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Presence, Absence and Divine Vision.

A Comparative Study of the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation is a comparison of the Spanish sixteenth-century text and commentary of the *Cántico espiritual* by Juan de la Cruz with the Sanskrit text *Rāsa Līlā* (*The dance of divine love*), a poetical work derived from the Indian oral tradition between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries, along with Sṛīdhara Svāmi's commentary. The central argument of this dissertation is that it is possible to read the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā* along each other, even when they are not historically or otherwise related, and that this comparison illumines aspects of the texts that are not so obvious outside the comparative frame. Through a strong interdisciplinary dialogue, I reexamine traditional assumptions about contextual circumstances for Spanish Early Modern mystical literature. The notions of absence and presence of the divine introduce the dissertation in order to remind the reader that it is in the transitional space between one and the other where both texts indwell, and the impulse that moves from absent to presence and from presence to absence is precisely the desire to attain the divine vision.

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The writing of this dissertation was marked by the physical loss of my loving friend and first Sanskrit teacher, Pran Popat, and to his memory I write.

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Author's Note

This project rests strongly upon translation in order to bring texts from Spanish and Sanskrit to English speaking readers. For the poem of the *Cántico* I have consulted the translation by Colin Thompson that appears in the Apendix to *The Poet and the Mystic*. For the commentaries by Juan de la Cruz to the *Cántico* I have consulted the translation by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodríguez. For the text of *Rāsa Līlā* I have consulted the translation of Edwin Bryant in *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God*. For the commentaries by Srīdhara Svāmi on *Rāsa Līlā* I have not consulted any translation. I have greatly relied upon the guidance of Meenal Kulkarni to read the *Rāsa Līlā* and the commentaries of Srīdhara Svāmi, as well as any other Sanskrit text cited here. I have ultimately decided to render the translations for what they are, exercises in interpretation. Unless otherwise noted, all quoted translations from Spanish and Sanskrit into English are mine.

Introduction: From Salamanca to Vrindāvan

Words stand in the way, words are a window, we see by seeing through
words, and by seeing through our efforts to treat them as words.
Francis Clooney, *Seeing Through Texts*

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida says that an archive is a commencement where signs gather together. Although the story of this project did not begin in an archive, it is definitely marked by archival moments and a gathering of signs that inflected further desire and, inevitably, some fever.

In the summer of 2006, I attended classes at the Old Library of the University of Salamanca to learn how to read medieval manuscripts. Two blocks away from the library is the Monasterio de San Andrés, where today's San Juan de la Cruz, then Juan de Santo Matía, lived as a novice from 1564 to 1568. I was immersed in the feeling of walking in the same streets and seeing the same walls that Juan de Santo Matía had seen, and I had a last drop of naïve hope to find at least some anecdote from which I could construct the fiction of a relation between Juan de la Cruz and the Sanskrit *Rāsa Līlā*. One afternoon, I asked Don José Rincón, the *archivero mayor* of the library, if there were in those archives any document referring to India. Don José, whose kindness I had won in advance, showed me his big treasure: a facsimile edition of a sixteenth-century enameled Bible that the Jesuit missionaries had prepared with Aztec drawings in order to evangelize the inhabitants of today's Mexico. For Don José, the only possible "India" that could inhabit the shelves of the archives in Salamanca was that of the Western "Indians," the Americas. This event contains multiple levels of interpretation and a

proliferation of signs that are at work in the present research project. Derrida also says that “archive” means commanding or ruling. And thus, the archive of Salamanca guards the traces of a rule that was erected in a great degree thanks to an exercise of comparison. One could argue that the Jesuit missionaries would never have been able to put together an Aztec Christian Bible without engaging the power of resemblances. Their acts of comparison allowed them to come closer to their compared subjects and to create a bridge of communication in the first years of the *Conquista*. Furthermore, comparison also allowed them later on to disarticulate power and create dialogue. Since its archival beginnings, comparison renders itself comprehensible in actions of colonization and decolonization.

The academic atmosphere of Salamanca during the second half of the sixteenth century was particularly marked by comparative enterprises. First, the professor Martín Martínez de Cantalapiedra was, since 1561, in charge of the *Colegio Trilingüe*—founded in 1554—which taught Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic.¹ The documents regarding the *Colegio Trilingüe* are still in the archives and have been scrutinized by scholars like Luce López-Baralt, trying to shed light upon the Oriental mysteries of the poetry of Juan de la Cruz by arguing for a possible encounter of Juan de Santo Matía with the Arabic language. Cantalapiedra’s objective was to create a bridge of comparison between the Latin translation of the Bible to which they had to adhere by command of the Holy Inquisition, and the texts as they had been originally written, including also the Arabic because, as López-Baralt observes, it had been used for the sake of comparison with its

¹ For all these details I am relying on the detailed 2006 study by Luce López-Baralt, “*A zaga de tu huella*”: *La enseñanza de las lenguas semíticas en Salamanca en tiempos de san Juan de la Cruz*.

related Semitic languages (*A zaga* 21). Not surprisingly, Cantalapiedra's comparative project would lead to his juridical processing and incarceration in 1572 (*A zaga* 44).

Closely related to Cantalapiedra's project is the most famous ecclesiastic scandal of the sixteenth century, that of Professor Fray Luis de León, the Augustinian monk and theology professor who occupied the *Cátedra de Santo Tomás* at the Universidad de Salamanca, and who was put into prison for six years and processed in 1572 under the accusation of *judaizante* for having translated the *Song of Songs* from the Hebrew to the Spanish and given it to his cousin, the nun Isabel Osorio. As Colin Thompson has noted, following Saint Jerónimos's notion of the "Hebrew truth," stating that believers should never fall far from the fact that the original word of god had been given in the Hebrew language, Fray Luis de León argued a correspondence between the creation of god by resemblance and the metaphorical power of language (*La lucha de las lenguas* 24). Fray Luis explained the existence of metaphors in language as a result of the resemblance to divine creation. Accordingly, a good exegesis of the divine word was dependent upon its fidelity to the activity of translation:

El que traslada ha desear fiel y cabal y si fuere posible contar las palabras para no dar ni más ni menos dela misma calidad y condición y variedad de significaciones que los originales tienen; sin limitallas asu propio sentido y parecer, para los que leyeren la traducción puedan entender toda la variedad desentidos a a que daa ocasión el original si se leyese y queden libres para escoger lo que mejor dellos les pareçiere.
 ("Prólogo" *Cantar de los cantares* 101)

The one who translates should be faithful and loyal. If possible, he should count the words not to give more or less of the quality, condition and variety of meanings that the originals carried. And he should do this without limiting [the words] to his own sense of similitude, so that those who read the translation can understand the variety of senses that the original would create in them. And in this way, they [the readers] are free to choose which they consider better.

Whether directly exposed or not to Cantalapiedra's *Colegio Trilingüe* or to Luis de León's Spanish translation of the *Song of Songs*, Juan de Santo Matía lived and learned in an environment where the concepts of comparison and translation were topics for ardent debate. When, in 1568, Juan de Santo Matía left the *Colegio de San Andrés de Salamanca* without finishing his courses of theology and changed his name into Juan de la Cruz to follow along with Teresa de Jesús the reformation of the Carmelite Order, he might have carried with him some of this translational and comparative impetus. This is—as far as is known—as much as a researcher can gather from the archives in the Universidad de Salamanca. And this is what I learned there and from the work of scholars like López-Baralt and Thompson, along with the very important lesson that the South Asian subcontinent of India is absent from the shelves of Salamanca and from the archival imagination of Don Pepe Rincón.

I would ask the reader to approach the first chapter of this dissertation, “Mysticism, Orientalism, and Comparison in the Field of Spanish Literature: A Critical Review,” by keeping this first archival event as a background. In Chapter 1, I discuss the work of the scholars that I consider my predecessors in the field of Spanish literature.

Their often brilliant arguments, the revolutionary changes that they undertook within their academic contexts, and the disagreements among themselves have set the basis for this project, even when I frequently depart from their stances. To look at their work is indispensable because my dissertation not only seeks to show the possibility of a conversation among two texts that are unrelated historically or linguistically, but it also calls for a dialogue among disciplines that are not always conversant, even when they share the same buildings in colleges and universities and gather under the same denomination of Humanities.

To initiate the dialogue I begin by selecting two analytical categories that lay at the very foundational questions of this project: mysticism and Orientalism. Such categories play a role in the question that I asked Don Pepe at the Universidad de Salamanca, and in his answer. Don Pepe seemed to still be under the influence of the terror that the most important nineteenth-century Spanish scholar Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo confessed feeling when facing the “Oriental poetry” of the mystic Juan de la Cruz.

Like Menéndez Pelayo, each of the scholars that I discuss here struggled, and some still struggle, with the discursive tools at his or her disposal to understand the work of the mystic writers of Iberia. Conscious that, in their contexts, I would not have asked the kind of questions that I ask today, I point at ways in which their thought can be reconsidered. From the “terror” of Menéndez Pelayo, the mythical images of Iberian mysticism of Edgar Allison Peers, the hillsides of Dámaso Alonso, the national tendencies of mystical languages of Helmut Hatzfeld, the essential mysticism of Angel Cilveti, the incursions into language and origins of Jean Baruzi and Collin Thompson, the comparative Christianizing enterprise of Miguel Asín Palacios, and the methodological

moves from origins to convergences of Luce López-Baralt, I have learned that the field of Spanish literature has carved a path that can now move, in the words of Diana Eck, beyond Orientalism and into the terrain of dialogue (“Dialogue and Method” 140).

The particularities of such movement occupy Chapter 2, “Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Methodology. The Texts and their Contexts.” Here I begin with an anecdote that could be read as a second part of my archival experience in Salamanca. The forests of the Northern Indian town of Vrindāvan, where the Kṛṣṇa of *Rāsa Līlā* spent his childhood, are another kind of archive where a different set of signs gathers together. Modern-day Vrindāvan contains diverse dimensions. The two most obvious are, on one hand, the daily life of a rather eclectic Indian village with quite contrasting social differences, and on the other, the mythical Vrindāvan, the destination of *sadhus*, and the powerful religious presence that makes many of its inhabitants vow to never leave the town during their life time.

I went there in May of 2009, looking for an answer to the reverse of the question that I had asked in Salamanca. It was just that this time I was not looking for a manuscript evidence; I was, rather, looking for a metaphor. I wanted to see if some of Vrindāvan’s landscape would invoke the presence of Juan de la Cruz. Having left this *dhām* (“holy place”) without evidence of success, I did find an answer after returning to my research. I realized that I could see the trees of *Rāsa Līlā* in my imagination when reading the *Cántico espiritual*. This experience echoes the thoughts of the theologian Francis Clooney, the scholar of religion Wendy Doniger, and the scholar of comparative literature David Damrosch when they argue, each within his or her own terms, for the importance of the reader and the task of translation in the project of comparison.

Thinking, along with Doniger, about comparison as a translation between multiple levels of significance, I continue Chapter 2 by stating my position as reader and determining the perspectives from which I, the comparatist, will approach the texts and the commentaries. In the series of sections that I group within the first part of this second chapter, “Lost in Comparison,” I consider the notions of commensurability, incommensurability, resemblance, and resonance, and I “compare” them with the method that Juan de la Cruz himself states in the “Prólogo” to his *Comentarios* to the *Cántico*. I find that Juan de la Cruz’s own approach to the act of writing about the experience of encounter with the divine is in itself a comparison, a comparison that he explains in a manner that “resembles” how contemporary theorists think of the comparison of religious texts. This is not to say that the theoretical response to comparison is a “mystical” response. What I intend in this section is to call the attention to the very idea of comparison across the context of mystical writing and theoretical thinking. Within these terms, I find that Juan de la Cruz already offers an idea of comparison between language and experience that coincides with how comparatists think of comparison between texts that are not historically or linguistically related.

To go into the specifics of comparing mystical texts, I draw upon the work of Frederick Streng and Michael Sells, and their respective notions of the “switch of awareness” and “meaning event.” These notions, I argue, help to relocate the question of comparative mysticism from the context of historicity to the context of language. Mystical texts claim, in manifold ways, to perform through language the experience of an encounter with the divine that the author had. It is in the search for what Bernard

McGinn calls “verbal strategies” that mark the “switch of awareness” (Streng) and the “meaning event” (Sells) that is how mysticism wants to be read and compared.

In the second part of this chapter I discuss specific aspects of the texts, their creation, and their historical and theological contexts. Here I pay special attention to questions of authorship and orality, stressing the oral character of the composition of the *Cántico espiritual*, which I suggest has not been sufficiently noticed. I find that despite the lack of a specific author in *Rāsa Līlā* and the claim of a specific authorship of the *Cántico*, both texts are immersed in the dynamics of oral traditions that have left their traces in the textual configurations. I stress the historical and textual evidences of the participation of the Carmelite cloistered nuns of Beas de Segura—to whose prioress, Ana de Jesús, Juan de la Cruz dedicated the *Cántico* and the *Comentarios*—in the composition of the text and the commentary. Furthermore, I propose that the co-creation of the *Cántico* was part of the very experience of *teología mística* that Juan de la Cruz aimed to teach to the nuns and to describe in the writings, and this aspect becomes more evident in the conversation with *Rāsa Līlā*.

Considering all the above theoretical premises, I explain my method of comparison as text-focused and non-historically framed, although I do not deny the dialogue with history when the comparative reading requires it. I undertake a close reading of the texts separately and then comparatively, looking at specific notions that I did not determine in advance but that were suggested by the very act of reading. The methodological flexibility in this project has been critical, and probably the hardest task has been the unseen one, the work of choosing among the many possibilities of dialogue. A first choice was to keep the *Cántico espiritual* as the text to be looked at from the

perspective of *Rāsa Līlā*, and the next choices were the topics of comparison to which I devote the third and fourth chapters.

Chapter 3 is entitled “Presence, Absence, and Secret Meaning.” Here I perform detailed close readings of both works, first separately and then comparatively, observing how they describe the actions of withdrawal of the divine lover and the female beloved, which is a plural subject in the case of *Rāsa Līlā*; and finally highlighting what I understand as the withdrawal of meaning, where the notion of secrecy is played out by unique linguistic devices.

The notions of absence and presence of the divine introduce this chapter and the entire dissertation in order to remind the reader that it is in the transitional space between one and the other, as in the “referential openness” in the words of Sells, where the mystical event takes place. When reading these texts, the notions of *ausencia* and *presencia*—as their Sanskrit equivalents of *vipralambha* and *sambhoga*—should be thought of not as opposites but as co-dependent realities that create each other, and which together give rise to whatever divine vision can be attained in the diachronic space of language and sense perception. The most important resemblance to be observed in Chapter 3 is that, for both works, the attainment of the presence is never devoid of the feeling of absence, as the absence is never held without presence. The revelation of the desired face of the divine lover occurs always in the transition between absence and presence.

Two other very important notions discussed in this chapter are indwelling and *antardhā*. Indwelling, in the context of the *Cántico*, is a term used by the theologian Edith Stein to explain what Juan de la Cruz in the *Comentarios* calls *transformación de*

amor (“transformation of love”). This *transformación* takes place at the highest degree of union between the person and divine, and it carries a sense of constant transformation that is nonetheless incomplete. On the other hand, the Sanskrit *antardhā* is used to explain the mode of disappearance of Kṛṣṇa. Literally “to place inside,” *antardhā* signals a complicated dynamic of being present, but not visually perceptible. These two notions enter into a provoking comparative dialogue that addresses theological questions from the perspective of literary resonances.

Reading how each text describes the withdrawal of the divine lover, I find some important points of difference along with the resemblances of absence and presence. The most notable is that the directionality of the withdrawals is reversed. While the *Amado* is said to be outside of the textual space from the very beginning of the *Cántico*, Kṛṣṇa seems to hide inside the *Rāsa Līlā*. Consequently, the female beloved and the *gopis* imitate the directionality of the withdrawal of their divine lover, and both texts inscribe the withdrawal of the female characters as a progressive immersion in the love of the divine.

The female characters, whose bodies are marked by the withdrawal of their lover, stand as agents by virtue of their wounded and heated bodies, which enable them to claim an exclusive relationship with the divine and to become theological models in the context of both texts. The last part of the third chapter offers an insight into the places of encounter, at which both texts arrive in a rhetorical movement of secrecy. The secret meaning to which both texts point leads back to the notions of indwelling and *antardhā*, notions that hide the unsaid meaning from the perception of the reader. The *Cántico* veils the meaning by pointing at spatial locations that are hidden from view. The text of *Rāsa*

Līlā contains a conversation between the *gopis* and Kṛṣṇa about the secrecy of meaning, but the answer given only directs both *gopis* and reader to further secret questions. The going outside the textual space—as in the *Cántico*—as well as the going inside the interstices of the texts—as in *Rāsa Līlā*—reveals as a going beyond, and thus both texts perform the hidden in the transition between absence and presence.

The modalities of secrecy are closely related to the dynamics of vision represented in both texts, and this is the topic of the fourth and last chapter, “Seeing.” Here I re-engage with the concepts discussed in the third chapter, as I observe how the poetry and the theology of each text, by itself and in comparison, talk about the experience of divine vision. First, I discuss the notion of divine vision as grace. I point out that for Juan de la Cruz and in agreement with the Dionysian *theologia mystikee*, in Spanish *teología mística* (“mystical theology”), to see is to inhabit a place, to indwell. What the *Amada* of the *Cántico* longs for, I argue, is not to see the divine, but also to be seen by him, to exchange sight and knowledge in an image of what I call “the cohabitation of the eye in the eye.” On the other hand, the central notion of vision in *Rāsa Līlā* is the concept of *darśana*, which evokes a mutual relationship between the person and the deity taking place through visual interaction. Exchanging sight, both texts fulfill an exchange of beauty, and this evidence sheds light upon the esthetic theological project inherent to each work.

Holding the notions of vision as indwelling and *darśana* as mutuality of sight, I further illustrate how the texts refer to the experience of seeing the divine through the creatures of nature. Shepherds, mountains, trees, and forest prove in both texts to be insufficient messengers, which alleviate, but do not cure, the pain of the lover’s absence.

The sensorial contact with nature comes to play an important role in the comparison of both works, as does also the notion of grace as an exchange of beauty. The poetic images of seeing illustrate an even more complicated dynamic when the *Amada* and the *gopis* see the *Amado* and Kṛṣṇa through the creatures of nature. The modalities of vision interact with the modalities of absence and presence, creating an effect of “vision in nonvision,” a notion that Hans Urs von Balthasar proposes in order to talk about the *Cántico*, and which I find useful in the analysis of both works.

The last section of the final chapter is devoted to one of the most commented-on stanzas of the *Cántico espiritual*, where the *Amada* addresses a fountain, asking it to reflect the eyes of her *Amado*, which she claims to have drawn in her inmost self. Analyzing this stanza from the perspective of *darśana* anticipates a reading that resonates with Juan de la Cruz’s theological arguments on the topic of *transformación de amor*. Chapter 4 closes with a reflection on the differences and resemblances that both works hold with respect to the direct vision of the divine. Said by Juan de la Cruz to be imperfect within the realm of language, this divine vision proves attainable only at the intersecting spaces between presence and absence, secret and knowledge, vision and nonvision.

In the conclusion of this dissertation, I re-engage in a more general manner with the question of how each text, individually and comparatively, performs through language the presence of the divine. These dynamics, their areas of commensurability, differences, and the resonances produced from both, shed further light upon the discussions about the nature of mystical literature and the suggestive capacity of language. I also point at different directions in which this discussion could move, and to

the specific aspects that I plan to develop in the near future. As it is now, and returning to the archival event that opened these pages, this dissertation looks to bridge some of the distances that separate the fields of study of religion and Spanish mysticism, the geographical and religious notions of India and Spain, and the archives of Salamanca and the forests of Vrindāvan.

As a task of comparison, I have also undertaken the translation of *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā* into English. All translations from Spanish and Sanskrit into English of these texts and the commentaries are mine. For certain difficult passages I have consulted the previous translation of the *Cántico* into English by Colin Thompson, which appears in the “Appendix” to *The Poet and the Mystic* (1976). In the case of *Rāsa Līlā*, on the other hand, I have used the translation of Book X of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* by Edwin Bryant, *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God* (2003). As a translation decision, I have used the Sanskrit transliteration “Kṛṣṇa,” and not its English version “Krishna” for the name of the divine being in *Rāsa Līlā*.

Before I proceed, I offer one last word on the concepts and structures of this dissertation. Looking for a structure that would be correspondent with my methodology, I have divided up the chapters to orient the reader within the various topics. In the first and second chapters, both of which deal with theoretical notions, methodology, and particularities of the texts within their contexts, the parts and epigraphs are divided according to authors (Chapter 1) and topics (Chapter 2). In the third and fourth chapters, I choose a different structure: the chapters are divided into topics, each of which is marked by a title. Within each topic, I have added sub-topics generally organized in the following order: first, the analysis of the correspondent topic in the *Cántico espiritual*;

second, the analysis of the same topic in *Rāsa Līlā*; and third, the analysis of the topic in comparison. Also as a choice of comparison, I have decided to write the word “god” without an initial capital letter. I find this decision coherent with the comparison between the oneness of the *Cántico* and the “oneness in manyness” of *Rāsa Līlā*.

Likewise, I have chosen to name Juan de la Cruz by his religious name, and not by his canonization name, San Juan de la Cruz. I have made this decision after much consideration, and having tested both choices in many writing exercises. After much debate, I have to agree with María Mercedes Carrión on the difference between the authorial figure and the canonized figure, and I have felt, while I write, that to keep this difference in mind helps me think of Fray Juan de la Cruz as the Carmelite brother and the spiritual teacher of the nuns of Beas de Segura and Granada.²

² María Mercedes Carrión explained in detail this argument for the first time in her *Arquitectura y cuerpo en la figura autorial de Teresa de Jesús* (1994), and has continued expanding it in diverse venues.

Chapter 1

Mysticism, Orientalism, and Comparison in the Field of Spanish Literature:

A Critical Review

The present chapter is a review of the state of the scholarship on Spanish mystical literature and specifically on the work of Juan de la Cruz, scholarship produced in Spain, the rest of Europe, and the United States during the late nineteenth and twentieth century. The objective of this review is to locate my research in the context of the discussion and then—in the Chapter 2—to elaborate on the interdisciplinary theoretical dialogue that constitutes the basis of my comparative methodology. Here I will address questions such as the following: What have been the politics involved in the study of Spanish mysticism? How has the field of mystical literature and Spanish literature been defined? And what are the challenges posed by the contemporary debates on religion and politics to the scholars of Spanish mystical literature? Considering these inquiries, this critical revision will be guided by two analytical categories that prove central to the discussion: mysticism and Orientalism—which I define as Inside and Outside. Observing how these two topics have been directly or indirectly addressed in the discussion of Spanish mystical literature will lead into a reconsideration of the critical mechanisms at play during the last two centuries and into the inquiry as to which new approaches are demanded in the context of twenty-first century discussions on literature, religion, and particularly in the context of comparative endeavors.

One should remember that “mysticism” is a modern term put into use in the seventeenth century, and none of the mystical authors of the sixteenth century use it in

the same way that I do here. However, the association of mysticism and language was already recognized by Sebastián de Covarrubias in his *Tesoro de la lengua española*, the first monolingual Spanish dictionary, published in 1611. Covarrubias defines *místico* in relation to *misterio* (mystery), and “*misterio*” as *cualquiera cosa que está encerrada debaxo de velo, o de hecho, o de palabras, o otras señales* (551) (“anything that is hidden behind a veil, or facts, or words, or other signs”). This image of being behind signs is also present in Juan de la Cruz, as well as in Teresa de Jesús, when they talk about *teología mística*, an expression first found in the writings of the sixth-century Syrian Christian monk known as Dionysius the Areopagite.

Building on Neoplatonic sources and on Origen’s commentary on the Biblical *Song of Songs*, Dionysius was the first one to offer a dialectical understanding primarily in terms of god as Eros (McGinn *Foundations* 167). Dionysius’ image of god as going “out of himself in a complete ecstasy of self-giving because he alone has the ability to remain absolutely within himself” implied that the divine nature was “differentiated in a unified way” (McGinn *Foundations* 169). For Dionysius, the understanding of this “differentiated union” can be explained in different ways by the different schools of theology. He distinguishes between the cataphatic method, which uses the instrument of reason, and the apophatic method of mystical theology, which goes beyond reason (McGinn *Foundations* 163) Dionysius’s choice of the term “mystical”—from the Greek *mustikos*, “hidden, secret”—is the root of what is today known as mysticism and its always-related categories of apophatic and cataphatic, invisible and visible, unsayable and sayable.³

³ Cataphatic, from the Greek *kataphatikos* (Affirmative Speech). Apophatic from the Greek *apophatikos* (Denial of Speech).

This irresolvable tension between what is felt and known and what needs to be said, even if it does not find its way into expression, is repeatedly mentioned by the Spanish mystics and clearly depicted by Juan de la Cruz in the “Prólogo” to his commentaries to the *Cántico espiritual*:

...Porque ¿quién podrá escribir lo que las almas amorosas, donde él mora, hace entender? Y ¿quién podrá manifestar con palabras lo que las hace sentir? Y ¿quién finalmente, lo que las hace desear? Ciertamente, nadie lo puede; cierto, ni ellas mismas (las almas) por quien pasa lo pueden. Porque ésta es la causa porque con figuras, comparaciones y semejanzas, antes rebosan algo de lo que sienten y de la abundancia del espíritu vierten secretos misteriosos, que con razones las declaran. (10)

...Because, who can write what to the amorous souls, where he dwells, he makes understand? And who can manifest with words the experience he makes them feel? And who, finally, what he makes them desire? Certainly, no one can! Certainly! Not even they (the souls) for whom it passes can. And this is the cause of why with figures, comparisons, and resemblances, they let overflow something from which they feel, and from the abundance of the spirit, they pour out mysterious secrets, that with reasons they declare.⁴

This statement, to which I will go back more than once in the pages of this dissertation, is a declaration of the method that Juan de la Cruz conceived for his writing, following the Dionysian principle of mystical theology and also dwelling upon Saint Augustine’s

⁴ For this dissertation, I use the complete works of Juan de la Cruz edited by Luce López Baralt and Eulogio Pacho. Hereafter I will cite the *Cántico* and the *Comentarios* from this edition.

notion of *Visio Dei*. Juan de la Cruz's is a method of comparison between two categories that one could generally group as experience and language. On the side of experience, he mentions the *entender* ("understandings"), *sentir* ("feelings") and *desear* ("desires") acquired in the particular location of the encounter ("*donde él mora*"). On the side of language, he talks about the act of *escribir* ("writing") and *manifestar con palabras* ("manifesting through words") *lo que sienten* ("what they feel") and those *secretos misterios* ("secret mysteries") that the soul attains. The only means that Juan de la Cruz finds to connect the two seemingly opposite sides of his statement is to link one to the other through *figuras, comparaciones y semejanzas* ("figures, comparisons, and resemblances"). He is implicitly comparing not only the experience with the language, but also two moments: the moment of the experience—not grounded in the limitations of time and space—and the moment in which the experience is described—the historical, recognizable moment of the act of writing.

These words of Juan de la Cruz contain all the theoretical problems that have occupied scholars and have framed the actual state of the question in the studies of mysticism, making of it, as Jean-Luc Marion writes, a "saturated phenomenon" (18). Still, the scholars of mysticism seem driven to the intellectual effort of defining the term through an intellectual and imaginative exercise in an attempt that resembles that of the mystics to put into the boundaries of language an experience that, they claim, does not adhere to words and time.⁵

At the very beginning of the twentieth century William James called attention to the historical and natural foundations of every religious phenomenon. In his *The*

⁵ Here I am considering Jeffrey J. Kripal's recent discussions on the mysticism of mystical scholar in his *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom* (2001).

Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), he referred to “mysticism” as a psychological state characterized by four specific marks that the mystic claims: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. For James, the mystic’s achievement is the overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute (419), and it is commonly combined with pathological conditions of the subject. James suggests that there is a lower and a higher mysticism, and he includes under the rubric of mysticism the effects of anesthetics and alcohol along with the religious raptures of Teresa de Jesús and Juan de la Cruz. During the last century, James’s ideas were widely criticized and revised. Still, his claims remain foundational for the discussion on the topic, and this chapter will observe how some European scholars such as Hatzfeld explicitly dialogue with him in his arguments about the nature of Spanish mysticism.

James asserts that one finds the “same recurring note” in the mysticism of Hindus, Neoplatonics, Sufis, and Christians (419). This remark makes him one of the first advocates of the school of *Philosophia Perennia*, whose principle is traditionally described by the phrase of Saint-Martin that all mystics “speak the same language, for they come from the same country” (Cited by Underhill 80). The English writer Evelyn Underhill, whose work is cited by her countryman and the father of English Hispanism Peers, remains one of the most-read authors claimed by the school of *Perennialism*. In her 1911 book *Mysticism*, Underhill contests James’s ideas stating that mysticism is not a peak experience, but a form of “organic life,” and therefore the effects of drugs and mysticism cannot be equated (90). Underhill further argues against James’s definition of mysticism as something passive. For her, mysticism is not passive and theoretical but active and practical; it is not an opinion or a philosophy; and it is not to be identified with

“religious queerness.” Instead, it is “the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love of God” (81). Following these precepts, she defends as a historical fact her idea that mysticism “has found its best map in Christianity” and that the “Christian atmosphere is the one in which the individual mystic has most often been able to develop his genius in a sane and fruitful way” (105). The conviction that Christianity is the environment where authentic mysticism exists is also represented by other scholars like R.C Zaehner and finds echo in the work of most of the Europeans who wrote about the Spanish mystics inside and outside Spain, as can be seen in the cases of the already mentioned Peers, Hatzfeld, and Ángel Cilveti.

The school of *Philosophia Perennia* was strongly criticized by scholars like Steven Katz and Robert Gimello (1978), who argue that there cannot be pure, unmediated mystical experience and that each mystic does not have an experience that he then describes, but only a pre-formed, anticipated experience conditioned by his culture, language, and other factors (26); to this I will refer again in Chapter 2. In the last twenty years, Katz’s statements have been further questioned and the discussion of mysticism has been reframed in relation to the linguistic implications of claiming to say what cannot be said. Scholars such as Frederick Streng and Michael Sells—to whom I will refer in the next chapter—and, in a different fashion, Jean-Luc Marion and Jeffrey Kripal, have undertaken the latest critical reconsideration of the term. However, these contemporary scholars have not yet been—with a specific exception—brought into the discussion of the topic of mysticism in the field of Spanish literature, and with them I intend to dialogue.⁶

⁶ This exception, as I will mention later in this chapter, is the 1998 study *Asedios a lo indecible*, by Luce-López Baralt.

Throughout the following pages, leading to the interdisciplinary conversation, I consider the comprehensive definition of mysticism by Bernard McGinn as re-written in the prologue of the 2008 volume *Mystics*: mysticism is the element within the Christian religion (as well as within other religious traditions) that concerns the preparation for, the attainment of, and the effect of what is described as an immediately conscious “presence” of god (often a presence realized in Absence) (“Preface” viii). Following this definition, the corpus of mystical literature is made up of those texts that describe and perform the processes of preparation for, attainment of, and effects of the conscious encounter with god which they claim.

The “saturated phenomena” in the field of religious studies regarding the category of mysticism finds its analogical effect in the context of Orientalism with the notion of the “eternal temporality,” which Edward Said identifies as meant to create the impression of repetition and force, but with the secondary effect of a diminishing valorization (92). In other words, the emphasis on the intellectual bewilderment and its consequent passive criticism that one observes in many of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century scholars of Spanish mysticism creates an excess of non-referentiality and inaccessibility which ultimately induces the annulment of the mystical text. This attitude was justified by critics such as Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo and Dámaso Alonso by their incapacity to access the experience that the texts claim and their lack of means of judging the literature born from such experience. I find that behind this apparent theological imperative lies the same political agenda that caused the “eternal temporality” of the phenomenon of Orientalism in Spain. If the inaccessibility of mystical literature is justified by virtue of

its theological predicament, then the inaccessibility to the Orient is justified by virtue of a political one.

As José Ángel Valente has rightly noticed, “The association of the religious or the sacred with limiting and threatening determinants of fear is correlated with the historical circumstance of 1942” (“Formas de lectura” 16). The year 1942—when the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Juan de la Cruz was magnificently celebrated—marks the apogee of the Spanish *nacionalcatolicismo* under the rule of Francisco Franco.⁷ This *nacionalcatolicismo*, which still remains a political concern in Spain, especially in relation to the Muslim community, determined the ideology and the language of the academics of the time.⁸ Scholars like Dámaso Alonso, to whom I will soon refer, meant to justify from the intellectual perspective the history that was being constructed by the National-Catholic ideology, an ideology that claimed the absence of the “oriental” in Iberia, especially in relation to the figure of the North African Muslim, from the other side of the Strait of Gibraltar. The consequences of this historical reinvention, which I here call Inside Orientalism, have been widely discussed by Spanish historians such as Américo Castro and writers like Juan Goytisolo and Valente, among others.

⁷ The dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1936-1975) established some of its most relevant features during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), characterized by the theory of the “caudillo” regarding the figure of Franco. The political measures adopted during the years of the war and the early post-war were marked by the ambiguous rhetoric of a triumphant fascism and a National-Catholicism. They were materialized in the creation of a unique political party (the FET—Falange Española Tradicionalista) and the JONS (Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista), as well as in the central role of the militant Catholic Church. These three elements sustained the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

⁸ Two months before the day I wrote this chapter, two Dutch Muslims were expelled from the historical Mosque/Cathedral of Córdoba for intending to perform prayers. This event has generated much controversy about the fear of an Islamic “invasion,” which contradicts the current interreligious dialogues that are taking place about the possibility of allowing both Muslims and Christians to perform religious practices in the building.

In his *Epistolary* with Juan Goytisolo (1997), Américo Castro recognizes the historical obliviousness of Spaniards toward the Orientalism quest, writing, *la verdad es que a este desventurado pueblo nunca le hicieron darse cuenta de quién era, ni de los motivos de haber sido todo como fue* (136) (“The truth is that these unfortunate people were never told who they were, or the reasons why they were who they were”). This unawareness, as Goytisolo points out in his commentaries to the letters, is expressed as the absence of Jewish and Muslims names in the most common references to Peninsular literature:

La literatura castellana era examinada—y desdichadamente lo sigue siendo por algunas cabezas pensantes curiosamente impermeables al lenguaje de los hechos—en función de sus coordenadas latino cristianas, aceptando a lo sumo un pasajero contagio árabe y judío.(13)

The Castilian literature was examined—and unfortunately it is still being examined by some thoughtful heads curiously impermeable to the language of facts—as a function of Latin-Christian coordinates, accepting at most a casual Arabic and Jewish contagion (*contagio*.)

The intellectual exercise of examining Castilian literature as dependent upon Latin Christianity is a manifestation of the phenomenon of Inside Orientalism practiced by national scholars. I call it “Inside” as it concerns the “inside others” (Domínguez 427) and because it is practiced by national subjects. In dialectical relation with this Inside Orientalism there is an Outside Orientalism expressed in the image of the Iberian Peninsula constructed by the rest of Europe as an “other” of the European and expressed by scholars such as Peers, who still constitutes one of the main referents to Spanish

Mysticism for English speakers. This inside / outside dynamic has been well described by César Domínguez:

The relationship of the Iberian Peninsula to orientalist narratives is paradoxical, as its supposed orientalist otherness came from within and without: while the rest of Europe created an orientalist image of the peninsula, the Iberian community used Orientalism as a means to define *internal* others. (439)

While I take the category of Orientalism in the classic definition of Edward Said, as the stage on which the whole East is confined (63), I do not refer exclusively to the Islamic and Jewish questions or to the strenuous characteristics of Islamic Iberia, but to this double paradox of internal and external practices, in a sense of self-confined Spanish Orientalism struggling to be hidden from the eye of the European outsider, who, on the other hand, tends to constantly name it. I will observe that the critical literature on the Spanish mystics is a discursive space where this Inside / Outside Orientalism paradox becomes quite apparent. In the larger context of this dissertation, it is a central concern of mine to propose a method of comparative reading that goes beyond this paradox and promotes an interdisciplinary dialogue.

Along with the intellectual discomfort and the difficulties of definition, both mysticism and Orientalism seem to share the familiarity of the uncanny. In the remainder of this chapter, it will be observed how some important authors refer, literally or by implication, to the mystical and to the Oriental as something about which they and their readers share a common understanding, if also a common fear. Such acknowledgment, as Antonio Machado puts it, carries the vertigo of what is too close to be ignored, but too far to be controlled: *Hombre occidental / Tu miedo al Oriente, ¿es miedo/ A dormir o a*

despertar? (12) (“Western man, your fear of the Orient, is it a fear of sleeping or waking up?”).

Inside Orientalism: Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo and the Terror of the Orient

The reviews of the scholarship on Juan de la Cruz usually start with the lecture given by the renowned Spanish scholar Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo at his induction into the *Real Academia de la Lengua Española* in 1881. The honored academician chose to address the topic of Spanish mysticism, arguing that this would be a subject *simpático a toda alma cristiana y española* (1) (“pleasant to all Christian and Spanish souls”). In his discourse, Menéndez Pelayo refers to Juan de la Cruz’s works with his much-cited declaration of terror: *Confieso que me infunden (las obras) religioso terror al tocarlas* (20) (“I confess that they (the works) instill religious terror when I touch them”). These words fulfilled a double function in the literary criticism of the writing of Juan de la Cruz. Firstly, they placed his name for the first time outside the strict theological context, namely, within the walls of academia and not of a Catholic institution. Secondly, the transference of context carried along the theological attitude of intellectual bewilderment from one space to the other. This “syndrome of terror,” as Valente has named it, is the sign of the adherence to the prevalent religious ideology that defined the language and the attitude with which to talk about the Spanish mystics until the second half of the twentieth century (“Formas de lectura” 19).

Menéndez Pelayo’s declaration of religious terror has been quoted and rephrased so often that it has come to be read out of its original literary context. If placed back within the context of the complete discourse, though, it becomes evident that Menéndez

Pelayo's statement is strongly determined by thoughts about the mystical and the Oriental. At the beginning of his speech, Menéndez Pelayo affirms that *Poesía mística no es sinónimo de poesía cristiana: abarca más y abarca menos* (3) ("Mystical poetry is not synonymous with Christian poetry; it encompasses more and less). To support his statement, Menéndez Pelayo mentions the Spanish Jewish poet Ben Gabirol (Yehudah Ibn Gabirol) as an example of an author who, while not a Christian, is still a mystic. Immediately after this reference, Menéndez Pelayo begins the next paragraph stating that *sólo en el Cristianismo vive perfecta y pura esta poesía* ("only in Christianity does this poetry live perfectly and purely) and continues, *Fuera del Cristo humanado, [...] ¿qué arte, qué poesía sagrada habrá que no sea monstruosa como la de la India o solitaria e infecunda como la de los hebreos de la Edad Media?* (5) ("Beyond the humanized Christ, [...] which art, which sacred poetry could exist that is not monstrous like the Indian or solitary and infertile like that of the Hebrews from the Middle Age?"), among whom was Ibn Gabirol, whom he had just named as an example of the non-exclusive nature of mysticism.

In this and other similar fragments of the discourse, it becomes apparent that Menéndez Pelayo is making an effort to solve the contradiction between his definition of mystical poetry as a "translation in the form of art of all the theologies and philosophies animated by a personal and alive feeling of the poet who sings to his spiritual loves" (2), and his compliance with the religious and political imperative that favored the value of Western Christianity. He attempts, with little methodological success, to solve this inconsistency with the idea of "more or less" mysticism in a text, identifying the "more"

with Christianity and the “less” with everything that it is not Christian and therefore belongs to the domain of the Oriental.⁹

The Indian “monstrosity,” the Hebrew “infertility,” and what he labels as the “excessively refractory nature of the Arabic race” (8), are terms of objection to everything that did not fall under the limits of the constructed post-1492 Imperial Christian Iberia. Along with his representation of the non-Christian as “less,” Menéndez Pelayo displays a radical denial of the literary influence of Arabic and Hebrew authors in Spanish literature. Referring to a previous argument about the influence of a work of the Spanish Jewish author Ben Gabirol on a sixteenth-century novel Menéndez Pelayo states, *¿Cuándo de las tinieblas salió la luz?* (8) (“When, from shadows, did light appear?”). Similarly, when in his historiographical incursions to link the birth of the Spanish nation with the Roman Empire he has no other choice but to point out the traces of the “oriental,” he does so in negative terms. For Menéndez Pelayo, the Oriental had the effect of obscuring the purity of the ancient Romans, a space in which he, many of his contemporaries, and the hegemonic discourse of the *nacionalcatolicismo*, located the birth of the Spanish culture.

However, there is one instance in which Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo uses the word “oriental” to refer to an author that he does, in fact, recognize as Spanish and Catholic; this happens only when speaking about Juan de la Cruz. Right after his declaration of the terror he experiences when reading the writings of Juan de la Cruz, Menéndez Pelayo qualifies his poetry as “oriental,” given its relation with the Hebrew *Song of Songs*, *trasplantada de la cumbre del Carmelo y de los floridos valles de Sión*

⁹ This idea resonates with William James’ later qualification of higher and lower mysticisms. Although the contexts of discussion differ, one can observe in both scholars the tendency to taxonomize the category.

(23) (“transplanted from the tops of the Mount Carmel and the flowered valleys of Zion”). Here, the ground for contradiction expands.

The *Song of Songs* is, as I mentioned in the case of Dionysius’s reliance on Origen’s commentaries, at the very core of the formation of both Christian and Hebrew mysticism, and, McGuinn reminds us, to neglect the Jewish roots of Christian mysticism and to see it as a purely Greek phenomenon is to risk misconstruing an important part of its history (22); but this is not what Menéndez Pelayo intended here. He does recognize the link between Juan de la Cruz’s *Cántico espiritual* and the *Song of Songs*; however, in doing so, he immediately withdraws from inquiry and falls into religious dread, the only path of escape from the gap of terror between the praiseworthy mysticism of Juan de la Cruz and the awe of the Oriental.

The recognition of the *Song of Song*’s influence in the work of the Spanish mystics is even more complicated if one considers that the Council of Trent (1546) maintained the prohibition against the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages; and recalls the famous Inquisitorial case against Fray Luis de León, professor at the University of Salamanca while Juan de la Cruz was a student there, for privately translating the *Song of Songs* into Spanish.¹⁰ Menéndez Pelayo’s contradiction appears then not as a fruit of his own but as an inherited problem between the orientality of the Hebrew canonical texts as part of the Christian canon and the Romanization of Christian Iberia.

¹⁰ The possible contact of Juan de la Cruz (then Juan de Santo Matía) with the Spanish translation of the *Song of Songs* by Fray Luis de León has been investigated by Ángel Custodio Vega (1963) and Luce López Baralt (*A zaga*). For detailed analyses of Fray Luis’s Inquisitorial case and his position as a Hebraist Scholar in the Universidad de Salamanca, see Collin Thompson, Daniel Nahson, and Luis Girón-Negrón.

The work of Juan de la Cruz reveals such contradictions, and, in facing them, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo retreats into a pseudo-theological justification of “religious terror” to avoid an explanation.¹¹ The most important lesson that one can learn today from Menéndez Pelayo’s discourse is that his religious terror might not have been born, as he puts it, from a lack of ability to “judge” the work of Juan de la Cruz, but from a lack of discursive terms and an intellectual setting to do so. Moreover, this deficiency was not solely his own responsibility, but the result of the Inside Orientalist historical narrative that had been imposed in the Peninsula for the sake of political and religious enterprises, a vision that in many aspects contradicted the Outside Orientalist perspective from which the rest of Europe was looking at Spain.

Tectonic Events and Mysticism: Said Forgets Spain

In his 1992 article “Mysticism,” Michel de Certeau notices that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Europe ceased to define itself as Christian, and this represented a crucial moment for the formation of the concept of mysticism as an “experimental knowledge that slowly detached itself from traditional theology or church institutions” (13). The separation of mysticism from Christianity was preceded, de Certeau explains, by the Europeans’ quest for self-definition. Such a process of self-questioning implied a geographical, linguistic, and religious practice of “othering” with respect to the rest of the world. What de Certeau does not consider in this article or in the many references to the Spanish mystics in his *The Mystic Fable* is that the European self-questioning was not

¹¹ In the following paragraphs of his discourse, the scholar mentions the influence of Garcilaso de la Vega, known for bringing the Italian poetic style into Spanish poetics, as one of the sources of Juan de la Cruz.

homogeneous for all of Europe. In fact, in the Iberian Peninsula, the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries marked precisely the opposite of what de Certeau describes. The “tectonic events,” as Gil Anidjar has named them, that determined the entry of Spain into Europe were fueled by the Spanish monarchy’s conscious strategies of becoming a *monarchia universalis*, by the agency of the Holy Office of the Inquisition and by the command of submission, if not of genocide, over all the non-Christian subjects, their religions, languages, and history (“Jewish Mysticism” 125).

Although this is not the place to discuss the many particularities of the process of the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 and of the Muslims in 1609, and the equally-distasteful choice of conversion or persecution, it is important to recount that these were the events that defined the Iberian empire’s image of itself as opposite to the alternative of the great oriental. The “tectonic events” that provoked the Iberian rupture came to reflect in the Inside as much as in the Outside Orientalism. Restating de Certeau’s vision of the formation of the concept of mysticism in Europe, one can affirm that, if the Europeans’ self-critique determined the Western conception of mysticism, Spain certainly traversed a different path.

While Spain was reasserting its Christianity—not ceasing to recognize itself as Christian, as de Certeau assumes—it was doing so in constant tension with its internal others as well as with the otherness that the rest of Europe was pointing out in the Peninsula. The internal others that neither then nor in the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty first centuries were and are coherently accepted by the national discourse were not only those who lived or claimed to have lived in Al-Andalus, but also the people whose

thought, religious practices, or writings were difficult to approach, such as Menéndez Pelayo's description of the work of Juan de la Cruz signals.

De Certeau's omission of Spain's particularities in the process of European self-critique and its participation in the Western conception of the "mystic" resonates with Said's well-known acknowledgement, in the prologue to the Spanish edition of *Orientalism*, that he realized later that Spain was a "notable exception within the context of the general European model whose main features are described in *Orientalism*" (9). Both thinkers, either by simplification or because they paid more attention to the roles played by certain national politics and languages in the creation of models for *Orientalism* and mysticism, chose not to consider at length the particularities of the internal and external orientalist paradigms in one of the westernmost territories of Europe.¹² I propose to interpret this lack of attention to Iberian particularities as a consequence of the way that Europe portrayed Spain in the context of what Domínguez calls the "Isolation of the Iberian peninsula." Domínguez has analyzed how the European narrative enhanced the images of an Oriental Iberia; the "oriental," he argues, is precisely the term used by the rest of Europe to refer to Spain during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and at the same time the term used by Spain to talk about its internal others. This European vision of Iberia as Oriental, which was still prevalent in the

¹² This limitation of the frame of argument has been widely criticized by post-colonial scholars, in the case of Said, as a fall in the essentialist mistake of a stereotyping of the West for the sake of de-stereotyping of the East, as well as for its lack of mention of the Orient for the sake of denouncing *Orientalism* (Varisco). Probably this lack of mention of the Orient is among the reasons for not considering Spain in the coordinates of an orientalist map. The case of de Certeau's omission is not strictly similar since he does rely on examples of Spanish mystics to construct his essential critical work of *The Mystic Fable*. Still, the inaccuracy of his historical references to Juan de la Cruz and other Spanish literary sources, as well as his somehow forceful arguments about the actions of the Spanish mystics, show that de Certeau's focus was in a great measure concentrated in his linguistic project. The work of this renowned theorist would have benefitted from a more serious investigation into the historical circumstances of Spain.

twentieth century, as Domínguez demonstrates, explains to a certain extent de Certeau's detour from the specificities of Iberia as well as Said's "not realization" of Spain's particular situation in the mapping of Orientalism.

Outside Orientalism and Mysticism: Edgar Allison Peers

The Outside Orientalism of the rest of Europe with respect to Iberia was in great part initiated by England since the beginning of the seventeenth century. As discussed in the 2008 collection of essays edited by Anne Cruz, *Material and Symbolic Circulation Between Spain and England*, Spain was "built" as a "racial other" by England and consequently by the rest of Europe during the geographical reorganization that took place after the "discovery" of America in 1492 and during the subsequent re-mapping of the world. After the vanquishing of the *Armada Invencible*, the Spanish Army of Phillip II in 1588, Spain began to be diminished by virtue of its racial difference. As Barbara Fuchs has noticed, the English representations of Spain as "Moorish" or "Turkish" constitute a powerful early form of Orientalism that disregards actual geographic or religious borders to emphasize the alien aspect of England's most powerful enemy (64). David Howarth has also argued in his *The Invention of Spain* that such "invention" took place not only as a political strategy involving the circles of power, but also as an enterprise involving the arts, the literature, and mainly the religious discourse. From a basic lack of understanding about the Peninsula, Howarth affirms, the interest of the British in Spanish religiosity was "morbid, inseparable from the fears men had as to the reappearance of a proscribed faith in Britain" (xi).

Considering these facts, it is not surprising that in 1924, Edgar Allison Peers, founder of English Hispanism, would announce the unveiling of the Spanish mystics to the world, including the Spaniards themselves. As a professor at the University of Liverpool, Peers published his *Spanish Mysticism: A Preliminary Survey* (1924) with the purpose of showing the richness of Spanish mystical literature, which, in his own words, had “not yet been fully realized” even by Spanish people (14). This book was followed by his two-volume *Studies of the Spanish Mystics* in 1930 and by his English translation of the works of Ramón Llull, Juan de la Cruz, and Teresa de Jesús. His biography of Juan de la Cruz, entitled *Spirit of Flame*, was published in New York in 1944; this made Peers the first to introduce this author and the Spanish mystics to American readers.¹³ From this moment on, he became a constant referent in the discussions about Spanish mysticism inside and out of Spain.

In the first paragraph of the first chapter of *Spanish Mysticism*, entitled “Mystical Spain,” Peers observes, “No thoughtful traveler can spend many weeks in Spain without perceiving that mysticism is inborn in its people,” and maintains that this is proved not only by experience, but also by the literary evidence of the works of the mystics compiled in his book (13). The innate character of mysticism in the Spanish character is Peers’s main theme throughout his work. In spite of his references to possible influences, he asserts again and again that the mystical literature appeared in Spain all of a sudden as a

¹³ In 1958, the biography of Juan de la Cruz by Crisógono de Jesús was published in the United States in translation by Kathleen Pond. In the “Foreword,” Pond recognizes Peers as the first one who made available the scholarly work of Saint John of the Cross to the English reader.

spontaneous impulse and that it is, for reasons he does not explain, inherent to its people.¹⁴

In the “Introduction” to a 1997 collection of essays honoring Peers published by Liverpool University, Peers’s academic personality is depicted with the following words: “As well as having a pragmatic cast of mind and a deep sensuality, he held strong religious convictions (he was a devout high Anglican and lay preacher) which predisposed him toward the mystical” (Mackenzie 27). Here I want to argue that there is more in Peers’s thinking than a “predisposition toward the mystical and a lack of analyses in favor of a prolific discursive descriptions” (25). In debates that Peers maintained with American and Spanish scholars, the features of Orientalism in his academic practices become quite apparent.

I will briefly refer to two of such debates, the first one with the American scholar Otis H. Green, and the second with the Spaniard Dámaso Alonso. In his article “The Historical Problem of Castilian Mysticism” (1938), Green questions Peers’s affirmation of the “inborn mysticism” of Spaniards. His counterargument is based on the fact that the period of the foundation, growing, flourishing, and decaying of Spanish mysticism can be historically located between the beginning of the sixteenth and the middle of the seventeenth centuries. According to Green, the period of prosperity in the sixteenth century was caused by a combination of three elements: the specific historical conditions during the rule of Phillip II (1556-1598), the Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church, and what he calls the quality of “genius” of the mystics. In his analysis, Green

¹⁴ It is important to notice that in later studies, such as his short article “Contemporary Spain, legend and reality” (3-4), Peers shows a more updated and less Outside Orientalist vision of the social history of Spain.

calls attention to the difference, not mentioned by Peers, between ascetic and mystical literature, and he recognizes that most of the works cited by the English scholar belong to the first group.¹⁵

Theology became, Green asserts, the *ciencia oficial* of sixteenth-century Spain, a rising nation that had made of Catholicism its collective ensign (12). With this affirmation, Green is commenting upon the sixteenth-century national agenda which Peers does not mention; however, Green does not go further on this issue. In conclusion, he adheres to the thought that the ultimate reason for the prominence of mystical theology in sixteenth-century Spain was “the influence of a few outstanding personalities whose genius was able to impress itself upon the age” (51). But his insistence on such a “genius” is a perspective as subjective as the “innate mysticism” of Peers, and it does not give a satisfactory answer to the “historical problem of Castilian mysticism” that he aimed at.

Not surprisingly, in Peers’s response to Green, “Notes on the Historical Problem of Castilian Mysticism” (1942), the British professor agrees with the American’s argument about the “genius” of the mystics. This notion of the genius, Peers comments, “lays due stress upon the personal and individual nature of the mystical experience” (29) and does not contradict his own thesis of the “the sudden mystical eruption” in sixteenth-century Spain, asserting again that Spaniards themselves “seldom know much about the sixteenth century in Spain and sometimes have no idea that the phenomena they are

¹⁵ According to Green, the discussions around the “historical problem of Castilian mysticism” can be divided into four arguments: first, the thesis of the German influence; second, the rebirth of the Neoplatonics during the sixteenth century; third, the ideological and theological campaign of the Counter Reformation; and fourth, the individual “genius” of the mystics who found the right historical circumstances to develop.

describing have anything to do with mysticism at all” (20). However, Peers denies every other argument proposed by Green, especially as regards the German traces in Iberian mysticism. Peers affirms that the Spanish scholars mentioned by Green as supporters of the thesis of an importation of German influences into the sixteenth-century Spanish mystical literature were not well enough informed about their own tradition.¹⁶ He, rather, supports the position of the Belgian scholar Pierre Groult, who asserted that the German mystics influenced, but were not imported into, Spanish soil.¹⁷ Above all, Peers insists upon the idyllic mystic landscape, thus stressing his religious statement of difference. Peers’s vision of Spain as a safe haven from the the multitudinous religious denominations of Great Britain and the United States enhances what Howarth calls the morbid interests of English in Spanish religiosity. The devotional imagery represented by Peers had nothing to do with the compulsive historical situation or with the literature produced in Spain while Peers was writing, which was highly concerned with issues of the loss of identity and the constant postposition of rationality in a period that Eduardo Subirats rightly named “Insufficient Illustration.” None of these appears to concern Peers in *Spanish Mysticism*. For him, Spain is endlessly mystic in a way that he does not quite

¹⁶ About this point there is a curious exchange between Green and Peers. Green cites Menéndez Pelayo as one of the defenders of the German thesis, but Peers affirms that Menéndez Pelayo never wrote this. However, this is Peers’s error. Although Menéndez Pelayo generally defended the Italian thesis, in his *Historia de las ideas estéticas* he wrote, *Quien trabaje para la historia de nuestra mística, tendrá pues, que fijar ante todo sus miradas en esta remota época de influencia alemana y de incubación de la escuela española* (124). (Whoever works for the history of our mysticism, will have, first of all, to look at that remote era of German influence in the incubation of the Spanish school).

¹⁷ Secondly, Peers denies the Platonic and Neoplatonic influence as cause of the flowering of mysticism in the sixteenth century, reasoning that that Platonic writings were “long before the Renaissance” and that Neoplatonism was present in the literature of the period, but cannot be considered as a cause. As well, he does not agree with the input of the Counter-Reformation.

explain, ignorant of itself and in need of others to explain its mystical national identity to the rest of the world and to the Spaniards themselves.

Inside and Outside Orientalism in Argument: Peers and Alonso

Also in 1942—the year of the celebration of the fourth centenary of Juan de la Cruz’s birth and the year of Peers’s answer to Green’s argument—the renowned Spanish writer and scholar Dámaso Alonso published *La poesía de San Juan de la Cruz (desde esta ladera)* (*The Poetry of San Juan de la Cruz (From this Side of the Hill)*), a title that would become a canonical topic in Spanish literature. As Valente has named it, *el socorrido tópico de las laderas*, or “the much-repeated topic of the hillside” (*Hermenéutica*, “Introducción” 10), is a proposal to strictly distinguish the theological from the non-theological in the writings of Juan de la Cruz. Alonso announces that he does not want to exclude the wonder (*no excluyo el portento*), but he will not deal with it as long as there is a human explanation (73). He claims to follow a strict method of literary analysis in order to prove the influence of the Spanish poets Garcilaso de la Vega and Juan Boscán on Juan de la Cruz.¹⁸

Alonso’s insistence on the Italian thesis was again refuted by Peers, who published a two-part article in response. Peers puts into question Alonso’s affirmation through a very detailed study of every passage of Garcilaso, Boscán, Córdoba, and Juan

¹⁸ According to Alonso, Juan de la Cruz did not read Garcilaso and Boscán directly, but “without any doubt” was familiar with the divinized poetry of Sebastián de Córdoba, who adapted Garcilaso’s images to the religious Catholic context. Alonso heavily relies in Juan de la Cruz’s reference to a verse of Boscán to affirm that he had in his hands the book of Córdoba and imitated a verse from Córdoba’s poem” (...). This quote, from the endnotes of Alonso’s 1946 edition, is in response to Edgar Allison Peers who, as we have mentioned before, did not agree with the Italian thesis and put into doubt Alonso’s statement. “What other choice,” Alonso continues addressing Peers, “do we have but to think that these verses come from the divinized Garcilaso?”(329).

de la Cruz analyzed by Alonso in 1942. In addition, he reviews the previous arguments of Crisógono de Jesús (1912-14) and José Ángel Valbuena (1942) who, like Alonso, argued about the influence of the poetry of Boscán and Garcilaso or the divinized versions of Sebastián de Córdoba in Juan de la Cruz. Peers affirms that the intentions of some of these critics are “not primarily literary” (“The Alleged Debts” I, 5), although he does not venture to speculate about what, other than the literature, are the reasons for the insistence on the Italian and Romanized influence in the poetry of Juan de la Cruz. In the second part of his essay, Peers concludes that these critics have “tended to assume too much” (II,54) and that the claimed influence should be more accurately understood as a case of reminiscence on topics and figures very familiar to the Spanish lyric with which Juan de la Cruz could have been familiar since his boyhood.

The Alonso / Peers debate offers a different perspective from the Peers / Green debate that had taken place a decade before. In the earlier instance, Peers announces that he ultimately agrees with Green about the idea of the “Spanish genius” as the only tangible detonator of the mystical flowering in the sixteenth century. In the case of the later debate, Peers strongly disagrees with the theories of influence proposed by Spanish scholars and accepts only Ramón Llull to be the Christianized Oriental bridge of Iberia. His view contrasted with Alonso’s effort to prove the exclusive affiliations of Juan de la Cruz with Christian and Latin sources more in tune with the historic project of the politics of the *nacionalcatolicismo*.¹⁹

¹⁹ The topics and contexts of this discussion echo the much better known debate about the origins of Arabic Andalusian poetry, which was taking place at the same time. This debate began in 1948 when Samuel Stern published from Oxford University his “Descubrimiento de las jarchas,” and was refuted by Emilio García Gómez in 1952 with his *Poesía árabigoandaluza*. This academic dispute, with clearly political overtones, was carried on over the last half of the twentieth century. The three different theses defended by scholars have been: the Roman thesis, which claims the Roman origin of the *jarchas* and defends the notion that the *moaxajas* were composed to frame the *jarchas*; the Arabic-Andalusian thesis, suggesting that the

An Outside / Inside Orientalist: Helmut Hatzfeld and the “National Tendencies of Mystical Language”

The German scholar Helmut Hatzfeld presents the particular case of sharing with Peers the theory of “Arabic Christianity” in the figure of Raimundo Llull, at the same time that he proposes the parallelism of poetical images as an evidence of the historical influence of German mystics, especially of the Flemish Jan Van Ruysbroeck, on the Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century. In his *Estudios literarios sobre mística española* (1955), Hatzfeld follows a method similar to the one used by Dámaso Alonso in *La poesía de San Juan de la Cruz (desde esta ladera)* (1942) to argue for the impact of Ruysbroeck’s writings on the Spanish mystics, even though he acknowledges that the first Spanish translations of the Flemish were not published until 1593, two years after the death of Juan de la Cruz and eleven after the death of Teresa de Jesús.²⁰

jarchas were an independent and bilingual genre; and finally the Arabic thesis, which posits on philological grounds the Arabic origin of the *jarchas*. Among the defenders of the Roman thesis, along with Emilio García Gomez, stands Dámaso Alonso, who in his “*Jarchas, cántigas y villancicos*” (1949) makes his well-known affirmation that the *jarchas* are nothing but *simples villancicos conservados prodigiosamente, como en alcohol, dentro de las moaxajas de cultos hebreos* (67) (“simple villancicos prodigiously conserved, as in alcohol, inside the Hebrew *moaxajas*”).

Looking at both debates, about the sources of the mystical literature and the origins of the Arabic-Andalusian poetry, one finds a common denominator in the responses of the Spanish scholars, namely the insistence upon Latin and Christian traces. In the case of the discussion of the *jarchas*, and because of its strong historical implications, there is a more evident denial of the Arabic input; on the other hand, in relation to the origins of the poetry of Juan de la Cruz, one can also observe the insistence on the Latin and Christian claims in the arguments of national scholars and their implicit refusal of dialogue with the voices of the non-Spanish academy. Later critics on the topic such as Federico Corriente (1997)—in the case of the debate on the Arabic Andalusian poetry—and Valente (1995)—in the case of the debate about the sources of Juan de la Cruz—have noticed that the ideologically biased opinion of these previous scholars had a devastating effect on later scholarship. Today one can observe that each side of the debate—the scholars inside and outside Spain—was exercising an implied Orientalism from its particular point of view. On the Spanish side (the inside part of the paradigm) this was done for the sake of emphasizing the non-Oriental sources, thus making the oriental invisible; on the foreign side for the sake of making it evident from the outside.

²⁰ Hatzfeld’s book was published by the publishing house directed by Alonso.

Despite his basic disagreements with Alonso, Hatzfeld strongly asserts that the Spanish mystics *emplearon la lengua, cuya gramática acababa de fijar Nebrija, cuyo rico vocabulario y fraseología pondría de manifiesto Covarrubias, y la utilizaron con espíritu creador para sus propios fines* (20) (“used the language, whose grammar had just been fixed by Nebrija, whose rich vocabulary and phrases Covarrubias would reveal, and used this language with a creative spirit and for their own purpose”). According to Hatzfeld, these were propitious conditions for the birth of a *misticismo clásico, típico y normativo, tanto para el teólogo como para el historiador de la literatura* (17) (“classic, typical and normative mysticism in the eyes of the theologian as well as the student of literature”). With these and similar affirmations, Hatzfeld excludes from his analysis any work written in the Peninsula in a language other than Spanish and at a date prior to 1492, with the sole exception of Lull, whose writings carried a missionary zeal that justifies his presence in the Spanish imagination and in the work of the mystics of the sixteenth century.

Hatzfeld’s ideas, after Alonso’s, were meant to support the politics of the *nacionalcatolicismo* that linked Antonio de Nebrija’s first Castilian *Gramática* and the expulsion of the Jews and, later, the Arabs with the establishment of the Empire:

Como los conquistadores en tierras lejanas, así pretenden los místicos de aquel tiempo descubrir mundos nuevos en el interior del alma por la ruta de ‘ensimismarse’ [...] Las almas de los ascetas clásicos se sienten como castillos iguales a los castillos de Castilla levantados contra los moros; sólo que ahora el castillo del alma (castillo interior) se mantiene alerta y vigilante contra el demonio en vez de contra los moros. (257)

Just like the *conquistadores* in faraway lands, the mystics from that time pretended to discover new worlds in the interior of the souls by the route of *ensimismarse* [...] The souls of the classic ascetics were, like the castles of Castile, raised against the Moors; just that now the castle of the soul (interior castle) is alert and vigilant against the demon instead of against the Moors.²¹

The parallelism suggested by Hatzfeld between the subjects he calls “the Moors” and, on the other hand, “the demons” is quite apparent, as well as the link between the power erected against Muslims (*castillos levantados contra los moros*) and Spanish mysticism (*castillos interiores*). However, the Orientalist views of Hatzfeld are more complicated than his compliance with the political enterprise of the Spanish dictatorship would suggest. If, in one hand, Hatzfeld stresses the identification of the Muslims with the devil, on the other hand he qualifies the mystical practices of Llull and Teresa de Jesús with what he indiscriminately names “a Christian yoga” (51). Hatzfeld affirms that both Llull and Teresa de Jesús adhered to this practice because they used the metaphor of the union to symbolize the encounter of the mystic’s soul with god. Relying on a semantic analogy—Hatzfeld’s own argument that “yoga” and *unión* have the same etymology—he asserts that the poetic images of Llull and Teresa have their foundations in the spiritual practice of “a Christian yoga”—a notion that he fails to explain beyond his etymological assumptions. Hatzfeld’s generalization seems to show not only his implicit identification of the Spanish mystics with something that he could not quite argue, but also his view of “that” as something in the imprecise limits of the Orient and Spain.

²¹ There is not an English equivalent for the term *ensimismar*, which literarily means “to go inside oneself.”

Probably Hatzfeld's most evident contribution to the Outside Orientalist quest was his incursions into historical determinism and psychology to explain what he sought as *tendencias nacionales del lenguaje místico* (146) ("national tendencies of mystical language"). Hatzfeld builds his argument upon the theories of the German philologist Eugen Lerch, who, following the school of idealistic linguistics, analyzed the syntax and vocabulary of Spanish and French languages to conclude that they correspond to the men of fantasy and the men of reason respectively. Taking up these bipolar distinctions, Hatzfeld establishes a difference between *meditación*—the spiritual practice of the French mystics because they are endowed with the national characteristic of reason—and *contemplación*—practiced by the Spaniards because they have the national characteristics of unreason and passion (148). Within such a distinctive frame, Hatzfeld compares the writings of mystics from each country, for example, Teresa de Jesús and Marie de l'Incarnation, seeking to prove that the mystical literature produced by each of them differs according to the national characteristics of rationality or irrationality.²²

Although in his comparisons Hatzfeld seems to morally favor the rationality of the French mystics instead of the Spaniards' lack of control, at the end of his study he concludes that the French do not attain the same deep states of the Spaniards because the latter *expresan directamente su experiencia de la unión mística* (201) ("express directly their experience of mystical union") while the former *prefieren teorizar* ("prefer to theorize"). With this statement, Hatzfeld assumes that the national characteristics of irrationality, passion, and fantasy favor the attainment of higher degrees in the mystical

²² Within this argument, Hatzfeld affirms that one of the features of Spanish mystical literature is the abundance of similes of penetration, while the French were not interested in penetration or immersion, but in a middle thing (*una cosa intermedia*) (183).

practices. Here he disagrees with scholars of religion like William James and Rudolf Otto since the psychological categories that they suggest are defined only in different intellectual capacities, while they miss the intrinsic tendencies of the work of religious art (167).

Hatzfeld's judgment clearly echoes the insistence of Peers on the innate mysticism of the Spanish people. If one analyzes both arguments alongside each other, one observes that the "truth" that Peers says (in 1924) to know by experience is not distant from Hatzfeld's 1955 claims about the national characteristics of Spaniards. In both cases, this Spanish distinctiveness is what the authors identify as the features that favor the flourishing of mysticism in the Iberian land. Both Peers and Hatzfeld construct their arguments in a specific, if also unclearly stated, idea of what mysticism is and what Spain is. The lack of measure and the excessive passion cited by Hatzfeld comes to resonate with Peers's image of a church in the early morning hours, his symbol of the essence of mysticism. Peers and Hatzfeld, each in his intellectual context and time, are examples of the European image of the Iberian Peninsula as a space that needs to be explained away in different terms from the rest of the continent.²³

Internal Orientalism and Essential Mysticism: Ángel Cilveti

A notable switch in the discursive academic strategies on the topic is to be found in 1974, a year before the death of the dictator Francisco Franco and the democratization

²³ This critical comparison also shows how the post-war rearranging of the European continent influenced the coordinates from which the Peninsula was to be explored and compared with. If in 1924 one could talk about an English invention of Spain, during the post-war years the agents of invention posed as Germany and France. Moreover, in both cases is found the constant denominator of the exclusion of non-Spanish and non-Christian factors from what they historically frame as the Spanish Mysticism.

of Spain. In this year Cilveti published *Introducción a la mística española*, the first instance of a study that includes—with important caveats—non-Spaniards and the pre-1492 mystical writers:

Nuestro concepto de mística española abarca no sólo la mística cristiana, sino también la árabe y la judía. La inclusión de éstas se justifica, en primer lugar, por una razón de carácter cultural: la mística del árabe Ibn Arabi y la del judío Abulafia tienen tanto derecho a figurar en el patrimonio cultural español como la filosofía de Averroes y la de Maimónides, que ya figuran en él; pero por su lengua e ideología la mística y la filosofía de estos autores no es tan esencial a la cultura española como la mística de Santa Teresa y la filosofía de Suárez. Por eso damos más importancia a la mística cristiana que a la árabe y la judía.

(9)

Our concept of Spanish mysticism includes not only Christian mysticism, but also the Arabic and the Jewish. The inclusion of these is justified, in the first place, by a cultural reason: the mysticism of Ibn Arabi and of the Jewish Abulafia has as much right to appear in the Spanish cultural patrimony as does the philosophy of Averroes and Maimónides, which are already included. Still, because of their language and ideology, the mysticism and philosophy of these authors is not as essential to the Spanish culture as are the mysticism of Santa Teresa and the philosophy of Suárez. This is the reason why we attribute more importance to the Christian mysticism than to the Arabic and Jewish.

In his necessary clarifying note, Cilveti explains his intention to incorporate the Oriental within the limits of the Peninsula, while at the same time, by virtue of the political imperative shared with his predecessors, he points to Catholicism and Spanish as the religion and the language which are *esenciales* to the *cultura española*. Language and ideology are the aspects that Cilveti uses to discern the mystic and the philosophy of what he calls el *patrimonio cultural español*. According to Cilveti, there is in Iberian mysticism a model of “heroic man,” produced by the Arab, Jewish, and Christian culture; moreover, the works of the Spanish mystics, namely the Christian mystics of the sixteenth century, are the “culmination of these three and the triumph of the spirit” (10). Still, Cilveti’s gesture represents a radical change in the critical tradition that this chapter has dealt with up to now. His goal is to offer the reader a clear and systematic description of the different mystical traditions that have existed in Iberia, and his method unfolds in an effort to balance his predicament of the value of all religious systems with the claimed “essentiality” of Christianity.

In his first chapter, Cilveti undertakes a description of the mystical experience and argues that the predicament of the school of *Philosophia Perennial*—claiming the same divine principle behind every religious experience—is inexact because each mystic describes a god “taken from his particular religious creed” (15). In spite of this critique, Cilveti’s ideas seem to fall in a middle path between *Perennialism* and its critics. Cilveti does not allege a complete identity of the different traditions, as the *perennial* philosophers do, but a resemblance (*semejanza*) of the mystical phenomenon justified on the idea of experience, *la idea común que los une (a las diferentes tradiciones) es la siguiente paradoja: todo es uno, en el sentido de que el uno (Dios, el Amado, Kali) es*

aprehendido en la multiplicidad de las cosas (16) (“the common idea that unifies the different traditions is the following paradox: that all is one, in the sense that the one (God, the Beloved, Kali) is apprehended in the multiplicity of things”). Up to this point, Cilveti seems to be in conversation with scholars like William James and Evelyn Underhill, who claimed that the divine was a common ultimate reality for all mystics. However, he continues, *ahora bien, la identidad admitida por el místico cristiano no es panteísta* (38) (“now, the identity admitted by the Christian is not pantheistic”). For Cilveti the limit of the experiential commonality is the theological quality of the experience.

Here Cilveti seems to be in dialogue with Gershom Scholem, who in his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941)—quoted by Cilveti in his footnotes—maintains that the mystic must speak the language of the tradition in order to be understood at all. Although Cilveti does not distinguish between the traditions that he describes in terms of the language that they use—whether Hebrew, Arabic, or Spanish—he makes a value judgment based on what he understands as the essence of the traditions. Probably Cilveti was also considering the work of R. C. Zaehner (1957), who suggested that different textual descriptions imply different experiences and that, ultimately, the theistic experience is superior to the pantheistic or non-theistic. Just as Zaehner’s—and before him Evelyn Underhill’s—Cilveti’s methodology favors the Christian experience. Moreover, he adopts a Christian terminology to describe the “common characteristics” of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian mystics (16).²⁴ Cilveti’s method, marked by strong

²⁴ Through a set of terms based on scholastic theological principles, Cilveti enumerates series of examples from each religious tradition that fit his Christian-based structure, leaving a prominent place for the Spanish Christian mystics.

theological and political biases, is the first one to address the problem of Inside Orientalism in Iberia through the exercise of literary comparison.

Comparison, Mysticism, and Orientalism: Miguel Asín Palacios and Comparative Philology

The practice of comparative readings of the work of Juan de la Cruz was initiated in strict terms by Miguel Asín Palacios, the most important Hispano-Arabist from the twentieth century, whose work has been read with both extreme caution and admiration. Asín Palacios's scholarship, in the words of María Rosa Menocal, gave rise to one of the more far-reaching schools of revisionist thought about the Arabic question (Review of *Don Miguel Asín Palacios*). Asín Palacios had been a student of Julián Rivera—one of the main defenders of the Romance thesis for Arabic-Andalusian poetry—and was also a Roman Catholic priest and professor of Arabic at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid. He devoted his academic life to proving the influence of early Christianity on Islamic doctrine and thus justifying the presence of Sufi features in the work not only of Juan de la Cruz and Teresa de Jesús, but also of European authors like Dante Alighieri. For Asín Palacios, the Islamic attributes in the poetry of the sixteenth-century mystics had not been inherited from Islamic sources, but from the common source of early Christianity. In his famous work *Islam cristianizado* (1931), Asín Palacios uses philological analyses to prove the *imitación, más o menos consciente, de la doctrina y método de vida del monacato cristiano oriental* (9) (“the more or less conscious imitation of the doctrine and life style of Oriental Christian monasticism”). He also argues that, other than the three Christian dogmas of the trinity, the incarnation, and the divinity of

Jesus, the Sufi or Muslim mystics speak and act “exactly like the Christians mystics” (14). These analogies, Asín Palacios states, are too many and too “typical” to be explained by the identity of religious feeling common to human psychology, but need to be recognized as legitimate influences (9).

Islam cristianizado attempts to demonstrate the “deep Christian character” of the spirituality of the Sufi Ibn Arabi de Murcia, who, Asín explains, *era un alma cristiana sin saberlo* (173) (“was a Christian without knowing it”) in the same fashion that Muslims would consider the early Oriental Christians to be Muslims ignorant of their own religious identity. Asín Palacios painstakingly shows parallelisms or, in his own words, *peregrinas coincidencias*, between Ibn Arabi and Juan de la Cruz. According to him, the two authors shared the same views on topics such as the preeminent existence of god above the existence of the creatures, the negation of rationality as an ultimate tool to attain god, the secondary role of the charismas, the rejection of spiritual consolations, and human sexual enjoyment as the symbol of divine love. About this last idea, Asín Palacios affirms that the origin of this literary resource is both Christian and Neoplatonic, and its presence in the Sufi writings is not the product of the tradition initiated with the *Song of Songs*, as happened in Christianity, but the result of an analogous exegetical process in Islam influenced by Christian and Neoplatonic currents. In his Christianizing project, Asín Palacios’s position on Islam is clearly that of a great admirer although an intended missionary. His double analogical argument that *Dos cosas análogas a una tercera, de la cual ambas proceden, deben ser análogas entre sí* (13) (“Two analogous things to a third one from which the first two originate, should be analogous between them”) reveals a purpose of bringing home, meaning to Christian terms, all that he found

that needed to be admired and learned about Sufism and Islam. Still, it is important to notice that in *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (1919), Asín Palacios proposes rather an islamization of Dante, the prominent figure of the European Renaissance. As well, in the posthumous *Sadilíes y Alumbrados* (1989), his position again varies from the maintained in *Islam cristianizado*.

Although Asín Palacios was the first to propose this theory in Spain, he was not completely original. Rather, he was trying to come to terms with the nineteenth-century European double process of self-identity and othering that I have already mentioned. The “discovery” of the world religions with consequent mapping of the world was the background of Asín Palacios’s work, although he offered a different perspective than did his contemporary European scholars. As Tomoko Masuzawa has recently noticed in *The Invention of the World Religions*, the emerging science of religion can be understood as a product of the parallel emerging science of language (209). The birth of these two sciences had been primarily motivated by the European discovery of the Sanskrit language by Max Muller, and by the birth of comparative philology. This field of comparative philology was in charge of organizing the newly-discovered languages and religions into Aryan (Indo-European) and Semitic (Hebrew and Arabic). This division of languages, Masuzawa reminds scholars, “facilitated a new expression of Europe’s age-old animosity toward the Islamic powers, insofar as this science categorized Jews and Arabs as being ‘of the same stock,’ conjointly epitomizing the character of the Semitic race” (26).

The European scholars contemporary with Asín Palacios were theologians who practiced comparative philology. Among them, one finds Asín Palacios in implicit

conversation with the German Otto Pfliegerer, who, in a series of lectures given in Berlin and published in an English translation as *Religion and Historic Faith* (1906), argues along with a strong undermining attitude of the dogmas of Islam, that Sufism had an Aryan origin. Pfliegerer affirms that Sufism is not the product of Islam, although framed by it, and that “it must remain undecided whether it owes its origin to ancient Persian, Indian or Neo-platonic Gnosticism” (Masuzawa 202). This view of Sufism as an Aryan Islam can be interpreted, with Masuzawa, as the vision held by these nineteenth-century scholars of a future world-Christianity. However, missing from Masuzawa’s references is the fact that Asín Palacios’s argument was, directly or not, answering Pfliegerer’s question about the origins of the Aryan Sufism. The main difference is that Asín Palacios included, along with Neoplatonism, a Christian input not mentioned by Pfliegerer. This academic dialogue of Asín Palacios with the European “new sensitivity of global awareness” is still to be studied, but it is not surprising. In spite of the silence regarding Asín Palacios’s work for almost half a century, there is reason to assume that he was well aware of the ideas of his contemporaries and that he was conversing with them from his own position within the Spanish academy.²⁵

Asín Palacios’s choice to attribute Christian origins to the Sufi tradition seems to be an effort to come to terms with Islamic Iberia. While the rest of Europe was in the process of rejecting Islam, the same exercise was taking place inside Spain with the complex dynamic of Inside / Outside Orientalism. Asín Palacios’s attempt aimed at adopting the inside-other by Christianizing it. His was a scholarly act of conversion that somehow echoes Llull’s thirteenth-century attempt at religious conversion. If the Sufis,

²⁵ Asín Palacios attended the Congresses of Orientalists in Argel and Copenhagen (1905 and 1908) and his work was much commented on by European and North American scholars.

being the heart of true Islamic religion—as Asín Palacios attests—were nothing else than Christians without knowing it, then Muslims were as much insiders as the “genuine,” self-denominated Christians. This endeavor to Christianize Islamic Iberia is also the reason why Asín Palacios’s work was taken in such ambivalent terms, officially damned by his fellow Spanish scholars and not quite understood or accepted into dialogue by his European counterparts—hence Masuzawa’s lack of mention. Still, Asín Palacios’s act of comparison, grounded in terms of philological and theological comparative sciences, had a tremendous impact on the future of the Spanish academy and needs to be further addressed.

The Question of Origins and Comparativism

The question of the origins of the poetry of Juan de la Cruz, included in Peers’s, Green’s and Alonso’s arguments, was methodologically reconsidered in the work of the French scholar Jean Baruzi. Although Baruzi’s scholarship was not echoed by his contemporaries, Valente recently identified him as the first one defending the convergence of the experience and the specificities of literary language in the study of Juan de la Cruz (*Hermenéutica*, “Introducción” 9).²⁶ Baruzi belonged to the French school of psychology of religion and was in dialogue with William James. However, Baruzi does not follow James’s methodological path. Instead, his argument is supported by an extremely detailed analysis of the life and work of Juan de la Cruz and a meticulously archived research through which he proves that *las obras que la Religión ha*

²⁶ Baruzi defended his doctoral dissertation “Saint Jean de la Croix et le problème de l’expérience mystique” in 1924, which was published in its final version in 1932.

publicado no son en rigor las obras que el santo escribió (47) (“the works that Religion has published are not strictly speaking the works that the saint wrote”).

Jean Baruzi seeks a discursive distance between the theological and the psychological scholarship of mysticism. Arguing that the mystical experience is “a thought in search of itself” (43), Baruzi affirms that mystics’ traces are to be found in the writings and lives of the authors. Facing the question of the origins of Juan de la Cruz’s work, Baruzi gives priority to what is to be learned from the close examination of the language of the mystics:

Either considering Spanish texts or those texts from other European spiritual traditions, nothing can sustain, in the case of Juan de la Cruz, the appreciation of a moment of indisputable sources that determined his thought. This is because all happens as if he had the purpose of creating a technique that left all such sources at an unreachable distance. (171)

Although Alonso praises Baruzi in opposition to his criticism of Peers, the only direct answer to Baruzi’s work from Spain was the publication of a doctrinal work, *San Juan de la Cruz, su obra científica y literaria* (1929) by the Carmelite priest Crisógono de Jesús.²⁷ What Crisógono de Jesús found at fault in Jean Baruzi’s work was that it veered from a strict theological perspective into a psychological one (18).

Another method of addressing the matter of the origins is found in the comparative enterprise of Colin P. Thompson, who claims to explore both the mystical experience and the use of language in Juan de la Cruz, affirming that “San Juan is to be understood in the context of the tradition” (12). In his 1977 *The Poet and the Mystic*,

²⁷ Crisógono de Jesús’s biography of Juan de la Cruz was published in 1942 and received the award for the best biography produced during the fourth-centenary celebrations.

Thompson offers a detailed examination of the *Cántico espiritual* along with its Biblical source, the *Song of Songs*. Thompson's work critically updates the work of previous scholars, especially that of Alonso. He argues strongly for an understanding of Juan de la Cruz in the context of tradition (12), but does not restrict the tradition to Latin sources. For Thompson, Juan de la Cruz's writings were primarily inspired by his relation to the sacred scriptures and by his very personal spiritual and creative relation with the biblical *Song of Songs*. He makes a case for the *Cántico* to be thought of not as a static, but as a dynamic process of creation (30), involving spiritual as well as creative practices such as oral transmission and repetition. Thompson's excursion into the process of theological and literary creation from the perspective of religion and literature concurs with the work of Valente, although Thompson does not make a case—as Valente does—for mystical writing going beyond the constrictions of the tradition to which the mystic belongs. Instead, Thompson praises Crisógono de Jesús's work—a detraction of Baruzi's study—as the first attempt to bring together experience and literature in the criticism to Juan de la Cruz's work. After 1975, the question of origins in the work of Juan de la Cruz became a topic more open to debate as the political context was less resistant to works of comparison.

From Where to What: Methodological Switch in the Work of Luce López-Baralt

Fifty years passed with no explicit dialogue between scholars of mysticism and Asín Palacios. His comparative exercise, however, was re-examined by Luce López-Baralt, who declares herself a disciple of Asín Palacios in her *San Juan de la Cruz y el*

Islam (1985).²⁸ López-Baralt's work, though presented as a continuation of Asín Palacios's, radically changed her predecessor's argument, if not the methodology. According to her, what the literary evidence indicates is not a Christianized Islam—as Asín Palacios had argued—but an Islamized Christianity which she deems tangible in the poetic parallels between Juan de la Cruz and Iberian and non-Iberian traditions of Sufi poetry. López-Baralt argues that if, in fact, the Muslim mystics had borrowed certain “rudiments” from the primitive Christians, they had painstakingly incorporated them into their tradition over centuries, making them their own and giving them intricate features that were easily recognized as Islamic, not as Neoplatonic or Christian as Asín Palacios had thought. Those uniquely Muslim symbols, López-Baralt asserts, are precisely what readers find in the writings of Juan de la Cruz (239). Insisting on this critical emendment to the ideas of Asín Palacios, López-Baralt goes on with the methodological question of *¿dónde encontrar?* (“where to find?”) that moment of historical encounter of Juan de la Cruz with Sufism.

For López-Baralt the literary evidence for a familiarity of Juan de la Cruz with Sufi poets such as Ibn Arabi and Ibn Alfarid was a *fascinante enigma* and an *auténtico problema histórico-literario* (229). Such similarities, which López-Baralt describes as *demasiada especificidad para ser una coincidencia casual* (“too much specificity to be a casual coincidence”) (230), seems apparent in features of the writings of Juan de la Cruz which cannot be traced within the European context and have seriously challenged

²⁸ This book has a very similar title to the English translation of Asín Palacios's article "Un precursor hispanomusulman de San Juan de la Cruz," translated by Howard W. Yoder and Elmer H. Douglas as *Saint John of the Cross and Islam*, Vantage Press, New York, 1981. It first appeared in the journal *Al-Andalus*, vol.1 (1933), 7-79; then *Huellas del Islam*, Espasa-Calpe (Madrid, 1941), 235-304; and also in the *Obras escogidas*, vol. I (Madrid, 1946), 243-326.

scholars such as Menéndez Pelayo and Alonso. The points of parallelism examined by López-Baralt include literary devices such as the attribution of more than one meaning to the same word, the absence of verbs in parallel descriptive expressions, and a specific use of poetic images such as the fountain and the solitary bird, all of which Juan de la Cruz adopts in a fashion long cultivated among the Sufis and unprecedented in European traditions.²⁹ According to her, one of the more striking characteristics of Juan de la Cruz's writings is that he appears to be rarely familiar with the hermetic principles of the *Trobar Clus*—a coded Sufi poetical style— which, in its beginnings, was accessible only to the initiated Sufi writers and later became an standardized literary convention, although only inside the Islamic tradition (229).

Considering such evidence, López-Baralt strives to prove a hypothesis of historical contact. But at the end of her study, in order to be coherent with the lack of historical proof, she leaves this question open to further research. I consider that the dilemma of this crucial critical study—the starting question of *Where to locate?*—undermines the scope of the dialogue between the Arabic and Spanish texts. If a “where” frames a comparative project, then its absence—the verification of a “nowhere”—will mean the end of the comparative enterprise, and the scholar who has witnessed the works dialoguing, as López-Baralt does, finds himself or herself at yet another critical crossroads.

The question behind López-Baralt's insistence on historical facts has various implications. What would change if scholars could be certain that Juan de la Cruz read

²⁹ López Baralt expands on these topics in other studies such as *Asedios a lo invisible* (1998), to which I will further refer, but also in articles. For more reference see: “La amada nocturna de San Juan de la Cruz se pudo haber llamado Layla” in *Mujeres de Luz*.

Arabic and knew the cryptic system of Sufi sects, as López-Baralt strongly suggests? What if the Spanish Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church was hiding Sufi codes in his writings? Or if he, despite being a sincere Catholic, had been so familiar with Sufism as to be condemned by the Inquisition and never to be read or heard about, as happened with many *moriscos* in the sixteenth century at the door of the final expulsion in 1609? These are—although not clearly articulated—the inquiries at work in López-Baralt’s insistence in the “too many evidences” of literary similitude. López-Baralt’s 1985 work, with its unanswered questions and the eloquent final acknowledgement of the limits of historical inquiry, marks an important turn in the scholarship on the work of Juan de la Cruz.

San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam constitutes the clearest answer given to Menéndez Pelayos’s legendary *terror religioso* when facing Juan de la Cruz’s *oriental* poetry. And although history fails López-Baralt’s attempts, as she so recognizes, her scholarly work will develop from here through an interesting parallel methodology. On the one hand, López-Baralt re-contextualizes the historical quest and researches the possibilities of original contact in *A zaga de tu huella: La enseñanza de las lenguas semíticas en Salamanca en tiempos de San Juan de la Cruz*. In this 2006 work, López-Baralt claims to prove, by virtue of archival evidence, the probability that Juan de la Cruz was a student in, or at least was in contact with, Arabic classes taught at the Universidad de Salamanca.

On the other hand, López-Baralt moves beyond the historical search and the question of “Where?” into a search for the answers to Juan de la Cruz’s rare familiarity with other traditions in the textual *corpus* through the question of “What?” Such is López-Baralt’s proposal in *Asedios a lo Indecible: San Juan de la Cruz canta al éxtasis transformante* (1998), where she draws upon what is to be learned from the confrontation

of the texts of Juan de la Cruz with those of Muslim poets, even without the possibility of a direct literary influence: *los textos místicos de san Juan y los de sus antecesores musulmanes dialogan unos con otros y se enriquecen enormemente cuando se confrontan, aun cuando no se plantee la posibilidad de una influencia literaria de la espiritualidad sufí sobre la obra del Reformador* (17) (“the mystical texts of San Juan and his Muslim predecessors dialogue with each other and are enormously enriched when facing each other, even without considering the possibility of a literary influence of Sufi spirituality on the work of the Reformer.”) Here one observes how the research question has transited from a “Where?” to a “What?”

This effective methodological turn in the scholarship of the Spanish mystics and specifically of Juan de la Cruz switches attention from the problem of affiliations to a comparative project for the sake of enriching the reading of the texts. The need to concentrate on the particularities of the mystical language comes to be a point of agreement at which scholars of religion, theology, and literature seem to have commonly arrived toward the end of the twentieth century. Keeping the focus on the movements, the effects, and the transformative uses—in the words of Bernard McGinn—of mystical language, the comparative project is contemplated differently, and the question of affiliations or transmissions is now posed as a question of convergences.

Conclusions: Going Beyond Orientalism and Toward Dialogue

From Menéndez Pelayo’s *terror religioso* to López-Baralt’s question of convergences lies more than a century of critical debate imbued by political enterprises in the midst of complex dynamics of Inside and Outside Orientalism. Such debates have

framed and reframed the field of Spanish literature to exclude or include subjects, ideas, and topics that were or were not amenable with the politics at work. Within the broad field of literature, mysticism renders itself as a particularly challenging set of discourses and practices since it raises the question of what is, after all, the religion of Iberia. To answer the challenge that Spanish mysticism posits is, today as much as it did in the nineteenth century, problematic, and it has had a profound impact on literary scholarship.

The methodological challenges of mysticism for both religious and literary studies rests upon its relation to experience. As Bernard McGinn has justly noticed, mysticism presents itself as a process strictly linked to experience or awareness which previous authors like James and Underhill identified as “experience” or “knowledge”—cannot be coherently separated from the work of the mystics. Thus the project of Alonso (“from this hillside”) appears, in the words of Valente, *una lectura de antemano mutilada* (“Formas de lectura” 20) (“a reading mutilated beforehand”). This is because to exclude the field of experience from the literary analysis is to exclude the very quality that distinguishes mysticism from other writings.³⁰ Mystical literature needs to be read on its own terms; by this, I mean neither denying that it emerges from a historical context nor that it claims to be the result of an ineffable experience.

The interrelation between experience and interpretation is similar to the interrelation between the act of writing and the historical context that determines the language in which general codes the mystical text is produced. This idea is explained well by Valente:

³⁰ In the same chapter Valente criticizes Jorge Guillén’s ideas about Juan de la Cruz in his theory of the insufficiency of language, exposed in *Lenguaje y poesía* (1962). Guillén, Valente explains, was not participating in the political fears in which Alonso was involved, but came to a similar dualistic perspective between literature and experience.(21)

El místico se produce dentro de una tradición religiosa constituida y no es ajeno a todo el aparato tanto escritural como dogmático de aquella. Pero con respecto a lo escritural, el místico opera siempre una apertura hacia la plenitud o infinitud del texto. El místico abre o reinaugura o hace explotar el texto sagrado. (“Presencia” 1556)

The mystic is produced inside a constructed religious tradition, and he is not alien to its written and dogmatic apparatus. But regarding the writing, the mystic always brings about an opening into the fullness or the infiniteness of the text. The mystic opens or re-inaugurates or exploits the sacred text.

This “opening” into the fullness of the text to which Valente refers is to be traced through a concentrated attention in *lo escritural* (“the writings”). While early scholarship has struggled in the reconciliation of experience, interpretation, history, and context, I find in the recent work of scholars such as Frederick Streng, Francis Clooney, and Michael Sells an answer to the difficulty posited by mysticism and experience. These scholars—each with his own particularities that I will discuss in detail in the next chapter—offer a methodology that does not deny the claim of experience while focusing on the meaningful “openings” in the writings of the mystic. Their work relocates the question of experience and historical affiliations through an acute attention to language. These traces of mystical literature are understood by Michael Sells as “referential openness,” which are not static, but “fleeting,” and have the quality of allowing the conversation with other traditions (8).

It is in this mindful attentiveness to language where I find that the scholarship on Juan de la Cruz can bear its best fruits, and this is the perspective that I intend to follow in the present comparative project. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, I conceive of my comparative project as a path at once that takes scholars beyond the question of Orientalism, and gives them an option—not a definitive, but a plausible one—to approach certain critical topics in the mystical writings of Juan de la Cruz in ways that would not be apparent outside the comparative perspective. To go beyond the Orientalist quest for Juan de la Cruz’s work is to go beyond the question of affiliations—with all its specific political and doctrinal undertones—and into the inquiry posed by comparison. This does not mean that I deny the importance of the political, historical, and literary context of Juan de la Cruz’s work, or that of *Rāsa Līlā*, but that through attentive concentration on the questions raised through the comparative dialogue, I intend to establish a dialogue through the texts’ “referential openness.”

Wendy Doniger has noticed that the field of comparative religion has suffered a “post-colonial backlash,” reflected in the fear to compare traditions that are not philogenetically related, albeit carrying a colonialist scholarly project (“Post Modern and Colonial Structural Comparisons” 64). However, she insists, it is possible to undertake a comparison if one thinks of comparison as a translation (*The Implied Spider* 4). I find that in the field of Spanish mystical literature, scholars have not attained a moment of “post-colonial backlash” because—immersed in the Spanish exception, in the words of Said—most scholarship in the field is still invested in the Inside / Outside Orientalist quest. However, I believe that through the dialogue between the fields of comparative religion and of Spanish literature, it is possible to carve a way out from the Inside /

Outside Orientalist dynamic and reconsider the mechanisms for reading and interpreting the Iberian literary corpus.

The discourses that scholars construct, limited by their own academic or political context, are never absolutely objective and should not be claimed as such. Comparison involves, Clooney says, imagination and intuition (*Beyond Compare* 22). And in this particular academic milieu, it demands an acute awareness that researchers are always interacting with others, mutually comparing their work, and trying to come to terms with their own perception of their otherness; this is the only way to bring about what, in the words of Laurie Patton, would constitute “an ethical connection between traditions” (“The Magic in Miniature” 204). When considering the *terror religioso* of Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, the hillsides of Alonso, or the image of an early morning church by Peers, I am also performing an act of comparison between their ideas and the theoretical notions that I have been taught and that I share with many of my contemporaries.

Wendy Doniger has argued that myth is an inherently comparative genre in a double sense: it both compares and is amenable to comparison (*The Implied Spider* 28). To this I add that mysticism, like myth, is amenable to comparison; and, among the Spanish mystical authors, Juan de la Cruz has proved to be particularly so. The challenge is to cherish the amenability of the conversation.

Chapter 2

Post Orientalist Inquiry, Interdisciplinary Dialogue and Methodology:

The Texts and Their Contexts

Lost in Comparison

*sthūlam sūkṣmaṁ kāraṇam brahma-turye
śrī-vaikuṅṭha-dvāṛakā-jaṇma-bhūmiḥ /
kṛṣṇasyātho goṣṭha-vṛndāvanam tat
gopy-ākrīḍam dhāma vṛndāvanāntaḥ //*

Within this Vrindāvan, one can find everything: the gross, the subtle, the causal and Brahman, the fourth state of consciousness, Vaikuntha, Dwaraka and Mathura, Kṛṣṇa's birthplace. There is the terrain on which Kṛṣṇa grazed the cows with his friends, and his most secret effulgent abode, his playground with the *gopis*.

Śrī-vṛndāvana-mahimāmṛtam (1.8)

In May 2009, after an academic year studying *Rāsa Līlā* and the commentary of Srīdhara Svāmi, and after finishing a translation of the *Cántico espiritual* into Sanskrit to tease out the poetical commensurabilities, I went to Vrindāvan for the first time. I had read many times that Vrindāvan was the land of divine love, where Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā live in an endless romance, and I expected to find there an auspicious sign for my methodology, something that would enlighten the path of my studies. I expected to find some of the spirit of Juan de la Cruz's *Cántico* in Brindavana. I knew what temple I had to visit first and I went there for the evening prayers known as *ārati*; I took *darśana* ("vision") of the deity, but I did not see anything that could evoke the *Cántico*. I visited other temples, I visited scholars, and I walked by the side of the Yamuna River, but Juan de la Cruz was not there. I could find nothing that evoked the Spanish mystic in

Brindavana. The *Cántico* did not seem to inhabit the historical and traditional abode of *Rāsa Līlā*. The texts were being revealed as two totally independent realities. How could I ever be able to encompass these two distant works in one *corpus*? Juan de la Cruz's Iberia and Brindavana had no visible window into each other.³¹

During one of the last days of my visit, a friend took me to Vamsivat, the “forest of the flute,” identified in the sixteenth century by the sage Vallabhācārya as the place where the events narrated in *Rāsa Līlā* took place. It is a small, round grove with low trees joined to each other, suggesting for the devotee the images of the *Rāsa Dance*. Visitors are not allowed after sunset, and in all the houses surrounding the grove, the windows and doors that face the forest are closed. Everyone knows that no human being could survive the sight of what happens there every night, the love dance of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopis*. Although it was almost sunset, my friend wanted to sing the thirty-second chapter of *Rāsa Līlā* in front of a very particular deity, Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa's favorite beloved, playing the lover's flute. We sang and left; we were among the last visitors to leave. With time, Vamsivat became the image which I call up when reading how the beloved of the *Cántico* asks the trees and the flowers about her missing lover. The memory of that visit comes to me as a sign of a deeper relationship between the *Rāsa Līlā*, the *Cántico*, and me. And the insight finally arises that the ultimate place for the encounter between these two narrations is my own search. As the inhabitants of Brindavana know that the trees become dancing *gopis* in the night, although no one is meant to witness it, I am

³¹ While the Sanskrit name is Vrindāvan, Hindi speakers today usually use Brindavana or Brindaban.

bound to believe in the unseen conversation of these texts by a leap of faith, as Wendy Doniger says, the same leap that is needed for translation:

Translation requires a leap of faith very much like the leap that, I will soon argue, is required by comparison. We are always moving between worlds, trying to make sense of an orient our lives, and the trick of comparison is the trick of translating between worlds. (*The Implied Spider* 4)

I have chosen the narration of my trip to Vrindāvan to begin this chapter because it involves central questions of translation and comparison that I have faced since I decided to undertake this project, and during the periods of Sanskrit study in India and research in Spain. Not only did I have to learn the language in order to translate myself to *Rāsa Līlā*, but I also have had to translate aspects of my project to American, Spanish, and Indian scholars who were often involved in academic and political issues of translation and interpretation similar to the ones I have described in the previous chapter. In this sense, I have sometimes seen myself as the space where all these literary and academic currents meet and—more or less fluently—compare and translate each other. The process of translation, comparison and interpretation that rests behind this project has been the path that I am transiting into an interdisciplinary dialogue.

In this chapter, I will describe the most effective way that I have found to compare and translate the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*. My methodology, as I stated in the conclusion to the previous chapter, has resulted from an engagement with the recent discussions in the field of religion about the comparative studies of religious texts, and specifically about the comparison of mystical texts. In the discussions of scholars like Francis Clooney, Wendy Doniger, and Michael Sells, I have found a way to

creatively reconsider the state of mystical literature in the field of Spanish Studies. Having observed in detail the critiques of mystical literature among scholars of Spanish literature, the current chapter presents the other side of the interdisciplinary dialogue. Here I will refer to the work of scholars in the field of religious studies with whom I have a dialogue, and departing from this dialogue I will expand on my methodology. Afterwards, because an important aspect of my method is that specific historical contexts are not to be omitted even in a non-historical frame of comparison, I will offer a comprehensive introduction to the *Cántico espiritual* and the *Rāsa Līlā* within their religious and historical milieus, emphasizing those aspects with which my work is concerned.

The Comparative Mode

The comparative studies of religious texts have been brought up to date during the last two decades in the context of what Doniger has called “a post-colonial backlash, inspired in large part by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*” (“Post-Modern” 64). The core question of this post-colonial enterprise for comparative studies is the ethical imperative of respect for the difference, for the “otherness,” that the comparativist approaches from his or her specific context and with a set of methodological and ideological pre-conceived ideas. The previous chapter noted a typical example of the scholarship to which the Orientalist quest is reacting in the work of scholars like Helmut Hatzfeld, who compares Spanish and French mystics on the basis of “national tendencies of mystical language” (146). The results of such approaches and the claimed universalism associated with them is now seen from the Orientalist perspective not only as reductive, but also as ethically

questionable. Examples like this have rendered doubtful the results of any comparative enterprise. Facing this criticism, scholars of religious studies and theology like Wendy Doniger, Francis Clooney, Michael Sells, and Benson Saler, among others, have restated their methodology with a view towards an ethical and productive engagement in the practice of comparative readings of religious texts.

Among these scholars, I particularly rely upon the work of the theologian Francis Clooney, who has developed a thorough methodology for the comparison of Vaiṣṇava and Christian texts. I will further discuss Clooney's insights into the practice of comparison and how they illuminate my work, although I do not regard myself as a theologian. Clooney proposes that the theologian who compares should risk finding him or herself in an area of uncertainty and at the paradoxical point of being caught between diversity and tradition. Other scholars such as Doniger and Damrosch, each in a particular enterprise, call upon the risk value to be found at the intersection of the traditions that scholars bring together when approaching comparison with respect to the texts and the traditions. I find that the drive for such risk—like my trip to Vrindāvan—is also required to cross disciplines.

What to Look for in Comparison

The foundation for a comparative enterprise is the acknowledgement of the vertices that structure the comparative frame, namely each text—usually two texts—and the reader. Clooney has provided a set of questions to be asked of the texts that one wants to compare (1996, 2008). Bearing in mind that these inquiries are not fixed but respond to the particularities of the text under consideration, I will consider them in my approach

to the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*. First of all—and this is crucial in mystical texts—one should not resist the appealing but vague category of experience. This means not only the real author of the text—if there is such—but also the fictional or non-fictional authorship claimed by the text; the traditional author and the author who appears as the “I” of the narrative. Below, I compare the *Cántico espiritual*, a text created by an individual author, but with a strong (if insufficiently noticed) dependence on oral tradition, with the *Rāsa Līlā* as a fragment of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a text belonging to the oral tradition but with traceable links to the writings of single religious groups and individuals. The inquiry into the notion of authorship in the creation of these works, along with the notion of audience, will lead in the last chapter to revealing questions about the female role in the *Cántico espiritual* when seen from the perspective of *Rāsa Līlā*.

The process of creating each text and its intended audience are also key components of the comparative procedure, and I find that in asking these questions, the historical aspects of the texts that I am comparing begin to interact beyond their historical, geographical, and religious distances. When the reader knows the texts well and then looks at how and for whom they were created, questions start arising from the texts and lead to their history—rather than vice versa. Awareness of the historical milieu allows the reader further interaction with the literature, finding in the specific circumstances the reasons why the texts say what they say or do not say what they suggest. In Chapter 4 of this dissertation, I will observe how the comparison sheds new light on the question of the intended audience for the *Cántico espiritual* and on the historical relation of Juan de la Cruz to the nuns of Beas de Segura, with and for whom

he composed the manuscript of the poem and its commentary. Along with inquiry into the intended audience, the question of the textual practices also may reveal the process through which the texts have become normative and how contemporary readers approach them.

The Reader

The reader, as Doniger puts it, is “the observer,” the one who stands at the intersection of cross-cultural paradigms and the unique events of history (*The Implied Spider* 36). Recognition of the role played by the individual who compares texts acknowledges what is at the core of any comparative project: the fact that texts are read comparatively because they first have, as David Damrosch says, resonated in the mind of a reader, a space “where works meet and interact in ways that may have little to do with cultural and historical proximity” (298). I consider myself, in the first place, a reader of literature who relishes the aesthetic pleasure of the *Cántico espiritual* and the *Rāsa Līlā*, and takes this enjoyment seriously. Without the joy of savoring each of these works in its original language, I would never have dared to put them together. The choice of the texts and the fact that I opened myself to the appearance of these texts in my life speaks of a further motive linked with my interest in creative writing and religion. Stretching the poetic word to the point of the ineffability is a quest that has guided this research, and I will address it in detail while I read closely the verses of the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā*, alongside each other.

I have learned to read *Rāsa Līlā* from the Indian perspective as I have mostly read, memorized, sung, and thought about this work guided by Indian teachers and by the

sight of Indians' real and imaginative landscapes. Similarly, I have a more long-standing interaction with the *Cántico espiritual* and the person of Juan de la Cruz, an interaction which has become stronger through years of relating with people who follow his spiritual path and through visiting and revisiting the places marked by his life and work. These two streams of personal and academic association come together in my position in the American academy, where I find the questions and the poetics to formulate this comparison. Reading according to one alternative, as Clooney reminds the scholar, "allows one to see and hear the power of the alternative one has chosen not to choose, and to see that intelligent choices never fully exclude the paths not taken" (*Divine* 24). The correct discrimination between the paths taken and not taken ultimately lies in the ability to remain close to the texts, asking them how they want to be read and compared.

How Does Comparison Work?

Returning to the "Prólogo" of Juan de la Cruz for his commentary on the *Cántico espiritual* referred to in the previous chapter, one finds in his words a persuasive description of mystical writing as an act of comparison:

Porque ¿quién podrá escribir lo que las almas amorosas, donde él mora, hace entender? Y ¿quién podrá manifestar con palabras lo que las hace sentir? Y ¿quién finalmente, lo que las hace desear? Ciertamente, nadie lo puede; cierto, ni ellas mismas (las almas) por quien pasa lo pueden.

Porque ésta es la causa porque con figuras, comparaciones y semejanzas, antes rebosan algo de lo que sienten y de la abundancia del espíritu vierten secretos misteriosos, que con razones las declaran. (10)

Who can describe in writing the understanding he gives to loving souls in whom he dwells? And who can express with words the experience he imparts to them? Who, finally, can explain the desires he gives them? Certainly, no one can! Not even they who receive these communications. As a result, these persons let something of their experience overflow in figures, comparisons, and resemblances, and from the abundance of their spirit pour out secrets and mysteries rather than rational explanations.

Juan de la Cruz places his writings at the center of a comparative system between what he calls “mystical intelligence” and the realm of language. Many of the commentaries for the verses of the *Cántico* start with the phrase “this is like saying,” and he names his own work as a *semejanza*, closer in meaning to the English “resemblance.” The very act of writing was for him an act of comparison between what he had experienced and the language resources at his disposal. Figures, comparisons, and *semejanzas* were used poetically to bridge the theological distance between his encounter with the divine and the realm of words. The result was a simile, a “pouring” of what he had experienced. He knew that something was lost, but something also was gained for the sake of god and for the sake of the language. This is the best image of comparison that I have found, and I think Juan de la Cruz would agree with Doniger in thinking of comparison as translation between multiple levels, all the different textual and theological levels in between which oneness and otherness mutate as they are read.

Thomas Kuhn’s ideas on “Commensurability, Comparability, Communicability” are also in line with Juan de la Cruz’s idea of mystical writing as an act of comparison. What Juan de la Cruz does is to put words to the “commensurable” between the

experience and the language that he has at his disposal. Moreover, incommensurability, as Kuhn's latest work points, does not mean incomparability, because differences bring about the act of comparison as much as resemblances do. Resemblance, closer to what Juan de la Cruz proposes as "similarities," is what Benson Saler suggests in *Conceptualizing Religion* when trying to find a central term for a comparative enterprise, which creatively switches the attention of the comparer from universal similarities to particular resemblances. This switch from universals to resemblances would benefit the study of Spanish mystical literature in its interdisciplinary dialogue with the field of religious studies.

The attention to incommensurabilities and particular resemblances makes the careful reader sensitive to resonances—in the sense of Mark Taylor's revisiting of the term. Resonance points to a repetition of a sound that is at the same time reiterative—resembling—and changing—incommensurable. Reiteration and change create the conditions for resonance.³² Translating this into textual comparison, one can affirm, with Ronald Radano, that "listening to the sounds and texts of resonance becomes a task of double hearing" (45), of hearing both incommensurabilities and resemblances, and thus hearing the resonance. How, then, can the comparer of texts tune the ear to double hearing? The best answer that I have found is by staying close to the texts, by being, as Laurie Patton always urges, "text grounded."³³

Clooney describes his methodological approach with the phrase, "I work from the inside out," referring to a mode of reading that requires that scholars "remain close to the

³² Here I am referring to Ronald Michael Radano's understanding of Taylor's concept of resonance in his study on music and comparison (*Lying up a Nation* 53).

³³ Personal conversation with Laurie Patton on September 9, 2010.

dynamics of our texts as they are written [...] and that we discipline ourselves to think within the boundaries of this writing” (*Beyond Compare* 25). This “inside out” methodology is primarily concerned with the texts themselves, not with the traditions as social and historical phenomena, nor on any given theme, nor on comparative methodology, although tradition and method should always be taken into account (*Beyond Compare* 25). In the context of a different comparative project, Doniger describes a similar method of comparison constructed “from the bottom up” in the sense of dealing with particular narratives that can be traced throughout myths from different cultural contexts, but avoiding universalist categories of continuity (*The Implied Spider* 59). Each from his or her particular comparative endeavor, Clooney and Doniger point to the importance of giving priority to the details of each narrative and letting the texts speak for themselves. The “inside out” and “bottom up” perspectives are not simple quests; they are in fact exercises conducive to unsettlement and disorientation, as Clooney warns.

Reading according to one’s alternative resembles the exercise of arguing oneself out of one’s own project by means of pointing at the incommensurabilities.³⁴ There comes a moment when dissonances become more apparent than resonances to the double-ear of the attentive reader. Then one needs to remember that to commensurate does not mean “to make equal,” but to bring measures together. And doing thus, scholars need to trust their cohabitation with the texts. Considering close cohabitation—in the words of J.Z. Smith—and alternatives chosen, what is envisioned from an act of comparison is that

³⁴ I am here restating the first exercise that I had to complete in the seminar “On the Very Idea of Comparing Religion: Theoretical Approaches,” taught by Professor Laurie Patton at Emory University in the spring semester, 2007.

the two texts resonate to create a larger text, as Clooney says, bringing one “unexpectedly more words, images, desires, emotions, and deeds, that we can consider and respond to in new patterns” (*Beyond Compare* 204).

Comparing Mystical Texts: Mysticism, Context, and Comparison

The next critical question for my methodology is whether mystical literature claims for a particular pattern of comparison. Although it is not my intention to exhaust this question here, I want to address some issues that are significant for my project. Mystical literature, as in the definition of Bernard McGinn quoted in the previous chapter, is essentially a literature that claims—either explicitly or implicitly—to be the result of an encounter with the divine. The claim of an experience outside the coordinates of time and space, in contrast with the act of writing and the location of that experience inside a specific religious tradition, is a point of argument among scholars of religion concerned with the category of context. Discussions about mysticism and context can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century in the psychological approaches of William James, who considered it possible to find the “same recurring note” in the mysticism of Hindus, Neoplatonics, Sufis and Christians (419). Such an idea makes him a predecessor of the school of *Philosophia Perennia*, whose motif is traditionally described in the phrase of Saint-Martin that all mystics “speak the same language, for they come from the same country” (Cited in Underhill 80). This school of thought, later systematized by Aldous Huxley (1945), includes scholars with quite different perspectives that nevertheless agree in the point of *perennialism*, such as Evelyn Underhill, Rudolf Otto, W.T. Stace, and, arguably, Mircea Eliade. The common point of

their approaches is that there is a similar—if not identical—experience claimed by mystics from different historical, geographical, and religious contexts.

This position was strongly questioned by scholars like Steven Katz and Robert Gimello. In the collection of essays entitled *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, Katz insists that there cannot be a pure, unmediated mystical experience and that each mystic can only undergo the experience conditioned by aspects such as his or her culture, language, and religion. Reacting to the unifying principle of *perennialism*, Katz makes a strong case for the importance of historical context in the analysis of religious phenomena. His much-discussed ideas mark a new era in the study of the topic, and his stress on attention to contextuality has led to much argument about the epistemological basis for a comparative mysticism. In light of Katz's ideas, if the mystical experience is restricted exclusively to cultural context, then a project such a reading of the *Cántico espiritual* along with *Rāsa Līlā* would have, in the best of cases, no other value than the accrued in a realm of poetry and imagination.

In his recent article “The Contextual Illusion,” Jonathan R. Herman critiques the role of context in mystical literature. Herman asserts that the “best hope for a rigorous comparative study of mysticism is to work within the prevailing concern for context” (98). Still, he advises doing so “with a “renewed methodological self-consciousness and a receptivity to the types of resonances that may indicate connections buried beneath the surface” (98). To do this, Herman points out, it is important to be aware that although mysticism is strictly related to the concept of experience, the dependence of experience on context is always debatable. According to Herman, the question of context can be creatively saved if one considers the heuristic character of the very idea of contextuality.

A reader who compares can structure the frame of context for a specific comparison according to limits that are different from the conventional ones established by geography, religion, tradition, and language. For Herman, the context of mystical literature can be historical and located, or conceptual and constructed, and it is the work of the reader to justify the choice. From this point of view, the particularities of mysticism as an autonomous genre are not diminished, and the comparative project can still be placed within the prevalent epistemology.

Agreeing with the general prescriptions of Herman, I do not opt for a conceptual and constructed context for my comparative project, but rather for a switch of context attending the demands of the comparison. My methodology relies on further consideration of the problem of contextuality in mystical literature. As I stated previously, my comparison depends on close attention to the texts and acknowledgement of the dynamics of relation occurring among the author, the texts, and the reader. Adhering to this mode of reading implies the need to be mindful about the relationship between awareness and language, and I find that this viewpoint offers a new perspective on the question of contextuality.

Awareness and Language in the Discussion of Context

In the previous chapter I observed that the role of awareness cannot be omitted from the work of the mystics without rendering the reading incoherent. Mystical literature, one notices, needs to be read on its own terms; by this I mean neither denying that it is part of a literary *corpus* produced in a specific literary context, nor denying that it claims to be the result of an ineffable encounter with the divine. Both awareness and

language are intertwined in the most important resource that comes to us from the mystics: their writings. The need to attend to the peculiarities of the language used by the mystics has been examined during the last decades of scholarly inquiry, along with concerns about context and historicity. In the essay “Language and Mystical Awareness,” included in the collection *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, Frederick Streng calls attention to the difference between the descriptive and the transformative functions of language in mystical awareness. Streng explains in detail that this mystical awareness is the result of a change, a “shift” in the person of the mystic, who then has a new attitude “more than, but inclusive of, intellect or ideas” (143). In the passage from the “Prólogo” by Juan de la Cruz analyzed above, this shift can be found in the verb *pasar*, “to pass” (in the translation, “to receive”), which includes passing, receiving, and happening. It is this passing that places the soul, according to Juan de la Cruz, in a state of not been able “to say.” The recognition of this shift, as Streng affirms, “extends the conception of the possible content of mystical awareness, and provides an alternative understanding of the nature of these mystical claims” (150). This “shift of awareness” affects the consideration of contextuality because it marks two different moments in the process of mystical writing: on one side, the moment before the shift identified with conventional awareness and a conventional context the readers can locate; and on the other side, the moment during and after the shift identified with mystical awareness, which demands a more conceptual definition of context. The differentiation between conventional and non-conventional context requires close attention to the dynamics of language—not descriptive but transformational—that signal the turn.³⁵ Following this

³⁵ Bernard McGinn explains that the recognition of the interdependence between experience and interpretation can help avoid some of the false problems evident in the scholarship on mysticism. Both

idea, one can identify two different modes of contextual awareness corresponding to the conventional, descriptive use of language previous to the shift in awareness; and the non-conventional, transformative use of language occurring during and after the shift.

Rethinking Herman's statement, it is not necessary to adhere to a conceptual versus constructed context for the comparison of mystical literature if one can be attentive to the shifting of contexts that the shift of awareness claims.

This switch from conventional awareness to mystical awareness that Streng suggests has an analogical semantic moment that Sells has identified as a "meaning event," which "does not describe or refer to mystical union but has the effect of a semantic union that re-creates or imitates the mystical union" (9). In the passage of the "Prólogo" by Juan de la Cruz, the "meaning event" would be identified with the *rebosan* ("overflowing") of comparison and similarities which allows the awareness *pasar* ("to pass") into words. Here, the context of the meaning event is none but the text itself, where readers find performed what is claimed discursively. In the previous chapter, I mentioned Valente's idea that the "the mystic always operates an opening into the fullness or the infiniteness of the text. The mystic opens or re-inaugurates or exploits the sacred text. ("Presencia" 1556). This textual "explosion," this opening into infinity, is produced by the tension between awareness and language. Reflecting upon the location of mystery as a key component of mysticism, Sells asserts that the mystery is a "referential openness" which can only be glimpsed—not permanently stared at—in the

experience and interpretation intertwine in the language that the mystic uses "not so much informationally as transformationally," to communicate the experience that defies conceptualization and verbalization" (*Foundations* xiv).

interstices of the text, in the tension between the saying and the unsaying (8). This tension is not a stable place that one can easily point out as if on a map; rather it is a dynamic interaction between the author, the text, and the readers. It is, in the words of Sells, “a referential openness onto the depths of a particular tradition, and into conversation with other traditions” (8). What Valente and Sells are calling attention to is the textual space as the only available *locus* of inquiry about ineffability—infinity, mystery—and as the context that promotes the “conversation with other traditions.”

The role of language is to be the instrument through which a mystical writer bridges the distance between the encounter with the divine and his or her own specific linguistic and cultural resources; it is an essential key in the discussion of the role of contextuality in mystical literature. While critics like Katz and Gimello would argue that the experience itself is always contextually bound and that a mystic like Juan de la Cruz would only have that specific experience that his Catholic tradition has programmed him to have, the notions of “switch of awareness” and “meaning event” allow readers to relocate the frame of contextuality in the field of language. From this angle, it is logical to consider both the historically localizable and the conceptual, non-localizable features of the mystical genre as they express themselves in the language used by the mystical writer to communicate an occurrence that defies conceptualization and verbalization. That experience, in McGinn’s words, “can only be presented indirectly, partially, by a series of verbal strategies” (*Foundations* xvii). The verbal strategies that McGinn refers to are the *semejanzas* (“resemblances”) that Juan de la Cruz talks about in the “Prólogo” to the commentary to his *Cántico espiritual*, and which he uses to translate the awareness into commensurate language. With Sells’ ideas in mind, one can conclude that these

semejanzas effect an “opening” into the mystery and stand as the viewpoint to witness the “conversation with other traditions.”

The Present Method of Comparison

My first encounter with the resonances of the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā* occurred when I came across *Rāsa Līlā* after being familiar with the work of Juan de la Cruz, and particularly with the imagery of the *Cántico*. The genuineness of this encounter prompts me to agree with David Damrosch that “world literature” occurs in the mind of the reader, where texts come together in ways that have nothing to do with geographies or languages (298). I have sometimes felt that all the critical methodological apparatus that I have built in order to academically frame this comparison is just a *post-facto* construction with the only purpose of inserting this project in the academic fields within which it needs to be framed. Nonetheless, it would not be truthful to think that these critical encounters have been otherwise unfruitful. They have, indeed, offered a more clear direction to my project and helped me, in the words of the Cuban poet Dulce María Loynaz, to *poner ritmo a mi arrebatado* (108) (“to put rhythm to my scatteredness”). This continues to be, as at its birth, a poetic project, as all comparisons are. And this is probably the most important lesson I have learned, one that Laurie Patton repeatedly reminds me of.

My method of comparison rests upon the tripartite notions of commensurability, resemblances, and resonances; and attending to the particularities of the project, it rests upon a close attention to the poetic events inscribed in mystical literature. I begin from the texts, following Clooney’s statement of reading “through texts” while also reading

“inside out.” I have tested the fact that in keeping close to the particularities of comparison—and not to the universals—the texts interact together in the mind of a comparativist, teaching him or her how they want to be read along each other.³⁶ And I have found the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā* interacting in unexpected ways, and asking each other questions that would rarely be raised if the texts were looked at separately.

From the many questions raised, I have had to make choices, and the first choice has been to focus on the way *Rāsa Līlā* offers me a new perspective form which to read the *Cántico*. Rephrasing Clooney’s image of comparison, I am reading the *Cántico through Rāsa Līlā*. Keeping this direction, the dialogue sometimes has turned the other way around, and I hope to better attend that perspective in the near future. A second problem has been how to group the questions into coherent topics of analysis. Thus I have chosen to look at how the texts perform a cycle of withdrawals that lead to the final withdrawal of meaning, to the limits of the act of comparison between experience and language. To these withdrawals I will devote the next chapter. The withdrawal of the divine, the beloved, and the meaning leads the inquiry into the topic of divine vision that I discuss in the Chapter 4. From vision, again, I had to choose to focus on specific directions of sight leading to the final meeting of sights where, again, words and meaning withdraw.

One important clarification is that I do not deny the importance of historical contexts. Rather, I observe how a non-historical frame of comparison redirects scholars

³⁶ I should mention here that I also experienced the result of comparing by keeping close to the texts with the students of the undergraduate seminar “Presence, Absence and Memory,” which I taught at Emory University in the spring semester of 2010.

to historical issues. This will be particularly evident in the Chapter 4, when I address the topic of the ideal reader of the *Cántico espiritual* and Juan de la Cruz's esthetical theological project. In Herman's terms, I have chosen a general, conceptual—not located—context of comparison, which is textually grounded and not historically grounded. However, within that general methodological frame, I take the risk of switching contexts as the comparison demands.

Other Comparisons of Juan de la Cruz with Eastern Authors and Traditions

Before discussing the particularities of the texts, I will mention the works of three scholars that have previously argued for comparing Juan de la Cruz to the tradition of Hinduism, to the Hindu philosopher and mystic Rāmānuja, and to the tradition of Buddhism, respectively. These are works produced during the last two decades, and they present different methodological natures. Broadly speaking, they belong to the field of theology, and, again, this dissertation is not written from a strict theological point of view. Still, I consider these works as predecessors of the present project of comparison.

Hindu Thought and Carmelite Mysticism (1998) is a collection of essays by Swami Siddheswarananda. Setting the basis of his comparison from a non-religious and non-proselytizing point of view, and regarding the indisputable differences between Christianity and Hinduism, Siddheswarananda aims to present to a Western audience “the way Hindus see” Juan de la Cruz. Although in his introduction he warns against the limitations of a method of comparison as a search for parallelism, he proposes certain parallel concepts between the *advaita* (non-dualistic) branch of Hinduism and the theology of Juan de la Cruz. Siddheswarananda focuses mainly on Juan de la Cruz's

Subida al Monte Carmelo, although he also mentions the *Cántico espiritual* and the *Llama de amor viva*.

In my comparison, I will refer to three of the convergences that Siddheswarananda points out between the theology of Juan de la Cruz and some aspects of Hinduism. In the chapter devoted to *bhakti* (“devotion”), Siddheswarananda comments on the *Cántico espiritual* in relation to the five different ways of relationship with the divine as stated in the *bhakti*—devotional—tradition. And he finds that *madhura*, an “agreeable” love represented by the amorous relationship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, is “the attitude found throughout the work of St. John of the Cross” (74). As I will explain later in this chapter, *madhura bhakti* (“sweet devotion”) is the aesthetic and theological aspect with which *Rāsa Līlā* is essentially identified and constitutes one of the premises of my comparison. Another topic expounded by Siddheswarananda, to which I will refer, is the notion of creator and creature as separate as portrayed in the theology of Juan de la Cruz.

The second work of comparison is “Fire and Wood: The Journey Leading to Transformation of the Soul in Union with God / Brahman as Described in the Writings of Rāmānuja and John of the Cross,”³⁷ by Denise Hanusek. Relying on the shared image of a burning log of wood to describe the effect of the divine in the soul, Hanusek explores how Juan de la Cruz and Rāmānuja describe the process of encounter of the individual soul with the divine in various texts. This work is especially important for the present project because it explores the theological thought of Juan de la Cruz along with that of

³⁷ This is an unpublished dissertation from 1999.

an author from the Vaiṣṇava tradition, the same one to which the *Rāsa Līlā* belongs, although Rāmānuja does not refer directly to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in his writings.

Through the metaphor of the fire and the wood, Hanusek explains, Juan de la Cruz illustrates the theological notion of the union with god through participation. This metaphor depicts the theological concept—shared by Christians and Vaiṣṇavas—of a relationship between the soul and the divine. This relationship does not imply a total immersion of one into the other, but a constant separation which is conducive to the continuity of an association—not of a total union—as long as the body remains. I will engage with this idea in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. This notion of separation in union, moreover, is essential to understanding the dynamics of *madhura bhakti* or sweet devotion that Swami Siddheswarananda finds crucial to the work of Juan de la Cruz. The relation is based in an essential separateness, and it will be observed that both *Rāsa Līlā* and the *Cántico* see this separation as a condition for the loving experience.

The most recent comparison of Juan de la Cruz and an Eastern author is found in *Christianity Looks East* (2006), by Peter Feldmeier. One of the most interesting aspects of this work is that Feldmeier reads the work of Juan de la Cruz along with the Buddhist author Buddhaghosa, belonging to a tradition that differs in many aspects from that of the authors discussed by Siddheswarananda and Hanusek. Feldmeier proposes a study of three central themes in the Christian and Buddhist spiritual life, namely, the human being; the path of spiritual life; and the descriptions of their respective ultimate horizons, that is, union with God and Nirvana (6), as explained in the works of Juan de la Cruz and Buddhaghosa. Although I will not directly refer to Feldmeier's work, I discuss, as he

does, the notion of Juan de la Cruz's theology as an intimate relationship with the divine and the process of union as "relational reality."

The Texts: Authorship and the Process of Creation

The *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā* were composed in different historical and theological contexts, and scholars do not have the same archival information about each text's authorship and process of creation. A notable difference at a first comparative glance is that while the process of creation and transmission of the *Cántico* can be traced in general terms in the lifetime of its author, the *Rāsa Līlā* is part of a larger work, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, whose origins and authors are hard to trace amid the intermingling of centuries-long oral traditions.³⁸ Although this comparison is based on the evidence of textual resonances and not on any assumption about authorship or phylogenetic relations, I consider it important to observe the role of these factors within the contexts in which each work was created, and to notice some historical particularities that will be called upon during the exercise of comparison.

Authorship and Orality in *Rāsa Līlā*

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, literally *The Ancient Life Stories of He Who Possesses Bhāga* (*bhāgavan*) is a Vaiṣṇavite text that regards Viṣṇu as the supreme deity of the Hindu *trimurti*.³⁹ Far from the precise, if somewhat distorted, details about the life of

³⁸ For a detailed study on historical and literary traces, see Friedhelm Hardy's *Viraha Bhakti* (1983).

³⁹ The term *bhāga* implies prosperity, honor, good fortune, fame, love, and strength. It is related to the sun and it is an adjective commonly employed to describe gods and goddesses. *Bhāgavan* is described in *Rāsa Līlā* as he who is immeasurable, imperishable, without qualities and in control of all qualities (29.14).

Juan de la Cruz and the process of the creation and propagation of the *Cántico espiritual* to which scholars have access, the book of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* takes places in the living oral tradition known as *smṛti* or “remembered,” as distinct from *śruti* or revealed. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is composed of twelve cantos that narrate the life stories of the different *avataras* (“incarnations”) of Viṣṇu. The tenth canto focuses on Kṛṣṇa, who appears in all aspects as a personal and as a divine being, both facets of his being illustrated in the narration from his early childhood in the village of Vrindāvan until the never-again seen prosperous years of his kingdom in the city of Mathura. The *Rāsa Līlā* comprises the text from the twenty-ninth to the thirty-third chapter of the *Canto X* of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and narrates the amorous activities of Kṛṣṇa with the young ladies of the village of Vraja. As Daniel Sheridan reminds readers, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* marks a truly creative religious moment in which the transcendence and the immanence of god is beheld equally (*The Advaitic Theism 2*).

It is also difficult to determine what the expected audience was at the time the *Bhāgavata* was compiled. Sheridan has explained that five specific religious groups seem to have intervened during the course of the compilation, each with a different emphasis on devotion, ritual, and scriptural commentaries as well as with different expectations regarding the audience (*The Advaitic Theism 8*).⁴⁰ Hardy argues that the *Bhāgavata* should be seen as an attempt to encompass diverse streams that came together in the Tamil Nadu region during the Gupta period, or South Indian Golden Age; and that it can be generally identified with Northern Brahmin culture with its fixed social structure

⁴⁰ These four groups are the *ālvārs*, the *pāñcarātras*, the *śrī vaiṣṇava* and the *bhāgavatas* (*The Advaitic Theism 8*).

of *varṇas*, or castes, and the Vedānta ideology and the Southern culture characterized by devotion and aesthetic sensibility (*Viraha* 543). Besides the many possible audiences first intended for the text, one should also realize that the text has been and still is interpreted by different philosophical and theological schools for very diverse audiences through the centuries.

The dates of the creation and compilation of the *Rāsa Līlā*, as well as the date of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* into which it is inserted, have been a source of much scholarly debate. Hardy and Bryant agree that to talk about a specific date or authorship of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* renders it as impossible as to talk about the date of any *Purāṇa* at all. Instead, Bryant argues, one would have to speak of the age of individual sections within particular *Purāṇas*, which are an accumulation of material from many previous sources. Some Western scholars point to the ninth and thirteenth centuries, while others, like Bryant, maintain that there are “a number of significant reasons to question such a time frame, as well as place of origin” (*Krishna: The Beautiful Legend* xvi).⁴¹

A more generally accepted notion—coherently argued in the work of Hardy—is that many passages of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* were part of the oral repertoire of the group of South Indian Tamil poets known as the Āḷvārs. The Āḷvārs, studied in the work of A.K. Ramanujan, V. N. Rao, David Shulman, and Clooney, developed a particular devotion to the *avatara* of Kṛṣṇa between the sixth and the ninth or tenth centuries, and composed amorous devotional poems in Tamil language which are included in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Out of the entire *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Hardy argues, the *Rāsa Līlā* is the fragment that evokes most clearly the troubadour influence, writing that “in

⁴¹ According to the *Sanskrit Dictionary Project* of Deccan College, Pune, the date of compilation was the eighth century. For Hardy, the ninth century is more likely but Bryant opts for the eight century.

separation, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* makes the *gopīs* sing songs which are adaptations of Ālvārs poems, more precisely, songs in which the basic validity of sensuous experience and passion is defended” (531). Other previous sources of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Harivāṃsa Purāṇa*.⁴²

Now, despite this clear oral phylogenesis with which, one could assume, most of the contemporaries of the creation of the text might have been familiar, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is attributed to the legendary sage Vyāsa, to whom most of the Indian Epics, included the extensive *Mahābhārata*, are also attributed. Moreover, the narrative of the authorship of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself points to manifold sources.

The *Nārada Purāṇa* narrates that, after having composed the *Mahābhārata*, the sum of the teachings of *dharma*, the sage Vyāsa did not feel joyful. While he was reflecting on his mental condition by the shore of the Sarasvātī River, there appeared his spiritual teacher, the celestial sage Nārada, who explained to Vyāsa that although he had fulfilled a great task by composing the *Mahābhārata*, his sadness was the result of his work being incomplete.⁴³ Nārada now instructed Vyāsa to talk about the glories of god, and the result was the *Shrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Many years afterward, Vyāsa’s son and disciple Shukha (whose name means “parrot”) was called upon by the King Parikṣit, the grandson of Arjuna, one of the protagonists of the *Mahābhārata*. King Parikṣit was undertaking the penance of dying in slow fire during the period of seven days, and he

⁴² Tracy Coleman (2001) has compared in detail the passage of *Rāsa Līlā* with its correspondent passages in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Harivāṃsa Purāṇa*.

⁴³ *Dharma*, a much discussed Sanskrit term, refers to a complex dynamic of life-long engagements of the individual with religion and society. In the context of Hinduism, the *dharma* of a person is determined by the caste, sect and family. Among the many meanings of the term, the most common are duty, law, right, religion, and custom.

asked the sage Shukha to give him the teachings that a dying king needs to receive.

Thus, Shukha narrated the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to King Parikṣit in the presence of many sages, among them Suta (“son”). And the narration of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that is known today is from the mouth of the sage Suta, who heard the sage Shukha tell to King Parikṣit what he had heard his father Vyāsa narrate about the glories of god. Who is, then, the author of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*?

A coherent answer to this question is all of them, and none of them. The authorship of the Indian epics, as argued by Patton, is “the constitution of a cultural repertoire [...] a reservoir into which other early Indian narrators might dip at any given moment. The figure of an author is somewhat like a style of imagining that attaches itself to a name” (“Traces” 4). Rather than an author creating a text, as it is usually argued for Iberian literature—despite recent discussions on the orality of Medieval literature—“in ancient India, an author does not create a text so much as a textual tradition creates a sense of authorial capacity, an authorial imaginaire” (Patton, “Traces” 1). Following this thought, Vyāsa, his son Shukha, and the sage Suta are part of an authorial imaginaire that, again, would be impossible to locate in either complete fictional or complete historical terms. In a similar manner, the Āḷvārs poetry is part of an imaginaire that is locatable in time and space, and that integrates fluently into the intermingling of devotion, fiction, and history which is the nature of Indian orality.

Authorship and Orality in the *Cántico espiritual*

Although the question of authorship in the *Cántico* should be addressed from a quite different perspective because archival material provide scholars with a specific

biography and a timeline, to think of a comparison with the question of authorship in *Rāsa Līlā* helps one notice the important role of oral transmission and the construction of authorship in the creation and critical discussion of the *Cántico*, and to which only recently authors have paid attention.⁴⁴

Juan de la Cruz (1542-1592) is the name that the author of the *Cántico espiritual* took when he joined the reformed order of the Discalced Carmelites in 1568. His previous name was Juan de Santo Matía, as he had taken it five years before, at the age of twenty-one, when he joined the Order of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. This is the name that appears in the records of the Universidad de Salamanca, which he attended from 1564 to 1568. His birth name had been Juan de Yepes y Álvares. Recent biographers (most prominently José Luis Sánchez Lora) have pursued a deconstruction of the hagiographies published during the years before his canonization in 1726. One of the main topics of discussion—as in the case of Teresa de Jesús—is his genealogy. Although the institutionally-accepted narrative talks about the noble origins of his father and the obscure origins of his mother, contemporary authors have considered this opinion as a need to purify the blood of the saint-to-be and to veil the signs of a possible Muslim background.⁴⁵ It is true that references such as to his ability to manage accounts and the testimony that he liked to sit on the floor as an adult

⁴⁴ Sánchez-Lora (2004), Elia (1991) and Gil (2004).

⁴⁵ In sixteenth-century Spain where Juan de la Cruz lived, as well as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the processes of beatification and canonization took place, the practice of *limpieza de sangre* (“cleaning up blood lineages”) was common. The *crisianos nuevos*, like Teresa de Jesús, were under constant surveillance by the *crisianos viejos* and the Holy Office of the Inquisition.

because he did so during his childhood are not enough to confirm his Muslim descent.⁴⁶

The obscure origins of Fray Juan de la Cruz would play a role within the framework of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, led by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, King of Spain (1500-1558), and—within the broader context of the Counter-Reformation—in the reformation of the Carmelite Order begun by Teresa de Jesús in

⁴⁶ José Gómez Menor (1970) was the first one to suggest a Muslim lineage for Juan de la Cruz. Otger Steggink and Efrén (1992) also refer to this debate. The event of sitting in the floor as a Muslim behavior is used by Rosa Rossi (1996) and Juan de la Cruz Martín (2005) to argue for the Muslim lineage of Juan de la Cruz's family. Dámaso Chicharro Chamorro (1991) argues that Juan de la Cruz must have been a *converse*, based on the documentary proof of the way he managed the language of selling and buying as a merchant would do. After a childhood marked by his father's death, economic migrations, and care under reformatory institutions, Juan attended the *Colegio de la Compañía de Jesús* of Medina del Campo from 1559 until 1563. Although the early hagiographies do not pay much attention to this period, contemporary researchers believe that those were the years of the basic humanistic foundations of Juan de Yepes, where he was exposed to the works of, among others, Erasmus of Rotterdam, who was not yet prohibited by the Spanish Inquisition. The Jesuits were practicing the new academic method of *ratio studiorum* based on classicism and humanism (Martín 34), and one of their basic exercises was to study, comment, and compose in prose and verse using the rhetorical figures learned from the classics. Some argue that Juan de la Cruz's first verses were written during this period. After joining the religious order of the Brothers of our Lady of Mount Carmel in 1564, (as Juan de Santo Matías) he attended the Colegio Carmelitano de San Andrés de Salamanca. The Universidad de Salamanca was the first university in Spain and one of the first four in Europe, a noted center of debate and development of Renaissance scholarship. There Juan de Santo Matía intended to study arts, philosophy and theology. The most famous professor of Salamanca from that time was Fray Luis de León, whose translation of the *Song of Songs* into vulgar language, as history goes, ran from hand to hand among the students. The possible contact and influence of Fray Luis on Juan de Santo Matía/de la Cruz has been widely discussed, but what is certain is that Juan de Santo Matía was exposed to discussions of Erasmus, the Neoplatonist, Pythagoras, and the Biblical languages. In 1568, Juan de Santo Matía took holy vows as a "discalced" brother, thus adhering to the reformation of the order and changing his name, for the last time, to Juan de la Cruz, becoming the master of novices and spiritual teacher of the Reformation. After the first three years of university, having completed the studies of "Arts," and after his ordination as a Carmelite 1567, Juan was disappointed with the spirit of the order and was considering a change to the more contemplative and stricter order of the Carthusians. All narratives agree that in the fall of 1567, after his first ordination while chanting mass in Medina del Campo, Juan de Santo Matía met Teresa de Jesús and she proposed that he join the movement of reformation of the Carmelite order, which he did after returning to Salamanca for his only year of theological studies. During the next four years, he was responsible for four religious foundations in the towns of Duruelo, Macera, Pastrana, and in the city of Alcalá de Henares, where he was assigned to be the dean of the new Carmelite college.

1561.⁴⁷ The Counter-Reformation was meant to counteract the reforms of Luther and to strengthen the basis of the Catholic faith. And the reform of the Carmelite Order initiated by Teresa de Jesús in the city of Ávila, although authorized by the Pope Pius IV and the King Phillip II, was frequently accused of being *erasmista*, *iluminista* or *luterana*. While Teresa de Jesús carved a political relationship that allowed the Discalced Reform to exist, and her canonization process lasted less than forty years, Juan de la Cruz would become a much more controversial figure and was not canonized until the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ As Sánchez Lora asserts, Fray Juan de la Cruz came to be the first enemy of Juan de la Cruz as constructed by the Catholic institution throughout the four centuries that preceded his short life (14).

Here the question arises as to how the construction of a personality leading to the canonization influenced the ideas about the authorship and the process of creation of the *Cántico espiritual* and the *Comentarios*. The first problem that one faces when

⁴⁷ During the last decade of the fifteenth century, the Spanish Catholic Monarchy of Isabel of Castile and Fernando of León had been established. The last city under Muslim rule had been taken over by the king in 1492 and in October of the same year, Christopher Columbus arrived in America, thus embarking on the colonial enterprise that made Spain the center of the most powerful empire of its time. The Holy Office of the Inquisition had been brought to Spain by the Catholic kings in 1478, and at the beginning of the sixteenth century, it was a powerful institution, exercising economic and political control well beyond the crown. The Iberian Jewish community had been officially expelled from Spain in 1492, and the Muslims would be banished in 1605, but were equally persecuted during the sixteenth century. In 1517, Martin Luther presented his ninety-five theses, and the Holy Roman Emperor called for the Council of Trent to avoid the schism. In 1564, King Phillip II, successor of Charles V, incorporated in Spain the laws approved at the Council of Trent, which included the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum et Expurgatorum*, the *Index of Prohibited Books*, which had been created by the Church in 1559. One of the first prohibited authors, along with Luther, was Erasmus of Rotterdam, who, it was said, “laid the egg that Luther hatched,” even after his influence had been so strong in Spain that the Cardinal Cisneros, personal advisor of Queen Isabel, had invited him to the Universidad Complutense de Madrid in Alcalá de Henares, the first Renaissance university of Spain, where Juan de la Cruz would be the rector of the Carmelite college in 1571-72.

⁴⁸ Although her canonization was contested by the Inquisition, after her death, Teresa de Jesús’s image was adjusted to the canons of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, and her canonization process lasted less than forty years, as had occurred with other Spanish saints like Ignacio de Loyola.

approaching the works of Juan de la Cruz is that of authenticity. Such careful readers as Edith Stein (234-236) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (128) have suggested that the additions to the edition of his works were to conform to the postulates of the Holy Inquisition.⁴⁹ According to Sánchez Lora, this invention is the cause, in the first place, of the fact that the figure of Fray Juan de la Cruz and his teachings were not consistent with the plans for the Carmelite Reform envisioned by King Phillip II after the death of Teresa de Jesús and executed by Nicolas Doria, who was the General of the Order under the protection of the King. Juan de la Cruz's writings, his theology (privileging non-mediated relation with the divine), and the way in which he advised nuns and friars of the Reform on spiritual practices did not agree with the scholastic precepts of the mainstream Counter-Reformation. The argument of the contemporary biographers echoes the worries expressed in 1776 by the Carmelite brother Fray Andrés de la Encarnación, who, in a report to his superiors, affirmed that the published works of Juan de la Cruz had included such strange innovations that Juan de la Cruz himself would not recognize them as his own. Agreeing with von Balthasar, Stein, de la Encarnación, and Sánchez Lora, I want to call attention to two aspects. First, that scholasticism and *teología mística* are not completely divorced in the work of Juan de la Cruz—I will return to this idea when I discuss the theological context of the work. Second, I want to highlight the fact that the *Cántico*, as Colin Thompson has noticed, is not to be thought of as static, but as a dynamic interplay of poetic and life experiences.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ In *The Science of the Cross*, Edith Stein refers to the possible additions to the commentary and the poem, and von Balthasar, in *The Glory of God*, talks about the “scholastic additions.”

⁵⁰ The entire quote reads: “All this strongly suggests a dynamic *Cántico*; not a single work written at one specific time, but a poem and a prose exposition which developed and grew beyond its genesis during San Juan imprisonment.” (*The Poet and the Mystic*, 27).

Orality and the Process of Creation of the *Cántico espiritual*

The *Cántico espiritual* is the first of Juan de la Cruz's three main poetic compositions to which he added commentaries, turning them into theological treatises.⁵¹ The *Cántico* and its *Comentarios* were conceived in various physical spaces and times, such as the prison of Toledo in 1577 and the convents of Beas de Segura and Granada between 1578 and 1587; as well as in various subjective spaces such as Juan de la Cruz's spiritual contemplation and his memory, and the dialogue and further spiritual practices of the nuns of Beas de Segura and Granada. From the two versions of the poem, I have chosen for this dissertation the *Cántico B*, corresponding to the manuscript of Jaén, in which the order of the verses is changed from the first version (*Cántico A*, manuscript of Sanlúcar) and new stanzas are added. The original title of the poem, as it appears in the *Cántico B*, is *Canciones entre el alma y el esposo*.

To think about how the *Cántico espiritual* came to light, one should consider both the biographical events in the life of Juan de la Cruz during the decade of 1570 to 1580, as well as the place that the *Song of Songs* played within the theological context of the period. In 1572, Teresa de Jesús called Juan de la Cruz to be the confessor and spiritual director of the nuns of the *Monasterio de la Encarnación* de Ávila, where she had first been ordained and from which she had left to initiate her reforms. This period marked the beginning of Juan de la Cruz's life as a spiritual director of the female branch of the

⁵¹ The three poems are *Cántico espiritual*, *Noche oscura* and *Llama de amor viva*. There are four commentaries, one to the *Cántico*, two to the *Noche oscura* (*Subida al Monte Carmelo* and *Noche oscura*) and one on the *Llama de amor viva*.

order. Adhering to this responsibility would eventually cause Doria, the later general of the order, to take away all Juan de la Cruz's authority over the order.

His work along with Teresa de Jesús in Ávila would be suddenly interrupted when he was kidnapped and taken to prison by the friars from the original Carmelite order that he first joined, under the charge of disobedience to the religious constitutions of the order.⁵² Testimonies agree that when he escaped, he carried with him either in his memory or in a notebook tied to his neck what can be considered the first—and lost—manuscript of the *Cántico espiritual*, which he had begun to compose in his prison cell. The first recorded testimonies of the existence of this work are collected in the canonization documents of Juan de la Cruz and in the *Historia del Carmen Descalzo*. The Discalced Carmelite nuns of Toledo, where Juan first took refuge, refer to *la recitación de los lindísimos versos que en ella había compuesto* (136) (“the recitation of the very beautiful verses that there [in prison] he had composed”). After escaping from prison, Juan de la Cruz was sent to Andalucía as a superior of the convent El Calvario, in the region of Jaén, and he continued his work as a spiritual director of the friars and the nuns of the *Monasterio de las Carmelitas Descalzas de San Salvador*, in the southern town of Beas la Segura.

The process of creation, transmission, and *post mortis* publication of the *Cántico espiritual* is linked to the relationship between Juan de la Cruz and these nuns, to whose

⁵² The eight or nine months of prison in Toledo constitute, along with his childhood, the littlest-known (if also most speculated about) period in the life of Juan de la Cruz. He seems to have never referred to these months in too much detail, but the testimonies of those who saw him after he escaped are enough to enable readers to picture the extreme isolation and immense physical and moral pain of which he was the victim. Many conjectures have been made about his escape, and it seems that it will never be known for certain whether it was arranged or, as the process of canonization states, it happened “as a miracle.”

prioress, Ana de Jesús, the poem and commentaries are dedicated.⁵³ Many refer to this monastery as “his favorite,” following the comments from the manuscripts of the canonization process quoted by Silverio de Santa Teresa in his *Historia del Carmen*

Descalzo:

Siempre favoreció a este convento de Beas con su presencia, acudiendo a él, o con sus cartas espirituales que las escribía, en las cuales comenzando desde la priora hasta acabar en la menor del convento, nombrándolas a todas, a cada una escribía una sentencia espiritual, diciéndole se ejercitase en aquello para crecer en la virtud; y decía estas sentencias tan acertadamente que parecía veía las necesidades de las almas de todas, las cuales las recibían como oráculos del cielo. (173)

He always favored this convent of Beas with his presence, visiting it, or with his spiritual letters that he wrote, in which, beginning with the prioress and ending at the most junior member of the convent, naming all, to each of them he would write a spiritual maxim, telling them to put that into practice so that they would grow in virtue; and he would tell them those maxims so accurately that it seemed as if he saw the needs of the soul of all, and they would receive them as oracles from heaven.

⁵³ Although it is his first poem and the one with a higher number of manuscripts, the *Cántico* was not included in the first Spanish edition of his works approved by the Church in 1618. Instead, the poem and its commentary were first published in Paris in 1622, in a French translation by M. René Gaultier from the Spanish manuscript brought to Brussels by Ana de Jesús, the Carmelite nun to whom Juan de la Cruz dedicated his commentary to the poem. It is an interesting coincidence that the first translation of *Rāsa Līlā* into a Romance language would also be in French, in 1840.

Similar narrations portray the nuns of Beas handmaking notebooks with the spiritual maxims that Juan de la Cruz would write for them, which they memorized and used in their daily spiritual practice. Other testimonies picture Fray Juan drawing the details of his *teología mística* to better explain to the nuns. In addition, unpublished archival research by López-Baralt and Eulogio Pacho point at a tradition of musicalization of the *Cántico* that travelled through different convents and foundations in the first years of the Carmelite Reformation.⁵⁴ Here is where the *Cántico espiritual*, first conceived either by memory or in written in the prison of Toledo, took its manuscript form and where Juan de la Cruz, in collaboration with these religious women, began to compose his own commentaries to the poem in order to guide them through the path of *teología mística* depicted in the lyrics of the *Cántico*. These women memorized, pondered over, copied, and rewrote many times the words of Fray Juan de la Cruz, using it as a text for the exercise of the meditative practices at the style of the *lectio divina*. If his *Subida al Monte Carmelo* and *Noche oscura* are dedicated to “many souls” in much need of help, the commentary of the *Cántico* is personally meant for Ana de Jesús, the prioress of the nuns of Beas, who “although lacking the exercise of scholastic theology [...] does not lack the exercise of *mística*, that is known by love” (*Cántico*, “Prólogo” 11).⁵⁵

Carlos Andrés Gil has analyzed in detail the implications of the oral origins of the *Cántico espiritual*, and Paola Elía has explained the importance of oral trends in its transmission. Still, it is essential to stress that this creative process took place in the

⁵⁴ Personal conversation with Luce López-Baralt. May 17, 2011.

⁵⁵ This is not the only case in which he dedicated a poetic composition to a woman; the *Llama de Amor Viva* was dedicated to Ana de Peñalosa.

context of a reciprocal and productive spiritual relationship between Juan and these women who were not only the recipients of the poem, but also its co-authors, its spiritual performers, its proclaimers, and its disseminators. It is curious that when in 1776 Fray Andrés de la Encarnación complained to his superiors about the major alterations in the edition of the works of Juan de la Cruz, he said that this occurs “in particular in the *Subida del Monte Carmelo*, *Noche Escura*, and *Llama de Amor viva*” (Sánchez Lora 105) but his list does not include the *Cántico espiritual* in spite of the many manuscripts. It is probable that the *Cántico* managed to escape excessive editing for two reasons, first because the authorities did not allow its inclusion in the first edition of the complete works of the saint, and second because of the zeal with which the nuns of Beas de Segura, later spread throughout different locations in Spain and Europe, kept the verses of the *Cántico* intact. The important role of orality in the composition of the *Cántico* and its *Comentarios* is closely intertwined with the theological project of Juan de la Cruz, and to this idea I will return when I refer to the theological context of the work.

Theological Contexts: Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity

In his 1996 *Reading Through Texts*, Clooney compares the Vaiṣṇava and Christian traditions, a comparison that I shall review before discussing in detail the theological context of each work. The first feature Clooney notices is that both traditions are theistic and “in regard to soteriological concerns, in fact monotheistic too” (39). Both traditions claim to believe in the existence of a divinity, and for both, salvation will come through the intersection of one specific aspect of such divinity. This characteristic, Clooney explains, is more obvious in the Christian tradition than in the Vaiṣṇavism,

where it refers to the centrality of one of the Hindu *trimurti*, Viṣṇu. The tenth book of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, in which *Rāsa Līlā* appears, has been understood in terms of Kṛṣṇateism, regarding Kṛṣṇa not as an incarnation of Viṣṇu and the intermediary deity through whose intersection the devotee will obtain salvation, but as superior to Viṣṇu itself and the only godhead granter of liberation.⁵⁶

Secondly, Clooney also notices that the reality of the world and the real distinction between humans and god is defended by both Christians and Vaiṣṇavas, and this will be a central argument alongside my comparison. Such a shared aspect of both traditions is essential for the poetic and theological comparison of the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*. The goal of both works is the union with the divine, but this union is not an undifferentiated essential identity. God keeps his divinity and human beings keep their humanity. In the commentaries, Juan de la Cruz describes this process with the Biblical notion of “god by participation,” which Thomas Aquinas explained as the possession of an attribute partially, not fully, and which Juan de la Cruz adopts to describe the state of *matrimonio espiritual* between the soul and god as *dos naturalezas en un espíritu* (“two natures in one spirit”). On the other hand, the context of the not strictly dualistic branches of the Vaiṣṇava tradition, there is a famous anonymous saying that “it is not the same to be sugar as to taste the sugar,” thus attributing superior value to the act of enjoying in duality over the act of being totally transformed in oneness.

⁵⁶ This characteristic has given rise to earlier comparison between Christ and Kṛṣṇa such as Noel Sheth’s *The Divinity of Krishna* (1984). The *mahāvākya* (“great statement”) used by the Kṛṣṇaite theologians to argue the supremacy of Kṛṣṇa as declared in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is: *ete cāmśa-kalāḥ puṁsaḥ/kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam/indrāri-vyākulaḥ lokaḥ/mṛḍayanti yuge yuge* (“All of the above-mentioned incarnations are either plenary portions or portions of the plenary portions of the Lord, but Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the genuine *Bhagavan*. All [the others] give protection to the world in different ages whenever there is a disturbance created by the enemies of Indra.”) (I.3.28)

Thirdly, both traditions represent the process of searching for the divine as mediated by the experience of the human being in the world. One observes that the *Cántico*, as well as *Rāsa Līlā*, portrays the creatures of nature—trees, flowers, forests—as messengers that bridge the distance between the person and the divine and relieve, if only temporarily, the feeling of absence. A fourth relevant aspect noticed by Clooney is that although the delay of the desired divine vision is interconnected with the commitment to service, for both Vaiṣṇavas and Christians the final result depends on divine grace. So the *Amada* of the *Cántico* and the *gopis* of *Rāsa Līlā* turn to their divine lovers as the means, as well as the aim, of their desire of vision.

One final important aspect concerning this comparison is that in the contexts of each tradition, these texts are not passive, but are imbued with performance and participation. The *Rāsa Līlā* is, even today, the most performed and popular known Kṛṣṇa-related text in India.⁵⁷ Moreover, some of the modes of spiritual practice of the text involve elaborate performative practices.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the *Cántico* is still a main part of the teachings for nuns and friars of the Discalced Carmelite order, although the performative aspect of the practices—which mostly occur in cloistered monasteries—needs to be the object of a new study. Nonetheless, both texts share their demanding nature; they want, in the words of Clooney, to be “taken to heart” by the practitioners that approach them (*Beyond Compare* 27).

These five aspects—first, the implied monotheism and theism; second, the conception of the world as both a manifestation of god and as means for the search; third,

⁵⁷ For more details see Haberman (1988), Sax (1995), and Hawley (1981).

⁵⁸ See Haberman (1988).

the essential separation between creator and creature; fourth, the role of grace; and fifth, the demanding and performative nature of the texts—will be addressed along with the comparison of the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*. A final common feature is that each tradition claims its universality, as Clooney puts it, seeking to place their “others,” their “outsiders” properly and *vis à vis* themselves. Proportionally, the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā* reflect this exclusivist principle as they are works fully incorporated in their religious traditions.

Narratives and Theological Context: The Narration of *Rāsa Līlā*

Canto X of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, much more extensive than its predecessors, narrates the events of the life of Kṛṣṇa in an intensified sense of personified theism. The first twenty-eight chapters are devoted to Kṛṣṇa’s birth and his childhood under the care of his adoptive parents in the cattle-herding village of Vraja. The second half of *Canto X* describes the stories of Kṛṣṇa as a king in the city of Mathura. Between both sections, chapters twenty-nine to thirty-three relate the episode known as *Rāsa Līlā* or *Pañcadhyāya* that pertain to this dissertation. The *Rāsa Līlā*, like the rest of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, is composed mostly in *śloka*, the basic rhyme of Sanskrit poetry, but with many interludes of complicated rhythmic structures such as *vasantatilakam*. The first chapter contains forty-eight verses, the second forty-two, the third nineteen, the fourth twenty-two, and the last forty.

The first chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*—the twenty-ninth of *Canto X* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*—begins on an autumn night, when Kṛṣṇa decides to resort to the power of illusion and to play a melody on his flute, stealing the minds, hearts, and senses of all the

young girls and wives of Vraja, the *gopis*. These young women, who have previously asked the boon of being loved by Kṛṣṇa, abandon all activities and run to this encounter with him. When he sees them in front of him, he reprimands them—or pretends to—reminding them of their duties as wives and women of good families. Then the women engage in a theological argument with Kṛṣṇa, calling him “a god hard to understand” and positioning themselves not only as devotees who stay at the feet of the Lord to fulfill *dharma*, but as ones who hold him as the dearest friend of their soul.⁵⁹ With a smile, the *gopis* turn Kṛṣṇa’s argument back to him, arguing that as the lord of *dharma*, he can take on as his charge the due duties to husbands and sons. Kṛṣṇa answers with an action described in only two verses, announcing that moved by compassion, he enjoyed love with those women, who made him “shine like a sapphire” (33.7). This is the first time in the text where the terms *ātmārāma* is used.⁶⁰ At the end of the first chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*, Kṛṣṇa disappears before the eyes of the *gopis* as a reaction to their extreme pride born from joy of interaction with the beloved.

The second chapter—the thirtieth of the *Canto X* of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*—narrates the *gopis*’ anguish of separation and their search for Kṛṣṇa. They wander “heated by the separation,” asking the trees and the plants of the forest where he is, and enacting among themselves the events of the previous encounters with the beloved. By the end of the chapter, the *gopis* discover the footprints of Kṛṣṇa and in a magnified description of the

⁵⁹ The complete verse reads, *yat paty-apatya-suhrdām anuvṛttir aṅga/ strīṇām sva-dharma iti dharma-vidā tvayoktam//astu evam etad upadeśa-pade tvayīše/ preṣṭho bhavāms tanu-bhṛtām kila bandhur ātmā//* (29.32)

(Oh Bhavān, what has been said by you, the knower of dharma, is in conformity with the duties of good women. Let that be in the case of you as the goal of teaching and in the case of you as the Lord. But aren’t you the dearest friend of the soul of all human beings?)

⁶⁰ *Ātmārāma*, literally “satisfied in the *ātman*.” It is an adjective used for the deities to point at their self-sufficient quality.

footsteps they find out that Kṛṣṇa has taken another *gopi* with him to the forest. Later they find this *gopi*, also abandoned by Kṛṣṇa after a display of pride. The women walk together to a clearing in the forest where, tired by the anguish and by the search, sit and fix their minds on Kṛṣṇa.

The third chapter of *Rāsa Līlā* is an invocation by the *gopis* for the presence of Kṛṣṇa. This chapter is known as “*Gopi Gīta*,” the song of the *gopis*, because they are the only voices heard in the narration, describing their anguish of separation and continuously calling for the vision of the beloved’s lotus feet. The fourth chapter of *Rāsa Līlā* narrates the return of Kṛṣṇa and precedes the famous *Rāsa Dance*. The second half of this chapter recreates the theological discussion of the first chapter, when the *gopis* ask Kṛṣṇa—also with smiles and a certain tone of anger—about the nature of reciprocity in love. His answer can be understood as the principles of devotion—*Bhakti*—in which Kṛṣṇa explains who the adequate recipient of his love is. In the last verse of the fourth chapter, Kṛṣṇa declares that the *gopis* have attained the highest state of love of his person, which he himself cannot repay even in the lifetime of a god, meaning in the infiniteness of time.⁶¹

The last chapter of *Rāsa Līlā* announces that the words of Kṛṣṇa have put an end to the distress of the women, and thus begins the *Rāsa Dance* between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopis*, in which the god, “like a boy playing with his own reflection,” multiplies himself

⁶¹The verse reads: *na pārāye 'haṁ niravadya-saṁyujām / sva-sādhukṛtyaṁ vibudhāyusāpi vaḥ //yā mābhajan durjaragehaśṛṅkhalāḥ /saṁvṛśya tad vaḥ pratiyātu sādhunā//*(32.22)
(Even in the life of a god, I am not capable by my own actions of your spotless devotion. Let it be returned, by the measure of your good actions to you, who have loved me, having broken the hard chains of household for me.)

for as many girls as were there so that each of them would think that Kṛṣṇa is “embracing only her.” The *Rāsa Līlā* ends with a theological debate among sages about the nature of the acts of Kṛṣṇa in the context of *dharma*. They conclude that he has not strayed into *adharmā* (non-*dharma*), because Kṛṣṇa himself is the incarnation of *dharma*. The last two verses state that the women return “unwillingly” to their houses and that the ultimate purpose of this narration is to increase the devotion of those who listen and repeat the stories of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*.

Theological Context of *Rāsa Līlā*

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has been interpreted and claimed by religious schools that support diverse positions regarding the relationship of the divine and the creatures of nature. This discussion, with many nuances, develops around the notions of *advaita* (non-dual) and *dvaita* (dual) philosophy. The *advaita* position claims that the reality of the world and the individual self is ontologically dependent upon a single absolute reality; and the *advaita* maintains that the relation between god and the world is one of ultimate difference. Within the *advaitic* tradition are found two main perspectives. One conceives of the definitive unreality of the world and of an ultimate reality without distinctions (*nirviṣeṣādvaita*). This is the view maintained by Shankara and the school called *māyāvādins*. The other position recognizes that there is a real world and an individual self, which are ultimately dependent upon one absolute reality, and this reality is a divine with distinguishable qualities. This position is called *saviṣeṣādvaita*, or qualified non-dualism (Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism* 69). Among the various schools that support a qualified non-dualism, I will refer briefly to the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavas

(sixteenth century), which proposes the concept of *acintyabhedābheda* or unthinkable difference in identity. This school recognizes simultaneously that Bhagavan (Kṛṣṇa) and his *śakti* (powers of creation) are identical and different at the same time (Gupta 71). In contrast with the non-dual perspective and its many variants, other theologians such as Madhva proclaim a *dvaitic* (dual) position, maintaining that the divine and the individual self are ultimately different and distinct.

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and particularly in *Rāsa Līlā*, Kṛṣṇa is often described by the term *ātmarāma* (*ātma* here understood as “self” and *rāma*, from the verbal root *ram*, “to enjoy”). This term lends itself to different theological interpretations that subsume the various points of approach to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The term *ātmarāma* can be read as “he who is self-satisfied,” and therefore does not require others to please himself, or as “he whose source of satisfaction is himself,” but with the theological twist that the self includes all the creatures of the world. The difference between the first and the second perspective corresponds broadly to the main theological discussion in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, namely, the degree of identity and differentiation (*bheda*) between god and the creatures of the world. Generally speaking, from the non-dual and non-qualified perspective, Kṛṣṇa as *ātmarāma* engages in amorous pastimes with the women of Vraja without ulterior impulse and exclusively for the sake of compassion. From the non-dual qualified perspective, the *gopis* are a creation of Kṛṣṇa and not separate from him, but at the same time, there remains a level of difference that allows Kṛṣṇa to take pleasure in them as they take pleasure in him. Both positions, along with the *dvaitic* perspective, could be argued literally and theologically from the text, as I will discuss further when referring to the commentary of Śrīdhara Svāmi. Still, it cannot be said that

there are exact divisions among all of them. For the non-qualified *advaitic*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is a source of *jñāna* (knowledge). For the dualists, the text is a source of devotion, a living expression and manifestation of the god that is meant to be remembered and repeated. For the qualified *advaitic*, it seems to be a source of both. But in any case, *jñāna* (knowledge) does not totally exclude devotion, and vice versa. As Gupta remarks, the *Bhāgavata* serves as a bridge between the worlds of *rāsa* (the emotion of devotion) and *jñāna*, mediating the emotional and intellectual, welding together Bhakti and Vedānta, an intertwining devotional narrative with philosophical speculation (28).

Bhakti, Yogamāya, Rāsa, and Līlā

The last prescription of the *Rāsa Līlā*, to listen and to repeat, identifies the supreme acts of devotion that grant the continuous life of the text previous to and beyond its written form. From the Sanskrit verbal root *bhaj*, to enjoy, to share, to honor, the term *bhakti* is generally translated as “devotion,” but implies much more. It is a dynamic relationship between the divine and the person in which each is both the enjoyed and the enjoyer. The *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* describe *bhakti* as “having the nature of a supreme Love of God” and being “nothing less than the immortal bliss of freedom itself, which comes unsolicited by the grace of God and by self-sacrifice” (2.3). In his commentary to *Rāsa Līlā*, Śrīdhara Svāmī offers a definition of the *bhakta*—the one who practices *bhakti*—as one who is always satisfied by service at the dust of god’s feet, and therefore not bound by desire.⁶² Sheridan observes that being love, *bhakti* uses the language of

⁶² Here Śrīdhara is rephrasing the thirty-fifth verse of the last chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*: *yat-pāda-paṅkaja-parāga-niṣeva-tṛptā/yoga-prabhāva-vidhutākhila-karma-bandhāḥ/svairam caranti munayo 'pi na*

love and is related to erotic passion and desire because it is rooted in the nature of the personal individual self and within the field of humanity (*Loving God* 35). If *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is considered the *galitam phalam*, “the ripened fruit of the Vedic tree,” then *Rāsa Līlā* is the sum and substance of *bhakti* because in no other utterance of literature is there an example of such an intimate relationship with the divine. The relationship of the *gopis* and Kṛṣṇa subsumes utter enjoyment and with it utter knowledge of the divine. The text itself so claims at the end of the thirty-second chapter, when Kṛṣṇa proclaims that the *gopis* have attended the highest degree of devotion for him, and the *Nārada Sūtras* echoes this statement. From a qualified non-dualistic perspective, the goal of devotion is a blissful Bhagavan, eager to share and experience its fullness with his creation (Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism* 31). But the most important quality of *bhakti* is that it is a sharing of love; *sauhṛdyam bhaktim*, says the *Rāsa Līlā* (29.15): “*bhakti* is good-heart.”

A core concept needed to understand *bhakti* in the context of of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is *yogamāya*. Here *yoga* translates as its most common assertion of “union,” while the term *māyā* holds a more complicated function. *Māyā*, from the verbal root *may*, to go, to move, is a term related to an illusory power, the illusion by virtue of which one considers the unreal universe as a really existent and distinct form. This deceptive nature of *māyā* is interpreted from two main theological perspectives, again determined by the presuppositions about the levels of identity and difference between god and the world. From a non-dualistic perspective, *māyā* is an effect of ignorance and needs to be

nahyamānās/tasyecchayātta-vapuṣaḥ kuta eva bandhaḥ// (“Those who are satisfied by the service at the dust of his feet, those who are bound to *karma* have been cleaned by the power of *yoga*, they go freely like *munis*. Where is the bondage of he who has taken this body by will?”)

overcome; it is one of the dangers of the soul identified by the tradition, and its common adjective is “*samsaric*,” referring to the endless cycle of birth and rebirth produced by the prevalence of desire caused by the illusion—*māyā*—that the world is real. Although even great sages are anxious to avoid the illusory power of *samsaric māyā*, the greatest sage of all, Nārada, is very eager to experience *yogamāyā*, the illusion of union with the divine. While the regular *māyā* can only disappear by devotion to Kṛṣṇa, the divine *yogamāyā* can only appear by devotion to Kṛṣṇa (Bryant, *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend* xxvii). *Yogamāyā*, also translated as yogic energy, is manifest at the beginning of *Canto X* as a baby girl born from Kṛṣṇa’s future adoptive mother in Vraja, for whom he is later exchanged to avoid being murdered.⁶³ In popular performances, *yogamāyā* is portrayed as Kṛṣṇa’s favorite playmate and the executor of his commands (Hawley *At Play* 191). However, *yogamāyā*’s most important role in *Rāsa Līlā* is fulfilled as the power summoned by Kṛṣṇa (in the first verse) to begin his amorous play with the *gopis*.⁶⁴ All throughout *Rāsa Līlā*, *yogamāyā* is the one responsible for setting the stage for the amorous interplay and guaranteeing its course. In relation to the category of *bhakti* and in the context of the qualified non-dualism of the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavas, *yogamāyā*

⁶³ Kāṁsa, the maternal uncle of Kṛṣṇa, has been predicted to die at the hands of his sister Devakī’s son. Therefore, he would kill every child born from her. When Kṛṣṇa is born, his father Vasudeva takes him to Vraja and gives him to Yaśoda and Nanda, and in return, he brings to Devakī the girl that had been born to them. When Kāṁsa tries to kill Yogamāyā, she becomes manifest in her eight-armed form and ascends to heaven.

⁶⁴ The verse 29.1 reads: *bhagavān api tā rātrīḥ/śāradotphullamallikāḥ/vīkṣya rantum manas cakre/yogamāyām upāśritaḥ*// (“Even Bhagavān, having contemplated those autumnal nights of flowering jasmines, turned his mind to love and took recourse of *yogamāyā*.”)

functions as one of the powers (*shakti*) of Bhagavan, controlled by him and on whom he does not depend, but uses in his play with his creatures.⁶⁵

The third and fourth categories essential for the analysis of *Rāsa Līlā* are precisely *rāsa* and *līlā*. In the realm of Sanskrit poetics, the term *rāsa*, meaning essence, juice, or sap, was first employed as an aesthetic concept by the legendary sage and dramatic theoretician Bhārata. In his work *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bhārata describes *rāsa* as that which rises from the mixture of specific psychological states stimulated by the theatrical performance.⁶⁶ Generally translatable as “aesthetic enjoyment,” *rāsa* is a rather complex concept that evolved over the centuries of Indian aesthetics and philosophy. Between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, the concept of *rāsa* was actualized by various scholars. Among them was Ānandavardhana (eleventh century) who applied *rāsa* to all artistic manifestations and Abhinavagupta (thirteenth century) who, in his commentary to the *Rāsa Sūtra* (the verse that defines *rāsa*) of Bhārata—called *Abhinavabhāratī*—brought the concept of *rāsa* into the domain of spiritual experience. To the eight kinds of *rāsas* first proclaimed by Bhārata, Abhinavagupta added the *śānta rāsa* or peaceful *rāsa*, which induces *moksa* or liberation. Although direct influence is discussed, these were the theoretical bases for the further expansion of the theological and aesthetic concept of *rāsa* in the sixteenth century by the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava School as seen in the work of two of its

⁶⁵ For further reference see Daniel Sheridan, *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 35-37, and Ravi Gupta, *The Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedaanta of Jīva Gosāvmni* 68-71.

⁶⁶ The most important *Sūtra* or sentence from *Nāṭyaśāstra*, known as *Rāsa Sūtra*, says: *tatra vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārisaṃyogādrasaniṣpattiḥ*. It refers to the combination of different psychological states that may come together to produce the experience of *rāsa*.

founders, Rūpa Goswāmin and Jīva Goswāmin.⁶⁷ Rūpa Goswāmin developed in detail a new kind of *rāsa*, *bhakti rāsa*, the emotion of the devotion for Kṛṣṇa in religious and aesthetic terms. Rūpa defined *bhakti rāsa* as “serving the Lord of Senses with one’s own senses” (*Bhaktirāsamrtasindhu* 1.1.12) and the love for Kṛṣṇa (*Kṛṣṇarati*) as the foundational emotion that becomes *bhakti rāsa* (2.1.5).⁶⁸

Closely related to *yogamāya*, *bhakti* and *rāsa* is the notion of *līlā*. *Līlā* means “play,” and it was first used as a theological term in the *Vedāntasūtras* by Bādarāyana, maintaining that the Supreme Lord creates the world “merely in play” (Sax 4). In the context of Vaiṣṇavism, *līlā* is understood in at least three different ways. The creation of the universe is the sport of Viṣṇu, his descent into the world—especially in leading the idyllic life of Vrindavan—is seen as divine play, and finally the extravagant ritual dramas of northern India in which episodes from the epics are enacted are known as *līlā* (Narayanan 177). In the first sense, the notion of *līlā* supports the image of a self-sufficient god who creates this universe out of spontaneous creativity and not out of need. In the case of the manifestation of *līlā* in the world, the term refers to the activities of Kṛṣṇa, the *līlāvatar*—incarnation of play—in his earthly abode. In its performative meaning, *līlā* is the enactment of the actions of the *līlāvatar*, and because those actions are called “*līlā*” in the theological sense, their performance is also called *līlā*. From both

⁶⁷ In *Aesthetic Rapture* (1970), Masson and Patwardhan argue the influence of Abhinavagupta in Rūpa Goswāmin. On the other hand, David Haberman, in his *Acting as a Way of Salvation* (1988) as well as in the Introduction to his translation of *Bhaktirāsamrtasindhu* (2003), offers reasons to demonstrate the improbability of such influence.

⁶⁸ Thus in the context of the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavas, *rāsa* is clearly contemplated as carrying both religious and performative functions that work interdependently, as the “remember and recite” last verse of *Rāsa Līlā* suggests.

the theological and the performative perspectives, *līlā* resembles freedom, spontaneity, and playfulness (Sax 5).

The relationship of *līlā* and *yogamāya* is clearly expressed in the first verse of *Rāsa Līlā*, when the meeting of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopis* and their game, their *līlās* are precluded:

भगवानपि ता रात्रिः शरदोत्फुल्लमल्लिकाः।

वीक्ष्य रन्तुं मनश्चक्रे योगमायामुपाश्रितः॥२९.१॥

bhagavānpi tā rātrīḥ śaradotphullamallikāḥ/

vīkśya rantum manaścakre yogamāyāmupāśrite//

Even Bhagavan (Kṛṣṇa), having contemplated those autumnal nights with flowered jasmines, and invoking the power of *Yogamāya*, turned his mind to the enjoyment of love. (29.1)

Within the confines of *Bhakti* or devotional love, *rāsa* is relishing the experience of that love, *yogamāya* is the power through which the divine effects the loving relation with the creature, and *līlā* are the actions, the events of love that take place through the participation of the divine and the person.

The Commentary of Srīdhara Svāmi: Other Traditions of Commentary

As a peculiar case among the collections of *Purāṇas*, the *Bhāgavata* has been commented on by more than eighty known authors in Sanskrit alone and in many other commentaries which have been lost. The foundational commentary on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was composed by Srīdhara Svāmi, whose life and theological position is a source of discussion among scholars. Srīdhara has been located in the thirteenth and the

fourteenth century, some suggesting in the southern eastern state of Orissa (Coleman 149). Although some scholars argue that he was initiated into the non-dualistic tradition of Shankara, others hold that this is not true because Srīdhara was a devotee of Nṛsimha, the lion-avatar of Viṣṇu, and his basic perspective is that of *Bhakti*. I agree with Tracy Coleman that Srīdhara’s commentary can be claimed by both dualistic and non-dualistic defenders because the text offers itself to both, and if Srīdhara had posited a strict interpretation, he would have been distorting the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Coleman 153). Sheridan has discussed Srīdhara’s theological position as having moved from Shankara’s radical non-dualism toward a non-dualism of a realistic *Sāṃkhya* type, otherwise called qualified nondualism, “softening his non-dualistic interpretation as a result of Madhva’s previous commentary in the thirteen century, who advocated a dualistic theology” (*The Advaitic Theism* 118). Sheridan’s view is supported by Gupta, who finds that in his writings, Srīdhara was “closer to the Caitanya Vaisnava view of *śakti* than he was to Advaitic concepts of *māyā*” (70). For this comparison, I will rely on Srīdhara’s commentary for *Rāsa Līlā*, using my own translation from the Sanskrit. Besides the rich theological texture of this commentary, I will also dwell upon Srīdhara’s incursions in aesthetics, which show his own *rāsika* relationship with the text manifested in a strong component of *bhakti* (Gupta 70), one of the aspects that brings Srīdhara’s commentary closer to the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava tradition and has made it the basis of Jīva Goswāmin’s own commentary on *Rāsa Līlā*.⁶⁹

I will also refer, although briefly, in some points of the comparison to the notion of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa*, developed by the the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava school. This

⁶⁹ Ravi Gupta also points out that Srīdhara Svāmi includes *bhakti* in the list of *rāsas* (73).

theological movement was founded in the sixteenth century by Srī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya in the northern region of Bengal, and it holds the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as its central text. The Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava was systematized and expounded by Caitanya’s direct disciples, especially the “six Goswāmins of Vrindāvan,” who wrote exclusively in Sanskrit for the community of Vaiṣṇavas (Gupta 7). I will refer in my comparison to two of their primary works. The first is the *Bhaktirāsamrtasindhu* (*The Ocean of the Nectar of Sweet Devotion*) (1541), by Rūpa Goswāmin, which can be considered a commentary of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Haberman, Introduction xlix). This text defines the concept of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa*, the sweet amorous devotion to Kṛṣṇa. According to Rūpa, *Bhakti Rāsa* expresses itself in different modes such as *dāsyā Rāsa*, when the devotee assumes himself to be a perfect servant of Kṛṣṇa, and *vātsalya Rāsa*, when the devotee considers himself a parent of Kṛṣṇa. But among these, the highest role is that of *Madhura Rāsa* or *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa*, the relationship of intimate love with Kṛṣṇa, exemplified by the *gopis* in *Rāsa Līlā*.

I will also mention briefly the next work of Rūpa, *Ujjvalanīlamanīḥ* (*The Shining Blue Gem*), along with the commentary that the youngest of the Goswāmin, Jīva, composed for it. In the *Ujjvalanīlamanīḥ*, Rūpa expounds on the details of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa*, and in his commentary on Rūpa, Jīva Goswāmin affirms that the heart of the women of Vraja is one with the heart of Kṛṣṇa, and that is the reason why he is *ātmārāma*, and that is why he rejoices (22). Here the notion of *ātmārāma* is reinterpreted in the context of the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism in the light of the theological principle of

acintyabhedābheda, “unthinkable unity in difference,” in which separation and union occur in unison, although this is unconceivable through human reasoning.⁷⁰

These are the most important theological notions to keep in mind when reading *Rāsa Līlā*, and I will observe how they interact with the theological notions at work in the *Cántico espiritual*.

The *Cántico espiritual*, the *Song of Songs*, and *Teología Mística*

The original title of the poem, as it appears in the *Cántico B*, is *Canciones entre el alma y el esposo* (*Songs Between the Soul and the Husband*), and it is glossed in verses that, as López-Baralt points out, imitate the poetical cadence of the Hebrew epithalamion the *Song of Songs*. In the second paragraph of his “Prólogo,” Juan de la Cruz says that his *semejanzas* (“resemblances”) should be read with “simplicity of spirit,” like the *Cantares de Salomón*, thus linking his poem with the biblical *Song of Solomon* not only at the textual level, but also at the level of exegesis. The *Cántico espiritual* recreates the topic of the *Song of Songs* at the same time that it comments upon it. It features a dialogue between the *esposa* and the *esposo*—the wife and the husband—in which the creatures and the narrative voice intervene at times. Also after the *Song of Songs*, the *Cántico* follows a non-linear dramatic structure, in which the two main characters interact, while the reader is left to imagine the creatures and other non-corporeal voices.

⁷⁰ Although I will not mention it in this work, another main text of this tradition is the *Bhakti Sandhārbha* (*The Arranging of Bhakti*) by Jīva Gosvāmin, one of the six volumes that make up the *Bhagavata Sandharva*, a thematic arrangement of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* expounding the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava doctrine and practice. In the *Bhakti Sandhārbha*, Jīva borrows from the *Bhaktirāsamṛtasindhu* and the *Ujvalanīlamanīḥ* to chart the path of devotion as a loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa in the qualified non-dual context of Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava (Gupta 206).

Despite the somewhat puzzling poetical nature of the *Cántico*, I want to stress that such strangeness is not to be mistaken with inscrutability. One can perceive the love story narrated in the poem, opening in a moment of absence of the lover and ending in what could be interpreted either as a union or as a further separation. After the first recognition of absence, the female voice, the protagonist of the *Cántico*, goes on asking the creatures of the forest about the whereabouts of her beloved. Seemingly unaware, she changes interlocutors and directs her dialogue to herself, to her missing lover, and to a fountain in which she finds her own eyes reflected. The husband intervenes after a brief interval and she goes on praising and proclaiming his presence everywhere. Then the beloved returns and the celebrations of love are described. The last verses depict the solitude in which she lives, still guided by his love. Then there is a sort of epilogue by the wife—the five last verses added in Granada—in which she again celebrates the union of love in praises of her beloved.

The *Comentarios* by Juan de la Cruz: Other Interpretations

Like the poem, the commentary is also meant to be thought of as a work that progressed throughout time. The archival testimonies say that Juan de la Cruz answered questions from the nuns about the spiritual matters treated in the verses. His commentary was born from these questions and from the long, slow process of composition and re-elaboration of the *Cántico*. Dated at 1584, the commentary is structured as *declaraciones* for each stanza of the poem, not all stanzas having explanations of the same length. As I noted earlier, it is difficult to attest to the authenticity of the complete commentary, and one finds changes in the mode of speech as well as sudden departures from the main topic

which do not seem to follow the outline of the work. Nevertheless, the commentary draws upon the verses as a progressive path into the intimacy with god, which culminates in the *matrimonio espiritual* that Juan de la Cruz describes, as does the *Song of Songs*, as the highest state that a soul can attain while still in the body.

Along with the *Comentarios* by the author, I will refer to the interpretation of the work of Juan de la Cruz by two theologians, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Edith Stein. I read von Balthasar and Stein as commentators on the work of Juan de la Cruz whose ideas have shed light upon the task of approaching his writings theologically and aesthetically. From the contemporary Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar I refer to the three chapters dedicated to Juan de la Cruz in the third volume of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. These are “The Perfect Adventure,” “The Paradox of Mystical Poetry,” and “Value and Limits.” And from these three I draw specifically upon the second one, where von Balthasar explains how he understands the theological aesthetic project of Juan de la Cruz. In Chapter 4, I propose a reconsideration of von Balthasar’s thought regarding the participation of religious women in the creation of the *Cántico espiritual*.

Particularly in Chapter 4, I refer to *The Science of the Cross*, by Stein. Although the complete work is devoted to Juan de la Cruz, I have found some chapters particularly enlightening for my reading. The first is Chapter 14, “The Kinds of Divine Union,” where Stein explains her ideas on Juan de la Cruz’s notions of union and separation between the divine and the person. Second is Chapter 18, “The Hidden Life of Love,” in which Stein draws upon Juan de la Cruz’s poetical images to represent the notion of divine immanence. Thirdly, in Chapters 19 to 21, “The Bridal Song,” “The Bridal

Symbol,” and “The Bridal Symbol and the Cross,” Stein interprets the verses and the commentaries of Juan de la Cruz.

Teología Mística: To Taste the Living God

The connection of the *Cántico* to the *Song of Songs* can be followed not only in the evident literary traces, but also in the theological traces. The choice of the *Song of Songs* shows Juan de la Cruz’s inclination to the school of “mystical theology,” and about this, von Balthasar writes: “The shadowy notion of God that natural reason can gain from its own resources does not interest John. He desires God as he is in himself, and this God can be known only through God” (107). This “knowing god through god” is what Juan de la Cruz urged his spiritual disciples to do. *Gustar a Dios vivo* (“to taste the living God”), as he puts it in the commentaries to the poem *Llama de amor viva* (1.6), constitutes the significant center of the *Cántico espiritual*, and this is the main principle of the practice of *teología mística*—to which I referred at the beginning of the previous chapter.

Sánchez Lora argues that Juan de la Cruz favored the *teología mística* in rejection of the institutional scholasticism which promoted a mediated experience of the divine and that, in its sixteen-century Counter-Reformation Spanish version, was the official ideology of the Church and the Holy Inquisition. Reconsidering this opinion, I propose that in Juan de la Cruz’s writings, one finds, rather, an unexplored combination of rigorous scholasticism—obvious in a work like *Subida al Monte Carmelo*—and mystical theology—more evident in the *Cántico espiritual* and the *Llama de amor viva*. I would not suggest that his more scholastic works are devoid of mystical theology, but they in

fact complement each other in a combination of method—scholastic—and theological nature—mystical.

Considering this non-exclusivist perspective, it is clear that the *Cántico espiritual*, in words of von Balthasar, is the work in which Juan de la Cruz seems “much closer to the original rhythms of Denys, although he is much more consistent and relentless in his logic” (116), this consistency being exactly a product of his undeniably scholastic education at the Universidad de Salamanca. It is with this sense of theological and didactic coherence that the work of Juan de la Cruz is meant to be approached. Still, to argue along with Stein and López-Baralt that the *Cántico* is ultimately a product of mystical theology is to recognize that the core of his teachings was *Gustar a Dios vivo* (“To taste the living God”).

And how did Juan de la Cruz conceive that “the living God” was meant to be tasted? As this is a question to which I will go back repeatedly during the comparison between the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā*, I will begin here by pointing out some of the main theological notions that I will consider in the following chapters. *Gustar*, “to taste” or “to relish,” is the term chosen by Juan de la Cruz to describe the relation of the person to the divine, evoking Origen’s erotic language in his commentaries to the *Song of Songs*. Building upon Origen’s concept of god as *eros*, Dionysius the Areopagite explains the nature of the desire (*eros*) for the divine love (*āgape*):

All things must desire, must yearn for, must love the Beautiful and the Good. Because of it and for its sake, subordinate is returned to superior, equal keeps company with equal, superior turns providentially to subordinate. And we may be so bold as to claim also that the cause of all

things loves all things in the superabundance of his goodness, that because of this goodness, he makes all things, brings all things to perfection, holds all things together, returns all things. Divine Eros is the Good of the Good for the sake of the Good.” Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 4.10
(Cited in Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* 166-167)

Here, Dionysius is explaining two principles that are found all throughout the work of Juan de la Cruz. First, all human beings are meant to feel desire, yearning (*eros*) for the divine; and second, the divine also comes out of himself (becomes “ecstatic”) in his love for the creatures. This notion of an exchange of love is evident in the poem and the commentaries of the *Cántico*, where Juan de la Cruz often describes not only the abrasive effects of the divine’s love in the soul, but also the moves of love by which the divine (*el esposo*, the husband) attracts and accepts the soul, as well as his satisfaction upon seeing the soul approaching him. The relation between the divine and the soul as Dionysius depicts it is, indeed, an erotic dialogue, but erotic understood in Dionysian terms, “not to be found in physical attraction, which is a mere image, but in the ‘simplicity of the one divine Eros’” (McGinn, *Foundations* 166).⁷¹

Juan de la Cruz uses the term *teología mística* in the same sense that Dionysius the Areopagite uses the Greek *theologia mystikee*, signifying “not a particular kind of experience but the knowledge (or better, “superknowledge”) that deals with the mystery of God in himself” (McGinn, *Foundations* 171). Thus, as will be observed Chapter 4, in his commentaries to the verse *en la interior bodega de mi amado bebí* (“in the interior wine cellar of my beloved I drank”), Juan de la Cruz explains that what the *Amada*

⁷¹ For a detailed review of Dionysius the Areopagite’s theology, see Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (1999). Chapter 5 “The Monastic Turn and Mysticism.”

(female beloved) drinks is the *sabrosa ciencia de la teología mística* (*Comentarios* 26.5) (“savory science of mystical theology”).

The *Amada* of the *Cántico* receives the sweet knowledge of mystical theology in the interior wine cellars while reposing her head on the chest of the beloved, a crucial image of mutual surrender. The divine has asked her out of herself, and she answers and runs to taste him by tasting the *teología mística*. Moreover, as there is mutuality of love, so there is a mutuality of giving and receiving, which Juan de la Cruz describes with the term *transformación de amor*, on which I will further elaborate in Chapter 4. Such *transformación de amor*, as explained by Stein, implies a mutual indwelling in which each part has made a space for the other to inhabit. At this moment of indwelling, and by virtue of such transforming love, the soul is not giving itself to god, but “God himself to God” (179).

“To give God, God himself in God,” as Juan de la Cruz puts it and Stein comments on, should be understood as “a union of persons that does not end their independence, but rather has it as a prerequisite” (179). The *transformación de amor* occurs in the form of an “indwelling,” where “both sides must have an inner being, that is, a being that contains itself interiorly and can receive another being within itself, so that without the accepted and the accepting beings ceasing to be independent, a unity of being comes into existence” (175). To the notions of *transformación de amor* and “indwelling,” I will return more than once throughout the conversation between the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*.

Considering what history allows scholars to know about the genesis of the *Cántico*, and what theology and poetry tell about the *teología mística*, I want to

underscore the role of orality in the process of creation of this text and its commentaries. In this dissertation, I propose to look at the creation of the *Cántico espiritual* as a process of both teaching and practicing mystical theology. And with this, one ought to look at the text as the material symbol of the mystical theology taught by Juan de la Cruz to his female disciples, the nuns of Beas de Segura and Granada.

Von Balthasar has argued for an aesthetic theological project of Juan de la Cruz—to which I will refer again in Chapter 4. I believe that von Balthasar’s argument can be further expanded by taking into consideration the relationship between Juan de la Cruz and his female spiritual disciples, and the role of this relationship in the practice of his aesthetic theology, whose material evidence are the texts and the commentaries. His “theological aesthetics,” I argue, is much more evident in two of his works, the *Cántico espiritual* and the *Llama de amor viva*, where he proposes that the goal of the soul is *Gustar a Dios vivo* (“To taste the living God”) (*Llama* 1.6). These two works, filled with a sensorial imagery and by far his best poetic compositions, were dedicated to women who were his spiritual disciples during the time between his escape from prison and his return to Castile, destitution, and death in 1591.⁷²

In the declarations during the process of canonization of Juan de la Cruz, one of the nuns who had been his spiritual daughter in the convent of Beas de Segura, Francisca de la Madre de Dios, narrates that one day Fray Juan asked her about the object of her prayers, and she answered that she was delighted to see the beauty of god. Hearing this

⁷² It would not be accurate to affirm that he was exclusively addressing the religious female branch of the Discalced Carmelites, but these two texts mention—as no other work of the saint does—in their “Prólogo” the name of these women to whom they were dedicated. The *Cántico* is dedicated to “Madre Ana de Jesús, priora de las Descalzas en San José de Granada. Año de 1584,” and the *Llama de amor viva* says to be “written by the petition of Doña Ana de Peñalosa.”

made the confessor so happy that for many days he was giving “very elevated;” during that time he composed the five stanzas that begin *Gocémonos, Amado, y vámonos a ver en tu hermosura*:

*Gocémonos, Amado,
y vámonos a ver en tu hermosura
al monte o al collado,
do mana el agua pura,
entremos más adentro en la espesura.*(36)

Let us rejoice, Beloved!

And let us go to see in your beauty

the mountain and the hill,

where pure water sprouts.

Let us enter deeper into the thickness.

These are the stanzas that conclude the second version of the *Cántico espiritual*, and the anecdote, which the specialists quote among the verifiable stories in the life of Juan de la Cruz, contains all the principles from which von Balthasar argues his “theological aesthetics.” Events like this one demonstrate the relation of orality, theology, and aesthetics in the creation of the *Cántico espiritual* and its commentaries, and they make evident how Juan de la Cruz shared with his female disciples the practice of the *teología mística*. I will return to this topic in Chapter 4.

These are the most important theological notions to consider in the *Cántico espiritual* and they will be called upon throughout the comparison with *Rāsa Līlā*. As I let the texts enter a meaningful dialogue, I want to repeat an important methodological

caveat. Within the chosen directions, I seek to stay close to the texts, observing how they interact and claim to be read. Textual fidelity is more important for me than the fidelity to a preconceived method. Consequently mine is a method that will take shape as it is read, and to whose commensurabilities and resemblances I will return in the Conclusion.

Chapter 3

Presence, Absence, and Secret Meaning

In his *Comentarios* to the first verse of the *Cántico espiritual*, Juan de la Cruz emphasizes the fact that god is never absent from the soul: *Grande contento es para el alma entender que nunca Dios falta del alma* (1.8) (“It is great joy for the soul to understand that God is never absent from the soul.”) This immanent presence, however, is far from evident, and its manifestation is, theologically speaking, correlative to the soul’s capacity to understand: *entender*. Moreover, such understanding depends upon the grace of god, and grace, Juan de la Cruz says, is correlative to the ardent desire of the soul to see and to unite with the divine. Later on, in the commentary to the eleventh verse of the second version of the *Cántico*, *Descubre tu presencia* (“Reveal your presence”), the author describes three forms of presence in which god exists in every creature: through essence, through grace, and through spiritual affection. Building on Juan de la Cruz’s comments, Edith Stein explains that these three forms of presence are “three forms of indwelling,” the last one being the indwelling of mystical love (175). This ultimate indwelling, as described by Stein, is a “being within each other” (169) for which each being—the divine and the human—needs to create a space within to contain the other at the time that he or she is contained within the other:

... to be an indwelling, both sides must have an inner being, that is, a being that contains itself interiorly and can receive another being within itself, so that without the accepted and the accepting beings ceasing to be

independent, a unity of being comes into existence. This is only possible in spiritual being: only what is spiritual is self-contained and can take within itself another being, again only a spiritual one. This alone is authentic indwelling. (175)

The theological concept of indwelling, poetically illustrated in the *Cántico* through dynamic images of presence and absence, finds suggestive possibilities of comparison with the notion of *antardhā*—literally, “placing inside.” *Antardhā* plays an important role in the dynamics of *bhakti*—devotion—as represented in *Rāsa Līlā*. From the verbal root *bhaj*, *bhakti* evokes the notions of sharing, apprehending through the understanding, and also making love. As A. K. Ramanujan points out, the *bhakta* (the practitioner of *bhakti*), does not look for the withdrawal of “enstasy” or the out-of-body experiences of ecstasy, but “seeks to be a vessel for his chosen one, who has also chosen him [...]. He needs to possess him and be possessed by him” (*Hymns* 116). Śrīdhara Svāmi defines *bhakti* in his commentaries to *Rāsa Līlā* as *sauhṛdyaṁ bhaktim* (*Commentaries* 29.15).⁷³ *Bhakti* is, literally, the possession of a “good heart,” a relationship of mutual love and constant presence. Thus in the thirty-second chapter, right before the magnificent *Rāsa Dance*, Kṛṣṇa tells the *gopīs* that he has been loving them by placing himself inside himself (*antardhā*) and that his receding from view had the only purpose of increasing the *gopīs*’ longing for his presence (32.19-20), so that the increasing of their desire to see would eventually produce the manifestation of a visible presence, a presence that was already there although unseen.

⁷³ Hereafter *Commentaries* refers to Śrīdhara Svāmi’s *Commentaries* on *Rāsa Līlā*, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

This theological dynamic of apparent absence, which kindles the desire for the always-elusive presence of the divine lover referred to by the notions of indwelling and *antardhā*, is shared by *Rāsa Līlā* and the *Cántico espiritual*, if with very distinctive features. In both texts, the absence of the divine lover is never represented as an existential lack or a void of meaning, but as a receding from view, always preceded and succeeded by instances of encounter. What the *Amada* of the *Cántico* and the *gopis* of *Rāsa Līlā* do not know is where their lover has gone, not whether he exists. Their question is not about his being, but about his location, and therefore it is not a question of existential absence, but of withdrawal.

The *Amado*'s and Kṛṣṇa's receding from view has the effect of provoking the withdrawal of the *Amada* and the *gopis*. To go in hiding in order to find him who is hidden, paraphrasing the advice of Juan de la Cruz in his *Comentarios* (1.9), is poetically represented by the withdrawal of the female beloveds from different structures of constraint, like their social status, their bodies, and their self-awareness. In doing so, they conceal themselves to look for that one who is concealed. The withdrawal of the beloveds following the elusive divine lover leads them into different landscapes where they find his traces, and ultimately into places of encounter and indwelling that in both texts are described in terms of secrecy.

In those secret instances of indwelling, a third withdrawal takes place: the withdrawal of meaning. As the narrative leads to these intricate places, it seems as if it would be possible to attain a revelation of meaning, an answer to why the lover is constantly withdrawing and why the *gopis* and the *Amada* cannot cease to search for him. However, arriving at these places of encounter, speech ceases to function, and all that can

be uttered is the impossibility of explaining any further.⁷⁴ Poetically, these secret places of encounter and indwelling fulfill the function of letting the meaning of the texts slip. The withdrawal of meaning completes the dynamics of withdrawal performed by the texts: as Kṛṣṇa and the *Amada* withdraw from view, they create the gap of absence that impels the *Amada* and the *gopis* to seek out the lover. As the *gopis* and the *Amada* search for their lover, they withdraw from their previous spaces of identity, and are described as entering into unknown and hidden mental and physical landscapes. In this manner, the conditions are created for the encounter between the hidden beloveds with the hidden divine lover. As female beloveds and divine lover unite in those hidden places, the withdrawal of meaning takes place, and the divine lover recedes again from view, producing yet a new cycle of withdrawals. Those secret spaces of encounter, where secret talks are held and secret actions take place, signal the eternal reenactment of the experience of encounter with the divine lover to which the *gopis* and the *Amada*, as well as the reader, are led. The ultimate meaning, expressed by each text in its own terms, is that the “meaning” is not to be searched for in the speech, but in the always recurring withdrawals of the divine lover, of the female beloveds, and of the meaning itself.

In accordance with a non-linear narration, these series of withdrawals do not take place successively, but take place, rather, within a poetic structure that progresses according to the increasing desire of the *Amada* and the *gopis* to see their lover and to be seen by him. This condition of seeing and being seen that I identify as the driving desire

⁷⁴ In the *Subida al Monte Carmelo*, Juan de la Cruz expresses the cessation of speech in the experience of union with the divine in these terms: *Porque esto tiene el lenguaje de Dios, que por ser muy íntimo al alma y espiritual, en que excede todo sentido, luego hace cesar y enmudecer toda la armonía y habilidad de los sentidos exteriores e interiores.*(2.3) (“Because this is the language of God, that by being so intimate to the soul and so spiritual, it exceeds all senses and makes all the harmony and ability of the exterior and interior senses cease and be mute”).

of the female characters is not to be confused with a longing for an essential transmutation in the sense of losing each other's identity in order to be transformed into the object of love. Rather, it should be understood, as Juan de la Cruz explains in the commentaries, as "indwelling," and as it is explained in the context of *Rāsa Līlā*, as the actions of loving and sharing envisioned in the concept of *bhakti*.⁷⁵ Indwelling and *bhakti*, distinctive resonating categories, are represented in the texts through different metaphors, the most prominent being the image of sharing each other's sight. As I will devote the next chapter to what I call "the cohabitation of the eye in the eye," in the following pages, I will compare instances of the three occurrences of withdrawal—of the lover, of the beloveds, and of the meaning of the texts—involved in the attainment of vision. This comparison seeks to analyze the different dynamics through which each text constructs the presence of the divine, a presence to be first realized in absence, or rather in withdrawal. The resemblances and differences to be found throughout the comparison will lead to a further inquiry into how mystical language is meant to perform the experience that it claims by enacting an arrival to its own limits of expression.

The method that I follow in this chapter, as I announced in Chapter 2, is based on the strict close reading of the text. First, I analyze how the different facets of withdrawal occur in each text separately. After the particularities of each text are observed, I draw upon the comparison, keeping in mind the comparative direction of reading the *Cántico* through *Rāsa Līlā*. For this chapter, even more than for Chapter 4, I think of the conversation between the texts as if they were two transparencies superimposed, rendered

⁷⁵ As I explained in the previous chapter, the term *bhakti* derives from the Sanskrit verbal root *bhaj*, to enjoy, to share. Although generally translated as devotion, *bhakti* implies much more. It is a dynamic relationship between the divine and the person in which both are simultaneously the enjoyed and the enjoyer.

visible by the light of an overhead projector. This image helps to observe the areas where the narrative and the metaphors overlap, and thus becomes intensified as the texts are read together. Moreover, as the projector illumines the transparencies, it also amplifies the texts, so that the eye of the reader is not caught in the general overlapping or salient images, but in the intensity of the details. The result is a somehow unsettling abundance like the one that Clooney warns about (*Beyond Compare* 186). In what follows, I intend to walk my way through such textual abundance, while offering a glimpse into how the texts perform fugues of love and meaning.

The Withdrawal of the *Amado* and the Question of Location

The opening verse of the *Cántico espiritual*, a question about location, functions as the poem's first "meaning event," to borrow Michael Sells's term. The question of location makes apparent that the text is not the result of a situation of absence, but of withdrawal. This first inquiry starts out by leading the reader's attention towards an unknown place outside the text where the *Amado* has withdrawn, the *Amada* will enter, and the secret encounters will take place:

*Adónde te escondiste, Amado,
y me dejaste con gemido?
Como el ciervo huiste,
habiéndome herido;
Salí tras ti clamando, y eras ido. (1)*

Where did you hide, Beloved,
and leave me moaning?

Like the stag you fled
 having wounded me;
 I went out running after you, but you were gone.

This first reference to time and space evokes a moment and a location outside the textual *corpus*, where the previous encounter takes place and to which the reader, through the female interlocutor, has no glimpse other than what can be deduced from the present situation, “and left me moaning.” The female speaker wonders about the divine lover’s whereabouts, and her very act of questioning implies that he has not remained permanently out of sight, but has shown himself and then gone into hiding. *¿Adónde te escondiste?* is the interrogation put forward; it will be repeated every time the desire of seeing is renewed, and the desire is constantly renewed as the object of desire is constantly withdrawing from view. Her *¿Adónde?*, as Valente notices, marks a beginning without a beginning because what the poem finally represents is a theory of the beginnings without an end (*Variaciones* 401).⁷⁶ The final answer to the question of *¿Adónde?* will be just a new question provoked by a new instance of encounter and departure. And thus, the reader learns that the *Amado* is not to be looked for in the linear narrative but in the referential openings that the text performs beyond words, in the infinite outer possibilities of meaning.

In his commentary to this verse, Juan de la Cruz stresses that the *¿Adónde?* question refers to the “manifestation of the divine essence” that accompanies the revelation of the vision: *Y es como si dijera: Verbo, Esposo mío, muéstrame el lugar donde estás escondido. En lo cual le pide la manifestación de su divina esencia* (1.3) (“It

⁷⁶ Following this thought, Valente suggests that the *Cántico* is a continuation of the *Song of Songs* because the former begins in the moment of the narration where the latter ends. (*Variaciones* 402)

is as if she said: Verb, my Husband, show me the place where you are hidden. And by this she asks him the manifestation of his divine essence.”) When the divine lover reveals himself, Juan de la Cruz explains, he reveals his essence, and the essence is the ultimate hidden object of the search of the *Amada* (1.6). Consequently, the theological attitude that Juan de la Cruz advises is to go into the hidden in order to find the one who is hidden: *Porque el que ha de hallar una cosa escondida, tan a lo escondido y hasta lo escondido donde ella está ha de entrar y, cuando la halla, él también está escondido como ella* (1.9) (“Because the one who is meant to find what is hidden, that much in the hidden and in a hidden manner he must enter, and when he finds it, he is also hidden.”) Considering Juan de la Cruz’s perspective, it becomes apparent that his theological stance about the hidden nature of the divine lover is poetically expressed through a constant movement toward concealment from the very beginning of the poem. Being a beginning without an end, the text will again perform these referential openings at every instance that the *Amado* reveals and hides himself.

However, while the place of the theological “hidden” is the inside of the soul, the poetic “hidden” is outside of the text. Juan de la Cruz insists throughout his commentaries that *en esta vida*, “in this life,” referring to the human mortal life, *no hay certeza ni claridad de la posesión del Esposo* (1.4) (“there is neither certainty nor clarity about the possession of the Husband”). Therefore, the ultimate implication of the question about location is to guarantee the vision of the essence *en la otra* (“in the other [life]”), because here, as a *dibujo imperfecto* (“imperfect drawing”), the real presence cannot be perceived.⁷⁷ In a similar fashion, the poem proves insufficient to hold the

⁷⁷ With this, Juan de la Cruz is coming to terms with Saint Augustine’s notion of *visio dei*, the imaginative and higher intellectual visions in which God grants an immediate perception of the divine truth, “There the

presence of the divine lover through linguistic resources. The best that the poetic language can do is precisely to point beyond itself. The presence is held “in the other” life, as in that space and time apart from the poem.

With the opening question of *¿Adónde?*, the *Cántico* refers to that “otherness” unattainable in this life from a theological perspective, and impossible to express in poetic terms. The presence of the lover is to be sought out by language at the shifting space of transition between absence and presence. That space of transition is the abode of the poem. Total absence, as well as total presence, would imply a reduction of language to silence. Here lies the difference between absence, presence, and the space of transition between them. The manifested presence of the lover, located “in the other” life and, therefore, beyond the reach of language, would imply the cessation of the need for language. The image of being face-to-face with the divine lover is described by Juan de la Cruz as a *dibujo perfecto* (“perfect drawing”), which he compares with the “imperfect drawing” to which the *Amada* has access “in this life.” On the other hand, the absolute absence would imply the lack of a question for the presence, and this is not the place where the *Amada* stands at the beginning of the poem. The “perfect drawing” of the complete presence, like the total absence, would have the effect of nullifying language. It is thus at the “imperfectly” drawn shifting space between absence and presence where the poem—and the theology—arises with the question of *¿Adónde?*

Being a “meaning event,” the function of *¿Adónde?* is to recreate not the state of presence, but the event of the manifestation. The question is not directly answered in the

brightness of the Lord is seen, not through a symbolic or corporeal vision [...] nor through a spiritual vision, but through a direct vision and not through a dark image, as far as the human mind elevated by God’s grace can receive it.” (Cited in Bernard McGinn, “Visions and Visualizations.” (230).

linear continuum of the speech, but its answer rests on its own utterance, on the certainty of a previous presence and the expectation of a future return. This is an example of what McGinn recognizes as the language turning from an informing into a transforming quality. It is the “switch” from conventional to mystical awareness that Frederick Streng describes, and the point to which the poem will return again and again, resembling the theological act of search for the divine.

As the divine withdraws, he leaves behind a question, an opening through which the *Amada* will also withdraw, to be followed by the textual meaning. This question of location, ¿*Adónde?*, situated at the intersection between presence and absence, initiates the moving metaphor that the complete poem recreates.⁷⁸

The Withdrawal of Kṛṣṇa: *Vipralambha* and *Sambhoga*

If one superimposes the poetic narratives of *Rāsa Līlā* on the *Cántico* as if with an overhead projector, one sees that the text of *Rāsa Līlā* attempts to say what the *Cántico* attempts to suggest with its ¿*Adónde?* regarding the nature of the encounter previous to the first withdrawal of the divine lover:

तदोडुराजः ककुभः करैर्मुखं प्राच्या विलिम्पन्नरूपेण शंतमैः ।

स चर्षणीनामुदगाच्छुचो मृजन् प्रियः प्रियाया इव दीर्घदर्शनः ॥२९.२॥

tadoḍurājaḥ kakubhaḥ karairmukhaṁ prācyā vilimpannarūṇena

śāntamaiḥ/

sa carṣaṇīnāmudagācchuco mṛjan priyaḥ priyāyā iva dīrghadarśanaḥ//

⁷⁸ Here I am re-inscribing Michel de Certeau's notion of mystical literature as a “metaphor in process” as he explains it in *The Mystic Fable*.

The moon, smeared in red, having turned her face toward the East, alleviated with her soothing rays the sufferings of all beings, as the lover alleviates his beloved after a long absence.(29.2)

This stanza portrays all the esthetic-theological features of *Rāsa Līlā* and sets up the scenery of *vipralambha* (“love in separation”) and *sambhoga* (“love in union”).

Vipralambha and *sambhoga* are very important terms for the aesthetic and theological context of *Rāsa Līlā*. They were first stated by the legendary sage Bhārata in his dramatic treatise *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in which it is explained that the two manifestations of erotic love are joined enjoyment (*sambhoga*), usually translated as union, and separation or disunion (*vipralambha*). The verses present an image of transition between *vipralambha*, evoked by the traces of sun in the moon, and *sambhoga*, the moon’s rays that break through the night. The relief of the lovers of *Rāsa Līlā* is always at this subtle shifting between the union and the separation described in the second verse of the text. In his devotional treatise *Ujjvalanīlamanīḥ*, Rūpa Gosvāmin comments on the functions of *vipralambha* and *sambhoga* in the context of *bhakti*:

न विना विप्रलम्भेन सम्भोगः प्रष्टिमश्रुते ॥३॥

na vinā vipralambhena sambhogah praṣṭimaśnute //

Love in union does not prevail without the love in separation. (*Atha śrṅgāra*.3)

Vipralambha and *sambhoga* are to be understood as states only apparently opposed, and actually interdependent in the context of *bhakti*. Thus the absence and the presence of Kṛṣṇa, which brings about the conditions of *vipralambha* or *sambhoga* respectively, are also to be considered as different expressions of the same reality.

अटति यद्भवान्हि काननं त्रुटिर्युगायते त्वामपश्यताम् ।

कुटिलकुन्तलं श्रीमुखं च ते जड उदीक्षतां पक्ष्मकृद् दशाम् ॥ ३१।१५॥

aṭati yadbhavānahni kānanam truṭiryugāyate tvāmapaśyatām/

kuṭilakuntalam śrīmukhaṁ ca te jaḍa udīkṣatām pakṣmakṛd dṛśām//

Bhavan, when you go for many days to the forest, one instant becomes a *yuga* for those who don't see your beautiful face with curly hair. (31.15)

In the commentary to this verse, Srīdhara emphasizes that the state of not seeing Kṛṣṇa produces misery, as seeing him is happiness. But vision, just as union, is preceded and followed by its counterpart of non-vision and disunion. *Vipralambha* is but the other face of *sambhoga* and vice versa. It is in the midst of these apparent opposites that the *gopis* undergo their search for Kṛṣṇa, whom they call a “hard-to-be-with husband” (1.10) and a “god difficult to understand” (10.31).

However, the dynamics of *vipralambha* and *sambhoga* are theologically framed in *Rāsa Līlā* by the power of *yogamāyā*, to which Kṛṣṇa calls upon in the opening *śloka* of the text:

भगवानपि ता रात्रिः शरदोत्फुल्लमल्लिकाः ।

वीक्ष्य रन्तुं मनश्चक्रे योगमायामुपाश्रितः ॥२९.१॥

bhagavānpi tā rātrīḥ śaradotphullamallikāḥ/

vīkṣya rantum manaścakre yogamāyā mupāśrite//

Even Bhagavan (Kṛṣṇa), having contemplated those autumnal nights with blossoming jasmines, invoking the power of *yogamāyā*, turned his mind to the enjoyment of love.(29.1)

From the perspective of *yogamāyā*, every event is first of all a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*, a hiding and revealing game of the god with the creatures.⁷⁹ This impermanence of vision, described poetically as an attribute of Kṛṣṇa and caused theologically by the power of *yogamāyā*, is the scenario where *vipralambha* and *sambhoga* take place, as part of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*, to induce the theological state of devotion or *bhakti*.

The notions of *sambhoga* and *vipralambha*, framed by the concept of *yogamāyā* and *līlā*, offer an aesthetic-theological perspective from which to explain Kṛṣṇa's withdrawals in *Rāsa Līlā*. The text starts out announcing that the god "turned his mind to the enjoyment of love." The narration continues, describing Kṛṣṇa playing his flute; and at the sound, the *gopis* ran away from all their prescribed duties, a fragment to which I will later return in detail. Then, after a passionate theological argument between the women and Kṛṣṇa, he decides to enjoy love with them, and then immediately disappears from their midst, according to the text, "to calm and favor" the pride that the women were exhibiting as a result of the satisfaction of their desire.⁸⁰

But there is more here. At the most straightforward narrative level, Kṛṣṇa disappears due to the pride of the women, but considering the first verse, one finds another level of interpretation: his appearance, as well as his disappearance, is nothing but the result of his own will to play under the cover of illusion bestowed by *yogamāyā*.

⁷⁹ Here *yoga* translates as its most common assertion of "union," while the term *māyā* holds a more complicated function. *Māyā*, from the verbal root *may*, "to go, to move," is a term related to an illusory power, the illusion by virtue of which one considers the unreal universe as a truly existent and distinct form. (For further reference on *Yogamāyā*, see Chapter 2.

⁸⁰ The line of this *Rāsa Līlā* verse reads: "Seeing that state of self contentment and pride, Keśava disappeared right there in order to calm and favor them" (29.48).

The first verse announces that all the actions to come are the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa's desire to enjoy love. He then passes as the demiurge of the text by virtue of the delusive power of *yogamāyā*. From the moment that Kṛṣṇa plays his flute, every action can be said to happen—at the narrative level—but at the same time not to happen—at the level of *yogamāyā*. These actions include Kṛṣṇa's appearances and disappearances and every instance of *vipralambha* and *sambhoga*.

When, at the beginning of the second chapter of *Rāsa Līlā* the *gopis* utter the question about the location of Kṛṣṇa (in correspondence with the beginning of the *Cántico*), the Sanskrit text has already announced the complicated dynamics of *vipralambha*, *sambhoga*, *yogamāyā* and *līlā*. Kṛṣṇa has already been seen—he was seen in the first place. He called the *gopis*, made them abandon their duties, a theological argument took place between both parts, they enjoyed mutual love, and the god disappeared. And all this took place—according to the first verse of the text—under the auspicious, veiling power of *yogamāyā* and by the sake of the god's *līlā*.

The Withdrawal of the Divine Lover in Comparison: The Didactics of Absence and Presence

The comparative exercise of superimposing the narratives of withdrawal of the divine lover sheds light upon three important aspects of the *Cántico*. First, the comparison with *Rāsa Līlā* begins by recalling the role played by the oral tradition in the *Cántico*, and its relation to the *Song of Songs*. With this, the comparison also makes the reader look back to the *Cántico* as a work in progress, whose limits are not poetically fixed; and, as Juan de la Cruz reminds readers in the “Prólogo” to the *Comentarios*, it is

not theologically fixed: *los dichos de amor es mejor dejarlos en su anchura* (“the sayings of love are better left them in their broadness”). This freedom in tradition and interpretation is, I find, the first feature of the *Cántico* that is recovered from its interaction with *Rāsa Līlā*.

Second, in looking at the superimposed narratives, one realizes that the withdrawal of the *Amado* at the beginning of the *Cántico* corresponds to the beginning of the second chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*. And here, the question arises whether *Rāsa Līlā*’s first chapter could shed light upon the unsaid meanings suggested by the *Cántico*’s first *¿Adónde?* To address this question, it is necessary to draw upon the theological didactics of absence and presence as illustrated by the poetry and the theology of each text. The comparative perspective suggests that such didactics function at two levels. On one hand is the more direct instructive purpose that both texts explain in terms of teaching and appeasing. On the other hand, and much more suggestive, the didactics of absence and presence fulfill a function as a poetical and theological device to provoke the “meaning event” of the revelation.

In the third place, the superimposition of the narratives of divine withdrawal allows the comparativist to look at a particular feature of both texts, that of the directionality of the metaphors. Being metaphors in movement that, Elaine Scarry suggests, are easy to imagine, they also move in certain specific directions. The direction of the movement of the metaphors dialogues with the notion of “meaning event” and sheds light upon the way each text performs the mystical revelation that it claims, and how such a poetic feature as directionality can reveal to the reader aspects of the theological premises at work behind the poetry.

The beginning of *Rāsa Līlā*, as has been observed, does not correspond with the beginning of the *Cántico*. It would, nonetheless, correspond with the *Song of Songs*, which many considered to be the beginning of the *Cántico* (Valente, *Variaciones* 339). Being the immediate context for the *Cántico*, the *Song of Songs* is to the *Cántico* what the first chapter of *Rāsa Līlā* is to the remainder of the text. Apart from the possibility of a further comparison between the *Song of Songs* and *Rāsa Līlā* suggested by this observation, I want to pay attention to how the first chapter of *Rāsa Līlā* could inform the events that took place in the *Cántico* before the question of “¿Adónde?”

Following this thought, I entertain the question of whether *Rāsa Līlā*'s image of a god that engages in a purposeless pastime with his creatures—as the text states in its first chapter—is reflected in any facet of the *Cántico* or in Juan de la Cruz's theological arguments.⁸¹ From a broad perspective, the answer seems a negative one. Juan de la Cruz does not refer to a god that aimlessly plays with his creatures in the sense that *Rāsa Līlā* does. However, if one looks at those passages of the *Cántico* more directly transposed from the *Song of Songs*, it is clear that the text does conceive of a god that participates in an exchange of delight with his creatures. Juan de la Cruz speaks of the divine being imprisoned by will in the eye of the *Amada*, and in the *Comentarios*, he muses about the wonders of a god that lets himself be imprisoned by an eye and by a strand of hair. This sense of mutual enjoyment that the *Cántico* inherits from the *Songs* is certainly implied in the notion of play and is evident in Juan de la Cruz's aesthetic-theological project, to which I shall refer in the next chapter. Such evidence allows one

⁸¹ The notion of “theology of play” in Christianity and the possibilities and problems of its comparison with the *Vaiśnava* theology has been referred to before. See Hospital in *The Gods at Play*.

to look at the dynamics of absence and presence of the *Cántico* interacting with the dynamics of play—as a textual playfulness—that appear in the text from the very first question of location. Did the *Amado*, then, hide just to be searched for?

A first glance makes it apparent that the *Cántico*'s claim for the presence by virtue of the actual absence shares a basis with the dynamics of *vipralambha* and *sambhoga* as portrayed in *Rāsa Līlā*: the separation as a counterpart of the union, the one being the condition for the expression of the other. In the *Cántico*, the lover is compared with a stag, *como el ciervo huiste* (“like the stag you fled”), and in his commentaries to this verse, Juan de la Cruz explains that this simile results not only from him being strange and solitary, but also *por la presteza del esconderse y mostrarse* (1.15) (“for his quickness to hide and show himself”). Such quickness to hide and to show is a metaphor of the poetic play that he performs in the *Cántico*. Without a previous presence, it is clear; there could not be an *¿Adónde?* that contains both absence and presence.

Absence and presence—*vipralambha* and *sambhoga*—appear, then, as didactic devices that not only aim at creating the desire for the presence, but also as co-dependent states that fulfill the poetical and theological purpose of one evoking the other. The poetic and theological function of the interplay between absence and presence is evident even when it appears justified in both works by the double purpose of praising and humiliating, making the *Amada*—the soul in the commentary—and the *gopis* feel the pain of absence as means *para probarlas y humillarlas y enseñarlas* (1.15) (“for humiliating and teaching them”). But more than humiliating or teaching, when the *Amado* and Kṛṣṇa leave, they create the proper conditions for the “meaning event” to arise. Asking “*¿Adónde?*,” the *Amada* is already creating a presence.

It has already been noticed that in *Rāsa Līlā*, the dynamics of *vipralambha* and *sambhoga* are further complicated by the notions of *yogamāyā* and *līlā*, which render doubtful any didactic means beyond the mere playfulness of god. While *yogamāyā* and *līlā* could not be directly transposed into the theological context of the *Cántico*, the comparison of the dynamics of absence and presence reveals the possibility of a playful god in the *Cántico* as the creator of the play of meaning performed by language and theology. The playfulness of the divine lover, then, cannot be said to be absent from the *Cántico*. The action of the divine to hide himself, provoking the primal question of “¿Adónde te escondiste?” appears as playful because it triggers all the poetic events that will eventually conduce to his appearance. It is a play of meaning produced by the absence that the divine leaves behind with his fleeing before the appearance of language to that space outside of the poem that contextually points at the *Song of Songs*. Orality and playfulness, then, are recovered in the *Cántico* when looked at through *Rāsa Līlā*. The withdrawal of the *Amado* seems now even more abundant with meaning, and the questions opened, such as what would be the theological implications of a playfulness of god in the *Cántico*, are more than those that can be addressed here.

The superimposed reading of the withdrawal of the divine also points at the directionality of the texts. It has already been observed that the first question of location of the *Cántico*—¿Adónde?—refers to the withdrawal of the divine lover into a space and time outside the text. In contrast with this outer directionality in the *Cántico*, *Rāsa Līlā* shows a much more inside directionality in the succession of withdrawals. When Kṛṣṇa disappears in *Rāsa Līlā*, he is said to have gone *antarhite*, where *antar* stands for “inside”

and *hita* is the participle of the verb *dhā*, “to place,” which in the locative *hite* points that his locus of disappearance lies inside of himself.

Imitating this primal directionality set by the divine lovers, the *Amada* of the *Cántico* is described as going out into the open landscape, *cruzaré los fuertes y fronteras* (“I will cross over fortresses and frontiers”), while the *gopis* are said to go into the depths of the forest. Seemingly, as I will observe in the last section of this chapter, the final meaning of the texts—although ultimately an unrevealed meaning—points at Kṛṣṇa hiding in an “inside” of the textual tessitura, while the *Amado* is again to be sought in the “outer” of the textual space. This outside / inside distinction in the directionality of the withdrawals is far from being a clear-cut, bipolar scheme, but it is revealed as an important aspect made evident through the act of comparison, and it is an important feature when thinking of how each text makes use of language to perform poetically what is claimed theologically.

Withdrawing outside the text as in the *Amado* of the *Cántico*, or inside himself as Kṛṣṇa does, the manifestation of the presence is in both cases meant to be sought not completely outside or inside, but in the transit between one and the other, between the absence and the presence, *vipralambha* and *sambhoga*. Such are the means of the divine’s play of meaning. The opening twilight of the autumnal night in *Rāsa Līlā*, like the first verse of the *Cántico*, the question about location, points at spaces and times of transition where the language is able to perform the meaningful event of revelation of the *Amado* and Kṛṣṇa. The event of the revelation, moreover, is not fixed, but suggested at every stage of withdrawal. In the following section, I will observe how the absence of

the divine lover is stamped in the physicality of the *Amada* and the *gopis* as they go on this search.

The Withdrawal of the Female: Agency of the Wounded

Juan de la Cruz compares the *Amado* to a stag whose nature is constant showing and hiding:

*Como el ciervo huiste,
habíendome herido;
Salí tras ti clamando, y eras ido. (1)*

Like the stag, you fled
having wounded me;

I went out running after you, but you were gone.

Commenting upon the verse “having wounded me,” Juan de la Cruz explains the nature of the “wounds of love,” *Y éstas propiamente se llaman heridas de amor, de las cuales habla aquí el alma. Inflaman éstas tanto la voluntad en afición, que se está el alma abrasando en fuego y llama de amor; tanto, que parece consumirse en aquella llama* (1.17) (“And these are properly called wounds of love, to which here the soul refers.

They inflame the soul in the will with affection, in a way that the soul is in the fire and flame of love; so much, that they seem to consume themselves in that flame”). The effect of these ardent wounds of love, Juan de la Cruz continues, is to make the soul *salir de sí y entrar en Dios* (1.19) (“go out of herself and enter into God”), and thus the next verse follows: *salí tras ti clamando y eras ido* (“I went out running after you, but you were gone”). This experience of a physical reaction due to separation is also present

throughout *Rāsa Līlā*. The *gopis* long to put Kṛṣṇa's feet on their heads and breasts, which are heated by the pain of separation. Śrīdhara often points out that the *gopis*' experience of a feeling of ardor (in Sanskrit, *tapas*) can be interpreted as distress, but also as a literal heating up, identified with the heat produced by the ascetic practices of advanced yogis.⁸²

I want to begin this section by looking at the *tapas* of the *gopis* and the ardent wounds of love of the *Amada* as bodily marks of the primal withdrawal of the lover. The physical signs inscribed in the female beloveds render their bodies incomplete, and thus they withdraw in the search for him who will return their wholeness. In his *Comentarios*, Juan de la Cruz rephrases the painful utterances of the *Amada* with these words: *Decir a mi Amado que, pues adolezco, y él solo es mi salud, que me dé mi salud; y que, pues peno, y él solo es mi gozo, que me dé mi gozo; y que, pues muero, y él solo es mi vida, que me dé mi vida.* (2.6) (“Tell my Beloved, since I am sick and he alone is my health, to give me health; and since I suffer and he alone is my joy, to give me joy; and, since I die and he alone is my life, to give me life”). In a comparable fashion, Śrīdhara states that the return of Kṛṣṇa is the only medicine that will cure the *gopis*: “The medicine for the illness of the heart of your *gopis* is your return” (31.18).

Geoffrey Hartman has called attention to the wounding power of words which, he argues, is more obvious than their healing power (122). In the comparison between the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā*, the notion of the wounding power of words contrasts with the

⁸² The *Rāsa Līlā* verse reads: “Dear, with the stream of the nectar from your lips sprinkle this fire, born from the desire for your smiles, your glances, your sweet music. Otherwise, friend, with our bodies consumed by the fire of separation, we will go to your feet through the path of meditation” (29.37). In the commentary to this verse, Śrīdhara points out that the heat (*tapas*) was the same experienced by the ascetic yogis.

wounding power of silence, of the absence of words left behind by the *Amado* and Kṛṣṇa. From this silent absence, the bodies of the *Amada* and the *gopis*, like the words they will utter, arise wounded. The *Amada*'s declaration of her wound, like that of the *gopis*' heated bodies, clearly calls for an analogy between female eroticism and mystical discourse. To have been left wounded is a bodily mark, a hole in the completeness of the physicality that renders itself as a metaphor of the spiritual absence of the divine. The erotic wounds of the female body mirror the holes of meaning left by the absence of the *Amado* and Kṛṣṇa in the body of the text. As the “¿Adónde?” at the beginning of the *Cántico* points to an outer space where the *Amado* has withdrawn, the wound that the *Amada* witnesses in her own body signals a new meaning event. The incomplete text, as the wounded body of the female beloveds, will find its restitution only at the return of the wound-giver. These wounds of fire initiate the path into which the *Amada* and the *gopis* will withdraw. However, as the textual holes of meaning do not point in the same directions, the wounds in the bodies of the female beloveds do not produce the same withdrawals.

The Withdrawal of the *Amada*: Wounds, Sores, and Fistulas

In his commentaries to the seventh stanza of the *Cántico*, Juan de la Cruz revisits the metaphor of the wound, explaining in physiological detail the three grades of love as three degrees of wounds:

*La primera se llama herida, la cual es más remisa y más brevemente
pasa...Y de esta herida, que aquí llamamos también enfermedad, habla la
Esposa en los Cantares [...]*

La segunda se llama llaga, la cual hace más asiento en el alma que la herida, y por eso dura más, porque es como herida ya vuelta llaga, con la cual se siente el alma verdaderamente andar llagada de amor [...]

La tercera manera de penar de amor es como morir, lo cual es ya como tener la llaga afistolada, hecha el alma ya toda afistolada, la cual vive muriendo, hasta que, matándola el amor, la haga vivir vida de amor, transformándola en amor [...]

The first one is called a wound, which is softer and passes more briefly...And of this wound, which here we also call illness, the Wife in the *Songs* [*Song of Songs*] speaks [...]

The second is called a sore, which sits longer in the soul than the wound, and thus it lasts longer because it is like a painful wound, and with it the soul feels to truly be wandering sorely in love [...]

The third manner of suffering for love is like dying, and it is as like having a sore with fistulas, being the soul all covered in fistulas, living as if dying until, killing her with love, he makes her live a life of love, transforming her in love [...]

The wound becomes a metaphor in the poem thanks to its existence as an opening into the wholeness of meaning. And with it, the wholeness represented by the body becomes a metaphor by virtue of its propensity to be wounded. The three degrees of infliction in the body are correlative to degrees of love, which at the same time are determined by the degrees of withdrawal that the *Amada* transits in the poem.

The wound of the *Amada* in the first verse of the *Cántico*—which is a wound, not a sore or fistula—lacks a locality in the body of the wounded. Likewise, the landscapes into which she withdraws are depicted as poetic images that do not reveal particular details, but give the reader an overview of her withdrawing:

*Mi Amado, las montañas,
 los valles solitarios nemorosos,
 las ínsulas extrañas,
 los ríos sonorosos,
 el silbo de los aires amorosos.*(14)

My lover, the mountains,
 the solitary wooded valleys,
 the strange islands,
 the sonorous rivers,
 the whistle of the amorous winds.

Wounded, the *Amada* exits, and her exiting brings along the *transformación de la palabra de instrumento de la comunicación en forma de la contemplación* (“transformation of the word from an instrument of communication in a form of contemplation”) (Valente, *La piedra y el centro* 319).⁸³ This “transformation of the

⁸³ The full quote by Valente says: *Abolición del discursus, ingreso del lenguaje en una salida de sí mismo, transformación de la palabra de instrumento de la comunicación en forma de la contemplación: tales serían los elementos más inmediatamente visibles de la materia verbal en que la experiencia mística (en cuanto tal y no como posible objeto de mera descripción doctrinal) se aloja. Hay en todos los elementos antedichos un movimiento de apertura, de negación de los límites, de irresistible salida.* (“Abolition of speech, entering of language into an exit of itself, transformation of the word from an instrument of communication in a form of contemplation: those would be the elements more immediately visible of the verbal material in the mystical experience (as it is and not as a possible object of mere doctrinal description). In all these elements there is an opening movement of negation of the limits, of an irresistible going out” (*La piedra y el centro* 319).

word” evokes Streng’s concept of a “switch of awareness” performed in the language. If the first question about location signals a place outside the textual *corpus* where the divine lover is to be found, the *Amada*’s going out directs the poetic narration into the path that will eventually lead to that *¿Adónde?* But such an *¿Adónde?* is not a specific textual destination, but the ever-intermittent transition between the absence and the presence, the mountains and the valleys, the music and the silence—as the following stanza proceeds. Like the incorporeal description of her wounded body, the path taken by the *Amada* when going out after her lover is not described in concrete terms; rather, it is described as a succession of contradictory poetic images, whose nontraditional syntactic and rare grammar constructions have made critics identify them with oneiric states (López-Baralt, *Asedios* 36). These strange landscapes of search into which the *Amada* withdraws perform linguistically the theological experience described by Juan de la Cruz as going into the hidden to find him who is hidden: *Porque el que ha de hallar una cosa escondida, tan a lo escondido y hasta lo escondido donde ella está ha de entrar* (*Comentarios* 1.9) (“Because he who is to find a hidden thing, so much into the hidden and up to the hidden where it is, that far he should go”).

The *Amada*’s first action after her departure is to address the shepherds, in a dialogue that can be understood in the literary and theological context of the poem as a trespassing of the established positionality of the female voice. From the perspective of the literary context, this verse exemplifies the inversion of the pastoral roles of traditional Spanish Medieval poetry based on the aesthetic Platonic conception of love. This *amor cortés* (courtly love), corresponding to the Medieval imagery, changes here into a Neoplatonic perspective:

*Pastores, los que fuerdes
allá por las majadas al otero,
si por ventura vierdes
aquel que yo más quiero,
decidle que adolezco, peno y muero.(2)*

Shepherds, those of you who are going
there from the flock to the hill,
if by chance you see
the one whom I most love,
tell him that I am in pain, that I grieve and die.

This stanza refers to the three main medieval traditions of pastoral motifs: the shepherds, the female beloved, and the hill landscapes. However, quite different from the pre-established roles of the beautiful and rather passive female shepherd who captivates the mind and the heart of her male counterparts, making them abandon their duties out of madness of love, in the *Cántico* it is she who proclaims her excess of passion and despair for the absence of her lover.⁸⁴ With this aesthetic choice, Juan de la Cruz is coming to terms with his theological argument of the soul as an agent in the search for the divine, as he intends to teach the Discalced Carmelite nuns to whom he addresses the poem and the commentary.⁸⁵ The abandonment of the prescribed pastoral duties stands as the first

⁸⁴ In *Asedios a lo indecible* Luce López-Baralt analyzes in detail the *Amada's* rejection of her pastoral duties (34).

⁸⁵ In contrast with the Counter-Reformation's institutionally supported Scholasticism, which rendered dubious any possibility of a personal relationship with the divine, here Juan de la Cruz vividly depicts a close and unique communication of the individual soul with god. Without a doubt, this premise constitutes a clear transgression of the religious behavior prescribed by the Scholastic claims of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, although it coincides with the spiritual aims of the Carmelite Order reformation.

process of withdrawal through which the *Amada* transits, taking her into another step of withdrawal:

*Mi alma se ha empleado,
y todo mi caudal en su servicio;
ya no guardo ganado,
ni ya tengo otro oficio,
que ya sólo en amar es mi ejercicio.
Pues ya si en el ejido
de hoy más no fuere vista ni hallada,
diréis que me he perdido;
que, andando enamorada,
me hice perdidiza, y fui ganada. (28-29)*

My soul has been employed
and all my wealth in his service.
No longer do I keep the flock,
nor have I any other duty,
for now love is my only occupation.
So now, if in public spaces
from this day on I am not seen or found,
say I have been lost;
for, being enamored,
I pretended to be lost, and now I am found.

Continuing her proclamation of agency, the *Amada* now contemplates her soul immersed in one purpose. She warns others about her falling away from accepted locations and standards of behavior. She not only witnesses and announces the trespassing nature of her actions, but also seems to be forecasting the consequences of her acts: “I made myself losable, and I was won.” It is impossible not to pay attention to the flirtatious mood of this verse and to ascertain its moral connotations. *Perdidiza*—from *perder*, (to lose)—is an adjectival form, used less frequently than the participle *perdida*, (“lost”). A *mujer perdida* (“lost woman”) was a standard metaphor for a woman such as a prostitute or an unfaithful wife who did not comply with proper moral behavior. The *Amada* of the *Cántico* resorts to a transitive verb and says *me hice perdidiza*, literally, “I made myself losable,” implying a certain performance, a pretense of being what she was not in order to obtain a result, *y fui ganada* (“and I was won”), which, I argue, is a correlative to “I was wounded.” This verse clearly indicates that the *Amada*’s encounter with the object of her desire is not only outside the space of the literary poetic tradition, but also outside recognizable norms of cultural and social interaction.

Dwelling upon the *Amada*’s statement of making herself losable, Juan de la Cruz explains that this action takes place in two different manners:

Y es de dos maneras, conviene a saber: a sí misma, no haciendo caso de sí en ninguna cosa sino del Amado, [...], haciéndose perdidiza a sí misma, no queriendo ganarse en nada para sí; lo segundo: a todas las cosas, no haciendo caso de todas sus cosas sino de las que tocan al Amado; y eso es hacerse perdidiza, que es tener gana que la ganen. (29.10)

And this is in two ways, namely: to herself, not paying attention to the self in anything except regarding the Lover, [...], making herself losable, not wanting to gain herself in anything; the second: to all things, not paying attention to any of her concerns but the ones that regard the Lover; and this is to make herself losable, to be willing to be won.

These two ways, as explained by Juan de la Cruz, can be also read in terms of the three degrees of love illustrated with the progressively deeper wounds. She withdraws from her duties as in the first wound (*herida*), she withdraws from the outside phenomenological world as in the sore (*llaga*), and finally she withdraws from the self, as in the fissure (*llaga afistolada*). Continuing the metaphorical parallels, one sees that these three stages of withdrawal have interesting resemblances to and differences from the three kinds of withdrawal that the *gopis* perform in *Rāsa Līlā*, according to Sṛīdhara's interpretation: from the world, "not wanting to gain herself in anything," from the *dharma*, "failing to all that was not God," and from the self out of sacrifice of love: "to be willing to be won."

The Withdrawal of the Heated *Gopis*

In *Rāsa Līlā*, the heated *gopis* go out as soon as they hear the melody of Kṛṣṇa's flute: "The very impatient ones went there having abandoned the nurturing [of babies]. Others, having placed the milk in the oven, not having removed the *samyāva* (wheat cakes), ran away" (29.5), and they go out again, and further, after Kṛṣṇa's first receding from view: "This is the search for Kṛṣṇa by the *gopis*, ardent in their separation, who, like crazy women, search from forest to forest" (*Commentary* 30.1). The *gopis*' poetic exiting

is theologically explained as three stages of withdrawal that need to be undertaken in order to attain the manifestation of the divine. These three stages are pointed out by Srīdhara in the commentary to the following verse:

एवम् मदर्थोज्झितलोकवेदस्वानाम् हि वो मय्यनुवृत्तयेवलाः।

मया परोक्षं भजता तिरोहितं माऽसूयितुं मार्हथ तत् प्रियं प्रियाः॥३२।२१॥

*evam madarthojjhatalokavedasvānām hi vo mayyanuvṛttayevalāḥ/
mayā parokṣam bhajatā tirohitam mā'suyitum mārhattha tat priyam
priyāḥ//*

Those who have abandoned the world, the Vedas and their own for my sake, their service is in me. They are shared by me invisibly. “Women, do not be angry because I have become invisible.” So said the lover to the beloveds. (30.21)

This verse, to which I will go back in detail in the following section of this chapter, states in the words of Kṛṣṇa the condition of *bhakti*, or devotional love. The first compound in the first line *madarthojjhatalokavedasvānām* refers to the three different categories of the objects abandoned by the *gopis* in their search for Kṛṣṇa: *loka*, the world; *veda*, literally the knowledge of the scriptures, and *svā*, what regards to oneself. In his comments, Srīdhara expands on these three dimensions of abandonment: first, renouncing the world, regarding the expectations about what is right or wrong (*yuktāyuktāpratīkṣhaṇāt*); secondly, withdrawing from the *vedas* out of no expectations for *dharma* or *adharmā* (*dharmādharmāpratīkṣhaṇāt*) and thirdly, abandoning the self out of sacrifice of love

(*snehatyāgāt*).⁸⁶ Those who fulfill these conditions, Kṛṣṇa says and Srīdhara illustrates, have their service in Kṛṣṇa and he loves them.

Noticeably, even when Kṛṣṇa’s veiling and unveiling is the leading metaphor of the text, the first actual withdrawal—as an action of “going out” described in *Rāsa Līlā*—is that of the *gopis*, who, at the sound of Kṛṣṇa’s flute, start running away from their houses, leaving the babies crying, the milk boiling, and the husbands waiting to be served:

निशम्य गीतं तदनङ्गवर्धनं व्रजस्त्रियः कृष्णगृहीतमानसाः।

आजग्मुरन्यो ऽ न्यमलक्षितोद्यमाः स यत्र कान्तो जवलोककुण्डलाः ॥२९।४॥

*niśamya gītāṁ tadanaṅgavardhanam vrajastrīyaḥ kṛṣṇagr̥hītamānasāḥ/
ājagmuranyo'nyamalakṣitodyamāḥ sa yatra kānto javalokakuṇḍalāḥ//*

The cowherd women, having heard that song arousing amorous feelings, with their minds taken by Kṛṣṇa and not seeing each other’s efforts, came to the encounter of the lover with their earrings trembling with speed.

(29.4)

This first withdrawal of the *gopis* is a withdrawal from *loka*—the world—but also a withdrawal from *dharma*: a serious social trespass and also a violation of the religious prescriptions that determine social acts.⁸⁷ The four verses that follow the one quoted

⁸⁶ The idea of moving beyond the dualistic position of *dharma* and non-*dharma* is also reflected in the *Bhāgavad Gītā*—the famous discourse of Kṛṣṇa to his cousin and chief of the army Arjuna—as well as in the larger *Mahābhārata* where the *Bhāgavad Gītā* is inserted. Examples of these are the two famous verses: “Renouncing all *dharma*, take refuge only in me. / I will liberate you from all sins. Do not be afraid” (*Bhāgavad Gītā* 18.66); and “Renounce *dharma* and *adharma*, and both truth and lie. / Renouncing both truth and lie, renounce that by which you renounce.” (*Mahābhārata*, “*Shanti Parva*” 318.44).

⁸⁷ Originally translated as “duty,” *dharma* refers to much more and needs to be understood in the context of the prescribed spiritual and social actions of individuals which also have a cosmic effect in their cycles of life and death. It is difficult in this context to separate religious and social duties. Here one should

above are a quite vivid description of the *gopis* abandoning their household duties, and the sense of a condemnable infringement of *dharma* is intensified by two interventions in the text. The first is an intertextual theological discussion between the narrator Shrīśuka and his audience (verses 11-16). This argument—which happens twice in the text—deals with the nature of the love of the *gopis* for Kṛṣṇa. How, the king asks, could these cowherd women attain the liberation from the bodies if they only saw Kṛṣṇa as a paramour? (1.12). In the answer to this question of King Parikshit, Shrīśuka defines the nature of *bhakti*:

कामं क्रोधं भयं स्नेहं ऐक्यं सौहृदमेव च।

नित्यं हरौ विदधतो यान्ति तन्मयतां हि ते ॥ २९।१५॥

kāmaṁ krodhaṁ bhayaṁ snehaṁ aikyaṁ sauhṛdam eva ca/

nityaṁ harau vidadhato yānti tanmayatām hi te//

Those who are always desiring, hating, fearing, loving, uniting and bestowing friendship upon Hari (Kṛṣṇa), they attain oneness with him.

(29.15)

With this verse, the *gopis*' trespass of *loka* and *dharma* is not only justified, but also given authority in the realm of devotion. This authority is further emphasized by Kṛṣṇa's own speech on the *dharma* of women that he addresses to the *gopis* when they appear in disarray before him. Kṛṣṇa reminds the women that, according to *dharma*, they have unalterable duties to husbands and family and insists that they return to their houses (29.22-27). His speech appears, as Tracy Coleman has named it, “a serious women

remember the *Law of Manu*, one of the three *Dharma Shastras* (*Treatises of Dharma*), which lists specific behaviors for Hindu women, such as never being separated from a male member of their family.

dharma talk” if not for two important contextual nuances.⁸⁸ First, if one considers that the narration of *Rāsa Līlā* is framed by Kṛṣṇa’s decision to turn his mind to love and to the power of *Yogamāyā*, then Kṛṣṇa’s speech is nothing but his own amorous teasing of the ladies of Vraja. This becomes even more apparent by a verse placed right at the center of Kṛṣṇa’s speech and without a discursive transition with the stanzas that precede and follow it:

अथवा मदभिस्नेजाद्भवन्त्यो यन्त्रिताशयाः ।

आगता ह्युपपन्नं वः प्रीयन्ते मयि जन्तवः ॥२९॥२३॥

athavā madabhisnejādbhavantyo yantritāśayāḥ/

āgatā hyupapannaṁ vaḥ prīyante mayi jantavaḥ//

Or maybe, Oh ladies, it is that your will is imprisoned by my love.

In that case your coming is correct because all creatures find pleasure in me.

(29.23)

In his commentary to this verse, Srīdhara explains that the adjectival form used to describe the *gopis*, *viśā*, means literally “those whose will is imprisoned because the mind is dominated by fascination,” where *viśi* is the noun, meaning “subjugation” or “fascination” (*yantritāśayā vaśīḍṛtacittāḥ*). The *gopis* are described as those who are fascinated or subjugated by Kṛṣṇa, who is said to have taken control of their will. The trembling bodies of the *gopis*, their heated heads and breasts, and their apparently nonsense actions are the effects of being *viśā*.

⁸⁸ Coleman has argued that: “...as the *gopis*’ and wives’ emotions become more wild and potent, Kṛṣṇa becomes desireless, and even more in control of himself and his surroundings” (111).

However, this subjugation does not seem to imply a lack of agency. In their answer to Kṛṣṇa (verses 31-41), the *gopis* exercise a notable theological defense that begins by recognizing that they are immersed in a particular state, but that this is not their responsibility. The *gopis* place themselves in a superior status to those who would obey Kṛṣṇa without argument.⁸⁹ They remind their lover of his own divine condition, they call him the Lord of *Dharma*, and they tell him that whatever needs to be done for the sake of *dharma* regarding family duties can be done by him since they are only women “curious about *dharma*” who have come to his feet with the hope that he would accept their service. Therefore, the *gopis* continue, “What is the use of husbands and sons that cause only suffering?” (29.32-38). This logical argumentation of the women, which concludes by imploring Kṛṣṇa to place his feet on their burning breasts (29.41), has the effect of softening Kṛṣṇa’s heart and making him enjoy love with the ladies of Vraja.⁹⁰ Thus the withdrawal of *dharma* of the *gopis* not only seems proper, but also attains authority in the context of *bhakti*.

After the withdrawal from the world and from *dharma*, the *gopis* go in search of Kṛṣṇa and there takes place what I identify as the third state of withdrawal, which Srīdhara points to as “abandoning the self out of a sacrifice of love (*snehatyāgāt*).” This move is poetically illustrated by the withdrawal from the identification with their physicality. The *gopis* begin to re-enact their previous interactions with Kṛṣṇa and to

⁸⁹ The words of the *gopis* read: “Dear, you have said that obedience is the correct *dharma* of good women who know *dharma*. Let that be for those who seat at your feet to receive instructions, but aren’t you the most loved of all human beings, the friend of the soul?” (29.32).

⁹⁰ Still, it is important to remember that Kṛṣṇa’s *dharma* talk, the theological defense of the *gopis*, the event of sharing love, and even his first withdrawal at the end of the chapter attain a different perspective when looked at from the point of view of *yogamāya*, where no *dharma* is withdrawn because Kṛṣṇa posits as the demiurge of his own play.

perform the well-known actions of his life through their bodies, voices, and feelings. The verses describe the women letting their bodies go to the service of their lover by “taking hold of Kṛṣṇa as their own nature”:

गत्यानुरागस्मितविभ्रमेक्षितैर्मनोरमालापविहारविभ्रमैः।

आक्षिप्तचिताः प्रमदा रमापतेस्तास्ता विचेष्टा जगृस्तदात्मिकाः॥३०॥२॥

gatyānurāgasmitavibhramekṣitairmanoramālāpavihāravibhramaiḥ/

ākṣiptacittāḥ pramadā ramāpatestāstā viceṣṭā jagṛstadātmikāḥ//

All those women whose minds were captivated and who had become static took hold of him [as] their own nature through movements of love, smiles, confused sights, beautiful speech and loving wanderings. (30.2)

Through the act of taking hold of Kṛṣṇa’s external nature, the *gopis* cross into a third state of withdrawal: from their own *ātman*, they become *tadātmikāḥ* made of his *ātman*.⁹¹

This verse is linked to the following one, which states: *pratyāḥ priyasya*

pratirūḍhamūrtayah, literally, “the beloveds entered the form of the lover.” To “be made of his *ātman*” and to “enter his form” intends here a rather complicated theological instance that has raised much argument among commentators as to whether this image represents a real transmutation of the *gopis* into Kṛṣṇa. In his commentary, Śrīdhara does not seem to give a definitive answer to this question, but makes an interesting grammatical point. He explains *pratirūḍh* as *āviṣṭā*, a verbal form that could mean “to imitate,” but also “to enter.”⁹² From a linguistic and poetic point of view, it is interesting

⁹¹ As in the case of *dharma*, *ātman* is a term difficult to translate and I prefer to leave it in the original Sanskrit. It is loosely translated as “self,” but it carries a complicated interaction of mind, body, and spiritual self that no English word can translate.

⁹² More than the representational effect of an imitation, some argue, this image is an actual multiplication of the figure of Kṛṣṇa. Other commentators, particularly from the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava school, would argue

to notice that the enclitic grammatical form *tat* can stand for all the declensions of the third-person pronoun *sah*. In this way, the *gopis* are described as holding all possible subject-object relationships with Kṛṣṇa's *ātman*. They can be for, by, in, through, or just identical to Kṛṣṇa. What is clear is that here a deeper sense of transformation takes place, which Sṛīdhara identifies to be a transformation of love, poetically represented through the unitive possibilities of grammar. I will return to the concept of *tadātmikāḥ* at the end of this chapter and in the next one.

Female Withdrawals in Comparison

Looking comparatively at the paths traversed by the wounded *Amada* and the heated *gopis*, one arrives at some provocative resemblances and distinctions that shed further light in the use of body metaphors by each text and onto the specifics of sensual images in the *Cántico*. It is important to point out that I am aware that this discussion would easily engage with the arguments on female body, mysticism and text by authors like Jacques Lacan, Luce Irigaray, and Simone de Beauvoir, and especially with the revision that Amy Hollywood has proposed of their theories. I recognize that the engagement with those authors is provocative, especially because it would invite an inversion of the direction of comparison: reading the use of metaphors of the female body in the *Rāsa Līlā* through the *Cántico*, and framing this reading with the theories of

that this act of imitation through which the *gopis* become Kṛṣṇa's *tadātmikāḥ* is not to be confused with an image of the *gopis* actually dropping their identity and being transmuted into Kṛṣṇa, but instead is an image of performance through which Kṛṣṇa's form is multiplied in front of the reader's eyes by virtue of the many *gopis* who want to be him, but continue being themselves imitating him. To this question I will refer in detail in the last chapter of this dissertation.

feminism and mysticism looking at a non-Western text. Nonetheless, considering the coherence with the frame of this project, I have chosen to focus on the literary effect of the body metaphors as seen in comparison.

The wound of the *Amada* in the *Cántico*, we already observed, fulfills the function of reflecting the divine lover's departure. The wound is a hole that mirrors the hole of meaning left in the text by his exiting, which produced the question of “¿Adónde?” In this sense, the body of the *Amada* becomes a mirror of the text, and, in fact, after this moment, the poem follows each of her movements. In the words of López-Baralt, *él queda definido tan solo por el amor que ella le tiene (Asedios 34)* (“he is defined only by her love”). The wound fulfills, then, the double poetic function of giving the reader a clue into the events previous to the text, and of being the starting point of her withdrawal. However, the wound is not mentioned again in the text. Even when Juan de la Cruz's commentary dwells upon physiological descriptions of the different kinds of wounds, the wound of the poem is somehow lost in its effects. In fact, it does not even present a specific location in the incorporeal physicality of the *Amada*.

Instead, the heat (*tapas*) of the *gopis* defines the *gopis'* nature. It is a repeated, all-encompassing metaphor, although it lacks the visibility of a body mark—like that of a wound. The superimposition of the narratives of female withdrawals makes evident the corporeal difference marked by the wound and the *tapas*. Looking further at the *Cántico* through *Rāsa Līlā*, one observes the *Amada* fleeing from her wound and performing physical actions that nonetheless seem incorporeal, while her comparands, the *gopis*, are going deeper into their own corporeality and using their bodies as means to relieve the pain of absence left by Kṛṣṇa.

Reading the wound of the *Amada* through the heat of the *gopis*, the non-corporeal quality of the former is intensified when compared with the corporeality of the latter, although both are endowed with an intense sensuality. In a parallel fashion, the path walked by the female character in the *Cántico* holds a strong sense of poetic connotation while the *gopis*' path adheres to a more descriptive and detailed illustration. The incorporeality of the *Amada* is projected on to the landscape in such a way that it welcomes her as she exits. Valleys, mountains, and rivers point to a non-defined destiny that seems to recede from view, as if viewed from the air, through which—as will be observed in detail in the next chapter—she transits quickly. In contrast, the reader is exposed to the details of the flight of the *gopis*, and the landscape into which they enter is not described as an overview, but as inland scenery. While the *Amada* seems to fly above, the *gopis* get lost in the depth of the forest. These distinctions between the withdrawals of the female characters make it apparent that the directionality of the withdrawal of the female beloved imitates the directionality of the withdrawal of the divine lovers. The wounded *Amada* flees to the “outside” of the text, while the heated *gopis* lose themselves in the depth of the woods. The *Amada* leaves, the *gopis* enter, and the path of the latter is figured with no more metaphorical intensity, but instead with more detail than the path of her counterparts.

To further address this difference, it is necessary to return to the theological didactics at work in the *Cántico* mentioned in the previous section, as well as to advance an analysis that I shall continue in the next chapter. From Juan de la Cruz's theological stance, and according to the experience of *teología mística* that he teaches in the *Cántico*, there was a clear stress on the interior spiritual life, unmediated by objects or other

obstacles between the person and the divine. Therefore, the insubstantiality of the *Amada*'s body and the concomitant incorporeal nature of the world around could be read as a poetic manifestation of this theological statement which—as I will discuss in the next chapter—does not contradict his aesthetic-theological project of returning to the creatures from divine love.⁹³

However, despite the lack of corporeal description of the *Amada*, which projects into the undefined landscape described by the text, the sensuality suggested by the *Cántico* matches that of *Rāsa Līlā*. Although Juan de la Cruz chooses not to draw her in such terms, the *Amada* could, by means of desire, be as physically involved as the *gopis* are. The intense sensual desire suggested in the *Cántico* and more clearly in *Rāsa Līlā* becomes the means of agency of all female characters. To acquire agency by means of desire and by means of been wounded is another feature of the *Amada* that becomes intensified when reading it along with the agency of the heated *gopis*.

The wounded *Amada* and the heated *gopis* become agents not despite, but precisely by virtue of, the possession of sensually affected corporealities—either through suggested or through implicit bodies. Thus, Juan de la Cruz explains the grades of love with images of progressively intensified wounds—as was observed at the beginning of the chapter—and Srīdhara compares the heat of the bodily reactions of the *gopis* (like their hair standing on end) with the reactions of advanced yogis drowned in bliss after the most intense ascetic practices (31.8). From this prominent resonance, it becomes apparent that both texts claim a wound—theologically explained as the withdrawal of the

⁹³ This difference in the imagery of corporality may also speak about the specific religious performance practices related to each text.

self—to be a condition for the attainment of the divine. Not wishing to fall into a bipolar feminine / masculine analysis, I call attention to the premise of the agency of the wounded who, through the meaningful event of her wound, withdraws in the search that will end in an encounter with the divine. Words, Hartman reminds us, are the wounds that are always, again, words (156).

Places of Encounter and Withdrawal of Meaning in the *Cántico*

Having withdrawn in their search for him who first receded from view, the beloveds of *Rāsa Līlā* and the *Cántico* arrive at places of encounter with their divine lover. These destinations, so sought after by the female beloveds, are expected to reveal the meaning of the absences of the divine. Facilitating the union between the *Amada* with the *Amado* and the *gopis* with Kṛṣṇa, the places of encounter should complete the cycles of withdrawal. However, arriving there, the meaning becomes obscure rather than clear, as the beloveds engage with their lover in secret talks, involving secret meanings that are not to be unveiled in the corpus of the text. Moreover, in both cases the places of encounter will transit from a destination to a new beginning, as the *Amado* and Kṛṣṇa withdraw again from view. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall examine the significance of the withdrawal of meaning in the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*.

The descriptions of places in the *Cántico*, as was observed in the previous section, reproduce a sort of aerial view as the *Amada* travels over the landscape. Resorting to a series of oxymorons, Juan de la Cruz brings the poetic language to its highest transformative use through the elimination of the verb in a statement of apparently contradictory adjectival phrases.

(...)

la noche sosegada

en par de los levantes de la aurora,

la música callada,

la soledad sonora,

la cena que recrea y enamora. (15)

(...)

the calm night

at the rising of the dawn,

the silent music,

the sonorous solitude,

the feast that recreates and enamors.

In the commentaries to these verses, Juan de la Cruz relies greatly on Dionysius the Areopagite's fundamental essay "Mystical Theology," in which the author claims that the divine cannot be expressed either by negative or by positive terms. The contradictory images of the poetry such as "silent music" and "sonorous solitude" evoke Dionysius's own prayer at the beginning of his treatise:

Lead us up beyond unknowing and light,

up to the farthest, highest peak

of mystic scripture,

where the mysteries of God's Word

lie simple, absolute and unchangeable

in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence.

(“Mystical Theology” 135)

Following Dionysius, Juan de la Cruz reproduces in the language the tension between *kataphatic* and *apophatic* expressions and the insufficiency of both, an insufficiency that, rather, resolves itself in a sufficiency to refer the reader—just like the opening *¿Adónde?* and like the wound of love of the *Amada*—to another space outside the textual reality, the space of encounter with the divine lover. The theological purpose of these verses, as Juan de la Cruz explains in the commentaries, is to describe the condition of spiritual marriage, or *desposorio espiritual*, that the soul has attained and which leads to the proper condition for *contemplación*. To describe the state of contemplation, Juan de la Cruz quotes directly from Dionysius’s treatise in order to explain that it is not a condition of perfectly and absolutely clear seeing, but, in the words of Dionysius, “as the ray of the shadows,” meaning that the vision is not clear, but obscured, as it is meant to be within the coordinates of material limitations, including the body and the language. Thus, Juan de la Cruz calls it a *contemplación obscura*. Dionysius’s literary description of the act of contemplating describes an exercise not of seeing an image, but of inhabiting a place: “And yet he does not meet God himself, but contemplates, not him who is invisible, but rather where he dwells” (137). The Dionysian idea of contemplation as inhabiting a place sheds light upon the stanzas of the *Cántico*, where the places of encounter and indwelling of the *Amada* and her *Amado* are described, as the poetic narration seems to lead to an answer for the opening *¿Adónde?*

There is more than one location in the *Cántico* that may answer the “*¿Adónde?*” of the *Amado* and the longed destination of the *Amada*, where she will finally contemplate her divine lover not by seeing him clearly, but by inhabiting his *locus* of

indwelling. Those places—as were pointed out in the previous section—are not clearly described, and the language used to refer to them carries strong connotations of secrecy. They are the water of the fountain, where the lover and the beloved indwell in each other’s eyes—*si en esos tus semblantes plateados* (12), the orchard or garden—*entrado se ha la Amada en el ameno huerto deseado* (22), under the apple tree —*Debajo del manzano, allí conmigo fuiste desposada* (23), the flower bed—*Nuestro lecho florido* (24), the inner wine cellar—*en la interior bodega de mi amado bebí* (26), and the caverns —*Y luego a las subidas cavernas de la piedra nos iremos.* (37).⁹⁴

Among these indwelling loci, the interior wine cellar is where the highest form of *contemplación obscura* takes place:

*En la interior bodega
de mi Amado bebí, y cuando salía
por toda aquesta vega,
ya cosa no sabía;
y el ganado perdí que antes seguía.
Allí me dio su pecho,
allí me enseñó ciencia muy sabrosa;
y yo le di de hecho
a mí sin dejar cosa;
allí le prometí de ser su Esposa. (26-27)*

In the inner cellar

⁹⁴ In the article “‘En el más profundo centro.’ San Juan de la Cruz y el espacio sagrado,” María M. Carrión elaborates on the architectural premises Juan de la Cruz diploides to represents possible locations of the ineffable. Here the author draws upon the image of the deepest center (*el más profundo centro*), to which Juan de la Cruz refers in his poem *Llama de amor viva*.

of my Beloved I drank, and when I came out
 to all these valleys
 I did not know a thing,
 and I lost the flock that I was following.
 There he gave me his breast,
 there he taught me a very savory science,
 and I gave myself to him indeed,
 without leaving a thing;
 there I promised him to be his bride.

The mutual giving described in these verses fulfills the *Amada*'s desires. Still, the repetition of the adverb *allí* ("there") signals a refusal to say or the impossibility of saying where the wine cellar is located. Readers are never allowed in that "there" where he taught her "a very savory science," the only science that could shed light upon the reasons for her comings and goings. As he begins his explanation on this verse, Juan de la Cruz asks, in a singular instance in his commentaries, the Holy Spirit to take his hand and to move his pen, *era menester que Espiritu Santo tomase la mano y moviese la pluma.*(26.3) He explains that this "interior wine cellar" represents the deepest state of love between the *Amado* and the *Amada* and insists on the ineffable nature of what god communicates to the soul, saying that it is totally unsayable, *y no se puede decir nada, así como del mismo Dios no se puede decir algo que sea como él, porque el mismo Dios es el que se le comunica* (26.4) ("and cannot be said, just as about God himself nothing can be said; because God himself is what is been communicated").

This “savory science,” Juan de la Cruz further declares, is the *teología mística*, *que es ciencia secreta de Dios, que llaman los espirituales contemplación, la cual es muy sabrosa, porque es ciencia por amor.* (27.5) (“mystical theology, which is the secret science of God, which the spiritual ones call contemplation, which is very savory because it is a science by love...”). The Dionysian idea of contemplation not as seeing, but as inhabiting, is here made clear. Mystical theology, in Juan de la Cruz’s terms, is ultimately that action of teaching a “savory science” which happens in the *allí* of the encounter and through the act of mutual giving, or indwelling—as will soon be observed. What cannot be said in these stanzas is marked grammatically by the repetition of the relative *allí* as a non-stable *locus* of inhabiting, but as the always-receding dwelling place of the *Amado*, where the *Amada* enters and indwells in the exchange of love and knowledge which constitutes the *contemplación oscura*.

The image of contemplation as the *Amada* inhabiting the same space of her *Amado* and drinking there a secret knowledge is announced at the opening question of the poem, *¿Adónde te escondiste?* In his commentary to this verse, Juan de la Cruz describes three forms of presence in which god exists in every creature: through essence, through grace, and through spiritual affection. Building on Juan de la Cruz’s comments, Stein explains that these three forms of presence are “three forms of indwelling,” the last one being the indwelling of mystical love (175). According to Juan de la Cruz’s explanation and Stein’s analysis, these three forms of indwelling are equally concealed, and the claim for vision that mobilizes the withdrawal of the *Amada* could be understood regarding any of them. However, Juan de la Cruz continues, for an advanced soul—like the souls for

whom the *Cántico* and the commentary are composed—it is to be understood that her claim refers to the “affective presence” (11.4).

The “indwelling of mystical love”—to which I will return—is a notion consonant with Dionysius’s idea of contemplation as inhabiting the same place, which Juan de la Cruz recreates in the stanza of the inner cellar, and which he will call upon in other stanzas of the poem. Indwelling and inhabiting are the actions that define the nature of the secret places of encounter. They imply a participation of two subjects that share love and knowledge. As Stein writes, “to be an indwelling, both sides must have an inner being, that is, a being that contains itself interiorly and can receive another being within itself” (175).

When the secret meaning of the *teología mística* escapes from the domain of language, and Juan de la Cruz needs to ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to describe the actions taking place in that “inner wine cellar,” the image of indwelling arises as the last locus of meaning to which poetry and theology can point. After indwelling, the meaning withdraws because the *Amada* has reached the outer textual place where the *Amado* escaped before she uttered the question about location. Thus, indwelling occurs at the very limits of the text; and the *teología mística* drunk by her while inhabiting the dwelling place of her beloved cannot find any possibility of expression within the domain of the poem. The meaning is now outside, and the reader is left with the question of *¿Adónde?*

Withdrawal of meaning in *Rāsa Līlā*

The withdrawal of meaning in *Rāsa Līlā* takes place in a different fashion from that of its comparand. At a first comparative glance, one sees that Kṛṣṇa appears and disappears twice in the text—the second time mirroring the first one—and the secret place becomes a topic of the discourse among the *gopis*:

कस्याः पदानि चैतानि याताया नन्दसूनुना।

अंसन्यस्तप्रकोष्टायाः करेणोः करिणा यथा॥३०॥२७॥

*kasyāḥ padāni caitāni yātāyā nandasūnunā/
aṁsanyastaprakoṣṭyāyāḥ kareṇoḥ kariṇā yathā//*

And whose are these footprints, walking with the son of Nanda, with his arm on her shoulder like a female elephant with a male elephant? (30.27)

तस्या अमूनि नः क्षोभं कुर्वन्त्युच्चैः पदानि यत्।

यैकापहृत्य गोपीनाम् रहो भुङ्क्तेच्युताधरम् ॥३०॥३०॥

*tasyā amūni naḥ kṣobham kurvantyuccaiḥ padāni yat/
yaikāpahṛtya gopīnām raho bhukṭecyutādharam//*

These footprints of her cause great anxiety in us because she is the one among the *gopis* who, having been taken to a secret place, enjoys the lips of Acyuta. (30.30)

When searching in the forests of Vrindāvan, the *gopis* find the footprints of Kṛṣṇa and realize that he has fled with one of them and taken her “to a secret place.” This is the first time that a “secret place” is mentioned in *Rāsa Līlā*. It is secret to the extent that it is hidden from view, although what happens with one *gopi* at that “secret” location is taking place at the same time as the group of *gopis* asks and searches for Kṛṣṇa. The name given here to Kṛṣṇa is Acyuta, from the verbal root *cyut*, “to fall.” *Acyuta* literally means

“the unfallen,” but also “imperishable” or “stable.” The image of the chosen *gopi* enjoying the lips of Acyuta evokes the sense of Kṛṣṇa as always present, although not always available to sight.

This “secret place” where the chosen *gopi* meets Kṛṣṇa is located at the limit between visibility and invisibility. The *gopis* do not see directly the sporting of the couple, but they can guess their love events in great detail through their revealing footprints:

अत्र प्रसूनावचयः प्रियार्थे प्रेयसा कृतः।

प्रपदाक्रमणे एते पश्यताऽसकले पदे ॥३०॥३२॥

atra prasūnāvachayaḥ priyārthe preyasā kṛtaḥ/

prapadākramaṇe ete paśyatā'sakale pade//

These footprints are more sunken because of the weight of the bride. Oh *gopis*! The beloved’s weight makes Kṛṣṇa heavier. Look here! He put the bride down because of a flower. (30.32)

The footprints become a window from the visible into the invisible spaces where Kṛṣṇa enjoys love with one *gopi* as each of them desires him to do with her. Through this windowing effect, it is clear that this chosen *gopi* reacts to the lover’s special attentions with pride, as the group of *gopis* had done at the end of the first chapter. She proudly refuses to walk any further and asks Kṛṣṇa: *naya mām yatra te manaḥ* (“take me there in your mind”). Kṛṣṇa tells her to climb on his shoulders, and while she is doing so, he vanishes, leaving the woman in great anxiety (30.37- 38).

This is the second disappearance of Kṛṣṇa narrated in the text. The first one occurs at the end of the first chapter after the first encounter, when the *gopis* regard

themselves as the most important women on earth, and Kṛṣṇa “disappears right there.” The first instance of Kṛṣṇa’s receding from view foreshadows the second, and the second refers back to the first. Both fulfill the didactic purpose of teaching to not take for granted the presence of the divine and to not bestow glory upon the individual effort, but only upon his grace. Still, there is more to the mirroring disappearances. While the first disappearance occurs at the immediate, direct level of the narrative, the second one occurs at the level of what is not directly visible but nonetheless is open to scrutiny from the perspective of main narrative. The second disappearance breaks the spatial linearity of the narrative and makes it evident that there is a space hidden inside the space of the text: a text within a text. In that hidden, secret locus, Kṛṣṇa meets and enjoys love with his beloved.⁹⁵ What the reader knows from the loving actions taking place in that secret textual dimension is not learned from the direct narration, but through the *gopis*’ inferences, made at the same time from the testimony of the footprints. The searching group of *gopis* is able to read the hidden text by virtue of two instruments: their desire and their own previous experiences. Desire, as Clooney reminds us, is grounded in one’s knowing of “what one does not have” and in the fact that “one experiences what does not remain surely present” (*Seeing* 106).

The previous experiences of the *gopis* with Kṛṣṇa are, as the private one-to-one encounter, located in secret places. In the next chapter of the text, as the group of the *gopis* sings in chorus the glories of Kṛṣṇa, they talk about their personal “secret places” that they cannot help constantly remembering:

⁹⁵ This section could be analyzed as an example of what A.K. Ramanujan calls “reflexions” in Hindu myths and literature. (“Where Mirrors are Windows”)

रहसि संविदं हृच्छयोदयं प्रहसिताननं प्रेमवीक्षणम् ।

बृहदुरःश्रियो वीक्ष्य धाम ते मुहुरतिस्पृहा मुह्यते मनः ॥३१॥१७॥

rahasi samvidam hr̥cchayodayam prahasitānanam premavīkṣṇam/

brjaduraḥśriyo vīkṣya dhāma te muhuratispr̥hā muhyate manaḥ//

Having seen your smiling face and your loving eyes, having contemplated your broad arms, which are the refuge of the goddess Lakṣmī, our desire is kindled by the memory of those secret encounters, and we are desirous, with our minds bewildered. (31.17)

In both cases—the verse with the one *gopi* and the verse quoted above—the term “secret” is expressed in Sanskrit as *rahas*, which means “solitude,” but it is mostly used with the connotation of mystery, secrecy, mystical or esoteric knowledge, and also as an erotic secret or sexual intercourse. The memory of those *rahas*, the *gopis* cry out, kindles their desire, making from the object of memory an object of desire. What the *gopis* want—what they do not have—but have experienced, is all that *rahas* stand for: the erotic encounters, the mystical knowledge, the secret.

Following the verse about the memory of secret places, the *gopis* explain the condition of their heart when deprived of the presence of the divine lover in the state of *vipralambha*:

व्रजवनौकसां व्यक्तिरङ्ग ते वृजिनहन्त्र्यलं विश्वमङ्गलम् ।

त्यज मनाक् च नस्त्वत्स्पृहात्मनां स्वजनहृद्रुजां यन्निषूदनम् ॥३१॥१८॥

vrajavanaukasām vyaktiraṅga te vṛjinahantryalam viśvamaṅgalam/

tyaja manāk ca nastvatspr̥hātmanām svajanaḥṛdrujām yanniṣūdanam//

Our dear, ornament of the world! Your manifestation is enough to take away the pain of those who live in the forests of Vraja. Relieve this pain just a little bit! We are yours. Our mind is taken by desire and our heart is sick. (31.18)⁹⁶

In his commentary to this verse, Srīdhara explains what “secret meaning,” *gūḍāhbhīprāyam*, means in the discourse of the *gopīs*. The term *gūḍha* derives from the verbal root *guh*, meaning “to hide”—also from this verbal root comes the noun *guhā*, meaning cave, hole, and heart. *Abhīprāya* (*abhi pra i*) means “to approach” literally or figuratively. Srīdhara’s comment implies that the *gopīs*, through the formal speech, are approaching an occult one. And the “secret meaning” that the *gopīs* approach, Srīdhara continues, is that “the medicine for the illness of the heart of the *gopīs* is Kṛṣṇa’s return;” thus, the secret is the relief for the wounds of love. Onto this secret, the secret of Kṛṣṇa’s return, the *gopīs* direct all their efforts.

The next time that Srīdhara writes about a “secret meaning” implied by the speech of the *gopīs* is not in an instance of absence, but when Kṛṣṇa comes back in the final chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*, and the *gopīs* exult in his manifestation. “It is said that they went to the end of their desire” as Kṛṣṇa finally sat in a seat arranged by their upper garments and smeared with the *kumkum* from their breasts.⁹⁷ Srīdhara comments here that the *gopīs* are filled with joy and abandon all the bondages created by desire. Still, immersed in this

⁹⁶ In the Sanskrit text, although the *gopīs* is a plural subject, they usually refer to themselves as one body, having one heart or one feeling. I chose to keep that image in the translation.

⁹⁷ The verse reads, “It is said that those whose hearts were hurting and trembling from the bliss came to the end of their desire. With their upper garments smeared with *kumkum* from their breasts, they arranged a seat for the friend of their soul.” *Kumkum* is a red powder used by Indian women for makeup.

absolute bliss, they take a step back from the intensity of emotion to enter into a second theological argument with their lover about the nature of mutuality in love:

भजतोऽनुभजन्त्येक एक एतद्विपर्ययम् ।

नोभयांश्च भजन्त्यन्य एतन्नो ब्रूहि साधु भो ॥३१॥१६॥

bhajato'nu bhajantyeका eका etadviparyayam/

nobhayāṁśca bhajantyanya etanno brūhi sādhu bho//

One loves because they love him back, one does the opposite.

And others do not love. Tell us, who is correct? (31.16)

Srīdhara affirms in the commentary that “they were asking for a secret meaning as if it were something from the world.” This hidden meaning that the *gopis* want to approach, as they ask their lover a question about the qualities of love and lovers, is the question about *bhakti*, about the particular ways in which Kṛṣṇa shares love with them. His answer begins by recounting the different kinds of human attitudes toward love: first, those who love like parents; second, those who love only when they are loved; third, those who do not love anyone because they cannot see beyond themselves; and finally, those who do not love anyone because all their desires are satisfied (32. 17-20). After this detailed classification, Kṛṣṇa responds to the hidden question of the *gopis*, the question about the nature of his love:

एवम् मदर्थोज्झितलोकवेदस्वानाम् हि वो मय्यनुवृत्तयेवलाः ।

मया परोक्षं भजता तिरोहितं माऽसूयितुं मार्हथ तत् प्रियं प्रियाः ॥३२॥२१॥

evam madarthojjhatalokavedasvānām hi vo mayyanuvṛttayevalāḥ/

mayā parokṣam bhajatā tirohitam mā'suyitum mārhatathat priyam priyāḥ//

Those who have abandoned the world, the Vedas, and their own for my sake, have their service in me. They are shared by me invisibly. ‘Oh women, do not be angry for my becoming invisible,’ so said the lover to the beloveds. (30.21)⁹⁸

The second line of the *śloka* constitutes one of Kṛṣṇa’s most important revelations in the text. He starts by referring to his own person in the instrumental declensional case, *mayā*, talking about himself in an active mood. *Paroksham* here means literally “hidden from sight.”⁹⁹ The following word is *bhajatā*, from the verbal root *bhaj*, “to share”—the same verbal root from which the word *bhakti* derives. Here *bhajatā* functions as a participle describing the *gopis*, the ones who are served by or shared with Kṛṣṇa. The next word that completes the first phrase is the adverb *tirohitam*, from the indeclinable *tiras*, meaning “beyond” and the already known participle *hita*, from the verb *dhā*, “to place.” In his commentary, Srīdhara explains that *tirohitam* means *antardhānena* (*antar*, “inside,” *dhā*, “to place”) declined in the instrumental case: by the act of *antardhā* or placing oneself inside oneself.

This grammatical illustration in the commentary refers clearly to the two earlier instances of Kṛṣṇa’s disappearance—that from the group of *gopis* in Chapter 29 and that from the single *gopi* in Chapter 30. In both cases, the verb used to describe the way Kṛṣṇa leaves the *gopis* is *antardhā*, “to place inside,” signaling a movement of Kṛṣṇa to the center of himself. Srīdhara points out that by the *antardhā* of Kṛṣṇa, he was *tirohitam* (“invisibly”) sharing or worshipping—*bhaj*—the *gopis*. Thus, what Kṛṣṇa is explaining

⁹⁸ This verse was quoted above in the discussion of the withdrawal of the female beloveds.

⁹⁹ Srīdhara explains this as *adarsham*.

to the *gopis* with “*mayā parokṣam bhajatā tirohitam*” is literally “you are worshiped / loved / shared by me invisibly.” That is his answer to the beloveds’ secret question. The nature of Kṛṣṇa’s *bhakti* is revealed as a secret invisible place of love located in Kṛṣṇa’s self. Here again, grammar illuminates theology: the means for the sharing (*bhaj*) between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopis* is precisely his placing himself inside himself (*tirohitam* as *antardhānena*). He hides for the sake of love, and for the sake of love he manifests.

In addition, the grammatical argument of Sṛīdhara sheds light upon the previous discussion about *yogamāyā* and *līlā*. I mentioned before that the idea of Kṛṣṇa’s evanescence as a consequence of the excessive pride of the female lovers is put into question by Kṛṣṇa’s use of the power of *yogamāyā* for the sake of his *līlā*. The image of Kṛṣṇa hidden inside himself—*antardhā*—comes to be the figuration of Kṛṣṇa’s will to play (*līlā*) under the veil of the illusion of union (*yogamāyā*). Thus, *antardhā* questions even further the statement of the women’s pride as a reason for his abandonment. Rather than making a didactic claim, Kṛṣṇa seems to be hiding himself as an answer to the very desire of the *gopis*. His presence cannot be revealed without the act of hiding. Sharing cannot occur in visibility, but only as he recedes from view, *antardhānena*. Kṛṣṇa’s serving the *gopis* invisibly stands as the secret meaning of the text that the *gopis* attain through their love. That is why in the first chapter—during the theological argument that precedes their first sporting—they remind Kṛṣṇa that they are not like other devotees coming at the feet of the teacher but, instead, women entering the presence of the friend of their soul (1.32). As the god of love—a name repeatedly given to Kṛṣṇa along the text—he trespasses the logics of *dharma* for the sake of *bhakti*, and this is revealed to the *gopis* when they inquire of Kṛṣṇa about the secret meaning of his love.

As the text possesses an inside text—the text of Kṛṣṇa’s love disporting—that the *gopis* can read, thanks to their memories and desires, Kṛṣṇa also possesses an inside space into which he withdraws: *antardhā*. From that space of his own self, he invisibly loves the *gopis* and attracts them. As in the case of the *Cántico*, the ultimate secret meaning of the text reveals itself as a location. However, copying Jeffrey Kripal’s term, the rhetorics of secret through which each text arrives at the place of ultimate secret meaning are quite distinctive. I shall explore such differences in the remainder of this chapter.

Withdrawal of Meaning in Comparison

¿Adónde te escondiste? (“Where did you hide?”)

Kvāsi kvāsi mahābhūja? (“Where are your big arms?”)

In his important study *The Mystic Fable*, Michel de Certeau affirms that “the other is in the text” (15), and therefore the text functions as map, or rather a body, where the traces of the other—the divine object of desire—are to be found; however, the cases of the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā* do not completely follow de Certeau’s thought. If it is true that in both cases the text is the body in whose traces one finds “the other,” it is also evident that that “other” is not always to be found “in the text.” As the present analysis has shown, concluding with the notions of indwelling—inhabiting the dwelling place of the Amado—and *antardhā*—placing inside—the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā*’s paths are not the same. Each text moves in opposite directions, although they finally converge.

In the *Cántico*, the *Amado* has withdrawn to the extra-textual space even before the first utterance of the text. The question of *¿Adónde?* marks the presence of the

Amado in a locus that is as much out of view as out of language. In contrast with de Certeau, what the *Cántico* starts out to tell about the location of the *Amado* is precisely that he is not *in* the text. Beginning with the *Amado* out of the text, Juan de la Cruz is immediately coming to terms with the notion of the insufficiency of language that he announces in the “Prólogo” of the poem and repeats throughout the commentaries. The divine is not to be framed by words, or by the space marked by the body of the poem. What words do, Juan de la Cruz declares in the “Prólogo,” is to compare, to overflow (*rebosan*) some of what they feel (*algo de lo que sienten*). The feeling of words is always mediated by the feeling of the one who reads the words, and thus Juan de la Cruz specifies who his readers are: those who, along with the *Amada*, can search out of the constraints of the textual body.

Here the question arises as to how the outer directionality of the *Cántico* may affect the reader, and how it may particularly affect the intended historical readers of the text, the cloistered Carmelite nuns with whom Juan de la Cruz composed the poem and to whom he dedicated the commentaries. As the second question implies a grade of subjectivity that I am not ready to address—and as I address the question of the intended reader in the next chapter—I will address here the first question, trying to offer some concluding thoughts that will certainly raise more questions that it will answer.

To start out with a question about a lost object is a disorienting reading experience, which could be aesthetically and intellectually understood as a parallel to the wound of the *Amada*. The reader begins facing a wound practiced in the completeness of meaning. This hole—or wound of meaning—is further disorienting as one knows that it involves a feeling of love, of corporeal love that was expressing itself in the space and

time previous to the text, and to which there is only the clue of the wound in the body of the speaker. The resonance with the erotic event is palpable. As Jean-Luc Marion has pointed out, two of the parallels between mystical theology and erotic discourse are the use of all names to call upon the object of desire and the strict apophasis or absence of all names (116).¹⁰⁰

The reader is exposed to the exhaustion of names that have been cried out (*salí tras ti clamando*) but are now reduced to silence in the face of absence (*y eras ido*). In this way, Juan de la Cruz plays in between the *apophatic* and the *kataphatic* powers of language, producing a disorienting effect in the reader, the effect of having arrived at a locus of erotic absence that is nonetheless full of the desire for presence. Thus the wound, an erotic wound, fulfills here a double function: it is, on the one hand, the trace left for the *Amada* to find the way back to her object of desire; on the other, it is the trace left for the readers to guess—which is all that can be done—what happened in the outside of the textual corpus.

With the attention focused on the wound, which mirrors the outer space where the *Amado* has withdrawn, the reader now sees the *Amada* overflying landscapes, moving quickly in the direction of the first *¿Adónde?* And when she finally arrives at an interior place of encounter, only one action is described: that she “drank” from an unnamable and delicious drink. Here the reader of the poem—a reader assumed to be holding on to the help of the commentary—attains a moment of utter disorientation because if the *Amada* says only that she “drank,” the commentator—Juan de la Cruz—says only that what she drank is that about which nothing can be said.

¹⁰⁰ The third parallel is to remain oneself and be the other. I will return to this idea at the end of the next chapter.

The term *teología mística* arises in the commentary, and Juan de la Cruz introduces the idea of *contemplación obscura*, which he explains as inhabiting a place. As with the first question about the location, all the reader knows now is what the effects of that drink are. The reader is not allowed into the “inner cellar” that guarded the lovers’ encounter. Thus, the text folds onto itself to cover the entrance to that place of indwelling. From the beginning question of *¿Adónde?* to the “inner cellar” and beyond, the reader is provoked into looking for meaning beyond the domain of words.

However, when these series of withdrawals attain the notion of indwelling—in the words of Stein—the outer directionality seems to reverse into a sense of interiority—interior as well as private. The locus of indwelling is an inner locus—in other parts of the text described using the metaphor of hidden caverns—that remains nonetheless outside the descriptive function of language, but is enhanced by the suggestive power of poetry. The reader remains wondering about the nature of that inner place of indwelling outside the textual body.

Rāsa Līlā, in comparison, travels a similar path although in a different direction. Becoming invisible by the action of *antardhā*—placing himself inside himself—Kṛṣṇa deprives the *gopīs* and the reader of his already manifested beauty and grace. However, his hiding destination never points to extratextuality, but to the deepness of the text. After the disappearance, the *gopīs* move like one body whose grammar many times is rendered in the singular—as having one heart, one feeling, one mind. This body made by the many female bodies, moreover, is said to be “heated.” The reader does not witness one marked wound, as in the case of the *Amada*, but heated bodies that come together by virtue of their shared suffering of absence. As in the *Cántico*, the erotic metaphor of the

gopis is obvious, although here it is much more corporeal and specific than in the Spanish poem.

The bodies of the *gopis* form a body that acts as a more functional device in the poetic structure of *Rāsa Līlā* than the body of the *Amada* does in the *Cántico*. The *gopis* use this body to feel, to imitate, to desire, to witness, to be with and for the body of Kṛṣṇa. In the same way, the textual body breaks into different spaces and temporalities, as Ramanujan teaches, into “mirrors that become windows.” As the body of the *Amada*—in imitation of the textual body—moves toward transcending itself, the bodies of the *gopis* move as instruments for the search and the encounter. The image of the wound of the *Amada* contrasts with the image of the heat in the body of the *gopis*. The wound is an accident in the whole, while the heat (*tapas*) that the body experiences is an all-encompassing whole in the whole. In parallel fashion, the textual body of the *Cántico* is wounded by the withdrawal of the *Amado*, who escapes outside. The textual body of *Rāsa Līlā* is heated by the disappearance of Kṛṣṇa, who heats it further from the inside—*antardhā*.

However, the place of encounter is in both instances illustrated as an inner place. The difference is that the *Amada* indwells with the *Amado* outside of the textual body, where language does not reach; and the *gopis* also indwell with Kṛṣṇa, but in the inside—*antar*—of the forest, of the night, of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā*. The secret meaning of the *Cántico*, that of the *teología mística*, cannot be framed by language, while in *Rāsa Līlā* the secret meaning is part of the textual corpus, and it is moreover uttered by Kṛṣṇa himself. The ultimate question arises as to whether the secret—even that of *Rāsa Līlā*—is meant to be revealed.

Concluding Thoughts: The Question of the Secret

This is a question that I can just begin to answer and that I will not claim to have answered, not even as I re-examine it in the last section of the next chapter. As Kripal emphasizes:

Mystical secrecy, then, is not something we impose on the texts or the culture from without, but a discourse that we enter and participate in from within the texts and their narratives. It is the other that initiates the process. We answer the call.

(xii)

It is crucial for the comparativist of mystical texts to see himself or herself as one who answers the call, but not as one who answers the final question, not as one who accesses the secret. Given this necessary introduction to the very end of this chapter, I will refer to an illuminating conversation with a scholar of *Rāsa Līlā*, Shrīnātha Shastri, during a short visit to Vrindāvan in October of 2010. As I prepared for my trip, I had some crucial questions about the text and Srīdhara’s commentary. The most urgent one was: “What is that ‘*gūḍāhbhiprāya*’ (“secret meaning”) to which Srīdhara refers at crucial moments of the text?” My question, Shrīnātha knew, was—in imitation of the question of the *gopis* to Kṛṣṇa—pointing to another question: “What is, in the end, the secret of *Rāsa Līlā*?” Shrīnātha looked intensely and seriously into my eyes and answered in Sanskrit: *Kṛṣṇasya tadātmikāḥ gopyāḥ santi tat gūḍāhbhiprāya*. (“The *gopis* are Kṛṣṇa’s *tadātmikāḥ*. That is the secret meaning”).

Echoing Kṛṣṇa in his answer to the *gopis*, Shrīnātha gave me an answer that leads to further questions. *Tadātmikāḥ*, I mentioned before, is a grammatical statement that illustrates all possible prepositional relationships between the *gopis* and Kṛṣṇa. The

enclitic *tat* substitutes for all the declensions of the third-person pronoun *sah* (“he”). I also mentioned that this term has been at the core of a theological disagreement among Vaiṣṇava scholars. This discussion, recorded by Daniel Sheridan (*The Advaitic Theism*), is still alive, and Shrīnātha, through his answer, was also participating in it. However, I did not ask him about that, because there was a certainty in his sight that prevented me from asking any further.

At the light of *tadātmikāḥ*, the notion of the *antardhā*—placing himself inside himself—of Kṛṣṇa attains a new meaning hidden in the visual perspective that is at work in both the poetry and the theology. Kṛṣṇa appears now in the inside of himself, but also in the inside and the outside of the *gopis*. In an equally complicated fashion, the notion of indwelling as the inhabiting of the *Amada* with the *Amado* in a place outside the textual corpus provides a difficult exercise for visual imagination that is at work in Scarry’s affirmation that metaphors that move are easier to visualize (90). The *Amada*’s indwelling in the inner extratextual dwelling space of the *Amado* is a metaphor that at the same time moves—moving outside the text—but does not move; it rather indwells.

One finds that the going-out of the *Amada*, like the going-in of the *gopis*, although moving in different directions, is ultimately going beyond. First of all, it is going beyond the text and, along with it, beyond the reader’s capacity to see what the text is claiming. How can one see what cannot be said? In the next chapter, I shall analyze these intricate visualizations of the unsayable, of the moving metaphors that perform the meaning event of union in the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*.

Chapter 4

Seeing

As the *Amado* and Kṛṣṇa recede from view, the *Amada* and the *gopis* follow after him in the search for hidden places of encounter with that one who has put himself into hiding. Attaining these secret places of encounter, the poetry of the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā* reaches its highest capacity of connotation to suggest the ultimate secrecy of the meaning of the texts. The secret meaning, about which nothing is directly uttered, is referred to literally as “secret” in the commentaries of Juan de la Cruz and Śrīdhara. Later in the texts, this “secret” is explained in terms of vision and knowledge.

The transit from the withdrawal of the divine lover to the withdrawal of the beloveds, the encounter in the secret places, and the arrival at a secret and impermanent meaning is driven by the *Amada*'s and the *gopis*' strong desire to have an actual, palpable encounter with the divine. The emphasis on the act of visual interaction is shared by the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā*, although not expressed by each in the same poetic and theological manner. Still, in both texts the exchange of vision is meant to represent the higher expression of union between the person and the divine, and this supreme form of union is poetically expressed in both through an imagery of cohabitation of the eye in the eye.

This image of the cohabitation of the eye in the eye that I will revisit throughout this chapter is consonant with the concept of indwelling, as explained by Edith Stein in her commentaries on the work of Juan de la Cruz, and it also holds important

resemblances to the notion of *antardhā*, or Kṛṣṇa placing himself inside himself. In this image of cohabitation of the eye in the eye, the idea of location previously discussed leads the analysis into the notion of vision. In this sense, the *locus* of cohabitation is none but the eye.

It is important at this point to revisit some of the notions related to the concepts of eye and seeing that were at work in Juan de la Cruz's linguistic context, and to advance the way to approach such notions within the frame of the reading. The image of seeing in each other's eyes as an exchange of love was very present in the Neoplatonic Renaissance poets like Petrarch, Dante, Marsilio Ficino and Pietro Bembo. The Platonic metempsychosis or transmigration of the soul was believed to occur through the eyes that were, in Dante's words, the "balconies" and "windows" of the soul (Perella 23). Although the degree of actual transformation was a topic of argument, these first Renaissance poets agree in considering the exchange of sight as an exchange of soul, and the eyes as the "passageway that allows the hearts of lovers to exchange breasts" (Perella 25). This tradition, as López-Baralt has already noticed, was inherited to Juan de la Cruz's imaginarié (*Asedios*), but not without adding his personal input.

In his *Tesoro de la lengua española*, published at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Sebastián de Covarrubias defines *ojo*, "eye," as *las ventanas adonde el alma suele asomarse* (567) ("the windows where the soul tends to show itself") and *los mensajeros del corazón, y los parleros de lo oculto de nuestros pechos* (567) ("the heart's messengers and the speakers of what is hidden in our chests"). Covarrubias's definition of eyes as windows, and eyes as revealers of what is hidden coincides with Elaine Scarry's explanation that "eyes are, according to neurobiologists, the direct outcropping

of the brain: not content to receive messages by mediation, the brain has moved out to the surface of the skull in order to rub up against the world directly” (68). Poetically, the eyes are windows and messengers because in their rubbing against the world, they not only allow the eye-holder to look through, but also to take in and to bring out. The eyes are the perfect metaphor because, recreating the words of A.K. Ramanujan (1989), they are windows that become mirrors, they project and inject, and they keep up the constant motion of images.

Images that move, Scarry suggests, are the images that are easy to imagine because they are not solid, but carry a sense of lightness (90). The eyes, as windows and mirrors, lack solidity and abound in lightness. More than perceivers of what moves, they are easily movable themselves, and thus their function—to see—is never a static seeing, but always a seeing in movement. Imploded into the inner self, the moving vision of the eyes becomes the act of understanding. That is why Covarrubias writes in his definition of *ver* and *mirar*, “to see,” that this is a function usually associated with verbs like *advertir*, *considerar*, *entender* (550v) (“to notice, to consider, to understand”). It is, as well, a function associated with other senses, especially with touching. The hand, Scarry notices, is also in continual motion (148). The hand wants to touch what the eyes see and what the mind understands.

It is precisely the desire to see, touch, and understand that moves the *gopis* of *Rāsa Līlā* and the *Amada* of the *Cántico espiritual* in their search for the divine lover. They want to see, to touch, and to understand Kṛṣṇa and the *Amado*, and in an equal degree, they want to be seen, touched and understood by them. They want to be loved by

the object of their love. This drive for mutuality is also contained in the image of cohabitation of the eye in the eye.

Throughout this chapter, I will practice Francis Clooney’s idea of seeing through texts, relying on the methodological basis of commensurability, resemblances, and resonances. Keeping the notion of vision as the broadest encompassing frame, I will begin by delineating the theological meaning of vision within the context of each text. Then I have selected—given a careful prior study of the texts—three aspects of vision that determine the three general sections into which the chapter is divided: vision as grace, vision through the creatures of nature, and direct vision. In the first two sections, I will begin by explaining how each text illustrates the specific aspect, and then I will read comparatively, keeping the perspective of how *Rāsa Līlā* informs the reading of the *Cántico*. The last section, concerning direct vision, will lead into a comparative reading of one of the more visual and commented-on stanzas of the *Cántico* from the theological and poetical perspective of *Rāsa Līlā*.

Following Clooney’s methodological advice, I adhere to textual closeness and pay intense attention to the particularities of the texts, to those revealing clues that tell how the works want to be read. Moreover, I will “read through.” Specifically, and as promised in the Chapter 2, I will read the vision of the *Cántico* through the eyes of vision of *Rāsa Līlā*. This “through” reading takes place at the correspondent comparative passages ending each section. One should remember that this is not an exclusive perspective. It is, in fact, a hard-to-keep direction because it contains in itself the possibility of its inversion, namely, of reading *Rāsa Līlā* from the perspective of the

Cántico. However, the chosen direction corresponds, as explained before, to the necessary constraints of the present project.

Keeping within the general frame of the dissertation, my methodology is not determined by historicity, although it is flexible to call upon history when the comparison requires it—and this switch will be particularly salient when I talk about the poetic theological project of Juan de la Cruz from the perspective of the aesthetic context of *Rāsa Līlā*. Moreover, at the end of the chapter, I shall observe that the resonances of the texts shed light upon the discussions about mystical literature referred to before—particularly that of López-Baralt—and on the way that mysticism develops a language meant to perform what it claims. Performing vision, these texts come together and depart in a fluent dialogue that further reveals that the vision of comparison is to be attained, as that of the *Amado* and Kṛṣṇa, not in the absence or the presence, but in the space in between.

Vision in the *Cántico*

Coming to terms with the Augustinian conception of *visio dei*, the image of Saint Bonaventure of God as a “Divine Lamp,” and the medieval notions of optics as applied to divine vision by thinkers like Robert Grosseteste, Juan de la Cruz writes:

...y véante mis ojos,
pues eres lumbre dellos. (10)
...and let my eyes see you,
since you are their light.

However, he does not strictly follow the notions of his medieval predecessors, but modifies them into a Renaissance critique of what it means to see god and to be seen by

him. Like the Bishop of Hippo, Juan de la Cruz stresses the importance of the desire for vision. The *Amada*'s foremost desire in the *Cántico* is to fill the gap that the presence of the lover has left. And this absence, made to the lover's measure, can only be occupied by the lover himself, by his perceptible appearance. This makes the longing for vision unique, as other desires could be satisfied without the presence, but seeing—and along with it the other senses—can only be satisfied by the presence. Juan de la Cruz calls this longing *la dolencia de amor, que no se cura, sino con la presencia y la figura* (*Cántico* 11) (“the pain of love that is not cured except by the presence and the figure”).

Like Saint Bonaventure, Juan de la Cruz does not deny “the participation of the interior faculties and the exterior senses in the mystical vision” (Neaman 27). Instead, the *Amada* yearns for a presence that will fulfill all her sensorial needs by means of fulfilling the thirst of seeing. This seeing, involving all the senses, is further intensified by the continuous metaphorical moving of the *Cántico*. This intense advocacy for movement is what has made critics like Miguel Norbert Ubarri argue that what the Renaissance did for the arts, Juan de la Cruz did for mystical writing, adding to the plain seeing a perspective that is indeed revolutionary (“El cuadro”).

Reconstructing Augustine's thought from the perspective of the optical sciences, the Franciscan Grosseteste affirms:

(...) just as infirm corporeal eyes do not see colored bodies unless they are illuminated by the light of the sun (however, they cannot gaze on the light of the sun itself, but only as radiated onto colored bodies), so the infirm eyes of the mind do not perceive truths themselves except in the light of

supreme truth; however, they cannot gaze on the supreme truth but only in conjunction with and irradiation upon true things. (Cited in Neaman 32).

In a poetic reconsideration of Grosseteste's theoretical thoughts, the *Amada* of the *Cántico* points to a difficulty that cannot be overcome except by the actual manifestation of the object of desire, which brings light to vision. The direct pronoun *te* represents the paradox of the eyes without light, which are not eyes since they do not fulfill the function of seeing. Therefore, *véante* implies the mere functionality of the eye. It is as if she said, "If it is not your eyes '*te*,' my eyes will not see."¹⁰¹ Here Juan de la Cruz is coming to terms with the Augustinian emphasis on the importance of the desire to see, the total participation of the senses in the phenomenon of vision as in Bonaventure, and the acknowledgement of the function of god as the light of the eyes. But beyond them, Juan de la Cruz's major Renaissance innovation toward an image of movement is the notion of mutuality of sight and the quality of movement implied by it.¹⁰² The *Amado*'s bestowal of sight is the means through which the *Amada* will see him, and from this, it follows that he makes possible her seeing him. Thus one can affirm that what the *Amada* of the *Cántico* desires is more than contemplation of herself as a subject seeing the object of the *Amado*; rather, it is a mutual seeing, a reciprocal relationship through sight manifested in

¹⁰¹ The first two references quoted here, Saint Augustine and Saint Bonaventure, have been previously discussed regarding Juan de la Cruz's thought, while the reference to Robert Grosseteste has not been argued in the literature to date.

¹⁰² Enrique García Santo Tomás (2009) has explained the repercussions of the theories of vision and perspectives in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He reminds readers that the theories of Copernicus were not taught at the University of Salamanca until 1594 (three years after Juan de la Cruz's death). Still, this will be the object of future studies to investigate how these poetical images used by Juan de la Cruz come to term with the discussions on perspective and optics of his time. Moreover, he explains how such optical metaphors could have been a source of conflict with the official ideology of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, which closely watched any literary or scientific work on new perspectives of vision, especially in the second half of the sixteenth century.

the use of the direct object pronoun *te*. The mutuality of sight, a paradigm of cohabitation of the eye on the eye, calls upon Juan de la Cruz's theological ideas about identity and individuality in the mystical union. As will soon be observed, he explains the exchange of sight by the *Amada* and the *Amado* as a "transformation of love" in which each subject—the divine and the human—becomes the object of the other's gaze.

In his commentary to the first verse of the *Cántico* "¿Adónde te escondiste?" ("Where did you hide?"), Juan de la Cruz states that in this particular verse, the soul's main attempt is nothing more than to ask for the clear presence and vision of the divine's essence in this life, where she can be assured and satisfied in the other life: *el intento principal del alma en este verso no es sólo pedir la devoción afectiva y sensible, en que no hay certeza ni claridad de la posesión del Esposo en esta vida, sino principalmente la clara presencia y vision de su esencia* (1.4) ("The main attempt of the soul in this verse is not only to ask for affective and sensory devotion, in which there is not certainty or clarity of the possession of the Husband in this life, but more importantly [to ask for] the clear presence and vision of his essence"). Again, following Dionysius the Areopagite, Juan de la Cruz uses the *Song of Songs* to illustrate that the *Amada*'s request for the vision of the lover implies a request for his location, and to ask for his location is to ask for his essence, for an attainment of his vision, *y es como si dijera: Verbo, Esposo mío, muéstrame el lugar donde estás Escondido* (1.3) ("and it is as if she said, Verb, my Husband, show me the place where you are hidden"). Arriving at the place where the *Amado* indwells, the *Amada* will attain the vision. This is how location and vision appear superimposed from the beginning of the *Cántico*. This theological desire for essence as a *locus* is expressed poetically as a desire for reciprocal sight that seizes all other senses.

By inhabiting the *locus* of the *Amado*, the *Amada* attains a sight, a touch and an understanding of her lover and she also comes to *gustar a Dios vivo* (*Llama, Comentario* 1.6) (“to taste the living God”) and to drink the “savoring science” of the *teología mística*.

This mutual seeing, meaning also tasting and knowing, is an image of the higher form of indwelling that Juan de la Cruz explains in his commentaries as a “transformation of love” and which Stein depicts as a “being within each other.” According to Juan de la Cruz’s explanation, that again rests upon Augustinian principles, for there are three forms of indwelling equally concealed—namely, by grace, essence, or spiritual affection—and the claim for vision could be understood regarding any of them. However, Juan de la Cruz clearly states, an advanced soul must understand that the claim of the *Amada*—theologically identified with the soul—refers to the *presencia afectiva* (*Comentarios* 11.4).¹⁰³

While the *Amada* contemplates the *presencia afectiva* of the *Amado*, both inhabiting the same place, he also contemplates her, and a wordless exchange takes place while each one enters the space of the other and accepts the other within the self. However, and on this Juan de la Cruz insists, neither the place nor the vision are meant to be permanent “in this life.” The sensual apprehension of the divine, whose higher expression is the tasting of god through which the *teología mística* is acquired implies, as von Balthasar writes, a “vision in nonvision”: “This love, which seeks in the void and is found ‘in the hunt’, is union; it is also the vehicle of contemplation and of what one must call vision in nonvision” (140). The “vision in nonvision,” von Balthasar explains, is

¹⁰³ As was explained in the previous chapter, the three forms of indwelling correspond to indwelling through essence, through grace, and through spiritual affection.

implicit in the *Cántico*'s imagery as the impermanence of presence. The theological implications of seeing / not seeing, von Balthasar argues, rest upon Juan de la Cruz's identification of the theological virtue of faith with the experience of love, and ultimately with the state of contemplation in the experience of mystical theology:

...For faith is depicted as nonvision and noncomprehension, whereas contemplation means vision. Where the two are identified, then the act of "mystical theology", with all its nonvision, dispossession, privation and night, must nevertheless involve vision: vision in the mode of nonvision, vision of someone present in the mode of absence or as through a veil or a quest, which is so absolute, tends so much towards the Absolute itself, that it cannot do other than ultimately find, "hunt down", the Absolute; then again, the vision is love, which is set so much on the ultimate that it discovers the ultimate being itself as the mystery of love. (144)

The theological quest of the *Cántico* is a quest for vision and love in a context of impermanence. The faith that moves the soul in its search is poetically and theologically illustrated by Juan de la Cruz as an impulse of love in the form of desire, and the encounter of that loving faith with the state of contemplation by virtue of inhabiting the secret place where the divine dwells is the core of the experience of *teología mística*.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Von Balthasar affirms that stressing the Christian principle of faith as love, and the envisioning of a cohabitation of faith and contemplation, places Juan de la Cruz along his mystic predecessors Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, and Dionysius himself (140). To this I would add that it also places Juan de la Cruz far from the scholasticism as understood by the European Catholic Counter-Reformation that was in existence during his life time, and which insisted that the divine perception had necessarily to be institutionally mediated. This is precisely one of the subjects of argument between Juan de la Cruz and Nicolás de Doria, who became the general of the Discalced Carmelites after the death of Teresa de Jesús and the removal of Gracián. Doria insisted on the imposition of specific spiritual directors to the female branch of the order, while Juan de la Cruz attempted to keep the adherence to the original Constitutions which allowed the nuns to choose their spiritual directors according to their spiritual needs. To go against

Juan de la Cruz also goes beyond his mystic predecessors by developing a complex design of reflection of sights involved in the process of seeing the divine. The purpose of the *Cántico*— as will be analyzed in detail in the following pages—is to represent the indwelling of the creature in the divine through the power of grace granted by the act of vision. Such indwelling envisions a constant exchange of sight involving a dynamic of perspectives that Juan de la Cruz attempts to represent through the language. His purpose is to illustrate poetically the love and sight in which the person and the divine are actively involved. Juan de la Cruz understands this exchange of vision in the *Cántico* as an exchange of beauty, since such a concept involves for him all the possible qualities that the divine could bestow upon a soul. The marked emphasis on the desire of seeing is for Juan de la Cruz, as for his predecessors, an ontological value that warrants the actual attainment of the vision in the afterlife. However, for him, this desire to see is a desire for mutuality and beauty, an aspect of human vision that recreates the Neoplatonist quest for the mystical theology of the Spanish saint and, as will be evident shortly, finds a suggestive resonance with the aesthetic-devotional functionality of the vision of Kṛṣṇa in *Rāsa Līlā*.

Vision in *Rāsa Līlā*: The Concept of *Darśana*

In the following *śloka*, taken from the third chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*, the *gopis* approach Kṛṣṇa with a series of vocatives that progressively move from his most heroic image to the closest and most intimate expression of relationship:

Doria's mandate caused Juan de la Cruz to be relieved of all his responsibilities in the order and to be sent to exile in Mexico, a process that was halted by his death in December of 1591.

व्रजजनार्तिहन् वीरयोषिताम् निजजनस्मयध्वंसन स्मित।

भज सखे भवत्किङ्करीः स्म नो जलरूहाननम् चारु दर्शय।।३१।६।।

vrajajanārtihan vīrayoṣitām nijajanasmayadhvaṁsana smita/

bhaja sakhe bhavatkiṅkarīḥ sma no jalarūhānanam cāru darśaya//

Destroyer of the pain of Vraja, hero whose smiles kill the pride of the women who live in Vraja! Friend, share with us, your slaves, and bestow your lotus face. You beautiful! (31.6)

At each of those levels, they call upon him as the only savior of their existence. From the position of dwellers of Vraja, they call upon the protector who destroys the pain of the villagers. As women whose pride has been stolen, they call upon the hero. As ones bound by slavery to Kṛṣṇa, they call upon the friend. Finally, as desiring to see his face, they call him *cāru* (“beautiful”), as if whispering in his ears. The two imperative verbs in the second line are *bhaja* (“share”) and *darśaya* (“show”). The same verbal root of *bhaja* is *bhaj*, to share, from which the noun *bhakti* is derived. Here *bhaja* is translated as the imperative “share;” it is an acceptance that implies giving and making a space for the accepted one. The verbal form *darśaya* is a causative imperative of *drś*, to see or to become visible, including the concept of seeing with the mind or with the heart, a translation of which would be “you cause yourself to be seen.” To share and to see, as is claimed by the *gopis*, evokes the image of indwelling in each other’s sight, an exchange of the subject-object relation fashioned in such a way that they both are capable of seeing while, simultaneously, they are seen. This is the highest desire of the *gopis* illustrated in the text: to see Kṛṣṇa’s lotus face and in doing so to take a share of his beauty and glory, indwell with him, and still be able to enjoy love —another meaning of *bhaj*—with him.

This exchange of vision—in Sanskrit *darśana*—lies at the heart of Hindu devotional worship (*bhakti*) and can take many forms, such as the *darśana* of an image of a god or goddess, a *darśana* of a holy person, a *darśana* of a place, and for the very spiritual advanced, the *darśana* of the divine: as the *gopis* claim in *Rāsa Līlā*, the direct vision of Kṛṣṇa’s face. “Taking *darśana*”—as it is commonly known—implies the action of seeing the divine and, even more importantly, to be seen at once by him or her.¹⁰⁵ As the worshiper (*bhakta*) has eyes to see the divine, the divine always has eyes to look at his or her devotee, and in this exchange of vision is where the act of *bhakti* takes place.¹⁰⁶

Diana Eck has noticed that seeing, in *bhakti* terms, “is not a passive awareness of visual data, but an active focusing upon it, touching it” (15). The action of seeing can occur with the eyes of the body as well as with the spiritual eyes, and through this act, the person comes to share (*bhaji*) the love, the touch, the knowledge, and the taste of the divine. Laurence A. Babb has suggested that “seeing and being seen is a special (and perhaps the highest) medium of intimacy between deity and worshiper” (396). When the devotee sees the deity and the deity sees the devotee, Babb argues, there is a “seeing flow” that “allows the devotee to take in, in a manner of speaking to drink with the eyes, the deity’s own current of seeing” (397). Through such flowing sight, the devotee literally shares, takes part in, the divine’s love and knowledge. Merged with the act of seeing, the devotee cannot but search for a new visual encounter. *Bhaj* and *drś*, to share

¹⁰⁵ For more references on the meaning of “*darśana*” see Diana Eck’s *Darśan, Seeing the Divine in India*.

¹⁰⁶ In its daily function, to which Eck refers, the action of *darśana* carries a ritual implication. Here I am explaining the term as it also reflects on the poetic imagery of *Rāsa Līlā*.

and to see, are occasionally exchangeable terms closely interdependent in the devotional context.¹⁰⁷

In *Rāsa Līlā*, the *gopis*' drive is clearly illustrated as the desire to see Kṛṣṇa. As was observed in the commentary to Verse 31.18 in the previous chapter, Kṛṣṇa's vision is considered the medicine for the anguish of the *gopis*, and one instant without seeing Kṛṣṇa is said to be an entire eon because of the pain of their separation (31.15). Moreover, the text also reveals that Kṛṣṇa wants to see the *gopis* and to be seen by them as much as the *gopis* want to see and be seen by him. Thus, when the actual encounter takes place, Kṛṣṇa is described as beautified by the surrounding *gopis*, as they are beautified and worshiped by him:

तत्रातिशुशुभे ताभिर्बगवान् देवकीसुतः।

मध्ये मणीनाम् हैमानां महामरकतो यथा ॥३३७॥

tatrātiśuśubhe tābhirbagavān devakīsutaḥ/

madhye maṇīnām haimānām mahāmarakato yathā//

Bhagavan, the son of Devakī, looked extremely splendid among those women, like a big sapphire in the midst of golden ornaments. (33.7)

In his commentary to the next verse Srīdhara explains that, as the *gopis* were shining by the glittering presence of their lover, in the same way he was shining by the beauty and splendour of the women (33.8). This exchange of beauty, it will be observed, is at the

¹⁰⁷ Eck comments on Rāmānuja's translation of a *Bhagavad Gītā* verse, where Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna "in whatever way people approach me, in that way do I show them favor." Eck explains that here the word *bhajāmi*, translated as "I show favor," is from the same root as *bhakti*. Therefore, it could equally be translated "in that way do I love them," and Rāmānuja translates it as "in that way do I make myself visible (*darshayāmi*) to them. (46)

core of the dynamics of *darśana* represented in the text, but, in contrast to the *Cántico*, where the sight mediated by faith is the vision in nonvision, *darśana* in *Rāsa Līlā* implies a much more direct, sensorial encounter between the person and the divine.

Vision as Grace

To behold is to bestow. This principle is at the core of both works' poetic and theological premises. Through sight, the person gives something to the divine and the divine gives something back to the person. What the person gives takes— theologically—the form of the self, a self that does not lose its self-ness, even while it makes itself available to be transformed. What the divine gives is described as knowledge, freedom, and love, but most prominently, it is expressed poetically as a giving of beauty. For Juan de la Cruz, the notion of beauty contains all the qualities bestowed by god. It is, notes von Balthasar, a beauty that Juan de la Cruz first renounced and later returned to, as a rediscovery of beauty through divine aesthetics. Thus the *Amada* requests her lover not to abandon her after she has been beautified by his own sight. The *Amado* relishes the beauty that he has bestowed in the *Amada* and, as von Balthasar puts it, in the *Cántico* the contemplative gaze is only made possible by the preliminary gaze of grace (146). The *Amada* offers beauty back to the *Amado*, but that is not exclusively the beauty that he first deposited on her; it is also her own beauty, a reflecting eye from which the *Amado* can look at himself and his creation.

For *Rāsa Līlā*, the beauty of Kṛṣṇa permeates all seen and unseen spaces, including the text, itself proclaimed to be a source of aesthetic delight and devotion. The aesthetic-devotional project proposed by each text holds intriguingly resonant points,

such as the compromises with beauty and the notion of a divine that enjoys the beauty that he has deposited in his creation. However, they also maintain some important points of distinction, particularly noticeable in the expressions that this beauty takes.

Vision as Grace in the *Cántico*

This stanza of the *Cántico* directly points to an exercise of seeing that proposes a peculiar movement of the divine gaze into the gaze of the *Amada*.

*En solo aquel cabello
que en mi cuello volar consideraste,
mirástele en mi cuello,
y en él preso quedaste,
y en uno de mis ojos te llagaste. (31)*

In only that hair
that you considered to fly in my neck,
you looked at it in my neck,
and on it you were imprisoned,
and in one of my eyes you were wounded.¹⁰⁸

The stanza begins by alluding to the previous stanza through the mention of the strand of hair, said to be used as a thread by the *Amada* and her lover to knit a fresh morning flower garland. This same hair, the *Amada* says in the thirty-first stanza, was beheld in her neck by the gaze of the divine, and through his beholding, he was made prisoner of

¹⁰⁸ This translation does not reproduce the connotation of the Spanish verse. The *Amado*'s consideration of the flying of a strand of hair in the *Amada*'s neck is much more connotative than what the English can suggest. As well, the last line does not refer strictly to a wound, but to a sort of sore that imprints the *Amado* in one of the eyes of the *Amada*.

that hair and was wounded in her eye. The first verb of the stanza is the infinitive *volar* (“to fly”), followed by the second-person, *consideraste* (“you considered”), which signals the will of the lover manifested in the action of looking, *mirástele* (“you looked at it”); by the effect of this gazing, the divine will is submitted, *preso quedaste* (“you were made prisoner”). Ultimately, the *Amado* ends up being wounded in the eye of the *Amada*, *te llagaste* (“you were wounded”). This succession of actions, uttered in the direct second-person, crosses progressively through the features of the *Amada*’s face: from the hair to the neck, and from there to the eyes, where all the images seem to be absorbed as the divine gazing subject is made prisoner in the receiving gaze of the *Amada*. The trajectory drawn by the stanza goes from gaze to gaze, from the gaze of the *Amado*, prompted by his will, to the gaze of the *Amada*, which functions as a reflective lens from which the succession of images could again rise: from the eye back to the neck, to the hair, and to the divine lover’s eyes.

As the lover is wounded in her eye, he provides the *Amada* with a new way of seeing. Now, to see her lover, the *Amada* has to look into her own eye, where another being indwells and looks with and inside her. Through this encounter of her sight with his sight inside her eye, Juan de la Cruz is proposing a double phenomenon of vision, where the *Amada* and the *Amado*’s sight unite, suggesting that they see themselves together, looking at themselves. This drawing of double vision is further complicated when one considers that the description of the lover as “wounded” in the eye of the *Amada* mirrors a phrase in the first verse of the *Cántico*: *habiéndome herido* (“having wounded me”). The wound in the eye, as the first wound of the poem, is a sign of his sight on her sight revealing his presence as much as his absence. The subject of gaze can

only be the object of his own gaze when he is extricated from himself. Thus, it could be argued, the *Amado* needs the eye of the *Amada* to look at himself, to receive that newness of sight that only she can offer, while at the same time he looks with her.¹⁰⁹

To be inside the eye of the *Amada* and to see with her— through her eye—is explained theologically by Juan de la Cruz as the higher act of grace that the divine lover bestows upon the soul. As suggested by this poetry, the theological input of Juan de la Cruz points at a mutuality of the relation between the human being and the divine. The poet envisions a god who has fallen in love and has willingly made himself prisoner of the person: *Oh cosa digna de toda acepción y gozo, quedar Dios preso en un cabello* (*Comentarios* 31.8) (“Oh, a thing worthy of meaning and joy, to be God made prisoner by a hair”). In his commentary to this verse, Juan de la Cruz insists that the first act of will that began the sequence of actions described in the stanza was precisely that of god, who *se bajó a mirarnos y a provocar el vuelo [...] por eso él mismo se prendó en el vuelo del cabello* (31.8) (“came down to look at us and to provoke the flight [...] for which he himself was grasped in the flight of the hair”). Juan de la Cruz stresses that for god, *el mirar de Dios es amar* (33.7) (“God’s gazing is to love”) and, therefore, he *da gracia por gracia* (“gives grace by gracing”). The preliminary gaze of grace, as the thirty-second stanza illustrates, intensifies the visual transaction and the reciprocity of love: God loves more the creature who, at the same time, loves god more as he loves her. To describe the nature of god’s love for the creature, Juan de la Cruz uses in his commentary the adverb

¹⁰⁹ This verse could also be analyzed from the perspective of Meister Eckhart’s notion of “ocular identity,” as expressed in his famous German Sermon: “The eye with which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye is one eye and one seeing, one knowing and one loving” (Cited in Bernard McGinn, “Visions and Visualizations in the Here and Hereafter” 234).

“ineffably”—the same word that he uses in his “Prólogo” to depict the impossibility of the language to express the nature of the human encounter with the divine.

As explained above, Juan de la Cruz identifies the theological virtue of faith with the emotion of love and ultimately with the state of contemplation. For him, faith involves nonvision, and contemplation involves vision. And yet, both come together, hand in hand, in the experience of *teología mística*. Commenting on the image of the divine’s sight trapped in the hair, Juan de la Cruz identifies the eye in which the divine lover is imprinted with the virtue of faith:

... Entiéndase aquí por el ojo la fe, y dice uno solo, y que en él se llagó, porque si la fe y fidelidad del alma para con Dios no fuese sola, sino que fuese mezclada con otro algún respeto o cumplimiento, no llegaría a efecto de llagar a Dios de amor [...] en el ojo de su fe aprieta con tan estrecho nudo la prisión, que le hace llaga de amor por la gran ternura del afecto con que está aficionado a ella, lo cual es entrarla más en su amor. (195)

... Here the eye should be understood as the faith, and she says only one [eye] and that in it he was wounded, because if the faith and fidelity of the soul for God were not only one, but were mixed with some other respect or compliment, they would not fulfill the effect of wounding God with love [...] in the eye of her faith she ties the prison with such a narrow nod that it wounds the love by the great tenderness of affection in his fondness of her, and thus he brings her further in his love.

This identification of the eye with faith introduces here the question of faith as the means through which the *Amada* sees her *Amado* and the notion of theological vision as conceived in the context of this *teología mística*. The eye as faith indicates an image of the “vision in nonvision,” and it has to be accompanied by the “hair of love” because the theological virtue of faith is not sufficient without the theological virtue of love which, according to Juan de la Cruz, takes place by the activity of the will. The conception of faith, here represented by an eye, and love, prompted by will, is a *leitmotiv* in the *Cántico*. As will be discussed below, the faith is said to be the fountain in whose reflective waters the sight of the lover and the beloved meet.

Continuing with the particularities of grace bestowed by the divine vision according to Juan de la Cruz, I shall begin to explore how he conceives the gracious looking of god as an act of bestowing beauty:

*Cuando tú me mirabas,
su gracia en mí tus ojos imprimían;
por eso me adamabas,
y en eso merecían
los míos adorar lo que en ti vían.
No quieras despreciarme,
que si color moreno en mí hallaste,
ya bien puedes mirarme
después que me miraste,
que gracia y hermosura en mí dejaste. (32-33)*

While you looked at me,
your grace on me your eyes imprinted.

Thus you loved me more,
 and thus mine deserved
 to adore what in you they beheld.
 Do not try to reject me,
 because you first found me dark.
 Now you can look at me
 after having looked at me,
 that grace and beauty on me you left.

These verses portray god reveling in beauty, in a beauty that is not totally his own yet is not totally independent of him. It is the beauty with which he has endowed the soul and which now returns to him as he contemplates the image of his object of grace. Von Balthasar proposes that Juan de la Cruz's "obsession" with beauty clarifies the dichotomy between "his most radical renunciation of the world" and "a spirituality that can truly be called esthetic" (151). God being the source of beauty, beauty becomes in Juan de la Cruz's terms "not only the end, but also the means" (152). Theologically speaking, the world is looked at anew not as a place of ascetic renunciation, but as a manifestation of the divine beauty where god himself finds enjoyment. Poetically, Juan de la Cruz finds a way to reconcile, as von Balthasar stresses, his own aesthetic sensitivity with his ascetic compromise. "When he forsook the values of art," von Balthasar argues, "he was making a very hard decision" (154), and he returns to beauty through the "hope and faith that the finite forms are illuminated in their true and everlasting beauty" (158).

Juan de la Cruz's aesthetic spirituality has also been commented by Eulogio Pacho, who emphasizes that the poet was mainly concerned not with the pure perception of beauty, but with the *apetito* ("appetite") for beauty, *la sensación o percepción de la*

belleza; la vertiente subjetiva o estética en cuanto gozo, gusto, placer [...]y otras expresiones similares alusivas a la misma realidad del impacto de lo bello en el sujeto (244). (“the sensation or perception of beauty, the subjective or aesthetic side as enjoyment, savor, pleasure [...] and other similar expressions referring to the same reality of the impact of the beautiful in the subject”). The natural appetite, Pacho argues, is for Juan de la Cruz nothing but *el apetito por Dios* (“the appetite for God”) (257). Thus, Juan de la Cruz describes the desire for divine vision of the soul as a “relishing of the living God” (*Llama* 1.6).

Juan de la Cruz’s commitment to aesthetic spirituality is particularly evident in the dynamics of visual interaction through which he describes the process of the divine bestowing grace in the form of beauty on the creature. In his commentary to one of the last verses of the *Cántico*, *y vámonos a ver en tu hermosura* (36) (“and let us go to see in your beauty”), Juan de la Cruz elaborates on the notion of the exchange of beauty between the divine and the person in the voice of the *Amada*:

... hagamos de manera que, por medio de este ejercicio de amor ya dicho, lleguemos hasta vernos en tu hermosura en la vida eterna, esto es: que de tal manera esté yo transformada en tu hermosura, que, siendo semejante en hermosura, nos veamos entrambos en tu hermosura, teniendo ya tu misma hermosura; de manera que, mirando el uno al otro, vea cada uno en el otro su hermosura, siendo la una y la del otro tu hermosura sola, absorba yo en tu hermosura; y así te veré yo a ti en tu hermosura, y tú a mí en tu hermosura, y yo me veré en ti en tu hermosura, y tú te verás en mí en tu hermosura; y así, parezca yo tú en tu hermosura, y parezcas tú yo en tu

hermosura, y mi hermosura sea tu hermosura y tu hermosura mi hermosura; y así, seré yo tú en tu hermosura, y serás tú yo en tu hermosura, porque tu misma hermosura será mi hermosura; y así, nos veremos el uno al otro en tu hermosura. (Comentarios 36.5)

Let us do it in a way that, through this already mentioned exercise of love, we will see each other in your beauty in the eternal life. And this is: that in such a way I may be transformed in your beauty so that, resembling in beauty, we would see each other in your beauty, having already your same beauty; in such a way that, looking at each other, each one sees in the other his own beauty, being the one's and the other's only your beauty; and in that way, I will see you in your beauty and you will see me in your beauty, and I will see myself in your beauty, and you will see yourself in me in your beauty; and in this way, I will resemble you in your beauty, and you will resemble me in your beauty; and my beauty would be your beauty and your beauty my beauty, and you will be me in your beauty, because your own beauty will be my beauty; and in that way, we will see each other in your beauty.

The transaction of beauty through the transaction of sight is (beautifully) made evident in this passage. For him, beauty was the means and the substance communicated in the visual intimacy of love between the person and the divine. It is not an exclusive spiritual or poetic beauty, but rather ultimately a personal, *sanjuanista* conception of the indwelling relationship between god and the person.

Darśana as Grace in Rāsa Līlā

While the *Cántico* talks about a divine being who lets himself be tied up by a strand of hair and wounded in the eye of love and faith, the *Rāsa Līlā* pictures Kṛṣṇa as a god whose heart is been “softened” by the love of the cowherd girls.¹¹⁰ In his commentary, Srīdhara states that the claim of the *gopis* is for the direct manifestation of Kṛṣṇa to their eyes: *tvayā drśhyatām pratyakśībhūyatām* (31.1) (“let your sight be manifested”), where *prati akśa*, here translated as “manifested,” also stands as perceptible to all the organ senses—*akśa*. Thus, the desire to see is also a desire to touch, to hear, to smell, and to taste.

जयति तेऽधिकं जन्मना व्रजः श्रयत इन्दिरा शश्वदत्र हि।

दयित दृश्यतां दिक्षु तावकास्त्वयि दृतासवस्त्वां गोप्य ऊचुः ॥३१।१॥

शरदुदाशये साधुजातसत्सरसिजोदरश्रीमुषा दृशा।

सुरतनाथ ते शुल्कदासिका वरद निघ्नतो नेह किं वर्धोः ॥३१।२॥

jayati te'dhikam janmanā vrajaḥ śrayata indirā śaśvadatra hi/

dayita drśyatām dikṣu tāvakāstvayi dṛtāsavastvām gopya ūcuḥ//

śaradudāśaye sādhujātasatsarasijodaraśrīmuṣā drśā/

suratanātha te śulkadāsikā varada niḡhnato neha kim vadhāḥ//

Vraja is victorious because of your preeminent birth. Indirā spreads everywhere. Lover, show yourself! Those who belong to you and sustain their lives in you are in your search. (31.1)

¹¹⁰ In his commentaries to the first stanza of the fourth chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*, when Kṛṣṇa returns to the *gopis*, Srīdhara Svāmi describes Kṛṣṇa in the following terms: *virajaviklinnahṛdayoḥ hariḥ* (“that one whose heart has become soft by the separation”).

The beauty of the lotus-face rises at the shore of the autumnal pond.

He, whose glances steal beauty, Lord of love, we are your slaves beyond worth.

You are killing us, Boon-giver, is this not murder? (31.2)

In the commentary to these first two verses of the third chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*, also known as the *Gopī Gītā*, or the “Song of the Gopis in Separation,” Srīdhara explains that the *gopīs* are performing a willful act of *avatāranam* or “bringing down” (*sarvaślokeṣu avatāraṇa asti*) (31.1) (in all these verses there is a “bringing down”). This particular comment does not refer exclusively to the nature of Kṛṣṇa as an *avatar* of the god Viṣṇu. Here Srīdhara uses the term *avatāraṇa* in its most literal sense, “to bring down, to cause to descend, to produce the manifestation.” What the *gopīs* are doing through their claim for Kṛṣṇa’s presence, according to Srīdhara, is to “bring Kṛṣṇa down” through their invocation. By virtue of their expressing their desire of seeing, the *gopīs* make Kṛṣṇa descend, manifest his image, show himself. Moreover, the women undertake this act of *avatāraṇa* by their own will—*svatamtrānām badhunām*—thus suggesting that the *gopīs*’ desire fulfills an essential function in the visual manifestation of the divine.

This primary functionality of the *gopīs*’ claim for Kṛṣṇa’s perceptible manifestation becomes visually and theologically complicated as they also recognize Kṛṣṇa as “the witness inside the *ātman* of all”:

न खलु गोपिकानन्दनो भवानखिलदेहिनामन्तरात्मदृक्।

विखनसा अर्थितो विश्वगुप्तये सख उदेयिवान् सात्त्वतां कुले ॥३१॥४॥

na khalu gopikānandano bhavānakhiladehināmantarātmadṛk/

vikhanasā'rthito viśvaguptaye sakha udeyivān sāttvatām kule//

You are certainly not the son of Nanda, Bhavan, you are the witness inside the *ātman* of all. Vikhanasa waited for you, friend, you were born in the family of Sattva for the protection of all. (31.4)

The term *ātmadr̥k*—originating in the literary corpus of the *Upaniśads*—is commonly translated as “the indwelling witness in the hearts of all embodied souls,” where *dr̥k* stands for “the seer” and *ātman* refers to a quite complex concept much debated in the different religious schools of Hinduism. Broadly, one can describe *ātman* as the center of the creation process, involving knowledge, consciousness, and existence. The image of Kṛṣṇa as *ātmadr̥k* proposes a sense of the divine as a primal essence indwelling inside the person and at the same time pervading the outside space. Being the inner witness, Kṛṣṇa looks from inside the women at the same women searching for him, imitating him and seeing him. From one perspective, more tuned with the *advaita* philosophy, it could be said that *ātmadr̥k* represents a phenomenon of self-seeing. From a qualified non-dualism perspective such as the one proclaimed by the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava School, Kṛṣṇa is seeing the women from inside themselves, searching, imitating, and seeing him, but the women are still the ones who look upon him as an object of love and desire, and find pleasure in him as he is said to find pleasure in them—although self-pleased. The text itself does not seem to take a definitive position with respect to the nature of *ātmadr̥k*, while Srīdhara’s commentary is open to both arguments.¹¹¹

Poetically, the idea of the *gopis* searching Kṛṣṇa’s perceptible manifestation at the same time that they recognize the object of their search as dwelling inside themselves implies a two-fold phenomenon of outer and inner vision. They want to see Kṛṣṇa with

¹¹¹ In the second chapter, I mentioned that some scholars have noticed that Srīdhara Svāmi’s thought renders itself arguable from the *advaita* as well as from the *dvaita* point of view.

their physical eyes, and they know that Kṛṣṇa sees from inside them—as a witness—and therefore he is seeing himself along with them. The *gopis* claim both the interior awareness of the indwelling and the exterior manifestation of that indwelling in the form of the visualization—*pratyakṣa*—of Kṛṣṇa’s lotus face.

This twofold phenomenon of vision—interior and exterior—implied by the *gopis*’ ardent desire to see Kṛṣṇa is ultimately explained in the devotional context of *Rāsa Līlā* as a claim for the loving grace of the divine. *Darshayāmi* (“I see”), as Eck has noticed, has been understood in the Vaiṣṇava school as *bhajāmi* (“I love / worship / share”) (46). Asking for the sight of Kṛṣṇa, the *gopis* ask for his love, and, obtaining sight and love, the pain of separation will be relieved.

तद्दर्शनाह्लादविधूतहृद्रुजो मनोरथान्तम् श्रुतयो यथा ययुः।

स्वैरूतरीयैः कुचकुङ्कुमाङ्कितरचीक्लृपन्नासनमात्मबन्धवे ॥३२॥१३॥

taddarśanāhlādavidhūtahṛdrujo manorathāntam śrutayo yathā yayuḥ/

svairūttarīyaiḥ kucakuṅkumāṅkitaracīklṛpannāsanamātmabandhave//

It is said that those whose painful heart was trembling by the bliss of [his] vision went to the end of their desire. They arranged a seat for the friend of their *ātman* with their upper garments, smeared with the *kumkum* of their breast. (32.13)

The image of the seat arranged with the upper garments and smeared with the *kumkum* of the passion of absence signals the transit from the love in separation (*vipralamba śṛṅgāra*) to the love in union (*sambhoga*). Sitting in the seat made with the *gopis*’ dresses, Kṛṣṇa fills the gap opened by his previous departure. Here the term *ātman* recurs as *ātmabandha*, translated as “the friend of the soul.” It literally means the one that is

adhered to the *ātman*. This reference restates the notion of Kṛṣṇa placed inside as well as outside the *gopis*' phenomenological bodies. Here they are holding, with their exterior senses, the figure of him who is also held (*bandha*) in their most interior beings.

This complex visual exchange involving Kṛṣṇa, the *gopis*, and the reader or spectator reaches its higher poetic expression two chapters later, in the passage known as the *Rāsa Dance*, where Kṛṣṇa multiplies himself into as many *gopis* and rejoices with them in amorous sports “as a child playing with his own reflection”:

एवं परिष्वङ्गकराभिमर्शस्निग्धेक्षणोद्दमविलासहासैः।

रेमे रमेशो व्रजसुन्दरीभिर्यथाऽर्भकः स्वप्रतिबिम्बविभ्रमः ॥३३॥१७॥

evam pariṣvaṅgakarābhimarśasniḡdhekṣaṇodrāmavilāsahāsaiḥ/

reme rameśo vrajasundarībhiryathā'rbhakaḥ svapratibimbavibhramaḥ//

Ramesha (Kṛṣṇa) took pleasure with the beautiful women of Vraja in playful big smiles, loving glances, hand-touching and embraces, like a boy playing with his own reflection. (33.17)

The multiplication of his own body is commented by Śrīdhara as an “unthinkable power” (33.3) and considered as the supreme act of grace that Kṛṣṇa bestows upon the *gopis*. By multiplying himself, he is fulfilling the *gopis*' most inner desire of having an exclusive relationship with their divine lover. But more than the display of power and graciousness, the image of the multiplication of Kṛṣṇa into as many as *gopis* there are transcends the context of the narration. A few verses later it is stated that “those [autumnal nights] are the recipient and the source of *Rāsa* for the poets” (26). Being a “recipient and source of *Rāsa*,” *Rāsa Līlā* situates itself as a poetic text at the highest place of aesthetics and also as a work of devotion in the highest place of divine love. It

becomes, in Clooney’s terms, a text of echoes.¹¹² With the spreading of *Rāsa*, Kṛṣṇa’s grace also spreads beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the textual frame.

Readers and spectators become involved in an extra-temporal movement from the dance of Kṛṣṇa with the girls of Vraja to whoever reads the text thereafter.

The concept of *Rāsa* acquires here an all-encompassing devotional and aesthetic force, being recognized as Kṛṣṇa’s superior mode of grace and as the means of transmitting his “unthinkable power”—a power that transcends not only moral and natural laws, but also the temporary and spatial boundaries of the narrative. Even the goddess, as the following verses depict, “fainted, afflicted by desire,” and the moon “became mesmerized” seeing the love games of Kṛṣṇa with the *gopis* (33.19). Sṛīdhara comments further that the moon was unable to move, and thus all the planets “were detained right there, producing a very long night as they played” (*Commentaries* 33.19). Being warned that the text is the supreme source of *Rāsa*, the reader is also meant to become mesmerized under the spell of a god who is a producer of love. Some of the epithets of Kṛṣṇa in this section are *Suratanātha* (“Lord of Love”), *Sambhogapate* (“Lord of Enjoyment”), and *Ramaṇam Ratijanakam* (“Producer of Love”). In the words of David Kinsley, “There is an implicit invitation to take part in the delight of the cosmic dance. So it is that in delight, through delight, and to the delight of a perfectly delightful Being, a vast part of the Hindu religious tradition has ‘played out’ or ‘danced out’ its salvation” (152).

¹¹² Clooney speaks of the Tamil poem *Tiruvāymoḷi* as “a text of echoes, a text which speaks of itself” (*Seeing* 71). This is a quality that can be pointed out in several examples of the oral devotional tradition, and among them *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as has already been argued when explaining the question of authorship in Chapter 2 of the present study.

In aesthetic terms, the delight of *rāsa* beyond the limits of time and space is what the “ideal perceiver” is meant to experience when in contact with the work of art. This ideal perceiver is called *sahṛdaya*, “the one with the same heart,” in the Sanskrit aesthetic tradition.¹¹³ He or she is able to transcend the words and images of the work of art and to experience the emotion, as Priyadarshi Patnaik describes it, “in its elementarity, without any temporality of spatiality” (39). Bringing the concept of *sahṛdaya* into the context of *Rāsa Līlā*, one can notice the text’s explicit intentionality of producing such a reader, one who would identify with the emotions that this text is capable of eliciting. By doing so, the *sahṛdaya* will become a participant in the grace that Kṛṣṇa spreads in the form of aesthetic beauty and devotional love.

The category of the *sahṛdaya* in Indian aesthetics was developed later than the concept of *Rāsa*. In the sixteenth century, the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava School merged the idea of the *sahṛdaya* with the notion of *bhakta*, or devotee; this is the one who shares (*bhaj*) with the divine. The *bhakta* is the *sahṛdaya* able to experience the *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa* or sweet *rāsa* of devotion through a series of disciplines and performative practices prescribed in detail by the teachers.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ The term *sahṛdaya* was first used by Anandavardhana, one of the commentators of *Nāṭyaśāstra*. According to Priyadarshi Patnaik, Abhinavagupta—who brought the category of *Rāsa* to the realm of spiritual practices—later defined the *sahṛdaya* as “those who are capable of identifying with the subject-matter, since the mirror of their hearts has been polished through constant recitation and study of poetry, and who sympathetically respond in their own hearts are known as *sahṛdaya*” (49).

¹¹⁴ The most important text about the outer and interior practice of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa* is *Ujjvalanīlamanīḥ* (*The shining blue gem*), by Rūpa Gosvāmin and commented on by Jīva Gosvāmin. I am currently reading this Sanskrit text—never translated into English—in order to delve into the comparison of the performative aspect of these works. For more details on the devotional performative practices promoted by the *Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava*, see David Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*.

The particular kind of grace that comes with Kṛṣṇa's amorous manifestation is what the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava philosopher Rūpa Gosvāmin called *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa*, the *rāsa* of the amorous devotion, where the term *madhura* stands for the sweetness of love; this kind of love was especially manifested in Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with the girls of Vraja and the aesthetic enjoyment that derives from them. The concept of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa* is particular to the realm of Kṛṣṇa's manifestation, and his play, *līlā*, to his created world, with which he amuses himself "as with his own reflection." By virtue of the *rāsa* (relishing) of *madhura bhakti* or loving devotion, Kṛṣṇa and the *gopis* are meant to unite in beauty and love, while the *sahṛdaya* reader shall be prompted into identification with the beautiful amorous sports described in the text, and as a result he or she will attain salvation from lust.

Grace and Beauty in Comparison

After having analyzed the textual particularities, it is time now to look at the *Cántico* through the aesthetic categories involved in the concept of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa*. Aesthetics are a historically grounded phenomenon, determined by the specificities of historical context. Looking at one text from the aesthetic perspectives of the other is still a useful reading tool because, one observes, it reveals aspects of the texts that would be less obvious otherwise. Moreover, this aesthetic cross-reading rises from the attention to the particular narratives, and it offers a cross-cultural aesthetic view. As Doniger writes: "The cross-cultural view is not an overview that subsumes the contextualized view, but an alternative view that slices the problem in a different way"

(*The Implied Spider* 47). Moreover, it will be seen how this slicing aesthetic perspective summons history in unexpected ways.

As anticipated in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, this is a moment for resorting to history even within the non-historical broad frame of comparison. Following the question of historical context, I reconsider Herman's idea of needing to determine a conceptual and constructed versus a located and historical frame (96). Agreeing with Herman's general principle, I, however, insist on the importance of flexibility in order to be coherent with textual closeness. Thus I propose to attend to the historical context as it is called upon by the exercise of comparison within a non-historically framed project.

Von Balthasar, as was already mentioned, has argued for an aesthetic-theological intention in the work of Juan de la Cruz. What von Balthasar does not consider is the role played by the female spiritual disciples of Juan de la Cruz in the development of his aesthetic-theological project. Under the lens of comparison with the aesthetic notion of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa*, a question arises: Who are the *sahṛdaya* of the *Cántico espiritual*? Here I suggest that the nuns who were Juan de la Cruz's disciples in Beas de Segura and Granada during the decade of 1578-1588, and especially the prioress Ana de Jesús, fulfill in Juan de la Cruz's aesthetic-theological project the function of the *sahṛdaya*, the ideal perceiver of the work of art and devotion. Even though the role of these religious women, and especially of Ana de Jesús, has been explored by Pilar Manero Sorolla, no author to date has dwelt upon the co-creational character of the *Cántico*, and this is indeed a study that will require a much deeper attention as well as archival research. What the comparative question of the *sahṛdaya* does is simply to open the discussion.

After the extreme asceticism of his first years of religious life—also documented in the letters of Teresa de Jesús—and whose highest point were the nine months of prison and torture that he suffered at the hands of his own brothers of religion, Juan de la Cruz’s religious thought evolved to conceive of a way of spirituality that did not deny, but recovered, the beauty of the creatures of the world. Without lessening the impact of asceticism in spiritual practices, he was immersed in the contemplation of divine beauty, which he explains theologically as knowing the cause by the effect and not the effect by the cause: *Las cosas invisibles de Dios, del alma son conocidas por las cosas visible criadas e invisibles (Comentarios 4.1)* (“The invisible things of God, are known to the soul by the visible created and invisible things”).

This was the time when Juan de la Cruz, having escaped from the prison in Toledo, became the spiritual director of the Carmelite Discalced nuns of Beas de Segura. In 1581, Juan de la Cruz and these religious women founded the Convent of Discalced Carmelites in the city of Granada.¹¹⁵ Chapter 2 mentioned that the method through which Juan de la Cruz taught these nuns how to practice the *teología mística* was precisely a spiritual aesthetic practice involving recitation, memorization, meditation, and creation and re-creation of literary materials, mainly from the work that is known today as the *Cántico espiritual*. Archival testimonies of these nuns describe their relation with the composition and the material reproduction of the *Cántico*. The nuns prepared manuscripts, put to music, memorized, and meditated upon the textual creations that resulted from their interaction with their spiritual director. Through such meditative practices centered on the *Cántico* and not so much directed to the intellectual

¹¹⁵ This was the first foundation of the Carmelite Reform without the physical presence of the Founder Teresa de Jesús.

argumentation as to the internalization of the divine truths through spiritual and aesthetic delight, Juan de la Cruz made of the *teología mística* not only the goal, but also the means for his teachings.¹¹⁶

Briefly attending to a question that requires further studies, I suggest that these religious women can be thought of as the first *sahṛdaya* of the *Cántico*. Not only were they co-authors of the text and the commentaries by virtue of the exchange between them and the authorial figure, but they were also the recipients whom Juan de la Cruz had in mind when proposing the enjoyment of the beauty of god as the culminating point of a reader's spiritual life. The historical testimonies as well as the textual traces clearly show Juan de la Cruz's concern with, and learning from, his female audience, as well as the prominent place they occupied within his project of aesthetic theology. And this suggestive and unexplored aspect of Juan de la Cruz's aesthetic-theological thought becomes evident through the exercise of comparison.¹¹⁷

Reading the *Cántico* through the aesthetic notions at work in *Rāsa Līlā* also makes it evident that the concept of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa* offers notable parallels to the way in which Juan de la Cruz depicts the notion of *gustar al Dios vivo* (*Llama* 1.6) ("to taste of the living God"). The notion of tasting the living God is expounded in *Llama de Amor Viva*, a text that Juan de la Cruz devoted to another female disciple, Ana de

¹¹⁶ In Chapter 2 I suggested that the *Cántico* becomes for this nun a text to be approached with the meditative method of the *lectio divina*.

¹¹⁷ Luce López-Baralt discusses the reception of the *Cántico* and the archival testimonies about nuns that, in fact, did not agree with Juan de la Cruz's aesthetical theological project in the forthcoming article "Acerca del 'aroma de Yemen' en las letras del Siglo de Oro y de las dificultades de su estudio." *Actas del Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas*. Rome, 2010.

Peñalosa, who was very involved in the foundations of Granada. “To taste the living God,” as it has been already mentioned, is the pinnacle of the practice of *teología mística*.

It is interesting to notice that in especially obscure passages of the two texts dedicated to women—the *Cántico* and the *Llama de Amor Viva*—the experience of tasting the living god is identified with the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John. I suggest that Juan de la Cruz uses the image of the Samaritan woman as a device for identification, keeping in mind his female disciples. In the passage, narrated in the “Gospel of John,” the Samaritan woman meets Jesus at the well, where he questions her, reminds her of her many husbands, and asks if she wants to drink from a well of “living water.” In the stanza of the *Cántico* where the *Amada* addresses the fountain asking for the vision of the eyes of the *Amado*—which I will mention in the last section of this chapter—Juan de la Cruz cites the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman to give authority to his metaphor of the fountain as the virtue of faith. In the *Llama*, referring to the sweet savor of god and right before expanding the idea of “Taste the living God,” he again quotes the passage of the Samaritan woman, *y la Samaritana olvidó el agua y el cántaro por la dulzura de las palabras de Dios (Comentarios, Llama 1.6)* (“And the Samaritan forgot the water and the pot because of the sweetness of the words of God”). “The sweetness of the words of God,” according to Juan de la Cruz, is meant to be “tasted” with the purified “appetite” that has been exclusively directed to the delight in relishing of the beauty of God.¹¹⁸ This is what the Samaritan woman experienced in the conversation with Jesus by the well, and this is how Juan de la Cruz explained the

¹¹⁸ Juan de la Cruz refers in detail to the purification of the appetite in the First Book of the *Subida al Monte Carmelo*.

ultimate relationship with the divine to his spiritual disciples—mainly women—with whom he cultivated his aesthetic-theological project.

“To taste the living God” as living water is tasted illustrates a specific kind of relationship with the divine that resonates with the relationship portrayed by *Madhura Bhakti Raasa* as defined by Rūpa Gosvāmi, “service with the senses to the Lord of the Senses” (Haberman, *The Bhaktirāsamrtasindhu* “Introduction” li). This resonance has already been noticed by Swami Siddheswarananda, who affirms that the “agreeable love” represented by *Madhura* is “found throughout the work of St. John of the Cross” (74). Both theological expressions point to the identification of all emotions with the emotion of love and at the concentration of love in the exclusive figure of the divine.

From the aesthetic and theological parallels I propose here, two important theological nuances must be pointed out; one, a difference, and the other, a resemblance. The difference has been already noticed by David Haberman, who refers to the misguidedness of identifying the Christian religion in its totality with the Hindu branch of *bhakti*.¹¹⁹ As Haberman rightly notes, there are specific *sādhana* or prescribed practices in the context of *bhakti* that vary according to the particular schools. It is reasonable to compare those specific means through which the enjoyment of the divine is to be attained, but they also present important differences from the practices prescribed in Christianity.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ For more detail on these practices, see David Haberman’s *Acting as a Way of Salvation* (62-65).

¹²⁰ I look forward to Clooney’s new project involving performative practice in the context of a comparison between the *Song of Songs* and the Tamil poem *Tiruvāymoḷi*.

The last resemblance is that both theological contexts conceive of a non-substantial sameness between the divine and the person. However, this essential separation is differently understood among the various schools of devotion. Among them, the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavas call it an *acintyabhedābheda* (“an unthinkable difference in union”), and other branches of devotional schools quote the famous dictum that “tasting the salt is not being the salt.” Still, situated at the crossroad of reading the *Cántico* through *Rāsa Līlā*, it is no mistake to point out a substantial distinction maintained between the person and the divine within the limits of the body and the language as an important resemblance that will reappear again as one continues reading the texts. This theological and substantial distinction occupies two functions in the narratives of the texts. On one hand, it causes the endless sense of separation even in unity, and grants the perpetual absence-presence dynamic in which the *Amado* and Kṛṣṇa move throughout the text. On the other side, it carries the positive—if non-permanent—quality of granting the possibility of delighting in the divine, since relishing—as in tasting and sensually enjoying—implies a necessary separation. Thus aesthetics brings one back to theology, as theology calls upon aesthetics. I will return to this again in the last section of this chapter.

Seeing through Nature: The Insufficient Messengers

Considering suggestive differences to which I will refer in this section, the most striking of the poetic parallels between the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā* occurs while the *gopis* and the *Amada* search for Kṛṣṇa and the *Amado*, asking the creatures of the forest about

their whereabouts.¹²¹ In these passages, it seems as if the verses could be exchanged without altering the poetic structure of the works, and here the moving metaphors abound, as images that can be, as Scarry reminds us, easily imaginable:

बाहुं प्रियांस उपधाय गृहीतपद्मो रामानुजस्तुलसिकालिकुलैर्मदान्धैः।

अन्वीयमान इह वस्तरवः प्रणामं किं वाऽभिनन्दति चरन्

प्रणयावलोकैः॥३०॥१२॥

bāhuṃ priyāṃsa upadhāya grhītapadmo

rāmānujastulasikalikalairmadāndhaiḥ/

anvīyamāna iha vastaravaḥ praṇāmaṃ kim vā'bhinandati caran

praṇayāvalokaiḥ//

With his arm placed over the beloved, holding a lotus, and with a family of drunk bees following the smell of *tulasi*, did Rāmānuja bow to you while walking by, trees, giving you pleasure with his lovely glances?

(30.12)

¡Oh bosques y espesuras,

plantados por la mano del Amado!

¡Oh prado de verduras,

de flores esmaltado!

Decid si por vosotros ha pasado. (4)

Oh forest and meadows,

planted by the hand of the Lover!

¹²¹ I am referring to the fourth to thirteenth stanzas of the second chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*, and to the fourth to seventh stanzas of the *Cántico espiritual*.

Oh green valleys

enameled with flowers!

Say if by you he has passed.

In his *Comentarios*, Juan de la Cruz stresses the notion of knowing the effect by the cause: *Las cosas invisibles de Dios, del alma son conocidas por las cosas visibles criadas* (4.1) (“The invisible things of God are known to the soul through the visible created things”). Sṛīdhara, on the other hand, comments on the beginning of the second chapter stating, *virahasamtaptagopibhiḥ kṛṣṇamārgaṇam* (30.1) (“this is the search of Kṛṣṇa by the ardent *gopis* in separation”), and he continues to describe them as madwomen who go on searching from forest to forest. In both texts, the creatures of nature are revealed as a manifestation of the divine presence, as containers of his grace and carriers of his beauty, *con sola su figura vestidos los dejó de su hermosura* (“with only his figure, he dressed them with his beauty”). The *gopis* see the leaves of the creeping vine standing like hair on end as a result of the touch of Kṛṣṇa, while the *Amada* sees the flowers in the valley as if placed there by the sight of the *Amado*; both works depict a nature that is alive and responding by virtue of the life and beauty bestowed by the lover in them. Still, in both cases the creatures are described as insufficient messengers of the divine’s presence; and the female voices continuously clamor for the palpable presence rather than the mediated vision that relieves, but does not cure, the wounds of love and meaning left by withdrawal of their divine lover.

Seeing the Invisible through the Visible in the *Cántico*

The first utterance of the *Amada* after she withdraws (*salí*) from her duties and from herself in the search for the *Amado* is a request for vision directed to the creatures of nature:

*Mil gracias derramando
pasó por estos sotos con presura,
y, yéndolos mirando,
con sola su figura
vestidos los dejó de hermosura. (5)*

A thousand graces showering
he passed quickly through these fields.
And looking while passing by,
only with his figure,
clothed they were left by his beauty.

While she looks at the trees and the meadows, she guesses that these beings have seen her lover because of the gracious traces, in the form of splendid beauty, which he has left in them by his passing sight. The question of the *Amada*, therefore, implies an assumption of a previous act of the divine looking at the creatures: *y yéndolos mirando* (“and looking while passing by”). It also reveals itself as a rhetorical device since it points to another question, that is, whether the *Amada* can or cannot see the face of the divine lover through his imprints of grace in the created world. The *Amada*’s question is the topic that Juan de la Cruz addresses in the commentary to the verse, saying that the *Amada* is asking for an “essential knowledge.”

Although the theological question is for the essence, as Juan de la Cruz states, the *Amada*'s poetical questioning to the creatures implies an act of indirect seeing. Aware that the forests have been "planted by his hand," she wants to know about the divine's location, but the "locus" that the creatures of nature can reveal is precisely their own bodies, endowed by the beauty of the *Amado*. This act of asking for his location, while at the same time being aware of his immanent presence, reveals the *Amada*'s drive for a new way of seeing. In other words, how can the devotee see a being who is involved in a constant dynamic of creation and at the same time remains always present?

Referring to the relation between the divine, the person and the creatures of nature in this verse, von Balthasar quotes Juan de la Cruz's commentary on a similar stanza in the poem *Llama de Amor Viva*, where the mystic elaborates on a very interesting notion of the relationship between the divine and the creatures based on a creative model of visual perspective. The parallel passage from Juan de la Cruz's *Llama de amor viva* quoted by von Balthasar sheds light upon his theological and aesthetic notions of vision and will allow further elaboration on the visual claim of the *Amada* in the *Cántico*. The cited verse of the *Llama de amor viva* is:

¡Cuán manso y amoroso

recuerdas en mi seno! (4)

How tamed and lovely

you remember in my breast.

And in the commentary Juan de la Cruz states:

Pero Dios siempre se está así, como el alma lo echa de ver, moviendo,

rigiendo y dando ser y virtud y gracias y dones a todas las criaturas,

teniéndolas en sí virtual y presencial y sustancialmente, viendo el alma lo que Dios es en sí y lo que en sus criaturas en una sola vista, así como quien, abriendo un palacio, ve en un acto la eminencia de la persona que está dentro, y ve juntamente lo que está haciendo. Y así, lo que yo entiendo cómo se haga este recuerdo y vista del alma es que, estando el alma en Dios sustancialmente, como lo está toda criatura, quítale de delante algunos de los muchos velos y cortinas que ella tiene antepuestos para poderle ver como él es, y entonces traslúcese y viséase algo entreoscuramente (porque no se quitan todos los velos) aquel rostro suyo lleno de gracias; el cual, como todas las cosas está moviendo con su virtud, parécese juntamente con él lo que está haciendo, y parece moverse él en ellas y ellas en él con movimiento continuo; y por eso le parece al alma que él se movió y recordó, siendo ella la movida y la recordada.
(Llama, Comentario 4.7)

But God always locates himself there, where the soul sees him, moving, ruling and giving being and virtue, and graces and gifts to all creatures, having them in himself by virtue, by presence and by substance. The soul sees at a glance what God is in himself and what he is in his creatures, just like one opening a palace can see at once the eminence of the person that is inside and also what he is doing. And thus, what I understand as how this remembrance and vision of the soul is, is that having the soul in God substantially, as he is in all creatures, he removes some of the veils and curtains that she has in front so that she can see him as he is. And then,

that face full of grace becomes visible and shows itself as if between darkness, between shadows, and something can be seen (because all the veils are not removed). As all things he is moving by his virtue, it seems to be moving in all things, and all things in him with continuous movement; and thus it seems to the soul that she moved, and that she remembered, she being the one who is moved and remembered.

Now returning to the verses of the search in the *Cántico*, I consider the design of visual perspective that Juan de la Cruz proposes here. The movement *pasó por estos sotos con presura* (“he passed quickly through these fields”) of which the creatures give notice to the *Amada* in answer to her question comes to be, if one follows Juan de la Cruz’s statement, a visual illusion caused by the actual immanence of the divine in all forms of existence *teniéndolas en sí* (“having them in himself”). Being the creatures *in* the divine, they perceive as a movement of him what is actually a movement of themselves towards—and *inside*—the space of the divine. This illusion of movement, to which the creatures give notice to the *Amada*, reflects further on her own illusion of seeing through the creatures. The woods and the meadows think that the *Amado* has passed by, but they themselves are the ones who are transformed and moved by the *Amado*. In the same way, the *Amada* thinks that she searches for him, while in fact she is the one who is moved and, Juan de la Cruz says, sought by the divine.

The other moves as one is moved inside that other: this is how Juan de la Cruz pictures the relation of the soul to the divine. The response of the creatures in the *Cántico*, *pasó* (“he passed”), mirrors the *Amada*’s own quest for vision, which is meant to be indirect, *entreoscuramente* (“between shadows”), as all the veils are not removed, in

coherence with the theological principle of the impossibility of a total vision while in the limits of the physical existence.

Through this poetic image, Juan de la Cruz suggests a model of visual perspective that reproduces the theological relationship that he wants to advance. His incursion into perspective is in correspondence with the one previously referred, when the *Amada* requires the eyes of the *Amado* to look at her, since they are the very cause of what she can see. However, here Juan de la Cruz offers a deeper insight into the divine's will acting from within the soul of the person. It is the divine who "removes the veil" and let himself be indirectly seen. God appears, therefore, as a subject that acts and sees from within the soul while he is also pervading the outside space by his continuing act of creation. On this interior presence of the divine in the soul of the person, von Balthasar comments:

... as God opens his eyes in the soul, it seems to her that God does indeed move "in an incomparable newness," a newness that creatures also now share: the being and harmony of every creature... with its movements in God, is revealed to her with such newness, it seems to the soul that it is God who moves and that the cause assumes the name of the effect it produces. (150)

The theological subtlety to which von Balthasar refers complicates further the design of visual perspective. If the divine "opens his eyes in the soul," then he is seeing the soul from within, as she imagines that she sees him *moving*, while she is the one who is moved. Moreover, the lover would also be looking at her from within the creatures, who offer her a testimony of what they think has been the divine's passage.

This play of perspectives obtained by combining the visual interaction suggested by the poetry with Juan de la Cruz's theological explanation stresses the notion of the immanence of the divine and leads to answering the question of how the *Amada* can see the divine through the creatures. What she sees, poetry and theology suggest, is an illusion of movement of the divine who is ever-present in inside and outside space, and also constantly re-creating the surrounding universe. The creatures offer the *Amada* a mirror with which to look at her own situation of *absentia* from her object of desire. Their beauty, bestowed by the divine's previous sight, is a relief in the search. Still, seeing his traces in the creatures or being seen by him through the creatures will remain as an indirect and insufficient vision, unable to fill the gap left by the divine's withdrawal. This gap, as has been observed before, can only be poetically and theologically filled by his direct perception. Thus, the *Amada* further requests:

¡Ay, quién podrá sanarme!
Acaba de entregarte ya de vero;
no quieras enviarme
de hoy más ya mensajero,
que no saben decirme lo que quiero. (6)

Oh, who can heal me?
 Resolve to truly give yourself.
 Do not send me from today
 any more messengers,
 for they cannot tell me what I want.

The topic of the insufficient messengers is broadly addressed by Juan de la Cruz in the commentaries. He explains that the messengers have the effect of augmenting the pain of separation. In addition, they never satisfy the longing of the soul that seeks the direct perception of the divine. Instead, all the creatures leave behind is *un no sé qué que quedan balbuciendo* (an “I don’t know what” that they keep babbling) which deepens the wound of absence:

*Y todos cuanto vagan
de ti me van mil gracias refiriendo,
y todos más me llagan,
y déjame muriendo
un no se qué que quedan balbuciendo. (7)*

And all who pass by
a thousand of your graces come and tell me,
and all wounded me deeper
and it leaves me dying
an “I don’t know what” that they keep babbling.

The last verse of this stanza, a poetic performance of ineffability, closes the passage of the search for the *Amado* through the creatures of the world. The alliteration *un no sé qué* (“an ‘I don’t know what’”) is the coming to an end of the connotative possibilities of language, even of poetic language. The repeated, alliterated *que* (“what”) functions as a surrendering of the question of meaning and of the attempt to bridge the gap between experience and expression:

Esto creo no lo acabará bien de entender el que no lo hubiere experimentado; pero el alma que lo experimenta, como ve que se le queda por entender aquello de que altamente siente, llámalo un no sé qué; porque así como no se entiende, así tampoco se sabe decir, aunque, como he dicho, se sabe sentir. (Comentario 7.10)

I think that this is not to be well understood for him who does not have the experience; but the soul that experiences it, as she sees herself lacking understanding of what she highly feels, she calls it “an I don’t know”; because just as it is not understood, it cannot be said; although, as I mentioned before, it can be felt.

What Juan de la Cruz is describing in his commentaries with “she calls it an ‘I don’t know’” is, in Frederick Streng’s terms, the switch of the function of the language from descriptive to transformational. In other words, it is the switch from the insufficient and indirect reference of the messengers to the direct perception of the divine lover that the *Amada* is claiming. Such direct perception will be marked by a much more complex phenomenon of sight, and it will also be, indeed, a much more intense experience fluctuating between frustration and relief.

Seeing Through the Creatures in *Rāsa Līlā*

Apart from the more extensive utterances of the *gopis*, as *Rāsa Līlā* is much longer than the *Cántico*, the conversations of the *gopis* with the plants and trees of the forest of Vraja are distinguished from the dialogue between the *Amada* and the creatures of nature in the *Cántico* by two aspects that become apparent at a first comparative look. First, in the case of *Rāsa Līlā*, the creatures do not respond to the questions about Kṛṣṇa’s

whereabouts as the forest and trees of the *Cántico* do, using words. Rather, they respond through sensorial reactions that reveal the previous encounters with the lover and mark the passage with a strong erotic connotation. In addition, the search of the *gopis* leads them to engage in an imitation of the actions of Kṛṣṇa, a very suggestive case of self-fashion that also fulfills the narrative and performative functions of offering the reader / spectator images of Kṛṣṇa's previous events and of the secret encounters of love with the women of Vraja.

While I discuss these differences at the end of this section, I will focus on the perspective of vision that the *gopis* pursue and on the remarkably erotic tone of their search, which ultimately leads them into a switch of perspective—from not seeing Kṛṣṇa to seeing him, although insufficiently, in the sensual sprouting of nature.

The passage of the *gopis* searching for Kṛṣṇa through the creatures of nature begins with this verse:

गायन्त्य उच्चैरमुमेव संहता विचिक्युरून्मतकवद्वनाद्वनम्।

पप्रच्छुराकाशवदन्तरम् बहिर्भूतेषु सन्तं पुरुषं वनस्पतीन् ॥३०॥४॥

gāyantya uccairamumeva saṁhatā vicikyurūnmattakavadvanādvanaṁ/

papraccchurākāśavadantaram bahirbhūteṣu santam puruṣam vanaspatīn//

Singing loudly together, they searched like madwomen from forest to forest. They asked the trees [about] that one who exists outside and inside all beings, like the sky. (30.4)

This verse introduces the search for Kṛṣṇa framed by the same paradox of perspectives discussed in the previous section of this chapter in relation to the term *ātmadr̥k*.

Although *ātmadr̥k* is not literally mentioned, Srīdhara's commentary makes the reference

apparent: *bhūteṣu antaram madhye saṁtam puruṣam bahiṣca saṁtam iti*, (“[he] who exists in the middle of the inside of all beings and also in the outside, that is *saṁtam*”). Here, *saṁtam* is taken as an essential state of being or pure existence for which the “witness of the *ātman*” stands. The *gopis* are searching from forest to forest for the one who is already inside and outside all beings, including the *gopis* themselves. This nuance reveals that the *gopis*’ questions to the flowers and the trees of the forests of Vraja is a plea for the manifestation of the vision rather than a doubt about the existence of their lover. Deprived of seeing him directly, they want to access him through his traces in nature, and to do so, they require a new way of seeing that would allow them to penetrate the hidden dimension of Kṛṣṇa’s eternal presence.

This different way of seeing calls, in the case of the dialogue with the creatures, for an immersion of all the senses in the current of sight. By virtue of their seeing the creatures, the *gopis* can touch, smell, hear, and taste the presence of their lover, while at once they can project their desires onto the excited bodies of nature. Thus, the *gopis* discover that their lover has produced pleasure by the touch of his hands on the flowers, *prītim vo jahayan yātaḥ karasparśena mādhabaḥ* (30.8) (“*Mādhabaḥ* [Kṛṣṇa] has moved you to love with the touch of his hands”) and on the leaves, making them stand on end by the contact with his limbs (30.13).

The reacting nature also allows the *gopis* to reconstruct a parallel narrative of love that is taking place between Kṛṣṇa and another woman. This parallel narrative, to which I referred earlier, functions in the context of the *gopis*’ search as a mirror of their desire. As they project their intense emotions in a mood of jealousy and despair, they wonder if the jasmines are smeared with the *kumkum* of the nipples because of the contact with his

lovers (30.11). The abundance of sensorial motives that the *gopis* project onto the creatures of nature and in the parallel narration of the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa with the other woman makes it evident that the senses are the means for the *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa in the search through the creatures. Throughout the entire passage, the *gopis* repeat insistently their urgent question of vision in different forms of the verbs *drś*, and the proofs of his *darśana* are the sensual reactions of nature that cause the *gopis*' empathy. Altered sensuality is the evidence of Kṛṣṇa's presence, and so he is called along these stanzas *Suratanātha*, "God of love," and *Ramaṇam Ratijanakam*, "Producer of Love"; and yet the creatures of nature are finally left behind as insufficient messengers.

It is important to notice that despite the sensual nature of the passage, there is one stanza where sensual responses of the creatures are said to be the result of a long-performed penitence that has deserved the merit of the physical contact (30-10). The curiosity of the *gopis*, however, is evidently not focused on the act of penitence, but on its result as the possibility of a direct physical contact with Kṛṣṇa, which is the ultimate evidence of his sight.

Seeing Through the Creatures in Comparison

In the previous comparative section, I drew upon the topic of aesthetics, looking at the *Cántico* through aesthetic devotional aspects at work in the notion of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa* and the devotional aesthetic project of *Rāsa Līlā*. *Gustar a Dios vivo* ("to taste the living God") is the way that Juan de la Cruz describes the aim of the experience of *teología mística*. Such "tasting" is at work in the co-creation of the *Cántico espiritual* experienced by Juan de la Cruz and his female disciples, the nuns of Beas de Segura and

Granada. The *sanjuanista* notion of tasting, involving an immersion of all the senses, resonates with the practice of *Madhura Bhakti* or amorous devotion portrayed in *Rāsa Līlā*. Looking at the search for the divine in the relation with the creatures of nature, I will continue drawing upon the aesthetic project, asking more specific questions from the literature to the theology.

To see through nature is a way of indirect perception—indirect tasting, one could call it—to which both texts take recourse in their path toward the experience of direct seeing. In the *Cántico*, there are two stanzas where the creatures of nature respond, in the first person, to the *Amada*'s inquiry about the presence of the *Amado*. In such a response, the *Amado* is described as a bestower of beauty, and the creatures are aware of his gracious effect in their beautified bodies, *vestidos los dejó de hermosura* (“clothed they were left by his beauty”), thus inviting the contemplation of the traces of the divine in nature through the relishing of beauty. Moreover, this beauty, albeit all-encompassing and effective, invites perception as a general overview from a witnessing mood that is not in tune with the urgent desire of the *Amada*; thus, she immediately re-directs her quest to the first person of the *Amado*, asking him to show him by himself, since they are insufficient messengers *que no saben decirme lo que quiero* (“that do not know how to tell me what I want”).

In sharp contrast, the creatures of nature in *Rāsa Līlā* do not respond through speech, but through detailed sensual evidences of their bodies reacting to the presence of Kṛṣṇa which allows the *gopis* to engage in a more palpable relationship with them than what the *Amada* of the *Cántico* experiences. The leaves and flowers of the forest activate the *gopis*' sensory memory and make them identify the excited bodies of the creatures of

nature with their own bodies. Through this empathy, they revive their own enjoyment of the contact with Kṛṣṇa. The poetic descriptions abound in specific sensory details that also invite the reader, along with the *gopis*, to participate in the sensorial sprouting produced by the divine.

Here the comparative question rises as to why, although the *Amada*'s desire is as keen as the *gopis*', the creatures of nature in the *Cántico* are not portrayed with the same intensity of detail and sensorial participation. How can this inform the aesthetic theological project of Juan de la Cruz and the devotional, performative practices of the *Cántico*'s addressees and co-authors, the religious women disciples of the poet? An answer to this question leads into Juan de la Cruz's poetic approach to a theological argument at the core of his religious *milieu*, that of the possibility of a non-mediated perception of the divine. Von Balthasar has noticed that Juan de la Cruz's decisive option for the rejection of all manifestations, even the divine ones, makes him seem "more radical than Luther" (109). For Juan de la Cruz, von Balthasar argues, "no created thing is God, and because every created thing has form, all forms must be surmounted and abandoned if the vision of God is to be possible" (127), and "God can be known only through God" (107).¹²² At the same time, the excessive claim for a direct vision as a proof of existence could be rendered as a lack of faith, and faith is for Juan de la Cruz the supreme theological virtue and the means to accessing the secret knowledge of *teología mística*.

¹²² Moreover, the sensual relation with nature is already denied—according to the commentaries—from the second verse: *ni cogeré las flores, ni temeré las fieras* (3) ("I will not pick up the flowers and I will not fear the beasts").

The theological prominence given to the virtue of faith, along with the claim for an undistracted concentration on the divine as the only goal of spiritual life, could stand as an answer to the question of why the creatures of the *Cántico* do not involve the *Amada* in a sensorial re-creation such as what the *gopis* experience. The beauty of god, for Juan de la Cruz, can be positively enjoyed through the beauty of the creatures, but in light of the awareness of being a beauty that reflects the non-seen beauty of the cause, a beauty of the effects (*Comentarios* 4). In other words, the beauty that the *Amada* finds through the creatures is the beauty recovered through the awareness of the all-encompassing presence of the divine.

The relations of the divine with the soul, as well as the notion of beauty and the creatures in Juan de la Cruz's work, depend on the theocentric basis of his thought, which stood at the core of the methodology that he used to direct the attention of the "advanced souls" he addresses in his commentaries to the direct revelation of the divine as far as it can be obtained within the limits of the body. These advanced spiritual aspirants, particularly the cloistered Carmelite Discalced nuns who were his spiritual disciples, were meant to perform the *teología mística* learned in the *Cántico* within specific physical and virtual spaces of relation with the divine determined by their religious practices. An emphasis on the exterior activity of the senses would not be in tune with their spiritual path. In the same way, the sensual relation with the creatures portrayed in *Rāsa Līlā* is connected with its specific performative sceneries.

For the *bhakta*, the whole universe is absolutely pervaded by the presence of the divine in such a way that the extension of the senses throughout nature is not only not rare, but highly desirable—as long as it is used as means to bridge the distance with the

direct perception. That is why the experience of *yogamāyā*, the illusion of union, is highly sought even being an illusion. On the other hand, for the devotee that Juan de la Cruz had in mind, external beauty needed to be transcended and recovered. Although this is not the direction of the comparison, a question could be open for further studies as how the cause-effect relation would work in the context of the *gopis*' sensual interaction with nature.

Given the differences in the relations with the creatures of nature, the attempt to find the divine in the creatures of nature due to its insufficiency to fulfill the quests of the *Amada* and the *gopis* is nonetheless obvious in the comparative reading that both texts explore, and later leave behind. In the case of the *Cántico*, she desperately turns to the *Amado*, addressing him in the second person and requesting him to cease the communication through the messengers. In the case of *Rāsa Līlā*, the sensorial upsurge caused by the creatures leads the *gopis* to a play of imitation, a kind of spiritual entertainment and edification among themselves. This passage, which occupies the first part of the second chapter of *Rāsa Līlā*, represents a unique case of self-reflexivity, as they imitate demons, animals, other persons, and themselves in their relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Ultimately, this self-reflective activity, along with their sensual interrelation with nature, is also left behind by the unsatisfied *gopis*.

The comparative stance sheds light upon the much-discussed notion of sensuality in the *Cántico*. Authors like José C. Nieto have proposed reading Juan de la Cruz's poetry—in this case the poem *Noche Oscura* (*Dark Night of the Soul*)—from the perspective of *amor profano* (“profane love”). Nieto argues that it has been a mistake to approach the poem exclusively with the tools left by the author, and that the poem can be

read as a result of a very human experience that Juan de la Cruz lived and suffered, without implying a biographical event, but a psychological and poetic experience (44). Still, while readings like Nieto's are indeed valid, his thought could be reconsidered in light of the aspects that this comparison makes relevant. Looking at the passage of the search by the creatures in the *Cántico* through the passage of the search in *Rāsa Līlā* sheds light upon two aspects. First, it would be a mistake to deny the sensuality in the *Cántico*—which is, moreover, present in another passages. However, and this is the second aspect, it is a contained sensuality, much more suggestive than explicit, much more contemplative than active.

Another appealing subject of comparison is the use that both works make of visual perspectives to describe poetically their theocentric notion. In his commentaries to the *Cántico*, Juan de la Cruz says that god moves the soul from within, while at the same time he *is* the place where she exists and moves. Being an inner witness, as Stein observes, the divine opens his eyes inside the soul, and thus he sees through her, while she is involved in the illusive perspective of his moving. If one superimposes the perspective of vision suggested by the Spanish poet with that of *Rāsa Līlā*, the resulting image would be, at least in part, overlapping the notion of *ātmadrk* as explained in *Rāsa Līlā*, *bhūteṣu antaram madhye saṁtam puruṣam bahiṣca saṁtam iti*, (“[he] who exists in the middle of the inside of all beings and also in the outside, that is *saṁtam*”).¹²³ The poetic design of vision that both works suggest departs in both cases from the theological basis of a god who lives outside and inside the creatures. The theological problem of

¹²³ On the contrary, it is clear that Juan de la Cruz's conception of an immanent god in three possible forms of presence (by virtue, presence, and substance) could not be easily transposed to the theological structure of *Rāsa Līlā*.

attaining the vision of the divine that already inhabits, and sees, from within as well as from outside—in the exterior world—of the seeker is evident in both poetic cases and becomes even more complicated in the descriptions of actual instances of direct vision, to which I will refer in the next section.

Seeing the Face of the Divine: Taking *Darśana* in the Fountain

These verses of *Rāsa Līlā* are among a series of stanzas that describe what happens when Kṛṣṇa finally makes himself manifested among the *gopis*.

तत्रातिशुशुभे ताभिर्भगवान् देवकीसुतः।

मध्ये मणीनां हैमानां महामरकतो यथा ॥३३।७॥

पादन्यासैर्भुजविधुतिभिः सस्मितैर्भ्रूविलासैर्भज्यन्मध्ये श्वलकुचपटैः

कुण्ठर्गण्डलोलैः।

स्विद्यन्मुख्यः कबररशनाग्रन्थयः कृष्णवद्वो गायन्त्यस्तं तडित इव ता मेघचक्रे

विरेजुः॥३३।८॥

tatrātiśuśubhe tābhirbhagavān devakīsutaḥ/

madhye maṇīnām haimānām mahāamarakato yathā//

pādanyāsairbhujavidhutibhiḥ

sasmitairbhrūvilāsairbhajyanmadhyaiścalakucapaṭaiḥ

kuṅṭhargañḍalolaiḥ/ svidyanmukhyaḥ kabararaśanāgranthayaḥ

kṛṣṇavadvo gāyantyastam taḍita iva tā meghacakre virejuḥ//

Another woman drank that lotus-eyed with closed eyes, but she was not satisfied, just as the saints are not satisfied with the touch of his feet.

(33.7)

Another one, having closed the eyes, placed him in the heart through the pupil, and remained embracing him with the hair standing on end, like a yogi drowned in *ānanda* (bliss). (33.8)

The complete passage displays the most diverse reactions, from happiness to remorse to the contemplation of his beauty, all colored by an intense *ānanda* (bliss) and a sense of fulfillment. The first of the two stanzas quoted above describes a phenomenon that I will call here “interior *darśana*.” The use of the epithet “the lotus-eyed one” for Kṛṣṇa directs the attention of the reader to the point to which the *gopi* directs her sight: the lotus-shaped eyes of her lover. And moreover, she does so with her own eyes closed, resulting in the reader being exposed to the *gopi*’s interior vision, the inner absorption of Kṛṣṇa’s eyes into her inner self. Bringing the god’s eye into her own self, she acquires a new way of seeing which is different from seeing through the creatures, but also different from seeing Kṛṣṇa’s outside bodily manifestation. Holding on to Kṛṣṇa’s eyes in her interior *darśana* would guarantee that the god will never be absent again, but always available for vision in her inner self. However, this “drinking the current of sight” (to borrow Laurence Babb’s words) is also an incomplete act, unable to grant total fulfillment. In the commentary to this stanza, Srīdhara emphasizes the meaning of dissatisfaction: *punaḥ punaḥ juṣāṇā na atrpyat* (“again and again she was not satisfied”).

This sense of incompleteness of satisfaction draws upon an important intersection of resemblances and differences between *Rāsa Līlā* and the *Cántico* regarding the direct vision of the divine. As was observed before, the poem of the *Cántico* and its commentaries emphasize the importance of what von Balthasar calls “vision in nonvision.” The *Amada*’s driven desire, as well as that of the *gopis*, is to see. Attaining

sight, the *Amada*'s seeing becomes a further non-seeing, to which she needs to surrender in an act of faith: *en la interior bodega de mi Amado bebí, y cuando salía por toda aquesta vega ya cosa no sabía* (“in the interior winecellar of my lover I drank, and when I came out through all these lands I did not know a thing”). Henceforth, in the stanza that concludes the first version of the *Cántico*, she is said to be *en soledad de amor herido* (35) (“in solitude of wounded love”). The transition between the encounter and the awareness of a further absence is quickly bridged in the *Cántico*. The *Amada* is immediately left immersed in the shade of her own faith, *entreoscuramente* (“between shadows”), at the threshold of “vision in nonvision.”

On the other hand, *Rāsa Līlā* devotes more than two chapters to the aesthetic details of the encounter with Kṛṣṇa, characterized by their marked sensual and erotic character. In doing this, the text reflects an important quality of the Hindu concept of *darśana*, that of the visibility of the divine exterior, incarnated, available for an exchange of sight as an image in the temple, or even more, as a real “incarnation” in the beautiful and beautifying body of the cowherd boy. The basic difference between the *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa in *Rāsa Līlā* and that of a temple deity is that, although the temple deity is assumed to be alive by virtue of the life-bestowing rituals, the most important of which is the opening of the eyes, Kṛṣṇa is god himself living among humans, moving around, dancing, flirting, and teaching that the divine is to be exclusively worshiped despite, and because of, his constant tendency to hide himself. The recreation of the interaction of the *gopis* and Kṛṣṇa, therefore, fulfills the double devotional and pedagogical function of inciting the search for the living, touchable god at the same time that it instructs the devotees on how Kṛṣṇa is to be looked after. The text is assumed to have an aesthetic-

religious function beyond the textual constrictions and into the everlasting transcendent frame of devotion, which is founded on the fact that god is externally visible and able to be apprehended and united with by the activity of the senses—if not without limitations.

Thus stated and as shown in the two stanzas quoted above, *Rāsa Līlā* also proposes an act of “interior *darśana*” that bridges the vision of Kṛṣṇa and the inner vision of the devotee transporting the external sharing and loving joy of *bhakti* into the interior self. Nonetheless, as the “exterior *darśana*,” the attempt to hold the divine lover in the inner self is also said to be incomplete and bound to dissatisfaction. No matter how many times the *gopi* closes her eyes and drinks in the lotus-eyes, she is, in the words of Śrīdhara, *punaḥ punaḥ* (“again and again”) unsatisfied.

Putting these textual qualities under the comparative lens, one can see that in the *Cántico* there is a quick switch from the vision to the further absence; moreover, the vision is never described as a clear external sensorial event, but as an interior and always ineffable occurrence. The vision of the *Amado* is better known by its effects than by the actual representation of the encounter. The *Amada* is meant to see in nonvision and to search for the lover at the light of the dark faith. On the other hand, the *gopis* can take hold of Kṛṣṇa by the senses and they are said to have gone “to the end of their desires” of contact and exchange with the beloved. However, this statement is further contradicted by two means: first, by the actual narrative of Kṛṣṇa’s further departure and the *gopis*’ portrayal as ever longing for exterior *darśana*, and second, by the textual declaration of the impossibility of satisfaction in the attempt of interior *darśana*. Here one arrives at a point of intersection, already noticed by John Carman, between the Christian and the Hindu notion of the direct vision of the divine:

The Christian believes without seeing his absent Lord while the Hindu can see the Lord incarnate in the image, both in the temple and in the home shrine. Yet both the Christian and the Hindu place great emphasis on remembering the visible presence of the Lord in the past and on anticipating a spiritual seeing beyond the temporal plane. Moreover, for the Hindu devotee, the physical vision of the image, though a real *darśana*, a seeing of God, is incomplete. (206)

The convergence in the final non-satisfaction, mediated by the difference in the temporal satisfaction through the external *darśana*, leads now to the theological question of the essential separateness between creature and creature that both works proclaim.

In the following pages, I propose a different comparative stance. Until now, I have observed specific aspects of both works separately and in comparison. Now, keeping the perspective of reading the *Cántico* through *Rāsa Līlā*, I will analyze some of the more commented-on stanzas of the *Cántico espiritual* under the light of the Hindu concept of *darśana*. The purpose of this reading is to prove how this notable theological resemblance of both works—namely the distinction between god and the person—makes itself more apparent through the exercise of comparison.

This theological resemblance between the Christian and the Vaiṣṇavas doctrines has already been noticed by comparativist like Clooney and Denise Hanusek. Regarding the specific case of Juan de la Cruz in comparison with the Vaiṣṇava philosopher and mystic Rāmānuja, Hanusek argues: “Both [Rāmānuja and Juan de la Cruz] insist that the experience of the mystics is something that involves an “Other” as an active partner”

(15). This active participation, this mutuality of the relationship, I propose, becomes more evident in the *Cántico* when read through the notion of *daršana*.

*Oh cristalina fuente,
si en esos tus semblantes plateados
formases de repente
los ojos deseados
que tengo en mis entrañas dibujados.* (12)

*¡Apártalos, Amado,
Que voy de vuelo! (...).* (13)

O crystalline fountain,
if in those your silver features
you would suddenly form
the desired eyes
that I have drawn in my most inside.

Take them apart, Beloved!

Lest I fly away.

The syntactic structure of this stanza describes the image of what I called at the beginning of the chapter the cohabitation of the eye in the eye: the indwelling on one in the sight of the other, while making space in its own sight for the other to indwell. If one were going to draw the different directions of sight indicated by the verses, one would find three vertices indicating the three sources of vision: first, the *Amada* looking at the fountain and proclaiming her desire; second, the eyes of the *Amado*, located in the “most inside” of the *Amada*, which look at the fountain from inside her; and third, the fountain, which has the power of reflecting the eyes of the *Amado*. However, the triangle traced between

these three points of reflection is not a perfect geometrical figure, given the idea that the eyes of the *Amado* are “drawn in my most inside.” Because of that, when she looks at the fountain, he also looks at her, producing an infinite reflection of the *Amada*’s eyes in the *Amado* and vice-versa, mediated by the transparency of the waters.

Rather than drawing upon the metaphors suggested in the poetry, as in most cases, the commentaries to the verses of the fountain are written in a marked theological tone. Here, Juan de la Cruz attempts to explain the mystery of faith as the only means that leads to the union with the divine. He begins the commentary saying that the *Amada* *vuélvese a hablar con la fe como la que más al vivo le ha de dar de su Amado luz* (*Comentarios* 12.2) (“she turns to speak with the faith (as the one who is able to offer the *Amado*’s light more lively”). With these words Juan de la Cruz is coming to terms with the theological function of faith as a mediator, *tomándola por medio para esto, porque, a la verdad, no hay otro por donde se venga a la verdadera unión y desposorio espiritual con Dios* (*Comentarios* 12.2) (“taking it as mediator, because, truly, there is no other mean for the true union and spiritual engagement with God”).

Juan de la Cruz starts out by declaring that the fountain is the faith. This declaration refers forward to stanza 31, previously discussed here, in which he comments on the verse *en uno de mis ojos te llagaste* (“and in one of my eyes you were wounded”), identifying the eye with faith. Juan de la Cruz’s envisioning affirms that the identification of the theological virtue of faith with the eye can be transferred to the identification of the eye with the faith and with the crystalline fountain. Juan de la Cruz bestows the quality of faith on the fountain because its reflecting quality, very much like that of a reflecting eye, allows the *Amada* to look at herself *in* and to be looked *at* from

the *Amado*'s eyes; as the latter, in effect, are also looking at her from the reflection of the fountain-eye.

Being both eye and fountain, faith functions theologically and poetically as a significant opening. As the triangle formed between the *Amada*'s eyes, the fountain-eye, and the *Amado*'s eyes are not perfect geometrical figures; thus the quality of faith cannot be conceived of as an arrival at a final permanent vision, but, as von Balthasar suggests, as a place from where the soul "looks out into openness," and becomes an openness in loving faith (134). This theological quality of openness with which faith bestows the soul is represented in the poetry as the "meaning event" that takes place when the *Amada* looks through the waters of the fountain-eye into a significant opening that will reveal to her the eyes of the beloved. How so, though? She is aware that the *Amado* is inside herself, although she cannot look at her own inside without the exterior reflective effect that the fountain offers. Through the opening of the fountain-eye, the *Amada* and the *Amado* engage in an active, mutual seeing based on the same principle of visual exchange as *darśana*. To borrow Babb's words again, the *Amada* "drinks the current of sight" of the *Amado*, while at the same time she is the object of his loving gaze. The fountain-eye returns to the *Amada* the other's sight as he looks at her, and in that process they exchange knowledge and vision. That is precisely the event of mutual sight, *darśana*, the "vision in nonvision" taking place in the opening of the fountain-eye. This is where the language of poetry, imitating that of theology and vice-versa, performs an incision into the interstices of meaning. In an acute attention to significance, in his commentaries to this verse Juan de la Cruz returns to the topic of ineffability, writing *no quiero dejar de decir algo de ello, aunque por palabras no se puede explicar*. (12.9) ("I cannot help

saying something of that, although it cannot be explained through words”). Here, at the very limit of words, the *Amada* takes *dar’sana* of her *Amado* thanks to the reflecting power of the fountain-eye, theologically explained as the mystery of faith.

The comparative reading that I propose here is part of a long literary debate about this rather difficult stanza of the fountain.¹²⁴ Among the opinion of many scholars, I find this comparison to be in particular conversation with the detailed analysis of the verses that Luce López-Baralt has made in her *Asedios a lo indecible*. This scholar proposes two possible codes with which to read the exchange of sight through the fountain. She begins her argument by pointing out that, in the search for the divine lover, the *Amada ha perdido su identidad [...] no tiene rostro, ni identidad, ni bulto corpóreo, ya que no se refleja en las aguas del manantial*. (*Asedios* 42) (“she has lost her identity [...] does not have face, or identity, or corporeal mass, since she cannot reflect in the waters of the stream”). Therefore, López-Baralt continues, her petition to the fountain can be interpreted as a subversion of the myth of Narcissus: *aquí la protagonista también se va a enamorar de sí misma—y con todo derecho—porque está en proceso de transformación con lo que más ama*. (*Asedios* 42) (“here the protagonist is going to fall in love with herself—and rightfully—since she is in a process of becoming that what she most loves”). Based on this fundamental argument of the essential transformation and the loss of self-identity, López-Baralt continues her reasoning, suggesting two possible ways to read the stanza. First, she considers the possibility of a direct influence of the original

¹²⁴ This image has been cause of argument among scholars of the work of Juan de la Cruz, who identify it with such dissimilar sources as the poetry of Garcilaso de la Vega through the “divinized” versions by Sebastián de Córdoba, and the knight’s book of *Platir* or the book of *Primaleón*. (*Diccionario de San Juan de la Cruz* 488)

Hebrew of the *Song of Songs* in the *Cántico*. Second, she proposes from a non-historical frame, a relationship of the poem to Sufi sources.¹²⁵ Through these two readings, López-Baralt seeks to sustain her initial argument about the *absoluta unidad de la esencia transformada de los amantes* (*Asedios* 50) (“absolute unity and the transformed essence of the lovers”) as well as the *extinción del ego en la unión transformante*. (*Asedios* 50) (“extinction of the ego in the transforming union”). The scholar concludes her detailed analysis of the verses of the fountain maintaining that *no es posible establecer diferencias entre ambas miradas que se auto-contemplan*. (*Asedios* 50) (“it is not possible to establish differences between the two sights which auto-contemplate”).

López-Baralt argues that the verses of the fountain offer an image of transubstantiation that needs to find its reading codes *fuera de Occidente* (“outside the West”) (*Asedios* 45), because the nature of the transformation suggested by Juan de la Cruz does not come to terms with his Western Christian tradition (*Asedios* 45).

Departing from López-Baralt’s provoking argument, I find that analyzing the stanza from the perspective of *darsana*, although it is a non-Christian reading code, anticipates a reading that agrees with Juan de la Cruz’s emphatically theological commentary to this stanza.

The image of mutual seeing that the verses describe, as well the quoted clarifications in Juan de la Cruz’s commentaries regarding the “imperfect drawing,” invite a revision of López-Baralt’s conclusions with respect to the “loss of self identity” on the

¹²⁵ López-Baralt’s argument draws upon the Hebrew term *ayin*, present in the original of the *Song of Songs* and meaning “fountain, eye, aspect” and the Arabic term *ayn*, present in Sufi literature and meaning the same as its Hebrew cognate *ayin*, and also identity.

side of the *Amada* and the “total transformation” of the *Amada* into the *Amado*. The imperfect drawing of the *transformación de amor* that Juan de la Cruz describes theologically as the imperfect mutual vision through the fountain-eye that the poetry illustrates does not seem to present a case of total transformation or of the “lost of self identity,” but rather a case of cohabitation of the eye on the eye: the presence of two subjects, the divine and the human, each making space inside the self to receive the other, at the time that he or she is received by the other without annulling the primary individuality. Moreover, as the reflecting dynamics that the verses suggest, the *Amada* does not seem to be “falling in love with herself” as López-Baralt proposes. Instead, the verses illustrate an infinite looking at each other mediated by the reflecting power of the fountain-eye. The *Amada* endlessly falls in love with her *Amado*, whose eyes dwell in her innermost self, at the time that she observes and is observed by the eyes that love her. They are both the subject and the object of the other’s loving gaze. It is a process of perpetual transformation, but not of complete transmutation. The *Amada*, like the *gopis* from *Rāsa Līlā*, wants to see and to share (*drś* and *bhāj*); she wants to have access to the beloved’s grace through the act of mutual gazing. Nevertheless, as she shares and sees, she continues to be herself while the divine continues being himself; otherwise, there could be neither relation nor desire, and, therefore, there could be no *darśana*.

Along with this revealing resemblance, there is also a notable theological and poetic distinction between the *darśana* experienced by the *Amada* and the *gopis*. That is precisely the difference between the experience of seeing through the reflective waters, which Juan de la Cruz explains theologically as seeing through faith, and seeing directly, as the *gopis* repeatedly do in *Rāsa Līlā*. Comparing the poetic fabric of these two texts, it

seems that the *gopis* do not require the help of a reflective intermediary to attain Kṛṣṇa's loving gaze; after all their intense struggle, they attain his lotus face, and all their senses become ultimately involved in the absorption of Kṛṣṇa's overtaking presence. From this poetic distinction, a theological question arises: What is the role of faith, if we could translate the term, in the context of *Rāsa Līlā*? Although readers can find passages of strong longing, such as chapters thirty and thirty-one, the latter known as the famous *Gopi Gītā*, they do not find a case of reflected vision that resembles the stanza of the fountain-eye staged in the *Cántico*. Moreover, the actions of the *gopis* that ultimately provoke the *avātāraṇam* (descent) of Kṛṣṇa, as observed earlier, are the actions of evocation of the *gopis* through their intense desire of vision:

पुनः पुलिनमागत्य कालिन्ध्याः कृष्णभावनाः।

समवेता जगुः कृष्णं तदागमनकाङ्क्षिताः॥३०।४४॥

punaḥ pulinamāgatya kālindyāḥ kṛṣṇabhāvanāḥ/

samavetā jaguḥ kṛṣṇam tadāgamanakāṅkṣitāḥ//

Having arrived again at the shore of *Kālindya*, making Kṛṣṇa in their minds, they sang to him together, desiring his return. (30.44)

Such is the verse that ends the search through the realm of the creatures, and precedes the intense longing of *Gopi Gītā*. In the commentary to this verse, Srīdhara emphasizes the method that the *gopis* use to bring Kṛṣṇa into their midst: *Kṛṣṇam bhāvayanti dhyāyanti iti* (being and meditating upon Kṛṣṇa). Here, *bhāvayanti* can be read as “being,” but also as “feeling” and *dhyāyanti*, usually translated as “meditation,” also implies imagination and contemplation. The *gopis* bring Kṛṣṇa to their side by feeling and imagining him. The following chapter of the text is described by Srīdhara as an act of *avātāraṇam* that

the *gopis* perform “by their own will.” This act of evocation performed by the *gopis* is prompted by the creative combination of *bhāvayanti dhyāyanti*, which in the poetry is primarily represented as a driven desire of vision.¹²⁶ Likewise, in the verses of the *Cántico*, the *Amada* is represented as moved by an intense desire to see her divine lover if, at once, the desire of the *Amada* never leads her, or the reader, to the witnessing of a direct vision, but to a vision mediated by faith.

The *gopis* see directly, while the *Amada* sees not seeing. The *gopis* feel, contemplate, imagine, and make Kṛṣṇa descend and be with them. The *Amada* also seeks, feels, imagines, and says to have the *Amado* by her side, but the vision that she attains, like the vision that the poem offers to the reader, is a vision created by the power of suggestion of the language—theologically created by faith—not a vision witnessed as in the case of the *gopis*.

The question of faith leads to the limit of the concept of *darśana* in the context of *Rāsa Līlā* and back to Carman’s reflection quoted at the beginning of this section. To see, in Christian terms, is to believe, while in Hindu terms to attain *darśana* is to “really” see. While the *gopis* see through the power of *yogamāyā*, they are said “to see” in the text. Carman notices that the *bhakta* is faced with an epistemological as well as an ontological problem: “The devotees’ problem is that the omnipresent Lord of the universe, who has graciously entrusted himself to his worshippers in his countless image incarnations, is nevertheless painfully absent from his devotees longing sight” (206).

¹²⁶ However, I would not completely agree with Tracy Coleman’s argument that the desirous *gopis* are always facing the desireless Kṛṣṇa (111-115). The *gopis* are, indeed, desirous, but their desire becomes, in Śrīdhara terms, *bhāvayanti dhyāyanti*, the means through which they make Kṛṣṇa descend.

This point of “nevertheless painful” absence is where “vision in nonvision” and *darśana* come again together. The *gopis*, as well as the *Amada*, will always long for a further exchange with the divine’s eyes, for a non-discontinued indwelling and for a transformation about which neither poetry nor theology come to final terms because this does not happen in the word or in the silence, in the presence or in the absence, but in the space in between.

Concluding Thoughts: *Entre dos luces*: Between Two Lights

Referring to how advanced souls perceive divine knowledge, Juan de la Cruz uses this image of transition of vision:

Porque así como la noche en par de los levantes no del todo es noche ni del todo es día, sino, como dicen, entre dos luces, así esta soledad y sosiego divino, ni con toda claridad es informado de la luz divina ni deja de participar algo de ella. Comentarios (15.23)

Because just as the night at the threshold of the dawn is neither absolutely night nor absolutely day, but, as they say, in between two lights, in that way this solitude and divine solace is neither informed with all clarity by the divine lights nor stops somehow participating in it.

The image of the night at the threshold of the dawn evokes here the quality of the knowledge of the divine that the soul can attain, according to Juan de la Cruz, while limited by the dimensions of language and by the experience of the physical body. “In between two lights” signals a vision that can never be said to be absolutely attained. It points to a moment and a place always to come and always receding, to a presence that is

always absent, and to an absence that is always present, to a meaning that is to be found at the liminality of meaning.

Moreover, the night at the threshold of the dawn also stands as an image of the exercise of comparison in the search for textual resonances. Textual resonances hold a measure of difference and a measure of resemblance, and the place of the one who compares is “in between two lights” because the resonance of texts, as Damrosch points out, occurs “in the mind of the reader” (298). This is the richness of the work of comparison—but also its vulnerability. The insights into the poetic and theological imagery of vision at work in the *Cántico espiritual* and *Rāsa Līlā* suggest multiple possibilities of comparison; some of them I have explored already, yet some will remain unexplored for now since the act of reading is also limited by the constraints of time and space.

Among the many ideas discussed in this chapter, I think that the aesthetic-theological project of Juan de la Cruz, involving the teaching and practice of *teología mística*, in comparison with the aesthetic-theological project of *Rāsa Līlā* as delineated in *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa*, is one topic that especially deserves further attention. This comparison, moreover, is linked to the act of reading the verse of the fountain from the perspective of *darśana*.

Perspectives both theological and aesthetic are also involved in the section of the messengers. Juan de la Cruz states that the divine moves the soul from within in a way that makes the soul harbor the illusion of moving, while she is the one who is moved. What the *Amada* (theologically identified with the soul) sees through the creatures is an illusion of movement and an insufficient vision. Bringing that statement to the context of

the discussion of *darśana* and the stanza of the fountain, one finds a notable difference between asking the creatures if the *Amado* has passed by and asking the fountain-eye to reveal the eyes of the *Amado* drawn in her inmost self. That difference is marked by the *Amada*'s own awareness of holding the eyes of the other inside herself, an awareness that Juan de la Cruz describes in his commentaries as the critical turning of the *Amada* onto faith. The creatures cannot reflect his longed-for sight, but the fountain-eye does so. The fountain offers the *Amada* a real vision that she, in turn, cannot hold *que casi le cueste la vida* (*Comentarios* 13.3) ("save for the price of her life"). The vision attained from the fountain, representing the theological quality of faith, makes evident a distinction between the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā* that also deserves further attention, namely, the distinction of faith.

As overwhelming as the *Amada*'s vision in the fountain is, it is also meant to be incomplete, a statement that Juan de la Cruz describes in the commentaries as an "imperfect drawing." The "drawing of faith," like the "drawing of love" traced by the theological virtue of will, is ultimately imperfect. Also imperfect is the "transformation of love" produced by the intimate communication through the fountain, described by Juan de la Cruz as a supposition: *se puede decir que cada uno es el otro y que entrambos son uno* (*Comentarios* 12.7). ("it could be said that one is the other and both are one"). Here, Juan de la Cruz does not deny the supreme importance of this stage for spiritual aspirants but emphasizes the theological premise of the impossibility of total union within the limits of the body. The imperfection of the drawings of faith contrasts with the "perfect figure of transformation and glory" which the soul will attain when it is

devoid of the bodily limits, and which language performs when pressing upon its own limits.

This emphasis on the non-completeness, which becomes more evident when reading the stanza of the fountain from the perspective of *daršana*, allows one to reconsider López-Baralt's reading of the verses as a case of the *Amada* falling in love with herself since she is in a process of "transformation into him whom she loves" (*Asedios* 42). López-Baralt finds that, in reading the stanza of the fountain, the Muslim literary contexts are *los que mejor nos ubiquen y los que den pleno sentido al enigmático símbolo de la fuente* (*Asedios* 46) ("the ones that situate us better and offer full sense to the enigmatic symbol of the fountain"). Resorting to Muslim literary codes for the sake of textual interpretation, López-Baralt chooses a non-historical frame of comparative reading to argue a theological position in Juan de la Cruz—that of the *absoluta unidad de la esencia transformada* (*Asedios* 50) ("absolute unity of transformed essence")—that is not aligned with Juan de la Cruz's theological premises in the commentary to the stanza.

It is interesting to suggest here a quick comparison of comparative methods, looking not to determine if one method is right or wrong, but how each of them affects the reading of the text. In a different, although certainly related comparative movement to that of López-Baralt, I propose to read the stanza of the fountain using non-Western and non-Christian codes. My reading attempts to show that a Hindu devotional category such as *daršana*, also rooted in pragmatic ritual practices, can be used as a code to approach the stanza of the fountain. The resulting interpretation, rather than being far from Juan de la Cruz's own theological commentaries, sustains them. This does not mean that the parallel is strict, or that if one were going to attempt a similar reading with

other Hindu concepts, one would obtain a similar result. In fact, I have already observed several examples of incommensurability along these pages. In the same way—and here I am suggesting another way in which López-Baralt argument could move—I do not think that the parallelism of Juan de la Cruz with Islamic gnosticism is *sencillamente perfecto* (*Asedios* 49) (“simply perfect”), as López-Baralt suggests. Nonetheless, it is indeed a provocative path of literary comparison and another way to see how the poetic dialogue informs the theological dialogue and vice versa.

To compare by seeking resonances made of incommensurabilities and resemblances, instead of seeking perfect similarities, does not end in the labor of the comparativist, but in the perception of him or her who approaches the comparison. The ideal disposition of a comparative work, like that of a work of art, is to risk seeing between two lights, and exploring paths not previously taken.

Conclusion

Words mediate what word cannot express,
the flesh reveals what bodily eyes cannot see.
Francis Clooney *Seeing Through Texts*

I began this dissertation talking about Salamanca, the town that holds the first European institution that had the title of “university.” Juan de Santo Matía lived and studied in Salamanca from 1564 to 1568, and from there he departed to become a Discalced Carmelite, changing his name to Juan de la Cruz. This Conclusion shall begin in Segovia, where Juan de la Cruz was named Prior of the Discalced Carmelite Brothers in 1588, after returning from spending time in the south of the Peninsula, where he composed the poem and the commentaries of the *Cántico espiritual*.

Part of the mutilated body of Juan de la Cruz rests in a sumptuous mausoleum in the Monastery of Segovia. The monastery is situated next to the Knights Templar church of *Ermita de la Vera Cruz* and looks out at the fortress of the Alcázar. When Fray Juan de la Cruz moved there, the Alcázar might still have shown some of the renovations made by King Philip II, who celebrated his fourth wedding to Ana of Austria in 1570 within its walls. What today is called the *Paseo de San Juan de la Cruz*, which bridges the rivers of Eresma and Clamores and descends from the Alcázar to the monastery, might have been a much more sloping and difficult path. As the story goes, Fray Juan liked to walk this trail every day. To the right of the path there is a small garden where, still now, young bards sit waiting for the muses to descend to the same place where the best poet of Spanish letters composed his verses. After winding down by the Alcázar, passing by the church of the Knights Templars and right before the convent of *Nuestra Señora de*

Fuencisla, patroness of Segovia, at the road leads to the Monastery of the Discalced, a solemn stone building peacefully blending in with the pines that shelter it. Apart from the gold-riveted mausoleum in a side chapel, the inside of the church is grave and humble, like a genuine Carmelite church. In the main chapel, to the right, illuminated by small lamps that break the mellow darkness of the temple, hangs a colorful painting known as the *Ícono de San Juan de la Cruz*.

The icon portrays Juan de la Cruz looking at the observer, with the palms of his two hands open upon his chest, his bare feet in sandals showing below the Carmelite habit, and his face slightly turned to the left, with a moon-like wrinkle in his forehead. Behind him the painting shows an entrance to a cave bordered by colors, a tree, and a ladder, and behind the cave lies a castle with many doors, adorned with windows and curtains. This central picture graciously evokes the landscapes of Lebanon, where the icon was painted by Carmelite nuns of Harissa at the end of the twentieth century. The bottom, left, and right sides of this main figure are framed by small icons painted in the same style. In each of these small icons one sees even smaller hand-written verses, most of them from the *Cántico espiritual*. The sequence of the icons, which, in imitation of the *Cántico*, is not linear, is meant to describe the trajectory of the female beloved in search for her divine lover.

The *Ícono de San Juan de la Cruz* has been used to argue for the influence of Sufism in the work of Juan de la Cruz as well as for the eroticism of his verses. But to claim an understanding of Juan de la Cruz's experience from the *Ícono*, which is itself an interpretation of his words and at the same time an interpretation of his ineffable experience, seems to be quite a far-fetched attempt. Still, this stunning work of sacred

art, like any good image, is worth at least a thousand words. Painted by cloistered religious women in Lebanon in 1984 for the fourth centenary of his death, this icon tells us more about Juan de la Cruz than most hagiographies and critical studies. The icon is a reading of Juan de la Cruz from the Middle East, and is not hesitant to display the signs of a multi-layered translation. Juan de la Cruz was not a missionary, he never left Iberia, and in his writings no urge to convert the infidels can be found. Moreover, he talked and wrote for those who spend their lives within walls, in silence, *en soledad*, devoted to the search of the always-evanescent divine lover. It is through that current flowing beneath the oceans of words and arguments that Juan de la Cruz came to be so intimately known to the cloistered nuns of Lebanon 400 years after his death. Today, the *Ícono de San Juan de la Cruz* stands as a symbol of the relationship between the *Cántico*, the female branch of the Carmelite Order, Juan de la Cruz and his writings.

The *Ícono*, like the *Cántico*, is a work of mysticism. In their prayer, meditation, writing, repeating, and memorizing the verses of the *Cántico espiritual*, as their founder sisters of Beas de Segura and Granada did in the 1590's, the Carmelite nuns of Lebanon created this painting. For the *Ícono*, the Eastern influence that has caused so much concern among critics and apologetics is not a problematic sign; it is merely the natural result of contemplating all the contrast of colors, darkness, textures, shapes and depths of the writings of this man.

With a suggestive potential matching that of the *Cántico*, the *Ícono* demands for itself the same method of reading that Juan de la Cruz proposes in the "Prólogo" to the *Comentarios* written for Ana de Jesús, stating: *Las cuales semejanzas, no léidas con la sencillez del espíritu de amor e inteligencia que ellas llevan, antes parecen dislates que*

dichos puestos en razón (10) (“If these similitudes are not read with the simplicity of the spirit of knowledge and love they contain, they will seem to be absurdities rather than reasonable utterances”). This statement questions the simplicity, spirit of love, or intelligence with which scholars approach the writings of Juan de la Cruz. It also questions my attempt at comparison, save for the simplicity with which this textual intersection came to me, for the love with which I have undertaken this task, and for the overabundance of the textual conversation.

On Method, Metaphors, and the Politics of Comparison

The objective of this dissertation has been twofold. It seeks, simultaneously, to address disciplinary questions surrounding the issue of comparison, and to engage in the comparison itself through close readings of mystical texts. In relation to the fields of study (Chapters 1 and 2), I have addressed the interdisciplinary dialogue between scholars in the field of religious studies and Spanish mystical literature. Such a dialogue already exists, but it has not taken into consideration the post-Orientalist inquiry, an important topic of debate among comparativists in the field of religion. This post-Orientalist inquiry, to which I propose that the field of Spanish mysticism should attend, calls for a reconsideration of the quest for finding historical answers to explain literary events that may not be historically grounded. Such literary events have traditionally involved Western / Eastern dichotomies which carry along Orientalist assumptions such as the Christianizing of Sufi literature, or the “Suficizing” of Christian literature.

I think of this study as a step into the post-Orientalist debate regarding Spanish mysticism. I have proposed a work of comparison that is not historically, but textually,

framed. However, it is far from being ahistorical. This project has paid close attention to the historical contexts of each work and has called upon history when the comparative reading has required it. Rather than a radical separation from history, I am proposing a methodological flexibility able to reconsider history while keeping a textual frame of reading. I have attempted to show that historical events—such as those concerning the creation of the *Cántico*—can be called upon by the conversation of the texts even if they are not historically related. Keeping a textual frame, and following a comparative methodology focused on a close reading, I have been persistent in respecting the traditions to which each text belongs. I have stayed away from making any kind of universal claims, and I have kept my attention on the question of how the Sanskrit text can become a reference from which to look at the Spanish text, although—as I have many times observed—this directionality of reading constantly suggest its reversal.

Besides not denying history, this method is also far from being non-political. My methodology rests upon the awareness that the Hindus are, for the current political milieu, not only “the others” of Spanish Christians, but the others of the others—Jewish and Muslims—who have been so central to the polemics of race, language and religion in Iberia. The study of Spanish mysticism along with Indian literature also allows scholars in the field of Spanish literature to meditate on the mechanisms of cultural and religious inclusion and exclusion, asking why certain subjects of study are “othered” by canonical fields of thought beyond the literary and scholarly enterprise.

My awareness of the political undertones of this project has been enhanced by the different reactions that I have received when talking at academic venues and during occasional interactions with scholars from different geographical and political

coordinates. Within the post-modernist American academic approach, and in the field of Spanish literature, I have found reactions as distinct as some scholars questioning whether this research is possible within the field of Spanish literature, and others emphasizing and actually encouraging me to break through the boundaries of the field. Among Spanish scholars at the *Universidad Complutense* in Madrid, the Devavānī Institute in Barcelona, and the first Spanish Iberian Congress of Golden Age Literature in New Delhi University, I have also found similar reactions. But here the concern is not so much about the limits of a field of study as about the philological outcomes of such project and the genuineness of the reading. Among Indian scholars of Spanish literature, I have been sometimes baffled by their surprise at my interest in their very traditions and language, when their goal is sometimes to “Westernize” themselves as much as possible. All these different reactions have reminded me that to compare could be a colonizing or a decolonizing endeavor. Moreover, it makes me aware of being at the intersections of cultures and religions that do not necessarily dialogue at first glance. Although this is not a theological project, interreligious dialogue has been a part of it since its beginnings, as have been the theological concerns that may guide the directions of future revisions.

Crossing into the post-Orientalist debate is to cross, rephrasing Diana Eck’s thought, from Orientalism into interdisciplinary dialogue. However, this cannot be said to be a clear-cut switch, but rather a process that is already taking place as the disciplines converse and as different participants enter the conversation. Scholars concerned with issues of Iberian religious national identities like George Mariscal and María Mercedes Carrión are important interlocutors in this dialogue. Also, scholars whose work has focused on the literatures of Al-Andalus and the critical question of the Christian,

Muslim, and Jewish so-called *convivencia*, such as María Rosa Menocal, Ross Bran, and Federico Corriente, will play a main role in the post-Orientalist debate.

In Chapter 1, I look at critical texts that had not been previously gathered together, some of which are not translated into English. The critical review that I undertake in this chapter presents interesting points of dialogue with the literary criticism about the origins of the Arabic-Andalusian poetry. The debate about Iberian mysticism and the debate over the origins of Andalusian poetry took place, at least partially, within the same historical context marked by the Spanish *nacional-catolicismo*. Given such a historical overlap, the notions of Inside and Outside Orientalism that I propose in Chapter 1 could shed light upon these academic discussions and contribute to the post-Orientalist debate in the field of Spanish literature and cultural studies.¹²⁷

Based on the interdisciplinary dialogue between the fields of Spanish mystical literature and religious studies, I have proposed in Chapter 2 a specific methodology of comparison. I suggest (and this shall be the topic for future studies) that Juan de la Cruz explains his act of writing as an exercise of comparison based on similar principles to those used by contemporary critics; namely, the notions of resemblances, incommensurabilities, and resonances. To think of mystical writing as an act of comparison, whose very methodology could enlighten the comparative study of mystical texts, is a provocative critical move that leads the attention of the comparativists to the texts in a double task of questioning. Mystical texts, in this way, do not only teach how they want to be read, but also give clues about how they want to be compared. As a

¹²⁷ See Chapter 1, Footnote 19, p. 35.

result, “the text we look at becomes a text we look through; the mirror becomes a window (Doniger, *The Implied Spider* 69).

I began to think about this exercise of comparison considering Juan de la Cruz’s use of the term *semejanzas* (“resemblances”) in his writing. He says that such *semejanzas* bridge the distance between his experience of encounter with the divine and the language that he has at his disposal. In a resonant manner, contemporary comparativists of religious texts like Benson Saler have talked about resemblances as the best focus to keep while comparing in order to be safe from universalist generalizations. When seeing resemblances one also sees incommensurabilities and—like consonances and dissonances in music—both come together to form resonances. I approached the texts keeping this metaphor as the foundation of the comparison. *Rāsa Līlā* and the *Cántico* are texts that resonate by virtue of their resemblances and incommensurabilities.

In Chapter 3, I propose another metaphor for comparison closely related to the one of resonances, that is to say, the superimposition of the texts as if with an overhead projector. The most important feature of this metaphor is that the projector not only illuminates the texts, it also amplifies them. In fact, Patton has talked about a microscope as the inquiring instrument of the comparativist (“The Magic in Miniature”). The amplifying overhead projector allows the texts to shine in their details. I found this metaphor especially useful to address two of my topics of comparison. The first consists of the different narrative structures of *Rāsa Līlā* and the *Cántico*. When looking at these, I inquire into the details of the didactics of absence in each text and the notion of a divine entity who plays with the creatures. Second, the metaphor of the amplifying projector was useful to observe the differences in the bodily metaphors that each text uses. Such

bodily metaphors have the function of signifying the pain and showing the traces of the absence, and from this analysis raises the question of female agency.

From Chapter 3 to Chapter 4, the question of location and withdrawal turns into the question of sight. In Chapter 4, I focus on the theme of vision and return to Clooney's metaphor of seeing through texts. Thus, I propose to look at the aesthetics of the *Cántico* through the aesthetics of *Rāsa Līlā* and to look at the sensuality of the former through the sensuality of the latter. Aesthetics and sensuality intertwine in the experience of vision; and this exercise of "seeing through" attains a particularly enlightening moment at the end of Chapter 4 as I see the very act of seeing the divine in the *Cántico* through the seeing experience of *Rāsa Līlā*.

Chapters 3 and 4 could be further addressed in two general terms, each of them branching in manifold directions. Firstly, they could be rethought in terms of methodology. Resemblances, incommensurabilities, resonances, texts superimposed and illuminated by an amplifying overhead projector, and reading through texts—all these are metaphors of comparison that I invoke to perform my exercise of comparison. I would find it especially appealing to further compare these methods with the very method of mystical writing that Juan de la Cruz proposes in the "Prólogo" to the *Comentarios* to the *Cántico*. I would like to inquire deeper into the meaning of comparison as a tool of writing, and to muse about how the category of the ineffable—which makes mysticism a "saturated phenomenon," in the words of Marion—functions in a comparative system. Ineffability is also amenable to comparison. The unsayable to which mystic authors constantly refer can be compared to the incommensurable that the comparativist finds in the conversation of texts—given, of course, the nuance that the writing of the mystics is a

comparison between the text of god and the text of human beings; and the work of the comparativist of mystical texts, on the other hand, is placed between texts that mediate the unsayable divine and the human language.

Another metaphor of comparison that I long considered—although I did not mention it in this study so as to not overly complicate the methodological perspectives—is Daniel Sheridan’s idea of a comparison as a homology. “A homology,” Sheridan states, “is a comparison that discerns a similarity that is based on a similar function in a different system” (*Loving God* 9). A similar function, to borrow Taylor’s terms, would be a resonant function. For example, in the last section of Chapter 3, one could talk about similar functions of the notions of indwelling and *antardhā* within the theological and poetical different systems of the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā*. However, I find this category more appropriate to theological comparisons, like Sheridan’s study, and not so easily transferable to a more literary-focused project like mine.

I maintain that each comparative project demands its own method, and, therefore, I do not think that a specific mode of reading could be transferred into a different comparative project. However, the methodological basis and the path that I have followed toward the conception of this method can certainly be useful, in the same way that I have taken recourse to the paths proposed mainly by Clooney. These basic assumptions are, simply put, to stay close to the texts, and in doing so, to look at one text through the lens of the other. This is far from an easy task, precisely because it always takes one back to the demands of the multiplicity of meanings that arises from staying close to the texts. Moreover, as I have experienced here, this method is not conducive to a set of fixed answers, but rather to a variety of questions that one needs to return to, as in

a life-time reading engagement. The very notion of reading through texts, as explained by Clooney, is a learning process. One “learns to see through texts” (*Seeing* 309), and the choices made always imply the exclusion of other plausible choices.

On Mystical Language, Comparison, and Translation

Apart from readdressing the question of method, this study could be further engaged from two perspectives, first from a literary and theological reconsideration of the topics that have framed the comparison, and second—and closely related to the first—from the inquiry into the nature of mystical language proposed by the close readings. The topics that have framed the comparison are, in general terms, withdrawal and vision. More specifically, within Chapter 3 they are the notions of playfulness of the divine, female agency, corporeal metaphors, the literary performances of theological secrecy, and the degree of identification between the divine and the person; and in Chapter 4, the metaphorical use of perspectives and movement, the didactics of absence and presence, the metaphors of sensuality, and, again, the degree of identification between the divine and the person as illustrated in the exchange of vision.

As many comparativists have noticed, the comparative perspective implies both a gain and a loss. There are many advantages to concentrating on a specific text by itself, and both the *Cántico espiritual* and the *Rāsa Līlā* could be read by themselves and be completely sufficient. But there are advantages to the comparative reading that cannot be obtained when focusing exclusively on the individual text. As a first gain from the comparison, I want to emphasize that the place from where I have compared these mystical works is the close attention to the movement of the texts, the metaphors that

produce the “referential openings.” Textual closeness has been the only available locus of inquiry about ineffability—infinity, mystery—and as the context that promotes, in the words of Michael Sells, the “conversation with other traditions.”

I have approached these works as mystical, namely, as writings concerning the immediate, conscious presence of god, a presence often realized in absence. Beginning with this premise, I have read these texts keeping in mind the notions of a “switch of awareness” by Streng and a “meaning event” by Sells. These notions focus on specific textual moments where the language performs particular acts of significance that, as Streng and Sells have shown, evoke the event of mysticism, the unsayable encounter with the divine. To locate the “switch of awareness” and the “meaning event” in a text requires a close attention to the dynamics of movements and variations of the language. In these dynamics, Sells asserts, one finds the “referential openness” that allows the dialogue with other traditions, other writings, and other experiences. Keeping this perspective in mind, I began a parallel reading of the texts, being alert to the presence of “referential openings.” This search revealed to me that there were two resonant movements in the texts: the movement of withdrawal and the movement of sight.

The movement of withdrawal constitutes a meaning event inherent to the nature of both texts, as they hold the intermittent presence of the divine at their poetic and theological heart. The shifting space of transition between absence and presence, the “imperfect drawing” in the words of Juan de la Cruz, and the interdependence of *vipralambha* and *sambhoga* (“union” and “disunion”) in *Rāsa Līlā*, are signs of the divine’s withdrawal. Within this rather encompassing notion of withdrawal, the

particularities are much more interesting and suggestive: they are the universe upon which only the comparative perspective sheds light.

First, one notices the difference between the outer directionality of the *Cántico* and the inner directionality of *Rāsa Līlā*. This inner / outer distinction is a stand from which the poetry and the theology interact in surprising ways. Thus, I began to pay attention to the corporeal metaphors—the outer wound of the *Amada*, and the inner heat of the *gopis*—and their poetic and theological implications. I noticed that the comparative perspective intensifies the almost unnoticed aspect of female agency in the writings of Juan de la Cruz, and I intent to continue this discussion in future work, touching basis with the recent work of scholars like Amy M. Hollywood on mysticism, gender, and female agency.

The last topic of discussion in the third chapter, the withdrawal of meaning and the performance of secret, is probably the most difficult of all the topics discussed in this study. Its difficulty resides, as McGinn finds, in the question of how to understand from a critical perspective the experience that the texts claim. To say that the reader “understands” the secret could render the critical reading outside the literary critical quest, and that is certainly not what I claim. Holding the literary perspective and talking in poetic terms, the secret meanings held at secret places of encounter are, in effect, the end and the beginning of the narrative; they are meant to produce the most profound withdrawal, to leave the reader with the sensation of knowing everything and knowing nothing at all. I found that the distinction between the ways in which “the secret” is said or unsaid in both texts imitates and intensifies the distinctiveness of directionalities. For the *Cántico*, the secret is invisible, unsayable, and does not lend itself to imitation; it is,

simply put, the *teología mística* of which Juan de la Cruz speaks in the commentary, saying that it cannot be said. For *Rāsa Līlā*, the secret is proclaimed in the corpus of the text by the mouth of Kṛṣṇa himself. However, is it really said? Certainly not. The secret that the texts hold will remain hidden. To approach the secret intending to uncover it would imply a move into spiritual practices and another different set of decisions and compromises where the notion of comparison is much harder to integrate.¹²⁸

Continuing with the gains of the comparative approach, the seemingly different directionalities performed by these texts are at work with Streng's notions of "switch of awareness" and Sells's "meaning event." The directions of the moving metaphors in mystical literature perform a function in the different ways that the semantic events at which the texts aim take place; thus, I found that in the *Cántico* the metaphors lead outside the text, while in the *Rāsa Līlā*, they direct one towards the center of the text itself. Such differences in directionality have an impact on the reader, who is moved in the direction of the metaphors as he or she reads. The culminating experience of union, we observed, takes place as these movements reach a destination point. And that place of union is in both cases represented by secret places, either if the path to them has been directed into the outside or into the inside of the textual space.

The dynamics of directionality performed by poetic metaphors in mystical texts allow the reader to look from the poetry to the theology. At the end of Chapter 3 I analyzed how the notions of indwelling and *antardhā* are revealed not as concepts which keep the devoted reader from thinking of the divine as static and comprehensible, but, rather, as only graspable in terms of constant and creative transformation. This notion of

¹²⁸ This comparative theological approach lived as a theological experience has been broadly addressed by Clooney's work, particularly in *Beyond Compare*.

secrecy as an act of hiding is more specifically at work in Sells's writings on the "location of mystery." The shifting location of mystery is referred in both works by a series of moving metaphors, the most prominent being the metaphor of vision. As the mysterious event constantly shifts, vision is marked by a permanent change of perspective. Such change of perspective is determined by the moving dynamics of the object of sight and the seeing subject. The notions of *darśana* and vision in nonvision point at the moment of union—the location of mystery—as still another shifting, unlocalizable space, that of the encounter of sights. While *Rāsa Līlā* recreates more in the sensorial absorption of sight, the *Cántico* seems to transit faster into an experience of interior vision. I argue that the poetic function of the senses—which could be described as explosive in *Rāsa Līlā* and implosive in the *Cántico*—relates to the religious practices associated with these texts. Religious practices, in fact, constitute another area of inquiry that could be further addressed as a comparison between spiritual female practices and the exercise of reading through texts.

The close readings of Chapters 3 and 4 suggest further inquiry into what interiority and exteriority means as a metaphor in mystical writing. From the first analysis of the *Cántico* posed by its first question about location, the spatial features of the texts are conceived as having a sense of interiority—from where the *Amada* searches—and of exteriority—where the *Amado* withdraws. These interior / exterior dynamics evoke the notion of switch of awareness, and a further argument points at considering the switch of spaces as a switch of awareness: from the interior to the exterior, from the textual to the extra textual, from the linguistically and bodily constrained to the "other" space that Juan de la Cruz refers as "perfect." This

consideration of a spatial switch as switch of awareness could offer a new perspective to look at the moments of withdrawal of the *Amada* and the *gopis*, who transit through different locations as they come closer to the presence of the divine. Furthermore, as the textual space is conceived as one with and interiority and an exteriority, the divine is also referred to as holding both interior and exterior spatial features. Thus, the *Amado* guides the *Amada* into the inner wine cellar where he teaches her the mysteries of love and Kṛṣṇa folds within himself (*antarhite*), being this the utmost secret of his sharing of love.

The close readings of Chapter 4 suggest further engagement with question of what are the modalities of sight in mystical writings. As in the case of the notion of interior and exterior space, the switch of sight can also be thought of as a switch of awareness. Asking for the vision of the divine, the *Amada* and the *gopis* are asking not only for his grace, but also for a new way of seeing. As there is an indwelling space, there is also an indwelling of the eye in the eye. Sight also holds a sense of spatiality that allows it to bring the image of the other in (sight). The higher spiritual goal of inhabiting the same place where the divine dwells mirrors the goal of engaging in mutual gazing through cohabitation in each other's eyes.

Along with seeing, the other senses, especially touching and hearing, also play an important role in the metaphorical universe of both works and in the exercise of comparison. The sensorial dimensions of these works could be furthered following the thought of Marion, as two modes of phenomenalization, to grasp both signification and feeling, to frame a concept and to seize “an intuition that no concept will assume adequately but that will demand a multiplicity of them” (130). Continuing on this thought, we could ask how the divine is said to be seen, but also touched, heard, tasted

and smelled as he poses as an object of senses at the time that he is beyond senses. The sensorial interaction allows the *Amada* and the *gopis* to enter into this double dimension where they actually see what cannot be seen, touch what cannot be touched etc, bridging the “gap between the objective phenomenon and the saturated phenomenon” (128). The “saturation,” as Marion calls it, becomes a metaphorical resource in mystical writing and very much so in the works compared in this study.

Related to the role of the senses, this comparison would be further benefited by a closer attention to the traces of orality in the literary corpus of the texts. In Chapter 2 I referred to the archival testimonies about the oral composition and transmission of the *Cántico*, and its relation with the practice of *teología mística* as Juan de la Cruz was instructing to his spiritual disciples, mostly the nuns of the Carmelite Reformation. Further archival work is needed to shed light upon these practices in the disalced Carmelites convents of the first years of the Reform, although it might not even be possible to trace precise historical details. Still, the *Cántico* holds a performative quality inherited from the *Song of Songs* and enriched by Juan de la Cruz’s authorship, and this oral feature could be further addressed from the comparative perspective with the well-documented performative nature of *Rāsa Līlā*.

In the immediate future, I plan to pay further attention to two related topics: the question of female agency and the comparison of the aesthetic-theological projects of each work. Apart from Hans Urs von Balthasar, as well as Eulogio Pacho’s recreation of von Balthasar’s work, the aesthetic-theological question in Juan de la Cruz has been rarely addressed. Moreover, when thinking about what “aesthetics” meant for Juan de la Cruz, one finds a deep relationship between his aesthetic thought, the role of orality and

the female agency as expressed in the poetry and as historically present in the composition of the *Cántico* as a practice of the *teología mística*. I find that the notion of *Madhura Bhakti Rāsa* as understood by the *Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava* tradition of the sixteenth century, particularly in the work of Rūpa Gosvāmin and Jīva Gosvāmin, could offer a very provocative comparative perspective that can shed new light on the esthetic-theological project of Juan de la Cruz.

One of the most memorable reactions that I have received while working on this project was from my Sanskrit teacher, Madhura Godbole. At the end of the year-long Sanskrit program in Pune, India, and after reading the *Rāsa Līlā* and the commentaries of Śrīdhara Svāmi, I translated for the final project the *Cántico espiritual* into Sanskrit and gave an oral presentation in Sanskrit about my research. While working on the translation, which inevitably was influenced by my reading during that year, Professor Godbole and I were trying to find the appropriate Sanskrit way to translate the following verse:

*En solo aquel cabello
que en mi cuello volar consideraste,
mirástele en mi cuello,
y en él preso quedaste,
y en uno de mis ojos te llastaste. (31)*

In only that hair
that on my neck you flying considered
you looked at it on my neck,
and in it you stayed imprisoned,

and in one of my eyes you were wounded.

This was the final result of the Sanskrit translation, quite loyal to the verses cited above:

अस्मिन्नेव केशे
 मम कण्ठे उत्पते
 तत् आलोचयन् त्वम् मम कण्ठे
 अस्मिन्नेव मुद्रयसे
 मम एव नेत्रेऽपि बन्दि त्वम् ॥

asminneva keśe

mama kaṅṭhe utpate

tat ālocayan tvam mama kaṅṭhe

aminneva mudryase

mama eva netre'pi baṁdi tvam//

As I was trying to explain the poetic image to Professor Godbole, she said, “This poetry has so much *rāsa*, it looks like Eastern poetry.” Her reaction reflects the main problems at work in this comparative project. The poetry of Juan de la Cruz carries images that “look Eastern” although it is not. Still being Spanish poetry, it lends itself to translation, and with translation to comparison. What I was doing when translating the *Cántico* into Sanskrit was a work of teasing out the commensurabilities of the Spanish and the Sanskrit texts; naturally, some passages were very hard to translate, while others were easier. In the translation, as in the comparison, something is gained and something lost. The angles of translation and comparison, rephrasing Paul de Man’s images of blindness and insight, always holds a blind point where other paths are relegated. Resemblances and differences are at work in the resonances of translation and comparison because seeing

through texts, as Clooney suggests, is also “seeing through words” (*Seeing* 305).

Keeping in mind Godbole’s perception of the *Cántico* in translation as a work with much *rāsa*, I intend in the near future to translate *Rāsa Līlā* into Spanish, a task which has not been performed up to date. Such translation would be, as the first one of the *Cántico* from Spanish into Sanskrit, another work of comparison that would open venues to begin a reading of *Rāsa Līlā* from the perspective of the *Cántico*.

Walter Benjamin wrote that the translatability of a work corresponds to its literary quality (4). By virtue of the power of suggestion of their poetic language, the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā* are works particularly translatable not only into other languages, but also into other forms of art, as the *Ícono* testifies, and as the many performances, music compositions, paintings and literary works inspired in *Rāsa Līlā* demonstrate. If one thinks with Doniger about comparison as translation, one also has to affirm that the *Cántico* and *Rāsa Līlā* are as translatable as they are amenable to comparison; they are texts that multiply in images and meanings. Clooney repeatedly stresses that the result of the comparative conversation comes to be “a new text, larger than any given text; and this new larger text implies a world of its own, that is deeply indebted but not reducible to the texts read.”¹²⁹ As I close this comparative project in the form of a doctoral dissertation and open it in a form of a life-long engagement, I meditate upon the experience of reading this larger text, an experience that I want to share with readers beyond the audience of this academic exercise. I am now, in many ways, an affected reader who cannot imagine the *Cántico* devoid of its conversation with *Rāsa Līlā*, in the same way that I cannot read *Rāsa Līlā* without thinking of the larger text resulting from the

¹²⁹ Personal Correspondence with Francis Clooney. August 28, 2010.

conversation between both works. However, I cannot say that the texts have lost their individual voice. Just as the *Amada* and the *Amado*, the *gopis* and Krishna, engage in a visual exchange and at the same time remain themselves, in a similar manner, in the context of the comparison each text remains itself, at the same time creating a larger text born from the dialogue.

Neither the *Cántico* nor the *Rāsa Līlā* can properly said to have an end. Juan de la Cruz closes his poem with verses that begin with the absence of sight: *Que nadie lo miraba* (“For nobody was looking at it”). The reader does not know, not even at this very end, who this “nobody” is and whom this “nobody” is not looking at. In the *Comentarios*, Juan de la Cruz says that the soul tells the divine that she is *tan desnuda* (“so naked”) and totally involved in the *íntimo deleite que en ti poseo* (“intimate delight that on you I hold”) that she has gone totally out of the sight. The *Amada* is now in that same “¿Adónde?” whose location she was asking for at the beginning of the verse. And the poem closes with a movement, the movement of descent of the cavalry: *y la caballería / a vista de las aguas descendían* (40) (“and the herd of horses / at the sight of the waters were descending”). *Rāsa Līlā* finishes with the invitation to the beginning of a new action of narrating. The *gopis* have returned unwillingly to their houses, and the author turns now to the reader, and says that whoever narrates with devotion this love game of Viṣṇu and the young girls of Vraja will soon be free from the disease of desire in the heart, *bhaktim parām bhagavati pratilabhya* (33.40) (“obtaining supreme *bhakti* in Bhagavat [Kṛṣṇa].”) *Bhakti*, again, means much more than devotion. It means intense love.

Descending at the sight of the waters and continuously narrating are actions that make it hard for the this reader to leave the conversation of these texts. She would rather cling a little longer, chasing out some new moving metaphors. But the presences, the absences, and the divine visions do not exhaust themselves at any reading exercise. They live longer than words, always renewing one's desires to seek, to love, and to read.

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