

The Eloquence of Mercury and the Enchantments of Venus: *Humanitas* in Botticelli and Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, II.10

Frederick A. de Armas

[The Pennsylvania State University](#)

Although in our century the term "Humanism" has been the subject of 1
so many broad definitions that it has lost much of its specificity and
positivity, such was not the case in early modern Europe. In its inception,
the term carried with it the excitement and fascination of discovering,
editing and coming to an understanding of recently re-discovered works
from classical antiquity. The term *umanista* "was used, in fifteenth century
Italian academic jargon, to describe a teacher or student of classical
literature and the arts associated with it" (Mann 1996, 1).¹ While Kristeller
argues "against the repeated attempts to identify Renaissance humanism
with the philosophy, science, or the learning of the period as a whole"
(1979, 23), more recent studies strive to cautiously broaden the term in its
original context, without losing specificity. Countering the view "that
Renaissance humanism was a narrowly philological enterprise," Jill Kraye
has assembled a collection of essays that shows that it was "a broad
intellectual and cultural movement, which contributed to, or at any rate
engaged with, disciplines such as biblical studies, political thought, art,
science and all branches of philosophy" (1996, xv). As for the value of
humanistic endeavors, Petrarch was quite clear in his pronouncement that
studia humanitatis, "the study of literature, and in particular classical
literature, makes a man good" (Mann 1996, 14).

Since the "goodness" and "humane values" of humanistic endeavors are 2
being questioned and even rejected by many today, this study seeks to
show how such questioning was already present in early modern Europe --
and how a study of the problematics of humanism yielded a more modern,
yet at the same time a strikingly positive assessment in Cervantes' *Don
Quijote*, where in the tenth chapter of Part Two, the complexity of
humanitas is brought to light through an *ekphrasis*² based on Botticelli's
Primavera [FIGURE #1]. Some may argue that the leap from humanism to
art is too great.³ Others might add that a literary text that is said to imitate
the chivalric rather than the classical may place us at too far a distance
from humanism to be able to consider it as part of the textuality of *Don
Quijote*. However, Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath have shown that
although humanism "was principally concerned with texts which few if

any artists would have read" (1996, 161) there are a number of ways in which the two groups (humanists and artists) came together, the most important being through their interaction in iconographic schemes and particularly "the devising of attributes for mythological figures and especially for personifications" (1996, 173). Indeed, Hope and McGrath point to Botticelli's *Primavera* as one of the most noted examples of humanist involvement: Botticelli must have sought advice from humanists for his depiction of the transformation of Chloris into Flora after being ravished by the wind-god Zephyr. His depiction of these figures "seems to correspond to a passage in Ovid's *Fasti*" (V.195-222).⁴

Although some have seen Cervantes' imitation of the novels of chivalry in *Don Quijote* as a barrier for understanding his humanistic pursuits, at least one modern critic has argued that "the parody of the novels of chivalry was in reality only a smoke screen intended to mask Cervantes' primary intention in *Don Quijote*, which was to imitate and improve upon Virgil's *Aeneid*" (McGaha 1980, 34). Indeed, Luis Murillo has asserted that *Don Quijote* must be studied within the tradition of the Renaissance epic. Showing how Cervantes was influenced by theoreticians of the epic and humanist scholars, Murillo argues that he was not bound by them since as a story teller he "subordinates all elements and influences from either learned or popular traditions into one fabric of narrative" (1980, 68). Finally, the humanist concern with *imitatio* of classical literature (Mann 1996, 13) can be found in the cervantine text not only in the uses of Virgil, the Renaissance epic and Botticelli's own humanistic program, but also in his rather complex utilization of Plato, Herodotus, Apuleius and many other classical authors.⁵

At the beginning of the tenth chapter of *Don Quijote* Part Two, the narrator confesses to the reader that he would almost prefer to "pasarle en silencio, temeroso de que no había de ser creído, porque las locuras de don Quijote llegaron aquí al término y raya de las mayores que pueden imaginarse, y aun pasaron dos tiros de ballesta más allá de las mayores" (2.102-3). Not only does the chapter include one of don Quijote's greatest *locuras* but it also represents the climactic point in the development of Sancho's imagination. This chapter also changes the nature of don Quijote's quest. The knight has traveled to El Toboso to visit Dulcinea. Sancho, who had mendaciously told don Quijote that he had delivered a letter to the fictional Dulcinea, is now in a very awkward position since Don Quijote wants him to find the princess to whom he delivered the letter, warning him "que no volviese a su presencia sin haber primero hablado de su parte a su señora, pidiéndola fuese servida de dejarse ver de su cautivo caballero" (1978, 2.104). Not knowing what to do, Sancho sits under a tree and tries to determine his future course. Reasoning that his master believes that windmills are giants, he figures it would not be too difficult to persuade him that any woman is in reality Dulcinea.⁶

Returning late in the afternoon to where don Quijote awaits, Sancho sees three peasant women riding on donkeys. He tells his master to emerge from the *selva* where he had been waiting so that he can see his beloved Dulcinea and two of her ladies.⁷ Eric Auerbach, who has devoted considerable attention to this chapter, explains the transformation that

takes place at this point: "...for the first time roles are exchanged. Until now it had been Don Quixote who, encountering everyday phenomena, spontaneously saw and transformed them in terms of the romances of chivalry, while Sancho was generally in doubt and often tried to contradict and prevent his master's absurdities. Now it is the other way around. Sancho improvises a scene after the fashion of the romances of chivalry, while Don Quijote's ability to transform events to harmonize with his illusion breaks down before the crude vulgarity of the sight of the peasant women" (1968, 339). Indeed, don Quijote responds to Sancho's imaginings by saying "Yo no veo, Sancho...sino a tres labradoras sobre tres borricos" (1978, 2.109). He insists that is all they are. His vision is no longer one of giants and princesses. He does not see these women riding *hacaneas* (hackneys) but mere donkeys: "que es tan verdad que son borricos, o borricas, como yo soy don Quijote y tú Sancho Panza" (1978, 2.109). Don Quijote makes quite an effort to perceive the homely peasant woman, "no de muy buen rostro" (1978, 2.110) as the beautiful princess Dulcinea. Although he fails to transform his vision, the knight does kneel in her presence. Auerbach adds: "He finds a solution which prevents him both from falling into despair and from recovering sanity: Dulcinea is enchanted" (1968, 340). This ideal will carry through the second part of the novel, becoming its central motif according to both Auerbach and El Saffar [8](#)

Auerbach adds that on recovering from shock, don Quijote pronounces a perfect speech. It begins with an *invocatio* which has three parts "extremo, término y único" (1978, 2.110) thus emphasizing "an absolute perfection, then a perfection in human terms and finally the special personal devotion of the speaker" (1968, 341). Before beginning the central section, the *supplicatio*, a complex sentence creates rhythm and suspense. It is also composed of three parts, the first beginning with *ya que*, the second with three "y's" and the third with *si ya*. Finally, the *supplicatio* is also divided into three parts. Thus we have a speech with three sections, each having three parts. For Auerbach, the important point here is its technical perfection. But the emphasis on the number three has further significance. Indeed, it parallels the appearance of three peasant women rather than just one Dulcinea. 6

I would argue that by foregrounding the number three throughout this chapter [9](#) the narrator alerts the reader that there is a mystery here that needs to be deciphered. After all, the Renaissance Neoplatonists saw "vestiges of the Trinity" (Wind 1968, 41) in pagan triads and particularly in the three Graces. Cervantes seems to acknowledge this "pagan mystery" in the *prólogo* to the first part of *Don Quijote*. Here, a friend advises the author on how to adorn his narrative, parodying the ways in which some writers feign knowledge of humanism and classical learning. Among these adornments are two sets of three classical women, which can serve to parody the pagan trinities: one set is composed of wanton lovers (Lamia, Laida, Flora) and a second of enchantresses (Medea, Calipso, Circe). [10](#) Shortly thereafter the friend argues that when dealing with love, references to a particular Renaissance Neoplatonic writer should be made: "Si tratáredes de amores, con dos onzas que sepáis de la lengua toscana, toparéis con León Hebreo" (1978, 1.56). It should come as no surprise that 7

in Hebreo's *Diálogos de amor*, one of the mythological allegories described is that of the three Graces. Indeed, these figures, as Edgar Wind has pointed out, were utilized by Neoplatonists in order to define Platonic love: Love is a Desire for Beauty. Each one of the Graces represents one of these three terms, and for this reason they are seen as Venus's companions. It may well be that the three *labradoras* in Part Two of *Don Quijote* reflect in grotesque fashion this definition of love. At a time when don Quijote struggles to understand what love is, Dulcinea/Venus is rendered as a homely peasant, exhibiting yet another key pagan mystery, the *discordia concors* where mighty opposites come together to create beauty and harmony.

During the Renaissance, the best known representation of the three 8
graces is found in Botticelli's *Primavera*. This painting, although located in Florence, seems to have been known either through prints or descriptions in Spain during the Spanish Golden Age. There is a scene in Calderón's play *Apolo y Climene* which clearly demonstrates his knowledge of the painting (de Armas 1986). As for Cervantes, his travels to Italy starting in 1569 allowed him to study many of the images and programs of Renaissance art, which he later incorporated in his works (de Armas 1996b). Indeed, George Camamis has shown that Cervantes was acquainted with the *Primavera* and "left us clear proof of his knowledge of this and other Venus paintings by Botticelli in two of his least read novels: *La Galatea* and *La Gitanilla*" (1988, 183). Given Calderón's and Cervantes' knowledge of the *Primavera*, I think it is entirely possible that the tenth chapter of part two of *Don Quijote* is also inspired by the painting. As Helena Percas de Ponsetti states, "Cervantes can be seen to develop his fiction along two levels simultaneously: a narrative level... and a visual, *pictorial* level in which objects, form, textures, and colors sustain, refute, qualify, or transform what is said or intimated" (1988, 12). This is precisely what happens in chapter ten. A pictorial level which points to Botticelli's *Primavera* transforms the parodic narrative level and vice versa. By problematizing a painting with an underlying humanistic program, Cervantes takes on questions of *imitatio*, *ekphrasis* and the uses of humanism in the arts.

Although most modern readings of the *Primavera* teach us to view the 9
development of the *favola* by reading it from right to left (Dempsey 1992, 62), the Cervantine chapter unfolds the figures from left to right. On the extreme left hand side of the painting stands Mercury. As Wind asserts: "The crux of any interpretation of the *Primavera* is to explain the part played by Mercury. By tradition he is 'the leader of the Graces'; but while that would seem to explain his place next to them, it is hard to reconcile with his disengaged -- not to say, indifferent, attitude" (1968, 121).¹¹

When don Quijote sends Sancho to find and talk to Dulcinea in the village of El Toboso, he counsels him to look carefully at her actions and movements, since these will reveal her amorous attitude towards don Quijote: "son certísimos correos que traen las nuevas de lo que allá en lo interior del alma pasa" (1978, 2.104). Gestures thus become messages or mail from the soul revealing its inner movements. This is the message that Sancho is to bring back to don Quijote. Acknowledging his role as messenger, Sancho cites a *romance* of Bernardo del Carpio which begins:

"Mensajero sois, amigo" (1978, 2.106). Mercury's most obvious role is that of messenger of the gods. He is also a *psychopompos* or leader of the souls to the beyond. In this Cervantine interpretation of Botticelli's program, Sancho/Mercury is just that messenger, who is to mediate between Dulcinea's soul and don Quijote's passion. Clearly, the image of Mercury in the painting, young and slender, pointing to the heavens with his caduceus is very much the opposite of a portly Sancho, seated under a tree, conversing with himself (1978, 2.105). But just as we are about to conclude that Sancho as messenger is a grotesque parody of the god, we begin to see in him a newly acquired perception and inventiveness. With his caduceus, Botticelli's Mercury turns away the clouds. Wind takes this to mean that this deity has the "power to dispel mental clouds" (1968, 213). The repeated questioning of his role as messenger represents Sancho's mental clouds. But these he eventually dispels with a new insight. As "patron of lettered inquiry" (Wind 1968, 122) Mercury provides his earthly counterpart with the means to resolve his dilemma. Sancho will create his greatest invention and deceive don Quijote into believing that whatever peasant woman arrives is actually the princess Dulcinea, hoping in this manner to shed his role as messenger ("que no me envíe otra vez a semejantes mensajerías" [1978, 2.107]).

It is then that Sancho encounters the three peasant women riding their donkeys. Continuing in his role as Mercury, god of eloquence, the squire describes the recent arrivals to don Quijote in poetic terms: "Sus doncellas y ella toda son una ascua de oro, todo mazorcas de perlas, todas son diamantes, todas rubíes, todas telas de brocado" (1978, 2.108). This brocade or rich design woven into the cloth of the imagined ladies is also found in the dresses of the dancing Graces of Botticelli. As for the pearls, diamonds and rubies, they may be discovered in the jewels worn by the two Graces that face the spectator. The mercurial eloquence of Sancho goes on to describe their hair: "los cabellos sueltos por las espaldas, que son otros tantos rayos de sol que andan jugando con el viento" (1978, 2.108). The golden hair of the three imagined ladies derives from Botticelli's three Graces. As for the wind, it blows from the extreme right of the painting, where Zephyrus, the god of the west wind touches Chloris, thus recalling Sancho's eloquent comparison of the golden hair with the rays of the sun playing with the wind. 10

One of the many levels of the humanistic program of the painting may be astrological. For Gombrich, Botticelli follows Marsilio Ficino who conceives of three benefic planets (which he often refers to as the three Graces) with gifts to bestow on the initiate: Venus, Apollo and Mercury (1972, 59). While Venus stands at the center and Mercury at the extreme left of the painting, the influence of Sol is pervasive. Having shown how Mercury's influence has transformed Sancho, granting him the power of eloquence and invention, Cervantes' *Don Quijote* goes on to point to the luminescence of Sol/Apollo through the golden hair/rays of the Graces. When don Quijote fails to believe Sancho's argument that the peasant women are Dulcinea and her maids the squire asks: "que no vea que son éstas, las que aquí vienen, resplandecientes como el mismo sol del mediodía" (1978, 2.109). This resplendence is certainly one of the attributes of the Graces. According to Pico della Mirandola: "The Poets 11

say that Venus has as companions and as her maids, the Graces, whose names in the vulgar tongue are Verdure, Gladness and Splendour. These three Graces are nothing but the three properties appertaining to the Ideal Beauty" (Gombrich 1972, 56). These names given to the Graces in the *Orphic Hymns* (LX, 3) and included by Ficino in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, can be considered both as representing Ideal Beauty and as impulses that become lively during the *primavera*. It is the vivifying sun that provides Spring its qualities of *Viriditas*, *Laetitia* and *Splendor*. Indeed the third Grace or quality can be associated with the brightness of sunlight which comes about as Sol becomes more brilliant following the Spring equinox.

Since Sol's benefic rays and warmth help to stimulate the growth of vegetation, it is surprising to observe the predominance of shadow in Botticelli's painting. Similar shadows appear in the Cervantine episode since don Quijote has been waiting in a "floresta, encinar o selva" (1978, 2.104) for Sancho's return. The squire, on the other hand, has waited under the shadows of a tree until late to search for the would-be Dulcinea, since he wants his master to believe that he has been to El Toboso and back. Both painting and prose text invoke the solar rays of spring but depict an action that takes place in the cool shadows at the edge of a forest. 12

In the *Primavera*, the light that defines the aureole of myrtle surrounding Venus' head can be regarded as the solar energies that are harnessed by the goddess. Astrologically, Venus is viewed as a humid planet "con mucha humedad" (Nájera 1632, 5). This quality combines with Sol's warmth to produce the spring described by Nájera as "calido y humedo templado" (1632, 20). But the presence of Venus surrounded by light is not merely a representation of the forces that bring about spring. She is also the Ideal Beauty spoken of by Pico della Mirandola (Gombrich 1972, 56) and together with the three Graces, she embodies the definition of love, found in Plato's Symposium (Wind 1968, 46), in Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (1985, 40), in León Hebreo and in other Neoplatonic writers who states that *Amor* is a desire for beauty.¹² 13

In his search for the ideal conception of beauty as embodied in Dulcinea, don Quijote is not prepared to transform the vision of three peasant women into Dulcinea and her maids. Nor is he prepared to follow the humanistic program which has been set out for him through Botticelli's *Primavera*. Instead of Venus and the three Graces, the knight sees only three peasant women riding their asses or donkeys. In addition to confronting don Quijote with the definition of love, the absence of Dulcinea/Venus may well reflect his refusal to follow humanistic teachings. According to E. H. Gombrich, the initial impulse for the *Primavera* stems from a letter sent by Ficino to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de Medici who lived at the Villa di Castello where the painting was housed (1972, 33). Although recently Dempsey has shown that the painting was made for the *case vecchie de' Medici* in the Via Larga, this does not negate the possible importance of Ficino's letter as one of the possible models for the painting. The letter "culminates in an appeal to the young man that he should fix his eyes on Venus who stood for *Humanitas*" (1972, 33). It would be most appropriate that the *Primavera* should be 14

interpreted, on one level, as a description of Venus-Humanitas. Describing Botticelli's frescoes in the Villa Lemni outside of Florence Gombrich explains that one shows "Venus with the three Graces appearing to a young woman," [FIGURE #2] while a second shows Venus leading a young man "towards the personifications of Philosophy and the Liberal Arts" (1972, 75) [FIGURE #3]. Thus, these paintings would corroborate Botticelli's interest in Venus-*Humanitas* and in *Amor* as "teacher of all the arts" (1972, 75).¹³

It is curious to note that the virtue of *Humanitas*, "which Ficino commends so passionately to the young man Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, may have been precisely a virtue he conspicuously lacked. Throughout his life the younger Lorenzo was an irascible person... How desirable it was to tame him and to teach him the value of *Humanitas*, which means not only culture but also affability" (Gombrich 33-4). Irascibility, the excess of a choleric disposition, is also a key trait in don Quijote. Throughout the novel, the would-be knight lets this choleric disposition propel him into inappropriate actions, which is one of the main aspects that lend humor to the work. It may be that the humanistic program of Botticelli's *Primavera* is inserted at this point in the novel to transform his character. His previous invention of Dulcinea has been based on romances of chivalry, a type of reading that led to his choleric and humorous behavior. By presenting an alternative model, Sancho, through the eloquence of Mercury, may be attempting to have the knight re-invent Dulcinea as Venus-*Humanitas*. After all, such a transformation in her representation would allow him to turn away from the chivalric, medieval and choleric and move towards humanistic readings which would lead to affability, beauty and goodness.

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But don Quijote fails to view the peasant women in a painterly fashion. His invention resists this metamorphosis. He will argue instead that Dulcinea has been enchanted. This enchantment works through his perception of her: "el maligno encantador que me persigue... ha puesto nubes y cataratas en mis ojos, y para sólo ellos y no para otros ha mudado y transformado tu sin igual hermosura" (1978, 2.110). Let us recall that in Botticelli's painting, Mercury with his caduceus is attempting to remove the clouds from the sky. In *Don Quijote*, Sancho's mercurial ruse could have dispelled the clouds that blind the knight, but don Quijote admits instead that the clouds make him unable to properly see Dulcinea/Venus.

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But Sancho's eloquence is not at an end. When the peasant woman, who has fallen from the donkey regains her seat, and rapidly departs along with her companions, the squire uses figurative language to describe their flight: "Y no le van en zaga sus doncellas; que todas corren como el viento" (1978, 2.111). The mention of the wind brings us again to the last section of the painting. At the extreme right three figures recall Ovid's *Fasti* since Zephyr, the west wind, impregnates Chloris. "However, he made amends by making her Queen of flowers." As Dempsey notes, "the meaning of the Ovidian model is transformed, for Ovid does not literally describe a transformation in the *Fasti*, but Botticelli has nevertheless imagined the event as an Ovidian metamorphosis and thereby rendered, in true Ovidian fashion, the meaning of the event in the actions themselves" (1992, 32-33). Cervantes had mentioned Flora in the prologue to Part One,

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where she formed part of one of two unholy trinities. Only one hint of her presence in chapter ten is given by don Quijote. He bemoans the fact that the village maid is nothing like Dulcinea, since the enchanters: "le quitaron lo que es tan suyo en las buenas señoras, que es el buen olor, por siempre entre ámbar y flores" (1978, 2.112).

Now that the full painting is accounted for, with Sancho as Mercury, the three peasant women as the three graces, the absent Dulcinea as Venus, Zephyrus as the wind associated with the *labradoras*, and Chloris as Flora queen of flowers, it may be pertinent to discuss why the cervantine text debases the idealized images in Botticelli's painting to present a rustic atmosphere where don Quijote fails to perceive his Dulcinea. Such a rustification is actually in keeping with one level of the humanistic program followed by Botticelli. Dempsey explains that the gods depicted in the painting are, on one level, not the traditional Roman gods, but "archaic deities of nature's fertility" (1992, 49). The Zephyr-Chloris-Flora story is nothing more than "Ovid's account of the primitive origins of the feast of the Floralia" (Dempsey 1992, 49); while Venus is the archaic goddess of the garden, "an old-fashioned rustic deity" (Dempsey 1992, 44); and Mercury is "an archaic god of the springtime" (Dempsey 1992, 43). By infusing his text with rusticity, Cervantes reflects this primal era, before the gods were moved to the Roman pantheon. 18

In spite of the arguments presented above, there are at least three elements that further problematize the representation of the *Primavera* within Cervantes' text. First, the rusticity of the deities depicted by Botticelli is by no means sufficient to account for the grotesque manner in which the would-be gods are portrayed in chapter ten. Second, the absence of Venus (the "enchantment" of Dulcinea), removes the central figure from the cervantine representation of the painting. And third, the chapter "reads" the painting backwards -- instead of proceeding from right to left, it begins with Mercury and ends with the Zephyr-Chloris-Flora triad. 19

Let us begin with this third problem. The two most contradictory readings of Botticelli's painting emphasize a narrative sequence that unfolds from right to left. The "rustic" reading shows the Zephyr-Chloris-Flora triad as the first flowering of spring; Venus as the "goddess of April," the fullness of *primavera*; and finally Mercury as May, the end of springtime (Dempsey 1992, 62). The Neoplatonic reading, on the other hand, [14](#) follows a similar pattern. From Proclus' *Elements of Theology* to Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*, there is a constant perception that "the bounty bestowed by the gods upon lower beings" began "as a kind of overflowing (*emanatio*) which produced a vivifying rapture or conversion (called by Ficino *conversio*, *raptio* or *vivificatio*) whereby the lower beings were drawn back to heaven and rejoined the gods (*remeatio*)" (Wind 1968, 37). The *Primavera* exhibits this Neoplatonic movement. Starting at the right hand side of the painting, Zephyr's downward flight is the *emanatio*, the overflowing from the heavens. Venus or ideal beauty leads to *raptio* or the conversion of the lower beings, while Mercury as "mediator between mortals and gods bridging the distance between earth and heaven" (Wind 1968, 122) represents the process of *remeatio*. Why then does the Cervantine *ekphrasis* transgress against prevalent 20

interpretations, reading the painting backwards (from left to right)?

This backward reading may represent the knight's inability to read the signs of the world (or of the painting) correctly. Throughout Part One, don Quijote had chosen to read the world according to the chivalric authorities but was defeated in the end. In Part Two, he no longer has the will to impose his vision on the world. Here, others will provide the chivalric backdrop in which he becomes merely an actor. In terms of the painting the backward reading may well refer to the fact that he no longer has a vision of a Golden Age (the rustic gods of spring) and that he no longer has the Neoplatonic vision that leads to *raptio*. This allows us to comprehend the other two problems. 21

Venus "who is the manifestation of the love and beauty that stirs the world to renewal" (Dempsey 1992, 62) cannot be envisioned by the knight. His idealized love, based on the romances of chivalry, cannot allow for a humanistic reading of his beloved as Venus, as the force that will lead him to harmony, affability and culture. The knight will only accept a princess that will lead him into war and conflict. Her absence must mean that she has been enchanted. And yet, this absence may point to the knight's struggle to metamorphose his own vision. Seldom in Part Two will he be the agent of warfare. Others, knowing his propensities, will create theatrical pieces in which the knight will act out his part. Venus-Humanitas has penetrated his being and is in the process of transforming don Quijote. As Henry Sullivan has noted, Part Two of the novel is very different. Here, "the theme of cruelty, the sufferings of Knight and Squire seemed invested with an arbitrary, even sadistic, dimension of excess" (Sullivan 1996, 2). For Sullivan, it connotes a desire for purification, which he relates to the notion of Purgatory in this life. 22

I would argue that this desire for purification has to do with his encounter with Venus-Humanitas. As Petrarch has noted, humanism makes a man good. In abandoning his novels of chivalry and returning to civilization, don Quijote metamorphoses himself into Alonso Quijano "el bueno." In Botticelli's painting, both the rustic Venus and Flora abide in a land of eternal spring. This is don Quijote's goal from the start. His speech on the Golden Age shows his motivation -- to bring back the perfection of beginnings. The novel's humanistic program emphasizes classical civilization's desire for this return to origins. Don Quijote's adventures in Part Two take him from an encounter with Venus, which he denies, through a series of purgatorial purifications so that he may become the ideal of the humanists. Sancho, under the influence of Mercury or eloquence will also grow in stature becoming an ideal governor of the island of Barataria. Both knight and squire fulfill their destinies -- the first in his vision of eternity which is a return to origins and the latter in the wisdom granted him by the god of speech. 23

Transformation, as Gombrich has noted, comes from the spell of the visual arts, leading to "lasting psychological effects" (1972, 34). Images were said to affect one's character in the same way as planets influenced those born under them: "If this belief existed it is natural that those who commissioned the painting of the Goddess would also be concerned with her authentic appearance. For just as an amulet is only effective if it has the right image so the picture destined to exert its beneficent spell would 24

only work it was correct" (Gombrich 1972, 34). Although the effect of humanism in general was that of creating goodness, that of specific images, would have limited effects: Venus would make one affable and harmonious while Mercury's gift would be eloquence and wisdom. Such magical thinking may be at odds with modern conceptions, and may marginalize humanism.¹⁵ And yet, some modern readers are coming to realize the power of literature, the worth of the image. If not "magical" it has a certain aura which rises beyond culture.

In a recent forum containing thirty two letters on the relationship of cultural studies to the literary, Alan Powers spoke for the "bliss of reading" and of the humanist or literary scholar as a "teacher of pleasure" (Powers 1997, 264). For Renaissance Neoplatonists such as Ficino, *raptio* was key to the power of humanism. And it is represented as such in Botticelli's *Primavera* where, through Zephyr's emanations, the human spirit comes to envision the rapture of beauty (Venus). The power, the pleasure and the rapture of reading is not merely a Renaissance phenomenon. In our time, Roland Barthes has conceived of *jouissance*, or the pleasure of the text, the "body of bliss" (1975, 62) which appeals "to a natural substratum beyond the transient forces of culture" (Haney 1993, 95). In Haney's interpretation, it is a "widening of consciousness" that serves to "peel away our sense of separateness and makes us participate in the process of History" (Haney 1993, 99). In addition, Frank Lentricchia has called for a return of the reader as rhapsode: "As Plato says in the *Ion*, rhapsodes are enthusiasts... I tell my students that in true recitation, we're possessed, we are the medium for the writer's voice" (1996, 65-6).

As rhapsodes or witnesses to the "primal numinous awe" (Otto 1973, 126) of "deep aesthetic experience,"¹⁶ as believers that the word and the image can change our consciousness, we must also realize the complexities of these texts and images, their contradictions, which mirror the contradictions of humanity. Don Quijote's transformation is one based on *discordia concors*: when faced with Venus his choleric disposition begins to change. As in Botticelli's *Mars and Venus* [FIGURE #4], the goddess can transform the warrior. So let us in our readings seek these metamorphoses and harness their transformative power. Literature and art can indeed lead to goodness when this concept is understood as the amazing harmony that can emerge from contrariety, as that self or consciousness that lies beyond the many political and theoretical controversies of our century. This is not to say that we ought to abandon the political and cultural contextualization of texts and images. There is no question that certain works weave in and out of the canon due to political imperatives (de Armas 1996a). We must continue to probe the limits of gender, power and sexuality in the works of the early modern period. However, we may also want to foreground the forgotten *humanitas*. We may want to remember that aesthetic beauty and the rapture it produces can be one of the most subversive forces in the verbal and visual arts. After all, the possible laudatory or political program of the *Primavera* is momentarily forgotten when the viewer is enraptured by the mysterious beauty of the work.¹⁷

A move to the twenty first century is a move to *terra incognita* where knowledge becomes intimately associated with the knower, where the

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consciousness of the individual exposed to the *raptio* of "deep aesthetic experience" expands so as to understand the multiplicity and diversity of humanity as a union of contraries. It is this *raptio* that don Quijote first denies in viewing a rustic version of the *Primavera*. But Alonso Quijano "el bueno" learns in the end to go beyond oppositions, to subvert hierarchical thinking, transforming the Other, the *labradora*, into an image of Venus-*Humanitas*, into a vision of goodness.

Endnotes

1 On this subject see also Kristeller 1979, 22.

2 On *ekphrasis* during the Spanish Golden Age see Bergmann (1979).

3 And yet, Edward Dudley has shown intriguing parallels between Raphael's and Cervantes' *Galatea*. Both the painting at the Farnesina and the eponymous heroine of Cervantes' pastoral novel partake of deep humanistic learning. Very much like Raphael, Cervantes understood this figure as key to the "Galatea agenda which established her both as an ideal of chaste and inspiring beauty and as a symbol of artistic power and beauty threatened by violence" (1995, 42).

4 Dempsey has shown that the humanist program here is even more complex, based on both Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, Ovid's *Fasti*, Horace's *Odes*, Seneca's *De beneficiis* and Hesiod's *Georgics* (1992, 36-7). Each is re-thought and transformed. For example: "Botticelli has altered Lucretius's simple description of a rustic parade of springtime deities into his own invention, one that changes Lucretius's sequential listing into a manifestation of the growth and development of the season" (1992, 32).

5 For the imitation of these classical authors see de Armas 1992. E. C. Riley fully develops the Renaissance practice of *imitatio* in Cervantes' depiction of madness in *Don Quijote* (especially in chapters 25 and 26 of part one (1966, 107-116).

6 "no será muy difícil hacerle creer que una labradora, la primera que me topare por aquí, es la señora Dulcinea" (1978, 2.107).

7 "a la señora Dulcinea del Toboso, que con otras dos doncellas suyas viene a ver a vuesa merced" (1978, 2.108).

8 "The search for Dulcinea with which Don Quixote begins the action of Part II forms the underlying motive for all he does throughout the rest of the work" (El Saffar 1984, 86).

9 In addition to the tripartite speech with three sub-sections within each part, the chapter includes three peasant women, three donkeys and the colts that will be born from don Quijote's three "yeguas." Indeed the number three is often repeated in the chapter: "tres yeguas," "tres aldeanas," "tres labradoras," "tres labradoras," "tres borricos," "tres hacaneas" (1978, 2.108-9).

10 For an analysis of the women cited in the prologue to *Don Quijote* and the way in which they are later incorporated into the first part of the work see Nadeau (1994).

11 Both Panofsky (1960, 193) Dempsey (1992, 37) agree with this assessment, but for very different reasons.

12 This definition became quite popular and can be found, for example in Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* where, to Mengo's question "¿Qué es amor?" Laurencia replies: "Es un desseo de hermosura" (1990, vv. 409-10).

13 Citing these frescoes, Camamís relates Venus-Humanitas to Cervantes' *Galatea* (1988, 187-88).

14 Dempsey reluctantly acknowledges that: "it is obvious that the means exist to reintroduce a Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Primavera*..." (1992, 65).

15 And yet, one of the most influential Hispanic writers of this century has stressed the relationship between textuality and the magical nature of reality which calls into question what is "real." In his essay on *Don Quijote*, Jorge Luis Borges states: "Nosotros, sus lectores o espectadores, podemos ser ficticios. En 1833, Carlyle observó que la historia universal es un infinito libro sagrado que todos los hombres escriben y leen y tratan de entender, y en el que también los escriben" (1960, 69).

16 Etlin agrees with Otto in that the "primal numinous awe" is "analogous to deep aesthetic experience": "The nature and meaning of both experiences merit our utmost consideration if we wish to understand the question of value in art" (1996, 154).

17 Studying Sanskrit poetics, William S. Haney II offers a critique of modern and postmodern poetics whose "emphasis on ambiguity and indeterminacy reflects the futile attempt on the part of the intellect to account for experiences that will always be enigmatic until grasped on the unifying level of consciousness" (1993, 60). He goes on to show how Sanskrit poetics opens texts "to the pure possibility of meaning, a function of the coexistence of opposites" (1993, 60).

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The Weapons of Spectacle:

Song, Dance and Imaginary Identity in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* and

Le Bourgeois gentilhomme

Thomas P. Finn
Angelo State University

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The enormous theatrical production of Spain and France in the early and mid-seventeenth century provides numerous examples of characters who assume other identities by manipulating widespread beliefs, rumor and even attire, and in so doing, they explore and expand the otherwise restrictive societal criteria for identity. The mercurial, complex and resilient characters of the Spanish "comedia"--whose existence as such challenges society's power to impose upon them static, simplistic identity criteria--find their counterparts in the French dramatic world whose characters ardently seek to create their own subjectivity. 1

Despite the dissimilarity in plot between Tirso de Molina's *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615) and Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670)--it should be noted that there is little evidence to support the notion of a single "comedia" that served as Molière's model for this play¹ --both continue the rich tradition of incorporating musical routines into the story not merely because they fit logically into the action (for this is not always the case), but because festive song and dance is a way of creating a more 2

pliant ambiance in which identity alternatives can flourish.² This becomes evident in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* in the form of a dance number (known as the "Ballet des Nations") that ends the play. This musical production is the culmination of the triumph of M. Jourdain's imaginary world over the real world of the society that surrounds him (Defaux 1980, 273).³

There is one stanza that deserves our special attention. Molière has "un Espagnol" sing:

3

Alegrese enamorado
Y tome mi parecer
Que en esto de querer
Todo es hallar el vado. (V, 6, "troisième entrée")
(Be glad, suitor
and take my lead
for when it comes to love
Finding the ford is everything).⁴

The last two verses seem to sum up the guiding force in M. Jourdain's life. His intense desire to join the ranks of the nobility resembles that of a lover longing to be united with her/his beloved. Although M. Jourdain never actually reaches his goal of noble status, he exhausts virtually all means available to induce society's confirmation of his imaginary identity.⁵

4

In addition, "vado" is an interesting word choice. Its figurative meaning is a solution or a way around the problem, while its literal meaning indicates a passage from one side to another. Just as one would look for a ford to traverse a stream, M. Jourdain adamantly seeks passage across the gulf separating the bourgeois from the nobility. In this musical and festive atmosphere, his final defeat is unimportant. The song seems to praise not the outcome, but the relentless pursuit of the goal, incarnated in M. Jourdain. Thus, on the surface, while the Spanish verses of this musical routine may refer to the persistence of the traditional suitor of the "comedia" as he tries to overcome obstacles to his beloved, there is also an intriguing subtext which emphasizes the seemingly boundless energy M. Jourdain expends in order to find a way to realize his imaginary identity.

5

While the song and dance in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* ("La Molinera", 864-901) is not closely related to the theme of imaginary identity, it is reminiscent of the ambiance created by the machinations of Doña Juana in her attempt to win back Don Martín, the man who seduced, then abandoned her. Despite being promised to Juana, Martín follows his father's orders to leave her so that the young man will be free to marry the wealthier Doña Inés. Juana decides to pursue Martín both under the pseudonym of Doña Elvira and disguised as a man named Don Gil de las calzas verdes (green britches). She eventually wins him back at the end of the play.

6

In a scene near the end of Act I, Juana, disguised as Gil, dances with Inés and Doña Clara, Inés' friend. The [accompanying song](#) describes a mill which metaphorically reaps its power from human jealousy in order to continue operating:

7

...this suggests that Juana's ingenuity in creating jealousy among the several characters by means of her disguises and her suspicion about the fidelity of one's mate will keep the mill running and will provide the motivating force to produce the result she so ardently desires (Hesse 1980, 59)

"La Molinera" provides a metaphoric description of the emotional atmosphere which Juana must create and in which she must function if the multiple identities she assumes are to be believed. It is an atmosphere in which social class and actual behavior have little bearing on identity construction:

8

...[la pièce] s'édifie sur l'axe polysémique de l'identité, entendue comme ressemblance et similitude, singularité ou individualité propre, et sur les signes extérieurs de l'identité, essentiellement l'apparence, la voix...et le nom. (Ly 1983, 183).

(...[the play] is built on the polysemic axis of identity, understood as resemblance and similarity, singularity and individuality itself, and on the exterior signs of

identity, essentially appearance, voice...and name.)

Musical routines, then, are regularly integrated into the "comedia" as coherent and pertinent components of the play that reinforce its basic plot and the environment in which it (the plot) unfolds.

As seen earlier, the confluence of song and dance in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* plays a key role in M. Jourdain's identity construction (Mazouer 1993, 75). As the protagonist is preparing the melodies and dance in order to woo the "marquise," DorimÈne, it is only natural that he see a preview of them at the end of Act I and that the full spectacle be presented at the conclusion of the dinner with the "marquise" at the end of Act III. The famous "cÈrÈmonie turque" ends Act IV, and Act V concludes with the "Ballet des Nations" during which ClÈonte weds Lucille, M. Jourdain's daughter, and Dorante marries DorimÈne (Abraham 63-66).

In addition to their logical distribution throughout the play, these musically choreographed productions are also an exterior manifestation of the methodology used by M. Jourdain to confirm his noble identity. Story and the performing arts become inextricably intertwined. Thus, M. Jourdain has discovered a medium in which appearances are given special emphasis and the possibilities of transforming and expanding one's identity are greatly increased. He turns his life into theatre, that magical place where disbelief is suspended and the normal limits of human existence are pushed back. This is evident in [Act II](#) where the tailors fit him for a new suit: 10

DÈs lors, [the tailors' ballet], ce ´gentilhomme^a se rÈvÈle au spectateur, de maniÈre toute cinÈmatographique, comme un bourgeois incurablement rigide qui, dans le sens littÈral aussi bien que dans le sens pÈjoratif de l'expression franÁaise, ´se donne en spectacle.^a

(From that point, [the tailor's ballet], this "gentleman" reveals himself to the spectator, in a completely kinetic way, as an incurably rigid bourgeois who, in the literal as well as pejorative sense of the French expression, "makes a spectacle of himself," Brody 1968, 315)

This spectacle is infectious, spawning a musical, dream-like world of potentialities yet to be realized. 11 Indeed M. Jourdain certainly believes that a nobleman already exists within him and that all his noble persona lacks is an accurate imitation of the actions of the "gens de qualitÈ," (people of quality):

...il ne voit point de mal...de vouloir singer et hanter la noblesse, de vouloir apprendre toutes ces belles choses qui font de vous une personne de qualitÈ. Jourdain fait la roue. Il veut que le monde l'admire, et il le dit. (Defaux 1980, 281) (...he sees nothing wrong in wanting to ape and frequent the nobility, in wanting to learn all these fine things that make one a person of quality. Joudain is putting on airs. He wants the world to admire him and he says so.)

There is little doubt M. Jourdain equates appearances with authentic identity. He does not intend to deceive anyone with his new persona, for he truly believes that looking the part and being the part are identical.

For this reason he is disinterested in any skill that he cannot show off or that has no immediate applicability. He declines the offer of the "maÓtre de philosophie" to teach him logic, ethics and physics, opting instead for a spelling lesson (during which M. Jourdain thoroughly enjoys the exaggerated pronunciation of vowels) and a tutoring session to help him write a love letter to the "marquise" (II, 4). He also learns the terms "prose" and "poetry" which are valuable to him, not because M. Jourdain is ignorant of the difference between the two (he has known the difference for years without being aware of the terms), but rather because it is demonstrable, albeit useless, knowledge that he may flaunt before others (III, 3). M. Jourdain must attract attention, must be seen, heard and well-known in his community because it is in conjunction with and/or in defiance of his community that he will construct his new persona. Consequently, he spends much of the play trying to imitate the noble arts of music, dance, fencing, gastronomy and even courtship. But because he has not been instructed from birth in these areas, he must hire teachers ("maÓtres") so he may learn them. 12

M. Jourdain is in line with long-standing "comedia" tradition, equating noble identity with noble appearance and noble reputation. He seeks only to show off his acquired merchandise and knowledge for 13

public consumption in the hopes he will convince the community that he belongs in its upper echelons. To this end, he tries to influence what others say about him and how they see him. He insists that the "maÓtre de musique" and the "maÓtre y danser" remain until his tailor arrives so they may see him in his new suit in the style of "les gens de qualitÈ;" even a walk through the city becomes a carefully choreographed event as he tells his valets to follow behind him during the promenade "afin qu'on voie bien que vous Ítes y moi" ("so they see that you belong to me," III, 1); he explains to his wife the benefit of having others notice the Count Dorante frequenting their home (III, 3); and he is of course thrilled to be the center of attention at the musically dramatized ceremony where he receives the empty title of "Mamamouchi" (IV, 5). M. Jourdain believes the only difference between himself and the nobility to be their reputations in the community, how they are perceived by the rest of society. He accepts the premise that noble reputation is acquired through external manifestations and so seeks to imitate them in order to achieve noble identity.

Ironically for M. Jourdain, his exaggerated and inaccurate emulation of the nobility is indeed the natural expression of his bourgeois identity. Whereas the protagonist believes he is communicating what he considers to be his true noble identity, his actions are, in reality, only more evidence that he cannot escape from the ostentatious consumerism that characterize many of MoliÈre's bourgeois. M. Jourdain makes no conscious effort to trick anyone. His project is executed in good faith, for he truly believes he is participating in the ordinary activities of the nobility. Nonetheless, in a very real sense, it is more difficult for M. Jourdain to distinguish himself from the bourgeoisie than it is for him to imitate the upper classes and since he chooses the fine arts to make the distinction, he cannot hide the bourgeois origin from which he wants to escape. 14

Thus imitation and differentiation in the performing arts are crucial themes in this play and even the agents of these arts--the "maÓtres"--try to prove their superiority over their rival, the "maÓtre de philosophie." The latter tries to elevate his stature by pointing out how one must set himself apart from the rest of society by stoically ignoring the insults of others (II, 3). He, of course, quickly betrays his own observation by falling into the same argument which preceded his arrival, bickering and then brawling with the other "maÓtres" over which art form is more important. 15

But M. Jourdain's awkward attempts to participate in the fine arts--an activity that usually identifies one as a member of the upper classes--only make him the object of scorn for his family and servants. This ridicule, however, far from making him see that he is at best a poor imitator of aristocratic ways, only reassures him of his ascendancy and his family's low social status which, for M. Jourdain, prevents them from fully understanding him. 16

While this ritual may have had a similar prototype in the "comedia,"⁶ my interest lies with those characters who convince their community of the veracity of an imaginary persona--a notion embodied in the protagonist of Tirso's *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*.⁷ Indeed, it is Juana's gift for generating multiple and believable personas that remains constant in this otherwise unpredictable and intricate "comedia."⁸ 17

Juana succeeds in producing a persona out of her own remarkable ingenuity and astuteness, yet she is nonetheless aware that she needs society's cooperation. Appearances may prompt the community to recognize and authenticate a particular identity without investigating the individual's motivations for putting forth such appearances, but the collectivity must have a reason for such collaboration. It is society's need to believe in this imaginary persona that Juana exploits and which allows her to conjure up a new state of things: 18

([Juana crea una] misteriosa pseudo-realidad en que se embrollan los otros personajes gracias a su avaricia, sus celos, su deseo de hallar un esposo gal-n o una mujer rica, y sus propias decepciones unos de otros. (Varey 1989, 367)

([Juana creates a] mysterious pseudo-reality in which the other characters embroil themselves due to their avarice, their jealousy, their desire to find a handsome man or rich woman, and their own deceptions of one another.)

Juana is then using society's own weaknesses against itself. She does not change the criteria for identity, but wrests control over it from the collectivity and uses them to her own advantage. Juana exploits the

vulnerabilities of society and not only convinces it of a false identity, but actually forces the collectivity to submit itself to her own machinations and, in the process, to accept her version of what is true and what is false.

Turning back to Molière's work, M. Jourdain would like to pick up where Juana leaves off. As successful as Juana is in her endeavor, it is important not to lose sight of the reason she undertakes such a project: 19

La realidad nueva no fue creada para evadirse, sino como medio para alcanzar una meta. Por sus varios papeles, trucos y distorsión de la verdad, Juana crea un laberinto más que desagradable para Martín. Esto le devuelve al mundo de la realidad. Lograda su meta, Juana abandona su personalidad múltiple. (Hesse 1981, 271)

(The new reality was not created as an escape, rather as a means to a goal. Through her various roles, tricks and distortion of the truth, Juana creates a more than unpleasant maze for Martín. This returns him to the real world. Her goal achieved, Juana abandons her multiple personality.)

While the temporary nature of Juana's plan may not constitute a full-scale indictment of society's authority to decide identity, it does provide the blueprint for M. Jourdain's attempt to impose indefinitely his imaginary persona on his community. To that end he spares no expense not only to acquire noble accoutrements, but to buy a permanent aura that heightens his attempts to create a new reality. Lessons and new clothes are but two of his high-priced commodities:

...the expenses involved in acquiring a noble mistress are massive: 18,000 livres to Dorante to serve as go-between...a costly diamond, feasts, serenades, and entertainment. Jourdain's road to noble privilege runs through the means of personal relations purchased with his family's patrimony.... (Gaines 1984, 159)

This is no temporary project with a short-term goal. M. Jourdain is far too business-conscious (remember his quick addition, without pen or paper, of Dorante's debt, III, 4) to spend his money for a new status of which he will quickly dispose after he tires of it. On the contrary, it is very telling that he is willing to sacrifice a good portion of his family wealth in order to create a melodic, dance-filled world in which all others comply with his desire to be recognized as a nobleman.

The "[Mamamouchi](#)" ceremony of the final act is of course the materialization of this compliance. The collectivity finally concedes defeat not to the authenticity of M. Jourdain's noble persona, but rather to the impossibility of derailing his individual imaginary identity. Indeed, he is so certain of his identity, he continues to see his wife as the stubborn one: 20

Vous venez toujours mêler vos extravagances à toutes choses; et il n'y a pas moyen de vous apprendre à être raisonnable. (V, 6)
(You always come along and mix your foolishness into everything; and there is no way to teach you to be reasonable.)

M. Jourdain's enduring struggle to wrest this concession from society does more than make us laugh at 21 an obvious and ridiculous impostor. Although he is never a serious threat to society's fabric, the result of M. Jourdain's project is that he exposes the collectivity's reliance on precarious criteria for the creation and distribution of identity as well as its impotence when it comes to correcting the outrageous behavior of its members. Neither ridicule nor reasonable discourse have any effect on M. Jourdain. Even Cléonte, the "honnête homme" of the work *par excellence*, makes no headway when he explains to the protagonist that, although he (Cléonte) is not of noble lineage, merit makes him worthy to marry Lucille (III, 12). Cléonte is, thus, forced to enter M. Jourdain's lyrical world of disguises to win his daughter's hand. But the young man's masquerade as the son of the "Grand Turc" has some very serious ramifications. The fact that he must hide his real identity only reinforces the futility of the individual's struggle against a society which extols appearances and respects vacuous titles (Mishriky 1982, 149).

M. Jourdain is certainly not aware of Cléonte's ruse, and it is impossible to predict how he would react if he were aware of the trick. Yet it is important to remember that Cléonte is only being practical 22

and M. Jourdain is only being consistent. Despite Cl onte's dislike for society's preference of appearances over identity, he finds he must say what the reluctant father wants to hear (or more accurately, show him what he wants to see) in order to marry the one he loves. As for M. Jourdain, the title of "Grand Turc" convinces him that he is marrying off his daughter to someone of noble rank.

Imaginary identity (for M. Jourdain) and role-playing (for all the others) help to break out of the impasse. M. Jourdain's community is unable to shake his myopic view of himself from the outside and the bourgeois is equally incapable of convincing the collectivity of his noble identity. Something has to give and Covielle, the valet who organizes the whole masquerade of the "Mamamouchi" ceremony, explains to Mme Jourdain why they had to penetrate M. Jourdain's world of melody and prancing: 23

...ne voyez-vous pas bien que tout ceci n'est fait que pour nous ajuster aux visions de votre mari; que nous l'abusons sous ce d guisement, et que c'est Cl onte lui-m me qui est le fils du Grand Turc? (V, 6)

(...don't you see that this is only to accommodate the hallucinations of your husband; we are tricking him with this disguise, and it's Cleonte himself who is the son of the Grand Turk.)

In the end, music, dance and the unrelenting conviction of one man deny the collectivity's right to determine identity and its prerogative to punish those who would challenge such an authority. *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* may have allowed a glimpse at an individual overpowering her community, but M. Jourdain is unique in that he obtains a societal concession without deceit. At no time does his community actually believe he is truly of noble lineage, yet it remains incapable of converting him and too weak to expel him. The whole musical, festive atmosphere of the play (which eventually governs everyone's behavior) indicates society has lost the authority it reserved for itself to be the final arbiter of identity. To break the stalemate between itself and an unyielding individual, society must relinquish this favored position. It is by no means an unconditional surrender, but rather a compromise. M. Jourdain is satisfied (at least temporarily) with the recognition he receives and society neutralizes the immediate threat to the marriage of two young lovers. 24

Extending the moment

M. Jourdain is the culmination of many French characters in that he represents the individual who does not conquer society, but rather fights it to a stalemate, forcing the entire community to play a role, to pretend to adopt the individual's point of view. This is a dramatic departure from the dynamic of the individual and society in many "comedias," where the individual promoting an imaginary identity is made to relinquish role-playing at the end of the work--such as the title-character of Tirso's *Marta la piadosa*--or surrenders the mask like Juana in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*. 25

French comedy hypothesizes on what would happen if this moment of illusion, seemingly evoked into existence with such ease in the "comedia", were extended to a lifetime. Juana poses this "what if?" question by actualizing false identities and making others believe them, if only temporarily. Her will to succeed with her ruse not only completes the task at hand, but also reveals the diverse spectrum of identity possibilities. The temporary nature of such imposture was obviously no obstacle to Moli re's notion that such role-playing could be expanded and integrated into some of his more complex characters as well as into a buffoon such as M. Jourdain. Nevertheless, Moli re, ever aware of the awesome power of the collectivity, instills his protagonist with a deep and durable resilience, demonstrating the constant, and sometimes painfully slow, progress of the subject as s/he resists society's efforts to dictate identity. It would seem that "extending the moment" leads to a truce between the individual and society rather than to a clear victory in the struggle for the right to create and determine "authentic" identity. 26

Yet, north and south of the Pyrenees, the truce is unstable. If French comedy of the era does not complete, but rather pushes forward the identity experiments undertaken by Spanish playwrights in the first half of the seventeenth century, then two elements key to the advancement of the subject are revealed; the will and the weapons. Whereas French comedy supplies the stubborn character who tirelessly resists the efforts of society to convert her/him, it lacks the Spanish weapons--the numerous ways a "comedia" character tricks and dupes the community. Thus the Spanish and French notions of 27

subjectivity do not differ so much as they compliment each other and when combined, will be a formidable opponent of any society that seeks to control them.

NOTES

1. There is an "entremÈs" (a short skit usually put on between acts of a featured play) by Moreto which resembles MoliÈre's basic plot, but it is not at all certain that the French playwright even knew of its existence, (Husz:r 1907, 241). It seems undeniable, however, that MoliÈre had more than a passing knowledge of Moreto's *El DesdÈn con el desdÈn* (1654) during the composition of *La Princesse d'Elide* (1664).

2. I wish to express my thanks to the Association for Hispanic Classical Theater for its permission to use scenes from *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* and to Debbie Berg Beyer and her students at Western Illinois University for permission to use scenes from their production of *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*.

3. The Spanish verses in this concluding act were, in all probability, written by MoliÈre himself (Husz:r 1907, 244).

4. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

5. Gaines notes that M. Jourdain neglects the most common path of social, upward mobility in the seventeenth century, that of buying "lands and offices," (1984, 159).

6. Husz:r mentions Lope's *La boba para otros y la discreta para sÌ* and Rojas' *El DesafÌo de Carlos Quinto* as possible models for MoliÈre, (1907, 243).

7. In terms of the capability to create new identities seemingly at will, the protagonist, DoÒa Juana, as her name implies, could easily be considered the ancestor of Tirso's legendary trickster, the approximate earliest dates of composition for *Don Gil...* and *El Burlador..* being 1615 and 1616- 20, respectively. While in pursuit of the man who wronged her, Juana even creates a DoÒa Elvira. Even though there exists no concrete evidence to suggest MoliÈre knew of Tirso's heroine, the similarity of function and name to MoliÈre's Done Elvire is intriguing.

8. Hesse affirms that "it contains, perhaps, the most involved plot in Golden Age drama," (1962, 389).

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**Transfiguring Form:
The Poetics of Self, Contradiction and Nonsense in
San Juan de la Cruz**

Charles D. Presberg

University of Missouri-Columbia

The mystical poetry of San Juan de la Cruz proves difficult to label according to an artistic or historical period. Does our author belong to the late Renaissance or the early Baroque? Enlisting the commonplaces of literary scholarship, we may argue that his general tone of optimism, his harmonious view of nature, and his scant reference to morality and sin tend to place him, perhaps, with poets of the earlier period; or perhaps his considerable penchant for verbal conceits and for such figures relying on the mechanism of contradiction as oxymoron, antithesis, catechresis and paradox squares better with authors of the later period. Perhaps. But it seems more plausible to argue that, besides pointing up the limited utility of such labels, the poetic enterprise of San Juan de la Cruz self-consciously withdraws from prevailing, classificatory schemes. As Margaret Wilson writes: "San Juan does not react against classical decorum, he ignores it" (71). Indeed, San Juan's mystical verse represents a private, monastic undertaking, produced on the margins of secular society and the competitive milieu of poetic schools or literary circles (Wilson 14, 71; Orozco 115-170). But a margin is not a vacuum; and besides his refashioning of Scripture and of the Spanish translations of religious poetry by Jacopone da Todi (Orozco 129-34), San Juan draws from the tradition of secular poetry, especially from the works of Garcilaso de la Vega, though often passing through the filter of Sebastián de Cordoba's *contrafacta*, renditions *a lo divino*, or sacred parody. ¹

The locus of San Juan's poetic undertaking on the borderlands of political and literary history, and the isolation of his person from secular and even, when in prison, from monastic society, find analogous expression in his poetic diction, his poetic subject, or lyrical "I," and the poetics which underlies his mystical verse. Though not concerned directly with biography, San Juan's mystical doctrine, or authorial intent, the following discussion springs from the conviction that our author's composition of a mystic and poet self in the domain of history remains inseparable from the composition of his lyrical, mystic subject in verse (Orozco 83-90; Aranguren 97-111; Tavar; Baruzi 305-74). ² As with other mystic writers, San Juan's lyrical subject represents a poetic and linguistic translation of his historical self. Indeed, his mystical poetry reveals no

other aim. More important, however, what sets him apart from other mystics or mystic poets is the degree to which both the process and product of his acts of self-creation rely on an innovative refashioning of existing poetic and religious codes and on a method of systematic contradiction. To paraphrase Wilson, San Juan adopts a method which "ignores" accepted "decorum" in its pursuit of self-transformation. For it is a method that manages, at the same time, to use, misuse, undermine and enlarge the conceptual and linguistic categories which direct the composition of social and poetic order and, so, of a social and poetic persona.

My purpose in this essay is to argue that the semiotic system of San Juan's mystical verse relies on the manufacture of logical contradiction and the concomitant manufacture of lexical-semantic and pragmatic nonsense.³ In particular, my analysis will draw on selected passages from San Juan's mystical poetry which illustrate how that system generates the alternately self-affirming and self-voiding image of his lyrical subject (Wilson 17; Happold 48-50, 58-59). This choice of purpose and method therefore entrusts the present study with the task of "explaining" San Juan's system of contradiction and nonsense in terms of logical analysis, sense making and propositional discourse--that is, in terms and categories which our author's poetic discourse seeks to call into question, or even to surpass, and terms and categories upon which that self-conscious discourse remains knowingly contingent. Yet the upshot of such an analysis consists less in favoring one concept or procedure over the other--sense over nonsense, or logic over contradiction--than in underscoring how San Juan's mystical poetry exemplifies their mutual dependence and, especially, their status as constructions of discursive practice.

I. Mystical Modes of Signification: The Logic of Contradiction, The Semantics of Nonsense

Putting a Christian and Biblical gloss on his view of life on earth, San Juan imbues all his mystical works with the paradox of Christ: "in order to live you must die." But in abstract terms, the mystical verse of San Juan represents the passage from "death" to "life" as an *affirmation* of infinity, which denotes the *negation* of limits and existence *in form* (Ktretzman; Bernadete). Within the textual system of our poet's mystical art, this hypothesis of infinity as a positive existent (Gilson 145-48), transcending all essence and form, receives the less abstract name of "God" ("Dios") or, in his three "major" mystical poems, the allegorical names for either a male beloved, "Amado," or a male spouse, "Esposo." Hence, in a rich play of contradictory imagery and diction, San Juan consistently represents the "death" of one's worldly self, which leads to "life" in God, as a systematic negation of finitude, definition and form, and as a quasi-erotic act of self-transcendence.

In discoursing and, implicitly, thinking about the infinity of the Godhead in his poetry, San Juan draws primarily, though not exclusively, on the tradition of "negative theology," or the *via negativa*, which posits a "Divine Silence" as the basis for human discourse and a "Divine Darkness" as the basis of human thought.⁴ This mode of thought and

expression is also called "apophatic theology," which relies on the negation of creatures in the soul's ascent to God, as against "cataphatic theology," which relies for such an ascent on their affirmation (Katz *Mystical Speech*; Cousins 237). In part, the negative tradition derives from the "know-nothing" wisdom of Socrates, the idealist philosophy of Plato, the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Proclus, the Pauline contrast between worldly or godly wisdom and folly, as well as the mystical writings of St. Augustine and St. Gregory of Nyssa. Yet, strictly speaking, "negative theology" emerges with the *Mystical Theology* and *Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a Christian Neoplatonist of the sixth century, whose pen-name led writers and thinkers over the course of a thousand years wrongly to identify him with the Athenian convert of St. Paul referred to in Acts 17, 34, and also with St. Denis, first archbishop of Paris.⁵ Among that mystical tradition's most representative texts, besides the works of San Juan himself, one finds *The Cloud of Unknowing*, written in Middle English by an unknown author of the fourteenth century, whose "un-knowing" presents nothing less than an ascetical program which stresses the infinite degree to which "knowledge" of God surpasses every human being's cognitive powers of perception, memory, imagination and conceptual thought.

San Juan's own approach to "un-knowing" as a species of "knowledge," surpassing every person's cognitive powers, occurs most explicitly in one of his best known "minor" works of mystical poetry called *Entréme donde no supe*, or *I Entered Where I Knew Not* (*Poesía completa* 18-19). As suggested in the title itself, the lyrical subject of the poem expresses the paradox of *feeling* at rest and at home though in an unfamiliar "place." It remains an unnamed and unnameable place which the subject is able to "enter" only after leaving behind her former reliance on finite modes of understanding--a place which thus lies outside the confines of earthly knowledge, perception, memory or expression. The poem's refrain, or *estribillo*, portrays mystical union as a communion with the infinite which outstrips *all* categories and *all* human experience of "knowing": "toda ciencia trascendiendo" ("all knowledge transcending"). Implicitly, the subject moves away from the knowledge of facts and of cognitive objects--a knowledge which, in Spanish, is rendered as "saber." Such knowledge is replaced by the idea contained in the verb "conocer," which signifies a knowledge of intimacy with respect to a familiar place, a friend, a lover or even a spouse. Tellingly, the Latin equivalent of "saber" is *scire*, the root of San Juan's transcended "ciencia," whose contemporary spelling in Spanish is "ciencia." Furthermore, this poem's transcendent knowledge-as-unknowing, and the bond between that "knowledge" and the infinite, suggest an analogy, fully exploited in San Juan's verse, with the Biblical acceptance of "to know"--in Hebrew, *yadoah*--which also means sexual union. In other words, it is in "transcending" the limits of knowledge that the soul is also able to transcend the distinction between "knowing" and "loving," implicitly put forth as a single act. Just as true "life" follows an experience akin to death, truly knowing, loving and expressing entail some kind of negation of those very acts. But what kind of negation prevents these contraries from simply canceling each other out?

7

Despite the affinities between San Juan's ascetical program and that of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, of which San Juan was unaware, it is perhaps more relevant to that Spanish author's method of poetic contradiction to recall that Dionysius's "negative" doctrine receives its most systematic reformulation in St. Thomas Aquinas's concept of analogy (Knowles, *Evolution* 263; Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy* 196-7; McInerny). Regarding this concept, Aquinas promotes a three-step method of predication in reference to the deity and, therefore, in reference to the infinite, the ineffable, and the range of intelligibility which exceeds the range of reason or propositional discourse. The first step, the *via affirmativa*, whose name Aquinas borrows from Dionysius, ascribes to God the qualities which one finds in "created," empirical phenomena, provided those qualities entail no inherent limitation. It is valid to predicate, say, goodness, love, wisdom and existence of God, but not roundness, weight, fear or mortality. The second step, which is what Aquinas considers, after Dionysius, the *via negativa* proper, specifically negates in relation to God the limited forms through which we know such perfections in the order of empirical experience. And, in a final borrowing of terminology from Dionysius, Aquinas understands the third step as a *via eminentis*, which predicates those perfections of God in an *analogous* fashion, since they exist in the deity to an "eminent," unfathomable degree.

8

In principle, what prevents analogous predication from lapsing into an exercise in word-magic is Aquinas's shrewd distinction between finite "modes of signification," which pertain to created things, and God as an infinite referent (Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy* 197). The terms of predication are "analogous" because they are neither univocal nor equivocal and relate to entities (creatures and Creator, for example) which are similar in some respects, yet dissimilar in others. Furthermore, though bound by their modes of thought and signification alike, human beings are therefore capable of employing this method's negative assertions in order to think and utter both positive realities and truths about God, the transcendental *Signified* (e.g., that God is wise, good, loving, and so on). Yet they utter such truths in the *knowledge* that they do not know exactly *what* they are thinking or talking about. For, in discoursing about God, human beings invariably utter and mean more than they realize, and more than what their cognitive and discursive categories are able to accommodate. They know nothing of what the deity *is* in itself, but only what it is *not*--not finite, not material, not mutable, not anthropomorphic--and how finite creatures relate to their Creator. They *experience* the infinite intelligibility or "light" of the deity as "darkness"; the deity's infinite being as "nothing"; and the divine "utterance" which brings forth the cosmos, holds it in existence and communicates its meaning, as "silence."

9

In San Juan, negative assertion and "silent" utterance occur most explicitly in his allegorical denotations of God and the infinite. Indeed, a central feature of San Juan's mysticism, as it has been for all mystical writers from Dionysius's *Divine Names* onward, is the impossibility of using names to encompass one's experience of perfect communion, one's fleeting glimpse of mystery, or the moment or place of one's encounter with the ineffable. In the fourth stanza of *Dark Night*, for instance, the soul refers to a loving encounter with a beloved who is so well known that he

remains anonymous, implicitly unnameable in what we may call the "eminence" of his particularity: "a donde me esperaba/quien yo bien sabía" ("where awaiting me was *he whom I well knew*") (*Poesía completa* 3) (emphasis added). At the close of the stanza, the location where the lovers meet can be "defined" only by a negative term of absence: "en parte donde *nadie* parecía ("in a place where *no one* appeared") (*Poesía completa* 3) (emphasis added). Not surprisingly, conveying even the faintest hint of this ineffable union must often rely on the rhetorical nullity and non-sense of paradox, which transcends the bounds of denotation, logical discourse and ratiocination.

Hence, in accord with San Juan's refashioning of the "negative way," the type of thought and discourse which equates progress in wisdom with the pursuit of "unknowing" befits intelligent though contingent beings who continually experience the insufficiency of their knowledge, even as they experience their own existence as both lacking and received. 10

By drawing the reader's attention to the human subject's experience of its own contingency, lack and creatureliness, San Juan's mystical poetry casts the question of infinity as neither an abstraction nor an intellectual problem but, instead, as a personal concern and a personal drama. This combination of a personal emphasis with the quest for infinity accounts for much of San Juan's innovation as a mystical poet. This is so because the negative theology of Dionysius had already yielded, besides other theological systems, a "negative philosophy" (Gilson 151) in the Christian Neoplatonism of the fifteenth century, exemplified particularly in *De docta ignorantia* (*Of Learned Ignorance*) and *Idiota de sapientia et de mente* (*The Idiot* [sometimes rendered as *The Layman*] *on Wisdom and the Mind*) by Nicholas Cusanus (1401-1464). The play of paradox and contradiction in such writings remains as mystical as anything found in Dionysius, but forms part of abstract disquisitions and dialogues on the joining of God and the soul--any soul--in general terms. By contrast, San Juan's mystical verse concerning union with the infinite represents nothing less than a "negative" psychology and a "negative" brand of proto-existentialist lyric. The *via negativa* is dramatized in his poetry, not only as a way of life and thought, but also as an individual project, analogous to a poetic work. 11

II. The Soul as Semantic Context: Minor Mystical Poems 12

San Juan's lyrical subject yearns, of course, for oneness with God, the Beloved, the Spouse. Yet it is important to stress that, in simulating God and infinity as the aim and "end" of an individual subject, San Juan creates a protagonist for his mystical verse who is something other than a human person, or a psycho-physical agent. Rather, his protagonist represents a unique personification and a unique allegory of a *particular* "soul," in consonance with how the latter term was understood by Aristotle and, subsequently, by theologians and philosophers throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: as the "vital principle," or source of action, and the energizing *form* of a sentient, rational being (Copleston, *History of Philosophy* 1:327-328; *Medieval Philosophy* 187). In short, the soul is the form of a human person, which delimits, defines and *informs* that person's conscious and unconscious activity.

The hypothesis of a personified "soul" establishes the semantic *context* which circumscribes the meaning of San Juan's mystical verse. This context allows those texts to *make* sense, or to *accomplish* their implicit aim of signifying and translating his unique view of mystical experience. Further, besides the name for soul, "alma," which appears primarily in his titles, the subject of San Juan's mystical verse is most often designated by the allegorical names for a female beloved, "Amada," and a female spouse, "Esposa." As an expansion of San Juan's contradictory, "negative" method of signification, the context of his mystical poetry is likewise threefold. His "soul" (1) is situated between God (2) and the temporal order (3), and is alternately drawn toward union with both creatures and their Creator and, so, toward union with finite objects and the infinite "object" of appetency, cognition and volition. Indeed, God and creation occur in San Juan's mystical verse only insofar as they act upon the soul.⁶ 13

The tensions which arise within that soul, who is longing to attain infinity, and which result from its attraction to both creatures and the Creator as "objects" of knowledge and desire, provide the subject matter of one of San Juan's minor poems which bears the descriptive title of *Un alma que pena por ver a Dios (A Soul Who Pines to See God)*, whose first verse reads: *Vivo sin vivir en mí (I Live Without Living Within Myself)* (*Poesía completa* 20-21). This poem offers a gloss on a traditional type of song called a *villancico*, whose stanzas--of six or seven eight-syllable verses--end with a refrain, or *estribillo*. Moreover, the work borrows much of its rhetorical scaffolding--its contradictions and paradoxy--from Spain's medieval lyric of courtly love.⁷ 14

One finds no image of movement--whether of progress or regress--in these verses. They avoid narrative sequence and temporality, unfolding within a psychological, atemporal present, the better to portray the anguish of a soul who is caught somewhere *between* what ascetical theology calls the illuminative and the unitive ways, and what San Juan dubs the "night of the soul." This condition precedes and contrasts with mystical union in this life and beatitude in the next. Because of the protracted "middle" position of its subject, this is among the most overtly paradoxical of all San Juan's poems. It opens with the subject reflecting on what seems to be its abandonment by God, felt as a state of "living death," whose end is nowhere in sight--a state, in other words, which resembles the time-honored descriptions of what a soul would *experience* in purgatory and hell: 15

Vivo sin vivir en mí
y de tal manera espero
que muero porque no muero.

En mí yo no vivo ya,
y sin Dios vivir no puedo;
pues sin él y sin mi quedo,
este vivir ¿qué será;?
Mil muertes se me hará,
pues mi misma vida espero,

muriendo porque no muero

(I live without living within myself,/and I hope in such a way/ that I am dying because I do not die//Within myself I no longer live/ and I cannot live without God;/for I remain without him and myself,/this living, what can it be?/A thousand deaths must for me it must be,/for I await my very life./dying because I do not die) (*Poesía completa* 20).

The soul's lament over its present condition in these verses is twofold and relates to its agony over an uncertain future and an irretrievable past. First, the soul tacitly expresses the predictable longing to become one with the Godhead through either mystical union or beatitude. But, more important, the soul tacitly expresses nostalgia for earthly contentment, its state of earlier complacency, uncomplicated by yearnings for mystical union. In particular, the subject regrets its inability to return with satisfaction to its earlier status as a "form" which finds expression in a particular character, or a finite persona--that is, the character or persona which manifests the soul and gives it form as an *object* of thought or love, both for others and for oneself. Hence the repetition of negative assertions, together with personal pronouns in the objective case: "Vivo *sin* vivir *en mí*" ("I live *without* living *within* myself"), "*en mí* yo no vivo ya" ("*in* myself I no longer live"), and "*sin él* y *sin mí* quedo" ("I remain *without* him and *without* myself") (emphasis added). It is, furthermore, the soul's perception of itself as a creature, hovering on the frontier between being and non-being, which leads to an acute sense of its contingency, lack and homelessness, here put forth through the nonsense imagery of the subject's "mil muertes" ("a thousand deaths"): life that is not life, life that is death, death which is not death. The experience of creatureliness and contingency accounts, too, for the soul's personalized reference to "mi misma vida" ("my very life"), which is a particular "life" or non-life which lies beyond life in *any* recognizable form. In brief, there is a struggle within the soul between two selves, as two "forms," which it feels drawn to produce: one finite, the other infinite; one associated with an unspecified moment in the past, the other, with an unspecified moment in the future. No less significantly, both those "forms" are objects of desire and, therefore, neither attained nor possessed. For the soul has managed to enact and become a negation of its erstwhile form, or its expression in an earthly character, but without achieving "eminent" being, free of contour, structure or contingency within the temporal order. The claim to be "dying because I do not die" thus points to the soul's twofold powerlessness either definitively to live as, or definitively to die to, itself or the other--to relinquish or enjoy either mystical life or its analogous, non-mystical shadow.

16

The next stanza's affirmation of "this " life as but a lack of life, and as a prolonged act of dying that is non-death, gives way to a prayer of petition in which the soul is able to ask God only for what it does *not* want, in a multiplicity of negative terms: that is, for a lack of this life," already established as a "privation" of both life and its opposite:

17

Esta vida que yo vivo es privación de vivir
y así, es contino morir
hasta que viva contigo;

oye, mi Dios, lo que digo:
que esta vida no la quiero,
que muero porque no muero

(*This life that I am living is the privation of life /and so it is a continuous dying / until I live with you; /listen, my God, to what I say:/that I do not want this life /for I am dying because I do not die*) (*Poesía completa* 20) (emphasis added).

Even Christ's presence in the Eucharist provides the lyrical subject with imperfect solace: "háceme más sentimiento/el no te poder gozar" ("it only makes me more sorrowful/since I cannot possess you") (*Poesía completa* 20). It would seem that the reason behind this startling complaint is that, in the sacramental "presence," Christ appears under what are called the "forms" and "species" of bread and wine (Ott 385-88). Faith in Christ's presence implies lack of knowledge and lack of full *communion*. Hope in the sacrament's salvific power and in its joining of the communicant with the person of Christ likewise entails lack and privation, manifest in a *desire* to "possess" and to be possessed by the imperceptible object of love. Indeed, hope is a sign that the subject has still failed to attain God and that it remains open to the danger of falling into sin, thus sparking a continued, if diminishing, cry of anguish. For union with God involves neither faith nor hope--virtues that have God as their object, and by which the soul approaches him in this life--but fulfillment and "eminent" sight:

Y si me gozo, Señor,
con esperanza de verte,
en ver que puedo perderte
se me dobla mi dolor;
viviendo en tanto pavor,
y esperando como espero,
muérome porque no muero

(And if I delight, Lord/in the hope of seeing you./in seeing that I may lose you/for me my pain is doubled;/living in such fear./and hoping as I hope, I, myself, am dying because I do not die) (*Poesía completa* 21) (emphasis added) .

This passage creates a bewildering tangle of paradox and nonsense through its use of polyptoton and of images which stem from the verbs "ver" (to see) and "esperar" (to hope or to await). Besides alluding to the "sight" of faith, previously related to the Eucharist (Christ's *invisible* presence), the largely joyful hope of seeing God ("con esperanza de verte") refers to the beatific vision (what no eye has seen). But the soul's sense of hope is also linked to "seeing" the potential *loss* of that vision. Endowed with a light specific to the illuminative way--that is, a "dark night"--an insightful faith (at bottom, the belief in an unseen God) permits the subject both to see and foresee, in time, the purely potential (thus invisible) *loss* of *sight* which is both eternal death and eternal "darkness," or separation from the sight of God and divine "light."

The illuminative way's incomplete light becomes personally torturous, as emphasized by the reflexive pronoun affixed to the verb "muero":

"muérome porque no muero" ("I *myself* am dying because I do not die") (emphasis added). In this condition, the "joy" which first arises from a faith-filled hope and from hopeful foresight serves only to increase the soul's anguish, as stressed in the use of both an object pronoun and a possessive adjective: "se *me* dobla *mi* dolor" ("for *me*, *my* pain is doubled") (emphasis added). The same joy also plunges the soul into fear ("viviendo en tanto pavor"). This *kind* of "hoping"--"esperando *como* espero" ("hoping *as* I hope")--diminishes the theological virtue of hope in God for as long as it endures. It therefore borders on an act of despair, an "unpardonable" sin against the Holy Spirit, which leads to a loss of all hope, of all faith, and of the beatific "vision."

Paradoxically enough, meditation on the appearance of Christ in Eucharistic form has brought the subject to meditate on the possibility of its own damnation, the negative resolution of faith and hope, and a state of endless privation, particularly with respect to the soul's powers of knowing and loving, where the virtues of faith and hope reside.

21

In the poem's final stanza, the soul ultimately "resolves" to endure as long as necessary in a state which provides a foretaste of both heaven and hell, and of union with, or separation from, God. It is a dizzying state for soul and reader alike which oscillates between hope and fear, darkness and light, as well as both temporal and eternal "death" and "life":

22

Lloraré mi *muerte* ya,
y lamentaré mi *vida*
en tanto que detenida
por mis pecados está

(I shall now mourn my *death*,/and I shall lament my *life*/for as long as *detained/by my sins it remains*) (*Poesía completa* 21) (emphasis added).

The word "vida" in "lamentaré mi vida" ("I shall lament my life") is coterminous with the word "death" which occurs in the previous verse. That "life" or "death"--it makes no difference which it is called--also refers at the same time to the living-death of the soul's temporal existence that is prolonged, "detenida," in sin, and to the experience of both mystical union and eternal beatitude that are deferred, also "detenida," by sin. The soul's sense of "detainment" in its present state of ambivalence, with no foreseeable end, finds visual, acoustic and syntactic reinforcement by means of the enjambment which links this passage's last three verses, and by means of the distance which separates the participle "detenida" ("detained") and the verb form "está," "it is," translated above as "it remains."

23

Appropriately, the poem concludes with a supplicant, personal query in search of deliverance, addressed to a personal God:

24

¡Oh mi Dios! ¿Cuándo será
cuando yo diga de vero:
vivo ya porque no muero?

(Oh my God! When will it be/when I can say truly:/now I live because I am not dying?) (*Poesía completa* 21).

The question hopefully, yet sorrowfully, delays the prospect of "truthful" resolution and perfect union. There is sufficient light in this state of spiritual darkness, and sufficient life in this prologued act of dying, for the soul to imply that potential union with the infinite will do away with the experience of death-in-life anguish which accompanies temporal existence. For, at that moment of either literal death or metaphorical death to the world, the soul would be one with God, everlasting source of light and life. The lyrical subject would no longer be able to "die" in any sense of the word: "vivo ya porque no muero" ("now I live because I am not dying"). Life on the hither side of either mystical union or beatitude is shown to be fraught with a blend of warring contraries, opposing tensions within both the sensible and spiritual parts of the soul. More positively, mystical union and beatitude are acknowledged, while remaining unknown in themselves, as modes of existence from which every trace of tension, contingency and privation has vanished. 25

In a self-conscious gesture, the question put forth in these verses likewise defers indefinitely the prospect for either the poetic subject or the poem itself "truly" to express what they can only body forth as an absence, and as an object of hope and desire, in verbal form: "I live"; and "I am not dying." Like its lyrical "I," the poem here points to its own marginal locus between being and non-being; its need to "die" in order to "live." At the levels of content and form alike, the poetic utterance exemplifies its own "life" as "dying"; its expression as a process of non-expression; its lexical-semantic sense as nonsense; its form as anti-form. Also like its lyrical subject, the poem makes non-sense out of sense in order to posit and acknowledge the unknown possibility of "eminent" sense, of infinite or "true" expression, which precludes the need for any "soul" to express itself at all within the constraints of logical, semantic or poetic form. Paradoxically, however, it is only as "forms" that both "soul" and poem succeed in negating their formal limitations, in negatively asserting the infinite "expression" which they both are *not*, yet strive to become, through their act of self-negation. 26

III. The Soul of Desire and the Plotting of Infinity: *Living Flame of Love and Dark Night* 27

Bound up with the image of *homo viator*--man the wayfarer and pilgrim--the most common images in ascetical literature of the soul's progress toward mystical union are those of a journey with an itinerary and an ascent, either to the summit of a sacred mountain or to the top of the "scale of perfection" (*scala perfectionis*), marked by foreordained resting places. San Juan draws explicitly on the second image in his *Ascent to Mount Carmel* (*Subida del monte Carmelo*), which constitutes a long, though unfinished, treatise concerning the achievement of spiritual union, based on his major mystical poem, *Dark Night*. Yet, taken together, his mystical poems portray a particular soul's ascent to God as an erotic drama with a plot. In all these related images of spiritual progress, the destination, summit or denouement of mystical union comes upon the soul suddenly, through an act of divine grace. But God bestows such grace, and

grafts the soul on to himself, only after that soul has undergone an arduous preparation which varies in duration yet unfolds according to a foreseeable pattern.

Traditional theology divides progress toward mystical union into three stages: the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways, thus echoing the Neoplatonist categories of Proclus, who wrote of *katharsis*, *ellampsis* and *henosis* in reference to the soul's fusion with the ultimate reality of the One (Pelikan 124).⁸ In Christian mysticism, the first stage purifies the soul of its attachments to earthly ways of knowing and loving. The second, illuminative way marks the soul's advancement in spiritual insight and in both the moral and theological virtues. The unitive way signals the greatest intimacy that a soul can achieve with God in this life and consists of the power to embrace, and to be embraced by, the Godhead, the infinite reality, in whom the soul *knows* and *loves* everything else, including itself. 28

That San Juan is fully conversant with this traditional division is clear from all his commentaries. For example, in the Prologue to his commentary on *Dark Night*--a commentary which complements San Juan's *Ascent to Mount Carmel*--we read: 29

En las dos primeras canciones se declaran los efectos de las dos *purgaciones* espiritual [*sic*] de la parte sensitiva del hombre y de la espiritual. En las otras seis se declaran varios y admirables efectos de la *iluminación* espiritual y *unión* con Dios

(In the two first songs we discuss the effects of the two spiritual *purgations* of man's sensible and spiritual parts. In the other six we discuss various admirable effects of spiritual *illumination* and *union* with God) (*Poesía completa* 45) (emphasis added).

Nonetheless, San Juan refashions these traditional categories, insisting on four stages in the soul's ascent to God, which imply, as well, a significant shift in emphasis. In allegorical terms, rather than the abstract or analytical terms of traditional theology, San Juan refers to the four stages of a soul's development throughout his poetry and commentaries as: 1) The Dark Night of the Senses (*noche oscura de los sentidos*); 2) Spiritual Betrothal (*desposorio espiritual*); 3) The Dark Night of the Soul (*noche oscura del alma*); and 4) Spiritual Marriage (*matrimonio espiritual*). If it is common among religious writers to speak of union with God in nuptial imagery, San Juan's innovation lies in his incorporating those traditional images into a systematic program and particularly in his complementing the soul's "betrothal" and "marriage" to God with two "dark nights." Our poet's emphasis is thus in favor of the will, the powers of appetency, and very much at the expense of the cognitive powers of intellect. The "dark night of the *senses*" and the "dark night of the *soul*" allude, respectively, to *perceptual* and *conceptual* understanding, whose limits, or "darkness," the soul must make every effort to transcend. 30

Phrased another way, the powers of perceptual and conceptual understanding are affirmed only in order that their limitations may be negated and overcome through the soul's active reception, and God's generous bestowal, of grace.

In his stressing the soul's progress as a journey, an ascent and a plot, and especially in his stressing the primacy of love over truth, or will over intellect, San Juan deviates, without departing, from the intellectualist tradition of Dionysius and Aquinas. Further, the "love" and the kind of plot which prevail in San Juan's verses is passionate and "erotic" in the strict sense. But one ought to distinguish "erotic" here from sex, since love and sex can surely be complementary, but are not necessarily linked at the level of either concept or fact. Indeed, San Juan's major poems dramatize and plot an allegorical love affair of great passion between God and soul, exemplifying a love of *eros* rather than *agape* or *phylon* (sex), and of *amor* rather than *caritas* or *sexus*. 31

On the one hand, the erotic and what we may call the "voluntarist" emphases in San Juan's spirituality place his verses squarely within the tradition of St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), who stresses the primacy of the affective over the cognitive, and will over intellect, in his *Grace and Free Will*, and his two most celebrated works: his treatise *On the Love of God* and his sermons *On the Song of Songs*.⁹ On the other hand, San Juan's emphases derive less remotely from the love-centered contemplation and spirituality which the Carmelites inherited from the Franciscans (Hellman; Egan), and which San Juan, as well as St. Teresa of Avila, his precursor in Carmelite reform, inherits from Luis de Granada--a Dominican who is frequently perceived as a displaced Franciscan--and the Spanish Franciscans, Fernando de Osuna and St. Pedro de Alcantara (Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey 137; Orozco 121-26). This spirituality finds its classical expression, not only in the life of St. Francis of Assisi himself, but also in *The Soul's Journey into God (itinerarium mentis in Deum)* by St. Bonaventure (1217-1274), often called the Franciscans' "second founder."¹⁰ 32

The tradition of which both Bernard and Bonaventure are the chief representatives exerts a clear influence over both the thematic and even the emplotment of San Juan's three major poems: *Living Flame of Love (Llama de amor viva)*, *Dark Night (Noche oscura)* and the *Spiritual Canticle (Cántico espiritual)*. Like the minor mystical poems, these works rely on the language of contradiction, nonsense and paradox, following from what I have already described as an analogous mode of predication. Additionally, however, the major poems portray the dramatic end and destination of the soul's journey toward perfect, mystical union. I shall limit my illustration of this ascetical journey in San Juan's verse to an analysis of *Living Flame* and *Dark Night*, since a similar reading of the forty stanzas comprising San Juan's *Spiritual Canticle* would unduly lengthen the present essay, and is best left for a later study. 33

In the first of those poems, which consists of four stanzas, the "living flame of love" is personified, addressed apostrophically in each stanza, and first said to "wound" the soul "tenderly" (*tiernamente*) (*Poesía completa* 17). The second stanza begins by calling attention first to the wounding quality of the "living flame" and only secondarily to its soothing 34

effect, "cauterio suave," "cauterio" meaning "cautery" and "suave," "soft." A second apostrophe in the next verse of the same stanza--the only stanza containing more than one apostrophe--reverses the order of emphasis, placing "regalada" ("pleasing") before "llaga" ("wound") (*Poesía completa* 17). This reversal thus signals a second *step* in spiritual progress toward union, though still retaining a subtle trace of pain, which allegorically expresses the soul's attachment to earthly objects of intellection or, especially, of desire. We may further infer from these verses that the poem is concerned to dramatize, in allegorical fashion, a particular soul's passage from its spiritual "dark night" into a state of matrimonial union with God, the Beloved. In the second stanza's two remaining apostrophes, "¡Oh mano blanda! ¡Oh toque delicado," the "softness" of God's "hand" and the "delicacy" of his "touch" have come to supplant the sensation of pain altogether (*Poesía completa* 17). Tension and the admixture of joy with pain disappear. Earthly attachments have vanished from the soul, erotically joined to God, the infinite object of desire. What was formerly a wound (*llaga*) now becomes a "foretaste" of "eternal life" (*que a vida eterna sabe*) (*Poesía completa* 17).

According to St. John's own commentary on these verses, the hand, the touch and the cautery stand respectively for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (*Poesía completa* 370). Even so, in keeping with that mystic's spiritual eroticism, the rapid succession of apostrophes which the presumptively "female" subject addresses to her "male" Beloved also suggests the feminine (non-female) soul's gratifying penetration by a triune, masculine (non-male) deity. The disappearance of tension, in turn, suggests the climax of ecstasy, which permeates the soul's cognitive and affective powers. In the poem's dramatization of its lyrical subject's act of love-making, San Juan's reader has "overheard" the consummation of a mystic soul's "spiritual marriage." This stanza therefore exemplifies the merger we have discerned in San Juan's mystical verses between the soul's internal and external faculties of: 1) affect or appetency, which ranges from sensual to intellectual appetite, with "intellectual appetite" standing as the technical, Neo-Scholastic description for "will"; and 2) cognition, which ranges from perceptual to conceptual understanding.

Through the intelligible medium of poetic imagery, the allegorical penetration and consequent ecstasy of these verses therefore reveal how the powers of intellect and will, and knowing and loving move, as in a single act, to join their infinite object and transcend their inherent limits. The unitive act between soul and God, creature and Creator, results in a knowledge of intimacy (*conocer*) and in a species of erotic intellection which echoes the Biblical sense of "knowledge" encompassed in the Hebrew *yadoah*. It is in this way that San Juan creates the paradox of an extreme eroticism which preserves the soul as the poem's semantic context and pays almost no attention to the body, or the human organism, as such. In other words, despite its adherence to the tradition of Christian Neo-Platonism, San Juan's mystical poem "ignores" the material body, without rejecting or scorning it as either a "tomb" or a "prison" for the spirit.

Further, this pivotal second stanza paradoxically concludes with the soul's acknowledging that it is ultimately the agency of God, not that of her purgative efforts, which has brought about her "death" to the world,

thereby transforming that death and all death into life: "matando, muerte en vida la has trocado" ("killing, death into life you have transformed") (*Poesía completa* 17). In accord with the "death-as-life" thematic, one may also detect in this passage the traditional Renaissance usage of death as an image for sexual bliss, the height of both erotic and sensual pleasure. Hence, despite the apparent contradiction, and the semantic nonsense which these verses call forth, subject and object are "eminently" one; the form of the finite creature--now joyfully "alive," because "dead"--has been enlarged to an infinite degree; and, in effecting this transfiguration, the soul's efforts were fully her own yet not her own, but God's.

The two last stanzas of *Living Flame* deal with the joy of the soul at one with God; with the self paradoxically at one with the other, and thus both lost (absent) and more fully itself. The mood is one of calm and quiet, and the previous experience of the "dark night" and sensual attachment ("que estaba obscuro y ciego," ["that was dark and blind"]) now a distant memory (*Poesía completa* 17). Internal contradictions and conflicts of the soul have indeed "resolved" in the Godhead, yet without altering the contradictory structure of the poetic utterance. Following the work's underlying theme, and its explicit linguistic act, of transformation, the personified "living flame" is finally experienced as a "beloved" (*querido*) who is seen less as "tenderly wounding" than as gently loving and joining himself in love: "¡cuán delicadamente me enamoras!" (*Poesía completa* 17).

San Juan's *Dark Night* likewise plots an erotic drama. It engages, too, in what I have termed an "analogous" mode of predication that involves the creation of lexical-semantic nonsense as well as a contradictory use of imagery. As R.O Jones was the first to point out (170-171), the action of San Juan's *Dark Night*, comprised of eight stanzas, literally dramatizes a secret, romantic encounter. The female protagonist steals out of her house in the evening for a tryst with her lover (stanzas 1-4). Along the lines of the *Living Flame*, the protagonist's triple apostrophe, in the fifth stanza, leads the reader to infer that the couple give sexual expression to their love in the open air, surrounded by the evening darkness. The remaining three stanzas describe the couple's mutual enjoyment of each other's company at the break of day, and end with a celebration of the principals' isolation from the world, as they remain alone and together on the battlements of a fortress.

The common understanding of the poem's figurative sense coincides with that of Margaret Wilson, who asserts, in her fine reading of the work, that what these verses "celebrate is in mystical terms the night of the senses" (48). Nonetheless, without disputing the validity of Wilson's other insights, I would suggest that this poem traces San Juan's complete, fourfold itinerary of a soul's journey into intimacy with God, and that the title refers to the "night" of both the senses and the spirit.

In specific terms, the image of darkness functions as an allegory of the night of the senses when, at the start of the poem, the female protagonist descends the staircase from her "house," which is in turn an allegory of the body as well as its sensual powers and appetites. As the girl goes forth to meet her lover, so the soul goes forth to meet God, its betrothed. The

darkness through which the poetic subject passes, in stanzas 2-4, would thus cause the evening blackness to stand, at this point of the poem, for the night of the soul. The inner light which guides the protagonist in her search points to both the "light" of faith (appealing to the intellect) and the "flame" of love (appealing to the will). Such imagery reinforces the degree to which the night of the soul forms part of the "illuminative way." Following the implicit act of consummation (stanza 5), night gives way to dawn, and darkness to an abundance of brightness and visual and tactile imagery, in the remaining three stanzas. This sudden shift in atmosphere and setting--which includes the soul's unexplained transport to the battlements--serves to signify the divinized soul's new power to apprehend both God and creatures in an act of what I have called erotic intellection, which enlarges the soul's formerly natural powers of cognition and volition to an infinite degree.

Furthermore, the poem's chief images are fraught with a logic and semantics of contradiction and commonly serve two contrary purposes at the same time. The "escala" (either "staircase" or "ladder") which leads, in the first stanza, from the protagonist's house, operates at once as a means of descent and ascent (*Poesía completa* 3). For to descend from the allegorical "house," a figure of corporeal nature, is to ascend the *scala perfectionis*. The same ladder or staircase, which leads the protagonist down from the house in the darkness, also leads her, unawares, up to the battlements. Further, like the protagonist's house, which she leaves behind in order to live in her lover's castle, the body is both affirmed and negated as the soul's true "home."

In the final two verses of the third stanza, the protagonist claims to go forth "without any other light and guide/but the one which blazed in my heart" (*sin otra luz y guía/sino la que en el corazón ardía*) (*Poesía completa* 3). In a similar vein, the fourth stanza informs us as follows: "that [light] guided me/more certain than the light of the noonday" (*Aquésta me guiaba/ más cierto que la luz del mediodía*) (*Poesía completa* 3). And yet, the first of the three apostrophes in the fifth stanza exclaims "Oh night which *guided* [me]!" (*¡Oh noche que guiaste!*) (*Poesía completa* 3) (emphasis added). "Night" and "light" are, therefore, two contradictory names for the same "guide." From this, the reader infers that it means the same thing to claim that either the "light" or the "night" is what brought the lovers together. In the nonsense logic which permeates this series of images, the two were joined under the light which is darkness and the brightness of the night. Consequently, the darkest of the two dark nights is identical to the "light" of faith, which is also the "blaze" of the soul's erotic yearning for its divine Beloved¹¹.

Moreover, it is this contradictory, luminous night of the *soul*, "more lovable than the dawn" (*¡Oh noche amable más que el alborada !*), which reveals supernatural powers of transfiguration in three of San Juan's most arresting verses, which make up the fifth stanza's final apostrophe:

Oh noche que juntaste
Amado con amada,
amada en el Amado transformada!

(Oh night which joined/the man with the woman lover,/the woman lover into the man is the woman lover transformed!) (*Poesía completa* 3).

The transformative nonsense and ingenious paradox of these verses, which I have futilely tried to capture through an analogous wordplay in English, arises primarily from three features. The first centers on the nouns "amado" ("man lover") and "amada" ("woman lover"), and on the adjective "transformada," which is feminine in gender. The second involves San Juan's inventive repetition of the phonemes /a/ and /o/, represented by their corresponding letters, which Spanish uses to designate, respectively, the feminine or masculine gender of both nouns and adjectives:*amado con amada/amada en el amado transformada*. The third feature is the trope of chiasmus which obtains between the nouns of those two verses: 45

amado con amada

amada en el amado transformada.

As already discussed in connection with *Living Flame*, the "feminine" soul and the "masculine" deity are neither male nor female--or only allegorically male and female--in San Juan's mystical verse. In this poem, however, the transfigurative agency of the "dark night" works both to maintain and obliterate the distinction between what is already the seemingly nonsensical, non-female femininity of the soul and the non-male masculinity of the Godhead. 46

This contradictory, or "eminently" logical, process of transfiguration is perhaps most conspicuous in the last line of the passage just cited. When the "amada" is transformed "into the amado," both phonemically and lexically ("amada en el amado"), *she* becomes masculine by becoming the "amado." She also becomes herself by becoming, even in the gender of "her" new designation, her counterpart. But the final word of the poem's apostrophic verses is the feminine adjective "transformada," which refers to the "amada" who has since become the "amado." The lexeme "transformada" thus performs a doubly transformative function, transforming its first transformation, or feminizing its previous masculinization. At the phonemic level of both internal and final rhyme, the poem provides an analogy of how the presumptively female protagonist, allegory of the poet's soul, remains or becomes more fully herself by becoming the other, and remains "eminently" feminine in her designation at the very moment when she attains masculinity. 47

Moreover, through the trope of chiasmus in these two verses, God and the soul--the "man and woman lover"--appear in reverse order, which is closely analogous to their changing places. Phrased another way, they stand in the successive verses as each other's equivalents and surrogates. 48

So, like the distinction between their genders, the distinction between the nature of God and that of the soul is simultaneously affirmed and denied by means of the poem's syntactical and spatial arrangements.

In the final stanza of *Dark Night*, San Juan concludes his erotic plot of self-transformation, or "eminent" self-affirmation through self-negation. The stanza's atmosphere is one of passive quiescence, and its first word is the polyvalent "Quedéme" (*Poesía completa* 4). Although this expression customarily signifies either "I remained" or "I remained still," it may also signify, in the poem's semantic context of spiritual metamorphosis, "I remained who I am." Reinforcing the atmosphere of passiveness and tranquility, this three-word verse ends with "olvidéme" ("I forget myself"), preceded by "y" ("and") (*Poesía completa* 4). The emphasis on self comes to the fore through the reflexive pronoun, "-me," affixed to the verse's only two verbs. 49

Now, if there is nothing unusual about a person's remaining both still and self-forgetful, it is surely a paradox for the verse to imply that the protagonist/soul remains, and is, most fully "herself" when she forgets herself. And, unlike "quedéme," "olvidéme" represents an uncommon expression that commands special attention from the reader. What is more, "to forget" (*olvidar*) is one of only two verbs that appear in the final stanza more than once, and both those verbs complement each other in their meaning. The other verb is "dejar," which can mean either "to abandon" or "to leave behind." This verb's first appearance in the stanza is likewise in the preterite form of the first person reflexive: "dejéme" ("I abandoned myself" or "I left myself behind"). As San Juan writes, in the poem's last three verses: 50

cesó todo, y *dejéme*,
dejando mi cuidado
entre las azucenas olvidado

(Everything ceased, and I *abandoned* myself./*abandoning* my
cares/among the lilies *forgotten*) (*Poesía completa* 4)(emphasis
added)

Through this repetition of verbs and reflexives, the stanza clearly equates forgetting and abandoning one's cares with forgetting and abandoning one's sense of self. But it seems important to bear in mind that the verses themselves constitute an act of remembering and of bringing both that self and those cares to the fore. In light of what they say and what they *do*, these verses produce a paradoxical blend of forgetting and remembering, abandoning and retaining. In negating "cares" and self, the poem affirms them. 51

But, once again, one can resolve the paradox without altering the contradictory *form* of the utterance, and without the opposites' canceling each other out. One can assert, in apparently nonsensical terms, that both the cares and the self have undergone a transfiguration, in keeping with the transfiguration of the soul, as represented by the protagonist. If the soul forgets, or no longer *feels* worldly concerns and attachments as "cares," the 52

soul does feel compelled to remember and retain their designation as such. The simulated voice of the personified soul here *affirms* what finite objects, as "cares," suggest and *promise*. At the same time, and through the same words, the voice also *negates* what those objects *deliver* in the *form* of understanding and delight, as apprehended by the finite powers of mind and will. As allegorized by the night which yields to the dawn, and by the erotic union between the protagonist and her beloved, our poem dramatizes how a mystic soul comes to "know" finite percepts, concepts and objects of desire in a transcendent "light," linked to an infinite sympathy, intimacy and "care." In Eliot's famous line, the soul has learned "to care and not to care." And in typically mystical fashion, the soul no longer knows God in creatures, but creatures in God; the finite in the infinite. Such a soul, like the voice of the female lover in *Dark Night*, draws on the normative categories of human discourse, negating their limitations, in an effort to predicate by way of analogy and allegory--to translate into the finite *sensibilia* of language what the soul "knows" in a manner which infinitely exceeds the categories of human thought, volition and expression.

Moreover, San Juan's verses also imply that the creation of both his mystical poetry and his mystic *self* represent inseparable acts of what his *Dark Night* exemplifies as affirming and negating, abandoning and retaining, remembering and forgetting. In particular, the *projects* of both his mystic self and his mystical verses derive from an analogous poetics: that is, a principled view concerning the nature, aim and practice of creative endeavor. As exemplified in the allegorical image of his own soul, and in the plotting of that soul's erotic union with God, San Juan's persona and his poetry are at once deeds and works of transfigurative discourse. And if it is true that San Juan's mystic self remains integral to the creation of his mystical verse, his mystical verse remains integral to the creation, and the work, of his mystic self. In conformity with his unique poetics of self-creation, San Juan's person and his poetry share the need to pass through "dark nights" of both a sensible and intellectual kind before playing their roles as "eminent" signifiers of an infinite signified. For the texts of San Juan's mystical poetry, like the *texts* of his mystic persona and of his poetic subject, seek the same contradictory end: to express the ineffable, exemplify the trans-historical and give shape to the infinite. They can achieve that end only to the degree that they alternately remember and forget the imperative to make sense, and to manifest their limits, or their contingency, as forms.

53

Footntes

1. The groundbreaking study on San Juan's borrowings from Garcilaso and Boscán, and from de Córdoba's *contrafaca* of these two poets' works, is that of Dámaso Alonso (24-77). The best known attempt to refute many of Alonso's assessments on this subject is "The Alleged Debts of San Juan de la Cruz to Boscán and Garcilaso" by Peers. A brief summary of criticism, and controversy, regarding the chief sources of San Juan's poetry is found in Wilson (13-15). Wardropper's investigation on the lyric of sacred parody in the West deals comprehensively with the place which Spain's *a lo divino* verse occupies within that poetic tradition. Orozco (83-114) and

Camón Aznar (34- 40) discuss the likely connection between San Juan's poetry and songs, both secular and religious, in the Spanish Renaissance, as well as the likelihood that some of San Juan's poetry was sung to instrumental accompaniment.

2. Standard biographical accounts include the works of Baruzi (69-228) and Brenan. A short, reliable introduction to San Juan's doctrine and the relevant historical background of Spain is found in Gicovate (1 1-86).

3. Susan Stewart draws on myriad examples from literature and folklore in her theoretical discussion of how human beings use discourse to make sense and nonsense, and to make each out of the other. She relates the semantics of nonsense implicitly to the logic of contradiction, and explicitly to the trope of paradox, in her concluding chapter (206-209). Though she does not use the term, Stewart's investigation also examines the "pragmatic" dimension of using nonsense to manufacture what she repeatedly calls a "lifeworld" in which human beings can communicate meaning, and challenge the imperative to communicate meaning, in accord with the presumptive normalcy of accepted convention.

4. The terms "divine silence" and "divine darkness" trace their origin, respectively, to the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. On the first term, see Cotrell (ix); and on the second, see Copleston (*History of Philosophy* 2:95).

5. Copleston provides a fine summary of Pseudo-Dionysius's thought (*History of Philosophy* 2:91-100). An excellent study that relates the work of this pseudonymous theologian to the teachings of Sts. Paul, Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, and to his influence on other mystical writers in the West, is that of Knowles ("The Influence of Pseudo-Dionysius"). A recent study on Dionysius, by Rorem, incorporates more recent scholarship into its treatment of that author's "uplifting spirituality." Tavar devotes a historically-oriented chapter of his book on San Juan's verses to our poet's language of contraries and contradiction, in reference to the traditions of Scholasticism and the *via negativa* (75-91). More briefly, Elizabeth Davis discusses the relation between Dionysian legacy of negative theology and paradox in the poetic works of San Juan at the beginning of her study on "Cántico espiritual" (203-7).

6. Happold draws attention to the standard distinction between "nature-mysticism," "soul-mysticism" and "God-mysticism," insisting that they often overlap (43-45). San Juan's mystical verses, though not all his religious verses, belong to Happold's second type.

7. Hatzfeld provides an insightful comparison of this poem by San Juan with a poem based on the same *estribillo* by Saint Teresa de Avila (203-52). R.O. Jones provides an informed and sensitive synopsis of the imagery, lexicon and rhetorical devices that characterized traditional Spanish lyric (i.e., lyric before the Italianate reforms of Boscán and Garcilaso) (56-63).

8.Besides Happold's elegant summary (56-57), other important discussions of Christian mysticism's three phases include the theoretical and practical guide by Tanqueray, as well as the long treatise by Garrigou-Lagrange, which systematizes San Juan's rather diffuse doctrine in order to explore those three phases in rigorous detail.

9.San Juan cites Saint Bernard's doctrines explicitly in the nineteenth chapter of his commentary on the *Dark Night (Poesía completa 138-141)*.

10. A Benedictine from Stanbrook Abbey points out that "'The Glorious Doctor, Saint Bonaventure' is singled out for special study in the *Instruction for Novices*, signed by St. John of the Cross, as Consultor, on January 11, 1590, the only other writers mentioned by name being St. Teresa and the Dominican, Fr. Luis de Granada" (56). Using terms that we may just as readily apply to San Juan, Cousins analyzes what he judges to be the "linguistic theology" of St. Bonaventure in "St. Bonaventure's Mysticism of Language" (236-57). Furthermore, besides the influence of the German and Flemish mystics, who were clear followers of Bonaventure, Hatzfeld detects echoes of the Franciscan Raymond Lull in the diction and symbolism of both San Juan and Saint Teresa (33- 143). A Benedictine from Stanbrook Abbey likewise traces the debt of San Juan to his German and Flemish predecessors, and to a host of writings, collectively dubbed "Pseudo-Bonaventure," since they were falsely attributed to that Franciscan contemporary of Aquinas (86-134). Haas provides an overview of the principal schools of spirituality in the Middle Ages.

11.Mancho Duque wrote the most comprehensive study on the symbol of the night in San Juan's writings. Published before the study by Mancho Duque, Wilson's reading of *Dark Night* incorporates a succinct discussion of earlier critical opinions on the same subject (47-48).

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"Aquel Señor Moteczuma": La construcción literaria del Otro en las crónicas mesoamericanas

Silvia Nagy-Zekmi

State University of New York at Albany

Pues allí en Huitzillan les sale al encuentro Motecuzoma. Luego hace dones al capitán, al que rige la gente y a los que vienen a guerrear. Los regala con dones, les pone flores en el cuello, les da collares de flores y sartanales de flores para cruzarse el pecho, les pene en la cabeza guirnaldas de flores. (Informantes de Sahagún, Códice Florentino, Libro XII, Cap. XVI.) 1

Ya que llegábamos cerca de Méjico, adonde estaban otras torrecillas, se apeó el gran Montezuma en andas, y trayéndole del brazo aquellos grandes caciques debajo de un palio muy riquísimo a maravilla, y la color de plumas verdes con grandes labores de oro, con mucha argentería y perlas... que hobo mucho que mirar en ello. (Bernal Díaz 180) 2

Pasada esta puente, nos salió a recibir aquel señor Moteczuma con fasta doscientos señores, todos descalzos y vestidos de otra librea o manera de ropas, asimismo bien rica a su uso... y venían en dos procesiones, muy arrimados a las paredes de la calle, que es muy ancha y muy hermosa y derecha... y el dicho Moteczuma venía por medio de la calle... (Cortés 61) 3

Así relatan los Informantes de Sahagún, Bernal Díaz de Castillo y Hernán Cortés el momento en que éste último y Moctezuma¹ entran en contacto por primera vez, aquel gran encuentro que, en realidad fue un "desencuentro"² por varias razones. Los textos arriba citados parecen referirse a tres sucesos totalmente diferentes. Mi propósito no es argüir cuál de las descripciones es más verosímil, sino que me interesa la perspectiva de cada una de las fuentes, porque fue la que influyó en la recepción coetánea de estos textos y en la idea de los destinatarios (en los tres casos muy diferentes) sobre lo narrado. 4

Todorov, en *La conquista de América*, opina sobre esta influencia:

Un hecho pudo no haber ocurrido, contrariamente a lo que afirma un cronista determinado. Pero el que éste haya podido afirmarlo, que haya podido contar con que sería aceptado por el público contemporáneo, es algo por lo menos tan revelador como la simple ocurrencia de un acontecimiento. (60) 5

De cualquier manera, esas primeras "invenciones de América" (O'Gorman) marcaron toda su historia desde la conquista y sus residuos continúan hasta hoy. La narrativa, como modalidad discursiva es el vehículo que transmite el registro histórico tanto de los pueblos europeos, como de pueblos de otra tradición pictográfica. En nuestro caso a considerar, la narrativa es directamente escrita por el autor (Bernal Díaz, Cortés), o bien, es narrativa mediada como en el Códice Florentino, en el cual la narración se lleva al cabo por "informantes" y el registro por Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. Lo que es de importancia aquí es la diferencia que se manifiesta en los textos narrados por europeos y los de los amerindios con respecto al histórico encuentro. Hayden White opina: 6

[T]he fact that narrative is a mode of discourse common to both 'historical' and 'non-historical' cultures and it predominates in both mythic and fictional discourses makes it suspect as a manner of speaking about 'real' events. (57) 7

El encuentro entre Moctezuma y Cortés fue, en efecto, un evento real, y por esta razón no pongo incapié 8
en la cuestión de la veridicción de las fuentes, sino que enfocaré mi estudio acerca de la representación
del Otro en los tres textos arriba citados. Creo que este enfoque responde a una observación hecha por
Michel de Certeau en *L'écriture de l'histoire* de acuerdo al cual, la etnografía (europea) moderna se basa
en la disyuntiva entre el sujeto europeo, capaz de introspección, autorreflexión e interpretación
histórica, y el Otro indígena, el mero objeto de estudio, ya que los europeos creían que el indígena no
poseía ni conocimiento histórico ni entendimiento de su propia historia. Durante el proceso de
colonización dos oposiciones semánticas intervienen para definir la identidad específica de cada
cultura: dentro/fuera, por lo que se refiere a las categorías espaciales y la definición del territorio y
nosotros/ellos por lo que se refiere a las categorías de la identidad cultural. Emanuele Amodio añade
otro elemento al proceso de la construcción del Otro que, según él, permite la identificación de una
"alteridad cercana" (ustedes) y una "alteridad lejana" (ellos). De manera que la identidad cultural sería
el resultado de una doble oposición entre el nosotros/ustedes, por un lado, y el nosotros/ellos, por el otro
(17). Dado el hecho que Cortés y su empresa colonizadora representaba las intenciones del rey Carlos
V, esta doble oposición tiene mucho sentido.

Al leer estos tres fragmentos, comprobamos que no sólo el contenido, sino también el tono de los 9
relatos es muy diferente. Recordemos que, con las palabras de Edward Said, "territory and possessions
are at stake" (7). No obstante, el enunciatario, la persona del autor es un elemento clave que determina
tanto la selección de los hechos narrados como el tono del discurso. Surge la pregunta: ¿en qué medida
la selección de hechos y el tono de la narración se ven afectados por la percepción que los autores
tienen del Otro? De acuerdo a Wlad Godzich,

This other, which forces discourses to take the meandering appearance that they have, is not 10
a magical or a tanscendental entity; it is the discourse's mode of relation to its own
historicity in the momentum of its utterance. (XX)

En los textos considerados, en efecto, aparecen ejemplos a lo que Godzich llama "a meandering 11
appearance of a discourse" y se perciben las huellas de un desencuentro cultural en un episodio que,
paradójicamente, es un encuentro y un hito en la historia de la conquista: la primera reunión de
Moctezuma con Cortés.

Concentré mi investigación en la 2a "Carta de relación" de Cortés a Carlos V, particularmente en los 12
capítulos titulados: "La angustia de Mutezuma y del pueblo en general", "El encuentro de Cortés y
Mutezuma", en la descripción del encuentro por los informantes de Sahagún, y tres capítulos de *La
Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de Nueva España* de Bernal Díaz de Castillo.

Volviendo a las citas iniciales, podemos advertir el tono épico y teñido de lirismo del texto de los 13
informantes (idígenas) de Sahagún quienes relatan la epopeya de su pueblo y tratan de recuperar la
palabra y presentar la versión "de los vencidos."³ Para ellos es importante destacar su hospitalidad
posteriormente traicionada por los españoles. En cambio, Bernal Díaz, quien escribe su crónica a
manera de vindicación personal además de producir sus memorias y un relato de costumbres, busca
siempre maravillar al destinatario y se esmera en detallar aquello que produzca esta reacción.
Finalmente, el texto de Cortés es el informe inmediato del estratega y conquistador a sus superiores, en
este caso, a Carlos V. Vemos en la cita la atención que Cortés presta a la topografía del lugar y a los
rangos de quienes vienen a su encuentro, así como a su disposición en el terreno. También se cuida de
mencionar aquellos elementos de interés económico para el rey: riqueza de las vestiduras, hermosura de
la calle y la ciudad. Con respecto a su representación de Moctezuma, nos recuerda Hugh Thomas (280-
281) el hecho que Cortés escribió esa (2a) carta diez meses más tarde, cuando ya se sabría el resultado
de la guerra y México habría de quedar conquistado. Por eso no es por demás concluir, que las Cartas
de relación manifiestan las aspiraciones personales de Cortés como fiel vasallo, como gran estratega
militar y como historiador. Tal como lo comenta Margarita Levisi: "Un historiador revela lo que es y lo
que piensa a través de sus estrategias e intereses." (19)

Como lo expresé anteriormente, mi propósito es detectar cuál es en estos breves fragmentos la 14
percepción del Otro. Podría aventurar como tesis inicial que, para los informantes, el Otro es el

vencedor y objeto de oprobio; para Cortés, es el objeto a conquistar, y para Bernal Díaz el objeto de admiración, admiración que subsecuentemente se transfiere a su propia persona, por haber participado en la conquista de este objeto. Utilizo intencionalmente el término "objeto". El objeto es toda la empresa de la conquista, pero también el Otro que es parte orgánica de aquella empresa. Cuando se dice que una persona es "objeto" de determinados sentimientos, se expresa, en alguna medida, la pasividad del sujeto. Un ejemplo casi exasperante de esta pasividad se da en las Cartas de Relación de Cortés, en las páginas que siguen al fragmento citado arriba, donde relata la prisión de Moctezuma:

E fue tanto el buen tratamiento que yo le hice y el contentamiento que de mi tenía, que algunas veces y muchas, le acometé con su libertad, rogándole que fuese a su casa, y me dijo, todas las veces que se lo decía, que él estaba bien allí... (66) 15

En esta cita se destaca la "domesticación" del Otro. Cortés menciona, como al descuido, la razón política por la cual Moctezuma no se quiere ir: el reproche de sus vasallos por haber cambiado de estrategia con respecto a los conquistadores. El énfasis del texto se da, sin embargo, en la felicidad que experimenta Moctezuma como cautivo de Cortés. Cabe citar las palabras del filósofo francés, Emmanuel Levinas, cuya investigación se centra en la búsqueda de la noción de la verdad, que se opone a la posición dominante e incluye la categoría del Otro:⁴ 16

. . . in my originary encounter I discover my responsibility for the existence of this other, a responsibility that will lie at the root of all my subsequent ethical decisions. . . The responsibility that I then experience is the very ground of my response-ability that is my capacity to communicate with myself in noncoercive ways. (Citado en Godzich XVI) 17

Nos queda claro que la responsabilidad de Cortés no es hacia ese Otro, Moctezuma, sino hacia el rey, quien exigía la conversión del Otro en subalterno. Su capacidad de respuesta o "response-ability" en los términos levinianos resulta, por lo tanto, totalmente anulada. Por lo contrario, en el texto de los Informantes de Sahagún no se manifiesta una actitud similar. Según estos informantes, los españoles habían sido enviados por la divinidad para gobernar y, por lo tanto, Moctezuma asume una responsabilidad por su existencia. Encontramos en el texto de los Informantes de Sahagún muchas evidencias de esa responsabilidad. Moctezuma se preocupa por el bienestar físico de Cortés y su gente: "te has fatigado;", "con gran fatiga, con afán viniste", "ven y descansa", "da refrigerio a tu cuerpo" (Los informantes de Sahagún, citado en León Portilla 36-38). Sin embargo, esta preocupación enfatizada en el texto permite que los informantes destaquen la brutalidad de la respuesta del conquistador ante los ojos del destinatario. Es interesante notar que ni Cortés, ni Bernal Díaz incluyen más que una breve referencia a la preocupación de Moctezuma por el bienestar de los españoles. Por el contrario, ambos textos citan muchas otras expresiones de Moctezuma que los Informantes de Sahagún pasan por alto. Resulta obvio, que para los dos autores españoles estas palabras de Moctezuma son meras expresiones de cortesía, carentes de importancia.⁵ Sin embargo, la preocupación que Moctezuma expresa acerca de la condición humana de Cortés y los españoles es el elemento más relevante que permite detectar el desencuentro cultural bien evidente en estos tres textos. Se debe recordar, sin embargo, lo que advierte Michel de Certeau,

...the written discourse which cites the speech of the other is not, cannot be the discourse of the other. On the contrary, this discourse is writing the Fable that authorizes it, alters it. (78) 19

En ciertos incidentes ambos autores españoles coinciden en citar ciertas palabras de Moctezuma que probablemente sean parte del discurso del Otro; es decir, el discurso y el contexto del discurso es alterado en su interpretación, pero contiene elementos auténticos que ambos autores citan.⁶ Me refiero al momento en que Moctezuma 20

...alzó las vestiduras y me mostró el cuerpo, diciendo a mi: 'Veisme aquí que so de carne y hueso como vos y como cada uno, y que soy mortal y palpable'. (Cortés 62) 21

...lo que agora, señor Malinche, veis: mi cuerpo de hueso y de carne como los vuestros, (Bernal Díaz 185)

Vemos que Bernal Díaz omite la mención del dramático hecho de que Moctezuma se levante las 22

vestiduras y muestre su cuerpo, además de desplazar la cita a un tercer encuentro entre Moctezuma y Cortés. Los informantes de Sahagún no incluyen la referencia anterior, pero sí enfatizan la preocupación del Otro⁷ por la apariencia física de Moctezuma, por la necesidad de verle el rostro, un aspecto que no aparece en ninguno de los textos de los cronistas españoles:

...Por este tiempo también fue cuando ellos (la gente de Castilla), hacían con instancia 23
preguntas tocante a Motecuhzoma: cómo era, si acaso muchacho, si acaso hombre maduro,
si acaso viejo....si tenía cabeza blanca. (citado en León Portilla 35)

...Bien satisfecho está hoy nuestro corazón. Le vemos la cara, lo oímos. Hace ya mucho
tiempo que deseábamos verlo. (39)

En los textos de Cortés y Bernal Díaz, a diferencia de los informantes de Sahagún, no se le da 24
importancia al aspecto físico de Moctezuma, aunque ambos describen con detalle su vestimenta (Bernal
Díaz prácticamente diserta sobre el calzado de Moctezuma), su entorno, sus actitudes, elementos en los
que se destaca su otredad.⁸ El Otro no puede ser humano (pese a lo que diga: "soy de carne y hueso
como vos") y, por lo tanto, no es necesario describir su apariencia física. ¿Por qué entonces Cortés cita
a Moctezuma enfatizando su condición de ser humano, el hecho de ser de carne y hueso, al fin y al
cabo, una condición de igualdad ("como vos")? Godzich nos aclara esta pregunta:

Western thought has always thematized the other as a threat to be reduced, as a potential 25
same-to-be, a yet not same. (XIII)

En los textos analizados nunca aparece este concepto tan claramente ejemplificado como en la cita 26
que Cortés hace de las primeras palabras que Moctezuma le dirigiera:

"Muchos días ha que por nuestras escrituras tenemos de nuestros antepasados noticia que yo 27
ni todos los que en esta tierra habitamos no somos naturales della, sino extranjeros y
venidos a ella de partes muy extrañas..." (61)

Lo que Moctezuma le comunica a Cortés es: 'Nosotros no somos el Otro, el extranjero. Somos como 28
ustedes'. El discurso de Cortés, por otra parte, pone de manifiesto que, a sus ojos, no son como "los
hombres de Castilla". Por lo tanto, la refutación de la igualdad en el discurso cortesiano sienta las bases
del sometimiento de los mexicas. En el marco ideológico en el que se maneja Cortés, la identificación
con el Otro es signo de debilidad. La posición del Otro es la del enemigo. Se ha repetido ad infinitum
que después de la larga Reconquista ha sido más que "conveniente" sustituir un enemigo por el otro,
(indígenas americanos por moros musulmanes musulmanes que eran el Otro por excelencia hasta ese
momento) hecho por el cual los indígenas quedan categorizados como el enemigo. Para confirmar esta
idea, basta recordar que en sus cartas (2, 5) Cortés habla de mezquitas (en vez de templos). En el
discurso de los autores españoles, comenzando por Colón, se encuentran amplias huellas del lenguaje
militar que indica las intenciones bélicas de "la gente de Castilla". Colón escribe lo siguiente a Luis de
Santángel:

Señor: Porque sé que avréis plazer de la grand vitoria que nuestro Señor me ha dado en mi 29
viaje... treinta y tres días pasé a las Indias con la armada, ... donde yo fallé muy muchas
islas pobladas con gente sin número, y d'ellas todas he tomado posesión por sus Altezas,
con pregón y vadera real estendida, y non me fue contradicho. (16) (El destacado es mío.)

Los informantes de Sahagún reproducen un parlamento totalmente distinto, según el cual 30
Moctezuma enumera los reyes que han "conservado" el trono destinado a Cortés de acuerdo a los
presagios. Para Moctezuma, la otredad de Cortés consiste de una superioridad jerárquica establecida por
los dioses. Hay, sin embargo una "response-ability", volviendo a los términos de Levinas, en el hecho
de que ambos hombres pueden verse cara a cara que indica posiciones igualitarias. Justamente, para
evitar esta aparente igualdad, los autores españoles eluden la descripción de los rasgos físicos de los
mexicas en general, y de Moctezuma en particular. Para Cortés el rostro de Moctezuma es irrelevante:
el Otro no tiene rostro. Como lo señala Amodio, el Otro, en cuanto ser individualizado o como grupo
constituye un único complejo con el ambiente geográfico externo. En general, no se da la imagen del
Otro sin contexto ambiental que redunde su sentido -como se hace aquí en las dos citas de pluma

Europea- pero también puede ocurrir al revés.⁹

Para incluir una perspectiva más, creo que es necesario referirme a la iconografía que ha tenido tan extensa existencia en el antiguo México. La práctica de combinar la palabra con la imagen es tan antigua como la escritura misma, cuyos orígenes son pictográficos. (López Baralt 51) 31

En su Historia de los Indios de Nueva España (1541) Motolinía, un sacerdote franciscano describe en detalle "los caracteres y figuras" aplicadas por los aztecas para registrar los eventos que se suman bajo el nombre xiuhtonalmatl, "el libro que cuenta los años" o sea, memoriales. Pese a que la historia (de los aztecas, en este caso) no está escrita con caracteres alfabéticos, Motolinía lo acepta como un documento histórico. Elizabeth Hill Boone alude a la dificultad en categorizar la comunicación mesoamericana, si considerarlo "arte" o "escritura" (i.e. registro de conocimiento). La palabra náhuatl tlacuilolitzli significa tanto "escribir" como "pintar." (3) Volviendo a mi indagación original, i.e. la percepción del Otro, me permito citar lo escrito por Hill Boone con respecto a la condición (i)letrada de los amerindios: 32

We are well aware of the commonly held belief among those scholars and particularly linguists who focus on Europe and Asia that Pre-Columbian cultures did not yet develop "true writing". (El destacado es mío.) We have heard terms such as illiterate [and] nonliterate [...] applied to these peoples. Clearly the term "illiterate," with its meaning of "uneducated," is simply a pejorative misuse of the word. The term "nonliterate" implies that Amerindian cultures lacked something important - that something being writing - and it implies more subtly that this "lack" held them back in some way and caused them to be culturally deficient. (4) 33

Evidentemente, estos prejuicios no son característica exclusiva de los investigadores, antropólogos, etc. de antaño, sino que formaban parte de la mentalidad de Cortés y la de Díaz de Castillo. De acuerdo al gran estudioso de los pueblos mesoamericanos, Miguel León Portilla los nahuas (como los llama él tenían una escritura fonética. 34

Sabemos con certeza que los nahuas desarrollaron un sistema de glifos para representar fonéticamente numerosas sílabas y algunas letras. (la a,e,y,o) Estos glifos fonéticos, silábicos y alfabéticos se derivaban, como sucedió en la escritura de otras culturas, de la representación estilizada de diversos objetos, cuyo nombre comenzaba por el sonido que se pretendía simbolizar. (León Portilla, Los antiguos...60) 35

Aunque no fuera así, recurriendo al dicho "una imagen vale mil palabras" me gustaría detenerme en las ilustraciones del Códice Florentino, que son de valor inigualable para el investigador. Este códice es "indudablemente el más importante de los relatos de la conquista en lengua náhuatl de que disponemos en la actualidad", opina George Baudot (22), pertenece al Libro XII de la Historia General de las cosas de la Nueva España por Fray Bernardino de Sahagún y contiene numerosas ilustraciones que revelan, además de lo que representan, las bases iconográficas de la representación mexicana. La posibilidad hermenéutica de una imagen ocurre en donde la impresión visual se encuentra con la formación verbal del pensamiento. (Boehm 88) La comprensión, como tal, puede realizarse a nivel de imagen y a nivel de lenguaje, estando estos dos en posición de convergencia, aunque en constante oposición. Los análisis hermenéuticos no parecen haber sugerido que la comprensión fuera meramente un proceso lingüístico, más bien siempre reconocieron sus aspectos extra-lingüísticos o ultra-lingüísticos.¹⁰ En el Códice Florentino aparecen varias representaciones de Moctezuma: estando él sólo, acompañado de su adivino, en compañía de sus vasallos o enfrentado a los españoles. Sin la aspiración de decodificar la simbología gráfica de los mexicanos, sugiero que éstos aparecen en la mayoría de los dibujos de tamaño menor que los españoles¹¹ posiblemente por la intimidación que no sólo se manifiesta en las crónicas escritas por los españoles (en el lenguaje de tipo militar y en la consideración del mexicano como enemigo, ab ovo), sino que se sentía entre los mexicanos a causa de los malos presagios.¹² Esta presencia amenazante aparece con claridad en las imágenes del Códice, pues en cada representación de encuentro, los españoles tienen todas sus armas a la mano, en cambio los mexicanos no llevan nada. Es de particular interés el dibujo que registra el encuentro de Cortés con los nobles de Tlaxcala (antes de encontrarse 36

con Moctezuma). Como en el texto (primera cita al comienzo de este trabajo), en el dibujo también se incluye la ofrenda de abundantes regalos a los españoles destacando la recepción amistosa y pacífica con la intención de poner de relieve el contraste con el posterior comportamiento (violento) de los europeos.

El estudio minucioso y comparado de las distintas crónicas de la Conquista, daría infinidad de indicios como éste, que señalan un profundo desencuentro cultural. Es de suma importancia buscar aquellos momentos que sintetizan los conceptos del Otro, las ideas sobre el mundo del Otro y, en fin, las intenciones de los europeos y de los indígenas. Concentrándose en el momento del encuentro histórico entre Moctezuma y Cortés se podría seguir investigando una multitud de elementos que subrayan la paradoja: el llamado encuentro es la sinécdoque del desencuentro de culturas que fue la llamada conquista de América. La investigación no sólo se motivaría por el deseo de resolver desacuerdos sobre lo que sucedió hace siglos, sino - como lo señala Edward Said - también por la influencia que esos eventos en el pasado pueden tener sobre el presente (3).

37

CITAS

1. Opté arbitrariamente por esta versión del nombre de Moctezuma, que parece ser la versión más común.
2. En otro artículo desarrollo el tema del "desencuentro" que se dio, a mi juicio, por la incomunicación entre los europeos y los indígenas, cuyas razones se ven claramente en los propósitos de la Conquista y la subsecuente colonización. Más exactamente, la incomunicación resulta del hecho que los españoles no llegaron al Nuevo Mundo por conocerlo, sino por 1. expandir su imperio, 2. propagar la fe cristiana y 3. enriquecerse y llenar las arcas reales vacías a causa de la Reconquista. (Nagy 3-9)
3. La frase es una alusión al indispensable libro de Miguel de León Portilla.
4. Michael Smith, traductor de *Proper Names* (de Levinas) escribe en el prólogo sobre Levinas: "Combining elements from Heidegger's philosophy of "being-in the-word" and the tradition of Jewish theology. Levinas evolved a new type of ethics, based on a concept of 'the Other'." (iv)
5. Hugh Thomas tampoco parece darle importancia a estas preocupaciones: "Cortés said that Montezuma began with a repetition of the words of welcome usual on formal occasions in Tenochtitlan: 'Our lord, you must be tired, you have experienced fatigue, but you have arrived at your city...' Part of the warmth of Montezuma's welcome derived from the natural good manners for which the Mexica were well known. Indeed, the heart of the very expression already cited ('thou hast endured fatigue') was used on all sorts of occasions. (280-281)
6. Raquel Gutiérrez en su lúcido artículo sobre la veridicción en las crónicas habla de la importancia de los elementos verídicos colocados en un contexto ideológicamente definido. (239-254)
7. Evidentemente, para ellos, el Otro es representado por los "Hombres de Castilla".
8. Hugh Thomas opina que los españoles no admiraron nada de los indígenas en general y Moctezuma en particular que no les fuera familiar: "[N]one of the Castilians would have admired the polisjed stone labret with on it the blue figure of a humming bird which the Emperor wore on his lower lip. Nor would they have approved his large ear-plugs and turquoise nose-ornaments." (279)
9. Este proceso también se da al revés. Véanse, por ejemplo, las historias de niños perdidos en bosques europeos, considerados "monstruos" por haber vivido fuera de la sociedad, fuera de convivencia humana.
10. La posibilidad hermenéutica de una imagen ocurre en donde la impresión visual se encuentra con la

formación verbal del pensamiento. (Boehm 444) La comprensión, como tal, puede realizarse a nivel de imagen y a nivel de lenguaje, estando estos dos en posición de convergencia, aunque en constante oposición. Los análisis hermenéuticos no parecen haber sugerido que la comprensión fuera meramente un proceso lingüístico, más bien siempre reconocieron sus aspectos extra-lingüísticos o ultra-lingüísticos. Derrida en su tan citado *De la grammatologie* ha ido más allá de la idea de Boehm (pese a que *De la grammatologie* es anterior al artículo de Boehm) al decir que la escritura no se relaciona con el lenguaje como una frontera externa, sino que el concepto de la escritura excede y abarca al del lenguaje (*passim*).

11. Evidentemente, es posible que en la realidad los europeos hayan sido de mayor tamaño que los mexicas, como por lo general sucede hoy día.

12. Para un análisis más completo sobre los presagios amerindios con respecto al encuentro violento de culturas véase *Ideas y presagios del descubrimiento de América* compilado por Leopoldo Zea.

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