

Jewish Mysticism from Borges to Cirlot: a Transatlantic Approach to the Possibility of a Non-Subject Subjectivity

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Erika Martínez,

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Abstract: In her article "Jewish Mysticism from Borges to Cirlot," Erika Martínez discusses the form in which some Latin American and Spanish poets of the twentieth century have experimented, in a disruptive way, with the subjective possibilities of stillness and of time capable of overflowing. Foucault defended, in his last lectures, the construction of a new governmentality of self and of others. Among the many possible technologies to achieve it would be that of the writing of a poetry without words, knowing the insurrectional potentiality of silence. This provides us with a possible starting point for reading the post-secular revision of contemporary mysticism in Spanish. Starting from the Kabbalah, how have Huidobro, Borges, Gelman or Valente delved into an "I" capable of exercising uncertainty and *being outside of self*? How do they configure out of this discourse a non-subject, unsecured subjectivity, capable of growing even out of its own withdrawal?

Erika MARTÍNEZ

Jewish Mysticism from Borges to Cirlot: a Transatlantic Approach to the Possibility of a Non-Subject Subjectivity

In an interview entitled "La torture, c'est la raison," Michel Foucault declares that the world was regressing to 1848 or even to the pre-revolutionary period – that is, that everything would have to be started from scratch (397-398). Both Jean-Paul Sartre, in *What Is Literature?*, and Roland Barthes, in *Writing Degree Zero*, marked this date as the moment from which writers had started to write not for their readers but against them, in what can be considered poetry's reaction to its marginalization within a world governed by the values of pragmatism and economic profitability. The advance of that ideology would have been accompanied, in different moments of the twentieth century, by the revival and reinterpretation of certain spiritualist discourses that ended up becoming possible new milieu of subjective experimentation.

In the last lectures that he gave at the Collège de France (1982-1983), Foucault defended the need of a new governmentality of self and of others. Among the many possible technologies for achieving it would be that of the writing of a poetry without words, one that knows the insurrectional potentiality of silence. As opposed to the defense of the categories of movement and fluidity, typical of this new phase of neoliberalism, it can be said that mystical writing experimented, throughout the twentieth century and in a disruptive way, with the subjective possibilities of stillness and of a time capable of overflowing. Faced with the dynamics of security and control, mystical writing offered an inquiry into an "I" capable of exercising uncertainty and the being outside of self. This is something that not only distances it from the incarceration of disciplinary societies but also opens new ways of subjective emancipation in our biopolitical societies. Perhaps the mystical writing of the twentieth century might continue to speak of an apologia of *other experience*, as Georges Bataille understood it, but without forgetting that, as Foucault himself stated, asceticism is also the care of freedom. Someone might object: if power is the master in a Lacanian sense, how is the search for the master that is also God going to be liberating? It cannot be forgotten, however, that the logic of these discourses tackles highly varied phenomena, from the profane reappropriation of certain values of mysticism to the erosion of the traditional religious imageries in the context of a secularized culture. God is empty in post-secular mysticism.

How did these processes affect poetic discourse during Modernism, avant-gardism and post-avant-gardism? Setting out from these approaches, I will here undertake a more specific study of certain reinterpretations of the Kabbalah and mediaeval Jewish mysticism in the work of some significant authors of poetry in Spanish of the twentieth century. In order to do so, I will focus on the poetic development of different notions originating in ecstatic mysticism, divine withdrawal, the night of exile and the hermeneutic neurosis of the sacred texts. Jewish mysticism is present, as process of subjectivation, in some fundamental twentieth-century authors of the poetic tradition in Spanish. From among all the authors in whom one can perceive a direct or indirect trace of the Kabbalah, we can highlight the following: Vicente Huidobro, Jorge Luis Borges, Juan Gelman and José Ángel Valente; with their influence continuing to be very much present in the work of contemporary poets such as Myriam Moscona, from Mexico, or Juan Andrés García Román, from Spain.

Hispanic Modernism, with its restoration of Spiritualist principles, could be considered as a favorable period for Mysticism. Faced with the bourgeois fin-de-siècle crisis, the Modernists advanced what Rodríguez and Salvador have called "Moral Aestheticism": in other words, the need for a pure poetry that involved its secular resacralization. Their harmonic conception of existence, moreover, came from different doctrines on universal analogy and from a broad esoteric tradition that culminated in a particular form of symbolism. Modernist poetry aspired to revelation, understood as an instant of harmonic fusion with the cosmos, whose sacred path was, at times, Eros. From that period on, the possible influence of mysticism becomes progressively blurred, acquiring specific historical and national characteristics that are impossible to address here, but in which an askesis appears to be imposed in a general way, at the end of which the void is found. At the mercy of the elements, reactions often waver between the usurpation of the space abandoned by God, the existentialist abandonment and the hymn to the immanence of language. Of all its possible variants, I will focus on those that more specifically concern Jewish Mysticism, paying attention to the form in which it is in some cases intermingled with the Buddhist and the Christian traditions.

The path Vicente Huidobro outlines in one of the emblematic books of the Latin American avant-garde, *Altazor* (1931), is well known. Its progressive annihilation can be read as the search for an extreme spiritual state: "Real poems are fires. Poetry is spreading everywhere, lighting its quests with

a shuddering of pleasure or pain" (*The Selected* 85). God is sometimes invoked out of a demonic incarnation of romantic inspiration, but above all the fragments of *Altazor* in which Huidobro conceives of the poet as a creature forged "in tongues of prophets," "the shepherd of aeroplanes, the driver of wayward nights," have been repeated, paid homage to and ridiculed. Although his cosmic journey does not sketch an ascension but a fall, his linguistic breakdown can be connected with the *Hokhmat ha-Tseruf* or "science of the combination of letters" of the Spanish-Jewish mystic, Abraham Abulafia, who pursued the alteration of consciousness through exercises of repetition and fragmentation of words. The fall of *Altazor* is developed by Huidobro as an authentic grammatical cataclysm that advances based on arbitrary semantic associations, alliteration and repetitions of syntactic structures, until causing, at the end of the book, the loss of referential capacity, reducing language to its phonic elements.

Avoiding the trance of *Altazor*, criticism has analyzed Huidobro's poem "Eclogue" as an example of the desire for mystic union. In his reading of the poem, René De Costa has seen an erotic-satirical revision of *The Spiritual Canticle*, whereas Cedomil Goic has focused on the analysis of the Creationist transformation that Huidobro makes of San Juan de la Cruz. As Goic states, in the "Eclogue" Huidobro develops the moment in which the soul wonders out in search of the beloved but gets no response, its dialogue frustrated, failing to meet with the Other that is now silence and absence, that belongs to the past (6). What in *The Spiritual Canticle* were footprints that guided the steps of the soul toward the beloved are, in these verses of Huidobro, signs of a time that cannot be recovered:

Sun about to die

The car broken down

And a smell of spring
Remains as the air sweeps by

Somewhere

a song

WHERE ARE YOU

One afternoon much like this

I looked for you in vain

In the fog covering the roads
I kept finding myself

And in the smoke of my cigar
A lost bird

Nobody answered

The last pastors drowned

And the stray sheep
Ate flowers and did not give honey

The wind that went by
Piles up their wool

Between the clouds
Holding my tears

Why cry once more

about what I've cried already

And since the sheep eat flowers
Sign that you went by (Huidobro, "Eclogue")

A process of subjectivation that at the same time entails a process of revision of genealogies is the one undertaken by Jorge Luis Borges, who asks in a poem from *In Praise of Darkness* (1969): "Who can say if you are in the lost / labyrinth of age-old rivers / of my blood, Israel?" (67). The fascination that the Argentinian writer felt for, among other things, the Kabbalistic, its symbolic siege of the absolute and its faith in the creative and destructive power of the word is well known. "If you omit a single letter, or write a letter too many, you will destroy the whole world" (*The Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin* 13a). As the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the aleph seemed to point to the origin of creation and at the

same time the origin of what is ominous, just like mirrors, copulation and all that multiplies the number of men in the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (OC I: 431-443). Significantly, Borges hides his aleph in a cellar, a space where Bachelard finds an alliance between mystery and the unconscious. Beyond this abject connection, its possible mystical projection was indicated by Estela Canto, to whom Borges dedicated his story. She declared that it consists of the narration of an extreme experience of transcendence and ecstasy leading to the union of one with everything (211).

This same experience is explicit in many of Borges's poems. "The Unending Rose", for example, depicts two topics in this respect: the search for revelation through darkness and the infinite nature of the path that leads, like the garden of forking paths, towards it: "I am blind and know nothing, but foresee / that more are the ways. Each thing / is infinite things. You are music, / firmaments, palaces, rivers, angels, / profound rose, limitless, intimate, / which the Lord will finally show to my dead eyes" (Borges, *Selected Poems* 367). Books as *El otro, el mismo* [*The One, The Other*] (OC II: 235-327) and *In Praise of Darkness* (1969) contain allusions to the Kabbalah, understood as a lucky metaphor of thought and of the intelligence in its omnipotent eagerness. But beyond the numerous references to Jewish Mysticism, spread through poems, stories and essays, all of the Argentinian's work connects profoundly with practices such as the recourse to false attribution, the speculative method of interpretation of the sacred (a certain hermeneutic neurosis related to his idea of reading) or the conceptualization of the book as sacred body to which the web of interpretation besieges and at the same time protects. Edna Aizenberg writes: "Al armonizar la especulación con los símbolos, al deificar el Libro y al presentar su búsqueda religiosa en forma de textos apócrifos y glosas revisionistas a textos sagrados, el misticismo judío tenía mucho que ofrecer al Borges escritor" ["By harmonizing the speculation with symbols, by deifying the Book and by presenting its religious search in the form of apocryphal texts and revisionist glosses on sacred texts, Jewish mysticism had much to offer Borges the writer"] (95).

The idea of the world as the enigmatic writing of God, in which nothing is subject to chance but whose meanings are as uncountable as their interpretations, is probably one of the most fecund connections Borges made with the Kabbalah. In a lecture entitled "Poetry" and gathered in the book *Seven Nights*, Borges stated: "A Spanish Kabbalist said that God wrote the Scriptures for each one of the men of Israel, that there are as many Bibles as there are readers of the Bible" (76). Borges lived profaning the classics, which was proof of his sacred view of them. This was why he claimed that the translation of *The Quixote* to English was better than the original, or proposed reading *The Odyssey* as though it had been written by Céline, as Umberto Eco recalled (44). That irreverent proposal of Pierre Menard or the allusion to the existence of "as many Bibles as there are readers" (*Seven Nights* 76) all repeat the error of the incessant displacement of the horizon of reading that converts the Argentinian narrator into a precedent – repeatedly analyzed – of the theories of reception.

The work of Borges appears equally afflicted by the mystical problem of the waning of divinity throughout the creative process, a problem that compels the rereading of his obsession for the scales. To the rhetorical question of whether it is possible to create without diminishing the mystery, Borges's work adds another: Is any form of literalness at all possible? Yet a book never stops being created, something that enables every text to contain, among its infinite possibilities, its own parody. The celebrated micro-story "On Exactitude in Science," which Borges attributes to one Suárez de Miranda, puts it like this (*Collected Fictions* 325):

In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography (Suárez Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes*, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658.)

All theory involves a reduction of reality. This reduction is the origin of its meaning and, at the same time, of its fallibility. Only a theory that includes the absolute totality of all the factors of reality would be irrefutable, thus making it unnecessary in its complete coincidence with what it aspired to understand. Perhaps for this reason, humanity finds meaning in its incomplete nature, deformed, diminished, a nature that does not cease transmitting in an abominable way to its own creation. This would explain the monstrous character of the Golem, which greatly interested Borges through the novel by Gustav Meyrink and which marked, along with his friendship with Gershom Scholem, his initiation in the Kabbalah.

A related conflict drives characters such as Funes, whose memory coincides with the totality of his experience and not with its reduction, and not by chance the story begins: "I remember him (I have no right to utter this sacred verb, only one man on earth had that right and he is dead)" (*Collected Fictions* 295). Beatriz Sarlo has interpreted this story not so much as a paradox as a hyperbole of the catastrophic consequences that absolute realism would entail, a hyperbole equally applicable to "On Exactitude in Science". Funes is incapable of thinking, stresses Sarlo: faced with its inability to convert experience into discourse, literature offers a symbolic practice that breaks with the immediacy of memory (30-31). Similarly, the prologue of Borges to *A Universal History of Infamy* warns us ironically that its texts take advantage of "the reduction of a person's entire life to two or three scenes" (*Collected Fictions* 10). And it adds that the biographies it contains do not claim to present a character but to create an image of the character that will be different for each reader who reconstructs it: a symbol. The symbol, in fact, seems the only possible route of reconciliation between the part and the whole; the place where mystery is not diminished, which for Borges constituted one of the most attractive aspects of mysticism. In a 1971 interview, he declared: "Lo que me atrae es la impresión de que los cabalistas no escribieron para facilitar la verdad, para darla servida, sino para insinuarla y estimular su búsqueda [...]: no hablan en forma lógica, hablan con símbolos" ["What attracts me is the impression that the Kabbalists did not write to promote the truth, to serve it up, but rather to hint at it and stimulate the search for it [...]: they do not speak in a logical way, they speak in symbols"] (Borges, "Todos" 36-37).

Not only the Kabbalah but also the tensions existing between its different hermeneutic schools are wholly concerned with the conflicts that intertwine the possible representations and interpretations of the universe made by the Argentinian author. On the one hand, a parody of the ambition of science-like exactitude is perceptible in Borges, complementary to his satire of the abuses of realism. The actual intellectual exercise that all his work encompasses has been attributed to his early reading of Hume, Locke and Berkeley, whose idealism he exhausted and put to the use not so much in the search for truth as disinterested speculation, which amuses itself in the beauty of the arguments and even in the art of creating conviction using fallacious arguments, as José Miguel Oviedo stated (20). Perhaps the emancipated speculation of the truth fulfils in Borges a similar function to that in the Talmud, which builds a fence around the Torah, to protect it without touching it. If so, the deploying of the Borgesian discursive shields would strengthen the sacredness of the word, disorienting those who encircle its essence, pre-empting full siege. Joyce and Lezama had undertaken a similar procedure, building extremely complex but decipherable hieroglyphs: there is a Truth – they seem to assert – but it is hidden and the world is its labyrinth. In the case of Borges, however, the interpretative madness of his characters seems rather a symptom of fear of the existence of a void that must be hidden: in the center of his speculative exercise, there is nothing, something that makes the task they undertake movingly ridiculous. If the *specula* are abominable because they multiply the number of men, perhaps the speculation on their infinite production of reality also is.

We know that Borges did not read Hebrew. All his life he searched unsuccessfully for a forebear that would allow him to practice what Gil Anidjar called a "Judaïsme sans mot" ["Judaism without word"] (263), a forebear whom he invented to a certain extent, as every writer invents their predecessors. On more than one occasion, he declared his meagre interest in doctrines and it could be said that his work is more metaphysical than transcendent. There is no search for God nor for an absolute truth taking the place of the word. In "On the Classics" Borges wrote: "A classic is that book which a nation or a group of nations or history have decided to read as if in its pages everything was deliberate, fatal, profound as the cosmos and capable of interminable interpretations" (qtd. in Johnson, 75). In other words, a book that is read as if it were sacred, without that "as if" being an impediment to infinite hermeneutics.

Son of a revolutionary Ukrainian Jew who emigrated to Argentina, Juan Gelman had a renowned, itinerant life marked by successive political affiliations, disillusionments and new affiliations. His interest in mysticism goes back to the exile he was forced into in 1975, when he started to read the work of Santa Teresa, San Juan and other mystics, with whom he established a dialogue that was foundational. The book *Citas y Comentarios* [*Commentaries and Citations*], brings together a series of poems, written between 1978 and 1979, which give an account of this dialogue. In them, Gelman develops the paradox of mystical seclusion and the opening of the word, as well as the wish to build a community that was free from belonging to something or to a place. Kate Jenckes points out that Gelman keeps a space open to withstand against the "encerramiento de la mundo [sic]" ["enclosure of the world"] (27), culminating in a radical opening to the other materialized in the possibility of justice. The "vos" [you] takes on the form of a closed space, in silence, protected from the disturbance of memory. Its fortification is, as Jenckes states, easily linked to the incarceration of the country under dictatorship (28): a space unreachable for the love that encircles it. This siege that spins around its object is again implicitly a Kabbalistic task that, far from being presented as unsuccessful, produces meaning in a

paradoxical way: "¿piensan hermanas y hermanos // que rodeando se puede llegar / o // partiendo y quedándose a la vez se llega / a la unidad buscada como manjar celeste?" ["do you think, brothers and sisters // that you can arrive by surrounding / or // by leaving and staying at the same time one reaches / the sought-for unity that is like heavenly delicacy?"] (Gelman, *Pesar todo* 171).

In exile, Gelman develops a language of suffering out of mysticism, investigating the unsolvable conflict between the sayable and the unsayable. In his process, he begins an approach specific to Kabbalist and Sephardic literature, which he gives an account of in an interview of Pedro Salvador Ale:

Mi encuentro de fondo con la cultura judía y hebrea se produjo después, cuando conocí el exilio. Entonces empecé a preguntarme muchas cosas acerca de por qué nos habían derrotado, de las matanzas en Argentina, la desaparición de seres queridos, la ausencia de uno del país, la ausencia del país de uno, del habla de su gente... Ese sentimiento me llevó a leer por primera vez la Cábala. Y encontré en ella algo acorde con lo que me ocurría, es decir, una visión exiliar de la vida. Encontré esa misma visión en poetas hebreos de los siglos XII, XIII y XIV, sobre todo españoles, italianos y alemanes, y "traduje" algunos de sus textos.

[My in-depth encounter with Jewish and Hebrew culture occurred later, when I came to know exile. It was then that I began to wonder about many things concerning why they had defeated us, the killings in Argentina, the disappearance of loved ones, one's absence from the country, the country's absence from oneself, the speech of its people... That sentiment led me to read the Kabbalah for the first time. And in it I found something akin to what was happening to me, that is, an exile's view of life. I found that same view in Hebrew poets of the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, above all Spanish, Italian and German, and I "translated" some of their texts.]

In the book, *Com/posiciones* [*Com/positions*] (1986), Gelman indeed collected versions from Hebrew and Sephardic poets read in that period, many of them from Al-Andalus: Abu Nuwas, Salomón Ibn Yose Ben Hanin, Yehuda al-Harizi, Joseph Tsarfati, Yehuda Halevi, Samuel Hanagid, Abraham and Todros Abulafia, Emanuel de Roma, Isaac Luria and Ramprasad. The prologue describes the book of poems as a collective work of all of them, but also of an anonymous Provençal author, several characters from the Bible and one apocryphal: Eliezer Ben Jonon, heteronym of Juan Gelman. The interrogative insistence of these poems is inserted in a very deeply rooted trend in Argentinian poetry, nevertheless acquiring fresh resonances with regard to the Jewish literary tradition, in which the rhetorical questioning is particularly frequent, as Cynthia Gabbay has shown (112). In a poem like "Preguntas" ["Questions"], written before his exile and included in the book *Relaciones* [*Relations*] (1973), we can find not only a grammatical destabilization, produced by the rhetorical saturation of questions, but also a destabilization of the idea of God, from which he seems to cut himself off. On the one hand, God appears represented in the poem as a collective being (when his unity is opposed in the Christian Bible to the multiple nature of the demonic). On the other, God is represented as a female being, here following the logic of the Jewish *Shekinah*: "¿y si Dios fuera una mujer? alguno dijo / ¿y si Dios fuera las Seis Enfermeras Locas de Pickapoon? dijo alguno / ¿y si Dios moviera sus pechos dulcemente? dijo / ¿y si Dios fuera una mujer?" ["And if God were a woman? someone said / And if God were the Six Crazy Nurses of Pickapoon? said another / And if God gently moved her breasts? he said / And if God were a woman?"] (Gelman, *Pesar todo* 101).

The interrogative invocation, as resistance against the given and a way of communication with what is absent, is used again in the book *Carta a mi madre* [*Letter to My Mother*], from 1989. This includes a long, homonymous poem in which he converses with a dead woman, using long concatenations of questions. What is lacking is not a transcendent entity of divine nature but a feminine beyond, formulated as need of amorous desire. The special paradox of this effect is that the *Shekinah* specifically alludes to the presence of God, to the form in which God resides or makes her nest. But in this long poem maternal love, which should irradiate presence, is pure interruption, separation. In 1994, this process of approaching Jewish mysticism culminated in the publication of *Dibaxu*, a book of Sephardic poems translated into Spanish. In these poems, Gelman addresses the absent lover, that changeable figure in his poetry, but deeply rooted to the experience of exile, forced disappearances and death. Within the *Tanaj*, the *Book of Lamentations* already contains a pitiful litany due to exile and the absence of the loved one. Gelman would continue to connect both axes from the perspective of mysticism, as occurs this poem of *Dibaxu* (Gelman, *Salarios* 72):

partindu di tu ladu
discubro
il nuevu mundu
di tu ladu /
tus islas comu lampas

cun una escuridad /
yendu / viniendu /
nil tiempu /
in tu bozen
il mar cayi
duluridu
di mi /.

[leaving your side
I discover
the new world
of your side /
your islands like lamps
with a darkness /
going / coming /
in time /
your voice
the sea falls
distressed
of me /]

As Miguel Dalmaroni states, Gelman, using the literary Spanish of the Siglo de Oro, unhinged the Gaucho and Buenos Aires colloquialism of the 1960s to the point of derangement. His poetry carried out an experimental intervention in these dialects that aspired to unspeak the Spanish language. In order to do this, he used foreign-sounding, infantile and even ungrammatical expressions as a way of shaking and shifting the language out of its rules. And among his verses, the babbling discourse of mysticism occupied a unique space. Dalmaroni writes (117):

La poesía de Gelman transforma el mandato de la tradición de la poesía política con que se inicia su obra, al reemplazarlo por la construcción de una lengua sin estado. La voz de esa tradición se desliza hacia una lengua que problematiza el reconocimiento pero resulta –a la vez– de una disonancia legible, y que se lee en las formas de una voz desalineada respecto de un sujeto, e imaginada como superposición entre figuras que proporcionan, desde el nivel de la representación, orientación constructiva de la escritura e indicación de lectura: el niño; el extranjero sin estado y sin lengua (inmigrante, exiliado, judío, etc.); el estado inestable del español literario de la época de la conquista y especialmente el de los místicos.

[Gelman's poetry transforms the mandate of the tradition of political poetry with which his work begins, by replacing it by the construction of a stateless language. The voice of this tradition slides toward a language that problematizes recognition but, at the same time, results from a legible dissonance, and which is read in the forms of a misaligned voice with regard to a subject, and imagined as superposition between figures that provide, from the level of representation, constructive orientation of the writing and indication of reading: the boy; the stateless foreigner without language (immigrant, exile, Jew, etc.); the unstable state of literary Spanish from the era of conquest and especially that of the mystics.]

It can be said that, in Gelman's case, the turning to Kabbalistic sources points to a collective experience of the foreign typical of those who have remained excluded. The poem's struggle against death is marked by dispossession and emerges from the mystical paradox of renunciation as the only way possible for an amorous union. As opposed to being with fatherland, there arises what Olivera Williams has called "being-for-the-fatherland-in-exile" (83). The mystical night or Gelman's "night of meaning" is, as Pérez López shows, the night of exile (568). As had already occurred in *Gotán* (1962), the emotional pulse of *Citas y Comentarios* is crossed with the literature of tango, specifically Gardel, Homero Manzi and Alfredo Le Pera, although it could be said – doing a *back slang* reading – that lyricists like Homero Expósito were not themselves alien to the amorous imagery of mysticism. These verses from "Naranja en flor" ["Orange Tree in Blossom"], which Homero Expósito wrote in 1944, are read differently, for example, from Gelman's perspective of exile: "First one has to know suffering, / then how to love, then how to depart, / at the end to walk without a thought. [...] eternal, ancient youth / that has left me intimidated / like a bird without light" (Brown). In the poetic language of Gelman, there is a search that does not find and in which the immigrant, the expelled, the Jew, constitute a new community. Michel de Certeau writes about the spiritual effects of that search when he states, in *The Mystic Fable*, that everything that does not belong to the social unity of a faith ends up becoming mysticism (11). Gelman alludes in an interview to the political nature of the phenomenon in which he stated that his interest in religion concerns its ties with human solidarity and its original meaning, *religare*, to rebind (Leyva).

The poetry of the Spaniard Juan Eduardo Cirlot, meanwhile, dialogues with two central elements of the Kabbalistic: the ecstatic mysticism of Abraham Abulafia and the femininity of God or *Shekinah*. Similarly, one can link his concept of negative mysticism with the Kabbalist concept of nothingness, the first benchmark of which is the poetry of Paul Celan. As Corazón Ardura has stated: "El interés por dar con una imagen de la Shekinah, la consideración de un meridiano a traspasar entre crítica y poesía, el cambio de aliento que Celan sitúa en la metáfora como traducción más allá, vienen a coincidir en los intereses que Cirlot tiene en su metafísica, salmos compartidos en la rosa de Nadie" ["The interest in finding an image of the *Shekinah*, the consideration of a meridian to go beyond between criticism and poetry, the breathturn that Celan places in the metaphor as translation that goes further, come together in the interests that Cirlot has in his metaphysics, psalms shared on the rose of Nobody"] (215).

The poetic permutations of Cirlot can also be connected to Abulafia's *Hokhmat ha-Tseruf*. In the poem, "Inger permutaciones" ["Inger permutations"] (*Del no mundo* 657), dedicated to a deceased actress, Cirlot uses all the combinations of letters that make up her name and develops some variants that lead them towards nothingness. The purpose of Abulafia's renowned combinatory method was also the *devekut*: the union with the divinity or agent intellect, that would lead to the annihilation of individual consciousness. An explicit reflection on this annihilation permeates many of Cirlot's poems, such as the following, included in *Bronwyn*: "Y no tenerte nunca ni en la nada / ni en el vacío de la ausencia luz, / ni en la muda quietud del ya no ser / o ni siquiera entonces haber sido, / cuando la aparición era presencia / Bronwyn no tenerte ni en el no" ["And not to have you ever even in nothingness / not even in the void of absence light, / not even in the mute quietness of the already not being / or not even then having been, / when apparition was presence / Bronwyn not to have you even in the no"] (466).

The origin of Cirlot's poetry of permutations goes back to 1954, when he began to apply Abulafia's Kabbalism and Schönberg's twelve-tone system to the Becquerian swallows in his homage to the Sevillian poet. Although his work could be linked in appearance to Futurist phonetic poetry, Cirlot himself insisted upon disassociating himself from it, stressing the ritual and mystical nature of his permutations, in what they have of symbolism. It is a question, he says in the prologue to *Bronwyn*, "de no dejar vacía una zona de lo inexpresable puro, llenándola con oscuros sonidos que aspiran a la luminosidad de un carácter ininteligible más emparentado con el de la música o la abstracción que con el lenguaje cotidiano" ["of not leaving a zone empty of the pure inexpressible, filling it with obscure sounds that aspire to the luminosity of an unintelligible character more related to that of music or abstraction than to everyday language"] (542). In the following poem we can read: "Onwyn / nyb nyn / Ronwyn / nyr nyn / Nonwyn / nyn nyn" (*Bronwyn* 288). This mumbling, as mystical as it is Dadaist, recalls in its broken-down state the poem from the verses of *Altazor*, which was an inconclusive project, just like the *Bronwyn* cycle.

Also close to Celan, José Ángel Valente showed explicit interest in Jewish mysticism, its concept of the word and exile, of silence as trace of the ineffable. The Kabbalist tradition, however, is in his poems interwoven with Buddhist, Taoist and Christian mysticism, being indistinguishable at times. Perhaps the most meaningful book in its relation to the Kabbalah is *Tres lecciones de tinieblas* [*Three Lessons of Darkness*] (1980), in which the word speaks through the poet dispossessed of himself. If God had to withdraw from the world to leave space for creation in what is known as *Tzimtzum*, a similar retreat seems to be a necessary operation to give way to God. Feeding off this paradoxical relation between presence and absence, Valente writes: "Borrarse. / Sólo en la ausencia de todo signo / se posa el dios." ["Erase yourself. / Only in the absence of all sign / Does the god settle"] (*Al dios* 13). In a text on the painter Antonio Tapiès and in dialogue with Isaac Luria, Valente writes: "Quizá el supremo, el solo ejercicio radical del arte sea un ejercicio de retracción (...). Pues lo único que el artista acaso crea es el espacio de la creación. Y en el espacio de la creación no hay nada (para que algo pueda ser creado). La creación de la nada es el principio absoluto de toda creación" ["perhaps the supreme, the only radical exercise of art is an exercise of withdrawal (...) For the only thing that can perhaps create is the space of creation. And in the space of creation there is nothing (so that something can be created). The creation of nothingness is the absolute beginning of all creation"] (*Material memoria* 41).

For Gómez Toré, in the case of Valente, this paradox can be related to the death of God and to a radicalization of negative theology. His poems seem to contain an immanence, the existing ambiguity between the silence of God and the wait for an event that does not quite come into effect. More than dealing with the overflowing of language that the mystical experience conventionally entails, the word of Valente would be a word that, turned upon itself, discovers itself as pure ability to be, as matrix of meanings (Gómez Toré 175). Silence protects and annihilates the sacred simultaneously: the poem encloses it, just as the Talmud draws a protective chalk circle around the Torah without touching it. In this sense, writing also functions as a veil that hides vacuity, a rite without God or with a God understood as a center that emptied itself. The withdrawal of the infinite to leave space to the created contains the

paradox of having created the empty space at the same time. In an interview with Ana Nuño, Valente recognized that the Kabbalah had determined radical forms of his poetic conception, specially the vision of the Kabbalists of the sixteenth century. Due to all this, it could be said that the mystical breath of Valente does not so much aspire to a fusion with the divine as to a disintegration. In the place where God should be, there is nothing: God is also the first exile. Valente's God is often, like Santa Teresa's *Castillo*, an internal exile. He wrote: "Bajé desde mí mismo / hasta tu centro, dios, hasta tu rostro / que nadie puede ver y sólo / en esta cegadora, en esta oscura / explosión de la luz se manifiesta" ["I descended from myself / to your center, god, to your face / that nobody can see and only / in this blinding, in this dark / explosion of light, shows itself"] (*Fragmentos* 60).

Mircea Eliade stated in 1977 that certain patterns of religious structures had become integral to our secular literary imagination, without involving a return of religions and always taking these sacred elements as an omitted reality and in many cases diminished in the interior of discourses (279-280). Two years earlier, Harold Bloom declared that modern poets had seemed to subconsciously understand that their relation with tradition was fueled by the mechanisms of the Kabbalah. Michel de Certeau, for his part, in his introduction to *The Mystic Fable* stressed that the need to not be separated from the One, becoming improbable, ended up being impossible (1-2), a place where mysticism met the absence of the object of desire. The history of contemporary mysticism is also the history of that loss. Mystical discourse, Certeau writes, appropriates the detail, multiplies it out of all proportion and makes it burst, converting the detail into myth inside its own historicity. The pleasures and torments of lovers and scholars lead towards this pathos, the ecstatic instant of which introduces silence, a fragment of the unknown in the midst of hermeneutic confusion (10). This is the place where San Juan de la Cruz, Valente and Borges are found. Representation, we know, is impossible. What discourses, given that things cannot be represented, risk doing so even though it proves unsuccessful? In that place, the revisions of mysticism are established through the assumption that the structure is full of holes (and this has consequences for the government of self and others). Its discourse is an argument for tracing around that emptiness that cannot be filled. From there, we can consider that mystical writing might offer itself to the construction of a non-subject subjectivity, not assured, capable of growing even out of its own withdrawal, with a freedom resistant to power's technologies of subjectivation.

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