

Syntactically Silent Subjects:
Luis Muñoz and Poetry of Ellipsis

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“Los que leen la poesía la necesitan como drogadictos.”
‘Those who read poetry need it like drug addicts.’
—Francisco Brines¹

At the intersection of two centuries, Luis Muñoz (1966) is one of contemporary Spain’s most salient poets. A number of critics have commented on Muñoz’s poetry, characterizing it as “minimalist” (Mainer 36) and “measured” (Morales Barba 44). They note his style to be “pure” (Díaz de Castro), “refined,” “atomized” (Morales Barba 44) and “condensed” (Sánchez-Mesa Martínez 48). In his “poetry of ellipsis and metonymy” (Morales Barba 41) this poet seeks to explore “intellectual enigmas” (Mainer 36). His poems have been anthologized in a number of major turn-of-the-century collections, most notably those presented by Luis Antonio de Villena (1997; 2003; 2010), Rafael Morales Barba (2006) and Domingo Sánchez-Mesa (2007). Most recently, at the turn of the decade, Villena observes that it is in *Correspondencias* (2001) ‘Correspondences’ and *Querido silencio* (2006) ‘Dear Silence’ where Muñoz “has found his voice” (*La inteligencia* 11). Significantly, *Correspondencias* received two prestigious awards in Spain in 2001: the fourth *Premio Internacional de Poesía del 27* ‘Generation of 1927 International Poetry Prize’ and the *Premio de Ojo Crítico de Poesía* ‘The Critic’s Choice Award in Poetry.’ Nevertheless, no study has examined his poetry in any detail and the present work will address this matter. Muñoz’s most recent poetry demonstrates conceptual and linguistic efficiency due, in part, to his mastery of syntactic omission. Ellipsis figures prominently in this 2006 collection. In one exemplary poem, “Dejar la poesía” (93) ‘Leave Poetry,’ two syntactically silent characters engage in a conceptually efficient conversation concerning the

nature of poetry.² This work manifests the economy of expression reflected throughout the poetic discourse of *Querido silencio*. It also, as will be shown, serves as a response to the essential question framing this collection and this illustrative poem: Why is poetry an addiction?

In 2005 Muñoz published *Limpiar pescado: Poesía reunida* 'Cleaning Fish: Collected Poetry.' This work contains the majority of his decidedly innovative poems published up to this temporal crossroad. Gathered here are poems from *Septiembre* (1991) 'September,' *Manzanas amarillas* (1995) 'Yellow Apples,' *El apetito* (1998) 'Appetite' and the aforementioned award-winning *Correspondencias*.³ *Limpiar pescado* establishes the singular relevance of his work and at the same time brings to light the introductory prologue "Transición" 'Transition,' where Muñoz reflects on his identity as a poet and his evolving views concerning his poetics. His essay reveals the conception, development and nature of his poetry at the mid-point of the inaugural decade of the current century.⁴

One year later, *Querido silencio* appeared. Here Muñoz continues to practice many of the guiding principles outlined the year before in his aptly named "Transition." The collection, however, is especially noteworthy because it elucidates what Sánchez-Mesa considers to be a distinguishing feature of the newest poetry emerging in Spain today: "una renovada consciencia poética del lenguaje" (40) 'a renewed poetic awareness of language.' With a well-defined economy of words, Muñoz presents in this collection an elegant analysis of innovative and vitally expressive poetic discourse.

Sánchez-Mesa's *Cambio de siglo: Antología de poesía española 1990-2007* 'Turn of the Century: Anthology of Spanish Poetry 1990-2007' foregrounds *Querido silencio* by presenting seventeen poems from it while including seven from Muñoz's earlier works. This is significant because also in this anthology Muñoz himself elucidates the prominent features of the new expressivity characterizing his most recent work. In particular, when responding to one of the questions posed in the questionnaire presented to each of the poets represented in this anthology, Muñoz makes clear:

La lengua es, naturalmente, un instrumento de comunicación, de conocimiento y es un código moral, en el sentido literal, de *mor*, *mores*, costumbre, que nos invita a intervenir en él, a jugar,

a dialogar, a forcejear con él. La identidad de un poeta, que es inevitablemente lingüística, creo que está en el punto que confluyen los elementos personales, sus vivencias, sus ideas y su capacidad sensorial con la corriente de la tradición elegida por él, la que le ayuda a conocer y a conocerse. (*Cambio de siglo* 405 'Turn of the Century')

Language is, naturally, an instrument of communication, knowledge and also a moral code, in the literal sense of *mor*, *mores*, customary habits, inviting us to intervene, play, dialogue and struggle with it. The identity of a poet, which unavoidably is linguistic, I believe resides in the confluence of personal elements, his experiences, ideas and sensorial capacity as they merge with his elected tradition, the one that helps him to know and to know himself.⁵

Additionally, in another key anthology of this same era, Muñoz furnishes further commentary regarding his evolving poetics. In Rafael Morales Barba's *Última poesía española (1990-2005)* 'Latest Spanish Poetry (1990-2005),' Muñoz's "Poética" 'Poetics' reveals that for him poetry involves a "search," an "adventure" and a "conversation" (129-30).⁶ These recent illuminating descriptions readily characterize *Querido silencio*.

The 2006 collection demonstrates Muñoz's profound investigation into linguistic identity, both of the poet and, above all, of the poem. "Dejar la poesía" (93) serves as a fine example. This poem probes the nature of poetry. Intriguingly, although it appears to be a self-reflexive poetics, the poem does not establish how to practice the art of poetic composition, nor does it furnish a succinct explanation concerning the process of writing poetry. Instead, by presenting poetry as an addiction Muñoz discloses its intrinsic identity. This poem also illustrates the economy of expression distinguishing Muñoz's newest poetry. However, as will be shown, "Dejar la poesía" does even more than this. It also concisely demonstrates why his poetry is unmistakably "inventive" (Morales Barba 41) while also providing evidence supporting Mainer's 2009 claim that Luis Muñoz is one of the most important young poets advancing the new lyric poetry written in Spain today (36).

Por restar mientras que tú sumas.
Por llenarte de pájaros la mesa.
Por llevarte a donde no sabes salir.
Por castigarte sin hablar.
Por decirte: estás solo.
Por preferir que cargues
con su dolor de siglos
cuando te sientes nuevo.
Por su imán descabellado.
Por la sed que produce
cuando finge ser agua.
Por su vida paralela.
Por hablarte
cuando quieres dormir.
Por su orgullo de bestia descarriada.
Porque mira a la muerte
con el rabo del ojo
cuando canta oh belleza.
Por no dar explicaciones.
Por suficiente.
Por insuficiente.
Por beberse la sombra de mañana. (*Querido silencio* 93)⁷

By subtracting while you add.
By filling your table with birds.
By taking you where you know no escape.
By punishing you without speaking.
By telling you: you are alone.
By preferring that you accept the burden
of its centuries of pain
when you experience something new.
By its unbridled magnetism.
By creating thirst
when pretending to be water.
By its parallel life.
By speaking to you
when you want to sleep.

By its silly pride.
 Because it stares death
 in the face
 when it sings oh beauty.
 By not providing explanations.
 By just enough.
 By totally insufficient.
 By drinking up the shadow of tomorrow.⁸

In this poem Muñoz introduces “poetry” as a distinctive personality with a unique temperament and an extraordinary life of its own (line 12). As such, it knows exactly what it is and what it does (lines 1, 7, 9, 13, 15, 20-22). Possessing unparalleled self-knowledge, “poetry” exhibits a boundless potential, supremacy and self-will (4, 5, 6, 10-11, 16-18, 19). The poem thus features a self-assured leading “character,” first identified in the title. This personage displays an impressive linguistic identity, an inviting conversational style, diverse behavioral patterns and motives, and an uncanny capacity to understand not only its primary functions but also its own enchanting qualities. The poem allows the traits of its central *persona* to unfold by establishing from the outset its unique association with another fellow “character,” an “impersonal you” (“tú” 1). The latter experiences poetry’s effects (1-9) and, at times, appears to be troubled by these (3, 4, 5, 6-8, 14). Yet the “impersonal you” cannot resist the alluring central personality (9) and its appealing self-expression (10-11, 13-14, 16-18). This dramatic staging is smart and original, but what is most exciting and inviting about this poem is the engaging exchange occurring between “poetry” and “you,” two syntactically silent characters masterfully presented by means of ellipsis. Here the poet utilizes and exploits expressivity by means of syntactic and rhetorical omission.

The refined and condensed nature of Muñoz’s “Dejar la poesía” is due in large part to the clarity of expression achieved by means of ellipsis. Its use readily illustrates the minimalist efficacy of this poet’s style as well as the conceptual concision of his poetry. Two complimentary summaries concerning ellipsis ground and inform the present study. One concerns its application in Spanish syntax and the other its use in poetry. In “Empty categories and ellipsis” Josep María Brucart explains: “A rather striking and cross-

linguistically prominent property of natural language is the presence of phonetically unrealized elements in a sentence, necessary for its correct interpretation. This general phenomenon falls under the heading of ellipsis (579).” *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* makes clear:

In ellipsis the thought is complete; it is only that a word or words ordinarily called for in the full construction but not strictly necessary are omitted (since obvious). This obviousness which makes the omission possible is therefore much facilitated by the use of parallelism of syntactic members in the construction, which explains the importance of such parallelism for achieving that effect of compression. (326)

In “Dejar la poesía” the poem’s central “character,” “poetry,” is introduced in the title. Curiously, this immediate, direct, introductory and phonetically realized naming does not occur elsewhere in the poem. Rather, as the poem develops, the presence of “poetry” makes itself known by means of its unmistakable absence. Ellipsis directly figures into this poem at the outset: “Por restar mientras que tú sumas” (1) ‘By subtracting while you add.’ The identity of the “empty subject” of the stated infinitive “restar” in line one is derived from the closest preceding noun, in this case “la poesía,” found in the title. It is “the presence” of such a “phonetically unrealized” element in line one that offers the first indication of the prevalent role syntactic omission will play in this poem.⁹ “Poetry” will occupy the syntactically “empty subject” position for nine different infinitives in the poem: “restar” (1), “llenar” (2), “llevar” (3), “castigar” (4), “decir” (5), “preferir” (6), “hablar” (13), “dar” (19) and “beberse” (22). In each case the vacant subject of the infinitive is the pronominal PRO, that is “poesía.”¹⁰ Additionally, in each case the preposition *por*, expressing cause, introduces the parallel adverbial phrases in the lines in which these infinitives occur. It is within this pattern that the poet then constructs the poem, as evident in the opening and closing lines that serve as the syntactic framework in which the conversation will take place in “Dejar la poesía” (1 and 22).

From the outset Muñoz presents “poetry” by foregrounding its absence (1). The first five introductory lines function as the dramatic

exposition revealing the fundamental role “poetry” will play in the overall staging of the dialogue taking place among the poem’s distinctive *dramatis personae*. This introduction also highlights the key role ellipsis is to play in the presentation of “Dejar la poesía.” The opening lines repeatedly call attention to establishing the primacy of the poem’s central character by featuring the syntax of ellipsis. The obvious omission of “poetry” in this opening scene masterfully underscores its captivating syntactic and figurative presence (1-5). This initial scene also foregrounds the immediacy of Muñoz’s discourse. Here the poet quickly closes any distance between text and reader by establishing the underlying processes of omission and recovery essential to this poem. In Spanish, ellipsis is recoverable from the syntax and elision is recoverable from the content (Brucart, *La elisión sintáctica española* 7 ‘Syntactic Elision in Spanish’). The poem’s opening lines immediately require the syntactic recovery of “poetry” in order to be understood. The presence/absence of “poetry” as the “empty subject” of additional parallel syntactic constructions introduced by *por* followed by the infinitive is reinforced as the poem advances and other scenes unfold (6, 13, 19, 22). Syntactic omission thus establishes the important cognitive course of action the reader of this poem must assume in processing empty contents. It is in this way that “Dejar la poesía” further exemplifies another fundamental aspect of Spain’s recent poetry. In Sánchez-Mesa’s view the contemporary poet’s own heightened awareness of language calls for a “competent reader” that readily assumes a prominent role in “comprehending and participating in poetic communication” (39).

Expressively, “poetry” also elliptically presents itself in other syntactical positions in the poem. For example, it is the referent of the third person singular possessive *su* (“su dolor” 7 ‘its pain,’ “su imán” 9 ‘its magnetism,’ “su vida” 12 ‘its life,’ and “su orgullo” 15, ‘its pride’). It functions as the “empty subject” of four different third person singular finite verbs (*produce* 10 ‘creating,’ *finge* 11 ‘pretending,’ *mira* 16 ‘stares,’ and *canta* 18, ‘sings’). It further manifests itself as the empty subject of two different elided infinitives: *tener* (“Por su imán descabellado” 9 ‘By its unbridled magnetism,’ “Por su vida paralela” 12 ‘By its parallel life,’ “Por su orgullo de bestia descarriada” 15 ‘By its silly pride’) and *ser* (“Por suficiente” 20 ‘By just enough,’ “Por insuficiente” 21 ‘By totally insufficient’). As the

poem draws to a close “poetry,” as the silent subject of the infinitive “beber,” is also the referent of the telic pronoun *se* (“Por beberse la sombra de mañana” 22 ‘By drinking up the shadow of tomorrow’).

The process of omission, however, begins in the poem’s title. Here another significant yet silent personage is introduced as the elided quasi-impersonal subject of the infinitive *dejar*. Because this infinitive appears in absolute and initial position, it does not depend on a principal verb or verb phrase preceding it. Both blank space on the printed page as well as Spanish syntax signal as much. However, what is most intriguing is that because there is no plausible governing subject for this infinitive it can be understood in Spanish to have an arbitrary pronominal subject *PRO_{arb}*, corresponding in general to “whoever”—whoever is to leave poetry.¹¹ This evident and immediate use of an elided empty infinitival subject is significant. As a silent character in this poem its presence also is signaled by its absence. Thus, from the very beginning Muñoz launches the play and interplay of the process of creative omission crucial to this poem. Furthermore, the obvious ambiguity of this silent subject allows the poem’s most prominent personality, poetry, to gain importance and perform the lead role.

“Dejar la poesía” also features another important syntactically silent “character,” an ambiguous *pro-tú*, easily interpreted as the “impersonal you,” that converses with “poetry” and in so doing witnesses various modes of being exhibited by the latter.¹² The syntactic presence of *pro-tú* is obvious in the poem’s first line where it performs a specific action: *tú sumas* (1, ‘you add’). As the poem develops, this “character” soon will experience the effects of “poetry.” We shall learn that it repeatedly is at once drawn to this attractive personality (2, 8, 9, 10-11, 16-18, 22) but, at the same time, also considers abandoning it because of this addictive appeal (3, 5, 13-14). Syntactically, during the course of the poem’s developing conversation, the “impersonal you” functions as the elided subject, in Brucart’s sense, of various finite verbs (*sabes* 3 ‘know,’ *estás* 5 ‘are,’ *cargues* 6 ‘accept the burden,’ *te sientes* 8 ‘experience,’ *quieres* 14 ‘want’), demonstrates possessive value (“Por llenarte de pájaros la mesa” 2 ‘By filling your table with birds’), functions as the indirect object (*decirte* 5 ‘telling you,’ *hablarte* 13 ‘speaking to you’), is manifested as the direct object (*castigarte* 4 ‘punishing you’), and,

in only one instance, is featured as the empty subject PRO-tú of an infinitive (*sin hablar* 4 ‘without speaking’).

The poem begins by establishing a contrast between its two main characters. Here “poetry” performs one action “while” “you” perform another in opposition: “Por restar mientras que tú sumas” (1) ‘By subtracting while you add.’ Later, in the closing lines, “poetry” is characterized as being at one and the same time “sufficient” (20) and yet “insufficient” (21) where both descriptions further enhance the opening dichotomy. As the poem unfolds “poetry” exhibits a number of singular and self-contained powers (6-8, 10-11, 16-18, 22) and does not hesitate to exercise its authority and control (4, 13-14). At times the “impersonal you” benefits as the metaphoric “llenarte de pájaros la mesa” ‘by filling your table with birds’ (2) reveals. However, at other times “poetry” exerts its unswerving supremacy because it, unlike “you,” is fearless in boldly facing existential human enigmas, be they doubt (3), loneliness (5), anguish (6-8), death (16-18) or temporality (22).

The primacy of “poetry” is especially evident in one particular instance in the poem: “Porque mira a la muerte / con el rabo del ojo / cuando canta oh belleza” (16-18) ‘Because it stares death / in the face / when it sings oh beauty.’ Here the adverbial conjunction *porque* introduces a causal subordinate clause. The poet breaks the predominant parallelism of the syntactic construction of *por* + infinitive and its rhetorically cadenced effects evident in fourteen of the poem’s twenty-two lines. In this important scene, showcasing the poem’s leading “character” in one of its most captivating modes of being, “poetry” is self-assured especially when openly manifesting various facets of its complex linguistic identity. By resourcefully making use of the potential of its own imaginative self-expression, “poetry” does not hesitate to face perplexing existential matters with metaphoric intensity. Here Muñoz not only demonstrates condensed linguistic expression characteristic of his newest poetry but also, and above all, distills from this conversation the essential nature of his subject.

The eloquence of the poem’s leading personage is contrasted with the silence of the impersonal you in one telling point in the poem’s conversation where “poetry” proves verbal dominance: “Por castigarte sin hablar” (4) ‘By punishing you without speaking.’ This

marks the only moment in the poem when the PRO-tú occupies the empty subject position of an infinitive, in this case *hablar*. The syntax of ellipsis emphasizes the resulting silence experienced by the “impersonal you” when reprimanded by “poetry.”¹³ “Poetry,” in this instance, as well as in three other significant moments in the poem’s conversation, continues to maintain the advantage by effectively articulating its intention (“Por decirte: estás solo” [5] ‘By telling you: you are alone’), addictive nature (“Por hablarte / cuando quieres dormir” [13-14] ‘By speaking to you / when you want to sleep’) and unwavering belief in its discourse (“Por no dar explicaciones” [19] ‘By not providing explanations’).

Verbally confident, “poetry” communicates its charm (9), enjoys leading its own life (12) and proudly displays its accomplishments (15). These inherent qualities make possible its unique and creative self-expression. Possessing remarkable linguistic acuity, “poetry” does not hesitate to establish and exhibit its figurative identity. Consciously cognizant of the potential of its verbal expressivity, “poetry” relies and reflects on past manifestations of “su dolor de siglos” ‘its centuries of pain’ and, at the same time, both experiences and relishes its own imaginative discourse when fully consuming the present moment: “Por beberse la sombra de mañana” (22) ‘By drinking up the shadow of tomorrow.’ By expressing its enticing metaphoric possibilities, “poetry” readily displays its magnetism (9). Understood in this way, “poetry,” itself personified, delivers a superb performance: “Por la sed que produce / cuando finge ser agua” (10-11) ‘By creating thirst / when pretending to be water.’ Conversant with its own unbound linguistic potential and attentive to its universal appeal, “poetry” will tantalize “anyone”—you, me, readers, the poet, whomever. The evident omission in these lines (10-11) of the indirect object of the Spanish verb *produce*, together with the figurative unsatisfied longing experienced and known by “anyone” captivated by poetry’s own enchanting and imaginative idiom, underscore that the poem’s “impersonal you” is not alone. “Dejar la poesía” convincingly makes clear that due to the charming personality of its lead personage, “poetry” always is capable of captivating “anyone” irresistibly drawn to it even when it does not provide explanations: “Por no dar explicaciones” (19). Once again, the empty indirect object for the verb *dar* in line nineteen not only

echoes but also serves to reinforce the presence of the indefinite “anyone” encountered earlier (10) and here, for a second time, portrayed in *absentia*. Self-assured (1, 4), self-reflective (9, 12, 15) and self-contained (19), the nature of “poetry” is such that it derives complete satisfaction when manifesting its metaphoric mastery and aesthetic appeal: “Por beberse la sombra de mañana” (22) ‘By drinking up the shadow of tomorrow.’

In “Dejar la poesía” Muñoz investigates poetic discourse by presenting an enlightening performance featuring two distinct *dramatis personae* engaged in a lively conversation. The poem reveals the addictive nature of one character, “poetry,” along with a series of persistent circumstances enveloping the other character, the “impersonal you,” caught in a struggle to abandon an irresistible habit.¹⁴ Conscious self-expression assumes a significant role when the poet spotlights the self-referential linguistic identity of both personalities. What is most innovative in this poem is the way in which Muñoz enriches the on-going discussion concerning the language of poetry by attentively allowing condensed poetic expression to demonstrate its provocative and unbound potential.¹⁵ “Special awareness of language” (Sánchez-Mesa 41) is fundamental to this poem and the collection it uniquely represents. It also is critical to understanding the incisive linguistic identity of this poet and his extraordinary ability to exploit syntactic and poetic ellipses.¹⁶ In this way “Dejar la poesía” also serves as an illustrative example of another one of the most distinguishing features characterizing the newest poetry emerging in Spain today—“a syntax that searches for new possibilities” (Sánchez-Mesa 39). At the crucial intersection of the first and second decades of the new twenty-first century, Luis Muñoz and his work will continue to shape and distinguish contemporary Spanish poetry.

Notes

1 “Entrevista: Francisco Brines XIX Premio Reina Sofía de Poesía: ‘Los que leen poesía la necesitan como drogadictos’” ‘Interview: Francisco Brines XIX Annual Reina Sofía Poetry Prize: Those who read poetry need it like drug addicts.’ Elsa Fernández-Santos. Madrid, April 29, 2010. *El País.com*. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

2 Page numbers for the poetry provided in the text refer to the 2006 Tusquets publication of *Querido silencio*.

3 Luis Muñoz's 2005 *Limpiar pescado: Poesía reunida* contains a few unedited poems, some recent and others pertaining to his personal notebooks, as well as a few works published in magazines. In his "Note to the Edition," he indicates that he "corrected the imperfections" in some of the poems from *Manzanas amarillas* and also elected not to include others previously published as part of this collection (19).

4 "Transition" also is featured on the poet's website but not translated to English.

5 Muñoz responded to the following: "Trata de enhebrar, en unas pocas líneas, qué significan para ti tradición, lengua e identidad" (405) 'Try to thread together, in a few lines, what tradition, language and identity mean to you.' Muñoz indicates in "Transition" that as a poet he is indebted to Juan Ramón Jiménez, Luis Cernuda, Rafael Alberti, Charles Baudelaire and Giuseppe Ungaretti (9-16). In response to a question posed in Luis Antonio de Villena's *10 menos 30*, Muñoz explains his interest in "French symbolist poets" such as Tristan Corbière, Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine, as well as the modern "hermetic" Italian poets Ungaretti, Eugenio Montale and Salvatore Quasimodo (119).

6 Although published in 2005, this anthology includes two unedited poems that later would appear in *Querido silencio* (139-40).

7 As of the writing of this article, this poem also introduces Muñoz's website. There, however, at the present time, the poem includes a line six, "Porque le rindes cuentas" 'Because you are accountable to it,' that does not appear in the definitive version of the poem published by Tusquets in *Querido silencio* (2006). This was confirmed by the poet in his email to me of January 14, 2011 and in additional conversations I had with the poet in Madrid in May, 2011 when he and I discussed this line. "Dejar la poesía" also is included in Sánchez-Mesa's *Cambio del siglo* (420) and Villena's 2010 *La inteligencia y el hacha* (173).

8 Muñoz's website also presents an English translation of this poem. Based on my study, my own translation differs in many respects but coincides for lines sixteen and seventeen. The website translation for lines twenty and twenty-one was useful in that it helps to preserve the contextual elision of the verb "ser" 'to be' as discussed in my study.

9 Two works assisted me in my study, Josep María Brucart's "Empty categories and ellipsis" and his *La elision sintáctica en español*. I thank my colleague Professor Antxon Olarrea for bringing to my attention Brucart's fundamental work on ellipsis in Spanish syntax. My analysis of "Dejar la poesía" greatly

benefitted from my discussions with Professor Olarrea. In particular, I wish to acknowledge his insightful explanations concerning “empty subjects,” the use of PRO and *PRO_{arb}*, empty indirect objects and also the use of the “impersonal you” in Spanish syntax.

10 See Brucart “Empty categories and ellipsis” and, in particular, his discussion of “Empty (pro)nominal categories” (579-90). I do not wish to disrupt the tempo of my article by providing English translations of singular words and brief phrases that I make use of while interpreting the dramatic interplay between the two syntactically silent subjects in Muñoz’s “Dejar la poesía.” I offer a modern linguistic analysis of this poem by emphasizing this poet’s mastery of ellipsis as it is used in Spanish. In modern Spanish theoretical syntax it is imperative that ellipsis not be examined in isolation, but rather in the context in which it is used. With this in mind, I offer a few translations in the endnotes. Here, for example, when citing the nine different infinitives where “poetry” occupies the syntactically “empty subject” the translation yields ‘subtracting,’ ‘filling,’ ‘taking,’ ‘punishing,’ ‘telling,’ ‘preferring,’ ‘speaking,’ ‘providing,’ and ‘drinking up.’

11 I especially appreciate Professor Olarrea’s guidance on the use of the impersonal *PRO_{arbitrario}* in modern Spanish syntax and his clear-cut example: “Fumar es malo para la salud” ‘Smoking is bad for your health.’ *Limpiar pescado*: *Poesía reunida*, Muñoz’s title for his collected works, also exhibits an infinitive in absolute initial position without a clear syntactic referent. Here, too, the vacant pronominal subject could be considered as the quasi-impersonal *PRO_{arb}* corresponding in general to “whoever”—whoever is to clean fish. See “Transition” for Muñoz’s explanation of this curious title (7-8). Additionally, in perusing all of Muñoz’s published collected poetry to date, only “Dejar la poesía” features an initial absolute infinitive with a vacant pronominal subject in the title of a poem.

12 One might be tempted to argue that the “you” is the reader, should the reader wish to identify with what he or she might assume to be her/his textual counterpart, or even the author, should the reader imagine that the poet might be engaged in a conversation with himself. However, the salient and impersonal nature of the second person singular “you” must be considered. Ambiguity and impersonalization already have been posited as distinguishing aspects of the understood *Pro_{arb}* subject of the poem’s lead infinitive of the title. It thus is not surprising that another and different impersonal pronoun *pro-tú* also has a key role.

13 This line could be misunderstood, thus, I furnish here a concise syntactic summation: “Por (PRO-poesía) castigarte (te=tú) sin (PRO-tú) hablar.” In Spanish “castigar” ‘to punish’ is an object control verb. The infinitival complement “hablar” ‘speaking’ complement to the preposition “sin” ‘without’

is controlled by the direct object “te=tú” of the main non-finite verb “castigarte.” In this way, Spanish syntax itself brings to light and further reinforces the initial conflict established in the opening line between the poem’s two central characters. Also noteworthy in line four is the effect on the “impersonal you,” to whom the reprimand of the lead character “poetry” is directed. As mentioned earlier, in line four we encounter the singular instance in this poem where the PRO-tú fills the empty subject position of an infinitive, in this case “hablar.” Nonetheless, even when filling the vacant subject position the “impersonal you” continues to experience “poetry’s” dominant self-expression. One further contrast in line four is the transitive use of “castigar” and the intransitive use of “hablar.”

14 As a literary critic I find that I am in an interesting position when approaching “Dejar la poesía.” At the outset, the poem makes clear the lead character’s principal rule of engagement: “Por restar mientras que tú sumas” ‘By subtracting while you add.’ It also makes clear in the title that “whoever” approaches this poem must consider leaving, abandoning “poetry.” The ensuing conversation, as demonstrated in my study, manifests poetry’s addictive nature and magnetic qualities. Thus, if I should choose to identify with the poem’s “impersonal you” I also must accept the role interpretive additions have and the superior function of “poetry” (l. 1). Just the same, poetry is my addiction.

15 It is well known that during the 1980s and 1990s ample discussions and publications brought to the fore a number of different tendencies in Spanish poetry in these decades. See Mainer’s objective review of these debates (34-37). Luis Muñoz explains in “Transition” that his approach to poetry does not correspond to the “confrontational” views “circulated” in Spain in the aforementioned decades (11) and Mainer reiterates this point (36).

16 Muñoz’s linguistic awareness and the vitality of his expression point to why his poetry often has been included in significant Spanish anthologies at the turn of the century. I mention here two recent collections informing the present study: Sánchez-Mesa’s 2007 *Cambio de siglo* and Morales Barba’s 2006 *Última poesía*. Three other anthologies where Muñoz’s poetry appears also deserve recognition: Luis Antonio de Villena’s 2003 *La lógica de Orfeo (Antología)*, his 1997 *10 menos 30* and his 2010 *La inteligencia*. Finally, see Ángel Luis Prieto de Paula’s overview of the poetry anthologies published during the temporal intersection in Spain discussed here.

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