

María Zambrano: Appropriation and Transfiguration of Antigone

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When María Zambrano published *La tumba de Antígona* (Antigone's Tomb) in 1967 she had spent almost thirty years in a state of exile that had by then turned into, if that is possible, a normal, habitual condition. It was during those long decades of exile that her thought expanded and matured. She achieved this in the realms of trauma, travel, solitude, and openness to the unexpected. In the brief prologue to the reprinted edition of the work published along with *Los intelectuales en el drama de España* (Intellectuals in Spanish Drama) and later grouped together under the title *Senderos* (Paths) (1986), Zambrano states that Antigone “responde a la inspiración del exilio diariamente en París y más tarde en una aldea del Jura francés” (*Prólogo 7*) (responds to the inspiration of daily exile in Paris and later in a hamlet in the French Jura region). The use of “diariamente” (daily) points to the routine character of exile, while the French references allude to a dual transition: first, from American lands to European ones, which Zambrano first attempted in 1946, when she lived in Paris for three years, and later in 1953, when she moved to Rome, finally settling in La Pièce in 1964. The second transition corresponds to the author's thought itself, starting as early as her Parisian years, and that fosters the impression that the character—the voice—of Antigone accompanies the author from the time of her return to the Old World. Antigone would speak to Zambrano and both sought to find their own voice. First separately, when Zambrano published her text “Delirio de Antígona” (Antigone's Delirium) from Paris in 1948 in the Havana, Cuba, journal *Orígenes*. Then later, merging both voices in the work at hand, twenty years on.

As I intend to demonstrate, one could say that Antigone's drama as dreamed by Zambrano only comes about in its complete form and open to reality under conditions of at the very least a triple transition of

implementation, appropriation, and transfiguration. The implementation represents a shift from nonfictional reflection, the essay and the treatise, toward a dramatic form organized starting with the dialogical relationship between characters in an environment, and about a conflict. Appropriation means the adoption of protagonists, a mythical plot, a confrontation, and symbols that are not private, but instead typical of Western tradition, and their intentional rewriting. Finally, transfiguration constitutes the translation of identity from the author's personal biographical individuality to that of her *creatura* Antigone through the use of allegory. By adding the transposition of life experience, the play as a whole updates a thought process that seeks to fuse the individual with the collective, the temporal with the mythical, in a quaternity of Heideggerian echoes.¹ Zambrano is thus able to speak simultaneously about herself, humankind, twentieth-century history, and philosophical topics whose relevance is never exhausted.

In order to conjure up all of these manifestations, Zambrano, in the same manner as Unamuno, makes use of an extensive prologue that tries to spell out the conditions under which the work is possible as well as its objective.² In so doing, from the very beginning, the meaning unfolds, feeding off itself and reevaluating itself, expanding in scope. In this way, the play acquires a context and framework, but also basks in a new light of meanings that modify the hermeneutics involved. So, in a certain sense, we could say that the work allows two readings, both distinct and yet interdependent.

The strategy I will follow ahead will be to temporarily set the prologue aside, precisely in order to first of all be able to analyze how the character Antigone is shaped without applying the allegorical background. And afterwards, we will return to it.

Implementation

In addressing the transition that makes Antigone's appropriation possible, we can try a variety of tactics, in keeping with the choices regarding form that Zambrano has set in motion in the creation of her work in order to provide it with biographical, historical, and philosophical resonance. Zambrano knows that she ruminates over an experience that is unique, but nonetheless, not necessarily private. Thus, she seeks the best way to share it, shedding light on her very core, on the trauma rooted in the incomprehension of the experience, and finds the means in a unique combination of these elements: theatricality, dialogue, poeticism, the Greek universe, and the figure of Antigone.

La tumba de Antígona is presented as a theatrical work, the only one of its type executed by the author from Málaga. Fitting within the long tradition of the dramatic transposition of thought problems begun by Greek playwrights, the work is constructed in one act and attempts to translate reflection into a game of masks. In so doing, Zambrano rejects

explicit univocal philosophical discourse, abandoning the realm of traditional, solidly supported philosophical discourse in order to allude to the type of thinking that struggles to be thought (here, the experience of sacrifice, exile, and their expression) and that moves capriciously through Antigone's monologues and subsequent dialogues with her visitors. The thinking and conflicts thus become embodied are inseparable from the voices that modulate and experience them, just as in real life. Thinking evolves here into an inquiry more than an explanation, an experience of learning, clarifying, and becoming aware—always with the opposite of the inexplicable and the incomprehensible. We grope in the darkness together with Antigone, seeing her challenge those who visit her. We note that what is thought and said does not emerge from an abstraction or an attempt to resolve some practical matter, but instead is a response to both an individual and collective life experience. The characters talk about what they feel.

Without any stage directions or other dramatic indications, the play is dominated by the voice, which is always explicit dialogue between characters, and at the same time always implicit because from the start Zambrano talks to herself in the same way Antigone does in her monologues, but in this case through her character. The author lays out the text as an obsessive quest for answers to questions and interrogations that return time and again. The characters clash amongst themselves, make demands of each other, attack and defend one another, and discover themselves and the others. Because we know nothing of their appearance, wardrobe, or movements, all we are left with are their names (and not everyone's), their voices, and their words. In general, their phrases are harsh, mostly accusatory, dissonant. It appears that on not a few occasions the characters either don't hear or don't understand each other, especially among the male characters, in whom the lack of understanding—and the frustration coupled with it—generally wins out. Only Antigone seems to understand—glimpse, rather—in the middle of the conversations, and each exchange with her visitors concludes with some sort of lesson learned, of truth gleaned, of wisdom about herself. What is also curious about those who visit Antigone is that they present themselves, at first glance, as liberators who know more about her than she herself does and wish to “rescue her” from her situation when in fact they seek some type of salvation and understanding for themselves. Do the visitors really want to understand Antigone, or are they simply thinking about themselves? Are they instead seeking to expiate their own guilt in light of the injustice and punishment imposed on Antigone? The tables are turned and Antigone, the keeper of cosmic justice, tells those who listen a truth about themselves, by which she, in a way, saves them amidst the clamor of their guilty suffering.

That which really must be thought (and always will be) and that which is lived (individually) meet at the point where they are communicated in an oblique way. Zambrano removes herself from the planes of “referentiality” or “opinion” typical of the essay form or

nonfictional genres in general (of which the prologue is an example) to situate herself in fiction.³ She chooses the medium of a few characters with names and biographies, known and recognizable, and a well-known plot. Within this framework, she can put thought into play. But also, the language these characters will speak, Antigone above all, won't be common, but strange due to its poetry. This brings with it another shift: from referential language to that of insinuation, nuance, contrast, intensity, sudden enlightenment, and truth that makes itself present. These are phrases that are felt more than thought, the response to rebuke and experience both, embodied thought that struggles to become language by colliding with other words and other lives. This is what Zambrano refers to as "delirium" (221), and what turns reading *La tumba de Antígona* into a sort of multiple-decoding of its lines, an experience that draws readers in, obliging them, precisely, to reject the understanding of familiar reference points in pursuit of an opening up of what is actually said. With all of this the reader understands—and experiences—the fact that not everything can be completely comprehended, that not everything has a defined sense, but that perhaps something does. Thus, the reader must continue to listen. And that is the same experience as living.

As was already mentioned, Zambrano situates her drama in Greek antiquity. Naturally, this return to the past is not by chance. In the prologue, Zambrano makes clear that the Athenian context and that of the postwar are similar because in both there is a crucial need for a mediator's presence, charged with making room for agreement and for what is possible. Antigone, as we shall see, is a mediating character and Zambrano identifies herself with that role, among others.

We also assume that the choice of setting obeys other logics, each of which would drag with it a long history, among them the classical understanding of Greek culture as the dawn of thought and the birth of philosophy; the restoration of the Greek tragedy as a path to knowledge starting with Nietzsche; the rediscovery and reassessment of pre-Platonic thought motivated by Heidegger, among others; Western fascination with rewriting Hellenic drama, especially its female characters (Medea, Antigone, Phaedra, etc.); and also a revisiting of classical antiquity as a fetishistic return to our very origins. Many of these points would be made under the problematic assumption that likes to outfit origins with final explanations—that is, with the unveiling of truth. In the same way, Zambrano understands that explaining where one is from to some extent is equivalent to saying who one is (as we shall see ahead regarding the question of "lineage"). But she also knows that who one is, is the combination of where one is and which way one is headed: Antigone is a character representing change, transition, and impermanence. As we are reminded, she was born of love, only to be punished. She turns to conjecture and seeks to understand (herself). She is the end result and thus an archetype of a way of understanding reality.

Within the Greek cultural universe, Zambrano had numerous options for transfiguring her life experience and her thought—the two always go together.⁴ According to Zambrano, choosing Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus, responds first of all to a calling from Antigone herself, meaning that the character, what she symbolizes and explains—in other words, what allows the author to conjecture about her own life—becomes an insistent exigency.⁵ Antigone becomes a key for interpretation and deciphering that sheds light on personal and collective experience, and in so doing, also reiterates history’s eternal repetitions, “la ley de reaparición que modula la historia” (*Tumba* 215) (the law of reappearance that modulates history). Antigone emerges as the keystone in the Zambranian biographical-philosophical arch by virtue of being a woman and a strong, independent woman thrown into solitude at that; misunderstood by intimates and strangers alike, facing a fate of death and misery. Punished, Antigone moves forward down a path of suffering and injustice, estranged from her homeland and her family. She nonetheless feels that she is the guardian of the laws of the gods—superior to those of humankind—the possessor of an ultimate, superior reason incomprehensible to humankind. In addition, following Sophocles, Antigone embodies the fate of the exile. Zambrano could not have identified more with a character.

In fact, in her final monologue, Antigone speaks bluntly of living in exile. She thus complains of those who welcome exiles and do so as if they were “huéspedes, invitados” (259) (invited guests), without even acknowledging their condition as exiles. What is worse, they do so without allowing the exiles to do what they want to most, “offer” their own lives, share their own experiences as wanderers, as beggars who have lost everything and have no home or homeland. In order to explain their uprooted condition, Antigone contrasts homeland with exile. Homeland is defined as that safe place of one’s own, a place where forgetting is allowed and where one can blend in with the People “sin mancharse, sin perderse” (260) (without being stained, without getting lost). Meanwhile, in exile we carry the weight of our own life—the present becomes unpleasant and must be tolerated. The way of not giving up and losing everything is “tener el corazón en lo alto” (260) (to keep the heart high). And that is precisely the Law of Love that Antigone, as we shall see, will defend insistently when facing humankind. That heart makes tolerable contemplating all the life possibilities shattered by the exile experience, all the happiness of a “vida prometida” (261) (promised life) that faded away. Antigone fiercely acknowledges the experience of exile. She does not fool herself. She endeavors to pick herself up, understand, and know how to keep her heart afloat in hard life’s face.

Appropriation

Zambrano's brief piece is divided into twelve short chapters. It begins with a monologue by the protagonist, which reveals to us her awareness of being out of place and in transition: buried alive, in the middle of her journey between life and death. This is undoubtedly how Creon condemned her to death in Sophocles' play: alone, trapped in a tomb carved in stone, next to her brother's corpse, waiting for death.⁶ There she will receive the spectral guests of her relatives and those who accompanied her in life, among whom several attempt to in some way ingratiate themselves with her and make her abandon the tomb.

From the beginning of the play, Antigone appears to have the choice of remaining confined or to leave (the door of the tomb, in fact, is ajar). We can thus surmise where Zambrano situates her text within Sophocles' plot: the moment after Tiresias's predictions when the others' opinions about Antigone's crime change. The culmination of this change is when Creon, understanding his mistake, rectifies it. In Sophocles' play, this rectification is in vain, since upon opening the tomb Antigone is already dead, having hung herself, which in fact unleashes the subsequent deaths of her fiancée Haemon (Creon's son) and his mother, Euridice.

In a certain sense, we could say that, in rejecting Antigone's suicide, Zambrano actually places the character in a vague atemporality outside Sophocles' narration within which there is a series of visitors both dead and alive. In fact, in Zambrano's text, all the visitors have become specters and ghosts, as what Antigone faces in her solitude are the memories of the past that return and materialize, demanding a place to be and be understood. The past as a trauma that cannot be elided finds embodiment in the shadows of the visitors, and the present unfolds as a place of persistent rifts between what was and what is, and at the same time a space for conjecture in the dialogues between shadows. From this, perhaps, comes the recognition and painful understanding of her own sacrificial fate (in Sophocles' play, Antigone acknowledges her guilt and punishment, but does not see them as destiny).

Antigone is visited successively by her sister Ismene, her father Oedipus, her nurse Ana (a character invented by Zambrano), the shadow of her mother Jocasta, a harpy, her brothers Polyneices and Eteocles, her fiancée Haemon, his father Creon (the responsible party for her punishment), and finally by two strangers. The visitors quickly find themselves disoriented by a delirious Antigone with whom they attempt to reconcile in different ways and somehow find, firstly, a way back into her good graces, and secondly, a return to the way things were before their actions. Antigone, however, rejects both requests. On the contrary, it is she who will have to shed light on the displaced lives of her visitors to make them see how little they understand not only of the life of the one they are visiting, but also of their own. In this way, Antigone helps them to find and know themselves again on their trip of self-discovery.

Moreover, Antigone will reiterate her unwillingness to leave the tomb and, as a result, stress again the impossibility of returning to a previous order. Returning to it is impossible, just as the past cannot be changed.

Throughout the play, Antigone expresses herself in a confessional tone comprised of a complex mix of doubt and affirmation, displeasure and desire, knowledge and tranquility. It is an intimate yet uncontrolled tone, subtly superior in contrast with the demands of the other characters. We always feel that Antigone has lived and comprehended something that the others cannot reach, as well as palpably feeling that she, in fact, continually addresses herself. The others have not sacrificed themselves and none of them has reflected deeply as she has.

All of the action transpires in barely two days, clearly marked by the turning of night to day and the transition from darkness to light. The sunlight is the sense of sight but, from the beginning, also threatens like the sun—which points to the world of the living that hounds Antigone in her refuge and reminds her of the existence of the world she has abandoned and a reality from which she can never escape.

The work is divided into two parts: the first ending with the visit from the harpy, when, rather than face her final actions—those which led to her punishment—Antigone confronts the ghosts of the past and her childhood. This part focuses on the female characters in the play and only one male counterpart: her father Oedipus. All of them are found in Antigone's roots and help her to understand exactly who she is. Thus, Antigone discovers with which powers she is endowed and this will allow her to better understand her later actions as well as help increase her self-awareness when dealing with the visitors that make up the second part of the story: all male and all related to her “illegal” actions. In the second part, Antigone discovers the Law of Terror, which dominates humankind as well as her possible role as mediator—a role rooted in the defense of truth and love.

From her first proclamations, Antigone accepts her fate in the tomb because, in truth, she affirms, she was always within it: [the] tomb for her was her family (*Tumba* 226). This means that Antigone partially blames her family for what has transpired, which explains her later attitude regarding her brothers and parents who, moreover, are not willing to take responsibility for what they themselves did and offer vague apologies. As such, when she speaks with the “dream” of her sister Ismene, Antigone reiterates her decision to not allow her to accompany her to the tomb.⁷ Ismene represents the life that Antigone could not have, the life of a wife and mother, but also, as a result, the bourgeois life that never exceeds its own limits.

In the harsh exchange with her father Oedipus, Antigone accuses him of selfishness and a lack of sensitivity toward her. In the end, Oedipus explains why all the relatives come to see her: she is, after all, on earth, the place where one is fully born (235). In the play, Oedipus situates Antigone as the giver of meaning: she can give a reason for being to others, “hacerlos nacer” (234) (make them be born). Antigone

vigorously welcomes this mission, which she carries out throughout the play.

The visit from the nurse Ana takes us to Antigone's infancy and also allows the introduction of the symbolic figure of the disinherited, those who are not of the nobility: the anonymous day-to-day world that is underappreciated in official history. Ana is also the keeper of the stories in which each one of us finds his or her own life, which in Antigone's case is childhood memories. In addition, she is the character that makes Antigone aware of her destiny as a thinker, as she was always one to think. What makes Ana and Antigone equals, according to the former, is that they are beings chained to seeing what happens to others, unable to remedy the situation. Thus Ana helps Antigone accept the painful fate which has been imposed upon her and her lineage as a thinker. Because dedication to thought is not a choice, but rather "una invencible exigencia, un mandato" (*Prólogo* 9) (an invincible requirement, a command) and accepted as such implies the suffering of knowing the guiding forces of history and the solitude of who sees a bit further and beyond. In the wake of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, for Zambrano the thinker assumes the arduous task of understanding and interpreting.

The mother, who appears as a shadow, symbolizes the Mother and the original impurity which allows life to be, maternity as a grand goddess that has made everything possible, and the material and carnal origin of Antigone's own existence as a body, woman, and human being.

Following the harpy's visit, as we noted, there are no more visits from female characters. The harpy has a key role. First, she makes Antigone aware of her own prudence and her similarity to the spider in her web: loving weaver of the dialogue and loving exchange between the living and the dead (the figure of forgiveness). The harpy also reminds her of "la inteligencia que por castigo pusieron en tu cabecita" (244) (the intelligence that was put in your pretty little head as punishment), reaffirming her fate/punishment in knowing. But in this fate, Antigone will not be able to forget the carnal and earthly part of her being; instead, she will have to incorporate it and make it a participant.

With this behind her, Antigone is equipped to face a world dominated by men. In those men, closed off to transitions and transformations ("los hombres son hombres siempre" [243] [men are always men]), the "Law of Terror" rules—a law whose radical opposite is the Law of Love that only Antigone knows (242). Antigone listens to the harpy, learns from her words, but confronts her and seeks to rebuff her on two key matters. She thus rejects her as "diosa de las razones disfrazada" (the disguised goddess of reasons) for wanting to find an explanation and meaning in everything. Also, the harpy wishes to separate Love and Pity, when for Antigone they are one and the same.⁸

The first men who visit Antigone are her brothers Polyneices and Eteocles. Similar in creed and conduct, they seek to justify the need to act to their sister who holds reflection above things that allow the truth to appear. She makes them see that their actions quickly focused on

bringing death and she abhors a culture focused on combat and death as signs of manhood and power. Antigone had already said: “toda la historia está hecha con sangre” (*Tumba* 230) (all of history is made with blood). This Law of Terror is that which she contrasts with Love, which is the echo of the truth of life.

The proof that the brothers have understood nothing of what has been previously said—and that men “listen” and “learn” in this way—is that they immediately move on to disputing Antigone’s love amongst themselves and continue to think under the logic of victory and possession, justifying violence as a way of imposing law and order. Antigone abhors all victories that presuppose destruction but recognizes that all victories are that way. In vain she demands that her brothers abandon rancor as an avenue to true brotherhood. They intend to act, resolve issues while their sister reminds them that “ya nada tenemos que hacer que no sea mirar, mirarnos, mirarlo todo” (249) (we have nothing left to do but look, look at ourselves, look at everything). They seek order, she the truth. A bit later, Antigone defines the truth as a “luz” (light), that one “a la que nos arrojan los dioses cuando nos abandonan” (250) (to which the gods hurl us when they abandon us).

In the conversation with her brothers, Antigone reminds them that she did not choose to find herself in the situation of having to sacrifice herself and the illumination that said sacrifice brings about.⁹ The knowledge she possesses is paid for with pain and blood and definitively with having lost “su propia vida” (252) (her own life).

At that moment, Antigone’s fiancé Haemon, who is also there to take her away, joins the dialogue still believing that she is a possession of his as his betrothed and that she will still want the life of the sweet-natured wife for which she was headed before her punishment. But Antigone shows him that the naïve young woman and her desire for the bourgeois life have totally faded away. In the same way, she rejects all of the offers from her brothers to accompany them to new lands.

Creon also comes to take Antigone away to the light above and is likewise rejected. His insistence is really an inability to understand Antigone and a vain desire to make amends for the punishment he ordered as if nothing had happened. In fact, all of the men in the play are also characterized as living anchored in a past prior to Antigone’s terrible sacrifice—something from which they have learned nothing. They did not go through it and continue to act as if nothing had happened. Despite the clarity of Antigone’s words, they do not appear to understand entirely. We cannot overlook also that with her rejection of Creon, Antigone refuses to collaborate with the powers that be.

After the visits and her refusal to return to life outside the tomb, Antigone remains alone. Free, she can therefore explain and explain herself, understand herself, tell herself just what has happened, and justify her decisions. It is at this point that the work can be seen as a process of self-awareness and learning.¹⁰ Antigone knows more about herself as she receives more visits and these visits, as we have seen,

reveal different contours of her personality. Antigone assents but also argues; she makes decisions, affirms, denies, and refuses. She better understands what happened to her progressively, why she acted, and what were the consequences of her actions. And she understands how the others misunderstood her. Thus, her refusal to abandon the cave after the requests of the men is explained because none of them was ruled by the offerings of the New Law of Love, instead continuing to follow the ancient Law of Terror and Power. Antigone feels alone and so decides to stay.

In Sophocles' tragedy, Antigone also learns: she loses her haughtiness and shows signs of fear in the face of death. Creon attempts to rectify the situation, but when he tries to save Antigone, he finds her hanged by her own hand. Sophocles rules out the possibility of power being redeemed, but also negates Antigone's sacrificial fate. In fact, he never takes into account even the possibility of Antigone representing the new Law of Love when confronting the (omnipotent) Law of Terror. In Zambrano's particular version/correction, Antigone's role, clearly, expands in multiple directions and in the end the possibility for redemption arises precisely through love and self-knowledge: Antigone needs reflection to achieve clarification: contemplation to gain a voice.

Transfiguration

In this third part I will attempt to finish profiling Antigone's role, adding a new, supplementary layer. Having seen the work first as unveiling a series of formal choices directed at staging a drama, next we focused our attention on that drama and how the character is shaped through her interaction with the other characters. I now want to focus on the composition of the symbolic value the Antigone character has for the author. In other words, the strange connection she has with Zambrano.

Zambrano recognizes Antigone as a "hermana" (*Prólogo* 8) (sister) marked by a similar destiny, as encapsulated in the phrase "nacida por el amor he sido devorada por la piedad" (8) (born of love I have been devoured by pity). Furthermore, Antigone constitutes an ancestor for the author, someone who has already lived her same story in the past and who, as a result, serves as a revelation and a key for her. With this comes an understanding that true history is not that comprised of events in time but the "ancestral" one—a history already written and inexorable. Certain characters have the power to reveal it, because they have already lived it.

In that way, Antigone must first be understood as history's instrument in the form of destiny: that is, as an allegory.¹¹ She is simultaneously the cause and spokesperson for the tragic conflict. She is a prophetic figure who, for Zambrano, presides over Western history starting at a specific point in time: when the laws of the gods are complemented—and therefore debated—by new laws, the laws of the

city. Antigone is the sacrificial victim precisely for defending the validity of the first when confronted with the arrogance of the latter. For that reason, Zambrano names her “doncella sacrificada a los ínferos sobre los que se alza la ciudad” (*Tumba* 204) (the virgin sacrificed to the roots upon which the city is built).

But, in what context does Antigone appear? The answer indicates, in its very formulation, an indissoluble link between both women. Antigone arrives in the world of men in “el laberinto de la guerra civil y de la tiranía subsiguiente” (204) (the labyrinth of civil war and the subsequent tyranny). With this last affirmation, Zambrano interprets and constructs Antigone in correlation with herself, because of her origins, her environment, her actions, and the consequences of those actions. Zambrano gathers together meanings that work like wrappers, melding the person with the fictional character. In this sense, whatever Zambrano says about her can be read automatically as an indirect reference to her own biography and the figures involved are in a certain sense interchangeable as reference points.¹² This is aided by the use of language, which, as we have seen in the previous quote, resorts to more than a few terms that for the Spanish reader are tinged with unequivocal postwar reminders such as “guerra civil” (civil war), “destierro” (exile), and “traición” (betrayal).

Dropped into the inhospitable world of men and defending divine laws before them, Antigone survives her punishment through sacrifice. Antigone’s sentence consists of, as we know, finishing off a life not lived, breaking with the reality of her past and present, a trauma that simply cannot be forgotten. However, in Zambrano’s particular formulation she reaches an understanding of the reasons for her fate, becoming wise to the role that has been imposed upon her, rejecting death as a result. For that reason, Zambrano considers her “una figura de la aurora de la conciencia” (205) (a figure at the dawn of consciousness). Sophocles had eliminated room for this dawning of consciousness to develop and, as a result, its life-giving ability in connection with the pain of sacrifice, by having Antigone hang herself shortly after being enclosed in the tomb. When Zambrano rectifies this death, the central question of Sophocles’ tragedy—Antigone’s determination to bury her brother—becomes secondary compared to the sacrifice, punishment, and exile in the midst of an endless fratricidal war.

Zambrano is more concerned with the life within the tomb because, for her, it is not death but instead a sign of a new experience, a new state: an intermediate, transitional space: “el tiempo del exilio” (the time of exile). That exile is just as much a way to live as it is to die, in which a path to the dawn of consciousness is nonetheless being opened. Exile is equated with being buried alive in a tomb—that is the image that explains it—and for that reason Antigone’s character makes the meaning of exile universally understandable. It also inaugurates a lineage: that of all those who have had their place taken away, condemned to wander aimlessly or create a new home. Absence will make them suffer and

they will try to give it meaning, in that way reducing it while comprehending it. In this sense, the lineage of exiles is identical to that of the dispossessed, and in their commonality as sacrificial historical figures, they demand justice.

In her exile, Antigone painfully understands the meaning of her sacrifice in not having married. She becomes tormented by the vision of the life not lived, conjecturing “de lo que ha sido y de lo que podría haber sido, de su posibilidad y de la realidad impuesta” (220) (what has been and what could have been, of her possibilities and the reality imposed upon her)—all of which produce a horrible pain. Nonetheless, the torment of the life not lived frees her and brings her closer to her own identity, what Zambrano calls “presencia íntegra” (220) (complete presence). But also, in the imbalance between the expected life and what actually occurred, Antigone glimpses the radical difference between the laws of men and those of the gods, something that she herself had defended with her actions.

Zambrano acknowledges that one aspect of the particular rewrite Sophocles did of the tragedy that fascinates her is that “los dioses no intervienen” (206) (the gods do not intervene). Antigone and the rest of the characters have been abandoned by them. As such, Antigone, like Zambrano, is in fact the daughter of a nihilistic era when the gods have gone into hiding. Their absence is what rules, the stain of their non-presence, the vestiges of their emptiness as the actual sign of their previous existence. It is not so much a time without gods as a time when the gods themselves have been abandoned: “la pasión de Antígona se da en la ausencia y en el silencio de los dioses” (206) (Antigone’s passion emerges in the absence and silence of the gods).

But the parallels between creation and creator don’t end there. Antigone is also, on the one hand, a symbol of “la pasión de la hija” (the passion of the daughter), and on the other she is constituted as a mediating figure.¹³ In Sophocles’ tragedy she already was a mediator between men and the gods as well as between the living and the dead. Zambrano will see herself the same way, with the addition of being the mediator between the conquerors and the conquered, between those who remained in that past, those who live in the present, and we, the inhabitants of the future, who will have to understand that experience and message. The mediator is one who creates his/her own intermediate space that, when facing those propounding confrontation—by Force, Terror—proposes another avenue by which to proceed, another pact, that of Love. “Sólo un pacto que señala un límite entre el ilimitado empuje de los dioses y la no menos ilimitada pasión de ser del hombre puede aportar la estabilidad” (209) (Only a pact that draws a line between the unlimited push of the gods and the no-less-limited passion of being human can offer stability). If the will to power can blind men, love can return their ability to see the truth. The mediating character of Antigone, like that of the text itself where she comes to life, is strongly reinforced when we are reminded that in 1985 Zambrano decided to include them

in a volume, *Senderos* (Paths), alongside texts of the traumatic experience brought about by the Spanish Civil War. *La tumba de Antígona*, read after them, functions as an expansion, clarification, and justification of the texts about other intellectuals written by Zambrano during the Civil War. Trauma is a central focus of *La tumba* and a topic that must be discussed according to Zambrano. The tomb tries to point out the wounds the other texts allude to and show the way of, if not healing them, at least comprehending and recognizing them.

As we said before, if Antigone already carried the inherited pitilessness of her father Oedipus without being able to share it, the punishment received for her actions by being shut in a tomb provide her with a new tragedy, her own. Within that tragedy, solitude replaces fraternity and Antigone's own culpability is revealed to her. It is here that identifying herself becomes possible and as a result a second birth that will offer her the revelation of her being in all of its dimensions. Antigone/Zambrano recognizes herself within a new life in transitional mode, since she didn't choose the fate given her and, furthermore, is headed toward "la finalidad no alcanzada" (213) (an unrealized objective). Zambrano affirms that sacrificial beings need to hide themselves in the tomb of oblivion in order to obtain the time that is owed them within which they can receive a revelation "en el bosque de la historia" (215) (in the forest of history). In place of forgetting understood in its negative form, Zambrano proposes a sort of method: make forgetting more positive as a necessity for conscious distancing from life experience, a requirement for being able to comprehend it. Life experience forever remains a part of those who lived it (Antigone affirms: "todas mis vidas están presentes ante mis ojos" (249) (all my lives are present before my eyes), but there is no reason for it to be recalled persistently. Forgetting does not eliminate its presence, but instead allows it to gain precious time to deepen, and allows that among the tangled thicket of historical facts, a meaning can be found that explains them. For that reason, the existence of characters like Antigone grows more meaningful: "los personajes en quien la verdad encarna hasta hacerse profecía" (215) (characters in whom truth is embodied to the point of becoming prophecy). These characters not only embody the truth, but are also the keepers of it as they hide within a tomb to guard it. In this sense Antigone is "la fundadora de la estirpe" (the founder of the lineage) of keepers, as Zambrano justifiably calls her. It is a lineage of which Zambrano feels a part and to which some of those who have felt attracted to Antigone's character have as well—because they recognized her as a sister. As such, Zambrano affirms that Antigone seduced Kierkegaard not so much for her philosophical content, but because he "era a su modo de la especie 'Antígona'" (217) (he was in his own way of Antigone's species), and for various other reasons that are familiar to us: his fate as a son, his quest, his hunger for companionship, and his incurable solitude. She attracted Hölderlin for the same reasons and also because she is situated in a time when philosophy and poetry had not yet

been torn asunder.¹⁴ And it is this identification uniting fictional character and flesh and blood person, which reaffirms poetry (that is, poeticism, here in the form of drama) as a superior form of knowledge as it certainly contains the prophecy and the oracle.

In mustering all of these identifications, Zambrano has composed a mythical genealogy that allows her to comprehend her own biography and the history that surrounds it. She endows her own condition as an exile and a thinker with meaning. At the same time, the double biography itself becomes a demonstration, proof, example, and justification of Zambrano's way of being while in exile—a reaffirmation of the value of that attitude and that way of facing the exile altogether. The work functions like an explanation and vindication of the philosophical dedication of existence itself—something that is simultaneously condemnation, expiation, tragedy, destiny, and revelation; meanings reaffirmed often throughout the work not just implicitly, but explicitly. For example, in the beginning when Antigone, after affirming that history is made of blood, announces her fate/punishment: “no me puedo morir hasta que no se me dé la razón de esta sangre y se vaya la historia” (230) (I cannot die until someone justifies this blood and history goes away). Or when the protagonist noisily plays the part of a medium through which the truth “sale” (232) (emerges); or when the nurse says “la historia, niña Antígona, te esperaba a ti” (237) (history, young Antigone, was waiting for you).

Antigone is established thus as a figure of knowledge in a double sense: through her it is possible to know and reinterpret life itself and also, in Zambrano's particular interpretation, she presents a form of knowledge that is an alternative to the scientific and rational form (what Heidegger calls “ratio” and that Zambrano had strongly criticized in *Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española* (Thought and Poetry in Spanish Life) and *Filosofía y poesía* (Philosophy and Poetry), both from 1939. Its characteristics are understanding the truth as an adaptation that in the end is an imposition of the dominion of man's will upon the world, “llegar a poseer por la fuerza lo que es inagotable” (*Pensamiento* 53) (coming to possess what is inexhaustible by force), and thus a simplifying rationalism that rejects everything that is not its own and builds itself up to be the only source of meaning. Opposing this, Antigone represents a vision of insinuation, nuance, contrast, and intensity that does not emerge from empirical observation but from a consciousness in a nascent state that is “claridad profética que la aurora inexorablemente nos tiende” (*Tumba* 218) (prophetic clarity that the dawn inexorably lays before us). This consciousness cannot separate truth from justice and love, nor can it separate its own life and its emotions from what it knows and says having overcome the narrow perspective that converts all reality into the mere dealings of humankind in which everything should be knowable. Given this, consciousness is open to the Unknown and speaks in a mode akin to Delirium. For that reason, Antigone chooses not to leave her Platonic cave.

The only thing, then, that Zambrano would have done was to have been open to hearing this delirium and to attempting to transcribe it. With it, Zambrano acknowledges how the text is a dispossession precisely through the most extreme transfiguration of a literary character's life. The reiterated identifications, the deep links between character and creator are not created, but instead are found; they are not affirmed, but instead alluded to.

At this point it is pertinent to recall the last visit to Antigone's tomb, that of two strangers. As before, confrontational men, they descend into the tomb with a purpose: to collect and convey Antigone's word. Their ways of doing so are quite different. The first stranger wants to take her "arriba en medio de las gentes, a que cuente su historia en voz alta, porque los que claman han de ser oídos" (263) (above among the people, so she can tell her story out loud, because those who cry out ought to be heard). But the second stranger makes him see that this is not the proper manner of conveying her message. Her delirium is better heard from afar, like a whisper. This dialogue is the closing point of the work justifying that Antigone be heard and, as a result, that Zambrano reflect upon her experience as an exile out loud. But Zambrano refuses to denounce, criticize, speak out, or recount. To that she contrasts her writing of conjecture, her way of insinuating that does not yell but whispers, the obliqueness that she suggests and that makes the reader see through imagery that does not seek an immediate response but instead slowly penetrates the hearts of those open to hear. She transmits as much if not more than knowledge, experience, and emotions, deeply felt life experiences: Love, definitively the cornerstone of the New Law confronted with the omnipotent Law of Terror. This explains and justifies not only Antigone's mode of expression, but the author's way of writing and, in fact, its ultimate consequence, the very set of choices, appropriation, and transfiguration that constitute *La tumba de Antígona* in its heterogeneity, but also its place within Zambrano's oeuvre.

Notes

1. Regarding the concept of quaternity (*Geviert*s), it is formed by heaven and earth, mortals and divine beings, see Martin Heidegger's "Construir, Habitar, Pensar" (Building, Dwelling, Thinking).
2. Regarding Unamuno's influence, see Ortega Martín (18–19) and Gómez Blesa.
3. Regarding Zambrano's choices in respect to literary genre in practicing philosophy, see Martín.
4. However, as Buttarelli notes, at the historical moment that *La tumba* is written "no había mediaciones femeninas de pensamiento disponibles que tuvieran autoridad suficiente" (50) (there were no available means for feminine thought that carried enough authority) to allow Zambrano the modifying intercession that she executes with Sophocles' tragedy. The role of the female figures in *Antigone* is also discussed in Prezzo and Quance. See also Castillo, Nieva de la Paz and Vilches de Frutos for the place of Zambrano's play in Spanish drama in exile.

5. George Steiner has followed the fortunes of Antigone's character throughout the history of Western culture in his now classic *Antigones*, and Camacho Rojo and Azcue have analyzed her use in contemporary Spanish theatre.
6. Antigone's very well-known "crime" consists of wanting to give a proper burial to her brother Polyneices, forbidden by Creon, King of Thebes.
7. In Sophocles' tragedy, Ismene refuses to help her sister in burying Polyneices and Antigone harshly berates her for her attitude, thus deciding to move forward on her own. Later on, when her sister is sentenced to death, Ismene wants to join her in her fate and also confesses her guilt, but Antigone refuses to die with her by her side.
8. "Piedad" (Pity) in Zambrano's thought is a complex concept that alludes to the ability to "saber tratar con 'lo otro'" (know how to deal with "the other"), and that approximates what we understand as empathy. Regarding this, see Buttarelli, 59–60.
9. The notion of "sacrificio" (sacrifice) is pivotal in Zambrano's thought. She dedicates the main section of *Persona y democracia* (The Person and Democracy) to it. Regarding its relationship to the writing of Antigone, see Marseet.
10. And with that, Zambrano follows the example of other modern philosophical texts laid out as avenues for personal self-discovery that culminate in a re-discovery. The most renowned example is Hegel's *Fenomenología del espíritu* (Phenomenology of Spirit).
11. The relationship between history and allegory in relation to the tragically ambivalent destiny of modernity was noted by Walter Benjamin. Regarding its fortune in the Hispanic context, see Cornago.
12. For that reason Andrew Bush has purposely referred to *La tumba* as an "allegorical autobiography" (94). Regarding the problems this poses and a reading rooted in the "identification" of Antigone with Araceli, Zambrano's sister, see Buttarelli 59–61.
13. Regarding mediation, see M. Zambrano, *El pensamiento vivo de Séneca* (Seneca's Living Thought) (23).
14. That is the truly tragic time according to Nietzsche and that is the superior form of understanding to which Heidegger will appeal in his writings on poetry.

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