THE SUFI TROBAR CLUS AND SPANISH MYSTICISM: A SHARED SYMBOLISM

(Part II)

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First part of this study appeared in *Iqbal Review*, October 1997. Dr Baralt argued that the degree to which the mystical literature of Spain came under the influence of Islam is much greater than had been studied. Focusing on such great figures of Christian mysticism as St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avila she presented her thesis with reference to the key concepts, symbols and recurrent motifs that are found in these works. Part I was devoted to preliminary observations and studied the imagery of "*Wine and Mystical Drunkenness*" and "Dark Night of the Soul" in the Works of St John of the Cross. In part II she continues to investigate further and draws our attention toward the close parallels between the two traditions.

The process of assimilating the æsthetics, 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.

Américo Castro

(Part II)

(c) Inward illumination. The living flame of love and the "lamps of fire."

Let us now turn our attention to another of St John of the Cross's most important symbols: inward illumination. It is mainly in his poem "*Llama de amor viva*," or "The Living Flame of Love," which has not received a great deal of attention from scholars, that St John celebrates light, the flames in which his ecstatic soul burns, and the mysterious "lamps of fire" that illuminate his soul at the instant of its transformation into God. As a symbol light is, of course, universal; we see it in the Pseudo-Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchies,* and Mircea Eliade calls our attention to the many cultures that have adopted it as their own: Judaism, Hellenism, gnosticism, syncretism, Christianity in general.1 But in St John of the Cross many of the details of the symbol seem, once again, to be Sufi.

From its earliest beginnings Islamic mysticism was obsessed with the trope of illumination—perhaps, as Edward Jabra Jurji (12) and Annemarie Schimmel suggest, because Islam frequently merged the ideas of Plotinus and Plato with those of Zoroaster and other ancient Persian sages. Suhrawardī, called *al-maqtūl* (the murdered or "executed," d. 1191), is also called "*Sheikh al-Ishrāq*," master or teacher of the philosophy of illumination, due to his many writings on the subject: some fifty treatises in Arabic and Persian (showing influences from Avicenna, Hellenism, and important ancient Irani and Eastern elements), among which one might mention his *Àikmat al-ishrāq* ("The Philosophy of Illumination") and *Hayākil an-nūr* ("The Altars of Light"). His followers insisted so emphatically upon this interior light that they earned for themselves the epithet *ishrāqiyyūn,* literally "illuminated" or "enlightened" (in the radical sense of the word: inwardly lighted: *alumbrados*), precisely like that persecuted sect in sixteenth-century Spain.2 For St John of the Cross, the accusation that he was an *alumbrado* was very dangerous, and indeed weighed heavily against him with the Inquisition, but among his

[1] *Cf.* also the study of the symbolism of illumination in Western religious figures (Dante, Jacopone di Todi, St Augustine, St Catherine of Genoa, etc.) in the chapter titled "The Illumination of the Self" in Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism.*

2 Curiously, this parallel escaped Asín and Antonio Márquez (*Los alumbrados. Orígenes y filosofía: 1525-1559.*) The word "*alumbrado*" ("Illuminatus," "enlightened one") needs further study. In Spanish the term is now applied to a drunk (perhaps as a vague reminder of this often delirious sect of spiritual "drunkards"?); it is odd that Spanish often employs "Orientalizing" terms for drunkenness: a "curda" or Kurd, a "turca" or Turk.

Islamic counterparts the epithet was neither dangerous nor pejorative nor at all uncommon. Ibn 'Arabī uses it, in fact, to refer to one of his authorities: "One of the *illuminati* told me" (TAA 84). We find the same respect accorded the epithet in Al-Ghazzālī, who, referring to a Sufi teacher, says in the *IÁyā* (IV, 176-197): "A man, one of those whom the uncreated light illumines with its splendors. . . " (*cf.* Asin, *Espiritualidad* II:363). The motif of illumination is common throughout Islamic mysticism, which gave it several technical names, among them *zawā'id* (excess of light or spiritual illumination in the heart [Al-Hujwīrī, 384]). Critics have always acknowledged the importance of illumination in Sufi literature: Domingo de Santa Teresa saw among the Shādhilites "an exaggerated dependence on interior illumination, on the divine brightness" (17) while Annemarie Schimmel, more positively, alludes to the "highly developed light metaphysics" of Al-Ghazzālī's *Niche of Lights* (*Mystical Dimensions* 96).

Highly developed and highly detailed: in his *IÁyā,* Al-Ghazzālī assigns illumination to the third degree of *tawÁīd* or oneness with God: "au troisième [degré] on. . . contemple [l'Unité de Dieu] par illumination intrieure" (381) while for the later Abū 'l-Àasan al Shādhalī it is the fourth degree of spiritual ascension, in which "God illuminates the soul with the light of original intellect in the midst of the lights of mystical certainty."3 But the eleventh-century mystic Hujwīrī, ever concerned with exactitude, makes a subtle distinction between the light of illumination and the fire that may cast that light: "There is a difference between one who is burned by His Majesty in the fire of love and one who is illuminated by His beauty in the light of contemplation" (*Kashf al-MaÁjūb,* in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 6). And although in many passages St John of the Cross spoke of the interior light with which the "Father of Brightness" (Iac. 1:17; *VO* 836) illuminates his spirit, he insisted a great deal more on the "living fire of love" which is the soul at the moment of its transformation into God. This is the same metaphor the impassioned Sufis employed throughout the Middle Ages, hundreds of years before the emblem of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary burning with flames of love became popular—a phenomenon which

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3 *Mafajir,* 97, 199, in Asín, *Šādhilâes* 259-260; *cf.* also the case of Aémad al-Kharrāz, in Smith, *Sufi Path* 121-122.

occurred, according to the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (vol. 2, Paris, 1953) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

This distinction, and St John's poem on the "flame" and his highly detailed commentaries on that poem, perceived within the context of the European Renaissance as so original, look less and less strange or "foreign" to us within the contexts of literary Islam. Avicenna, for example, was able to recognize the fifth *Áāl* of the ecstatic state because of the brilliant *flames* (not *light*) of direct knowledge of Allah (*cf.* Pareja 378)—a fire that inflames "his soul at its very deepest center" and which the philosopher calls, technically, "*qalb*."4 Invariably precise in his treatment of symbols, Kubrā establishes the difference between the fire of the devil or demon and the spiritual fire of *dhikr* (repeated prayer, memory of God, withdrawal inward), which the mystic will surely recognize "comme un flamboient ardent et pur, animé d'un mouvement ascendant et rapide" (Corbin, *L'homme* 113-114; Kubrā p. 8). 'AÇÇār celebrates that same flame poetically: "What is *wajd*? (ecstasy) / to become fire without the presence of the sun" (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 48-49).

While Fr Crisógono finds that St John's "Living Fire of Love" and the glosses on that poem remind him of Boscn's line "O fire of living love!", and while Demaso Alonso would hear echoes of the "Boscán *à la divine*" of Sebastin of Córdoba, my own view is that we can find parallels in Sufi mysticism that are perhaps even more significant. Nor are they hard to document. The most noteworthy of the tropes found in Sufism is undoubtedly that of the lamps of fire—an image that Baruzi, perhaps seeing as excessively enigmatic, calls "assez pauvre" (360). But this is the lamp which, with few exceptions, mystically illuminates the center of the soul of that Sufi who has begun to follow the mystical path. Bāyazīd celebrates

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4 In Sufism, the precise conception of the *qalb* or deepest centre of the heart is quite complex. Some Sufis conceive it to be an organ which is at once physical and spiritual and which is able to know God. This view also frequently subdivides the organ of spiritual communion into distinct degrees or profound centres in which distinct moments of the mystical process are experienced. Nūrâ of Baghdad, for instance, subdivides the "heart" (or this ecstatic process) into four degrees, which culminate in the *lubb* or "deepest heart." Annemarie Schimmel comments that, however, "Sufis often add the element of *sirr,* the innermost heart in which the divine revelation is experienced" (*Mystical Dimensions* 192; *cf.* also Nicholson 97).

"having within oneself the lamp of eternity" (Nicholson 79); Rūzbehān of Shīrāz (1209) notes the "nombreuses lampes qui répandent une vive lumière" within his soul (Corbin, *L'homme* 79); Al-Ghazzālī insists upon the splendor and brightness of "the light of the lamp that burns in his heart" (Asín, *Espiritualidad* 371); while Ibn 'Arabī teaches that the heart is the dwelling-place of God and that the gnostic should "illumine it with the lamps of the celestial and divine virtues until its light hath penetrated into every corner" (Asín, *El Islam* 423). The mystical lamps become (one must use the word) a commonplace of Sufism, reappearing over and over again among religious writers, thinkers, and teachers of Islam in many lands and many periods. This tradition would appear to have had its origin in the many commentaries on the famous Qur'ānic sūrah of the lamp (24:35):

> God is the LIGHT of the Heavens and of the Earth. His Light is like a niche in which [there] is a lamp—the lamp encased in glass—the glass, as it were, a glistening star. From a blessed tree is it lighted, the olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out, even though fire touched it not! It is light upon light. God guideth whom He will to His light, and God setteth forth parables to men, for God knoweth all things (Rodwell's translation).

In his work entitled *FaÄl fi-_l-maÁabbah* ("Treatise Upon Love"), Al-MuÁāsibī, born in Basra in 781, interpreted this sūrah in a "mystical" way: God lights an inextinguishable lamp that illuminates the most secret "caverns" or orifices of the gnostic's heart: "When God kindles that lamp in the heart of His servant, it burns fiercely in the crevices of his heart [and] he is lighted by it" (Arberry, *Sufism* 50). Another who applied this sura to his private spiritual experiences was Al-Ghazzālī, who in *The Niche of Lights* underscored, as St John of the Cross did also, the autonomous nature of this interior lamp: "self-luminous and with no external source" (Bakhtiar 20).

These symbolic lamps, tended for such a long time by the Muslims,5 would seem somehow to be mirrored in the image St John lifts from the

5 There is a poem by Rūmâ (translated by W. Hastie) in which the symbols of the lamp and night that we have been dealing with here are glimpsed; these were doubtlessly recurrent images in the mystical literature of Islam: "All Unbelief is midnight, but Faith the Night-Lamp's glow; / Then see that no thief cometh to steal Thy Lamp when low, / Our hope is

Song of Songs—"quia fortis est un mors dilectio, dura sicut infernus æmulatio, lampades ejus, lampades ignis atque flammarum,"6 though St John drains away the literal Biblical meaning and reinterprets those "lampades" or flames of blazing fire in terms very similar to those we have just looked at. And there is yet another surprise: St John of the Cross coincides detail for detail with several of the Muslim mystics in his interpretation of these spiritual lamps: for Al-Ghazzālī they signify the "archetypes or Divine Names and Qualities" (*Niche for Lights, cf.* Bakhtiar 20), and for the Shādhilites, through Ibn 'Ubbād of Ronda's *SharÁ al-Àikam* (I, 69), "the lights of the [divine] attributes" (Asin, *Šādhilīes* 266). That is precisely the way St John understands his own lamps of fire. And further still: as chronologically and geographically distant from St John of the Cross as he is, Nūrī of Baghdad in the ninth century, in his *Maqāmāt al Qulūb* ("Dwellings of the Heart"), makes clear what the divine attributes are that can be understood as "residing" in the lamps of fire:

> [God] has suspended from the main door [of the house of the heart] one lamp from among the lamps of His grace. . . and has lighted it with the oil of His justice and makes it to shine with the light of His mercy.7

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for the Sunlight, from which the Lamp did shine; / The Light from it kindles, still feeds its flame below; / But when the sun hath risen, both Night and Lamp go out; / And Unbelief and Faith then, the higher Vision know, / O Night! Why art thou dreaming? O Lamp! Why flickerest so? / The swift Sunhorses panting, from East their fire-foam throw, / 'Tis Night still in the shadow; the village Lamp burns dim; / But in Dawn's Splendour towering, the Peaks Heaven's Glory show" (Smith 93-94).

6 In the Spanish Bible this verse (Song of Songs 8:6) reads as follows: "Porque fuerte es como la muerte el amor; / Duros como el Seol los celos; / Sus brasas, brasas de fuego, fuerte llama"; the King James version reads "for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame"; and the New Catholic Bible reads as follows: "for stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion; its flames are a blazing fire."

7 Our translation into Spanish (translated here into English) is to be published soon in its entirety; it is based on Paul Nwyia's edition of the text (*Textes inédits* etc., p. 18). *Cf.* also *Exégèse* 327.

These attributes of the lamp (or the light it produces) are virtually the same as in St John's glosses to his poem:

> [The] splendor that this lamp of God gives [to the soul] insofar as it is goodness. . ., [and,] neither more nor less, it is the lamp of justice, and of strength, and of mercy, and of all the other attributes which together are represented to the soul in God (*L,* 3:3; *VO,* 872).

The words of Laleh Bakhtiar in her analysis of the Sufi symbol of the lamp of fire would appear to apply equally to St John of the Cross. For Bakhtiar, the lamp of fire is "related to the intelligence for it is this faculty which recognizes the Archetypes or Divine Names or Qualities" (20). St John, however, and as usual, supports his explanation of the symbol with that Biblical passage referred to above: "Knows well the soul the truth of that said by the Spouse in the Song of Songs, when he said that *the lamps* [coals] *of love were lamps of fire and flame* (8:6)" (*L* 3:3; *VO* 873). Here, St John's reading of the literal words of the Bible is somewhat forced; the result is to give them, as on so many other occasions, an interpretation concordant with the Symbolism of Islamic mysticism. Might this sincere yet culturally hybrid Christian be, at least partially and perhaps unwittingly, "islamicizing" the Scriptures?

He does islamicize at least his own literature, for the many detailed parallels continue. One of these parallels is the lamp as certain knowledge of God. For the Sufis, the spiritual lamps or lights are the dwelling-place of consciousness: mystical certainty, the fourth stage in Abū-l-Àasan al Shādhalī's *ñabaqāt, Sha'rānī*, 11, 10-11) and for Abū ÀafÄ al-Suhrawardī the degree of *Anwār al-yaqīn* or "lights of certainty." For St John of the Cross, too, the knowledge of God's attributes leads to the total knowledge of God: "Oh what delights! in which it is to such a degree *known*" (*L* 3:17; *VO* 880). The process ends, in St John's words, with "the transformation of the soul into God[, which] is totally unspeakable [ineffable]" (*L,* 3:8; *VO,* 876). For Suhrawardī too, this is the final transformation of the soul into God, the *Áaqq al-yaqīn* or "point at which the lover is immersed into the light of contemplation. . . and is transformed, and this is the Supreme degree of oneness (Pareja 396). In order for this wonder to occur, the fire and the lamps have purified the soul of all that is not God: St John, if one is to judge by his own commentaries, would fully agree with the vivid interpretation that Kubrā gives the purifying action of the fire of *dhikr* (remembrance of

God/withdrawal inward): it flames up in the soul, proclaiming "*anā, wa lā ghayrī* " ("I, and nothing else") and joins its flame to those of the mystic's kindled heart, and all is then "*nūrun 'alā nūr*" (Kubrā, II:4): light upon light, as the Qur'ān says. That is, "Bride into the Bridegroom transformed."

In both St John of the Cross and the Sufis, the soul has been prepared for this transformative union because it has been purified or cleansed beforehand of all its impurities. St John alludes metaphorically to these impurities again and again, though schematically: "if we were to speak on purpose of the ugly, dirty figure which the appetites present to the soul, we would find no thing, however covered with cobwebs and vermin it may be, . . . nor any other filthy, dirty thing that might exist or that one might imagine in this life, to which we might compare it" (*N* I: 9:3; *VO* 383). But in spite of the avowed impossibility of comparison, more than once St John, like St Theresa, compares this spiritual sensuality with "animals" (*L,* 3:73; *VO,* 911). And once again it is the imaginative Kubrā who offers a vivid portrayal of the allegorical motif, giving the impression that he is amplifying upon the more sober St John yet without deviating from his line of thought. The light from the lamp of fire illuminates his soul and Kubrā points out the vermin or animals that the soul is full of[8] and needs to expel in order to reach "quietude."

> *Dhikr* (withdrawal inward) is like a lamp that is lighted within a dark house. . . . By its light, [the soul] understands that the house is filled with impurities[:][9] such as the impurity of the dog, of a panther, of a leopard, of an ass, of a bull, of an elephant, and of every objectionable creature in existence (chapter 54, p. 25).

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8 We should recall the special impact for a Muslim, accustomed to rites of purification such as ablutions, that the idea of "impurity" would have. If certain animals such as the dog "contaminate" or "pollute" a place, one must not pray there. St John, as we have seen, seems close to this acute sensitivity to corruption or pollution as manifested in Kubrā. St John's "vermin," which produce a repugnance that is difficult to describe, would seem to fall within the emotional tradition of those impure animals described by the Muslim mystic.

9 The Arabic contains the conjunction *wā* "and," which renders the passage not altogether clear; we have substituted a colon for greater understanding.

Union with God is manifested for both St John and the Muslim illuminists or Ishrāqīs by one further element: the veils that cover and separate the Divinity from the mystic's soul are stripped away. As both Asín Palacios and W. H. T. Gairdner (44) point out, this symbol of the veil of the phenomenological and human which separates us from God is given only sketchy portrayal by the neoplatonists (the Pseudo-Dionysius, for example, in *The Celestial Hierarchies*) and such writers as Garcilaso and Fray Luis de León. But the Muslims' insistence on the symbol, and the symbol's widespread and elaborate employment in poems and treatises, allow us to associate it here with Islam, especially because of the specific context in which it appears: as part of the most widespread symbol of spiritual illumination. At least one Islamicist seems to consider it a uniquely Sufi metaphor: "In Sufi parlance, phenomenal existence is conceived by a veil, which conceals the truth from man's view," comments T. H. Weir (xxxii), though we could not say with how much awareness of the distant antecedents in Alexandria. For Alexandrian antecedents there are: the symbol of the veil, which is admittedly ancient in Islam, appears in the "traditions" or "hadīths" as the famous formulation that follows:

> Allah hath Seventy Thousand Veils of Light and Darkness: were He to withdraw the curtain, then would the splendours of His Face surely consume everyone who apprehended Him with his sight (Gairdner 44).

Mystics as diverse as Semnānī_, who sets the unveiling of God at dwelling number 81 of the ninth stage of the mystical path (Bakhtiar 96), Kubrā (pp. 20, 62), Ibn Iraqī (Smith, *Sufi Path*), Al- Hujwīrī (291), Ibn 'AÇā' Allāh (*Àikam,* 90), Jāmī (Smith 52), Ibn 'Arabī (*TAA* 95, 51), and Aémad Al-Ghazzālī (*TAA* 108)—all employ the symbol, each adding his own complexity to it. We are reminded by Maria Teresa Narvaez (85) that AÁmad Al-Ghazzālī's brother, the more famous MuÁammad Al-Ghazzālī, is very close to St John of the Cross: God cleanses the soul "of worldly filth and [pulls back] the veils which hide Him, so that He may be seen in the heart as though one were gazing upon Him with the eyes (qtd. in Asin, *Espiritualidad* II:515-516). "Break through the cloth of this sweet encounter!" says St John in the "Living Flame." And in his commentary, he describes in detail, in a most Sufi-like manner, what this "cloth" is:

> Take away from before [the soul] some of the many veils and curtains that the soul has before it, so that it may see what He looks like, and then there shines through and is glimpsed, somewhat darkly (because not all the veils are taken away) that face of His that is filled with grace (*L* 4:8; *VO* 920).

Not only veils but *curtains* that prevent the soul's perfect union with God: St John parallels the Muslims very closely: in Arabic *éijāb* is "veil" or "curtain" (Pareja 321; *Arabic-English Dictionary* 156) and poets such as Ibn al-Fāriî allude to this latter meaning: "Thou shalt find all that appears to thee / . . . but in the veils of occultation wrapt: When he removes / the curtain, thou beholdest none but Him" (Smith *Sufi Path* 132). In a more popular version, curtains and veils also separate Muhammad from God in the legend of the *mir'āj* (XIX, 21).

The parallels continue: in the process of purification that culminates in illumination, both St John and the Sufis polish the mirror of their soul to the point where it is so burnished that it can reflect the light of God: "the mirror [of the] heart has been so polished with divers classes of mortification. . . whose effect is the polishing that must be accomplished so that the forms of mystical realities can manifest themselves with all their brightness in the heart." These words are from Abū al-Mawāhib al- Shādhalī of Cairo's (*ñabaqāt,* Sha'rānī, II, 70), but the image is repeated over and over by Rūmī, Ibn 'Aèā' Allāh, Ibn 'Arabī, Al-Ghazzālī, and even the ancient Bīsèāmī (d. 874), Àakīm Tirmidhī (d. 898), and Hasan BaÅrī (d. 728). St John sounds like them all, and his soul, "through the brightness that comes supernaturally," becomes a "bright mirror" (*N* II: 24:4; *VO* 459).

In another view of the symbol, Al-Sha'rānī explores the mysterious depths of the soul which is enkindled with love: it is subdivided into seven concentric states, each deeper than the one before (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 174). St John of the Cross echoes this figure by declaring in his "Living Flame" that his soul is concentric (I, 13). The Pseudo-Dionysius had used such a figure even earlier, but St John and the Sufis coincide in the smaller details of the figure. In the glosses to the "Spiritual Canticle," St John remarks that there are precisely seven of these degrees or stages of the soul's concentricity:

> This wine-cellar that here the soul speaks of is the last and narrowest degree of love in which the soul can reside in this life; and it is for that reason that it is called the inward *wine-cellar,* that is, the most inward. From which it follows that there are others which are not so inward, which are the degrees of love from which one ascends unto this last, and we may say that these degrees or wine-cellars of love are seven [in number] (*CB* 26:4; *VO* 700).

While for St Theresa, as we all know, it is the interior castles of the soul that are seven in number, for St John of the Cross it is cellars, with the most inward quite specifically a wine-cellar. Would his imagination have been under the influence of some recollection of the symbol of the ecstatic wine—which is also, apparently, Sufi? In Kubrā's fertile imagination, the concentricities of the soul take the form of seven wells which the interior soul, inflamed with love, must climb out of until it reaches the ultimate light of truth. Here is the passage in which he describes this ascent:

> Thou shouldst know that existence is not limited to a single act. There is no act of being [or of existence] that is not underlain by another act of being [or of existence] which is more important and more sublime than the preceding one, until we come to the divine Being. For each of these acts or levels of existence, which we see throughout the mystical path, there is a well. These acts of being or levels of existence are seven [in number]. . . . [Once] thou hast ascended through the seven wells of the divers categories of existence, behold, thou arrivest at the Heaven of the Deity and the Power of God. . . and His light is so bright that human spirits may only barely stand it, while yet they become enamoured of it with mystical love (8: 7)

The soul as an interior well is not an image that is Kubrā's alone, however curious it may seem to us. It has a long Muslim genealogy—we should recall, for example, Najm Rāzī, a thirteenth-century Sufi who also used it (*cf.* Corbin, *L'homme* 156-157). But few get as much mileage out of the simile as the late-Persian treatise-writer Kubrā does. In one passage from his *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl wa-Fawātié al-Jalāl* (chapter 17, p. 8), we come upon a very interesting and highly significant play on words with the Arabic root *q-l-b* □□□□ whose multiple meanings Kubrā fully and explicitly exploits: *qalaba* ("to turn around, to transmute, to reflect something, to be transformed, to

change"); *qalb* ("transmutation"); *qalb* in its more usual sense of "essence, heart, center, middle"; and, last, the variant *qalīb* ("well") (all, *Arabic-English Dictionary*). Kubrā points out, then, for the illuminated heart of the mystic, the shifting possibilities: it can reflect God, it can become transmuted or transformed in Him, it can be the most profound essence and centre of the soul, and it can be (at least metaphorically) a well. The wit or ingenuity of this master of style is doubly important because it coincides in a surprisingly precise way with St John of the Cross. For as though he were aware of the possibilities of the Arabic root, in the "Living Flame" St John also equates the deepest centre of his soul, which is able to reflect God and transform itself into Him, with a well: "O happy soul!. . . which also art *the well of living waters*." Like Kubrā, St John is insistent in his use of the image, repeating it more than once and supporting it with the Biblical passage on Jeremiah's "fountain of living waters" (*L* 3:7-8; *VO* 875; Jer 2:13). Kubrā had supported his own conceit with the Qur'ānic passage on Joseph (12:10-19). There is another very interesting, and rather strange, parallel: in employing the image of the soul as a well or cistern in the midst of a process of illumination, both mystics—like so many previous Sufis—link and intermingle the "living waters of that spiritual well with the flames of transformation in God." Kubrā's soul-as-a-well "se métamorphose en puits de lumière" (Corbin, *L'homme* 121). In St John of the Cross, water and fire are equated to a miracle, one which is mirrored in the miraculous transformation of Bridegroom into Bride:

> Thus these lamps of fire are living waters of the spirit. . . . [For although] they were lamps of fire, they were also pure and limpid waters. . . . And thus, although it is fire, it is also water; for this fire is figured forth by the fire of the sacrifice which Jeremiah hid at the cistern, which when hidden was water, and when pulled from the well for the sacrifice was fire (2 March 1, 20-22; 2:1-22)10. . . called

10 Here, reference is to the Apocryphal book of Machabees (book 2), whose verse reads as follows (New Catholic Bible): "But when many years had passed, and it pleased God that Nehemias should be sent by the king of Persia, he sent some of the posterity of those priests that had hid it, to seek for the fire; and as thy told us, they found no fire, but thick water, Then he bade them draw it up, and bring it to him. And the priest Nehemias commanded the sacrifices that were laid on, to be sprinkled with the same water, both the wood and the things that were laid upon it. And when this was done, and the time came that the sun shone out, which before was in a cloud, there was a great fire kindled, so that all

> *flames* rather than *water,* saying *O lamps of fire!* All that which can in that song be said, is less than that which is, because the transformation of the soul into God is ineffable (*L,* 3:8; *VO,* p. 875-876).

Another trope for the process of illumination that both St John and the Sufis insist on is the metaphor of the sudden stroke of lightning or lightning-bolt which indicates the abrupt and fleeting manifestation of God. Although in this case the parallel seems quite widespread (Mircea Eliade remarks that "the rapidity of mystical illumination has been compared in many religions to lightning" [*The Two . . .,* p. 22]), among Muslims, including the alchemists (*cf.* Jung 317), it becomes an obligatory technical equation. Ibn 'Arabī assures us of the stability of his image, in Arabic *lā'ié,* literally "lightning": "The author of these poems always uses the term 'lightning' to denote a centre of manifestation of the Divine Essence" (*T.A.A.* 92). Again, Semnānī gives it a precise numerical location along the mystical path: strokes of lightning occupy number 69 of the ninth stage along the road (Bakhtiar 96). Many other Muslims employ the term, but we shall only look closely at the case of Al-Ghazzālī who, in his *IÁyā* remarks:

> [The] lights of truth shall shine brightly in his heart. . . . In the beginning they shall be as fleeting bolts of lightning, which flash and flash again and remain a short while or a longer . . . and there shall be divers illuminations, or always the same one (in Pareja 294).

In words remarkably resembling those of Al-Ghazzālī, St John of the Cross also presents the sudden flash of mystical experience under the metaphor of a flash of lightning:

> And it is, sometimes, as though an extraordinarily bright door had opened, and through it [the soul] should see [a light] like a flash of lightning, when upon a dark night things suddenly become bright and clear and one can see them clearly and distinctly and then they are once again in darkness (*N* II: 24:5; *VO* 459).

And that is the figure of the mystical stroke of lightning. We will not insist overmuch on a similar image that St John shares with the Muslims—

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wondered." The second verse (2:1-22) is too long to quote in its entirety here.

the "stroke of darkness" (*Dark Night* II:5:3; *VO* p. 572)—because here the antecedent common to both (possibly the Pseudo-Dionysius) is quite clear. It is, however, useful to note that this "lightning-bolt of darkness" is part of a metaphysics of light and darkness which, while already quite complex in the early Fathers of the Church, took on unexpected dimensions of complication and wit among the Sufis (and especially Persian Sufis), as Toshihiko Izutzu has demonstrated in his essay "The Paradox of Light and Darkness in The Garden of Mystery of Shabastari." Even the architects of Islamic mosques played with the alternations of light and shadow, and we will discover in St John of the Cross—at a much later date than the Pseudo-Dionysius—that same play of chiaroscuro, for which St John even invents a term: "*obumbraciones*" or "*hacimiento de sombra*" (*L* 3:12; *VO* p. 878). St John's curious elaboration of this kaleidoscopic spiritual phenomenon would appear to locate him quite close to Muslim mysticism and Arabic aesthetics, which, in patent defiance of Aristotelian logic, delights in the impossible union of contraries:

> But although these virtues and attributes of God may be lighted lamps that are burning brightly, being so near the soul. . . they yet cannot fail to touch [the soul] with their shadows, which are also brightly lighted and burning bright, in the figure of the lamps which create them, and there these shadows shall be splendours. (*L* 3:14; *VO* 878).

The "Living Flame of Love" (which we might consider to include the glosses on that poem), in which St John describes the process of his final illumination, has always been one of the poet's most enigmatic works, and one of those least addressed by literary criticism. Reference to Muslim illuminationist literature, however, helps us decipher its mystery and recognise some of its possible sources—*Sufi* sources to which St John of the Cross would appear, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, to have had some access. While we do not question the Christian orthodoxy or intentions of St John, we must recognise that even though he was an undeniable child of the West, in paralleling the Sufis so closely, and even in so frequently realigning his Biblical citations and "supports" with the axis of the technical Symbolism of Islam, he also was, in more than one sense, a cultural child of the East. Or better, a child of genius of that Spain of three bloodlines that Américo Castro explored—the poet sings his Christian sentiments with

Muslim metaphors. And his "Living Flame of Love," an unquestionably orthodox yet culturally hybrid poem, would appear to celebrate the *morada* or "dwelling" of illuminative union from the point of view of an *ishrāqī* or Muslim Illuminationists. Or further yet: from the point of view of a very erudite *ishrāqī,* well versed in the matter and Symbolism of Illumination.

d. Water, or the inner spring or fountain of mystical life.

Yet this "initiate" of Islamic symbolism that St John of the Cross would appear to have been holds yet further surprises for us. Another of his favourite symbols is water as the inner spring or fountain of the soul, a symbol he incorporates into his poetry in stanza 12 of the "Spiritual Canticle" ("¡Oh cristalina *fuente,* / si en esos tus semblantes plateados, / formases de repente / los ojos deseados, / que tengo en mis entrañas dibujados!") and in the poem titled "Cantar de la alma que se huelga de conocer a Dios por fe," which begins "Que bien sé yo la *fonte que mana y corre* / aunque es de noche." The universality of water as a spiritual metaphor is clear, from the Bible (John 4:14) to alchemical terminology (Jung 104), as is the spring or fountain, the "immemorial symbol of eternal life" as Maria Rosa Lida calls it. In exploring the particular modalities that the symbol assumes in St John of the Cross, once again we find traits that would appear to be clearly Muslim. Some of them have already been pointed out by Asín Palacios: both St John and St Teresa, for instance, employ the Islamic (and especially Shādhilite)11 image of diligent and laborious prayer or meditation seen in terms of the arduous transport of spiritual water through channels and aqueducts, an effort that contrasts with the spontaneity of the autonomous bubbling-forth of the spring of a higher degree of contemplation: "[When it] gives itself to prayer, the soul is now like one to whom water has been brought, so that he drinks peacefully, without labour, and is no longer forced to draw [the water] through the aqueducts (also: 'the buckets of a water wheel') of past meditations and forms and figures," as St John said in *The Ascent* (II: 14:2; *VO* 421). (This is very similar to St Teresa's water-figure in the *Autobiography* (XI) and the *Interior Castle* (IV: 2:3).

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11 *Cf.* also Al-Ghazzālâ, *IÁyā',* 211-212, and Rūmâ, who also speaks of the water of the soul transported by canals (Schimmel, *Triumphal Sun* 80, 85).

The symbol of the spring or fountain in St John of the Cross has been the object of numerous critical studies, though critics have had difficulty tracing its sources. David Rubio does not think the sources are Biblical:

> None of the 56 metaphors of the "spring" or "fountain" of the Vulgate, and none of the numerous metaphors of the same object in Western mysticism can in any way be tied to the concept of the "spring" or "fountain" in St John of the Cross (18).

Ludwig Pfandl associates St John's use of the spring or fountain with the spring "della prouva dei leali amanti" of the chivalric romance *Plati.* (108). Dámaso Alonso, on the other hand, rejects, for reasons mainly bibliographical in nature, any possible influence by the *Caballero Platir* and favors instead Garcilaso's Eclogue II as transmitted through the "divinification" of Sebastián de Córdoba. María Rosa Lida's review of Alonso's book minimizes the importance of Sebastián de Córdoba and emphasizes instead St John's close similarity to the spring of the *Platir* (despite the problematic nature of its possible influence) and the spring of Primaleón. Lida takes an essential element of the symbol to be the fact that St John's spring or fountain reflects another's face, precisely as it does in these chivalric romances, Garcilaso's Eclogue I, Sannazaro's *Arcadia,* and even an epigram by Paulo el Silenciario.

But without rejecting these possible Greco-Latin and European antecedents (which might to some degree have left their mark on St John), we must insist that they do not entirely clear up the problem of St John's particular spring. Sebastián de Córdoba does take Garcilaso's poem and recast it *à la divine,* so that the spring takes on a "religious" or allegorical cast, but he does not give it the details that would bring it into congruence with the symbol as found in St John. Although other authors (Garcilaso himself, for instance) are closer in some essential aspects of the spring (the fact that it reflects another's face), their images lack the mystical dimension that is so obvious in St John of the Cross. And besides—St John's spring reflects the *eyes* of the Bridegroom, not his face.

The mystical literature of Islam will not solve all the thorny problems of St John's spring or fountain, but it will provide some answers that I believe to be fundamental. First of all, the spring in Islamic literature is conceived of from the beginning *à la divine*. Ramon Lull, so clearly grounded in things

Arabic, speaks of a crystalline mirror that reflects the degree of contemplation which the soul has of God (*cf.* Hatzfeld) and in Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūéāt* (II, 447) the spring is a mirage (*sarāb*) that the thirsty mystic thinks he sees but, realizing his error, discovers instead to be God and himself (*cf.* Asín, *Islam cristianizado* 497). We should recall that the "semblantes plateados" or "silvery semblances [or mien]" of the spring reflect the eyes which St John/ the female narrator/ the Bride has "engraved [or drawn] within [his/her] entrails." That is: the eyes reflect him/herself and God/ the Bridegroom.

Let us pause for a moment to look at the poem "Qué bien sé yo la fonte. . .," which was composed in prison in Toledo ca. 1577-1578 and is one of the most shatteringly beautiful poems of St John's *oeuvre.* In this poem, the poet explains his "fonte" or fountain to the reader, and when we compare these details with Bakhtiar's commentary on the *Book of Certainty* we see that St John of the Cross and the anonymous Sufi author coincide virtually phrase for phrase. Below, we offer a side-by-side reading of the two figures:

Bakhtiar:	St John of the Cross:
The mystic enters the Garden of the Spirit and finds a fountain, water which gushes forth. . . ["flowing" in the *Book of Certainty*]. . . .	"Fonte que mana y corre": "fount which issues forth and flows." . . .
[The] fountain is the Fountain of Knowledge. . .	"Qué bien sé yo," "how well I know," is the poet's constant refrain.
Which is illuminated by the Spirit. It is the contemplative Truth of Certainty, the knowledge of Illumination, . . .	St John said of his fountain or spring, which is also curiously "lighted," that "its brightness is never dimmed, and I know that all light from it is come."
Knowledge of the Oneness of all Divine	St John insists on Oneness, although he

Qualities. . . .	refers to the unity that underlies the mystery of the Trinity: “Well I know that three in one single living water / live, and one from the other is derived.”
The Fountain of Knowledge appears like veils of light, not darkness, behind each of which shines the Light of Essence Itself (Bakhtiar 27).	In the “silvery semblances” of the spring in the “Spiritual Canticle,” which St John understands as “faith,” one may glimpse God “even through veils”; “beneath this faith lies the substance of faith, stripped of the veil of this silver. . . . So that faith is given us and joins us to God Himself, but covered with a silvering of faith” (*VO* 657).

“Although it is night,” St John insists upon the mystical certainty that he feels in the presence of this spring or fountain. He repeats the verb *to know* no fewer than eleven times in the poem, and almost invariably emphatically: “qué bien sé yo,” “how well I myself do know.” “Certainty,” indeed, is the principal semantic referent of the Sufi symbol of the spring or fountain. Al-Ghazzālī, to take just one example, says (Gairdner, *Niche for Lights* 77) in a commentary on Sūra 13:19 of the Qur’ān, “the water here is knowledge.” Nūrī of Baghdad had the same insight as early as the ninth century: in Treatise VII of his *Maqāmāt al Qulūb* (135), in which he gives long descriptions of the mystical water of the soul, he declares that the water that flows in the gnostic’s heart implies knowledge (*‘ulūm*) of the secrets of an eternal God (and here we should recall St John: “that eternal fount is hidden” [*VO* 930]). For Nūrī the divine water symbolises not only knowledge of God, but the *certainty* of that knowledge.

But St John adds yet another element to that certainty: "qué bien *sé* yo por *fe* la fonte frida" (*VO* 931). The "crystalline spring" of the "Spiritual Canticle" thus signifies faith as well, as the poet explains in the glosses to the poem (*CB* 12:3; *VO* 657). That most delicate conjunction of faith and certainty occurs also among the Sufis. The author of the *Book of Certainty* describes the "Fountain of the Lore of Certainty" in precisely those terms: "This degree of certainty being none other than faith (*īmān*)" (145). Another passage states that in Sufism the second degree of faith is the "Eye of Certainty" (*'aynu'l-'yaqīn*) (13). This terminology might seem very abstruse and strange, and yet we see that it takes us closer to that complex spring or fountain of St John of the Cross than do the European sources quoted by critics to date..

Within the fountain of the "Spiritual Canticle" (and this no doubt reinforces in some critics' mind the association with Garcilaso's Eclogue II: "¿Sabes que me quitaste, fuente clara / los ojos de la cara?": "Do you know that you have taken from me, bright spring/ the eyes of my face?"), St John sees mirrored "the desired eyes" of the Bridegroom—curiously, mysteriously, the *eyes,* not the face. In the "Spiritual Canticle" this lovely *lira* on the spring immediately precedes the moment at which the lovers are joined. The same thing occurs in Kubrā: "le double cercle des deux yeux" appears "au stade final de pèlerinage mystique" (Corbin, *L'homme* 127). As Shabastarī reminds us, these eyes can wound the mystic who is about to enter absolute union: "the eye has no power to stand the dazzling light of the sun. It can only see the sun as reflected in the water" (in Izutsu, 298). It is perhaps for that reason that St John asks first to contemplate those allegorical eyes in his "crystalline spring"—only thus, and echoing his Sufi colleagues in the mystical experience, can he bear the experience. In the light of these close parallels, then, the stanza's mystery would appear to be gradually coming clear. When in the next stanza the poet's soul "flies off" toward God, it "can hardly receive Him without losing its life" (*CB* 13:12; *VO* 660) and the poet/ Bride exclaims: "Turn them [the eyes] away, Lover!" How close St John of the Cross is to Ibn 'Arabī, who in his comment on the enigmatic line from the *Tarjumān*, "She kills with her glances," explains that the line refers "to the station of passing away in contemplation" (*fanā fi'l-mushāhadah*).

The unbearable pain of ecstasy prefigured in a pair of divine eyes whose glance can hardly be borne brings St John yet once again into parallel with his

religious counterparts in the East. Both cases ask for the eyes of God in order to be able to see God: "When you looked at me/ Your grace in me your eyes impressed / . . . / and at that, my own eyes / became worthy of adoring what they saw in you" (*VO* 628), exclaims St John, echoing so many Muslims such as Ibn 'Arabī: "When my Lover appears, what eye shall I look upon him with? With his, not my own, because no one sees him save Himself alone" (in Nicholson 198).

But there is a powerful reason for the recurrence of the figure of the other person's eyes reflected in a spring, that trope which marks for Sufis the beginning of the alchemy of Union through Love. The unquestionable reason for the fact that we find in the mystical literature of Islam (and not of Europe) so many examples in which at the precise moment of mystical transformation the fount of ultimate spiritual knowledge reflects a pair of mysterious eyes, is that in Arabic the word *'ayn* has the simultaneous meanings "fountain" or "spring," "eye," "identity" (or "substance" or "individuality") and "the same."12 (There are other meanings as well.) All the Sufis seem to have done is translate the various *simultaneous* semantic meanings of the three-letter word-root into *linear* poetry, in a way that is extraordinarily profound in its mystical implications and at the same time constant throughout Arabic contemplative literature. What is astonishing is that St John of the Cross should parallel the Sufi masters so closely—indeed, perfectly. Although practitioners of the *dolce stil nuovo* such as Petrarch and Achilini had suggested that the intermingling of souls that occurred at the moment of love (and lovemaking) was achieved through the eyes, which are the windows of the soul, they had never set these eyes within a fountain,

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12 *Cf.* J. M. Cowan, *Arabic-English Dictionary* (663), which offers some of the main meanings of the root *'ayn,* as noted in the text above. Michael Sells notes the extraordinary richness of the word in the Sufi master Ibn 'Arabâ: " *'Ayn* is one of the most difficult terms in all of Ibn 'Arabâ's writings" (Polished Mirror 137). Sometimes *'ayn* is translated by "determination, delimitation, or unification of the undetermined, unlimited, non-entified real." (Here the term, which is equivalent, as we know, to "spring" and "eye," would appear to approach the concept of indeterminacy that we see in the spring in St John's poem "La fonte": "bien sé que suelo en ella no se halla, / y que ninguno puede vadealla, / aunque es de noche." Sells also translates the multivalent concept of *'ayn* by "the same," as in the lines from the *FuÄūÄ,* 119: "But in reality Lordship is *the same* [*'ayn*] as the Self" (Garden Among the Flames 295, emphasis added). Sells has incorporated the two essays we have just quoted in his book *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*; these are the first journal publications.

spring, or pool, and especially not one with mystical overtones. The Arabic root *'ayn* establishes an equation (*i.e.,* between the fount or spring, the eyes, and "identity") which is inescapable to anyone who knows Arabic yet which seems eccentric, "odd," to a Westerner unfamiliar with the linguistic terms that the root brings into association.13

As though he were an initiate into the secrets of the Arabic languge and had direct knowledge of this semantic field (or as though he had "miraculously" stumbled upon it for himself), St John of the Cross asks the reader to understand that the fount which reveals to the Bride the eyes of the Bridegroom symbolizes the total transformation of one into the other. Thus, St John says in his commentary to this stanza, "it is true to say that the Bridegroom lives in the Bride, and the Bride in the Bridegroom, and such likeness does love bring about in the transformation of the Lovers that one can say that each is the other and that both are one. . . . Each ceases to be each and changes into the other; and thus, each one lives in the other, and the one lives in the other, and the one is the other, and both are one, by the transformation of love" (*CB* 12:7; *VO* 658). To signal the absolute unity of the transformed essence of these lovers, St John could apparently think of nothing so apt as that the Bride see the *eyes* of the Bridegroom reflected in

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13 We should recall, in addition, that in speaking in this section of the poem about the beginnings of transformative ecstasy, St John of the Cross might also being pointing toward the ancient image of the "eye of the soul." This trope, which Plato apparently introduced into the West, has been employed as a symbol by countless Western religious writers: St Augustine (in his *Confessions*), Origen, Meister Eckhardt, St Bonaventure, Ramon Lull. Ludwig Schrader has written an admirable essay on this subject (*q.v.*). J. García Palacios (220) adds yet other Spanish authors who use the symbol: Laredo, Estella, Gómez García. But the figure of the eye is also—in the singular—an organ of spiritual knowledge for the Muslims. In his *IÁyā' 'ulum al-dân,* Al-Ghazzālâ calls the eye the '*ayn al-qalb* (the eye of the heart or of the soul), and the anonymous author of the *Book of Certainty,* as we have noted earlier, calls it the '*ayn l-yaqân,* or eye of certainty. Ibn 'Abbād of Ronda used the symbol in similar terms in his *Àikam* (243). Popular Hindu literature refers to the mystic as the possessor of a "third eye." Later we will have occasion to see that St John of the Cross appears to parallel the detailed elaboration of the trope among the Sufis more than he does his counterparts in religious writing and poetry in the West.

Finally, we should recall, as a curious coincidence perhaps, that Spanish still "remembers" the ancient Arabic-language association of "eye" and "spring" or "fount": a still spring issuing from the ground is still called an *ojo de agua,* an "eye of water."

the pool, and not his *face.* If St John, like his Sufi counterparts, understands that the *eyes* are semantically equated with the *pool* into which the Bride gazes, and that this *fount* and these *eyes* are in turn equated with *identity,* then we should find it strange that he *not* elaborate the literary trope within these lines of close, mysterious transformative equivalence. All are made perfectly equal in this verbal alchemy: the *eyes,* the *fount* or *spring,* the *unity* or *oneness* or *identity* of the lovers who are transformed into one another in the silvery surface of the water of the pool that serves as mirror. What is astonishing, as we say, is that this stanza written by St John of the Cross, the most enigmatic of Spanish poets, ceases to be eccentric or unnecessarily mysterious when we read it with the knowledge of that three-letter Arabic root. I myself am astounded to admit that a Sufi would understand this odd mystical narcissism of the "Spiritual Canticle" 's spring better than a Western Christian reader, however religious he or she might be.

e) *The heart as the mirror of God: the* **qalb,** *translucid and ever-changing vessel.*

Immediately after seeing the eyes of the Bridegroom reflected in the spring of silvery mien, the female protagonist of the "Spiritual Canticle" sings joyfully, in lines that are possibly the finest love poetry in the Spanish language, of having found the ineffable Love—and the delicious union that is intrinsic to it—that she had been seeking:

Mi Amado, las montañas,	My Beloved, the mountains,
los valles solitarios nemorosos,	the bosky solitary valleys,
las ínsulas extrañas,	the strange isles,
los ríos sonorosos,	the sounding rivers,
el silbo de los aires amorosos,	the whisper of the loving breezes,
la noche sosegada	the night as serene
en par de los levantes del aurora,	as the rising light of dawn,
la música callada,	the hushed music,
la soledad sonora,	the sounding solitude,

la cena que recrea y enamora.	the feast that recreates and invites to love.

Once again the poetry, in lines of immense profundity, seems to want to reveal secrets—suggestions of St John of the Cross's experience of the infinite, an experience terribly difficult to put into words because it is outside language and human reason. But once again we find in Islamic mysticism the symbolic coordinates that will help us understand the poet's most intimate mystical thoughts and feelings. At the point of mystical union, when the poem's symbolic pool is revealed to be the locus of oneness between Bride and Bridegroom, and thus the locus of divine manifestation, the Bride who at the beginning of the poem had sought her Bridegroom through a hazy landscape that her swift foot really barely trod (so little "realized" was the scene), now suddenly discovers that the Bridegroom is not *in* that landscape, but rather *is* it: the mountains, valleys, rivers, breezes. And unexpectedly the anguished question "Where?" with which the poem had begun ("Where have you hidden, Beloved, and left me with my moan?") begins to be answered with a myriad of spaces in glorious, kaleidoscopic succession. The Bridegroom, curiously, does not have a face, as those traditional lovers of European love poetry would have had (we should recall Petrarch and Ronsard), but is conceived rather in the metaphoric terms of a vertiginous cascade of spaces and even unexpected times and situations (night, music, solitude, a feast or dinner) which suggest the collapsing of the contraries height and depth, sound and silence, the solid and the ethereal.

In the poem's ecstatic union of Bride and Bridegroom, everything seems to merge: "Mi Amado las montañas / los valles solitarios nemorosos / las ínsulas extrañas. . . ." The metaphorization by means of which the Bridegroom has been linked—in fact verblessly equated—with those spaces is completely unknown in the European poetry of the Renaissance; indeed, so strange is this mode of imaging that the Spanish critic Carlos Bousoño, in a most fortunate essay for our topic here, calls it "visionary" and "contemporary." In the metaphor, what is associatively brought together is the sensations or impressions that are produced by the two linked elements: in the Bride's perception, St John tells us in his glosses, the Bridegroom is "like" the mountains because the impression produced by the mountains (height, majesty, pleasant fragrance) is similar to the impression produced by the Bridegroom: "The mountains are lofty, abundant, broad, and lovely, filled

with flowers and scents. These mountains are my Beloved for me" (*CB* 14-15:7; *VO* 665). Likewise, the valleys are associated with the sensations of delight, coolness, and rest; the "strange isles," with the notion of mystery; the sounding rivers, with the sensation of being washed over by them and hearing that profound roar that blots out all external sound; and so on, through the celebratory stanzas.

These equations are achieved not by means of parallel elements that are recognizable by logic, but rather through non-rational, non-logical associations, just as in such Semitic poems as the Song of Songs and such drunk-with-love Sufi texts as Ibn 'Arabī's *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* (*The Interpreter of Desires*) or Ibn al-Fāriî's *Khamriyyah* (Wine Song).

And St John the "visionary" reveals even further mystical equations. The Bride asked at the beginning of the poem about where—in what *space*—the Bridegroom had hidden himself from her. Now she has discovered that He *is* those spaces that she wandered through in search of Him, and discovers also that this unexpected identity of her Beloved's is completed—by a true prodigy of love and wondrous literary insight—in her *realisation* of this fact: in a word, in her herself. "These mountains *are* my Beloved *for me,*" the poet-commentator insists in the glosses that are meant to clarify the poem's obscurities: "All these things (mountains, rivers, valleys) is her Beloved in him/itself and is so *for her*" (*CB* 14-15:5; *VO* 664, emphasis ours).14 The act of intuition is indeed wondrous: in the high intermingling of love, God has transformed her into Himself, yet it is she who in employing the metaphorical mirror gives the Bridegroom a new identity: He is that whole myriad of marvellous spaces and music and nights and times because He is so in her realisation or perception of Him; she contains, so to speak, within herself all that delicious, extraordinarily free and changing identity. Times and spaces are not simply cancelled or collapsed, as they are in all ecstatic moments, but converge in the unified identity of the two Lovers. The once-perplexed Bride at last knows where her Bridegroom had hidden Himself. The answer is repeated yet again, overwhelming in its pure simplicity: "In

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14 The Spanish syntax corresponds to the English given here: the apparently plural subject with a singular verb and singular predicate pronoun. Even the syntax, then, speaks of identity.

me."15 And the seeking, agonising Bride of the "Spiritual Canticle" realises that she, like 'AÇÇār's thirty birds that so assiduously sought the Sīmurg throughout the world, was herself the Sīmurg that she had sought through the sheepfolds, through the hillside, and through the woods and undergrowth that are journeyed through in the first stanzas of the poem. She could not find her Beloved there because she was seeking Him where she would never find him: outside herself.

Of course God is, or contains within Himself, all of these elements with which the Bride identifies Him—mountains, valleys, rivers. In this transformative state the soul understands the secret concatenation of causes that articulate the harmony of the Universe—an understanding that far transcends simple pantheism, into which St John of the Cross never falls. God transforms the soul into His virtues and attributes. He is—or manifests—His attributes in the soul, which acts as a mirror of Him. Although the poem's protagonist saw her Beloved reflected in the pool or mirror of herself, now the Beloved is reflected in the pool or mirror of the soul, which is also Him: both are the mirror of the other, and reflect back and forth its/their ipsiety in an unending succession of unendingly self-reflecting mirrors, as though one were set before the other. Or to say this in another way: God observes Himself in His Bride, while she contemplates Him in herself because she *is,* or perfectly reflects, all these simultaneous transformations of ineffable attributes that come together in her own substance. It is no coincidence, given what we have been discussing thus far, that the consummation of the union which the "Spiritual Canticle" celebrates began in a metaphorical mirror—the water of the spring. God shall be reflected in the mirror of the soul as though in pure translucid water which at this moment of supreme identification is able to reflect Him in His glory.

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15 St John of the Cross apparently was very given to the use of this figure, a symbolic space, to communicate the transformative ecstatic moment. In the "Coplas del mismo hechas sobre un éxtasis de harta contemplación," he insists upon this image, repeating the "where" and the "there" of the "Spiritual Canticle": "Entréme *donde* no supe, / y quedéme no sabiendo / toda ciencia trascendiendo. // Ya no supe *donde* estaba, / pero, cuando *allí* me ví, / sin saber *donde* me estaba, / grandes cosas entendí. // . . . . El que *allí* llega de vero / de sí mismo desfallece. . . ." (emphasis added).

This mirror is a well polished one: St John of the Cross (and St Teresa, who used the trope in her own work) adopted an ancient *leit-motif* which the Sufis of the Middle Ages had been using and refining for centuries. The soul, loosed of its bonds and given up wholly to God, is, metaphorically, a spotless mirror which can reflect the Godhead. Henri Corbin saw this in the case of Ibn ʻArabī, who felt that he knew God in the exact proportion to which the Names and Attributes of God had their epiphany in him: "Dieu se décrit á nous-mêmes par nous-mêmes;" "par cette *sympatheia* s'actualise l'aspiration reciproque fondée en la communauté de leur essence" (Corbin, *Imagination créatrice* 95, 88). The soul, whose powers are filled only with the infinite, becomes, as we have seen, a polished mirror, transparent water, in order to be able to reflect, as though in a glowing kaleidoscope, all these divine attributes. The swift succession of attributes in this wonderfully pure mirror of the soul is only apparent, however, since in God, free of time and space, the manifestation occurs simultaneously and instantaneously.

St John of the Cross makes clear that this spring or fount in which the union begins to be celebrated is "the heart, [which] here signifies the soul" (*CA,* 12:7; *VO,* p. 658). In Western mysticism this trope of a heart as the symbolic vessel or receptacle of crystalline waters that reflect the changing and visionary images of the divine manifestations within the soul, is a strange one. But once again, the Sufis come to the aid of our understanding of the apparently enigmatic symbols of St John of the Cross. Ibn ʻArabī would have very profoundly understood, and would have seconded, what St John wants to say at this point in the poem, for he knew a great deal about this inner heart that was also the mirror of changing images: in Arabic, the word *qalb,* as we have noted, simultaneously means "heart" and "perpetual, constant change," among other things. As one might expect, Muslim mystics took full advantage of this coincidence in the multivalent roots of Arabic, and put them to work in their poetry. Thus, in the most famous and most complex lines of his *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq,* Ibn ʻArabī says the following:

> My heart is capable of any form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
>
> And the idols' temple and the pilgrim's Kaʻabah and the tablets of the Torah and the book of the Qur'ān.

> I follow the religion of love: where so ever the camels of love go,
> that is my religion and my faith.

It is Michael Sells who has seen, with extraordinarily keen sight, that Ibn 'Arabī's "drunken" lines speak not simply (as many Arabists have it) of tolerance for all revealed religions—for God may be found in all of them—but also, and much more profoundly, of the high dwelling-place of the ecstatic heart that is receptive of any form ("Garden Among the Flames" 311, n. 37). Or, to say it another way, receptive of any divine manifestation that may occur in it. These are Sells' words:

> The heart that is receptive of every form is in a state of perpetual transformation (*taqallub,* a play on the two meanings of the root *q–l–b,* heart and change). The heart moulds itself to, receives, and becomes each form of the perpetually changing forms in which the Truth reveals itself to itself. . . . [To] achieve a heart that is receptive of every form requires a continual process of effacement of the individual self in the universal (293).

Ibn 'Arabī is quite conscious of these truths, since in the original Arabic of his poem, the line "my heart is capable [or has become the vessel] of any form," the poet is playing with the possibilities of the word *qalb* __________: his heart (*i.e.,* the mirror of his soul) is in a state of perpetual transformation as it "successively" reflects the manifestations of God: "For Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Áaqq* (the Truth) manifests itself to itself through every form or image but is confined to none. The forms of manifestation are constantly changing" (290-291). St John of the Cross tells us exactly the same thing when he makes explicit that the kaleidoscopic stanzas of the "Spiritual Canticle" ("My Beloved, the mountains. . .") represent the continual manifestation of God in the mirror of the soul. This heart-mirror should obviously be capable of reflecting any divine form, without fixing any one within itself, since (and we quote St John himself here) "not even the angels can see enough of it, nor ever will." It always "brings newness to them, and always they marvel more" (*CB,* 14-15:8). Thus the soul of the true contemplative, as Sells once more notes, "is not so much an entity or object as an event, the process of perspective shift, of *fanā',* the polishing of the divine mirror" (299). There is, then, no reason to seize upon any one of these states or manifestations, even the highest of them, because, as St John tells us, only God can finally know them truly and infinitely.

I believe that this is the reason the poet lavished such indeterminate joy on his poetic kaleidoscope: God is spaces, times, music, sounding solitude, and not simply one of these things, but all, and infinite numbers more, because surely from St John's feverish cataloguing celebration we can infer that the joy of the reception of these attributes never ends. Once again Michael Sells: "From the divine perspective the eternal manifestation always has occurred and always is occurring. From the human perspective it is eternal but also a moment in time, an eternal moment that cannot be held on to but must be continually re-enacted" (132). It would appear that with these words Sells is explaining not only the *Tarjumān*'s stanzas of transformative union, but those of the "Spiritual Canticle" as well, and for good reason it would appear so: both mystics have a heart—a *qalb*—which is colourless and of utter purity, like water,16 and endowed, for that very reason, with a protean ability to reflect in its "silvery mien," as in an unending mirror, the continuous manifestations which the Deity makes of its own Essence to Itself in the fortunate soul that is able to assume any form.

f) The ascent of the mount.

One of St John's most famous—if not most fully elaborated—symbols is the ascent of the mount (Mount Carmel in his case), which signifies the soul's ascent to the mystical peak. Few symbols are as "Jungian" as the cosmic mountain whose echoes reverberate in St John: from the ziggurats of Mesopotamia to the temple of Borobudur in Java (Eliade, *Patterns* 376), what we have is a symbolic architecture that makes possible a ritual and yet concrete ascent of profound spiritual significance. As one might expect, mystical literature has adopted this symbolic motif, which can be documented over and over in European literature: in the *Neunfelsenbuch* (*Book of the Nine Rocks*) of the fourteenth-century German mystic Rulman Merwin; in Jean Gerson; in Diego de Estella's *Meditaciones del amor de Dios*; in the Blessed Nicholas Factor; in Francisco de Osuna's *Tercer abecedario espiritual* ("Third Spiritual Primer"); and, above all, in the case of Bernardino de

16 We will see in a moment that St John of the Cross attributes a similar and, once again, recognisably Sufi nature to the symbolic "solitary bird" of his soul in transformative ecstasy. The bird "has no determined colour" but possesses at the same time all colours, and for the mystic the strange quality of the colourless bird symbolically signifies the loosing of the soul from the bonds of all that is created.

Laredo, whose *Subida del Monte Sión* (*Ascent of Mount Zion*) would seem to serve as a prelude to the *Ascent* of St John of the Cross (*cf.* Santiago Barroso).

It should come as no surprise that for several reasons, the symbol also receives considerable attention in Muslim mysticism. The mountain at whose summit the mystic struggles to arrive is part of a visionary geography of impossible but highly articulated maps that Henri Corbin has discussed in profound detail: in Suhrawardī's *Récit de l'éxil,* for example, the "orientation est celle d'une géographie visionaire s'orientant sur le 'climat de l'Īme'" (Corbin, *L'homme* 70). From the *Libro de la escala de Mahoma* (*Book of Muhammad's Stairway*) (*cf.* Muñoz Sendino, 225-226) to Ibn 'Arabī's *Tarjumān,* we find the theoretical elaboration of the spiritual mountain. Kūbra insisted a great deal on it, and gave it an often-employed technical name: it was the mountain *Kāf.*

We turn our attention to this universal symbol in order to note that in some details of his own particular use of it, St John of the Cross reminds us once again of his Sufi predecessors. Bernardino de Laredo's spiritual *Ascent* is to Mount Zion, which is one of the mounts that St John also names (*S,* III: 42:5, *VO* 533), and so it might at first appear to be a Christian elaboration of the allegory, but we are surprised to find that hundreds of years earlier, Muslim mysticism had employed the image of an ascent to that same Mount Zion or Sinai (we should recall that the Qur'ān inherits a great deal of the Scriptures and that Mount Zion/Sinai is also sacred to Islam).

In a work titled *Ba'ze az ta'wīlāt-e Golshan-e-Rāz* (in Corbin's translation *Quelques-unes des exégeses spirituelles de la Roseraie du Mystère*: *Trilogía* 96), which is a commentary on Shabastarī's *Rose Garden of the Mysteries,* an obscure Ismā'īlī treatise-writer speaks particularly of his ascent to Mount Zion or Sinai. More important yet is the case of Suhrawardī:

> Le symbol du Sinaï, nous le recontrons deja. . . dans Sohrawardi [*Récit de l'exil occidental*]. La même, la figure que le pèlerin découvre au sommet du Sinaï mystique, typifie a la fois sa propre Nature parfaite (al-Tibī' al-Tāmm. . .). . . . Avec cette ascension au "Sinaï de son être", le mystique achève l'expérience de son escathologie personelle du présent. En révivant l'état de Moïse au sommet de la montagne, c'est le "Moïse de son être" qui est volatilisé (Corbin, *L'homme* 111-112).

For us, the most interesting parallel between St John of the Cross and the Muslim mystics who elaborated this cosmic ascent in their works over the course of centuries is that both cases have recourse to drawings, etchings, or paintings that help provide the reader with doctrinal illustration and explanation of how this arduous ascent may be achieved. Julián Rivera associates the graphic representations of the mystical path, quite common in Ramon Lull, more with Lull's Sufi predecessors than with the European emblematic tradition:

> That didactic method which is taken to be an innovation introduced [by Lull] and by which everything is vulgarised . . . with graphic representations, schemata, concentric circles. . ., squares, so that it might enter through the eyes into the intelligence of the masses, was a method peculiar to and characteristic of the Muslim Sufis contemporaneous with Lull (170-171).

If we compare the two traditions, we find that it is true that Lull, who did not read Latin and who wrote in Arabic, seems to derive more from the "Sufi hermits" he directly quotes in his *Libre d'amic e amat* than from the European emblemists that Frances Yates has studied. Bakhtiar reproduces a concrete example of that long Muslim tradition, a Persian rendering of the cosmic mountain *Kāf* that forms part of a manuscript containing an anthology of fourteenth-century Persian poems. (See Fig. 1.) Although it is polychrome, and much more highly decorated than the famous illustration of the Ascent of Mount Carmel that was drawn first by St John (*VO* p. 362) and then re-elaborated more "artistically" by his followers (see Figs. 2 & 3), the fundamental idea shared by the two illustrations is not hard to see. In the Persian case, the rendering, covered with explanations (especially in the top part of the drawing), serves as illustration for mystical poems dealing with the ascent of the spiritual mountain. Is this linking of a graphic representation, a poem, and a prose gloss a distant antecedent of St John's procedure as he speaks of his own mystical ascent? Both St John of the Cross and the Sufis employ this tripartite technique. And some details of the Muslims' symbolic mountain are quite similar to St John's. Frithof Schuon describes the Sufi's ascent to his own soul in these terms:

> What separates man from divine Reality is the slightest of barriers. God is infinitely close to man, but man is infinitely far from God. The barrier, for man, is a mountain. . . which he must remove with

> his own hand. He digs away the earth, but in vain, the mountain remains; man goes on digging in the Name of God. And the mountain vanishes. It was never there (*Stations of Wisdom,* in Bakhtiar 57).

St John of the Cross says of the summit of his mountain that "in this place there is no longer any path," and he discovers that there never was. In the depths of his soul is God: St John has performed a circular and non-existent journey: "from God to God."

But the path is no less arduous for all that. Bakhtiar insists: "One needs a guide to climb: one can climb a mountain by many paths, but one needs to follow one made by experienced people" (28). We should recall St John's obsession with the spiritual teacher, who should be that person that is right for each soul—an obsession that Asín traced to the Muslims. We should also note that they are *plural* paths, some twisting and therefore leading nowhere: these also appear in St John's schema, as we see in the drawing. Bakhtiar continues: "The higher one moves spiritually, the more vision one gains. . . . [One] passes from form to formlessness" (28). Al-Ghazzālī insists upon the same process: "The fourth stage is to gaze at the union of an all-comprehensive, all-absorbing One, losing sight ever of the duality of one's own self. This is the highest stage" (Nawab Ali 104). Because of his insistence on this *nothing* which is the pathway to arrive at the *all* at the summit of the mountain, St John once again shows himself to be a brother of the mystics of the East: "to come to be all / wish not to be something in nothing," says the poem that accompanies the drawing. St John also sees annihilation (that oft-mentioned *fanā* of the Sufis) as necessary in the process of ascent: "one single thing is needed; which is to know how to truly negate oneself . . . and annihilate oneself in all" (*N* III: 16:1; *VO* 495).

The ascent to the mountain of one's own soul, which is achieved by self-annihilation, is, we must acknowledge, a universal motif of mysticism, and yet St John of the Cross and the Sufis (and even Bernardino de Laredo) precisely parallel one another in their metaphorical ascent of the Sinai of the soul, taking their direction in this singular adventure from mystical "maps."

g) The solitary bird.

St John of the Cross conceives the soul as a "solitary bird" (much like the "passer solitarius" of David's Psalm 102:7; in Vulgate 101:8), but he

endows it with enigmatic properties that transform it into a symbol which has baffled critics such as Fr. Eulogio Pacho because of its total lack of Western antecedents. And indeed such antecedents are virtually impossible to discover in Europe. Authors who in one way or another use the symbol of the soul as a bird (which is, of course, a trope so long-used that it has been documented even in ancient Egypt)—St Bonaventure, St Bernard, Hugh of St-Victor, Ramon Lull, the blessed Orozco, Laredo, and even such anonymous medieval texts as the Portuguese *Book of the Birds* and the *Ancren Riwle* (*The Nun's Rule*), by an unknown English anchorite of the thirteenth century—are not really very helpful when we attempt to penetrate the trope as presented by St John of the Cross. Nor are we particularly enlightened in this regard by such studies on the subject of literary birds as that by María Rosa Lida: the nightingale and the swallow of the Renaissance, with their clear Greco-Latin lineage, make St John's solitary bird all the more mysterious and singular.

All St John tells us of this mysterious bird is contained in two brief and almost identical portraits, one in the *Dichos de luz y Amor* (120, *VO* 967) and the other in the glosses to the "Spiritual Canticle" (*CB* 15:23; *VO* 670). The *Treatise on the Properties of the Solitary Bird,* which would have been so illuminating, is so far lost. We will, nonetheless, make an attempt to throw some light on St John's schematic bird of the soul. Once again, the most fertile fields in which to search seem to be Eastern and not Western. Muslims, like Christians, have for centuries employed the symbol, which we clearly see to have mystical connotations in the Qur'ān, where Solomon exclaims: "O men, we have been taught the speech of birds, and are endued with everything. This is indeed a clear boon *from God.*" (27:16) Later Sufis such as Kubrā, adapting the verse, exclaimed:

> ("praise to God, Who has given us the language of the birds"). This is "the language of self [which] contains knowledge of the higher state of being" (Bakhtiar 3, 7).

Throughout the Middle Ages, Muslim authors—Sanā'i, 'Aèèār, Bāyazīd, al-Bīsèāmī—all produced treatises on the mystical bird. Particularly important are those that Suhrawardī, Avicenna, and Al-Ghazzālī each composed under the title *Risalāt al-ñair,* or the *Treatise upon the Bird,* although, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes (51), Suhrawardī virtually translated into Persian the Arabic treatise written by Avicenna.

To decipher or put into perspective the mysteries of the "properties" of St John of the Cross's particular bird, let us look for a moment at some of St John's parallels with these Sufis.17 St John closely echoes the Persian Al-Bīsèāmī (d. 877), who described himself as "a bird whose body was of Oneness," and who flies "in singularity" [(Attar, *Muslim. . .,* n.p.)]]; St John's bird is "solitary" and will not suffer "the company of another creature" (*Dichos* 120; *VO* 967). The wings of al-Bīsèāmī's bird are "of eternity" (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 49); Rūmī's symbolic bird flies far away from all things material and perishable (Nicholson 86); St John's "shall rise above all things transitory" (*Dichos* 120). Al-Bīsèāmī's bird raises its head toward the Lord [[(Attar, *ibid.*)]]; St John's "puts its beak into the air of the Holy Spirit" (*Dichos* 120). Àallāj exclaims, "I fly with my wings to my Beloved" (*ñawāsin* 34); in St John's flight, "the spirit. . . sets itself in highest contemplation" (*VO* 670). And both finally acquire a knowledge that transcends all reason; Àallāj's soul, like that metaphorical bird, "fell into the sea of understanding and was drowned" (34), while St John's, because it is a bird on the rooftop, as in Psalm 102:7, rises so high that it "remains as though ignorant of all things, for it knows God only, without knowing how" (*Ascent* II: 15:11; *VO* 424).

Perhaps the most interesting parallel is between St John of the Cross and the contemplative bird of Suhrawardī. There is no doubt that it is the fifth quality or property of St John's solitary bird (the fourth property in the *Dichos*) that is most problematic: the bird "has no one color" (*Dichos* 120; *VO* 967). St John explains this by saying that "thus is the spirit perfect (*VO* 670). . . which has no specific quality in any thing" (*VO* 967). This is a curious image, a bird of no colour. To our surprise, though, Suhrawardī had attributed this same property—in identical words—to his own bird, four

17 There are other parallels between St John's symbol of the mystical bird and that of the Sufis. St John speaks of the falcon or hunting bird which is his soul in the poem whose refrain is "Tras un amoroso lance / y no de esperanza falto / volé tan alto / que le di a la caza alcance" ("After a loving pass / and lacking not in hope / so high I flew / that I overtook the hunt"). This same equation of the soul and the hunting falcon was made by Rūmâ in his *Manèiq al-ñair* (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 307). It would appear that St John interprets the hunting motif of poems such as Diego Ramírez' "Indirecta a una dama" (in *Floresta de varía poesía*), which Dámaso Alonso has quite rightly associated with St John, not only *à la divine* but also *à la Soufi*.

hundred years before St John of the Cross: “All colours are in him but he is colourless” (*Three Treatises* 29). The congruence here is so perfect and so curious that it will be worth our while to quote the text in its Persian original:

*********(Persian verse)

In both cases, the absence of colour implies exactly the same thing: the letting-go of all things material, the absence of material things in the soul. This is a most remarkable parallel. We should recall, however, that this image of the spirit as a colourless entity or process is far from foreign to Islamic mystics. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, one of the world’s foremost scholars of Islamic mysticism in Persian, tells us that ‘Aèèār‘s famous *Manèiq al-ñair* also makes indirect allusion to this colourlessness in the bird known as the Simurg. When the thirty birds—each of a different colour—discover that they themselves are the Sīmurg, the beautiful rainbow of their diverse colours must of necessity be erased, so that they, too, in a moment of transformative ecstasy, become “of no determined colour.” This is a commonplace of Persian mysticism: in one of his most beautiful verses, Àāfiï also compares the spirit’s letting-go to the freedom from colour:

***************(Persian verse)

(Nasr translates this into English as “I am the slave of the will of that person who under the azur’s sphere has become free of the attachment to whatever possesses color.”) Najm ad-dīn al- Kubrā repeats this image, with some variation, in his *Fawā’ié al-Jamāl wa-Fawātié al-Jalāl,* imagining that the most profound centre of his soul (his *qalb*) is as colourless and fluctuating as water, and able precisely for that reason to reflect the infinite, always changing attributes of God.

h) Ascetic war.

The mystic's progress along the spiritual path under the representation of a struggle or combat against the forces of evil—the devil, sensual appetites, vices—has a long history as a moral or mystical allegory. In his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies,* the Pseudo-Dionysius gives an early (but fundamentally different) outline of the detailed and even picturesque "warfare of the spirit," in the description of which the mystics of the Spanish Peninsula seem to have excelled (Lourenzo Justiniano [*cf.* Martins 175], Fray Luis de Granada, Fray Alonso de Madrid, Osuna), although there are also cases in other areas of Europe, such as Suso. St John of the Cross and St Teresa employed the trope of spiritual battle as few others ever did; it seems to have culminated (though by now with other nuances) in the work of St Ignatius Loyola.

Islam employed the trope of ascetic warfare or battle during the Middle Ages, and in virtually the same terms as the Peninsular mystics. "The Sufis," says Fr Félix Pareja, "often cite the Qur'ānic verse 'and those who fought ardently for us, we shall guide them along our path; for surely Allah is with those who do good'" (229). And the strict mystical application of the Qur'ānic verses and *hadiths* or traditions of the Prophet are easy enough to find. Al-Hujwīrī's summary is perfect:

> The Apostle said: "We have returned from the lesser holy war (*al-jihād al-aÄghar*) to the greatest war (*al-jihād al-akbar*). . . . What is the greatest war? He replied, "It is the struggle against one's self (*mujāhadat al-nafs*)" (*Kashf al-Maéjūb* 200).

This, then, is the trope of a "*javānmardī,* c'est-a-dire de 'chevalerie spirituelle,'" according to Corbin (*L'homme* 195), whose brilliant insights into the trope include his suggestion that the initial Lam-Alif of the famous Muslim dictum "lā illāha illa Allāh" (there is no god but Allah) has the shape of a sword— —and therefore both heralds and participates in that ascetic war. Through time, the image grew so familiar that Ibn QaÄī organized his followers into a sort of religious militia, in a fortified convent (or *rapita*) in Silves (Pareja 381), hundreds of years before the birth of St Ignatius Loyola. Almost all the most important Sufis appear to be aware of the theory: Al-Ghazzālī in his *IÁyā 'ulūm al-dīn* (*cf.* Pareja 293-4 and Nwyia, *Ibn 'Aèā' Allāh* 225), Kubrā in his *Fawāih al Jamāl wa Fawātih al-Jalāl* (*cf.* Corbin, *L'homme* 99), Ibn 'Arabī in his *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*.

The metaphor of spiritual combat is developed into what one might almost call a "conceit" in Islam: the "spiritual knight" wages battle against a siege on the castle of his soul, which is turreted and equipped with battlements and walled about by allegorical walls. It would appear sometimes almost to be a chivalric romance (such as those that St Teresa so delighted in reading) though *à la divine,* except that the knightly romances had not yet been written, in the ninth century if not before, when the Sufis were allegorising the interior castle of their soul. In the *Ascent,* St John of the Cross speaks of the "walls and battlements [or in Peers' translation, the fence and wall] of the heart" (*S* III: 20:1; *VO* 502), but the enigmatic final *lira* of the "Spiritual Canticle" is actually constructed upon the allegory of this battle against the devil in the impregnable fortress of the mystic's spirit: "Que nadie lo miraba / Aminadab tampoco parecía / y el cerco sosegaba / y la caballería / a vista de las aguas descendía" ("Nor did Amminadib appear / whom no one looked upon / and the siege abated / and the cavalry / in sight of the waters descended.").

In his glosses, St John clears up, at least somewhat, the mystery of the words of the poem's ending, which gives the impression of being anticlimactic: "[Aminnadib] signifies the devil (speaking spiritually), the soul's adversary" (*CB* 40:3; *VO* 738). This is an odd equation; St John quotes a verse from the Song of Songs entirely out of context ("Or ever I was aware, my soul made like the chariots of Amminadib," Song 6:12), though Fr Sullivan thinks the "quotation" may come from an exegesis by St Gregory. The gloss gives the details of this spiritual battle: Amminadib "fought and always disturbed the soul with the innumerable armament of his artillery, so that the soul might not enter into this fortress, and hiding-place of the inward withdrawal with the Spouse" (*CB* 40:3; *VO* 738).

But the soul is now in contemplation and "the devil not only dares not arrive, but with great terror flees far away and dares not appear" (*ibid.*). That is why the siege—clearly an addition to the castle—"abates": "By which wall [or "fence"] is understood here. . . the passions and appetites of the soul, / which[,] when they are not vanquished and muzzled closely[,] surround [the soul] and battle with it in one place and yet another" (*CB* 40:4; *VO* 738). Here, clearly, the passions and appetites (and the devil) have been vanquished. And the "cavalry"—another warlike image—which in descending "in view of the waters" adds so much mystery to the stanza,

signifies simply the "corporeal senses of the sensitive part" (*CB* 40:5; *VO* 738) which descend and grow tranquil in view of the waters that are the good things or delights of the soul in the state of absolute union.

However detailed St John's explanation of his verses may be, if we are not familiar with the allegory of the ascetic war, it may still remain quite mysterious and seem somewhat forced or strained. But the Islamic context begins to bring the battle-imagery into a more familiar perspective. Let us look for a moment at a passage from the *Kitāb-al-Tanwīr fī isqāè al Tadbīr,* by Ibn 'Aèā' Allāh of Alexandria (d. 1309):

> [The] dwellings of mystical certainty and the light that floods them all resemble the walls or battlements that encircle the city and its castles. The walls are the lights and the castles are the dwelling-places of mystical certainty, which surround the city of the heart. For him whose heart is surrounded by the wall of certainty and whose dwelling-places, which are the walls of lights in the manner of castles, are whole and firm, Satan has no path by which to arrive at him nor in his house does Satan find habitation in which to rest (Asín *Šhadhiles* 179).

Although the parallels do not always coincide precisely with St John's, the fundamental elements recur: the heart as a fortress or walled city, the walls. And above all, at this precise spiritual moment, Satan has no way of getting at the soul.

We insist on that point—the safety of the soul—because the flight of Satan at the end of the "Spiritual Canticle" might seem illogical, since in earlier stanzas of the poem the ecstatic union had already been consummated and the devil could not possibly have been present at that time. However, and, as we noted earlier, almost anticlimactically, St John announces just at the end of his poem that Satan has been vanquished. If we look at Sufi referents, that "anticlimax" of the poem's may turn into a grand finale: The absolute absence from the soul of its fierce enemy the Devil marks for Muslim mystics the last and highest degree of ecstasy; it is the absolute guarantee of the spiritual heights to which the soul has climbed. The final *lira* of the poem would imply, then, a true poetic *and mystical* culmination. Let us look at how close St John of the Cross is to Ibn 'Abbād of Ronda's *Sharé al-Àikam* (II:78):

> [The] subject has lost the consciousness of his own being and preserves only the consciousness of his presence with his Lord; and he who finds himself in that state is now one of those who are free of all evil and danger, because over them the accursed enemy no longer has any power whatsoever, and he who during his prayer is free of the power of the enemy need not work to combat him and reject him, and so his prayer is accompanied by the presence of God. . . . So that, the devout man having lost consciousness of himself and being now free of the temptation of his enemy, must feel the height of well-being and the apex of delight, bringing to realisation within himself with all truth that which is signified by the word consolation. . . . That is why the contemplative master Abu Muhammad ʻAbd al-Azīz of Mahdijja would often say: "Spiritual consolation does not exist for him who struggles with his passions, nor for him who battles Satan, but exists only for him who is free and serene from both dangers" (Asín, "El símil" 242-3).

We should note the emphasis on final tranquillity, serenity, consolation, and well-being, which St John repeats in the three last lines of the "Spiritual Canticle" and their corresponding glosses. Al-Ghazzālī also insists on that state of serenity: "Satan shall flee in disappointment and without any further hope of perturbing. . . thy unitary intuition" (Asín, *espiritualidad* 3: 361). In the ninth century, and once more employing the metaphor of ascetic warfare or combat that the soul wages from the battlements of its interior castles or fortresses, Nūrī of Baghdad also sets Satan outside, where he barks in vain and cannot find a way in: "Satan. . . barks from without this castle as the dog barks" (*Maqāmāt* VIII, p. 136):

St John of the Cross, a valiant knight of the spirit, struggles more fiercely yet. He reminds us of some spiritual St George battling against an infernal beast, a seven-headed dragon:

> Happy the soul that is able to do battle against that beast of the Apocalypse (12:3) with its seven heads, the opposite of these seven grades of love, against each one of which [heads] he wages war, and against each one of which he fights with his soul [as ally or weapon or protagonist] in each one of these mansions in which the soul is struggling and gaining each grade of love of God. Which, without doubt, if the soul faithfully do battle in each one and triumph, it

> shall merit going onward from grade to grade and from mansion to mansion until the last, leaving the beast's seven heads, with which it did fierce battle, cut off. . . . And thus the pain is great in many men who enter into spiritual battle against the beast yet are not yet ripe to cut off even its first head by denying the sensual things of the world; and once some men master themselves and do cut it off, still they cannot cut off the second, which is the visions of the sense that we have been speaking of. But what hurts even more is that some, having cut off not only the second and the first, but even the third—which is that which concerns the sensitive inward senses, passing from the state of meditation, and even farther on—, just as they enter into the purity of spirit they are vanquished by this spiritual beast, and it once again rises up against them and even the first head takes on life again, and thus makes the last years of them worse than the first in their falling-back, taking another seven spirits with it worse than he (*N* II: 11:10; *VO* 416).18

But once again, the Sufis' "chivalric romance *à la divine*" includes the figure of a mystical valiant knight who does battle precisely against a dragon—sometimes, precisely a seven-headed one—whose graphic representation (with commentaries in Persian) we see in a miniature contained in a Persian manuscript by Shāh Nāmeh (Fig. 4). In that same manuscript we see another illustration (Fig. 5), in which the spiritual knight, with a handsome steed and luxurious clothing, is presented in the midst of battle against malign spirits that block his mystical path. These *aljines* or genii (of Qur'ānic lineage) resemble monstrous animals or vermin that elude easy description: against such creatures, we might recall, St John and St Teresa also heroically battled.

i) The soul as a garden.

Another image that is quite extensively employed in European mysticism but that St John of the Cross and the Sufis employ in amazingly exact parallel and detail, is a park like place or flower-garden in representation of the soul

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18 Here, St John (s 2:11:10, VO 416) is quoting Like 11:26, "Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and sell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first," which is why this quotation contains italics.

in a state of oneness. This garden, the "unitive station" (*al-maqām al-jāmi'*)in Ibn 'Arabī (*TAA* 65), is explored and codified more fully by Nūrī of Baghdad than any other author. Nūrī dedicated several chapters of his *Maqāmāt al-qulūb* to a description of the wonders of the garden: its flowers, rain showers, fragrances, breezes.19 St John of the Cross also finds these delicate allegorical elements in his garden or "*huerto*" (*CB* 24:6; *VO* 677), which is at the same time his soul. The breeze that refreshes the poet's ecstatic spirit, inherited as it is no doubt from the Spanish versions of the Song of Songs, in the glosses takes on a mystical cast that is often recognisably Islamic. The south wind or Zephyr, which helps to open the flowers and spread their fragrance, "is the Holy Spirit. . . which, when this divine air strikes the soul, inflames it all . . . and enlivens and awakes the will and raises the appetites which erstwhile were drooping and asleep to the love of God" (*CB* 17:2; *VO* 676). This is very much like the wind that blows through the soul of Sa'dī: "It's natural for plants to be revived by the morning breeze, whereas minerals and dead bodies are not susceptible to the Zephyr's influence. (The meaning is that only those hearts which are alive to the meaning of spiritual love, can be quickened by the breath of Divine Inspiration" (Smith, *Sufi Path* 113; *cf.* also Schimmel, *Triumphal Sun* 203). For St John of the Cross, the fragrances that these divine winds raise from the flowers are God and soul in union: "the same soul. . . that. . . gives fragrance of softness to the Bridegroom that in that soul lives" . . . "the divine fragrances of God" (*CB* 18:9; *VO* 678). After defining this same equation between the perfume of the garden and spiritual Oneness, Nūrī exclaims over the indescribable fragrance of the garden: "God—blessed be He—has a garden upon the face of the earth. He who breathes the perfume of this garden no longer desires Paradise. And these gardens are the hearts of the gnostics" (*Maqāmāt* V: 134). In the garden we also find flowing water; the thirst of the Arab poet would have it no other way: "The Garden of the Soul. . . contains a fountain, flowing water," says Bakhtiar (30) of this water that Nūrī gives such attention to in his poem. Interestingly, St John, for whom water was of course in much more plentiful supply than for the Arab poet, also includes flowing water in his garden, and explains it in divine terms: he

19 In Rūmâ, the breeze is also "a fitting symbol of the life-giving breath of the Beloved" (Schimmel, *Triumphal Sun* 86). *Cf.* also Macdougal and Ettinghausen, *The Islamic Garden.*

discovers that his soul has "become a paradise divinely irrigated" (*L* 3:7; *VO* 873-4).

Nor of course can flowers themselves be lacking in this garden. St John, recalling fragrant passages from the Song of Songs, says that the Bridegroom comes to the soul (in the biblical sense of the phrase) "among the fragrance of these flowers" (*CB* 18:10; *VO* 678). In a more detailed passage in the glosses to the "Spiritual Canticle," these flowers are named and their qualities enumerated: the lily, the jasmine, roses—each flower lends a different dimension of knowledge of God, and under the tutelage of each in turn, the soul is gradually transformed. For Ibn 'Arabī the mystical dwelling-place we are speaking of is easy to define: "the flower. . . i.e., the station of Divine Revelation" (*TAA* 101). Likewise, for St John of the Cross, roses are specifically "the strange news of God" (*CB* 24:6; *VO* 694).

Here, then, all that is missing is the nightingale, which sips at the rose which is one of the most famous Sufi symbols, the manifestation of the glory of God which the mystical bird unceasingly sips at (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 306). But in fact we continue to follow close upon the mystical Symbolism of Islam, since for St John, too, the nightingale—"the sweet Philomela"—sings the glorious melody of transformative union in the "Spiritual Canticle."

j) Fanā': The lily of letting-go.

There is a flower that St John praises in another poem, and which merits a few additional words. The "Dark Night" culminates in a final letting-go: "leaving my care / forgotten among the lilies." If we look for possible referents among Islamic poetry, we find that the grand finale of the poem is explained (imagistically, at least) in that tradition, and the selection of that specific (perhaps apparently clichéd) flower comes to seem to us to have been more "artistic" and intentional. For lilies are precisely the flower of letting-go for Sufis who have attained the last stage of the mystical voyage, at which all language fails. In those men, the lily, "breathless with adoration" in the words of Annemarie Schimmel (*Mystical Dimensions* 308), glorifies God in silence with the ten necessarily mute tongues of its petals.

k) The foxes of sensuality; the hair as "spiritual snare."

Lastly, some other symbols in common. St John of the Cross, as we have noted several times, obtains a good deal of his poetic vocabulary from the Scriptures (and especially from the Song of Songs), but when he raises that vocabulary to a symbolic and mystical level he does so quite often from a standpoint that is recognisable as within the *trobar clus* of Sufism. For instance, St John equates the foxes of the "Spiritual Canticle" with the sensual appetites of the soul (*CB* 16:5; *VO* 673), Islamicizing the biblical animal that the Bride of the Song of Songs asks be hunted—because for Sufis such as Mohamed ibn Ulyan, the little foxes or vixens are their *nafs* or carnal appetites, which they must repress throughout their spiritual journey:

> In my novitiate, when I had become aware of the corruption of the lower soul and acquainted with its places of ambush, I always felt a violent hatred of it in my heart. One day something like a young fox came forth from my throat, and God caused me to understand that it was my lower soul (Al- Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maéjūb* 206).20

Perhaps more curious yet is the symbol of the hair, which "flies at the neck" of the Bride in the "Spiritual Canticle" and serves as a "snare" to trap her Beloved. Here St John, as Francisco García Lorca has noted, seems to be following the Vulgate version of the Song of Songs ("Vulnerasti cor meum in uno crine tui," 4:9; "thou hast wounded my heart in a lock of thy hair") rather than the Spanish translation by Fray Luis ("robaste mi corazón con uno de los tus ojos, y con sartal de tu cuello": "you stole my heart with one of your eyes, and with a string [as of beads, etc.] of your neck"; *cf.* the King James version: "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse: thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck"). However, Fray Luis, commenting on another passage of the epithalamion (7:5: "Tu cabeza como el Carmelo: y los cabellos de tu cabeza como purpura de Rey atada en canales": "Your head [is] like Carmel: and the hairs of your head like King's crimson bound in channels"; but *cf.* the King James version: "Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple:

20 For *nafs* compared with an animal, *cf.* also Nicholson 67, and Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 112, *Triumphal Sun* 197 & 70. St John of the Cross also interprets his sensuality as "livestock" or sheep: "I no longer keep livestock." Here he parallels Al-Sarrāj, who in the *Kitāb al-Luma'* compares the *nafs* with livestock or sheep that the soul "shepherds."

the king is held in the galleries"), notes that the "king" is held within the Bride's hair as though in a bond:

> . . . says that [the hair] is a *snare,* and like a *chain* in which by her inestimable beauty, the king, which is Solomon her Spouse, *is prisoner* (García Lorca 183).

The image of the Bridegroom "held captive" by the Bride's locks is not unknown to other traditions that St John might have been familiar with. Damaso Alonso documents the figure in popular poetry and Emilio Orozco (203) finds it in Theocritus' Fifth Idyll (l. 90) ("A shining lock of hair curling along the neck"). Fr Crisógono y María Rosa Lida tell us that other, secular, lovers also employ the motif: we find the trope in Garcilaso's Canción IV, though somewhat generalized: "De los cabellos de oro fue tejida / la red que fabricó mi sentimiento. . . . Pues soy por los cabellos arrastrado" ("Of her golden hair was woven / the net which my emotions made. . . . For I am by the hair dragged along"). And Petrarch had already used it, more than once: "dico le chiome bionde, e'l crespo laccio, / che si soavemente lega e stringe / l'alma" ("???") (Sonnet 198); "e folgorare [of the eyes] i nodi [of the hair] ond' io son preso" ("???") (Sonnet 198). But it was the Sufis who hundreds of years earlier had turned to religio-mystical purposes the poetic motif of the curls or locks of hair that seduce and entrap and imprison, and which Europeans like Petrarch and Garcilaso only employed at the profane level. Would St John of the Cross, once again, be treading Islamic ground, receiving the image ready-worked to his purposes from Muslim poets and writers, who would appear to be much closer to his uses than were the writers and poets of the Renaissance and the Classics? St John gives some evidence of knowledge of the secret equivalence of the *zulf* or "lock of hair" (*cf.* Arberry, *Sufism* 113) that is the "hook" or "snare" by which so many Sufis, such as Ibn 'Arabī and Shabistarī, snare the Deity or are ensnared:

> If you ask me the long story / Of the Beloved's curl, / I cannot answer, for it contains a mystery / Which only true lovers understand, / And they, maddened by its beauty, / Are held captive as by a golden chain (Lederer 20).

The Sufis, with their characteristic verbal imagination, metaphorically transfigure this curl into the *lām* (the letter *L*), which has the same shape: _.

Thus far we have been exploring the parallels between the mystical Symbolism of St John of the Cross and the Sufis: the abundance of these parallels and their exact correspondence allow us to see how seminal (and to a degree prescient) those early essays were in which Asín Palacios linked St John of the Cross to literary and mystical contexts within Islam. Asín was laying the groundwork for research that is still in a sense only beginning, and which has thrown and is still throwing new light on the works of St John of the Cross—a body of work which has traditionally been seen as so filled with mysteries. Let us now look at the case of St Teresa de Jesus.

(To be Continued)