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DE-COINCIDENCE IN POETRY. ANALYSIS OF THE POEM THE PURE NO (EL PURO NO) BY OLIVERIO GIRONDO

Abstract: This article presents an innovative reading of the poetry of Oliverio Girondo – one of the most prominent representatives of the Argentinian literary avant-garde – through the lens of Gaston Bachelard's theory of poetic imagination. The starting point is the concept of de-coincidence, defined by François Jullien as a departure from coincidence and adequacy towards novelty and the discovery of the unknown, which enables a reinterpretation of the poet's works. The analysis focuses on the poem *The Pure No (El puro no)*, from the volume *In the Moremarrow (En la masmédula)*, which marks the height of Girondo's formal and semantic experimentation. The article highlights deep connections between the poet's work and Bachelard's concept of the four elements, with particular emphasis on earth. In the poem, earth – traditionally associated with fertility and permanence – is completely stripped of these properties and depicted as barren, dead and incapable of sustaining life. Girondo constructs negative material imagination: a space of extreme negation, devoid of form, substance and even the possibility of decay. "No" becomes the dominant poetic category, transforming the materiality of the earth into "no-matter" and time into "no-time" – stagnant and unchanging. From this perspective, earth appears as the foundation of a poetics of radical negation.

Keywords: Oliverio Girondo, literary avant-garde, Argentinian avant-garde, Gaston Bachelard, poetic imagination, earth element, phenomenology, *The Pure No*.

Introduction

This paper refers to the work of Octavio José Oliverio Girondo (1891-1967), known as Oliverio Girondo – one of the leading representatives of the Argentinian literary avant-garde – who experimented with language and form to reflect the dynamics of the present day. His work was deeply rooted in the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, which rejected modernnism in favour of new forms of expression. Girondo introduced radical innovations in language, exploring its materiality and boundaries. He distanced himself from work recognised as art, already established in its adequacy, and knew how to oppose it, gradually widening the gap with what was generally accepted and perceived as artistic activity in his time.

For Girondo, language became a space of cultural struggle and resistance to literary norms; he aimed to surprise his readers at every turn. He frequently coined neologisms, arranged verses graphically, and departed from traditional syntax and semantics, expanding the boundaries of poetry and pushing language to its limits. It is also worth noting the polysemous nature of the linguistic units he employed and the special significance he attributed to imagery, particularly the visual dimension of his spatial compositions. These elements demonstrate how Girondo truly renewed poetry. The continuity of Girondo's work - its interconnectedness, evolution, sound and musical dimensions (including repetitions of words, sounds and letters; neologisms; phonetic and musical qualities of words; grammatical, rhythmic and musical structures) - is particularly significant. For Girondo, words were not only carriers of meaning but also possessed audio, visual and emotional dimensions. He was a poet of de-coincidence: he questioned coincidence, disagreed with what he had already done and re-evaluated what he had previously achieved, thus opening himself to new possibilities of thought and creation². He often produced different versions of the same poem or even an entire anthology, as was the case with In the Moremarrow (En la masmédula).

The first part of this article presents the poet's profile and briefly discusses his avantgarde work. This is followed by a discussion of the elements in Gaston Bachelard's theory of poetic imagination, establishing connections between it and Girondo's poetry. The final section offers an analysis of the poem *The Pure No (El puro no)* from Girondo's volume In the Moremarrow³. In Girondo's

F. Jullien, *Ponownie otworzyć możliwości. De-koincydencja i kolejne życie*, transl. E. Marynowicz-Hetka, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2024, p. 154.

² Ibid., pp. 56, 57.

O. Girondo, El puro no, in: Obra completa, ed. R. Antelo, ALLCA XX, Madrid, Barcelona, Lisboa, París, México, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Lima, Guatemala, San José, Santiago de Chile 1999, p. 231.

work, de-coincidence - defined by Jullien as incompatibility and inadequacy⁴ - becomes a tool for interpretive de-coincidence; his poem will be analysed through the lens of Bachelard's poetic imagination, focusing in particular on the element of earth. The point of departure will be adequacy with Bachelard "so that new may emerge - that is, a detachment from this coincidence"5.

Oliverio Girondo was a traveller and cosmopolitan, and his life became a perfect reflection of an avant-garde author. He had an overwhelming influence on the development of Argentinian poetry from the 1920s onwards. The work of this Argentinian poet is very peculiar and rich - he did not commit to a single literary genre but drew on eclectic currents in his work, including symbolism, creolism, tellurism, and various avant-garde movements such as ultraism, creationism, surrealism, literary cubism and simultaneism. At the same time, his output remains among the least known in twentieth-century Hispano-American poetry, which has made him something of a cult figure. Girondo was a pioneer of the avant-garde both in his own country and in South America, creating new poetry and a new poetic model. His works revolutionised Argentinian literature, redefining the boundaries of poetry, and his legacy continues to shape the study of avant-garde literature.

Oliverio Girondo's works include anthologies of poetry and short stories, such as: Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía (1922, French edition; 1925, Argentinian edition), Calcomanías (1925), Espantapájaros (al alcance de todos) (1932), Interlunio (1937), Persuasión de los días (1942), Campo nuestro (1946), and En la masmédula (1953, first version consisting of 16 poems; 1956, final version with ten additional poems). He was also the author of plays such as La Madrastra (1915) and La comedia de todos los días (1916), written in collaboration with René Zapata Quesada, though only the first one was staged. It is worth highlighting their static nature (in contrast to his dynamic poetry full of movement), especially their Maeterlinckian character, realising Maeterlinck's concepts of static drama, allegorism and symbolism. The theatricality of Girondo's other artistic work should also be emphasised - the performative nature of both his texts and the promotion and dissemination of his own work. Girondo also published *Membretes* in the journal "Martín Fierro" from 1920 onwards. A collection of philosophical aphorisms inspired by the greguerías of Ramón Gómez de la Serna, these works offer reflections on art, especially literature and painting, in the broadest sense and mock the seriousness of official culture with irony.

It is worth noting Girondo's relationship with the visual arts, as he was also an art critic. His work in this area includes a review of an exhibition by the

F. Jullien, De-koincydencja..., p. 38.

Ibid., p. 55, translated by the author.

sculptor Gonzalo Leguizamón Pondal (written with René Zapata Quesada), published in the journal "La Revista Teatral y Social" (1911), and the textcatalogue *Pintura moderna* (1936) on an exhibition from the Rafael Crespo collection presented at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires. In these texts. Girondo combines precise, analytical art criticism with a metaphorical literary style; he describes art exhibitions in detail while also reflecting on his own literature and his vision of art (metaliterature). Girondo's own artistic activity should also be highlighted, including illustrations for the anthology Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía, as well as the use of filmic and photographic techniques in his poetry, where each text functions like a postcard or a photograph - as if the poet had captured landscapes and set them in motion. The poetic experience in his work is not only contained in the words, but also in what they reflect. The most avant-garde, formally and semantically radical work in Girondo's oeuvre is his final poetry anthology, written well into adulthood and entitled En la masmédula (In the Moremarrow). There, the poet uses distorted words, word clusters and deformations, is fond of neologisms and breaks grammatical rules by blurring the boundaries between different parts of speech (nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc.). Words in these poems operate on both semantic and phonetic levels. Girondo also breaks with graphic conventions through the absence of punctuation and the unconventional arrangement of verses, which acquires visual meaning. Scott Challener⁶, writing in the "Los Angeles Review of Books", emphasises that Girondo aimed to create a "breathable language" - poetry that transcends meaning and becomes a bodily experience. The poem analysed later in the paper, The Pure No, comes from this volume, In the Moremarrow.

Elements According to the Poetic Imagination of Gaston Bachelard

An in-depth analysis of Oliverio Girondo's poetic texts can be undertaken by adopting the phenomenological approach proposed by Gaston Bachelard, according to which the poetic image is understood as a new phenomenon of language. This perspective allows us to explore Girondo's poetic imagination⁷ and to identify the structure of his poetic universe, constituted by the four elements of nature: water, fire, air and earth. Bachelard, referring to the ancient division into the four elements, analyses them through the lens of poetic

G. Bachelard, On Poetic Imagination and Reverie, transl. C. Gaudin, Spring Publications, Dallas, TX 1998.

S. Challener, A Breathable Language: Oliverio Girondo and the Poetry of the Americas, "Los Angeles Review of Books", 11 April 2019, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-breathable-language-oliverio-girondo-and-the-poetry-of-the-americas/ [accessed: 25.04.2025].

imagination. He does not treat them as physical substances, but as archetypal symbols and sources of imagination that shape our dreams and art. According to the French philosopher, "each element has its own poetics, psychology, ethics, and shapes experiences"8; "it triggers ideas, emotional reactions, appeals to beliefs and cultural identity (...)"9. Thus, we can speak of a psychoanalysis of the elements, of their material imagination. Poetic imagination assumes that we imagine not only forms or figures, but also the material qualities of the elements, which evoke specific emotions and deep associations. Drawing freely on the methods of psychoanalysis and phenomenology, Bachelard explores how each element influences human imagination and how these elements stimulate poetic creativity. For the originator of the concept of material imagination, the elements are not only sources of poetic inspiration but also profound symbols of aspects of human life and the psyche.

The following section presents each of the elements. Due to the limited scope of this paper, the discussion will necessarily remain concise. Fire is associated with dynamic imagination because it is in constant and rapid transformation. Bachelard addresses it in his work La psychanalyse du feu (1938), translated into English as The Psychoanalysis of Fire¹⁰, in which he emphasises that it symbolises desire, transformation, mystery, and also passion or the creative impulse. He also stresses its dual nature: on the one hand, it is destructive and threatening; on the other, purifying and creative - both life-giving and deadly. It is capable of uniting good and evil, and thus can contradict itself. Fire is also linked to the Prometheus complex: the desire to know what is forbidden or dangerous.

According to the concept of material imagination, all liquid is water, and everything that flows is considered water. Water is associated with lyrical imagination and inner experience. It is explored in Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter¹¹ (L'eau et les rêves: Essai sur l'imagination de la matière, 1942), where it symbolises emotional depth and profound imagination. It carries an ambivalent poetics of birth and death. Water can signify peace or melancholy; above all, it expresses the emotions of the soul - sadness, despair, or nostalgia. Key images linked to the element of water include rivers and lakes, conceived as spaces of reflection and sorrow. One can also speak of the water of motherhood (with the sea as its symbol) and the water of femininity; water

P. Gurgul, Filozoficzne ujęcia wyobraźni poetyckiej. Wprowadzenie do myśli Gastona Bachelarda, słowo / obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2022, p. 46, translated by the author.

Ibid., p. 48, translated by the author.

G. Bachelard, The Psychoanalysis of Fire, transl. A. C. M. Ross, Beacon Press, Boston 1964.

G. Bachelard, Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter, transl. E. R. Farrell, Pegasus Foundation, Dallas, TX 1983.

is tied to the idea of immersion, evoking a return to the womb. The elements of water and air intermingle, and one can even transform into the other.

Air is identified with volatile or light imagination. Its poetics are discussed in *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*¹² (*L'air et les songes: essai sur les l'imagination du mouvement*, 1943), where it symbolises freedom, lightness, sublimity, movement and flight ("the poetics of wings", the alternating ascent and descent; the flight of a bird symbolises the soul in motion). Air is linked to dreams, imagination and spirituality. According to Bachelard, imagination associated with air occurs most rarely – less frequently than those associated with fire, water, or earth.

Earth, by contrast, is associated with static imagination and is discussed in two of Bachelard's works: Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter¹³ (La terre et les reveries de la volonté, 1948) and Earth and Reveries of Repose: An Essay on Images of Interiority¹⁴ (La terre et les rêveries du repos, 1948). The earth of repose is linked to warmth, drowsiness and security, while the earth of will is associated with strength, resistance, perseverance, struggle and labour. According to the philosopher of imagination, earth symbolises solidity, stability, permanence, constancy, shelter, rootedness, as well as silence and weight. It embodies the notion of home, as it provides a sense of security and stability, and a feeling of belonging to nature, to history, and to the place in which we live. It serves as the foundation for all forms of life and growth – the very basis of our sense of existence. Earth is also the element of materiality: permanent, concrete, tangible, and real.

According to Bachelard, "For each poet, then, it is possible to create a diagram that would reveal the meaning and symmetries of their metaphorical combinations, just as the diagram of a flower reveals the meaning and symmetries of its successive phases of blooming (...). We believe that the reality and the profound logic of a poetic work are discovered *post factum*, objectively, only after it has come into full bloom" Let us, then, attempt to draw up a poetic diagram of Oliverio Girondo.

G. Bachelard, Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement, transl. E. R. Farrell, Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas, TX 1988.

G. Bachelard, Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter, transl. K. Haltman, Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas, TX 2002.

¹⁴ G. Bachelard, Earth and Reveries of Repose: An Essay on Images of Interiority, transl. M. McAllester Jones, Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas, TX 2011.

¹⁵ G. Bachelard, Wyobraźnia poetycka. Wybór pism, PIW, Warszawa 1975, p. 57, translated by the author.

Oliverio Girondo and the Poetic Imagination of Gaston Bachelard

In his works Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía and Calcomanías, Girondo presents both a symbolic and a real journey. The poems in these anthologies take on imaginary values that, in line with Bachelardian poetics, lead us towards a "poetics of flight". In them, Girondo becomes a poet of the air, frequently invoking movement, speed, the city and the landscape of the world - elements that contrast with the poems in the volume Campo nuestro, which evoke the countryside, stillness, constancy, the local landscape and the earth. For Girondo, the journey represents a mythic metamorphosis not only of the body but also of the spirit; it acquires a spiritual dimension, as he discovers in it the profound meaning of literature and its relationship to life.

In Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía and Calcomanías, the poet also addresses the earthly journey, drawing attention to references to the body, nature, the city and its elements - something tangible and concrete from the physicalearthly plane. He reveals the poetry of geographical postcards in which he traverses both real and imaginary territories: earthly and human geographies. For Girondo, the map is not merely a marker of places but also signifies a journey; it serves as a guide that shows the way. In his works, poetic and physical space play a significant role. For example, in the poetry collection *Campo nuestro*, the author depicts the mythic-magical space of Argentinian pampas, with all imagery transcending traditional telluric representations to become a pure metaphor.

Girondo's journey can also be perceived vertically. According to Bachelard's definition, the vertical poet is associated with the basic elements - those of phenomenological nature - air or earth. This verticality appears in downwards movements such as descent, falling, or dropping "from the sky to the earth", as well as in upward motions "from the earth to the sky", associated with metaphors of shadow, speed, rapidity, vertigo and climbing stairs at night. In his poems, Girondo expresses lightness and dematerialisation of the body through images of lightness and flight, symbolising a strive towards the immaterial. The body is presented as changeable, light, capable of transformation, floating and dissolving - signifying a desire to transcend materiality. In Girondo's work, flight becomes a metaphor for freedom and subversion: liberation from prevailing norms and a rupture with earthly reality. It represents the tension between the terrestrial and the aerial. Particularly noteworthy are the poetics of ascent, the metaphorics of flight, and the way in which the author transforms himself from an earthly poet into a poet of the air. To sum up, the three characteristic elements of Girondo's poetry are: earth, fall and speed¹⁶.

For more on this subject, see the monograph A. Wendorff, Acercamientos a las poéticas de Oliverio Girondo: Estudio específico sobre un poeta de la vanguardia argentina, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2023.

The Element of Earth in the Poem The Pure No by Oliverio Girondo

This analysis focuses on the element of earth. In Bachelard's poetics, earth represents solidity, concreteness and the archaic. In the case of the poem *The Pure No*, this category is used paradoxically. Girondo invokes the image of earth as a symbol of immutability and eternity – but only to deny and question it. This paradox heightens the sense of emptiness and absolute nothingness in the poem. Earth becomes a hidden structure that supports and reinforces negation.

Let us quote the poem *The Pure No* in its entirety in English, translated from Spanish by Gilbert Alter-Gilbert¹⁷,1 for subsequent analysis:

The Pure No

The no the novarian no the cease aryan no the nooo the post-mucosmos of animal evolent zero no's that no no no and nooo and monoplurally no to the morbid amorpus nooo nodious no no deus no sense no sex no way the stiff no bones about it nooo in the unisolo amodule no pores no nodule nor me nor man nor mal the no no macros dirt the no greater than all no things the pure no the no bull

The discussion will address material imagination and negation, the poetic space of emptiness, time and the concept of "no-time", and earth as an element of negation. In Bachelard's poetics, the primary elements – such as earth or fire – are expressed through what is termed material imagination, that is, sensory and concrete imagery. However, in *The Pure No*, Girondo reverses this principle: he evokes earth from which all traces of substance and fertility have been removed. Just as Bachelard – the author of *La philosophie du non: Essai d'une*

O. Girondo, The Pure No, transl. G. Alter-Gilbert, 2002, https://www.poesi.as/og5611uk.htm [accessed: 10.05.2025].

philosophie du nouvel esprit scientifique, or The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Mind¹⁸ - advocates the overcoming and supplementing of past knowledge and re-evaluation of phenomena and theories, Girondo similarly embraces a poetics of absolute negation. He undermines the materiality of the elements, conjuring an image of earth stripped of all life. The phrase "the stiff no bones about it nooo in the unisolo amodule" evokes a barren, rigid, almost petrified space - a kind of dead earth. Negation pervades the entire poem, transforming earth into a symbol of total infertility: dry land incapable of giving birth to life. In this context, it becomes an image of "no-humanity" and archaic emptiness - a vast terrain that no longer offers support or serves as a root for existence but instead becomes an earth of nothingness. Through the repetition of "no", Girondo constructs negative material imagination that turns earth into "no-matter" - an impossible foundation, stripped of all its life-giving qualities. Earth is transformed into "anti-life", "no-life": a space where all potential is annihilated, a realm of negation devoid of substance or form.

In Bachelard's theory, poetic space allows for the expansion of being. Yet in The Pure No, Girondo constructs a reality that stands in total contrast. It is a space that is dark and dry, stretching without boundaries or contours resembling a dead, mineralised earth. Words such as "no pores", "no nodule" and "the stiff no bones" evoke the image of earth that is sealed, lifeless and inert. It is a space where there is no room for fertility, growth, or transformation - a barren field where even bodies and thoughts are rootless. In this context, negation takes the form of a useless ground that cannot sustain any form of existence, not even thought. Girondo thus appropriates the Bachelardian category of earth to construct a poetic image of emptiness and radical rejection a "macro-no" that supports neither identity nor individuality, as suggested by the phrase "nor me nor man nor mal". Earth becomes a symbolic grave without function - a place that cannot even receive death.

In Bachelardian poetics, time is sometimes conceived as a cyclical process, particularly linked to earth: that which endures, that which changes slowly, that which symbolises eternity. In contrast, in The Pure No, Girondo introduces time that is frozen, fossilised in its very negation. Phrases such as "the no greater than all no things" and "the pure no" evoke an absolute standstill, a lack of movement that mirrors the hardness of dead earth. It is a still, crystallised time - as if the "no" had frozen the poem in a kind of stony eternity. Girondo thereby creates a "no-time" linked to a "no-earth", where the rigidity of negation transforms time into a mineral, closed layer, incapable of development. This

G. Bachelard, The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Mind, transl. G. C. Waterston, Orion Press, New York 1968.

fossilised temporality reinforces the poem's immobility, in which "no" becomes a symbol of an eternity without transformation – an eternity in which even dust, a traditional symbol of decay and rebirth, is absent. Genesis states: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" 19, yet in Girondo's case, the phrase "the no macros dirt" becomes crucial, for it excludes even the very possibility of decay. Notably, in Bachelard's theory, each element is associated with a distinct mode of obliteration – earth disintegrates into dust. In Girondo's vision, even this is denied: the poem negates the possibility of disintegration itself.

In the poem, earth becomes the supreme symbol of negation: a land without dust, without roots, and without the possibility of accepting any form of existence. In *The Pure No*, Girondo takes the negation of matter and earth to an absolute extreme, creating a poetics in which nothingness becomes the only foundation. Here, earth no longer symbolises solidity and fertility in the traditional sense, but instead becomes a sign of negative eternity. Girondo presents earth in an anti-poetic way – as a force within which nothing can be born or sprout, an image of death that transcends death itself. His "no" evokes a space in which even dust has no place, and earth becomes useless, rigid, utterly incapable of transformation. It is no longer earth, but "the pure no" – "the no bull", as Girondo writes in the final verses. Earth ceases to be matter and becomes an archetype of silence and absolute stillness, a symbol of nothingness that sustains total negation. It is the "amodule" that creates a universe without pores, without nodules, without the possibility of being inhabited or transformed.

The use of the category of earth according to Bachelard's concept reveals that *The Pure No* is a poem in which Girondo develops a poetics of absolute negation. Material imagination transforms earth into a symbol of barrenness and rigidity, and poetic space becomes a dry, negative realm, devoid of substance and form. Time is frozen in a "no-time" – an eternity without change. Ultimately, earth ceases to be a place of life: it becomes a "pure no", an image of total emptiness, a surface that cannot support any form of existence. Thus, Girondo creates a poem in which nothingness becomes the only possible foundation.

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¹⁹ The Holy Bible: King James Version, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010, Genesis 3:19.

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DE-KOINCYDENCJA W POEZJI. ANALIZA WIERSZA **EL PURO NO OLIVERIA GIRONDA** (streszczenie)

Artykuł stanowi próbę nowatorskiego odczytania poezji Oliveria Gironda - jednego z najwybitniejszych przedstawicieli argentyńskiej awangardy literackiej - poprzez pryzmat wyobraźni poetyckiej Gastona Bachelarda. Punktem wyjścia jest koncepcja de-koincydencji, rozumiana za François Jullienem jako odejście od zgodności i adekwatności w kierunku nowości i odkrywania nieznanego, która pozwala na reinterpretację utworów poety. Analiza skupia się na wierszu

The Pure No (El puro no) z tomu In the Moremarrow (En la masmédula), będącego apogeum formalnych i semantycznych eksperymentów Gironda. Artykuł wskazuje na głębokie związki między twórczością poety a bachelardowską koncepcją czterech żywiołów, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ziemi. Ziemia – tradycyjnie kojarzona z żyznością i trwałością – zostaje w wierszu całkowicie odarta z tych właściwości i ukazana jako jałowa, martwa, niezdolna do podtrzymania życia. Girondo tworzy negatywną wyobraźnię materialną, przestrzeń skrajnej negacji: pozbawioną formy, substancji, nawet możliwości rozpadu. "Nie" staje się dominującą kategorią poetycką, przekształcając materialność ziemi w "nie-materię", a czas – w "nie-czas", zastygły i niezmienny. W tym ujęciu ziemia jawi się jako fundament poetyki radykalnej negacji.

Słowa kluczowe: Oliverio Girondo, awangarda literacka, awangarda argentyńska, Gaston Bachelard, wyobraźnia poetycka, żywioł ziemi, fenomenologia, *El puro no*.

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