THE SUFI TROBAR CLUS AND SPANISH MYSTICISM: A SHARED SYMBOLISM

(Part I)

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Translated by Andrew Hurley

The process of assimilating the aesthetics, the mysticism, and the narrative and metaphoric symbolic devices that were present in the literature of their Moorish neighbours went on among the Christians of Castille for hundreds of years; some day [the co presence of that literature in Spanish letters] will be talked about with the same naturalness as we say today that Virgil and Ovid were present in the literature of the sixteenth century.

Americo Castro

After the vast work of the Arabist Miguel Asin Palacios, few of us will be surprised today by a study whose purpose is to link the Spanish mysticism of the Siglo de Oro to the mysticism of the Islamic Middle Ages. The present author has detailed, in more than one study, the close parallels between the two traditions. But the degree to which the mystical literature of Spain comes under the influence of Islam is much greater than we have seen to date,[208]

208 Cf the present author's studies on this subject: San Juan de la Cruzy el /slam; Huellas de Islam en la literatura espanota. De Juan Ruiz a Juan Goytisolo (also trans. to Arabic and English: cf bibliography); - Luce Lopez-Baralt,'ed., Miguel Asin Palacios, Saihilcies v alumhrados; Luce Lopez-Baralt and Eulogio Pacho, eds., San Juan de la Cruz, Obra comp/eta; Un Kama Sutra espaiol; Literaturcr hispano=semiticu comparada (with Marta Elena Venier), double number of Nueva Revista de Filo/ogia Hispbnica; El sol a medianoche. La experiencia mistica, tradition y actualidad; Asedios a to indecible San Juan de la Cruz can/a al extasis transformante (in press: Madrid: Trotta). In the volume I am now preparing, titled La literatura secreta de /os ultimos musulmanes de Espana, I include many articles on aljamiado-morisco literature, and in Nuevas huellas de/ Is/am en /a literatura espanola: de Juan Ruiz a Jorge Luis Borges (also to be published soon) I include my recent comparative studies nature on the literature of Spain and the Near East.

certainly greater than Asin Palacios was able to document in the essays in which for the first time he established the connection. Writers such as St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila (to mention but the two greatest figures) present us with a singular phenomenon: they share with their Islamic counterparts many of the same symbols and much of the most important technical language of mysticism. This fact is most significant, for (at least from the literary point of view) it implies that one must seek the precedents for much of St John's and St Teresa's vocabulary among the Sufis. We find ourselves dealing, therefore, with the phenomenon of a sometimes quite enigmatic European literary Symbolism that only keys from Arabic and Persian literature unlock.[209]

The present study is based on an earlier study, "Simbologia mistica islamica en San Juan de la Cruz y en Santa Teresa de Jesus" (.NRFH XXX (1981), 21-91), which I have corrected, expanded, and brought up to date. The present article compares the mystical Symbolism of Islam as it appears in the extensive Islamic literature with the surprising appearance of that Symbolism in the mystical belles lettres of Peninsular Spain, but does not deal at any length with the possible historical routes by which the Spanish mystics, and especially the Carmelite reformers St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa de Jesus, might have had access to the sophisticated contemplative culture of the Muslims. For essays specifically addressing the problem of the historical filiation between the two religious traditions (a problem which also occupied the great Muslim critic Miguel Asian Palaces until his death), cf. the present author's articles and books San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam, the Introduction to the Obra completa of St. John of the Cross (bibliographic reference above), and "Acerca de la enseñanza del arabe en Salamanca en tiempos de San Juan de la Cruz o de como el maestro Cantalapiedra 'Ieia el aravigo por un libro que se llama la .Jurrumia"" (in press, Colegio de Mexico). In this last article I discuss a recent discovery: contrary to what both Marcel Bataillon and I have been maintaining for some time. Arabic was indeed taught at the University of Salamanca when St. John of the Cross studied there.

209 A caveat needs to be inserted here about these Persian sources. Some parallels or congruences between the symbolism of Irani mystical literature and that of St. John and St. Teresa seem to me obvious, and I include them here. However, I do not believe that this is a case of direct influence, which\would clearly be historically difficult; I think, rather, that the examples of Persian Sufi Symbolism that I have documented bear a cultural relationship to the Sufism of Spain and Africa, which is then that line of 'Sufism that exerted more proximal influence on St. John and Spanish mysticism in general. Muslim mysticism in the Persian language implies a literary tradition distinct in certain senses from the Muslim literary tradition in Arabic; there is not space here to enlarge upon these variants but I do want to note that they exist.

Although Sufi poets and their commentators often employed a poetic language that we might call "open," with unlimited and arbitrary meanings (we might think of the extraordinarily free glosses to the mystical verses of lbn 'Arabi and lbn al-Farid, themselves so resembling the verses of St John of the Cross), still they respected a number of fixed conceits. They used, that is, a "secret language" to create a trobar clus avant la /ettre—one whose key, according to critics such as Louis Massignon and Emile Dermenghem, only Sufi initiates possessed:

> Les mystiques, dit Lahiji, commentateur du Goulcha-i Raz, Roseraie de Savoir, de Chabistari[,] ... ont convenu d'exprimer par des métaphores leurs découvertes et leurs états spirituels; si ces images parfois étonnent I'intention n'en est pas moins bonne. Les mystiques ont arrange un langage que ne comprennent pas ceux qui n'ont pas leur experience spirituelle, en sorte que lorsqu'ils experiment leurs etats.. . comprend le sens de leurs termes, mais celui que n'y participe pas le sens lui en este interdit... Certains initiés ont exprimé différentes degrés de la contemplation mystique par ses symboles de vétements boubles de cheveux, joues, grains de beaute, vin, flambeaux, etc. . . . qui aux yeux du vulgaire ne forment qu'une brillante apparence.. Ils ont signifié par la boucle la multiplicité des choses que cachent le visage de I'Aimé... le vin répresente ('l'amour, le désir ardent et I'ivresse spirituelle; le flambeau ('irradiation de lumière divide dans le coeur de celui qui suit la voie (Dermenghem, Foreword, Al Khamriyah 62-63).

On the other hand, I have employed numerous examples from the Persian tradition (even when I take the Hispano-African and Arabic tradition in general to be the more eloquent one) because documentation of and critical studies on this tradition are much more abundant and accessible. All in all, the reader will note that there are cases in which St. John of the Cross or St. Teresa seems closer to certain symbols characteristic of Persian-language mysticism. It is hard to say whether this is a case of our not having discovered the same symbol among the Sufis of the Arab world or whether it simply does not exist there. If this should be the case, then it would be legitimate to argue that St. John of the Cross is indeed close to Persian/non-Arabic literary sources. The entire phenomenon of Sufi mystical Symbolism and its repercussions in the West needs much further study.

This encoded or "secret" literature is of great antiquity; it has been a literary tradition at least since the tenth century. Farid al-din 'Attar gives us a conversation between lbn 'Arabi (d. 922) and his interlocutors:

> How is it with you Sufis," certain theologians asked Ibn Ata, "that you have invented terms which sound strange to those who hear them, abandoning ordinary language?".. .
>
> "We [have done] it because it is precious to us. . . and we desired that none but we Sufis should know of it. We did .not wish to employ ordinary language, so we invented a special vocabulary" (qtd. in Arberry, 237-8).

Islamicists constantly insist on that "special vocabulary": "the Ghazels or odes . . . are, to those who possess the key to their symbolic imagery, the fervent outpourings of hearts ecstasied…., intoxicated with spiritual love," says Margaret Smith (45), underscoring the mystical meaning beneath the erotic metaphors. "But as time went on certain words began to have a recognised meaning amongst themselves," notes Florence Lederer (5). And she is right: over time the trobar clus was indeed lexicalized and became an easily recognised literary convention. But we should recall that -these tropes were recognisable as conventions within Islam. So when we come upon that same secret symbolic imagery in the pious and unquestionably Christian pages of a St John of the Cross, a Francisco de Osuna, a Juan de los Angeles, or a St Teresa of Avila we cannot help taking the enigma of this presence as an authentic problem of literary history.

We can see immediately that the similarities between the Spanish and Islamic mystics do not lie simply in these shared cryptic conceits —whose origins within Islam (Massignon -Essai sur les origenes) are attributed to Qur'anic sources— but rather involve a broader, and perhaps even more significant, Symbolism, including the dark night of the soul and the lamps of fire found in St John of the Cross and the seven concentric castles of St Teresa. Asin Palacios' suggestion (cf. Escatologia musu/mana) that Islamic eschatological imagery may be detected in the Divine Comedy comes immediately to mind, and we take our .cue from him. Indeed, his book (widely attacked when it appeared in 1919) was the brilliant prelude to all the subsequent discoveries that we comparatists and Islamicists have been

granted as we have followed in Asin's footsteps and compared the two literatures.

Let me make one brief clarification before proceeding. Here, I am "lumping together,"_ as it were, two distinct phenomena: the technical equation of terms—which often borders on the "allegorical" or reminds us of the extended comparison of the European "conceit"—and symbols. Clear differentiation between "conceit" or "allegory" and "symbol," however, is extremely difficult and subtle, even when we are conscious of the many attempts that have been made, from Aristotle and Goethe to Henri Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, to draw the theoretical distinction between the two. But in this essay, what I propose to do is go to the heart of things and attempt to show that the mystical literature of Spain, and especially that of St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila, is fed by similes, metaphors, equivalences, and symbols—in a word, by a symbolic imagery—taken in large part from Islam. (We explore the historical routes by which this influence arrived in our study San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam, q. v.)

I should also note that although this essay will focus on the close parallels between many images and symbols in St John and St Teresa and those used for hundreds of years (so that they finally constitute a literary "tradition") by Islamic mystics, I do not thereby deny the fundamental influence of other, Western, literatures on the two Spanish writers. In the case of St John of the Cross, influences on his writings may be traced from Castillian poetry, the "cult of Italy," popular poetry, the cuncionero tradition, the "divine lyric," and the Song of Songs, as a number of scholars have pointed out. What I will attempt to show is that even when St John evidences having read these sources and closely imitates many lines and many turns of phrase, and even the style, found in those other traditions, the rich semantic content that his symbols hold coincides to a remarkable degree with the semantic content of those same symbols among the Sufis. Thus we will see how, even though St John of the Cross imitates lines from Garcilaso's Eclogue II ("hizo que de mi choza me saliese por el silencio de la noche uscura ": "made me leave my hut and go into the silence of the dark night"), he elevates the phrase to the level of symbol, and the details with which he presents the image seem closer to Niffari and Junayd than to the spiritual generalizations of Sebastian of Córdoba, whom we know St John of the

Cross read. St John is, of course, stylistically distant from the Arabs, and yet a substantial part of his Symbolism would appear to belong to the Islamic literary tradition. The case of St Teresa is similar: although she buttresses her conceit of the interior castle filled with "rooms" with Biblical passages ("In my father's house there are many mansions," John ' 14:2), the symbolic conception of seven concentric castles marking the mystic's progress through seven spiritual stations seems virtually a "direct quotation" from the frequent literary formulations of the same image presented for hundreds of years by Muslim sufi writers.

With that said, let us look at the work of these two Spanish Christian mystics. We will begin with St John of the Cross.

St John of the Cross

St John may be a somewhat surprising "Sufi initiate," yet he would seem to be quite familiar with the codes and "secret language" of the Islamic trobar clus, and to employ the same hermetic language that many Muslim mystical poets employed. We, like any elementary reader of Carl Jung, Evelyn Underhill, or Mircea Eliade, may take as a given that certain fundamental symbols or images (light, fire, darkness) recur in all religions. But that is not precisely my argument with respect to St John of the Cross. I will attempt to show that St John's knowledge of the semantic content of some of the most important Islamic symbols is altogether too specific, too detailed, to be merely a casual coincidence that one might expect in any religious person. Even in some cases in which the symbol under consideration might be the legacy of universal mysticism—such as the ascent of the mystical mountain or the transmutation of the soul into a bird—the particular way in which St John portrays the details of the image closely parallels the Sufi counterpart. As we might expect, there are divergences between St John and the Muslims—that is only natural—and yet I .have been able to document more than thirty of these fixed conceits or shared symbols. In this essay we will look at only a few of the most significant of these, while noting that I have chronicled in another essay the work of the medieval European mystics who in one way or another echo this Sufi symbolism that antedates them by hundreds of years.

(a) Wine and mystical drunkenness.

Although the Sufis were not the first to use wine or the vineyard as the archetype of spiritual wisdom—we find the association as early as Gilgumesh and the Mishna (Eliade, Patterns 284-6)—we are obliged to note that after several hundred years of its employment in the mystical literature of Is-lam, the conceit of wine, understood invariably as mystical ecstasy, becomes a very part of the language. It is probably this lexicalization of the image that explains the several cases of wine/vineyard symbolism that I have been able to document in a number of medieval European mystics; for this, cf. San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam. But no mystical tradition insists so greatly upon the trope of the wine of ecstatic drunkenness as the Muslim tradition does. St John of the Cross always uses the figure of wine in that same sense; he would appear to be aware of the Sufi "exegetical key" when he sees in his "seasoned wine" a "most great mercy which God makes to those souls who partake of it, for He intoxicates them with the Holy Spirit with a wine of soft love, . . which is that which God gives to those who are now perfect."[210] In other lines, in which there is obvious allusion to the wine and vineyards of the Song of Songs ("In the interior wine-cellar of my Beloved did I drink"[Spiritual Canticle, Il. 81-2]), we are once more in the presence of an ecstatic experience: "the soul becomes God" (CB 26:6; VO 700)

We find this same equation of wine and ecstasy among the Sufis, who are quite conscious of employing a technical vocabulary. In declaiming the verse from Ibn al-Farid, "Nous avons bu a la mémoire du Bien-Aline un vin dont nous nous sommes enivres avant la creation de la vigne," Biruni and Nablusi have this to say:

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210 San Juan de la Cruz, Vida y ohms comp/etas, CB 25:7 (p. 697). We cite the edition by Crisogono de Jesus et al., Vida y obras comp/etas de' San Juan de la Cruz, Madrid: BAC, 1964, which we will abbreviate as VO. In addition, we will abbreviate the titles of the individual works as follows: —Cantico espiritual," redaction B or Jaen codex: CB; Noche oscura: N; Subida del Monte Carmelo: S; Llama de amor viva L. Where the works are divided into distinct books, chapters, etc. we so indicate. Where possible, we have quoted from the English translations of the works; for those, short titles are given, and the reader is referred to the bibliography. We also refer the reader to our own edition of the Obra comp/eta de San Juan de /u Cruz (edited in collaboration with Eulogio Pacho), in the introduction.to which we explore in detail some of the comparatist subjects that we engage in this article.

> *Biruni* — Sache que cette qacida est composee dans la langue technique des çoufis, dans le lexique desquels le Vin, avec ses noms et ses attributs, signifie ce que Dieu a infuse en leur ame de connaissance, de désir et d'amour. . . Le vin, ici, c'est la Connaissance de Dieu et le désir ardent d'aller vers Dieu (Dermenghem, L'Eloge 117).
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> *Nabluei* — Le Vin signifie la boisson de L'Amour Divin qui resulte de la contemplation des traces de ses beaux Noms. Car cet amour engendre I'ivresse et I'oubli complet de tout ce qui existe au monde (119).

The Muslims tend to be more specific and more sophisticated in their employment of this symbol of the wine than St John of the Cross, who would appear to have a vague and distant, though accurate, memory of the invariable equivalences. Thus, for Ibn 'Arabi the manifestation of God occurs at four levels represented by images of drinking: the first is dawq (tasting), the second shurb (the drink itself, or the wine), the third is riy (extinction of one's thirst), and the fourth sukr (drunkenness). (Tarjunuin al Ashwaq, 75; hereafter TAA)[211]. If ever a lexicalized "conceit" existed in Sufism, it is'this one: wine understood as ecstatic drunkenness. The Persian poets Jalal al-din Rumi, Shabastari, and Hafiz devote entire poems to this drink, which was forbidden by the Qur'an but celebrated by poets at a new secret level throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In his "Wine of Rapture," Shabastari exclaims:

> Drink wine! For the bowl is the face of The Friend.
>
> Drink wine! For the cup is his eye.. .
>
> Drink this wine and, dying to self,
>
> You will be freed from the spell of self...
>
> What sweetness! What intoxication! What blissful ecstasy!

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211 M. Gloton's French version of the Turjuman al Ashwaq, edited by Albin Michel (L'lnterprete. de desirs, Paris, I996), has just been published.

(Lederer, 34-35)

The impassioned Rumi, is quite close to St John: "the heat of the wine fired my breast and flooded my veins," Rumi exclaims (Nicholson 15), and St John appears to follow him almost word for word: "just as the drink spreads and flows through all the members and veins of the body, so does this communication from God spread in substance throughout the soul" (CB 26:5; VO 700).

But by this late moment of splendor in the poetry of Persia, the symbol of wine was already very old; the Persians had received it as a fully-worked-out trope from Sa'di (cf. Smith,Sufi Path 113), Semnani, AI-Ghazzali(cf. Pareja 295). One of the first times we find the figure documented is in the ninth century, when Bistami and Yabya ibn Mu'adh exchange impassioned mystical correspondence in code, employing, as Annemarie Schimmel points out, precisely the terminology of wine:

Sufi hagiography often mentions a letter sent to Bayezid [Bistami, d. 874] by Yabya ibn Mu'adh, who wrote: "1 am intoxicated from having drunk so deeply of the cup of His love--". Abu Yazid [Bayezid] wrote to him in reply: "Some one else has drunk up the seas of Heaven and earth, but his thirst is not yet slaked: his tongue is hanging out and he is crying 'Is there any more?'" (Abu Nu'aym al-Isfahani, Hilyat u/-awliya', Vol. 10, Cairo, 1932, p. 40, quoted in Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions 51)

Naturally, theorists of Islam give great weight to this simile, considering it to be of vital importance in the understanding of this mystical literature a clef and often devoting extensive commentary to it. Often, indeed, it is those critics, gleaning specific nuances from the symbol, who once again remind us, in a startling way, of the closeness of St John of the Cross and the Sufi mystics. Laleh Bakhtiar underscores the emanations received by God's mystic and changing his soul: "Wine is a symbol for the ecstasy which causes the mystic to be beside himself in the presence of a vision of emanation of the Beloved. . . . Wine is the catalyst which causes a motion between the mystic's soul and the spiritual vision" (Bakhtiar, Sufi Expressions 113, emphasis ours). Similarly, when St John comments upon his enigmatic lines "AI toque de centella, / al adobado vino, / emisiones de balsamo divino" (CB 25:5; VO 697), he alludes to the "exercise which these souls perform inwardly upon the

will, moved as they are by ... two mercies and inward visits which the Beloved makes to them, which are called here "the spark is struck and the seasoned wine is drunk" (ibid.).

In addition to these images, St John of the Cross employs the variant of the must [or dark wine] of the pomegranate to indicate ecstatic knowledge and rapture, noting how. under the apparent multiplicity of the grains of the pomegranate, there lies the absolute and indisputable unity of God, represented by the intoxicating drink:

> Because, just as from many grains of the pomegranate a single must emerges when they are eaten, so from all these marvels. . . of God infused into the soul there emerges a fruition and delight of love, which is the liquor of the Holy Spirit. . . divine liquor (CB 37:8; VO 730).

It is precisely this fruit—the pomegranate—that marks the Sufi's arrival at the fourth stage on the road or in the mystical garden, and that symbolises, Bakhtiar says, "the integration of multiplicity into unity, in the station of Union" (30). TheBook of Certainty, insists on the pomegranate as emblem of the essence and ultimate oneness of God: "The pomegranate, which is the fruit of the Paradise of the Essence... in the Station of Union.. . is the direct consciousness of the Essence (ash-shuhud adhdhati)" (27-28).

The consequence of imbibing this spiritual wine or must is, as we might expect, not only knowledge of the divinity but also ecstatic drunkenness. Once more, the mystical traditions of East and West converge. The "gentle drunkenness" (CB 25:8; VO 697), whose relatively prolonged duration is underscored by St John, occupies a very specific place on the mystical path of 'Ala' al-Dawla Semnani: number 87 of the ninth stage of degree of ecstasy (Bakhtiar 96). In his Kashf aI-Muhjub, Al-Hujwiri makes a distinction: "there are two kinds of intoxication: 1) with the wine of affections (Mawaddat) and 2) with the cup of love (Mahabbat)" (117). In his "Spiritual Canticle" St John celebrates drunkenness with fewer theoretical details but also without indirection: After drinking in the Bridegroom's (or Beloved's) "interior wine cellar," "when I walked out / over that wide plain / I no longer knew anything / and I lost the cattle [i.e., "livestock" and therefore prob. "sheep"] that once I followed." It is remarkable how close those lines are to Rumi's

Diwan-e-Shams Tabriz): "I have no task but drunkenness and clamour." And yet St John finds this spiritual drunkenness an important task. He acquires through it a most prudent and advisable lucidity, for it implies a forgetfulness of and oblivion to the world: "that drink of God's most high wisdom which it [the soul] drank there makes it forget all things of the world, [which] in comparison with that taste is purest ignorance" (CB 26:13; VO p. 701). In his Kashf al-Mahjub, AI-Hujwiri had expressed the same insight in virtually the same words: drunkenness is "the lover's closing his eyes to the things of the world, in order to see the Creator in his Heart."

Yet as we noted earlier, the literature that the Sufis produce shows them to be generally more sophisticated and detailed in their elaboration of these technical conceits than St John is. Thus. we find in the Sufis the extreme delicacy (not found in John) of distinguishing between two types of mystical states: the mystical state of drunkenness (sukr.) and the mystical state wherein one is sober (sahw). AI-Hujwiri (11th c.) reviewed the long debate over which of the two states should be preferred. Al-Bistami and his followers preferred drunkenness, while Al-Hujwtri, following Junayd (who in turn is following his teacher). opts initially for sobriety. The arguments by which the distinction is made are of great subtlety, and they lead us to a curious question: Would St John of the Cross be classified among the "drunkards," like Al-Bistami? In an unexpected and moving apotheosis, Al-Hujwiri discovers that at the highest level of ecstasy, the apparent difference between the two states is obliterated:

> In short, where true mystics tread, sobriety and intoxication are the effect of difference (ikhtila/) and when the Sultan of Truth displays His beauty, both sobriety and intoxication appear to be intruders (tufayli), because the boundaries of both are joined, and the end of the one is the beginning of the other. . . . In union all separations are negated, as the poet says:
>
> When the morning-star of wine rises,
>
> The drunken and the sober are as one (180).

But let us return to the ecstatic drunkenness celebrated by St John of the Cross and most of the Muslim mystics. A drunkard speaks incoherently; likewise, a mystical drunkard will speak delirious words which somehow translate the untranslatable aspects of his spiritual experience. Once again, the Christian saint would appear to follow in the footsteps of the Sufis mystics who preceded him. From the martyr Ilallaj[212] to the late Spanish-American Sufi sect of the Shadhilites, there is an insistence that the true mystic is not the master of his own language:

> If the drinking persists and continues until the veins and joints of the lover are swollen with the mysterious lights of God, then comes the saturation, which sometimes causes [the drinker] even to lose consciousness of all things sensible and intelligible, and the subject becomes no longer aware of what others say or what he himself says, and this is drunkenness (Asin, Shadhilis 298).

The problem of incoherence becomes more acute when the spiritual delirium of these drunkards is translated into poetry, for it often becomes unintelligible, like that of lbn 'Arabi or lbn al-Farid. (We should note that in the Middle Ages the Sufis were producing a poetry which today we would consider "surrealistic.") The enigmatic lines of Ibn 'Arabi's Tarjuman, like St John's, often elude rational understanding, and the author, lbn 'Arabi himself, meditating upon the difficulties of human language in translating the Godhead, admits that many passages are mysterious even to him. For his delirious (or rapturous) verses— that "non-sense" that St John so staunchly defended in his own behalf (in the prologue to the "Spiritual Canticle" he tells us that his images "seem more nonsense than words set into reason") — the Sufi mystic employs the technical term shath], and the fact is that such verses are a very common literary phenomenon. In his Kitab al-Lum'a, AI-Sarraj (10th century) explains the origin of the term:

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212 I,Iallaj's ecstatic exclamation "ana 7-haqq" ("I am the Truth For God]"), is famous in the Islamic world, and it brought him if not execution at least severe theological censure. Cf. Louis Massignon, Essui .sur les origines 283, and La Passion de Hallaj.

> Just as a river in flood overflows its banks (shataha 'l-ma' fi'I-nahr) so the Sufi, when his ecstasy grows strong, cannot contain himself and finds relief in strange and obscure utterances, technically known as shath (Nicholson, Kitab 100).

Delirium is a universal phenomenon, but St John of the Cross would appear somehow to be familiar with the specific image associated with that Arabic word shath.] ("that which is excessive or exceeds its proper bounds; excess," according to the Arabic-English Dictionary), which signifies "that which overflows its normal banks":

> Who could write that which He allows loving souls to understand? No one can, not even the souls themselves can; for that is the reason that figures, comparisons, and similes overflow something of what they feel and out of the abundance of the spirit pour secrets and mysteries that appear to be nonsense (VO 626).

(b) The dark night of the soul.

The symbol of the dark night of the soul. St John's most famous and most complex figure, left the distinguished St John scholar Jean Baruzi perplexed. Baruzi could never discover the sources that might have inspired this trope, and so he asserted St John's originality: "Aucun tradition n'avait besoin d'etre invoquée pour que nous puissons suivre le poete" (147). Baruzi explained that the "night"—a metaphorical night[213]—would be the way that particular spiritual moment of mystical experience would naturally have imposed itself on St John's intuition and his language.[214]

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213 We say "metaphorical night" because there are many instances of evidence that St John meditated at night in the solitude of the outdoors. He also prayed with his face uplifted into the night, which he looked out upon from the window of his cell. Baruzi notes in this regard that "le poete mystique adherait au silence des espaces nocturnes ou s'abimait en une perception limitee, perception soudain exaltee et devenue comme un signe de I'univers" (288).

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The clues that St John himself offers to this figure of speech are quite enigmatic. In Dark Night I:viii, after dividing the mystical state into a "sensual night" and a "spiritual night," he announces that he will speak briefly about the "sensual night" or (more precisely) "night of sense": "since more is written of it, as of a thing that is more common; and we shall pass on to treat more fully of the spiritual night, since very little has been said of this, either in speech [platica] or in writing, and very little is known of it, even by experience" (Peers, Dark Night 61).

It is hard to say what concrete sources St John might be thinking of here, hard to know whether he is recalling authors who either allude to the "bitter and terrible" spiritual stage or "dwelling" [morada] whose specific technical name is "night" or just describe the same experience that St John has called dark night. What is certainly the case is that given the subtle distinction that St John establishes between the "night of sense" and the "night of spirit," and given also his indirect but clear allusion to both oral and written sources, we are allowed, I think, to suspect that St John is acknowledging a spiritual tradition for his symbol.

This tradition is not easy to document, but certain partial antecedents for this enigmatic night have been found. A number (some close, some not so close to St John's figure) have been proposed by critics. Dámaso Alonzo (La poesia de San Juan de la Cruz. Desde esta laden') points out the sketchy symbolic outlines of the night in Sebastian de Córdoba and the stylistic traces of Garcilaso (perhaps through a recasting of Córdoba's formulation) that seem to be "recalled" by St John. In his book St. John of the Cross: The Poet

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Evelyn Underhill (Mysticism 412) describes the spiritual state of the "dark night": "Psychologically... the 'dark night of the soul' is due to the double fact of the exhaustion of an old state, and the growth towards a new state of consciousness. it is a 'growing pain' in the organic process of the soul's attainment of the Absolute. . . . Parallel with the mental oscillations. upheavals and readjustments, through which an unstable psycho-physical type moves through new centres of_ consciousness, run the spiritual oscillations of a striving and ascending spiritual type. . . . (386) [Thel travail of the 'Dark Night is all directed towards the essential mystic act of utter self-surrender; that fiat voluntas tnu which marks the death of selfhood in interest of a new and deeper life." Significantly, Underhill titles the chapter describing this mystical dwelling of purificatory undoing "The Dark Night of the Soul." There seems no doubt that she borrows the term from St John of the Cross, for although many mystics go through the same spiritual process, none of those mentioned by Underhill employ the technical term "dark night."

and the Mystic, Colin Peter Thompson explains that the "dark night" is associable in the last analysis with the divine caligo or "luminous darkness" of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, although Thompson admits that the symbol is much more elaborate in St John and that there are fundamental differences between the two writers: "[St John's] dark night is an intimate personal experience compounded of many features, whereas Dionysius is concerned primarily with the metaphysical gulf which lies between the human and the divine" (8).

Other critics agree to simply accept the differences: "the mystics. . . speak of the darkness of the night of purgation, and the dark night of the soul, but the Divine Darkness is in a different category from these."[215]

Indeed, despite the fact that St John quotes the Pseudo-Dionysius directly, and despite his undeniable general familiarity with the Areopagite's doctrines, with the Divine Darkness and "lightning-bolt of darkness"—that darkness which is an excess of light and which implies the transcendental knowledge of God that one cannot achieve through discursive reason—the problem of the apparent artistic originality of St John's "dark night of the soul" is still apparently unresolved.

Perhaps we can feel that we are somewhat closer to St John when we read St Gregory's Moralia, in which St Gregory does not limit himself, as the Pseudo-Dionysius does, to images of darkness and light, but rather includes interpretations of the sporadic mentions of "night" in Job and the Psalms (Psalms 42:8 and 16:7 [King James] and Job 3:3 and 3:23, for example) in terms of a spiritual experience, a spiritual process. It must be pointed out that the symbol of the dark night in St Gregory's -biblical commentaries is a variable thing, whose semantic content changes from one moment to the next—but the same can be said of St John of the Cross. St Gregory sometimes under-stands the biblical night as an "excess of light" whose power blots out the natural light of the intellect (and here we are very close to the Pseudo-Dionysius), sometimes as the dark night of this corporeal life,

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215 See Dionysius the Areopagite, The Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies, London, 1949, p. I. The commentary "Darkness of Unknowing" appears to be anonymous, and is only credited as "Commentaries by the editors of the Shrine of Wisdom."

sometimes again as the tribulationis noctent which (we fully agree with Fr. Lawrence Sullivan's asessment) are quite close to those same tribulations in St John: "The Nox of Psalm 41:9 [New Catholic Bible; 42:8, King James] is. . . applied by Gregory (II 284) to a period in the spiritual life of all souls wherein they feel the withdrawal of God's protection, the loss of former consolation, spiritual weakness and emptiness and overwhelming sadness and darkness. This is a passive purification of the soul" (Sullivan 62-3).

Without in the slightest denying these probable Christian influences, we are forced, I think, to concede that St John's complex night overflows the boundaries of its supposed sources. We should recall—without entering into the small details that have so occupied the critics—that St John semantically expands and unfolds his symbolic "night," glossing it variously as a "movement which the soul makes toward God," a "deprivation of the savor in the appetite of things," a "faith," and "straits and sorrows," among many other senses. Sometimes we are close to the Pseudo-Dionysius: the night darkens the spirit but so as to give it light, for it empties the soul of the Created World in order that the soul may enjoy the Heavenly (N III: 9:1; VO 580). So plural are the meanings of the symbol[216] in St John that he seems to want two distinct treatises—the Ascent of Mount Carmel and The Dark Night of the Soul—to simultaneously explain his poem "On a dark night." And yet at least some of the modalities of his complex symbolic night (such as "straitness" versus "breadth" understood. as alternate spiritual states) are simply not to be found among the possible sources adduced by critics up to now. Once again: when we turn to Islamic literature, many of the enigmas of St John's most famous symbol are resolved.

Asin Palacios brilliantly' initiated the explorations into this literature. In his essay "Un precursor hispano-musulman de San Juan de la Cruz" and his posthumous book Shadhilis y alumbrados, Asin (somewhat timidly and, as we all know, under heavy attack from the critics of his time—when not utterly ignored by them) associated St John's "dark night" of the soul with that of lbn 'Abbad of Ronda and Abu 'I-Hasan al-Shadhili. Asin was the first

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216 For an excellent study of the semantic richness of "darkness" in St John of the Cross, see Maria Jesus Fernandez Lebgrans, Luf i' oscuridad en la mist/ca espanola, Madrid, 1978.

to allow the possibility of a common source that would help to explain certain coincidences between Islamic mysticism and its Christian counterpart—such coincidences as the "dark night of the soul" conceived as a stage on a spiritual journey. Although the notion of Islam's being influenced by Western, Christian monasticism, an idea defended by Asin in his Islam cristiani;ado, is still controversial, we should recognise that some Sufis may in fact have been influenced by such authors as the Pseudo-Dionysius. But still, even supposing that medieval Muslim mystics might have received the rudiments of the symbol of the "dark night" from primitive Christianity, they elaborated upon it obsessively for hundreds of years, making it their own and endowing it with complex nuances that are not only immediately recognisable as Islamic but also—as Asin himself admits—impossible to trace to neoplatonic sources in the West. And it is some of these "untraceable" nuances of the dark night that we find in the writings of St John of the Cross, who would appear to have received the symbol--which could conceivably be of ancient Christian origin--in its now-Islamicized incarnation.

In his early essay, Asin studied the dark night as the mystical image employed by such latter-day Sufis as the Shadhilites of the eighteenth century; he did not explore the widespread occurrence and complexity of the symbol in Muslim mystics of earlier times. As we explore the symbol, however, we will find in those earlier writers and religious men several different modalities of the symbol, and those modalities are also to be found, as we have noted, in St John. And in almost all these, variants from the earlier centuries we find a presage of the spiritual night that St John of the Cross later moulded as no one in the sixteenth century had done.

As early as the twelfth century, Rumi celebrated his spiritual night in impassioned verses: "Into my heart's night / Along a narrow way / I groped, and lo: The light, / and infinite land of day" (Arberry, Sufism 1 17).

Abu al-Muwahib al-Shadhilt makes much the same ecstatic exclamation in his Maxims of Illumination:

> Oh night of love and happiness at home

> Its joy drove our steeds to dancing gaits in merriment... (48)
> Obscurity is not disgraceful to the man of perfection.
>
> For the "night of Power" [Koran, s. 97]
>
> is concealed while of all the nights 'tis the best (Jabra Jurgi 59).

The night is not, however, always a phenomenon to be joyously celebrated by the Muslims; often it is seen in terms of grief, pain, and anguish. Thus the author'of the Book of Certainty points out "the complete absence of the Lore of Certainty [that] corresponds to the darkest of nights" (67) and Lahiji (conceiving the night much as St Gregory does) feels it to be the night of our condition humaine: "Assumer la condition humaine, c'est se trouver dans cette nuit, ou plutót, c'est etre cette nuit" (Corbin, Trilogie 38).

One of the most complex theorists of Sufism, the thirteenth-century Najm ad-din al-Kubra_, whose treatise Fawa ih al-jamalwa-Fawatih al-Jalal (which I have translated into Arabic) Henri Corbin discusses in his book L'homme de lumiere dans le soufisme irannian, makes the distinction (and by so doing reminds us of the subtlety of St John's formulation) between the "Nuit lumineuse de la sur-conscience et la Nuit tenébreuse de I'inconscience. La Tenebre divine... Ia 'Nuit des symboles' au sein de laquelle l'ame progresse, ce n'est nullement la Tenebre" (20-21). Sa'di, on the other hand, says that he—exactly like St John--can "appreciate the prolongation of the long, dark night" (Smith 113) as a hard but necessary spiritual stage, and in a formulation still closer to St John Shabastari's famous Secret Rose Garden contains a line that is-known to every Sufi: "Nuit lumineuse, midi obscur!" (Corbin, Trilogie 117) (This is the counterpart of St John's "brighter than the light of midday."[217]) Shabastari's line has been the object of countless

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217 The metaphorical play with a "luminously bright" night of mysticai experience would seem to be quite common in Muslim mysticism. This is Rumi's variant: "And the beloved is the moon beyond the horizons[.] which takes its resting place (qonug) in the lover's heart for just one night, since the night regards itself as white and luminous during full moon, the lover, dark night himself, becomes enlightened by the moon-like beloved" (Schimmel, Triumphal Sun 343).

commentaries, 'among them that by Lahiji, which is as complex and profound as St John's itself: .

> Comment enoncerai-je ce qu'il en est d'un cas si subtil? Nuit lumineuse, Midi obscur! (v. 125), s'scrie encore le poête de la Roserai du Mystere. Son commentateur le sait; pour qui a experiments cet etat mystique, una allusion suffit. . . . Et Lahiji s'enchante de cette Nuit lumineuse (hab-e roshun) qui est Midi obscur, mystique aurore bóreale... . C'est bien une Nuit, puisque lumière noire et abscondite de la pure Essence, nuit de puisqu'elle est en meme temps la théophaniques de / 'absconditum, en la multitude infinie de ses formes théophaniques... Midi, milieu du Jour... c'est-adire plein jour de lumisres suprasensibles... que Ies mystiques perçoivent par leur organe de lumière, leur I'oeil interieur... ; et pourtant Midi obscur, puisque la multitude de ces formes théophaniques son aussi Ies 70,000 voiles de lumière et de ténèbres qui occultant la pure Essence.... Null de la pure Essence, sans couleur ni determination, inaccessible au sujet connaissant. . . et pourtant Nuit lumineuse, puisqu'elle est celle que fait être ce sujet en se faisant voir par lui, celle qui le fait voir en le faisant étre midi obscur des formes théophaniques, certes, puisque Iivrées a elle-memes elles seraint tenèbres et non-êtres, et que dans leur manifesation meme, "elles se montrent cachees!" (Corbin, Trilogie 177)

This "divine night of the unknowable" ofSuhrawardi (ibid.) and Avicena (ibid., 20) marks distinct dwellings or stages (moradus) on the pathway to God. For Semnani, it is the sixth stage, the stage of "aswad nurani' or "black light"; for the critic - Corbin the "luminous night" is "I'etape initiatique la plus perilleuse" (151). For both Lahiji and Najm Rail, the night implies the ecstatic culmination of the mystical experience—the seventh and final stage, which is that of black light and which is "envahissante, anéantissaiite" (161), just as it is for St John. (We are close here, too, to the "lightning-bolt of darkness" of the Pseudo-Dionysius; we should note how the Sufis appear. to gradually adapt and reinterpret the ideas of the earlier mystic in terms of a spiritual process, and how this brings them closer to St John.) Niffari, from

the early tenth century, six hundred years before St John of the Cross, and with a theoretical intention that is clear enough to remind us inevitably of St John, also sees his personal "dark night" as a milestone on the pathway that leads to ultimate ecstasy:

> II me posa dans la station de la Nuit, puis II me dit: quand te survient la Nuit tiens-toi devant Moi et saisis en ta main la Nescience (gahl): par elle tu detourneras de Moi la science des cieux et de la terre, et en la detournant, tu verras Ma descente (Mawaq (Nwyia, Ibn 'Ata Allah 105).

The Persian poet Rumi envisions how in concrete terms the mystic should embrace and accept this "night" which will lead him to precisely that intuition of the essential oneness of God:

> Take the Leyla 'Night' (layl) on your breast, o Majnun.[218]
>
> The night is the secret chamber of tawhid [oneness of God], and the day idolatry (shirk) and multiplicity. . . (Schimmel, Triumphal Sun 346).

In the thirteenth century, Ibn 'Arabi repeated the theoretical assertion made by so many of his fellow Sufis (the assertion that was somehow to be picked up by St John of the Cross in the Renaissance): the "night" marks a stage or dwelling on the mystical road, and this stage is very close to the longed-for stage of Union, Oneness. It is the station of nearness (TAA 146) that is closest to the "risings of the dawn" or final possession of God. For Ibn 'Arabi, as for so many other Sufis, and St John as well, the ecstatic night is illuminated by lightning-bolts, abrupt manifestations of the divine essence. Often the parallels between St John and the Eastern mystics are quite close: in his thirteenth-century Ta' iyyat al Kubra (The Greater Poem Rhyming in T), Ibn al-Farid makes poetry out of a trope which St John will employ in the sixteenth—the night of the senses: "And thou, illumined, knowest by His light / Thou find'st His actions in the sense's night" (Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions 277).

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218 Rumt is playing with the Arabic word/name "Ley/a," which both means "night" (the "Thousand and One Nights" is "Ley/a Alf Ley/a") and is the name of a famous lover, one of the couple Leyla and Majnun, as famous in Islam as Romeo and Juliet in the West.

So important is this symbolic night for the Sufis that the author of The Book of Certainty associates the name of the most famous female lover in Islamic literature, the Muslim Beatrice or Juliet, Layla, with the spiritual dark night.[219] Little wonder: "Layla" means "night" in Arabic: "in Arabic stories and lyrics the beloved is so often named Layla (Night) for the night is above all a symbol of the Passive Perfection of Beauty. . . . [The] lover's desire may ... he taken to represent . . . his aspiration to the Truth Itself' (63-64).

Given this almost inevitable equivalence, we should not be surprised that even among the Spanish Moriscos of the sixteenth century, a group whose culture was being slowly strangled, we should hear the last echoes of this special spiritual night, with the night still.clearly understood as a stage of spiritual or moral suffering, as we see in these lines from a zajal to Muhammad, a version of which in aljatnlado has been transcribed by Julian Ribera and Asin Palacios:[220]

Quien quiera buena ventura Let him who wishes good

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219 One motif in secular Arabic poetry that clearly needs further study is the frequent figure of the lover who surreptitiously creeps through the night to find and meet his beloved. Some critics believe that this motif has been used in the "divine" sense in mystical literature. If that is true, we would, doubtlessly be quite close to St John of the Cross's poem "En una noche oscura...," which has that "plot" and which must certainly be understood under its divine aspect. James T. Monroe alludes to the secular Arabic poetic tradition in the following way: "In one section of his Risalah, the poet [Abu 'Amir ibn Suhail, 922-1035, writing under the Caliphate of Cordova] attends a gathering of literary critics who were discussing poetry. The discussion revolves around the topic of how a theme (ma 'na) can gradually be refined by successive poets. A theme is proposed: That of the lover who creeps softly through the dark to visit the beloved, doing so as quietly as possible in order to avoid being heard by her guardians. A good example by Imra'u 'I-Qays is cited, followed by a bad one by 'Umar ibn AN Rabi'ah" (Hispano-Arabic Poetry" 142). For'hrs own surreptitious nocturnal excursion, St John had used the "secret ladder." One of Rumi's favourite symbols, "again in tune with Sana'i's imagery, is that of the ladder or stair case (nardaban) which will eventually lead the lover to the roof, where the beloved is waiting" (Schimmel, Triumphal Sun 289).

220 Manuscritos arabes y aljamiados, mss. XII and IX. James T. Monroe cites the same zajal, collected also by Saavedra and Moragas, and associates it with St John's dark night; see Islam and the Arabs I l 1.

Alcançar grada de altura	fortune
Porponga en la noche escura	
	and to reach a stage of
	highness
I'aççala sobre Mahommad.	
	propose in the dark night
	a prayer to Mohammad.

Curiously, even the words that rhyme with "noche oscura" in the poems ("buena ventura" in the anonymous zajal, "dichosa ventura" in the famous lyrics of St John) are the same.

We have seen that the Sufis, in their widespread employment and elaboration of the symbol of the "dark night," would appear to foreshadow the sudden reappearance of the elusive "dark night" of St John of the Cross into the Spain of the Siglo de Oro—in fact make the appearance of the figure in St John seem not so strange or original as Western criticism has so long thought it to be. But the parallels or "coincidences" between the two employments go further yet. Asin Palacios (and it is only fair to repeat his words) has already explored how as part of St John's explanation of or glosses on the dark night, the poet uses a precise terminology that would seem to repeat very closely the terminology used by the Shadhilites hundreds of years before: The Shadhilites associated,hats-or expansion of spirit, which is an emotion of spiritual consolation and sweetness, with the day, and the qabd or "straitness / contraction" of spirit, the state of anguish or desolation, with the night, and particularly with the dark night of the soul (Asin Palacios, "Un precursor" 262, 272) wherein God plunges the mystic into despair so as to separate him from all that is other than Him. Surprisingly (because it seems so counter-intuitive), St John prefers the night or qabd to the day, as

the Shadhilites did, and Asin discovered that St John repeats in precise detail the nuances that the two technical terms possess in Arabic:

> The technical term gabd which as we have seen is the axis on which all Shadhili theory turns, derives from the Arabic root qabada, which has the following direct or metaphoric senses: "to take," "to bind," "to squeeze or make tight," "to pick up" or "grasp," "to contract or shrink," "to feel disgust," "to be sad," "to experience anguish," "to have a tightness at the heart." The term, then, functions in Arabic texts with the same rich variety of ideas that St John of the Cross expresses with the following Spanish words, repeated over .and over in The Dark Night of the Soul: "aprieto" ["straits"], "apretura" ["tightness"], "prisión" ["prison"], "oprimir" ["oppress"], "poner en estrecho" ["'constrain, put in a tight spot"], "tortura" ["torture"], "angustia" ['anguish"], "pena" ["sorrow"].
>
> Its opposite, the term bast, which in Arabic has the direct meaning "to extend," "to widen," "to dilate or stretch," "to open the hand," and, metaphorically, "to become happy," "to be comfortable," "to enjoy or take delight in," "to feel a sense of well-being," "to be glad," is also a synonym of the Spanish word anchura, "breadth," which with its two values, direct and figurative, is also used by St John of the Cross, though less frequently than "straitness" (Asin, Shadhills 117-118).

And in attempting to anticipate his critics' possible objection that there may have been a common early-Christian source for both the Shadhilites' and St John's use of these terms, Asin notes. referring mainly to qabd and bast, that "[eliminating] . . . the technical terms and the metaphorical images common to both schools because deriving from the same Christian and neoplatonic tradition, there still remains a not inconsiderable residue of common symbols and words that lack precedent in that tradition and that are exclusive to the Shadhilite school and the mysticism of St John of the Cross" (270-1).

The close parallels between St John and the Shadhilites do not end even there, for St John's "dark night" contains within itself and communicates the precise triple figuration of the Sufi qabd the "straits of the soul" because of the soul's purgation both passive and active; "spiritual desolation"; a "dark night" in whose darkness God reveals Himself to the soul more often than during the day of illumination or breadth.

Asin limits his study to the case of the Shadhilites, but it is important to note that the presence of the terms gabd and bast in Islam is much, much older. Massingnon points out that they are part of the Qur'anic lexicon, for they are in surah II, 246 of the Book ("God is close, but He is open-handed also"). We might ponder the literary significance of being able to document the technical vocabulary of St John of the Cross in the Qur'an of the Muslims, of the fact that the Qur'an may be one of St John's literary "contexts". . . But there is yet more: several Sufi commentators of different times and traditions repeat and comment upon these technical terms, among them, Al Ghazzali(cf. Asin, Esp rituulidad III: I65), Ibn 'Arabi (Tarjuman 56). Qushayri (cf Nwyia, Ibn,Allah 261-262), AI-Sarraj, Ibn al-Farid (cf Pareja, Rcligiosidad musulmanu 320). For the theorist Semnani, qabd / and bust correspond to stages 85 and 86 of the ninth register or list of the mystical path (Bakhtiar 96-97), while for the more poetic Kubra (Fawa'ih al-Jamal wa-Fawaiih al-.Jalal 43) "straitness and breadth are the heart's savor [or delight]," (al-qabd wa 7- bast dhait'y fi' 7- qalb).

Annemarie Schimmel points out that the predilection for the state of qabd comes to Ibn 'Abbad of Ronda from "Junayd as well as by the school of Abu Madyan" (Mystical Dimensions 253). Junayd defended his strange preference in this way: '"when He [God] presses me through fear He makes me disappear from myself. but when He expands me through hope He gives me hack to myself' (ibid., p. 129). In the eleventh century, other mystics, such as Al-Hujwiri. alluded to the debates between the shaykhs (masters or teachers) over which of the two states. (qabd and bast, was preferable.[221]

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221 Qabd (contraction) and bast (expansion) are two involuntary states which cannot be induced by any human act or banished by any human exertion. God hath said: 'God contracts and expands' (Kor. 11,246). Qabd denotes contraction of the heart in the state of being veiled, and bast denotes the expansion of the heart in the state of revelation (Kashf).

When all is said and done, St John of the Cross's preference for straitness brings him closer to Junayd, lbn 'Abbad, Abeu 'I-Hasan al Shadhali, and even St Gregory, who in the Moralia briefly makes the association between day and spiritual peace. night and suffering.[222]

In the light of all the above, it does not seem reckless to suggest that the curious parts into which St John divides his mystical night—the three clearly delimited moments "beginning of night," "midnight," and "end of night" or "period preceding the dawn" (S ll: 2:1; V() 395)—may also be derived from Muslim or Arabic sources. In Arabic, the term atamah means "first third of the night" (Cowan, Arabic-English Dictionary) and some Muslim mystics such as Dhu '1-Nun make mention of a tripartite night. St John and Ibn 'Arabi are very similar in this also: for both, "the last third of the Night" (Tarjuman 95) implies the nearness of the dawn of divine knowledge.[223]

Both states proceed from God without effort on the part of Man... . Some Shaykhs hold that qabd is superior in degree to bast for two reasons: (1) it is mentioned before bast in the Koran, (2) qabd involves dissolution and oppression, whereas bust involves nutrition and favour. ... Others, again, hold that bust is superior to qabd The fact, they say, that qabd is mentioned before bust in the Koran shows the superiority of bast, for the Arabs are accustomed to mention in the first place that which is interior in merit.... Moreover, they argue that in bust there is joy and in yand grief' (Kushf al-Mahjub 374-375).

222 "Job's enjoyment of spiritual peace and prosperity is likened to Day, but in his sufferings he entered into a Night: 'Unde bene per prophetam dicitur: "In die mandavit Dominus misericordiam suarn, et in nocte declaravit" (Ps. 41:9). Misericordia enim Domini in die mandatur, quia in tranquilo tempore cognoscendo percipitur; in nocte vero declaratur, quia donum, quod in tranquillitate sumitur, in tribulationibus manifestatur'" (Sullivan, "St. Gregory's Aferal/a" 62).

223 St John of the Cross employs Biblical arguments to support his "three parts" of the night, but would appear to interpret the tripartite night of Tobias from fundamentally Islamic assumptions. The night is a purificatory spiritual path which culminates in the possession of God: "In the book of the holy Tobias [6:18-22] these three kinds of night were shadowed forth by the three nights which, as the angel commanded. were to pass ere the youth Tobias should be united with his bride. In the first he commanded him to burn the heart of the fish in the fire, which signifies the heart that is affectioned to, and set upon, the things of the world.... On the second night the angel told him that he would be admitted into the company of the holy patriarchs, who are the fathers of the faith.... On the third night the angel told him that he would obtain a blessing, which is God; Who, by means of the second night, which is faith, continually communicates Himself to the soul in such a secret and

Such stubborn insistence on this secret and initiatory night among the Sufis could perhaps have its origin in—or at least bear some relation to—the legend of the night-journey or isra' which Muhammad, "de nocte et nullo vidente" in the words of undo Martin (Asin. Escatalogia 583), makes to the seventh heaven. The origin of the legend is, once again, Qur'anic. Although sura XVII:1 refers very specifically to the experience of Muhammad the Prophet, the Sufis (as both Massignon [Passion 312] and Asin point out), "appropriate the legend and have the audacity to arrogate to themselves the role of protagonists" (Asin, Escatalogia 76). Annemarie Schimmel agrees: "The Night-Journey, the ascension to heaven to which the Koran (Sura 1711) alludes[,] ... has been interpreted from at least the days of Bayazid Bestami as the prototype of the mystic's flight into the immediate Divine presence and thus as a symbol for the highest spiritual experience" (Triumphal Sun 285). In the Book of Certainty, we see precisely how Sufis would comment upon and transform the Qur'anic verses into personal

spiritual experience:

> Verily we sent it down in the Night of Power. / And how canst thou tell the Night of Power? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. / The Angels and the Spirit descend therein from the source of all decrees by the leave of their Lord. Peace it is until the break of dawn. (Qur'an. XCVII).
>
> [The] Chapter of Power, which if interpreted with reference to the microcosm may be taken as a hymn of the

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intimate manner that He becomes another night to the soul, inasmuch as this said communication is far darker than those others. . . [and is] the complete accomplishment of the communication of God in the spirit, which is ordinarily wrought in great darkness of the soul, [and] there then follows its union with the Bride, which is the wisdom of God" (Ascent 1:2:2-4). Tobias 6:18-22 reads as follows: "But thou, when thou shalt take her, go into the chamber, and for three days keep thyself continent from her, and give thyself to nothing else but to prayers to her. And on that night lay the liver of the fish on the fire, and the devil shall be driven away. But the second night thou shalt be admitted into the society of the holy Patriarchs. And the third night thou shalt obtain a blessing that sound children may be born of you. And when the third night is past, thou shalt take the virgin with the fear of the Lord, . . . that... thou mayest obtain a blessing in children."

perfect soul's marriage with the Spirit, the "Night of Power" being the soul of the Saint, into which alone descends the

Spirit (62).

Such mystical and-allegorical commentaries on the mi'raj or ascent by Muhammad into heaven as this one—we should recall also lbn 'Arabi's Book of the Night-Journey to the Majesty of the Most Generous (Asan, Escatalogia 77) and perhaps Suhrawardi's Treatise on the Night-Journey (Nasr, Three Muslim Sages 59)—form a consistent tradition which once again strengthens the symbol of the dark night within Islam. Specific details of this tradition bring to mind St John. Bakhtiar's description (84) of this divine "Night of Might" of the Sufis might almost be a comment on the poem in which the soul of St John goes out on a dark night "without being observed": "The ascent of the Sufi occurs in what is known as the Night of Power, when the Heavens open. . . . [His] soul is as the darkness of night [like St John: "in the darkness. . . without [other] light or guide"]. [his] Heart, now full, totally reflects the sun [in the midst of the darkness, St John's heart gives off light .in the same way: "without light or guide, save that which burned in my' heart. / This light guided me More surely than the light of noonday."] which brings tranquillity, until the break of dawn." St John, too, in his night "more lovely than the dawn," at last sinks into a limitless peace: "I remained, lost in oblivion, . . . all ceased, and I abandoned myself' (VO. p. 363).

The work in which the Prophet's mi'raj is described' (a work translated into Latin and the Romance languages under King Alfonso X the Learned [cf. Munoz Sendino, Ewalt', and Metlitzki, Matter of Araby). is of course titled the Liber Scale Machometi (ms. Lat. 6064. fols. I05v/126v, Paris). Might there be distant echoes in this ascent of Muhammad to the ascent in the poem of St John of the Cross?—though of course this is a fairly common spiritual leitmotif which St John himself associates with St Bernard and St Thomas (cf.' above, note ?). Whatever the case, it is simply impossible that the word ascent, within the specific context of a secret and nocturnal "rising-up" of the spirit into the heavens, not remind one of the Muslim mi'raj St John of the Cross traces the general lines of the legend when he equates his own night-ascent with the "secret contemplation" during which "the soul ascends and climbs up to [lit. "rises to scale, know and possess] a knowledge

and possession of the good things and treasures of heaven" (N 11:18:1 (Dark Night 164); VO 601). Of heaven—curiously, St John here would seem closer to the legend of Muhammad's ascent into heaven than to the Sufis who transformed the myth into mysticism.

This mystical night of St John of the Cross and the Sufis becomes, last of all, the desired dawn of the beginnings—still hazy---of divine knowledge. In her essay titled "San Juan de la Cruz y Algazel: paralelos," Maria Teresa Narváez notes that Asin Palacios seems to have missed the close parallel between AI-Ghazzali and St John of the Cross in this aspect of the trope. Asfn's comments on Al-Ghazzttlf"s use of the image are as follows:

> Sometimes in his diva' adapting the conventional technical terminology of the Sufis, [AI-Ghazzali] calls the emerging lights and splendors of divine intuition "levantes" or "auroras" (Tawali') [sunrises or dawns]. [He says that] the brilliance of' these splendors, though still slight, is nonetheless enough to blot out on the horizon of consciousness those things that are not God, just as the Sun with its still-pale splendor blots out the light of the stars (Espiritualiclad 279),

But let us look at how closely St John follows Al-Ghazzalf 's version of the image when St John glosses his lines "la noche sosegada / en par de Ios levantes del aurora" ("night sunk in a profound / hush, with the stir of dawn about the skies" in the Nims version) St John's words on this image make the schematic dawn a la divine in Sebastian de C6rdoba pale by comparison:

.. [Just] as the eastern breezes of the morning sweep away the obscurity of the night and reveal the light of day, so this spirit, calmed and quiet in God, is raised from the darkness of natural knowledge to the morning light of the supernatural knowledge of God [which is] not bright but rather (as the - saying is) dark. . . . Like night en par de los levantes [at the stirring of the dawn], all is neither night nor day, but, as they say, "between two lights" (CB 15; VO 670, quoted in Narvaez 87-88).

Even the peace and tranquillity of this morning-state upon which St John lays such insistence was foreshadowed by the Sufis: "The break of dawn

is the moment when the peace is annihilated in the Light of the Absolute, leaving only the Absolute Peace of Unity" (Bakhtiar 84), Thus St John of the Cross, after the dark night of his soul which culminates in the light that is brighter than midday, becomes one with God and leaves his cares "forgotten among the lilies.'.

(To be Continued)