

NOTES

1. Seth Ward, as quoted in James Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes in England and France, 1600-1800* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 14.
2. Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes*, p. 14.
3. See Wolfgang Kayser's discussion of this concept in "La Doctrine du langage naturel chez Jacob Boehme," *Poétique* (1976), 338-49.
4. MacGregor Mathers classified the Kaballah into three systems: the "Practical Qabalah, which deals with talismanic and ceremonial magic," the *Dogmatic Qabalah*, which "consists of the Qabalistic literature," and the *Literal Qabalah*, "which deals with the use of letters," as quoted in Dion Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah*, tenth ed. (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1972), p. 21. While *gematria* and *notaricon* involve permutations of letters and numbers and are part of the *Literal Qabalah*, *temura* is part of the *Practical Qabalah*.
5. Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes*, pp. 72-73.
6. Occult philosophy classifies the pre-Adamites as part of the third and fourth root races—civilizations that preceded the biblical Adam and Eve.
7. Saint-Martin's theory of mirrors was written as a response to empiricists like Locke who found sensation to be the foundation of knowledge. For Saint-Martin, root ideas are derived not from sensation (man's tactile center) but from images. When these images come into man's "center," ideas are formed.
8. Malcolm de Chazal, *Le Livre de conscience* (Port-Louis: Imprimerie Al-Madinah, 1952), p. 15.
9. Chazal, *La Vie Filtrée* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1949), p. 202.
10. In scholastic philosophy, the doctrine of traducianism (as it was defined by theologians such as Saint Augustine) referred to the transmission of original sin through a type of cosmic heredity.
11. Chazal, *Sens Plastique II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. i (preface).
12. The Atlantean *Book of Colors* is a book of white magic supposedly lost when Atlantis was destroyed.
13. Chazal, *L'Ame de la musique* (Port-Louis: Mauritius, 1950), p. 5.
14. In contrast to Darwinian evolution, which traces man's evolution from the ape, Mosaic evolution stresses man's divine origin (from angels) and his retrograde evolution from a pristine state.
15. Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes*, p. 9.
16. Chazal, *Le Rocher de Sisyphe* (Port-Louis: Imprimerie Al-Madinah, 1952), p. 23.
17. Novalis's magical idealism is based on a vitalistic notion of the cosmos in which all of nature is imprinted with the sign or signature of the universal soul. He studies the Book of Nature to deduce universal laws.
18. Novalis, *Werke, Band I* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978), p. 265: "Es ist dem Stein ein räthselhaftes Zeichen/Tief eingegraben in sein glühend Blut."

The "Cocopleonasm" of Oliverio Girondo's Poetry

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The international fame of Jorge Luis Borges has reduced the importance of other Argentinian writers who have shaped the literature of that country in the 20th century. The poetry of Oliverio Girondo parallels that of Borges in time and space.

Oliverio Girondo's wealth afforded him the luxury of living in Europe during the years of cubism, dadaism, futurism, ultraism, and surrealism. His circle of friends included such well-known international leaders of the avant-garde as Apollinaire, Jules Supervielle, Tristan Tzara, Marinetti, and Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Although deeply shaped by the European avant-garde, it is significant that Girondo always wrote in his native language, unlike other Latin American poets with the same preoccupation for the nature of the poetic sign (Vicente Huidobro, César Moro). His fluency in both English and French merely provided him with the opportunity to read those who so closely shaped his interest in the maximum foregrounding¹ of poetic speech: Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Paul Morand, Leon Paul Fargue, Henri Michaux, Lewis Carroll, and James Joyce.

Saul Yurkievich has named Girondo as one of the six founders of Spanish American contemporary poetry.² Although the other five—César Vallejo, Huidobro, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, and Borges—have been internationally recognized, Girondo remains relatively unknown even in his own country. With few exceptions, the critics have seen his literary world as chaotic, anarchic, fragmentary, and illogical.³ Yet, if we focus on Girondo's appreciation of the signifier over

the signified, we can integrate his mimetic chaos into a unified higher significance. This manifestation of semiosis becomes apparent in the linguistic disorder of his last book, *En la masmédula* (1954). However, it is already present in his first two books of poetry, *Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía* (1922) and *Calcomanías* (1928). The semantic humor of these two texts distorts the mimetic reality in order to produce the semiosis. Although critics have identified these texts as part of the "ultraísta" movement led by the Borges of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923) and *Luna de enfrente* (1925),⁴ Girondo's poetics of metaphysical humor separates him from the abstract and intuitive metaphors of what Borges has called "la equivocación ultraísta." Girondo, then, precedes Borges in bringing the avant-garde spirit to Argentina in 1920.⁵ In addition, his effort to supersede the limitations of conventional language—the arbitrariness of the sign—introduces in Argentina the motivation of the linguistic sign that is so characteristic of modern poetry.

A comparison of two poems of the same matrix—Borges's "Dakar" and Girondo's "Fiesta en Dakar"—will elucidate the differences between the two founders of contemporary Argentinian poetry.⁶ The first statement of Borges's poem—"Dakar está" (Dakar is located)—contrasts with the beginning of Girondo's—"La calle pasa" (The street advances). Borges's poetic universe presents an eternal Dakar that has passed through a metaphorical process to acquire absolute value. Girondo, on the other hand, presents a linguistic carnival where humor has penetrated the sign in an effort to "de-automatize" it; that is, in an effort to present it in a new perspective that will force the reader to emancipate it from its denotative function.⁷ "Dakar" will then experience its metathesis into the English vocable "dark," which is semantically reinforced through the blacks that appear in the poem ("un friso de negros sentados sobre el cordón de la vereda," "negros estilizados con ademanes de sultán," "negras vestidas de papagayo"). "Dakar" also points to the sordidness of an absurd world where there are "discursos en cuatro mil lenguas oscuras" (discourses in four thousand "dark" languages). The dual sign *oscuras* not only functions in its humorous mimetic relation to the blackness of its interlocutors, but also acts as a synonym of ignorance. Language has been disassociated from myth and art through its use by a society like those "Europeos que usan una escupidera en la cabeza" (Europeans who use a spittoon on their heads) who appear in Girondo's poem. This last humorous image also conveys Girondo's contempt for this "logical" human race. All this carnival of blackness will be eliminated through the final exclamation of the poem

"¡ILUMINACION!/a cargo de las constelaciones" (ILLUMINATION!/in charge of the constellations). It almost seems as if Girondo anticipates Roland Barthes's idea of the plural text as a "galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds."⁸ That is, the true illumination as infusion of intellectual light will occur when poetic discourse ceases to be obscure and functions instead as a galactic circle of acoustical images. The task of the reader will not then be to recover the signified that is irrecoverable, but to interpret the signifier. Girondo thus moves away from the "logocentrism" of Western culture that has placed the signified as the sole essence of the sign.

The exclamation "¡Plantas callicidas!" (Plants that extirpate corns!) that seems unmotivated at a mimetic level is related to the first affirmation of the poem—"La calle pasa"—through the phonological alliance of the velar stop of "calle" and "callicidas" and the bilabial stop of "plantas" and "pasa." Thus "plantas" loses its denotative meaning and functions as a synecdoche of "plantas de los pies" (sole of the feet) of those streets that repeatedly and habitually advance through the poem. "Callicidas" phonologically repeats the word "calle," reinforcing its component "-cida" and its semantic connotation of "to kill." The mimetic reality (la calle) is abolished (-cida) by the de-automatization of the poetic sign. The poet thus confronts us with a poetic universe that by functioning as a galaxy of signifiers will destroy (kill) that callousness, that hardness that has been produced by the artificial friction of the signifier and the signified.

Girondo's effort to find a poetic sign free from all cultural restraints does not end here or in the metaironic eroticism of the prose poems of *Espantapájaros* (1932).⁹ He first attempts to completely purify the sign in the poems of *Persuasión de los días* (1942). But his desire of the "Puro No" (the pure nothingness) is answered in the pampa he internalizes in the long poem *Campo nuestro* (1946). It is precisely from the joyous position of having found a reply to his desire, not in an oriental asceticism but in a "gaucho mysticism," that Girondo writes *En la masmédula*. The title already reveals Girondo's use of morphological humor in the creation of neologisms by agglutination. Although he violates the laws of the semiotic system of language, he does not separate himself from it.

The scandal of the poetic sign of *En la masmédula* forces the reader to push the act of reading toward the higher level of significance that is the proper domain of semiotics. Since the texts violate not only the syntagmatic unfolding, but also the morphological code, and move toward the paradigmatic axis, only a hermeneutic reading of *En la masmédula* is possible. Although it is difficult to isolate one poem, a careful look at Girondo's marvelous distortion of the

linguistic sign in his poem "Al gravitar rotando" will manifest the semiosis of the paradigmatic significance.*

En la sed
 en el ser
 en las psiquis
 en las equis
 en las exquisitísimas respuestas
 en los enlunamientos
 en lo erecto por los excesos lesos del erofrote etcétera
 o en el bisueño exhausto del "damc toma date hasta el
 mismo testuz de tu tan gana"

.....
 en toda forma hundido polimellado adrroto a ras afaz subrripio
cocopleonasma exotro
 sin lar sin can sin cala sin camastro sin coca sin historia
endosorbienglutido
 por los engendros móviles del gravitar rotando bajo el prurito astrífero
 junto a las musaslianias chupaporos pulposas y los no menos
pólipos hijos del hipo lutio
 voluntarios del miasma

.....
 al desplegar la sangre sin introitos enanos en el plecoito lato
 con todo sueño insomne y todo espectro apuesto
gociferando
 amente
 en lo no noto nato

The title "Al gravitar rotando" (While gravitating/gravid (pregnant) rolling/broken) once more introduces the Girondian text as a galaxy of signifiers rather than a structure of signifieds. The meaningful use of "rotando" instead of the more common "rodando" reinforces its phonological component "rota" (broken), which is emphasized by the neologism "adrroto" that appears in the poem. "Gravitar" accentuates semantically the idea that the signs will fall upon each other (the agglutinative technique), but also phonologically connotes "grávido" to indicate that the poet will now fertilize the "puro no" of his earlier stage in order to produce the original linguistic sign. Thus, the title is connected to the last verse of the poem: "en lo no noto nato." This true "sign-womb" will result from the extension

* Since Girondo's poetry places the signifier over the signified, a direct translation would hinder the reader's semiotic process. Thus, I have decided to quote the text in Spanish and give the English equivalents of Girondo's "de-automatized" signs in the analysis.

of the absolute zero in *Persuasión de los días* to the absolute fullness of the pregnant womb in the texts of *En la masmédula*. The semantic reduction of the sign in the previous stage had freed it from its illegitimate status ("noto"). "Nato," with its phonological and semantic relation to the past participle "nacido," stresses its phonological component "ato" (to tie). This sign-womb will tie and combine words in a superior bond.

The texts of *En la masmédula* are built on the maximum excess or redundancy of the signs that Barthes has called "cacography."¹⁰ But Girondo's neologism seems to be more exact—"cocopleonismo." This portmanteau word is an example of the value of Girondo's poetic signs. Not only can they be considered nonsense words like those of Lewis Carroll, but since as agents of semiosis they are intratextually determined, they are examples of what Riffaterre has termed "scrambling."¹¹ "Pleonasma" (to use more words than those that are necessary) is repeated by the word "coco," which through its phonological duplication of the "o" reproduces its signified of a bacterium of spherical or round form. The empty circle will become gravid. "Pleonasma" also liberates the true "sous-texte"¹² of the poem: the "pleno onanismo" (full masturbation) and the "pleno orgasmo" (full orgasm) of the signs. The "pleno onanismo" is repeated by the neologism "erofrote" (erotic rubbing) that is characteristic of Girondo's writing. "Pleno orgasmo" is reinforced by the phrase "plecoito lato" (full diffused coitus). "Lato" liberates its component "ato" (to tie) in this "erofrote" of signs. We can relate Girondo's poetics to Francis Ponge's assertion:

It is necessary to conceive of writing not as a transcription according to a conventional code of some exterior or former idea, but truly as an orgasm, as the orgasm of a being or of a structure which must, in order to accomplish itself, give itself up with joy as itself, in one word, signify itself.¹³

This "pleno orgasmo/onanismo" of the signs is repeated throughout the poem. The signs are "engendros móviles" (movable embryos). The poet finds himself "polimellado" with its semantic indetermination of "polimerizar" (to convert into others of more weight), "pólipo" (polypus/with tentacles), "polillas" (moths that consume), "mellar" (to notch), all semantically related to "Al gravitar rotando" until finally discovering the "ella" (the true sign-womb). The poet lies near the "pólipos hijos del hipo lutio" (polyps children of "muddy" desire). The neologism "lutio" arises because of its phonological relation to "lúteo," which is reflected in the next verse of the poem in the sign "miasma." But the "i" of "hijos" and "hipo"

destroys the semantic reality of "lúteo." The pollution that is phonologically associated with "hipo lúteo" is abolished through the extreme desire that causes the orgasm, the emission of semen that is semantically contained in the liberated sign "polución." "Hipo lúteo" is also related phonologically to Hippolytus, object of extreme desire to his stepmother. The signs must be passionately attracted toward each other.

The vertical accumulation of the preposition "en" in the first lines of the poem is followed by a horizontal projection of the preposition "sin," which is resolved not "en el sin," in the nothingness of the previous stage, but in the innermost "másmédula." The poet, along with his discourse, will now be "endosorbienglutido," a portmanteau word that again points to Gironde's agglutinative technique. There will be signs within others ("endo"), swallowed by others ("sorbien" → sorber bien) and tied to others ("glutido" → gluten).

This amalgamation occurs not only in syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, but also in phonological ones. For example, the neologism "exquisitísicas" occurs through the interpenetration of the two previous signs—"psiquis" and "equis." The change of the superlative suffix "-ísimas" to "-ísicas" occurs precisely because of the insertion of the velar stop of "equis" and "psiquis."

The neologism that follows, "enlunamientos," suggests the three semantic realities that provoke the other signs of the poem: "luna" (moon), "amante" (lover), "demente" (without a mind). This last semantic reality is related to the neologism "amente" in the next-to-last line of the poem. "Amente" goes beyond its signified (a-mente, without a mind) and functions as an "acronym" of "amante demente" (crazy lover).

Gironde's poetics does not respond to the illogical automatism of the surrealists, but to a superior logic of love, of agglutination, of indifferenciation, which destroys logocentrism. The reality of "enlunamientos" is repeated by the phrase "prurito astrífero," not only a great desire ("prurito"), but a heavenly body full of love ("astrífero") that reinforces the galaxy of signifiers making love. "Astro" is phonologically reflected throughout the poem ("camastro," "historia," "exhausto"). Even a sign like "camastro" loses its signified as a poor, miserable bed, and acts only in its capacity as a signifier: "camastro" (the bed where the heavenly bodies make love). "Camastro" also functions in its phonological relation to the *Kamasutra*, that treatise on love that Gironde read so avidly.

Gironde does not write from a surrealist sleep, but from a "bisoño," a repeated dream that will always change and be "bisoño" (new, inexperienced), from a "sueño insomne" (sleepless dream). The

poet will be "amente" and his "excesos lesos" (wounded exuberance) will turn into "ex sesos lesos" (perverted judgment), through the excessive "erofrote" of the signs. The oral vision of the lovemaking in the poem, the "dame toma date," thus repeats the semantic reality of "endosorbienglutido" when it liberates "dar, amar, meter, tomar, más dar, atar" (to give, to love, to put into, to drink, to give more, to tie).

Gironde's tautological discourse is a joyous act of enunciation, a "gociferando" (vociferando/gozando, vociferating joyously). The poet absolves all corruption by the act of naming, and his poetry becomes a sensual exploration of the arbitrary sign in order to fertilize it.

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NOTES

1. "Foregrounding" as defined by Jan Mukarovsky in "Standard Language and Poetic Language," in *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure and Style*, ed. Paul L. Garvin (Washington: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1964), p. 19.
2. Saul Yurkievich, *Fundadores de la nueva poesía latinoamericana* (Barcelona: Barral Editores, 1973), pp. 141-59.
3. Two excellent books on Gironde's work are: Gaspar Pió del Corro, *Oliverio Gironde. Los límites del signo* (Buenos Aires: Fernando García Cambreiro, 1976), and Beatriz de Nóbile, *El acto experimental. Oliverio Gironde y las tensiones del lenguaje* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1972).
4. Guillermo de Torre, "Ultraismo en América Hispana," *Testigo*, No. 2 (April-June 1966), 12.
5. Alfonso Sola González, "Oliverio Gironde, iniciador de la vanguardia poética argentina," *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, Nos. 163-164 (July-August 1963), 83-101.
6. Jorge Luis Borges, "Dakar," in *Obra poética 1923-1964* (Buenos Aires: Emece, 1964), p. 91, and Oliverio Gironde, "Fiesta en Dakar," in *Obras Completas* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1968), p. 71.
7. We use "de-automatize" following García Berrio's translation of "foregrounding" to the Spanish "desautomatización" in Antonio García Berrio, *Significado actual del formalismo ruso* (Barcelona: Ed. Planeta, 1973), p. 143.
8. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1970), p. 12.
9. This meta-ironic eroticism refers directly to Marcel Duchamp's "meta-ironie."
10. The term "sous-texte" is used by Mary Ann Caws in, for example, "Suppression et sous-texte: une relecture d'Antonin Artaud," in *Le Siècle Eclaté: Théorie/tableau/texte*, No. 2 (Paris: Minard, 1978), pp. 175-98.
11. Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 139.
12. Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), p. 139.
13. Francis Ponge, *Le Savon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 127.