

## ARTICLE

# The Subversive Silence of Alejandra Pizarnik

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## Introduction

El silencio, única tentación y la más alta promesa.  
(Pizarnik 2012: 312–13)

The poems of Pizarnik are rooted in a group of meticulously selected emblematic words. One of these emblems, the term 'silencio', was reiterated 'sin cesar, sin tregua, sin piedad' (2012: 311) by the poet throughout the entirety of her rebellious yet extremely brief poetic life. The thematic notion of silence first surfaces explicitly in *Las aventuras perdidas* (1958). Its textual presence is gradually developed over *Árbol de Diana* (1962) and culminates in *Los trabajos y las noches* (1965) where nearly one third of the volume embraces either the term 'silencio' or 'silenciosa'. It is thereafter retained in Pizarnik's poetry as one of its most crucial lyrical features. Although this important aspect has been commented upon by some critics, no explicit work has so far drawn a connection between the notion of silence in Pizarnik and the rebellious energy conveyed in this seemingly submissive idea. In *Límites, diálogos, confrontaciones* (2012), Piña asserts the poet's inclusion of obscenity in her prose work as a form of subversion.<sup>1</sup> Though she declares that 'la represión y la ausencia' of obscenity in Pizarnik's poetry is 'la peculiar forma de obscenidad' (Piña 2012: 45), the subversive force underneath such a silence of sexual explicitness in Pizarnik's poetic work remains undisclosed. However, when one considers the poet's restless demand for silence and her explicit pronouncement of suicide as a profoundly subversive act often pertaining to the same realm as silence (Pizarnik 2012: 299), the silence of Pizarnik seems to be more than a state of mere calmness and tranquillity.

To interrogate the notion of silence, a corpus of sixty-seven poems where the term 'silencio' and its associated adjectives are explicitly pronounced will be my principal focus. I will show that Pizarnik's silence subverts the Symbolic, in the Lacanian and Kristevan senses, through challenging the Symbolic language. To understand the process of the subversion, I divide the chosen corpus and categorise the poems into three progressive phases of rebellion (this does not imply, however, that there is an absence of overlap between these three stages). The first phase begins in *Las aventuras perdidas* (1958) and demonstrates her increasing awareness of silence as homeland, just as poetic language is a homeland. For Pizarnik, poetry from the very start had always been the place 'donde todo sucede' (Pizarnik 2012: 299). Similar to all her favourite 'poetas malditos' (Aira 75), she chose poetry, this simultaneously protective and rebellious realm where all subversive acts are born, as the refuge for both surviving and

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, when I refer to Pizarnik's prose and poetic works, I refer to compositions collected in *Prosa Completa* (2012) and *Poesía Completa* (2009) respectively.

rejecting the Symbolic world. The first phase of subversion illustrates the poet's discovery of silence as another realm where she can reside and rebel. In other words, if we are to visualise poetry as a circle enclosing the poet, and which is within the greater universe of the Symbolic Order, the first stage involves the discovery of another geometric protective circle, that of silence. The protective circle of silence is a refuge because it is outside the totalising system of the Symbolic world. Silence is therefore revealed to be, to Pizarnik, as important as poetic language. The second phase begins in *Árbol de Diana* (1962). It exemplifies her desire to shift the locus of her subversion from poetry to the realm of silence, that is, a desire to leave the poetic circle and move herself to the silent zone. As we shall see, such a wish is very much triggered by dissatisfaction with the representative power of language. Finally, the third phase, mostly late poems from *Extracción de la piedra de locura* (1968) and *El infierno musical* (1971), illustrates her realisation of the subversive aspiration in concrete form, achieved by silencing the speaking subject through replacing words with silence and producing unexpected blank spaces.

I find the theoretical concepts of Julia Kristeva helpful for studying the idea of subversion in Pizarnik through the notion of silence. The choice of Kristeva is not accidental. I choose Kristeva's theory because both Kristeva and Pizarnik see the feasibility of subversive act via poetic language. Pizarnik, unlike her predecessor Alfonsina Storni, was not exactly a feminist poet in the political sense. She was often regarded as apolitical and so unworldly that she committed suicide 'precisamente en Buenos Aires, en el mismo momento en que su país, los países vecinos, su continente, emprende una tarea gigantesca de liberación' (Peri Rossi 585). The single and explicit objective of Pizarnik, as observed by César Aira, was to produce 'buenos poemas and llegar a ser un buen poeta' (14). While she detached herself from overtly rebellious political activities, the subversive force within her poetry, though less visible, is certainly not absent. She subverts, as she acknowledges, in the very domain of poetry:

La poesía es el lugar donde todo sucede. A semejanza del amor, del humor, del suicidio y de todo acto profundamente subversivo, la poesía se desentiende de lo que no es su libertad o su verdad. Decir *libertad* y *verdad* y referir estas palabras al mundo en que vivimos o no vivimos es decir una mentira. No lo es cuando se las atribuye a la poesía: lugar donde todo es posible. (2012: 299, original emphasis)

Comparable to Pizarnik, Kristeva's entire theory of subversion is developed based on the very characteristics of poetic language. In Kristeva's doctoral thesis *La Révolution du langage poétique* (1974), she perceives language as being simultaneously structured and heterogeneous. Kristeva's observations and arguments are based on the works of Stéphane Mallarmé, the French-Uruguayan Conde de Lautréamont, Antonin Artaud and James Joyce, writers who evidently greatly influenced Pizarnik (Piña 2012: 26–7). A further point of convergence between these two writers is Pizarnik's interest in Freudian psychoanalytical theories, clearly illustrated by the poem 'Sala de psicopatología', in which Freud's name is unambiguously pronounced. Therefore, the Kristevan post-structuralist approach based on the literary genre of poetry and psychoanalytical theories serves as an appropriate lens for exploring the subversive forces in Pizarnik.

In this paper, I will employ Kristeva's concept of *signifying process*: 'These two modalities [the semiotic and the symbolic] are inseparable within the *signifying process* that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved' (Kristeva 1984: 24). This *signifying process* is an interaction between these two modalities, the symbolic and the semiotic. The symbolic is the pure systematic component of language, and the semiotic is language's other pure

rhythmic component. The two components, through their interaction, form the *dialectical* final outcome, the Symbolic. The semiotic modality is 'linked to the pre-Oedipal primary processes' (Moi 160). The drives formed in the semiotic are 'discrete quantities of energy [which] move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such' and 'articulate what we call a *chora*' (Kristeva 1984: 25). This is then followed by the *thetic* break, which prepares the entrance into the Symbolic and 'produces the positing of signification' (Kristeva 43). Finally, after the *thetic* break, the subject enters into the Symbolic. Within the Symbolic, although the semiotic *chora* is repressed, it may still attack the Symbolic. Consequently, in Kristeva's view, the Symbolic, the final dialectical outcome can be disrupted and subverted when the pure semiotic modality regains its presence and attacks.

### The First Phase: The Emergence of Silence as an Alternative to Language

The notions of silence and of language in the poetry of Pizarnik often interact with one another in a simultaneously parasitical and repressive manner; for instance, Pizarnik sees silence as fire, and words as water (2009: 288). Nevertheless, silence is transfigured into a conceivable substitute for language at the end of the first phase, in contrast to its position as a mere companion and refuge at the beginning of it. The role of silence as companion is first pronounced in 'La caída'. The poem, composed around 1958, describes a melancholic weeper 'llora junto al silencio' (2009: 81); silence therefore consoles the crier through its very presence. In a later poem, 'Reconocimiento', from *Los trabajos y las noches* (1965), silence is no longer just a companion but that which supports and protects, with the image of lilacs almost always possessing positive connotations in Pizarnik's poetry:

Tú haces el silencio de las lilas que aletean  
 en mi tragedia del viento en el corazón.  
 Tú hiciste de mi vida un cuento para niños  
 en donde naufragios y muertes  
 son pretextos de ceremonias adorables.  
 (2009: 161)

Although many interpret the above poem as an affectionate gesture, analysis perhaps grounded upon the amorous symbolism of lilacs. However, I perceive in it also a competitive tension between silence and language. The second person singular not only possesses utter power over the persona, it also 'haces' and *engenders* silence. Such productive affiliation between 'Tú' and silence discloses that this 'Tú' may not only refer to a beloved but is more appropriately seen as the personified form of Pizarnik's much-beloved poem, words and language. Because, in Pizarnik, 'el lenguaje es siempre un *pretexto* para el silencio. Es mi [su] manera de expresar mi fatiga inexpresable' (2012: 26, my emphasis).

In other words, it is only when words can generate silence that they will be privileged by the poet. Re-examining 'Reconocimiento' by juxtaposing it with the opening poem, titled 'Poema', from the same volume affirms the above presupposition. Similarly to 'Reconocimiento', 'Poema' is structured in two parts separated by full stops, and each fragment also begins with 'Tú'. Poetry, personified as 'Tú' by Pizarnik, chooses 'el lugar de la herida donde hablamos nuestro silencio' (the poem and persona's silence). Furthermore, it transforms the life of the persona to a 'ceremonia demasiado pura' (2009: 155). Poetry is thus important to the persona precisely because it creates a space for speaking silence, as opposed to speaking about silence, as if silence was also a type of language. Such an observation explains why it is the silence created by 'Tú' and not 'Tú' itself which alleviates 'mi tragedia del viento en el corazón'. The tension is thus unveiled when we comprehend that it is silence, and not verbal expression, which

Pizarnik aspires to produce; in other words, what is ultimately desired by her is 'el silencio de las palabras' (2009: 319). On the other hand, the lettered space is merely the pretext for seeking silence, this pure and adorable ceremony. Therefore, while depicting silence as consolation and protection, at the same time Pizarnik sees language as being merely 'el instrumento del que es preciso servirse para poder acceder al silencio' (Soncini 1990: 8).

If silence in 'La caída' and 'Reconocimiento' is only an abstract expression of a temporary protective force, in 'En un lugar para huirse' (positioned only a few pages after 'Reconocimiento'), Pizarnik for the first time grants silence a tangible shape in the universe when she overtly underscores that 'Espacio. Silencio Ardiente' is 'un lugar para huirse' (2009: 184). Silence is now a concrete physical space where the poet can seek protection. In an even later piece, 'Signos', further elaboration of the notion emerges as we learn that silence is portrayed no longer as only an anonymous and impersonal space. Rather, it has been transformed into 'una casa del silencio' (2009: 276), that is, a *permanent* located presence accessible at any moment of need. If we envisage language and silence as the two ends of a simple mass balance, the first phase of subversion reveals that silence is increasingly endowed with greater weight and shaped into another homeland, whereas language is gradually undermined in its significance as the poetic work matures. The poet's strengthening faith in silence as the new refuge, a subversive locality where rationality collapses in the Symbolic world, prepares for the occurrence of the second phase. Within the second phase, an occasional escape to the realm of silence is no longer adequate. In other words, I will show that instead of viewing silence as another form of shelter, in the next phase Pizarnik demonstrates her intention of making it the only shelter, manifested through her desire to speak no longer words but silence.

### **The Second Phase: Desiring Silence as the Only Shelter**

Before discussing the second phase, I will demonstrate an important connection between Pizarnik's silence and Kristeva's theory of subversion. According to Kristeva, as outlined previously, in order to interrupt the Symbolic, the semiotic (linked to the death drive) must permeate it. Although most discourses are formed through the interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic modalities, Kristeva also points out that 'there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (*music*, for example)' (1984: 24, my emphasis). Pizarnik's comprehension of silence can be best elucidated in the following fragment from 'Las promesas de la música':

Es el despertar de las ofrendas [...] Y que suene siempre, así nadie asistirá al movimiento del nacimiento, a la mímica de las ofrendas, al discurso de aquella que soy anudada a esta silenciosa que también soy [...] Es la música, es la muerte.  
(2009: 233)

The above quotation demonstrates that the notion of silence under Pizarnik can be perceived as the Kristevan semiotic modality, in other words, a signifying system akin to music established without its antagonist symbolic counterpart.

The poet opposes music, the exclusively semiotic signifying system, with 'la mímica' and 'el discurso', types of discourse in which the presence of symbolic disposition can be traced. Pizarnik parallels the awakening of the sacrificial victims with the notion of birth; such emphasis on the conception of the emergence of life insinuates the poet's association of sign language with nativity. This, viewed under the Kristevan microscope, suggests that 'la mímica' from the above poetic context corresponds to, in effect, the *thetic* phase, which produces the positing of signification and subsequently the child's first holophrastic

enunciations embodied in the form of vocal emission or *gesture* (Kristeva 1984: 43). The *thetic* break denotes the moment of drift from the semiotic towards naming, towards becoming participatory in a signifying system. It is the moment in which the child 'attribute[s] to [an entity] a semiotic fragment [movement, rhythm, unarticulated sounds], which thereby becomes a signifier' (1984: 43). Therefore, if music pertains to a pure semiotic realm deprived of the socio-symbolic order, miming implies the beginning of the constitution of symbolism, a step towards establishing the subject. The third signifying system depicted – 'el discurso' – differs from both music and miming as it can only exist on completion of a separation process: the termination of the *thetic* break, and the subject's full integration into the Symbolic. The evident distinction posited by the poet between music, miming and discourse engenders a valuable reference for understanding the notion of silence *vis-à-vis* its position in the semiotic/symbolic continuum. Namely, it assists us in identifying the modality to which Pizarnikian silence pertains. The unexpected contrast, manifested by the word 'también', constructed between 'el discurso de aquella que soy' and 'esta silenciosa que también soy' embodies the poet's very understanding of the existing schism between the concept of discourse and that of silence. By opposing music with discourse governed predominantly by the symbolic modality, and afterwards discourse with silence, the author has effectively paralleled silence with the notion of music. The silence of Pizarnik is therefore synonymous with music, it 'identifica con la música' (Piña 2005: 60) and it is thereby exclusively semiotic.

Silence to the poet is thus neither a structured Symbolic language nor a *thetic* enunciation; it is not only non-verbal, but also non-vocal. It lacks an enunciating subject, the signifier/signified break, the semiotic/symbolic dialectic. It is therefore an ultimate return to the semiotic *chora*: 'a modality of significance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated' (Kristeva 1984: 26). In fact, a close examination of the fragment cited above ('al discurso de aquella que soy anudada a esta silenciosa que también soy') further reveals that silence belongs to the realm of the semiotic *chora*. Pizarnik has employed oxymoron to amalgamate the irreconcilable double in which one enunciates and the other is silent. The character that is capable of articulating is an established subject; on the contrary, the other half, non-verbal, non-vocal and non-enunciative, is a fragmented body which has not yet taken up its allotted place in the socio-symbolic order. By refusing the subject of enunciation (*sujet de l'énonciation*) and returning it to a yet unconstituted self, put into practice textually through positioning such a self *after* the enunciating subject, Pizarnik alludes to the very formation and negation of the subject.<sup>2</sup> In other words, Pizarnik discloses in the above contradiction, and through the syntactic order in which this repudiation of the subject is manifested, one of the semiotic *chora*'s most unique characteristics: 'the place where the subject is both generated and negated' (1984: 28). The poet's association of music, and therefore silence, with death at the very end illuminates the fact that it is indeed the destructive waves of the death drive from the semiotic *chora* embodied in silence that have dissolved the formed subjectivity and led to the ultimate striking out of identity. Pizarnik's silence thus embodies a return to the *chora* in which the world is experienced in terms of rhythmic, sporadic movements or sounds without prescribed significations, and it connotes the breakdown of the Symbolic. Comprehending this allows us to recognise the subversion contained in the poet's emergent desire to speak silence exhibited in the second phase. If, in the first phase, Pizarnik only insinuates timidly that the objective of her writing is to attain silence and not words, in the second phase, she recognises and explicitly announces the limitation of the linguistic signifying system. She overtly reveals her

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the terms 'speaking subject', 'enunciating subject' and 'subject of enunciation' all refer to the Lacanian *sujet de l'énonciation*; and the terms 'subject of statement' and 'grammatical subject' refer to the Lacanian *sujet de l'énoncé*.

intention to abandon poetic language as the place of subversion, and discloses the desire to enter the realm of silence as the new and only homeland, the exclusive space where the symbolic disposition has not yet and never can contaminate the semiotic.

Pizarnik's very first declaration of language's inadequate representative power and consequently the first trace of her wavering belief in it occurs in *Árbol de Diana* (1962). Perhaps it was precisely this first attempt to generate these extremely brief and pure poems (Aira 22) through making 'poemas terriblemente exactos' (Pizarnik 2012: 313) that provoked the author's initial dissatisfaction with language. This discontent endured throughout her subsequent works: 'Siento que los signos, las palabras, insinúan, hacen alusión. Este modo complejo de sentir el lenguaje me induce a creer que el lenguaje no puede expresar la realidad' (2012: 313). Poems 18 and 28 from *Árbol de Diana* demonstrate such a frustration:

como un poema enterado  
del silencio de las cosas  
hablas para no verme  
(2009: 120, complete)

and also:

te alejas de los nombres  
que hilan el silencio de las cosas  
(2009: 130, complete)

Crucial in the first of these poems is Pizarnik's addressing language's inability to capture reality. It is a poem that is aware of the limits of signification, that succumbs to the unattainable signifier/signified unity, and that comprehends the intransgressibly absent part of meaning in every verbal reproduction of the object ('el silencio de las cosas'). Indeed, no matter how accurate and polished language is, any textual representation is destined to be always partially silent. The disappointment stemming from recognising 'el silencio de las cosas' also emerges in the second poem; this very dissatisfaction leads to Pizarnik's emphasis on the importance of distancing herself from 'los nombres'.

Such discovery of the inevitable deficiency of signification conveyed in the linguistic system undeniably also destabilises the poet's perception of poetry, for the notion of language in Pizarnik can never be completely detached from it. Poetry has formerly been the place of refuge in the Symbolic Order, the realm in which the poet can seek protection, the locus where fundamentally subversive acts (Pizarnik 2012: 299) are produced and, therefore, the place in which the Symbolic law can be disrupted. This is best illustrated through 'Sortilegios', a poem composed for *Extracción de la piedra de locura* (1968). It depicts not only the destruction of the Symbolic by poetic language; most importantly, it also demonstrates the persona's struggle with poetic language itself:

Y las damas vestidas de rojo [...] agazapadas como fetos de escorpiones en el lado más interno de mi nuca [...] ahora vienen a beber de mí luego de haber matado al rey que flota en el río. (Pizarnik 2009: 224)

The violent assassination of the king, an emblem of order and rationality, by 'las damas', a symbol of 'las fuerzas del lenguaje' (2009: 223), in the above fragment illustrates the author's belief in poetry's power to subvert the order established by the socio-symbolic world. Language is transformed into a vampiric figure and consumes the persona after it has apparently defeated the Law of the Father. Being consumed and exhausted by language in Pizarnik could only be induced by one cause: the failure to attain the exact word in her obsessive

search for it. This inevitable failure and the consequent feeling of being consumed by language is an effect of the Symbolic – because it is on account of the obligation to serve the Symbolic Order that one needs to accept the sign system and narrow down the meaning of each signifier. Nevertheless, the artificial signifying system goes against the nature of meaning and subsequently exasperates the poet, she says: ‘Después de hablar o de escribir siempre tenía que explicar’ (2009: 403). In other words, it is the deceptive notion of the possibility of seizing the meaning, imposed by the Symbolic world that consumes the poet. Poetry, therefore, is a weapon employed by Pizarnik to subvert the Symbolic. Nevertheless, while it is capable of disrupting the Symbolic, such destruction relies on a simultaneous consumption of the rebel: this is precisely why she laments ‘las damas vestidas de rojo ... agazapadas como fetos de escorpiones en el lado más interno de mi nuca’ (2009: 224).

Moreover, no matter how much more semiotic, fluid and emancipatory poetic language is compared with other types of discourse (metalanguage, theory, etc.), it is still regulated by the linguistic system, and cannot elude language’s symbolic disposition towards syntax and mathematisation. As suggested by Kristeva, the signifying system is simultaneously semiotic and symbolic because ‘the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic’ (1984: 24). If subverting the Symbolic entails not only injecting what is rejected and repressed, the semiotic, into it, but also the complete eradication of its symbolic modality, then poetry, unlike music or silence, is predestined to fail because it is parasitic on it. Eliminating the symbolic disposition drives the text into nonsense and ‘[n]o text, no matter how “musicalized”, is devoid of meaning or signification’ (Kristeva 1984: 65). Consequently, a total subversion realised by poetry destroys its very role as a weapon of subversion. Poetry, as gradually recognised by the poet, cannot protect and neither can it become the authentic place of rebellion. It progressively converts into writing that drives the poet ‘[a] lo negro, a lo estéril, a lo fragmentado’ (Pizarnik 2009: 265), and it is therefore no longer ‘el lugar donde todo sucede’ (2012: 299). This conclusion is critical as it unfolds the central motives behind Pizarnik’s altered choice of silence rather than poetry as the new homeland, the realm of subversion, which characterises her later works in particular.

While poetic language faces a loss of privilege, Pizarnik’s request for silence, by contrast, proliferates. Poems containing the explicit desire for silence manifested in their titles, such as ‘Pido el silencio’ and ‘Un sueño donde el silencio es de oro’, as well as content, such as ‘Deseaba un silencio perfecto. / Por eso hablo’ (2009: 243), begin to appear during this stage. In ‘Piedra fundamental’, Pizarnik for the first time openly announces her wish to change her homeland to music, which is synonymous with silence in her poetry: ‘Yo quería entrar en el teclado para entrar adentro de la música para tener una patria’ (2009: 265). If the title of her first book *La tierra más ajena* suggests poetry as the land of alienness which denies entrance to the author (Piña 2005: 53), this, on the other hand, is the moment in which the author denies poetry, for ‘la casa del lenguaje se le vuela el tejado’ (2009: 223). This is the moment in which the poet attempts to move to the exclusively semiotic domain of music and silence because poetry can no longer protect; it is the moment in which silence is no longer another place, but *the* place where subversion can occur. Such a desire culminates in ‘Endechas’, the antepenultimate poem from *El infierno musical* (1971):

El lenguaje silencioso engendra fuego. El silencio se propaga, el silencio es fuego [...] Ella se prueba en su nuevo lenguaje e indaga el peso del muerto en la balanza de su corazón. (2009: 288)

Instead of ‘quería’ and wanting to alter the homeland, what is illustrated in this fragment is the termination of such a revolution. The object of desire, silence, is no longer remote from

her, for she now voices it in an identical manner to any other language. If previously the poet was outside of the realm of silence and contemplated it from the domain of poetry, with the clandestine wish to enter it one day, textually the poet has now informed us of her successful entrance into this realm. Consequently, the phrase 'el lenguaje silencioso' is a victory claim alluding to the realisation of subversion against language and the Symbolic Order. If in *Las aventuras perdidas* (1958), 'Hemos dicho palabras, / ... / palabras para hacer un fuego, / palabras donde poder sentarnos / y sonreír' (2009: 82), then what protects, burns, propagates and combats in *El infierno musical* (1971) is now unquestionably silence and not words.

The poet's distancing herself from words is founded on one other crucial reason: her broken hope of attaining silence through words. As shown previously, Pizarnik believes a total silence is accessible from words, for her words 'se doraban' in silence (2009: 242), 'exigen silencio' (2009: 361). She also openly claims that:

atesoraba palabras muy puras  
para crear nuevos silencios.  
(2009: 175)

Silence is thus the authentic destiny of desire. In fact, it is also the most concrete manifestation of the Freudian Thanatos in Pizarnik's poetry. This is not only because Pizarnik parallels the notion of silence with that of death in her work; viewing silence and death under the Lacanian framework also confirms the above observation. Moi observes that Lacan's famous statement 'The unconscious is structured like a language' informs us that 'desire "behaves" in precisely the same way as language: it moves ceaselessly on from object to object or from signifier to signifier, and will never find full and present satisfaction just as meaning can never be seized as full presence' (99). If Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), posits death as the ultimate object of desire, this is because death is the only means of fully satisfying desire; it provides a final healing of the split subject and enables it to recapture its unity, which is formerly lost at its very entrance into the Symbolic. Now, if we accept that for desire, death – the absence of life – is the final healing because it terminates the subject's endless search for objects, we can apply the same logic to language: the only state that is capable of ending the ceaseless moving from signifier to signifier cannot be anything other than silence, that is, the absence of the very objects of desire (signifiers). Just as Thanatos paradoxically perpetuates life, silence also nourishes Pizarnik's poetry; and just as 'the true goal of living is dying' (Boothby 3), the entire poetry of Pizarnik can be perceived as an attempt to create a total silence, this is perhaps why she articulates 'Deseaba un silencio perfecto. / Por eso hablo' (2009: 243).

Nevertheless, the poet soon discovers that obtaining silence through poetry, the place where everything is possible, is merely an illusion. While the *sujet de l'énoncé* in 'Deseaba un silencio perfecto' aspires to a perfect silence, the Lacanian unconscious *sujet de l'énonciation* is still pronouncing and is therefore not silent. Coalescing physical soundless silence from real life with words, whose very nature is that of sonorous entities, essentially requires a flawless amalgamation of life and poetry. This union, despite Pizarnik's constant attempt at attaining it ('haciendo el cuerpo del poema con mi cuerpo', 2009: 269), is doomed to failure because it requires an impossible merging of the enunciating subject and the grammatical subject, which are always divided within the Symbolic Order. This is precisely why Pizarnik states in her later works 'el silencio no existe' (2009: 401) and 'por más que hable no encuentro el silencio' (2009: 430). Truly realising the subversion of language and the Symbolic Order thus requires a tangible silencing of words, for no matter how rebellious the notion of silence is, speaking or writing about silence is still a verbal act. This, as I shall show, is exactly what Pizarnik demonstrates in the third stage: the ultimate implementation of speaking silence.

### The Third Phase: The Realisation of Speaking Silence

As observed by Kuhnheim, 'as *Árbol de Diana* advances, silence is mentioned less as a theme; instead it is implemented' (69). The following untitled poem included in *Otros poemas* (1959), a collection aggregated at the end of *Árbol de Diana* (1962) (but in fact composed immediately before it during the period when Pizarnik began her poetic transformation into the brief and condensed poetic style that lasted throughout her entire poetic career), illustrates what I believe to be her first attempt to replace words with silence:

silencio  
 yo me uno al silencio  
 yo me he unido al silencio  
 y me dejo hacer  
 me dejo beber  
 me dejo decir  
 [blank]  
 (2009: 143)

This poem is critical as it opens *Otros poemas* (1959), and so also unlocks the passage to *Árbol de Diana* (1962) and all her subsequent works, where the majority of these texts consist of two, three or four lines (verse or prose), and the most extensive fails to fill one page. Pizarnik's later poems, as noted by Molloy, 'are composed of silence as much as they are of words' (1991: 204).

Examining the quoted poem in a linear fashion reveals the consent of the persona to be pronounced by silence. What is most interesting, however, is the progression that underlies each verse. We can almost visualise silence and the persona being united gradually as we proceed into the next line. The poem can be interpreted, to a certain extent, as a series of tableaux, with the first sequence narrating the appearance of the personified silence and the last the complete possession of the persona by silence. In other words, the subject disappears as the poem continues linearly: the clearly pronounced nominative 'yo' is first reduced to 'y' and then further transformed into an accusative and utterly passive 'me'. Not only does the alteration from the present tense to the present perfect tense between the second and third lines suggest the above observation, but the change of verb from 'unirse' to 'dejarse' further alludes to the evolution of the relation between 'I' and silence. The former ('me uno') is a quasi-reflexive verb in which the subject is not being acted upon as an object by herself. Consequently, 'I' and silence are here merging as two separate identities. The latter ('me dejo') can be interpreted either as 'I allow myself to act' or 'I allow myself to be acted upon by someone else'. The notion of permitting oneself to act implies a tension inside oneself. This tension becomes clearer as we learn that 'me dejo' appears the first time after the line 'yo me he unido al silencio'. In other words, the very tension inside the subject is between 'I' and silence, since, through the union with the persona ('yo me he unido al silencio'), silence has effectively transformed into the other 'I', which is part of the persona and contends with the subject 'I'. The emergence of 'me dejo' consequently embodies the beginning of physically being occupied by silence. Silence has entered the persona; it is now, together with the persona, one united identity. That is to say, if 'me uno' indicates that silence is still outside the persona, the first use of 'me dejo' informs us that silence has now just become part of the persona. Once it is inside her, it then starts increasingly to expand its occupation of the poetic speaker, manifested in a series of progressions from 'me dejo hacer', 'me dejo beber' to 'me dejo decir'. The mechanism of possession reaches completion in the last verse with the subject allowing silence even to speak for her. That is, the complete occupation of the

persona is manifested in the textual blank space in which the subject now *speaks silence* by being utterly silent.

At first glance, this poem seems to suggest that the subject is still pronouncing as 'I' and therefore that the voice is not silenced. On termination of the final line ('me dejo decir'), one cannot help but wonder: if silence is granted the power to speak for her, thus implying the muteness of the subject, who then is speaking in the poem? In effect, what is realised in the final line at the exact point of junction between the text and the blank space is the very eradication of the Lacanian subject of statement, for the 'I' vanishes precisely at the moment of the persona's negation of herself as the speaking subject. In other words, when one expresses the idea of 'I am not speaking', this can be read as 'Someone else is speaking' with the grammatical subject 'I' therefore silenced. While the subject of the statement is dissolved, the enunciating subject is still present for it only fades inside the semiotic *chora* in the absence of any enunciation. That is to say, although one could employ a non-subjective grammatical position to speak for her (such as, 'she says this') and silence the subject of statement 'I', this cannot annihilate the physical subject of enunciation underneath – for as long as the poem exists, there will always be unsilenced pronunciation. It is useful to recall that for Kristeva the grammatical subject 'I' is established *after* the entrance into the Symbolic, whereas the enunciating subject appears in the *thetic* phase, which is *before* the Symbolic (Kristeva 1984: 43). Therefore, to silence the subject fully, one needs first to destroy the subject of statement, and then the subject of enunciation. If these two subjects were to disappear, we would return to the semiotic *chora*. The progressive linear erosion of the Symbolic pronouns 'yo', 'me' and the subject of statement in the poem seems to suggest that (after the eradication of the subject of statement in the final line) the next line will be the ultimate diminishing step of the subject – the destruction of the subject of enunciation. Closer examination discloses that after the last line there are indeed no words and consequently no enunciation but only textual silence. This discovery implies that the poem in fact advances into a total silence. Thus, the final line, 'me dejo decir', does not terminate the poem; rather, it alludes to the yet-to-be-pronounced silence, which constitutes the other (larger) half of the poem.

Furthermore, as examined previously, uniting with silence embodies the very return to the semiotic *chora* in Pizarnik. And for Kristeva the semiotic is inextricably bound to the status of the feminine-maternal (Lechte and Margaroni 17), for it is formed through the transfer between two bodies: 'the infant's confused mass of body parts and the mother's always already socialized body' (14). The preposition used by Pizarnik, 'a' and not 'con', implies that the persona shares less weight in this union. With the diminishing of the subject, such information indeed seems to suggest that the amalgamation realised between the persona and silence in the poem is parallel to the restoration of the dyadic unity between mother and child. Pizarnik thereby illustrates textually the subversion of Symbolic language through *speaking silence* by continuing the poem into the empty silent space in which no subjectivity can be reified.

If the poet's endeavour to destabilise words by authorising silence to voice is still moderately implicit in *Otros poemas* (1959), by the end of her last volume, *El infierno musical* (1971), the textual silence has been fully integrated as an element of subversive essence. The following poem 'Fuga en lila' demonstrates this (2009: 277):

Había que escribir sin para qué, sin para quién.  
 El cuerpo se acuerda de un amor como encender la lámpara.  
 Si silencio es tentación y promesa.  
 [blank]

The final conditional sentence terminates abruptly and the unsaid other half is cut off and obliged to be expressed in silence. If the motive in relation to the employment of silence is less evident in the previous example, for the space can imply a natural closure as well as a subversive gesture, the present one leaves no doubt that the textual silence created following the sudden full stop in the ruptured final line is a subversion of Symbolic language. Nevertheless, in order to comprehend the other spaces surrounding the text, and for the very reason that one cannot distinguish easily whether they function to close or rebel against language, I find it necessary at this stage to inspect the use of textual silence in detail. Examining the significance of silence contextually illustrates the frequent parallels constructed by Pizarnik between silence, music and colour. The words 'tentación' and 'promesa', despite their association with silence ('Si silencio es la tentación y promesa'), have only been employed explicitly by Pizarnik in her poetry for designating music – 'Las promesas de la música' (2009: 233), and light – 'la luz es tentación y promesa' (2009: 401). In another poem titled '[...] del silencio', Pizarnik stresses 'Los colores rayan el silencio' (2009: 357). The equivalence can also be understood through the title 'Fuga en lila', for the word fugue not only embodies the meaning of escape but also the contrapuntal musical composition technique. Therefore, the word lilac not only denotes the colour but also takes the place of the expected key signature. If we interpret the title as *escape in lilac*, what the lilac connotes in this reading appears to be bound to the conception of silence. Firstly, this is because the notions of lilac and silence almost always pertain to the same territory, the side opposing life and reality where the Pizarnikian poetic subject encounters the conditions of her own survival. Secondly, the intentional double spacing of this poem, together with the prominence given to silence in the form of a promise, seems to affirm that the realm of silence is indeed where this escape is directed. The word lilac therefore establishes the parallel between music, colour and silence. The relation of silence to other artistic expressions helps us understand the rationale behind the employment of the excessive textual silence that characterises the cited text as well as Pizarnik's later works. The empty space can thus be correlated with the visual: 'Like the painter she was, Pizarnik begins the development of a poem with a view to the "negative space" [...] It is that emptiness which determines the painting or poem' (Running 54). But it can also be correlated with the aural: 'Estos espacios generan un efecto de lectura equivalente al de los silencios en una partitura musical' (Goldberg 96). Now, according to Kristeva, colour 'is not zero meaning; it is excess meaning through instinctual drive, that is, through death' (Kristeva 1980: 221). In addition, music, being constructed exclusively based on the semiotic disposition, consequently also 'pluralizes meanings' (1984: 65): 'The melody, harmony, rhythm, the "sweet" and "pleasant" sounds [...] can be interpreted as [...] the returned expulsion [death drive]' (1998: 146). The notion of silence within Pizarnik thus coincides with the Kristevan reading of plastic arts and musicality because, as discussed before, 'el silencio en Pizarnik es "sinónimo de muerte"' (Malpartida 40). Incorporating an abundance of textual silence in which the visually disruptive contrast is formulated subsequently exemplifies the presence of Thanatos, the subversive semiotic expulsion and plurality. Recalling that Pizarnik exhibits a strong dissatisfaction with the representative power of the linguistic system (see above), such a disappointment arises from the false impression created by Symbolic language, in which the impossibility of seizing meaning is deceitfully acknowledged to be a conceivable and achievable goal. As such, progressively reducing the words in her writing and devoting an increasingly large amount of space to silence in her later works suggest the subversive rejection of ordered (linguistic) symbolism constructed by society. The constructed symbolism oppresses nature's innate irregularity and multiplicity by imposing limited and specific meanings upon signs. Textual silence, on the other hand, embraces chaotic uncertainty and plurality, and opens the possibility of a

poem being perceived as a sensation of percepts and affects similar to music and colour; that is, to be discerned as an authentic artistic creation that 'does not have opinions' (Deleuze and Guattari 176). In this sense, the subversion of language in Pizarnik is implemented not only by the abrupt blank space but also the retention of exploding emptiness in her poetry. The subversive plurality of textual silence was perhaps already alluded to by Octavio Paz in the enthusiastic preface he wrote for *Árbol de Diana* (1962): 'el árbol de Diana no es un cuerpo que se pueda ver: es un objeto (animado) que nos deja *ver más allá*' (2009: 102, my emphasis). As a preface written for a volume in which textual silence dominates the entire book, Paz's observation seems to suggest that it is indeed the very silence that rebelliously emancipates the regulated mind and enables us to see beyond the suppressive conventionality and rigidity imposed by the Symbolic world.

### Conclusion

The silence of Pizarnik is certainly not a peaceful one. It embodies the subversive desire to restore the mother–child dyadic unity ruptured by the Law of the Father; it is both music and colour; it embraces nature's chaotic plurality that has been rejected by society; and it destabilises Symbolic language through its disruptive semiotic disposition, which at times takes the paradoxical form of textual blankness. Nevertheless, just as the semiotic paradoxically relies on the very presence of the Symbolic to subvert it, and just as death, prior to terminating life, first engenders it, silence, although connoting a dimension seemingly opposed to language, possesses a non-verbal and non-vocal existence which only becomes visible owing to the sonorous contrast highlighted by words, and is thus to a certain extent also dependent on language.

Despite the evident rebellious energy conveyed in Pizarnik's silence, one nonetheless wonders if the semiotic silence is parasitic on Symbolic language: can it truly subvert it, when obliterating the Symbolic will inevitably lead to a simultaneous annihilation of itself? This is perhaps why Kristeva prefers to articulate semiotic subversion only as a partial disruption of the Symbolic, as opposed to a total removal of it. Pizarnik was evidently aware of this paradox. Unfortunately for her, the only solution to the conundrum appears to be removing this problem, once for all, by becoming silent both in writing and in life, that is, by committing suicide. In 1971, one year before Pizarnik's suicide, Cortázar urged Pizarnik to remain alive, he says:

*no te acepto así, no te quiero así, yo te quiero viva [...] ya no vivimos los tiempos en que ese poder [el poder poético] era el antagonista frente a la vida [...] Yo te reclamo [...] enlace con esto que nos envuelve a todos, llámale la luz o César Vallejo [...] pero no un silencio de renuncia voluntaria.* (249: 2012, original emphasis)

Re-reading her poem 'Desde esta orilla' from *Las aventuras perdidas* (1958), I wonder if we were to ask her about her suicide, the utter silence she left behind, the lines below would be indeed her response:

me levanto de mi cadáver  
y cuidando de no hollar mi sonrisa muerta  
voy al encuentro del sol  
....  
(2009: 98)

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