

## THE SENSUAL HUMAN NATURE: A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS POETRY

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...  
Then every man of every clime  
That prays in his distress,  
Prays to the human form divine<sup>1</sup>

Sensual experience has traditionally been admitted into religion as a means to convey mystic encounters with divinities. Even the strict Christian dogma gives its consent to the expression of sensual encounters, provided that they can be justified from a religious moral perspective. But the fact is that the use of sensual imagery with a communicative intention seems to have an *experientialist* base: Any kind of knowledge we have originates from our phenomenological apprehension of the world; and appealing to the motor-sensory domains seems to be the easiest and quickest way to guarantee understanding. Following a cognitive orientation, this paper explores into two samples of religious poetry (San Juan de la Cruz's "Noche Oscura" and G. Herbert's "Love") and shows evidence that meaning conveyance is possible thanks to the use of motor-sensory imagery, which at the same time allows for other more universal readings of the poems.

Suppose you are asked to imagine God. If you are from a Western country, you will probably figure it out in human terms, as a father or an oldish man with some more or less precise anthropomorphic features. Your *human* image may be much more precise if you are a Roman Catholic and think of the Divinity as *Jesus Christ*: you will see it as a dark-haired strong white man dressed in a tunic, or a half-naked dark-haired white man hanging on a wooden cross whose body has been damaged by nails and thorns. And even the *Holy Ghost* will display for you a bodily image, this corresponding to a dove's. Religious symbols are frequently based on human

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<sup>1</sup> "The Divine Image", ll. 13-15 from *Songs of Innocence* by William Blake (1970:17-18).

and animal motives which offer not just a symbolic allusion to a concept but also a great amount of information transmitted through sensory stimuli. Religious painting is constantly playing with human bodies representing souls; notice for instance Michelangelo's fresco in the Sistine Chapel, in which it is easy to appreciate the tight mutual dependency that religious and sensory (or sensuous) information maintain.

The blending of a Christian disposition of mind and a sensuous appreciation of natural existence is not an exclusive characteristic of painting<sup>2</sup>, but it is also frequent in other artistic expressions such as *poetry*. The 17<sup>th</sup> century English Metaphysical poets and the Spanish Renaissance Mystic poets provide illustrating literary examples of this interesting integration. In this paper we shall discuss two poems playing with the religious and natural conceptions of the Man - "Love" (Abrams 1993:1388) by George Herbert and "Noche Oscura"<sup>3</sup> (Asún 1996:3-4) by San Juan de la Cruz. From the first reading it seems clear that they share at least the following characteristics:

1. They both account for the relation between a lyrical subject and a higher-level entity.
2. There is an explicit allusion to the "love" concept.
3. There is a final carnal encounter between the first and second entities.

The aim of this paper is to discover the way spiritual experiences are conveyed through the invocation of physical experiences in ordinary life situations. In our view, this interrelation between spiritual and natural world happens only because our human embodied minds tend to organise and convey meaning by means of *orientational* image-schemas and *sensory* experience so as to make it comprehensible. In order to fulfil this target, a sound theoretical basis which considers sensory experience as one of its essentials will be needed. Thus, we will adopt a cognitive-aesthetic approach that will include the Cognitive Linguistics assumptions on *the embodied mind* and the *mental space dynamics*.

## 1. COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS FUNDAMENTALS ASSUMED

Cognitive Linguistics bases on the mentalist idea that language is neither a container of meaning nor a representation of things. Actually they follow psychology in their assumption that anything we interpret from written or oral discourse is just the result of our *cognitive processing*, activating the necessary

<sup>2</sup> See Calderón Quindós (2004) for a study of Anglo-Irish poetry in this light.

<sup>3</sup> Henceforth L and NO when the poems are mentioned within brackets.

concepts that we store in our individual minds and establishing the right connections between them. The linguistic form of discourse is just but formal guidelines that will be understood only by those who possess enough information about the code used. Thus to understand a text in English we need to have some semiotic system corresponding to the English language stored in our minds; but also some other information about life taken from our own human experiences as physical and as social beings.

### 1.1. IDEALISED COGNITIVE MODELS

The whole corpus of information that any person stores in their mind is arranged in categories with different degrees of specificity (see Lakoff 1987). Each of these categories are called *Cognitive Models* by Lakoff and *Idealised Cognitive Models* (ICM) by most of the contemporary cognitive linguists. An ICM is a relatively permanent -but not fixed- multidimensional conceptual structure consisting of encyclopaedic information about a concept; this information is in a great deal *subjective* since it originates from our individual experience in the world and in society. Nevertheless, there seem to exist “universal” ICMs, mainly those which essentially have to do with orientational information. And we can also speak of ICMs which are widely spread in a particular culture (these are called Cultural Models), these ICMs working in our individual minds will more or less respond to a *prototype*<sup>4</sup>. As an example we shall consider the *love* ICM, which can be found at work all through the poetic discourse studied in this paper.

### 1.2. IMAGE-SCHEMAS

One of the most interesting Cognitive Linguistics assumptions about the human mind is that thought is of an *embodied* nature (see especially Johnson 1987). In short, this means that our motor-sensory experience as physical beings results in an understanding of the world in orientational and sensory terms; and through schematisation, our individual minds create generic structure on a motor-sensory base. Thus, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain with the help of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, each abstract concept in our minds will be provided motor-sensory generic structure in order to make it comprehensible. These generic structures, called by Johnson (1987) *image-schemas*, originate at its base through

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<sup>4</sup> For more on *prototypes* you can see Ungerer & Schmid (1996) and R.W. Gibbs, Jr “Prototypes in dynamic meaning construal” in Gavins & Steen (2003:27-40).

our motor-sensory interaction with the physical world around. Some of their roles in the cognitive processing are: 1) making it possible for two concepts to map onto each other, and 2) providing generic frames to *mental spaces*.

One of these image-schemas is the VERTICALITY image-schema, which -as it will be proved- will play a relevant role in the discourse analysed; the VERTICALITY image-schema also works as a frame for the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor (Lakoff and Turner 1989:170-192), according to which our cognition organises *beings* in a hierarchy of categories. Another frequent image-schema also at work in these poems is the JOURNEY image-schema consisting of a *trajector* moving along a *path* from a *source* to a *target*. As we shall see, the JOURNEY image-schema is functioning as a frame for the mental-space nets suggested by the poems. The *cognitive metonymy* theory also accounts for the understanding of abstract concepts (such as emotions) in terms of motor-sensory impressions; for instance, PASSION can be seen in terms of HEAT<sup>5</sup>, this notion (becoming a conceptual metaphor itself: PASSION IS HEAT) will be also useful to understand one of the poems.

### 1.3. MENTAL SPACES

Against the relatively permanent nature of the concepts (or *Idealised Cognitive Models*) in our individual minds, the human thought is also able to create new cognitive structures called *mental spaces*<sup>6</sup> (Fauconnier 1997). Mental spaces are temporary cognitive structures created *ad hoc* with an operative intention: as tools for the interpretation of human expressions, such as poetic discourse. Even when we read a single poem its discourse suggests manifold mental spaces connected in a net fashion that we construe with the help of our cognition skills. By means of its linguistic form the discourse provides the clues that help the reader to mentally activate old information and arrange it in multiple connections according to frames, and so, to create mental spaces. As we have said, these frames can consist of basic image-schemas such as the VERTICALITY or the JOURNEY image-schemas. But the frames must necessarily be enriched with specific information, and this is often suggested through the sensory images evoked by the discourse.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the emotion expression through metonymy and metaphor see Lakoff (1987: 382ff) and Ungerer & Schmid (1996:131-143).

<sup>6</sup> For more on mental space dynamics from an integrational perspective see further work by Fauconnier and Turner (2001,2002).

## 1.4. SENSORY DOMAINS

It seems that not only the information that can be transmitted through sensory images is astonishingly manifold, but also the *sensory domain* activated seems to make a vital difference in the way our minds conceptualise the input information. Eve Sweetser (1990:37-44) explains the reason why we tend to classify the sensory domains in two categories: i.e. in *higher* domains and *lower* domains. She assumes an *experientialist* orientation and tells about the differentiation degrees of the perceiver towards the stimuli depending on the sensory organ which is used to sense it. Thus, the lower domains (smell, touch and taste) require of a closer *physical relation* with the object than the higher domains (sight and ear), through which the perceiver can appreciate objects from a distance. Sweetser explains that the different degrees of contact established between subject and object are commonly understood as a difference in the degree of objectivity in the perception. Therefore, the *higher* domains are understood as more *objective* than the lower domains, and so, more *intellectual*. On the contrary, the *lower* domains are commonly perceived as more *subjective* and *emotional*. Assuming this implies that the sensory domains that a particular discourse activates in the reader's mind will influence the way information is being perceived (as more intellectual or more emotional).

## 2. COGNITIVE-STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

### 2.1. A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO THE LOVE EXPERIENCE

One of the most frequent emotions that literature -and in general any artistic expression- has dealt with to our days is the one called "love". This is not surprising, since it seems to be a basic human instinct which guarantees the spreading of the species over the world. Talking about *love* and not about *mating* gives the human copulation activity a higher and more humane status. The *love* concept integrates manifold dimensions which can vary from one culture to another. But at least it is possible to identify a basic schema articulating the several Cultural Models of *love*. Gerard Steen in 'Love Stories' (Gavins and Steen 2003:67-82) offers the structure of a prototypical 'love scenario' in the western society (Table 1), the 'causation' relations in 'love stories' and a list of the *metaphorical* aspects of love, which we reproduce here (Table 2).

**Table 1** 'love scenario'

DOES Y WANT X? →	NO
YES ↓	
DOES X GET Y? →	NO
YES ↓	
	→
DOES Y GET X?	NO
YES ↓	
DOES X KEEP Y? →	NO
YES ↓	
DOES Y KEEP X? →	NO
YES ↓	

**Table 2**

Causation in love stories: motivation and positive and negative results. Metaphorical aspects of love

WANT / GET / KEEP BECAUSE OF

DESIRE = HUNGER

PASSION = NATURAL FORCE

NEED = ADDICTION

WANT / GET / KEEP RESULTS IN

HAPPINESS = UP

AFFAIR = UNION

RELATIONSHIP = POSSESSION

NOT WANT / GET / KEEP BECAUSE OF

INTERNAL LACK

OF DESIRE, PASSION, NEED (see above)

EXTERNAL IMPEDIMENT

COMPETITOR, SOCIETY = ENEMY

NOT WANT / GET / KEEP RESULTS IN

LACK OF HAPPINESS

ANGER > HATE > JEALOUSY (other metaphors)

LACK OF AFFAIR

DISAPPOINTMENT

LACK OF RELATIONSHIP

Western society tends to believe that *love* is a “universal emotion”, though actually it does not seem to be a “universal notion”. Nevertheless, it is a basic concept in the English and Spanish societies, to which the poems under discussion belong. In fact, ‘Love’ and ‘Noche Oscura’ suggest a straightforward evocation of the *love* concept from the very beginning. George Herbert’s ‘Love’ does immediately from the title, and San Juan de la Cruz’s ‘Noche Oscura’ invokes it all through the poem by means of the vocabulary (“amores”, ll.24, 25, 37 and “amada”, ll.24, 25). But of course, these poems having been written by

Herbert and San Juan de la Cruz, it might seem fairly obvious to the reader that the *love* notion is applied here in an enriched or modified way. We shall see later whether the poems give the reader any clue towards this belief or whether the basic ‘love scenario’ is rich enough for the reader to work out meaning from the poem.

## 2.2. IMAGE-SCHEMAS AND ROLES

The cognitive frames that support mental spaces are usually based on ordinary thought image-schemas. This is what happens in the two poems for discussion, both of them suggesting mental spaces based on the ENCOUNTER image-schema - which as we can see corresponds to one of the *results* of the *wanting/getting/keeping* sequence in Steen’s table (AFFAIR = UNION). In both cases an encounter between a *speaker* and a *second entity* takes place; but there is a radical contrast in the positions the speakers take towards the encounter itself. This contrast seems to make the essential difference between these samples of *merely Religious Poetry* and *Mystic Poetry*.

“Love bade me welcome” (L, l.1) straightforwardly suggests the encounter relation, *Love* and *the speaker* being the entities involved; but a satisfactory encounter is soon rejected by the speaker, whose “soul drew back /guilty of dust and sin” (L, ll.1-2). On the contrary, the speaker in “Noche Oscura” leaves home in search of her male loved one-

En una noche oscura,  
con ansias en amores inflamada,  
¡Oh dichosa ventura!,  
salí sin ser notada,  
estando ya mi casa sosegada.

It is worth notice that the second entity in both cases is a male one: “Love” is an a priori a-sexuated entity, but then the speakers addresses it as “Lord” (L., l.13); similarly “Noche Oscura” conceals the second entity’s sex to the middle of the poem, where its manliness is suggested through the word “Amado” (NO, ll.24-25). But it is even more interesting to consider the speaker’s behaviours towards their own sexuality. There is a brief but prominent allusion to the male nature of the lyrical subject in “Love” (L, l.8) when Love’s own sex is still undetermined in the poem:

Love said, “You shall be he”

In a first reading this may seem uninteresting, since we tend to think that lyric poetry displays a great deal of autobiographic information, and here the artist is a man (George Herbert). More interesting may seem the clearly sexuated female

speaker in “Noche Oscura”, since it will not map with San Juan de la Cruz’s male identity: there is an outstanding constant repetition of the Spanish feminine morpheme “-a” connected with the lyrical subject all through the composition, which will make it easy for the reader to settle the identity of the counterparts in the last two lines (ll.23-25), the “amada” being the lyrical subject and the “Amado” the second entity in the encounter -

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

As we have already said, “Love” and “Noche Oscura” are both poems dealing with the *love* motif and displaying an ENCOUNTER relation between a lyrical subject and a second entity. We have identified the sexuated nature of each of these elements, but it is also important to notice that in both cases the second is perceived as a higher-level entity. There is a purely formal reason for this, which both poems share: the second entity is always directly evoked by means of an initial capital letter.

Capital letters are ordinarily perceived as more important than small letters and as a mark of individuality, as we can see from proper names. The capitalisation of the word “love” happens because it is being used as a proper name; but it is also interesting: 1) that the name “Love” evokes an abstract multidimensional concept, and 2) that such a name is being used in order to designate a male entity (“Lord” , l.15), when it should prototypically be assigned to a woman. On the contrary the word “Amado” maintains its common noun state (as the determiner “el” suggests, l.25) but is introduced by a capital letter in contrast with the small first letter of its counterpart “amada”, which clearly implies the male subject occupies a higher position in the relation. Therefore, the VERTICALITY image-schema is also suggested by the poems -though not in a purely physical way, but through the cognitive arrangement of concepts and beings in a hierarchic scale according to the GREAT CHAIN METAPHOR OF BEING (Lakoff and Turner 1989:170-192). In “Noche Oscura” this verticality notion is firstly suggested by the word “escala” - prototypically suggesting a *descending* movement in a flight-from-home scenario- and is later reinforced by expressions such as “almena” (l.31) and “suspendía” (l.35) in the stanza, now offering a *rising* movement as we will see below

El aire de la almena,  
...  
en mi cuello hería  
y todos mis sentidos suspendía.

(ll.31,34-35)

Conversely, “Love” makes use of the VERTICALITY image-schema with the invocation of a *downward* movement in the final stanza-



“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat”  
So I did sit and eat.

(ll.17-18)

a movement which diverges from the *upraised* sensual movement conveyed in “Noche Oscura”.

The CONTAINER and the PATH image-schemas are also at work in both poems. Each of them starts with the suggestion of a domestic environment. “Love” bids the speaker *welcome* to its place -where the speaker intends to *enter*; it conveys a movement *into* a container-

Love bade me *welcome*: yet my soul drew back,  
Guilty of dust and sin  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first *entrance in*,

(ll.1-4, *my italics*)

and “la amada” starts a night journey *out of* her home *to* a love encounter-

En una noche oscura,  
con *ansias en amores* inflamada,  
¡Oh dichosa ventura!,  
*sali* sin ser notada,  
estando ya *mi casa* sosegada.

(ll.1-5, *my italics*)

The domestic environment is relevant in both poems at a metonymy level, since connections can be established between a person’s house and their own privacy or private internal world. Thus, “love” makes no explicit mention of a *home*, yet the reader needs to locate the entities and the meal in a particular geographical place; therefore the *Love* entity and his *place* can be perceived as separate or as a *blended* unity. On the contrary, there is a direct mention of the *amada*’s home. Taking her home literally would make enough sense; but also a metonymic mapping might be perceived between her home and her inner self, especially if we are reading the poem from a religious perspective. The way the reader understands the *amada*’s home will influence the understanding of the *out-of-home journey* she will accomplish in the following lines. The JOURNEY-PATH image-schema will be considered in more detail in section 2.4.

### 2.3. ROLES AND VALUES

#### *THE DIVINE FORM HUMAN*

Needless to say a sexuated characterisation of the higher entity, which many readers will identify as God -and this we will assume at this point-, implies the divinity's image is perceived as anthropomorphic. But this is not the only indicator of God's human image in the poems. Both poems describe their respective Gods by suggesting parts of their bodies. From "Love" (ll.3,12) we know of God's *eyes* ("But quick-eyed Love, observing me ...", l.3) *hands*, *mouth* - how else would he smile and take the speaker's hand? - ("Love took my hand, and smiling did reply", l.12). And from "Noche Oscura" we know of his *hair* and *hands* ("cuando yo sus cabellos esparcía / con su mano serena / en mi cuello hería", ll.32-34). But his physical characteristics are also suggested through the subtle evocation of a sexual encounter between the lovers.

#### *THE HUMAN FORM DIVINE*

That the first person speakers in the poems are anthropomorphic seems to be clear. "Love" suggests a person with a body: the speaker has *hands* (l.11) and is able to "look" (l.10) -which implies having *eyes*- and to "sit and eat" (l.18) -which implies having *legs*, *gluteus* and a *mouth*. And so does "Noche Oscura" with the invocation of manifold body parts ascribed to the "amada" in the last stanzas ("pecho", l.26; "cuello", l.34; "rostro", l.37) and a clear evocation of her sensuous features ("y todos mis *sentidos* suspendía"; l.35, my italics). But there are other perceived features in the lyrical subjects that make us think of them as disembodied personas.

The first line in "Love" makes this suggestion by directly addressing the *soul* component of the person ("Love made me welcome; yet my soul drew back", l.1). Following the DIVIDED PERSON METAPHOR -the convention through which we understand the human person as a compound of *self* and *body* (Lakoff 1996)- and the *religious convention* that once the body consumes, the soul (or self) starts a new spiritual life, the reader figures out an entirely ghostly soul. But interestingly, the only way we can imagine this human spiritual figure is by giving it a human body image. And this human body image of the soul is what the discourse conveys, as we have seen in lines 10, 11 and 18.

The spiritual nature of the speaker in "Noche Oscura" is not so clearly perceived, but the discourse provides clues which make us think of the person as a

*divided* being -in the sense of the DIVIDED PERSON METAPHOR. This is attained by means of evoking unexpected sensory stimuli projected by a human body, but which the reader will associate, through metonymy, with emotional experience -especially because the sensory lexicon and lexicon connected with emotions work hand in hand for the same purpose. Thus, expressions such as “con ansias en amores inflamada” (l.2) and “sin otra luz ni guía /sino la que en el corazón ardía” (ll.14-15) evoke sensations happening at a level different from the human body itself as we know it. The metonymy at work here is PASSION IS HEAT: through the reader’s passionate experiences (when they are angry or excited about something) they will recognise what seems to be a body reaction producing *heat*, this tactile impression is easily associated with the visual *light* impression that the inner self of the “amada” projects. And this light impression which guides the speaker through the night suggests a spiritual dimension supported by the conceptual metaphors KNOWING IS SEEING (a universal metaphor) and GOD IS LIGHT (a religious conceptual metaphor). In fact, the “amada” sets off in search of a lover whom we have identified as God.

## 2.4 MENTAL SPACE DYNAMICS

### *SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS*

The JOURNEY (or PATH) image-schema seems to act as a guideline for the poems’ dynamics. This is more evident in “Noche Oscura”, which evokes a *trajector* (the “amada”) going from a *source* (“home”) to a *target point* (the “Amado”), but there is also a PATH image-schema at work in “Love”, as we shall see, and the whole mental space dynamics depend on it.

“Love” displays a progressive *dialectical* relation between two entities which is framed by a PATH image-schema involving *two* journeys.

- The first journey is accomplished by the lyrical subject (*trajector 1*), who goes from an *undetermined source* to a *target*, Love’s place: (“Love bade me welcome”, l.1), but there is an immediate opposite journey carried out by its ghostly counterpart (*trajector 1’*) as we can see in line 1 (“yet my soul drew back”). This opposing movement is reinforced by the functional word “yet”.
- The second entity (“Love”, *trajector 2*) undertakes another journey, this being motivated by the drawing back of *trajector 1’*-

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, ... (ll.3-5)

This results in different movements along the same *path*, the lyrical subject and “love” being the *trajectors* moving to and from different *sources* and *targets* - themselves being sources and targets for their counterparts (Figure 1).

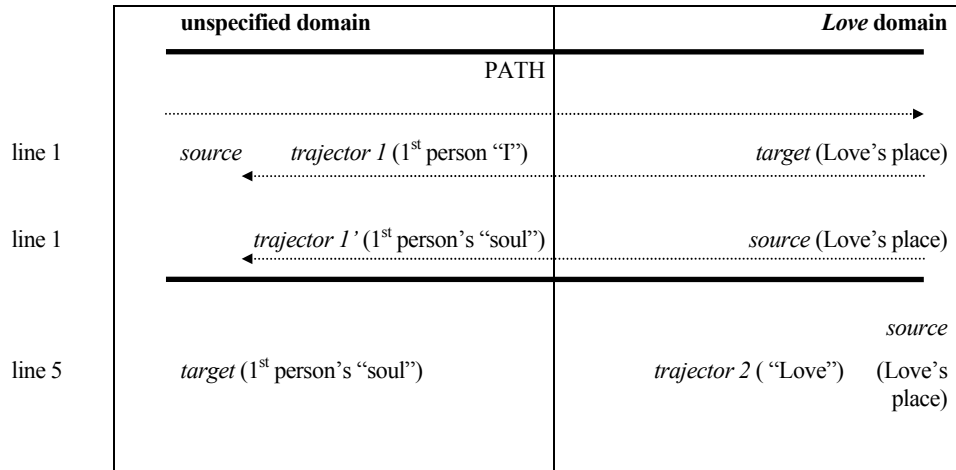


Figure 1

The dialogue structure suggested also responds to this generic TO-AND-FRO image-schema, as we can see from Reddy’s CONDUIT METAPHOR convention - according to which ideas *travel* from *emitters* to *receivers* (Reddy 1979). And the relation between the travelling entities will finally end up in a *meeting*, which corresponds to an agreement at the discourse level (Table 3).

GENERIC STRUCTURE	INPUT 1: JOURNEY DOMAIN	INPUT 2: DISCOURSE DOMAIN
PATH	path	discourse (dialogue)
TRAJECTOR 1	guest	guest
DIRECTION 1, 1’	walking? <b>towards</b> trajector 2 <b>from</b> trajector 2	speaking <b>to</b> trajector 2
TRAJECTOR 2	host ( <i>Love</i> )	host ( <i>Love</i> )
DIRECTION 2	walking? <b>towards</b> trajector 1	speaking <b>to</b> trajector 1
MEETING	sharing <i>Love’s</i> meat	getting at an agreement (end of dialogue)

Table 3

The meeting-agreement is deferred to the end of the poem by introducing spiritual obstacles. These obstacles can be understood as INTERNAL LACKS or IMPEDIMENTS in Steen's table and are *schematically* perceived as *material* hindrances or barriers in the PATH. In fact, they are at some points in the poem appreciated through *visual* and *tactile* images. The line that conceptually summarises the visitant's indignity to take part in the meeting is number 9 ("I, the unkind, ungrateful" ...), evoking abstract concepts that are immediately followed by a suggestion of an impediment at a *physical* level in line 10 (... I *cannot look on* thee.", italics added). But there is a more direct suggestion of *physical* experiences linked to moral impediments in lines 2 and 15:

- First, line 2 ("Guilty of dust and sin") suggests a conceptual connection between the abstract notions *guilt* and *sin* and the concrete notion *dust*, which implies the presence of a bodily support. This connection is evoked by means of the grammatical relation established between the terms "guilt" and "dust", together with the equivalence suggested by "and", conceptually connecting the terms "dust" and "sin" in the same grammatical structure.
- Second, in line 15 (... "who bore the blame") ascribes a physical gravity dimension to the abstract concept "blame" through the use of the verb "bear".

Even there is a recognition of the involvement of *physical* entities in *moral* affairs in lines 10-13:

I cannot look on thee."  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
"Who made the eyes but I?"  
"Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; ...

On the contrary, "Noche Oscura" displays a progressive *mono-directional* journey, in which a single *trajector* (the "amada") goes from a *source* (her home) to a *target* (a recondite place where the "Amado" waits). There is no IMPEDIMENT either external or internal in the JOURNEY. Actually, the only obstacles that are in some way suggested (the night and other people living in the amada's home) are mitigated by the discourse development. Lines 1-5 suggest a space where the *night* functions as a concealing veil for the amada's movements and the people or beings in her place are properly quiet and calm. The risk of someone noticing the amada's leaving the *source* has finished, as line 6 suggests ("A escuras y segura", my italics) and the night turns into a *guide*, as suggested in line 21 ("¡Oh noche que guiaste!"). In "Noche Oscura" light and darkness visual images act as *guides* or *vehicles*. Yet, from the very beginning darkness is appreciated more as a favourable context for *secrecy* than as a guide - as in lines 1,4 ("En una noche oscura,/ .../ salí sin ser notada,"); and lines 6-12-

A escuras y segura,  
por la *secreta* escala *disfrazada*,

¡Oh dichosa ventura!  
a oscuras y *en celada*,  
estando ya mi casa sosegada.

En la noche dichosa,  
en *secreto*, que *nadie me veía*,  
(ll.6-12, *my italics*)

Actually, it is *light visual* images that play a guiding role in the journey as you can see in lines 13-15

ni yo miraba cosa  
sin otra luz ni guía  
sino la que en el corazón ardía

As we have said, the emotional dimension in the speaker is appreciated through visual and tactile images, but in fact only the visual dimension (and not the tactile one) is understood by the reader as a *guide* in the journey. This is due to the conventional metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING originated in ordinary life experience: if the “amada” knows the way it is because she can *see* it, and she will only be able to see if there is any light that illuminates the way. What is interesting here is that the *light* comes from her inner self as it originates from a human passion conveyed in metonymic terms through a tactile image (Figure 2).

*trajector 1*

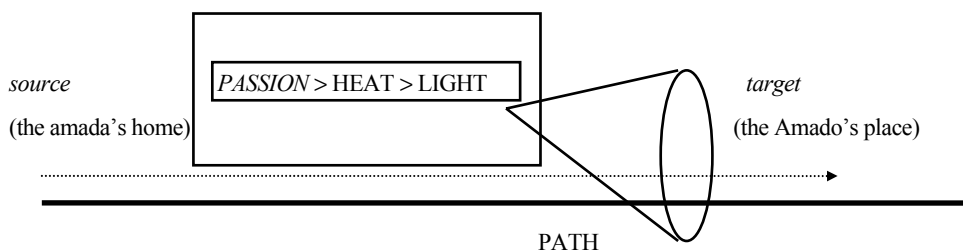


Figure 2

But neither is the final encounter straightforwardly suggested in “Noche Oscura”. Although there is no external or internal impediment for it, the discourse length itself produces the deferral of the encounter point. This impression of deferring is mainly attained thanks to lexical and conceptual repetition, and interjections (“¡Oh dichosa ventura! ll. 3, 8; ¡Oh noche que guíaste!, / ‘Oh noche amable más que el alborada!, ll.21-22). Thus, the development of the *formal dimension* of the poem works together with the visual *night* image and the *secrecy* vocabulary for the evocation of a final encounter happening at a remote secret place.

*SPIRITUOUS ENCOUNTERS*

As we have already seen, both “Love” and “Noche Oscura” suggest mental spaces based on the JOURNEY image-schema with *trajectors* moving from *sources* to *targets* either in an hesitant way (in “Love”) or in a determined way (in “Noche Oscura”). After a conceptual development which graphically corresponds to more than 15 lines, both poems suggest a final *encounter*. The encounters themselves are perceived by the reader, first, as God’s *acceptance* of the lyrical subjects, and second as *carnal unions* between the lyrical subjects and God<sup>7</sup>. This is mainly due to a dynamic conceptual play acted out by the motor-sensory information, the VERTICALITY image-schema, the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor- and the readers own knowledge of the Christian Cultural Model.

“Love” and “Noche Oscura” evoke encounters through the suggestion of a great dose of sensory information. The kind of sensory information is particularly significant, since it tends to correspond to the *lower* sensory domains (taste and touch especially), which involves *emotional* engagement (Sweetser 1990:37-44). In the first poem the visitant is treated to a dinner by the host “Love”, to which the visitant responds as he is expected-

“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat”  
So I did sit and eat.

(ll.17-18)

These lines immediately activate the reader’s knowledge about *hosting*. It seems a commonplace belief that sharing your food and time at home with someone else means to show a certain concern for that person; the verbal expression “taste” in “taste my meat” calls for other conceptual implications -for instance, that that meat is tender and good, that the host is expecting some kind of response from the guest perhaps approving of his meat, or any other. But these lines also provide linguistic clues that will make it possible for the reader to construe more figurative meanings.

- Notice the way the term “Love” seems to be strategically placed in the middle of lines 15 and 17, the reader will perceive its prominence through structural repetition;

“And know you not,” says Love, “who bore the blame?”  
...  
“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat”

---

<sup>7</sup> We are using the word “God” in its singular form, but in fact the mental space theory assumes that elements in the mental spaces are unique; so we should refer at least to two Gods -one corresponding to each poem.

and notice how the “Love” term in line 17 precedes the clause “and taste my meat”. The line makes it clear that “my meat” is in fact “Love’s meat”, and this rephrasing will call for the *carnal* dimension of Love, i.e. the sexual encounter.

- The religious domain has much to do with the final interpretation of the poem. For a reader who knows about the Christian Cultural Model, it is easy to identify Love’s words with Jesus Christ’s words in the Last Dinner referring to the bread and the wine as his own flesh and blood. Through this traditionally controversial equivalence Christ invited Man to join Him in a material and spiritual union which, on the other hand, displays similarities with a prototypical Love encounter - where bodies and minds will ideally join.

In the *hosting* domain the act of sitting down implies making oneself comfortable, and waiting to be attended by the host. This taken to the religious domain, the implications are much higher. Notice once again the conversation between guest and host in lines 16-18

“My dear, then I will serve.”  
 “You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat”  
 So I did sit and eat.

There is a first commitment from the guest to the host (Love), to which Love responds with a “you *must* ...” (my italics) The *servicing* attitude in line 16. implies a lower position of the guest with respect to the host, this is emphasised through the imperative expression “you must”. But this is immediately followed by a “sit down”, thus the lower mental position (serving) turns into a lower physical position (sitting down) implying higher comfort. Meanwhile, any reader who is familiar with the Christian Cultural Model will see this as a re-creation of Jesus Christ’s attitude towards his followers: Him coming to the world so as to serve. The poem seems to make us play with the VERTICALITY image-schema by doing and undoing the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor with the help of the DIVIDED PERSON METAPHOR (Table 4).

image-schema	SELF	BODY	SELF	Christian ICM SELF
UP	<i>Love</i> (‘You must’)	<i>Love</i> (standing)	<i>I</i> (being served)	<i>Love</i> (serving)
DOWN	<i>I</i> (‘I will serve.’)	<i>I</i> (sitting down)	<i>Love</i> (serving)	<i>I</i>

Table 4



A love encounter is openly suggested by the last stanzas in “Noche Oscura”, lines 23-25 acting as a transition from the JOURNEY space to the ENCOUNTER space:

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

From this point on, the discourse displays a great deal of motor-sensory stimuli which the reader uses to make up the ENCOUNTER mental space: a woman and a man (both possessing bodies) maintaining *physical* contact

ll.26,28-29: “En mi pecho florido /... / allí quedó dormido, / y yo le regalaba”  
l.32: “... yo sus cabellos esparcía,”  
l.37: “el rostro recliné sobre el Amado;”

This is perceived as a gesture of *internal/mental* commitment mainly from the “amada” to the Amado (... mi pecho florido, / que entero para él solo se guardaba”, ll.26-27), and self-abandonment, as suggested in the last stanza

Quedéme y olvidéme,  
el rostro recliné sobre el Amado;  
cesó todo y dejéme,  
dejando mi cuidado  
entre las azucenas *olvidado*.  
(ll. 36-40, *my italics*)

The LOVE ENCOUNTER space is also completed with the help of orientational information based on the VERTICALITY image-schema. This time it is possible to perceive a stable correspondence between the *upper* position of God in the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor (and thus, the reader’s perception of the “Amado” as the higher entity in the love relation) on the one hand, and on the other, the *height* images in the last stanzas. This *height* information perceived through sight (i.e., through *differentiated* sensations) is deeply related with *undifferentiated* sensory information perceived through *tactile* stimuli in an interesting play.

- Through *visual* information, words such as “cedros” (l.30), “almena” (l.31) and “suspendía” (l.35) invoke the upper pole of a VERTICALITY image-schema. According to Sweetser, the higher sensory domains (sight and ear) imply receiving the stimulus from a differentiated perspective -which means that there is no physical contact between stimulus and perceiver- and thus the perspective is considered as objective and intellectual.
- But the fact is that this *sight* vocabulary is grammatically connected with other vocabulary suggesting *tactile* information -which implies an *undifferentiated* perspective conceptually connected with *emotions*. From the structure “el

*ventalle de cedros aire daba*” (l.30) the reader will construe a space where the cedars work as a force producing air, suggesting a tactile impression. Similarly, the second and third terms displaying the *height* dimension are again grammatically linked to tactile images in lines 31,33-34 (my italics)

El *aire* de la almena,  
 ...  
*con su mano* serena  
 en mi cuello *hería*,  
 y todos mis sentidos suspendía.

This is particularly interesting, since the air element displays anthropomorphic features (having a *hand*) and is the one responsible for the sensory upraising during the love relation. Thus, there seems to be a conceptual mapping between the *air* element and the *Amado* element, and there are several reasons to believe this conceptual equivalence really exists:

- a) There is a mapping based on the VERTICALITY image-schema: the *Amado* is in a higher position with respect to the *amada*, and the cedars and the battlements are in the higher position in the domains to which they belong.
- b) The *amada* maintains some *physical* contact with both the *Amado* and the *air* coming from the battlements, the air having a tactile dimension emphasised through its anthropomorphic feature (its hand).
- c) The *air* contact with the *amada* results in the *upraising* of her senses, which can be easily mapped onto the *climatic* sensation in a sexual intercourse -step which is not straightforwardly invoked in the poem, but which the reader activates thanks to their knowledge of human relations. The last stanza (ll.36-40) will actually be perceived as the final relaxing moment after sex, though we have not been directly informed that there has been such

Quedéme y olvidéme,  
 el rostro recliné sobre el Amado;  
 cesó todo y dejéme,  
 dejando mi cuidado  
 entre las azucenas olvidado.

Having in mind that this poem was written by a very well known Spanish Mystic, and having identified the *Amado* as the Roman Catholic *God*, the reader will very likely construe a religious interpretation for the poem and will be able to give reasons for the choices the author made when writing it and the risks that he took. Actually, Herbert's poem seems more cautious and reverent towards the Christian doctrine and morality.

### 3. CONCLUSION

A religious reading of these poems is not a compulsory option, though. The word “God” is used in none of them and the higher position of the second entity might be understood just as an expression of idolatry towards the loved one; and even the biblical words themselves could be just understood as a device to say something else. But what it is definitely clear from the poems is that, in order to generate *aesthetic* meaning, the *artists* did make use of widespread notions about the human *motor-sensory* reality. And it is through this human *sensuality* that the reader will make out meaning from the poems.

Much has already been said about Spanish Mystic and English Metaphysical poetry from many different perspectives, particularly including dogmatic interpretations. Frequently -especially in the case of Spanish one- dogmatic interpretations have eclipsed the dimension of their poems as *artistic* creations. Nevertheless, still nowadays San Juan de la Cruz and Herbert are being read and admired for their poetic genius<sup>8</sup>. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century fashion of allowing the poems to speak for themselves, we have only clarified the way the reader’s motor-sensory knowledge about the world and about human relations participates in the poem meaning construction at the *aesthetic* pole. We would not like to go any further in our interpretation of the poems. The task of speculating on the possible meanings of the poems will be left to the readers themselves, for what we believe about poetry is similar to what San Juan de la Cruz says about his choosing poetry to communicate his love experience:

porque los dichos de amor es mejor declararlos en su anchura, para que cada uno de ellos se aproveche de según su modo y caudal de espíritu, que abreviarlos a un sentido a que no se acomode todo paladar ...<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a rather complete list of 20<sup>th</sup> century studies on San Juan de la Cruz see Asún (1996:IL-LIII), on George Herbert see Coms (2001:199).

<sup>9</sup> San Juan de la Cruz quoted in Asún (1996:XVII).

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