 4).

All is fatal in this second Chilean *Antigone*. Men are characterized as "caminantes muertos de esta tierra" (Tercer Canto Alrededor del Ara). Everything here is mortal, as our heroine laments at the end of Act 5:

Los llamados antes amigos, hoy me quitan la mirada. Si a esto aún llaman vida, que se acabe pronto para alcanzar «las cóncavas mansiones de los muertos. ¿Cuál es la ley divina que» permite que esto me suceda? ¿Dónde el Bien o la razón de mi existir? (Antígona se quiebra) Mis ojos se nublan ante el horror que se respira. ¿Cómo pueden mantener esta miseria? Si muerta fuera por los dioses, si hubiera errado... No hay salida ni ventana para el amor que estoy cargando.

For his part, Tiresias, the blind soothsayer, confesses that "nunca ha dejado de aterrarme el ruido de esas muertes" (Act 6). Creon's violence, which has transgressed the limits assigned to man, will be punished, but this punishment leaves no room for starting over, it is merely the reestablishment of a fatal order. So says Tiresias:

Has obrado con violencia inusitada que tendrá castigo, Creonte... Ni es dado a los dioses allá arriba, ni a las humildes manos de los hombres el retener a uno que ya no forma parte de la tierra. Comienzan del Hades a levantarse las Furias contra ti, cargando su ira y el mal que reflejan como espejo de tu actuar (Act 6).

In fact, pressured by Coryphaeus to no longer delay Antigone's rescue and to permit the definitive interment of Polynices, Creon will say: "Sabes que debo ceder ante lo escrito" (Act 6). In a new game of mirrors, Villavicencio assimilates the fatal destiny which looms over the characters to the text of the play itself; and, through this, with Sophocles' *Antigone*. In this way, the characters of *Antígona en el espejo* are puppets in the hands of the author; an idea which works in at least two senses. In the first, Sophocles (author) is a metaphor for the inexorable fate which looms over

the characters (creatures). In the second, *Antígona en el espejo* is a room which suffocatingly closes in upon itself, as a metaphor of a vision of man and the world equally closed and suffocating. One must not forget, on the other hand, the fatal destiny already suffered by Antigone in Sophocles' original, which naturally weighs upon this version and causes it to take the form of tragedy. That is to say, not only the characters, but the author himself is forced to behave as a puppet.

Near the end (Act 7), the Messenger tells Eurydice how he accompanied Creon to bury Polynices. The necessary rites having been accomplished, they run to the cave where Antigone is held to forestall that which they fear will take place. When they arrive, they hear the laughter of Haemon and Antigone. Creon cries believing that he has prevented that which was ordained. But, as we anticipated,

cuando presta Antígona indicaba al Rey y comenzaba a hablar, algo, algo como una sombra salió corriendo por un costado rauda, y al pasar frente a la joven levantó el brazo y continuó, mientras del cuello abierto de Antígona la sangre la enmudecía y le quitaba el respiro y la alejaba de este mundo. Ahí quedó tomándose el cuello, mientras nadie reaccionaba ni decía nada. Hemón la abrazó cuando pudo y ella lo miró mientras comenzaba a derrumbarse y abandonaba su mirada hacia lo alto de la cueva (Act 7).

Something mysterious and uncontrollable, a furtive hand, bursts into the scene –and into the play – in order to determine the course of events. It is a mysterious *deus ex machina* that ruins everything.

After the preceeding, the Messenger tells Eurydice that Haemon, “bruscamente y fuera de sí se abalanzó sobre Creonte, yo creo que para abrazar su pena”. However, one of the guards that accompanies the King misinterprets the gesture and spears him, mortally wounding him. Then, “la sangre de los dos cuerpos se abrazó en el polvo, un cadáver junto al otro, tristes huellas de un amor y la desgracia del destino” (Act 7). Again, fate will have its own.

Eurydice will silently leave the stage and the Messenger's speech will end. This last will affirm that there is nothing to add, “pues poco queda a mi entender de estas nuevas formas que reflejan lo por tanto repetido” (Act 7).

Next the final part of the play will come, a lengthy succession of stanzas and antistanzas called “Lamento”, in which Coryphaeus, Creon, and the Messenger will take part. It is then that we will have, out of the mouth of the King himself, the key to so much adversity:

*De una mente enferma más alta
debe haber sido forjado este sufrir,
infierno abismante i doble
como se me acercó a gritar Tiresias.*

(Act 7, Lamento)

Someone, or something, cruelly controls the characters in the text; in one of the two senses to which we referred. And it is this same “mente enferma” that is ultimately responsible for the death of Eurydice, which we learn of in this section (“su corazón atravesó con el metal / de una daga furiosa regalada” by Creon). The Messenger tells the King that his wife, before dying, points to him as the cause of all this “infecta condena”.

*Ay de mí,
me estremece el hastío i su tortura.
¿Por qué en estas letras no hay redentor
que termine con una espada mi tormento?*

(Act 7, Lamento)

As it can be seen, it is argued that the fatality of destiny is synonymous with the “mente enferma”, which is the author of the text or the suffocating obstinacy of the play upon itself. Creon shouts to the four winds that he has been the cause of all the deaths, and he implores his servants “¡Sáquenme de este horror / para morir i que nada de esto vuelva a ser!” (Act 7, Lamento).

However, the King well knows that death is not possible for him so his only end in existence is to return, return to being himself in the play’s mirror, again and again, according to the judgment of the “mente enferma”. According to Coryphaeus, moreover, mortal beings cannot avoid the fear that corrupts their fates (Act 7, Lamento, Antiestrofa 2). For that reason, the Chilean *Antigone* of Villavicencio concludes by playing with time. He puts Pilate’s words on the lips of Creon and expresses what seems to be

the conclusion of a life that is a mere plaything in the hands of Fate (or the play or the author):

*Los dados están tirados hace tanto
i el círculo en su fin
reconoce otra vez el lamento de su inicio.
Lo escrito,
escrito está.*

(Act 7, Lamento)

Everything ends on a terse note: “Creonte baja la cabeza obediente. El Corifeo permanece mudo, mientras se retira dejando solo al rey. Música de cierre. Las sombras del tiempo entran a escena. Todos salen a saludar vestidos de sombras del tiempo o si no, no deben salir” (Act 7, Lamento). This last Chilean *Antigone* is the most pagan and pessimistic of all.

VI. Echoes of Antigone

The *Antigones* which we have discussed share certain traits but also exhibit some particularly significant differences, both of which may be characterized in terms of five fundamental ideas found in the original Sophoclean *Antigone*, the presence or absence of which marks the changes which this story undergoes when recreated in the extreme south of the American continent: place, time, transcendence, conflict of legal codes and the psychological state of Antigone.

Like that of Sophocles, the *Antigones* which we have studied are all urban, with the exception of Marechal's which is indissolubly linked to the land, more specifically to the Argentinean Pampa; in that tale the land is one more character, always present and capable of explaining Don Facundo's actions in a certain way which even Antigone comes to understand. Only that of Huertas presents such a marked geographical reference. His is an Argentinean *Antigone*, which could neither have been written nor have taken place anywhere but in Buenos Aires, because it needs the nauseating banks of the Riachuelo as a company for Polynices and the old voice of the Río de la Plata to tell what it has seen and heard during these years.

In terms of time, the authors have chosen to locate it nowadays, at the very least within the republican lives of Latin American nations if we want to include Marechal's; only Villavicencio keeps it, at least in appearance,

in ancient Thebes even if it is full of contemporary allusions. In a certain sense, his is an *Antigone* that is in various places at the same time.

The presence of the divine is quite varied. There are two versions, those of Marechal and Huertas, in which the divine and religion are constantly present. The latter includes a painful confirmation of the effect of a secularized world. In Gambaro, too, there are religious echoes, but in the Chilean *Antigones* there are no gods whose will is being followed or disregarded by the characters. The consequence of this break with transcendence is felt in that the central axis of the classical *Antigones*, the conflict between the two laws, is lost. The most notorious case is that of Cápona: hers is, literally, an *Antigone* with neither God, nor law, but also in Villavicencio's a good part of the individual conflict is missing: the characters are not free actors who must make heartwrenching decisions, but rather mere chess pieces of a fate which moves them from without.

In terms of psychological identities, Marechal's version is the most classic. On the other hand, the plays which were written during the transition from one millennium to another are much less defined. The protagonist of Huertas' is at the same time Antigone and all the women of history. The River is made to talk as is Evita Perón, not the Evita who would meet her shirtless ones in the Plaza de Mayo, but rather the embalmed one, the one carried from one place to the next as an object of religious devotion or abjection. She is transformed into an Embalmed Pilgrim. In Gambaro's, this dissolution of identities is taken to the extreme, to the point that diverse characters speak through the same carcass. And finally, for Cápona, nearly all have disappeared. Creon is not there, nor Ismene, nor Tiresias, nor Eurydice, nor the guards, nor the chorus, nor the gods; only He and She remain, stripped of everything, even of their names. Although it is called "historia de objetos perdidos", in this version the characters themselves are lost, along with the mythological background, and everything that might prevent He and She from being anything other than uncertainty and desolation.

Sophocles' *Antigone* was a polemic, in which the intellectual adversary was the moral relativism and religious indifferentism of the Sophists. The Latin American *Antigones* which we have analyzed, at least



the most recent, are not in the same line. They involve themselves in a strong moral protest, but not in defense of a traditional divine order; theirs is a protest, rather, against the dissolution of the human as the result of the capriciousness of power. They acknowledge the disorientation in which men and women are submerged when there is no compass to guide them nor limits to restrict the actions of the powerful. In a certain sense, their uneasiness is similar to that felt by the soothsayer Tiresias when he saw that all of nature was unbalanced as a result of a disorder, a stain, which, ultimately, could be traced back to man's *hubris*.

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Resumo: Este trabalho faz uma análise de cinco versões latino-americanas de "Antígona" que não são frequentemente consideradas. As peças mostram diferenças significativas com o original, a maior parte delas relacionadas com acontecimentos dolorosos da história recente do continente. Porém as peças têm, em comum com o original de Sófocles, as características antropológicas permanentes que fizeram Antígona um clássico, que podemos expressar em cinco ideias fundamentais: lugar, tempo, transcendência, conflito de códigos legais e o estado psicológico de Antígona.

Palavras-chave: Antígona; Sófocles; América latina; desaparecimento forçado; Leopoldo Marechal; Griselda Gambaro; Jorge Huertas; Daniela Cápona; Juan Carlos Villavicencio.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza cinco versiones latinoamericanas de Antígona, que no son frecuentemente consideradas. Las obras exhiben diferencias significativas con respecto al original, la mayoría de ellas relativas a dolorosos eventos acaecidos en la historia reciente del continente. Sin embargo, las obras tienen en común con el original de Sófocles las características antropológicas que han hecho de Antígona un clásico, y que pueden expresarse en cinco ideas fundamentales: lugar, tiempo, trascendencia, conflicto de legalidades y estado psicológico de Antígona.

Palabras clave: Antígona; Sófocles; América latina; desaparición forzada; Leopoldo Marechal; Griselda Gambaro; Jorge Huertas; Daniela Cápona; Juan Carlos Villavicencio.

Résumé: Cet article analyse cinq versions latino-américaines d'Antigone, qui ne sont pas fréquemment prises en considération. Les pièces possèdent des différences significatives avec la version originale, la plupart d'entre elles se trouvant liée aux événements douloureux de l'histoire récente du continent. Ces œuvres ont, néanmoins, des points communs avec le texte de Sophocle, telles que les caractéristiques anthropologiques permanentes qui ont fait qu'*Antigone* soit devenue un classique, celles-ci pouvant être résumées en cinq idées fondamentales: le lieu, le temps, la transcendance, le conflit des codes légaux et l'état psychologique d'Antigone.

Mots-clé: Antigone; Sophocle; Amérique latine; Disparition forcée; Leopoldo Marechal; Griselda Gambaro; Jorge Huertas; Daniela Cápona; Juan Carlos Villavicencio.