In analyzing the contemporary phenomenon of adapting classical myths, critics note several prominent trends. On the one hand, they stress the general tendency of authors within the Western tradition, above all from the interwar years onward, to turn to the great, archetypal themes of Greek tragedy. At the same time, they underscore the fact that in times of conflict and censorship, mythic themes offer the possibility of addressing, in an oblique fashion, issues which otherwise could not be raised. These considerations help us to explain the fact that the Antigone myth emerges forcefully in Spain following the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, from that point on there began to appear one work after another inspired by the figure of the classical heroine, and this tendency continued throughout the Franco dictatorship. Antígona entre muros (Antigone Between Walls), by José Martín Elizondo, was written in 1969, while the author was living in exile in Toulouse, France, a city in which much of the theatrical output produced by the Spanish exile community in France emerged. It was later granted the First International Teatro Romano de Mérida Prize, an award aimed at promoting literary work bearing on the Greco-Latin classical heritage, and was first performed on July 7, 1988, during the festival of the same name. As happened with other myths, the evocation of the figure of Antigone was motivated by a specific sociopolitical context, that of post-Civil War Spain, and the reemergence of this figure is conditioned by a basic fact: the imposition of censorship. The story of Antigone would be used during Franco’s dictatorship as a veiled means of addressing important social and political themes: fratricidal war, the politics of burial, the death penalty, and repression. Moreover, it seemed to offer an especially suitable model for the expression of the exiles’ condition, and in this sense Martín Elizondo’s version of Antigone bears
an affinity to those versions of the myth produced by such authors as María Zambrano and José Bergamín.

Martín Elizondo’s play is set in Greece during “The Regime of the Colonels,” and unfolds in a prison cell containing ten female political prisoners. “The Regime of the Colonels” is the name used to refer to the period of military dictatorship in Greece that lasted from 1967 to 1974, and which thus coincided with the final years of Francoism. In April 1967, during the reign of King Constantine II, a group of three colonels established a military government on the pretext that there existed a clear communist threat to the nation. Thousands of Greeks were arrested, imprisoned, and confined on the Aegean Islands. At the end of that year, the participants in an attempted countercoup were arrested and subsequently tortured in an attempt to induce them to denounce their accomplices. The dictatorship ended in an economic, political, and social failure and, even more important, brought the country to the brink of war with Turkey over the status of Cyprus. In 1973, thanks to the intervention of Constantine Karamanlis, who prevented a war and legalized the Communist Party, a republic was finally established.

The choice of time and place—contemporary Greece—and the specific circumstances of Antigone’s confinement—her cohabitation with a group of female prisoners—signal two of the principal features of Martín Elizondo’s Antigone: the play’s inquiry into both the particular and universal readings of the myth, and the “collectivization” of the heroine. With respect to the play’s setting, the author himself writes, in a short prologue titled “Sobre mi Antígona” (On My Antigone):

(Is my old and young heroine, Spanish, as compared with the abundant catalogue of Antígones . . . , because [the play is] written in this language, or does she live and die in the Greece of the colonels, where the fable takes place? Is she closer in spirit to ethics or poetics? I have lost a good deal of sleep thinking about this. Despite it all, the heroine gains acceptance in the women’s prison, in the face of Creon’s dogs. Within this prison it is a matter of showing that the interpretations [enfoques] that can be given to the nature of
power are many and inexhaustible, and that our destiny hangs on them, though we must not forget that, consciously or unconsciously, power often finds a way to steal the fire of terror and threaten us with it.)

Martín Elizondo, whose selection of space and time appears conditioned to a large degree by Franco’s censorship, could hardly fail to wonder about the scope of his play’s implications. Would his version remain a mere representation of the reality of a specific moment, the Greece of the colonels, or would it likewise serve to evoke the situation in Spain, that is, the repression existing under Franco’s dictatorial regime? Is his version of the Greek myth a merely aesthetic and literary exercise, or can it also be interpreted as an ethical and political act? What, in the last analysis, is the relation between myth and history, and the relation between different contemporary repressive regimes?

The protagonists in Martín Elizondo’s version, who devote their time in prison to performing the classical version of Antigone, dramatize and express the question posed by the author in his prologue. The group of prisoner-actresses interrogate the relation that exists between the present in which they live and the content of the classical work, and they wonder how much the literary myth created by Sophocles is capable of expressing their current situation. The viewer quickly sees for herself how that heroism, which in the classical work was identified with Antigone, is now diffused among the whole collective of those who have been detained and condemned by the dictatorship.

The prisoners, steeped in the recursive tendency that permeates and structures the text, stage the play and at the same time question the meaning of their dramatic enterprise, by means of commentaries on various levels. The ritual of the performance appears to be a form of therapy: “NODRIZA. ¡Que nos sirva de alivio el fingir la mueca de dolor que los antiguos grabaron en esta tierra de perdición!” (29) (NURSEMAID. Let us find relief in faking the grimace of pain that the ancients engraved in this land of damnation!). The text’s stage directions insist, moreover, on this function of the performance:

Las demás toman una serie de actitudes que dan a entender que, si reconstituyen la vieja tragedia, no es por hacer teatro o por celebrar algún rito, sino para utilizar e el viejo simulacro como estimulante que les ayude a mantener la moral. (29)

(The others assume various attitudes suggesting that if they reconstitute the old tragedy, it is not to do theater or to celebrate some rite, but to use the old pretense as a stimulus to help them to maintain their morale.)

With regard to plot, the performance seems to follow the classical model: Antigone’s claim to justice, or the conflict between Haemon and
Creon; but the script is inevitably “contaminated” by references to contemporary political reality and the prisoners’ personal experiences. In the middle of the performance, the Nursemaid character is unable to avoid an allusion to her husband’s political activity against the Regime of the Colonels, and she evokes an attack in which he lost his hand. On hearing this free interpretation, the actress-character Antigone immediately criticizes this departure from the text: “ANTÍGONA. No sé a qué viene ahora el que hagas de hazmerreír” (30) (ANTIGONE. I don’t know why you now want to make yourself the laughingstock). To which the Nursemaid replies by insisting on the ethical, rather than aesthetic, commitment of her rendition of the play:

NODRIZA. . . . Ya empezáis a poneros insoportables de sublimes. Bajad del coturno, hijas, que miréis las cosas como se presentan, al ras. (33)

(NURSEMAID. . . . You’re starting to become unbearably sublime. Get down off your stilts, girls, and see things as they are on the ground.)

The prisoners’ recursive tendency in questioning the meaning of their own performance goes even further in Martín Elizondo’s play; the very relevance of the classical play’s main issue—Antigone’s assertion of her right to bury her dead brother in opposition to Creon’s decree and, together with it, the essence of the tragedy’s central conflict, the confrontation between religious and political laws—is likewise called into question in the performance they propose. Although the war and the dead are reflected in the play’s dialogue, the work focuses on the Regime’s repression, explicitly downplaying the issue of the dead, an integral part of the Greek tragedy. In the Nursemaid’s words:

NODRIZA. . . . Tu hermano, Antígona, ya está muerto y en el libro de los muertos grabado su nombre. ¿Qué importa la prohibición del tirano privándole de sepultura? Mira más bien por los que aguardan condena, son legión. (41)

(NURSEMAID. . . . Your brother, Antigone, is already dead, and his name has been registered in the book of the deceased. Why does it matter if the tyrant’s prohibition prevents his burial? Worry instead about those who are awaiting their sentence, they are legion.)

The sociopolitical dilemma posed by Antigone thus undergoes a transformation and acquires a new meaning in Martín Elizondo’s adaptation. In contrast to previous adaptations in Spanish postwar drama, in which the Antigone myth evokes the fratricidal strife of the Spanish Civil War, Antígona entre muros, written during the last years
of Franco’s regime, focuses on the theme of dictatorial repression. De-emphasizing the question of proper burial, Martín Elizondo’s play centers primarily on the fate of the living, those who are imprisoned or sentenced to death under a dictatorial regime. Within this group, the play emphasizes non-religious commitments: their solidarity, or refusal to betray their comrades in arms. Tragic heroism is conveyed or represented in connection with a will and determination not to collaborate with the tyrannical regime, and therefore now consists in a non-religious moral attitude. With the postwar era long over, Martín Elizondo’s version of Antigone, produced in the final years of Franco’s dictatorship, situates the war dead in the background, as compared with the immediate victims of Francoist repression. The fight against the regime and the destiny of the condemned—and not the defense of the honor of the dead—is to be the tragedy’s fundamental theme, or so the Nursemaid seems to suggest. Antígona entre muros focuses on the collective political resistance of the moment and the contemporary effects of a dictatorial regime: arrests, prison, and death sentences. If the play begins with a poetic evocation of the dead male comrades, its focus will progressively shift to the destiny of the living and militant struggle, in a sense that transcends the limits of the prison cell.

While this version of the myth strictly maintains unity of place (all the action occurring within the confines of the prison cell), there is nonetheless a particular conception of space in which the boundaries between the prison grounds and the outside world are not clearly defined. The ten female prisoners who are locked up and held in solitary confinement in the old prison still remain connected to the world outside their cell on account of their memories and personal experiences. Furthermore, with the continual arrival of new prisoners, the inmates are kept abreast of the underground struggle on the outside:

LA NUEVA. . . . Fuera están . . . ¿pero es que no lo sabéis? Están arriesgándolo todo. Mis hermanos con el grupo de Anexágoras, en la barricada de la Escuela del Norte.

NODRIZA. ¿Y qué? ¿Y qué? Aquí hay quien ha perdido a su marido ya hace mucho y a quien se lo acaban de detener [por Menoecea]. Esa tiene a su cuñado con pena de muerte. Aquella [por Antígona] es la novia de Miceno, ¿lo conoces? Incomunicado por salir elegido en las elecciones de septiembre. La otra . . . bueno para que decirte más ¿Qué crees, que estás entre las de delito común? La que más o la que menos va acarreando lo suyo.

NUEVA. Quiero decir que la lucha sigue, que ha de seguir . . . (27–28)

(THE NEWCOMER. . . . They are out there . . . ¿Don’t you know? They’re risking everything. My brothers are with Anexagoras’s group, on the barricades at the North School.)
NURSEMAID. So what? So what? Here there are people who have lost their husbands long ago, and people who have just been arrested [Menoeus]. This one’s brother-in-law received a death sentence. That one [Antigone] is Mycene’s girlfriend; do you know him? He is being held incommunicado for having won in September’s elections. The other one over there…well, why say more? What did you think, that you’re among common criminals? Each one of them is paying a price, some a bit more, some a bit less.

THE NEWCOMER. I meant that the fight goes on, that it must go on . . .

The play conveys the idea of continuity between the two spaces; one evokes the other insofar as the power relations are reproduced in both of them. The awareness of the need for an organized struggle also arises within the cell, and the prisoners’ political commitment is maintained in the form of a dramatic exercise—the performance of Antigone, which includes an act of collective protest and which will be censored at the end of act 2. From the other direction, the repressive state’s techniques of control—the surveillance, searches and censorship associated with prisons—also appear in the exterior space, which is likewise perceived as a prison: “NODRIZA. (A Antígona) . . . Mujer, ¿para qué fugarnos si el país entero es una prisión?” (32) (NURSEMAID. [To Antígone] . . . Woman, why should we escape if the whole country is a prison?). Echoes and news also arrive from the prison cell’s immediate surroundings, the prison grounds. There is, the prisoners tell us, also a block for the men; the threatening growls of Creon’s dogs can be heard coming from outside, and the echoes of the dictator’s means of repression reach the cell.

As in the fight outside, within the cell there is spying among comrades. Betrayal (informing) is thus a major source of concern among the prisoners, and this concern both shapes their behavior to a large degree and explains their desire to seek refuge in a theatrical exercise. From the very start the prisoners’ dialogues express their worry about surveillance—not only surveillance by the guards, but also by possible informants among the prisoners themselves. Distrust prevails among the prisoners, and in their conversations they exchange accusations. The continual demands for silence among all the comrades in the cell gain their significance from this fear of dual surveillance. Yet another example of the characteristic non-delimitation between the events occurring in the exterior world and those which concern the cell, the informants’ activity affects the comrades on the outside as well as the prisoners.

NUEVA. No despegaré los labios.
NODRIZA. Haces bien. De una forma u otra siempre hablamos demasiado y aquí dentro es peligroso.
DETENIDA A. ¿Cuántos hombres se han perdido por nuestras lenguas desatadas! (24)

(THE NEWCOMER. I won’t say a word.
NURSEMAID. You’re doing the right thing. One way or another we always end up saying too much, and here inside that’s dangerous.
PRISONER A. How many men have been lost because of our loose lips!)

The dialogue at once expresses the prisoners’ commitment to fight and their need to impose silence and repression among themselves. As the Nursemaid explains to the Newcomer:

NODRIZA. ¿Has sabido del atentado contra el coronel que tú sabes? Pues puede que esté entre nosotras, o que estén entre nosotras las que tienen que ver con ese asunto. ¿Comprendes?, La que ha participado o las que han participado en el atentado contra el coronel. ¿No estás? Lo que importa por el momento es que aquí, en esta celda, hay quien tiene mucho interés en conocer los nombres . . . ¿Difícil de entender? ¿Verdad que no? Por eso, por regla general, vale mas no hablar de manera precisa de ése ni de otros asuntos. Ánimos mujer. Y paciencia. La lucha sigue a pesar de nuestras simplezas. (28)

(NURSEMAID. Have you heard about the attack on that colonel, you know? Well, the person or persons who are involved in that matter may be among us. Do you understand? The one, or ones, who participated in the attempt on the colonel’s life. Get it? The important thing for now is that here, in this cell, there are people who are very interested in knowing names . . . It’s not so difficult to understand, is it? That’s why it’s better, as a general rule, not to speak in a precise manner about that matter or other matters. Take heart, woman. And be patient. The fight continues in spite of our foolishness.)

The performance of Antigone will actually begin in act 1, precisely after the Nursemaid has finished her explanation. Faced with the impossibility of speaking freely, the prisoners seem to resort to the tragedy’s dialogues as a special form of expression; we might say that the prisoners “speak in Antigone code.” Antigone’s tragedy not only constitutes a therapeutic escape, but also becomes the prisoners’ own words and the only means of communication. Antigone becomes, in a word, the prisoners’ language. Participation in the daily staging of Antigone within the cell depends on one’s personal choice, and this decision will in fact serve to define the political identity of the prisoners. From the beginning of the play two groups are clearly established: the
prisoners committed to the fight against the dictatorship of the new Creon, who express and maintain an attitude of protest by recreating the Greek tragedy and, on the other hand, those who are outside the resistance movement and who watch the play without becoming involved in it, at the same time as they collaborate with power informing on the others and denouncing them. This division is reflected in the distribution of characters’ names. Those who participate in the dramatic exercise bear the name of the Greek characters whom they represent in the play, and those who do not participate in this theatrical production are referred to in the text by the generic name “Prisoner A,” “Prisoner B,” or “Prisoner C.” As an explanatory note following the list of characters tells us, “The prisoners who interpret a classical character will be referred to in the play by the name of the character” (17). That is: Antigone, Creon, Haemon, Tiresias, and Menoeceus.

Only one of the play’s characters, the prisoner who has just joined the group and who appears under the name “the Newcomer” (“La Nueva”), eludes this classification, at least at first. Her presence in the work has a singular function, for it is through her and her process of adaptation to life in prison that the meaning of the theatrical activity within the cell can be precisely expressed. The very first scene of the play introduces this recent prisoner, who, like the reader or spectator, views the other prisoner’s performance for the first time and tries to understand its meaning. Over the course of the following acts she undergoes a process of transformation, as she passes from her initial rejection of the dramatic enterprise to her final assimilation of the discourse of Antigone’s tragedy. It is significant that, on arriving in the cell, this new cellmate will be judged in terms referring to her theatrical potential.

DETENIDA A. (A la NODRIZA) Tiene una cara interesante, ¿no te parece?
NODRIZA. ¿Para qué?
DETENIDA A. Para la figuración. Yo la veo formando parte del coro de los desterrados. (23)

(PRISONER A [to the NURSEMAID]. She has an interesting face, don’t you think?
NURSEMAID. Interesting for what?
PRISONER A. For an extra. I see her forming part of the chorus of exiles.)

Throughout the first act, however, “the Newcomer” will remain on the sidelines of the theatrical activity. Unfamiliar with the Greek text and indifferent to the Nursemaid’s instructions and suggestions, she openly displays her rejection of her cellmates and their theatrical games, even as she points to those who are risking their lives in the streets outside as true examples of struggle and commitment. This reflection on
the efficacy of art as a political instrument capable of transforming reality is a constant in the work of José Martín Elizondo, who often introduces on stage an artist-character who, immersed in a creative process, suffers doubts about the usefulness and meaning of his or her art. This model of protagonist, actor, painter, or artisan constitutes what José Ángel Ascunce has called a “combative character,” who never gives up or lapses into a passive skepticism, but rather always finds in art a path and in the very act of resisting a meaning, regardless of the practical results.

In her attempt to include the Newcomer in the ritual of performance, the Nursemaid reveals another perspective on the meaning of this theatrical exercise within the cell. The first thing that she stresses is the subversive nature of the chosen tragedy, Antigone, a work that has been rejected by the dictator Creon: “NODRIZA. Una obra prohibida. Pero aquí, el el reposo forzado, tratamos de darla” (25) (NURSEMAID. A forbidden work. But here, in our forced rest, we attempt to present it). Her words also refer to drama’s capacity to surpass the limits imposed on the prisoners during their confinement in the cell, as it offers them new spaces and an alternative mode of expression:

NODRIZA. (Tratando de comunicarle su sonrisa) Verás, según se tome, el sol sale para todos. Si quieres acompañarnos, nos vamos a dar una vueltecita por el Ágora. (28)

(NURSEMAID. [Trying to show her smile] You’ll see, depending on how you take it, the sun comes out for everyone. If you want to join us, we’re going to take a little walk around the agora.)

Indeed, María Ruiz, the director who took charge of the play’s premier at the Festival of Mérida, underscores this quality as a central aspect of the work: “This use of art in order to endure life is one of the attractions of Antígona entre muros, and I myself imagine a small space in jail that is broken, that opens up, because of the performance” (11).

In the second act, The Newcomer seems to have assimilated the discourse of the tragedy and begins to express herself in the following manner:

LA NUEVA. (Tono confidencial, casi en aparte) ¿Cuándo gozaremos de ese minuto de sosiego en esta corralada de piedras dañinas? . . . (declamatoria)? ¡Oh, Dioses! Que ocurra esto en una tierra de esplendor; ¡Infiernos, si regís nuestros destinos, tiradnos ya las cuchilladas mortales! (40)

(THE NEWCOMER. [Confidential tone, almost aside] When will we enjoy that minute of tranquility in this ring of noxious stones? . . . [declamatory]? Oh, Gods! That this should happen in a
land of splendor. Hell, if you rule our destinies, let us have the mortal gashes now!)

In the end it will be the Newcomer who, completely identified with the group of prisoner-actresses, narrates the end of Antigone on her knees in the play’s third act. And in addition to her attitude of solidarity and combativeness in the cell as it appears in the staging of the tragedy, The Newcomer will declare to her cellmates her intention to continue the fight once she has been released from the cell, her aim being to “give and receive blows” (55). The theatrical activity in the cell appears in the end to be a useful exercise, as it defines the prisoners’ political identity, enables them to maintain their morale and guarantees the continuation of their commitment.10

Employing a progressively more complex meta-theatrical structure, Martín Elizondo’s play effects a complete erasure of the limits between the performance and the immediate reality of the prisoner-actresses. If the performance ultimately gives voice to the prisoners and reflects their relationships, the events that befall the group will turn out to recreate the theme and plot of the play. Indeed, from the very first scenes the play’s structure emphasizes the continuity between both dramatic situations: the daily reality of the prisoners, on the one hand, and the version of Antigone that they perform, on the other. The shifting between scenes from everyday life and the performance of Antigone is effected gradually, by means of a simple staging and the use of minimal theatrical resources. The stage design involves everyday props—a folding screen, a pail—and attire is reduced to the use of blankets or shawls, except in the case of Creon, for whom there is a mask.11 While there is initially a lofty, poetic tone for the play and a separate, prosaic, even conversational tone for the scenes of everyday life in the cell, this arrangement will eventually change.12 During their performance, the actresses deliberately include references to current events, while outside the performance some characters assume an elevated, tragic tone. From the second half of act 2 onwards, the dramatic progression tends toward a dissolution or erasure of the limit between the two settings, and there is a convergence of the tragic endings. The scene included at the end of act 2, a collective act of rebellion against Creon, will lead to the appearance of the cell’s guards and the censorship and suppression of the performance of Antigone, including a search of the cell and its evacuation.

In act 3, the Newcomer begins to narrate, kneeling, the end of the Greek tragedy and, following a pause and through the use of lighting, the setting becomes transformed into a cave, with the figure of Antigone standing in the center, reciting lines in verse as she awaits her death. The scene presents the end of both dramas at the same time: the punishment of the classical protagonist and that of the contemporary prisoner who portrays her, and who, together with the prisoner who represents Haemon, has been taken to the cell containing those who have been
sentenced to death. The play then concludes with a return to the common cell, suggesting a circular structure, in which the process of repression, revolt, and sentence are repeated. The meta-theatrical conception used by Martín Elizondo structures and lends meaning to the whole of his version in that it expresses and develops two central themes that the author mentions in his prologue. The play addresses, on the one hand, the relationship between myth and particular history, by exploring a historical particularization of the myth’s motifs. On the other hand, Martín Elizondo’s work involves an inquiry into the tragedy’s ethical content, and in particular as regards the scope and potential of literary commitment under the effect of censorship.

In *Antígona entre muros*, then, José Martín Elizondo achieves a completely contemporary rendering of Sophocles’ myth. His choice of dramatic setting—the cohabitation of ten female political prisoners in a prison cell—prompts a reconsideration of tragic heroism to the extent that it opens up the way to a generalized, collective protagonist: the victims of dictatorial political repression. After considering the relevance of the classical tragedy’s central conflict to a particular historical moment, namely the final years of a dictatorship, Martín Elizondo’s work displaces the play’s thematic and dramatic axis—Antigone’s personal religious and moral demand that her dead receive a proper burial—and locates the tragic conflict in the destiny of the living and in a group of those who have been sentenced to death.

By way of conclusion, it is interesting to consider Martín Elizondo’s play against the overall evolution of the Antigone myth in contemporary Spanish drama and in relation to distinct sociopolitical junctures. The conflict that Antigone embodies has acquired a variety of meanings in the different versions produced by Spanish authors during the postwar era, Franco’s dictatorship, the Transition, and the period of democracy. For example, in an Antigone (*Antígona*) written during the dark years of the post-war period, Francoist author José María Pemán had made the themes of burial and honoring of the dead from both sides central issues in the play. Writing from her exile in Paris, María Zambrano would be the first author to focus, in her *La tumba de Antígona* (Antigone’s Tomb), on the protagonist’s death sentence. As we have seen, Martín Elizondo clearly locates the tragic moral conflict in the fate of those who have been sentenced to death under a dictatorial regime. After the transition to democracy was already underway, vanguard playwright Luis Riaza offered a version of the myth in which the essential tragic conflict appears devoid of any political content, and the play’s meaning is trivialized. Riaza’s ¡Antígona . . . cerda! (Antigone . . . Pig!), written at the end of the 1980s and the product of a decade in which the spirit of reconciliation embodied in the “Moncloa Pacts” continued to hold sway, marked a complete depoliticization of the myth.

Today, the political and moral conflict posed by the classical tragedy has acquired, once again, a special relevance. The conflict suggested by the figure and myth of Antigone, with her insistence on the
right and duty to honor the dead, emerges as a theme within a debate present in the Spanish media on a daily basis, thanks to the controversy that has arisen concerning the passage, under the present Socialist government, of the Ley de la Memoria Histórica (Law of Historical Memory). This legislation, which has elicited a hostile reaction from the Spanish Right, “recognizes and extends rights, and establishes measures, in favor of those who suffered persecution or violence during the Civil War and dictatorship” (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 53410) and includes provisions bearing on Francoism’s summary trials and the common graves. The burial of the dead was, from the immediate postwar period until the return to democracy, an issue repressed by Franco’s regime. The dead lay in common graves, forgotten and anonymous. In the 1950s, the Valle de los Caídos (Valley of the Fallen) monument was built; it was officially intended for all the dead from the Civil War, even though the location of many corpses and common graves would remain a forbidden topic. Starting in 1976, with the beginning of the Transition, a series of laws and decrees were passed with the aim of providing economic compensation to the victims of the Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship. The measures included pensions and other forms of compensation for the disabled, former prisoners, and relatives of the deceased. Yet the issue of death sentences, executions, and the recovery of corpses would not be addressed until the passage, in 2007, of the Law of Historical Memory. Among other things, the law provides that the State will assist in the “location and identification of persons violently disappeared during the Civil War or the subsequent political repression and whose whereabouts remain unknown” (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 53413).

In this sense, and despite the fact that Martín Elizondo’s version of Antigone focuses on the commitment and destiny of the living, it is possible to find in this work the presence of a discourse that defends the memory of those who have already lost their lives in combat. Indeed, the play begins with an evocation of a fallen comrade, as is indicated by the stage directions; in total darkness “the voice of the Nursemaid” can be heard, as she sings:

VOZ DE LA NODRIZA. El hombre que ya no espero
El día de mi salida,
Está en un negro agujero
En tierra desconocida. (19)

(VOICE OF THE NURSEMAID. The man I no longer wait for
The day of my departure,
Is in a black hole
In an unknown land.)

This personal evocation later becomes, in the middle of the prisoners’ performance in act 2, a defense of the collective dead.
Following the scene in which Haemon defends Antigone’s determination to honor her dead brother in the face of Creon’s opposition, the prisoners’ version of the Greek tragedy incorporates another scene in which the group challenges and defies the dictator. Their criticism centers on his general policy of liquidating his opponents and erasing the memory of them. The female Menoeus is the main spokeswoman for this discourse:

**LA MENOECEA.** . . . Cayeron ya hace años en las arenas desiertas, en los campos rodeados de alambradas, en la helada del invierno tienen su hoyo, sin toque de campanas yacen allí donde no echen raíces, donde solo les visita el mugido del mar. (45)

(THE FEMALE MENOEUS. . . . It has already been many years since they fell in the desert sands, in camps surrounded by barbed wire, they have their grave in the winter frost, there they lie—with no toll of the bells—where they can never settle down, where their only visitor is the roar of the sea.)

If her references evoke the silence and solitude of the dead in the immensity of a distant space, the chorus underscores the fate of anonymity and burial in mass graves:

**CORO.** En hoyos, y sólo en hoyos los veías. Impotentes, roídos sus cinturones de soldados. Decías: “ahondad, ahondas y veréis, escarbando entre la arena, sus esqueletos enmohecidos y el orín de sus nombres revolucionarios ya ilegibles.” (45)

(CHORUS. In pits, and only in pits, you would find them. Helpless, their soldiers’ belts frayed. You would say: “dig, dig and you shall see, scratching amidst the sand, their moldy skeletons and the rust of their now illegible revolutionary names.”)

Similarly condemned to solitude and oblivion in an “unknown land” where “none can put down roots,” another group of victims of war and dictatorship also appears in the play—the group of exiles to which the author himself belongs. As the performance of Antigone begins at the end of act 1, the blind Tiresias, who has returned from exile, appears and expresses himself thus:

**TIRESIAS.** Me sigues callada, patria,
Golpeando las sienes,
Arruinándome día a día
De sentirte y no verte. (36)

(TIRESIAS. You follow me silently, fatherland,
Beating my temples,
FROM THE TOMB TO THE PRISON CELL

Ruining me day after day  
As I feel you but cannot see you.)

In 1989, and thanks to the success of the staging of his play *Antígona entre muros*, José Martín Elizondo decided to return to Spain. However, his hopes were dashed by the social and political realities of Spain at the beginning of the nineties, and above all by the culture’s apparent lack of interest in the values defended by the left, its indifference to the crimes of Franco’s regime, and the politics of silence and oblivion imposed on the defeated. In 1993, the playwright returned to France. In her valuable biography of Martín Elizondo published after the dramatist’s death in 2009, Madeleine Poujol, the dramatist’s widow, would recall his aborted return by citing the words of the exiled Spanish philosopher Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez: “And then, at the very moment in which his exile has objectively come to an end, the exile discovers, at first with shock and later with pain and still later with a certain irony, that time has passed with impunity, and that whether or not he returns, he will never cease to be an exile” (qtd. in “José Martín Elizondo o el hacedor” 86).

Notes

1. See, for example, the works cited by Paco Serrano in *La tragedia de Agamenón*, pp. 11, 26.
2. For the use of classical myths in post-Civil War Spanish drama, see Ragué-Arias. As proof of the continuous presence of the Antigone myth in Spain during the post-Civil War period, it suffices to consider the following list, which includes works from Catalan and Galician drama: *Antígona*, by Salvador Espriu (1939); *Antígona*, by José María Pemán (1945); *La tumba de Antígona*, by María Zambrano (1967); *Antígona 68*, by Josep María Muñoz i Pujol (1968); “La oración de Antígona”, a part of Antonio Jiménez Romero’s *Oratorio* (1969); *La razón de Antígona*, by Carlos de la Rica (1980); *La sangre de Antígona*, by José Bergamín (1983); *Antígona, cerda*, by Luis Riaza (1983); *Antígona, a forza do sangue*, by María Xosé Queizán (1989); and *Memoria de Antígona*, by Quico Cadaval (1998).
3. For more information regarding Spanish exile theater in Toulouse, see Aznar Soler, *Los Amigos*. Aznar Soler’s book includes extensive information about A.T.E., a theatrical troupe which was founded by José Martín Elizondo and which was responsible for disseminating Spanish drama among the exile community.
4. Manuel Aznar Soler has carried out exhaustive research on this work’s premiere in the amphitheater of Mérida. In “El estreno de *Antígona entre muros*,” he offers a detailed study of the circumstances surrounding the premiere, as well as a review of the commentary and criticism that followed.
5. For more information on the use of the Antigone myth among Spanish exiles, see Vilches de Frutos’s “Mitos y exilios.”
6. In “José Martín Elizondo: De una memoria defendida,” Madeleine Poujol notes the parallelism between *Antígona entre muros* and one of the author’s earlier works, *Pour la Grece*, written in French and staged in Toulouse. This work also takes place in the Greece of the Colonels’ Junta, yet, as Poujol points out, the

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text allows for a double reading, in that it can also be interpreted as referring to Franco’s dictatorship (340). Antígona entre muros lends itself to the same interpretation.

7. All translations from Spanish are my own.
8. Martín Elizondo’s writings often have a self-reflexive and meta-theatrical structure and appear to focus on artistic creation in its various manifestations, whether dramatic performance itself (as occurs in Pour la Grèce [1969] and Antígona entre muros [1969]), or the creation of a painting (as in Pavana para una infanta [1975]), or the production of a collage (as in Personaje combatiente [n.d.]). This tendency increasingly takes the form of experimentation with the plastic arts.

9. In his lucid reading of Conversaciones con el Diablo, another text by Martín Elizondo, José Ángel Ascunce furnishes a precise analysis of artists’ engagement and the ends of art as central motifs in the author’s work and thought. Particularly interesting is Ascunce’s definition and interpretation of the “combative character” in connection with the protagonists of Antígona entre muros. The combative character is defined not by the outcome of a fight, but by a dedication to action: “Art is necessary but not sufficient . . . Art shows us a way, but it does not guarantee the end . . . Man as a being responsible for his history creates himself and achieves his dignity in struggle, and not mainly because of the results, for so long as there is a rebellious subject who dreams of utopia and who fights to realize the ideal of humanity, he will have a destiny and life will have a meaning” (49).

10. Madeleine Poujol interprets this work as an example of the author’s faith in the power of drama, noting that “the performance in this case of an ancient tragedy by some political prisoners in the time of a dictatorship . . . becomes a weapon of liberation, which allows them to knock down, with the power of words, the walls of the cells in which the jailers have enclosed them” (“El yo ciudadano” 400–401). She then cites José Luis Aranguren, who also finds the hope for a continuation of the fight in the play’s circular structure: “In Antígona entre muros the fight for freedom’s torch is passed from a dying Antigone to the Newcomer. Thus Antigone is born, dies, and is then reborn. Antigone is immortal” (qtd. 401).

11. The performance staged in the cell reproduces, to a certain extent, the style and type of theater that José Martín Elizondo practiced with his ATE ensemble, and thus reflects his personal preferences regarding casting, acting, and stage direction. The main features of this theatrical approach can be summarized as follows: an eclectic cast, including actors with diverse backgrounds and training (students, workers, and professionals) but united by their anti-fascism; a commitment to collective work; and simplicity in stage design and use of props, inspired by Grotowski’s concept of “poor theater.” Gil Fombellida offers a detailed account of these features in “Martín Elizondo.”

12. Poujol refers to this dual effect in “José Martín Elizondo: De una memoria defendida” (343).

Works Cited


Paco Serrano, Diana de. La tragedia de Agamenón en el teatro español del siglo XX. Murcia: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Murcia, 2003. Print.


