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The Aristotelian Myth, the Screen Idea and the Making of the Chilean Film *No*

Abstract

This article takes a close look at an element that permeates the screenwriting process from initial idea to finished film, and suggests that at the beginning of the creative process there is a core or budding idea that takes gradual shape as the screenplay develops into the screen version. This element is neither detectable nor does it give the work unity at the beginning of the writing process, but results from such process. As the story develops, the authors (screenwriter, director, producer) negotiate about that intangible “something” they do not wish to lose. After a theoretical overview of Aristotle’s notion of the poetic myth understood as the soul of the story and *mimesis* of action (*Poetics*, 1450a 9, 16–18, 22, 32–35, et. al.), and Ian W. Macdonald’s notion of screen idea (2013) seen as the goal at which a screen project aims, this essay presents a case study of the Latin-American film *No* (Chile, 2012), written by Pedro Peirano, produced by Juan de Dios Larraín and directed by Pablo Larraín. The methodology combines narratological and thematic tools. As a result, the study shows how the screen idea can be tracked down by observing the transformation arc of some of the characters in the plot, and explains why the plot undergoes modifications throughout the different stages in the development of the film.

Keywords

Screenwriting, Aristotle’s Poetics, Screen Idea, Writing process, Narrative, Chilean cinema, Pablo Larraín.

1. Introduction

This article explores the relationship between writer, director and producer in the creative development of a film story. Specifically, it considers the degree to which the existence of a core idea of what the creative team wants to tell contributes to the decision-making process of a story. To address this question, this essay examines the Chilean film

No (2012)¹, directed by Pablo Larraín, written by Pedro Peirano and produced by Juan de Dios Larraín. The material and data used in this study consisted of seven versions of the screenplay, several interviews with Peirano and the Larraín brothers, and the film version released in 2012, which was nominated for the Oscar in 2013.

The study was based on the notion of the poetic myth as defined in Aristotle's *Poetics* and Ian W. Macdonald's proposal of the screen idea (2013). After a necessarily brief presentation of these concepts, there is a narrative analysis of the shifts in the protagonist's family subplot and of one aspect of the main plot throughout the different versions of the script. This is followed by the conclusions drawn from this exercise.

2. Theoretical assumptions of the analysis

As is known, Aristotle refers to the myth in Chapter VI of his *Poetics*. There, he points out that the myth is the most important of the six components of tragedy because, he says, it is "like the soul of tragedy" (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450a 38-39²). He suggests the substance of the myth to be a "mimesis of praxis", a "representation of action, life, happiness and unhappiness" (*Poetics* 1450a 16-18).

This dual description of the poetic myth suggests that the core or central idea that sparks off life in the entire dramatic and narrative fabric is the particular way in which a given story presents an aspect of life or, as García-Noblejas puts it, the way in which the story "acts out" human life (García-Noblejas, 2003: 272; Gutiérrez Delgado, 2007: 539-540).

This means there is a principle that unifies all the components of the story—including the characters, the framing, music, dialogues, and all the audiovisual resources: lenses, camera movements, lighting, sets, costumes, editing, etc.—which has to do with "the action around which the drama is centered" (Frede, 1992: 211). If according to Aristotle, a poetic story is that in which the actions take place as "necessary"—in Frede's clarifying words, with the necessariness of human action (1992: 203)—then, it is possible to suggest that the greater or lesser relation between the parts and this vital principle, implies a greater or lesser poetic unity in the story.

Thus, the development of a screenplay, involves the efforts of the whole creative team to make all the parts of the story respond to, and be consistent with, the crucial element that constitutes its "soul". Because of its very nature, "the soul" is neither tangible nor easy to define, nor is it present at the beginning of the process of creation. It is the outcome of such process.

In the foregoing brief introduction to the notion of poetic myth, its outcome, poetic unity, is the key issue for the negotiation of the development of a story. As can be seen, this is a classical approach, based on a reflection on the cause that has given rise to the tragedy and which, according to Aristotle, comes from "the impulse to understand the world of human action by making and enjoying representations of it" (Halliwell, 1987: 79).

In turn, from a perspective that is different from Aristotle's, Ian W. Macdonald also describes this key issue, which he refers to as the "screen idea":

[It is] what you, as a writer, think you're writing, but of course it does not exist except as an imaginary concept. It is a term which names what is being striven for, even while that goal cannot be seen or shared exactly. The goal of the concrete never arrives—as the screenwork

¹ *No* is considered part of Pablo Larraín's trilogy on the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, along with *Tony Manero* (2008) and *Post Mortem* (2010). However, Pablo Larraín has said he never intended to make a "trilogy": "I never planned it" (Rohter 2013). This allows *No* to be studied independently from the other two.

² I follow the standard numbering procedure to quote Aristotle's works (Bekker numbering). Thus, *Poetics*, 1450a 38-39 refers to lines 38-39, first column (a), page 1450 of Bekker's edition of Aristotle's works.

develops, each draft script becomes one more fixed version of the screen idea. The final film—the screenwork—is another such version (Macdonald, 2013, Ch. 1).

The notion of screen idea shows that in the creative development of a film project, the creative team have a certain awareness of what they want to do, but they also know that the way in which they convey such awareness is not mandatory and defined from the start, but is constructed throughout the process. Thus, as Macdonald explains, there is an objective which is conditioned by “the beliefs, the practices and conventions of those producing the film, and from the habitus and dispositions of those who discuss it” (2013, Ch. 1). At the same time, the objective is not rigidly predetermined, but “undergoes change throughout [the film-making] process” (2013, Ch. 1). One of the virtues of this concept is that it “can be applied across research traditions, as well as different levels of analysis” (2013, Ch. 1).

Given the scope of Macdonald’s approach, this study combines the screen idea with the notion of the poetic myth. Stated in screenplay analysis terms, it seeks to analyze how “that undetermined something” that the creative team of *No* were looking for was essential for the unity of the screenwork. We shall also see how, because of such unity, the movie permits a reading that differs from the one that the authors had originally intended. This last step is possible through the distinction between prefiguration, configuration and refiguration, posited by Paul Ricoeur (2012), where refiguration is understood as the personal interpretation of a narration by a specific spectator in a specific moment (García-Noblejas, 2004; Dowling, 2011; Vela Valdecabres, 2012).

3. Narrative analysis of *No*

The *No* project originated during a dinner conversation of the Larraín brothers and an executive of the Canadian production company Rhombus Media, who was familiar with *El Plebiscito*, a play by the Chilean playwright Antonio Skármeta (Rohter, 2013). This play has never been staged but, in the words of Juan de Dios Larraín, “one of its ideas struck us as interesting: this advertising agency in which the boss favours the *Yes* option and the ad-man, the *No* option” (J. de D. Larraín, personal communication, June 11, 2014). The Larraín brothers decided to make a film using this material as the starting point and asked screenwriter Pedro Peirano to join them.

The historical event on which the Skármeta play and the Larraín film are based is the referendum called by Augusto Pinochet in 1988, in which the Chilean citizens were asked whether they wanted him to remain in power for the next eight years. Should the *Yes* option win, Pinochet would continue to rule; otherwise, he would call for democratic elections after 15 years of dictatorship and severe human rights violations that started with the coup that overthrew Salvador Allende in 1973.

According to Pablo Larraín, right from the outset, Peirano was of the opinion that the treatment of the story should be that of a “big bank robbery” movie, in the sense that the ending—a historical fact already known by the audience—did not matter quite so much as showing “how that ending was organized and how it was planned” (Guillou-Vásquez, 2012).

The narrative analysis of the plot of the film version³ is based on the classical three-act structure and provides the necessary information to allow moving on to the analysis of the changes.

The film *No* narrates the story of René Saavedra (Gael García Bernal), a 35-year-old publicist whose past political allegiance was with the Left. He is now working at an agency

³ The television version was aired by TVN (Televisión Nacional de Chile). It consists of four episodes with a total duration of 200 minutes (3.32 hours). The story in the series follows the shooting script more closely than the film version (*No*, TVN, 2013).

run by Lucho Guzmán (Alfredo Castro), a man with right-wing political views. The movie opens with a scene in which Saavedra and Guzmán are presenting to some clients a publicity campaign for Free, a new soft drink. The publicity spot is very innovative and modern, considering the scene takes place in the 70s.

The incident that triggers the action is a conversation in which José Tomás Urrutia (Luis Gnecco), one of the leaders of the *No* campaign, asks Saavedra to help them in an advisory capacity. This conversation introduces two themes that will be recurring in the story: René's relation with his wife Verónica (Antonia Zegers) and the impossibility of defeating a dictator in the polls, due to the citizens' fear of going to vote. The following scene introduces the third theme: the relations between the employer (Guzmán), who supports the *Yes* option and his employee (Saavedra), who will come to support the *No* option.

After presenting a minister of Pinochet's (who, with the help of an Argentine publicist, is planning and conducting the *Yes* campaign), the film goes back to Saavedra. In the following seven minutes, there are three sequences characterized by their economy of narrative power. In the first sequence, Verónica's contentious personality emerges clearly in a scene in which she is being beaten up by the police while Saavedra looks on; in the second sequence, we get information about the protagonist's social background when we see him in his middle-class home, with a maid who looks after both him and his son; and, in the third one, Pinochet is shown in a TV programme, which presents him as the country's saviour in a rabble-rousing scene shot during a visit to Easter Island. In the following scene, we witness the tense relationship between René Saavedra and his wife: she has left home, probably to fight Pinochet's regime, leaving their seven-year-old son Simon under her husband's care. Thus, 20 minutes into the story, the spectator already has all the necessary clues to follow the second act in an informed way.

As the second act peaks, we can see on alternative succession the creation process of the *No* TV spot and the reaction of the government and of those responsible for the *Yes* spot. The film combines very aptly archive and purpose-filmed footage thanks to the use of the same Ikegami cameras and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch videotapes that were used at the end of the 1980s (Ortega, n.d.).

René and his team receive recurring threats. This makes him take his son to his wife's house, where she is now living with another man. The fixed shot of René's face after leaving his son shows the tragedy of the family break-up.

The second half of the second act shows the tensions between René and his boss, between René and the *No* team, and between the government and the opposition. As it closes, we see the end-of-campaign street demonstrations for and against Pinochet. The *No* demonstration ends with serious clashes with the police. This is the first time in which the images of our protagonists are interspersed and combined with archive footage. The police arrest Verónica. René takes his son with him, and later, with Guzmán's help and through the intervention of a senior military officer, he manages to have his wife released.

The spots of both campaigns are shown for the last time before the plebiscite. The generals and politicians supporting Pinochet are well pleased with, and applaud, the *Yes* spot. The Minister calls Guzmán, firmly convinced that the *Yes* option will win. Guzmán is not so sure. This marks the turning point of the story and the end of the second act.

The last twenty minutes of the movie can be divided into two sequences lasting almost ten minutes each. In the first one, we can see the reactions to the vote counting at the headquarters of the *No* campaign. The *Yes* option appears to be winning in the first official announcement of the results. There is tension among the *Yes* team when they see the police leave their headquarters. A sudden power-cut is aggravated by rumors that Pinochet will not take defeat sitting down. After the electricity is restored, however, the TV shows the

generals arriving at La Moneda, the government house. One of the generals speaks to the journalists and says “The *No* option has won. That much is clear, at least to me”.

The people at the *No* headquarters take a few moments to react and finally start cheering and embracing one another. René, however remains impassible. This is the beginning of the second sequence of the third act and of the end of the film. While everybody is celebrating, René holds his son in his arms, leaves the house where his colleagues are celebrating and walks along streets already full of cars celebrating the *No* victory. René looks at all this with indifference. After a short while, Simon gives him a kiss or whispers something in his ear which, finally, elicits a fleeting smile from René.

There is a cut to a very brief three-minute epilogue. René rides his skateboard to the agency. He is still working with Guzmán, this time on the publicity campaign for a new TV series featuring daring women and handsome men. The movie closes with the same speech we heard from René’s lips at the beginning of the story: a text he delivers *à la* Don Draper, which he repeats by heart and uses for the presentation of any publicity campaign. The screen fades to black on René’s face, listening very gravely to what one of the actresses in the TV series is saying.

4. The Creative development of *No*

According to Juan de Dios Larraín, when they decided to do *No*, he, the director and the writer had agreed on one core idea:

There is this group of people who don’t have much money, but are very creative. By highlighting the concept of joy they manage to overcome the pervasive fear of the civil society and force the dictator to step down [...]. The idea was to make an epic film and to do so, you’ve got to have a clear idea from the start. We had already started work, but had this idea early in the process (J. de D. Larraín, personal communication, June 11, 2014).

The two main themes discussed during the writing process were René’s relationship with his family and how far into the film they would show the *No* option as losing (J. de D. Larraín, personal communication, June 11, 2014).

The seven versions of the screenplay analyzed for this article were written by Pedro Peirano and their dates range from 18 August 2009 to 11 September 2012 (there are two versions bearing this date: one revised on 12 October and the other, which became the shooting script⁴. To facilitate reading, each version will be identified with a letter).

4.1. The structure of the family subplot

Let’s begin by addressing the shifts in the family subplot. In the versions of 18 August 2009 (A), 14 May 2010 (B), and November 2010 (C), René is separated from his wife Veronica, a woman of right-wing views. At the beginning of the story, René meets Carolina, a leftist journalist he falls in love with who, in due course, joins the *No* team. At the end of this story, René and Carolina get married. There is no mention of what happens to Verónica. The relationship between René and his son Simón is quite dysfunctional. He calls Simón “ugly”, hits him and makes fun of him whenever his son shows signs of fear, even at a funfair. At the end of these three versions, Simón hugs René who pokes fun at him once more, while Verónica walks away without looking at him.

In the May 2010 version (B), Carolina is a more empathetic character because she receives threats and is accused of being a right-wing informant, whereas Verónica becomes

⁴ The Draft dated 18 August 2009 corresponds to Draft 12, according to its cover. In the other Versions used in this research the draft number does not appear on the cover. All the translations are the author’s.

less likeable, as she is presented as a Pinochet supporter. There are initial signs of René softening towards his son: almost at the end, he tells Simón that he loves him. The November 2010 version (C) shows Carolina's personality in greater depth: she now speaks English because she was exiled in Canada. In turn, Verónica is now seeking to be reconciled with René.

The big change in this subplot appears in the April 2011 version (D). There is no Carolina, and Verónica's role as young Simon's mother is assigned more prominence. She buys him a toy train and visits him at René's house. Also, it becomes quite clear that she is now living with another man, Marcelo. In this version, Verónica is a hard-core leftist, who cannot accept what René is doing; René, in turn, flirts with a sociologist.

There is a particularly significant scene to understand the relationship between René and Verónica: when he gets the threats, René leaves his son with Verónica, the child's mother. From this version on, including the shooting script, this scene always ends as follows:

Simon goes into the house. Veronica takes the child's bag but does not go in at once in case Saavedra says something. Saavedra leaves without looking at her (Peirano, 2011a: 77).

However, in the film, this scene is somewhat different from the visual point of view. In fact, René does not look at his wife, maybe because he sees Marcelo, the man she is living with now. Marcelo is wearing a No T-shirt and invites him to have breakfast with them, which René refuses. The camera follows René and stops on a fixed close-up of his face, gazing at the horizon.

In the version of 18 May 2011 (E), René attempts to go back to his wife, but she rejects him. In a subsequent version, that of 11 September 2011 (F), the character of Verónica becomes more appealing. The first time we see her, she has just been released from jail, and this makes her appear brave and vulnerable at the same time. In addition, the script denotes affection between her and René:

Verónica looks at him with pity, yet fondly. Saavedra notices this and attempts to tone down his language (Peirano, 2011c: 52).

Also, further on

Saavedra laughs. The way they look at each other denotes the affection that, in their heart of hearts, they still feel for each other (Peirano, 2011c: 52).

In this script, there is also another scene that shows affection between husband and wife: René asks Verónica to stay overnight and have breakfast with Simón the following morning. However, Verónica refuses to do so.

This version includes Simon's birthday celebration scene, in which René has too much to drink and seduces another woman. Verónica is angry and Simón, who has been a witness to everything, is very sad. This scene appears in the shooting script (G) (Peirano, 2011d: 96-98) and in the television series⁵, but not in the film. In all these versions, including the shooting script (G), Verónica and Simón appear for the last time the day before the referendum, and, therefore, before the climax of the main plot. By contrast, as already mentioned, in the film version René leaves the *No* headquarters carrying Simón in his arms

⁵ The shooting script included more material than was necessary for the film version. "When the first cut lasted 5 hours and 20 minutes we got the idea of doing the series" (J. de D. Larraín, personal communication, 26 September 2014).

and looking very grave. He smiles only when his son whispers something in his ear or kisses him.

The differences between the first version of the film script (A), and the film version can be seen more clearly through a schematic analysis of the transformation arc of the main character. This analysis draws from Seger's claim (2010) that subplots often focus on relations rather than actions and have the same structure as a main plot. That is, a subplot has a beginning, a middle and an end, with twists, crises and climaxes of its own⁶.

In version (A) of the screenplay, René and Verónica are married, but do not get along. There is a negative tension between them. In the first act, René meets Carolina, a journalist, and their initial mutual attraction develops into a relationship that remains unchanged as the action proceeds. At the end of the story, René and Carolina get married; Verónica and Simon do not appear in this ending. As can be seen, the transformation arc of this subplot is quite flat: its only twist is that Carolina appears. The end comes with no further changes.

By contrast, in the film version, the character arc of René is much more complex. At the beginning of the film, René is married to Verónica. When we first see her, she is being beaten up at a police station, which shows her to be vulnerable yet strong. As the subplot develops, René expresses his interest in her repeatedly: he wants to know whether she was badly hurt by the police; he asks her to stay overnight at his place; he looks sad after he leaves his son in the house where she is living with another man. On all these occasions, there is more dramatic tension in their relationship than in version (A) of the script, as René makes small advances and Verónica keeps on rejecting him. At the end of the movie, Verónica does not appear physically, but is somehow present, personified by Simon being carried by René. René looks extremely serious. These different incidents enhance the structural complexity of the subplot, and provide a deeper insight into the character's emotions.

The analysis of the protagonist's family subplot shows that as a character, René acquires more depth when his relationship with his wife and son is defined in a better way. In the scripts, the subplot keeps oscillating, because the arc of the relationship appears to have no clear rationale. In the film, the story ends on a pessimistic note: René may be a winner in terms of his profession, but the fact that his wife left him still causes him pain. There is however a glimmer of hope, embodied in René's slight smile after hearing what Simón whispers in his ear as he carries him in his arms (or Simón may have kissed him: it is not quite clear what goes on here).

4. 2. A debate on the way of representing power

As for the evolution of the main plot, its main changes have to do with the way of narrating the relation between the *No* group and the people in power⁷. We shall analyze it starting from two components: the inclusion or omission of the "Lagos's finger" scene (Fuentes, 2013), and the threats to the *No* team by the military government. The main changes appear in the last version of the script (G) and in the film version. Juan de Dios Larraín confirmed that the director had been the sole originator of all the modifications of the script during the shooting of the film. "Pablo [Larraín] excels at proposing new scenes on the set. Rather than dramatic lines, they are different ways of resolving the same narrative arc" (J. de D. Larraín, personal communication, September 26, 2014).

⁶ I have cited Seger because of her clear presentation of this topic. In addition, McKee (1999), Suber (2006) and Truby (2008), among others, have referred to the advantages and possible dangers of the subplots.

⁷ There is also an interesting evolution in the live-footage segments: they are more fully developed in every successive version of the script.

The “Lagos’s finger” scene shows a real-life incident. Ricardo Lagos, one of the founders of the Partido por la Democracia (PPD), pointed his accusing finger at General Pinochet and criticized him in very strong terms during a TV programme called *De Cara al País*, aired by Channel 13. This historical fact took place at a time when there was no freedom of speech in Chile (Fuentes, 2013).

This segment, taken from archived footage, first appears in the screenplay in the version of 14 May 2010 (C) (Peirano, 2010a: 22) and in every version but one up to the shooting script. The exception is the April 2011 (D) version, which is a turning point with respect to the others. This scene does not appear in the film either, although it does in the television series.

Juan de Dios Larraín explains they had doubts about including this segment, as they felt it could be interpreted as if it was easy to oppose the dictator. This would have weakened the story they wanted to tell, which, as already mentioned, was to have an epic tone (J. de D. Larraín, personal communication, June 11, 2014).

As for the threats to the *No* people team from the Pinochet supporters, in the August 2009 version (A), they are foreshadowed in the conversation between Luis Guzmán and the Minister. Guzmán suggests that the *No* people are feeling too relaxed and “should be more afraid”. The Minister’s reply (which appears with slight differences in all the versions and in the screen version) is the following:

You know what these things are like: you have to open the door and close your eyes (Peirano, 2009: 74)⁸,

meaning that if he gives the order to instill fear in the *No* leaders, this may lead to actions beyond the law.

We shall analyze in further detail three scenes that express menace in the screen version: the phone call to René at night, with explicit threats to his son, after which René sees some men watching his street; the cars tailing the *No* partisans’ car that takes the video cassette with next day’s spot to the National Television Council; and the way in which the polling day is narrated.

The threat involving Simón and the persecution of the men in a car in the second part of the second act in the April 2011 version (D) (Peirano, 2011a: 74) are in almost the same position as in the May 2011 version (E) (Peirano, 2011b: 82), in the September 2011 version (F) (Peirano, 2011c: 94) and in the shooting script (G) (Peirano, 2011d: 99). In the screen version, the initial part of the threat, minus the phone call, appears much sooner, immediately after the Minister says to Guzmán: “If I open that door, you have to close your eyes”.

The second part of the threat (which includes the phone call and René noticing the men in the car when he goes out to inspect the street) is shown later. This change in the order of narrating the events increases the tension from the first half of the second act on.

A comparison of the first three versions (A, B and C) and the last four (D, E, F and G) shows that there are changes in the scene of the menacing cars tailing the car that takes the videotape to the National Television Council. In the first three versions, René and the young woman journalist leave with the videotape and are followed by Pinochet’s men. Initially, this was a comic scene in which a group of people help René and the journalist to pick up the tape that they have dropped. This scene was omitted in the November 2010 version (C). From the April 2011 version on (D), the scene shows one of the *No* creatives, Costa, leaving with a videotape, but when he notices there are several cars watching the *No* headquarters,

⁸ The May 2010 version (B) reads: “But you know what these things are like, one has to open the door and close one’s eyes” (Peirano, 2010a: 76); the April 2011 version (C) reads: “If I open that door, you have to close your eyes...” (Peirano, 2011a: 72).

he re-enters the building. René has a brilliant idea: everybody leaves the building carrying a videotape box, but only he himself has the original box with the tape and

the agents are confused and cannot follow every single one of them (Peirano, 2011a: 79).

In the film, this scene takes place much earlier and this, once again, increases the tension produced by the threats.

At the end of the second act and beginning of the third act, which starts on the day of the referendum, there are also differences between the shooting script (G) and the film version. The film cuts short whatever may distract attention from the dangers of campaigning against the government and the tension of not being certain about which side will win.

This is illustrated by a small detail in the scene in which René is going to the *No* headquarters. In all its versions the script reads:

We see Saavedra arriving at the *No* headquarters, which is being surveilled by the police (Peirano, 2011d: 116).

In the film version we see René, holding his son by the hand, and observing with some curiosity the shadows that every now and then come between him and us, the spectators. Only after he has taken some steps do we realize that the shadows are riot police.

It is this economy of language and handling of the images, particularly of close-ups, that gives the sequence a much greater tension than that generated by reading the last version of the script.

5. Conclusion

The study of the seven versions of the screenplay and the film version itself allows us to conclude that from the very beginning of the *No* project there was a central idea underpinning the decision-making process throughout the creative development. This central idea was to make an epic film in which the magnitude of the task to be carried out by the characters would be out of all proportion to their means and circumstances. The concept of “epic” was triggered by the perception shared by the director, the producer and the screenwriter that they were telling the story of a nearly impossible feat that called for much courage and imagination.

The protagonists of the *No* campaign were fully aware of the difficulties involved in the endeavour, given the enormous power of the dictator they were confronting and the fear prevailing in the country. All this changes when they discover that joy, as a concept, is the means to tilt the balance in their favour and win the day. As for René, the idea of epic action in the main plot made his personal story in the family subplot shift from that of a self-centred man, who always got his way with women, to the story of a man whose wish is to win back his wife’s love—a much harder to attain goal. Thus, unlike the outcome of the main plot, the protagonist meets with failure in the subplot dealing with his family life.

This contrast between professional success and personal failure, makes René Saavedra an epic hero in the classical tradition, in that he appears to be a character that is brave, as well as more righteous than immoral that “suffers a reversal and falls, because of a flaw of his own” (Santas, 2007: 31). In this sense, the film has one of the characteristics of the epic genre, consisting in highlighting “the character’s inner journey” (Wallace, 2003). The epic nature of the story can also be observed in the fact that, as Emil Staiger says, “the journey is more important than the arrival” (Rodríguez Pequeño, 2008: 47).

The second conclusion arising from the study of the changes in the plot and the subplot is that the sense of unity of the story, which is sought in the different versions of the

screenplay, materializes in the final cut. It is here that we can perceive in a clear way the dramatic arc of René's feelings towards his family, and the hostile environment against which the *No* team is working, which were not so clearly shown in the previous versions of the script. This, together with the choice of shots, prevalence of close-ups, and camera on shoulder in permanent movement, gives the film version a coherence and unity that was absent even in the shooting script.

Without this unity, which is what makes *No* a film with a poetic dimension—that is, there is unity in its capacity to represent human action (García-Noblejas, 1982; Brenes, 2005)—the film would only be a political documentary. And, definitely, it is much more than that.

With the inclusion of the prologue and the epilogue (the two scenes in which René and his boss Guzmán do a presentation of a soft drink advertisement for clients at the beginning of the story, and of a TV serial at the end) the film version elicits an interpretation of the story that takes everything into account.

The creators of *No* wanted their film to deal with an epic story, and they managed to do so through their choice of a tragic protagonist and the mounting tension generated by the way of narrating the confrontation with danger. This epic character, as well as the inclusion of the two sales-pitch scenes at the beginning and at the end—which appear even in the first version of the screenplays analyzed (A)—makes it possible to interpret *No* beyond history, by hinting at a reading that describes what happens when a man loses his family.

In this sense, by showing not “what has happened” but “what might happen” to any of us, *No* is “more philosophical than history”, as Aristotle says (*Poetics*, 1451b 5–6). It also explains why two of the close-ups of René's face are so moving, the first one, when he leaves his son with his estranged wife, and the other one, near the end of the film, when he listens to a frivolous comment by a TV actress.

To sum up, the screen idea in *No* had to do with the authors' intention of narrating a historical event in an epic tone and the search for that tone was what led them to find the unity of the whole narrative and dramatic fabric—a unity that comes from the poetic myth of the story, which was not present at the beginning of the process but needed that process to “appear” on screen, and provide consistency and poetic unity to the plots and subplots. If we take this unity as the starting point it is possible to arrive at a personal interpretation of the film, which may not be the one intended by the authors, but which is valid because it is based on what the story itself proposes. The term “valid” is used in the sense of validation operations that can be carried out on interpretations, as suggested by Ricoeur (1991: 160). Pablo Larraín himself points to his personal interpretation:

The main characters of the three movies [*Tony Manero*, *Post Mortem*, *No*] think that no matter how involved they are in the political situation, it is not going to affect them directly. But they are actually very affected, even if they don't notice. So the lack of consciousness of those characters is something that connects them (Rohter, 2013).

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