

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

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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. <sup>1</sup>

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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). <sup>2</sup> As with other mystic writers, San Juan's lyrical subject represents a poetic and linguistic

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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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

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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

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Darkness" as the basis of human thought.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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?

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. 7

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." 8

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 9



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," 10  
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.

By drawing the reader's attention to the human subject's experience of 11  
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.

## 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* 13 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.<sup>6</sup>

The tensions which arise within that soul, who is longing to attain 14 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.<sup>7</sup>

One finds no image of movement--whether of progress or regress--in 15 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:

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 el* 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.

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:

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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": "muéromeporque 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." 20

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).<sup>8</sup> 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.

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:

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. 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*.<sup>9</sup> 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."<sup>10</sup> 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 33



lengthen the present essay, and is best left for a later study.

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 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). 34

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. 35

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 36



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. 37

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). 38

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. 39

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, 40



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. 41

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." 42

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 Beloved<sup>11</sup>. 43

Moreover, it is this contradictory, luminous night of the *soul* , "more 44



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, 47



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.

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. 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. 48

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 51



remembering, abandoning and retaining. In negating "cares" and self, the poem affirms them.

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 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.

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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.

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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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