

**MYSTICISM WITHOUT BORDERS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY
MYSTICAL SYMBOLISM IN ANTÓNIO RAMOS
ROSA'S *O APRENDIZ SECRETO* AND THE POETRY
OF CLARA JANÉS**

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In a conversation I had with Clara Janés in June 2005, she and I briefly discussed, among other things, her recent translation of António Ramos Rosa's *O Aprendiz Secreto*, a work which first appeared on bookshelves in the original Portuguese in 2001. She mentioned to me her feeling that both she and Rosa shared a certain affinity for mystical thought. The work of Clara Janés contains an undeniably strong influence of Spanish mysticism, whether based on teachings of San Juan de la Cruz, or on those of the thirteenth-century Iberian Sufi mystic, Ibn 'Arabi. The purpose of this essay is to draw out whatever mystical processes and symbolism may be occurring in *O Aprendiz Secreto* and compare them to that already found in Janés's poetry.¹ I also intend to discuss briefly the postmodern, anti-hegemonic tendencies found in Janés's poetry which may even find a shred or two of commonality with the ontological struggle and polissemey for which Rosa's work is known.²

Before entering into our discussion of António Ramos Rosa's poetic trajectory and the project under study here, I would like first to define the term "Mysticism," at the very least for the purposes of this article. As Abhayananda states, "mysticism is that point of view which claims as its basis an intimate knowledge of the one source and substratum of all existence, a knowledge which is obtained through a revelatory experience during a rare moment of clarity in contemplation" (1). By contemplating one's existence in a certain way, in other words, one may attain the knowledge of existence's source. As has been pointed out before, the notion of momentary ontological clarity is present in twentieth-century poetry even in the Surrealist movement

(Simon, “Amores”), although the notion here is an ancient one, beyond the scope of any one literary or social movement. Interestingly, as we will see, Surrealism serves as a basis for Rosa’s techniques, even if the outcome is a mystical one.

To the experiential definition of Mysticism we must add a spatial one as well, in order that the imagery in Rosa’s *O Aprendiz Secreto* be clearly understood. In the work of the Iberian mystic Ibn ‘Arabi, there exists the notion of the heart, or “qalb,” as the space in which the mystic and his lover (presumably God) may enter into divine, mystical union required for ascension into heaven (Falconar 13). This space may also be interpreted, as seen in contemporary poetry, as a place where the mystic and the lover’s physical union is simultaneously a spiritual one, such as is Clara Janés’s *Diván y el ópalo de fuego* (Simon, “An Iberian Search” 167). This will then allow the mystic, now literally united with God, to ascend from *Khalq*, or the world of the mundane, into *Haqq*, (Arabic, “truth”), or the true, divine world.³ In Portuguese poetry, the image of the house as seen in Joaquim Pessoa’s *Os Olhos de Isa* serves also as a representation of “qalb” in the sense of a meeting place between the divine feminine lover and the mystic in his quest for illumination through love (“An Iberian Search,” 207). The notion of a house as a place of mystical union will be important in *O Aprendiz Secreto*, as the work’s central theme is that of the construction of this space (rather than the mystic’s use of it). This will have a profound importance in Rosa’s literary trajectory, as well as on its connection with Janés’s.

The 1950s see, in the work of poets such as António Ramos Rosa and other contributors to the magazine *Árvore* (Guimarães, *A Poesia Contemporânea*, 10), an attempt to recycle the Surrealist poetic style of the 1940s in order to create a staging-ground for a new poetic in which the universal could find its expression. “Com efeito, o modo como o imaginário se assume na escrita do autor ... tem algo a ver com a manifestação súbita e inesperada do inconsciente. ... Mas a poesia de Ramos Rosa consegue passar ao

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lado de uma observância demasiado fiel a tal poética surrealista. Pelo contrário, ele acaba por estar sob a vigilância de uma espécie de razão—a razão do poema—, evitando-se, assim, as associações gratuitas, a textualidade puramente aleatória tão característica do movimento surrealista” (Guimarães 29). Rosa’s work tries to combine the humanistic Neo-Realism of the 1930s and 40s with Surrealism’s freeing of the subconscious to make his a uniquely complete humanized poetry.⁴ “A poesia passava a ter para o homem a dimensão de um acto total. E era tendo em vista essa totalidade que se poderia fazer, agora, uma tentativa de *passagem* que contribuísse para relacionar entre si a própria situação do homem e a criação poética” (17). Despite this daring combination, he is described as a rather “restrained” poet, attempting to concentrate language in such a way that all words may contain a universal meaning (Gusmão 166). This “universal meaning,” in my judgment, reflects back upon the notion that through polissemey, the poetic word does not remain polysemantic, but part of an infinite, interwoven semantic which allows the poet to cross from one register, concept or mystical world to another with a minimum of explicitly revealed effort. As will become clear from *O Aprendiz Secreto*, this effort is seen in the process, rather than output, of poetic production, making the work more of an instruction manual for those desiring to enter the mystical realm. Such a notion is realized in his *O Grito Claro* (1958) and *Incêndio dos Aspectos* (1980), the latter of which is described as more metapoetic than Surrealist (166).

As can be seen in Rosa’s “Poema dum Funcionário Cansado,” from his early work *O Grito Claro*, the combination of the common-man’s plight with that of the immediacy found in Surrealist symbolism leads toward an attempt to understand better the nature of the universe as a whole:

A noite trocou-me os sonhos e as mãos
dispersou-me os amigos
tenho o coração confundido e a rua é estreita

Estreita em cada passo
as casas engolem-nos

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sumimo-nos
estou num quarto só num quarto só
com os sonhos trocados
com toda a vida às avessas a arder num quarto só

Sou um funcionário apagado
um funcionário triste
a minha alma não acompanha a minha mão
Débito e Crédito Débito e Crédito
a minha alma não dança com os números
tento escondê-la envergonhado
o chefe apanhou-me com o olho lírico na gaiola do quintal em
frente
e debitou-me na minha conta de empregado
Sou um funcionário cansado dum dia exemplar
Porque não me sinto orgulhoso de ter cumprido o meu dever?
Porque me sinto irremediavelmente perdido no meu cansaço?

Soletro velhas palavras generosas
Flor rapariga amigo menino
irmão beijo namorada
mãe estrela música

São as palavras cruzadas do meu sonho
palavras soterradas na prisão da minha vida
isto todas as noites do mundo uma noite só comprida
num quarto só

(Mendes (ed.), *O Poeta na Rua* 22-23)

The first stanza of the poem introduces the poetic subject, an emotionally exhausted office-worker who has begun to feel trapped and isolated. This is not only a spatial isolation, as emphasized in the “rua estreita” of the first stanza and in the repetition of the phrase “num quarto só” in the second stanza, but an emotional one as well. He feels confused and somewhat hopeless, as seen in the third stanza where he questions his own emotional reaction toward a job for which he thinks he should feel “orgulhoso.” In the fourth stanza the poetic subject, having hit an existential barrier, begins writing a series of words whose seemingly random order is reminiscent of the surrealist “automated writing” style in which semantic connections could be made through superficially unrelated words. Here, the words “flower girl friend boy / brother kiss girlfriend / mother star music” link the

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mundane, mortal and human (the “girl,” “boy,” “brother,” “girlfriend”) with the ephemeral, such as the notion of love, the supra-physical aspect of music and the greatness of the cosmos. Their combined meanings represent the “inter-crossed words of my dreams” which, as stated in the fifth stanza, contrast the utter hopelessness he feels in “the prison” of his life, reflected in the return to the “quarto” in which he physically resides.

As his poetry developed from the 1950s to the 1980s, the presence of certain Romantic-period myths began to emerge in his work, creating a scenario in which an animism, different from that present in Saudosista works such as those of Teixeira de Pascoaes, became tangled with an already strong Surrealist symbolism. “O possível animismo que se pode entrever em alguns passos da poesia de Ramos Rosa nunca é de natureza alegorizante, como tantas vezes acontece com os poetas ligados ao Saudosismo; aponta, antes, para uma concretização simbólica que lhe dá uma ambiguidade, um pulsar de sentidos diversificados” (Guimarães 25). This multiplicity of meanings, known also as polissemey, makes sense, as many cases Rosa’s work uses the past to express that past’s future, or the present, thus integrating the past and the present in an ever-renewing cycle of life and of the poetic word. “O poema que encerrava [*O Grito Claro*] deixava inscrito no pretérito aquilo que, de facto, se revelaria futuro, ao transformar-se numa espécie de programa poético ao longo dos anos: a procura de um lugar de palavras (e para as palavras) por forma a integrá-las num horizonte sempre interrogado e renovado de vida” (Mendes 11). The poem “O rosto sob as águas” from *Gravitações* (1983) makes evident this idea:

as intempéries talharam este rosto.
de chama. calcinada.
o seu silêncio é um latido do tempo.

por vezes é uma forma que cintila.
um talismã. e um desejo de
um fundo inesgotável.

por vezes vêmo-lo branco. a vertigem

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faz-nos desfolhar as páginas.
e ele irrompe como uma água surda.

é uma cabeça de terra. de árvore e pedra.
a sua ironia tem o sabor das estações.
por ele passaram já todas as águas.

pela água límpida a nitidez aviva-se
e é matriz de todos os nomes que cintila (17).

The poem contains three interconnected notions which are crucial to the understanding of Rosa's poetry in general as well as that of *O Aprendiz Secreto*. First, as found in "Poema dum Funcionário Cansado," there exists an existential plight from which the poetic subject suffers. In this case, however, it is not a Surrealist symbolism which carries him through the process of suffering, but an animist one. The poem begins with the poetic subject existing within the "latido do tempo," "fundo inesgotável" and "vertigem," a reflection of the limitations of worldly existence and the ontological crisis of existentialism found in his previous work. However, as the poem progresses, there is a movement away from this abstract existentialist language toward one that represents the relationship between nature and the human life-cycle. The symbols of "terra," "árvore," "pedra" and that of irony's taste being that of "as estações" create this link. Secondly and concomitantly, the iconic nature of these natural elements forces the poetic subject to state, in the final stanza, that the brightness of the natural face (or "rosto") in the first verse, and thus of life, is actually the womb of "all the names that scintillate," or of the multiplicity from which all life is created. Finally, there is a strongly emphasized symbol of water as the place from which the womb is found. It is not difficult to observe that water, in both a traditional and contemporary reading of the symbol, represents the origin of life. Interestingly, the first stanza eludes to the face as being one of fire ("de chama"), bringing the natural forces of fire, water and earth together in an act of essential creation, into what at first could appear to be a poem of existential crisis. So, almost in opposition to the poetic subject of the previously studied poem, Rosa's poetic subject in this case

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has opted to take what could be an animist approach to the dilemma before him.

Yet, the representation of nature is not semantically monolithic. The tension between the “latido do tempo” and the seemingly infinite nature present here allows for an ambiguity which, although not necessarily postmodern, certainly opens the way for Guimarães’ interpretation of Rosa’s natural symbolism as holding within it a semantic multiplicity unique to Rosa’s work and previously discussed here as semantic polissemey. Rosa’s poetic subject also delineates a circularity and repetition to the process of creation in this poem. In comparing the image of water in the final three stanzas, we see that the water had at first stopped flowing, yet it is again visible in both the first and final of the three. Thus, a circular pattern is established of wetness and drought, feeding into the animism, iconic naturalism, creating the sensation of a layering of distinct meanings upon each repetition of the pattern. This could also be referred to as a “circular multiplicity” and may be found in Rosa’s later poetry. This circular multiplicity is also the principal epistemological tool of one of Rosa’s more recent works, the mystical allegory *O Aprendiz Secreto*, on which this article is primarily focused.

As seen bilingually in Clara Janés’s translation of the work, *O Aprendiz Secreto* is an epistemological presentation of a mystical process which Rosa’s poetic subject attempts to teach to the reader, his supposed apprentice, or *aprendiz*. The allegorical nature of this world is reminiscent of the realm of “Alam-al-Mithal,” or the intermediate space between heaven and earth in which the latter is represented, as is to be expected, allegorically (Falconar 61). In this world we also find several points at which its circular nature is revealed. The theme of circularity is common in Rosa’s work, as explained above. Given the apparent presence of Alam-al-Mithal here, the highly abstract nature of this poetic allegory demonstrates an attention away from the ontological desperation of his more Existentialist work (such as his “Poema dum Funcionário Cansado”). The work follows the technique of polissemey that characterizes Rosa’s more recent

poetry. The remaining thematic of mystical illumination and union with the divine will then itself suggest the link between Rosa's and Janés's poetries.

The construction of the mystical space, or the "casa," is a creation of the mystic through which the union of his/her physical "matéria" with the energy of the universe may be recognized.⁵ This may sound simplistic and almost hokey to some readers, but make no mistake that this idea resonates through over 2000 years of mystical tradition as well as the mystical work of Ibn 'Arabi. The house is then a symbol representing the universe in which the mystic may attain illumination through contemplation of the universe's binary nature. Also, as will become clear in the examples below, the process of construction is not only allegorical but also physical, in which the length of each poem grows with the turning of each page. This remits us to the notion of the poetic word as a vehicle for a mystical search. In fact, Ibn 'Arabi's poetry is replete with images of the (crazed) poet/mystic, as is Clara Janés's, which we will see further on in this study.

The first poem of the collection declares that the ontological state necessary for the construction of this space is that of non-definition:

Não é altura de afirmar nada. Tudo deve permanecer oculto na sua pura inanidade (e unanimidade) inabordável. Este respeito absoluto é a condição de uma possível germinação futura e a única mediação de um enigma que se confunde com a própria respiração do construtor (*O Aprendiz* 8).

That is, making purely objectifying judgments about the universe will not set the stage for construction. In fact, we may more easily interpret the poem in terms of Sufi mystical symbolism. Thus, it seems that the narrative voice of the poem does not see the mundane world, or *Khalq*; rather, this voice sees that the affirmation of *Khalq* would be a catastrophic error for the apprentice. This world, as seen in the final poem of Clara Janés's *Arcángel de Sombra* (Janés, *Arcángel* 81), has entered into the intermediate space of "Alam-al-Mithal" (that is, in the mystic's mind) and thus may no longer "trick" the mystic into believing it is the only

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true reality. The reader then understands that the creation of the mystical space requires a context of ambiguity, where *Khalq* cannot force the mystic to believe its illusory concreteness, so that the nature of the construction is respected.

In interpreting the symbol of the “casa,” or “house,” as representative of “qalb,” or the mystical “heart,” one poem in particular describes the “casa” as “ser,” or “being”:

A construção será redonda porque redondo é o ser. Ela será uma frutificação da substância e, na sua multiplicidade, a unidade viva do desejo. Todas as linhas da morada reflectirão os enigmas, os turbilhões, os labirintos e os dilemas do construtor mas o núcleo da construção será uma pequena falha luminosa que a fará elevar-se para o cimo e para além de todas as determinações particulares do construtor. E, assim, ao ritmo da construção, o sentido se forma num recomeço constante, não como um eco do passado mas como o frémito novo de cada gesto construtivo que desperta, na materialidade da construção, a nascente viva e unificadora do ser (*O Aprendiz* 30).

The incredibly dense description of the “house” in the poem reflects three key points for which Rosa’s poetry is known. First, the notion of multiplicity as unity remits to the idea that universality is inherent in polyssemic discourse. Second, the notion that the house’s completion will take the constructor “past all the constructor’s particular determinations” refers, in my judgment, to the mystical notion that by reaching the essential, all worldly suppositions are surpassed. Finally, the “constant restarting” on which the rhythm of the process is based reminds us of the circular nature of the mystical process, a notion inherent both in Sufi mystical processes (such as that found in Ibn Árabî’s work) and in the final section of Janés’s *Arcángel de Sombra*.

In the poem “Yo misma, os digo,” from the third and final section of *Árcangel*, we see not only the first explicit identification of the poetic subject as female, but also as creator of a new world through her spiritual/erotic experience with the illuminated lover:⁶

Yo misma, os digo,
soy el tercer arcángel

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y os tenderé la mano
para cruzar el puente
porque el jardín que penetró
en mi corazón
en los prados florece
cada primavera.
Mi sangre ha encendido la aurora,
mi anhelo es bálsamo en las simas.
Y aliento soy
para la elevación del tallo,
alimento del aire que os sostiene,
voz de la hoja,
por la luz tensada,
por la insuflada vibración del rocío (73).

Here, “qalb,” now apparently contained within the poetic subject, has given rise to a new cycle of life. The verses “the garden that penetrated / (into) my heart / in the fields flowers / each spring” contain symbols seen before in *Diván*. For example, the garden alludes to the Sufi symbol of “qalb” as the space in which the lovers may become united in their sexual encounter, a simultaneously spiritual and erotic locus amoenus. We also observe the re-birth of the world in the metonymy of springtime flourishing through the power of mystical union in “qalb.” As the poetic subject is now not only divine naturally but illuminated spiritually through its nature as a union of two spirits, in the final verses of the poem, s/he speaks of itself as united also with nature, with the process of life and death. S/he states that its blood, or nutrition liquid, creates life in death (i.e., lighting up the aurora). The united poetic subject’s desire is that which bridges the rift (between *Khalq*, the place of life of the body, and *Haqq*, the place of life of the spirit and death of the flesh), and its breath is the air that sustains the readers’ life (the use of the second-person plural direct complement pronoun “os” before “sostiene” indicates this). These symbols have appeared before in Janés’s poetry. The poetic subject’s statement here that s/he is the “voice of the leaf,” an integral part of both *Haqq* and *Khalq* (or the simultaneous binary opposition between the pure and impure from which the universe is formed), deserves some clarification. This opposition is not a clear case of logically defined opposites

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in *Khalq*, such as the difference between sunlight and shadow, but based on the poetic subject's self-identification with the physical manifestation of nature and, simultaneously, the ephemeral forms of that nature in *Haqq*. The same technique of creating a simultaneous binary opposition from the pure and impure forms of an object, while at the same time identifying a personage from a given poem with that object, also appears in the poetic manifestation of the angelic, guiding voice of the lover. While his ephemeral voice appears throughout *Arcángel de Sombra*, he is also represented by the tongue of fire in the first poem of the work.

The notion of the house evolves in a later poem by relating the “corpo,” or “body,” with the greater universe. “Como a exalação de uma antiga sombra, o fago de uma antemanhã de renovo e nostalgia acentuará o paradoxo da construção do ser” (*O Aprendiz* 36). In this sense we may follow the path laid down for us as the house, or existence, as representing in *Khalq* by the body, which is the universe. *Khalq*, then, is as much the universe as *Haqq* (or the “truth,” the sublime reality to which *Khalq* serves as a somewhat poor reflection), a realization that the Sufi mystic makes during his or her process of illumination.

Now, it seems clear to the poetic subject that, even in an allegorical construction site, to build something one requires building materials. In this the connection with both Clara Janés's poetic work and Joaquim Pessoa's mystical work is evident.⁷ In another poem from the beginning of the present collection, Rosa's narrative voice states that the poetic word serves as the building block for all construction efforts. This statement emphasizes that the poetic word is part of the system of simultaneous binary oppositions, as it remains both mundane (as part of a created structure) and sublime (as part of the divine and mystical space known as the “qalb”). The sensation of polissemey is thus present, even when it appears at first as providing for only one or two apparent interpretations. In any case, the poetic word here is also *productive*, rather than simply *expressive*. I will argue later

in this article for the importance of this to Portuguese mystical poetry as a style unique in the peninsula.

Another important notion to consider in the reading of this work is that of the impediments to construction. As Joaquim Pessoa's poetic subject explains in his *Vou-me Embora de Mim*, an unnatural impeding of illumination happens when a person closes his or herself to the possibilities that an acceptance of the sublime may offer (Simon, "An Iberian Search" 107). In *O Aprendiz Secreto*, Rosa makes a similar statement when he describes the house as having "todas as aberturas necessárias" for the perception of the stars by the builder:

O espaço, que ninguém pode desenhar, porque é imperceptível como meio e origem dos nossos gestos e da nossa permanente habitação, é o fundamento absoluto do nosso ser temporal e da nossa continuidade sempre recomeçada. Se essa coordenada da nossa existência vacila, perde-se o equilíbrio essencial e a nossa relação viva com o mundo torna-se impossível e insustentável. Por isso, a construção será uma construção do espaço com todas as aberturas necessárias para que a orientação vital se assegure nas grandes linhas das paisagens e nas passagens que serão as órbitas suaves e frementes de imprevisíveis astros (*O Aprendiz* 16).

Within the confines of our allegory, the vision of the stars refers, of course, to a vision of the sublime and that which lies beyond the mundane world, or *Khalq*. There is also the idea that the house, or body, that the constructor builds may have been part of what called Janés's attention to this work. Her own work, *Creciente Fértil*, contains an image of a mosque with several entrances so to allow the entrance of many into the mosque, or body, of the poetic subject (Janés, *Creciente Fértil* 18). In each case the notion of agency is duplicated and shared by both the enterer (be they stars or lovers) and the builder.

Returning to the notion of impediments, although Rosa's poetic subject does not enter into a detailed explanation here, there does appear a sort of definition of what the impediments' nature may be. In one particular poem the poetic subject describes this central cause as "a dor" that creates neither "paciência nem a aceitação, mas a negação e o ressentimento":

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A intensidade de uma dor suscita não paciência nem a aceitação mas a negação e o ressentimento. Perante a agressão anónima do corpo o espírito perde a temporalidade e é incapaz de se sobrepor à violência que o nega e o confunde. A esta negação natural o espírito opõe a violência de uma negação gratuita e inoperante. O ser não pode construir nenhum abrigo, uma vez que a dor é a ruptura insuperável de qualquer construção e a imposição e exposição do insuportável para a qual não existe nenhum subterfúgio nem estratégia de abafamento ou de redução. Para esses momentos o construtor não tem nenhum plano, apenas uma sala vazia que não sabe como preencher e que provavelmente ficará vazia (*O Aprendiz* 22).

Pain, he states, makes the builder incapable of continuing the process nor entering into his own construction. The “qalb,” thus, would remain empty.

One very interesting and suggestive point in this poem is found when the poetic subject states that pain makes the body’s aggression separate the spirit from the temporality needed to build the allegorical, mystical house. There are two themes to consider in this phrase. First, pain is physical yet it can affect the spirit. Second, that spirit, in order to build the house, must stick to a time-line. Both ideas seem at first to contradict my argument that a Sufi mystical process may be at work, and that this process is a point of similarity for Janés and Rosa as well as for Joaquim Pessoa, to whom I have referred. However, I would like to emphasize that the pain referred to is not necessarily a physical ailment, but a spiritual impasse that creates a seemingly insuperable tension in the builder. This tension thus distracts the builder from completing the creation of “qalb,” and if finished, it will remain unused. Aggression on the part of the body in *Khalq* is a natural reaction to this sort of impasse, a symptom rather than a cause. Its presence also strengthens the idea that spirit and body are linked in such a way so that the body’s state in *Khalq*, the mundane world, reflects the state of the sublime spirit in *Haqq*, the divine world. As for the second point, that the spirit follows a time-line, I must again emphasize that any mystical process requires a concentration during the passage of time in *Khalq* so that the divine mirror image of that world, or *Haqq*, may be revealed to the mystic.

These worlds exist with or without the passage of time and in simultaneous binary opposition to one-another. If left alone these worlds are timeless; it is the mystic who feels the constraints of time on his body in *Khalq*. This constraint, of course, may be a point of stress for the mystic's spirit, even if the divine knowledge of the two worlds' coexistence is clear to him.⁸ It is also necessary to point out that in Sufi mystical practice, *love*, and not pain, is the key to mystical illumination (Simon, "An Iberian Search" 111). By allowing pain to take over, the mystic falls away from the correct path. So the mention of pain as a detriment to illumination in the poem both reinforces the Sufi roots of this process and removes the presence of mystical processes such as those of San Juan de la Cruz, which are based on the notion of pain as the key to union with God.

I have been focusing on the Sufi connection between Rosa and Janés. There are also notions of a mystical geometry in the collection which do not necessarily reference back to Sufi tradition, although they do demonstrate another point of similarity between the two poets. Several poems studied here utilize geometric imagery, such as the support columns and shape of the "casa." As a basis for comparison, in the prologue of one of Janés's recent works, *El Libro de los pájaros*, Janés states that in contemplating the objects that make up the universe, "las letras del libro de la naturaleza, cuyas combinaciones, dice Platón, se expresan en formulas matemáticas... Todo ello ha constutuido la lección cotidiana que confirmaba mis lecturas e intuiciones, siendo los pájaros sus principales mediadores..." (*El Libro de los pájaros* 10-11). As the bird represents the poetic word in many of Janés's poems, we may take the statement above to mean that the poetic word becomes a tool for the representation of mystical geometric forms in the poetic subject's path to illumination. In poem 32 of the work, the bird, or poet word, crosses the horizontal and vertical axis, which together create the "cráter" that "funde en infinito" (Eng., "fuses in infinity"):

Todo está dicho
en el cerúleo lienzo:

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la indetenible quietud
del blanco,
el ir y venire del ala abarcadora,
cintas que tejen
los dos vórtices,
se entretejen en
el cráter nevado
que funde en infinito (77).

It is the vision of the bird, flying above the event described, that allows us to see it.

In a similar way Rosa's construction is represented to us through the poetic word, although in the case of *O Aprendiz Secreto* there is a duplicity of meaning in the word's representative and constructive functions. Of course, this may suggest a slight difference in contemporary traditions in each Iberian country. While a Spanish poet such as Janés may see the poetic word as the reflection of a mystical poetic universe, Rosa, Joaquim Pessoa and other Portuguese poets may see the poetic word as ontologically as well as symbolically, and thus epistemologically, charged within the mystical environment. In poem 24 of the present work, Rosa speaks of the "black crater" whose circular shape is converted by the builder's imagination into a "circular projection" of the self as nearing closer to the end of existence, or the negative center which opposes the affirmative center to which the house provides access. Just as the poetic word may create the "casa," thus, its absence may reinforce the emptiness felt when the tension described above takes over the process. Janés's crater, created by geometry, is also a shape which signifies emptiness. However, in this case, Janés's poetic subject uses the poetic word to *represent* the creation of the negative space (which is, of course, part of the universal binary opposition of emptiness and presence felt throughout her poetic work). Rosa, by negating the poetic word's presence, does not just represent the negative, he *creates* it. Again, given the similarities between these two poets, this difference, although slight, may be explained through the suggestion of a difference in poetic traditions of Spain and Portugal.⁹

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Returning to *O Aprendiz*, there is another theme present, that of friendship and its importance in the house's construction. In the poem spanning pages 86 and 88 (pages 87 and 89 contain Janés's translation) we see the only indication of a physical world relatively untouched by the process which has, in all other poems of the collection, converted the outside world into symbolic abstraction:

O construtor está reunido com alguns amigos à volta de uma redonda mesa de pedra, no terraço. Um deles abana um velho fogareiro de barro onde vai pondo a assar sardinhas prateadas e um pouco gordas que logo se tornam loiras sobre a grelha por entre a qual se elevam as pequenas e faiscantes chamas do carvão. O ambiente é extremamente agradável porque dali se vê a larga faixa azul de um rio e entre os pinheiros e os eucaliptos e porque o ar é suave e a folhagem oscila levemente dispensando uma sobra fresca e tranquila. Este instante do encontro é um privilégio único em que a alegria reina e a palavra é fácil, transparente, plena da energia que difundem as árvores verdejantes de largas copas, a terra de um jardim um pouco selvagem, os fermentos vivos da aragem, o espaço solar, a pureza ácida dos frutos e das sementes. O instante é vivido na plenitude dos elementos que, imperceptivelmente, se combinam e constituem a integridade viva da presença do ser. A consciência não se apercebe da intrincada e odorífera trama subtil de tudo quanto a estimula e a projecta no círculo vivo do instante sempre inicial. Pouco se fala da construção, mas esta animada e revivificante pausa, é ainda uma construção, a leve e incandescente construção da amizade na abertura do encontro e da participação mútua da esfera do ser. A separação individual deixa de reger o comportamento dos que participam no encontro e a palavra opera a metamorfose do eu que, assim, se torna o centro aberto dos impulsos afectivos e eufóricos que se reflectem no círculo luminoso e ardente do encontro. É por esta razão que o construtor sente que a obra está em movimento na palavra viva dos que estão sentados em torno da redonda mesa de pedra bebendo um pouco de vinho e comendo as doiradas sardinhas que um deles lhes vai passando de sobre a grelha colocada sobre as brasas de que se elevam pequenas chamas faiscantes, no velho fogareiro de barro, que esse amigo aviva com um pequeno abano de palhas entrançadas.

What seems present as in all other poems, however, are the basic geometric shapes, mentioned above, which make up the construction, such as the roundness of the table and the sun, and the column-like stature of the trees. It may be

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argued that here we obtain a glimpse of the reality that has inspired Rosa's work, that is, a relaxing sardine cook-out with his friends in the garden of this house. Given the mystical quality of Rosa's poetry, I am sceptical of this position. Rather, I believe that the reader may witness not the inspiration for the collection, but the mundane side of the act of construction, that is, the reflection of the divine *Haqq* known to the Sufi mystic as *Khalq*. Thus, while seemingly outside of the "casa," the poetic subject makes evident that he exists in the divine house and the mundane house, i.e., the physical world, at the same time. The simultaneity of these two worlds may also be observed in the statement that the work of "construction" is not mentioned, because here we see that the act of constructing friendships represents the sublime nature of what would otherwise be a rather mundane weekend on the porch. This new, non-geometrical construction seems to appear after the "casa" is built. The reader, then, may be inclined to view the habitation of the house as a different kind of construction, perhaps as a unification of people within the divine dwelling.

Related to the above theme is that found in the poem on page 124:

A finalidade da construção não é a obra acabada para ser habitada finalmente na tranquilidade de um repouso merecido. O gesto construtivo é um fim em si mesmo, porque é um modo de abrir e habitar o espaço da construção. A obra nunca será uma propriedade mas sim a actividade incessante de um operário que se constrói a si mesmo em cada gesto construtivo. A matéria obscura e a matéria diurna reúnem-se num gesto inovador que se repercute no construtor amante. A realidade aparece agora à luz desse gesto amoroso e ingénuo que é como um feixe de centelhas que se curva, se eleva e se abate sobre a pedra e a modela tornando-a um astro do instante criativo. Graças a esta acção construtiva, a opacidade da existência é integrada no movimento instaurador da construção e, sem ser suprimida, torna-se uma componente estética da obra em construção. Esta transformação da relação com o real não encerra o ciclo das interrogações, das dúvidas e angústias do construtor. Estas são revividas à luz da génese construtiva e consagradas como momentos do mistério vivo do real. Todavia, isto não quer dizer que toda a negatividade da existência humana seja reabsorvida e integrada pelo processo construtivo. O núcleo deste é sempre um ponto negro e

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as suas margens confinam com o silêncio do impronunciável. O gesto construtivo não suprime ou elide o negativo, mas o seu ímpeto inadiável e a sua verticalidade erigem-se sobre o fundo negro da existência e criam o horizonte das possibilidades iniciais da construção humana.

Here, the act of construction is the method by which one may both create and enter into the constructed space. Interestingly, both the time-line from construction to habitability and the notion of habitable space versus the action to create it are lost in this poem. That is, participation and creation *is* union and habitation. By only acting to create the “casa” the builder has “united” affirmative and negative energies of which the universe is comprised (and which appear in poem 24 of *O Aprendiz*). There is a striking similarity here to the Sufi mystical process, in which the revelation of *Khalq* and *Haqq*’s simultaneous duality happens only through the conscious participation of the mystic in the creation of the divine space of union, or “qalb.” Here, the participation in creating the divine “casa” results in the builder’s ability to reside in that space. It should be noted that the two types of energies here are not brought together as one; rather, the builder has utilized both in his construction efforts. This “union,” thus, is not so much a union of the parts as it is a simultaneous application to a single purpose. This is not unlike the process, found in Janés’s *Diván y el Ópalo de Fuego*, of the separate spiritual trajectories of the two main characters, “Leyla” and “Majnun.” (These characters first appear in Ibn Árabi’s work, *Taryuman al-Aswaq*, which forms the basis for *Diván*.¹⁰) Leyla and Majnun, although in different physical spaces, simultaneously move toward each other and toward the construction of “qalb,” both physically (through Majnun’s wandering in the desert toward Leyla’s home) and spiritually (through Leyla’s desire for mystical union with Majnun). Each of these characters exists in the world of *Khalq*, which serves as the base from which the mystic (Majnun) and the lover (Leyla) may build their “house,” or “qalb,” and thus ascend to *Haqq*. The two energies of the characters may then inhabit the same space by working

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simultaneously toward the goal of union within “qalb.” As an example, the fifth section of *Diván*, “Vida en el desierto,” continues the image of Majnun’s wanderings on the geographic fringes of his world, both physically (in the desert) and mystically (as a Janesian illuminated lover). In one poem, “Layla confía su sentir a una vela, una mariposa nocturna y una nube,” Leyla’s emotional state takes center-stage, not in isolation, but as reflected in the growing “qalb” contained within Majnun:

A la vela que cabecea
pregunto por el calor
que los lutos del humo desvanecen.
Consumiéndose en lágrimas de cera
se aviva todavía y emula
el corazón de Machnún

A la falena que se le acerca
pregunto por su impulso invencible.
Desplegando las alas a ella se entrega
y dibuja en el espacio
mi propio corazón.

A la nube que absorbe nuestros suspiros
suplico que se aparte de la lluvia
y en fuego transmutada reúna nuestras llamas
en una hoguera única,
un astro inagotable,
cifra de nuestro amor.

Yo soy, Machnún, la voz de Layla,
del clamor envoltura,
de quien es transparencia,
figura de figura
que se ve con tus ojos (60).

Leyla’s emotions are transferred in the first three stanzas from her, through the object perceived (a candle, then a night butterfly, and finally a cloud) and into Majnun’s growing “qalb.” Again, “qalb” exists only due to Layla’s contact with Majnun, thus it is her emotional state, or “rain / transmuted into fire collecting our flames / in a singular hearth” which builds the impassioned “qalb” in Majnun. Finally, Majnun’s self-declaration as Leyla’s voice makes sense as he is, in

essence, declaring his voice as transformed into hers and vice-versa. Thus, despite their physical separation, their single sexual encounter has created the possibility of sublime unity within the intermediate space which, by way of Leyla's feminine divinity and Majnun's devotion to her, continues to grow. This unity, however, would not be possible *before* the creation of "qalb," just as the unity of energies in Rosa's work would not be possible without the simultaneously opposed positive and negative forces (which could be interpreted in Janés's work as that of the physical versus spiritual wonderers) that have come together separately to build the mystical "house."

As for the issue of the translation into Spanish, Janés wisely employs a vocabulary selection which reflects efficiently the meaning of the original poetry. For example, the translation of the word "mediação" on page 8 of the work is translated as "intermediario" (9). This lexical choice qualifies the notion of respecting the ambiguity as an intermediary, which the original Portuguese word implies. In Janés's translation of the word, the connotation of a person who mediates is evident, while the original does not contain that meaning. Rather, the original word could be any entity, animate or not, which serves as an abstract point between two ideas. While the original poem in Portuguese maintains the inanimate nature of the notion of respect, Janés's Spanish language version personifies the notion, re-enforcing the allegorical nature of the collections' symbolism as a whole. Thus, through shrewd lexical selection, Janés has managed to bring semantic connotations to the surface that may not necessarily be at first apparent to the reader.

The final poem of the collection summarizes all of the themes discussed above and also mentions others whose importance to the work (as well as to Rosa's poetic trajectory as a whole) cannot be ignored:

O corpo e o espaço constituem os dois dados essenciais da correlação do ser no mundo. Cada um deles é condição do outro e é por isso que a construção é um corpo do espaço e é o espaço do corpo, unindo, assim, a interioridade obscura do sangue à fulguração solar da terra. Esta unidade é, ao mesmo tempo, um dado originário, dissimulando pelos afazeres da vida quotidiana,

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e o ritmo do movimento construtivo sempre em uníssono com a integridade viva do ser. O espaço do corpo é o espaço da insurreiçã e da vitória unificadora de Eros sobre as tendências negativas do ser. Quando o construtor projecta este espaço, sente a vivacidade feliz da energia liberta e a sua ondulação unânime e unificadora. Os deuses da antiguidade preencheram este espaço virgem e inicial em que o mundo aparece no seu começo e nas suas fascinantes configurações. Agora é ainda a divindade imemorial que estremece na projecção desse espaço cuja nudez é a presença do corpo total aberto como um harmonioso leque em que pulsam as energias irradiantes. As bandeiras do poder e da glória não podem ser hasteadas neste espaço virgem em que o corpo atingiu a sua penitude nua e o seu poder originário. Mas a comunidade pode encontrar aí a sua vitalidade pura e reactualizar a festa do encontro no círculo da regeneração humana. Não há qualquer redução do espaço puramente corporal da construção: o que era divino ou o que era a origem do divino é a presença mesma da totalidade reencontrada no círculo inicial do ser. Assim, o espaço do corpo é a simbiose do sol e do mar numa festa essencialmente originária e, por isso, origem de todas as festas do encontro. A unidade indivisível do ser torna-se o domínio da visibilidade pura do corpo em que as energias do desejo se configuram como presenças da realidade vivida na unidade essencial com o espaço (*O Aprendiz* 136).

In this poem we see the notion that body and space are unified through a desire for union with the lover. This notion is supported, at least implicitly and in part, through the presence of geometric shapes, such as the sphere which represents both a mystical cycle and the house (and thus the body). The lovers' union in "qalb," the final stage before illumination, is emphasized in the layering of meanings found within this geometric symbolism. There is also the idea that love contrasts negativity, the latter being the greatest impediment to the construction of the house. By unifying them, however, we see that they form a simultaneous binary opposition through which the builder may create the divine space, the house (another symbol for the "qalb," or heart in which the lovers unite before attaining illumination). The erotic, mystical path seen here is reminiscent of the Sufi path studied in Janés's poetry. In fact, in Janés's poetry we see the above themes played out time and again. Finally, the house serves not only the builder but the community as well, as we see first in poem 124, to attain illumination. Returning

to the poem from *Árcangel de Sombra* cited above, although we could see the final verses of the poem by the united poetic subject as an indication of an anti-hegemonic, pro-feminine discourse still alive through the fluidity of gender definitions in Janés's poetic subject, I believe that the significance of the poem lays simultaneously in the Neo-Platonic ideal of the enlightened guiding the cave-dwellers to enlightenment. Here, the united poetic subject says "I am the third angel / and I will tender my hand to you / for you to cross the bridge," a declaration not only of her own ascension and newly-found enlightenment, but also of her willingness to help others attain the same illumination and union through the erotic mystical experience (which the poetic subject achieves in the second section of *Árcangel de Sombra*). This notion may help to explain the connection between the communal spirit working in Rosa's poem and the desire to return to aid others, found throughout Janés's poetry and particularly present in this poem.

Many consider Clara Janés to be both mystical and post-modern, as seen in articles by Wilcox, Keefe Ugalde and other critics. As we discussed at the beginning of this article, António Ramos Rosa's work brings to light the idea that through the polissemey his work is known for, one may find illumination, be it mystical (as in the case of *O Aprendiz Secreto*) or existential (as in cases previous to this work and cited here). The translation of his work by Janés certainly makes evident some of his own mystical leanings. Nonetheless, the connection between the two writers through mystical poetry is exciting not only because it shows a similar preoccupation with mystical thematic on both sides of the border. This link also bridges a somewhat recognized but not thoroughly studied gap in the dialog between neighboring Spanish and Portuguese cultures. This dialog is both diachronic and synchronic, dealing with issues common to both sides of where their cultures came from (i.e., an Iberian, yet non-Christian, mystical tradition like that of the Sufi) and where they are going (i.e., what aspects of contemporary culture would bring about the resurgence of this type of

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mystical discourse in an environment of essentially post-modern thinking in the peninsula).¹¹

In reading Clara Janés's translation of António Ramos Rosa's *O Aprendiz Secreto*, we find ourselves facing the notions of polissemism and eroticism in each author's work as linked through the mystical illumination. Despite the absence of an anti-hegemonic struggle of the type found in Janés's own poetry, by comparing Rosa's work to that of Clara Janés, we have opened the door for a greater recognition of mysticism's transcultural and transnational presence in the Iberian Peninsula. By translating Rosa's work into Spanish, Janés may also have opened the door toward a better understanding of the shared thematics and symbolism of Spanish and Portuguese poetic traditions by both the Spanish and the Portuguese. This final idea is, nonetheless, a possibility which remains to be seen.

Notes:

1. Along with references to Joaquim Pessoa, another Portuguese poet whose symbolism and realization of mystical creation seems similar to Rosa's.

2. The term "anti-hegemonic" as appears here refers to the inversion and subsequent deconstruction of the male hegemony as present in Iberian cultures and as perceived through Janés's poetry (Keefe Ugalde, "La subjetividad" 312).

3. See Baldick 83.

4. The term "uniquely complete humanized poetry" is applied here to refer to the idea present in the quote by Guimarães. That is, poetic creation becomes a form of human action and being, as opposed to remaining a human creation. This completes the process whereby a person's unique situation is *expressed* through poetry; indeed, the human condition is *enacted through* poetry. Rosa's poetry, thus, does not just remain a polissemic representation of the author's humanity; it creates that humanity through the creative power of the poetic word. I have noted this phenomenon in the mystical poetry of both Clara Janés and Joaquim Pessoa (Simon, "An Iberian Search"), as well as in the Surrealist works of Cesariny de Vasconcelos (Simon, "Amores").

5. Please note that the term "recognized" is used above—I have avoided the term "realized" so as not to confuse the notion of realizing a process with that of recognizing the innate quality of material as forever joined with energy, or the mundane world in simultaneous binary opposition to the divine world. This notion is key to Sufi mystical thought beginning with Ibn 'Arabi's *Taryuman al-Aswaq*.

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6. This lover had appeared in the first two sections of *Árcangel de Sombra* as an ascended mystic who has returned to guide another toward illumination. This is seen in both Clara Janés's and Joaquim Pessoa's work, as my own research has shown (Simon, "An Iberian Search")

7. Joaquim Pessoa, a contemporary Portuguese poet, utilizes a mystical thematic to emphasize and develop an anti-hegemonic discourse in his poetry from around 1980 to the present day. As is clear from my own investigation, although he and Clara Janés come from different traditions their poetries suggest a closer connection than would at first be thought.

8. This stage of the Sufi process is known as "Ma'rifat," or Divine Knowledge.

9. This notion requires a more detailed study that is well beyond the scope of this article.

10. These characters are the protagonists of Ibn-Árabi's *Taryuman al-Aswaq*, or *The Interpreter of Desires*. Majnun, or "the crazed one," takes a mystical journey which begins at the point at which he perceives of Leyla's beauty ("Leyla" is Arabic for "night"). Luce López-Baralt describes this idea, as well as its application in Janés's *Diván*, in the introduction to that work (*Diván* 15-16).

11. Although not discussed at length here, I plan on expanding upon these two directions in future studies.

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