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CASSANDRAS FOR THE MODERN AGE IN PLAYS BY MARÍA LUISA ALGARRA AND DIANA MARTA DE PACO SERRANO

Cassandras para la Edad Moderna en obras de María Luisa Algarra y Diana de Paco Serrano

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Abstract: Cassandra, one of mythology's most tragic female figures, has traditionally reappeared whenever the truth must be faced and lies revealed. María Luisa Algarra uses her young, Catalan Cassandra as a mouthpiece for the frustration of Republican ideals during the Second Republic and the ensuing Civil War in her 1954 play, *Casandra o la llave sin puerta*, written in hindsight from her Mexican exile. Diana M. de Paco Serrano, in her 2016 play, *Casandra*, transforms and reinvigorates the Trojan soothsayer, offering us a timeless figure who exposes the patriarchal trappings of the original myth. This paper shows how each playwright appropriates the power of myth to create thoughtful, relevant and engaging plays in response to her respective historical moment.
Keywords: Cassandra, mythology, truth, democracy, female agency

Resumen: Casandra, una de las figuras femeninas más trágicas de la mitología, reaparece a lo largo de los milenios cuando es necesario enfrentar la verdad y revelar las mentiras. María Luisa Algarra utiliza a su joven Casandra catalana como portavoz de la frustración de los ideales republicanos durante la Segunda República y la Guerra Civil española en su obra *Casandra o la llave sin puerta* (1954), escrita en retrospectiva desde su exilio mexicano. Diana M. de Paco Serrano, en su obra *Casandra* (2016), transforma y revitaliza la figura del vidente troyano ofreciéndonos una Casandra atemporal que se dedica a exponer los patrones patriarcales del mito original. Este trabajo mostrará cómo cada dramaturga se apropia del poder del mito para crear obras de teatro reflexivas, relevantes y atractivas para sus respectivos momentos históricos.
***Palabras claves*:** Casandra, mitología, la verdad, la democracia, agencia femenina

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1. Two Cassandras for the Modern Age in Plays by María Luisa Algarra and Diana M. de Paco Serrano

> Apollo, Apollo!
> Lord of the ways, my ruin,
> You have undone me once again, and utterly.
>
> —Cassandra in *Agamemnon* vv. 1080-82

1.1. Why Cassandra?

Cassandra is one of Greek mythology's most tragic figures. Daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy, she was a princess and Apollonian priestess before being taken to Greece as Agamemnon's slave in the aftermath of the city's destruction. Her story is best known from the retellings of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, tragedies that tell how Cassandra rejected Apollo's sexual advances, thus provoking the God's repudiation and anger.[1] Her punishment was a complex and psychologically painful one: she could accurately predict the future but would never be believed. The immense anguish caused by her powerlessness to prevent tragic future events made her appear insane to those around her. Cassandra foresaw, yet was unable to avert, some of the most infamous events in Greek mythology: the Trojan War; the Trojan horse; Odysseus' long journey home; Agamemnon's murder at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus; and Orestes' and Electra's revenge killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. In more modern times, Cassandra has allegorically returned to represent those who speak truth to power, who speak up but are not heard, and whose warnings are dismissed by male authority figures. The two dramatists from Spain whose plays are the focus of the present study, María Luisa Algarra and Diana Marta de Paco Serrano, chose to appropriate the myth of Cassandra to create thoughtful, relevant and socially-engaged plays that capture and criticize their particular cultural and political moments. Both Algarra and de Paco harness the psychological and cultural power of myth to convey universal truths. Through their rebellious main characters, they offer an urgently relevant — indeed, timeless — critique of the human condition.

2. *Casandra o la llave sin puerta* (1953) by María Luisa Algarra

2.1 María Luisa Algarra: from Barcelona to Mexico City

María Luisa Algarra was born in Barcelona in 1916 to a wealthy, upper-class family (de Talvira, 2003, p. 7). She was a highly intelligent young woman who graduated with a law degree from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Vázquez Osuna, 2009, p. 142) and she went on to become the first female judge in the political history of Spain (p. 136). Algarra was clearly a *mujer moderna*, a term used to describe progressive women who entered Spain's professional and political spheres in the 1920s and '30s (Nieva de la Paz, 2014, p. 45). She presented a paper entitled «Les reivindicacions conquerides per la dona en la lluita antifeixista» at the first Congreso Nacional de la Mujer in 1937 (143) and went on to publish many articles on women's legal issues in publications such as *La Rambla*, *Última Hora*, *Companya* and *Catalans* (Altés Rufias, 2010). During the Spanish Civil War, Algarra was closely aligned with the Republican cause, so, when Barcelona fell in 1939, she was forced into exile in France. The details of where, how and for how long she remained in

[1] Cassandra is of course mentioned in Homer's *Iliad* as Hecuba and Priam's most beautiful daughter, but no mention is made of her prophetic abilities.

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France are unclear, but we do know that she managed to escape and ultimately received political asylum in Mexico (Naranjo González, 2017).[2] Unlike many of her fellow exiles, Algarra embraced her new life and had a successful career as a professional writer, working in radio, film, television and theater, before her sudden death in 1957 at age forty-one (Nieva de la Paz, 2014, pp. 44-48).

2.1. Setting the Scene

Algarra's theatrical vocation began at an early age. While still a nineteen-year-old law student, she won the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona's prestigious theater prize for her first play, *Judith* (Gonzálo Heras, 2006, p. 326).[3] Once settled in her Mexican exile, Algarra wrote a series of commercially successful prize-winning plays between 1944 and 1954 (pp. 328-338). The play that is the focus of this study, *Casandra o la llave sin puerta*, premiered on February 6, 1953, in the Sala Moliere in Mexico City (p. 333). Pilar Nieva de la Paz defines *Casandra*… as a «comedia costumbrista de ambiente social elevado» while, at the same time recognizing its power as a «drama político» that offers an acerbic critique of society's wealthiest classes (2014, pp. 125-126). Algarra never reveals the name of the city in which she stages her play; all we know from the stage directions is that it is "cualquier ciudad industrial, de cualquier país, antes de estallar cualquier revolución obrera" (Algarra, 2003, p. 131). Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to presume that Algarra had the example of her native Barcelona in mind. Writing from exile a decade and a half later, Algarra revisits the memories of her activist past to reveal the mistreatment of the working class at the hands of wealthy business owners. She shows how ideological and economic disagreements at the local level can spark a wider workers' revolution. It is also fair to assume that Algarra recognized that her Mexican audience would also understand and relate to this topic as her adopted country had recently experienced its own brutal civil war and workers uprisings. Algarra invites her audience to look long and hard at how their own individual actions and decisions — or lack thereof — can affect society at both the micro level — the family unit — and society writ large. Unfortunately, this topic is still relevant for modern-day audiences, as issues of class divisions, civil inaction and the dangers of unbridled capitalism still fester in societies around the world these many years later.

In *Casandra o la llave sin puerta*, the socio-economic revolution is not presented from the point of view of the workers, but rather through the eyes of the wealthy Cirera family. This choice to silence the workers — Helena, the pretty maid, is the only worker from whom we hear directly — serves not merely to highlight their lack of voice and resultant lack of power but also to depict their plight against the backdrop of the greedy self-serving bourgeoise. Juan Pablo Heras González (2006) notes the following about the play and its characters:

> El planteamiento de la obra, una denuncia clara hasta lo obvio de las mezquindades de la burguesía y de la respuesta lógica de la revolución obrera, da lugar a una excesiva simplificación de los personajes, reducidos a meros estereotipos sólo justificables en un tono farsesco o expresionista que no acaba de percibirse (p. 334).

Although the characters may initially seem psychologically shallow, a closer look reveals them to be more than just "meros estereotipos" who represent an elite social class. Algarra's characters evoke, sometimes loosely, and at other times more directly, their mythological counterparts, forming a modern cast of characters for a contemporary version of the battle for

[2] Naranjo Gonzalez has uncovered the register of Algarra's arrival in Mexico, dating it to 1939, previous scholars not privy to this discovery (De Tavira, Nieva de la Paz and Gonzálo Heras, for example) put her arrival in Mexico some three years later, believing that she had meanwhile been imprisoned in a concentration camp.

[3] *Judith*, composed in Catalan, won the Premio del Concurso Teatral Universitario de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in 1935. The play was staged by Enrique Borrás' company in 1936 in Barcelona's Poliorama Theatre (Heras González, 2006, p. 326).

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Troy. The patriarch, Jaime Cirera, is a wealthy factory owner and a greedy magnate who cares only about his own enrichment. He represents a modern King Priam. His money-grubbing, social-climbing wife, Gertrudis, is Queen Hecuba, while their materialistic and self-centered twenty-four-year-old daughter, Cordelia, is Creusa. Alejandro, their twenty-year-old son, is a typical skirt-chasing, know-it-all university student who represents Paris. Their youngest child, sixteen-year-old Juana, is misunderstood by all. She is Cassandra the truthteller, and, like her mythological ancestor, she is listened to and believed by no one when she tries to warn of impending tragedy. Finally, to complete the analogy, the workers from the oppressed classes are the Greeks who attack Troy, and in this case, the motives behind their attack are both to avenge the mistreatment of their own Helen as well as to destroy the system that enslaves them. Helen is represented by the beautiful Helena, the daughter of one of Jaime's workers, who is currently working as a maid in the Cirera household. Casandra's myth is used to frame the story allegorically, to give weight and authority to the modern tragedy being told: the fight for workers' rights. This intriguing use of the myth serves Algarra surprisingly well.

2.3 Sowing The seeds of revolution

The first two acts, which are both uncomfortable and amusing, lull the audience into believing that they are watching an innocuous *comedia costumbrista*. In act one, the plot revolves around Gertrudis and Cordelia who are planning the latter's elaborate wedding to a financier, a man who later turns out to be a conman after the Cireras' fortune. The audience is also introduced to Juana and her clairvoyant powers. Although her predictions until that point have concerned a series of unimportant events — such as an unexpected downpour on a sunny day and the breaking of a visitor's pearl necklace —, Juana's parents are worried about her mental health, and have therefore arranged for her to see a psychiatrist. The *comedia costumbrista* continues in act two with the plight of Alejandro. The arrogant young student is having an illicit affair with a maid, the beautiful Helena, and wants to marry her. As the tension surrounding the domestic drama increases, the signs of the growing unrest on the streets are beginning to permeate the play. Indeed, the second act begins with a conversation between Jaime Cirera and Félix, his secretary, about the workers. Jaime is becoming increasingly annoyed by their radicalization and their constant demands and threats. In this quote Jaime vents his frustration:

> ¿Qué es lo que quieren? Ganar tanto como yo, ¿verdad? ¡Como yo o más que yo! ¿Verdad? ¡Cómo yo o más que yo! ¡Convertirse en «señores» de la noche a la mañana! ¡Tener casa propia y coche a la puerta y abono a la ópera! […] ¿Acaso heredé yo mi fortuna? ¡No, señor! ¡Tampoco me la encontré tirada en la calle! ¡Trabajé para hacerla! ¡Trabajé como no han trabajado ellos, todos juntos, en toda su vida! Para mí, desde que era un mocoso, ¡no ha habido más que trabajo y trabajo! ¿Una película… un teatro? ¡Hasta hace pocos años yo no sabía ni qué era eso! El dinero que podía costar la entrada, yo lo ahorraba… ¡Así empecé! Ellos, en cambio… ¡Siempre en la miseria, siempre llorando… ¡Pero van al cine hasta dos veces por semana! (Algarra, 2003, p. 165)

Jaime's tone-deaf, callous complaints are sadly still echoing in current political discourse. This quote reads like a page from the playbook of the Republican Party of the United States as it echoes Republicans claims that welfare recipients are 'takers', not 'makers' and that they are lazy and undeserving of governmental assistance. Just as it is painful to recognize the resurgence in the United States of these perennial arguments (Craw and Carter, 2012), these same comments are also present in policies of Spain's Partido Popular (de Cospedal, 2011) and, more recently and worryingly, in those of the ultra-right party, Vox (González, 2021). From the conversation between Jaime and Félix we gather that the workers have unionized to attain basic labor guarantees — such as a contract that reduces their working hours and provides paid time off together with sick leave

— and that the union is about to flex its political muscles by declaring a general strike for all textile workers.

As the parallel plots, the familial and the societal, start to converge, Juana has disturbing visions of an imminent tragedy: some sort of war, the details of which she cannot clearly perceive. She attempts to explain her visions to her family: "(*Tras pausa larga. En un tono extraño, aislado y mirando frente a sí*) Algo va a hundirse … ¿saben? Algo va a hundirse para siempre … y no quedarán más que escombros" (Algarra, 2003, p. 178). The stage directions encapsulate the reaction of her family: "*GERTRUDIS escucha atenta; pero con la expresión de quien oye desbarrar a un loco. CORDELIA y ALEJANDRO cambian miradas burlonas*" (p. 178). They clearly think Juana is unstable and do not take her worries seriously. Later, Juana attempts to stop Alejandro from telling his parents of his desire to marry Helena, foreseeing their negative reaction. She repeats to Alejandro what the voices inside her head are warning: "«¡Esto es peligroso, peligrosísimo…! ¡Cuidado, Alejandro…!» (*Pausa. Transición*) ¿Cómo es posible que no las oigas? ¡Suenan tan claras…!" (182). Although he clearly understands Juana's warning, Alejandro dismisses her concerns. Later, in a conversation with her psychiatrist, Juana expresses her frustration with the fact that her family pays no heed to her warnings:

> Vivirán mucho más tranquilos si se decidieran a aceptar la realidad … Pero no: cualquier cosa antes que eso … (*Pausa. Transición más lenta*) La mía es una facultad inútil que no tiene a qué aplicarse … Como una llave que no tuviera qué abrir … la llave de una puerta inexistente. (p. 193)

Of course, a few hours later all of Juana's predictions will come true: Cordelia will discover Alejandro's affair with Helena, and Alejandro, weak and spoiled, will allow his lover to be thrown out of the house in disgrace when faced with losing his inheritance. The original myth that began with Paris' abduction of Helen, an act that in turn led to the Greeks' departure for Troy, is visible here in a more modern context. Algarra's Helena is a symbolic figure who represents the abuses suffered by all members of her social class. She is seduced, used and then discarded as if she were simply a piece of merchandise at the disposal of the rich. Needless to say, no one listens to Juana's warning not to cast Helena out: "No lo hagan! ¡No hagan eso, no la echen! ¡Ahora es cuando va a empezar todo … ¡Y no habrá salida…! ¡No la echen así! ¡¡¡No la echen así …!!!" (Algarra, 2003, p. 202). The story cannot, and will not, end well.

2.4 She told you so…

The third act has an urgency to it that contrasts with the languid, and at times, vapid *comedia costumbrista* of the first two. Now the political drama, the bubbling subplot, starts to boil over as churches burn, bombs explode and rioting mobs take to the streets. Helena returns to her family pregnant and there is no way to contain her community's anger. Her mistreatment by the Cirera family did not cause the revolution but it provided the spark that led to its explosion. Félix, Jaime's secretary, sums up the situation in which the Cirera family finds itself, this way: "[L]a verdad es que a Don Jaime ya se lo traían entre ojos desde hacía mucho… pero lo de esa chica Helena vino a empeorar la situación" (p. 214). Jaime finally understands the danger facing his family and plans their escape by car later that evening. Juana, unruffled amid her family's hysteria, turns into a sibyl, a true Cassandra, and in a calm, trance-like state she delivers the verdict on the family's crimes, explaining how they are completely responsible for the destruction that they brought upon themselves. She intones:

> La culpa es de todos nosotros… y de los que son como nosotros. Hemos trabajado tenazmente, durante años, para que esto ocurriera… No hemos desperdiciado una sola

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> oportunidad para precipitarlo… para acercarnos a ello rápidamente… ¡Pues bien, ya hemos llegado! (p. 222)

Juana understands that the workers' demands were justified and that her family and all the other wealthy industrialists had ignored their troubles for personal gain. She continues to talk and to lay out in detail the errors that led to this inflection point:

> A pesar de todo el dinero, somos pobres miserables… porque no tenemos una sola razón para vivir… Nos apoyamos en bases que nosotros mismos hemos carcomido… la familia, la religión, la sociedad… ¡Siempre nos hemos llenado la boca con esas tres palabras! ¡Cada vez que las pronunciamos, era como si burlábamos de ellas! (p. 223)

Juana can do nothing but point out the truth — that this death and destruction had been both predictable and avoidable — as she picks up her suitcase and walks calmly outside to the awaiting car. The stage directions indicate the family's fate: "*[v]an hacia la puerta del fondo, y salen lentamente, en silencio. Han desaparecido y la escena queda sola unos instantes. Se oyen fuera, lejanos, los tiroteos espaciados. Luego un motor de automóvil que se pone en marcha*" (227). The Cirera family tragedy is over, and the workers' revolution has begun.

Casandra o la llave sin puerta is an ode to the revolutionary principles that Algarra held and fought for during the volatile years of the Second Republic and the ensuing Civil War. By attaching her socialist ideals to the mythical figure of Cassandra, Algarra adroitly employs the innate allegorical power of myth to encapsulate and globalize this drama of the human condition: exposing how wealth and power corrupt and dehumanize. We can undoubtedly see the Spanish Indignados and the Occupy Wall Street protesters in the United States in Algarra's workers revolution. She applies the framework of Cassandra's myth to expose the incorrect, self-serving choices made by a materialistic and corrupt family whose decision to ignore the suffering of the masses will sow the seeds of revolution and war.

3. *Casanra* by Diana Marta de Paco

3.1. Diana Marta de Paco Serrano

Diana Marta de Paco Serrano, professor of Greek Philology at the Universidad de Murcia, has published over thirty plays in the last two decades, many of which have been staged and have won prestigious theatrical prizes.[4] Stylistically, de Paco's plays employ dark humor and agile language to address themes of injustice, especially those that relate to women's issues: domestic violence, psychological abuse, mis- (and in-) communication and the silencing of the female voice. De Paco frequently utilizes Greek mythology to offer a commentary on problematic current events. To date, her plays with mythical characters and references include *Polifonía* (2001), *Lucía* (2002), *El canto póstumo de Orfeo* (2006), *Perros* (2015), *Hermíone o la guerra sin nombre* (2017), *En un lugar de nadie* (2018) and *Casandra* (2016), the object of the present study (Freear-Papio, 2019, p. 174). Given de Paco's background as a scholar of both Greek and contemporary Spanish theatre, her use of myth is more sophisticated, nuanced and intentional than Algarra's. While Algarra employs these ancient stories to create a parallel present-time universe populated by familiar mythical characters, de Paco chooses another approach, which she explains in this 2009 interview with Lourdes Bueno:

[4] See V. Serrano's (2016) introductory essay in *Casandras* for more details.

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> La literatura clásica ofrece grandes figuras femeninas que pueden ser recreadas una y otra vez gracias a las posibilidades infinitas de transformación e interpretación de sus perfiles míticos. A través de un proceso mitopoético estas heroínas se crean y se recrean desde el teatro griego hasta la actualidad, manteniendo un carácter paradigmático que las actualiza en cada una de sus nuevas 'vidas literarias.' (p. 8)

In other words, de Paco challenges the veracity of the myth itself by allowing her characters to redefine and reinvent their own stories, free from the restrictions placed on them by the original versions. The goal of this process of de- or re-mythification is not the creation of a new, definitive version of the myth, but the exposure of mythical themes to a potentially infinite series of possible interpretations.

In her 2017 essay "¿Por qué Casandra?", de Paco describes what drew her to give voice to this most tragic of mythic heroines: "eras sabia, dabas miedo, estabas maldita: una consecuencia que se convertirá en el destino inapelable de muchas heroínas griegas y que, desgraciadamente, es símbolo de la situación de muchas mujeres en la actualidad" (de Paco, 2017). De Paco deftly links the past to the present to show how little things have changed for women who speak truth to powerful men, men whose power is derived from intentional misapprehension and lies. *Casandra* was written in 2016, during a consequential time in modern history. Donald Trump, a self-proclaimed populist with authoritative tendencies, beat the infinitely more qualified Hillary Clinton for the Presidency of the United States, while on the other side of the Atlantic, the British voted to leave the European Union and in Spain, the Partido Popular returned to power in a fractious and close election. Spanish headlines were dominated by the so-called "wolf pack" rape case, which reignited the debate around toxic masculinity and sexual assault (Beatley 2019). Like Algarra, de Paco reflects her own unique cultural moment in *Casandra* by employing the universal power of myth to uphold her criticism of the mistreatment of women.

3.2. Cassandra takes center stage

In *Casandra*, de Paco takes a novel approach to the famous seer's story to communicate important, globally relevant themes: specifically, the corruption of unchecked power, the silencing of women's voices and the dangers of denying the truth while simultaneously propagating lies. De Paco transforms and reinvigorates the very figure of the Trojan princess herself, making Cassandra the protagonist of her own story. This skillfully crafted play — whose haunting production by Tríade Teatro has been on a successful tour since 2017[5] — offers us an eternal Cassandra, a woman who refuses to be defined by the patriarchal accoutrements of misinformation and narrative control. As the play is constructed as a monologue, it is Cassandra herself who systematically dismantles the myth in which she has been held captive for millennia. At times, she directs her words to a symbolic and mute interlocutor called Soledad, while at other moments, she addresses the audience directly, breaking the fourth wall and imploring the spectator to witness and to participate in the rewriting of her story. Cassandra also summarizes conversations held previously with her father, her mother and Paris, but we never witness these conversations directly. Ironically, then, Cassandra, the madwoman whom no one believes, becomes the narrator that the spectator must trust as the purveyor of truth and the destroyer of myth and misinformation. This, in turn, invites the audience to play the role of judge and jury, as they must decide whether their omniscient narrator is to be believed.

De Paco deconstructs the myth's framework, choosing to underscore how these ancient stories can be misused to uphold the problematic relationship between truth and power. In de

[5] Directed by Miguel Cegarra and starring Marina Miranda. See the website for a list of performances and for more information on the play. https://triadeteatro.wixsite.com/triadeteatro/casandra

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Paco's play, Algarra's wealthy magnates are replaced by the all-powerful Apollo, a vengeful, corrupt deity who is also a master of fabricating lies.[6] Cassandra describes him this way:

> El gran Apolo. El dios rechazado por una niña. El varón que no soporta ser ignorado por una mujer. El hombre divino que tiene que demostrar quién manda… El cobarde que castiga a la joven sacerdotisa por no querer ser su pareja, porque no lo soporta. El gobernante de todo. El equilibrado y sensible Apolo. Apolo celoso y engreído. Apolo ambicioso y ciego de poder. Apolo dios inmortal que ordena el desastre. Está aquí, Apolo, entre vosotros, es el que esconde las verdades. Es ese. (De Paco, 2016, p. 233)

It is this berating of Apollo that forms the basis for the rewriting of Cassandra's myth, and it is a technique that de Paco has used previously to great effect. In *Polifonía*, for example, she allowed the heroes (Ulysses, Telemachus, Jason, Agamemnon, Orestes, Hippolytus and Theseus) to speak and therefore to condemn themselves with their own words, revealing their egotistical, insensitive and cruel natures. De Paco juxtaposes the men's narratives with those of their wives and mothers: Penelope, Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra. Each woman confronts her menfolk about their violent actions and the audience comes to understand how these men, directly or indirectly, caused the death of their wives and mothers. The women leave these confrontations ennobled while the glorious heroes of antiquity are revealed to be petty, spiteful, and vindictive. However, in *Casandra*, the audience never sees or hears from Apollo; they only know his story through Cassandra's words, giving her complete narrative control over how she tells her story and how Apollo is presented to the world.

Algarra's play, although not identified by name, is clearly set in a universal industrialized city, like Barcelona, in the mid twentieth century, while de Paco's *Casandra* takes place in mythical time within a closed, prison-like space. The play occurs after the fall of Troy but before Agamemnon takes Cassandra to Mycenae as his concubine. Cassandra tells her story from the tower in which her father, scared of her prophecies, holds her under lock and key. Although she is effectively a prisoner, Cassandra feels safe enough in this space to reveal her story. In this liminal moment in her life, Cassandra reflects upon all that has occurred to this point, all the while knowing full well the death that awaits her in the near future at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

3.3. The truth is revealed

Cassandra provides her origin story, but it is one that contradicts and subverts the traditional versions of Aeschylus and Euripides. Paris, she admits, was not her biological brother, but her best friend and lover.[7] This revelation has many important ramifications that derail and transform the original story. As in the Greek versions of the myth, Cassandra rejects Apollo's advances, and he takes his vengeance by giving her the ability to foretell the future but ensuring that no one will ever believe her prophecies. However, in de Paco's version of events, Cassandra's motive is different. She rebuffs Apollo, not only because she does not want to be with him, but more importantly, because she is in love with Paris. As a result, Paris also becomes a victim of Apollo's anger. After cursing Cassandra, the jealous deity causes a landslide that crushes Paris to death in the cave where he had been hiding, hoping to avoid Apollo's wrath. Cassandra also divulges that Paris never fell in love with, nor did he abduct Helen of Troy, thereby setting in motion the Trojan War. Why? Because Helen of Troy never existed. Her story was a lie, a false

[6] As I noted in a previous study of this play: «No cabe duda de que Apolo se parecía a Trump y Trump a Apolo. Y Apolo no es solo Trump, sino que podría ser cualquier hombre poderoso acusado de abuso sexual en este momento del movimiento #metoo. La relación que Trump y Apolo tienen con la verdad es igual: crean sus propios mitos, se los repiten para que vuelvan a formar parte de una nueva realidad falsa» (Freear-Papio, 2019, p. 178).

[7] Although they were raised together as brother and sister by Priam and Hecuba.

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pretext, 'fake news' invented by Apollo so that he could blame Paris for the War. By killing Paris, Apollo effectively silenced the truth and controlled the ensuing mythological narrative surrounding the origins of this most famous of wars. Cassandra, however, sees right through Apollo's subterfuge and reveals that Paris was his scapegoat, "un chivo expiatorio para la destrucción de Troya" (pp. 233-34).

This shocking de- and re- mythification of the myth surrounding the relationship between Paris and Cassandra has other important and profound ramifications. In a similar fashion to Algarra, de Paco uses ancient myth to expose universal societal ills. In this case, the dramatist takes on the power of myth itself, myth as a vehicle used to promulgate, diffuse, and validate misinformation and lies. Apollo, like the members of the Cirera family, is a symbolic figure who represents all men in positions of authority. Although Apollo is a much more powerful figure than Jaime Cirera, he shares similar traits with the wealthy businessman. Apollo increases his influence, not by accumulating wealth, but by putting a curse on or killing his enemies and then controlling the public discourse around these events, creating a 'buzz' about his own fame and glory. Even though she pulls back the curtains on his game plan, Cassandra, like Juana, cannot escape her own fate. However, she can at least reveal the truth about what really happened to her and to Paris. De Paco's Cassandra reclaims her authority by telling the truth and holding it up against the lies and propaganda of a misogynistic dictator. She speaks out because she has learned a valuable lesson from the inaction of her mother, Hecuba, whom, as Virtudes Serrano notes, "la cree, aunque no se atreve a defenderla" (230). Cassandra explains her mother's frustratingly passive support this way: "mi madre lloraba en silencio porque creía que era lo mejor para todos. Mamá, siempre has llorado tus verdades en lugar de decirlas" (234). Although discouraged by her mother's inability to stand up to her father, Cassandra tells her this at the end of the play: "Mamá, yo sé que me crees, sé que tú sabes todas las verdades. […] He sentido tus abrazos cómplices, tu miedo y tu valor son míos también" (p. 238). Cassandra then reveals to Hecuba her fate and urges her to be strong because her anguish will move the gods to act in a compassionate way, turning Hecuba into a dog for eternity, a loyal companion who can follow her children "estén donde estén" (239). Cassandra begs her mother to be silent no longer and to repeat her story to the world for all eternity: "[p]or favor. Repíteselo con tus ladridos cada día, madre, él [Paris] no tuvo nada que ver, ni tú, ni yo" (p. 239).

Cassandra realizes that only she can defend herself because no one else can or will protect her. If the truth is to be heard, she must be the one to tell it. Cassandra's act of civil disobedience is based on a moral imperative: the obligation to speak truth to power.[8] One need only consider how the phenomena of «fake news» and «alternative facts» have dominated (indeed, nearly destroyed) democracy in the United States during and after the Trump presidency. This truthless American Apollo ran rings around the press and brought his citizens to within a hair's width of fascism by unleashing chaos, lying about stolen elections and a deadly virus.[9] Diana de Paco's Cassandra, true to her nature, obviously expected and understood what would happen when powerful, immoral men held the reins of power and assailed truth itself. Sadly, she has no recourse but to leave with Agamemnon at the end of the play, already aware that Clytemnestra will eventually take her life. Although Cassandra was ultimately unable to change her destiny, she left us with the hope that we might finally hear and believe women, especially those who question authority and warn of disaster.

[8] This part of her persona neatly aligns her with her fellow mythological dissident, Antigone, as I discuss in more detail in «Mitotopías en *Casandra* de Diana de Paco» (2019, p. 179).
[9] Cf. Kessler.

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4. CASSANDRA LIVES ON

In both plays considered in the preceding pages, the power of myth is refreshed and refocused at the convergence of two eternally human truths: the tendency toward greed, violence and misogyny, on the one hand, and toward irrational skepticism, prejudice and apathy on the other. María Luisa Algarra uses Cassandra's story allegorically to speak the truth about worker oppression as well as to expose the abuses created by the politics of unbridled capitalism. Diana de Paco overturns the traditional version of Cassandra's legacy by silencing Apollo and instead choosing to give agency and voice to the priestess herself, creating a new, more urgent iteration of the myth that is unexpectedly accessible. Cassandra's eternal lessons, unsurprisingly, continue to go unheeded in the modern world as the same psychological dynamics enshrined in ancient myth are still visible all around us. In the United States, Cassandra's admonitions echoed in the brave testimony of Christine Blasey Ford, a professor who credibly accused the Supreme Court nominee (and now judge), Brett Kavanaugh, of sexual assault. More generally, Cassandra's words are heard in the voices of the #metoo movement.[10] If there is a gleam of hope in these plays it is that both Algarra and De Paco side with Cassandra, not with the all-powerful Gods. In fact, both writers invite their audiences to play God: to listen to Cassandra's story and to assess it on the merits by weighing the evidence presented. This request, if taken up in good faith by modern spectators, will be what ultimately undermines and eventually collapses the patriarchal underpinnings of the myth of the woman whose warnings are never to be believed.

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[10] E.g., Stilling.

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