

7. El primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano de Nueva York acepta la organización denominada "Confederación de Teatro de Nuestra América," creada en México en 1974 durante el 5º Festival de Teatro Chicano y Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano y se compromete a llevar adelante esta organización y las tareas que la misma plantea.
8. El primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano de Nueva York ha organizado el Comité Coordinador de Festivales Internacionales de la Confederación de Teatro de Nuestra América, organismo encargado de coordinar los Festivales en los cuales participan las organizaciones y grupos afiliados a nuestra organización.
9. Tanto la Confederación de Teatro de Nuestra América como el Comité Coordinador de Festivales Internacionales estarán encargados de desarrollar inmediatamente la publicación y distribución de materiales teatrales y concretamente decidimos la creación de un órgano de la Confederación que se compromete a realizar el Comité Coordinador del primer Festival de Nueva York.
10. El primer Festival de Teatro Popular Latinoamericano de Nueva York eleva su más enérgica protesta por la represión que ejercen las oligarquías nacionales, sometidas al imperialismo, contra los pueblos y contra el derecho de libre expresión, especialmente en los países del Cono Sur del continente. El Festival invita, también, a los grupos a intensificar la lucha contra el fascismo cuya amenaza crece día a día en América Latina.

Luis Rafael Sánchez's *The Passion of Antígona Pérez*: Puerto Rican Drama in North American Performance¹

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In *The Passion of Antígona Pérez* by Puerto Rican playwright Luis Rafael Sánchez, a contemporary Antigone addresses her "Homeland, America," exhorting: "America, don't yield; America, don't wait; America, don't lose; America, don't die; America, awake; America, be calm; America, watch out." (Act II, sc. 2)² When the play was performed at Michigan State University as part of the Department of Theatre's 1975 Summer Circle Free Festival,³ the plea of the protagonist, Antígona Pérez, received uneven responses from confused audience members. Was Antígona sending a message to the United States (the audience's America) to intervene in her Latin American homeland? Was she boldly rejecting the assumed right of the United States to characterize itself as America? Or, was she warning U.S. citizens that what was happening in the fictional country of Molina was possible in their own nation?

Held captive in the palace of Generalísimo Creón Molina, Antígona Pérez is a political prisoner awaiting death. She stole and buried the bodies of two friends who attempted to assassinate Creón and accepts her sentence by refusing to disclose their location. But the conflict involves more than Antígona's defiance of Creón, for both characters symbolize contrasting elements of Latin American political life. Antígona expresses the desire for self-determination and freedom

from economic and political exploitation, while Creón represents the domination of military dictatorship and foreign influence. Antígona's plea to her "Homeland, America" reflects political turbulence, and the exclamations which startled audiences in East Lansing, Michigan are interpreted in a different way in Latin America.

The notion that Antígona might be calling for U.S. intervention is textually erroneous. Lines delivered throughout the play by a chorus of "yellow press" reporters establish that the United States already supports the military regime which Antígona opposes: the U.S. ambassador "defends the military governments of Latin America by declaring that they are totally distinct from those of the days of Trujillo, Batista, and Porfirio Díaz"; the Secretary of State "declared that the United States will continue to intervene unilaterally whenever necessary to defend the Western Hemisphere from Communism." (Act I, sc. 1) Antígona reveals that it is actually ruler Creón Molina who seeks intervention: "A perfect set-up for the landing of twenty thousand marines." (Act I, sc. 3) Enormous political posters described by the playwright as part of the scenic background—"YANKIS GO HOME, EL CANAL ES DE PANAMA, MINAS DE BOLIVIA PARA LOS BOLIVIANOS" (Act II, sc. 2)—further establish the play's perspective on the role of the United States in Latin America. Therefore, the confusion of audience members seemed to derive not from the play itself, but from their unfamiliarity with events shaping the modern political history of Latin America and their tendency—strongly reinforced in nearly every aspect of our society—to think of America exclusively as the United States.

Although Antígona's "America" does not directly include the United States, the play assumes additional thematic qualities when performed for North American audiences. What we in the United States egotistically consider America is redefined, and Antígona Pérez calls to the people of all Western Hemisphere nations—all American countries—to examine themselves in terms of the "passion" being performed. Her warning also implies that our culture can no longer afford to ignore or suppress the suggestion of important social, political, and artistic developments in other Western Hemisphere countries. Thus, the play provides a Latin American view of the United States; but beyond that, its representation of the small and isolated country of Molina illuminates political process in the United States as well. Luis Rafael Sánchez juxtaposes differing concepts of the nature of human existence: one is based on order and political expediency, whereas the other addresses human dignity, freedom, and self-determination. The conflict remains one of the most pressing concerns of all modern societies.

Luis Rafael Sánchez (b. 1936) is the most promising young writer contributing to the renaissance in literature and drama which has taken place in Puerto Rico during the past two decades. Like older and more celebrated authors such as René Marqués and Francisco Arriví, he has explored the cultural impact of Puerto Rico's relation to the United States (Puerto Rico is a commonwealth associated with the United States).⁶ His focus, however, is distinct, for his plays illustrate not only the imposing image of U.S. political domination, but Puerto Rico's equally strong cultural ties with Spanish-speaking America as well.

In *The Passion of Antígona Pérez*, Luis Rafael Sánchez modifies the *Antígone*

of Sophocles by bringing the conflict between Creon and Antigone into the perspective of modern political history. The result is a dialectical drama in which the classical struggle between individual rights and the laws of the state is re-enacted. As the play begins, the imprisoned Antígona states the hypothesis: "I'm twenty-five years old and I'm going to die tomorrow." The subsequent action proves that statement, revealing the circumstances which make her death necessary. The plot structure is nearly scientific. The emphasis is placed on the reasoned explanation of political actions rather than on the events themselves; on the explication of theme rather than on the dramatic excitement of the action. The change from action to theme, from suspense to analysis, does not, however, diminish the appeal. The apparent didacticism is neither dull nor propagandistic, for the play addresses the audience as a complete experience, piecing together ignored fragments which illuminate the familiar story in a new and meaningful way.

In Luis Rafael Sánchez's version, Antígona is the daughter of Creón's half-brother, Colonel Pérez y Santisteban, who was executed for insurrection, and her mother, now nearly destitute, is the first prison visitor who attempts to persuade her to confess. Ismene becomes Irene, a friend who housed Antígona after she was forced by Creón to leave her mother's home. Haemon is effectively translated in the unseen character Fernando Curet, a young officer in Creón's army. Antígona loves Fernando and to expedite her confession he is promoted by Creón to supervise her imprisonment.

Unlike Sophocles' heroine, Antígona's crime includes placing a bomb in a library to distract attention as well as stealing and burying the bodies of two would-be assassins, Héctor and Mario Tavárez. The Tavárez brothers were Antígona's comrades-in-arms and attempted an almost-certain-to-fail assassination of Generalísimo Creón Molina, self-styled dictator, in hopes of precipitating a crisis which would arouse international attention. Sentenced to death for her crime, Antígona can presumably escape by confessing to Creón where the bodies are buried.

The attempt to persuade Antígona to confess is the unifying action of the play. The burial, capture, and sentencing are secondary and have already taken place as the action begins. Her real crime is the embarrassment of Creón. The bodies were publicly displayed as a gruesome warning to other subversives. Antígona's refusal to capitulate poses the same threat to Creón as the abortive assassination: the Generalísimo's authority cannot be challenged without undermining his absolute rule.

Antígona's conflict with Creón is personal as well as ideological. Creón is powerful, shrewd, awesome, and nearly magnificent in his political manipulations. Yet, he is insecure and haunted by the erratic history of Latin American rulers. He fears being labeled a dictator, sponsors an opposition party, and supports general elections. The character is complex, for he operates from principles and well-developed senses of right and wrong, law and justice. He is a staunch Roman Catholic, intensely anti-communist, and truly believes his regime protects the citizens of Molina. His wife, Pilar Varga, further complicates his character. Her charm, ambition, and lust for power are additional forces influencing Creón. Both characters are composites drawn from attributes of a variety of Latin

American rulers, but they transcend classification as stereotypes. The principles they uphold are often convincing, their methods authenticated, and their personal appeal undeniable.

Other characters reflect the power and magnetism of Creón. The Monsignor Bernardo Escudero represents the complicity of church and state. He visits the imprisoned Antígona and uses his spiritual influence in the attempt to persuade her to confess and be saved. Two choruses are used throughout to further amplify the political ambiance. The Reporters demonstrate the functioning of the "yellow press" in supporting Creón's regime, whereas the Crowd reflects a psychology of fear and repression, supporting and resisting Creón, encouraging and renouncing Antígona.

In relating her "passion," Antígona's focus is the audience. She narrates and interprets the details of her crime, and her role as witness-commentator-participant provides the spectator with a multiple perspective on her relations to other characters. Commenting on Molina, Creón, Pilar, the Monsignor, and her own actions and imprisonment, Antígona's objectivity, cynicism, and anguish build a rapport with the audience. The action itself serves to verify her narration. It is here that Luis Rafael Sánchez's indebtedness to Bertolt Brecht is most evident: the plot progression is linear; the scenes are short and self-contained; and each scene provides new insight into the reasons for Antígona's execution. Furthermore, each character supplies the actor with the opportunity for commentary as well as realistic portrayal.

The *mise en scène* described by the playwright is versatile and mobile. Antígona's cell is also the palace bedchamber, a reception hall, and the streets of Molina. Huge murals resembling political posters and billboard advertisements serve as the constantly changing backdrop for the action. The documentary environment established by the playwright is further enhanced by his emphasis on the function of lighting in creating the theatrical atmosphere and complementing the multi-level dramatic form.

At Michigan State University, *The Passion of Antígona Pérez* was performed outdoors on a barren platform stage surrounded by a semicircle of stadium bleachers seating approximately 450. Although the open-air theatre limited the use of lighting, the theatricality described by the playwright was effectively conveyed through the emphasis of the fragmented action by blocking group tableaux and creating visual diversity with ritualized properties and striking contrasts in costumes. The two choruses became particularly significant in conveying the variegated spatial texture of the production. The Crowd was composed of men and women dressed in black. By donning military hats or wearing white gloves and aprons the Crowd also became the palace guard, reception guests, and servants as well as the popular response to Creón and Antígona. Carrying piked torches and death masks, the Crowd reflected religious tradition and menacing military presence. The Reporters functioned in a similar manner. The constant flashing of their over-sized, grotesque cameras, their mechanistic shouting of sensationalized headlines, their servile interviews with Creón and Monsignor Escudero, and their mingling with the audience contributed to the visual composition and flexibility of the staged action.

Overall, the production brought the milieu of Latin American politics to life,

and unlike the other 1975 Summer Circle Free Festival productions—*The Taming of the Shrew*, *A View From the Bridge*, and *The Rivals*—*The Passion of Antígona Pérez* presented its audience with a new kind of theatre experience. At a time when once innovative university theatre programs increasingly resemble the Broadway fare of musical comedy, second-rate thrillers, and tepid situation comedies, the production of *The Passion of Antígona Pérez* accrues additional meaning. The play was extremely popular, demonstrating high quality dramatic and theatrical values as well as maintaining the attention of the general public. The 1975 Summer Circle Free Festival was the most successful in its seven-year history. The contribution made by the production of *The Passion of Antígona Pérez* to that success provides evidence that the university theatre can continue to function as a public forum, and that audiences will react affirmatively to new works which address them intelligently and without condescending to preconceived notions of their likes and dislikes.

Luis Rafael Sánchez's *The Passion of Antígona Pérez* is not significantly different from Eric Bentley's *A Time to Die* or the *Antígonas* of Walter Hasenclever, Bertolt Brecht, and Jean Anouilh. Each attempts to bring the conflicts of ideals versus practicality, of humane values versus human order, and of individual rights versus the rights of the state, first explored by Sophocles, into the common experience of their audience. The importance of the Luis Rafael Sánchez version is that in radically departing from the original he is able to re-create its immediacy for contemporary American—North, South, and Central—audiences.

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Notes

1. See *La pasión según Antígona Pérez* (Hato Rey, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Lugar, 1968). Future references are made to the third edition of the play (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial Cultural, 1973) which includes some minor revisions of the original. Quoted passages in English have been taken from the unpublished translation prepared by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre for their 1972 New York production. The same translation was used in the July, 1975 production at Michigan State University.

2. Antígona makes a similar reference to America in her opening statement to the audience: "De los que crecimos en una América dura, América amarga, América tomada" (Act I, sc. 1).

3. The play was directed by a Master of Fine Arts candidate in Theatre, Vicente Castro, who is from Puerto Rico, and was performed on the evenings of July 23, 24, 25, and 26.

4. Recent discussions in the United Nations have raised questions about Puerto Rico's relation to the United States and its status as an autonomous commonwealth.

Dos Estrenos Mundiales

Teatro Espacio/15 presentó los estrenos mundiales de *La muerte de Adelita*, palíndromo de Miguel González Avelar y *La cantata de los emigrantes*, pieza de Héctor Azar, dentro del marco de Festival Internacional Cervantino el 3 y 4 de mayo de 1976 en la Ciudad de Guanajuato, México.