

Catalan Antigones: Between Religion and Politics¹

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Two aspects converged in the representations of tragedies in ancient Greece: on the one hand, insofar as they involved gods and transcendence, they had a religious dimension; on the other hand, insofar as they involved the city, the polis as a whole, they had a political character (Finley 99–106; Riu 131–51). Let us remember that the line between religion and politics, relatively clear today, was artificial in Athens in the fifth century BCE, since the religion of the Athenians was a *political religion* (Pòrtulas 30–32).

Regardless of the religious origin of tragedy, linked to the Dionysiac rites (Bowra 76–79; Pòrtulas 43–47), for the Greek spectators attending the representation of a play was doubtlessly also attendance at a religious act. The final verses of *Trachiniae*—“ye who have lately seen a dread death, with sorrows manifold and strange: and in all this there is nought but Zeus” (Sophocles)—do seem a profession of faith. And in the course of tragedies, the presence of divine powers is constantly felt; sometimes they even appear on stage, although their actions are mainly only sensed, as if they are watching for the ineluctable fulfillment of the fatality that has been predetermined and which the oracles have often announced.

This divine presence is one of the elements integrating Sophocles’ tragic conception (Malé, “Sòfocles” 173–75). However, in the adaptations of his plays through the years, this religious element, linked to the ancient mythic world of the Greeks, is considered under different perspectives. To most sixteenth-century humanists, for instance, Sophocles’ paganism becomes merely an “ornamental accident” (Steiner 139). But this is no reason to make the religious element disappear from the adaptations of his tragedies, as illustrated by Robert Garnier’s play *Antigone ou la piété* (1580). The word *piété* in the subtitle has Virgilian echoes, as George Steiner points out: “It is emblematic of that in Virgil’s

Eclogues and *Aeneid* which was seen as manifesting the mysterious yet necessary deployment of Christian values, the successive dawnings before Christ, in ancient art and civilization” (139).

This concept of piety, absent in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, was associated with *mater dolorosa*, God’s Mother, which led Renaissance sensibilities to see analogies between the evangelical figure and the tragic one, and to consider the latter from a religious perspective: “The Sophoclean motifs of virginity, of nocturnal burial, of sacrificial love, the Sophoclean sense of action as compassion, of heroism as freely shared agony, all these are exact annunciations or prefigurations of Christian truths” (Steiner 140).

The association of Antigone with Christianity and the reinterpretation of her actions in light of Christian values have been constant up to the present (Boutang and Steiner 60–61, 90–91). It was with this same spirit that the first modern adaptation in Catalan of the tragedy of Oedipus’ daughter was written: the *Antígona* of Majorcan poet Guillem Colom, published in Barcelona in 1935, a play written in verse that reflects the conservative and traditional Majorcan society of the 1930s.

Guillem Colom stated in the Prefaci (Preface) of his *Antígona* that the work was intended to be “un assaig de realització de teatre clàssic segons els cànons d’avui” (5) (an attempt to produce classical theatre according to today’s canons), giving the term *canon* not only an aesthetic sense but also an ideological one, since he stressed that the tragic heroine, when pronouncing the well-known verse number 523 of the play by Sophocles, “pressentia la nova llei Cristiana” (5) (anticipated the new Christian law).² It is not surprising, therefore, that in the staged prologue of the play, which places the two daughters of Oedipus in the battle for Thebes, when the two brothers are still fighting,³ one of the first words said by Antigone—having hinted to Ismene that they should go and separate the brothers, and after Ismene has expressed her fear to her—is “piety” (16).

This concept is mentioned several times throughout the play (32, 48, 60, 72). Colom introduces other expressions related to Christian values and ideas that do not appear in the Sophoclean tragedy, like the concept of forgiveness (26, 51) or the idea of “injustícia contra els desvalguts” (27) (injustice against the helpless). Mostly, he makes use of a word with deep Christian meaning: love. Throughout the play, “love” appears in different contexts, always spoken by the heroine⁴ and referring to the affection towards her brother, although it can be understood in an absolute sense. For instance, Antigone tells Creon about her intention to bury Polyneices in spite of the prohibition: “Sí! follia d’amor és el meu crim!” (29) (Yes! Mad love is my crime!). Later, she uses it to justify her action in front of the tyrant, copying verse 523 in Sophocles’ play: “Jo no vaig néixer, doncs, per la rancúnia, / sinó per l’eternal amor dels cors!” (52) (I was not born for resentment, / but for eternal love of the hearts!). Finally, she expresses her last will in front of Haemon and

Creon before she dies: “Sols vull fondre els odis amb l’amor!” (87) (I just want to melt hatred and love together!).

Most of the changes in the plot and the dialogues to the Sophoclean tragedy are a consequence of Colom’s intention to Christianize the characters and the conflicts, especially the denouement, as he also explains in his Prefaci. It must be kept in mind that, in this sense, Sophocles’ play contains elements incompatible with the Christian spirit (Gil 70–71), which Colom has eliminated or replaced. He suppresses, for example, the words with which the Greek Antigone declares she would have not acted the way she had if, instead of her brother, the deceased had been her son or her husband.⁵ And in the confrontation between Haemon and Creon inside Antigone’s tomb, the former does not try to kill the latter as the guard who has seen it explains in Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

The most relevant modification is the end of the play, as Colom also warns in the Prefaci. The bloody ending of most tragedies and the classical dramas were completely incompatible with the Catholic scene, and in the adaptations they were radically changed, sometimes with absurd outcomes.⁶ Since suicide is considered a sin, Colom prevents his heroine from committing it and instead has her die of physical and moral fatigue. He also suppresses Haemon’s and Eurydice’s suicides. Creon’s suffering is reduced, this way, to a Christian feeling: remorse (90); on the other hand, Creon goes as far as begging “clemency” and “forgiveness” (89).

At the end of the play, and in the words of an elderly man in the chorus, Antigone is implicitly compared to Jesus Christ for her heroic action: “;Oh l’esforçada i pia ànima pura / que amb sa mort redimí la seva gent!” (93) (Oh, the diligent and pious pure soul / whose death redeemed her people!). In this way, Colom makes obvious the main objective of his dramatic recreation: showing the exemplarity of Antigone’s behavior from a Christian perspective.

Likewise, at the end of *La tragèdia d’Antígona*, by Joan Povill Adserà (1962), when Ismene appears in stage deploring the death of her sister, Tiresias replies to her: “No t’ha deixat, Ismene! . . . La tens a vora teu . . . És amb els déus, no saps? L’han acollida entre mig d’ells, per bona!” (44) (She has not left you, Ismene! . . . She is near you . . . She is with the gods, don’t you know? They have taken her among them for being good!). Several other exclamations of the Messenger and the Guard follow: “Protegeix-nos a tots, oh dolça Antígona!” (Protect us all, oh sweet Antigone!); “Perdona’ns les misèries de la vida!” (45) (Forgive our life’s miserable actions!).

In this version of *Antígona*, then, like in Colom’s, the Greek heroine is seen as a Christian martyr. The play by Povill was published almost thirty years later and is also a Christianized version of the original tragedy, albeit more faithful to the text by Sophocles, so much so that it even reproduces some passages of the 1951 prose translation by Carles Riba. Of little literary quality, it was conceived to be staged in Teatre de

La Passió d'Olesa de Montserrat, with which the author had been involved since 1932 as the art director of the traditional play *La Passió*. The Catholic family audience of this theatre was, therefore, the recipient of Povill's version of *Antígona*.⁷

Nevertheless, the changes Povill makes to Sophocles' tragedy are not as extreme as Colom's; he does not eliminate, for instance, Antigone's, Haemon's, and Eurydice's suicides. On the other hand, Povill develops the roles of Eurydice and Haemon, and he makes them already participate in the first act. At the beginning, they represent the model wife and son who show, respectively, trust and respect towards their husband and father; thus, their behavior enhances Catholic family values. Further into the play, when Creon's senselessness and arrogance are made evident, both Eurydice and Haemon attempt to make him aware of his mistake, to no avail.

Povill uses several passages from Sophocles' play to present Antigone's action as that of a Christian martyr, and he does so by making use of language filled with Catholic connotations easily intelligible to the audience, like in the first dialogue between the heroine and Ismene, where the former states her resolution to carry out "una acció justa i pietosa" (14) (a fair and compassionate action). Finally, in the last scene of the play, as mentioned above, Antigone is evoked as if she were already in Heaven, which shows, as in the case of Colom's version, the character's Catholic exemplarity.

Both Povill and Colom place the action of their respective works in ancient times and they keep the references to gods and the divine or unwritten laws of the Greek tragedy. When doing so, their only aim is credibility and archaeological fidelity, which is in no case contradictory to their wish to connote with Christianity the tragedy, since Antigone's attitude and her action of burying her brother entail values to be interpreted in a Christian light (love, mercy), in spite of following old laws of the gods.

Salvador Espriu also keeps references to the gods in his *Antígona*, written in 1939 and published in 1955 (chronologically, between Colom and Povill's), but with a different aim. His intention when writing the play was not to present a new version of Sophocles' tragedy from a certain viewpoint, like Povill and Colom, but rather to recreate the classic myth with the objective of literarily expressing his personal worries and experiences, mainly political but also religious.⁸

For the most part, the divinities in Espriu's *Antígona* are a simple and credible reflection of the mentality and the beliefs of the characters placed in ancient Greece, like in the plays by Povill and Colom. But worth mentioning are those included in the exclamations of Eurydice and Euriganeia (one of Antigone and Ismene's wet nurses) when they find out Eteocles and Polyneices have killed one another in battle near Thebes:

EURYDICE. Que ens arribés aquest dia, que aquesta sang es vessés sota la indiferència del sol! . . .

EURIGANEIA. En esguardar la seva llum, esdeveníem orbs. El triomf del déu advers ens imposa de contemplar la nostra desolació reflectida al mirall de la seva impassibilitat. (34–35)

(EURYDICE. That this day should come, that this blood should be shed under the sun's indifference! . . .

EURIGANEIA. Watching his light, we became blind. The triumph of the adverse god forces us to contemplate our grief reflected in the mirror of his impassivity.)

These references to the god's impassivity in the face of the death of the two brothers, and the indifference of the sun and the sky—which, by metonymy, also refer to the divine—do not come from Sophocles, and they reveal Espriu's skepticism and agnosticism (Boix 38–39), that is, his conception of a distant inaccessible god (or God), totally indifferent to men and their suffering. Thus Lúcid Conseller—a character that can be considered Espriu's *alter ego* (Miralles, Introducció xxix)—states at the end of the play: “Qui sap si els plors dels homes únicament serveixen per mantenir sense mudança l'impassible somriure dels déus” (Espriu, *Antígona* 73) (Who knows if the crying of men is good only to keep unchanged the impassive smile of the gods). In addition, similar references are found in Espriu's poetry and prose. For instance, in the poem “Missatge des del glaç,” incorporated in the 1981 edition of *Les cançons d'Ariadna*, the poet establishes a contrast between childhood—the *origin*—and a dark and confusing *now*. The former is happy and free of suffering, equated to a “fresc pensament de salabor als llavis (fresh thought of salt on the lips)” whereas the latter is as when Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, left unprotected by God (who becomes an imaginary being), and could only hear the silence of his impassivity: “sota l'impassible somriure de déus imaginats” (133) (under the impassive smile of imagined gods).

Likewise, in “Hermes,” a prose of *Les roques i el mar, el blau* (1981)⁹, after narrating some aspects of this mythic figure, Espriu digresses regarding God, “immens en grau extrem, distant, personal, impassible” (103–104) (immense to an extreme degree, distant, personal, impassive).¹⁰ This impassive god, who does not feel affection towards humans and only loves himself, who leaves us in absolute silence, is the one Eurydice and Euriganeia invoke in the face of fatality and suffering. Through their words, part of Espriu's religious thought is reflected.

When justifying the burial of Polyneices, Espriu's Antigone invokes, on one hand, the “antics precepts” (49) (ancient precepts), and the “lleis eternes” (51) (eternal laws), and on the other hand, the fact that Polyneices was her brother (50), her own blood (71). Here, Espriu follows Sophocles; however, he does not reproduce or recreate the

already mentioned verse from the Sophoclean tragedy, “Tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving” (523), through which both Colom and Povill construe their respective Christianized versions of the myth. In the original, Antigone’s reply is important in the dispute between Creon and Antigone about justice and the laws—the laws by which a city is governed, as well as the unwritten laws of the gods. With this reply, Antigone “fuig de tota qüestió, remuntant-se al principi d’on deriva la justícia concreta i vivent, l’única que ella entén” (Riba 117) (avoids all questioning and goes back to the principle whence justice stems—concrete, living justice, the only one she understands). Riba refers here to the principle of love for her brother, and “tot diàleg entre Antígona i Creont és des d’aleshores impossible; i de fet cessa” (117) (all conversation between Antigone and Creon is from then on impossible; and in fact, it stops).

Espriu was aware, however, of the inevitable “ressò evangèlic” (evangelical resonance) of this line (Riba 117) and opted not to include it in his work—the same way he did not include any allusion to the concept of mercy, so much used by Colom and Povill—so that his character and work did not bear any Christian or even religious connotation.¹¹ In fact, his protagonist, unlike other characters, does not even mention the “gods” or “god.” For Espriu’s Antigone, transcendence does not exist—or, at least, she does not count on it; she is an Antigone without gods, however impassive, and without God. Sophocles’ heroine tells Creon she disobeyed the law “for it was not Zeus that had published me that edict” (Sophocles, *Antigone* 450), a verse from which, by the use of the pronoun “me,” it could be assumed—as George Steiner does—that “elle [Antigone] entretient avec lui [Zeus] une intimité tout à fait particulière” (Boutang and Steiner 86) (she [Antigone] enjoys with him [Zeus] a most particular intimacy). Espriu’s Antigone resides in the most radical solitude, without anyone to turn to, either in this world or in the afterlife. The only help she receives comes from a character created by Espriu, the hunchback jester Eumolp; however, he helps her not because he sees things the way she does and believes her action is fair, but rather, as he says, out of gratitude, because “tan sols tu has estat bona amb mi” (Espriu, *Antígona* 54) (you alone have been good to me). In her design and sacrifice, Espriu’s Antigone is completely alone.¹²

In Sophocles’ tragedy, after pronouncing the aforementioned verse number 450 with a reference to Zeus, Antigone invokes “the justice who dwells with the gods below” (Sophocles, *Antigone*), and in this way the discussion on the laws starts between her and Creon. Espriu also suppresses this discussion from his work and has Antigone, when asked by Creon, “Per què has fet això?” (Why have you done this?), simply answer: “No m’he de defensar, accepto el càstig” (54) (I do not need to defend myself, I accept my punishment). Just as he wanted to avoid his *Antígona* to be interpreted in a religious light (like Colom’s or Povill’s),

Espru also avoids a Hegelian interpretation, that is, that the nucleus of the play be reduced to a confrontation of ideas about laws and justice.

Where, then, does Espru's interest lead? Leaving the prologue aside, the first reply of the play, by one of the wet nurses, Astimedusa, already provides an indication: "Diuen que Antígona ha vist el seu germà petit per acabar la lluita" (13) (Antigone is said to have seen her younger brother to end the fight). The key concept of the play is the fight—an actual war—between siblings. Espru gave his *Antígona*, written towards the end of the Spanish Civil War, political meaning.¹³ In different ways and against the backdrop of World War II, Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*, written in 1942 and premiered in 1944, and Bertolt Brecht's, which premiered in 1948, will also have political meaning (Malé, Pròleg 11–19).

In his *Antígona*, Espru attempts to exteriorize his civic preoccupation with suffering caused by the fratricidal war of 1936–1939. This preoccupation reappears in other works: for example, in *Primera història d'Esther* (written between 1947 and the beginning of 1948), in the final speech of Altíssim (*Primera* 80). Another example is found in poem VI in *La pell de brau*, written between 1957 and 1958 (Espru, *Obres completes II* 18).

What interests Espru in the myth of Antigone is the fratricidal confrontation at its origin, and this is why, in addition to Sophocles' *Antigone*, he takes as reference *Seven against Thebes* by Aeschylus and *Phoenissae* by Euripides, focused on the fight of Oedipus' children over the city, and he includes and adapts some of the scenes in these tragedies (Miralles, Introducció xix–xxxviii). However, Espru is careful to avoid in his work, in the fight between the siblings, the audience taking sides for one or the other. In the dialogue between Antigone and Eteocles in Part I, where the sister defends Polyneices' position, both adduce arguments in which neither of the confronted siblings is right (Eteocles breaks the pact they had made and Polyneices is an unfair king). Moreover, the dialogue ends with these words by Antigone: "Parleu igual, amb paraules contràries. No vindrà la pau" (Espru, *Antígona* 25) (You speak alike, with contrary words. Peace will not come). By likening the siblings with regard to their reasons ("Parleu igual"), Espru does nothing but show that neither cause is better than the other and that the fight is senseless. Above the affection between the brothers, pride and ambition win out.

The last reply cited of Antigone in her dialogue with Eteocles contains another key concept in Espru's work: "No vindrà la pau" (Peace will not come). In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the aim of his heroine is obvious from the first scene: to oppose a law she deems unfair and carry out her duty of burying her brother. However, the duty Espru's *Antígona* imposes on herself from the beginning—and this is why the Catalan author places the beginning of the action during the Civil War—is to achieve peace in the city. This will be her objective at the start of the play, when she tries to prevent her brothers' fight, and also at the end

of the play. Certainly, the reason she objects to Creon's prohibition and buries Polyneices is that "era també el meu germà" (50) (he was also my brother). But unlike Sophocles' Antigone, who sacrifices herself convinced she has carried out her sacred duty, Espriu's Antigone sacrifices herself for another reason: "no pertorbaré la pau de Tebes, tan necessària" (71) (I will not disrupt peace in Thebes, [it being] so necessary). This is the meaning of her sacrifice, and this is why she can say: "sento que moro amb alegria" (71) (I feel I die with joy). In Thebes, the war is over and, along with peace, another king with his own laws has arrived. Antigone has broken the order of the city by disobeying a law she considers unfair, which is why she tells Creon "sóc ben innocent" (71) (I am completely innocent), but she accepts the punishment because she wants to restore order. She accepts her death to avoid a new revolt from the citizens and to avoid another war. She thus sacrifices herself for peace, for the people, because "oblidant el que el divideix, pugui treballar" (71) (people can work if they forget what divides them). With this *Antígona* written in 1939, just before the end of the Spanish Civil War, when the defeat of the Republic was imminent, Espriu does not ruminate on guilt and responsibility but rather, after almost three years of suffering, only on peace and reconciliation. Therefore, his work has not only political but also ethical significance.

In the first version of the work, Antigone addresses her last words to the crowd gathered at the entrance of the palace, screaming and about to revolt against the king to defend her: "Torna a les cases, poble de Cadmos!. . . Honra, poble, el teu príncep i oblida el que et divideix. Treballa, unit i en pau, per la grandesa de la ciutat" (Espriu, *Antígona. Fedra* 55) (Go back to your houses, people of Cadmos!. . . Honor, people, your prince and forget what divides you. Work, united and in peace, for the city's greatness). This was written at the beginning of 1939 when, we shall remember, the Civil War still had not ended. At the time, Espriu, not yet twenty-six years old, felt hope for peace after the conflict. He also perceived the injustice the new government—comprised of the winning side—could commit, but he believed in a conciliation between the parties that could allow people to live and prosper; that is, he believed in forgiveness, a concept mentioned only once, and not by Antigone but by Tiresias.¹⁴ When Espriu rewrote the play between 1963 and 1964, however, after almost twenty-five years of repression under Franco's dictatorship, his vision of reality was quite different.

One of the modifications to the new version is the elimination of the people's attempt to revolt found in the first version: after Creon's sentence, instead of the cries of the crowd, now only "una reprovació glaçada" (69) (a frosty disapproval) is heard: a condemnation, but a silent one.¹⁵ This silence is commented on by a new character created in the second version, Lúcid Conseller (Lucid Counselor). The introduction of this character, considered an *alter ego* of Espriu, as stated above, is used by the author to distance himself from his 1939 work (Miralles,

Introducció iii–viii). In his speech, addressed to another Counselor (who does not say anything), he revises the past events and he imagines the future of the characters that have taken part in them from an ironic skeptical viewpoint, reflecting the mood of the author in the 1960s, after more than two decades of Franco’s dictatorship. If Antigone’s sacrifice, in the 1939 version, stands as a starting point for hope, now it constitutes a completely useless, senseless action.

Aside from Lúcid Conseller’s comments about the characters of the tragedy, two observations addressed to his partner and himself (he speaks using first person plural) present interesting accusations. First, he says that “sovint les pitjors crueltats no alteren la nostra indiferència i ens trabsalsa, en canvi, una tonada estúpida” (72) (often the worst cruelties do not alter our indifference, and yet a silly song may upset us). After questioning Antigone’s attitude, he also wonders: “I com establir i repartir . . . responsabilitats i culpes? La responsabilitat, per exemple, del nostre silenci, fill tant del que sé que anomenes la meva distanciada lucidesa com del que permetràs que qualifiqui de temor, el teu temor de desplaure al nou rei” (73) (And how to decide and assign . . . responsibilities and blame? Responsibility, for example, for our silence, born both from what I now you call my distanced lucidity and from what you will allow me to name fear, your fear to displease the new king).

Both accusations, which are in fact the same—indifference and silence before injustice and the suffering of others—are addressed by Lúcid Conseller to the rest of the Counselors, but not only to them. Even in the first version of the play, the young playwright of 1939, in spite of his hopeful naïveté, already points to the other people responsible for Antigone’s death, in addition to Creon: all those who stand by the side of the winner and serve him only to ensure their own status and benefit, like the Counselors do. Espriu already foresaw, this way, the role of the collaborationists. In the second version of 1963–1964, however, he widens the reach of his accusation. When Lúcid Conseller speaks to his mute partner about “la responsabilitat . . . del nostre silenci” (73) (responsibility . . . for our silence), this “our” refers—as Miralles points out (Introducció vii)—to the Catalan audience of the 1960s. Espriu knew that, next to the responsibility of the person using power in an arbitrary and despotic way, there is the responsibility of those who, when seeing this despotism, remain silent and do not act to do anything in their control.

It is worth mentioning that the motif of silence in the presence of power is already found in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, when the heroine, before Creon, reproaches the chorus of the elderly for keeping their opinion quiet. But Espriu—like Brecht, in whose version the same motif is found—turns the reproach into a formal complaint and urges the spectators, given the recent historical events, to examine their conscience. In this way, with his *Antígona* he brings to the forefront the civilian and political dimensions of theatre and tragedy, together with the ethical one. And this civilian and political dimension will

predominate over the religious one in subsequent Catalan theatrical versions of the myth of Antigone, except for that of Povill.

In his prologue to another Catalan version of the myth of Antigone, that of Josep M. Muñoz Pujol (1965, revised in 1967)¹⁶, Espriu will continue to insist on denouncing silence (Introducció 6). Muñoz Pujol's *Antígona*, which does not follow Sophocles' text, is written under the influence of Espriu's work, but also under that of Anouilh's *Antigone*, seen mainly in the passages of the heroine's confrontation with Creon, which take the play closer to psychological drama.¹⁷

This new *Antígona* is different from the three previous Catalan versions because the action takes place in the audience's time, the 1960s. With this *transposition diégétique*, to use Gérard Genette's terminology (343–44), the author invites the audience to interpret the events of the story in relation to their historical present and to interpret them from a mainly political perspective (Moix 66–68; Fàbregas 47–49).

The chorus of Counselors that in Espriu's play drives Creon to condemn Antigone turns, in Muñoz's play, into the "Cor dels prohoms de Tebes" (Heart of the leaders of Thebes), all dressed in suit jackets. Although they initially want to convince the tyrant of the need to bury Polyneices, and at the end of the play they will try to save the protagonist, they only do so out of self-interest, with their businesses in mind. Even more than in Espriu's *Antígona*, in this new version of the myth, the audience can identify the chorus with the social class—the haute bourgeoisie—that causes the wars and takes the side of the winners with only the aim of becoming rich. Antigone, who considers them guilty of her brother's death, accuses them of such: "Sé que Polinices morí perquè gosà plantar-vos cara, a vosaltres, usurpadors! . . . Amos de la Guerra" (I know Polyneices died because he dared confront you, usurpers! . . . Masters of War) (Muñoz 72).

Whereas Espriu tried to prevent the audience from taking Eteocles' or Polyneices' sides because he wanted to emphasize the absurdity of war between siblings, Muñoz presents this war as the confrontation between two cities, one of which, Thebes (governed by tyrant Creon, with Eteocles under his influence), oppresses the other, Argos (where Polyneices lives). To the Catalan audience of the time, it was easy to identify Argos with Catalonia, culturally and politically oppressed by the Spanish state. Nevertheless, Muñoz Pujol does not appear to be seeking to create this specific identification, because his *Antígona* is full of social and political referents of a much wider and generic scope. For this reason, at the beginning of the play, Tiresias refers to Argos and Thebes as "les dues ciutats en què es parteix el món (the two cities into which the world is divided)" (14).

In an interview in the mid-1970s, when the interviewer reminded the playwright that *Antígona* was the first play he had written in Catalan and asked him if the language change was a political decision, Muñoz answered: "Prepolític. Però, evidentment, coincidint amb una crisi generacional que es produeix cap a l'any 65. La crisi política, filosòfica i

religiosa de la nostra generació fou en aquests anys . . . Tot això és el que em porta a intentar una mena d'aventura en teatre, que comença amb *Antígona*" (qtd. in Bartomeus 196) (Pre-political. But, obviously, coinciding with a generational crisis around 1965. The political, philosophical, and religious crisis of our generation took place in these years . . . All this is what leads me to try a sort of adventure in theatre, beginning with *Antígona*).

This generational crisis, which anticipated May 1968, caused the birth of a critical and insurgent spirit against the established reality, as well as the defense of new values and new ideas. Several passages in Muñoz's *Antígona* reflect this attitude. When the tyrant tells Antigone, "Oblides que sóc vell? Els vells sabem anar a la nostra. Creont ha complert dos mil quatre-cents anys" (Muñoz 59) (Do you forget I am old? We old people know how to do our own thing. Creon is now two thousand and four hundred years old), he implies tyranny and totalitarianism have always existed in the world. But the heroine answers: "Però això s'acaba, i amb tu morirà la maldat i la vellúria i després en vindran d'altres. D'altres que són joves . . . Són ells que saben les cançons i saben fer l'amor. D'ells és el món" (59) (But this will end, and with you, evil and age will die, and others will arrive. Others who are younger . . . They are the ones who know the songs and know how to make love. The world belongs to them). The reference to the young, the songs, and love (more or less free) evokes the hippie movement of the 1960s and other similar movements. Also reminiscent of these is Tiresias's narration about the attitude of the inhabitants of Argos, among them Polyneices, once they are aware of the oppression of Thebes upon them and overcome their fear: "Avançaren cap a Tebes, cap al llinar de Tebes, en silenci, no violents, respectuosos" (32) (We will move forward to Thebes, to the border of Thebes, in silence, nonviolent, respectful). Also characteristic of these movements were pacifism and nonviolence, with representative figures still present in the mid-1960s, like Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

We have seen how the objective of Espriu's Antigone, set in a war context, was to achieve peace. By contrast, what Muñoz's Antigone intends in a postwar environment—not only after the Spanish Civil War, but also World War II—is finding out the truth: "Jo vull saber. Grataré amb delit, i aixecaré, si puc, la pell de la veritat" (30) (I want to know. I will scratch with delight and will peel back, if I can, the skin of truth). The truth she seeks—in an attitude that reminds one of her father's Oedipus—initially appears to refer only to the death of her brothers, because she doubts the official version's truthfulness (according to which Polyneices attacked the city and Eteocles defended it), a version which ends up being false. But this search for the truth has a wider sense, because it goes against the defense of the ambiguity mentioned by Creon: "¿No saps que res no és mai veritat i que tot és mentida? ¿I que l'únic que és segur és l'ambigüitat?" (64) (Don't you know nothing is ever true and everything is a lie? And that the only sure thing is

ambiguïtat?). And ambiguity is linked to imposture, criticized by Antigone: “No m’agrada que la impostura sembli amable . . . procurant endormiscar; no violentant si pot, acovardint només, i afavorint adeptes” (50) (I do not like imposture to appear gentle . . . as if trying to induce sleep; not forcibly coercing where possible, only intimidating and gaining followers). This denunciation of ambiguity and imposture can certainly be linked to the corruption at every level of Franco’s regime¹⁸, but also, widening the scope and thinking of the context of the Cold War, for example, to the false appearance policies and the manipulation of information of many governments of the time.

The discovery of the truth about Polyneices’ death will make Muñoz’s Antigone disobey Creon’s law and bury him. And she will do so not because he is her brother, but because he has been a victim of oppression and violence, like the whole city of Argos (35); that is, for an ethical reason. For another ethical reason, she renounces Haemon’s love: “l’amor és obra mancada quan hi ha qui pateix fora i ens espera” (53) (love is an unfinished work when someone is suffering outside awaiting us), in a reference to the unburied corpse of her brother. Thus, Antigone imposes on herself what she calls a “duty” (52, 61, 64), a word with obvious ethical connotations.

However, once the heroine has finished the rite, when Tiresias tells her the guards will disinter the body, she refuses to go there again (whereas Sophocles’ Antigone does return). Both Antigone and Tiresias qualify this second attempt as “absurd” (36–37), and it is Tiresias who convinces her, in spite of everything, of the need to do it again, because “l’únic que compta és obstinar-se” (36) (the only thing that counts is obstinacy), and also because “cal fer només el que tu vols i estimes” (37) (you are only to do what you want and love). This indecisive and hesitant Antigone reappears towards the end of the play, when fear of dying makes her tell Creon: “Faré el que vulguis, oncle, ho sents? Seré submissa si em deslligues les mans” (71) (I will do whatever you like, uncle, do you hear me? I will be submissive if you untie my hands). In her last speech, however, when remembering Argos and Polyneices and the injustice committed against them, she is reassured in her resolution. In all these passages, the influence of Anouilh’s *Antigone*—a much more ambiguous play in relation to the attitudes and motivation of the protagonist (Steiner 192–94; Malé, Pròleg 12–13)—can be clearly seen.

Aside from these vacillations, Muñoz Pujol’s Antigone represents the heroine who, confronted with falsehood and indefiniteness, searches for truth and certainty. She also embodies the rebellious and nonconformist position of those who do not resign themselves to remain silent and dare say no to oppression and injustice from the powers that be.

The influence of Anouilh’s *Antigone*, together with that of Muñoz Pujol’s, is also present in the subsequent Catalan *Antígona*, written by Romà Comamala in 1985 and published the following year.¹⁹ Comamala’s protagonist undergoes a psychological process equal or

more complex to that of her predecessors. And, like them, at a certain point of the play, while she is in prison—where most of the action takes place—for having disobeyed the law, feeling lonely and hopeless, she will accept Creon’s proposal, made through other characters, to retract herself and disinter Polyneices’ body to save herself (128). In the end, she certainly changes her mind and tries to bury her brother again, knowing this will cost her life to her; but she does it full of doubts and confronting, implicitly, Sophocles’ Antigone: “No m’assemblo de res tanmateix a una d’aquestes dones que van segures a la mort perquè se saben en possessió de lleis eternes” (131) (I am not at all, however, like one of these women who die in all confidence because they know they own the eternal laws).

In many other aspects, the play by Comamala contrasts with that of the Greek author. Most secondary characters, for instance, have undergone what Genette calls a *dévalorisation* (404–408) and they now come to share Creon’s ideas: Eurydice represents “la dona subjugada” (Comamala 117) (the subjugated woman); Haemon, a “petulant jove feixista” (119) (self-satisfied young fascist), and to Tiresias, Antigone says, “Acòlit de Creont” (127) (Acolyte of Creon). In the case of Ismene, she also turns into a selfish hypocrite: at the beginning of the play, she calls Antigone obstinate and proud and criticizes her action; in the last scene with her, when finding out that in spite of her hesitations she will keep her resolution to bury Polyneices again, she celebrates it because deep down she knows that Creon’s prohibition is unfair and someone needs to be sacrificed for the cause—someone who is not herself, of course.

In his *Antígona*, Comamala also applies—as does Anouilh—a process of *démotivation* (Genette 372–83), that is, he elides the reasons why the heroine, not only in Sophocles’ play but in most of its modern versions, buries her brother, like fidelity to the eternal laws, love, justice, the wish to revolt. None of these motivations is adduced by his Antigone, beyond the need to carry out the burial “a què té dret el més baix dels mortals” (Comamala 110) (to which the lowest of mortals is entitled). To the point that she tells Tiresias: “Mai no he tingut raons per res” (126) (I have never had any reasons to do anything). But, as Genette explains, every process of *démotivation* usually involves, in modern works, another process of *transmotivation*, from the moment that “il peut suffire de supprimer un motif pour en suggérer irrésistiblement un autre en vertu du terrible principe *pas de conduite sans motif*, et sans avoir à le désigner explicitement” (376) (Suppressing a motive can be enough to irresistibly suggest another one, by virtue of the terrible principle of *no conduct without a motive*, without having to mention it explicitly). In Comamala’s version, this new reason, as we will see next, is not completely formed.

In the first scene where Antigone appears, after having carried out the rite with Polyneices’ corpse, she admits to her sister, “Quelcom superior a la meva voluntat m’ho imperava i jo obeïa cegament”

(Comamala 108) (Something higher than my own will obliged me and I obeyed blindly). Her decision has not, therefore, been conscious, but she obeys “quelcom superior” (something higher) or, as she says several times during the play, a “voice” (108). This voice is what has driven her to carry out a “sacred duty” (108, 116, 126, 128).

Adjectives like “sacred” or expressions like “el poc de fe que encara et resta” (130) (the little faith that still remains in you), said by the inner voice that leads Oedipus’ daughter to bury her brother again, have brought about the idea that Comamala’s protagonist is a Catholic Antigone (Ragué 130). It is true that the playwright classifies the play as “drama de fe” (Comamala 137) (faith drama), but these references do not necessarily link to Christianity. Because “el poc de fe” (the little bit of faith) that Comamala’s Antigone has is not faith in any divinity, as she hints when, once her brother is buried, she tries to give a “Christian” interpretation to her action, an attempt she foresaw useless: “Jo que em creia . . . que el Cel *per aquest cop almenys* em beneïa, i ara resulta que fins aquest es posa, *ja podia preveure-ho*, de la banda dels qui s’han establert de no fa gaire al tron de Tebes” (128, emphasis mine) (I believed . . . Heaven, *at least this once*, blessed me, and now it turns out it also takes, *I could foresee it*, the side of those who sit since not long ago on the throne of Thebes). Her meager faith should perhaps be understood in the sense of believing and having hope in some sort of transcendence, like when she says she will bury Polyneices again “[per] salvar . . . la mica de fe que tal volta conservo, per un últim intent de mantenir, com dir-t’ho?, el sentit del sagrat . . . per no quedar-me en la foscor absoluta” (130–31) ([to] save . . . the little bit of faith I perhaps retain, in a last attempt to maintain, how to put it to you? the sense of what is sacred . . . in order not to end up in absolute darkness).

With Comamala’s *Antígona*, the transcendent or religious dimension of the tragedy comes back to the foreground and politics are left aside. Although many elements in the play are modern (beginning with the policemen who guard the prison), rather than modernization or diegetic transposition, we should refer to anachronisms, as in the case of Anouilh (Genette 358), because the timeframe of the action is undetermined and it is not connoted historically, unlike in Muñoz Pujol’s play. Nevertheless, Comamala introduces some ideas already present in Muñoz’s version which do have some political connotation: for example, the defense of ambiguity by Tiresias (125) or the criticism of Creon and his followers toward people with their own ideas (111–12, 123). The policemen keeping watch over Antigone support Creon’s government because it has brought order and well-being to the city (111). Although the play is written in the Spanish transition period, references like this evoke Franco’s dictatorship.

Another *Antígona* written five years later, however, does indeed take the years of reestablishment of democracy in Spain as a reference. The author, Pere Alberó, a twenty-nine-year-old university student, will reinterpret the myth politically once again.²⁰ Of all the Catalan

Antígones, this one is furthest from Sophocles' play, to the point of eliminating the key motif of the prohibition on burying Polyneices. The action begins after the war, with an initial speech from Creon, and continues with Ismene and Antigone at the cemetery burying Polyneices. While in the traditional *Antígones* the transgression of the heroine is burying Polyneices, in Alberó's version it is disinterring him and showing his corpse around the city so that he is remembered. For this action, she is condemned to be locked up, not in a cave but in a mental asylum.

Alberó also carries out a *valorisation* (Genette 393–99) of Ismene's character, who ceases to be merely secondary. At the beginning of the play, both sisters oppose Creon and commit to keeping Polyneices' ideas alive against Eteocles', who, like Ismene, says "no era res més que un tirà ambiciós" (5) (he was nothing but an ambitious tyrant). But further in the play, the sisters will embody two conflicting attitudes.

When the war is over, as Ismene explains, Creon does not follow Eteocles' despotic ways and he has expressed his intention, repeated several times, for Thebes to be "una ciutat democràtica" (Alberó 8) (a democratic city). We would have no reason to doubt his intention, were it not for his first appearance, when one of the Corifeus alludes to the rebellious attitude of the two sisters, Creon replies that "si algú infringeix la llei no dubteu que serà castigat . . . Sigui qui sigui" (5) (if somebody breaks the law, they will, do not doubt it, be punished . . . be they whoever they may be).

However, in contrast to Eteocles' tyranny, Creon's attitude is tolerant, and this is why Ismene agrees to enter the government to defend Polyneices' ideals (9). Antigone's position will be opposed to Ismene's pragmatism: on the one hand, she is a dreamer, an almost mystical girl, who sometimes expresses herself in verse; on the other hand, she is a rebel and an anarchist, who even states that "sovint la destrucció és l'únic camí per a construir" (12) (destruction is often the only way to construction). Unlike her sister, Antigone does not want to resign (5, 12) and she opposes the safety and well-being the new government offers the people because she considers them "falsa llibertat" (14) (false freedom) and because they favor oblivion (12). As she tells Haemon (who will take her side), making use of Marxist language, Creon has imposed on the citizens "[un jou] de ferro daurat . . . on l'alienació pren l'aparença d'una orgullosa llibertat" (14) (a gilded iron [yoke] . . . where alienation takes the appearance of proud freedom). This is why she disinters Polyneices, because "només l'escàndol podia provocar la reflexió necessària per a la consciència" (14) (only scandal could bring the reflection necessary for conscience).

Aside from some indecision and inconsistencies, the play presents an interesting political reinterpretation of the myth and, as Salvat writes in the prologue, it sets out "una inquietant consideració sobre les contradiccions, paranys i claudicacions de la democràcia sorgida l'any

1975” (2) (a disturbing consideration of the contradictions, traps, and renunciations of the democracy born in 1975).

If in Muñoz’s, Comamala’s, and Alberó’s *Antigones* the tendency was to move increasingly farther away from Sophocles’s play, the last one to date (published in 2002), Jordi Coca’s, represents, conversely, a return to the origin (Malé, Pròleg). In a recent short study, Coca defended the interpretation of the Greek tragedies on the basis that “no eren literatura fora del temps” (“Tragèdia i història” 91) (they were not literature outside of time). His *Antígona*, in an only apparent paradox, places itself inside and outside time. Outside time because the action, in spite of some modern elements (in wardrobe, for instance), does not take place at any determined time, nor does it occur in a specific place, because the stage is completely empty, with only the actors present (and, at some points, wind and rain). At the same time, however, his *Antígona* is framed in time because it suggests a political interpretation of the myth, where the audience cannot help but recognize some aspects of more than one country’s recent history.

Coca recovers concepts like love (31, 49), forgiveness (49), and mercy (57), but free from any religious connotation, because he completely eliminates the transcendent dimension in his play. Even when Antigone, seeking to convince her sister to help her bury Polyneices, says “[hem de] complir la llei més sagrada” ([we have to] comply with the most sacred law), she immediately adds another adjective: “sagrada i elemental” (32) (sacred and elemental). While presenting the same conflict from Sophocles’ tragedy, the prohibition on burying the brother who fought against the city, Coca reduces it to its bare essence: the most elemental human dignity dictates that the dead must be buried (46); to forbid not only burying them but even mourning them, as the new king does, is inhuman (54).

The protagonist revolts against this inhumanity and this injustice (32), to prevent the power of the tyrant from “[pugui] arribar a tornar-nos bèsties” (34) ([being able to] end up turning us into beasts). While in most versions of the myth, including Sophocles’, Creon is presented as an ambiguous figure, in Coca’s version he is an unequivocally despotic, violent, and arrogant character. It is not difficult to find analogies with some twentieth- and even twenty-first-century heads of state. It must be said that, in some instances, this version’s Antigone appears tainted with her uncle’s character, like when she threatens her sister because she does not want to help her: “Tu i tot estàs en perill si m’ho impedeixes” (35) (Even you are in danger if you stop me). It is a brief moment, but without her realizing it, Creon’s outrage turns Antigone into what she fights to avoid: a beast.

Coca’s version takes up two motifs of Espriu’s: first, the motif of war. One of the innovations of this last *Antígona* is the substitution of the chorus by one single character: Noi (Boy), a child that witnesses the injustice and cruelty of what happens and comments on it, greatly perplexed.²¹ Among the events Noi comments on is the war between

Antigone's two brothers and its terrible effects, death and destruction to the city. Noi also embodies the future; while Creon tries to attract him towards his power, Antigone places in him her hope that "la memòria del que ara parlem duri més que nosaltres" (47) (the memory of what we now talk about will last longer than ourselves). The author, then, appeals to the value of witnesses and of memory, so that the events narrated in the play do not repeat themselves.

The other motif of Coca's *Antígona* already present in Espriu's work is silence, silence due to fear (one of the words that appears most in the play). The peace that Creon wants for the city is precisely based on fear and silence. Antigone will reproach this silence mainly to one character, Tiresias, who represents—as the initial annotation reads—"un intel·lectual d'èxit" (29) (a successful intellectual). Through this character, who in the end feels inhibited and does nothing to save Antigone, Coca criticizes the lack of ethic and civic commitment of many intellectuals, as well as their adhesion to power.

Unlike Tiresias, Antigone does act, in spite of having to give up her life. And she will do this—like the protagonist of Espriu's version—not only for herself, but also for the people, for society. If she has decided to bury her brother, she tells Ismene, "no és per tu ni per mi. És per Polinices i per tota la ciutat, que s'hauria d'esgarrifar amb un decret com aquest" (31) (it is not for you or for me. It is for Polyneices and for the whole city, who ought to shudder at such a decree). Coca's heroine is an Antigone, therefore, who assumes her responsibility towards the *polis*, that is, her political responsibility, the same responsibility Coca assumes when writing this new interpretation of the myth.

In twentieth-century Catalan literature, the myth of Antigone, eternalized in Sophocles' tragedy, has been interpreted, as we have seen, from religious and political perspectives. On one hand, since Catholicism has been part of Catalan life and society for centuries, it is not surprising the myth has been interpreted from a Christian point of view, especially taking into consideration some of the values embodied by this classic character, easily identifiable with Christian virtues. On the other hand, it is not surprising that the first *Antígona* with a civic and political character, Salvador Espriu's, was written the year the Spanish Civil War ended, because this historical fact marked Catalan culture decisively. This is why references to the war are found in every one of the great Catalan authors of the mid-twentieth century, from Carles Riba to J. V. Foix, from Pere Calders to Mercè Rodoreda, and from Joan Oliver to Espriu himself. Franco's dictatorship of the postwar period, as well as the political transition—which remains dubious for many—have also marked Catalan literature. When expressing their worries about reality and history, Catalan writers have found in the Greek myths fertile material. And if they have chosen mainly Antigone, with her confrontation with the tyrant Creon, it is because, unfortunately, many have seen such a confrontation in the circumstances of their time.

Notes

1. Study framed within the project FFI2010–16491/FILO (Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación) and the research group Grup de Recerca Aula Màrius Torres (2009 SGR 423, Generalitat de Catalunya). Translated from Catalan by Gemma Fors Soriano, with amendments by Ashley Puig-Herz.
2. Colom translates the verse (to which he gives a wrong number) in a footnote (5).
3. Besides taking Sophocles' *Antigone* as a reference, Colom adapts passages and elements of *Seven against Thebes* by Aeschylus and *Phoenissae* by Euripides.
4. I leave aside the Cor de Vells song referred to love (67–68), already present in Sophocles' tragedy.
5. On this controversial passage of Sophocles' play, see Riba 121.
6. Take as an example the version of *Hamlet* published in Barcelona in 1898 in the Biblioteca "La Tàlfa Catalana" (The Catalan Thalia), with the subtitle "Drama en tres actes y en vers original de Shakespeare, traduit y arreglat a l'escena catòlica per Àngel Guerra" (Shakespeare's original Drama in three acts and verse, translated and arranged for the Catholic scene by Àngel Guerra), where the female characters disappear and, at the end, when Hamlet is about to kill his uncle—who wishes to die because he cannot bear the burden of guilt—the appearance of his father has him spare his life and tells him: "Los cels vos salvan" (46) (The heavens save you).
7. This religious focus of the play does not necessarily need to be linked to the sociopolitical context of postwar Spain, as Ragué suggests (51), because Povill was bound to the Catholic theatre from the beginning of the 1930s through Olesa's play *La Passió*.
8. After the first edition of 1955 (staged in 1958), Espriu rewrites the play in 1963, with some modifications, suppressions and mainly additions to the first. This new version will be staged that same year and published in 1969 with one last addition: the final speech of a character called Lúcid Conseller, written in 1964. See Miralles, *Introducció*.
9. Already present in *Dibuixos (amb algun mot) sobre temes clàssics* (1976).
10. See also Miralles, "Salvador Espriu" (434–38).
11. The suppression of the word "love" can also be linked to the respect this concept caused in Espriu from a human and religious point of view, as he confessed to Montserrat monk Maur M. Boix in a letter dated 11 December 1969 (Boix 40).
12. It is true, as Miralles states, that Eumolp embodies "l'abnegació sense condicions" (*Introducció* iii) (unconditional abnegation) because he decides to stay with Antigone and risk his life, but it is not so clear that he represents "la fidelitat a uns principis de coherència amb una idea de l'humà" (loyalty to some consistency principles with an idea of what is human), because with his replies throughout the play, he remains at a distance from the facts and does not express a conviction comparable to those that will lead Antigone to sacrifice herself, to the point, as hinted above, that his aim is to discourage Oedipus' daughter—qualified by him as *obstinated* (Espriu, *Antígona* 46)—from burying her brother. We must admit, however, that his behavior is a sign of human dignity.
13. See Duprey.
14. The reason why Espriu does not make Antigone the one who talks about forgiveness is, possibly, because of the Christian connotation of the concept, like in the case of love we saw above.

15. For an interpretation of the motif of silence in Espriu's *Antígona*, see Duprey 220–24.
16. His text won the Josep Maria de Sagarra award in 1965 with the title *Els Corbs*. Muñoz rewrote and premiered it in 1967 with the title *Antígona 66*. Finally, it was published in 1968 under the title *Antígona*.
17. Not reaching, however, the psychological precision and subtlety of the French playwright; see Bosch 108.
18. Like the trial parody at the end of the play, where Antigone is condemned, which brings to mind Franco's "summary trials."
19. Comamala mentions Anouilh in the play's final note (137).
20. Written in 1990, his *Antígona* premiered in May that year in the gardens of the Facultat de Geografia i Història of the Universitat de Barcelona by the Institut d'Experimentació Teatral, directed by Ricard Salvat. It was published, with a prologue by Salvat, as an offprint (No.12) annex to number 17 of *Entreacte* magazine (March-April 1992).
21. For a fuller discussion on the perplexed child in Jordi Coca's narrative, see Malé, "Jordi Coca."

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