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TREMBLING IN THE HOUSE OF TIME: SELF-TRANSLATION AND THE INTERLIMINAL IN JUAN GELMAN'S *DIBAXU*

Abstract

Confronting exile and loss is a key element in the work of Argentine poet Juan Gelman (1930–2014). In the 1994 Ladino and Spanish collection *dibaxu*, the bilingual format of the book prompts a linguistic vacillation between languages, enabling the creation of an interliminal space away from the control of the oppressive military regime of the Argentine Dirty War (1974–1983). By creating an interaction between the archaic Jewish language of exile and a non-descript contemporary Spanish to place an emphasis on the space between languages, the speaker establishes a new locus where he can be reunited with his beloved, who represents those who were lost in the Dirty War as well as the poet's homeland of Argentina.

Keywords: Ladino ♦ self-translation ♦ Juan Gelman ♦ language ♦ poetry ♦ Dirty War

In 1994, the renowned Argentine poet Juan Gelman published his most experimental book, *dibaxu*, a bilingual Spanish and Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish, collection of twenty-nine poems. Gelman wrote these poems in exile, having suffered unspeakably as his son, daughter-in-law, and many close friends were kidnapped and murdered by the ruling military regime during the Argentine Dirty War. Rather than fixating on anger and devastation, this collection highlights the creation of a new space free from the control of the oppressive dictatorship. This new space emerges from the linguistic trembling that occurs as the archaic language of Ladino is paired with contemporary Spanish on the page, with the interaction of languages establishing the voice of enunciation in the interliminal space between languages. I argue that Gelman uses the process of self-translation and the bilingual format to highlight the interliminal, which in turn allows for this space between languages to become a reified locus of contact.¹ As a collection of tender love poems, *dibaxu* employs the linguistic trembling that arises as the languages interact with each other to allow the interliminal to become a site of reunification with the speaker's beloved, who represents not only those lost in the Dirty War, but also the lost homeland of Argentina.

Although a writer of Ashkenazi origins, Gelman never explicitly acknowledged his Jewishness before he adopted the diasporic tongue of Ladino to articulate his deterritorialization from his homeland and the separation from his loved ones. Gelman chooses to adopt Ladino as a means of expressing his exile; as a tongue marginal to other Jewish languages that only exists in exile, Gelman marginalizes himself in order to use Ladino to create a new narrative away from the oppression of the ruling military junta of the Dirty War, which desperately sought to control the Spanish language in order to, in turn, control the official narrative (Balbuena 2009). Balbuena (2016) contends that “to write his exile and express his deterritorialized, decentered identity, Gelman abandons his Castellano [Spanish] and instead writes in a minor language, born of an experience of marginalization and exclusion, and without a center of power” (156). I argue that while Gelman's adoption of Ladino is a self-marginalization that places him outside the sphere of influence of the military

dictatorship, he doesn't fully abandon his native tongue. Instead, the bilingual format of *dibaxu* is central to the collection, as the modern Spanish interacts with the anachronistic Ladino to draw attention to the interliminal space, creating the new space of reunion.

By choosing a marginal language to interact with modern Spanish, Gelman directly contrasts the military junta's appropriation of language as an extension of their power and control:

Brutal, sadistic, and rapacious, the whole regime was intensely verbal. From the moment of the coup, there was a constant torrent of speeches, proclamations, and interviews [...] With diabolical skill, the regime used language to: (1) shroud in mystery its true actions and intentions, (2) say the opposite of what it meant, (3) inspire trust, both at home and abroad, (4) instill guilt, especially in mothers, to seal their complicity, and (5) sow paralyzing terror and confusion. (Feitlowitz 1998: 20)

One of the primary strategies that the Argentine dictatorship employed to foment terror was that of forced disappearances, making “the term ‘disappear’ a sinister transitive verb” (Wright 2007: 108). The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights described the act of disappearing victims as “a true form of torture for the victim’s family and friends, because of the uncertainty they experience as to the fate of the victim and because they feel powerless to provide legal, moral, and material assistance” (ibid). One mother of a disappeared victim described the heartbreak in this way: “Disappearance is inexplicable. You are left with a void that is never filled” (ibid). In effect, the disappeared person, as an absence that is always present, becomes an empty space where once there was a person. In an attempt to recover that which was stolen from him and to combat this prolonged horror, Gelman takes a counter-approach by using the interaction of Ladino and Spanish to create a space that didn't exist before, inviting the beloved to join him there.

The verb pair from the opening line of the third poem of Gelman's collection highlights the semantic distance between the languages: “*l'amaniana arrelumbra a lus páxarus // la mañana hace brillar a los pájaros*” (“the morning makes the birds shine”). Commenting on Gelman's choice to not use the modern Spanish, which more visually and sonically approximates the Ladino verb, Balbuena (2016) explains that “in this specific example, Ladino offers two possible meanings (with a transitive and an intransitive verb) whereas Spanish is crystallized around one meaning. While *relumbrar* in Spanish means ‘to shine brightly,’ *arrelumbrar* may mean *briyar*, which is *lucir* in Spanish, or ‘to sparkle, shine,’ as well as *asender*, translated as *alumbrar*, ‘illuminate,’ in Spanish” (150). In the end, Gelman forgoes the Spanish verb that most resembles the Ladino, choosing another verb phrase to highlight its transitive quality:

“In this poem, the birds don’t shine; rather, the morning makes them shine—in agrammatical terms, ‘it shines them’” (ibid).

By choosing transitivity over proximity, Gelman transforms the Spanish verb *relumbrar*—evoked in the mind of the predominately Spanish-speaking audience by the Ladino *arrelumbrar*—from intransitive to a transitive. In this way, the poet speaks out against the horrors of the Dirty War by inverting the military regime’s use of language as a tool of oppression, demonstrated by their conversion of *desaparecer* [to disappear] into a transitive verb designed to both strike fear into the hearts of their political enemies and destroy any hope. Counteracting the asphyxiating darkness of the military ruler’s official language, *arrelumbrar* is at its core a word of light and optimism. In this case, it connects the morning, a time of hope and possibility with birds, a symbol of poetry throughout Gelman’s work, as well as the means by which the speaker is connected to his beloved in this collection. By evoking *relumbrar*, and then converting it into a transitive verb, the speaker demonstrates the impact that hope and brightness can exert on his beloved.

In addition to depicting the illumination that is possible through language and hope, this poem reinforces the interliminal, the space between languages which Gelman seeks to create as a site of reunification with his beloved. For Gelman, this new space emerges through the poetry itself as the languages interact and tremble back and forth, coming to rest somewhere between each other. The second line of the poem unequivocally establishes the new space, following the illumination of the birds with the concession that the morning “*sta aviarta/ teni frescura // está abierta / tiene frescura*” (“it is open / it has a newness”). Thus, the morning, conventionally conceived as a period of time, is endowed with a physicality, a locus from where it can affect the birds, and in turn reach out and touch the speaker’s beloved. I argue that this interliminal space is central to Gelman’s mission to create a space of reunification away from the influence and power of the perpetrators of the Dirty War, a space enabled by the trembling between languages that reifies the gap between languages into a site for amorous reunion.

The central theme of *dibaxu* is the concept of trembling, implying a state of movement, or a vacillation to and fro. The speaker who uses Ladino in exile trembles with desire as he yearns for his native tongue. The reader shifts constantly between the Ladino and Castellano versions of each poem. The words that become objects, and vice-versa, shudder as they change forms. And the language itself shakes as it travels through time from the archaic form of Ladino, evolving into contemporary Spanish. Thus, there is both lateral trembling as the poetry

collection flows between the two languages and the reader is invited to experience them simultaneously, and vertical trembling as well, as the languages reach backwards in time. The metaphor of trembling as both a synchronic and a diachronic approach to language and poetry is crucial for Gelman; it is through this trembling that the speaker, addressee, and the reader are all able to overcome the pains of loss, as the linguistic and temporal vacillations help to create a new space of reunification from which to begin to repair the devastation of deterritorialization.

Edward Said argues that while phenomena of exile and diaspora have altered cultures for millennia, it is a problem especially germane to our modern world: “The difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age—with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers—is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration” (2000b: 174). In addition to the increased frequency of deterritorialization inflicted in a globalized world, the interconnectedness of postmodernity itself aggravates the suffering of the exile as “living with the many reminders that [one is] in exile, that home is not in fact so far away, and that the normal traffic of everyday contemporary life keeps [the exile] in constant but tantalizing and unfulfilled touch with the old place” (Said 2000a: 370). It is the “tantalizing and unfulfilled” closeness of that left-behind that sparks the trembling Gelman employs to mitigate the impact of deterritorialization. Gelman’s poetry of exile is both an intensely personal view of his own suffering and his attempts to rise above it, as well as a model by which modern exiles can reclaim the identity and right to self-determination that have been stripped from them by oppressive regimes.

In the earlier exilic collection *Bajo la lluvia ajena*, Gelman articulates the damage inflicted by exile: “No debiera arrancarse a la gente de su tierra o país, no a la fuerza. La gente queda dolorida, la tierra queda dolorida” (Gelman 2012: 629) (“People should not be ripped away from their land or country, not by force. The people are left in pain, the land is left in pain”, translations mine). The scars of displacement are felt as much by the vacated land as they are by the exile (Quintana 2004: 8), and for Gelman, the healing process for both is through the new space created by the trembling of language and time.

The poet lays out his vision for the function of the tremor in the final sentence of the introduction to *dibaxu*: “A quien ruego que los lea en voz alta en un castellano y en el otro para escuchar, tal vez, entre los dos sonidos, algo del tiempo que tiembla y que nos da pasado desde el Cid” (Gelman 1994: 5) (“I implore the readers to read out loud in Spanish and in the

other to hear, possibly, between the two sounds, something that trembles in time and opens the past to us from El Cid”). His plea highlights both the lateral and vertical aspects of the language tremor, describing how they join together to carry all involved to a new place; the synchronic meaning created “between the two sounds” as the languages are read out loud together and the diachronic language change which “trembles in time.” This multi-dimensional trembling allows the reader to join the poetic voice and his beloved in a new space, before the contemporary human rights crisis that exiled the poet, before the expulsion of the Jewish people that led to the creation of Ladino as a diasporic language, to the time of El Cid, a historical-cultural anchor point for both languages of *dibaxu*.

The trembling felt throughout the collection parallels the poet’s perspective on the act of writing poetry itself, whereby a dialogue across time and texts forms the foundation of poetic meaning. Describing the genesis of *dibaxu* (see meaning below), Gelman explains that the Ladino poetry segues with his earlier exilic collections *Citas* and *Comentarios*, to which he adds that these earlier books “dialogan con el castellano del siglo XVI” (ibid) (“dialogue with the Spanish of the sixteenth century”). Trembling as dialogue showcases both the lateral and vertical vacillation discussed previously. In terms of side-to-side movement, Mercado argues that Gelman “utiliza el sefardí y el castellano moderno para proponer un diálogo en el fluir de la lengua a través del acto de la traducción” (Mercado 2008: 57) (“uses the Sephardic and modern Spanish to establish a dialogue by the means of the fluidity of language, through the act of translation”). Therefore, translation is the catalyst that makes a synchronic interaction between languages possible. Conversely, dialogue surfaces as vertical trembling through the poetic process itself, as the poet builds upon the poetic traditions of those that have preceded him. In fact, all poetry is predicated on a dialogue with the past, creating an intertextual web of tradition as poets respond to and build upon previous generations’ work (Guzmán 2013: 110). Trembling consequently acts as a metaphor for poetic composition in the case of *dibaxu*, as the lateral movement arises through translation and the vertical movement manifests itself through the intertextual interaction with other historical poetic conventions. As time trembles “and opens the past to us from El Cid,” (Gelman 1994: 5) becoming poetry creation itself, it is this poetry-as-trembling that allows the speaker to craft a space of union with his loved ones, safe from the ravages of war and time. The multi-dimensional trembling that transports the reader to El Cid is significant in that the medieval epic is not only a paragon of Spanish language and culture, it also establishes the pattern to overcome forced exile in order to regain lost honor, a model which Gelman employs in his quest for his loved ones.

In a 1988 interview, years after the conclusion of the Dirty War, but before he was allowed to return to Argentina, Gelman describes the emotional extremes sparked by exile:

[A]hora tengo emociones encontradas, paso de la alegría a la pena con sorprendente rapidez y, a mis años, ya no se debiera. A veces me acuerdo de ese soneto de Petrarca, es un fragmento de amor, donde él navega, describe las contradicciones del amor y en el último verso dice: ‘tiemblo en verano y ardo en invierno’. Acá estamos en verano y he temblado más de una vez. (Bocanera 1999: 48–49)

(Now I have mixed emotions, I pass from joy to sorrow with surprising speed, and one should not do that at my age. Sometimes I am reminded of the Petrarchan sonnet, one of his fragments of love, where he is sailing and he describes the contradictions of love. In the last line he says ‘I tremble in summer and burn in winter’. Here we’re in summer and I’ve trembled more than once.)

These drastic emotional fluctuations stem directly from the battering waves of memory that flood the exile, as distance from the beloved intensifies the feelings of love, but also of loss. The oscillations between fever and cold chills that a lovesick person experiences is echoed in the diasporic experience, as the exile vacillates between the happiness stirred by memories of the past and the bitterness of the separation of the present. As an exilic language, this emotional trembling is an inherent quality of Ladino heritage. In a later interview, Gelman illuminates his use of Ladino as he states “creo que esta lengua tiene la particularidad de dar cuenta del placer y del dolor que causa el amor” (Montanaro and Ture 1998: 147) (“I think that this language has the distinctive feature of bringing to mind the pleasure and pain caused by love”). Ladino itself then is an extension of the trembling felt throughout *dibaxu* as it encapsulates the contradictory highs and lows of love for both lost ones and the homeland. The speaker’s use of Ladino is a means by which he can articulate his feelings without forsaking the conflicting nuances of his love, and this vacillation allows him to conquer the loss and separation forced upon him.

The various examples of trembling in *dibaxu* demonstrate this range of emotions experienced by the speaker. Fabry points out that by considering both the noun *temblor* and the verb *temblar*, the notion of trembling is one of the most ubiquitous themes throughout the work (2008: 234). Despite the frequency of appearance, each use draws attention to the emotional extremes the speaker undergoes in exile as he crafts the new space to reencounter his lost love. In Poem I, “*il batideru di mis bezus/el temblor de mis labios*” (“trembling of my lips”) and the “*yave/ timblandu / llave/ temblando*” (“trembling key”) of poem XX both seem to depict the excitement felt at the thought of amorous reunification. These contrast with poem II

where “*il páxaru qui pasara es malu // el pájaro que pasó es malo*” (“the bird that passed by is bad”) because it leaves the poetic voice “*timblandu / temblando*” (“trembling”), showing the pain and fear that speaker experiences as well as the elation of love. In poem VII, “*la calor qui destruyi al pinser / el calor que destruye al pensar*” (“the heat that destroys upon thinking”) prefaces “*la luz timbla / in tus bezus // la luz tiembla / en tus besos*” (“the light which trembles in your kisses”), articulating Gelman’s interpretation of Petrarch and the vagaries of love as the light shivers in the burning heat, illustrating the extent of the lover’s sufferings, both through the process of loving and in the separation of exile. In certain examples, trembling appears to self-reflexively highlight the movement itself, such as in poem XVI where the speaker twice states that he hears “*il batideru/ di tu saia nil vienti // el temblor/ de tu saya en el viento/*” (“the trembling of your dress in the wind”). The variety of ways that trembling is incorporated into the work reinforces the complex emotions that the speaker undergoes in exile and contributes to his longing for a new space for love’s reencounter.

Vacillation within a single language is also present on the odd-numbered pages, as the Spanish versions demonstrate linguistic movement, which in turn serves to connect the two languages. Gelman’s use of Ladino is a specific attempt to portray his sufferings while in exile, as well as a “way of rejecting a limited and oppressive national identity—that of an Argentina controlled by a military dictatorship” (Balbuena 2009: 296). In relation to the notion of casting off the language of the oppressors, Gelman also modifies his Spanish in order to place it in a space within his control, removed from the influence of the perpetrators of the Dirty War. Despite widely using the informal, second-person address of *voseo* typical of Argentine Spanish in his other poetry, including his other works written in exile², the Spanish versions of *dibaxu* avoid all *voseo* conjugations. In fact, the word *vos* only appears in Spanish in poems IX and XVII, and then only as a prepositional pronoun. This limited use of *voseo* is a way of showing the internal movement that occurs within Spanish as the speaker reminds the reader that he indeed speaks a Buenos Aires geolect of Spanish, but chooses not to fully engage with it as an act of resistance.

Another way to view the conspicuous lack of *voseo* in the Spanish version is to consider it superfluous due to the presence of Ladino, which has also preserved *voseo* across the centuries and diverse locations of the diaspora. Gelman uses Ladino to both reject the actions of the Dirty War, as well as express love for his native tongue and country. Chirinos states that “el retorno al ‘voseo’ en la queja amorosa supone hermanar el lenguaje de los judeoespañoles expulsados con el lenguaje popular de los argentinos” (2002: 42) (“the return of the ‘voseo’ in the loving groan [of the poetry] implies a linkage between the language of

the expelled Judeo-Spanish and the popular language of the Argentines”). The connection that the *voseo* establishes between Ladino and the Spanish of the Río de la Plata allows the speaker to link the language of exile and the mother tongue on the poet’s terms, and not those established by the government by engaging in a process of conscious self-marginalization. In this way, Gelman can still lovingly employ the *voseo* with which he was raised, without succumbing to the need to use the same language used by the oppressive Videla regime.

The redundancy of *voseo* in Spanish due to the Ladino version prompts the question of the presence of the Spanish at all. Why include the Spanish when the Ladino is readily accessible for Spanish speakers? Although the Spanish side can be viewed as a gateway to access the Ladino, I argue that the inclusion of Spanish is more than merely a gloss for a Spanish-speaking audience; the poet has chosen Ladino for its exilic quality in order to create a new space within his control. Likewise, Spanish also has characteristics necessary for establishing a space of safety. Bolaños points to this aspect of Spanish as it relates to Ladino:

A pesar del origen centroeuropeo o de la Europa oriental de tantos judíos llegados a países iberoamericanos, como es el caso de la familia de Juan Gelman, la lengua de unión de todos ellos fue, obviamente, el español. El español, entonces, se hace prolongación de lo que había sido, antes, el sefardí. Se convierte en ‘lengua patria’ cuando las ‘patrias’ expulsan y aniquilan. (2008: 104)

(Despite the central-European or Eastern European origin of many of the Jews who arrived in Latin American countries, like the family of Juan Gelman, the language of union of all of them was, obviously, Spanish. Spanish, then, is an extension of what before had been Ladino. It becomes the ‘language of the motherland’ or mother tongue when the ‘fatherlands’ expel and massacre them.)

Therefore, in order to craft a space within which he can reunite with his lost loves, the speaker needs to tremble between both Ladino, the language of exile, and Spanish, the language of union. In this way, Gelman doesn’t reject outright his mother tongue of Spanish, just those aspects controlled by an oppressive regime, in order to emphasize other qualities that help him on his mission. I argue that both Ladino and Spanish are crucial aspects of Gelman’s challenge to the patriarchal regime that expelled him and took away his loved ones, as the new space which overcomes murder and loss arises from the simultaneous presence and interaction of the two languages of *dibaxu*. In an act that requires both languages, Gelman uses self-translation to defy the oppressive military junta by reclaiming what was taken away from him, creating a new space for love to blossom so as to supplant the home that he lost.

It is ultimately impossible to isolate these vibrations that are really the same movement, albeit on different axes. If synchronic movement arises from the translation between Ladino and Spanish as the two face each other on the page, then diachronic movement is the viewpoint that Ladino is a historical precursor to modern Spanish. Regardless of how they are viewed, these are not two unrelated tremors, but facets of the same movement that cannot be parsed. The first poem of the collection provides a multitude of different examples that illustrate the interconnectedness of this trembling:

<i>il batideru di mis bezus/ quero dizer: il batideru di mis bezus si sentirá in tu pasadu cun mí in tu vinu/</i>	el temblor de mis labios/ quiero decir: el temblor de mis besos se oirá en tu pasado conmigo en tu vino/
<i>avriendo la puarta dil tiempo/ tu sueniü dexa cayer yuvia durmida/ dámila tu yuvia/</i>	abriendo la puerta del tiempo/ tu sueño deja caer lluvia dormida/ dame tu lluvia/
<i>mi quedarí/ quietu in tu yuvia di sueniü/ londji nil pinsen/ sin spantu/ sin sulvidu/</i>	me detendré/ quieto en tu lluvia de sueño/ lejos en el pensar/ sin temor/ sin olvido/
<i>nila caza dil tiempo sta il pasadu/ dibaxu di tu piede/ qui balia/</i>	en la casa del tiempo está el pasado/ debajo de tu pie/ que baila/

[the trembling of my lips// i mean: the trembling of my kisses/ will be heard in your past/ with me in your wine// opening the door of time// your dream/ drops sleeping rain// give me your rain// i will stop here/ still/ in your dream rain// far away in thought// without fear/ without forgetting// in the house of time/ is the past// below your foot// that dances/]

The very first image of the poem is the word pair *batideru/temblor*. Not only does this trembling open the poetry collection, it is preceded directly by the author's final wish in the

introduction that the reader read out loud the two languages, promising that there will be “something that trembles in time,” carrying the reader to the new space of solace. This opening image sets the tone of the collection and hints at the various forms of linguistic and historical movement that emerge throughout the work. The speaker who uses Ladino in exile trembles with desire as he uses an exilic tongue to yearn for his native language. The words that become objects, and vice-versa, shudder as they change forms. And the language itself shakes as it travels through time from the ancient form of Ladino to become the Spanish of contemporary Argentina.

The signs themselves evoke a trembling between Ladino and Spanish. This word pair is one of many examples where the translations differ semiotically, drawing attention to the language itself and calling into question the assumptions of the role of translation in a work. The Ladino version of the word is similar in appearance to the Spanish verb “batir”, meaning to “churn, beat or stir”, which might surprise readers when they see it translated as “trembling or tremor” on the Spanish side. While arguably synonymous, this word pair highlights the language and how it is deployed, similar to how self-translation focuses attention on the process of translation. This increased attention on the languages themselves opens up the interliminal space, as the reader realizes that neither language is complete in its own right and that the true space of communication does not reside in either version, but between them.

Borrowing from Bhabha’s assertion that the location of culture resides in an interstitial or “third space” (2004), Hokenson and Munson argue that this in-between space is the “only possible site of translation” (2007: 154), as the human experience in a globalized, postmodern world resides among the intersections of multiple languages and cultures. Extending the metaphor, they state that this condition of interliminality is exemplified by self-translation, as it “constructs [the third space] stereoscopically as a unique reading field” (ibid: 12). In this way, self-translation, which thrived in the linguistic heterogeneity of the Roman Empire and again in medieval Europe as authors wrote in both Latin and the various vernaculars, is particularly apt for reflecting the multicultural and multilinguistic reality of the modern world.

The space between languages brings the reader to ask how a language means, not just what it means. This evokes Benjamin’s discussion on mode of intention, which Kohlross clarifies by stating that “when Benjamin calls upon us to focus on the way of meaning more than on what is meant in conducting our translations, he is simply saying that we should pay more attention to the way in which something is linguistically understood” (2009: 103). The way we

linguistically understand a statement is emphasized in *dibaxu* as the languages are presented side-by-side and the reader is invited to engage them together.

Complementing the synchronic focus on translation, the pair *batideru / temblor* also succeeds at illustrating diachronic vacillation. Fabry demonstrates this historical perspective by once again reflecting on the perceived gap between the two terms:

Ese mismo término ‘batideru’ deja resonar ese castellano antiguo que la Edad Moderna ha borrado en el español actual. En efecto, el ‘batidero’, nos dice Covarrubias, es ‘el lugar donde se bate y golpea’. Al comprobar la significación del verbo ‘batir’ en el mismo diccionario, la riqueza semántica del término se refuerza: ‘batir: golpear, del verbo latino *batuo*, vide batalla [...]’ El temblor del tiempo da paso, en la versión judeoespañola, a una dimensión agónica, ausente del texto en castellano. Este ‘batideru’, a la vez temblor y combate, también abre pautas de lectura que permitirán hilar—como veremos—unos ejes semánticos en el conjunto de los veintinueve poemas. (2008: 232–33)

(This term ‘batideru’ evokes the archaic Spanish that the modern age has erased from contemporary Spanish. In effect, the ‘batidero’, Covarrubias tells us, is ‘the place where one beats and hits’. By confirming the definition of the verb ‘batir’ in the same dictionary, the semantic richness of the term is reinforced: ‘batir: to hit, from the Latin verb *batuo*, related to battle [...]’ The trembling of time gives way, in the Judeo-Spanish version, to a struggle that is absent from the Spanish text. This ‘batideru’, at the same time trembling and combat, also sets patterns of reading that will permit us to string together some semantic axes in the collection of the twenty-nine poems.)

In addition to the semiotic difference that the reader notices when these terms are juxtaposed, the historical connection that forges in the reader’s mind strengthens the complexity of trembling as a means of creating a new safe space. The suggestion of struggle might seem to contradict the desire for a new space of peace out of reach of the regime that exiled Gelman from his family, friends, and homeland. However, I argue that the new space can only be created if all those involved maintain the full memory of the loss and pain they have suffered. This contrast ensures that their joy of reunion is even more complete.

Although the concept of trembling connects all of the poetry in *dibaxu*, poem XVI is the only other example besides poem I where this leitmotif is featured as a noun, resulting in the word pair *batideru / temblor*. The other explicit mentions of trembling are in the verb form, where the resulting word pair *timblar/temblar* lacks the semantic interplay salient in the noun pair. Seeming to confirm Fabry’s assertion concerning the violent associations with the *batideru*,

the incorporation of this word pair in poem XVI points to the horrors of the Dirty War, before transcending them to open up the new space created for reunification with the beloved. The *temblor* in this poem is invoked as the speaker states that after dying, he will “*sintiré entudavía / il batideru / di tu saia nil vienti // oiré todavía / el temblor / de tu saya en el viento //*” (“i will hear still / the trembling / of your dress in the wind //”). The implicit violence of the Ladino trembling eerily foreshadows the forced disappearances of his son and daughter-in-law.

When Marcelo Ariel and María Claudia were abducted in 1976, they were afforded special treatment due to María Claudia’s advanced pregnancy. Although they were separated, Marcelo Ariel was allowed to see his wife briefly, and he noted that she had been given a new maternity dress. During their short reunion and in an attempt to create solace amid desolation, the first thing she asked Marcelo Ariel was for his opinion on the new dress that they had given her. Gelman points to the significance of this exchange, stating that “*ella sabía que era el vestido de una compañera ‘trasladada,’ y estaba haciendo vida de la muerte*” (Montanaro and Ture 1998: 97) (“She knew that it was a dress of a ‘transferred’ compatriot, and that she was making life out of death”). This short account articulates the tension associated with the *batideru / temblor*. María Claudia received the dress because of the new life growing in her womb, and as such, she imbued the article of clothing with a second life. However, she was aware that the dress came to her after its previous owner was disappeared by the Videla regime, a move that prefigured her own murder after giving birth to Gelman’s granddaughter. Thus the trembling between life and death found here parallels *dibaxu* as a response to the horrors of war and oppression.

In contrast to the Ladino term, the *temblor* of Spanish is devoid of the violence evoked on the facing page and more consistent with the tone of *dibaxu*. Even though it is necessary to contextualize this collection as a response to the pain suffered in exile, it is clear that instead of dwelling on the horrors of war, the poems from this collection choose to focus on a new place of hope from which to reunite with those who have been lost, instead of just clinging to their memory. Rather than the underlying violence of the *batideru*, the *temblor* of poem XVI points to the tremulousness of anticipation that accompanies the longing of the speaker. Neither image is more correct or true than the other in illustrating the poetic voice’s viewpoint. Instead, both are necessary to demonstrate that despite the loss and suffering, the speaker of this collection has set his gaze clearly on a hope of a better world.

Returning to poem I, the trembling that begins with *batideru/temblor* casts linguistic ripples that spread throughout the rest of the poem, highlighting the tension that is created as the words of the two languages are juxtaposed with each other; the equivalents in the respective versions have the same Benjaminian intention, but they differ significantly in their mode of intention. This resulting contrast greets the reader in the first two lines: “*il batideru di mis bezus // quero dizer: il batideru di mis bezus / el temblor de mis labios // quiero decir: el temblor de mis besos*” (“the trembling of my lips // i mean: the trembling of my kisses”). *Bezus* in Ladino with its corresponding *labios* and *besos* in Spanish are archetypical examples of the mode of intention of language. As homonyms in Ladino, they generate a connection between them and their equivalents in Spanish that creates a thematic tension that Fabry argues flows throughout the entire work:

Los labios entroncan con las imágenes referidas a la voz y a la palabra, mientras que los besos (el segundo sustantivo más citado del poemario) orientan la significación hacia el ámbito de lo erótico-amoroso. Todo el poemario va a enlazar estas dos dimensiones pero sin confundirlas, introduciendo más bien una tensión con la reiterada afirmación de la no coincidencia del amor y de la palabra a pesar de (o través de) su relación consustancial. (2008: 232)

(The lips are related to the images that make reference to the voice and the word, while the kisses (the second most referenced noun in the collection) orient the meaning towards the erotic-affectionate. The entire poetry collection ties these two dimensions together, but without confusing them, instead inserting in them a tension with the reiterated affirmation of the non-coincidental nature of love and the word, in spite of (or because of) their consubstantial relationship.)

If the reader were only presented with the Ladino version, it would be possible, even probable to elide the relation between the two *bezus*. But the separate words on the Spanish side explicitly foreground and bring attention to not only the meaning of the words, but how they mean as well. Through the process of self-translation and the connection between voice, word, and erotic love, these terms anticipate poetry’s role in this collection to create the new space out of the voice of the lover.

To add even more tension to the word pair(s), the speaker shifts from one word to the other with the phrase “*quero dizer/ quiero decir,*” which could mean both “I want to say” and “I mean to say,” foregrounding the fact that what is intended to be expressed is distinct from what is said, as well as how it is said. The inability of any language to fully express the intention of the speaker points to what Rose calls “the affective, semantic space between”

(1997: 55) as the site of communication. It also reinforces the connection of *dibaxu* to Gelman's *Citas*, *Comentarios*, and *Com/posiciones*, because “el acercamiento a la poesía mística y a la Cábala no se produce únicamente por la coincidencia en una visión exiliar, sino también porque la escritura mística tiene en su punto de partida la condición del «inefable» o «indecible»” (Pérez López 2002: 83) (“the approach to mystical poetry and the Kabbalah is not produced solely in the coincidence of an exilic vision, but also because mystical writing has a departure point in the condition of ‘ineffable’ or ‘the unsayable’”). Thus, opening the poetry collection with the oscillation between what the speaker means to say and what he wants to say foreshadows the trembling felt throughout the book, but it also pays homage to the poet's rich poetic pedigree and connection to the ineffability of mystical poetry.

Following the introduction of the trembling with its accompanying *bezus-labios/besos*, the poetic voice concludes the first stanza of poem I, declaring the fate of all these elements: “*si sentirá in tu pasadu / cun mí in tu vinu // se oirá en tu pasado / conmigo en tu vino //*” (“they will be heard in your past/ with me in your wine//”). Like *batideru / temblor*, the verbs *sintir/oir* are semantically charged and evidence the poetic interaction and dialogue present throughout *dibaxu*. While presented as linguistic equivalents of each other, the precise relationship of these and other similarly distinct pairs from the collection illuminates the role of language, translation, and bilingual presentation in establishing the new space of reunification, by highlighting the semiotic gap between the terms. Rather than “false cognates” that are similar in form and meaning but have different roots, or “false friends” that look similar but differ significantly in meaning, these word pairs are presented as having the same meaning in languages sharing a common ancestor, but vary greatly in appearance and in function. Perhaps a more useful way to classify these word pairs would be to turn to the biological vocabulary of divergent evolution, wherein the accumulation of differences between species can lead to the formation of new species. Like the beaks of Darwin's finches which underwent drastic changes in size and shape over time as an adaptation to different food sources, these pairs have diverged from each other in form and function, contributing to the creation of two related, but separate languages over time. In scientific terms, this specific type of divergence witnessed in *dibaxu* would be classified as allopatric speciation, because the individual species (or languages) have been geographically isolated from each other (Hoskin et al 2005). Thus these linguistic *allopatries* approach the same linguistic intention with different tools or backgrounds, altering how they are received by the reader. Rather than the misleading similarity of false cognates, linguistic allopatries are visibly divergent pairs that strive to represent the same idea.

While *sinter/oir* purportedly both have the intention of hearing, the Ladino verb looks much more like *sentir*, or the verb *to feel* in Spanish. There is not a direct link between hearing and feeling in the text, but when confronted with this translation, the reader no doubt forms a connection, whether consciously or subconsciously. This association in turn creates a form of synesthesia; the reader, having come across one sensation first in the Ladino and formed a mental image, will encounter a completely different sense or way to interface with the world by crossing the page. This synesthetic moment leads to what Balbuena calls a “heightened sense of ‘strangement’: the physical proximity of Ladino and Castellano underscores their differences, while confirming their similarity” (2009: 294). This “strangement,” a mixture of the distancing that comes through estrangement and the strange feeling that arises when met with something foreign, sheds light on the act of translation. On the surface, the similarities of these languages imply that their translations will be relatively close to each other, but the area between them grows with each examination. This semantic gap is observable throughout the collection whenever the speaker employs the allopatry *sinter/oir*.

The primary reason that this word pair evokes a sense of uncanniness is its synesthetic quality of two simultaneous, somewhat contradictory sensations. The feeling through hearing and hearing by feeling in poem I and again in poem XVI both reference the trembling of the *batideru/temblor*, and both enrich the multi-dimensional trembling previously discussed. In the case of the first poem, the two different senses connect directly with the union of lips and kisses formed by the usage of *bezus* on the Ladino side. The two interpretations of this allopatric verb reinforce Fabry’s earlier notion that lips suggest word and voice, while kisses evoke an amorous connotation, as the sense of hearing connects to *labios* and touch associates with *besos*. In poem XVI, it is the trembling of the dress to which these verbs refer. The synesthetic condition of the verb pair reinforces the power of longing and memory as the speaker asserts that he will be able to alternately feel and hear his lover’s dress after he is dead. In both poems, the allopatricity of the verbs reinforces the trembling that ultimately serves as the birthplace of the speaker’s new locus in the interliminal space between languages.

The next example of allopatric deviation in poem I appears in the third stanza: “*mi quedarí / quietu / in tu yuvia di sueniu // me detendré / quieto / en tu lluvia de sueño /*” (“i will stop here / still / in your dream rain /”). Similar to the first verb pair from this poem, these two verbs arguably have the same intention, but employ a different mode to achieve that intention. In contrast to *sintir/oir*, the latter verbs don’t work together to form synesthesia, but rather they diverge based on the activity of the subject. The Ladino verb *quedar*—clearly creating links to

the Spanish verb *quedar*, or *to remain*—suggests a certain amount of immobility, in this case, remaining fixed in the addressee’s dream rain. There is an implication of passivity; the speaker is already still and chooses to remain that way.

The outcome is completely different on the Spanish side as the poetic voice uses the verb *detener*, denoting a conscious cessation of an action. Therefore, instead of continuing in stillness, the speaker in the Spanish version must actively calm himself to partake of the dream rain. These two verbs depict the speaker arriving at the same point in the rain, albeit from two opposite directions, prompting a reflection on the active-passive dichotomy of exile. The speaker is passive in his role of exile in the sense that he is deterritorialized against his will. Although he is powerless to resist the oppressive regime and regain his homeland, he can actively create a new poetic homeland of hope that will allow him to be reunited with his lover.

The verb pair *aspirar/esperar* appears in four different poems in the collection, including poem VI, where the speaker comments that colored leaves “*aspiran/ qu’il spantu si amati// esperan/ que el espanto se apague*” [wait/ for the terror to be extinguished]. These verbs are reminiscent of *quedar/detener* from poem I as the pair, when viewed from the perspective of a Spanish-speaker, are related to each other in function but diverge in the way that the speaker engages in the action. In the previous example, the passiveness of the Ladino verb juxtaposes with the active stance of the Spanish verb. The example from poem VI reverses language roles as the leaves in Ladino appear to actively strive to end the fear—related to loss and forgetting throughout the collection—while across the page, the leaves wait for the fear to cease on its own accord. Examining both examples together, it is clear that neither language is inherently more active or passive than the other, but rather that the possibility of different approaches and the trembling between options is what contributes to the linguistic interliminality of the collection.

Straying from the active-passive continuum of these last examples, and tied more closely to the synesthesia of the first verb pair, the final example of allopatric verb pairs establishes a connection of poetic language and ideas, requiring that the two poetic versions face each other and interact. In the third poem of the collection, the poetic voice states that the morning “*sta aviarta/ teni friscura/ la biviremus djuntu/ está abierta/ tiene frescura/ la beberemos junto*” [it is open/ it has a newness/ that we will drink together]. The translation of *biviremus* to *beberemos*, as the Ladino verb evokes *vivir* in Spanish, establishes a connection between living and drinking that would otherwise not exist without the bilingual presentation of

dibaxu. Bringing to mind Christ's living waters, these verbs acknowledge the link this collection shares with the mystical poetry of *Citas* and *Comentarios*, while also reinforcing the need for both languages to communicate with each other. It is only through the linguistic trembling back and forth that the speaker is able to overcome the devastation of exile and loss in order to be reunited with his loved ones.

The last allopatric example from poem I provides another outlook on the fragmented or fractured perspective presented by the speaker as the two languages create a dialogue: “*nila caza dil tiempu / sta il pasadu // en la casa del tiempo / está el pasado /*” (“in the house of time / is the past /”). The words *caza/casa*, different from the noun pair that opens the poem with its drastic semiotic divergence, are homonyms that nevertheless elicit a tension in their relationship with time, a relationship that Semilla Durán claim “*jueg[a] en el momento de la lectura y la hac[e] plurívoca, más allá de la simplicidad exhibida en los textos*” (2014: 181) (“comes into play in the moment of reading, making it multi-voiced, beyond the simplicity exhibited in the texts”). This plurivocality points in Ladino towards the hunt or search for lost time, and in Spanish to the place where time resides. The trembling that shudders throughout *dibaxu*, the synchronic and diachronic language vacillations present in every poem, allow the speaker to carve out this new space within his control, so that he can reclaim what was taken away from him: his loved ones and his homeland. These tremors make the creation of the new space possible, allowing for time and word to be spatialized in the work so that the new space can take shape and become reality.

As the first poem of the collection, the speaker introduces the concept of the new space that brings the beloved back to life, as well as establishes the centrality of the speaker and addressee to this space and to the entire collection. Having recently endured the process of resurrection effected through the poetic word, the addressee appears exhausted as her “dream / drops sleeping rain.” Notwithstanding her tired condition, she is able to bless the speaker as he takes refuge in her rain. Thus, as she is resurrected through his poetry, he is fed by her Christ-like living waters, which in this case fall from the sky as rain. Therefore, this poem lays the foundation of the cyclical relationship between the speaker and recipient followed throughout the rest of the collection wherein the speaker creates the “house of time” so that the addressee can live again, and as she returns to life, her love grants him a new life, imbued with the vivacity of her “foot // that dances /.” In this way, Gelman uses the process of self-translation as a means to reify the interliminal space, creating a site of reunification and love amid the horrors of war.

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¹ According to Rose (1997), translation offers an invaluable contribution to literary studies: "In between is the 'interliminal text', unwritten but paraphrasable. This interliminality is the gift translation gives to readers of literature [...] Put positively, translation studies points us to a sure way of participating in literature and adding to its richness" (7–8).

² See *Carta Abierta, Si dulcemente, Carta a mi madre* in Gelman 2012 vols. 1 and 2, for examples.