

“El hueso se convirtió en un hueso que escribe”:

Gelman between “juan” and “Juan”

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Juan Gelman’s poetry, and the processes of self-figuration that he practices in his books, are some of the most prolific and changing projects of the Argentine tradition. Although much has been said about his work on fake-translations and his depiction of military violence during the dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 until 1983, not much has been written about his first books from the late 50’s and early 60’s and the political and aesthetic challenges that the self-figuration depicted in them posed for Gelman’s later and more accomplished books. Likewise, little has been written about the connections between these first books and the ones from the 70’s and 80’s.

In 1956, Juan Gelman published his first book of poetry, *Violín y otras cuestiones*. In it, we find a lyric subject who reflects on his own identity and on his activity as a poet. However, this reflection is displayed on some occasions under the biographeme “juan” (in lowercase) and on other occasions under the uppercase form “Juan.” These two forms, although they share some features and are constantly overlapping, can still be individually identified. In the poem “Porque existen las plazas. Y los pájaros,” the name “juan” appears as a reference to the men and women that, for lack of a better

term, I will call “everyday man”: “Porque existen los juanes, preocupados/ porque la nena tiene fiebre o/ le salen los dientitos” (*Gotán* 20).¹ But, it can also be read as a first attempt by the lyric subject to inscribe himself and his own practice within the questioning of the indifference suffered by those “juanes” that the name “juan”—a common name in Spanish—represents. Against this indifference, the lyric subject, the lyric I, addresses an imaginary “tú/vos”—or you—in order to insinuate a possibility of resistance: “para que digan se murió, eso es todo,/ siempre eso es todo, se murió, que encuentren/ un peine roto en tu bolsillo, cartas,/ y eso es todo, eso es todo?” Against the passive acceptance of the death (both physical and discursive death) or pain of those “juanes,” the lyric subject uses the rhetorical doubt of the last verse as a way to criticize this accepted and institutionalized indifference. But at the same time, besides pledging for the survival of those “juanes,” the lyric subject drafts the resistance of poetry as a self-representation space that is the space of a singularity (a space for subjectivity even if it is considered as an effect always in transformation)². This space, then, is founded on the disconformity against indifference and against those poetic practices that do not address this indifference. But it is also founded on a non-conformity to renounce his singularity as a poet, a singularity that seems to be inevitable for a lyric I who identifies himself as “Juan Gelman,” the poet.

It should not surprise us, then, that in the poem “Hoy que estoy tan alegre, qué me dicen” we find an interesting example in line with this disconformity: “me levanté tan simple como siempre / y tan juan como suelo entré a la calle, / salud, ciudad, le dije” (*Gotán* 37). In this case, by using “juan” as an adjective, the lyric subject is, on the one hand, identifying himself with all the other possible “juanes” in order to problematize his own identity. But, on the other hand, he is implicitly assuring his

¹ Gelman’s first four books of poetry, that critics such as Sillato have identified as having formal and thematical similarities, are: *Violín y otras cuestiones* (1956), *El juego en que andamos* (1959), *Velorio del solo* (1961) y *Gotán* (1962). The edition I am using here gathers under the title *Gotán* almost the entirety of the first two books and the totality of the last two.

² Regine Robin has underlined that one of the most important aspects of self-figuration processes in self-fiction is its working with a notion of subjectivity that is extremely problematic to the extent that if it can be displayed, it can only be done so as a subject-effect (efecto-sujeto): “Above all, self-fiction is fiction, being of language, that which makes the narrated subject a fictional subject precisely because he/she/they is/are narrated (...) Fiction, because there is never adequacy between the author, the narrator and the character, between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the statement, between a supposedly complete subject and the divided, dispersed, disseminated one of writing. The problem consists then in finding for oneself a place for the subject and not the place of the subject, that is to say, in forming in writing a subject-effect” (44; the translation is mine).

identity as oneself; he is stressing the “oneself” part of Ricoeur’s formula “oneself as another,” though in a subtle way because the “oneself” and the “another” are, to a certain extent, dialectical and cannot be easily separated. “juan,” then, marks some of the features that should be addressed and sung in the poems, but it is also a specific mark that, like most adjectives, enhances certain precise qualities that bring it close to “Juan.”

The problem that can be found at the core of this demarcation, of this disconformity, is precisely how to account for those “juanes” without falling into a condescending and paternalistic attitude, like that of those who denounce from a place or view that is far away from those who suffer that which is being denounced. One also cannot lean towards a complete assimilation that would not allow for the lyric subject’s own poetic gesture as author and its singularity as a space of personal identity and resistance. This can be clearly found in the text “Oficio,” where the oscillation that I have just described appears in the context of a self-reflective or metapoetic poem:

Cuando al entrar al verso me disloco
 o no cabe un adverbio y se me quiebra
 toda la música
 (...)

quién me manda meterme, endecasílabo
 a cantar
 (...)

quién me manda, te digo, siendo Juan
 un Juan tan simple con sus pantalones,
 (...)

óigame amigo,
 cambio sueños y música y versos
 por una pica, pala y carretilla.
 Con una condición:
 déjeme un poco
 de este maldito gozo de cantar. (Gotán 35-36)

As can be observed, the presence of the lyric I and his relationship with his writing is clearly stated from the beginning. But this does not impede the lyric subject from seeing his self-representation affected either by his bifurcation in men with activities that differ from his own, or by the violence that writing and words produce in him. However, this problematic identity is quickly underlined—“siendo Juan”—and then reassured when at the end of the poem, the lyric subject demands to keep some of “este maldito gozo de cantar.” Thus, the proximity of the demonstrative “este” reproduces the proximity of the lyric subject “Juan” with regards to the lines he writes; that is, it reassures the

authority (and the authorship) that the lyric I has upon his practice and subtly separates him and his practice from the other “juanes.”

This authority, this signature or mark of authorship, is never appreciated clearly because of the need to be at the same time “juan” and “Juan.” There is a need to unify in the “I” both the “signaling himself as a poet” (which is understood as a self-identity accepted command—*mandato*), and also the common: community, everyday life and collective identification. The author’s gesture is, at first, related to a command, to a necessary projection, though one that is not completely accepted.

In fact, the last poem of *Violín y otras cuestiones* comes back to this idea of the command in a text that is, in a certain way, an *ars poetica*. Departing from some verses that oscillate between negation and affirmation (“La poesía no es un pájaro / no, nada de eso. Y todo eso. / Sí”, *Gotán* 46), oscillations that remind us of that of “juan” and “Juan,” the poem expresses the need to care about people and their everyday struggles. At the end of the poem, however, poetry and people converge and become the life of the “tú;” that is, they become the most singular feature of the “tú” that is being addressed by the lyric subject:

Tu vida entonces será un río innumerable que se llamará pedro, juan, ana, maría, pájaro, plumón, el aire, mi camisa, violín, crepúsculo, piedra, pañuelo aquel, vals antiguo, caballo de madera.

La poesía es esto.

Y luego, escríbelo. (*Gotán* 47)

In this sense, the end of the poem points again to the contradictions that were already visible at the beginning of the poem when the lyric subject attempted to define poetry. If in those first lines, poetry was and was not a bird, was and was not a shirt, was and was not all of that, now the singularity that marks the “tú” as a self has become an innumerable river that is followed, paradoxically, by a long enumeration. However, the command at the end “Y luego, escríbelo,” raises at least two different yet complementary readings. First, the command can be read as the final gesture of the lyric subject over the “tú,” as a command to use poetry as a way of dealing with indifference by making visible the material conditions of those “juan,” “ana,” “pedro,” etc. From this perspective, the lyric subject who addresses the “tú,” seems to have accepted his role as a poet and has, in a way, established the scope of his poetry. But, this alleged and clear acceptance entails a separation—even if only in its minimal expression—between the lyric subject that sings and those he sings about. By exhorting the “tú” to write the poem, the lyric I tries to bridge the gap, as if implying that his poetry does not establish differences between the poet and “everyday life.” That is,

“everyday men and women,” with all their *contretemps*, are themselves a form of poetry. However, I think that the command can also be read as a disconformity or, even better, as a yet-not-having-taken-place of the author’s poetic gesture. In other words, if the lyric subject needs to make this suggestion or, to be fair, needs to impose the final command “luego, escríbelo” on the “tú,” it is because his own writing, his own practice has not addressed the command either. This is in part because the lyric subject does not ignore the difficulty of channeling poetry in a definitive and one-way direction. It is also because he does not ignore the tension between “juan” and “Juan” that he must deal with (and has been dealing with) in his quest to delimitate and present his gesture as poet.

The disconformity, in terms of authorship or of the author figure, within the lyric subject’s own practice as poet, can also be seen in the poem “Arte poética” from *Velorio del solo*:

Entre tantos oficios ejerzo éste que no es mío,
 como un amo implacable
 me obliga a trabajar de día, de noche,
 (...)

 Nunca fui el dueño de mis cenizas, mis versos,
 rostros oscuros los escriben como tirar contra la muerte. (*Gotán* 97)

Here we find again what the last poem of *Violín y otras cuestiones* has already shown us and which summarizes this first part of Gelman’s self-figuration project: we constantly go from affirmation to negation and to the negation of that negation and so on, back and forth. We also find some traces of the command of the “escríbelo,” but in this case it is the presence of this order that forces the lyric I to fulfill his practice. However, this command is neither completely different nor necessarily identical to that of the former poem. On one hand, there is an acknowledgment of the impossibility of controlling what is being written, either because of the impossibility of controlling signification in language or because what is being written is in fact written by and from the lives of those others, those “rostros oscuros.” On the other hand, there is still some uneasiness in the lyric subject due to the fact that “being a poet” seems to be more of an imposition and something that “Juan” cannot handle. This is because the lyric subject that Gelman presents in these first four books seems to reject the possibility of depicting himself as an author, as if that implied abandoning the critique of indifference and collective representation. He also seems to be aware of the risks of the singularity of his gesture as author of accepting without question a unilateral ideological identification as his poetic practice. Thus, the first four books deal with what Rancière suggests should be

a politics of the image that is not based in a direct and unilateral relationship among perception, affection, comprehension and action:

The images of art do not provide weapons for combat. Their contribution helps to design the new configuration of the visible, of what can be said and thought and, consequently, of that which is possible. But they do so under the condition that they do not anticipate their meaning or their effect. (113; the translation is mine)

In the case of Gelman, the command has two faces just like the god Janus. On one of his faces, the command shows that the singularity of depicting himself as “Juan the poet” cannot be completely fulfilled, yet is always underlined as important and desirable. On its other face, the command sanctions and anticipates a series of effects and meanings (collective and ideological identification, a mandatory and in some cases unilateral way of dealing with indifference) for the reading of “juan’s” gesture. These effects and meanings, implied both in the references to what poetry should be and in the “escribelo” that I have already analyzed, are, in a way, promoted by “Juan” but they end up being resisted by him, too.

Maybe *Gotán’s* last poem, “Final”, can help us understand this last and enigmatic point: “Ha muerto un hombre y están juntando su sangre en cucharitas, / querido juan, has muerto finalmente.” What is significant in this poem is that “juan” has been killed; he has been massacred to the point that his blood can only be gathered with a spoon. This tragic violence is the result of the indifference that the “juanes” suffered and an indifference that the identification with “juan” makes visible and tries to challenge by making it visible. However, this death is, in a way, also needed and desired by “Juan.” This does not mean that in the following books the social critique of injustice and the resistance value of “juan,” as a figure that is part of a collective complaint or ethos, disappears. What this “gelmanicidio” of “juan” evokes is the necessity for the gesture of the lyric subject to be displayed in its singularity, erasing any anticipatory effects and senses that the command to represent indifference in poetry may include. In other words, indifference is closer here to the sense Rancière gives it and its importance for politics. As Galende explains in his reading of Rancière: “el asunto quizá se resume en que el arte no es político ni por los mensajes o las ideas que transmite sobre el mundo ni por la forma en que abrevia y expresa los problemas de los más humildes; es político porque nace exhibiendo la distancia que lo separa de esas funciones.” He adds “como la política es ella misma la intromisión de sujetos, voces y objetos que transforman el espacio de lo común gracias a la indiferencia que mantienen respecto de ese orden que quiere dejarlos afuera, arte y política emergen juntos en esa

indiferencia común al orden que precisamente por eso alteran” (93). In other words, what the dynamic “Juan” and “juan” brings to the self-figuration process of Juan Gelman is the need to think, even from the very beginning of this process, about the limits of its own practice. In a cultural context where revolutions were taking place (in the case of *Gotán*, the Cuban Revolution) and where discussions of political art were as crucial as their manifestation in artistic works, what Gelman is doing, in my view, is trying to create a figure of himself that includes the indifference against those others as a type of collective resistance. He does so by transforming it into an indifference that challenges any anticipatory effect (in terms of a specific political and aesthetical ideology) that poetry may have, or to state it more accurately, that political poetry is supposed to have. The figure “Juan,” which is the one that prevails in the books that follow *Gotán*, still accounts for “juan” if we understand this other “juan” as the importance of others as resistance and collective identification; but this account does not respond any more to a command (such as “poetry should be”), the representation “juan, pedro, maría”, that was still visible in the first four books. This helps to avoid a command of poetry and self-representation as something that should be because it already is. As Yurkievich has stated, Gelman “no puede aspirar a portavoz de su pueblo incurriendo en la demagógica facilidad del estilo directo (...) No puede optar por la simplificación pedagógica a fin de infundir a su expresión una legibilidad popular” (“La violencia estremecedora de lo real” 128-29). In the case of *Cólera Buey* and of the books collected later in *Interrupciones*, while the lyric subject insists on presenting a form of political resistance and intervention, this does not block the presence of different personal and intimate biographemes that question the explicit political lineaments and make them more personal, thus expanding their significance. If Gelman’s poetry is significant in terms of political content, and if his self-figuration as “Juan” includes political biographemes, it is because his poetry displays this idea (to follow Galende’s reading of Rancière) of the political as something that is born displaying its distance from the functions previously imposed on it. This can be observed in the poem “Héroes” from *Cólera Buey* [4]:

los soles solan y los mares maran
 los farmacéuticos especifican
 dictan bellas recetas para el pasmo
 se desayunan en su gran centímetro

a mí me toca gelmanear
 hemos perdido el miedo al gran caballo
 nos acontecen hachas sucesivas

y se amaneca siempre en los testículos
 (...)

a gelmanear a gelmanear les digo

a conocer a los más bellos

los que vencieron con su gran derrota. (Cólera Buey 27)

By opposing himself to the pharmacists and the exactness of their prescriptions, the lyric I of the poem identifies his singularity as a production of new meaning. This can be clearly observed in the use of verbs that do not exist in institutionalized and everyday language: “solan” and “maran” representing the actions of the sun and the sea. In this sense, it is very important to note the presence of the biographeme “gelmanear,” which produces at least three effects: (1) it underlines the author’s gesture by reminding us of Juan Gelman, by connecting the sign to a biographical sphere outside the text but without eliminating its fictitious character; (2) it highlights the dynamic and active profile of the biographeme that is both a biographically fictitious trait and an action, a verb; (3) by highlighting its dynamic character, it contradicts the exactness of the pharmacists’ prescriptions, thus promoting the potentiality of language and avoiding the command that anticipates its own effect. In fact, we do not know exactly what “gelmanear” means aside from its opposition to the pharmacists. What we know, though, is that “gelmanear” still represents a kind of singularity, a kind of subjectivity that in this sense is related to the figure “Juan”. We can add that this biographeme suggests a resistance both against the systematic and rationalistic routine of the pharmacists (and what it represents in terms of anesthetizing the bodies and the potentiality of words) and also against the violence imposed on the bodies and intimacy, in this case the testicles. However, this violence is also used as a self-presentation mark (the violence that the action “gelmanear” imposes on words) and as re-elaboration of defeat and violence as different ways of making sense and communicating through a singular subjectivity.³

³ Duchesne-Winter in his reading of Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community* states that the French philosopher prefers singularity to individuality. As Duchesne-Winter explains: “las singularidades sólo se vinculan a otras singularidades debido a su modo estrictamente plural de ser, aun con respecto a sí mismas. Los seres singulares se vinculan por aquello de lo que carecen, por lo que no tienen y no saben, en aquello desconocido a lo que se exponen (...) Es esa incompletud e inconclusividad radical, esa inevitable finitud, en realidad inconsolable por los mitos o las ideologías modernas o pre-modernas de inmanencia, la que articula a la comunidad nanciana, es decir, la comunidad incomunitaria” (34). In this community any imposed claim of communion could end up being dangerous because it might continue operating either on the level of individuality or within a transcendent / imminent axis that goes against singularity. That is why Nancy, according to Duchesne-Winter, instead of talking of communion, prefers to speak

It is not strange to find that the author’s gesture is also presented in the books that followed *Cólera Buey* by evoking political co-partisans, friends and relatives that were disappeared or killed during the years previous to the most recent dictatorship in Argentina or as a result of the violence exerted by the military government once they reached power in 1976. For example, in some of the poems in *Notas* (1979), we find that the reflections on poetic practice, at the intimate level of both confirmed self-identity and resistance, are produced by evoking those people who are absent and by presenting them as capable of (de)configuring the self-representation of the lyric I and questioning military violence and its commands. This can be found in the poem “Nota I” where the lyric I uses apostrophe to depict defeat and affirms that he will kill it, he will kill defeat, with the fragments of those he loves [9]: “te nombraré veces y veces. / (...) / te mataré los pedacitos. / te mataré uno con paco. / otro lo mato con rodolfo. / con haroldo te mato un pedacito más. / te mataré con mi hijo en la mano. / (...) / te voy a matar / derrota. / nunca me faltará un rostro amado para matarte otra vez / (...) te voy a matar / yo / te voy a matar” (*Interrupciones I* 97). In this case, the poetic enunciation is clearly accepted by the lyric subject and the beloved faces are those that confirm his identity and help him attack defeat. The presence of the others talking to and through the lyric subject not only expands the poet’s gesture but also posits a challenge to representation as we will see next.

In 1969 Juan Gelman published *Traducciones III. Los poemas de Sidney West*. With this book he inaugurated a series of books in which his name is listed as the editor or translator for different fake poets. The three poets are Sidney West (United States), John Wendell (United Kingdom), and Yamanokuchi Ando (Japan). However, these three names are not the only fictitious poets he will create over the course of his career. In 1982, Gelman published *Hacia el sur* (included later in *Interrupciones II*), where we find two other poets, José Galván and Julio Greco, whose poems Gelman keeps after they are kidnapped and disappeared under Argentina’s most recent dictatorship. What is worth noting is that these made up poets, who simultaneously are and are not Gelman, quote themselves constantly. For example, the poems of José Galvan have an epigraph by Julio Grecco that is a recreation of a famous phrase by Goya: “el monstruo de la

of communication, which he defines “no como un vínculo, sino como una mutua exposición, un exponerse a compartir el sentido de un mundo cuyo único sentido propio es que se abre al sentido” (34).

razón / engendra sueños”.⁴ Julio Grecco’s poems have an epigraph that is a poem by Yamanakouchi Ando (that, of course, is not included in the translations of this poet) whose title is “Diálogo” [5]: “¿por qué escribís?” me dijo un pajarito. / ‘qué se yo’ le dije. / ‘¿por qué lo preguntás?’ le dije. / ‘qué se yo’ me dijo” (119).

First, I would like to point out that this other moment of self-representation includes going from the author’s gesture to that of the translator, to that of the custodian, without embracing any of them completely but without abandoning any of them either. This distance between this same-yet-different gesture allows for the estrangement of the native language and the appearance of a variety of voices that do not necessarily fall into the anticipatory command of “juan.” In fact, they share with the figure “Juan” the closeness of poetry and politics, however, they also affirm the impossibility of denying a personal and intimate approach or singularity to their authorial gestures.

Different critics have studied these pseudo-translations and attributions and have analyzed the ambiguity of this other moment in Gelman’s self-figuration process. For example, Sillato points out that, in Galván’s and Grecco’s case, “un vínculo lo suficientemente fuerte que permita una identificación visible a través de una misma perspectiva de vida y de una misma causa política” is being looked for (53). Tiberi, instead, argues in her complex and stimulating reading of Gelman through Derrida, that with the use of heteronyms, the poetic Word “afirma una identidad constreñida en la otredad, como si solamente en ese encuentro con lo otro pudieran delinarse sus propiedades en tanto tal” (119).

In this second section of my article, I would like to comment on two poems in which the self-figuration process includes the projection of biographemes in others. This does not eliminate the singularity of the gesture “Juan” but rather expands it. The first of these two texts is part of John Wendell’s poems (the English poet that the figure “Gelman” translates) and is the poem “XCI” [6]:

toda poesía es hostil al capitalismo
puede volverse seca y dura pero no
porque sea pobre sino
para no contribuir a la riqueza oficial

puede ser su manera de protestar de
volverse flaca ya que hay hambre
amarilla de sed y penosa

⁴ The original phrase is from Goya’s famous 43 print from his series *Los caprichos*: “El sueño de la razón produce monstruos.”

de puro dolor que hay puede ser que

en cambio abra los callejones del delirio y las bestias
canten atropellándose vivas de
furia de calor sin destino puede
ser que se niegue a sí misma como otra

manera de vencer a la muerte
así como se llora en los velorios
poetas de hoy
poetas de este tiempo

nos separaron de la grey no sé qué será de nosotros
conservadores comunistas apolíticos cuando
suceda lo que sucederá pero
toda poesía es hostil al capitalismo (154)

Here we find a voice that is not exclusively singular or explicitly identified as “Juan” or “Wendell.” It is a voice that is not directly thinking about his own poems, though it is reflecting on poetry and is even making a political statement. However, though this political statement may remind us of the anticipatory effects of the command of the figure “juan,” it is given in a context where the identity of the lyric subject is not necessarily the result of a tension between “Juan” and “juan.” Rather, it is a tension between “Juan” and “Wendell,” one that challenges any unilateral identification of sense or subjectivity effects. Moreover, poetry is also depicted in a contradictory way. Like the Eros described by Plato in his *Symposium* (considered not the descendent of Aphrodite and Ares but of Poros and Penia, resourcefulness or opportunity, and poverty, respectively), poetry is seen here as abundance and shortage. In other words, poetry is not exempted from the shortages that those who seek its company or services have suffered. Similarly, the author’s gestures translated in the translation of the signature “Gelman” or “Juan” are not exempt from these privations. The same applies to the “juanes” of which “Juan” was supposed to give account without betraying them and without betraying himself. But if poetry is “lacking,” it is not because of its poverty (if we understand this poverty as a kind of sacred and constitutive condition of human beings, a condition that instead of being challenged and transformed, is “dignified” or, in the best scenario, made more “bearable”). No. If poetry is a shortage, if poetry is poor, it is because of its possibilities for transfigurative empathy (“volverse flaca ya que hay hambre”). Consequently, from the pain provoked by the unfairness of official wealth (and official “dignified poorness”), abundance (“los callejones del delirio o las bestias que cantan”) can be rearticulated.

However, it is not surprising that the poem oscillates from one possibility to its exact opposite and vice versa. In fact, after highlighting poetry's capacity of empathic lack as another way of abundance, the poem includes the verse "ser que se niegue a sí misma como otra," which reproduces this oscillation. Although it is true that the line, if read detached from its location within the poem does not seem to make much sense, I would like to offer two readings of it. The first one suggests that that which the negation negates is the possibility of "oneself" in poetry, that is, a singularity that denies its "itself" because it is like "an other", it already is "an other." The second reading, on the contrary, underlines that that which the negation negates or questions is alterity, otherness; it emphasizes a singularity that denies to itself the possibility of being "an other."

As noted, the authorial gesture in Gelman is one that is always intertwined with all different kinds of alterities. But if I bring up this second reading of the line, it is because I think that the series of the fake translations still underlines, in a very subtle and almost imperceptible way, the singularity of the "oneself" in the dynamic "oneself as another." In other words, the biographemes refer to a trait of singularity, an effect of subjectivity which highlights the gesture "Juan" that is latent in that of Wendell's poems.⁵ It is true that alterity and the projection of biographemes in others help to underline the complexity of a self-figuration process that has been praised (by Sillato and Tiberi) precisely for its otherness, for its strangeness in alterity. But this praise should not be seen as an erasure of "Juan" as a death of the author or of its gesture. Rather, we could understand it as a constant move that expands self-identity into alterity, the oneself to the other, only if and as long as it reties this expansion, this excess, to its own practice, as Agamben has accurately explained in his essay about the author.⁶

⁵ It is important to note that, in this case, although the biographemes are not explicitly shown, they are still visible because we have a poem about poetry where political issues are crucial and where government violence and capitalism are condemned as they were in the poems of *Notas* previously analyzed.

⁶ Departing from some remarks by Foucault, Agamben states that "The author is not dead but to position oneself as an author means occupying the place of a 'dead man.' An author-subject does exist, and yet he is attested to only through the traces of his absence" (64-65). He then mentions the figure of the Harlequin from the Italian commedia dell'arte and of his lazzo, a lazzo that as you know interrupts the main action of the commedia but ends up each time returning "to retie the thread that is has loosened" According to Agamben this gesture "guarantees the life only through the irreducible presence of an inexpressive outer edge. Like the mime in his silence and the Harlequin with the lazzo, the author tirelessly returns to enclose himself again within the opening he has created" (70). Agamben goes on a little bit more to connect this idea of the author as a gesture with subjectivity: "and just as the author must remain unexpressed in the work while still attesting, in precisely this way, to his own irreducible

But this excess is not only the surplus of alterity in the singularity of the “oneself” that is produced by a discordant concordance of biographemes, that is, by a plot in Ricoeur’s terms. This excess is also an overabundance of representation. In this sense the last poem I would like to comment on is one by José Galván, one of the poets who disappeared during the dictatorship and whose poems reached “Juan Gelman” almost by chance. The title of the poem is “Otras escrituras” and it opens with a very enigmatic line: “la noche te golpea la cara como los pies de Dios”. This line is followed by a question that reads: “¿qué es esta luz que sube de tus muertos?” The rest of the poem tries to answer the question, but in doing so it brings up new questions (many of them rhetorical) and shows how difficult this enterprise is for the lyric subject. Despite their difficulty, the questions are related to one main concern: they seek to answer if it is possible to see something, to make visible, to make sense of and to figure (and I stressed the importance of these two words *sense* and *figure*) something out of the light that comes up from the dead: “¿qué es esta luz que sube de tus muertos?/¿ves algo a la luz de esta luz?” The questions bring into display the possibility of the dead as writers: “¿están raspando las paredes del alma?/¿escriben ‘viva la lucha?’” Their writing is shown through the questions manifesting a political and social concern that, as we have seen, is one of “Juan’s” most important traits as long as it does not unilaterally anticipate the political effects and eliminate the intimate approach to the ideological topics. In this sense, the poem still tries to make of light an agent; in other words, it tries to make light capable of figuring or forming the faces, the dreams, the desires of those who have fought for a revolution and who, at the same time, are connecting the figure Galván with the figure “Juan.” However, the end of the poem brings a small but significant difference into display, a difference that sends us back to the initial question: “qué es esa luz que sube de tus muertos”:

ahora pasan los compañeros con la lengua cerrada/
 pasan entre los pies y los caminos de los pies/
 pasan cosidos a la luz/
 raspan el silencio con un hueso/
 el hueso está escribiendo la palabra “luchar”/
 el hueso se convirtió en un hueso que escribe. (101)

presence, so must subjectivity show itself and increase its resistance at the point where its apparatuses capture it and put it into play. A subjectivity is produced where the living being, encountering language and putting itself into play in language without reserve, exhibits in a gesture the impossibility of its being reduced to this gesture” (72).

What is the importance of a bone that writes for the question that the poem is circling? The answer, of course, is not easy because the poem is certainly not and “answer” may not be a suitable word for poetry. But I would like to suggest that here that we find a tension that is much more pressing than the one that shapes the relationship between the “oneself” and the “other” in the legibility of a plot. Here the tension seems to be between two ways of giving that account for the figure of the author. The first, the one concerning the plot: the emplotment of the biographemes, their projection in others and the marking of the lyric subject as a figure with some specific characteristics, helps to retie the gesture of the author with its singularity and with a “oneself” that is never fixed but can still be grasped. The other way of accounting for the figure of the author, however, evades the possibility of emplotment. In other words, it shows the gesture of the author in its excess by highlighting its display and, at the same time, the retreat of the visibility of writing. In this case, we can find this elucidation in the bone that writes by scraping or scratching silence and under the light of the dead. This does not mean that this second manifestation of the gesture of the author does not include biographemes, but rather that those biographemes are not part of an emplotment process. Nor does it mean that the bone from the poem is just a personification. What it means, in my view, is that both the bone and the biographemes (and it is important to add that in this case the bone is a metonym for those loved ones who have disappeared and for biographemes) are also a catachresis. They insist on naming and displaying something for which there is no actual name and representation, something that can only be grasped in its own “monstration,” demonstrating that is different from both a complete void and a complete articulation. This excess does not eliminate the possibility of writing or naming, but it certainly achieves that possibility in a different way, as if the clarifying could take place not only in the trace and the dynamics of an absent plot but also in a more immediate presence that works outside emplotment and narration.

To conclude, the self-figuration process of Gelman seems to operate within different tensions that are, in the best case, partially resolved. As noted in the first part, the gesture of the author “Juan” is founded on the need to include those other “juanes” that “juan” represents (as long as they do not anticipate their effects, thus eliminating the singularity and potentiality of “Juan’s” gesture, his “gelmanear”). Then, in the second part we found that the singularity of the gesture “Juan” is expanded and challenged by its relationship with the gestures of these other “fake” poets. However—and in addition—the singularity of the oneself is not completely eliminated and can still

be traced. Finally, we saw that these other poems challenge representation itself and try to present the author’s gesture in its “monstration” and not in the emplotment of biographemes. Therefore, Gelman’s poetry goes from being “juan” to being “Juan,” from “Juan” to a “gelmaneo” and to the fictitious poets, and from there to “a bone that writes,” that is, to a way of portraying himself as an instance that defies emplotment and representation without eliminating the political resistance and its sense of community that was already at stake in that original tension between “juan” and “Juan.”

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