

To Hand Oneself over to Memory: Antón Arrufat's *Los Siete Contra Tebas*

This paper examines the representation and repression of memory in *Los Siete Contra Tebas* by Cuban playwright Antón Arrufat. Until recently, Classical scholars are not likely to have encountered Arrufat, nor his award-winning adaptation of Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*. As the author describes (Bejel 1990, 5-6), the play was written in a flurry of creativity in May, 1968, and immediately banned from Cuba, despite winning the prestigious "José Antonio Ramos" prize from the Cuban writers' and artists' guild (UNEAC), who published the play with a preface rejecting its "ideology" (Escarpanter 1990, 890; Barquet 2002; Torrance 2007, 291-4). Nevertheless, scholars and critics agree that *Los Siete* represents some of Arrufat's finest work as a dramatist (Escarpanter 1990, 889; Martí de Cid and Wellington 1990, 37), and the growing literature on adaptations by Cuban playwrights of ancient Greek and Roman dramas (e.g. Piñera 1967; Barreda 1985; Carrió 1990; Miranda Cancela 2005, 72-6; Nikoloutsos 2012) suggests that Arrufat too merits closer study. Some recent approaches have pursued the play's unique version of the Theban myth (Bejel 1978 and 1978; Miranda Cancela 2006), others have attentively cataloged intertexts with Arrufat's ancient models (Alvaréz Moran and Iglesias Montiel 1999), and still others have sought to illuminate the play's revolutionary context (Estévez 1992; Barquet 2002; Torrance 2007). Yet none has studied the contextual significance of Arrufat's conflation of Aeschylus' *Seven* with Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, which has sometimes been recognized as a secondary model. It is this gap that my paper begins to fill by showing how Arrufat's fusion of Aeschylean and Euripidean elements contributes to his critique of Cuban revolutionary politics.

Like his ancient models, Arrufat concentrates his action on the fratricidal struggle for power between the sons of Oedipus: the exiled Polynices, who arrives at the head of an army, claiming his share of the throne, and the Theban champion Eteocles, who has betrayed a power-sharing agreement with his brother in an attempt to break with the recent history of Thebes. But Arrufat's *Los Siete* is not the faithful translation of Aeschylus that it appears in its opening passages to be, nor simply a tragedy in the Classical style; rather, the play is a cleverly adapted and subversive metaphor for revolutionary politics in Cuba,

challenging both the teleological, pro-government view of history, and the alleged utopian character of the Cuban communist state. Because Arrufat suppresses the curse of Oedipus and removes the supernatural elements of chance and necessity, the drama turns instead on the characters' conflicting remembrances of their shared past, and the price that his Eteocles pays to establish his vision of justice is to accept that he is a traitor. As I argue, Arrufat's critique depends on a creative fusion of Aeschylean and Euripidean elements, including an important dialogue between the brothers that refuses to glorify or to demonize either one. Eteocles figures as the young Castro, defender of a new order of social justice, who seeks to eliminate the competing revolutionary faction and its leader and to seize power for himself. Polynices, on the other hand, emerges as a figure of the nostalgic conservative, living in exile, and hoping to restore the *status quo* before Eteocles' revolution—*un burgués* in the language of the Cuban Marxist-Leninist régime (Bejel 1990, 8). Despite their shared memories, their contradictory arguments are crowded with the language of the revolution and demonstrate the ideological decontamination of past violence that makes state-history possible. By exposing the processes by which revolutionary violence is sanitized, memorialized, and turned into official "history", Arrufat's *Los Siete* offers a compelling example of the potential for Classical dramas to address moments of cultural and political instability.