

**Broken Treasures, Invincible Solitude: Silence,  
Absence and Time in Antón Arrufat's "Antígona"**

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Any thorough study of reinterpretations of traditional Greek myths in modern and contemporary Latin American contexts should include a discussion of Cuban playwright, essayist, poet, and novelist Antón Arrufat (Santiago de Cuba, 1935–). Arrufat has a well-known history of using classical myths in his literary work, most notably in his play *Los siete contra Tebas*, published in Cuba in 1968, the same emblematic year in which “el mito de Antígona es reiteradamente tratado en Iberoamérica” (Bosch 276) (the myth of Antigone is repeatedly dealt with in Latin America [i.e., in literature]).<sup>1</sup> During that turbulent year, Arrufat became the center of an infamous national controversy after *Los siete contra Tebas* was initially awarded the UNEAC (Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba) “José Antonio Ramos” prize for drama and subsequently banned in Cuba for being counterrevolutionary.<sup>2</sup> Arrufat’s play was based most closely on Aeschylus’s play of the same name, although it includes elements from Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*, which presents another version of essentially the same plot. The Greek originals lead up to the events that take place in Sophocles’ enduringly popular drama *Antigone*; in the Cuban version by Arrufat, however, the final section containing Antigone’s appearance is omitted.<sup>3</sup>

For all its notoriety, *Los siete contra Tebas* was by no means Arrufat’s first experiment with reinterpreting classical models, nor did it constitute his first dealings (or purposeful non-dealings) with the specific character of Antigone. Far less well known and much less widely disseminated than *Los siete* is his early poem “Antígona,” published in the Cuban journal *Ciclón* in 1955 and, to the best of this author’s knowledge, never republished elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> To date, “Antígona” has been almost totally ignored by scholarship; it is a minor piece in Arrufat’s overall oeuvre, to be sure. Yet a detailed examination of this

poem constitutes a humble but significant contribution that should not be overlooked, for studies both of Cuban literature as a whole and of reinterpretations of Antigone in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Arrufat is known, after all, for making effective use of ancient source material to comment on contemporary cultural and political circumstances.

Well before Arrufat found himself “en el centro de la cultura cubana” (Barquet, “El ‘caso’ se investiga” 61) (at the center of Cuban culture) in the 1960s and certainly before he became known as an alleged counterrevolutionary, his poem “Antígona” offers a substantive glimpse of themes that will become prevalent in his later work, particularly the subject of time. As a writer who produces essay, narrative, poetry, and drama, Arrufat has been analyzed by a number of scholars within varying frames of reference and labeled as belonging to different generations according to the genre in question. However Arrufat is to be classified as a writer, his piece “Antígona” offers interesting early versions of theories that the author will rework many times in the subsequent decades. In “Antígona,” Arrufat elaborates on memory, the body, and the relationship between humans and the things (*cosas*) that surround them; this theoretical speculation, notably presented through the lens of the defiant, desolate, but hopeful Antigone, represents a well-condensed version of the author’s take at the time on society, humanity, and philosophy, the seeds of which would grow and spill over into not only his later poetry, but also into pieces he would compose in other genres. The present article thus serves as an initial examination of this neglected text in the hopes of shedding light on Arrufat’s early vision, not only of Cuban society, but of broader questions of history and the human condition.

By honing in on Antigone’s separation from the rest of humankind, Arrufat makes a dramatic statement not only on the larger question of human beings trapped in inescapable violent situations, but also on the suffering that—inevitably, continuously, and absurdly—forms a crucial part of the present human condition in his poem. Rather than seeking to present history as a series of progressive steps leading to an inevitable final outcome, “Antígona” offers an image of an ongoing, elusive present; as we will see, a suffering, solitary Antigone is central in the alternative view of history that Arrufat creates in his poetic text.

Although perhaps he is best known for his dramas from the late 1950s and the 1960s, as well as his friendship with Virgilio Piñera and his promotion of Piñera’s work after the latter’s death, Arrufat has always composed both narrative and poetry, starting at a young age; he began penning a novel while a youth in Jesuit school (which was lost in one of the family’s changes of residence), and he has gone on to publish numerous novels and short stories, as well as several notable collections of poems. He commenced a vocation in poetry after his now-lost “early novel on the struggle for independence,” and the author himself feels that his “best pieces [of poetry] were written around 1954 or 1955” (qtd.

in Kirk and Padura 19). The publication of Arrufat's "Antígona" in 1955 in *Ciclón* would date this work approximately to his self-described zenith of poetic output.<sup>5</sup> The journal, which featured previously unpublished work by both Cuban and foreign authors, was founded by José Rodríguez Feo in January of that same year and continued in publication until 1957, with one final issue coming out in the first quarter of 1959 ("Ciclón").

Unfortunately—albeit with certain notable exceptions—Arrufat's complex and ongoing overall production has been somewhat neglected in studies of Cuban literature, given his sphere of influence in the past, particularly in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> After *Los siete contra Tebas* was labeled counterrevolutionary, Arrufat was officially ostracized; he was made to work in a library shelving books for almost a decade, with the other staff forbidden to speak to him, and his work was not published again on the island until he began to be "rehabilitated" in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Many of his plays were not performed until even more recently, and some have still never been staged. In recent years, however, a renewed interest in Arrufat has surfaced, as evidenced both by the publication of new books and articles on his work and by the appearance of some of his theatrical works on stage. *Los siete* finally premiered in Cuba in 2007, after nearly forty years of banishment. The fact that in 2000 he was awarded both the Premio de la Crítica Literaria and the prestigious Premio Nacional de Literatura in Cuba also clearly demonstrates that he has regained his place as a respected and significant writer on the island.

Arrufat may have been composing some of his best poetry in the mid-1950s, but he was certainly not alone in producing quality literature during the 1950s, despite the decade's reputation to the contrary; authors such as Virgilio Piñera and Dulce María Loynaz, among others, were active and fruitful in this decade. Questioned about literary production during the so-called sterile period of the 1950s in Cuba, Arrufat argues that there have not been

any really sterile periods in Cuban culture since the nineteenth century . . . The 1950s were the gestation period for future literary movements. How can it be termed sterile if it changed so many things in Cuba? Instead, there is a continuity. The revolution expressed, especially in the early years, the frustrated desires of the previous generation . . . [this was] the decade that led to the great flourishing of culture in the 1960s. (qtd. in Kirk and Padura 21)

Just as Arrufat rightly points out that the 1950s was a period of continuity leading to the flourishing of the following decade, I argue that his piece "Antígona" illustrates continuity in his oeuvre, even as his production, style, and themes have evolved and matured over time.<sup>8</sup>

Arrufat's choice of genre raises an interesting question that deserves some brief remarks, given that "Antígona," unlike the majority of reinterpretations of Antigone in Latin America or elsewhere, is, of

course, a poem, rather than a theatrical adaptation following the Greek original more directly. It is plausible that Arrufat simply elected to elaborate on the myth of Antigone in poetic verse because he was more heavily invested, at the time, in composing poetry and narrative, rather than drama; his first theatrical piece did not come out until several years later, with *El caso se investiga* in 1957, when he was commissioned to draft a drama to complement Piñera's one-hour play that was going to be staged.

However, there exist hints as to Arrufat's additional reasoning for composing "Antígona" in verse, beyond what genres he simply happened to be working in. In the original manuscript version of Arrufat's poem, which he composed in 1953, he subtitles the piece "tragedia elíptica" ("Antígona: tragedia elíptica") (elliptical tragedy). Although this subtitle is omitted in the final published version, it gives us, perhaps, some insight into the interesting choice of genre Arrufat made here: poetry has great potential to be more concise, more economical than most theatrical works, thus the designation of "elliptical" would make sense.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly not a short poem, however, Arrufat's piece contains nearly four hundred lines of free verse and is divided up into thirty-seven stanzas of varying length, each separated by a line break. As he would later do in other works, Arrufat uses a frequently shifting point of view. During much of the poem, it is Antigone herself who is speaking in first person. In a few stanzas, however, an omniscient voice speaks of Antigone and her woes in the third person. At other times, Antigone is addressed directly in the second person; it remains somewhat unclear whether this address is by another third-person poetic voice or whether the voice is occasionally (or even always) Antigone speaking to herself. Unlike in Sophocles' *Antigone*, there is no Chorus, no Messenger, no words directly from other characters like Creon or Haemon; there exists only Antigone and the musings of the other poetic voice(s) in what, effectively, amounts to a monologue in verse, despite the shifting references in first, second, and third person: if we were to imagine this Antigone in a dramatic work, she would undoubtedly appear alone on stage, much like the Peruvian theater group Yuyachkani's Antigone, solitary and heart-wrenching.

Starting with the very first word, "Quién" (Who), the opening stanza of the poem immediately creates a scene of isolation and abandonment with a question: "quién, sino el viento y la tierra / acorazando el cuerpo intacto, / escuchan la palabra amarga" (3-5) (who, except the wind and the earth / protecting the intact body / listens to the bitter word). The question is rhetorical, empty; barren like the content of its answer: no one is present to hear Antigone's bitter cries. Not even, the reader can surmise, the gods; only the earth and its elements will bear witness to Antígona's grief, her murmurings, and her ruminations on the meaning of life and love. Even the "bitter word" forebodingly laments its own existence: "que de ella misma se duele / y se arrepiente de ser hablada"

(6–7) (which laments itself / and regrets being spoken).

Moreover, the potentially hopeful “intact body” of the first stanza soon is contrasted with multiple references to fragmentation, emptiness, separation, and wounds punctuating the text throughout: “caricia ausente” (11) (absent caress), “herida” (37) (injury), “llaga” (37) (wound), “ahuecándose el pecho” (49) (hollowing out my breast), “invencible solitud” (76) (invincible solitude), “la nada” (147, 272) (nothingness), “interrumpir” (156) (interrupt), “rotos” (184) (broken), “violado” (194) (violated), “el vacío” (218, 241) (vacuum), “incompletas” (225) (incomplete), and “Nadie se acerque” (344) (No one come near). Arrufat achieves the creation of an overwhelming and even absurd sense of isolation and emptiness that bear down on the reader, just as they oppress Antigone in her suffering. Through this imagery, readers are left with a clear sense of Antigone’s loneliness and pain.<sup>10</sup>

Just as the image of the body Arrufat presents is more often than not broken or penetrated with wounds, the soul is likewise fragmented: “el alma fragmentada de toda la materia universal. / Inmantado pedazo consigo mismo en lucha / por la reintegración al desprendido centro” (167–69) (the fragmented soul of all the matter of the universe. / Magnetized piece fighting with itself / for reintegration into the detached center). While the juxtaposition of body and soul clearly stems from ancient models, Arrufat overlays a vein of existentialist thought onto the underpinnings of the specific Greek characters and their well-known subtexts. Regarding his experimentation with existentialism, the author himself mentions that during the period in which he collaborated with *Ciclón*, the very first article he published in the journal was a piece explicitly on existentialism and that he “considered [him]self something of a philosopher” at the time (qtd. in Kirk and Padura 20). Arrufat’s delving into philosophy during this epoch shows through in his writing of “Antígona” and her human predicament. Here, Arrufat’s particular insistence on fragmentation and perforation (e.g., wounds) helps to bring his own version of existential philosophy to the table by placing Antigone’s questioning of the meaning of her existence—and, by extension, that of all human beings—on an earthly plane, by honing in on the human experience and removing the influence of the gods from the text, and by reflecting on the absurd predicament in which Antigone finds herself.

Like Antigone herself, then, human beings must face the world and its “sed sombría, sutil y cruel” (207) (cruel, subtle, and sombre thirst) alone. Such is the predicament of human beings that, in fact, one of the poetic voices wonders: “¿es acaso posible penetrar / la invencible soledad de las almas / y del sexo la distancia tenebrosa?” (75–77) (is it even possible to penetrate / the invincible solitude of souls / and the murky distance between the sexes?). Through imagery that is at once spiritual and erotic, the author emphasizes the impassable and even absurd chasm between individuals. The focus here definitively avoids

Antigone's simultaneous act of disobedience (under mortal, i.e., Creon's, law) and obedience (to the bonds of family and the gods' orders to perform final rites on dead bodies), despite an oblique references to a "crime" (130). Rather, the solitude and "abandono" (283, 286) (abandonment) that Antigone perceives are what prevails.

Even faced with "invincible solitude," human beings are nonetheless not to be left without hope in Arrufat's creation. The poetic voice goes on to ask, "¿Vivir no es enlazarnos / en nuestra más íntima soledad?" (75–79) (Is living not bonding ourselves together / in our most intimate solitude?). By paradoxically connecting together in solitude, intimacy between human beings is possible. What does this mean for the figure of Antigone, who is the quintessential incarnation of desolation and utter solitude, indeed, "invincible" solitude? Perhaps we can say that her state of total abandonment by unjust society and, more particularly, unjust rulers, is tempered here by the possibility of relationships with other human beings, even if that relationship is forged through, and because of, mutual states of isolation.

In a crucial stanza, one of the poetic voices declares, in fact, that "Nada está solo. / Vivimos anudados / a las cosas y los seres" (94–96) (Nothing is alone. / We live tied / to things and beings). Not only the connection to other solitary beings that can be felt, but also the presence of things (*cosas*) is ostensibly what binds us to the circumstances around us and allows us to escape, in a way, our human solitude. Even the concept of understanding as presented in "Antígona" means, itself, to "reflejar / en las análogas cosas / nuestra propia sustancia resonante" (337–39) (reflect / in the analogous things / our own resounding substance). Without the "analogous things" around them, human beings cannot see, or therefore understand, the reflection of their own substance.

Despite his self-declared youthful fling with philosophy, Arrufat's persistent appeal to notice *things*, and to examine human's relationship to the things around them, did not end with his literary output of the 1950s. If anything, it is a constant that has remained and evolved throughout his literary production. As the author himself stated in a recent interview,

Soy un escritor de la mirada. Es uno de los sentidos que más aparecen en toda mi obra. Creo que el ser humano está unido a sus objetos, que no es nada sin ellos . . . Una silla tiene un sentido tanto cuando una persona la ocupa como cuando está vacía en un salón. A mí los objetos me hacen señales, me dicen aquí estamos. (qtd. in Resik Aguirre)

(I am a writer of the look. It is one of the senses that most appear in all of my work. I believe that human beings are linked to their objects, that they are nothing without them [i.e. the objects] . . . A chair has as much meaning when a person sits in it as when it is

empty in a room. To me, objects produce signs, they tell me here we are.)

While Arrufat's conception of human existence has indubitably undergone nuanced evolution, it is obvious that the seeds of his current thoughts on human beings and their relationship with their surroundings was already present in "Antígona," which acted as an early stage, as it were, for sounding out his ideas in a literary (con)text.

Indeed, according to the poetic voice in "Antígona," objects are what fills the vacuum of life: "El hombre no soporta su desnudez / levantando sobre el vacío las desteñidas cosas / nombrándolas" (240–42) (Man cannot stand his nakedness / lifting the faded things above the emptiness / naming them). Acting as perpetual Adams, humans feel compelled to identify the things around them; life would otherwise be barren of meaning. Regarding the importance Arrufat ascribes to objects in his poetry, poet Manuel Díaz Martínez has perceived that: "Su agonía no es la del místico, sino la del mortal convencido de que no hay nada más que lo que tiene ahora" (qtd. in "Antón Arrufat: comentarios sobre su poesía") (His agony is not that of a mystic, but rather of a mortal who is convinced that there is nothing else than what he has now). Precisely mortality alone—mortals in their solitude—is at the center of Arrufat's "Antígona," rather than mortality opposed to—or subjected to—the awesome power of the gods, as in the original Greek models. Mortality here is bound to the earth and its objects, not to the heavens or external machinations of deities.

Yet in "Antígona" there is a catch: no matter what links exist to things around them, these bonds are tenuous, because humans will inevitably find themselves facing separation from others. Even the objects that man raises above the void are "faded," their meaning already muted. The voice warns, "pero hay en todo secretamente / algo que separa / y nunca debe tocarse" (97–99) (but there is in everything secretly / something that separates / and should never be touched). If humans are perpetually and secretly separated by something, how are human relationships possible, if at all? How is friendship or amorous love possible? Indeed, the poetic voice asks, "¿Qué es amar entonces?" (100) (What is it to love, then?). The voice speculates on the nature of love: "¿Amar no es amar otra cosa / en la cual alojamos / nuestra vida callada?" (108–10) (Is it not to love another thing / in which we lodge / our silenced life?). According to the text, love is merely, or perhaps can only mean, to house one's life in objects; one's life inhabits objects, though only while one is alive.

The questions continue, leaving the reader with a shred of doubt in the air about the possibility of love's existence, or about the true nature of love. Yet the questions also shift direction, bringing up a new prospect: "¿Es entablar un diálogo de palabras ausente / que nos hace ser quien en la entraña somos?" (111–12) (Is it [i.e., love] to strike up an absent dialogue of words / that makes us be who, in our heart, we

are?).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, despite the barrage of questioning, it would seem that love may, in fact, exist or at least exist as a theoretical possibility.

Moreover, it is important to remember that life is also “silenced” in the text; perhaps this is why dialogue will always be absent, and words futile. Humans are defined—“quien en la entraña somos”—by this absent dialogue, a lack of communication and an unbridgeable chasm. Ergo the voice continues its exploration of paradoxical love, of the (im)possibility of intimate relationship by way of absence and distance:

¡Oh Antígona!, amar es consentir  
la distancia  
y renunciar a tocar  
en esa unión que sin saber  
se alcanza  
de la razón abandonados. (113–18)

(Oh Antigone! To love is to permit  
the distance  
and to renounce touch  
in that union that, without knowing it,  
is reached  
[as we are] abandoned by reason.)

Once again, love requires a space, a rupture between beings, a giving up of contact; union is produced paradoxically through a renouncing of spiritual contact. Thus, if love exists, it is perhaps only as a simulacrum, mediated through isolation and absence that cannot be penetrated, yet which constitutes the very substance of human relations: an absent dialogue, an irrevocable distance, a union that is achieved without its participants realizing what is occurring.

Unlike in classical Greek theater, “[n]o hay en Arrufat ni intervención de dioses, ni causa, ni destino inexorable al que se vean sometidos los mortales” (Álvarez Morán and Iglesias Montiel 263) (in Arrufat, there is no intervention of the gods, no cause, no inevitable fate that mortals are subjected to). While her “destino de mujer” (woman’s fate) is certainly invoked multiple times in “Antígona” and fate definitely has a role in her gloomy situation in the poem, the main focus of the text remains on the silence around her, her suffering, her isolation, and the relationship between human beings, and between humans and the things around them. Antigone laments that “Todo nacimiento fija el ser y su destino / sin huida posible” (253–54) (Each birth fixes the being and its fate / without possible escape). It is one’s humanity here on earth—i.e. one’s birth, the birth of each being, of each human—that fixes one’s destiny, not the gods above, per se. Thus the actions of other humans and demigods (e.g., Oedipus, Haemon, Persephone, Creon, Cadmus, the twins Amphion and Zethus) are typically invoked in the poem, rather than the decrees or will of the gods.<sup>12</sup>

Then again, even as human beings name and treasure the objects around them, granting life-force to life itself, time steps in to crush their efforts; time amounts, at the end, to nothing but broken treasures. The lament advances, as Antigone feels her hands and legs trapped as in a spider web (180). That ensnaring web, it turns out, is time:

es el tiempo, Antígona, es el tiempo  
 acumulando sus tesoros rotos;  
 ¡ah el tiempo!... Toda mi vida es algo que no es.  
 ¿Es posible saber de aquello que nos forma? (181–84)

(it is time, Antigone, it is time  
 accumulating its broken treasures;  
 ah, time! My whole life is something it is not.  
 Is it possible to know that which forms us?)

Thus can Antigone claim that her life is “something that it is not” and question the apparently futile epistemological quest; naming objects and forming connections based on one’s surroundings is merely an illusion of pride, if at the end all that is left is “broken treasures.”

In some ways, this stanza on the nature of time and its devastating effects harks back to Sophocles’ original. However, in the classical Sophoclean *Antigone* it is Love, not time, who ruins fortunes; and significantly, Love, not solitude, who is invincible:

Invincible, implacable Love, O  
 Love, that makes havoc of all wealth;  
 That peacefully keeps his night-watch  
 . . .  
 No one can escape Love’s domination,  
 Man, no, nor immortal god. (781–82, 788–89)<sup>13</sup>

Hence in Arrufat’s text, the passing of time seems almost to substitute directly for the classical gods, at least in terms of its role in human beings’ lives: time, or history, is what traps them and controls their destinies.

Arrufat’s Antigone perceives the passage of time as an accumulating pile of debris. As time passes in “Antígona,” what remains of life is a heap not merely of ruined treasures but also, notably, of memories. Antigone resists the oppression of history by bemoaning and rejecting her memories, which she finds piled up in a disorderly chaos, not unlike the accumulation of broken treasures: “¡Tropel enloquecido de recuerdos en mi frente! / ¿Qué mortal pudiera hacerse un hueco en la memoria? / Privilegio funesto . . .” (123–25) (Insane mess of memories in my head! / What mortal could create a hollow in his memory? / Privilege of the dead . . .). Only death will bring complete relief to the torment of memory, of the capacity to reflect back on one’s life and its inevitable

absurdity, the discovery that what one thought one's life to be was a deceitful illusion. Death may produce an end to love, as it cuts off the possibility of connections to both things and to other human beings in solitude, yet it provides a relief and constitutes a welcome privilege in Antigone's mind.

Perhaps Arrufat fears an impending political appropriation of the past, as "Antígona" berates humans' attempt to perpetuate themselves through monuments:

El viento errante,  
 heredero de los monumentos,  
 —pétreo intención contra la nada—  
 que el hombre en su necesidad  
 de perpetuarse construyó,  
 es ahora único acompañante lastimero  
 de la tristeza ensimismada  
 de lo que yace. (270–77)

(The erring wind,  
 heir of the monuments,  
 —stony intention against the void—  
 which man in his need  
 to perpetuate himself built,  
 is now the only pitiful companion  
 for the self-absorbed sadness  
 of what lies here.)

As in the beginning of the poem, only the wind here remains as witness to the ruins of pride and of the desire to advance or proclaim oneself politically through the erection of monuments meant to preserve a particular view of history. With the passing of time, however, monuments will also be left broken and in ruins at the end: "what lies here" will, indeed, only produce despair.

What Arrufat seems to be stipulating here is that love, life, and time are predicated on violent circumstances. After all, love and life in the text are only possible to begin with through paradoxical connections in impassable, impossible solitude. And history is, by definition, violent: it rakes up humans' accomplishments into a pile of broken ruins and renders them meaningless nonsense; what is left after the passing of time, in the face of death, is no longer humans and their lives, or even humans and their reflections in the things around them, but merely "[el] hombre ante el hombre" (381) (man in the presence of man). Thus we should beware the temptation to build monuments to ourselves, Arrufat warns, because in the end all that will be left is broken treasures, silence, and utter loneliness.

On the other hand, this sad, politically motivated rendering of history must, presumably, be evaded and a new image of history should

be pursued. Arrufat's "Antígona" interrupts the narrative of history in a revolutionary move, in this case through an insistence on silence and oblivion: it is, after all, "el olvido que vence, / en la fantástica esperanza / de ser soñada siempre por lo Eterno" (127–29) (the oblivion that conquers, / in the fantastic hope / of being always dreamed by the Eternal). Through a conscious decision not to look back, not to remember, is Antigone able to claim that: "Ahora me siento de perdón llena y de olvido / para las faltas hirientes de los hombres" (176, 179–80) (Now I feel filled with forgiveness and forgetting / for the wounding offenses of men). Only deliberate erasure of memory will permit forgiveness; only a resistance to official history will permit hope: the former, through death, and the latter against the relentless passage of time and its effect of accumulating ruins.

It is pertinent to recall momentarily what was occurring in Cuba in 1955, the year the poem was published in its final version: Batista was in power, Fidel Castro and his July 26 Movement comrades were pardoned that year for the 1953 attacks on the Moncada Barracks, and the country was generally in upheaval. Antigone, her woes and her state of abandonment were a fruitful choice in 1955 for representing the predicament for regular Cuban civilians who were nonetheless concerned with politics and society: how to deal emotionally and psychologically with the threat of violence around them; how to fight against the injustice they were witnessing under Batista's rule as the administration tried to crush the growing rebel movement, without getting arrested or killed. The controversy surrounding *Los siete* posited a rebellious Arrufat against the ruling Castro regime, even though, ironically, he had omitted the character of Antigone, who, as Barquet argues, would have represented difficulties in the Cuban revolutionary context due to her association with insubordination against authority. Although Antigone's rebellion certainly figures in this poetic text, the aspect of her character that is most at issue in the version of Antigone that Arrufat presents in "Antígona" is, as we have seen, her sense of solitude and isolation.

Yet Arrufat composed the poem "Antígona" in 1953 and published it in 1955, several years before Fidel Castro's Revolution triumphed in January of 1959. It is perhaps strangely prophetic, in a way, that Arrufat should have figuratively pulverized political treasures and human hubris through his portrayal of the passage of time in "Antígona," at a time when the Revolution, which was only gaining initial momentum, would eventually and become famous for its imposing monuments, built to recount a singular version of history.

Reading Antón Arrufat's "Antígona," we can say along with Bosch that "el mito [de Antígona] está vivo. . . . Hoy más que nunca Antígona es una necesidad" (271) (the myth [of Antigone] is alive. . . . Today more than ever, Antigone is a necessity). Certainly this is the case in "Antígona," poetic in all senses of the term. Arrufat's piece deserves, of course, not to be read simplistically as a direct allegory of the times or

the specific political figures on the real-life stage of the moment. Nor does it lend itself to such oversimplified readings, though perhaps parallels could be drawn. The turbulent moment in which it is composed is not insignificant, however, given the specific character of Antigone chosen as the primary poetic voice and persona in the piece. If Arrufat indeed removed Antigone from *Los siete contra Tebas* not because of the subsequent authorship of the scene in the original but because, as Barquet astutely argues, the collective action of the Coro encouraging Polinices' burial was preferable to including the character of Antigone, who represented an individual rebellious act against authority, what we see in his relatively early text "Antígona" is quite a different view, based as it is on Antigone's woeful sense of abandonment.

Arrufat's interpretation of Antigone does not exist primarily "para decir no en nombre de un colectivo ante una situación que desagrada" (Bosch 271) (in order to say no to a disagreeable situation, in the name of a collective), as the Greek character is often utilized in modern adaptations. Instead, Arrufat insists on the primacy of Antigone's isolation, representing the solitude of the human existence, to meditate on the nature of life and love. In so doing, the author also deftly twists Antigone's desolate situation into a subtle, innovative rebellion. The poet declines to produce a version of the situation found in the original Sophoclean drama, in which Antigone notoriously and stubbornly defies her future father-in-law's unjust decree, because such an interpretation might merely reenact an individual act of disobedience against a law declared by another individual, in favor of following a set of laws proclaimed by the gods, or it could reinforce the existence of human relationships found in kinship and family bonds. Arrufat offers an alternative Antigone, who can discern paradoxical human intimacy in and through invincible solitude, and who presents a deliberate embracing of death and its accompanying oblivion, as a resistance to the passage of time and its accumulation of the worthless ruins of human pride. Rather than resisting specific legal decrees representing individual human authority in favor of obeying divine law, as in the Sophoclean original—and, as such, perhaps far more subversive than his much later *Los siete contra Tebas*—Arrufat's "Antígona" makes an even more daring move, despite everything, by quietly rebelling against the progression of history itself.

## Notes

1. All translations in this article are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
2. For those unfamiliar with the controversy, two of the five judges perceived a counterrevolutionary criticism of Castro's government through a cursory link between Arrufat's version of the attack on Thebes and the Bay of Pigs invasion: the prideful Etéocles was seen to be representing Castro, while Polinices and his attackers were viewed as the Cuban exiles involved in the Bay of Pigs fiasco. However, Jesús Barquet argues, persuasively, for a more nuanced

approach, considering Arrufat to be “crítico-revolucionario” rather than actually counterrevolutionary, or working against the official socialist system and its societal-cultural ideals (“El ‘caso’” 64).

3. The reason behind the elision of Antigone’s appearance in *Los siete* has been up for discussion. As classicist Isabel Torrance points out, the epilogue in the original is “generally agreed upon to be an appendage to the original Aeschylan play, added after the Sophoclean version had become popular”; based on this, she goes on to claim that Arrufat, aware of this discrepancy, omitted the epilogue in his own version, preferring to keep more strictly with the Aeschylan text (295). Ricard Salvat, however, raises the question, “¿Podía conocer en el año 1968 las versiones más recientes del texto? No nos resulta verosímil” (qtd. in “Monográfico II.” 46) (Could he have been familiar, in 1968, with the most recent versions of the text? It doesn’t seem credible). Jesús Barquet presents a totally different and convincing theory of why Arrufat chose to eliminate Antigone from his piece, which will be discussed in more detail below.
4. Thank you to Jesús Barquet for confirming this and for offering other helpful information.
5. Arrufat notes further regarding his collaboration with *Ciclón*: “After the second issue . . . I became a writer with the journal . . . [before 1957,] I had published some poems in *Ciclón* which I had never used in my poetry collection because I didn’t really like them. They were in the neoclassical vein.” (qtd. in Kirk and Padura 20, 22). Given that he never republished it in his poetry collections, Arrufat surely would mean to include “Antígona” in this group of neoclassical poems that he disliked; yet the content of the poem and its serious and revealing relationship with the rest of his oeuvre is too important to discount, regardless of the author’s own opinion of this portion of his work.
6. For further information, see the various in-depth analyses of Antón Arrufat, most particularly on *Los siete contra Tebas*, by Jesús Barquet.
7. See Arrufat’s interview in Kirk and Padura for his description of the conditions under which he was made to work during this time of official shunning.
8. The objective of this paper is to analyze “Antígona” itself, not to provide an exhaustive comparison of the themes and ideas that appear in the poem and how they reappear in latter works, although the development of certain ideas over time in his work will be pointed out in this article when appropriate. However, there are myriad cases of re-fashioning of ideas that lie beyond the scope of this paper. By way of example, the question of time is particularly prevalent in pieces such as *Todos los domingos* and *La repetición*. Consider, too, the presence of elements like bones, blood, and prophesy in “Repaso final.” Or the idea of the body and its relationship with memory, in poems like “El espejo del cuerpo.” Though this is not the place to go into a detailed study of those comparisons and others, there is certainly room for further work in this regard.
9. The original manuscript is also substantially different in content (and much longer) from the published version that appeared in *Ciclón* in several places in the body of the text. Although some changes were minor alterations to syntax and such in individual lines, others have more significance. One example is found in lines 39–41: “Del sueño despertada / supe de la ternura la poderosa índole / que a mí misma inevitablemente inmola.” (From sleep awakened / I realized the powerful nature of the tenderness / that inevitably myself immolates). The 1953 manuscript version reads: “Del sueño despertada a la variedad de múltiples caminos / . . . / supe de la ternura que de mí misma inmola sacrificio. . . .” (From sleep awakened to the variety of multiple paths / . . . / I learned of the tenderness that self-immolates my sacrifice. . . .) (Translation with assistance from Enrique Sacerio-Garí). The change from “a variety of multiple paths” to an inevitable sacrifice is quite dramatic. I am

inclined to think that the political changes that were occurring in Cuba during the period between the original composition of the poem and its eventual publication two years later—the Moncada attack, the capture and torture of prisoners by Batista’s regime, the pardoning of Castro and his followers, etc.—perhaps led Arrufat down a different “camino,” as it were, in his interpretation of *Antigone*. The shift to an “inevitable sacrifice” constitutes yet further support for the idea that Arrufat’s primary interest in *Antigone* here is the abandonment by society and her corresponding death (i.e. her body and life as sacrifice, not the sacrifice that she makes through her rebellion vis-à-vis the authority), rather than using her character, as is often the case, as primarily representing the need to rebel against authority when the latter is found to be unjust.

10. It is also worth considering, given Arrufat’s strong friendship with Piñera and the influence that the latter had on his work (see the interviews in the bibliography for comments the author makes about his relationship with Piñera), that Piñera’s *Carne de René* (1952) was published shortly before Arrufat composed the original version of “*Antígona*.” *Carne de René* is rife with references to bodily wounds and the like. I am not suggesting a direct attempt on Arrufat’s part to imitate Piñera’s work; Arrufat himself has indicated that he never realized how important Piñera’s influence on him was until the latter passed away. However, it is quite possible that discussions between the two men, Arrufat’s reading of Piñera’s manuscript, etc. could have subtly influenced the direction and tone of “*Antígona*” (and later works) on this particular topic, particularly in the existentialist and/or absurdist veins, as relating to the body and the experience of the human being in the world.
11. Note on the translation. *Entrañas*, usually in the plural form, also means, literally, entrails. In this context, the term could be translated with a more lengthy and figurative phrase: the depths of one’s soul, as it were, or the deepest inner part of oneself. The literal translation of entrails sounds a bit odd in English; however, given the abundance of images and vocabulary in the poem dealing with the body, including *entrañas* in the plural, it would be appropriate to use the literal term. I have chosen the heart to keep a similarly evocative body part to indicate one’s core or inner self, in order to convey the strength and continuity of the content in the original.
12. This is in great contrast, for instance, to Sophocles’ original *Antigone*, which makes repeated reference to the importance of submitting to the will of the gods and supplicating for their support with lines such as “Thy power, Zeus, is almighty! No / Mortal insolence can oppose Thee!” (605-6), and “Of happiness, far the greatest part / Is wisdom, and reverence towards the gods” (1348–49). Also in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Antigone herself tells Creon that “[i]t was not Zeus who published this decree / . . . / Nor could I think that a decree of yours—/ A man—were could override the laws of Heaven / Unwritten and unchanging.” (450, 453–55). Arrufat’s *Antigone* is heavily secularized by comparison, and certainly there is no equivalent happiness to that of obeying the gods.
13. Here, Love in the original Greek text refers to Eros, the “personified force of sexual love . . . usually depicted as a boy” (Hall 158).

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