

**Intertextual Uses of *Antigone* and Liberation
Theology: The Passion of Ana in Juan Carlos
Gené's *Golpes a mi puerta***

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Juan Carlos Gené refers to his play, *Golpes a mi puerta* (Knocks at My Door), as “mi obra de los años de destierro, los que corrieron entre julio de 1976 y el presente, septiembre de 1984” (“De destierro” 7) (my work in the exile years that ran from July 1976 to the present September of 1984).¹ Later, Gené wrote the script for the film, *Golpes a mi puerta* (1994), a Venezuelan-Argentinian production directed by Alejandro Saderman, based on his play.² The plot in both cases is one easily recognized by any student of Latin American history or literature. Vaguely setting his play in an unidentifiable Latin American country where a foreign invasion has divided the population into collaborators and rebels, Gené alludes to events that evoke the turbulent history of the latter decades of the twentieth century in Latin America. When a young rebel takes refuge in their home, two Catholic nuns are caught in the middle of the conflict. The ensuing battle of wills between Cerone, the town mayor who collaborates with the newly imposed foreign-backed government, and Ana, the nun who refuses to collaborate to escape execution, bears a strong resemblance to the conflict between Creon and Antigone in Sophocles’ tragedy; however, Gené’s story diverges from Sophocles’ original in several key ways.

Gené not only contextualizes both the play and the film within the political scenario of Latin America, but he also firmly embeds the story within the concepts of liberation theology. The protagonists of *Golpes a mi puerta* have taken vows in the Catholic Church. As Catholic nuns, their response to the situation in which they find themselves is determined, to a large extent, by their religious vocation. Ana’s stand—her refusal to cooperate with the torturers and the authorities that represent the state that condones such treatment of its citizens—places

her on the path to martyrdom and is clearly based on her faith and on her solidarity with the poor, as understood according to the basic tenets espoused by liberation theology.

I intend to explore how Gené reimagines Antigone through the lens of liberation theology, casting the story within the practice and ritual of Catholicism, and within the political and social milieu of late twentieth-century Latin America. The dilemma at the heart of Antigone unfolds in Gené's play as a religious drama. Theological and religious concepts such as the celebration of the Eucharist (the body of Christ), sacrifice, martyrdom, and resurrection are constantly at the forefront, giving *Golpes a mi puerta* a spiritual grounding for the ethical, moral, and political confrontation among the characters.

Contextualizing Antigone's Dilemma

Born in Argentina, Gené left his native country in 1976 to live in exile in Venezuela, not returning until 1994. His voluntary exile responded to the Argentine military junta's blatant disregard for human rights. The period of "la guerra sucia" or "the Dirty War" (1976–1983) left an indelible mark on the Argentine nation. Since the 1970s, the traumatic events of state-sponsored terrorism and their consequences have been repeatedly documented, narrativized, dramatized, and filmed.³ Gené, however, does not set either his play or his film within an identifiable national landscape, even though key events allude to various hotspots within Latin America, ranging from El Salvador to Argentina. The casts of the play and of the film illustrate the transnational scope of the work. Referring to the play version, Gené boasts that "cuatro nacionalidades latinoamericanas están presentes en el grupo: venezolana, argentina, chilena, y boliviana" (30) (four Latin American nationalities are present in the group: Venezuelan, Argentine, Chilean, and Bolivian).⁴ In the film cast, Verónica Oddó (Ana) hails from Argentina; Elba Escobar (Úrsula), Ana Castell (Severa), and Frank Spano (Pablo) from Venezuela; and Mirta Ibarra (Amanda) and José Antonio Rodríguez (the Bishop) from Cuba. Having grown out of Gené's experience with theater in Venezuela and as a production of El Grupo Actoral 80, both the play and the movie represent Gené's vision of a culture that transcends national borders, allegiances, and identities.⁵

The story can be read against the backdrop of the conflicts that dominated the Southern Cone (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile) in the 1970s and 1980s, but the story does not limit itself to these events. In fact, the correlation between the play/film and specific events in any one country's history is imperfect.⁶ In his prologue to the published version of the playtext, Gené refers to the moment in which he was composing the play:

[B]astará decir que trabajaba yo en el texto de *Golpes a mi puerta*, mientras las agencias internacionales noticiosas multiplicaban las noticias referentes a tensiones y aprestos militares entre Nicaragua y Honduras (!), cuando inesperadamente se produjo la invasión. De Grenada. (20)

(Suffice it to say that I was working on the text of *Golpes a mi puerta*, while international news agencies were proliferating the news related to tensions and military preparations between Nicaragua and Honduras [!], when unexpectedly the invasion happened. Of Grenada.)

Using the example of Nicaragua in particular, Gené argues that when a Latin American government does not serve certain international interests, these interests—whether they be political or economic—seek the means to undermine it: “el mecanismo de la invasión disfrazada de guerra civil da excelentes resultados” (18) (the mechanism of invasion disguised as civil war gives excellent results). The context for his play is any country in Latin America:

América Latina, viva, sufriendo, sumida en la guerra, la miseria y la violencia. No quería una obra solamente argentina, solamente venezolana, etc. . . . [N]o hace falta aclarar . . . en qué país ocurre. Estoy seguro que el lector y el espectador . . . lo saben perfectamente: ese país es el suyo, en un momento de su historia real posible. (20)

(Latin America, alive, suffering, immersed in war, misery, and violence. I didn't want a work that would be solely Argentine, solely Venezuelan, etc. . . . It isn't necessary to clarify . . . in which country it takes place. I'm sure the reader and spectator . . . know perfectly well: that country is theirs, in a moment of their possible, real history.)

Gené alludes to specific events that had recently occurred or that were ongoing in different countries, but he places them within a context in which the commonalities outweigh the distinctions.

Gené dedicated the published version of his play (1988) to Enrique Angel Angelelli, a bishop of the Catholic Church who was murdered in 1976 during the Dirty War by the Argentine military. Angelelli was involved in investigating the previous murders of two other priests in La Rioja when he was attacked and killed by the military. Four years later, the assassination of Salvadoran Archbishop Óscar Romero during the celebration of mass shocked and outraged the international community.⁷ Gené's drama unfolds against this backdrop of violence, positing the demands of the state against the precepts of faith and justice as understood by liberation theology. Not only does much of the play occur

within the domicile of two Catholic nuns, but the conflict is inaugurated by the funeral mass for a priest who serves as an amalgam of religious figures involved with the church of the poor and of those assassinated by military and paramilitary forces. Opening the story with the funeral of the priest directly alludes to the deaths of Bishop Angelelli and Archbishop Oscar Romero and forewarns the audience that the conflict within the play can be understood within the framework of the political events of the 1970s onward.⁸ Given the religious setting and characters, as well as the conflict between faith and politics, the play evokes liberation theology as the moral compass within the plot. In this way, the political and the religious converge and are inextricably linked in *Golpes a mi puerta*.⁹

Both the play and film open in the aftermath of the politically-motivated assassination of a priest and, as such, the story transpires during a period of mourning.¹⁰ In each case, the assassination has recently occurred, martial law has been declared, and the community is deeply divided. After curfew, Severa, a neighbor whose husband is dying, knocks on the nuns' door, asking that one of them come and give him Holy Communion. Having had to pass through several checkpoints on her way to the nuns' house and having been harassed by the soldiers patrolling the streets, Severa remarks on recent events:

¿Pero usted ama a los que mataron como a un perro al Padre Ramírez? . . . ¿Y usted ama y ruega por los que vaciaron sus armas en su cabeza? ¿Y por los que mutilaron de esa manera espantosa a Pancho Aztigueta, antes de arrojarlo muerto en la puerta de su casa para que todos lo viéramos? (*Golpes* 45)

(But do you love those who killed Father Ramírez like a dog? . . . And do you love and pray for those who emptied their weapons into his head? And for those who mutilated Pancho Aztigueta in that horrifying way before dumping his corpse at the door of his home so that we would all see him?)

It's obvious that Gené refers to events within the recent historical record in Latin America. Fathers Angelelli and Romero were known as advocates of the poor and practitioners of liberation theology whose deep roots in social and political activism put clergy, including nuns, at risk during a period of violent upheaval in many Latin American countries. As Severa makes clear, the priest and others were targeted and murdered by the military because of their work with and on behalf of the poor: "Eran gente más mansa y más buena que el pan: por eso los mataron; porque defendían mansamente lo que los pobres habíamos conseguido, un gobierno que por fin hacía de verdad algo por nosotros" (*Golpes* 45) (They were the meekest people and good as gold: That's why they were killed; because they defended meekly what we poor had achieved, a government that at last was truly doing something for us).

The initial action of Gené's story within the context of the assassination of priests, as well as the choice of two nuns as his main characters, sets *Golpes a mi puerta* within the historical moments represented by Angelelli's and Romero's assassinations and embeds the action of the play/film within the theological context and praxis of liberation theology.

While the ideas at stake in the play/film are shaped by liberation theology, the plot intersects at several points with Sophocles' *Antigone*. In Sophocles' play, in broad terms, we witness the debate between obedience, governance, and law on one side and personal duty, justice, and the rites of mourning on the other. The Greek tragedy affords Gené a universal grounding for his play/film. The conflict between Antigone and Creon provides the basic model for the confrontation between Ana and Cerone. The arc of the action, too, follows loosely the plot of the Greek tragedy. In *Golpes a mi puerta* and in *Antigone*, the country/city state is divided by a war, pitting "brother against brother," which subsequently places a woman in the midst of a crisis of conscience. In Sophocles and in Gené, Antigone and Ana break the law, are asked to recant, and when they refuse to do so, on principle, both protagonists meet the same fate: they are condemned to death by the state. However, *Golpes a mi puerta* is not primarily an adaptation of Sophocles. The connection between *Antigone* and Gené's play is more broadly intertextual.

When we examine the intersection between Sophocles' story of Antigone's stand and the tenets and practice of liberation theology within Latin America, we can see how these two paradigms coexist in the play/film and how they weave a particularized ethics through the ritual enactment of communion and sacrifice. In this way, Gené proposes a spiritual grounding for the concept of community among and for nations in which the social contract between the government and its people has been severely compromised, if not broken. It is in the light of the religious paradigm of the celebration of the mass that Antigone's struggle is recontextualized.

What Means Antigone? A Reading of *Antigone* in Latin America

The story of *Antigone* resonates within Latin America. Its applicability across national divides and periods is attested by the number of times Sophocles' play has been staged and rewritten.¹¹ A case in point, Griselda Gambaro, compatriot of Gené, also lived in exile during the period of the Dirty War. Upon her return to Buenos Aires, Gambaro wrote her one-act play, *Antígona furiosa* (Furious Antigone) (1986), an Argentine adaptation of Sophocles' tragedy, foregrounding parallels to the national debate in the aftermath of the Dirty War. Unlike *Antígona furiosa*, however, Gené's play is not a rewriting or a restaging of

Sophocles' tragedy. Even so, the story of Antigone—her tragedy, her cause, her fate—rests at the heart of the crisis that confronts the two Catholic nuns in Gené's story. The intertextual use of *Antigone* in *Golpes a mi puerta* provides a mythic paradigm that allows the spectator to approach the play or film from a "universalist" position, removed from particular political events or national identities. It also requires that the spectator negotiate the interplay between the classic tradition of theater and the ritual of the mass, for Gené locates his play and film most firmly within the paradigm of the celebration of the Eucharist, as a ritual with a strong religious and moral character.

Interpretations of Sophocles' play abound.¹² Stefani Engelstein remarks that "[t]he ongoing compulsion to return to *Antigone* derives from the drama's gripping interrogation of subjectivity, desire, and collective political life" (39). This certainly makes Sophocles' text a fitting resource for Gené's purposes. Engelstein goes on to warn against reducing the play to an analysis of the protagonist alone. Instead of focusing on the eponymous character, Engelstein suggests that we focus our attention on "the web of relationships in play around Antigone" (39). In particular, she proposes a "sibling logic" in which the subject, intersubjectivity, and agency are located within a "network of *partial others*" as the major thrust of our interpretation (40). In this way, the relationship among Antigone and her siblings—Oedipus (as father and brother), Polyneices, Eteocles, and Ismene—is that which constitutes the paradigm for the subject within the networked world (41). In the sibling experience, one finds "recognition of the coexistence of degrees of sameness and otherness" (Engelstein 48). Instead of an approach that focuses on subjectivity through a vertical paradigm, establishing the hierarchy of parent to child, Engelstein's approach suggests that the lateral connections—among siblings—form the cruxes of identification and community for Antigone. Engelstein's reading of Sophocles can enlighten our understanding of the relationship between the two nuns, Ana and Úrsula, and, by extension, the concept of community as Gené envisions it.

In Gené's play, the natural and biological ties between Antigone and Ismene, who are both daughters of Jocasta and Oedipus, are replaced by the spiritual ties between two Catholic nuns. This point of confluence between the plots also moves Gené's story away from the classic tragedy. Faith binds Gené's characters and forms the basis for the concepts of subject, community, and agency. Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian Franciscan whose writings are seminal to the theology of liberation, provided a theological analysis of the church and a critique of hierarchy as part of its "reinvention." The friar proposed the establishment of Ecclesial Base Communities, anti-hierarchical in nature, which he saw as "a return to the sense of community and the presence of the Holy Spirit that characterized the early church" (Sigmund 83). Ana and Úrsula, who are "hermanas" (sisters/nuns) in and through the church, are certainly patterned on the dyad of Antigone and Ismene. Their

connection is no less real or profound than the one that binds Antigone and Ismene. Ismene's plea in Sophocles, "What life is there for me, once I have lost you!" (*Antigone* 548) is echoed by Úrsula's words in *Golpes a mi puerta*, "Ana, no quiero vivir si tú mueres" (140) (Ana, I don't want to live if you die). However, the bond between Ana and Úrsula is not through kinship or biology. As nuns, they are bound together through the body of Christ, through their vows to the church and their beliefs. This mystical and religious body replaces the ties of kinship or blood in the text by Sophocles and redefines community through the precepts of the theology of liberation.

The Sacred and the Profane

According to Gené, theater itself is "una práctica religiosa, en definitiva, unificadora (religadora), una actitud de tozuda esperanza, contra toda esperanza; la sencilla complejidad de lo humano como respuesta a la complicada sofisticación de un mundo donde valen las cosas y no los hombres" (16) (a religious practice, ultimately, unifying [binding], an attitude of obstinate hope, against all hope; the simple complexity of humanity as a response to the convoluted sophistication of a world where things matter and people don't). He goes on to say that "el teatro . . . debe moverse bajo las [reglas] del rito religioso, con conciencia permanentemente renovada del carácter misterioso de nuestra existencia" ("De destierro" 16) (theater . . . must operate under the rules of religious ritual, with constant and renewed awareness of the mystical nature of our existence). Ritual frames both the play and the film versions of the story. Adam Versényi reminds us of the religious and ritualized roots of theater in Latin America. Referring to the history of theater, ritual, and performance in the Americas before and after the arrival of the Spaniards, Versényi argues that "both the religious spectacle and the evangelical theater that was built on its foundations sought to eliminate the line dividing actor from spectator in order to achieve certain religious and political ends" (30). He goes on to document the use of theater in the evangelization and colonization of the indigenous populations.¹³ Even more recently, theater continues to combine religious and political concerns: "Such a combination is secularly derived but it mirrors the concerns of the region's liberation theology movement" (Versényi xi). *Golpes a mi puerta* is inscribed in a long tradition, including pageants, passion plays, the *auto sacramental*, and evangelical theater, in which religious ritual links with theatrical performance.

Gené begins his story with a mass. In the film version, the first scene takes place inside a church where the bishop is celebrating the funeral mass for a priest, Father Ramírez, who has been murdered. Soldiers interrupt the mass, occupy the church, and force the congregation to leave at gunpoint; the conflict between church and state

is immediately established. Gené sets up the play in a slightly different way; however, one soon learns that the situation is similar. The stage directions denote two settings: the nuns' house and then the prison. These two realistic settings, however, are placed within the frame of the mass: "la casa y la cárcel, claro, son sucesivas. Pero ambas son simultáneas con la misa" (*Golpes* 37) (the house and the prison, of course, are successive. But both are simultaneous with the mass). The celebration of the mass delimits and overshadows the entire play, serving as the frame for the action. Act 1 begins with the "Introito," or the introduction to the mass (41). At the beginning of act 2, the Gloria is recited (75), and the reading of the gospel or "evangelio" inaugurates the final scene (127). The play ends with the Offertory: "Ofertorio. Luz en el altar. Monseñor levanta al Cielo la patena con la hostia, ante Úrsula y Severa, que están de rodillas" (141) (Offertory. Light on the altar. Monsignor raises the paten with the host before Úrsula and Severa, who are kneeling). As the priest raises the host, offstage we hear the order given to the firing squad and the immediate discharge of the guns. Simultaneous with the consecration of Christ's crucifixion/sacrifice is Ana's execution and Úrsula's final response.

Although an opposition is set up within the play between the nuns' house and the prison, suggesting tension between the private domain and public space, both settings are contained and inscribed within the play's allusions to the mass. The primacy of the spiritual over the temporal domain is clear in the liturgical structure of the play. In a similar way, the domesticity of the nuns' house is subordinated to its spiritual function. Gené's stage directions are simple but significant in this regard: "*La casa* es la realidad cotidiana, en la que el sagrario instala lo Divino. Es por proteger la luz de ese sagrario que la acción desemboca en la cárcel final" (emphasis in the original, *Golpes* 37) (*The house* is quotidian reality, in which the tabernacle installs the Divine. It is because of protecting the light of that tabernacle that the action ends in the last prison). The ciborium and tabernacle dominate and define the setting in acts 1 and 2. As Ana explains later to the young rebel who takes refuge in her house, the ciborium holds the consecrated hosts, the body of Christ: "Aquí hay hostias consagradas, para los que quieren comulgar y para los enfermos" (*Golpes* 51) (Here there are consecrated hosts, for those who wish to take communion and for the ill).

The ciborium is kept in a tabernacle on the small altar in the nuns' domicile. Here, before the tabernacle, is where the sisters pray. When Úrsula leaves to give communion to a dying man, Ana is left alone with her fears and doubts. She turns to the tabernacle: "Su mirada se detiene, de pronto, en el sagrario" (Her gaze rests, suddenly, on the tabernacle), and she asks, "Bueno . . . ¿qué dices?" (48) (Well . . . what do you say?). For the next several moments, Ana carries on a one-sided conversation with God over the political crisis in her country: "¿De qué lado estamos Tú y yo? ¿Con los ricos, con los que entrarán en tu Reino después que el camello haya pasado por el ojo de la aguja? ¿O con los pobres, de

quienes dijiste que verían a Dios?” (49) (On which side are You and I? With the rich, with those who will enter your Kingdom after a camel has passed through the eye of the needle? Or with the poor, who you said would see God?). She stops short of asking for a sign, but in the very next moment, the rebel slips inside the house without her knowledge. Still conversing with God, Ana asks, “Y Tú, ¿me quieres explicar . . . ?” (And You? Do You want to explain to me . . . ?), only to find the intruder collapsed before the tabernacle: “Mira hacia el sagrario y ahoga un grito. Ante él, el agitado Pablo” (50) (She looks toward the tabernacle and swallows a cry. Before it, the agitated Pablo). The position and timing of the young man’s arrival coincide with Ana’s prayer. The religious significance cannot be dismissed: the young man becomes the answer or the sign. The tabernacle converts the domicile into a sanctuary, recasting the domestic space of the nuns’ home into a sacred space, and the entire play, within the celebration of the mass, oscillates between the spiritual realm and the realm of temporal power, continually subordinating the latter to the former.

At this point, it bears mentioning that the key conflict in Sophocles’ *Antigone* occurs in the aftermath of a civil war fought between two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices. At issue is Creon’s decision that one brother—Eteocles—will be buried with full honors, recognized as a son and hero of Thebes, while the other—Polyneices—is cast out and left as carrion on the battlefield. In spite of Creon’s determination that Polyneices be treated as an enemy, disavowed and exiled from the community, Antigone insists on burying and mourning her brother. Moved by her sense of justice, Antigone transgresses Creon’s law, and is, therefore, condemned to be taken to a cave and left there to die. Similar to Antigone, Ana also breaks the law—Cerone’s law—in which certain people in her country are denied their rights as citizens. She refuses to bear false witness against the rebel soldier who seeks sanctuary in her home, and hence is arrested, tortured, and executed. The young rebel has no rights within Cerone’s state. Over and above allegiance to any one particular state or ideology, the nuns profess obedience to a much broader concept of community that transcends national borders.

In particular, one way that community is determined within Gené’s play is through the ritual of Holy Communion or the Eucharist. The first time someone comes and knocks at the nuns’ door, it is in search of Holy Communion. Later, when the rebel Pablo is hiding in the nuns’ house, Ana makes bread. In spite of the fact that she corrects Pablo and denies that she is making the bread for the communion wafers, this simple act of making bread takes on symbolic significance. It suggests the most basic of domestic scenes, casting Ana in the role of the maternal as she protects the young man. At the same time, given the fact that the young man will soon be taken off by the military, the preparation of bread can be taken as an allusion to the last supper. Betrayed by a neighbor, ironically named Amanda (“worthy of love,

lovable”), the young man is seized by the military, his time with the nuns merely a respite. Gené doesn’t belabor the similarities between Jesus and the rebel, but the title of the play continues to draw us back to Biblical allusions, the most obvious of which is evident in the title of the play/film.

At various points in the action, someone “knocks at the door.” The title takes us first and foremost to a passage in the Bible: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). The text can be interpreted as an exhortation to accept God into one’s heart. On a more literal level, it suggests the obligation to give comfort to one’s neighbor or the less fortunate. In the play/film, the nuns behave according to both interpretations. When Severa comes, Ana and Úrsula are ready to go with her to her house to comfort a dying man in spite of the danger in the streets. Motivated by the same understanding of charity and community, Ana and Úrsula give sanctuary to the young man who slips inside their home to hide from the authorities.¹⁴ Ana is guided by the exhortation to give comfort to one in need because her faith teaches her to see Christ in all humankind: “For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. . . . Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:35–40). Even though the rebel is not Catholic, Ana gives him sanctuary at the risk of her own life. Cerone is a professed atheist, but when Pablo asks Ana about the mayor, she responds, “Si Cerone fuera el perseguido que llama a mi puerta, haría lo mismo que hago con usted” (*Golpes* 55) (If Cerone were the one persecuted who called at my door, I would do the same as I am doing for you). Through her faith, Ana embraces both friend and enemy, both believer and nonbeliever, within her concept of community.¹⁵

Gendered Resistance: The Passion of Ana

In her article on *Antigone*, Françoise Meltzer notes that readings of *Antigone* often see the conflict between the characters of Antigone and Creon as that of kinship versus state or as the debate between a personal ethics or justice and the law. Meltzer explains why many readings of Sophocles’ tragedy focus on the opposition between Creon and Antigone:

What makes the Sophocles play so disturbing, and so powerful, is precisely that from their own lights Creon and Antigone are both right; and yet they cancel each other out (hence we are dissatisfied with black-and-white renditions such as Heaney’s, as Wills complained). In Sophocles the two are, as everybody from Hegel to

Butler has noted, speaking from different registers. At least on the face of it, Creon speaks for the state; Antigone speaks for kinship. Such is the first layer of disharmony between them. (174)

The religious aspect of the conflict in Sophocles' play is often disregarded in favor of a secularized interpretation. On the other hand, Meltzer points out that Søren Kierkegaard speaks of Antigone in religious terms: "Kierkegaard's Antigone . . . is like Christ in that her identity lies between absolute suffering and absolute action" (Meltzer 175).

Meltzer analyzes readings of subjectivity and desire in Sophocles' play and concludes that the most significant quality of Antigone is that of excess. That is, unlike the tendency to flatten the conflict between two mutually exclusive binaries, Meltzer shows how Antigone continues to elude/transgress boundaries:

[W]e are seeing the Antigone of Sophocles as mixing registers that are meant to be mutually exclusive. The real point may be that subjectivity, with woman so consistently depicted as other, is in itself a self-protective but imagined boundary between self and death. The boundary is not only necessary, in other words, to demonstrate transgression and thus radicality; the boundary is also a shield allowing for the concept of subjectivity in itself. The Antigone of Sophocles is powerful because her very religiosity produces the architecture undergirding her shocking agency as feminine. At the same time, however, the extent to which this figure of Antigone embodies betweenness . . . puts into question not only subjectivity, but the dyads (for example, gender), which it must insist upon and their concomitant hypostasizations of noncongruity or spaces between them. (Meltzer 185)

Unlike Butler, Meltzer returns the religious aspect to her analysis of Sophocles' protagonist and suggests that Antigone can't be sufficiently explained by any one category. Antigone continues to defy containment, even that of gender. As such, Meltzer sees Antigone's relationship to subjectivity and to desire as one of excess and transgression.

Throughout her article, Meltzer shows how Antigone mixes registers and crosses or blurs borders. Antigone occupies both the feminine and the masculine role when she carries out the rituals of mourning (183–84). With regard to Gené's play, because his characters are Catholic nuns, they are excluded from the traditionally female roles as wife and mother.¹⁶ Like clergy, they are religious, but their role within the church is limited, constrained by their sex. As Gené allows his protagonist to point out, nuns can give communion, but they are not allowed to consecrate the hosts or to officiate at the mass:

PABLO. – . . . ¿Qué amasa?

ANA. –Pan.
 PABLO. –¿Pan?
 ANA. –¿Le parece tan raro?
 PABLO. –No . . . pensé que eran . . .
 ANA. –¿Sí?
 PABLO. –(*Timido*): Hostias.
 ANA. –¿Hostias?! ¿Y por qué?
 PABLO. –No sé. Se me ocurrió. Claro: como antes dije una idiotez . . . Es un disparate que una monja rece misa. No sé cómo se me ocurrió. Los nervios supongo . . .
 ANA. –(*Indignada*): ¡Oiga! Que la Iglesia todavía no lo considere conveniente, no quiere decir que sea ningún disparate.
 PABLO. –¿Perdone! No quise defenderla.
 ANA. –(*Insiste*). ¡Ya llegará!
 PABLO. –(*Escéptico*): ¿Usted cree?
 ANA. –Estoy convencida. Yo no lo veré, pero . . .
 PABLO. –(*Polémico*): Claro que no: ni sus hijos ni sus niet . . . ¡Perdón!
 Silencio.
 PABLO. –No entiendo, de todos modos. Pueden dar la comunión, pero . . .
 ANA. –Pero no consagrar. Esa es función sacerdotal.
 PABLO. –(*Agudo*) Cosa de hombres.
 Pausa. *Ella lo mira.*
 ANA. –Sí. (*Golpes 57*)

(PABLO. – . . . What are you kneading?
 ANA. –Bread.
 PABLO. –Bread?
 ANA. –Does it seem strange to you?
 PABLO. –No . . . I thought they were . . .
 ANA. –Yes?
 PABLO. –[*Timid*]: Hosts.
 ANA. –Hosts?! Why?
 PABLO. –I don't know. It just occurred to me. Of course: like before I've said something stupid . . . It's absurd: a nun saying mass. I don't know what got into me. Nerves, I guess . . .
 ANA. –[*Indignant*]: Listen! That the Church doesn't consider it appropriate doesn't mean that it's absurd.
 PABLO. –Sorry! I didn't mean to offend you.
 ANA. –[*Insistent*]. The day will come!
 PABLO. –[*Skeptical*]: You think so?
 ANA. –I'm convinced. I won't see it, but . . .
 PABLO. –[*Polemical*]: Of course not. Not your children nor your grandchi . . . Sorry!
 Silence.

PABLO. –Anyway, I don't understand. You can give communion, but . . .

ANA. –But not consecrate. That is a priestly function.

Pablo. –[Perceptive] A guy thing.

Pause. She looks at him.

ANA. –Yes.)

Clearly, gender plays a role within Gené's play, but the categories of male and female are not unambiguous. Like Sophocles' *Antigone*, Ana and Úrsula, as women *and* as nuns, are "in between."

Ana obviously disagrees with the church's position on women and the priesthood. She is also aware of the sacrifice the church demands of both women and men when they take vows of celibacy. Úrsula goes so far as to mention that their Mother Superior had thought that Ana would not ultimately take her vows. "'Eres inestable,' decía, 'tal vez tu vocación sea el matrimonio'" (*Golpes* 68) ("You are unstable," she would say, "maybe your vocation is to marry"). Úrsula also accuses Ana of humiliating her, treating her like a child, when Ana decides unilaterally to give sanctuary to the rebel. She insinuates that Ana's behavior arises from her frustrated maternal instinct: "Porque la mamá no tiene que consultar con su hijita una cosa así" (69) (Because the mother doesn't have to consult with the daughter over something like this). In this way, Gené also foregrounds gender and critiques the hierarchical divide between women and men within the religious orders. But even though Gené brings up gender, his characters complicate the issues of identity and agency. More significant than the category of gender is the concept of community. This becomes more evident when we consider the final moments of the play.

Liberation theology provides the concept of community based on faith and solidarity. It understands the church as an institution of social criticism, and holds that there is a political dimension to faith. One's responsibility towards one's brethren and the need to see the world from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed is fundamental to the movement. In Latin America, beginning in the 1960s, these basic theological concepts combined with certain aspects of Marxist analysis to form a politically engaged Christian movement that openly espoused political, economic, and social change. Gustavo Gutiérrez in *A Theology of Liberation* relegated theology to a secondary level and advocated for liberation theology first as praxis, a means of achieving change.¹⁷ In essence, "[t]he theologian must therefore be immersed in the struggle for transforming society and proclaim his message from that point" (Rhodes).¹⁸ This solidarity with the poor determines the community in which the nuns live and work and for which Ana is martyred.

In the final moments of the play/film, Ana offers her most powerful reason for refusing to sign a document that would save her from execution:

ANA. –(Por fin, se dirige a Úrsula): Úrsula . . . ¿por qué nuestra Orden decidió no usar más el hábito?

ÚRSULA. –(Tras una mirada furtiva al obispo) Para que no nos diferenciáramos de la gente.

ANA. –La gente, en este lugar, muere; pero antes es torturada y denigrada.

CERONE. --¿Qué significa ésto [sic], Monseñor?

MOSEÑOR. –Ana, ¡firme eso, por favor!

ANA. –Usted sabe, monseñor, que no puede ordenarme nada contra mi conciencia . . . Sabe, ¿señor Cerone? . . . mi padre amenazó con suicidarse cuando yo mi hice monja. Y ahora, cuando voy a visitarlo, se vuelve loco porque me ve sin hábito. ‘Tengo que saber a qué atenerme!’, grita: ‘¿Qué eres, hija? ¿Qué es lo que eres?’ Y le dan palpitations y tienen que acostarlo. Pero yo sé muy bien quién soy. Lo sé mejor que nunca. Una mujer de pueblo. Y una religiosa. (Golpes 139–140)

(ANA. –[Finally, she turns to Úrsula]: Úrsula . . . why did our order decide to give up wearing the habit?)

ÚRSULA. –[After a furtive glance toward the bishop] To avoid distinguishing ourselves from the people.

ANA. –People, in this place, die; but first they are tortured and denigrated.

CERONE. –What’s the meaning of this, Monsignor?

MOSEÑOR. –Ana, sign that, please!

ANA. –You know, Monsignor, that you can’t order me to do anything that’s against my conscience . . . Do you know, Mr. Cerone . . . my father threatened to kill himself when I became a nun. And now, when I go to visit him, he goes crazy because he sees me without my nun’s habit. “I have to know what to expect with you!” he shouts: “What are you, child? What is it that you are?” And it gives him palpitations and they have to put him to bed. But I know very well who I am. I know it better than ever. A woman of the people. And a nun.)

Ana refuses to be singled out by her identity as a nun: she is a woman of the people and a religious woman; for her the two are inextricable.

Testimony: Úrsula as Witness

Engelstein refers to the archaic use of the “dual” in the linguistic patterns of the Greek play. This linguistic pattern treats “brothers” and “sisters” as a natural pair, similar to the way we speak of “hands” and “eyes.” As such, on the linguistic level, Ismene and Antigone share a subject position. “The sisters constitute two nonidentical but

transsubjective links in an alinear, synechdochal network” (Engelstein 47). The critic goes on to explain that this means the one cannot be conceived as separate from the other and hence Antigone is correct to call herself the last of her line. “Their jointness is by no means naively celebratory but instead stresses vulnerability. And so Antigone is not entirely wrong to pronounce herself the last survivor of the family of Oedipus—her death wraps up in itself Ismene’s end as well” (47–48).

Gené similarly suggests that Ana and Úrsula constitute a dyad. They are sisters joined by their vows and through the sacraments of the church. They are “nonidentical” but linked. However, at a critical moment in the story, Gené diverges from both Engelstein’s interpretation of Antigone/Ismene and from Sophocles. Gené sets the climax of his play within the paradigm of sacrifice. He splits the duality that Úrsula and Ana have shared through much of the play into the one who is sacrificed (Ana) and the one who survives to bear witness to this act (Úrsula), giving each an equally significant role.

In Gené’s play, which is not a tragedy, Úrsula must survive. Her survival resuscitates hope. Her role is to become the witness who testifies. Here, too, the play brings together the spiritual and the political. In Sophocles, Antigone rejects Ismene. In the Greek play, Ismene is not allowed to share her sister’s fate and disappears from the story. Ana, however, never rejects Úrsula. On the contrary, she protects Úrsula, saving her from execution. Úrsula remains until the very end, and hers are the final words of the play: “El Señor reciba de tus manos este sacrificio, para alabanza y gloria de su nombre, para nuestra salvación y la de toda su Santa Iglesia” (141) (May the Lord receive from your hands this sacrifice, for the praise and glory of His name, for our welfare and that of all His Holy Church). Úrsula survives so that she can bear witness and give testimony to Ana’s martyrdom. Her response extends Christ’s sacrifice to include Ana’s. Ana’s martyrdom reenacts the passion of Christ and reaffirms the mysteries of faith and the communion of all people through the Eucharist.

Testimony in Latin America never strays far from its religious and juridical roots.¹⁹ These connections are woven throughout Gené’s play and film. Ultimately, *Golpes a mi puerta* functions as a testament/testimony to the strength of the one within the community of the many. Through the lens of liberation theology, Antigone’s story becomes a parable of courage in which the individual dies because she refuses to be raised above the rest of humanity. Ana arrives at her determination after she witnesses the torture of other prisoners around her. As a member of the church, she is offered special consideration. Cerone wants to avoid any further conflicts with the church and prefers to avoid the execution of another of its members. Because the play opens in the aftermath of the assassination of Father Ramírez, the authorities know that another attack on a member of the church could galvanize the opposition and place state and church at odds. But Ana does not allow Cerone to save face or to mitigate the consequences of his decisions. Her act confirms that

individuals or institutions such as the church cannot sit passively by while a government tortures and humiliates others. If this were so, there would be no basis for “community.”

Similar to Griselda Gambaro’s *Antígona furiosa*, *Golpes a mi puerta* places a woman at the center of the conflict. The gendered response to state-sponsored terrorism that Ana represents has its historical referent in the mobilization of women throughout Latin America, whether they fight side by side with men or march in public plazas in defiance of the military junta, as the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (*Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*) have done. But a political and/or feminist reading of *Golpes a mi puerta* will not suffice to reveal the true nature of Ana’s decision and the full extent of her sacrifice. Nor can we simply overlay Gené’s play with Sophocles’ *Antigone* and assume that an understanding of the Greek tragedy is all we need in order to understand *Golpes a mi puerta*. The richness of Gené’s play is that it recontextualizes the myth of Antigone within the sociopolitical and historical reality of Latin America. At the same time, it restores the ritual aspect to the story by embedding it within the frame of the liturgy of the mass. And, finally, it reinterprets and retells the story of Antigone through a reading of key scriptural passages informed by the hermeneutics of liberation theology. Because Ana incarnates the principles of liberation theology through her martyrdom, her story is not reduced to an individual’s fate but instead becomes the story of all those who are “persecuted for righteousness’s sake” (Matthew 5:10).

Notes

1. All translations from the Spanish, unless otherwise noted, are mine.
2. I will often refer to both the play and to the film version, which closely follows the original; however, my analysis is mostly concerned with the text of the play and relies on the published edition of this text, written in 1984, approximately a decade before the film version was produced.
3. The focus on the “guerra sucia” has created a vast body of work, ranging from testimonials at the time, such as Jacobo Timerman’s *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (*Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*), to more recent novelistic and film allusions, such as Eduardo Sacheri’s *La pregunta de sus ojos* (*The Question in Their Eyes*), and the film version of the same, *The Secret in Their Eyes* in 2009.
4. The cast of the movie differs from that of the play. However, it’s worth pointing out that among the principal roles, those of Ana and Cerone were played by Verónica Oddó and Gené himself in both. In each case, the cast draws on several different nationalities. This makes it impossible to reduce the movie, in particular, to any specific national context, for in its production as well as its referents the setting cannot be pinned down to one country or even to one identifiable time period. Gené in his prologue to the published text of the play refers to several hotspots in Latin America, in particular the struggle between the Contras and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (“De destierro . . .” 17–20). However, in the same essay, the author also refers to Argentine history, going back to the early decades of that nation’s existence.

5. See Gené's article, "El CELCIT en la formación teatral latinoamericana." Also in his prologue to the published play, "De destierro . . .," Gené speaks at length on the Bolivarian concept of Latin America as a "Nación de Repúblicas" (Nation of Republics).
6. Similar to Ariel Dorfman's *La muerte y la doncella* (*Death and the Maiden*), Gené's story cannot be read as an allegorized version of events in his native country. However, in Dorfman's play, the correlations between playtext and historical referent are fairly close. Upon reading or seeing *La muerte y la doncella*, one may first think of Chile even as one realizes that the play is not limited to this one scenario. Gené, on the other hand, prevents our reducing *Golpes a mi puerta* to a dramatization of the events of one nation.
7. Romero was assassinated by a death squad associated with Roberto D'Aubuisson, founder of ARENA, Alianza Republicana Nacionalista, in El Salvador. The archbishop was shot as he celebrated mass in the small chapel of a hospital called La Divina Providencia.
8. The text of Archbishop Romero's last sermon can be found online. For further reading, consult *Tiene que vencer el amor: Textos de Mons. Oscar Romero*, edited by James R. Brockman.
9. Even the title evokes both the religious and the political. At various times in the play/film, someone "knocks at the door." Gené quotes the title from the Bible passage: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). The nuns never bar the door, no matter who knocks, seeking comfort. At the same time, the title, especially in the Spanish, evokes the violence of the times. "Golpe" (Blows) can be understood as alluding to "golpe de estado" (coup d'état), and certainly the scenario of someone knocking at the door can suggest images of raids in which the military appears on one's doorstep. Indeed, this, too, happens in the play/film.
10. In his prologue to the published play, Gené refers to his play as "[u]na obra que, dedicada a la memoria del recordado y querido monseñor Angelelli, lleva implícitos en la dedicatoria los nombres de Monseñor Romero y las legiones de obispos mártires que la iglesia venera" (24) (a work that, dedicated to the memory of the remembered and beloved Monsignor Angelelli, bears implicit in the dedication the names of Monsignor Romero and the legions of martyred bishops that the church venerates).
11. There are, of course, a number of significant adaptations and/or versions of the myth in Latin America. See William García, "Sabotaje textual/teatral contra el modelo canónico: *Antígona Humor* de Franklin Domínguez." For my purposes, Gambaro's adaptation, *Antígona furiosa* (Furious Antigone), is worth mentioning. For an analysis of the relationship between this play and the Dirty War, see Becky Boling, "Reenacting Politics: The Theater of Griselda Gambaro."
12. It is not within the scope of my analysis of Gené's play to include a history of the interpretations of Sophocles' *Antigone*. I'm most concerned with how Gené shapes the story and the interpretation of his play within the paradigms he includes. Whatever Antigone may or may not mean for others, the point is what Gené borrows from the classic tragedy.
13. For a detailed discussion of the impact of liberation theology on Latin American theater, consult Versényi's work, *Theater in Latin America: Religion, Politics, and Culture from Cortés to the 1980s*.
14. Like Ismene, Úrsula rejects Ana's decision to harbor the young rebel. "¡Lo hiciste sola! . . . ¡Pues enféntalo sola!" (*Golpes* 69) (You did it alone! . . . So face it alone!); however, later when Ana is facing execution alone, Úrsula protests that she collaborated with Ana in hiding the rebel. "Yo estaba ahí, ¡es cierto! Yo sabía todo. . . . Y el muchacho no estaba armado, de modo que mal

- pudo amenazarnos. . . ¡Lo cobijamos porque era nuestro deber!” (*Golpes* 125) (I was there. It’s true! I knew everything. . . . And the boy was not armed, so he could hardly have threatened us. . . . We took him in because it was our duty!).
15. In her critique of Hegel, among others, Judith Butler gives a convincing reading of the infamous passage in Sophocles where Antigone explains that she would not have done what she has done for any other member of her family except her brother: “her law appears to have but one instance of application. Her brother is, in her view, not reproducible, but this means that the conditions under which the law becomes applicable are not reproducible. This is a law of the instant and, hence, a law with no generality and no transposability, one mired in the very circumstances to which it is applied, a law formulated precisely through the singular instance of its application and, therefore, no law at all in any ordinary, generalized sense” (10). Ana’s act, in contrast, can’t be reduced to “one instance of application.” Her sacrifice mirrors Christ’s, and her solidarity and compassion are not reduced to one person, but apply to all humankind, including her executioner.
 16. One possible translation of the name “Antigone” suggests an opposition to motherhood or origins. Various rendered it may be translated as “instead of mother” or “against birth.” Given the virginal state of Antigone and her death, this would make sense. This, too, is a point of confluence between Sophocles’ character and that of the nuns. Úrsula and Ana both discuss the sacrifice they have had to make as nuns, in particular in terms of the role of mother.
 17. For further information on liberation theology, one can find a number of documents and articles at the following website: <http://liberationtheology.org/>. In addition, for information on liberation theology in Latin America, consult Leonardo Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*; Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?*; and Curt Cadorette, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Reader*.
 18. Ron Rhodes provides an overview of liberation theology in Latin America, “Christian Revolution in Latin America: The Changing Face of Liberation Theology. Part One in a Three-Part Series on Liberation Theology.”
 19. The critical material on the genre of the testimony in Latin America is extensive. For a general description of the narrative genre, see these two articles by John Beverley, “Anatomía del testimonio,” *Revista de Crítica Latinoamericana*, and “The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative).” Also useful is René Jara’s essay, “Testimonio y literatura,” in *Testimonio y Literatura*. For more insights on the various uses of testimony in Latin American literature, consult *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, edited by George M. Gugelberger.

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