

5-16-2023

Cristina Pérez Díaz, *Antígona* by José Watanabe: A Bilingual Edition with Critical Essays. Routledge, 2022. Pp. 172. eBook (ISBN 9781003150350) \$40.45.

Andrés A. Carrete

The University of Texas at Austin, Andres.carrete@austin.texas.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj>



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Carrete, Andrés A. (2023) "Cristina Pérez Díaz, *Antígona* by José Watanabe: A Bilingual Edition with Critical Essays. Routledge, 2022. Pp. 172. eBook (ISBN 9781003150350) \$40.45," *New England Classical Journal*: Vol. 50 : Iss. 1 , 71-74.
<https://doi.org/10.52284/NECJ.50.1.review.carrete>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in New England Classical Journal by an authorized editor of CrossWorks.

Book Reviews

Cristina Pérez Díaz, *Antígona* by José Watanabe: A Bilingual Edition with Critical Essays. Routledge, 2022. Pp. 172. eBook (ISBN 9781003150350) \$40.45.

“The deaths of this story come to me
not so that I make a trade of telling other people’s misfortunes.
They come to me, and so vividly, because they are my own
misfortune” – Narradora (Pérez Díaz, 98).

The *Antígona* of José Watanabe (2000) is as engrossing as it is atypical. Born from a collaboration between actress Teresa Ralli, director Miguel Rubio, and poet José Watanabe, this *Antígona* exemplifies the many tensions present in the study of classical receptions from postcolonial perspectives. Watanabe’s *Antígona* features issues of local and global resonances, the dynamics between European influences and Latin American innovations, interrogations of the political and apolitical as represented in art, explorations of aesthetics, and the tensions and incongruities present between stage performances and transmitted texts. Given the richness of the Peruvian text and its history, it is only fitting that Cristina Pérez Díaz’s excellent critical edition of *Antígona* by José Watanabe should inaugurate a series on *Classics and the Postcolonial*.

Pérez Díaz edition of Watanabe’s *Antígona* makes the text available in its entirety to Anglophone audiences for the first time. In addition to translating Watanabe’s text, this volume offers an introduction rich in contextualizing information and a critical essay with robust analysis of Watanabe’s text and its positionality in *Antígona*’s global history of reception. The text features a facing translation and presents Pérez Díaz’s offering besides the original Spanish language text. Although this is not new (Sara Uribe’s *Antígona González* was published with facing translation in 2016), the poetic composition of Watanabe’s *Antígona* lends itself especially well to the format.¹ Like Uribe’s *Antígona*, this edition is likely to invite further scholarly engagement with the reception of Sophocles’ *Antigone* in Latin America. This responsibility is not lost on Pérez Díaz, who succeeds in crafting an edition that will serve a diverse group of scholars and students without sacrificing the cultural integrity of its source text.

Pérez Díaz’s edition is a veritable treasure trove for researchers. Its bibliography is extensive, varied, and representative of the current state of *Antigone* debates and scholarship in Latin America. Pérez Díaz strikes a good balance between representing theoretical debates, providing analysis, and communicating important contextualizing information. The volume’s introduction succinctly considers the artistic relationship between Watanabe and the founders of Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani (Ralli and Rubio). In examining this relationship, Pérez Díaz outlines relevant performance traditions at play in the creation of this *Antígona*, briefly touching upon the importance of the theater group’s practice of *acumulación sensible*, Third Theater, and the global backdrop of post-dramatic theater. Tracing the artistic origins of the play’s authorial collaborators, Pérez Díaz presents what appears to be the volume’s guiding principle. She argues that Watanabe’s *Antígona* is a layered production in terms of its creation, performance, and manifold receptions. As such, it necessitates permissive engagements which will foster a ‘manifold and noncontradictory understanding’ of the play and its positionalities. Pérez Díaz astutely refrains from offering over-arching narratives about *Antigone* and its reception, opting instead to highlight the diversity and contrast present within the reception of *Antigone* in Latin America. Her subsequent discussion of José Watanabe’s poetics strengthens her efforts and provides insights into a poet concerned with art’s aesthetic value over its political potential. For Watanabe, we

¹ Uribe 2016.

learn, evoking beauty through art is a form of solidarity, but not a catalyst for social change – a fascinating position for someone writing an *Antigone*.

As she finalizes her introduction, Pérez Díaz offers a note on translation. She discusses her positionality and conveys the responsibilities and anxieties inherent in presenting such a work to an Anglophone audience for the first time. Though brief, this section is central to Pérez Díaz's project and should be considered carefully by readers. The translator remarks on the recontextualization of the play at the point of reception and the linguistic tensions which can arise from the work of translation. Beyond signaling Pérez Díaz's approach to her translation and offering a meditation on translation ethics, this section reads as an invitation for readers to consider their own positionality and to question how it might affect their engagement with translated texts.

Pérez Díaz's translation of Watanabe's *Antígona* preserves the general structure of the Spanish-language text. Furthermore, Pérez Díaz has chosen to preserve the Spanish-language names of the dramatic cast (i.e., Antígona, Creonte, Hémon), a choice which acts as a constant reminder of the play's origins. Although fateful in the most important sense, this translation does not seem terribly concerned with preserving a one-to-one mirror of grammatical constructions. This is a good thing. Pérez Díaz's translations read as poems, and her voice as a translator is that of an accomplished poet. In moments of grammatical complexity, Pérez Díaz's translations prioritize the ephemeral aspects of poetry, the 'feel' of the poems, over grammatical nuances of gender, number, and tense equivalences – equivalences that would likely bog down the translation if prioritized. This is not to say that the translator is reckless with her editorializing. Noticeable changes in grammatical constructions work to the benefit of the translation's reader. Pérez Díaz strikes a delicate balance between making the text accessible and preserving the poetic choices, style, and rhythm, of the original Spanish language.

Speaking simply, this translation is a triumph. It preserves the meaning of the original work and makes it available to a new audience without sacrificing its cultural identity. We must note, however, that there are a few moments where the translations are more heavily editorialized and display some rather marked work of interpretation. This is an occupational necessity. Although these moments do not detract from the overall project, they are interesting and worth mentioning.

At the beginning of verse XIII, for example, Antigone states the following lines (followed by their translation):

La oscuridad le da a mi cuerpo una existencia extraña.
Soy
sólo cuando me palpo o toco la dura piedra de la caverna (69).

Darkness splits my body from its reality.
I am
only when I feel my skin or touch the rough stone of the cavern (70).

The Spanish word 'extraña', most commonly translated as strange, weird, foreign, or alien in accordance with its context, appears to be at the core of Pérez Díaz's translation. The sense of alienation in the word is emphasized and centered in Pérez Díaz's version, whereas it remains only a single interpretative possibility in Watanabe's text. Likewise in the following excerpt:

Soñé que amanecía. Qué absurdo,
soñé que amanecía.
Tal vez el amanecer esté encima de la montaña,
pero no tendrá la luz esplendente de mi sueño (90).

I dreamed of dawn. How absurd,
I dreamed of dawn.
Perhaps dawn's light falls on top of the mountain,
though it wouldn't have the luminous quality of my dream (91).

Pérez Díaz interprets 'amanecía' with an active sense, but a middle sense of the word is likely also present. If taken as such, Antígona's lament would signal a more personal disappointment (I dreamed there was a dawn *for me*/I dreamed I was able to wake up). Though the result of our interpretation is ultimately the same, Antígona scoffs at the absurdity of imagining life when her life has been made forfeit, there is a clear ambiguity in the Spanish text that necessitates an interpretative decision in the English. I point to these examples to remark on the difficulty of rendering cultural nuances as effectively and artfully as Pérez Díaz has been able to do. That moments of this sort are few and far in between is a testament to the translator's success. When these moments do appear, the facing translation should allow scholars with a passive understanding of Spanish to refer to the original text for the sake of close reading.

Though Pérez Díaz's translation is undoubtedly the main attraction, those interested in classical receptions, or the contemporary reception of *Antigone* in Latin America specifically, would do well to read Pérez Díaz's accompanying essay. 'Angles of Memory in *Antígona*: An aesthetic reading' is a learned and fiercely researched contribution to scholarship. It is here that Pérez Díaz engages with the scholarship of *Antigone* and classical receptions directly. By theoretically situating itself in the realm of aesthetics, Pérez Díaz presents her reading of Watanabe's *Antígona* as a layered existence distinctive in its text and performance. This chapter models and argues for an approach to reception which is permissive in its interpretations yet culturally nuanced. Pérez Díaz looks towards the future of *Antigone* and its reception by considering the presence and memory of Sophocles' *Antigone*. For Pérez Díaz, the interaction between *Antigone*, including "Antigone" as a body of texts, and productions like that of Watanabe allows for the creation of affective and political spaces in new cultural environments. In her reading of Watanabe's *Antígona*, Pérez Díaz discusses the act of redistribution as a mechanism through which these spaces are created. As she demonstrates, the poet's decisions to give to certain characters lines historically associated with others, or to reorder scenes from the ancient narrative, contributes to a redistribution of sympathies. It is as a result of contact with *Antigone*'s past and cultural memory that the conditions for innovation are met. Pérez Díaz uses the figure of the Narradora/Ismene to demonstrate the effect of such an innovation. Through Watanabe's redistributions, space is created for his Ismene to be read as a survivor of loss and trauma – a woman reclaiming and repairing a myth from the position of survivorship. This *Antígona* thus becomes a precursor to feminist interpretations and reimaginings of *Antigone* like that of Bonnie Honig's *Antigone Interrupted* (2013).

In providing her analysis, Pérez Díaz skillfully breaks down contemporary debates about reception in postcolonial frames. She positions her reading and methodology within the broader context of reception studies. Notably, Pérez Díaz aptly resists some of the more preclusive forces and ideas which could constrict the study of *Antigone*'s life beyond the ancient Greek stage. Pérez Díaz book does not allow itself to be over encumbered by notions of transhistoricity or regional assemblage. Instead, it demonstrates that even readings anchored in Sophocles' ancient tragedy are capable of creating interpretative spaces and fostering innovation through their affectation of the receiving public.

Cristina Pérez Díaz's critical edition of José Watanabe's *Antígona* is quite simply a fantastic accomplishment. In addition to its excellent translation, which will make Watanabe's text available to Anglophone audiences for the first time, the edition's accompanying materials are noteworthy contributions the study of *Antigone* and its reception. This edition contains an appendix including diverse productions of Watanabe's

Antígona on the world stage. A simple yet effective index can be found at the end of the volume and should especially assist those interested in specific theoretical frameworks or engagements with the thought of particular scholars. Though Pérez Díaz translation may be of interest to a general readership, this edition will be especially valuable for students, instructors, and scholars of classical receptions, Greek tragedy, Latin American theater, and translation studies. I can only hope that Pérez Díaz's translation will promptly make its way into undergraduate and graduate syllabi. This edition is a more than worthy piece to inaugurate a series on Classics and the Postcolonial.

Andrés A. Carrete
The University of Texas at Austin
Andres.carrete@austin.texas.edu

Hands Up Education CIC. 2021. *Suburani* (NA Edition) Book 1 Textbook. London, UK: Hands Up Education. Pp. 304 Paperback. (ISBN 978-1-912870-02-8) \$55.00.

Suburani wastes no time diving into the content of intuitive language learning. Students are thrown into seeing Latin with no English from the first page of Chapter 1. The first sentence, *ego sum Sabina*, can be inferred by students reasonably quickly if their English comprehension skills are already advanced; however, a teacher might find themselves doing a lot more legwork to introduce the concept of cognates and etymology early on as a tool to help get students familiar with Latin words. Additional reading supports include corresponding illustrations, from which students are expected to deduce the meaning of the sentences. The textbook is story-based, temporally grounded in 64 CE, in the early Roman empire, under Nero. Each of the sixteen chapters revolves around a different theme, and characters span the diversity of the Roman empire: including a young girl, a family from Britannica, an enslaved man, a barkeep, a charioteer, and even a dog. The chapters, while short, are jam-packed with information. Although the first few chapters start with brief, simple sentences, they ramp up in complexity, up to indirect statements in chapter 15 and demonstrative pronouns in chapter 16. The stories are the driving force for most learning in the textbook. Each chapter has about three or four stories about a different theme, occasionally building on previous chapters. Then, there are cultural, mythological, or historical context pages with critical thinking exercises and excerpts from Roman primary sources (e.g. translations of Juvenal, Pliny, Seneca), as well as information about material culture, such as mosaics, pictures of archaeological sites, and models of settlements.

Chapters with broader cultural themes, like Chapter 3: *Ludi*, are grounded in a digestible format. The larger context of public festivals is first introduced through the *Circus Maximus* and vocabulary about chariot racing and competitions. The focus on the cultural diversity of experiences in the Roman empire is fun to explore. For instance, as a supplemental activity for Chapter 3, my class simulated a chariot race where students were expected to fill all the roles, including charioteers, audience members, and even “acted” as the physical structures in the *Circus Maximus*, included in the diagram (p. 48): the *carceres*, the *metae*, or the *spina*. The use of charts was especially effective, combining different types of information from definitions, to quotes from Pliny and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and comprehension questions.

Culture and history are the critical focuses of Suburani, but grammar explanations were not necessarily a priority. In every chapter, there are a maximum of four language notes. The language notes might introduce grammatical concepts gradually, e.g., the accusative case or the verb *possum*, to build off learning the infinitive in a previous chapter. Although *Suburani* does not necessarily identify itself in a grammar-translation, or a comprehensible input camp, its headfirst dive into intuitive language learning places

<https://doi.org/10.52284/NECJ.50.1.review.lee-chin>