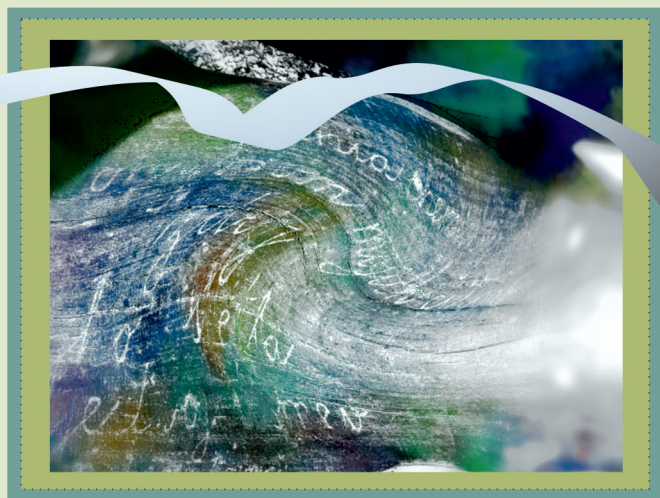


The Figurativeness of the Language of Mystical Experience

*Particularities
and Interpretations*



Edited by
Antonio Barnés and Magda Kučerková

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*The Figurativeness
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FOREWORD

The last days of June 2021 united two research projects: “God in Contemporary Literature” (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain) and “The Poetics of Mystical Experience and the Literary Forms of Mystagogy” (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia) into one common piece of work. This union was the result of an international scientific conference which thematized mystical experience and its representation through language and art. These proceedings were published with the same title *The Figurativeness of the Language of Mystical Experience. Particularities and Interpretations*.

Organizing the conference in a virtual space made it easy to connect participants from Spain, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Italy, and Argentina. The participants who joined online were not only from large cities, but also from smaller towns and villages, tuning in from their workplaces or from their homes. This online gathering was also the result of the present global pandemic which to date has been going on for more than one and a half years. Because of this, distances are being shortened, digital technologies and space created by them are being fully used, boundaries between work and home are being erased, and the nature of social interaction is changing. Unexpectedly (and somewhat paradoxically) this new, special, and complex situation has led many to contemplate the importance of the spiritual world and its values. Further, many have also in turn sought out sources for renewal and deeper self-knowledge. This points to the fact that the spiritual realm is an essential phenomenon, inherent to man, deeply personal, and, at the same time universal in nature. This is also confirmed by the papers presented at the conference, most of which can be found in this collection.

These contributions reflect, each their own way, the remarkable semantic richness of mystical experience as encounters with mystery and its creative-aesthetic dimension. In other words, these contributions reflect the innate need in man to search the depths and corners of being and synchronize this knowledge thus acquired (*sui generis*) with one’s own work in the world. The individual texts include the authors’ individual views on the concept of mysticism, revealing their own inspirations and scientific intuitions. The texts also include analytical-interpretive tools that focus on works involving or reflecting mystical experience in the context of the Western Christian tradition.

The subject of research were various national literatures and historical epochs that were written by both men and women who have experienced a transcendent experience of this kind and integrated this experience in such a way that they were able to materialize their inner spiritual world into text with literary attributes. This includes, as well, works reflecting on the topic in the context of iconographic

tradition, fine and conceptual art based on original life stories, and contemplation of God's presence in the world.

Paraphrasing the statement of St. Thomas Aquinas, grace does not destroy nature, but perfects and elevates it. The articles in this collection also show that mysticism, at least that of a Christian nature, is not depersonalized, incarnate or immaterial, it is not isolated from the world. Human abilities are not weakened in mystical experience. Rather, external and internal senses, imagination, reason, and intellect open up to mystery. Mysticism means acquiring a specific experience with God. Mysticism is the meeting point of reason and faith, of trust that the spiritual world can be understood and believed. It turns out that the *presence* and *absence* of God – that is, God in the form of *word* and *silence* – can become an analogous experience for man (which he expresses in a different form through the same language). A person who lives, learns, and dies, gets to know himself as he gets to know God. This knowledge needs to be expressed, whether in words or in images. In this way a tension is created between the spiritual and the material. To find a solution, one often reaches for symbols and through them, he changes the reality that needs to be captured into images that expand the narrowed sensory or verbal expressions. Water, fire, earth, air, or dream then take on unexpected meanings. But even symbols are not sufficient. In formulating mystical experience, it is necessary to apply the entire repertoire offered by rhetoric to expand the power of language, or to look for other artistic ways of depicting these inner facts.

The experience of God is contrasted with the human experience of history. Mysticism, in other words, the search for transcendence, belongs to the search for a meaning that motivates and fulfills a person in life. Artistic creation is a privileged space of this search and its reflection; it is an area in which traces of human experience with the divine can be found. We believe that this collection will be a relevant document of this issue.

Editors

CHAPTER ONE

THE MAN WHO KNOWS AND WHO DIES



MYSTICAL KNOWLEDGE: ANTHROPOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín

ABSTRACT

The mystical experience is not something reducible simply to the private experience sphere. The force of the Mystery that is revealed in the subject opens up to the need to understand and communicate that experience. This helps us to perceive the levels inherent to the mystical experience until it transforms into communication. And so, we speak of two ways of language linked to the mystical experience: written language, with its peculiarities and creative connotations, and anthropological language, communicable through the experienced transformation and the way of life of the subject.

KEYWORDS

Mysticism. Language. Anthropology. Levels of experience.

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Firstly, I would like to thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to participate in this international program about language in the field of mystical experience. The topics that are presented in this program already clearly show the great richness that the mystical experience offers us in relation to the language.

In view of this broad panorama, I want to focus on a specific question inherent to the mystical experience as such, which sustains, to a certain extent, creativity, through figurative and poetic language that seeks to bring us something of that ineffability of experience.

It is true that there are many more mystics than writers. I even believe that we could say that a huge number of mystics, that is, of people who in one way or another have experienced the Mystery, the Transcendent, have not left us any written testimony. This could be for multiple reasons. Perhaps because of an inability to do so, perhaps because of the lack of preparation, or perhaps because the experience has been so

shocking and intense that they have not found the form or the way to make it visible and to witness it.

But we do have, both in the Christian tradition and in other religious and cultural spheres, numerous writings that speak of a reality that occurs in the heart of the human, that, although we can qualify it as extraordinary, has its roots in the quality of the human nature and its ability to open to the Mystery. This Mystery allows itself to be felt and experienced in multiple ways, and needs the concept, the language, the figure, and the metaphor to become something tangible and understandable. This is sometimes to understand itself and share something of that experience, and other times it is just because of an overwhelmed creativity that needs to be materialized, externalized.

Not all mystics are writers or poets. The vast majority remain and will remain anonymous. In any case, the authentic mystical experience always leaves an indelible mark: sometimes it is transmitted in written language, but many other times it is embodied in existential language, that is, it finds its home in the transformation suffered and lived by the subject himself who undergoes the aforementioned “revelation”. Although the congress focuses mainly on the written language, I would like, even if only in passing, to mention that other language, which is the way of life of the person.

As a result of a mystical experience, a special knowledge is forged in the person that, even when it is not possible for the person to express the knowledge in concepts, the person himself is endowed with a different and deeper understanding. On the other hand, a capacity to explain that knowledge emerges through images, parables, metaphors, and life itself. The most important thing for the mystic is that this “knowledge” is not reduced to the cognitive dimension. It is better, rather, for this knowledge to permeate all existence with meaning and value. Perhaps here we begin to discover, not only the “rationality” of mystical knowledge, but the specificity of that knowledge which is intimately linked to existence, and in turn becomes language. I would even dare to say that “mystical knowledge” finds its peculiar status here. It is fruitful, that is, it has a practical and transforming dimension to it that changes man and his way of living and placing himself in the world. This is the great difference of mystical knowledge compared to other ways of knowing that generally do not affect the life of the person in such an obvious and convincing way. Language and life merge in the mystic.

For this reason, while beliefs can remain in the area which is simply ideological, formal, and legal, the authentic mystical experience can be verified through language, the change of life, and the fruits that are realized in the person. I will briefly present on both aspects mentioned in the title of my presentation.

Levels of mystical experience and its relationship with language

When we talk about the topic of mysticism and language, at bottom we are presupposing three different levels of an experienced process that needs to be understood and made known. It is what we would call, in a synthetic way:

1. The mystical experience as such, suffered or experienced by the subject.
2. The process of understanding-integration of that experience.
3. The communication or transmission of that experience.

Certainly, talking about levels does not mean talking about stages. It refers rather to the perspectives that occur within the existential process, which can therefore occur in another order, or simply be integrated.

Saint Teresa of Jesus, to cite a representative example, echoes that these three levels do not necessarily occur in all people:

For it is one favour that the Lord should grant this favour; but quite another to understand what favour and what grace it is; and still another to be able to describe and explain it. And although only the first of these favours seems necessary for the soul to be able to proceed without confusion and fear and to walk in the way of the Lord with the greater courage, trampling underfoot all the things of the world, it is a great benefit and favour (St. Teresa 1991, 100).¹

The first level refers to the experience itself lived by the subject, which, according to various factors, can have a greater or lesser impact on the person: it is not only the appearance or mystical grace received as a gift, but the very fact that he who receives this grace is a subject, with his own psychology, with his own characteristic emotionality, living within a cultural and religious background that offers him the necessary elements in order to understand something of what that experience is or implies as such. Although the most logical, in the first moment it is presented as something unexpected, as something sudden that exceeds the capacity of the subject at all levels: the person is overwhelmed.

When that experience stops being a simple circumstantial experience and can be integrated, the person undergoes and experiences a true change and transformation. It is what we could call “mystical knowledge”, that is, a wisdom of life that configures the way of being, of positioning oneself in life and of acting. It becomes something that emerges as a natural development of that experience of the Mystery which accompanies the life of the mystic.

1 “Porque una merced es dar el Señor la merced, y otra es entender qué merced es y qué gracia, otra es saber decirla y dar a entender cómo es. Y aunque no parece es menester más de la primera, para no andar el alma confusa y medrosa e ir con más ánimo por el camino del Señor llevando debajo de los pies todas las cosas del mundo, es gran provecho entenderlo y merced” (Teresa de Jesús 1997, 141).

The transformation occurs to the extent to which the subject wakes up to the Mystery that accompanies him, and that is illuminating the way of understanding himself and life. It is a step onward from the experience itself to the consciousness of the experience on the part of the subject. This is where everything acquires a value or a meaning, although it may never come to a true understanding of what is received. There is also a process of assimilation and integration. Understanding the experience is fundamental because out from it this experience is integrated and produces, passively and actively, a transformation in the subject.

At this level, language has great importance. Its importance is not so much in its creative value, but in its value as an instrument that can illuminate one's own experience. Comprehension is an act of human understanding that, through categories, concepts, symbolisms, etc. seeks to give name what has been lived.

Language here serves not so much as a conceptual tool, but as a tool that leads the person on an experiential path which can illuminate, circumscribe, or even clarify what has happened in the subject. In this sense, the cultural and religious principles that, in one way or another, have shaped the subject's mind, play an important role and serve to position themselves firmly in front of their own subjective experience. In other words, language here is not perceived so much in its limited category of expression, as it is in its power of illumination and self-understanding.

The third level, that is, the level wherein mystics write down something of their mystical experience, is yet a further step. Language appears here as an activity that goes far beyond the descriptive and moves into the field of transmission and communicative creativity. Language becomes a necessary, although limited, way of capturing and communicating the ineffable of the Mystery. The ineffability of the experience runs into, in every moment, the difficulty that comes with conceptualizing something that overcomes all reductionism.

Not surprisingly, ineffability is one of the main characteristics of a true mystical experience and is the base of any human experience of transcendence. Mystical experience is so great, so deep, so huge, that the word must recreate itself to be able to transmit at least a breath of that happened Mystery. It is the paradox of mystical language that it needs word and silence at the same time. It is the "silent music" ["*música callada*"] of John of the Cross or the "murmuring solitude" ["*soledad sonora*"] (St. John of the Cross 2000, 11).²

That background, the experiential, which is truly important for the mystic, thus becomes a constant challenge. This is a challenge that inspires language, creativity and an opening up to the impossible. It is then not surprising that there is a great preference for poetry, images, metaphors, symbols, and allegories. The mystic feels more comfortable within these linguistic spaces, not because it is more a simple aesthetic construction, but because of the emphasis on the experiential ("manifests

2 Cf. *Cántico espiritual* in Juan de la Cruz 1982, 913–1154.

the same abundance and strength in the words it uses”³; 7). Symbols have a wider capacity to communicate in comparison to the closed concept: it is a creative perspective, but also a projection for its reading. And thus, for example, John of the Cross suggests that the written verses should be read with abundance of love: “it is better to leave the outpourings of love in their own fullness, that everyone may apply them according to the measure of his spirit and power”⁴ (7).

In the Christian mystical tradition, this could be seen as favored and increased by the vision of the mystery of God. It is a common denominator of Christian mystics to resort to the so-called “negative theology” as a way of overcoming the limitation of concepts and language: to talk about God saying what is not God, because in the light of the experience of the Mystic, God cannot lock himself in an experience, he is always much more. He is much more than any word can describe because words refer us to concepts, judgments, descriptions, and limitations and in the Mystery, in God, there is no limit.

This places us in front of an important challenge in the reading and interpretation of the mystics, since they do not want to transmit dogmas or concepts, but rather to open an experiential panorama to the Mystery. The Mystic generally writes as a believer, as a man or woman who has been surprised by the experience of God. They do not write as theologians or as philosophers, although they sometimes do resort to that language, but inviting us to transcend language itself, to open ourselves to experience. This is possibly the most difficult moment in reading mystical texts. One tends to conceptualize and thus reduce the mystics vision and misread his perception and message.

This happens when they have tried to read some texts of the mystics from simply philosophical or theological categories, or when they have wanted to carry concepts more typical of other religious and cultural views to mystics from other cultures and/or times. The determining factor of mystical language is the ineffable experience that they hide, rather than making it transparent.

The aid to this is another form of comprehension of symbolic language that is already present in an “official” way. This form dates back to the fourth century in the Christian context, but was already inherent in biblical language: and it is what Dionysius the Areopagite called “symbolic theology” (cf. Dionisio el Areopagita 2019), that is, speaking of God, of the Mystery through symbols and images. This mode is more capable of transmitting or suggesting the truth of God than dogmatic concepts. That is why he himself places it as the highest level of theology, but which requires a readiness to read it in the same dynamic.

This is something like what the Church Fathers used to do in relation to the sacred books. They claimed a deeper level of reading, the anagogic and/or spiritual understanding that seeks its transcendent meaning beyond the concept. This reading

3 “en alguna manera esa misma abundancia e ímpetu lleva en su decir” (914).

4 “es mejor dejarlos en su anchura, para que cada uno de ellos se aproveche según su modo y caudal de espíritu” (914).

attitude, for example, is the one that Origen asks of the readers of the mystical book par excellence, *the Song of Songs*:

But it behooves us primarily to understand that, just as in childhood we are not affected by the passion of love, so also to those who are at the stage of infancy and childhood in their interior life – to those, that is to say, who are being nourished with milk in Christ, not with strong meat, and are only beginning to desire the rational milk without guile – it is not given to grasp the meaning of these sayings. For in the words of the Song of Songs there is that food, of which the Apostle says that strong meat is for the perfect; and that food calls for hearers who by ability have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil (Origen 1956, 22).⁵

Here, certainly, Origen not only speaks to us about the meaning of language and its symbolism, but about the need for a particular disposition on the part of the reader to be able to enter into the true meaning of the text without being trapped by the immediate semantics of language. The mystic always goes beyond the apparent.

Mystical knowledge – an anthropological language

In the previous section we spoke of the levels within the mystical process. We mentioned that the level of understanding is not simply understanding a conceptual reality, but is actually a knowledge which integrates and illuminates the life of the subject him or herself. It is here where the life of the mystic is configured in the language in a different way of communicating that is reflected in the way of living itself. This is in turn shaped from the consciousness and inner transformation that is forging and qualifying the mystic, because of his mystical experience.

At this point, a very broad topic opens to what we cannot go into deeply, but which I would like to tease out briefly as an outline which will help us to understand better the vital background of language. After all, the language of the mystic is not only an expression or embodiment of what is experienced, but also what he believes and what he lives.

We know that mystical knowledge is cannot be reduced to knowledge of the mystery of God. It passes through man's capacity of knowledge in his deepest interiority, in his dignity, in the sense of his own life and existence. Neither science nor speculative reason have been able to go so deep in the understanding of human interiority. And no language but the poetic and symbolic language is so capable of illuminating that "hidden mystery" which is, nevertheless, inherent to the human being.⁶

5 Cf. Origenes 1986, 2–4.

6 It is something that can be easily verified when we approach the great classics of Christian mysticism, where the autobiographical dimension and the vitally-experienced transformation, refer to underline the

The same subconscious, which in a huge way remains a mysterious intrigue for psychologists, finds solutions and positive answers in the meticulous knowledge that many mystics manifest in the psychological and spiritual mechanisms of the human being. The Desert Fathers, as spiritual parents and guides, the Spanish mystics, who deepen the Augustinian intuition and reveal a hidden and wonderful universe, give proof of this.

It is not the knowledge that closes itself to the ineffable of the mystery, but something that opens itself to the concrete and that affects the whole human being. Survival mechanisms in the face of any situation, against which even the most humanly mature or most psychologically perfect person is not capable of resisting and strengthening. An example of this resilience can be found in mystics like John of the Cross, capable of not collapsing after 9 months of confinement, or the case of Edith Stein who, even in the Nazi death camp, finds herself “sustained internally”⁷.

But this knowledge is not simply theoretical. It ends up establishing the capacity to know oneself, to accept oneself, and even more- to love oneself. Wisdom, which places man in front of himself and in front of others in the same relational and knowledge, is key. Saint Augustine already pointed out that an encounter with Wisdom forced him to find himself within himself. Saint Teresa of Jesus said that “self-knowledge [...] is the bread which must be eaten with food of every kind”⁸ (1991, 84), and that without this food one cannot sustain oneself on the spiritual-mystical path of the encounter with God. John of the Cross not only affirms that “realizing” [“el caer en la cuenta”]⁹ is the beginning of all wisdom, but also traces the whole path that man has to cross, wherein he traverses the hidden folds of his soul in order to forge in himself a true and authentic wisdom of life. Edith Stein moves in the same vein of thought. She affirms that “whoever seeks the truth is seeking God” looks especially at the horizon of the truth of what the human being is in his interiority. The mystery of God is resolved only in the mystery of man, and vice versa. It is the only way. (The degree of self-knowledge is what makes us position ourselves in front of ourselves, in front of the world, in front of others and in front of God.)

If science and the comprehension of physical and chemical mechanisms emerge from the contemplation of nature, the science and wisdom that help man to be a man and to place himself as such in front of the others emerge from the contemplation of the inner being. It is objectivity that arises from the contemplation of life, and from the abstraction-systematization of it.

In fact, many mystics have made this effort to reveal, write and systematize, at least in part, the results of this “inner knowledge” of the human being because of their own experience and the experience that others have shared with them. Although it

importance of issues such as self-knowledge. Paradigmatic examples are the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine or *The Interior Castle or the Mansions* of Saint Teresa of Jesus.

7 Edith Stein 2002, 1411.

8 “conocimiento de sí es el pan con que se han de comer todos los manjares” (Teresa de Jesús 1997, 107).

9 Cf. Juan de la Cruz 1982, 923.

is true that in fact we do not have – on the part of mystics – huge systematic studies about human interiority, it is not for lack of knowledge or interest on their part. It is rather because the mystics have not been interested as much in the concept or in the organic systematization, as they have in enhancing life in themselves and in the others, in facilitating the paths, the comprehension and especially the life. Now it is already a task for students of mysticism to systematize, understand, and give “reason” to the results that emerge from the experiences of mystics. In this way we can access, perhaps more systematically, the results they reached through life and experience.

In this area of experiential wisdom that reveals a real, observable and verifiable knowledge of what man is from inside, it could be said that the mystical experience has effective instruments for a possible transformation of society. This is because mystical knowledge contemplates the Mystery of God and is closely linked to authentically human knowledge, and therefore can help man transform his existence, filling it with meaning and dignity.

For this reason, it would turn out to be a universe unknown for us to know the intimate life of the soul without the revelation that the language and “experience of the mystics” conceal. Even in the field of self-knowledge itself, the person who wants to reach the deepest center of his being and of his freedom, must necessarily open himself to the experience of God. In this regard, the reflection that Edith carries out in many of her anthropological works confirms it. This text by Edith is enough to verify this statement:

But it is not possible to offer a precise picture of the soul – not even in a superficial and deficient way – without talking about what makes up its intimate life. For this, the fundamental experiences on which we must base ourselves are the testimonies of the great mystics of the life of prayer. And in such a quality, the “Interior Castle” is insuperable: either because of the richness of the Author’s inner experience, who has reached, when she writes it, the highest degree of mystical life; or because of her extraordinary ability to express her inner experiences by intelligible terms, to make the ineffable clear and evident, and leave it marked with the stamp of the highest veracity; or by the force that makes understand her inner connection and presents the whole in a finished work of art (“El castillo interior”; Stein 2007, 1112–1113).

It is not a knowledge that is imposed on others, but a knowledge that wants to fill all knowledge with meaning and dynamism. This is because it lays the foundations for a dignified life, a life full of value and committed to the existence of the human being and the world.

And when this knowledge is accompanied by language, then we have a masterpiece of human genius, which opens us to the mystery, respecting its true nature. It makes us like it and discover it. In mysticism, language and anthropology are a simple expression of wisdom.¹⁰

10 This text was translated by Monika Brezováková.

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THE INTENTIONALITY OF THE IMAGINATION IN ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA

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ABSTRACT

This paper pretends to make a brief incursion into the teachings of Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) about the imagination throughout her four main writings: *The Life*, *The Way of Perfection*, *The Interior Castle* and *The Book of the Foundations*. Firstly, it offers a terminological clarification. Secondly, it presents the Teresian semantics of the terms.

KEYWORDS

Imagination. Thoughts. *The Life*. *The Way of Perfection*. *The Interior Castle*. *The Book of the Foundations*.

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After the multiple analyses of the innerworkings of mystic authors, nobody doubts that these authors require symbolic language to express their transcendent experience. This language is understood to be a result of the human imagination, naturally not excluding the possibility of the divine inspiration. Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), the mystic writer par excellence, does not only utilize this human ability to explain to others the ineffable realities, but also, as a pedagogue and teacher of prayer, she talks about the imagination in her writings. This contribution efforts at making a brief incursion into the Teresian teachings regarding the imagination. Firstly, it offers a terminological clarification. Secondly, it presents the Teresian semantics of the terms.

Terminological clarification

Teresa utilizes various terms to express the reality of *imagination*. The synonym which appears most frequently in Teresian writings, apart from *imagination* itself, is the word *thought* or *thoughts*. It is convenient to bear in mind that “‘thoughts’ is a polysemic and sometimes ambiguous word in the Teresian writings” (Álvarez 2017). The verbs used in this sense are *imagine* and *picture*, and sometimes *look* in the sense of “look inside of oneself”. Teresa does not utilize the word *fantasy*. The expression “fantastic”¹ in *The Life* (25,3; St. Teresa 1991) is probably a nonce word. *Understanding* is another word which Teresa applies to talk about the imagination. In this case, the word *understanding* is used in ambiguous way as she reveals in *The Interior Castle*:

I have sometimes been terribly oppressed by this turmoil of thoughts and it is only just over four years ago that I came to understand by experience that thought (or, to put it more clearly, imagination) is not the same thing as understanding. I asked a learned man about this and he said I was right, which gave me no small satisfaction. For, as the understanding is one of the faculties of the soul, I found it very hard to see why it was sometimes so timid² (*Interior Castle* 4,1,8; St. Teresa 2014).

This discovery of Teresa reveals two facts. First, it shows Teresa as a reflective person who examines her psyche and makes out the discovery from her own experience (even if she consults its veracity afterwards). That means that Teresa is not only all-heart, an impassioned woman. The intellectual and emotional aspects are well-balanced in her. In the second place, it makes us see that the Teresian terminology of *imagination-thoughts-understanding* in her first two books (*The Life* and *The Way of Perfection*) is not settled. We should have this in mind when we approach towards it. This Teresian confession also urges to clear up the Teresian semantics of *imagination-thoughts* because it is seen here in a negative way.

1 “cosa [...] fantaseada”

2 “Yo he andado en esto de esta barahúnda del pensamiento bien apretada algunas veces, y habrá poco más de cuatro años que vine a entender por experiencia que el pensamiento (o imaginación, porque mejor se entienda) no es el entendimiento, y preguntélo a un letrado y díjome que era así, que no fue para mí poco contento. Porque, como el entendimiento es una de las potencias del alma, hacíaseme recia cosa estar tan tortolito a veces...”

Utility of imagination for the prayer

We start the semantic explanation leaving aside the word of *understanding* as a faculty of the soul, because if we find it in the mentioned Teresian writings in the sense of *imagination*, we already know that it is an error of the saint.

The Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy attributes four meanings to the Spanish word *imaginación*. Firstly, it is “the faculty of the soul that represents images of the things which are real or ideal”. Secondly, it is “a false apprehension or opinion about something that does not really exist or has no foundation”. Thirdly, it is “the image created by fantasy” and finally “facility to create new ideas, projects, etc.” (*Real Academia Española* 2014).

As far as Teresa is concerned, she appreciates positively the imagination as the ability of the soul. She acknowledges its utility mainly for the meditative prayer and that it can even compensate the reasoning incapacity in certain persons, as it was in her case in a specific way: “My method of prayer was this. As I could not reason with my mind, I would try to make pictures of Christ inwardly”³ (*Life* 9,4). It is a kind of prayer dramatization. Teresa shows that she has abundant experiences using this method in various occasions: whether it is the dramatization of the Gethsemane (*Life* 9,4), or that of Mary Magdalene at the feet of Jesus (*Way of Perfection* 34,6; St. Teresa 2019). She also recommends it to her readers:

If you are happy, look upon your risen Lord, and the very thought of how He rose from the sepulchre will gladden you. [...] If you are suffering trials, or are sad, look upon Him on His way to the Garden. [...] Or look upon Him bending under the weight of the Cross and not even allowed to take breath: He will look upon you with His lovely and compassionate eyes, full of tears, and in comforting your grief will forget His own because you are bearing Him company in order to comfort Him and turning your head to look upon Him. “O Lord of the world, my true Spouse!” you may say to Him, if seeing Him in such a plight has filled your heart with such tenderness that you not only desire to look upon Him but love to speak to Him, not using forms of prayer, but words issuing from the compassion of your heart, which means so much to Him⁴ (*Way of Perfection* 26,4–6).

3 “Tenía este modo de oración: que como no podía discurrir con el entendimiento, procuraba representar a Cristo dentro de mí, y hallábamos mejor...”

4 “Si estáis alegre, miradle resucitado; que sólo imaginar cómo salió del sepulcro os alegrará. [...] Si estáis con trabajos o triste, miradle camino del huerto: [...] O miradle cargado con la cruz, que aun no le dejaban hartar de huelgo. Miraros ha El con unos ojos tan hermosos y piadosos, llenos de lágrimas, y olvidará sus dolores por consolar los vuestros, sólo porque os vayáis vos con El a consolar y volváis la cabeza a mirarle. ¡Oh Señor del mundo, verdadero Esposo mío! –le podéis vos decir, si se os ha enternecido el corazón de verle tal, que no sólo queráis mirarle, sino que os holguéis de hablar con El, no oraciones compuestas, sino de la pena de vuestro corazón, que las tiene El en muy mucho–...”

It is an exercise of recollection that Teresa recommends even to the beginners and adds that they help themselves with some picture of Christ because she always has been “so fond of pictures”⁵ (*Life* 9,6). This exercise has a great significance as it disposes a person to receive major gifts: “When picturing Christ [...] and sometimes even when reading, I used unexpectedly to experience a consciousness of the presence of God, of such a kind that I could not possibly doubt that He was within me or that I was wholly engulfed in Him”⁶ (*Life* 10,1). The representation prepares the path for the God’s presence. Teresa counts this experience at the beginning of the supernatural favors that she received from God.

We only observe that to look for God and find him within oneself is not a typical invention of Teresa. We can already find it in *The Confessions* of Saint Augustine, one of the spiritual sources of Teresa. Her novel contribution is the Christological perspective of this exercise: “I had so little ability for picturing things in my mind that if I did not actually see a thing I could not use my imagination, as other people do, who can make pictures to themselves and so become recollected. Of Christ as Man I could only think”⁷ (*Life* 9,6).

Utility of imagination to express the supernatural

The imagination participates in some way in the three mystic favors – *experience-understanding-expression* – of the mystic elocutive process which Teresa talks about in her autobiography: “For it is one favor that the Lord should grant this favor; but quite another to understand what favor and what grace it is; and still another to be able to describe and explain it”⁸ (*Life* 17,5). Being the imagination the human collaborator of the divine grace, it is responsible for the rich Teresian symbology, for the figurative language of Teresa.

We make a terminological parenthesis: Teresa never talks about a *symbol*, *symbolize*, neither about *allegory*, *allegorize*, even if she knows these terms from other books. She utilizes the simple words of *comparison* or *simile* and *compare*.

The great Teresian specialist Tomás Álvarez observes that the comparisons of Teresa “culminate the effort of verbalization of the religious experience and join the system of Teresian teachings in the narrations of the experience as well as in the

5 “tan amiga de imágenes”

6 “...acaeciame en esta representación que hacía de ponerme cabe Cristo, que he dicho, y aun algunas veces leyendo, venirme a deshora un sentimiento de la presencia de Dios que en ninguna manera podía dudar que estaba dentro de mí o yo toda engolfada en El.”

7 “Tenía tan poca habilidad para con el entendimiento representar cosas, que si no era lo que veía, no me aprovechaba nada de mi imaginación, como hacen otras personas que pueden hacer representaciones adonde se recogen. Yo sólo podía pensar en Cristo como hombre.”

8 “Porque una merced es dar el Señor la merced, y otra es entender qué merced es y qué gracia, otra es saber decirla y dar a entender cómo es.”

doctrinal expositions” (Álvarez 2017). As far as Teresa is concerned, she is always glad when she achieves to explain her mystic favors for the benefit of the souls and God’s glory.

Nevertheless, even though we can highly praise Teresian symbology, Teresa often seemingly gets frustrated by her similes, which she calls rough, such as for example in the Fifth Mansions: “I am only making a rough comparison, but I can find no other which will better explain what I am trying to say than the Sacrament of Matrimony”⁹ (*Interior Castle* 5,4,3) or further on in the Sixth Mansions: “These are very unskillful comparisons to represent so precious a thing, but I am not clever enough to think out any more”¹⁰ (*Interior Castle* 6,6,13). Sometimes she even laughs at her own inventions: “These comparisons make me smile and I do not like them at all, but I know no others”¹¹ (*Interior Castle* 7,2,11). Perhaps, with this fact, she wants to advise us to not entertain ourselves too much with the glittering surface, the lovely and original thought that her comparisons may result, but we should go to its profound sense which touches the reality of the friendship, of the intimacy with God, which anyone, just like Teresa, can and is indeed called to cultivate.

Imagination as an obstacle for the prayer

On her trajectory of the life of prayer Teresa struggles with various difficulties: the fact that she does not have a teacher to guide her, her reasoning inability to meditate continuously, the incoherence between her prayer and her life (because the prayer and the life are mutually conditioned) and her imagination. Here the *imagination-thoughts* are equal to the “infatuation of the thoughts”, to the “disorder of our psychology”, to the distraction as an “involuntary diversion of the mind” (Álvarez 2017). It is during this negative experience of her imagination where the discovery of the difference between the *imagination-thoughts* and the *understanding* (which is one of the faculties of the soul, along with the will and the memory) is very comforting for Teresa and illuminating for her teaching about prayer.

According to Teresa “the distraction is due to the very structure of the psyche. A subtle interference of the imagination in the exercise of the meditative discourse or in the loving process of the will. A psychological disorder which proceeds, as she believes, ‘from the weakness which we inherit from the sin of Adam, along with many others’¹² (*Interior Castle* 4,1,11)” (Álvarez 2017).

9 “Aunque sea grosera comparación, yo no hallo otra que más pueda dar a entender lo que pretendo, que el sacramento del matrimonio.”

10 “Harto groseras comparaciones son éstas para tan preciosa causa, mas no alcanza otras comparaciones mi ingenio.”

11 “Riéndome estoy de estas comparaciones, que no me contentan, mas no sé otras.”

12 “de la miseria que nos dejó el pecado de Adán, con otras muchas”

Besides the fact that she confesses how much she suffered due to her imagination in this way: “I have sometimes been terribly oppressed by this turmoil of thoughts”¹³ (*Interior Castle* 4,1,8), she also insinuates it using great number of images to talk about it: it is “a young pigeon (flighty)”¹⁴ (*Interior Castle* 4,1,8); “the clacking old mill which, nevertheless, does not impede that we continue grounding our own flour with the will and understanding”¹⁵ (*Interior Castle* 4,1,13); it is “as those restless, importunate little moths that fly by night”¹⁶ (*Life* 17,6); “a raving lunatic”¹⁷ (*Life* 30,16). It is probably due to the last comparison that the famous definition of imagination as “the crazy woman in the house”¹⁸ is attributed to Teresa. However, it is not her words.

In the allegory of the ‘castle of the soul’, which finds its literary elaboration and perfection in the Teresian masterpiece of *Interior Castle*, the *imagination-thoughts* belongs to the order of ‘reptiles’ that hang around in the moat outside the castle. There they move just like “little lizards, being very agile, can hide themselves all over the place; and, although they do no harm – especially, as I said, if we take no notice of them – they correspond to the little thoughts which proceed from the imagination and [...] they are often very troublesome”¹⁹ (*Interior Castle* 5,1,5).

Teresa gives two key recommendations for the beginners to free themselves from the distractions in prayer: detachment and recollection. In other words, she says that it is indispensable that they should be detach the heart from affections to things, persons, one selves, proper values, honor, health, life, etc. and she proposes them technique of recollection to learn to subordinate the bodily senses and imagination and direct the prayer towards the interiority, as it was explained before, according to the conviction that “we are not empty inside”, but we are inhabited by God. The best Teresian antidote or pedagogical means is to center one’s attention on a passage of the Evangelium or on the very person of Jesus. To achieve that one can use a book or a picture or the book of the nature, because this also can help to recollect oneself: “It used also to help me to look at a field, or water, or flowers. These reminded me of the Creator – I mean, they awakened me, helped me to recollect myself and thus served me as a book”²⁰ (*Life* 9,5).

13 “Yo he andado con esta barahúnda del pensamiento bien apretada algunas veces...”

14 “un tortolito (atolondrado)”

15 “una tarabilla de molino que, sin embargo, no impide seguir moliendo nuestra harina con voluntad y entendimiento”

16 “una mariposa de las noches, importuna y desasosegada”

17 “un loco furioso”

18 “la loca de la casa”

19 “lagartijillas, que como son agudas, por doquiera se meten; y aunque no hacen daño, en especial si no hacen caso de ellas [...], porque son pensamientillos que proceden de la imaginación [...] importunan muchas veces.”

20 “campo o agua, flores: en estas cosas hallaba yo memoria del Criador, digo que me despertaban y recogían y servían de libro.”

Imagination liar and unhealthy

This last section simply completes the picture of imagination in the Teresian writings; it is not a central point. In the chapters VI and VII of the *Book of the Foundations*, we can say that Teresa speaks about the imagination as “a false apprehension or opinion about something that does not really exist or has no foundation” (*Real Academia Española* 2014).

In the chapter VI she advises against possible trickery of the imagination: it can make one believe that the initial supernatural graces are great ecstasies, or it seduces one to become absorbed in the consolations which God starts giving in the prayer and to pass long hours in useless faintings while the faculties of the soul and the senses become crippled and the human nature is weakening; or it exaggerates one's good desires, for example to receive the Eucharist, which if they are not satisfied, one feels to be dying. This disorder of the imagination is precisely opposed to the distractions which we talked about before. The people who suffer this trickery of the imagination do not want to distract themselves from the object of their imaginations. That means that the main remedy will be to do just the contrary: distract themselves, make more acts of will in prayer, do not pass so much time in personal prayer, be more occupied in the activity, take measures to strengthen the proper nature if it has weakened (take off the fastings, etc.).

In the chapter VII, entirely dedicated to the problem of melancholy which we would call neurasthenia today, the imaginations are considered unhealthy, and they should not be given rise by combating the temptation by occupying the person with activities and reducing to a minimum the times of prayer.

Conclusion

The current presentation of the Teresian thinking about the imagination may result very high and unreachable on one hand or quite distressing on the other. Because of that we conclude using the words of Teresa which express the essence of prayer: “I admit that it is a favor of our Lord, to be able always to keep our thoughts fixed on Him, and to be meditating on His works, and it is good to endeavor to do this: but we must remember that all minds are not naturally fit for such an exercise: but to love, all souls are fit”²¹ (*Foundations* 5,2; St. Teresa 1853).

21 “No digo que no es merced del Señor quien siempre puede estar meditando en sus obras, y es bien que se procure; mas hase de entender que no todas las imaginaciones son hábiles de su natural para esto, mas todas las almas lo son para amar.”

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IMAGINATIVE CONTEMPLATION IN THE 14TH CENTURY ENGLISH MYSTICISM

Lucie Rathouzská

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I focus on imagination in 14th century English mysticism and modern approaches of Richard Rolle's, Walter Hilton's, and the unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing's* concept of imagination. There are several inconsistencies within contemporary approaches to the imagination, affectivity, and bodily metaphors, implying a contradictory appreciation of the three English authors. In this paper, I will discuss criticism of imagination in the mysticism of these three English authors. Moreover, some possible responses will be highlighted.

KEYWORDS

Imagination. Mysticism. 14th century. England.

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The Christian tradition is full of images and parables. English mysticism of the 14th century merits the name “imaginative”¹ not because of its authors – Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and the unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, but because the doctrine of these three authors connotes contradictory conceptions of imagination within contemporary approaches. These approaches are inconsistent in conceptions of imagination, affectivity (*affectus*), and bodily metaphors. These inconsistencies imply a contradictory appreciation of three English authors we may sum up: E. Underhill deems the mysticism of all three authors to be authentic. Imaginative and bodily

1 L. Nelstrop, in her *Christian Mysticism*, refers to English mysticism as “imaginative mysticism” because their authors use imagination and parables (Nelstrop – Maggil 1995, 183–187). Christina Van Dyke focuses on the connection between imagination and affectivity. She refers to the mysticism of Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and the *Cloud of Unknowing* as “affective mysticism” and argues that it is in opposition to “apophatic tradition”, which seeks to unite with impersonal divinity, while affective mysticism uses emotion (Van Dyke 2009, 723–737).

metaphors are the way of verbalization of their experience (Underhill 1912, 317, 401, 408). D. Knowles claims doctrines of the *Cloud's* and Hilton's are credible while Rolle's is not due to his bodily experience, i.e., metaphors of heat (*calor*), sweetness (*dulcor*), and song (*canor*) (1961, 54). W. Riehle argues that Rolle's verbalization of experience is expressive, but he believes that Rolle's credibility is not shaken (2011, 134–142). B. McGinn is not interested in value of mystical experiences like Underhill or Knowles. He claims that imagination is a common medium of spiritual growth on lower grades of mystic outcome preceding contemplation. But later, on higher stages, i.e. contemplation, imagination must be overcome (Nelstrop – Maggil 1995, 195–199). A. J. Minnis and D. Turner agree with McGinn that imagination must be overcome. Minnis argues that *Cloud* author and Hilton overcome imagination, while Rolle does not. Turner argues that Rolle's uncontrolled imagination distracts the soul with false images of God, while *Cloud* author and Hilton recognize the inauthenticity of these images (Turner 1998, 476–484).

Turner's criticism of English mysticism is based on his knowledge of Pseudo-Dionysius's negative strategy and denying of divine names in his *Mystical theology* (1998, 479). Turner describes this negative strategy of consecutive denying of the positive statement or metaphors of God in a nutshell: The first affirmation is positive ("God is light"), the second is negative ("God is not light"), and the third connects both statements in paradoxical phase ("God lights the darkness") (Turner 1995, 22). According to Turner, his strategy is supported by paradoxical metaphors of light and darkness. The purpose of these strategies is to show that God is describable only through these interchanges of claims and denials and that he is behind the language (1998, 479–480).

English mysticism, especially the Rolle's one, according to Turner, does not respect negativity in the Christian tradition and instead of that it follows "just transcending with love" or "knowing with love" with will (*affectus*), reaches God instead of intellect (*intellectus*) (1995, 190–194).

In this paper, I will discuss the criticism of imagination in the mysticism of these three English authors. moreover, some possible responses will be highlighted.

Imagination in the mysticism of Richard Rolle

We may sum up Turner's criticism of Rolle's mysticism into three main points: 1. Rolle does not overcome imagination as quality creating images of things the soul can desire. 2. Rolle's metaphors of heat, sweetness, and song show that Rolle experiences them physically with his body. 3. Rolle cannot find limits of language and follow negative strategies for describing God and his own experience. Surprisingly, on many occasions, Rolle denies imagination as part of his mystical doctrine and claims that

his mystical experience does not lie in imagination. The most eloquent example of this statement is in the prologue of the *Fire of Love*: “More have I marveled than I showed when, forsooth, I first left my heart wax warm, truly, and not in imagination, but as if were burned with sensible fire” (Rolle 1920, 11).² This spiritual fire cannot be a product of imagination because it is a fruit of true spirituality.³ Rolle would most likely agree with Turner that imagination does not belong to mysticism (Rolle 1920, 137).⁴ However, shortly after Rolle’s death, the treatise *Officium et Miracula* averted any criticism for using imagination. The *Officium* argues that imagination harms the spiritual growth of the soul (Perry 1996, 17).⁵ Regardless of *Officium*’s defense of Rolle’s teaching, it seems reasonable to believe that Rolle did not approach unproblematically to the imagination.

Limits of language and refusing of imagination and sensual experience

A. Albin deals with Rolle’s bodily metaphors in connection to the imagination in *Listening for canor in Richard’s Rolle Melos amoris*. According to him, Rolle overcomes imagination and finds the limits of language and his experience when he fails to express divine song. He proves it on this extract from *Fire of Love*:

Here I cease: for, because of the unwitting and boisterousness of mine understanding, I can not describe this cry, nor yet how mickle it is or how merry to think, feel, bear; though I might in my measure. But to you I could not tell it, nor can not, for I know not how to overcome my wits except that I will say this cry is ghostly song (Rolle 1920, 147).⁶

Albin claims that Rolle is aware of the incomparability of language and divine song. Rolle also says that he wishes to meet someone able to sing or write the song he hears. In the 44th chapter of *Melos amoris* Rolle says to his reader to be aware that spiritual experience does not lie in organs of the human body (Rolle 1971, 112).⁷ Accordingly, Rolle’s treatises include the doctrine of numbness of the body. The more the soul loves God, the less it loves the world. It is hard to believe that Rolle ceases to

2 Comp. Latin text: “Admirabar magis quam enuncio quando siquidem sentivi cor meum primitus incalescere, et vere non imaginarie, quasi sensibile igne estuare” (Rolle 1915, 145).

3 Gregory the Great says, “the word ‘fire’ (ignis) use to denotes Holy Spirit” (Gregory the Great 1986, 178): “ignis enim nomine sanctus Spiritus significari solet”.

4 “And yet some others that men trowed had been holy had this heat in imagination only.” Comp. Latin text: “...quandoquidem et alii qui non inequales illi estimabantur, per imaginacionem tantum habent ardorem” (Rolle 1915, 236).

5 “for if a mane hase any presumpcion in his fantasies and in his wirkyngge, and þare-be falles in-to vndiscrete ymagynacyone, as it ware a frensyne, and es noghte kennede ne rewlede of grace, ne comforthede by gastely strenghe, þe deulle entirs þan by fals illumynacyons, and fals sownnes and swetnes, and dyssaues a mans soule.”

6 Comp. Latin text: “Non sufficio hunc clamorem describere, nec eciam quantus sit uel quasi iocuntus cogitare, sentire, et efferre promodulo meo potui. Sed uobis enarrare nec potui nec potero, quia ipsumsensum meum superare non ignore, nisi forte dicere uelim quod clamor iste canor est” (Rolle 1915, 243).

7 Comp. Latin text: “Autem nom obtures a sono suavi et oculum aperias aspectui interno.”

care for the body to reach bodily experienced contemplation. Rolle's using of bodily metaphor must have a different meaning.

According to Albin, the real meaning of Rolle's parables is not in the expression of bodily experience, like hearing or feeling. However, he tries to express the difference between true contemplation and sensual experience (Albin 2015, 184). So, Rolle compares divine song to listening song because he wants to show the difference in their qualities.

Albin also recognizes Rolle's denying of the imagination and says that it springs from his conception of imagination itself – i.e. the faculty of soul to represent what was in senses before. Imagination is in Rolle's conception connected with sensual cognition and, because of that, unable to attend to spiritual knowledge (184–185).

We may ask, why does Rolle use imagination for communicating his experience, although he denies it in the spiritual life? Albin claims that Rolle uses images and parables to express God's nature or substance when he reaches the limits of language. When Rolle finds the limits of language, he put an imaginative image into the gap arising from the failure of language (185–186).

Imagination in the mysticism of Walter Hilton

A. Minnis argues that Hilton overcomes imagination before contemplation. Contemplation cannot lie in imagination or affectivity but in the intellect. It is overcoming imagination with the intellect (Minnis 1983, 351–364). On closer inspection, it seems that Hilton follows imagination from the beginning to the end. Unlike Minnis, I believe that Hilton never leaves imagination and its images even in contemplation. Hilton's conception of imagination is more complex than Rolle's. Imagination is the faculty of the soul able to receive knowledge. It takes part in the perception of the material world through senses and the cognition of the spiritual world through intellect. Still, imagination is limited. It recognizes God's appearance, but not his form. Hilton attributes the skill of seeing God's substance to the intellect. Nevertheless, imagination is a "maid of the intellect" participating in higher cognition.

Imagination in the primary stages of mystical way

Some interpreters believe that Hilton refuses imagination itself⁸, but this assertion is a misapprehension. Hilton only warns beginners in spiritual life against images creates

8 Anne Baldwin's conclusion from this passage from the Scale: "In like manner may it be said of other kind of feelings that are like to bodily, as bearing of detectable sounds, or feeling of comfortable heat in the body, seeing of light, or sweetness of bodily savour. There are not spiritual feelings; for spiritual feelings are felt in the powers of the soul, principally in the understanding, and in love, and little in the imagination. But these feelings are felt in the powers of body in the imagination, and therefore are not spiritual feelings" (Hilton 1908, 233). See also Baldwin 2016, 133.

in imagination. He, unlike Rolle, believes that it has a significant role in spiritual life, but in the second stage of development:

If it be so that thou see any manner of light or brightness with thy bodily eye or thy imagination, other than every seeth; or if thou hear any pleasant, wonderful sounding with thy ear, or in thy mounth any sweet sudden savour, other than what than knowest to be natural, or any heat in thy breast like fire, or any manner of delight in any part of thy body, or if spirit appear bodily to thee; [...] beware in that time [...] and wisely consider the stirrings of thy heart; [...] refuse it and ascent not thereto, for this is a sleight of the enemy (Hilton 1908, 13–14).

Hilton believes that in the first stage, imagination is connected to carnality. The first stage ends when senses cease to dominate in the soul. then it increases the importance of imagination.

Imagination in the advanced stages of mystical way

The beginner is not ready for cognition in imagination, but it becomes a major faculty of the soul in the second stage (229).⁹ Perfect knowledge could be achieved by an advanced one by perfect contemplation through the intellect (*feeling*) (229).

Knowing through imagination brings true knowledge of God, not just false images—although, granted, it is not as perfect as intellectual cognition without imagination in the third stage (237).¹⁰ In the second stage, imagination encourages affectivity (6).¹¹ The soul cannot reach desire and imaginative knowledge on his or her own, they are a given mercy.

Sometimes Hilton's statements about imagination are confusing. For example, he says that imagination is not a part of the contemplation. We must understand that Hilton ordered the imagination in the second stage, memory in the first, and intellect in the third. The soul must be prepared for the approach before it moves ahead (223).¹²

9 "For thou shalt understand that the love of God is in three manner of ways; all of which are good, but each one is better than other. The first cometh only through Faith, in the lowest degree of clarity; and it is good, for it sufficient to salvation. The second is that which a soul feeleth thought faith and imagination of Jesus in His Manhood. This love is better than the first, when the imagination is stirred by grace, for then the spiritual eye is opened in beholding of our Lord's humility. The third love that a soul feeleth thorough spiritual sight of the Godhead in the humanity, as it be seen here, is the best and most worthy, and that is perfect love. This love a soul feeleth not, until it be reformed in feeling."

10 "One is had principally in imagination, and little in understanding. This knowing is in chosen souls beginning and profiting in grace, who know God, and love Him humanly (not spiritually) with human affections, and with a corporal image of His Humanity, as I have spoken before."

11 "The second part of Contemplation lieth principally in affection, without spiritual light in the understanding or sight of spiritual things."

12 "These spiritual feelings, whatsoever they stand in compunction or devotion, or in spiritual imagination, are not the feeling which a soul shall have and feel in the grace of Contemplation. I say not but they are true and graciously given of God. But these souls that feel such are not yet reformed in feeling, nor have as yet the gift of perfection nor the spiritual burning love of Jesus."

Although the imaginative way of knowledge is good, better is knowledge in the intellect: “But though that this be true that His love in imagination is good; nevertheless a soul should desire to have spiritual love in understanding of the Godhead” (232). Hilton distinguishes seeing God’s appearance and his form. God’s form is not knowable in the second stage through imagination (35).¹³ There is a moment when imagination displays an insufficient way of cognition (231).¹⁴ Then succeeds the intellect and brings the soul to the perfect contemplation. Through the intellect, the soul sees God as an unchangeable being: “he seeth Him that He is an unchangeable being” (238). Nevertheless, it seems that Hilton does not refuse the imagination even in perfect contemplation:

This knowing is good, and is likened to milk, by which they are tenderly nourished as children until they be able to come to the Father’s table and take from His hand substantial bread. Another knowing is principally felt in the understanding, and little in imagination, for the understanding is the lady, and the imagination is the maid, serving the understanding when need is. This knowing is solid tread meet for perfect soul and is reforming in feeling (237).

Imagination is a “maid of the intellect when needs it”, so too, probably, even in the highest level of knowledge.

“Overcoming imagination” in the mysticism of Walter Hilton

According to J. P. H. Clark, Hilton does not overcome imagination, and what seems to be overcoming imagination and its images is a mere abandonment of an image of sin. Even his metaphors of light and darkness have no apophatic meaning (Clark 1977, 98). Hilton’s metaphors of light and darkness are self-evident or axiomatic, not paradoxical, or contradictory. The soul is “in the darkness” (in sin) or “on the light” (without sin) but not “light in the darkness”, which is a paradoxical statement.

Hilton is aware of the false images created by imagination which serve to distract the soul. Nevertheless, imagination has a significant role in the spiritual life and it too participates in acquiring the knowledge of God, even from its ancillary role of being “a maid”. Hilton is also aware of the limits of imagination when he excludes it from seeing God’s form or substance (241).¹⁵

13 “Aspiring upward to Jesus Christ, whom yet thou canst never see bodily as He in His Godhead, nor frame any image or likeness of Him in thy imagination; but thou mayest, though devout and continual beholding of the humility of His precious humanity, feel the goodness and the grace of His godhead.”

14 “For our Lord showeth not Himself in the imagination as he is, nor that He is, for the soul cannot at that time for frailty of the flesh suffer it so.”

15 “Not as some manner imagine, that the opening of Heaven is as if a soul could see by imagination through the skies above Firmament, how our Lord Jesus sitteth in His Majesty, in a bodily light, as much as un hundred suns. No, it is not so; no, though he see never so light on this manner, verily he seeth not the spiritual Heaven. [...] Nevertheless, this kind of sight is tolerable in simple souls that can seek no better for Him that is invisible.”

Imagination in the *Cloud of Unknowing*

Anonym's mystical doctrine is as effective as Rolle's. God is for both authors unreachable by a reason and can only be loved:

Only see; all rational beings, angels and men, have in them, each individually, two principal active faculties, one a faculty of knowledge, and the second a faculty of love; and God, their maker, is forever beyond the reach of the first of these, the intellectual faculty; but by means of the second, the loving faculty, he can be fully grasped by each individual being... (Anonym 2001, 23)

Despite this positive transcending of love, which Turner criticized in Rolle's doctrine, he believes that anonym's doctrine belongs to negative tradition. That is because, as Turner argues, the anonym uses disciplined imagination, which is overcome in the latest stages, while Rolle's imagination was undisciplined, and he never leaves false images of God. Similarly, Clark believes that the *Cloud* author has overcome imagination. Minnis observes that *Cloud's* author uses imagination even though he denies it, that is, as he says a paradox of the *Cloud* (1983, 342). This paradox in Rolle's doctrine explained Albin as plugging the language gap, but it is unexplained in *Cloud's* doctrine.

Reason and imagination in works of the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*

Imagination in the *Cloud* is related to the role of reason. Reason cannot reach or know God, but it has a significant role in spiritual life. The author says that the nature of reason is good, but its utility depends on the right use of this faculty (Anonym 2001, 30). Even so, T. Ch. Burke argues that in the *Cloud's* doctrine there is no place for reason (Burke 1997, 216–220). It seemingly confirms the *Epistle of Privy Counselling*, where reason surrenders to contemplation (Anonym 2001, 116). Imagination submits images to the soul and their truthfulness is examined by the reason. It is a faculty that distinguishes good from evil or spiritual from sensual (Burke 1997, 120). It is a distinguishing faculty of the soul (Anonym 2001, 90). Further, the anonymous author specifies how the reason works with spiritual images.

The author clarifies repeatedly that the art of correct interpretation of spiritual metaphors is a key to spiritual development. That is to interpret the metaphors in their spiritual, not physical sense. The metaphors are essential for mystical advance:

Take case, therefore, that you do not understand in a bodily sense what is meant spiritually, even though it is expressed in bodily words, such as UP or DOWN, IN or OUT, BEHIND or IN FRONT, ON ONE SIDE or ON THE OTHER SIDE. For however

spiritual something may be in itself, yet if it is to be spoken about, given that speech is a bodily activity performed by the tongue, a bodily organ, it must always be spoken in bodily words. But does it follow that it must therefore be received and understood in a bodily sense? – no, not spiritually (88).

However, the author warns against false images of imagination: “the bodily and literal conceptions of those who have ingenious and fanciful minds are the cause of much error” (75). *Cloud* author never says it is needed to leave the imagination as a faculty creating images, but he insists that those images and metaphors require reasonable interpretation. R. P. Rovang claims that the *Cloud* author uses imagination in the lower stages of mystical development, but a genuine knowledge is reachable only without images that are a mere aid for beginners (1992, 133–137). Unlike Minnis or Turner, Rovang believes that the *Cloud* author leaves only particular images and understanding through imagination, not denying the imagination itself.

“Overcoming imagination” in the *Cloud of Unknowing*

According to Minnis, there are higher stages of contemplation in the darkness after the negation of all images (1983, 364). This is how the *Cloud* author uses the metaphor of darkness:

For when I say ‘darkness’ I mean an absence of knowing, in the sense that everything you do not know, or have forgotten, is dark you, because you cannot see it with your mind’s eye. And for this reason it is not called a cloud in the air but a cloud of unknowing that is between you and your God (Anonym 2001, 26).

The meaning of the metaphor of darkness is crucial but ambiguous. There is some speculation that its sense is in the unknowability of God with reason (Gicala 2007, 71–72). But, God is not in the darkness, the author does not place God directly into the cloud of unknowing or into darkness: „There is not sight of body, nor any figure in imagination, in this manner of working, but all spiritual, and of spiritual creatures” (Hilton 1908, 307). The cloud is a barrier standing between the soul and God. Also, the darkness is not experienced only in contemplation after leaving all images. It is there from the beginning to the end:

For the first time you do it, you will find only a darkness, and as it were a cloud of unknowing, you do not know what, except that you feel in your will a naked purpose towards God. Whatever you do, this darkness and this cloud are between you and your God, and hold your back from seeing him clearly by the light of understanding in your reason and from experiencing him in the sweetness of love in your feelings. And so prepare to remain in this darkness as long as you can... (Anonym 2001, 22)

Cloud refers to the inauthenticity of images of God, but the author does not seem to be leaving imagination and its images to find himself in the darkness without any images. But there are demands for leaving particular images of God in the *Cloud* and the *Epistle of Privy Counselling* (103).¹⁶ The author teaches his pupil to keep the distance from false images that can be projected into his understanding of God, and to use reason to evaluate them.

The author's warning against wrong interpretation of metaphors is a part of his teaching. He still says that "in" does not mean inside the soul, and "up" is not in heaven, because "How could a soul, which by its nature has nothing physical about it, be turned upright in a bodily sense? No, it cannot be so" (88). It is not intended to overcome the natural capacity of the soul to create images, which may be the physical understanding of metaphor the author warns us against. Therefore, I believe we will still work with images of the mind, but will need an adequate attitude supported by other faculties of the soul.

Conclusion

Based on our analysis, we may state some conclusion about imagination in English mysticism in following points:

1. Rolle refuses imagination because it is involved in sensual cognition, which is excluded from spiritual development. A. Albin claims that Rolle uses imagination when he cannot describe God within the language. So, we may conclude that there are some reasons to believe that Rolle is aware of God's inexpressibility by language.
2. Hilton's doctrine links imagination with a specific role in the second stage of the mystical way. This imaginative stage is a part of contemplation, and through imagination the soul can recognize God's appearance. Soul recognizes the God's form in the third stage through the intellect, which is the dominant power of the perfect contemplation. Hilton probably does not overcome imagination in the perfect contemplation and claims that it is a "maid of the intellect".
3. In the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the reason distinguishes spiritual concepts. Reason recognizes spiritual meanings of metaphors and sees imaginative images exalting the soul to God and inspiring affectivity of the soul toward him.

¹⁶ "And see that nothing remains in your active consciousness but a naked purpose reaching out to God, not cloaked in any specific thought of God in himself, what he is in his own nature or in any of his works, but only that he is as he is."

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DEATH AS RADICAL BORDER

ABOUT JAN ČEP'S NOVEL *THE BORDER OF A SHADOW*

Ján Gallik

ABSTRACT

The Czech Catholic writer Jan Čep (1902–1974) belonged to the group of authors who built their work on spiritual-religious motifs. Literary critic František Xaver Šalda stated in the bookmark of Čep's novel *The Border of a Shadow* (1935) that he is a “poet of death”, namely “a very special, possessing a very special, unusual view of things of life and death”. The language and imagery of his artistic work are based on philosophical-reflexive and meditative lyricism, often with a contemplative overlap. We consider the image of a double home to be one of the key images of Čep's poetics. Its development can be traced from the author's juvenile prose work to the latest texts, which are mainly essay-like. In addition to this image, however, in Čep's work, reflecting on the phenomenon of life and death also appears to be the mainstay, while it is obvious that these entities are very closely related to the image of a double home. In this context, it will be important to observe how the phenomenon of death is depicted in Čep's only novel *The Border of a Shadow*.

KEYWORDS

Jan Čep. Phenomenon of death. Catholic novel. Philosophical-reflexive and meditative lyricism.

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*Each moment of my life brings me irreversibly to my death,
which remains a frightening mystery both for believers and for non-believers.¹*

Jan Čep

1 „Každý okamžik mého života mě unáší nenávratně k mé smrti, která zůstává znepokojující záhadou jak pro věřící, tak i pro nevěřící.“

In his reflections, ancient Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca, tried to understand the relationship between man and death as a crucial element to solve the issue of life course approach. In his opinion, life is for death. This led him to a certain moral postulate residing in the need of promptly beginning to fulfil moral acts in compliance with stoic ethical principles. The substantial factor was the art of living rightly and dying rightly. According to Indian materialists “death is considered as the only and unavoidable ethical border and standard. After death, there is nothing that comes, only indefinable void; but before it, in their mind, there is full life if each single individual manages to fulfil it with their actions. Only during such a life – which we perceive and live in a straightforward way – can man have a chance to get established as a person” (Hajko 2016, 154–155). They thought it useless and senseless to look for assumptions of life in the transcendental sphere. On the other hand, Christianity², as well as other cultural-anthropological models, presents a different view: man has not only a mortal body, but also an immortal soul that goes to the otherworldly realm after death. There, its “destiny depends on the kind of life they live on earth. Those who take care of their soul live well and wisely. Those who live honestly don’t have to fear death” (Maršálek 2020, 37). Actions and sense of human existence depend on the perception of what death is and what there will be after it. In this vein, worldwide famous authors, like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, stressed the fact that good “preparation to death allows man living a full life” (36). Even current research in the field of children and youth literature began to treat this marginalized theme, because “by trying to understand the essence of death and of dying, we can not only discover the real sense of life, but also intensify our joy and happiness in each single moment of our life” (Rusňák – Bachurová 2021, 6).

Slovak thinker, essayist, and doctor, Pavol Strauss,³ is considered an extraordinary European phenomenon, a master of higher spirituality and culture, and a positive and elevating source of Christian humanist thought. He used to consider the issue of death and eternity as the crucial problem of his life and production. He was also pushed by the fact the people are no longer contemplating categories of eternity: “People are hardly thinking of death. Everybody moves it away from them, although it is the most real of realities”⁴ (Strauss 2013, 3). People tend to place death in the periphery of life, whereas “Strauss puts it in the *middle*. Whenever this surgeon starts speaking about death, he knows that it concerns the substance of life, the essence of being” (Rybák 2001, 60). Even the events related to world Coronavirus pandemic prove that these words are universally valid. Like Solzhenitsyn, Pavol Strauss also found preparation of death to be the key to fullness of life. This preparation is based on the need of “knowing valuable and great lives. To know our littleness – and

2 Religions are offering a stable and complex image of death and – at the same time – they help create the so-called cultural models with a high degree of stability (Rusňák – Bachurová 2021, 12).

3 In his study named “Straussova oslava pohanenej smrti” [Strauss’ Celebration of Disgraced Death] Július Rybák wrote: “Almost 800 years after St. Francis, a mystic man came out of our ground” (2001, 64).

4 „Málo sa myslí na smrť. Každý ju len odsúva, i keď je najreálnejšia realita.“

littleness of all people from the past and in current times. To learn to live from the visual angle of death”⁵ (Strauss 2013, 9). In his introductory study to the third volume of selected literary and philosophical works of Pavol Strauss *Rekviem za neumieranie* [Requiem for not Dying] (2009), Július Pašteka highlighted Strauss’ metaphysical orientation. Temporal human life was for him only a “temporary stopgap, whereas death is continuation of life, transformation into eternal existence; therefore double-stage duration” (Pašteka [Strauss 2009a, 5]).

Even the Czech Catholic writer, Jan Čep (1902–1974), belonged to the group of authors who based their production on spiritual-religious motifs. In the bookmark of Čep’s novel *Hranice stínu* [The Border of a Shadow], the literary critic František Xaver Šalda declared that Čep is the “poet of death” in a “very special way, with a quite peculiar and celestial view on the issue of life and death” (Šalda [Čep 1947, unpagged]). The language and the imagery of his artistic production derive from philosophical-reflexive and meditative lyricism, often with contemplative prevalence. As one of the key images of Čep’s poetics, we mention the image of the *Double Home*, as specifically analyzed in our study named “Obraz transcendentného domova v diele Jana Čepa” [The Image of Transcendent Home in the Works of Jan Čep] (see Gallik 2020). Its development can be monitored since the author’s juvenile prosaic production up to his last texts (that have notably essay character). If we try to describe Čep with the eyes of the *Geneva school*⁶ of literary criticism (also called French theme criticism – significantly influenced by phenomenology), we might state that the given image is made up of things dominating the literary motifs that the writer can use when selecting symbols, established mental schemes, and creative approaches that are strictly correlated to poetical figurativeness. To quote Gaston Bachelard, a representative of the above-mentioned school, “the image – as a work of absolute Imagination – gets its whole essence from imagination. [...] We can dedicate our reader’s life to image; image is the donor of our being. Image – as a pure creature of absolute imagination – is a phenomenon of being, one of the specific phenomena of the talking being” (Bachelard [Změlík – Komenda 2020, 29]).

Apart from the Double Home image, another main pillar of Čep’s literary production is also his reflection about the phenomenon of life and death. Both aspects are quite narrowly related to the image of the Double Home. The first home is considered as temporary accommodation for our earthly existence; the second home is analogically

5 „...poznanie cenných a veľkých životov. Poznať svoju malosť, i malosť každého človeka minulosti i súčasnosti. Naučiť sa žiť zo zorného uhla smrti.“

6 In his introductory study called “Francouzská tematická kritika v porovnání se strukturální a sémiotickou tematikou” [French Thematic Criticism Compared to Structural and Semeiotic Thematics], which is part of the book *Kapitoly z literárněvědné tematologie* [Chapters of Literary-science Thematology] (2020), Petr Komenda (editor of the above mentioned book together with Richard Změlík) states that the critical texts of *Geneva school* representatives “are not just perspicacious contemporary interpretations of selected authors, but – through their religious charge – they bind modern readers to accurate reading whose ultimate sense lies in a complex transformation of the recipient’s thought. Thematic criticism considers poetic images and artistic texts as a specific mystery; and this is also the core of our challenge” (2020, 49).

conceived as the transcendent image of our eternal home. In this context, it is important to monitor the way in which death phenomenon is viewed in Čep's *The Border of a Shadow*⁷, published for the first time in 1935. In 1996, the novel motifs inspired a film adaptation (black-and-white lyric ballade) with homonymous title. Its creators, Martin Müller (directions, screenplay), Veronika Müllerová (camera, screenplay), and Petr Michálek (actor, screenplay), tried to preserve Čep's specific poetics, but transferred actions to contemporary epoch.

Jan Čep perceived the metaphysical issue of death as one of the crucial mysteries that can significantly influence the interior life of a person. He was conscious of that even in a more specific way after the rising of the ideological concepts of the 20th century (Nazism and Communism). These ideologies tried to create a homogeneous and dehumanised man who had to forget about the mysterious dimension of his being and his desire for absoluteness. For this reason, by means of his essays and meditations during his French exile (since August 1948), Čep tried to provide moral support for those who were experiencing practices of totalitarian communist regimes in the satellite countries of the Soviet Union.

Petr Komenda and Jan Zatloukal, editors of a publication named *Jan Čep – Meditace* [Meditations] (2019), analyze Čep's view of death from the position of Christian existentialism. In their opinion, Čep was mainly interested in the personal drama of death and of dying: "In Čep, death is not considered as the defeat of life; but – on the contrary – it is its accomplishment and, in a certain sense, its fulfilment. The way we live our death gives the whole previous life its definitive form and value. Here, death is a matter of life, because life – in its fullness – focuses on the moment of death" (2019, 42). A significant analogy with the above-mentioned statements can be seen also in the reflections of Pavol Strauss, when he writes that life is

often a big illusion and death is there to put an end to it. Here you can see the real values of life. A value, a real value, is only what you cannot buy. Today's man believes that you can buy anything. Death is like a custom house. Nothing shall pass through it, except pure conscience and spiritual clarity⁸ (2013, 9).

The early and eternal law of this world is the law of delimitation, the rule of finiteness, a main sign of our humanness (Strauss 2009b, 22).

The image of death as custom house, radical border or immutable rule is pulsing in the whole of Čep's novel, *The Border of a Shadow*. Indeed, it has a decisive influence on the change of thinking of the main protagonist (Prokop Randa) and it gradually

7 The strength of Jan Čep's artistic testimony resided notably in the genres of short stories and essay. As stated by the Czech literary scientist Martin C. Putna, in the place of "Catholic novel" in "Čep's work we notice the growth of its Czech variant – the 'Catholic short story'". The self-limitation on the ground of short stories also has another meaning: Čep managed to display spiritual drama in a damped manner and to avoid the deepest depths of soul" (2012, 874).

8 "...neraz len veľká ilúzia a smrť jej urobí koniec. Tu sa ukážu pravé hodnoty života. Hodnota, pravá hodnota, je len to, čo sa nedá kúpiť. A dnešný človek si myslí, že sa dá všetko kúpiť. Ale smrť je colnica, ktorá nič okrem čistého svedomia a duchovnej prelesti neprepustí."

leads him to interior transformation and salvation. Several motif lines in the story are correlated to this image (e.g. the motif of the return to the native town of his mother, where he lived part of his childhood). After deceptions experienced in Prague, the arrival to Habřiny is linked to a certain hope; and is actually considered as a last chance to play: “I came here as a man who lost the direction on the road; and now I want to walk the ways of my childhood and find back my way”⁹ (Čep 1947, 31). Prokop perceived that rural region in strong contrast with Prague, where he lived with his mother Františka and his father Eustach Randa (a sort of ‘Don Juan’ who was never really accepted by his wife’s family). When he was a small child, Prokop Randa had already sensed that

there is somewhere a land where streams flow over clean rocks – not rusty and black like below the factory – where wind blows on green leaves and the sun illuminates pine trunks at the border of the forest; [...] He imagined it as the biblical Garden of Eden, as the land flowing with milk and honey, a shade under the trees besides a well where stars are reflected¹⁰ (27).

These ideas materialize the moment his mother brings him to her native region, because of serious illness of his grandmother. Here, Prokop becomes a witness of forgiveness and reconciliation between a sick mother and her daughter, just at the border between life and death:

As soon as his mother moved towards something dark in a corner under a cross, he recognised a human body lying on a bed under a blanket. He first thought it was a dead body, but his mother fell on her knees and placed her head just next to the head on the pillow. Suddenly, a hand arose from darkness and hugged the woman round her shoulder¹¹ (19).

He felt old wounds were not completely healed, but the process of spiritual healing took place also through the prism of prayer – and the main protagonist of the novel was in its epicentre:

His grandmother sometimes wanted him to sit on a chair close to her bed and pray along with her. Once she asked her daughter to sing a pilgrim song of the Virgin Mary of Křtiny. [...] A smile in the face of the old woman blossomed like a flower. Whilst the daughter sang the pilgrim song with an unsteady voice full of fervency, the old

9 „Přišel sem jako člověk, který ztratil směr své cesty, a teď chce vkročit do svých dětských šlépějí, aby ho vyvedly.“

10 „...kdesi jiný kraj, kde teče potok po čistém kamení – ne takový rezavý a černý jako dole pod továrnou – kde šumí vítr v zeleném listí a slunce zažehuje kmeny borovic na kraji lesa; [...]. Představoval si to jako rajskou krajinu z bible, zemi oplývající mlékem a medem, stín pod stromy vedle studny, v které se odrážejí hvězdy.“

11 „Teprve když matka udělala dva kroky k čemusi tmavému v rohu pod křížem, rozeznal na posteli lidské tělo pod pokrývkou. Myslíl nejdřív, že tam leží mrtvý, ale když matka padla na kolena a přitiskla hlavu k hlavě na podušce, pozdvihla se najednou ze tmy ruka a objala matku kolem ramenou.“

man Zavadil was sitting on a bench under the window, with his hands tight-knit on his knee¹² (20).

After his grandmother's death, Prokop remained five years in Habřiny and he considered this land as his real home. Unfortunately, World War 1 separated him from that place, and he was forced to go back to town for long time. He returned to Habřiny as an adult, led by his desire to find the direction of his lost life. He was seeking for support in the solitude of a centripetal place – to use the terminology of Gaston Bachelard¹³ – in an oneiric (dreamy) house that he perceived as a shelter, a refuge, a center. Indeed, “there is an oneiric home inside us; that is why we are always looking for the darkest corner, for the most hidden chamber of our native home” (Bachelard [Komenda – Malinová – Změlík 2013, 241]). For Prokop Randa, this place is the native house of his mother. It is a place he accepted as his own, because he spent a large part of his childhood there. This place is always drawing him in, especially because “it contains a testimony of a bygone protection” (241). Even classic psychoanalysis considered the image of the return to native land (and native home – incl. the oneiric home dynamizing the return) as a return to one's mother. Back in Habřiny, the protagonist became a teacher in the local primary school. He personally met only one still living member of his family, his ninety-year-old grandfather Jan Zavadil. After long separation, they rejoined- though the old man was on death's doorstep. The two gradually understand that “everyone arrives to death, alone. Charged with our deficits, guilt, and sins – and our whole past”¹⁴ (Strauss 2013, 12). Only “in the vicinity of death we better discover what life is”¹⁵ (12). Mortality is identified as an existential link between two people who are close to each other – as a quite substantial correlation of the dimension of human life. Finally, the author presents the death of old Zavadil, a religiously oriented man. His death is seen as a radical border between ‘here on earth’ and ‘there in heaven’¹⁶ (earthly life ↔ cessation of life, faith in otherworldly life). It is embodied in the image of the existence of the main protagonist. Even though he was sitting before the death bed of his old

12 „Babička někdy chtěla, aby si sedl na stoličku k jejímu lůžku a předříkával jí modlitby. Jednou jí musila dcera zazpívat poutní písničku k Panně Marii Křtinské. [...] V tváři stařenčině se zachvěl úsměv. Zatím co dcera zpívala nejistým hlasem poutní píseň plnou vroucnosti, seděl starý Zavadil mlčky na lavici pod oknem a ruce měl sepjaty na kolenou.“

13 *Antologie textů tartusko-moskevské sémiotické školy a francouzské tematické kritiky* [Anthology of Texts of the Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School and French Thematic Criticism] reports that the image “is perceived as something completely independent, as an atom, or – even better – as a germ; and the perceiving person lets it germinate. [...] Perception of image is not a passive act. It is not simply ‘reading’ in the classic meaning of this word, but it is ‘dreaming’ and it requires active participation” (2013, 217).

14 „...k smrti přicházda každý sám. Zaťažený svojimi nedostatkami, svojimi vinami a hriechmi, s celou svojou minulosťou.“

15 „...v blízkosti smrti poznáme lepšie život.“

16 “Even death is a piece of life, the hardest task in lifetime. Life before the curtain and beyond it. Through continuous transformation we become ourselves” (Strauss 2013, 8).

„Aj smrť je kus života, najťažšia úloha v živote. Život pred oponou a za ňou. Stálou premenou sa stávame sebou.“

grandfather, he didn't feel discomfort. He was overwhelmed by a "strange excitement, as though he was feeling the striking of the decisive hour for the old man – that it was time to take the last step forward by following the safest cardinal direction"¹⁷ (Čep 1947, 244). The final words of old Zavadil were the acknowledgement of his grandson as his legitimate heir, the continuator of the family:

You are my blood and my soul. You shall witness instead of me. I leave you all that was my temporal and eternal hope; take care of yourself and of your defunct. It shall be your pledge when you shall hesitate in the midst of amorphous time; it shall be your rampart when you shall feel too lonely and deprived. It shall be your ballast, dear boy, your burden to lift up and bring before God's face¹⁸ (244).

This is essential also for the interpretation of the image of mystic experience, incl. the perception of the death phenomenon – i.e., looking at death, which "radically transforms relationships between the dead and the survivors, transposes them to a different level, confers them a different quality" (Komenda – Zatloukal 2019, 43). Moreover, it is a revival of the tension between time of human existence and eternity, between the life of single individuals and human history, between the single person and the society. It gives way to an interior contiguity of human conscience, which is shaped by the outstroke of the individual towards other people. Probably, not by chance, the name of the main character is Prokop. Indeed, the author considered St. Procopius (co-founder and first abbot of the Sázava Benedictine monastery) as an important spiritual and Catholic patron, guardian of national legitimacy, who doesn't abandon his heritage. In his *The Border of a Shadow* Čep looks more in depth in empirical impulses and includes the dimension of family memory, by using it to refresh the "lost order of life. If the integral seizure of time is a sign of eternity, we can state that the native land (and its fibres, where destinies of individuals, families, communities, and nature are interwoven) gets consecrated and – in such a mutual connection – it also finds its fulfilment" (77).

Paraphrasing Pavol Strauss freely, borders are everywhere and in everything. They are visible (state borders, dams, physical borders with constitutional or hereditary effects) and invisible (borders of feeling and spirit). To create, to shape, means to save from the non-being (i.e. life in chaos). All things that exist are poured into the riverbed, in the borders of life – and they live. Life and borders are conditioning one another (2009b, 22). As for the theme of death as radical border, Pavol Strauss "encourages us and helps us get convinced that the 'complete fullness of all' is waiting for us where 'nothingness joins allness', where 'being joins non-being'" (Rybák 2001,

17 „...podivné vzrušení, tak jako když někdo cítí, že pro něho bije rozhodující hodina – že má vložit nohy do šlépějí, jejichž směr ukazuje v jistou světovou stranu.“

18 „Ty si moje krev a moje duše. Ty budeš vydávat svědectví místo mne. Zanechávám ti všecko, co bylo má časná i věčná naděje, nechávám ti starost o sebe i o své nebožtíky. To bude tvá záloha, až budeš váhat uprostřed beztvářého času, tvá hradba, až se budeš cítit příliš sám a obnažen. To bude také tvé závaží, milý hochu, tvé břímě, které budeš musit vzpírat, které budeš musit dovléci před tvář Boží.“

65). In his meditations, Jan Čep perceives all this as a revitalizing spiritual principle which Christian people have in their faith and in their participation in the life of Him who became man and gave us a pharmacon for all things that are constantly fading and drying out, getting attracted by death gravitation, getting closer and closer to nothingness. It remains for him a mystery of the Divine Love: why did God create free will, but then expose him to the danger of rebellion and fall. And there is also a deeper mystery: why God rescued man from his status of disinheritance and death in such a way that

He charged His own incarnated Son with human nature and human guilt, so that his crucified body would bridge the gap between man and God. The depth and horribleness of this gap are witnessed by the last cry of Christ dying on the Cross, which is an echo of man's cry, tumbling down from the height of his election – an echo of pain and desperation spreading out over long centuries of human history¹⁹ (Čep 2019, 103).

Prokop Randa represents man during his earthly pilgrimage, with his falls and rises on the road to his goal, through weakness and everyday suffering. Man was given something he can use – something to transform his weakness into strength, defeat into victory, grey emptiness of never-ending days into irradiation of silent light, desperation into hope, and disappointment into joy and love. Man received the grace, a share of eternity, the heritage of the children of God (104).

As Pavol Strauss wrote, it is not possible “to die, but only to live in a new form”²⁰ (2013, 8). Entity of death may appear as a radical border, but in Čep's novel it represents a new form of life. “It welcomes us with open arms and it is inside us, so that we can also welcome it with open arms”²¹ (12). For this reason, the transcendent experience “preserves its sense against absurdity and it is a guarantor between good and evil. Only a man of faith can take the burden of his destiny, with all bad things, pains, suffering, and death – and accept all this as something unavoidable that is part of his existence. Human history is inscribed in the broader flow of history of creation, where the whole universe is participating, incl. the Creator himself” (Komenda – Zatloukal 2019, 55). As we read in the conclusion of Čep's novel: “this was life, and this is death – it is a law no one can reject”²² (Čep 1947, 247).²³

19 „...naložil lidskou přirozenost a lidskou vinu na bedra svého vtěleného Syna, který svým tělem přibitým na kříž překlenul trhlinu zející mezi člověkem a Bohem. O hloubce a hrůze této trhliny svědčí poslední výkřik umírajícího Krista, výkřik, který byl ozvěnou výkřiku člověka, zřítivšího se z výše svého vyvolení, ozvěnou bolestí a zoufalství, které se rozléhají staletími lidských dějin.“

20 „...sa zomrieť, len v novej forme žiť.“

21 „Prijíma nás s otvoreným náručím a je na nás, aby sme ho aj my prijali s otvoreným náručím.“

22 „...byl život, a toto jest smrt – takový je zákon, který nelze odvrhnout.“

23 This text is an outcome from the grant VEGA 1/0514/19 *The Poetics of Mystical Experience and the Literary Forms of Mystagogy* and it was translated by Enzo Passerini.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE EXPRESSION OF KNOWN AND UNKNOWN



ENTHRALLED BY MYSTERY

ECKHART, HEIDEGGER AND THE POET MUJICA IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE

Silvia Julia Campana

ABSTRACT

Mysticism and poetry make up an inseparable pairing and, in these times of absence, they reveal the deep desire of man to go beyond the immediate, the existential, the superficial. The Argentine poet Hugo Mujica opens, from his poetic saying, a door towards the abyss and the desert, towards the limit of language and silence. We can glimpse in his poetry Heidegger's legacy and, together with the philosopher, the Master Eckhart is also dragged from his going to God without god. From the interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy, theology and poetry, we will approach to decipher this influence that transforms the saying of the poet-philosopher and updates his word in the desert and plunges us into the mystery of the unspeakable.

KEYWORDS

Mystical. Emptiness. Abyss. Silence. Poetic saying.

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*Between the roof and the sky / there is a void of / birds, / a nostalgia for rain. /
Between the night and / dawn / the impossible appointment of every life: /
the absence that the soul embraces.¹*

Hugo Mujica

1 "Entre el tejado y el cielo / hay un vacío de / pájaros, / una nostalgia de lluvias. / Entre la noche y / el alba / la cita imposible de cada vida: / la ausencia que el alma abraza" (Mujica 2017, 212).
Poetry translated by Pablo García and text translated by Patricia Mandel.

Mystic and poetry summon us to reflect during these times in which the individualism is part of our usual life, with its share of selfishness and isolation, on which the “other” has no place. Mystic and poetry conform an inseparable binomium, which has an impact on us particularly in these times of absence and unveil, and in a paradoxical way, the deep desire that survives in the man beyond the immediate, the existist, the shallowness. We could get closer to them, from a reflective experience, from diverse angles which will start showing us their existence. Interdisciplinary dialogue helps us meet these ends and may open up new ways to our inquiry, which will allow us an intertwining of objects and methods and, above all, will allow us to immerse ourselves in deep waters.

We have chosen for this task the meeting with one Argentine poet, Hugo Mujica,² who, from his poetic speech, opens a door towards the abyss and the desert, to the limit of the language and the silence, which arises from the serene act of listening before the loudness of the act of speaking. This is because the poet inhabits silence and from there he makes contact with the sacred. Shall we consider him a mystic poet? We could not affirm that for sure, but his words are rooted in the millenary language of the mystics. His thought is dialogic, the outcome of a life that from the restless quest was finding in enlightened routes and intertwining ways. Philosophy, theology, aesthetics, mystic, and literature meet together in his production in a unitary way. He is our center of reflection.

As from this dialogue, we may see in the poetry of Mujica the presence of Heidegger, the philosopher of the 20th century. We see him above all in the last stage of his thought, the the critique of technology, the one who considers the poets as the saviours of this world. And together with the philosopher, the presence of the theologian and medieval mystic, Master Eckhart from his going to God without god, from the *Gelassenheit*. From the interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy, theology, and poetry, we get closer to finding out such an influence as fertile ground from which there arises the words of the poet-philosopher who updates his word in the desert and which immerses us in the mystery of the ineffable.

2 He was born in Buenos Aires in 1942. He studied Fine Arts, Philosophy, Philosophical Anthropology and Theology. This range of studies is reflected in the variation of his work that encompasses both philosophy and anthropology, narrative and mysticism, and especially poetry. His major books of essays include “Kyrie Eleison” (1991); “Kénosis” (1992), “La palabra inicial” [The initial word] (1996); “Flecha en la niebla” [Arrow in the mist] (1997); “Poéticas del vacío” [Poetics of the void] (2009). His poetic work, published in various languages, has been collected in *Poesía completa. 1983–2004* [Complete Poetry. 1983–2004] (2005); *Lo nascente. Pensando el acto creador* [The nascent. Thinking about the creative act] (2007); *Y siempre después el viento* [And always after the wind] (2011). Last appearance *Al alba los pájaros* [At dawn the birds] (2017) is a new poetic anthology that covers 1983–2016. We have dedicated the latest research work in relation to language to Mujica mysticism and poetry: “A borderline saying for desert times: an interdisciplinary reflection from the poetics of Hugo Mujica” (2010). UCA Digital Library. Available at: <http://bibliotecadigital.uca.edu.ar/repositorio/ponencias/say-border-for-times-desert.pdf>; “The poetic event as the unveiling of the truth: Hugo Mujica, Heidegger and Ricoeur” (2012). In *Taller de Letras*, NE2: 119–127; “Naming the absence. Desire of God and mystical language in the poetics of Hugo Mujica” (2013). *Teoliteraria*, vol. 3, n. 5. Available at: <http://www.teoliteraria.com/tlj/index.php/tlt/article/view/86>; “Sparkles at night. Mystical poetry and encounter in times of absence” (2015). *Teoliteraria*, vol. V, n. 10.

Master Eckhart: the footprint of the desert

*You have to go inside / in the desert / to leave the mirages behind; //
we have to go back / to get drunk at the source: / we must return to thirst.³*

Hugo Mujica

Today the influence of the Rhenishm mystic in the thought of Martin Heidegger is not debatable. Above all, one of its main exponents are Master Eckhart and Angelus Silesius. “The reason of that would lie on the facti that the professor from Frieburg foundin Eckhart s peculiar way of thinking and expressing himself an alternative to the objectivist language [...] imposed from the old times in the metaphysics field and that [he] pretended to overcome” (Filippi 2011, 1). From this affirmation, we clearly see that the matter of language constitutes one of the greatest novelties of the Dominican master, which arises as the outcome of a profound experience of God who looks for new ways of conveying itself.

As related to our work, it is that this novelty of the language together with “detachment” the one that constitutes the centers of influence in the philosopher. The paradoxical language of Master Eckhart is an inexhaustible source, which also shows the lack of himself to say the mystery in which we are involved. The academic papers were written in Latin, but the sermons and treaties with which Eckhart relates in the formation of religious youngsters, are written in Low German; “we could have said, [then], that the Latin writings contain the conceptual-metaphysical foundation which supports the living mystic expressed in the vernacular language” (2). The center of interest of this doctrine is the mystic union of the soul with God, all his thought and reflection come to her constantly. The Neoplatonism influence makes him assert that God is beyond the Being for God is understanding and to-understand and not entity and being (3). And though he affirms that it is to the things to be created, it is surprising when paradoxically it tells us that the things are the pure nothing, as their existence depends on the presence of God. “What arises from these apparent paradoxes is that Eckhart states the relationship between God and the creatures dialectically, in such a way that if God is, the creatures are not, and to the contrary if the creatures are, God not” (4).

To think of creatures’ dependence on God as creator would be to think of God from his effects. From there the affirmation that the essence of God lies in the understanding, as the being says, through relationship to the order of the creation and as long as it is a such it is after divine understanding. This is the bottom of God (*Grund*), “where He himself shows as *Ab-Grund*, abyss, bottomless bottom; it is the

3 “Hay que adentrarse / en el desierto / para dejar atrás los espejismos; // hay que volver / a embriagarnos en la fuente: / hay que regresar a la sed” (Mujica 2011, 18).

unnamed desert of deity, the perfect unity where all the differences disappear. [...] It is not God (*Gott*) related to creatures, but to the Deity (*Gotttheit*): God considered in himself” (5). There is a double denial of the entity, for creatures are nothing on their own because of their dependence and God is nothing because he is beyond being something. Abyss background where the One is “without a reason (without why)”, “central expression in the Eckhartian mystic vocabulary which indicates the lack of object in the action” (Vega 2011, 35). In the same sense, to go in search of the assistance of God, takes us apart of his reality, because we transform him, we manipulate him according to our necessity. And the Master says beautifully:

If someone imagines, truly, that through interiority, the devotion, and the special grace he will receive more of God that together to the home or the barn, then you don't do anything different from what you would do if you forgot God and you covered his head with a blanket and you placed Him under a bench. Because for those who search for God according to a certain way take the way and forget God, who is hidden in the way. However, if someone searches for God without a way, he understands Him just the way He is Himself; and those lives with the Son and He is the life itself. Who during one thousand years will ask the life: “Why do you live?” If it could answer, it would not say anything but, “I live because I live”. This is way because the life lives in its own depths and arises from itself; this is a reason why it lives without a why, because it lives of itself (Eckhart [Vega, 2011, 36]).

God dwells in the depths of the soul, the one which must empty itself of its selfishness, of everything that is not God. Abyss and desert are the way to the Divinity, united to the Trinitary love. Poverty and spiritual nudity are the places to meet God and the soul, the place which is no-place. It is the way of the dispossession, of emptying. The soul must go along all the necessary deaths, following the footprints of the desert, footprints that are traces of God, footprints that, in abandonment, lead at night to the groundless abyss of divinity. The man “only reaches properly to God when he abandons his attachment to the creatures, and even to himself. *Gelassenheit*, *Abgeschiedenheit*, detachment, abandonment, separation” (Filippi 2011, 5), that has nothing to do with being imperturbable; with the ataraxia of the Greeks, but it is a dynamic concept “where passion and action are constantly being transformed” (Vega 2011, 53). This is not isolation or the contempt for the surrounding things or for him itself, but the way to the deepness of the soul where God and I form one, “as the habitat of the radical event, as a condition of my return to God, [...] sanctuary or temple of God” (Filippi 2011, 6).

Innovation in language and detachment is the a way towards divinity in the desert of our existence. This means to let God be God, and above all to let go of our concepts and confinements to go on naming without naming and letting oneself be transformed by Him who comes to us. Concepts and experiences that we will find recreated by the philosopher, and which will make poetry in Mujica because,

Eckhart is a *master of life* who cares about the correct life, the one that constitutes a *spiritual* life from the deepest and in a radical way. From there it comes his constant invitation to “over pass”, to open a way spiritually through all the rooted structures of our existence, all our attachments to determined ways and modalities in our intent to reach God. [...] The road is, in fact, a no-road, the way, a no-way. The Christian truly spiritual must remain in this paradox [...] (Haas 2002, 36–37).

Heidegger: *poetizing* as a gift and an event

*Poetry is the excess of the breath /
in the word and of the word in the language. //
Irreducibility of saying / to what can be said: //
impossible that makes of the poet / an opening, /
of the open an abyss, of the abyss a giving.⁴*

Hugo Mujica

The twentieth century brings us to Heidegger, the thinker of being, and in a historical context, deep changes for man in all areas. The horizon of understanding is marked by the decrease of confidence, the end of the metaphysics, remission of art, loss of certainties, the absence of God, the darkness of the world. The novelty of his thought presents an evolution that arrives at a criticism of the technique, poetic thought as the enlightenment of the being and revelation and to the resource of the mystic language as paradoxical and non-conclusive.

In the pursuit of the language, there appears his interest in the medieval mystic and, from that place, “there are serious reasons to believe that admitting footprints of the mystic language of Meister Eckhart in [his] work would not be at all adventurous” (Filippi 2011, 7). Whereas his interest in Christianity, appears above all to be in the Christian existence as a life style, even more than in the contents of the faith. It is the language of Eckhart that draws attention and closeness. In the year 1918 he prepared a course, “The metaphysical foundations of the medieval mystic”, which he did not dictate, but rather left a testimony of his knowledge of the Master’s thought and his interest in him from the beginning to the last stage of his philosophy (cf. González de Cardedal 2015, 232). About these, González de Cardedal states, as “In him [Eckhart], he finds a metaphysical reading which deserves a special acknowledgement but to the fact of having drilled the language and the concepts until fundamental God (*Grund*),

4 “La poesía es el exceso del soplo / en la palabra y de la palabra al lenguaje. // Irreducibilidad del decir / a lo decible: // imposible que hace del poeta / una apertura, / de lo abierto un abismo, de su abismo una entrega” (Mujica 2007, 130).

fundamental abyss (*Abgrund*), that at the same times founds the Nothingness (*Ungrund*) [...]” (232).

He discovers in the Rhenish mystic the union between the speculation and the mystical experience. On the other side, the philosopher denounces “with insistence the forgetfulness of the being in which we have fallen” when we care only about the entity, and even identify them. “The Being is not an entity but his source and support (*Grund*) that, at the same the Eckhartian God, is without a why (*ohne warum*), and groundless support, *Ab-grund*, impenetrable abyss and without deepness” (Filippi 2011, 9) and from there he speaks of the “mystery of the being”. God and soul in Eckhart, being and *Dasein* in Heidegger co-belong and, as stated in the “Letter on Humanism”, “only as from the truth of the being you start thinking about the essence of the sacred. Only arising from the nature of the sacred, we have to think the essence of the deity. Only with the light of the essence of the deity it can be thought and said what must be named the word God” (Heidegger [González de Cardedal 2015, 234]). It is the “god” of the philosophers, understood as a supreme entity, which has died. The Deity or Divinity belongs to the sacred, “a manifestation of a sacredness which is older than the times, [...] which anticipates ontologically and chronologically to every religion” (Mujica 1996, 130).

The word is the event of the sacred and the man, “shepherd of being”, it is also his guardian and, especially, “the thinkers and poets are the guardians of the Being, because they are devoted to language and through the language they watch over the Being” (92). The poetic word reveals the truth and it makes us think because it is installed in the Being which is a gift (*es gibt Sein*) and event (*Ereignis*) for which the man is thankful for. It is here where we should refer to another term, *Gelassenheit*, an invitation to detachment from the entities to access to the thought of the Being from Heidegger, beyond the technique, as “the Serenity for these things and the opening of the mystery which belong from one to each other, [...] they open us the perspective towards a new attachment” (Heidegger 1988, 28).

We perceive this brief stage to be an appropriation of some Eckhartian terms, which give a deepness to their philosophical cosmivision, not to mention the presence of Angelus Silesius in which the “without why” leads us to “a principle whose support is unfounded” according to the reading of the Heidegger himself (cf. Vega 2011, 75). However, the scopes are very different, as González de Cardedal states. He says, “in the Christian speech and in the Heideggerian discourse the music may appear the same but the lyrics is very different” (238). It is not our aim to baptize Heidegger or consider him mystical, but the presence of Rhenish mystic language is worth pointing out. The “language which gives support to the foundations of the modern speculative thought” (86) and which catches his attention in a way to say also the unapproachable. And here, the poetic saying, from the silence and the night, from the advancing absence and desert, claims the Being that is a gift.

Mujica: saying the silence in the night and the desert

*When the words / are silent / there is always a desert /
which extends itself in silence, //
and then, / always then, / one hears the wind come.⁵*

Hugo Mujica

Hugo Mujica meets in his poetry and in his essays the mystic and the philosopher, in a dialogical way, showing that “the interdisciplinary thought is always a thought with the others, from the others and for the others” (Avenatti 2014, 257). This thought transforms and names the Sacred in the desert. The philosopher who sees in the poetic word the act of unveiling of truth (Heidegger) and the mysticism of “going to God without god” (Eckhart) converge in him. Poetry and mysticism co-exist in his production and open us to the mystery that introduces us to the sorrow of the man who claims the absence.

In his essay, “The initial word”, Mujica focuses on the thought of Heidegger, focusing on the hero of his thought, that is “the one of the poets”, the one who “feels surprise and marvels because the *Being is said in his poeticizing*” (1996, 11). The poet sings and by singing, names things: in his essence, because “the man is the place where things can be mentioned” (Mujica 2008, interview), and the first attitude is the listening, poet is the one who knows, from the silence, to listen.

A poet is, in this way, an observer who perceives through the presences, the absence that supports them and reveals them: the absence of which that every presence is a testimony. A poet is, finally, the auscultant who listens in the silence and expresses them through the words that he says. As regards to the metaphysics, to “the danger of the dangers”, Heidegger repossesses the words of Hölderlin, Heidegger takes for himself the same hope: “Near, hard to catch is the god. But where danger abounds, it grows what he saves” (Mujica [Rodríguez Francia 2007, 22]).

In this affirmation of Mujica, we discover the road he looks for in indigence and poverty, in which the contemporary man finds himself, what he saves. His experience with writing from what arises from the silence comes from the time he lived for seven years in a Trappist monastery and where he made poems such as “like / a blind man calling light / to the thunder / my saying / what the silence names”⁶ (2007, 58). Submitted in the mystery, in the night, in the desert, there arises the desire to name the unnamed. The proper atmosphere for this is one of detachment, abandonment, the *Gelassenheit* Eckhartian, in which Mujica affirms as a means, “a state of liberty,

5 “Cuando las palabras / callan / siempre hay un desierto / que en el callar se extiende, // y después, / siempre después, / se escucha llegar el viento” (Mujica 2011, 44).

6 “como / un ciego llamando luz / al trueno / mi decir / lo que el silencio nombre”

the availability and dilatation of the soul for [...] the end for which it was created [...]: receive the Word and give the listening space in which it can carve its resonance". As "everything that is demanded to the creature is precisely nothing, a nothing in which it is nested everything that is possible, an opening in pure receptivity" (1996, 165).

Mujica takes over these sources and recreates them in a postmodern context, and from there his poetry acquires determined characteristics. This take us to the language of the mystics. Arising from experience, it is said that from there – but without capturing it in the words – "the language of the mystic enumerates the absence as a presence and the presence as an absence, [...] favors the excess to which the desire of the union arises" (Vega 2011, 65). All these can be seen from the exteriority of his poems, which tell us about the emptiness, the space, maybe the non-place as his poems. These poems are brief, conceptual, and are located at the bottom part of the page, with spaces between the verses. This leads us to the original silence and, at the same time, reveal an ungraspable access. He affirms in an interview that for him "the spatiality is part of the expression, [...] it is part of the writing. He tries to transmit the silence from, which the word take places, into space on the page where there predominates a space of gratuity or of emptiness, in which the lines have space for sounding and playing" (Mujica [Llanos Gómez 2008, interview]). "You breathe night / and everything asks for abandonment, / that calm / of all fears, / that loosening of moors / and make of not seeing / a shortcut, / a probing of the soul, / a giving of one self / to nothing"⁷ (*Barro desnudo* [Bare mud] 2017, 269).

This exteriority is so significant that it is completed with the poetic resources used in his poems. These resources reach their own sonority through the figures of the oxymoron, the synesthesia, the alliteration, generating a rhythm which distinguishes them. The use of metaphors, symbols, and everything that refers to the traces of the mystic language in its affinity with the poetic language since, as Octavio Paz says, "the act of poetry arises also from astonishment and the poet divinizes as the mystic and loves as the lover. In this poetic act, the saying of the poet is an act which does not constitute, originally at least, an interpretation, but a revelation of our condition" (1972, 141). Because, as it is affirmed by Mujica in his introduction to *Lo naciente*, "each creative act places us in that 'there' that it is not a place: in the nothing where everything appears, to the listening of what it comes in the search of one name that names it in its being" (2007, 11). And he sings "to wait for the creation is to guard / the absence, // to invite her / loke the hand of the beggar towards the gift, / like the poet, forgetting himself"⁸ (47).

Absence, presence, wound, gap, footprint, desert, nostalgia, desire, silence, light, night- all these words mention mystery, the sacred habitat of the man as the one who searches the presence of the Absent in the night. And how does God appear in his

7 "Se respira noche / y todo pide abandono, / ese sosiego / de todos los temores, / ese soltar amarras / y hacer del no ver / un atajo, / un sondear el alma/un entregarse / a nada."

8 "Esperar la creación es cotidiano / la ausencia, // invitarla / como la mano del mendigo a la dádiva, / como el poeta, en el olvido de sí."

poems, does he name him? The legacy of Heidegger and Eckhart is present in this not wanting to encompass what is bottomless. Mujica uses the small letters in the lexeme of god and he can involve in some cases, a reminiscence – metaphoric – of the Greek gods. The author confirms in an interview that “there neither god, nor gods: there are lives in which god opens space, he shows himself. Others, which catch him, that they see him in this space, in that transparency. Rip or tear” (Lahitte 1997, 58–59). How is it to name a God in times of absence, after the “death of God”? It is necessary, says Rodríguez Francia, “to fulfill the way of Meister Eckhart: *go to God without god*. God is dead but the divinity exists and lives poetically. In Mujica this appears as an absence that seeks to reach” (59–60).

The poetry book *Para albergar una ausencia* [To shelter an absence] (1995) is a faithful testimony of such a reality in which the name of God is “absence”. He says: “one is born to house / an absence / and we banish it / towards horizons, // sometimes we are that / absence, / sometimes we dare the cold / that another body trembles // or the hunger / that makes us equal. // only sometimes, / so as to know what life was // so as to know that we were others”⁹ (Mujica 2005, 325). God is the absence that we shelter, that we shout, that we moan and it is at the same time the footprint in such a way that Mujica affirms that, “God is, but it cannot be defined in words. After that [...] he enters a speech; but in my personal experience, it is to God is who precisely I never reach, but it is worth doing it. They give you a god made, who is supposed to guarantee the rationality of this world” (Crespín Argañaraz 2013, interview). But this god is not enough. Desire goes beyond reasoning, to this depth of the soul where the mystery dwells. The poet feels the call to support the absence as absence and not as nothingness but as a presence in the silence. An inexhaustible paradox is represented by word in the poetry and from which the poet is a privileged witness, the one who awaits the gift of the otherness: “Knowing us is a giving, / not a knowing ourselves, // it is to loosen ourselves, / and discover that we do not sink, / that we were always / sustained”¹⁰ (2011, 58).

Abyssed by mystery

*Words are breaths / from mouth to mouth they reveal a world; //
silence is a breath, / from ear to ear, guards a mystery.*¹¹

Hugo Mujica

9 “se nace para albergar / una ausencia / y la desterramos / hacia horizontes, // a veces somos nosotros esa / ausencia, / a veces osamos el frío / que otro cuerpo tiembla // o el hambre / que nos hace iguales. // sólo a veces, / como para saber qué fue / la vida // como para saber que fuimos otros”

10 “Conocernos es una entrega, / no un saberse, // es soltarnos, / y descubrir que no nos hundimos, / que estuvimos siempre/sostenidos.”

11 “Las palabras son soplos, / de boca en boca revelan un mundo; // el silencio es un aliento, / de oído a oído, custodia de un misterio” (Mujica 2007, 76).

Mujica, the poet-philosopher, is the one in whom thought poetizes and the poetry thinks, who recreates in his saying the Rhenish mystic and the philosopher of the new thought. He is the poet in hard times, who searches water in the desert, in the postmodern night that we undergo, eager for that search that does not cease and for the encounter that surprises: “The search is not a going, / even less to be arriving; / it is to endure / the absence of what we are looking for: / to allow ourselves to be found / in the resignation to the expected”¹² (2011, 17). It is the poet who listens and waits. It is the poet who names the absence and resigns to name the things and God, because every word is the word of the absent. It is the paradox that repeats the poet in each interview: when we name, we lose what we name, and this is what we also do with God, who definitely is the otherness that we cannot reach, that we cannot define in concepts. “He is the unknown, the question that keeps the life open; God is the interrogation of the life” (Báez Meza 2014).

In the silence he looks and listens for what life says and the language, as we mentioned, has a closeness with the language used by the mystics. Mujica rejects the nickname of “mystic” because he recognizes that this experience is unspeakable, but he knows, that he is aware of that his poetry generates in the reader a resonance that touches the mysterious, the deepness of the soul. He finds affinity between the poet and the mystic when he affirms that, “the mystic is the deconstructor of the religious and the poet is the deconstructor of language” (Crespín Argañaraz 2013). The resonance of his poems that do not belong to him, because it is a word refigured in the “other”, the listener, the one who also looks for a road in the night, a way, a footprint in the desert who saves, that may provoke an exodus towards the openness, because this is what the poet affirms:

As every man and woman vibrates with a different music, it is also the poetry, as a whole, multiple in its expression, generous in its production. We need to find ours, the poet who speaks to us, the one, those, with who we empathize, those whose music we tune our ears to: the ones whose poetry names us (Mujica 2000).

His poetry finds an echo in each and every one of us. We need only to be receptive, with an ear ready in silence. It is said that “Mysticism of the language... Poetry: the naked beside all words, the nakedness of the only silence. [...] Poetry: the named offering”¹³ (Mujica 2009, 68). The mysterious and secret gift of poetry which arises from our dispossession and nudity. It is an invitation to leave behind our pragmatism, our rationality and individualism in pursuit of walking in the opening, with an open heart to the irruption of the other. Nowadays there is abundance of words, shallow and meaningless, we are called to find a way that the mystic-poetic language offers

12 “La búsqueda no es un ir, / menos aún estar llegando; / es soporta / la ausencia de lo que buscamos: / dejarse encontrar / en la renuncia a lo esperado.”

13 “Mística del lenguaje... Poesía: el desnudo amén de todas las palabras, la desnudez del único silencio. [...] Poesía: lo nombrado ofrendado.”

us, since “its rising dimension, its sprouting, and its sacredness” (Mujica 2017, back cover). You only need to follow the dim light in the woods: “Forest, / dense forest and / between breeze and foliage / the light flickers, / the sign calls. // The way / is not inward / nor does it extend outward / it is the one of the steps / that we cannot take: / is the one of the other / that comes to give themselves”¹⁴ (Mujica 2017, 287).

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14 “Bosque, / espeso bosque y / entre brisa y follaje / la luz titila, / la seña llama. // El camino / no es hacia adentro / ni se extiende afuera, / es el del paso / que no podemos dar: / es el del otro/que viene a darse.”

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THE SILENCE OF GOD IN THE POETRY OF FATHER DAVID MARIA TUROLDO

Fabiano Gritti

ABSTRACT

The article concerns the last phase of poetic production of father David Maria Turoldo, notably the last collection published when he was still alive – the Final Chants. In his very long work as religious poet, liturgist, and essayist, he treated a number of topics, incl. social themes and current affairs. In his last phase of his poetic, he doesn't speak to the society, to the poor, and to marginalised people like in the past, but he addresses God directly – by forming an intense dialogue with the Absolute. In this poetical and mystical dialogue, he interrogates God about the most impenetrable mysteries for human understanding. These mysteries overwhelmed theologians and mystics of all times. Here, we shall focus notably on the topic of God being far from His creation – which is manifested through the divine silence. God seems not to hear the invocations of the faithful; it looks as though He doesn't care about the problem of suffering (especially of the weakest persons) that remains apparently unrelieved by divine intervention. We shall present some meaningful short examples of such deep and complex issues, in order to introduce the reader to the knowledge of the peculiar Turoldian approach, by providing a possible interpretative key.

KEYWORDS

Divine silence. Emptying of God. Kenosis. Theopathy.

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When we speak about figurativeness in the mystical language, it is necessary to consider even apparently paradox cases in which the mystical person reveals a supernatural experience characterized by silence. In the spiritual dialogue with the Absolute, it is not uncommon that a mystic person experiences the absence of answer. Indeed, silence is a condition of self-emptying. The mystical experience is featured by absence of strong metaphorical images, but – at the same time – it could potentially

generate such images, if the mystic wants to express his/her state of mind in this particular condition. In these cases, it is possible to observe a process analogous to that of negative theology, which is applied to the mystical experience with much stronger emotional repercussions.

We shall treat this topic through the poetic works of Fr. David Maria Turollo, a friar of the Order of Servants of Mary. As a poet, Fr. Turollo focused on the dramatic condition of a mystic who faces an inexplicable silence of God – always starting from personal experience. This author analyzed the topic of silence and emptying of God, especially in the last stage of his reflection and of his life, by reaching, according to a unanimous assessment by critics, the peak of his poetic oeuvre.

Our author was an active protagonist in Italian culture during the second half of the 20th century. His activity as a writer and preacher was very fruitful during the time of WW2 until his death in 1991. Despite his uninterrupted writing activity, he never wanted to be considered as an intellectual person, but instead as an engaged man of faith. His aim, as he used to say, was to show his readers, through chant, the faith that he received from God (see *Presentation* by Carlo Bo for Turollo 1987, IX). He did this by elaborating numerous spiritual and social topics, with particular attention to the poor and socially marginalized.

In his last poetic and mystical voyage, Fr. Turollo treated the deepest mystery of God, indeed one of the highest topics in the theological and mystical reflection: namely, God as Nothingness. This topic also implies a reflection about God and the evil, the mystery of suffering in the creation. The poet does not claim to understand or explain the mystery of God's silence. His maximum ambition is, at least, to chant the mystery of this silence so that it can resonate in the poetry he writes. We must agree with the most wide-spread opinion according to which, in such engagement, the poet found a strong source of inspiration in ontological poetry (throughout its many examples, from French surrealism to Italian hermeticism). He studied mainly Ungaretti, but he never became one of the many epigones of hermeticism (D'Elia 2006, 98). Unlike a number of his contemporaries, he managed to distance himself quite early on from hermeticism. This was possible, above all, thanks to the peculiar way in which he conceived his being a poet, as profoundly signed by his priestly vocation. Let's quote once again D'Elia (2007, 40): "Unlike [...] other writers confronted with religious topics [...], the Word becomes – in him and for him – a word/chant, since the poet is its minister." There is also another fundamental element combined with the previous ones. Probably, this element had a more evident influence on the style of the poetic writing and on the imagery of his poems. It is the biblical text. In many of the bibliographies concerning Fr. Turollo and his life, we often notice an extreme passion for Scripture. He has pursued this passion since he was a young student and continued to cultivate this love for the rest of his life. Notably, the basis upon which he built his poetry were the book of Psalms. The Psalms had a definitive influence on the evolution of his poetry. His intense study and analysis (see Ravasi 1973) was

not simply exegesis, its primary *raison d'être* in the peculiar Turoldian conception of liturgy. Only by understanding this aspect, can we fully understand the use of Psalms and of the Scriptures in his poetry. In this paper, we have no sufficient space to develop this concept of the Turoldian thought and poetic. We would deviate too much from the main goal of this article. Nevertheless, it is useful to remember, at least concisely, a very significant concept. Fr. Turoldo was an enthusiastic supporter of the Second Vatican Council and notably of liturgical innovations, whose aim was to make liturgy closer, more understandable, and altogether more fitting for the involvement of the whole community. He defined liturgy as “the real womb generating life” and “place of creation beginning from scratch”. As somebody wisely noted: “the metaphor of the ‘womb generating life’ is theologically referred to the womb of Mary as generator of life in the person of Christ – the liturgist par excellence, according to tradition” (Calista 2017, 54). Turoldo’s interest in Psalmody was put into practice through his translations, destined to adapt Psalms as much as possible to recitation and liturgical chant by the assembly of the faithful (Turoldo 1973). His extreme care for the Scriptures and Psalms shaped his poetic writing – which was always essential and focused on the mere word. This is the main reason why “the metric datum is absolutely secondary compared to the linguistic play” in the poetry of Father Turoldo (Pannunzio 2014; see also Maraviglia 2013, 882–883). It is for this reason some critics had the wrong impression that his poetry was naive.

Amongst the numerous topics of his poetry (often quite involved even in current political issues), there are also deep reflections concerning spiritual and mystical themes. His huge poetical production embraces more than half-a-century. I just focused on his last verses, published before his death – notably his last collection that was published when he was still alive: *Canti Ultimi* [the Final Chants]. Here, the central topic is God’s silence and God’s creation devoid of Him. It’s necessary to specify that in the Turoldo’s poetics, the word “emptying” does not indicate the result of negative theology (an *apheresis* intended as the mystical path leading to the Absolute, through negation of what senses can capture), but rather a kenosis (i.e. apparent absence or disinterest of God towards the creation). A consequence of this silence is also the tragedy of sufferance (notably innocent people suffering), which raises scandal due to the incomprehensible absence of the divine intervention. It is also the topic of God’s silence with regard to people in search, i.e. a particular condition mystic persons used to call “the night of the soul” or *via tenebrarum*. We shall start treating Turoldo’s poetry by beginning from this peculiar, hard, and discomfoting state of the mystical experience; and – of course – we shall briefly consider only some of the most relevant aspects.

The “silence of God” is a well-known paradox of the mystical experience. It is lived and documented in Christian mystical literature of all epochs: the mystic (i.e. the person who spent all his/her existence developing a direct relationship with the Absolute) will sooner or later experience the absence of God – for an indefinite

period of time. With regard to Fr. Turolto, see – e.g. – verses from the collection *Il grande male* [The Big Evil] (1987), which marked a turning point towards a more introspective view and always more mystical perspectives. A very representative piece of poetry in this sense is *Poi il silenzio* [Then, Silence] (verses 57–59):

Poi il silenzio	Then, silence
solo il silenzio	only silence
assoluto silenzio:	absolute silence:
muto	mute
plumbeo	leaden
fittissimo	very dense
silenzio!	silence!
Ma Dio chi è?	Who is God?
Non c'è.	He is not there.
C'è solo silenzio.	There is only silence.

It is not at all denial of God. As an expert translator of Psalms, Fr. Turolto knew very well the various verses condemning the misbeliever – e.g. Psalm 53 (52): “The fool says in his heart: ‘There is no God.’ / They are corrupt, and their ways are vile: / there is no one who does good.”

Through this paradox and disconsolate exclamation, the mystics manifest their pain because of the absence of the most longed for Entity. It is almost a protest – a claim, before God, for a missing presence. Silence and absence of God become so unbridgeable that even creation looks emptied of God’s presence, even though creation in itself should normally bear the imprint of its Creator. Even this extreme dimension is experienced by Fr. Turolto at such a point that he doesn’t manage to dissolve the silence and the feeling of God’s absence – not even by asking the creation itself: “E io a domandare alle pietre agli astri / al silenzio: chi ha veduto Cristo” [“And I asked stones and asters / I ask silence: who has seen Christ”] (“Gli occhi miei lo vedranno” [“My eyes shall see him”], 1955: vv. 13–14 [Luciano 1983, 305]).

The *topos* of silence is one of the most recurrent themes in Turolto’s poetry, although its meanings vary according to the prevailing nature of his reflection. In the first part of his poetic research, from the first collection *Io non ho mani* [I have no hands] (1948) until the 1980’s, the topic of silence is filled with meanings that vary from an idea of absurdity of world/society and alienation up to a reflection about sufferance in the society as a whole – therefore, social topic and current political issues. In this stage of his poetry, silence is the silence of the poor and of socially marginalized people – not only in civil society, but also within the Church (Calista 2014, 271–273). Notably, at the end of the 1980’s, silence is the silence of ideologies. They would like to make people free, but they use empty words that make people prisoners, because “Non c’è liberazione dell’uomo, di nessuno, se non come fatto religioso. O è Dio che libera o non c’è libertà [...] nessuna ideologia ha mai liberato l’uomo [...] le ideologie

creano sempre organismi di potere e quindi diventano, a loro volta, strumenti di oppressione. Così l'uomo, in nome della ideologia, è sempre dominato dall'uomo" ["*There is no liberation for man, for anyone, but in religious terms. God makes us free, or else there is no freedom [...] no ideology ever freed man [...] ideologies always create organisms of power and – thus – they become instruments of oppression. So, in the name of ideology, man is always dominated by man*"] (from *Non ci resta altro* [Nothing left to do], Turoldo /1976/ 2001, 155, also available in Turoldo /1990/ 2010, 437 [Calista 2014, 273]). In this case, silence is the silence of alienation, inability to communicate, empty and inefficient ideological debate.

In the *Final chants* we observe a clear mutation of poetic perspective. Critical studies show prevalence of the pronoun “you” in the final collection, against a prevalence of the pronouns “I” and “we” in the early collections (Giovannone 2005, 137). As wisely explained by Giovannone (Pontilunghi 2020):

More than two thirds of the poems included in the Final Chants are featured by direct allocution – a typical phenomenon of a large part of poetry of the second half of the 20th century. Here, the identity of the “first person” is guaranteed by the relationship between “me” and “you”, with an interlocutor [...]: the presence of an exclusive interlocutor, represented by a mute God whom the poet is tenaciously invoking, by asking Him questions and by trying to develop a dialogue with Him – sometimes ending up in a sort of verbal conflict.

The poet is speaking with a mute “you”. The only answer to all persistent questions is silence. Despite God’s imperturbability, the poet keeps asking him questions. In that period, the poet was suffering from an incurable disease. He was close to death and – for this reason – he keeps interrogating God even more fervently his. The poet is testing the divine mystery with his questions; in certain occasions, he is also angry and creates a real conflict – a “Theomachy”.

In *Salmi penitenziali per la Settimana Santa del 1946* [The Penitential Psalms for the Holy Week 1946] Turoldo writes (Psalm 5, currently available in Turoldo [1990] 2010, 78):

Oh, allora non maledirmi
se io riuscirò coi miei gridi
a rompere la tua pace
a comunicarti il nostro pianto.

Oh, don't curse me then
if I manage to cry
and break your peace
and express our cry.

The title of this collection (*Final Chants*) does not indicate time. They are not the “final” chants of the poet’s human existence, but they are chants about the ultimate eschatological truths. As noted by Ravasi, a great commentator of Fr. Turoldo, the poet reached the peak of his poetic production with these poems “that are a long meditation coming out of his winter, the winter of the body, winter of spiritual

experience as well, with a poverty of language, now fertile, in which he feels like a brother of St. John of the Cross; and he also includes direct allusion to this saint. St. John of the Cross described his famous and marvellous trip, not only in the ‘Night of the spirit’ – which is easy to understand as tuning for Turoldo – but also the ‘Trip at the discovery of strange islands’ o ‘Unexplored islands,’ i.e. islands where God seems to be absent, mysteriously absent. It is ascetic poetry [...] devoid poetry, distilled poetry, like in a crucible” (Ravasi 1995, 6 [Pontilunghi 2020, note 568]).

The theological reflection resulting from the analysis of the *Final Chants* is not actually a reflection about the *Logos*, which is always elusive and difficult to grasp at these theological heights (*La spada mentale II* [The Mental Sword II], Turoldo /1991/ 2021, 93–94):

tue gesta sono	your deeds are
il filo d'erba sulle macerie	a blade of grass on the debris
il raggio d'una stella da millenni	a millennial star beam
già spenta e le perle	already off – and the pearls
di rugiada nel prato dell'alba	of dew in the meadow at dawn

The intellectual way is not sufficient. When it gets close to mystery, our reason just stutters. There is only one possible solution. There is only one way that can lead us closer to mystery. It is the need for the researcher to be *theopath*:

Crederti è scegliere	To believe is a choice
di essere	of being
credere	of believing
è volere il Bene:	of longing for the Good:
anche noi Teopati!	even Theopaths like me!

Theopathy, or *pati divina*, is a term introduced by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (see Cavaleri 2019, 290; and also D’Elia 2007, 207 published in D’Elia 2012) and it concerns one of the three possible ways for contemplation/compenetrating of the divine. The first two ways require the knowledge of the teachings of Fathers and theologians as well as the reading of the Holy Scriptures. The third way has no mediators. It is more direct, but it requires an extraordinary willingness to sacrifice in the heart of the mystic. Indeed, it occurs “non tantum discens, sed et patiens divina”, through the experience of the divine pain – compassion of Christ’s suffering. God is not learnt but felt. Poetry becomes a fundamental instrument for carrying out such a difficult form of asceticism.

In the last stage of his life, the poet is closer than ever to such an experience of Christ’s suffering – not only in intellectual and spiritual terms, but also directly in his flesh. As we have said, Fr. Turoldo experiences death getting closer due to an incurable tumor. He becomes an incarnation of a “new Job” – not only poetically,

but also in physically. Indeed, the very last poems of the collection are dedicated to Job, a universal symbol of the suffering man: *Le mie notti con Qohelet* [My nights with Qohelet] (1992), published posthumously after the *Final Chant*. The biblical Job is hit by Satan and sends to heaven his “Why’s?” He is crucified in his pain and his reason cannot find any explanation for what was going on. Actually, the answer is there: incarnated in Christ. Job, obviously, does not yet know this and he surrenders. He doesn’t know at all what God’s plans are like, but he waits for Easter – in silence. Turoldo becomes Job of the Christian era (for more details, see Castelli 1992). In his poetry, he finds an answer to suffering and to the silence of God on the cross, in the resurrection that defeats the Evil.¹

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MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN LATE WORKS BY JULIUS ZEYER

Andrea Raušerová

ABSTRACT

Mystical experience is connected with ineffability. This paper proves it in works by various authors. It mentions some common phenomena associated with mysticism, such as stigma, levitation, appearance of light, religious anorexia, etc. Some of them are observed in late works by Julius Zeyer, a Czech novelist and poet, which represent the core of the analysis. *Christine the Miraculous* and *The Three Memoirs of Vít Choráz* both reflect mystical experience experienced by the main characters. The paper refers to accompanying aspects of the behaviour of the characters related to ineffable.

KEYWORDS

Julius Zeyer. *Christine the Miraculous*. *Three Memoirs of Vít Choráz*. Mystical Experience. Ineffability. Christian Mysticism.

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“Ecstasy stands outside common experience. It is unity, loneliness, uniqueness that cannot be transferred. It is an abyss no plumb bob can ever measure; it is incommunicable” (Buber 2016, 23).¹ These words characterize the mystical experience and its ineffability, according to Martin Buber. The psychoanalyst Avner Bergstein compares the Israelites in the desert who simply pointed at a cloud of fire to describe God to the Old Testament prophets who used all possible means to capture private experience or vision and communicate it to their audience (2018, 53).

Bergstein mentions the pitfalls of using the existing language. Because it always contains only the ideas and concepts that already existed before the personal experience of the mystic, they are therefore insufficient for describing unique experience (2018, 48). Such experience can generate new words: “the touch of

¹ This paper was translated from Czech to English. Many thanks to Mr Enzo Passerini and Mrs Silvia Rybárová. I admire their precise work and help. Zeyer’s original versions will be found in footnotes throughout the paper.

transcendence (captivating, burning, penetrating to the heart of the human existence, but at the same time evanescent, vague, distressful or completely mute) generates a wide range of means of expression” (Kučerková 2020, 7).

The historian Peter Dinzelbacher (2003), who focuses on the period of Christian Middle Ages, attributes to mystical experience an accompanying bodily phenomenon. It is not merely an autobiographical experience of mystics, there are also authentic testimonies among the people close to the mystics who recorded these states in one way or another. It concerns for instance: the stigmata (bleeding wounds reminding Christ’s Passion) or so-called salamandrism (miraculous healing), ecstatic ecstasy (when body does not react to normal sensorial impulses), prophecy, telepathy, levitation or enthusiasm. Mircea Eliade has developed a theory of radiant light, which in many cases accompanies such experience across religions (Eliade 1997).

The mystical experience can be linked with the erotic one, as traditionally recorded in the Song of Songs. In his *Erotism* (2001), Georges Bataille finds analogies as well as significant differences between the two types of experience. The link is represented, for example, by an act in secrecy that is mysterious, unknown to the public, and therefore indescribable. The right words are missing just because it is the experience that is not publicly shared. In the case of the erotic experience, I would rather consider a persistent tabooisation of the topic, and thus the reduced lexicon, rather than the inexistence of the shared content in a given community. Anyway, the result is the same at the moment. Both types of experience are characterized by a high degree of intensity and are energetically challenging (they reach a peak followed by weakness). Bataille admits differences as well. He believes that mysticism is foreign to obscenity and transgression. He also perceives different goals of single actions: eroticism leads to death (or more precisely, to the awareness of one’s own mortality), whereas mysticism aims at eternal life.

In the following part, I would like to deal with the mystical experience of literary characters, i.e. not real mystics or persons considered as mystics. It is not an authentic (auto)biography, but a list of the analogous experience of characters through the artistic language of a selected author. Poems are maybe the easiest tool to capture such experience. I already mentioned that mystical experience is accompanied by other phenomena and is close to eroticism. I will try to find them in selected prosaic works by Julius Zeyer, based on the aspects described above.

Julius Zeyer was a 19th century Czech novelist and poet. He also wrote some dramas. He was fascinated by exotic cultures and religions (Šach 1942, 5), travelled all over the world and spoke a number of languages. He transformed everything into his extensive production. He belonged to the so-called “Lumírovci” (a cosmopolitan current in the 1870’s and 1880’s). Later, he was adopted by the Decadent movement as an important personality (he acted in a way as a dandy on the literary scene). At the end of his life he, paradoxically, he inclined towards Catholicism from which he originated (Bitnar 1926, 17). The texts I would like to analyze in this study are taken

from the period of about five years before his death. These are *The Three Memoirs of Vít Choráz* and *Christine the Miraculous*.

Apart from being a convert, Zeyer explicitly admits in his rich correspondence that he read a number of works by female mystics. Already in the 1880's he was looking for a biography of St. Catherine of Siena (Zikmund 1949, 60). Later in his life he was interested in Anne Catherine Emmerich, who was one of the favorites of his mother (Bitnar 1926, 9). The revelation of the Virgin Mary (as part of a longer cycle of the *Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* recorded by Clemens Brentano) served as inspiration for Zeyer when he composed his novel *Marian Garden* (9). He also read controversial authors such as Blessed Angela of Foligno and Madame de Guyon. He quoted both, as I will show below. I believe that the experience of conversion and the previous untied and ostentatious lifestyle that is typical of both these mystics could have connected them with Zeyer. In his late letters, we can observe a penchant to an almost Franciscan interpretation of poverty.

Mystical experience in *The three memoirs of Vít Choráz*

This verse novel divided into three chants is an artistic document about conversion. Zeyer published it shortly before his death (in the literary magazine *Lumír* in 1899). I believe that the character experiencing the mystical experience is primarily the protagonist Vít Choráz. In his work, Zeyer often uses typographical signs expressing vagueness and mystery. In most of the cases, he uses ellipses or a long dash, sometimes even several times in a row. For example, in a passage concerning an erotic scene an ellipse appears five times in a row on a range of seven verses. For transparency, see it in the Czech original altogether.

In my breast as a victim... I was incredibly, Oh, incredibly happy!...	na hruď mou jako oběť... Byl jsem šílen, ó, šílen štěstím!...
No more words,	Ani slova více,
Oh, poor heart, no more words!...	ó srdce ubohé, ni slova více!...
A night full of delight and sin, Silence shall cover me as a pall, Whose elevation means profanation... Thinking back of it seems a sin to me...	Noc onu plnou rozkoše a hříchu, ať mlčení mé halí jako přikrov, ježž pozvednouti profanaci značí... I vzpomínati zdá se mi už hříchem...

(Zeyer 2009, 230)

The same thing occurs at the end of the novel, when the soul gets closer to God. It is pure mystical experience: “May God be your beginning, remember my soul! / May God be your end, oh my soul! — — —”² (267) In my opinion, Zeyer is intentionally working with the mystery that is undecipherable until death comes.

Choráz’ own mystical experience can be seen, among other things, in the following passage:

And Christ	a Kristus
Often visited me. I don’ want to say,	mne navštěvoval často. Nechci říci
Perhaps with these words, that the Lord	snad těmi slovy, že se Pán
appeared to me,	mně zjevil,
Unworthy man, as to great saints!	mně nehodnému, jako velkým svatým!
I just felt that Christ was close to me,	já cítil jen, že Kristus je mi blízky,
Irrigating my arid soul	že rozvlažuje zprahlou moji duši
Feeding it with the eternal bread of love,	a že ji věčným chlebem lásky sytí,
I just felt him pouring the power into it.	já cítil jen, že sílu do ní lije.

(254)

Here, I perceive several metaphors that relate to the image of the soul in a mystical framework, which are not unlike the already standardized form of previous mystics. The soul is compared to an arid desert that is flooded by a water spring. If we take the imagery of St. Teresa of Ávila, we cannot forget the fourth mansion of her *Interior Castle*, in which she confides her experience of a rising spring during prayer to the readers. The author freely refers to St. Teresa of Ávila and fictionally describes four successive ways of irrigating one’s soul by God (Sagardoy 1998, 15–16). It is as if Choráz’ soul was fed by bread or got nutrients from it. It is the Eucharist, yet in its physical, corporal experience. The final part of the description presents once again the image of pouring, this time it is something intangible poured into the soul. The whole passage is surprising because of its strong figurativeness, but it remains essentially sensual.

Choráz shares another experience that is relatively specific and remarkable: “yet I felt a smile / like a flare entering my painful soul”³ (256). This image is present also in *Christine the Miraculous*, so I will treat it in the following subchapter.

Throughout the story, Choráz meets Christ as a special character, who doesn’t speak or act like other characters in the text (the character is not material), and neither appears in visions. Choráz rather perceives Christ, feels him. He can’t hear the voice with his physical ears, but presumes it. “I felt as though Christ told me: /

2 „Bud’ Bůh tvým začátkem, to pomni duše! Bud’ Bůh tvým také koncem, duše moje! — — —“

3 „cítil jsem však úsměv / jak září vnikat v duši rozbolenu“

‘You have loved and many of your sins / shall be forgiven, for your love, although you erred! — —’⁴ (256)

As I have already mentioned in the theoretical part, Zeyer quotes famous female mystics in his works. The image of suffering Christ is clearly perceived also by Vít Choráz “and the image of Christ / indefinitely glimpsing over Prague / in front of my sight, not in that luminous glory / like Angela of Foligno saw / in her vision”⁵ (246). And elsewhere in the text: “I liked to read Angela of Foligno / I read a lot of her and once I was amazed / by a passage of her book where I read: / — ‘the deeper man lived in his sins, / the greater he could be in the infinite dimension —’, / and this infinity is holiness...”⁶ (245) For comparison, I also mention the sentence that Angela of Foligno received as a revelation: “the greater sinner one was, the greater mercy and grace he can embrace” (Foligno 1945, 55).

The most popular book by Madame de Guyon, *Spiritual Torrents*, is a linking element between Vít Choráz and an unknown woman. Both of them readers of the text, it is a crucial transforming aspect for both. Choráz seeks to reach the same mystical goal: “The mystic passing away of my soul, as described / in her writings by Madame de Guyon, / is the peak of all my desires and efforts”⁷ (Zeyer 2009, 262).

Mystical experience in *Christine the Miraculous*

In the short story *Christine the Miraculous*, I consider the protagonist Christine as a character who experiences mystical experience. The text is inspired by the legend of Christine Mirabilis, who lived at the turn of the 12th–13th century.⁸

In his text, Zeyer admits that some experience cannot be thoroughly described with words. At the beginning of his story, in which he discusses the content of the word love, he states the following: “there are words opening the abyss of concepts and meanings which the word itself illuminates slightly as a shy will-o’-the-wisp”⁹ (Zeyer 1928, 5). Further in the statement of Christine’s experience he writes: “How can she

4 „A bylo mi, jak byl by Kristus řekl: / ,Ty milovals a bude odpuštěno / ti mnohé pro tvou lásku, ač jsi bloudil! — — !“

5 „a obraz Kristův / mhou neurčitě nad Prahou se zamih / před zrakem mým, ne v oné jasné slávě, / jak ve své vizi Angela z Foligna / jej viděla“

6 „Rád, velmi rád též Angelu z Foliña / jsem čítával a jednou porazilo / mě místo v její knize, které znělo: / — ,čím hlubší člověk ve svých hříších býval, / tím větším být by mohl v bezdně druhém —’ / tím bezdnem druhým míněna je svatost...“

7 „skon duše mystický, jak o něm mluví / v svých spisech paní de Guyon, jest vrchol všech tužeb mých a snah“

8 In his introduction Zeyer admits that he was inspired by Thomas Cantimpratanus (Zeyer 1928, 5). Here is what is added by researchers who study Zeyer’s literary production: “[Christine’s] life was described by a monk called Thomas Cantimpratanus, by Cardinal Jacques de Vitry, and by Saint Denis the Carthusian” (Voborník 1907, 252). Tereza Riedlbauchová mentions as possible pretext *La vie de sainte Christine* by Gautier de Coinci – an author whom Zeyer may have known and read in French language (Riedlbauchová 2010, 229–234).

9 „jsou slova, za nimiž se hloubí propast pojmu a významu a slovo samo osvětluje to bezedno slabě jen jako plachá bludička“

say that? She could not utter even the words whose meaning she knew and felt, and if so, would they be sufficient? Christine was silent”¹⁰ (8). Silence is portrayed here as the only adequate way of reacting to an unknown situation.

In the theoretical part, I presented various phenomena that accompanied mystics. The first of them is in the analyzed text levitation. At the beginning of the story, Christine miraculously resurrects and levitates in the air. Later, this kind of movement is observed several times, such as here: “whenever she was seized by the spirit with full force, even in the presence of others, she could not stand on the ground at such a moment of angelic enthusiasm, she just soared above it”¹¹ (31) or here “white and silent, with celestial ardour in her wandering sight, Christine walked at the side of her sister. But she was hardly touching the ground. It was an unearthly phenomenon”¹² (11). It was as though such experience brought her closer to another – celestial – world, even with her body.

Christine’s task after her sudden revival is to suffer for others. Sometimes it is a spiritual torment, which reminds us of the one of the *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross: “Christine was suffering in silence as usual, but this time her body was succumbing and she felt abandoned by God”¹³ (38). Most of the time, however, she is subject to physical violence. To repeat her suffering several times, the broken bones and open wounds miraculously heal themselves without any intervention of other characters. For instance, if her body were to lie in the ashes in a huge furnace, “despite all her martyrdom, her body remained intact, and so did her clothes”¹⁴ (27).

This character reminds of the mystics due to the light surrounding her, which can also be seen by passers-by: “when she prayed, her whole appearance changed, she was like irradiated by heavenly glory”¹⁵ (31).

Last but not least, Christine doesn’t need food like everyone else, so we can talk about religious anorexia, which was St. Catherine of Siena’s destiny (she only ate hosts and drank water). This phenomenon is described by Dinzelbacher (2003, 28 and 199–201). So, Christine’s experience can be seen in this passage: “she was practically never eating or drinking, she just needed the Body of the Lord, she satisfied hunger and thirst”¹⁶ (41). But Christine goes even further. Instead of food, it was sufficient that a wild rose bloomed near her, and she could be fed for several weeks just by its dazzling fragrance (20).

10 „Jak to dovede říci? Ani ta slova, jejichž význam přece znala a cítila, jí nepřišla na jazyk, a kdyby, což byla by stačila? Kristina mlčela.“

11 „kdykoli duch jí plnou silou zachvátil, třeba i mezi lidmi, nedovedla v takové chvíli andělského nadšení státí na zemi, vznášela se pak povlovně nad ní“

12 „bílá a tichá, s nebeským zanícením v blouznivém zraku, kráčela vedle sestry své Kristina. Nedotýkala se téměř země. Byl to zjev nezemský.“

13 „Kristina snášela tiše, jako vždy, ale tentokrát podléhalo její tělo a byly chvíle, kdy se cítila opuštěnou i Bohem.“

14 „přes všechno její muče[d]nické utrpení zůstalo tělo její nedotknuto, tak jako její šat“

15 „modlila-li se, tu změnil se celý její zjev, byla jako nebeskou slávou ozářena“

16 „nejídala téměř ani nepila, stačilo jí skorem úplně tělo Páně, ukojila hlad i žízeň“

Similar to Vít Choráz, Christine has experiences with Christ, but he doesn't act like other characters in the story: "the Saviour did not appear to her, she didn't see his face in the Saint-Trond church. He was rather an indefinite vision in the depth of her interior and in the most hidden secrets of her soul"¹⁷ (8). Christine cannot communicate with him through normal language: "it was as though Christ talked to her and said: 'I know about you and your love for me.' She didn't hear those words, but she knew about them"¹⁸ (8). Just like Choráz, she doesn't hear the words, she perceives them in the interior of her body, as an echo, a response. Even some Old Testament prophets described their experience in similar terms (Jeremiah says "Now the word of Jehovah came unto me", Jer 1, 4).

Christine reveals her mystical experience below, through direct speech. Other than this portion, the short story is written in the third person. The reference to the "first person" is a key element for sharing the personal experience of the character:

my soul was with the angels. I know now only indefinitely that I saw dark and fearsome places first. Human language cannot tell about it. I saw torments and affliction, don't ask more, I don't know myself, it was different than here on earth. But I was seized by huge grief, just like the one we feel here. I knew the grief of the Purgatory had been revealed to me. I felt something like a big, bitter, burning human cry. Then I was brightened up, incredibly brightened, that can be neither described nor even thought of, and I found myself as on the threshold of heaven. It was a state of beatitude that no one can ever feel or imagine¹⁹ (14).

When revealing the Purgatory, Christine (despite some difficulties), refers to naturally perceived emotions, grief. When revealing heaven, she is breathtaken, words are unable to conceive the real power and depth of emotions, "no one can ever feel or imagine" (14). It is as though not just words but also the experience itself belonged to another, uncommon sphere of perception (for the fictional world of a literary character).

Christine's specific experience is as follows: "a sort of a white smile was coming out of the host and it entered her soul"²⁰ (8). A white smile entering the soul is present also in *The Three Memoirs of Vít Choráz* as a mysterious phenomenon. It is as if both characters could feel calm, bliss, and joy (corresponding to a smile as a manifestation of such an emotion). In addition, Choráz perceives it as a ray (luminous effect) which

17 „nezjevil se jí Spasitel, neviděla tvář jeho v kostele v Saint-Trond, vcházal spíše neurčitým vidmem do hloubi a v nejskrytější taj duše její“

18 „bylo, jako by byl Kristus k ní promluvil, jako by jí byl řekl: ‚Vím o tobě a tvojí ke mně lásce.‘ Ta slova neslyšela, ale věděla o nich“

19 „duše moje byla s anděly. Jen neurčitě teď o tom vím, že viděla jsem nejdříve místa temná a strašlivá. Jazyk lidský o tom vypravovati nemůže. Viděla jsem muka a strádání, netažte se jaká, nevím to sama, bylo to jiné, než zde na zemi. Ale velká lítost se mne zmocnila, lítost, jak ji cítíme i zde. Věděla jsem, že mi byl zjeven smutek očistce. Cítila jsem cosi jako velký, hořký, palčivý lidský pláč. Pak bylo jasno ve mně, nesmírně jasno, jak vypsat nelze, ani pomyslit, a stála jsem jako na prahu ráje. Byla to blaženost, jakou zde pocítiti nelze, ani se jí domyslit.“

20 „linul jakoby bílý úsměv z té hostie a ten vnikal jí do duše“

then heals the soul. Based on the research done so far and the analyzed corpus of texts, it is not possible for the moment to firmly state that Zeyer hasn't been inspired by his favourite female mystics. Nevertheless, I must express my acknowledgement to my colleague Zuzana Civaňová, dealing with the Colombian mystic St. Laura Montoya y Upegui, who, at the conference, related this smile to Virgin Mary's apparition. It is not known yet whether Zeyer could have learned anything about this mystic during his lifetime.

Conclusion

Both of Zeyer's late works represent main characters who experience and describe mystical experience. The ineffability of the experience is reflected in the text by means of typographical choices as well as by explicit acknowledgement. Moreover, *Christine the Miraculous* refers to the accompanying phenomena of mystics, as reported by Dinzeltbacher. In the experience of the main characters, accompanied by intensive light, communication with Christ occurs. Another common trait is also represented by a smile penetrating the soul. Zeyer himself read the works of selected female mystics and quoted some of them in *the Three Memoirs of Vít Choráz*. The scope of the paper does not allow to deal in detail with the experience of minor characters, however, this seems like a natural continuation for further research.

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SILENCE AS A MODALITY OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN THE WORK OF SYLVIE GERMAIN

Silvia Rybárová

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of silence in the thinking and work of the contemporary French author Sylvie Germain. The starting point for deliberation is the author's essay *Acte de silence* (2011), in which silence is conceived both as a manifestation of God's discreet appearance and as an act of humility and patience of man. The presence of silence seems to be a necessary condition for mystical experience. Silence understood in this way is the subject of the analysis in a selected passage from Germain's novel *L'Enfant Méduse* (1991), which suggests some specific features of the author's poetics of the transcendent, also present in her later novel work.

KEYWORDS

Silence. Mystical experience. Patience. Act of man.

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The need to capture spiritual experience in a literary form is present in the work of many contemporary French authors. In this context, the literary critic Dominique Viart speaks of the “return of religious thought” and of the “new mystics” that have been appearing on the French literary scene since the end of the 20th century (Viart – Vercier 2005, 337). Although it seems that at the beginning of the 21st century “the very word spirituality has been struck by a kind of rejection, as if it were indecent to speak of the spirit in times of triumphant materialism” (D’Humières 2009), Catherine d’Humières, an expert on Romance literature, suggests that the spiritual writing has basically been uninterrupted until now¹. However, what has changed in mystical

1 The author states it in a review on a comprehensive collective work called *La Spiritualité des écrivains* (Spirituality of Writers), which was published under the direction of Olivier Millet as a volume of the series *Travaux de Littérature*, n° XXI, Droz, Genève 2008, 544 p.

thinking in recent years compared to previous periods, is a more subtle and diverse form of expression. First and foremost, it is an attempt to distinguish spirituality from religion and a desire for personal experience with the ineffable without the necessary support of the institutionalized Church. According to D. Viart, the contemporary literature seeks to “reconnect with the lost dimension of being” (2005, 337). The disrupted balance is elaborated by some writers in relation to the historical and social context, especially through the incomprehensible brutality and boundless egoism of man in the 20th century. The will to seek answers beyond logical reasoning and to explore the invisible proves to be a way of understanding the behavior and complexity of human nature.

In this sense is also reflected the thinking and work of the French author Sylvie Germain (1954), which is the subject of the paper. According to the author, “it is really important to distinguish between spirituality and religion, especially the Catholic one” (Goulet, ed. 2008, 316). It was the Catholic family background and the captivating nature of some biblical images, which she became acquainted with as a child in catechism lessons, that marked her later imagination and artistic sensibility and are remarkably reflected in her novels. Having not found much importance in Catholic rites, as an adult S. Germain leans toward other religions, but does not turn away from reflections on the existence of God, or more precisely the man’s relationship with God. Her works are often full of images of immense despair, suffering or pessimism, while their prototype is the story of the biblical character Job, which is one of the initiating scenes of the author’s novel imagery. Just as Job explores the space of the world and encounters only emptiness and silence, as reflected in the author’s essay *Les Échos du silence* [Echoes of Silence] (1996), so her characters are in critical situations confronted with the ubiquitous nothingness and absence of God. The “unbearable silence of God”, who remains absent, or worse, indifferent to the people of, “all races lying in the mud, in oblivion” (Germain 1996, 17)², arouses S. Germain’s unceasing interest. While in her first works (*Le Livre des nuits*, *Nuit-d’Ambre*, *Jours de colère*, *Les Échos du silence*, etc.) the author is sensitive to perceive the agony of human destiny, and likewise depicts the silence of God in terms of his outrageous inattention to human suffering, in her following works (*L’Enfant Méduse*, *Immensités*, *Chanson des mal-aimants*, *Magnus*, etc.) she moves to the horizon of thinking about “silence in God and with God, i.e. the silence we assume in God and around him as well as the silence of man in his relationship to God” (Germain 2011, 39). In other words, the silence of God is to lead a man to greater immersion within oneself, to inner silence. The process of gradual maturation of thought of S. Germain is also reflected in the language: from the initial “baroque character” of her novels, which Laurent Demanze associates with the accumulation and rapid change of metaphors signalling the transformation of the outside world (2008, 191), the author

2 All the quotes from Sylvie Germain’s novels and essays were translated by the author of this paper. However, for an eventual comparison, the original version of the quoted key passages can also be found in the footnotes.

gradually moves on to what Milène Moris-Stefkovic aptly refers to as the “writing of breath”³ (2011, 34). Writing, paradoxically, balances between the present/absent, the effable/ineffable, following the image of the elusive God. Silence as such is the central theme of S. Germain’s rich novel and essay writing. This paper therefore focuses on two questions: What does the act of silence imply? And in what way does the author portray silence as a modality of mystical, or more precisely spiritual experience in her novels, specifically in the novel *L’Enfant Méduse* (1991)⁴?

The starting point of the reflection is the essay *Acte de silence* [The Act of Silence], which is part of the essay collection *Quatre actes de présence* [Four Acts of Presence] (2011). The author reflects on the possibilities of overcoming darkness and on the ways of being active in the world. One of them is the need for silence, which she perceives within the considerations of the Swiss theologian Maurice Zundel. Here I will allow myself a more extensive quote from the text, because it emphasizes the assumptions of mystical experience of the characters in S. Germain’s novels:

The silence, in the sense that Zundel and so many mystics before him celebrated, is an active passion which demands vigilance and patience. It is a passion in waking tension, which does not dismiss the will, but uses it “gently”, with finesse, and in an apparently paradoxical way, so the will is no longer exercised as a conquering force, often quickly threatened by pride, tension, but as an energy of endurance, of constancy. Because we do not force the silence to come and be established: we can only put ourselves in a condition to receive it, in a state of availability and interior hospitality, which requires a lot of attention and perseverance, and above all humility. Humility of a withdrawal of oneself to operate within oneself, of a long “self”-emptying, of a great lightening of one’s mind to be decluttered and of one’s senses to be purified and sharpened at the same time. Silence, in order to arise and unfold, needs space, a vast and calm interior space, it does not tolerate any pressure⁵ (Germain 2011, 40–41).

Silence appears here in two forms. On the one hand, silence is a conscious act of man, resulting from an inner feeling of desire (for God) and consisting of patient expectation and readiness. It requires an active approach, deliberate detruing of distracting elements, deep concentration and focused perception of the world with all the senses. On the other hand, it is also something that is given, that can fill such

3 “l’écriture du souffle”

4 The novel was translated into English by Liz Nash as *The Medusa Child* (Sawtry, Cambs: Dedalus, 1994).

5 “Le silence, au sens où Zundel, et tant de mystiques avant lui, l’a célébré, est une passion active qui exige vigilance et patience. C’est une passion en tension de veille, qui ne congédie pas la volonté, mais qui emploie celle-ci ‘en douceur’, en finesse, et en use de façon en apparence paradoxale, c’est-à-dire qu’alors la volonté ne s’exerce plus en tant que force de conquête, force souvent vite menacée d’orgueil, de crispation, mais en tant qu’énergie d’endurance, de constance. Car on ne contraint pas le silence à venir et à s’établir : on ne peut que se mettre en condition de le recevoir, en état de disponibilité et d’hospitalité intérieure, ce qui nécessite beaucoup d’attention et de persévérance, et surtout d’humilité. Humilité d’un retrait de soi à opérer au-dedans de soi-même, d’un long évidemment de son ‘moi’, d’un grand allègement de son esprit à désencombrer et de ses sens à épurer et aiguïser à la fois. Le silence, pour advenir et se déployer, a besoin d’espace, d’un vaste et calme espace intérieur, il ne supporte aucune pression.”

an empty space inside a person. It is a state of silence, peace, serenity that can make God's discreet presence stand out. In her essays, S. Germain often refers to the biblical story of the Lord's revelation to the prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb, which the author also applies to the novel depictions of the mystical experience of her characters. God appears to Elijah in a "gentle breeze" (1Kings 19:12).⁶ In her understanding, "God [is] the breeze⁷, the voice of gentle silence [...]" (55), his presence is inconspicuous but penetrating. "The breeze trembles like light on the border of the tangible and the intangible, between mystery and miracle" (55). Silence needs to be perceived in depth, intensely. According to the author, "a slow and long breath of silence is destined to become a breath of silence itself." Her authorial style often seems to copy this "breath of silence" (43).⁸

Silence also has a need for inner solitude. "Silence is in a relationship and in harmony with solitude, they are connected, they amble along" (42), as we learn in the essay in which the author refers to the thoughts of the poet Rilke. However, silence and solitude are only a means, not an end. They "[...] are arrangements of emptiness to enable the revelation of an unexpected other [...], the emergence of an unheard-of word, the surge of a lively breeze in the hollow of absence"⁹ (43). In another essay, *Mourir un peu* [To Die a little] (2010), in the chapter entitled "L'Infini dans un souffle" [Infinity in the Breeze], Elijah's transcendent experience, interpreted by the author, is described as "the mental state of absolute nudity and receptivity", when Elijah "feels, for the time of a sigh, an ineffable caress brush against him, radiate him"¹⁰ (Germain 2010, 54). In this spirit is described also the mystical experience of the character Magnus in the novel of the same name in the chapter entitled "Fragment 0", which is a transcript of a biblical story.

However, the way the characters approach the "voice of gentle silence" is not clear or straightforward. It brings a number of pitfalls, which, however, predestine the character to a mystical search. In general, the characters of S. Germain are extremely inconspicuous, marked by a hostile outside world. They often lack clear contours, appear invisible, are nameless, orphaned, expelled on the margins of society. However, it is the solitude together with the "effacement" of the existence of the characters, which the French mystic and philosopher Simone Weil, for example, speaks of in her inspirational work *La pesanteur et la grâce* (1988; *Gravity and Grace*, 2009), and which open up space for unsuspected possibilities. "If we uproot

6 It is also translated as a "still small voice", "a gentle whisper" or "a low murmuring sound". <http://www.churchofthecov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Noticing-Gods-Gentle-Whisper-8.27.17.pdf>

7 The French term "souffle" can have several meanings in English: "sigh", "breath", "blowing", "light breeze", "exhalation". For the purpose of this paper, we translate it as "a light breeze".

Cf. <https://m.interglot.com/fr/en/souffle>

8 "lente et longue inspiration-expiration de silence est appelée à devenir respiration du silence même"

9 "solitude et silence sont des aménagements de vide pour permettre l'advenue d'un autre inattendu au sein même du règne de 'personne', l'émergence d'une parole inouïe, la levée d'un souffle vif au creux de l'absence"

10 "Alors, projeté dans un état mental d'une nudité et d'une réceptivité absolues, il sent, le temps d'un soupir, une ineffable caresse le frôler, l'irradier. La mourance vient d'éclorre en merveille."

ourselves, we are heading for something real” (Weil 2009, 70) says S. Weil, who has greatly influenced S. Germain’s thinking. The absolute renunciation of one’s “self” represented by the characters of S. Germain’s novels reminds of what S. Weil states: “God can love in us only this consent that we withdraw to give him space; similarly, when he created, he withdrew so that we could exist” (71). Therefore, if silence is a desired, or more precisely necessary precondition for mystical experience, it is also inscribed in the language in some way. By silence is meant the act of inner emptiness and access to the ineffable, not necessarily mystical experience in the true sense of the word. According to S. Germain, the words are supposed to “emphasize the silence” (Germain 2011, 48). In fact, as she points out, “whether it is poetry or prose, silence is the background-palimpsest of every writing, silence must come to the surface in words, between words” (48).

The novel *L’Enfant Méduse*, which is the subject of the analysis, belongs to Germain’s earlier work, but suggests the author’s poetics of the transcendent of her subsequent novels. The work, excelling in the poetic and colorful depiction of the heroine’s inner mood, is a suggestive story of a victim of sexual abuse, eight-year-old protagonist Lucie, the blindness of her parents and inattention of her surroundings. S. Germain uses the language of fine arts – specifically color and composition, and transposes it into the structure of the text (it consists of the chapters called ‘Enluminures’, ‘Sanguines’, ‘Sépias’, ‘Fusains’ and ‘Fresque’).

The last part of the novel *L’Enfant Méduse*, entitled *Patience*, bears the sign of reconciliation of an adult protagonist with the past and represents her experience with the transcendent. While the pain, anger, and hatred disappear over time, and are replaced by forgiveness for those who hurt her, Lucie awaits something else to fill her with peace: “[t]he joy which Lucie awaits is different, it is gentle. Gentle as a fine rustle of wind in the foliage of the hazel tree, gentle and sweet as the bleating of lambs in the meadows, gentle as mist evaporating in the pinkness of dawn”¹¹ (Germain 1991, 273).

This short section, consisting of a rhythmic repetition of the epithet “gentle”, which characterizes the expected joy of Lucy, and its comparison with natural elements (a fine rustle of wind in the foliage of the hazel tree, bleating of lambs in the meadows, mist in the pinkness of dawn) together with an emphasis on the senses, especially hearing (rustle, bleating) and sight (mist evaporating in the pinkness of dawn), the untouchable nature of the mentioned joy (indicated by the words wind and mist) and the feeling of peace (symbolized by lambs) suggest the poetic nature of the representation of spiritual experience in the understanding of S. Germain.

Lucie gets to know this inner joy thanks to two meetings, or rather impulses. One of them is a meditation on a reproduction of the *Annunciation to the Shepherds* by Taddeo Gaddi. Although Lucie saw the fresco, as the reader learns, in Florence a few

11 “La joie que Lucie attend désormais est autre, elle est légère. Légère comme un fin bruissement de vent dans les feuillages du noisetier, légère et douce comme le bêlement des agneaux dans les prés, légère comme la brume s’évaporant dans la roseur de l’aube.”

years ago and was captivated by the radiant bright light, she clearly perceives a “gentle joy” in the picture only when she meditates on the painting on a postcard from a childhood friend. What leads Lucie to penetrate deeper into the mystery of the picture is her altered look, which Lucie learns from her neighbor. This seems to be a prerequisite for the establishment of silence, the moment when the ineffable touches a sore human heart and fills it with joy. The look of the old lady, who mourns after the death of her husband, is “extremely attentive” and humbly focused on the movements and colors of the sky. Her gaze is a gaze that neither expects nor hopes for anything. This second impulse initiates Lucie to learn to look, and especially to learn to see:

Not just the sky, but also the trees, the paths in the fields, the shadows sliding on the walls and the things, and the faces finally. Especially the faces. / Learn to look at the visible world, the body of the visible world, the skin of the sky and the skin of the earth [...]. Also learn to listen, to perceive the inflections of voices, silences, and breaths. Learn to touch the world, touch it with your fingertips to feel lost tenderness again. Learn patience¹² (236–237).

In other words, it is fundamental to change one’s mode of looking at the surrounding everyday world (which the word “learn” implies). The ability to perceive its smallest nuances, as the unusual metaphors like “the body of the visible world”, “the skin of the sky”, and “the skin of the earth” indicate means to observe their color, structure, but also their peculiarities and to involve in this observation a whole range of senses (“sight”, “hearing”, “touch”, etc.). Such a way of perceiving the world is first and foremost a look of amazement and astonishment.

The conclusion of the novel, from which I quote a longer but key passage, suggests the expected establishment of silence, which is the result of inner silence:

The sun has completely disappeared, only a grazing light remains, the sky is dark blue and cold. The chirping of birds subsides, only a few isolated songs, modulated in mute, can be heard. The flowers close up. A little white dog runs up the road, followed by a boy on a bicycle, crouched over the handlebars. The boy rings his bell, the dog stops, turns around, gives a bark, then scoots off again, tail in flair. Lucie gets up from the steps of the porch and goes into the house, she comes back to the living room, opens the door. But when she is about to turn on the light, her finger hangs over the switch. / On the table there is the postcard, a light spot on the dark wood. All the things around seem to have withdrawn, to have melted into the shadow that invades the room, to leave room only for this image, to place it in the heart of the visible. Lucie approaches the table, all

12 “Alors Lucie a senti qu’il lui fallait réapprendre à regarder ; apprendre à voir. Pas seulement le ciel, mais les arbres, les chemins dans les champs, les ombres glissant sur les murs et les choses, et les visages enfin. Les visages surtout. / Apprendre à regarder le visible, la chair du visible, la peau du ciel et la peau de la terre [...]. Apprendre aussi à écouter, à percevoir les inflexions des voix, des silences et des souffles. Apprendre à effleurer le monde, à le toucher du bout des doigts pour en ressentir la douceur enfouie. Apprendre la patience.”

she can see is this light spot. She leans towards the image. And her childhood leans as well. / Lucie Daubigné, soon to be in her forties, and little Lucie, both contemplate the same image, and their double gaze very slowly lights up in the straw-yellow glow which emerges from the hillside where the shepherds rest. / It is a deep peace that rises from the image, and consoles the child who has remained so long in the shadow of the woman. It is a light, light and transparent joy that tinkles in the image, and releases the woman of the little girl who has hitherto remained her shadow and burden. A tender peace like a yellow iris in a rush unfolds in Lucie's heart. For this image, this gleam, had long been germinating in her heart, had matured in shadow and silence; their emergence is as much astonishment as a matter of course. It is the inflorescence of long-term patience¹³ (238–239).

As it is usual for this author, silence permeates the outside, the visible (mostly natural) world and stands out in the depiction of trivial details of the evening, which the main character Lucie observes from the stairs of her house (the sunset, the cessation of birdsong, the dog running around, the boy racing on a bicycle, etc.). The emphasis on the banality of the described scene appeals to the need to sharpen the sight when looking at visible things so that the invisible can appear for a moment. This scene, which fills the observer (and also the reader) with unusual peace, suggests that the circumstances of opening up to the divine are naturally inconspicuous with S. Germain, similarly to the Lord's revelation to Elijah. Even in this last chapter, the visual intertwines with the textual, the play of colours and the presence of light have a symbolic meaning here. In S. Germain's poetics of colors, the blue color (here "the sky is dark blue") symbolizes "the look of the Emptiness", i.e. God who retreated. The "light spot" emerging from the shadow of the room "very slowly lights up in the straw-yellow glow", which is "in the Christian tradition", as Marinella Mariani states in her study of the meaning of colours in *L'Enfant Méduse*, "a transcendent colour, a symbol of holiness" (230, 130). The initial indistinct flash of light in Gaddi's *Annunciation to the Shepherds* becomes a glow of light penetrating the character's heart, which

13 "Le soleil a tout à fait disparu, il ne reste plus qu'une lumière rasante, le ciel est d'un bleu sombre et froid. Le brouhaha des oiseaux décroît, on n'entend plus que quelques chants isolés, modulés en sourdine. Les fleurs se referment. Le petit chien blanc remonte la route en courant, le garçon, arc-bouté sur le guidon de son vélo, le suit. Le garçon fait tintinnabuler son timbre, le chien s'arrête, se retourne, lance un jappement, puis détale à nouveau, la queue en panache. Lucie se relève des marches du perron et rentre dans la maison, elle revient vers le salon, ouvre la porte. Mais alors qu'elle s'apprête à ouvrir la lumière, son doigt reste en suspens au-dessus du commutateur. / Sur la table il y a la carte postale, tache blonde sur le bois sombre. Toutes les choses alentour semblent s'être retirées, s'être fondues dans l'ombre qui envahit la pièce, pour ne laisser de place qu'à cette image, la poser au cœur du visible. Lucie s'approche de la table, elle ne voit plus que cette tache blonde. Elle se penche vers l'image. Et son enfance aussi se penche. / Lucie Daubigné, bientôt quadragénaire, et la petite Lucie contemplent toutes les deux la même image, et leur double regard tout doucement s'éclaire à la lueur jaune paille qui sourd du flanc de la colline où les bergers reposent. / C'est une paix profonde qui monte de l'image, et console l'enfant demeurée si longtemps dans l'ombre de la femme. C'est une joie légère, légère et transparente qui tinte dans l'image, et délivre la femme de la petite fille jusqu'alors demeurée sa pénombre et sa chaîne. C'est une paix si tendre qui s'éploie dans le cœur de Lucie, comme un iris des marais à la saison de déhiscence. Car, cette image, cette lueur, étaient depuis longtemps en germe dans son cœur, avaient mûri dans l'ombre et le silence ; leur éclosion est tout autant étonnement qu'évidence. C'est la floraison d'une longue patience."

the author expresses by poetic means of expression (comparison, epithet): “A tender peace like a yellow iris in a rush unfolds in Lucie’s heart.” The straw-yellow light is a challenge to a spiritual journey. The name of the main character (Lucie) is a metaphor for the mystical search¹⁴. The author also refers to the story of St. Lucy, who, based on one version of the legend, tore out her eyes and offered them to God. However, for “the surge of a lively breeze in the hollow of absence”, an attentive and patient look of the heroine of the novel is needed. The light gushing from Taddeo Gaddi’s picture is one of the forms of the ineffable, similar to a smile observed by the heroine Laudes-Marie on a background of the sky in the novel *La Chanson des mal-aimants* (2002a)¹⁵, or a passionate playing of the saxophone in the work *Immensités* [Immensity] (1993), which is heard by the main hero Prokop Poupa. These flashes, echoes or touches come unexpectedly, but they “mature in the shadow and silence”, as the author says. The process of opening up to the transcendent is compared here to the growth of flowers – its individual stages, germination, maturation and flowering into beauty, which brings full joy, require patience.

In the quoted passage we find silence, as understood by S. Germain: as an act of humility, patience, and perseverance, but also as a state of inner fulfilment and peace, which represent a condition of the touch of the ineffable. Silence stands out in the text thanks to the use of poetic techniques (imagery, symbolism) and the choice of words that indicate more than they name. The author also often relies on intertextuality (i.e. on the literary and philosophical works, but also on the works of mystics or painters), which has a meaningful function here. S. Germain reminds us that in order to get to others and to God, it is really necessary to sharpen our vision to see the invisible, to prick up our ears to catch a light breeze in silence, and especially to learn to be quiet so that the voice of God can be heard within us. It’s is where God dwells, as the author emphasizes in her essay *Les Échos du Silence* or in her biography dedicated to the Jewish author Etty Hillesum, who said: “My life is only a perpetual listening ‘within’ myself, others, God.” (Germain 2011, 44) Silence represents an immeasurable space, it has the potential of unexpected possibilities, which the author deepens in her other works, for example in the aforementioned novel *La Chanson des mal-aimants*. It is with a passage from it, presented by the main heroine Laudes-Marie, that I conclude this paper, the aim of which was to look, through the prism of silence, into the experience of searching for the lost dimension of being by the exceptional author Sylvie Germain:

There remains just an increasingly tenuous monologue that the silence gently corrodes. But there is so much to hear in the silence, so much to see when all, yet, is gone. [...] And then, when the silence will have entirely consumed me, hollowed me out, perhaps the prayer which clawed at my heart, each time I thought I had forgotten it forever –

14 The original meaning of the name Lucie (Lucy) is “light”. <https://nominis.cef.fr/contenus/prenom/1662/Lucie.html>

15 Translated into English by Christine Donougher in 2004 as *The Song of False Lovers* (Sawtry, Cambs: Dedalus).

Mane nobiscum, Domine, advesperascit –, will rise to my lips for the last time. But it will not return quite like this, that prayer [...]. If it ever returns, it will be in a new, inverted form; it will be addressed to me from within, and it will rest in the breath around my heart to exhale to my lips, like the sigh of a child coming out of a long sleep. No, that very disturbing sentence [...] will not be uttered by me, but by the Lord Himself, in a whisper. He will ask me, as he asks everyone, to stay awake with him in the cold and darkness of the earth [...]. He will ask me to stay with him, discreetly, patiently [...]¹⁶ (Germain 2002a, 245–247).¹⁷

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16 "Juste un monologue de plus en plus tenu que le silence corrode en douceur. Mais il reste tellement à entendre dans le silence, tellement à voir alors que tout, pourtant, a disparu, et toujours à aimer quand tout le monde s'est retiré. [...] Et puis, quand le silence m'aura entièrement consumée, évidée, peut-être que la prière qui me griffait le cœur, chaque fois que je croyais l'avoir à jamais oubliée – *Mane nobiscum, Domine, advesperascit* –, me remontera aux lèvres une dernière fois. Ce n'est pas tout à fait ainsi qu'elle fera retour, cette prière [...]. Si jamais elle revient, ce sera sous une forme nouvelle, inversée ; elle me sera adressée du dedans, déposée en un souffle autour du cœur pour s'exhaler jusqu'à mes lèvres, tel un soupir d'enfant au sortir d'un long sommeil. Non, ce n'est pas moi qui la prononcerai, cette phrase [...], mais le Seigneur lui-même, dans un chuchotement. Il me demandera, ainsi qu'il le demande à tous, de rester avec lui pour veiller dans le froid et l'obscurité de la terre [...]. Il me demandera de rester avec lui, discrètement, patiemment [...]."

17 This text is an outcome from the grant VEGA 1/0514/19 *The Poetics of Mystical Experience and the Literary Forms of Mystagogy*.

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CHAPTER THREE

SYMBOLS. ON THE BORDERS OF MYSTERY



THE PATHS OF DREAMS

A REREADING OF ANTONIO MACHADO'S *GALLERIES*

Antonio Barnés

ABSTRACT

Poetic creation and encounter with God are two concepts that the Spanish poet Antonio Machado relates to dreams and childhood. He thus recovers the dream as a sphere of contact with God, overcoming in a certain way the faith/reason dialectic that modernity takes pleasure in emphasising. The dream is beyond reason, and there comes the divine inspiration which can then be translated into “a few true words”. Poetic language thus acquires a status far superior to that of delight: it is the key that allows us to touch the mystery. The relationship between dream and childhood also allows Machado to explore a lost innocence to which one always aspires to return.

KEYWORDS

Antonio Machado. God. Dream. Childhood. Inspiration.

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The Spanish poet Antonio Machado, one of the most conspicuous representatives of 20th century Hispanic lyric poetry, wrote, “perhaps the hand, in dreams, of the sower of stars” (God, in anthropomorphic figure), “made the forgotten music sound like a note of the immense lyre, and the humble wave to our lips came from a few true words.”¹ If this is the case, then it is admitted as a possibility that the poetic word – a few true words – is inspired by the sower of stars: the Creator of the cosmos and of beauty, by sounding the universal music that ends up coming in a humble way to the poet’s mind. The way is indeed humble, that is: non-invasive, non-coercive, non-imposing (which evokes the doctrine of biblical inspiration: God does not dictate, he inspires, respecting the ways of thinking and writing of the hagiographers). And what reaches the poet is a forgotten music. Inspiration consists, then, of bringing

1 All Antonio Machado’s texts in English are translated by Armand F. Baker (2006).

back the memory of a music, a harmony, a beauty that was known or known and forgotten at birth? At awakening? When growing up? At the dawn of reason?

The dream realm is mysterious, and it is there that divine communication takes place. The dream, therefore, is an image, a figure of the mystical experience, of the relationship with God. But the dream is not only a figure: it can also be taken literally. Since the Bible and Greco-Latin literature, the dream has been a channel for divine messages. Machado's poem suggests that God takes advantage of dream to send us his words which, deposited in that state, emerge in wakefulness.

It is difficult to express in fewer words, more beautifully and more clearly, what poetic inspiration could be. It can take the form of a dream, music, or insinuation. Dreams as a state of transition between consciousness and subconsciousness; music as art perceptible by the ears; insinuation (humble wave) as a method, a way. God does not speak loudly, imposingly, but softly, which is the way of love. What God emits is a musical note (beauty) which is transformed in a humble way (goodness) into true words (truth), bringing into play the three transcendentals of being. The sower of stars communicates with us through these transcendentals, which are nothing but beams of his own being.

Antonio Machado's verses recall the ode to Salinas by the master Luis de León, one of the main poets of the Spanish Renaissance:

El aire se serena
y viste de hermosura y luz no usada,
Salinas, cuando suena
la música estremada
por vuestra sabia mano gobernada.

The air becomes serene²
and is clothed in beauty and strange radiance,
Salinas, when there sounds
the incomparable music
governed by your skilled hand.

A cuyo son divino
el alma, que en olvido está sumida,
torna a cobrar el tino
y memoria perdida
de su origen primera esclarecida.

At that heavenly sound
my soul, that is sunk in forgetfulness,
recovers its judgement
and the lost memory
of its first, exalted origin.

[...] Traspasa el aire todo
hasta llegar a la más alta esfera,
y oye allí otro modo
de no percedera
música, que es la fuente y la primera.

[...] It traverses the ether
until it reaches the highest sphere,
and there it hears another mode
of imperishable
music, the first, the source of all.

Ve cómo el gran Maestro,
aquesta inmensa cítara aplicado,
con movimiento diestro
produce el son sagrado,
con que este eterno templo es sustentado.

It sees how the Great Master,
playing this immense cither,
with skilled movement
produces the sacred sound
by which this eternal temple is sustained.

Y como está compuesta
de números concordes, luego envía
consonante respuesta;
y entrambas a porfía
se mezcla una dulcísima armonía.

And as it is composed
of concordant numbers, it emits
a consonant response,
and from their vying
is mingled the sweetest harmony.

Aquí el alma navega
por un mar de dulzura, y finalmente,
en él así se anega,
que ningún accidente
extraño y peregrino oye o siente.

Here the soul steers
through a sea of sweetness, and at last
sinks so deep within,
that it hears or feels
no strange or rare event.

[...] ¡Oh, suene de contino,
Salinas, vuestro son en mis oídos,
por quien al bien divino
despiertan los sentidos,
quedando a lo demás amortecidos!

[...] Oh, may your music,
Salinas, sound everlastingly in my ears;
hearing it, my senses
awaken to God's goodness,
and to all else remain oblivious!

In the light of the lines of poem 28 of *Galleries* we can interpret several of the series. The first is a journey from the poem to its origin, from effect to cause:

Leyendo un claro día
mis bien amados versos,
he visto en el profundo
espejo de mis sueños

On a bright day while Reading
my dearly beloved poems,
I realized that in the deep
mirror of my dreams

que una verdad divina
temblando está de miedo,
y es una flor que quiere
echar su aroma al viento.

a divine truth was
trembling fearfully like
a flower that wants
to cast its aroma on the wind.

El alma del poeta
se orienta hacia el misterio.
Sólo el poeta puede
mirar lo que está lejos
dentro del alma, en turbio
mago sol envuelto.

The soul of the poet
is focused on mystery.
Only the poet is able
to see what is deep
within the soul, wrapped in
a blurred and mysterious light.

En esas galerías,
sin fondo, del recuerdo,
donde las pobres gentes
colgaron cual trofeo

el traje de una fiesta
apolillado y viejo,
allí el poeta sabe
el laborar eterno
mirar de las doradas
abejas de los sueños.

Poetas, con el alma
atenta al hondo cielo,
en la cruel batalla
o en el tranquilo huerto,

la nueva miel labramos
con los dolores viejos,
la veste blanca y pura
pacientemente hacemos,
y bajo el sol bruñimos
el fuerte arnés de hierro.

El alma que no sueña,
el enemigo espejo,
proyecta nuestra imagen
con un perfil grotesco.

Sentimos una ola
de sangre, en nuestro pecho,
que pasa... y sonreímos,
y a laborar volvemos.

In these bottomless
galleries of our memory,
where the poor souls
hung up their old

moth-eaten festival cape
like a trophy,
there the poet is able
to watch the eternal labor
of the golden bees
of our dreams.

Poets, with our soul
attuned to the depths of heaven,
in the cruel battle
or the quiet garden,

we make new honey
from our old sorrows;
we patiently create
our pure white cloak,
and under the sun we polish
our strong armor of steel.

For the soul who does not dream
the enemy mirror
projects our image
with a grotesque outline.

We feel a wave
of blood pass through
our breast..., then we smile
and begin our task again.

When he rereads his verses, which are a “deep mirror” of his dreams, the poet discovers a “divine truth”, which “is trembling with fear”, which is fragile. The divine truth, the word of God, comes in dreams to the soul of the poet who translates it in turn into verse. Poetry originates in God during sleep.

That divine truth “is a flower that wants to throw its fragrance to the wind”, something beautiful but fragile, beautiful to the eye and pleasant to the smell, which aspires to spread.

God tries to spread beauty throughout the world through the word of the poet, who has received it in dreams.

In this poem, which is written under the heading Introduction, the poet explains his principles. “The poet’s soul is oriented towards mystery.” The mystery of receiving that “humble wave” that reaches his “lips”. The mystery that the immense God puts the macrocosm at the service of the human microcosm, that he builds a machine of beauty that distills its honey in the poet’s soul.

“Only the poet is able to look at what is far away inside the soul, in cloudy and magician sun wrapped.” Only the poet can penetrate the mystery and know what is far away (he comes from afar) and at the same time remains within the soul. Only the poet can, in short, know himself. The poet identifies himself with the Platonic sage and, why not, with the Christian saint, insofar as the latter, in the words of Saint Augustine, knows that God is more intimate, more interior to him, than he himself is.

“In those galleries” (uncovered or stained-glass corridors that give light to the interior rooms of the houses), “bottomless, of memory, where the poor people hung as a trophy the old and moth-eaten costume of a feast, there the poet knows the eternal gaze of the golden bees of dreams”.

Where ordinary mortals keep outdated things, the poet knows how to contemplate the eternal work of the golden bees of dreams. Because the dream is a honeycomb full of honey, which God has deposited there. And only the poet knows how to extract this nectar: “a few true words” and transform it into poetry. The Machadian verses also fit in here: “Your truth? No, the truth. And come with me to look for it. Yours, keep it.” It is the truth with a capital “T” that the poet finds in his soul and brings it to light, and verbalises it to update a memory. To verbalise something that has been perceived in dreams is to remember, to bring it to the surface.

It is written that, “the soul attentive to the deep sky”. This is a beautiful metaphor of poetic contemplation, which is an introversion towards one’s own soul, where God is. Again, as the Augustinian phrase goes, “do not go outside, God is within”, and the evangelical: “the kingdom of God is within you”. The poet, hero, must contemplate in tribulation as well as in tranquillity, and to cultivate a new honey from that which God had deposited in the soul. That is why the poet is a maker, a creator, a recreator, because he makes new honey from the divine honey. Hence the poet’s particular status in relation to God. Rubén Darío writes:

¡Torres de Dios! ¡Poetas!

¡Pararrayos celestes,
que resistís las duras tempestades,
como crestas escuetas,
como picos agrestes,
rompeolas de las eternidades!

Poets! Towers of God³

Made to resist the fury of the storms
Like cliffs beside the ocean
Or clouded, savage peaks!
Masters of lightning!
Breakwaters of eternity!

Poetic creation is like childbirth (we remember the metaphor of childbirth in Socrates and St. Paul's "The whole creation groans in travail"), which implies pain. A "new honey" is made, a "white and pure garment" (the new man of which St. Paul also speaks), and under the sun, in the vigil, we burnish the strong iron harness. What harness? Perhaps Rubén Darío will also answer us in his sonnet *Atrio*, dedicated to Juan Ramón Jiménez:

¿Tienes, joven amigo, ceñida la
coraza⁴
para empezar, valiente, la divina pelea?
¿Has visto si resiste el metal de tu
idea
la furia del mandoble y el peso
de la maza?

Have you, young friend, girded up your
breastplate
To begin, brave man, the divine fight?
Hast thou seen if the metal of thine idea
withstands
the fury of the greatsword and the weight of
the mace?

[...] ¿Tu corazón las voces ocultas
interpreta?
Sigue, entonces, tu rumbo de amor. Eres
poeta.
La belleza te cubra de luz, y Dios
te guarde.

[...] Does thy heart interpret the hidden
voices?
Follow, then, your course of love. You are a
poet.
May beauty cover you with light, and God
keep you.

Let us continue with the same poem. The soul that does not dream does not discover God, nor his word, but itself. And it becomes a Narcissus: its own image with a grotesque profile. "A wave of blood" that contrasts with the "humble wave" that "the sower of stars" leaves in our soul. In poem LXIV of *Galleries* we read:

Desde el umbral de un sueño me
llamaron...⁵
Era la buena voz, la voz querida.

From the threshold of a dream they called
to me... It was the good voice, the beloved
voice.

–Dime: ¿vendrás conmigo a ver el alma?...
Llegó a mi corazón una caricia.

"Tell me: will you come with me to see the
soul?..." A caress touched my heart.

–Contigo siempre... Y avancé en mi sueño
por una larga, escueta galería,
sintiendo el roce de la veste pura
y el palpitar suave de la mano amiga.

"With you forever..." And I advanced in my
dream through a long, empty gallery,
feeling the touch of her pure cloak
and the soft pulse of her friendly hand.

At the threshold of a dream, at the beginning, a good voice arrives, a beloved voice, which proposes to visit the soul: Know thyself. Meanwhile, a caress comes to the

4 Rubén Darío (2015)

5 All Antonio Machado's texts are from Machado (1955).

poet's heart, who advances through a long and brief gallery "feeling the touch of the pure garment and the soft palpitation of the friendly hand". We do not know the end of this journey. The LXX:

Y nada importa ya que el vino de oro
rebose de tu copa cristalina,
o el agrio zumo enturbie el puro vaso...

And it does not matter if the golden wine
spills out of your crystal cup,
or if bitter juice clouds your pure vessel...

Tú sabes las secretas galerías
del alma, los caminos de los sueños,
y la tarde tranquila
donde van a morir... Allí te aguardan

You know the secret galleries
of the soul, the pathways of dreams,
and the calm afternoon
where they go to die... That is where

las hadas silenciosas de la vida,
y hacia un jardín de eterna primavera
te llevarán un día.

the silent fairies of life wait for you,
and one day they will carry you to
a garden of eternal springtime.

The poet knows the secret galleries of the soul, the paths of dreams, which go to die one quiet evening. There the silent fairies of life will lead you to a garden of eternal spring. The pleasures and sorrows of life are accidental. The important thing is the end of the road. The quiet evening reappears in poem LXXIV:

Tarde tranquila, casi
con placidez de alma,
para ser joven, para haberlo sido
cuando Dios quiso, para
tener algunas alegrías... lejos,
y poder dulcemente recordarlas.

A calm afternoon like
the peacefulness of a soul;
to be young, to have been like that when God
willed it, to have
a bit of happiness... long ago,
and to be able to recall it gladly.

The memory of lost youth brings consolation. Once again, the evening, the prelude to night, allows this joy (LXXVII):

Es una tarde cenicienta y mustia,
destartalada, como el alma mía;
y es esta vieja angustia
que habita mi usual hipocondría.

It is a grey and gloomy afternoon,
out of sorts, like my soul;
and it is that old anxiety
that fills my usual hypochondria.

La causa de esta angustia no consigo
ni vagamente comprender siquiera;
pero recuerdo y, recordando, digo:
-Sí, yo era niño, y tú, mi compañera.

As for the cause of this anxiety, I do not
have even the vaguest understanding;
but I remember, and as I remember, I say:
Yes, I was a child, and you companion.

*

*

Y no es verdad, dolor, yo te conozco,
tú eres nostalgia de la vida buena
y soledad de corazón sombrío,
de barco sin naufragio y sin estrella.

And that is not true, sorrow, I know you:
you are the longing for a good life,
and the loneliness of a somber heart,
of a boat without a shipwreck or a guiding star.

Como perro olvidado que no tiene
huella ni olfato y yerra
por los caminos, sin camino, como
el niño que en la noche de una fiesta

Like an abandoned dog who has no trail
to follow and wanders
along the road, without direction, like
the child on the night of a carnival

se pierde entre el gentío
y el aire polvoriento y las candelas
chispeantes, atónito, y asombra
su corazón de música y de pena,

who is lost among the crowds
and the dusty air and the sparkling
anterns, terrified, his heart
startled by music and by sorrow,

así voy yo, borracho melancólico,
guitarrista lunático, poeta,
y pobre hombre en sueños,
siempre buscando a Dios entre la niebla.

That's what I am, a melancholy drunkard,
a mad guitarist, a poet,
a poor creature lost in dreams,
always searching for God in the fog.

Friendly nature alternates with hostile nature. Now the afternoon is “ashen and mournful, shabby, like my soul”; the anguish, the hypochondria, which settled on the poet when he was a child, is present. And now come some stanzas which are key to understanding the whole series of *Galleries* and even Antonio Machado's search for God. The poet reveals what this pain, which he has just said he is unaware of, consists of: “you are nostalgia for the good life and the loneliness of a sombre heart, of a ship without a shipwreck and without a star”. The poet feels “like a forgotten dog that has neither track nor scent and wanders along the roads, without a path, like a child who on the night of a party gets lost in the crowd and the dusty air and the sparkling candles, stunned, and his heart is amazed by music and sorrow”; and concludes: “that's how I go, melancholic drunkard, lunatic guitarist, poet, and poor man in dreams, always looking for God in the fog”. I interpret “poor man in dreams” as a man devoid of dreams. He has lost the inspiration of the dream where he will soon say that God speaks and will look for God in the fog, the fog of wakefulness, the fog of a reason immersed in a rationalist culture. It is interesting to note the adverb always. And in the following poem, LXXVIII, we find the adjective magician again:

¿Y ha de morir contigo el mundo mago
donde guarda el recuerdo
los hálitos más puros de la vida,
la blanca sombra del amor primero,

Will the mysterious world die with you,
and with it the memory
of the purest breath of life,
the white shadow of your first love,

la voz que fue a tu corazón, la mano
que tú querías retener en sueños,
y todos los amores
que llegaron al alma, al hondo cielo?

the voice that spoke to your heart,
the hand you tried to hold in dreams,
and all the loves
that touched your soul at the deepest level?

¿Y ha de morir contigo el mundo tuyo,
la vieja vida en orden tuyo y nuevo?
¿Los yunques y crisoles de tu alma
trabajan para el polvo y para el viento?

And will your world die with you,
the old life to which you gave new form?
Do the anvils and the crucibles of your soul
produce only dust blown away by the wind?

Machado continues to unveil enigmas. Following on from the previous one, the poet asks himself: “Will the mysterious world die with you, / and with it the memory / of the purest breath of life, / the white shadow of your first love, // the voice that spoke to your heart, / the hand you tried to hold in dreams, / and all the loves / that touched your soul at the deepest level?”

The wizard world, the world of the dream that keeps, like a treasure the purest breaths of life, the inspiration, the engine; the white shadow of the first love – that of the mother? That of those eyes that did not want to look back? The young fairy who carried him in her arms and kissed him? Was that voice the voice of God, and the hand, his hand? Poem LXXXVII has the suggestive title “Renaissance”:

Galerías del alma... ¡El alma niña!
Su clara luz risueña;
y la pequeña historia,
y la alegría de la vida nueva...

Galleries of the soul... the young soul!
Its bright smiling light,
the short history,
and the happiness of a new life...

¡Ah, volver a nacer, y andar camino,
ya recobrada la perdida senda!

Ah, to be born again, and to travel
once more on the path that was lost!

Y volver a sentir en nuestra mano,
aquel latido de la mano buena
de nuestra madre... Y caminar en sueños
por amor de la mano que nos lleva.

And to feel again in our hand
the pulse of the good hand
of our mother... And to travel in dreams
for love of the hand that guides us.

*

*

En nuestras almas todo
por misteriosa mano se gobierna.
Incomprensibles, mudas,
nada sabemos de las almas nuestras.

Everything in our souls
is governed by a mysterious hand.
Incomprehensible, mute,
we know nothing of our souls.

Las más hondas palabras
del sabio nos enseñan,
lo que el silbar del viento cuando sopla,
o el sonar de las aguas cuando ruedan.

The most profound words
of the wise man teach us
what the wind whistles when it blows,
or the water murmurs as it flows.

Pathetic evocation of childhood, of motherly love. Longing to be born again. Would he remember Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus? Declaration of scepticism. "In our souls everything is governed by a mysterious hand. Incomprehensible, dumb, we know nothing of our souls." Then comes the first poem discussed in this paper, and then LXXXIX:

Y podrás conocerte recordando
del pasado soñar los turbios lienzos,
en este día triste en que caminas
con los ojos abiertos.

And you will know yourself by remembering
the clouded canvases of old dreams,
on this sad day when you walk
with your eyes wide open.

De toda la memoria, sólo vale
el don preclaro de evocar los sueños.

Of all your memory, only the supreme gift
of evoking your dreams is worthwhile.

And those few true words will make possible the Socratic aspiration to know oneself and the evangelical aspiration to be free, in spite of the sadness of the journey in wakefulness, in vigil. To evoke dreams is an enlightened gift. Memory, memory. And the last poem of *Galleries XCI*:

Húmedo está, bajo el laurel, el banco
de verdinosa piedra;

Under the laurel tree, the bench
of greenish stone is damp;

lavó la lluvia, sobre el muro blanco,
las empolvadas hojas de la hiedra.

the rain has washed the dusty leaves
of ivy on the white stone wall.

Del viento del otoño el tibio aliento
los céspedes undula, y la alameda
conversa con el viento...
¡el viento de la tarde en la arboleda!

The warm breath of the autumn wind
undulates the grass, and the poplar grove
converses with the wind...
the afternoon wind in the grove of trees!

Mientras el sol en el ocaso esplende
que los racimos de la vid orea,
y el buen burgués, en su balcón enciende
la estoica pipa en que el tabaco humea,

While the light from the sunset glows
on the clusters that hang on the grape vine,
and the good citizen on his balcony lights
his stoic pipe in which the tobacco smokes,

voy recordando versos juveniles...
 ¿Qué fue de aquel mi corazón sonoro?
 ¿Será cierto que os vais, sombras gentiles,
 huyendo entre los árboles de oro?

I am thinking of my childhood poems...
 Whatever happened to my melodious heart?
 Can it be true, beautiful shadows, that you
 are fleeing through the trees of gold?

The collection of poems ends as it began: recalling youthful verses, perhaps the purest, the ones that best capture those poor true words that the sower of stars brought to our lips. And everything is contemplated in an afternoon. The afternoon of paradise, of paradise lost.

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THE IMAGE OF THE JUNGIAN SELF IN THE WORK OF ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA

Ján Knapík

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the figurativeness of the language of mystical experience in the context of Jung's theory of collective unconsciousness. It analyses the autobiographical work of St. Teresa of Ávila and tries to identify images that mirror the archetype of the whole, or the Jungian Self (das Selbst). The main objective of the paper is to reveal the life-giving potential and spontaneous nature of symbols created by the unconscious and to highlight their scope and importance in human life.

KEYWORDS

The spiritual dimension of C. G. Jung. The Self. St. Teresa of Ávila. Mystical experience. Archetyp. Image.

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The first impulse to choose the theme of my paper was the biography *C. G. Jung ou expérience du divin* [Carl Gustav Jung or Experience with the Divine] (2010). The experienced biographer Jean-Jacques Antier managed to create an original portrait of the well-known Swiss psychoanalyst, in which he also made a significant contribution by identifying the main line of his life “the ultimate goal of mystics – the merger of consciousness with great mysteries” (2012, 11). This idea permeated individual views of Jung's life: the reader recognizes him as a child fascinated by a “hidden God”, and also as a receptive therapist who, in order to rid his patients of obsessions, asks himself questions about the meaning of life and its functions, undertakes risky inner journeys and discovers a mysterious world under the consciousness. Like St. John of the Cross, he meets in the words of Antier – “with the scorching sun in the aching desert and with a dark night of the soul” (11–13). In addition to the attraction of his personal inner journey, he is also a sympathetic figure. He is the author of the “breathtaking synthesis of human cognition” (Edinger 2006, 9), a man who discovered

the collective unconscious and explained the role of universal archetypes. He had a natural ability to contemplate nature and experience relationships, desires, joys and torments- on a personal level, as well as in society as a whole. The tragic events of the Second World War and the madness of Nazism marked his professional trajectory. The counterbalance for him during this period was a deeper reflection on religion and a return to his spiritual roots, which, as a doctor of the soul, he saw as a source of healing. He focused on this ever more in relation to his patients. As his biographer claims, he was an idealist, with his feet firmly on the ground, and apparently that's why he was able to write four years before he died:

There is no direct path from the ground to the celestial heights or from matter to spirituality. Rather, it is about walking in a circle while gradually approaching the *centre* [emphasis J. K.]. We will not liberate ourselves by suppressing part of reality, but by fulfilling the role that we have before us as human beings with all its opposites (*Correspondance*, vol. 4; Antier, 2012, 363).

The Jungian Self as a picture of God

I have made the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela several times and it has always been confirmed to me that walking is a very important part of this experience. According to the Italian theologian Stefan de Fiores, “the movement function of walking is [...] the basis of the symbolism of the human way in physical, mental and spiritual order” (92). If a person is *homo viator*, as the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel coined the phrase, then it is in the nature of the pilgrim that walking is a means of “achieving [...] fullness” (92). Jung compares the life story of a man to a concentrated circular movement towards the deepest center. What's the center? Let us briefly recall Jung's remarkable discovery of *the Self* (*das Selbst*). In the Slovak language, we like to use the term *essencial* (= “*bytostné*”; the Self = “*bytostné Ja*” [the being I]), interpreting it as something deeply internal and very important to us. The dictionary portal of the Linguistic Institute of Ľudovít Štúr at the Slovak Academy of Sciences lists several connections under this word that will enable us to create a more concrete idea of its meaning: we may have essential needs, some kind of an essential trait, an essential interest in something, feel the most essential desire, but also to experience essential loneliness. Although these are connections based on normal reality, in some of them it is possible to register a certain meaningful affinity with Jung's concept of the Self, especially where we could move the interpretation and semantical motivation of these expressions to the area of unconsciousness. The Self is the center of the whole/totality of the psyche (including both consciousness and unconsciousness), it is the archetype of the whole, the place of objective identity in the face of the *Ego* (*das Ego*), which is the center of conscious personality and the seat

of subjective identity (Edinger 2006, 13). He considered the Self to be a factor, “which is superior to the conscious self. [...] There is no hope that we will ever achieve even an approximate awareness our complete Self, because although we will realize a lot of it, there will still be an indefinite and vague amount of unconsciousness that belongs to the totality of the complete Self” (Jung 1928 [Jaffé 2015, 355]). This finding enables us to better understand what Edinger claims in another place – the Self “an inner-felt Divinity that is identical to *imago Dei*”, it is also a creative moment, “where God and man meet”, a point “where transpersonal energy flows into personal life”, the central source of life energy, the source of our being, which we usually call God (2006, 14). If the Self is our personality in its entire form (because it contains both the conscious and unconscious psyche in live interaction), or if, as Jung argues, it is “the most complete expression of that combination of destiny, which is referred to as an individual”, it is also the “object of life” (Jung 1928 [Jaffé 2015, 355]). And it is this idea that returns us to the path to completeness that sooner or later every person undergoes in the process of individualization, that is, in the process in which they become “a unique being, and as long as we understand our final and unmistakable inner uniqueness as individuality”, they become “their own Self” (Jung [Jacobi 2013, 113]).¹ This process of shaping “indivisible unity, *wholeness*” (Jung 1939 [Jaffé 2015, 355]) has the character of a certain development and is spontaneous and individual in nature, which corresponds to the nature of the psyche, which is also a “product of personal experience”, but at the same time it must be said, in the context of Jung’s reflections on collective ignorance or the archetypal psyche, “it also has a pre-personal or transpersonal dimension, which is expressed universally in formulas and images” (Edinger 2006, 13). Jung approached the limitless multifaceted nature and complexity of the human psyche with great respect and was convinced that a religious function was firmly embedded in its depth:

I can only look in deepest admiration and stand in deep respect and silence before the abyss and heights of the reality of a soul whose non-spatial world hides an immeasurable number of images that have accumulated and organically condensed millions of years of vivid development. My consciousness is like an eye that captures the furthest spaces (Jung 1930 [Jaffé 2015, 353]).

It would be blasphemy to claim that God can appear everywhere, just not in the human soul. After all, the warmth of the relationship between God and the soul precludes any underestimation of the soul in advance. [...] In any case, the soul must have some possibility of a relationship, i.e. some similarity or relationship to God, otherwise there could never be any connection between them. This corresponding period is –

1 Jung placed great emphasis on the process of individualization being difference from self-realization. At that time there is an identification of the Ego (*das Ich*) with the Self (*das Selbst*). “And that’s how individualization occurs with pure egocentrism and autoeroticism. The actual Self (*das Selbst*) however includes far more than the Ego (*das Ich*) [...]. That is the same for another person or other people too. Individualization does not exclude the world but it includes it” (Jung 1946 [Jaffé 2015, 354]).

psychologically formulated – *the archetype of the image of God*” (Jung 1976 [Jaffé 2015, 353]).

Part of the individual journey and thereby the fulfilment of individual life is self-discovery and self-realization (cf. Jacobi 2013, 113). These are processes of human maturation that – together with the previous consideration – lead us to the concept of the spiritual path. If we understand all the ideas up to this point as a starting point for interpreting the image of the Self in the story of St. Teresa of Ávila, then defining them could provide us with other useful interpretative tools. Self-realization is the opposite of focusing on oneself. It is sharing one’s creative energy, thoughts, and also deploying one’s own spiritual and physical forces for some higher purpose, in cooperation with other people. Self-knowledge is complementary to this type of action in the world, since it is a prerequisite for the possibility of a similar symbiosis: by knowing one’s positive and negative aspects, and one’s desires or needs, including the most existential ones, we connect to the unconsciousness in the spirit in the introduction of the Jung quote above. It is a way of gradually approaching the center, with its specific aspects and dynamics.

The Self and mystical experience

The authentic mediation of a personal experience is difficult even if it is a natural experience, such that even those to whom we are trying to describe it may have experienced such difficulty. The main reason is the holistness of the narrative. It concentrates on many important, complementary levels: for example, our idea/image of the whole event, but also the accumulation of analogous and contradictory images, the sequence of events, inner experience, or movements inside, and emotional engagement, etc. Therefore, to translate in words a similar experience, authentic and important to us, sometimes proves to be extremely complicated, especially since we would really need to express all the aforementioned elements/parts of the narrative at one moment and in their entire form. However, we do not always know how to approach this goal, and so it often happens that the bearer of an experience who has a need to share it will feel that the result of a stream of words spoken by them, accompanied by gesticulation or more pronounced expression, is an astonishing narrative, but the recipient lacks this suggestiveness. They have only been given part of the experience, some significant layers, maybe even connotations have disappeared, another thing was remembered by the narrator only afterwards, so, for example, they failed to express some specific situational aspect. And that’s when we’re talking about natural experiences that many people experience in more or less the same way, so based on their own experiences, they have the ability to at least intuitively understand them.

Mystical experience is an experience that transcends the boundaries of ordinary human communication because it touches the deeply inner realm of man, man's spiritual experience. Although it may also take the form of fixed ceremonies (liturgy, prayer), common to a certain religious community or upbringing, it is removed from a completely specific source of knowledge if it is experienced in its own right, authentically, as a result of a certain degree of individual process in any way. It has its specific and comprehensive phenomena (mysticism of faith, allegorical and symbolic interpretations of religious teachings, dogma, liturgy, etc.). Since I was intrigued by the mystical writing of St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), who is a representative of the Christian mystical tradition, I find it useful, at least in part, to define its typical lines: it is the life of a believer in the community of the God of the Trinity, characterized by the experience of Christian contemplation, which means that the third divine person, the Holy Spirit of potential purifies the potential mystic and subsequently unites them with God and in God. This is experienced by mystics immediately, in a passive attitude in which they completely get rid of their own self and are left to be changed by the mighty God (in attitudes, thoughts, deeds). They continue to grow in perfection, so as to be similar to the other divine person, Jesus Christ (cf. Kohut 2012, 28). The image of God or *imago Dei* comes from the church fathers and means the trace or impression of God in the human soul. Jung also regarded God and unconsciousness as two different quantities, as borderline terms for transcendental content (Jaffé 2015, 359). At the same time, however, he claimed that “[e]mpirically [...] it is sufficiently likely to be possible to find that in the unconscious there is an archetype of totality”, which has a leading role, and this brings it closer to the image of God (359).

This similarity is further supported especially by the fact that this archetype creates a symbolism that has characterized and expressed divinity since time immemorial... The image of God coincides – to be precise – not directly with unconsciousness, but only with a special content of unconsciousness, namely with the archetype of the Self (*das Selbst*). It is this archetype from which we are no longer able to separate the image of God empirically (Jung 1952 [Jaffé 2015, 359]).

The Interior Castle – imago dei in homine

The Jungian Self can be interpreted as “*imago Dei in homine*” [the image of God in man] (Jung 1948 [Jaffé 2015, 359]). One of the symbols of the Self is also the Sun, which in the book *The Interior Castle* (IC) is indirectly confirmed by St. Teresa: he is “the spring, or the brilliant sun which is in the center of the soul” (1 IC 2, 3). An image of a castle that, based on existing research (e.g. Kučerková – Režná 2014; Hornáčková Klapicová 2015), can be described as an inner image, that is, one that originated in the consciousness of the mystic during contemplation and is the result of imaginative

vision. With this original metaphor of the human soul, the author wants to reveal her own path to mystical unification with God.

In the introduction to the book, St. Teresa writes that few things done under obedience were as difficult for her as writing about prayer. She does not feel anything, neither the conduct of God's spirit nor the appetite for writing, but her own smallness, misery, even intellectual bluntness. Given the circumstances surrounding mystics on the path of perfection, it can be said that this is actually an ideal formation, similar to that familiar emptying and distancing from the Ego (*das Ego*). Only into such a state can God speak. While thinking about how to write, she pleads with God to lead her – that's when her searching results in an image. So it was not in any way thoughtful or planned on her part, she just suddenly saw it and began to express it gradually to the reader: "I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions" (1 IC 1, 1). Her narrative reveals that it is not an external structure, but the castle of the human interior. It has a rich structure, it is organized horizontally and vertically. "Let us now imagine that this castle, as I have said, contains many mansions, some above, others below, others at each side" (1 IC 1, 3). However, this description has one goal – to emphasize/reveal that the most important thing happens in the middle of the castle: "[I]n the centre and midst of them all is the chiefest mansion where the most secret things pass between God and the soul" (1 IC 1, 3). In order to clearly capture this numinous space, that is, the one engaged in something exclusively divine, she applied the language of analogy, using a common and comprehensible image for her time – the castle as a symbol of inner strength.

The location of individual rooms high, low and on the sides evokes the construction of the universe, the centre of which can be reached from all sides, provided that we can also pass through the chambers that are on the "periphery". Whether we come from the front, back, bottom, top, left, or right, the main chamber is always "protected" by the path to be taken. The symbol of the castle standing on an inaccessible cliff evokes the idea of mystery – something hidden (hidden things between God and the soul). Since it's hard to get there, we interpretively discover that this is because it must be protected.

The main chamber (in the middle of the castle) represents safety, yet it is impossible to resist the idea that few of the chosen ones will manage to get to it. And in such a spirit, we can think not only in relation to the hidden things that take place between God and the soul in this chamber, but also in relation to mystical experiences (Šavelová 2016). The spiritual conquest of this castle is as demanding as the conquest of a real one – the only difference is in the means to achieve the goal and also the pitfalls or other types of challenges faced. Getting rid of oneself, quietly and without guaranteeing the fulfilment of the goal is a reference to the impossibility of demanding to be in the deepest heart of the castle. There is an incomprehensible

cooperation of the earthly and transcendent – the image of the castle “sent from above” is combined, or rather cooperates with archetypes that have accumulated in the human unconscious throughout history and submit to a single – central archetype (= Self), as Jung names it.

Even before Teresa develops a narrative about how to get into this glowing and noble castle, she thinks for a moment: isn't that silly? “[F]or, if this castle is the soul, there can clearly be no question of our entering it” (1 IC 1, 5). At this point, the concept of I meets the Self as *imago Dei*. It clearly points to the process of individuation, in which “separation of oneself from the Self” and “return of the Ego to the Self” can be observed in individual developmental stages (Edinger 2006, 15). This means that if someone gets into the middle, they find themselves in a state of primary identity – the Ego and the Self are one, the initial image of God is restored in the soul (16). The path of individualization at the end of which this restoration occurs assumes – as Teresa claims – that the soul must “enter within itself” (1 IC 1, 5). The gateway to this castle is prayer and contemplation.

Another of Teresa's metaphors also explains the thought concept of the castle: “[T]his castle, so beautiful and resplendent this Orient pearl, this tree of life, planted in the living waters of life – namely, in God” (1 IC 2, 1). She compares the divine in the castle to clear water and to the radiant Sun. And despite the fact that the soul is polluted by heavy sin “it is not the spring, or the brilliant sun which is in the centre of the soul, that loses its splendour and beauty, for they are always within it and nothing can take away their beauty” (1 IC 2, 3). In this excerpt, the main symbol of the Self, which is mandala – Sun, is clearly shown; however, so is the phenomenality of the Self, which is associated with many valuable attributes, but above all it is a source of life energy, a creative element, the source of the human being, which is God.

Those who do not know what awaits them in the middle undergo a difficult path of purification. Those in the other chambers suffer more, it's as if their ticket is closer to the centre (2 IC 1, 2). In the third chambers, Teresa emphasizes humility (3 IC 1, 7). In describing the fourth chambers, Teresa seems to be losing inspiration in the search for images. “As these Mansions are now getting near to the place where the King dwells, they are of great beauty and there are such exquisite things to be seen and appreciated in them that the understanding is incapable of describing them...” (4 IC 1, 2) She then adds that a person with no experience of these chambers will find many ambiguities here, while the experienced will easily understand. In this section, the reader of *The Interior Castle* will wonder how Teresa will explain the fifth, sixth and seventh chambers, when she loses inspiration at the fourth. Indeed, at the beginning of the fifth chambers, she herself admits:

How shall I ever be able to tell you of the riches and the treasures and the delights which are to be found in the fifth Mansions? I think it would be better if I were to say nothing of the Mansions I have not yet treated, for no one can describe them, the understanding is

unable to comprehend them and no comparisons will avail to explain them, for earthly things are quite insufficient for this purpose (5 IC 1, 1).

Theresa's apparent attitude of resignation in the face of the limits of the human language and mind to express a mystical experience mirrors the essence of the poetics of the ineffable (Kučerková 2020; Gallik 2020), which is also the poetics of original internal images (Civáňová 2020). She talks about the soul in the fifth chambers as dead to the world, but alive to God. She says there is little life in her soul to breathe, but she still talks about her death because the soul separates from the body and approaches God (5 IC 1, 3–4). Here, in fact, I begin to return to the Self, and there is a regrouping into a state of close deification. Finally, the fifth chambers are not far from the centre. The state in the sixth chambers is characterized by the fact that the soul is wounded by the love of the Bridegroom, so it searches for solitude and avoids anything that could distract it from the loving view of him (6 IC 1, 1). At the same time, she adds that he sees nothing here with physical vision, and uses the expression gaze only as an aid. After a comprehensive and florid debate on the sixth Chambers, which has 11 chapters, she says at the beginning of the seventh chambers that perhaps everything could be said, but at the same time she corrects this idea with a striking assertion: "It would be a great mistake to think that; just as the greatness of God is without limit, even so are His works" (7 IC 1, 1). Teresa's description of the chambers is bordered by a symbolic seven, which is the number of fullness, the gradation of the images dissolves until the last chambers in the glow of God's light. From concrete to inaccurate to incomprehensible and at the same time an uncontrollable light.²

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THE HEART AS AN IMAGE OF DEIFICATION IN MYSTICAL WRITING

Magda Kučerková

ABSTRACT

The paper explores two phenomena powerful in life and interpretive terms: the heart and deification. One is understood as deeply human, the other as metaphysically appealing. It is a connection present in the history of Christian thinking for a long time, since the heart is perceived as an inner space where God meets man, in the most intimate form, which can only acquire the character of unification. Deification, as the experience of Christian mystics and mystics shows, basically means the deepest unification with God and activation of the change in God's love. The issue examined in the paper is presented in the form of a brief guide to the theological concept of deification, and also the convergence of the historical and biblical views of the heart. The core of thinking about the topic is the interpretation of the heart as an inner image (the heart as the center, exchange of hearts) and the interpretation of the phenomenality of deification in the context of written mystical experience.

KEYWORDS

Mystical experience. Inner image. The heart. Center. Transforming unification. Deification.

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In my paper, I examine two phenomena which are strong from the life and interpretive perspective. One is deeply human, the other is metaphysically appealing: the heart and deification. This juxtaposition has been perceived in the history of Christian religious thinking and spirituality for a long time, since the heart is understood as the inner space where God meets man, in the most intimate form, which can acquire even the nature of unification.¹ Deification basically means the deepest unification with God (with all consequences and gains), as I will try to point out.

¹ Cf. Hastings – Mason – Pyper 2000, 156; Álvarez Maestro – Hornáčkova Klapicová – Martínez Puche 2011, 144; Farrugia 2008, 971–972.

Deification as a theological concept

The basis of reasoning about the penetration of the divine with the human is found in Greek philosophy, which presented God's transcendence as the ideal of imitation, even eminence-unlike the Old Testament, which viewed the divine world as untouchable (Špidlík [Farrugia 2008, 971]). Greek theologians formulated this view in relation to the incarnation of Logos. Clement of Alexandria states: "The word of God has become man so that you, man, learn how man can become God" (971). St. Athanasius of Alexandria, in the work *De incarnatione* (54), follows him saying: "God became man to become God" (Farrugia 2008, 125). To further deepens the thesis it is said that "the divine Logos assumed flesh so that all humankind could be lifted up into the mystery of his divinity" (McGuckin 2000, 156). According to Athanasius, the incarnation was the "mystical reconciliation of the hitherto disparate natures of God and humanity" (156). Medieval mystical theology completely naturally adopted the concept of deification because it enabled it to express an ecstatic connection with God (156). Mystical writing reveals this remarkable phenomenality of the action of the transcendent in man over the centuries. In a striking way, this is what happens precisely in the image of the heart.

Historical and biblical view of the heart

The heart is one of the oldest and perhaps most comprehensible images in human society. Historically, the forms of its depiction are truly rich, and its interpretations vary depending on the cultures but also the contexts that initiated and/or developed them. Evolution – the development of human thinking, skills, creativity, and the ability to observe – has naturally played an important role in this context.

Somewhere at the beginning of the imaginary tradition of creating this image by artistic means (especially artistic and verbal) we can therefore situate, say, a painting from the Stone Age – a simple red spot in the chest of a mammoth, as we find on the wall of the El Pindal cave in the Spanish region of Asturias. In both visual and verbal art, traces appear that reveal how perception and awareness of the phenomenon of the heart have changed. With the evolution of mankind, thinking became abstract, and so the material image acquired an immaterial character. Therefore, several thousand years before Christ, we already observe that the perception of the heart shifts in meaning and is not only understood as a) a physical organ located in the middle of the chest, the beating of which enables life, but also as b) the seat of emotions. Already in *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is considered the most important literary-religious work of Akkad culture, the issues of humanity arise: "the meaning of life,

anxiety in the face of death or the search for immortality” (Fernández González 2016, 98). The Egyptians viewed the heart as the seat of the soul and life experiences, and adequately shaped and subjected (for example, amulets in the form of a heart) its mythological image. Greek culture removed the heart-spirit connection and brought the concept of dualism between body and soul (Hoystad 2007 [Fernández González 2016, 101–102]).

We could, of course, continue these considerations, including artistic or graphic or iconic refinement of the form of the heart under the influence of evolving medical knowledge, but in the thematic scope of the conference it is appropriate to pause, especially by the biblical interpretation of the heart. In the Bible, it is rather rarely used in the meaning of the bodily organ, but it often appears in the form of a metaphor. A metaphor is thereby a form of verbal depiction that makes it possible to record phenomena, things incomprehensible by nature to a person, but at the same time inherent to him. It can also, as Longman – Wihoit – Ryken claim, show him “those dynamic forces that make us unique personalities” (2015, 264).

The Old Testament observes the “heart-thinking” of a person, which can be inclined to evil, which in turn provokes grief in the heart of God” (Gen 6:5–6), highlights the pure intent of man and fair action and “uprightness” of the heart (Gen 20:6; 1Kgs 9:4). Since holy books capture a person’s relationship with divinity and vice versa, it is natural that they reveal the human being as it is, in relation to things, relationships, situations that normally surround it and to which it must necessarily take “an attitude”: as the heart tends to be “afraid and weakhearted” (cf. Deut 20:8), hardened (Exod 7:22; Sir 16:11) or evil (Num 15:39; Bar 2:8). It can be full of confidence, brightness, joy, boldness and need not worry, because it “remain true to him” (Sir 22:23).

The heart is a place where both memories and statements of God are kept (Ps 119:11 [Beth]). It is the source of the desire for God and the reason for searching Him: “Yet when you seek the Lord, your God, from there, you shall indeed find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul” (Deut 4:29). Love from the whole of a human being (heart, soul, strength – cf. Deut 6:5) towards God returns from Him with the potential to convert: The Israelites receive the promise of a “new heart” and a “new spirit”, a “heart of flesh” instead of a “heart of stone”, God himself inserts “his own spirit” into their insides (Ezek 36:26–27). In summary, it could therefore be said that a human personality is injected into the biblical metaphor of the heart, i.e. thoughts, memories and mementoes, intellect, desires and will, or the choice of man in some decisive situation (cf. Longman – Wihoit – Ryken 2015, 264). This reasoning and examples could also be continued in relation to the New Testament, but since the gospel message and, in particular, the secret of incarnation and the secret of the trinity are the deepest essence of Christian mystical writing, the new-testament revelation of God will represent both an explicit and implicit starting point for further interpretation, above all of the interpreted texts.

The heart as an interior image

In my paper, I consider what creates that interpretive power that historically motivates people to examine the connection of heart and deification, and also why these considerations are still current and attractive. Some time ago, in cooperation with Miroslava Režná, I wrote a study on internal images in Christian mystical writing (2014). We defined them as those that arise in the consciousness of mystics during a contemplative state as a result of their imaginative vision. When the mystic then wants to convey these images to their surroundings, they try to express them with words so that can best preserve the specificity of their image and bring them closer to their significance. The heart can be considered an interior image of *sui generis*. To illustrate this, I will give you a few examples.

The heart as the center

The commonly applied allegorical meaning of the word heart is associated with the source of human feelings and attitudes, as evidenced by many well-known phrases: having a noble heart, a large heart, a hard heart, one's heart in the right place, etc. As the theologian Jean Galot notes in this context, although we may also be aware of the accelerated beating of the physical heart when feeling emotions, it is “not their source or center” (2003, 25). However, people commonly perceive the heart as the center of their inner life, which results from the need to determine the place in which “feelings originate, and also movements of will” (25). Galot places this center as an “intimate strand of personal life” on an emotional-spiritual level and defines it as the moral and psychological/affective center. According to Mircea Eliade, the Center is where everything comes from, it is a zone of sanctity, of existence that is new and which lasts, i.e. is eternal (Eliade [1993] 2003, 18–19). One and the other perspective shows that the center that people intuitively associate with their heart is a place where a person knows and can realize the deepest meaning of their being. In Jungian terms: the center is the Self, and therefore “the beginning and purpose of life, a symbol of psychic wholeness, ‘a vessel for the grace of God’, ‘a borderline term expressing unlimited reality’, [...] ‘God’s Image in Us’” (Antier 2012, 419).

As themselves in God or, more precisely, in their idea of God, people perceive the heart as the seat and source of love, therefore they express unification with God through the metaphor of the heart (for example, the connection of hearts). An apt example of such a notion of the heart in relation to the divinity is the cult of the Divine Heart of Jesus, in which the respect of Christians towards the person of Christ the Redeemer is mirrored. In it, the heart represents the “most intimate center of the incarnated person of Jesus Christ”, who could be known as “supreme love” (Figura

2000, 257).² At the same time, with respect to Jesus' heart, God tries to be a loving Father who sends his Son to redeem the world. In this context, the Dictionary of Mysticism (*Diccionario de la mística*) emphasizes as a biblical starting point respect for The Heart of Jesus and the last word of God the Father "the pierced the Heart of his Son": "They will see whom they stabbed" (Jn 19:37). The open (physical) heart of Jesus "is translated into the epiphany of his love" (Figura 2000, 258), which, through this respect, continues to take place and is made available on a spiritual level and very personally also in mystical experience.

Respect for The Heart of Jesus is shown to be central in mystical Christian tradition. It takes on a special dimension in the context of female writing (mysticism of the heart). This is mainly because it feeds semantically on a specific spiritual phenomenon – the mystical marriage to Christ (*connubium*). This metaphor, as Dinzelsbacher argues (2000, 363), enables mystics to express "the revelation of God or the Trinity in the Soul", and also its profoundly changing power. The presence of God in the soul submerges the soul into bliss, and the soul that contemplates God becomes like him. Julian of Norwich (circa 1342–1420), sees her own heart in one of the revelations she recorded in *Revelations of Divine Love*, and in the middle of it, her soul, which takes the form of a noble city.

And then our Lord opened my ghostly eye and showed me my soul in the midst of my heart. I saw the soul so large as it were an endless world ward and as it were a blissful kingdom. And by the condition I saw therein I understood, thought that it is a worshipful city. In the midst of that city sits our Lord Jesus, true God and true man, a fair person and of large stature, highest Bishop, solemnest King, worshipfullest Lord (Julian of Norwich 2003).³

This image of *the soul as a city* in which the king resides is characterized by similar expressional-value qualities to the image of the soul as presented by St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) in the work *The Interior Castle or the Mansions* (*Castillo Interior o Las Moradas*, 1577). Teresa also approaches the soul as the place where the king dwells – "a King so mighty, so wise, and so pure, containing in Himself all good"⁴ (1 *Interior Castle* 1, 1; St. Teresa of Ávila 1921). His abode is located in the very center of the castle (i.e. soul) and this center corresponds to the last chambers, the Seventh Mansions, based on the gradual principle of the construction of the work – the deeper the soul progresses into the castle, the closer it is to the center. When it reaches the

2 In the cult of the Divine Heart, the heart of Jesus is venerated, "because only the Son was incarnated. However, the starting point of the Incarnation and, in particular, the formation of the heart of Jesus is in the Trinity." The theology of the heart must therefore develop in relation to the Trinity, as the New Testament revelation shows (Galot 2003, 27).

3 *Julian of Norwich: Showing of Love, part III*. (Julian of Norwich. 2003. *Showing of Love*. The Liturgical Press, St. John's Abbey.) In Julia Bolton Holloway website "Julian of Norwich, her Showing of Love and its contexts." Available at: <http://www.umilta.net/love3.html>.

4 "un Rey tan poderoso, tan sabio, tan limpio, tan lleno de todos los bienes" (1 *Castillo Interior* 1, 1; Santa Teresa 2006).

center, it is “revealed that it has reached the center of God’s life, to its own center and to the center of god’s universe” (Sicari 2012, 731). At the climax of the experience of wandering in the interior castle, Teresa experiences a spiritual marriage: “human nature unites with the nature of God” (732). The image of the interior castle and the image of the soul as a city, inspired by material reality (the castle evokes massive walls similar to those that surrounded the centers of medieval towns)⁵, in the writing of both female mystics, they have a materialized character – they become an interior space of unification and sanctity. The imaginary walls surround the innermost center of the soul, in which a rare and mysterious connection with God occurs, to a safe connection in his loving presence.

Exchange of hearts

It is one of the most famous literary images, which was inspired by a mystical experience. For example, it was experienced by St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), as she told her biographer Raymond of Capua. In her experience, there are two connected images. The first is the image of the removal of the human heart: when in prayer she asked Christ to take away her heart and his own will and give her a new heart (cf. Ps 50:12), “she dreamed that the eternal bridegroom came to visit her as always, opened her chest on the left, took her heart and left”⁶ (Pozzi – Leonardi, eds. [1988] 2004, 249). Catherine was then sure in the knowledge (accompanied by a distinct feeling) that she was living without a heart, and she often expressed it out loud. The second image is the image of the acceptance of Christ’s heart: after one of the ecstasies when she returned home from church, she was shrouded in a light in which Jesus appeared.

In his holy hands he held the human heart, fiery red and radiant. [...] again he opened her chest on her left again and put the same heart into her that he held in his hands and said: – Dearest daughter: since I took your heart before, behold, now I am giving you my own, with which you will live forever –. When he said it, he closed the hole he had made in her side and, as a sign of wonder, a scar was left in that part of the body, which was visible to me and her companions⁷ (249–250).

As Catherine later mentioned to Raymond, the state of transformation felt like the definitive loss of her own self (surrender of her own will), even on a spiritual level:

5 More details on the figurativeness of the castle and a definition of the concept of the castle can be found Hornáčková Klapicová 2015, 297–298.

6 “Le parve che l’eterno sposo fosse venuto come al solito a trovarla, le avesse aperto il petto dalla parte sinistra e presole il cuore, se ne fosse tornado via.”

7 “[T]eneva nelle sue sante mani un cuore umano, vermiglio e splendente. [...] apri nuovamente il petto di lei dalla parte sinistra, e introducendovi lo stesso cuore che teneva nelle mani, disse: – Carissima figliuola: come l’altro giorno presi il tuo cuore, ecco che ora ti do il mio, col quale sempre vivrai –. Ciò detto, egli richiuse l’apertura che aveva fatto nel costato di lei, e in segno del miracolo, rimase in quel punto della carne una cicatrice, come asserirono a me e ad altri le sue compagne, che poterono vederla.”

“I could no longer say ‘Lord, I recommend You my heart’” (250). This image well describes the intentionality of the mystical experience: it is not only the development of individual spirituality or the acquisition of solace which is given, but also the activation of being in the world for service to others, despite the pain expected, for example, by the acceptance of the heart of the crucified Christ. This is confirmed by Catherine’s recorded words of Jesus: “[T]hese are my second self, because they have lost and wasted their will and have joined into mine, with which they form a whole and imitate it”⁸ (*Dialogue*, 1; Santa Caterina da Siena 2008, 30). Similarly, St. Teresa of Ávila expressed herself similarly on her spiritual journey, full of experiences of a supernatural nature (for example, the phenomenon of transverberation – the piercing of the heart).⁹ She most valued “the imitation of Christ in his state of self-sacrifice for the whole world” (Sicari 2012, 731).

Deification as a transformation of the heart

The previous consideration can be summarized in four words: love – center – unification – kingdom. The desire for God’s love as a mirror of *imago Dei* initiates the spiritual path of the mystic, built by prayer, fasting, renunciation, self-denial, and sacrifice. The initial need for transcendence walks hand in hand with the need for self-recognition (Knapík 2020; see also Lalinská – Šarníková 2015), self-realization and understanding of the meaning of life, and it is felt in the deepest inside, which in mystical figurativeness corresponds to the image of the heart as the center. In this intimate space of the human being, unification with Christ the Bridegroom occurs at the height of the spiritual path. God’s presence is realized by the mystic as a royal, and such deification becomes his soul: “You persevered with me in my trials, and I give you the kingdom as my Father gave to me” (Lk 22:28–29). In it, as the perfect (incarnated son of God) and absolute (God) the bridegroom’s mystic simultaneously knows “divine love that turns to mankind to save him and announce a new life” (Galot 2003, 155). The essence of this Love of God is expressed plastically by Julian of Norwich (2003) at the end of the 16th revelation:

And from that time that it was showed I desired oftentimes to know what was our Lord’s meaning. And fifteen years after and more I was answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus, “Would you know your Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who showed it to you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did

8 “[E]ssi sono un altro me stesso; infatti hanno perduta e annullata la volontà propria, essendosi rivestiti della mia volontà alla quale si sono uniti e conformati.”

9 Less well known, but similarly strong interpretatively in this context is the image of a “strong loving beam”, as seen by St. Laura Montoya, a Colombian mystic of the 20th century: as a result she felt an injury to her chest and left hip, and with it an immense inner burning, which she likened to the revival of love. For more information see Civaňová 2020, 29.

he show it to you? For Love. Hold yourself therein, and you shall understand and know more of the same. But you shall never know or understand therein other things without end.” Thus was I taught that Love was our Lord’s meaning.¹⁰

The mystically accepted knowledge “of the universal love of God, which is revealed to her as the basis and purpose of all creation and of every being” (Čaja 2014, 36), was an impulse for Julian of Norwich to choose the hermit’s way of life. She chooses seclusion, solitude, a limited living space, where the bricked-up doors of the cell make available “the central paradox of the gospel, according to which life is born of death” (Pezzini [1984] 1997, 19). Finally, this thesis is confirmed by Julian’s rich activity in the form of spiritual counselling and work on a new editorial of the *Revelations* manuscript – deification realized in spiritual terms gives rise in everyday life to *amor unitivus*, unifying love (one of the key elements of the definition of mystical theology, as formulated by the French medieval philosopher Jean Gerson). Only in this attitude is the experience of the epiphany of God’s love fulfilling its purpose.

Giving God’s love is the basic idea of thinking about the heart as a picture of deification. St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) characterized the nature of experience with God in contemplation as an “infused and loving knowledge of God” (*Dark Night of the Soul* II, 18, 5). At the same time, in a broader context, he pointed to the wide scope of this loving force, which influences human stories through metanoia. “If a soul is penetrated by this love and if it receives an internal stimulus from it [...], then it also participates in its fullness and its sharpness” (Grün – Riedl 1996, 44). This is confirmed by the words of St. Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510): “I see how man turns into God with love” (*Life Chapter* 14 [Sertorius 2013, 87])¹¹.

St. Augustine (354–430) in *Confessions* reveals a remarkable gradation of the ascent into God’s presence. She and her mother look through the window of the garden and contemplate it, gradually rising “through all the levels of bodily objects, and even through the heaven itself, where the sun and moon and stars shine on the earth”. All of this happens “with a more ardent love” (*Confessions* 9, 10, 24). Spiritual theologian Francesco Asti stresses that in Augustine’s description, the state of the heart is of great importance – his total expansion, even the glowing/hot feeling, only in this attitude can one approach God. However, this is only possible because of the nature of the soul that was created in God’s image and form:

the garden becomes a spiritual space for them, from which the steps up to the fullness of Being Loved – Loving – Love. [...] Ecstasy is to step out of yourself and go towards God, and what’s more, it’s overcoming the intellectual dimension and totally immersing yourself [...] to similarity. The whole soul belongs to God; it is heavenly as God’s beauty (2009, 32).

¹⁰ *Julian of Norwich: Showing of Love, part III. Ibid.*

¹¹ Parts of this work are freely translated due to no access to the original text in Italian.

The pouring of Infusion of God's love arouses in the heart of mysticism the need for a radical diminishing of its own intentionality literally in the spirit of the gospel: to leave everything for the kingdom of God" (Lk 18:29; Mt 19:29). Only in a state of complete emptying (kenosis) is there a transforming unification, a breakthrough with God's essence, when – according to Julian of Norwich – everything becomes God: "And I saw no difference between God and our substance but as it were all God" (Julian of Norwich 2003).¹²

St. Catherine of Genoa, in a remarkable picture of the fire of God's love, clearly communicates the intensity and special quality of experience with God's revelation. God satiates the mystical being in a way that transcends the human abilities for reflection. Love is given to it in a way that excludes everything it knew and had experienced until then.

Finally, the abilities have lost their natural activity, they are quite captivating and burn in God's fireplace so brightly and with such clarity that they seem already to be blissful and led to the desired haven, where they enjoy the inner flames of such pure love that, with their power, would burn hell, even though it is their nature to be a flame that burns without consuming (*Life* Chapter 21 [Sertorius 2013, 8–88]).

God is so powerful that he can transform all human existence. Catherine says that "I feel such a fire without fire in myself that I wish everyone could understand it" (*Life* Chapter 9 [Sertorius 2013, 79–80]). Deification means a calling for testimony, she wants and needs to testify about what she saw and felt to make her experience life-giving. As the individual life stories of mystics show, the changing and loving scope of God (1 Jn 4:7–16) in them gives rise to the need to radically change one's way of life towards service to others, greater simplicity, or absolute poverty; it gives them the strength not to be afraid of pain or suffering. It also encourages their creative efforts to find accessible and appropriate forms of expression to express what appears to be ineffable.

Conclusion

The subtle inner nature of the mystical experience, resisting the exactness of scientific approaches, and its semantic rooting in the word mystery, are undoubtedly an interpretive challenge. Paradoxically, the interpretive power of this comprehensive and provocative phenomenon also lies in these characteristics. After all, man has always had the need to think about himself, about the meaning of life and death, about events, deviations on his own spiritual path, whether originating in a particular

¹² *Julian of Norwich: Showing of Love, part II* (14th revelation; Chapter 54).

Ibid. Available at: <http://www.umilta.net/love2.html>.

religious space or outside it. A person also feels the need be silent and immerse oneself in one's own interior, an inspiration for authentic being in its environment and relationships. The mystical narrative therefore represents one of the imaginary models of the inner world of man, and its interpretation contributes to identifying the possibilities of the (in)effability of this world, as I tried to point out in this paper, describing the image of the heart in the context of the phenomena of deification.¹³

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE RHETORIC OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE



TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCE OF ST. LAURA MONTOYA Y UPEGUI

Zuzana Civiánová – Monika Brezováková

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the life and written work of the Colombian Catholic mystic St. Laura Montoya y Upegui (1874–1949), known also as Mother Laura. The life of this mystic was marked by a mystical experience from her early childhood. In the work she left us, especially in her autobiography entitled *History of the Mercies of God in a Soul* [Historia de las misericordias de Dios en un alma], she tries to talk about her unique experience, although this task is not easy. She tends to speak about her mystical experience with God mainly through specific images of her own inner world. The aim of this study is to bring these images closer to the reader, analyse them and reconcile them with the aesthetic qualities of the narration, which helps to form more complete and complex image not only of the mystical experience, but also of the work by St. Laura.

KEYWORDS

Mysticism. St. Laura Montoya y Upegui. Transcendent experience. Images of inner world. Aesthetic qualities of the narration.

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Spanish written literature is characterized by a rich spiritual tradition, especially in the works of St. Teresa of Ávila (also known as St. Teresa of Jesus) (1515–1582) and St. John of the Cross (1542–1591). In recent years, the Colombian author Laura Montoya y Upegui (1874–1949), known as Mother Laura of Saint Catherine of Siena, is beginning to arouse more significant interest. The subject of interpretive attention is mainly her spiritual autobiography called *History of the Mercies of God in a Soul* [Historia de las misericordias de Dios en un alma]. The author wrote it between the years 1925–1933, but it is also available to current readers in the edition from 2017. In it, St. Laura Montoya reveals with her unique language her deep inner world, the

repeatedly experienced encounter with God in a mystical experience and the poetics composed of the original inner images that represent the focus of this interpretation. She wrote it on the initiative of her confessor Esteban Le Doussal, a priest from the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (the so-called The Eudists) in order to explain to the fellow sisters of her congregation her own experience of the transcendent. This more than a thousand-page work of epistolary character is a brilliant example of the so-called poetics of ineffable, both personal and intimate spiritual experience of the author. The interpretation in certain passages acquires a strongly mystagogical character. Laura Montoya uses introspection to illuminate the process of her spiritual maturation, immerses herself in memories, composes particles of a mosaic of her own spiritual story, and names the vibrations of her interior. The autobiographical dimension of the text stimulates its expressive impact and makes it credible, even inspiring.

God's pedagogy

The spiritual path of St. Laura Montoya was marked with the phenomenon of pain. She suffered because she was underestimated and humiliated. Injustice, which she did not understand as a child, was later included in her work as the concept of *God's pedagogy* [“pedagogía de Dios”]. “Look, venerable Father, as God has shaped me. I did not understand, I believed that poverty could be the reason responsible for my humiliation and suffering. Now I see that it was purely God's pedagogy. Other poor people do not have to experience so much cruelty”¹ (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 1230–1231)². The wide range of pain was caused by various circumstances of life: she failed to find a confessor who would understand it, nor could she find proper spiritual guidance. During her teaching career she experienced indifference and slandering or finger pointing, to a large extent she was also marked by the rejection of her application to join the Carmelite Order, etc.

The unfortunate and often unfavorable life events encourage us to look at Laura Montoya's work through the aesthetic expressive quality of tragedy. The life of the mystic was marked by suffering that was her real experience. The essence of this aesthetic quality is not formed only by physical or mental suffering, but also moral

- 1 “Mire, reverendo padre, ¡cómo me formaba Dios! Yo no lo entendía; ¡creía que mis humillaciones y sufrimientos se debían a la pobreza! Hoy veo que era puramente la pedagogía de Dios. Los demás pobres no tienen que experimentar estas durezas.”
- 2 All the citations are translated by the authors of this paper – unless otherwise stated. Since we are working with an electronic version of the book (Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana from 2017) purchased from Amazon, in order to read it, it is necessary to use the Amazon Kindle application, which does not have page numbering. Therefore, in order to identify the citation, we use the so-called locations that locate the quoted text in the e-book (1 location = 150 Kb of information). For all citations from the mentioned edition of the autobiography, we will therefore use the following notation with the relevant location numbers (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 1231–1232).

suffering. This can be manifested in a certain conflict, e.g., in the struggle between good and evil, which results in purification, the so-called catharsis (Plesník et al. 2011, 361–362). Thus, difficult experiences represented certain stages of her spiritual growth for the mystic. They shaped her and led her to free herself – from relationships and emotional ties, to stop being dependent on everything that binds her to earthly stuffs. She herself points to this in her spiritual biography: it was the only possible way to move forward on the path to perfection, which was her lifelong goal. The victory in this effort was that “humiliation eventually ceased to humiliate her, and love for one’s neighbour, without distinction, increased significantly”³ (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 15648).

In the literary reflection of the spiritual path at St. Laura can be clearly identified the desire for perfection.⁴ According to her own words, it can only be achieved through suffering. This knowledge is illustrated by the experience of spiritual exercises for teachers in Medellín in 1895. “During these exercises, I understood what suffering means. From day one, God wanted me to see the total distortion of my inner being. All the sins of my life were thrown at me like rabid dogs and mined to me by the scouts of the whole mountain range”⁵ (loc. 2352–2353).

Over time, Laura understood God’s intention to perfect her soul. She, therefore, turned more to prayer and the practice of virtues: “[My] soul yielded only to God’s intervention, to the divine Sun of my life”⁶ (loc. 1239). Such a resort to prayer evokes contemplation, more precisely focused thinking, thinking and contemplation not only on the “things of man” but also on the various mysteries of the world (Plesník et al. 2011, 95). Contemplation – psychic-spiritual activity – is related to thinking about the meaning of the existence, with the effort to get closer to God. In religion, it is associated with the transcendental positions of human existence (96). It is the prayer of the mystic that provides the opportunity to communicate with God: “A meditating Christian does not seek to identify with God (in humility he sees himself as an imperfect being), he only seeks to approach the Almighty in a contemplative depth and beg forgiveness and blessing” (96). In the theory of expressive qualities, contemplation is associated with a certain chasm that exists between the subject and the object. The contemplative, in this case the praying mystic, seeks to receive into her own soul the radiance of the Almighty. The fact that St. Laura tries to describe this experience with prayer, also draws our attention to the sacredness of her statement, more precisely an effort to express the sacred as a source of maximum respect and awe (295).

3 “Las humillaciones dejaron de humillarme y el amor del prójimo, sin distinciones, creció mucho.”

4 Evelyn Underhill identifies on a symbolic level three areas appealing to the great manifestations of human unrest: 1. the desire that makes man a pilgrim, 2. the desire of the heart for the heart, that is, for the perfect partner, 3. the desire for inner purity and perfection – that leads one to asceticism (2004, 161).

5 “En estos ejercicios supe lo que era sufrir. Desde los primeros días quiso Dios que me viera en toda la deformidad de mi ser interior. Los pecados todos de mi vida se me echaron encima como perros rabiosos y me pesaban como montañas.”

6 “mi alma era flexible solo a la acción de Dios, divino Sol de mi vida”

For a certain period (from years 1900/1901 – she is not sure – until 1906), Laura's life was permeated by darkness, a period of abandonment and emptiness that was associated with the absence of God's presence. She thus experienced that familiar *dark night of the soul* ["la noche oscura del alma"], as described by St. John of the Cross. Evelyn Underhill understands the dark night as a gradual dissolution of the state of mystical enlightenment⁷, when the consciousness comes to the surface and the I is still separated from the Absolute. "This consciousness is so deep and powerful that it dampens all consciousness of the transcendent and plunges the self into a state of negation and misery" (2004, 423).

St. Laura called this period of not feeling God's presence *a grip of a demon* ["cerco del demonio"]. "The state of my soul was the state of the deepest darkness. I seemed to miss God Himself. I spent the nights in a dark cave. I trembled with bitterness, as if I had severe cramps"⁸ (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 3226–3227) and on the other point she adds "In my pain I felt like a blind man without light and love"⁹ (loc. 3294). "Bitterness", "darkness" and "dark cave" represent the absence of God's presence, which Laura found very difficult – underlined it by comparing herself to a blind man who did not feel love and never saw light.

The life period of the mystic, marked by feelings of emptiness and loneliness, can be interpreted in terms of expressive aesthetic qualities with the melancholy expression of the statement, which Plesník et al. defined as a "sad expression of life attitude, evoked by an awareness of transience and loneliness" (2011, 364). On the one hand, melancholy is associated with the transience of being, on the other, it evokes a certain reconciliation and humility, but also nostalgia and sad memories.

This unhappy period of her life lasted several years, and St. Laura also brought it with her to the Urabá region, where she regularly opened her heart to the superior. It was he who first explained to her the principle of the simple soul on the path of approaching God. "He told me that this suffering cleansed my love in some way and that it allowed God to make my soul simple, and that was the next step in union with Him"¹⁰ (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 13878–13879). Thus, all the effort of the dark night leads to the necessary mystical act of absolute self-surrender (Underhill 2004, 454) – the soul of the mystic needs to be "emptied" in order to be filled by God's grace.

After six years of living a *dark night*, Laura has entered the next stage – she interprets it as a state of "absolute relaxation" ["una absoluta desocupez"] of her being for God. Nothing was more important to her, and therefore she did not consciously build

7 Evelyn Underhill speaks of enlightenment as an awakening to the consciousness of the Absolute, a certain sudden and surprising change in which the mystic "acquires consciousness of the world that has always been there and in which his essential being – its foundation, which is divine – has always rested" (2004, 271).

8 "El estado de mi alma era el de la más profunda oscuridad. Parecía que hasta Dios me hubiera faltado. Pasaba las noches como en una caverna oscura; temblaba de amargura como si tuviera fuertes convulsiones."

9 "Mi dolor era como un ciego sin luz ni amor."

10 "Me dijo que esas penas habían hecho cierta purificación en mi amor y que entonces Dios había simplificado mi alma, lo cual significaba un nuevo aumento de unión con Él."

relationships, did not engage in activities, no matter how good they were, her only intention was to build a void within herself that would be filled by God. This period brought strange things to her prayers (as she called them herself): sometimes it was a feeling that she understood the eternal unity of the Word with the Father (“it was not just light: it was like an encounter with God’s fatherhood” (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 3990), other times as if God had covered her with his fatherhood and appointed her the mother of unbelievers, who “hurt her like real children” (loc. 3995) – Laura figuratively named them “my wound” [“mi llaga”].

Transcendent experience in images

Against the background of the life and experience of St. Laura with the transcendent, we will try to present selected images from her spiritual autobiography. It is necessary to add that in the description of the experienced and difficult to express, the mystic is forced to use ordinary human language and often the analogy. In mystical experiences, however, she resorts mainly to the use of images. In figurative language, there is an important relationship between image and expressed reality, with authors most often using comparisons, metaphors, or allegories (Dinzelbacher 2006, 659).

When thinking about the imagery of the transcendent experience of St. Laura, we were inspired by the term *inner image*, as characterized by Magda Kučerková and Miroslava Režná in the study “Inner Images in Christian Mystics. Literary-Semantic Characteristics” [Vnútorné obrazy u kresťanských mystikov. Literárno-sémantická charakteristika]. By it, the authors understand

an image that was created in the consciousness of a mystic during a contemplative state and which the author-mystic seeks to form(ulate) in his work in a such way that he would like to preserve the semantic-value identity of the “seen” [...] the written recording of these images always takes place in the author’s belief that he is not humanly able to contain the revealed mystery in the fullness of meaning and expression (2014, 5–7).

It looks like that the images of the mystical work of St. Laura Montoya can also be explored through aesthetic expressive qualities, or more precisely categories, that Plesník et al. define as “the designation of the quality of the statement that we experience in perception as its effect, the scope” (2011, 15). We think about how the mystic’s statement affects us and what it is like. In theory, these are expressive qualifiers that have been defined conceptually within the framework of scientific discourse (e.g., tragic, nobility, etc.). The roots of this system of expression are mainly connected with the Slovak literary linguist František Miko, who created it in the

1950s.¹¹ Laura Montoya's autobiography shows that her statement is often intuitive, subjective, and melancholic, and that is why we would like to try to reconcile the images that the mystic creates in the work with various aesthetic expressive qualities.

At the same time, it makes opportunities to look at the work of St. Laura through phenomenology: "The essence of phenomenological analysis lies in the fact that the researcher tries to enter the inner world of the individual in order to understand the meanings the person attributes to the phenomenon under investigation" (Knapík 2019, 121).¹² The scope of our work will not allow us to look at the topic in this context, but it is a stimulus for future research. The following division of the subchapter presents selected interior images by Laura Montoya.

Experience with an anthill

At the beginning of the autobiography, Laura Montoya uses a parabola in order to describe her first mystical experience with God: she talks about the "experience with the anthill" ["golpe del hormiguero"]. One morning, she watched the ants tenaciously carrying leaves from a nearby tree to an anthill. The waves of love she felt during this play with ants: "sometimes I loved them tenderly"¹³ (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 866) at one point erupted into something much more intense. As it was extremely difficult for her to express the experience, she resorted to an internal monologue, from which in some points it is possible to feel the despair of her own inability to talk about the ineffable. This is underlined using exclamation or repetitive construction:

I was struck by a ray; I can't say more! That ray was the knowledge of God and his greatness, so deep, so majestic, so loving, that today, after so much study and teaching, I know no more about him than I knew then! And what was it like? That cannot be said!¹⁴ (loc. 867–869)

11 Within the theory of literature and literary-theoretical interpretation of an artistic text it meant a conceptual-methodological shift, within translation (especially thanks to A. Popovič) it established itself as a criterion for translation quality and from the seventies to the nineties it began to be used in order to explain various phenomena (e.g. interpretation of non-traditional aesthetic creations, etc.). When creating the model, F. Miko was inspired by the already existing model of language functions of K. Bühler from the work of Sprachtheorie from 1934, which is also related to Jakobson's hexadic model. See more <http://hyperlexikon.sav.sk/sk/pojem/zobrazit//vyrazova-sustava>.

12 The inspiration for our future reflexion about Laura's written work is the journal World Literature Studies, especially no. 3 from 2020 entitled "The language of transcendent experience in literary-phenomenological interpretation". In this journal, the authors look, among other things, at the works of mystics through the prism of the phenomenology of Jean Luc Marion, specifically through the phenomenality of giving and the theory of the so-called saturated phenomena.

13 "a veces acariciándolas con grande cariño"

14 "¡Fui como herida por un rayo! ¡Yo no sé decir más! Aquel rayo fue un conocimiento de Dios y de sus grandezas, tan hondo, tan magnífico, tan amoroso, que hoy, después de tanto estudiar y aprender, ¡no sé más de Dios que lo que supe entonces! ¿Cómo fue esto? ¡Imposible decirlo!"

This honest, non-forgable, and authentic statement about the experience with the anthill, more precisely, the feelings that the mystic experienced are underlined by the fact that Laura does not use traditional expressive techniques. On the contrary, what is valuable is her original perception or individual experience, which she confirms with words that she does not seem to be able to express such an experience at all. “The authentic expression purposefully focuses on an open and honest presentation of the creator’s feelings” (Plesník et al. 2011, 54).

In addition, Laura describes her lived experiences subjectively and these are therefore conditioned by her personal feelings. She applies subjectivity in the creation of the content of expression, for which she uses mainly language. The transcendent experience should be seen as a phenomenon incomprehensible by the cognitive processes of the ordinary person because it transcends them. In Laura, as in other mystics, the surrender of God is accompanied by a flood of love, even an indescribable ecstasy. The lived experience is often depicted more lyrically and, in St. Laura, transgresses with the chaotic nature of the statement (Laura turns to several recipients, on the one hand it is her confessor, Father Le Doussal, on the other hand God himself) and the (un)conscious use of symbols (e.g., light, fire, etc.), but also by ineffability.

Laura’s experience with the anthill shows signs of a fleeting knowledge of the existence and presence of God, which she could not explain due to her young age – her quite natural reaction was crying and screaming.¹⁵

Experience with carpenter’s workbench

A similar case is Laura’s other experience, this time with the feeling the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, lived again in childhood – in the twelfth year of life. She named it the “experience with carpenter’s workbench” [“golpe del banco”]. Although she used to receive Communion almost daily, she perceived it only as a certain duty of daily need. She again uses the parabola to describe her feelings as faithfully as possible: “But all this was as if out of a superficial faith (forgive me the word, I cannot find other), as if it were cold, insufficient, in short, inexperienced (another, of which I do not know whether it is not bold)”¹⁶ (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 1400).

In the manuscript, Laura emphasizes such words as “superficial” and “inexperienced”, as if she would like to indicate that she is not satisfied with their

15 In this context, it could be a paradox of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, which is also characterized by M. Kučerková in her study “Interpretation of the Mystical Experience Against the Background of the Phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion” [Interpretácia mystickej skúsenosti na pozadí fenomenológie Jeana-Luca Mariona]. She understands the paradox mentioned above as an encounter with radical otherness, exceeding the boundaries of the natural order, more precisely ordinary structures of life. “On the one hand, therefore, it attracts and captivates human existence, it attracts to participate in eternal being; on the other hand, it confronts it with immeasurable and unrecognized energy that arouses respect, perhaps fear or anxiety” (2020, 24).

16 “pero todo esto era como por fe seca (perdóname esa palabra, no tengo otra), como fría, como mediana, en fin, como no experimental (otra que no sé si será atrevida).”

expressive value, because they do not cover the semantic nuances she wants to convey. She compares life to that moment to a face obscured by a semi-transparent veil that someone took off from her in full light, which can be interpreted as meaning that even though she received the gift of knowing God, she had not yet penetrated the secrets of the Eucharist. However, this has changed with the experience with the carpenter's workbench:

So, I did a spiritual communion, and I can't say more. Stunned, I did not perceive anything that was going on around me, I felt an insurmountable pain with a touch of special love, as if the Holy Eucharist was passing through my soul, tears flooding me without me perceiving it. In addition, it seemed to me that I kind of understood how Jesus was present in the Host and how God's Word was present in Jesus¹⁷ (loc. 1404–1407).

The explicit "I can't say more" again points to the powerlessness of talking about lived events in common language. At the same time, it forces one to interpret the mystical statement with intuitive narration. "Artists usually say: I don't even know how, it just happened to me. Creative activity usually consists of a different share of balance and a sudden, unexpected idea" (Plesník et al. 2011, 93). Even Laura cannot describe her experience with words and tends to an intuitive statement, more precisely the mental statement, when she talks about the experience as she felt it. When talking about the intuitive statement, there is often an overlap of different styles, a certain translucency of one over the other, and such a mutual transgression has a metaphorical character (94).

This is confirmed by using the metaphor of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ by Laura, which she envelops in a feeling of "insurmountable pain mixed with special love". The fact that she has just survived something that transcended her both cognitively and emotionally is expressed by the antithesis: "In short, I am not trying to say more, because I will twist an idea that is not even an idea"¹⁸ (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 1408–1409).

17 "Hice la comunión espiritual y no sé decir más. Como electrizada, como si no sintiera lo que alrededor pasaba, como si tuviera un dolor soberano, con una mezcla de amor extraordinario, como si la santa eucaristía pasara mi alma de parte a parte me bañé en lágrimas sin sentirlo. Me parecía, además, como que comprendía cómo Jesús está en la hostia y cómo el Verbo Divino está en Jesús."

It is possible to identify a connotation with St. Bernard, whose work *Cantica cantorum*, sermon LXXIV, quotes Underhill in connection with the encounter of the soul with the Absolute. As the saint himself pointed out, the Word visited him very often, and although he never knew how it had ever entered his soul, he felt its presence. "This is exactly what contemplatives call passive or donated contemplation" (2004, 283).

18 "En fin, no ensayo decir más porque acabo de desfigurar la idea que tampoco es idea."

The image of the crucified Christ

Another experience of St. Laura, lived by looking at the image of Christ crucified in front of the eyes of the Jerusalemites, has the character of an active figurative vision.¹⁹ Despite the inconveniences that accompanied her missionary work, Laura retained a growing love in her soul and metaphorically perceived suffering as the “fuel of this love” [“combustible para este amor”] (loc. 17079). One day, she was supposed to attend a performance of the Tunebs – one of Colombia’s indigenous tribes – at a local parish. When she looked at the painting, even though she had seen the painting for the first time in her life, she felt a “strong loving ray” [“rayo amoroso tan fuerte”] (loc. 17081). It physically injured her chest and part of her left hip:

It was the first and only time I felt such a phenomenon. At the same time, with the inner ardour of love, I felt the heat on my chest and hip, it was as if they were igniting and the glow of fire penetrated my body, not only superficially, but all over it. While the inner ardour or revival of love lasted, without a flood of tears, as it happened the other times, I felt the phenomenon, but I did not perceive it. A little later, when the inner flame began to recede, I woke up, put my hand on my chest, and my clothes were as hot as if I were standing by a fire. It only lasted a short time. If it had been longer, I would probably have died²⁰ (loc. 17082–17086).

The experience of St. Laura can be compared to the transverberation experienced by St. Teresa of Jesus.²¹ Under a strong and loving ray, it is possible to identify a lance that pierced Christ on the cross: “But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water” (Jn 19:34), a symbol of Christ’s love, which he sacrificed for people (and which in it itself gradually increased): “Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (Jn 13:1).

The image of scar

Through her work, Laura returns several times to the “image of a scar” – she associates it with two attributes, light and blackness [“rayón de luz” / “rayón negro”]. Her interpretation of the relationship she has with herself and with God, as it emerged

19 We use the same term as Evelyn Underhill, according to her imaginative vision can be divided into passive and active (see Underhill 2004, 325).

20 “Es la primera y única vez que he sentido tal fenómeno. A la vez que el ardor interior amoroso sentía que se agolpaba el calor sobre el pecho y el costado, como encendiéndose, y con ardor de fuego aplicado a la carne, no superficialmente solo, sino en toda ella. Mientras duró el ardor interior o crecimiento de amor, sin efusión de lágrimas como otras veces, sentía el fenómeno, pero no lo advertía. Un poco después, cuando comenzó a calmar el ardor interior, advertí, y entonces puse la mano sobre el pecho y estaba la ropa caliente cual si hubiera estado al pie de una hoguera. Esto duró poco y si hubiera durado más, quizás hubiera muerto.”

21 More about St. Teresa’s mystical experiences is written by M. Kučerková and M. Režná in their publication *Poetics of the Ineffable* [Poetika nevyjadritelného] (2016). In this context, they analyse as St. Teresa saw a cherub in his physical form, who pierced her heart several times with a long spear.

from the transcendent experience, evokes Jung's archetype of shadow. She put it in opposition with the light of God's love.

When I immerse myself inside me and see what I call my being, I see in time clearly two scars, one black, the other as light. The first is the one I call myself and has its origin at the time when it began to exist according to your will. The second is what is yours and what never started, because it is eternal. This is what you showed when you said: I loved you with everlasting love!²² That one is black because it is a denial of one's own existence, because it is a vicious circle, a little of a little, because it is ignorance and sin. This one is light because it is yours, because it is real, because it is love, because it is life, because it is an eternal presence, because it is what it is²³ (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 506–510).

It is important to pay attention to the choice of other attributes related to the opposition black-light. While the scar of light is characterized by terms such as “real”, “love”, “life”, “eternal presence”, the black one is defined by the terms “denial of existence”, “vicious circle”, “little of a little”, “ignorance”, “sin.” When Laura assigns the attribute of blackness to this one scar, she describes herself through lyrical images as a set of negative qualities, frustration, fear, or cycle (in the sense of a vicious circle) – on the contrary, she understands the attribute of light – God or God's love – as infinity. St. Laura goes on to say that after death the two scars will merge and the only thing that will remain will be the light of God's being [“la luz de tu Ser”], indicating the insignificance of its existence compared to the nowhere beginning and nowhere ending presence of God. “The scar of light is simply eternal” (loc. 513). Thus, in Laura (as in most Christian mystics) we find the ancient Christian symbol of God as light, inspired by the Bible: “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (Jn 1:5).²⁴

In addition, St. Laura uses the metaphor of God as the Sun: “God, the divine Sun of my life” [“Dios, divino Sol de mi vida”], similar to what we see in St. Teresa of Ávila (he is the Sun that shines in the midst – cf. 1 *Interior Castle* 2, 3)²⁵, to which several

22 Reference to a quote from the Bible (Jer 31:3).

23 “Cuando entro dentro de mí y veo esto que llamo mi ser se me ocurre ver bien deslindados, dos rayones en un espacio de tiempo, el uno negro; de luz, el otro. El primero es el que llamo yo y comenzó en el tiempo, cuando fue tu voluntad que existiera. El otro es lo que es tuyo y que jamás ha comenzado porque es eterno. Es aquello que mostraste cuando dijiste: ¡Con caridad perpetua te amé! Aquel es negro, porque es una negación de existencia propia, porque es un girón de nada, un poquito de poquedad, porque es ignorancia y pecado. Este es luz, porque es tuyo, porque es real, porque es amor, porque es vida, porque es un eterno presente, porque es lo que es.”

24 It is important to add the fact, that the symbol of light as a result of mystical enlightenment is repeated in works of several mystics, e.g. at Jacopone da Todi, Mechtilda of Magdeburg, St. Hildegard or St. Teresa of Ávila. Although each of them has a different kind of experience in connection with enlightenment, the symbol of light has similar characteristics. In Jacopone da Todi it is a blinding light without measure, which shines in the heart, in St. Teresa a light that does not set and is eternal, Mechtilda of Magdeburg describes it as the flowing light of the Deity, for St. Laura is love, life and eternal presence. For Laura, this is what Underhill calls the “joyful perception of the Absolute,” but it must not be confused with the consciousness of union with God, as I realize myself as being separate from God (2004, 278).

25 “sol resplandeciente que está en el centro” (1 *Castillo interior* 2, 3; Santa Teresa de Jesús 2006).

times in her text St. Laura refers: “Like a butterfly, I was looking for what I should stick my heart to in the world, and since I couldn’t find it, I clung to the light and burned myself, painlessly, as St. Teresa says”²⁶ (*Autobiography* 2017, loc. 1323–1324).

The painless burning in connection with the light to which Laura “clung” refers to the Old Testament story of Moses and the baptism, which burned and did not burn out (again, there is a biblical motif presented). Laura understands God as the presence of light and ardour, which does not hurt, while the metaphor of the butterfly encounters the fragility of the human soul, but also its gradual transformation (a parallel of its spiritual maturation, or spiritual path to union with God).²⁷

The image of ray

Another image that Laura works with in connotation with light is the “image of a ray” [“rayo”].²⁸ Laura uses it several times, e.g., in the above-mentioned experience with the anthill: “I was as if struck by a ray”, or in view of the experience of looking at a painting of the crucified Christ when she was wounded by a “strong loving ray”. This expression is also a metaphor for knowing God and his living presence, and gives God, following a cataphatic approach, the attributes such as “deep”, “majestic” or “loving”.

Elsewhere, she speaks of how the black scar was gradually smoothed out by the “brightness of the beloved ray of light” [“las refulgencias del querido rayo de luz”] (loc. 11354–11355).

The black scar has completely lost its ability to resist. However, my life has been and still is far from perfection; I do not see: the light has blinded me, and I am not even trying to improve, because the need for eternal glory of God has filled my soul. Poor black scar! Her outline dulled! Love and my own knowledge took all her power!²⁹ (loc. 4040–4043)

26 “Como mariposa busqué a qué pegar el corazón en el mundo y no hallando sitio, me pegué a la luz y me quemé, sin dolor, como dice Santa Teresa.”

This is a reference to a quote from Teresa’s poem *Oh, exceeding beauty!* [¡Oh hermosura que excedéis!] (1577):

“Oh, beauty exceeding / All other beauties! / You cause pain without wounding / And you destroy painlessly / The love of creatures.”

“¡Oh hermosura que excedéis / a todas las hermosuras! / Sin herir dolor hacéis, / y sin dolor deshacéis, / el amor de las criaturas” (Santa Teresa de Jesús 2019).

27 The awakens of the mystic into the stage of release, the transition from darkness to light can also be perceived through Plato’s allegory of the cave – bound beings in darkness can only see shadows and their knowledge, more precisely vision changes with the arrival of light.

28 Although there are several meanings for the term “rayo” in Spanish (lightning, ray, radiation, etc.), we have decided to translate it as “ray” in order to preserve the aesthetic quality of the original text.

29 “El rayón negro perdió su facultad de pintar casi por completo. Sin embargo, mi vida distaba mucho y dista todavía de ser perfecta; pero no veo: la luz me ofuscó y ni me empeño en perfeccionarme, porque la necesidad de la gloria de Dios llenó mi alma. ¡Pobre rayón negro! ¡Se le embotó la punta! ¡El amor y mi propio conocimiento le quitaron todo su poder!”

In this part we can see how Laura gradually stopped concentrating on worldly things and let only the act of infinite love of God come to the fore. When Laura says that love has taken the power of the black scar, she invokes God because he is synonym of love.³⁰ Laura gives love (God) the attributes of “fragility” and “bitterness”, calling it “strange”, “very deep that cannot be felt” suggesting that it is not possible to capture the nature of God with human language or to describe union with him. Unification has its conditions, which, however, cannot be met if one does not take an active part in them. Fear, hope, and love were considered in patristic literature as a parallel with three paths: the path of perfection, the path of enlightenment and the path of unification. In union, God puts man in a new relationship with what surrounds him – the goal is to find God in all things (Dinzelbacher 2000, 75–77).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can claim that the simplicity of the statement, but also the topicality, brings Laura’s autobiography closer to the contemporary man, perhaps even more than the often complicated and metaphorically overshadowed works of mystics belonging to older literature. However, it should be pointed out that Laura also shows signs of universal mystical poetics, which is reflected in particular in the spontaneous nature of narration (denial of one’s expressive abilities), the use of biblical motifs (God as love) or archetypal symbols (light-shadow opposition). The authenticity of her statement is also confirmed by the distinctive inner images with which she tries to convey her experience with the transcendent as concisely as possible to the reader (scar of light vs. black scar, experience with an anthill, experience with a carpenter’s workbench, the image of the crucified Christ or the image of a ray). The written text of St. Laura can also be viewed through the aesthetic expressive qualities of a statement, for example through melancholy, tragedy, contemplativity, authenticity, etc., which help us to understand what her statement is about, what she tries to express and how she does so.³¹

30 In this context, we would like to pay attention to M. Vašek’s study “The Experience of Love and its Discourse: Marion’s Phenomenology and Mysticism” [Skúsenosť lásky a jej diskurz: Marionova fenomenológia a mystika], where the author points out the relationship between mystical experience and the experience of love. According to him, in philosophical thinking, God was not understood as Love, but as Good, One, Being, Infinity, etc. “Not only philosophy, but also religious thinking in its key texts (e.g., the Torah, the prophets, Islam, or modern Judaism) did not privileged love as the primary determination of the divinity of God. The New Testament, especially the First Letter of St. John, explicitly states this – ‘God is love’ (1 Jn 4:16). God’s transcendence is experienced, understood, and named in a specific way. In this case, it is love that seals the unity of God’s names, is above all his names. We are never able to fully follow or understand transcendence par excellence” (2020, 111).

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PARADOX AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE INEXPRESSIBLE IN SEDULIUS' *PASCHAL SONG*

Róbert Horka

ABSTRACT

In the middle of the Fifth century, a relatively mysterious Christian poet, Sedulius, wrote his epic composition named *Paschal Song*. In terms of contents, it is notably a description of Christ's miracles according to the four Gospels. The poet is facing the reality of something that transcends the common human experience – according to what was defined by the Council of Ephesus and Chalcedon regarding the real divine and human nature of Christ. For such reason, even his poetical language is adapted, in order to describe something that contravenes common reality. A useful and suitable means for reaching this purpose is the frequently employed paradox. The reader/listener can get closer to the indescribable, unprecedented, and inexpressible mysterious nature of Christ. In this way, the author creates a very specific and elegant mystic – and his epic composition becomes a meditative text.

KEYWORDS

Carmen Paschale. Jeweled Style. Oxymoron. Paradox. Polyptoton. Sedulius. True God and man.

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Sedulius is such a mysterious author that, without his poetic production, today we wouldn't even guess that he was a living author (White 2000, 105). His epic work *Carmen paschale* [Paschal Song] was so important that, since the very beginning, during the whole medieval period up to the 17th century, he ranked amongst the so-called major canonical authors of biblical epic poetry (together with the poems of Juvencus, Arator, and Alcimus Avitus) (Herzog 1975, xix–xx). Even his two most

famous lyric compositions used to be very appreciated (Zimmerl-Panagl 2014, 232). It is quite strange that we have got so little information about his person.

Most of our knowledge about this artist come from editors and copiers of his literary production. Nevertheless, if we sum up all available material and carry out a critical evaluation, we can obtain at least a bunch of plausible biographical data (Springer 2013, xiv). He was born and, very probably, also lived somewhere in the Italian peninsula, perhaps in Rome. There are also some opinions (mostly not accepted by scholars) according to which his place of residence was rather southern Gallia or Northern Hispania, at time of his literary production. Sometimes it was also believed that he lived and worked in Greece (Springer 1988, 27). Further data are sporadic and uncertain too. Some manuscripts suggest that Sedulius was not his family name (*gentilicium*) but his surname (*cognomen*), whereas his real family name was Coelius, Caelius or Caecilius (Hernández Mayor 2005, 80). On the other hand, there is no existing proof of his aristocratic origin (Green 2007, 135). Paschasius Radbertus states that he was a philosopher or a teacher in Rome, but he does so 300 years after his death (Pasch. Radb., *part. Virg.* 2). Therefore, the only possible truthful statements about his social status concern his perfect knowledge of classical ancient literature as well as of newly originating Christian poetry and rhetoric (Sedul., *epist. Maced. I.*). Some manuscripts containing his literary works report that he was a priest. This is, of course, acceptable, but not confirmed. As for his bishop function, it is only a pious desire of some copiers of his literary legacy (Di Bernardino 1986, 322). When we hear the name 'Sedulius', we see only a few presumable data emerging from the nebulous territory of history: Italian peninsula, concretely – Rome, 5th century, educated lay man, perhaps priest. These pieces of information are relatively scarce, compared to popularity achieved by his poetic work.

Practically soon after its publication, the *Paschal Song* became a model for the description of Jesus' miracles for the whole successive history of Christian poetry (Roberts 2009, 230). According to one of the editor's notes, this epic poem was composed under the reign of Valentinian and Theodosius, i.e., between 425 and 450 A. D. (Nazzaro 2014, 3:532). Internal notes confirm that it is a relatively authentic piece of information. Contemporary research tend to shift it to the lower threshold, ending in the year 430 (Moreschini – Norelli 2007, 507).

Between 495 and 511 Sedulius' poem is mentioned also by the former consul Turcius Rufius Apronianus Asterius, who, according to his testimony, rearranged and published the poem from the poet's heritage (Huemer 2007, ii). But a question after all remains open, because we don't know, what Asterius really meant by publishing his review of five books from this masterpiece (one from the Old Testament and four from the New Testament). If the first person who arranged the original version of the author's work was actually Asterius, then the readers could enjoy the complete poem only at the beginning of the 6th century. If Asterius just limited himself to correct some elements in his own exemplar, then we can suppose that Sedulius'

masterpiece was widespread amongst readers already at the end of the 5th century (Mondin 2018/2019, 360). Still today, we are persecuted by uncertainty and doubts – something normal for this concrete author.

Literary critic Asterius assessed Sedulius' production very positively and Sedulius was definitively one of the pioneers in the field of biblical epic poetry; but he wasn't its founder. Through poetic production he continued the tradition of three important predecessors (Fontaine 1981, 249). Juvencus, author of the oldest biblical epic poem *Evangeliorum libri IV* [Four books of the Gospels], created the first work belonging to this genre (McGill 2016, 7). In his poem, with no great inventive, but relatively elegantly, he transcribed the prosaic model of sacred Gospel texts in hexameters (Hier., *vir. illust.* 84). He used author license only to select and arrange the content of four Gospels in one only coherent and uninterrupted story (Tanca 2008, 21). In this activity he was imitated by Paulinus of Nola. Paulinus elaborated three Psalms in an analogous way (Trout 1999, 85). He was probably inspired by one of Horace's poems, when he transferred a poetic model from Bible into the metric system. Indeed, biblical poetry did not have a precise verse dimension (Bastiaensen 2007, 269). Nevertheless, it looks like Prudentius had the largest influence on Sedulius (Hernández Mayor 2017, 100). Prudentius did not paraphrase any contiguous biblical texts in his poems, but he often inserted allusions to them and poeticized them in a more courageous and more creative way than his two predecessors (O'Hogan 2016, 115).

Sedulius exploited all previous proceedings, articulated them together in a perfect manner, and added something very peculiar. If we look at all his preserved poems (although formally quite distinct one from the others), we observe that they always have a common complex element in the mapping of the history of salvation: from the creation of the world until Christ's apotheosis or his Second Coming (Mori 2019, 196–197). In his *Paschal Song* Sedulius elaborated all this under the form of hexameters, in five books. In his alphabetical hymnus *A soli ortu cardine* [From the Pivot of the Sun's Rising] – on the ground of two dozen of four-verse strophes – he presented the same matter in iambic dimeters. In his epanaleptic hymnus *Cantemus, socii, Domino* [Let us sing a Song to the Lord], he presented the same matter in fifty-five elegiac couplets (Döpp 2020, 96). The contents are always the same, but the form of elaboration changes.

In his *Paschal Song*, Sedulius focused only Christ's miracles in the whole history of salvation (De Nie 2010, 274). The first book presents Old-Testament miracles. The other four books describe New-Testament miracles (Hernández Mayor 2009b, 1076). Nevertheless, the whole work appears as a uniform piece because it is connected by the character of the main hero – Christ and his mission – help for mankind (Krynicka 2014, 334). Even in Sedulius (known in the Middle Ages as “the Christian Virgil”) (Accorinti 2020, 226), it is possible to find a Virgilian basic poetic line: celebration of a hero and his heroic acts [“arma virumque cano”]. Sedulius knows very well that – even in the Old Testament – all miracles were made by Christ, because during the

whole ancient history he manifested himself and operated through his archetypes: Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Daniel, etc. (Dermot Small 1990, 197). With regard to the miraculous Red Sea Crossing, Sedulius wrote:¹

Mutavit natura viam, mediumque per aequor
 Ingrediens populus rude iam baptisma gerebat,
 Cui dux Christus erat, clamat nam lectio: multas
 Vox Domini super extat aquas; vox denique verbum est.
 Verbum Christus adest.
 (I, 141–145)

Nature changed its way, and, as the people stepped through
 the midst of the main, they were already undergoing an early form of baptism.
 Christ was their leader, as the scripture lesson proclaims:
 The voice of the Lord is above many waters. Now the voice is the word.
 As the word, Christ was present.¹

On the basis of the above-mentioned verses, it is clear that Sedulius was inspired by Juvencus and Paulinus of Nola as for the contents of his poem, but – in terms of text elaboration – he is much closer to Prudentius' creative approach. Sedulius did not transcribe the biblical text in tied meter, but he composed an original biblical poem. The contents are based on the Gospels, but the form and the goal of the poem are peculiar and autonomous (Lubian 2016, 102). The author reveals the particular nature of his work by also composing another text *Paschale opus* [The Paschal Work], which is the prosaic counterpart of the *Paschal Song*. During the Middle Ages, these works were simply called *Opus geminatum* [The twinned Work] (Friesen 2011, 132). If Sedulius just wanted to technically transform prose into verses (like Juvencus), it wouldn't make sense to later re-transform verses into prose. The *Paschal Song* is an original epic poem inspired by the Gospel (Mori 2013, 33). The author himself assesses his work in such terms:

Cur ego, Daviticis adsuetus cantibus odas
 Cordarum resonare decem sanctoque verenter
 Stare choro et placidis caelestia psallere verbis,
 Clara salutiferi taceam miracula Christi?
 Cum possim manifesta loqui, Dominumque tonantem
 Sensibus et toto delectet corde fateri.
 (I, 23–28)

1 Latin text shall always be quoted according to: Huemer edition in CSEL 10, English text according to Springer's translation in: Springer 2013.

Why should I, who am used to sound out in the songs of David
 the psalms for the ten-stringed lyre, standing in awe
 in the holy choir and singing with gentle words of heavenly things,
 keep silent about the famous miracles of Christ the Savior,
 when I can speak the plain truth, and it is my wholehearted delight
 to confess the thundering Lord with all my senses?

Sedulius' aim is "non tacere clara miracula Christi" – not to be silent about the famous miracles of Christ. Great pagan epic poets took on great popularity through poetical shaping of fiction stories about false gods. Sedulius feels an even stronger need to spread the Gospel by exploiting this same art form – because the Gospel is a book describing the real action of the only true God (Hernández Mayor 2009a, 609). In general terms, he considers that man (incl. himself) is practically incapable of succeeding in this task or mission. We read:

Ex quibus audaci perstringere pauca relatu
 Vix animis conmitto meis, silvamque patentem
 Ingrediens aliquos nitor contingere ramos.
 Nam centum licet ora movens vox ferrea clamet
 Centenosque sonos, humanum pectus anhelet,
 Cuncta quis expediet, quorum nec lucida caeli
 Sidera nec bibulae numeris aequantur harenae?
 (I, 96–102)

To touch on a few of these in the course of my presumptuous retelling
 is a task I can barely undertake to do. It is a vast forest
 that I enter, and I aim to touch but a few branches.
 For even if I had an iron voice and shouted with a hundred tongues,
 and even if the human breast could breathe forth a hundred sounds,
 who could set forth all of his signs, whose number not even
 the stars shining in the sky or the sand in the thirsty deserts can rival?

Therefore, in order to fulfil his intimate need to announce Christ (whom he is not able to adequately express), he used some unconventional linguistic means as a tool against his incapableness – and by them he describes the supernatural essence of Christ and of his miracles (Roberts 1985, 155–157). Sedulius' poetic style is a fair example of what Michael Roberts defined as *the jeweled style*. Let's try to briefly characterize this style: the whole poem in his basic structure is subdivided in relatively short and coherent text units, with a finely articulated composition (Roberts 1989, 36). These episodes are made up of small *cola* (often only two words). Due to their shortness, we shall rather define them as *commata* – conceived under the form of independent

poetic tropes: *polyptoton*, *synecdoche*, *periphrase*, *antithesis*, *alliteration*, *oxymoron*, *pleonasm*, etc. (Wartena 2017, 196) Consequently, e.g. by gathering them together as *leptology*, the poet manages to give the impression of human incapableness of describing God:

Qui sensus et corda dedit, cui convenit uni
 Facturam servire suam, cui iure perenni
 Arcibus aetheriis una est cum patre potestas,
 Par splendor, communis apex, sociale cacumen,
 Aequus honor, virtus eadem, sine tempore regnum,
 Semper principium, sceptrum iuge, gloria consors,
 Maiestas similis. haec est via namque salutis,
 Haec firmos ad dona gradus paschalia ducit.
 (I, 29–36)

He it is who gave us senses and hearts, and him alone
 it is fitting for his creation to serve. His power by eternal right
 is one with his Father's in the vaults of heaven.
 His is an equal glory, a shared supremacy, a mutual elevation.
 His respect is equal, his power the same, his kingdom without end,
 his rule eternal, his sceptre perennial, his glory shared,
 his majesty alike. This, you see, is the way of salvation.
 This path leads our steps steadily on to the paschal gifts.

In other occasions – on the contrary – the elements are assembled as a contrast, so that the poet can express the deep abnormality of the status of a sick person healed by God through a miracle (Deproost 1997, 29). That's the way Sedulius describes – for example – the fever of Peter's Mother-in-Law:

Forte Petri validae torreat lampadis aestu
 Febris anhela socrum, dubioque in funere pendens
 Saucia sub gelidis ardebat vita periclis,
 Inmensusque calor frigus letale coquebat.
 (III, 33–36)

By chance, a fever with the intensity of a powerful torch was burning up
 Peter's mother-in-law and making her pant as she teetered on the brink of death.
 Her wounded life, in danger of soon growing cold, was aglow;
 the great heat was cooking up a lethal chill.

The acme of this jeweled literary medallion is often conceived as a subtle *sententia* (Elsner – Hernández Lobato 2018, 389). We can see this – for example – by the healing of the blind man (III, 198): “Verbaque per verbum, per lumen lumina surgunt.” [“And the man’s words came back through the Word, his lights through the Light.”]

The content acme is the *sententia*, whereas the formal acme is the *golden verse* – i.e., a sequence of words in a verse, which was considered as perfect: at the beginning a couple of adjectives separating a given verb from two nouns at the end of the verse (Berschin 2009, 183). This is the way Sedulius ended – e.g. – the description of the transformation of water into wine at the Wedding at Cana (III, 11): “Mitis inocciduas enutrit pampinus uvas.” [“The supple vine brings forth never failing grapes.”]

Sedulius subdivided the whole epic poem about Christ’s miracles in small textual units with autonomous contents. Then, within such units, he specified each single syntagma in details. By means of antitheses, parallels, and other poetic procedures, he assembled an epic mosaic made up of coloured pebbles (Roberts 2007, 147). It is a typical approach of the whole late ancient poetry (Trout 2005, 551), but Sedulius is managing it in a masterly manner, as proven by whatsoever part of his epic composition. By the way, this is not our goal in this moment.²

In our paper, we want to focus on the concrete group of *commata* exploited by the author in order to describe Christ. It is also a crucial element of the whole poem, because Sedulius describes it in an epoch characterized by two Christological Councils (van der Laam 1993, 136–137). The first of them was the Council of Ephesus (held in 431), which confirmed the eternal divinity of Jesus Christ. Sedulius highlights this dogma in a number of places in his poem. We could rename the whole poem as the *Song of God in human body*. Unlike classic mythological epic poems, Sedulius presents the only true God, as somebody who came down to earth not to foment fornication or wars, but to help people (De Nie 2016, 284). For example, regarding the healing the royal official’s son, Sedulius wrote:

Tunc larga potestas,
 Credenti quae nulla negat nec dona retardat,
 Velocem comitata fidem, sermone salutem
 Concedens facili: vivit iam filius, inquit,
 Perge, tuus. quantum imperii fert iussio Christi!
 Non dixit “victurus erit” sed “iam quia vivit”
 More Dei, qui cuncta prius quam nata videndo
 Praeteritum cernit quidquid vult esse futurum.
 (III, 15–22)

2 For example, an exhaustive list of oxymora in Sedulius’ poetry is presented by Corsaro (1956, 178).

Then Christ's generous power,
 which refuses no gifts to the believer and is not slow with them,
 in company with the man's swift faith, granted health
 with ready words: "Your son is already living," he said,
 "Go on your way." How much power Christ's command has!
 He didn't say "Your son will live", but "He is already living".
 This is God's way, who sees all things before they happen
 and perceives as past whatever he wants to happen in the future.

In this short example, the reader perceives that Christ is not just one of the human beings. He is above the things of this world. Compared to him, nobody and nothing of this world has any power, whereas he uses his supreme power to help those who pray him (Schubert 2019, 99). When Sedulius wrote this composition, there was already an ongoing dispute concerning Christ's human nature. Eventually, this controversy was solved in 451, during the Synod of Chalcedon (Springer 2019, 194–195). In Chalcedon, they provided a clear statement on the two natures of Christ, by affirming that Christ has not only divine nature, but also complete human nature. This doctrine is not abundantly present in Sedulius' poem. In some moments, it looks as though he just added a verse, confirming Christ's material nature too. For example, when Jesus was going to calm the storm, the whole episode begins as follows:

*Inde marina petens arentes gressibus algas
 Pressit, et exiguae conscendens robora cumbae
 Aequoreas intravit aquas; Dominumque sequentes
 Discipuli placido librabant carbasa ponto.*
 (III, 46–49)

From there, heading to the sea, crunching the dry seaweed
 under foot, he climbed on board a little boat
 and launched out onto the watery expanses, and, following their Lord,
 the disciples hoisted up the sails on the quiet sea.

Crunched seaweed in fresh footmarks on the seashore take away all doubts that Christ lived in this world in a real human body (Mazzega 1996, 102). By the way, as we have already suggested, these references are relatively rare. It is possible that the author inserted his notes about Christ's human nature in his poem only as refinement of the Divine Majesty that is reflected in Christ in the whole poem – and, thus, he confirmed the dogma about his two natures. Or it is possible that he didn't highlight the human nature, because he focused on a description of the Christian equivalent of the mythological epic poems about a divine being coming down to earth (Hanns

Homey 2013, 202–203); in this sense, emphasis on human nature of a divine hero was not compliant with the general concept of the poem.

In the Paschal Song we also find places where both Christ's natures are homogeneously represented. They are *commata* by means of which the author (through *paradox*) managed to capture the tension between Christ's eternal and temporal dimension, between life and death, between the divinity and humanness, almightiness, and weakness – all elements that were joint and coexisted in the person of the Saviour, according to the doctrine of Christian orthodoxy (Dermot Small 1986, 237–244). The *paradox* appears as a suitable device for expressing this reality. Indeed, neither the first nor the second opposite compound can be considered as true – and their reciprocal merging creates tension (Cuddon – Habib 2013, 510), by bringing a short and volatile flash of truth. These syntagmata deserve the legendary Horatian characterization: *calida iunctura*, i.e., a refined phrase, which is the top of the poetic beauty, according to his *Ars poetica*:

In uerbis etiam tenuis caustusque serendis
dixeris egregie, notum si callida uerbum
reddiderit iunctura nouum.
(Hor., *A. P.* 46–48)

You will express yourself eminently well,
if a dexterous combination should give
an air of novelty to a well-known word.

In his poem, Sedulius introduced some phrases and tried to catch the uncatchable and to name the unnamable (Roberts 1989, 135). He described a mystery that transcends the possibilities of verbalization by mutually opposite meanings under some semantic field. By using contradictory collocation of words, he declared that God is the harmony of all opposites. The exhaustive description of God always covers the full range (i.e., from one semantic edge to the opposite meaning). It also includes all the internal contents between these two borders. In other words, he is *Alpha* and *Omega* and all the letters between *Alpha* and *Omega*. Our attempts of describing Sedulius' paradoxes clearly suggest how hard is to explicate what the author implicated in the merger of antithetical expressions. Moreover, Sedulius combines such paradox usually with some another stylistic device (Roberts 1985, 158).

A suitable field for these linguistic experiments was the theme of Christ's birth, when presenting pregnant Mary, Sedulius states (II, 40): "paritura parentem" ["to give birth to her own Father"]. This *polyptoton* is made up of a couple of active participles (present and future); in this way, the author can freely exchange the subject and the object of action. Both of them are parent and child at the same time (Springer 1988, 42). It looks like the famous riddle: what came first, the chicken or the egg? Christ –

as God – is the parent of Mary, but now Mary is to become the parent of Christ – as a man. The circle between parent and child is completely closed.

Four verses later (II, 44), when Jesus was already born, Sedulius uses an oxymoron – once again in combination with a paradox: he is “*maximus infans*” [“the greatest baby”]. The baby suggests Christ’s human nature, by reminding the smallest physical dimension of a person – i.e., soon after birth. But this baby is defined as *maximus*. Indeed, according to the Holy Scripture (2 Chron. 2:6) God is so great that heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him (Satzl 2017, 86). Christ is completely immanent and – at the same time – completely transcendent.

When afterwards twelve-year old Jesus visited the temple and spoke with the teachers, Sedulius uses a *polyptoton* again and defines him (II, 136–137): “*senior senioribus*” [“older than his elders”]. This combination of two *identical* comparatives in different grammatical cases is also generating a paradox. The teachers are certainly older than twelve-year old Jesus, but – as the eternal God – Jesus is older than them (Green 2007, 176). Moreover, this expression also includes the taste of eternity. Indeed, all those who are older than somebody else are automatically younger than Christ. God preserves His both primacy in terms of time and His eternity in an image restricted in a vicious circle. And this was quite probably the aim of the poet in his description of Christ’s divinity.

We can find further similar paradoxes even in the description of Jesus’ public ministry. These paradoxes go beyond the level of *commata* and create a larger verse *colon*. Sedulius uses them, for example, in the description of the episode when Jesus calmed the storm (III, 56–57): “*pectore somnum, maiestate vigil*” [“was enjoying a quiet sleep, watchful in his sovereignty”]. As a man, Jesus is sleeping and is not conscious. But as God, he is continuously awake and monitors all things by preserving them in their being (Hanns Homey 2013, 219). Jesus was not aware of the storm, because he was sleeping; but – at the same time – he is awake and ready to save all those who pray to him, even when he is sleeping (so, hypothetically, he didn’t even need to wake up).

When Jesus travels to his native land, Sedulius once again uses a paradox *colon* with a *polyptoton* (III, 88): “*patriamque sibi pater ipse dicavit*” [“the Father himself designated this to be his fatherland”]. As a man, he was born in a concrete place. As almighty God, he created the whole earth, including his fatherland. It is the same thing the author reported regarding the birth of Jesus and parenthood of Mary, but this time in male grammatical gender. As God, Christ was the Creator of the earth, but he also came from earth in his human nature. He was *the Father of his fatherland*.

When Jesus talked with the Samaritan Woman at the well, Sedulius comments (IV, 224): “*fonsque perennis aquae modicum desiderat undam*” [“the eternal source of water needed a little water”]. Christ, as man, asks for a bit of something that he already owns to such an extent of fullness that it is not possible to add anything to it. It means that, as a man, he longed for something that was already belonging to him

since the dawn of time. Therefore, he can be thirsty and – at the same time – he can have his thirst constantly quenched (Roberts 2020, 6).

At the conclusion of his poem, in the description of Christ, Sedulius returns to shorter *commatic* expressions. Regarding the healing of the man blind from birth (IV, 254) Sedulius defines Christ as follows: “mundique orientis origo” [“the source of emerging world”]. This *assonance* does not reveal only the fact that Christ (as God) is the author of the world (*mundi origo*), but he is also the author of the idea of creating the world. It is quite an important difference, if we consider that the man blind from birth didn't just need to get rid of his illness. He needed something more than that, because he was never healthy in his life. It was necessary to create him once again, from scratch (McBrine 2017, 122). That's why Christ is presented as the originator of the origin of the world – and, therefore, also of the man blind from birth. Initially, he wanted him to be born blind, to be recreated as a sighted person. Once again, we observe a paradox: in Christ (as God) there must be the eternal idea of creating himself as a man. Since the dawn of time, God – as a non-created being – had the intention of creating himself as a man.

The last from selected paradoxes is, as a *polyptoton*, located in the final book (V, 281), when Sedulius observes that Christ “sine morte mori” [“could die without death”]. This paradox is fully logical. Indeed, as the author declares in his explanation, God didn't make death (Wisdom 1:13). Death is something that is in every way away from God. It is not possible for God to die. How could He die as a man? Sedulius solved this question by stating that God had already decided that He would die and therefore He died as a man. In this logical concept, death as something unavoidable doesn't play any role. God, who necessarily cannot die, freely decided to renounce His life as a man, in person of all people; then, those who decide to join him in their way of “death-avoidance” shall also be able to bypass their own death – and *to die without death*, with Jesus (Diederich 2009, 276).

By using a few examples, we tried to demonstrate how Sedulius conceived his paradoxes, not only in formal way but also in their content. With the help of a couple of simple antithetical words, he managed to define a sense that is located outside the proper meaning of the words themselves. He created a sufficient semantic space between the words, in order to embrace the infinite (at least partially), to define the incomprehensible, and to express the inexpressible. We feel that this is the real task and meaning of the existence of mystic in poems. By means of (visual, auditive, tactile, olfactive, taste or rational) perception, mystic compositions aim to express at least a partial aspect of what cannot be expressed in fullness. We are convinced that Sedulius more or less successfully reached his goal in his Paschal Song, by means of paradoxes.³

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IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA'S LITERARY WORK AS AN EXPRESSION OF HIS EXPERIENCE IN LIFE AND SPIRITUALITY

Edita Příhodová

ABSTRACT

The paper compares key life and spiritual experiences of St. Ignatius of Loyola with his literary works (the *Spiritual Exercises*, *Constitutions* and *Spiritual Diary*). It primarily focuses on events that influenced the “birth of a mystic” especially his stays in Loyola, Manresa and by the river of Cardoner. The paper also discusses a phenomenological description and interpretation of Ignatius’ spiritual metaphors and parables (God’s soldier – knight, life as a spiritual struggle, vocation as the call of the King, Christian life as a choice of Christ’s robe and its adornments). What is typical for Ignatius is that he radically shifted and spiritualized the semantics of this “secular” images. There is a spiritual theme that runs through *Constitutions* and which is based on a motif of spiritual love and not fear or discomfort. In *Spiritual Diary* Ignatius moves from spiritual metaphors and seeks new words to describe his mystical experience.

KEYWORDS

Discernment of Spirits. Mysticism. St. Ignatius of Loyola. Archetypes.

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Ignatius’ biographer confirms that every metaphor he used in his works (*Spiritual Exercises*, *Autobiography of a Pilgrim*, *Constitutions* and *Spiritual Diary*) “has its origin in experience” (Idígoras 2012, 90), so it is “pre-lived”. That is why in my contribution I shall concern myself with the connections between the life and spiritual work of St. Ignatius of Loyola. I shall examine the semantic changes of such metaphors, examining in Ignatius’ work those which have their origin in his experiences. At the same time, I shall look for those which are archetypes, in which it is possible to point to modifications in understanding of spiritual life. If it is true that “gratia supponit

naturam”, “grace presupposes nature”, I shall concern myself not only with Ignatius of Loyola’s extraordinary mystical states, but also with the path by which he became a mystic. The process of metanoia (conversion) may uncover the distinctiveness of his personal holiness and show in the use even of “impure” experience the search for self-fulfilment in life with God. The autobiographical dimension makes experience with the loving God authentic and convincing, but also attractive and inspiring (Kučerková – Režná 2016, 23).

Living context

Childhood and youth

Ignatius of Loyola, originally Iñigo López de Recalde (1491–1556) was born in the family castle of Loyola near Azpeitia, into an old Basque noble family. Iñigo’s character was developed in the atmosphere of his Basque homeland and courtly noble culture (Haas 2003b, 10–11). In his own words, up to his twenty-sixth year he gave himself over to worldly vanities, and his “greatest pleasure was exercising with weapons, with a great and vain desire to win honour for himself” (Ignatius of Loyola¹ 1990a, 31). God and relationship with him do not destroy a person’s nature but develop it. The essential foundation of a person’s natural humanity is in the relationship between God’s grace and his natural giftedness (Akvinský 1937, 29). Iñigo’s conversion to God was a process in which his natural ability was ennobled, so that from being a worldly knight he gradually became God’s man, “a new soldier of Christ” (1990a, 45), resolved to devote himself to the salvation of souls. Here already it can be seen that knighthood – “caballero” in the works of Ignatius of Loyola – will most probably be the central theme, because it joins experience “before conversion” and “after conversion”. Between the two, however, there will be not only connection, but also considerable difference.

His unbreakable knightly character showed itself at the defence of the stronghold of Pamplona before the French forces in 1521². When Iñigo was struck by a cannonball in his leg “the defenders of the fortress surrendered to the French” (31) They carried Iñigo to Loyola, where he spent a long period of convalescence and a new spiritual adventure with God began.

1 In the “Literature” as “Ignác z Loyoly”.

2 This year we remember the 500th anniversary of Ignatius’ conversion. Communities with Ignatian spirituality are celebrating this anniversary as a jubilee year.

Iñigo's conversion

During the time of convalescence in Loyola he asked his relations for romances of chivalry to read, but they could not find any books of that kind in the house. Instead, they offered him *The Life of Christ* and biographies of the saints. During his reading he noticed that the thoughts to which he gave himself left a certain echo in his soul: when he thought about worldly things, he felt dry and discontented. When he became engrossed in spiritual thoughts, he felt consolation, he remained content and joyful. In his own words: “thus gradually I began to discern the different spirits which moved me: the evil spirit and the spirit of God” (35). Ignatius remembered this reading (35) for the rest of his life; it remained the foundation for any kind of spiritual experience, in the broadest sense of the word, and the starting-point for the later Rules for the Discernment of Spirits.

After his recovery Ignatius went to Manresa, where he stayed for about a year (1522–1523). This was a decisive period in his spiritual life. Further, he carried out exterior works of penance (begging, not combing or cutting his hair, not eating meat, not drinking wine, etc.), then set out on a process of active purification – asceticism. In Manresa Ignatius experienced severe temptation, passive purification of thoughts, spiritual night. One of its forms was scrupulosity. He suffered so severely from this that he felt the temptation to suicide (48). He was so deeply marked by temptation, for which all available remedies proved useless (confession, spiritual conversation) that he could not see any kind of way out. From this experience he able to learn: “he already had a certain experience with various spirits” (48), he decided, “and that with great clearness of mind” (48) that he would not confess past sins. This grace, even though in searching for a way out Ignatius made use of his previous experience with discernment of spirits, he attributed to God and his mercy (48). It is an attitude of humility before God, which would grow further in Ignatius.

We may recognise the Manresa period as Iñigo's way of mystical purification, which grew into the grace of enlightenment. This process Ignatius considered in another metaphor with the concept of spiritual growth: “In this period God dealt with me as a teacher deals with a child in school when he teaches him” (49). It was a time of great spiritual learning, enlightenment and insight. From the time in Manresa comes the insight into the Most Holy Trinity, “in the likeness of three keys on a musical instrument” (50). This must have been a fundamental experience because Ignatius acknowledged that it stayed with him “for his whole life” (50). The autobiography speaks of enlightenments where to Ignatius “God worked in his soul” (51). Adolf Haas points out that these mystical experiences are the beginning, in which, as it were undeveloped, was contained Ignatius' later development and the deepening of these mysteries (Haas 2003b, 37).

But Ignatius personally attributes the meaning to the vision which he had by the river Cardoner, where “the eyes of his mind began to open” (1990a, 52). It was

not some concrete vision of religious mystery, but at that time “he understood and recognised much both of spiritual life and of faith and of learning, and that with such clear enlightenment”, that everything appeared new to him (52). According to Adolf Haas, by the river Cardoner there came to Ignatius the mystic engagement with Christ present in all people and things in the whole cosmos, because mystical perception is not related to the concrete Christ coming in a vision, but in the synthesis of all the mysteries of the world and God. Cardoner means the splendid organic Christological synthesis in the setting of Trinitarian life (2003b, 49–50). Here, with Iñigo pilgrim-penitent, stood apostolic man.

Ignatius of Loyola's literary work

Spiritual Exercises

The fruit of the period which Ignatius experienced in Manresa, especially under the influence of the insight by the river Cardoner, is the book of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Everything written in the *Spiritual Exercises* has its source in Ignatius' personal experience. For example, in the statement on scruples it is clear that he is writing of them concretely, empathetically, and realistically, just as he experienced them in his own reality: “as on the one hand I feel that I have sinned. On the other hand it seems to me that I have not sinned. All the same I feel uneasy with that, inasmuch as I feel doubtful, and again not doubtful. That is really scruple and temptation, which the enemy inspires” (Ignatius of Loyola 1990b, 160).

Ignatius leads the exercitant in the spiritual exercises to the pre-mystical phase, in that he teaches him/her how to cleanse the soul from sin, how to meditate on the mysteries of Christ and kindle love of God and seek him in all things. Spiritual exercises have a thought-out structure – grouped into four “weeks”, periods which have their own dynamic: the first week deals with the way of purification, the second and third stages are enlightenment and the fourth week is the way of union. The *Spiritual Exercises* reflect not only St. Ignatius' personal experience, but also his systematic and strategic skill, and creativity in finding expressions for spiritual realities.

One of Ignatius' fundamental experiences is that the human heart is a battleground, over which the good and the evil spirit contend:

The property of God and his angels is their tendency to give true spiritual happiness and joy and to remove all sorrow and confusion caused by the enemy. The property of the enemy, in fact, is to fight against such happiness and spiritual consolation, in that he himself brings into the mind seeming reasons, meaningless trivialities and incessant lies (1990b, 155).

The enemy, that is, when he cannot incite a person to sin, tries at least to make him anxious, to lead him away from balance, peace and spiritual joy. From seeing the influence, it is characteristic of St. Ignatius' spirituality that he not only considers sin as evil, but thinks of a much more sensitive dynamic at the level of feelings – joy and sadness, consolation and desolation. It is characteristic of the evil spirit to disturb, to take away spiritual joy and peace. The effects of spiritual life then show themselves also at the physical level (Šoltés 2019, 27; Šoltés 2020, 45). In this sense Christian life is directed to wholeness, because the values of faith bring together the outward (actions) and the inner level (faith, the experience of it as fullness of life, spiritual thoughts.).

In the *Spiritual Exercises* are to be found also Ignatius' characteristic, original and developed imagery, in which he tries to encourage the exercitant's imaginative creativity.³ One of the most useful, which draws inspiration from autobiographical material, is the comparison of the earthly and the eternal king. Also in this parable colouring from courtly language is to be found:

First point. This will be to place before my mind a human king, chosen by God our Lord himself, to whom all Christian princes and people pay homage and obedience. / Second point. This will be to consider the address this king makes to all his subjects, with the words: It is my will to conquer all the lands of the infidel. Therefore, whoever wishes to join with me in this enterprise must be content with the same food, drink, clothing etc. as mine. So, too, he must work with me by day and watch with me by night, etc., that as he has had a share in the toil with me, afterwards, he may share in the victory with me. / Third point. Consider what the answer of good subjects ought to be to a king so generous and noble-minded, and consequently, if anyone would refuse the invitation of such a king, how justly he would deserve to be condemned by the whole world, and looked upon as an ignoble knight (1990b, 63–64).

Had the exercise ended at page 63, it would have been possible to judge the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola as military, as the kind which organises Catholicism as an army. In the past Ignatius often met such misinterpretation. The application of the parable on the noble earthly king has before the eyes real spiritual concerns: the king is Jesus Christ, who wants to win (to save) the whole world. Those who are ready to offer themselves to the service of Jesus Christ, but especially those “who wish to give greater proof of their love, and to distinguish themselves in whatever concerns the service of the eternal King and the Lord of all” (66) offer themselves to the same eternal Lord of all in this way:

Eternal Lord of all things... this is the offering of myself which I make... provided only it is for thy greater service and praise, to imitate thee in bearing all wrongs and all abuse

3 In the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius of Loyola encourages the exercitant to use in meditation not only understanding but also body, senses, and finally also his creative and imaginative abilities. Scholars in the educational field see in this effort at equal use of both hemispheres of the brain, multiple definitions of intelligence leading to a different manner of thinking (Metts 1995, 13).

and all poverty, both actual and spiritual, should thy most holy majesty deign to choose and admit me to such a state and way of life (66).

The exercise is central for the process of the Exercises. Its goal is the deliberate choice not only of Christ as one's Lord, but at the same time the acceptance of his lifestyle (food, drink, dress) and evangelical values. In the notes the consideration concludes: "anyone who would not follow such a leader would be a person without ideals and incapable of proceeding further in the *Spiritual Exercises*" (64). The exercise on the earthly and the eternal King has its origin in the Bible. At the same time, it is an expression of Ignatius' own experience as a knight, because it leaves a knightly colouring.

Constitutions of the Society of Jesus

A further work written by Ignatius in his own hand is the *Constitutions*, which he wrote as general superior in Rome from 1544 practically till the end of his life (1990a, 165). In them Ignatius went very slowly, deliberately, seeking God's will for his developing religious society. The *Constitutions* are a fundamental work for the Society of Jesus, which already in Ignatius' time was scattered over various regions of the world and engaged in significant concerns of faith (Ignatius of Loyola 1997, 17). The *Constitutions* are the *Spiritual Exercises* reworked for the needs of religious life, so an analytical exploration would need to show the mutual dependencies and differences between both of these Ignatian works.

Ignatius speaks innumerable times in the *Constitutions* about goals (Zechmeister 1985, 132). The ultimate goal of the Society is in accordance with what is written in the First Principle and Foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises*: "The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord" (1990b, 29). True, the *Exercises* and the *Constitutions* come to this goal from different perspectives: while the *Spiritual Exercises* help the Christian to care for his own soul, to move from purification from sin and disorder to union with God, the *Constitutions* define that it is necessary for the Jesuit, with the same care, to be an apostle who helps people on the journey to God.

Already on the first pages of the *Constitutions*, in the Formula, in the religious rules praising the Pope, Ignatius establishes the spiritual identity of the man applying for acceptance into the Society:

Whoever wishes to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus and to serve the Lord alone and the Church, his spouse [...] should keep in mind that once he has made a solemn vow of perpetual chastity he is a member of a community founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defence and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine [...] let him take care, as long as he lives, first of all to keep before his eyes God and then the nature of this Institute, which is, so

to speak, a pathway to God; and then let him strive with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God (1997, 25–26).

In describing Jesuit life, he again uses the word strive, which is indeed spiritual striving, in which the combat is over “the spiritual progress of souls in Christian life”. Towards God and his Church the Jesuit fosters a relationship of love, because he perceives the Church as Spouse.⁴ See how Ignatius transposes the language of his courtly experience! At the same time, he behaves sensitively to his later experience, not denying it but transforming and transcending it. The Jesuit is to have “before his eyes in the first place God” – in that expression Ignatius appeals to pure intention and spiritual conscience, which a member of a religious order is to preserve and develop.

The meditation on the two standards, in which Ignatius leads the exercitant to the point where he is to accept suffering as following Jesus Christ, resonates also in a further Constitution. In it Ignatius asks the entrant whether he desires “to resemble and imitate in some manner our Creator and Lord Jesus Christ, by putting on his garb and uniform, since it was for our spiritual profit that he clothed himself as he did. For he gave us an example that in all things possible to us we might seek, with the aid of his grace, to imitate and follow him, since he is the way which leads men to life” (68). Christ’s garb and uniform mean enduring humiliations, false accusations, and injustices without having given any occasion for it.

It is possible to find the echo of Ignatius’ experiences after his conversion (specifically scrupulosity), but also his spiritual depth, in Constitution 602, in which he writes that the *Constitutions* do not bind under sin, because it is desirable that “all (the Society’s) members should live in peace” and not “fall into the snare of sin. [...] Thus the fear of sin should give place to the love and desire of all perfection and of contributing to the greater glory and praise of Christ our Creator and Lord” (200). In this wise provision it is possible to see Ignatius – mystic and teacher, whom fear of sin does not motivate to activity, but love – and he wants the same for the whole Society of Jesus.

In the examples we have seen, it is clear that the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* are more than a book of rules, more than a plan for apostolic work, more than a collection of experiences, more than a handbook for mission. They are the living fruit of an extraordinary experience of God, they are the diligent effort of a group of friends in the Lord to organise themselves so that they might work together in the most useful possible way in God’s work of saving the world (Ravier 2002, 277). Martha Zechmeister considers that the foundation line and core of the *Constitutions* is “devoción a la Santísima Trinidad” – spiritual experience of the Most Holy Trinity which the mystic experienced in Manresa and in his later life (Zechmeister 1985, 130).

4 The same linguistic colouring is to be found in the *Spiritual Exercises*: we must believe firmly that “between Christ the bridegroom, our Lord, and his bride the Church there is the same Spirit, which guides us and leads to the salvation of our souls” (1990b, 165).

Spiritual Diary

The last part of the extant work of Ignatius of Loyola (apart from a quantity of letters, which I have not taken into consideration in writing) is the *Spiritual Diary*, which fills two twenty-page notebooks, written between 2nd February 1544 and 27th February 1545 (90). The memoirs which have been preserved are only a part of what he “wrote each day, what took place in his soul” (1990a, 106). The *Spiritual Diary* contains Ignatius’ intimate memoirs from discernment on the poverty of houses and churches⁵ (1st part) and his mystical experiences (2nd part).

In this work we can discover the inner portrait of Ignatius, as he was when alone and with God. He understood the recording of graces received as an act of gratitude (Haas 2003a, 59). At the same time, he wanted to recall individual graces afresh, which is one of the chief reasons for the writing of the *Diary*. He read these memoirs afresh, cut them, corrected and filled them out. See in this the effort to find the right words, or better and more accurate expression. In the account of mystical experiences, he came up against the absolute limits and possibilities of language: “he saw in such a way that it is not possible to describe, how also other things are not possible to explain” (Ignatius of Loyola 2005, 362).

In the *Spiritual Diary* Ignatius expresses his mystical experiences with God by means of inner understandings which are compared with bodily feelings. In his lived experience of God Ignatius discovers: a certain sweetness (364); spiritual delight (367); warmth (367); inward jubilation in his soul (369); exterior warmth with burning devotion (373); great warmth or light and gentle devotion (377); warm clarity and spiritual taste (378); light and clarity (380); light and sweet love (396); increased devotion with notable gentleness and light, mixed with colour (400); and others.

As regards content, in the *Diary* the Trinitarian developmental circle is joined with the soteriological. In the Trinitarian mystery Ignatius views as in reality the mutual penetration of the three divine Persons in fundamentally equal essences and in equal inner divine processes and relations (2003a, 75):

In this Mass I knew, sensed or saw – God knows – when I spoke to the Father and saw <how>⁶ he is one Person of the Holy Trinity <that captivated me immediately>, then it struck me that I must love the Holy Trinity as a unity, or that more, for the second Person is in his essence in the Person of the Father; I felt the same in prayer to the Son

- 5 For Ignatius this is a very important question; he dedicated forty days of prayer to it (1985, 130). At last he decided that “in the houses or churches which the Society runs, so that they may help people spiritually, there may not be any revenue which can be disposed of in any way either for the sacristy or the workshop or for anything else, but they are to put their trust solely in God, whom they serve by means of his love. He will take care of everything which will be gained for his greater honour and greater service, and without any kind of revenue” (1997, 188–189).
- 6 The signs < > contain text which St. Ignatius crossed out and replaced with another more accurate expression. These signs (square brackets) were used in this sense in the Collected Works of Ignatius of Loyola, from which I have drawn, and to which I refer in the notes.

and equally in prayer to the Holy Spirit. I rejoiced <that it felt the same, in which> in each individual Person when I felt consolations from him, and I attributed them to all three, and I rejoiced that they were from all three (Ignatius of Loyola 2005, 378–379).

Ignatius writes that this vision and further similar mystical experiences of the Trinity brought it about that when he went into the town he felt great inward joy, “I imagined the Most Holy Trinity always, when perhaps I saw three intelligent beings or three animals or three other things, and that almost constantly” (376). For Ignatius what Trinitarian theology teaches became experience, which the whole universe and his own human disposition reflected. In spiritual experience subjective and external, objective elements play a part.

Trinitarian themes join with soteriological through the second divine Person, Jesus Christ. Ignatius uses “Christ” in two ways: as Jesus or as Son. This twofold use of language leads us to various aspects of the Ignatian picture of Christ (1985, 107). The aspect of Jesus as image of Christ is shown most clearly in the *Spiritual Diary* in the period between 23rd and 28th February:

While I was preparing the altar and vesting, the name of Jesus was before my eyes, with much love, <with much> confirmation and <very much> with strengthened will to follow him; and with tears and sobs. Throughout the Mass, constantly great devotion and many tears, and quite often I lost my voice. My whole devotion and whole feeling therefore were related to Jesus, and I was not able to share them with another Divine Person (2005, 383).

When Ignatius speaks of Jesus, he is placing the humanity of Christ in the foreground, and yet this human Person is entirely my God (1985, 109). When Ignatius writes of the Son, he experiences him primarily as the Mediator between God and people. The fundamental experience is: Christ is the way to the Father. Through Jesus Christ we have “free access to the Father” (Eph. 2:18), and the Life of the Trinity flows to the inner being of the person.

Finally, as the last mystical level of the *Spiritual Diary* he places in the foreground the mysticism of reverent love:

In all these periods, before Mass, in the Mass and after it, there was in me one thought, which penetrated to my inmost soul: With what great reverence and reverent humility I should have served the name of God, our Lord, when I come to Mass etc., and not seek tears, but this reverent humility and reverence; [...] finally I gained the conviction that I should consider this grace and knowledge as more necessary for the spiritual progress of my soul than all other graces so far (2005, 415–416).

Ignatius is led to new wisdom and prayer: with a humble look below he will seek his place vis-à-vis God’s presence: “In this space of time it seemed to me that humility, reverence and respect should not be filled with fear, but should be filled with love,

and that came into my thinking in such a way that I constantly said anew 'Give me loving humility!' And at the same time also in reverence and humble respect, with these words I received new visitations..." (421)

"Turning below" (Sich-Hinwenden) is examining self (Zechmeister 1985, 126) after creation. Reverence and humility, which Ignatius received from above, from God, flows to creation, where the grace of reverent humility and love continues: "It seemed to me that <this spirit> does not stay there; that the same <should> then be valid also towards the creature, that is, humility full of love, etc." (421) Turning below to creation, to which Ignatius is led, is the fulfilment of love, with which God gives himself to his creation. Ignatius was raised to the mystery of the Trinity, so that from this place "above" he should return "below" and thus have a part in the love welling up towards creation (1985, 126). In the love of the Three in One pouring itself into the universe in the mystery of creation and salvation Ignatius feels himself first of all sent into the world, because he knows he may not remain in reverence and humility before God, but the same is true before the universe. That is the conclusion of the Ignatian mystical *Diary*: humble love bowing down to the earth in reverence and service.

Conclusion

How important, indeed archetypal, is the mental picture of the knight and the conceptual metaphor of (spiritual) combat. What is spiritually exceptional in this image consists in the fact that it indicates the reflective spirituality in Ignatius and the reality that in his last experience he approached with delicacy, with discerning feeling, not with harsh refusal. Above all, he sought and found how to give transcendental potential to this concept (the eternal King and service for God's Kingdom).

But in the *Spiritual Exercises* the leitmotiv knight is to be found in the breaking or culminating places in which the exercitant decides for a life lived for the service of God – our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal King. Characteristic of this exercise is that Ignatius radically alters and spiritualises the semantics, so that any kind of suspicion of militarism is a tragic misunderstanding of Ignatius and lack of sympathy with him.

In the *Constitutions* there is a notable spiritual line founded in the Trinitarian mystery and based on the theme of love, not fear or lack of peace. In this point Ignatius teaches from his own earlier experience, and that by regulation, that the *Constitutions* do not bind under sin, so that the members of his religious order avoid scruples, from which Ignatius suffered very much after his conversion.

In the *Spiritual Diary* we can find the interior portrait of Ignatius, as he was in himself and with God, because he was originally destined as a writer only for private purposes. Ignatius appears here particularly as mystic. Even here his older inner

images do not occur explicitly, reference to knighthood, particularly, is absent, but he writes to a much greater extent in what way he relished mystical experience by way of interior understanding. In the *Diary* the Trinitarian developmental circle joins with the soteriological. The culmination of Ignatian mysticism is not the image of union with God by means of mystical betrothal or marriage, but the emphasis is on the mysticism of reverent love, in which the person is not only united with God, but also perceives his traces in creation.⁷

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THE FIGURATIVENESS OF THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN ANGELA OF FOLIGNO

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the figurativeness of the language of the mystical experiences in the texts of Angela of Foligno. For this purpose, the prism of literary interpretation and analysis is utilised. The aim of this article is to define the main signs and specificities of Angela's narration. The reflection on this theme also includes the research of possible similarities with other Christian mystical witnesses (Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross).

KEYWORDS

Figurativeness. Mystics. Transcendental Experience. Ineffability. Angela of Foligno.

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Some scholars believe that Italian mystic literature has its origin in Francis of Assisi (1181–1230) and in the early periods it was something that concerned exclusively his disciples (spirituals) who tried to keep Franciscan ideals in their original version (Underhill 2004, 507). In the concerned period, the description of the transcendent is symptomatically relating to the region of Umbria – a very fertile land in terms of various religious experience, incl. mystical one. Let's just call to mind at least the main representatives of this sort of literature: Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi (1194–1253), Jacopone of Todi (1228–1306), Angela of Foligno (1248–1309), Giovanna of Orvieto (1264–1306), Clare of Montefalco (1268–1308) and later Catherine of Siena (1347–1380).

At the beginning, ecstatic apparitions were only a partial component of the main genre of hagiographic literature. In other words, they were presented as selected episodes from the life of mystical people, embedded in the narration of individual life events. Later in time, they acquired their autonomy and their narrative function and the mere hagiography became spiritual autobiography or memoirs of the mystics. The

Memorial by Angela of Foligno could be considered as the document representing her spiritual and mystical way. It is a testament describing her transcendental experience, incl. the pilgrimage to Assisi, when God unexpectedly entered her life, until her total self-denial. According to Pozzi (1992, 31), this mode of expressing the mystical experience is a typical characteristic of female mysticism.

The aim of this paper is to explore figurativeness in the literature of Angela of Foligno, by using the prism of literary interpretation and analysis. We shall show the main features and peculiarities of her testimony and we shall search any possible similarities with other mystical testimonies. A paradox of the transcendental experience, where the single individual is examining (sometimes repeatedly) the essence of their being, resides in the fact that – although the experience is exclusively personal – God keeps always being its indispensable constant element. Everything is presented as the road of an imperfect person to God, i.e. Perfection. The immutability of the historical substance of apparitions in this steady ontological basis is in contrast with the variability of the concrete experience, with the diversity of the concrete implementation under a number of different forms in which God is acting, by causing diverse personal living of the supernatural experience. It may look like mystical reports are always the same, notably if we examine them through basic structural elements of mystical experience: at the beginning, there is a distinctive action of God undeservedly; in the middle of the story, the mystic person abandons himself or herself to his or her experience, by understanding that it is not possible to withstand; or – in certain cases – the mystic is waiting for some clarifications; and at the very end, there is the total self-denial of the mystic person. Angela's experiences are characterised by an incredible variableness; and this can be considered as a quite specific property of her mysticism, which is literally stressing the truth about the manifold Grace of God (*multiformis gratia Dei*).

At the same time – by agreeing with Asti (2006, 277, 280) – it is necessary to notice that in certain aspects of linguistic usage the mystic overcomes traditional Christian stylistic aspects and “her intuition and psychological images cannot be classified on the basis of already existing symbols” which is also due to the fact that the originality of her experience is captured through unusual expressive means. It was a tough challenge for *frater scriptor* in his transcription and translation into Latin. Indeed, several linguistic solutions reveal the theological culture and education of the scribe rather than the real contents the mystic woman would like to express. Moreover, with regard to reflection and text interpretation, we should take into account also the factor of translation shifts that occurred (or might have occurred) in the different translations with which we worked.¹

1 In this interpretation, the Slovak translation by Chladný Hanoš (1945), the Italian text according to Pozzi (1992), and parts of the Czech translation of Underhill (2004) were used. Unless otherwise indicated, we used quotations and annotations from Pozzi. All the English translations reported in this paper were carried out with the aim of preserving as faithfully as possible the literal version of the original quoted source; for this

Mystical types

Even though Angela's mystical experience is often compared to that of Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510) or Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582), it has a quite unique and specific form: a new object of seeing, a new object of hearing, novelty of feelings or knowledge, enlightenment, joy or its permanence. The way in which the mystical experience takes place is characterised by signs of amorous lyric poetry, love story (the so-called spousal mysticism, in Italian: *mistica nuziale*), and maternal mysticism. With regard to the efforts of cognitive penetration in the depths of the divine mystery or God's being, we use the term "mysticism of being" – where all experiences derive from a real experience (see Asti 2006, 289–299).

Despite the fact that God, who is the usually active and acting, and a mystic as a passive recipient of God's actions are the protagonists of mystical experience, certain activity can be observed in Angela in moments, when her mind debates with Christ, responds to him, shows her openness to his explanations, ponders. The apparitions take place as a dialogue between the Divinity and the soul, similarly to Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Ávila or Julian of Norwich (1342/3–1416). This kind of apparition represents a sort of manifestation of God materialised in the words. The mystic woman is "one thing with God" (i.e. she is like the real "voice of God"), but at the same time she remains a single individual.

Language peculiarity and rhetorical formulations

In Angela of Foligno, the figurativeness of transcendental experience is formed through a simple language, featured by visualisation and plasticity, not so demanding in syntactic and stylistic terms. It reflects the custom of that epoch, a traditional language of lower classes without education, although the expressiveness is relatively influenced by a proper idiolect of the keeper of records. The narration is not complicated, metaphorically or artistically chiselled as in the case of Catherine of Siena (see Šavelová 2020, 53–63). From a linguistic point of view – as confirmed by religious brother Arnaldo – Angela used different and unusual words, which he considers as great, efficacious, and full of light (Chladný Hanoš 1945, 16).

A distinctive element is represented by formulations of *false modesty*, manifesting the sentiment of unworthiness of the author in witnessing her mystical experience and these formulations look like sincerely felt lowness; we can perceive them as a testimony of her own unworthiness *in abstracto*: "Then my soul cried aloud, saying,

‘I will not ask, because I am not worthy...’² (III, 5), ‘I saw myself totally unworthy; and indeed I was unworthy’³ (IX). In synesthetic terms, it is possible to observe adjectives and nouns relating to the expression of sweetness (in Italian: *dolcezza*), similarly to Catherine of Siena (Šavelová 2020, 62).

The phenomenality of Angela’s discourse is made up of passive expressive means, where it is not so easy to deduce who is the agent: ‘suddenly, the eyes of the soul opened’⁴ (IX), ‘it was suggested to me by inspiration’⁵ (I, 9), ‘suddenly, my soul was ignited by one love’⁶ (XI, 1), ‘very pleasant words were spoken to me’⁷ (VI, 3), ‘the soul was abducted and it saw... It was taken away from there and was enlightened’⁸ (XII, 2); all these expressions indicated exactly what ‘happened’ to her. Intransitive movement verbs are also often used together with nouns describing the nature or mode of perception (visual, auditory formulations), e.g.: a voice entered [in my soul] (*venne una voce*), a vision came to me (*mi è venuta una vision*). According to Pozzi (1992, 34), these stylistic elements are dominant in female mysticism.

Literary topoi

The author develops several literary topoi that are quite frequent in religious and mystagogical literature. Somebody believes that the conversion in her life was caused by her strong pain due to the death of beloved ones. But Angela denies this with her own words:

Back then, by God’s will, my mother died. She was a great hindrance for me in following the way of God; my husband died as well; and in a short while all my children died, too. And because I had started to follow the above-mentioned way and I had prayed God that He would rid me of them, I had great consolation of their deaths, albeit I did also feel some grief⁹ (I, 9).

Underhill (2004, 205) states that this is a typical characteristic of mystical literature – abandonment of all obstacles in the road of the mystic to God: if a person wants to perfectly love God, they try to eliminate all internal and external things that contrast with God’s love and deviate from Him. A similar act was stripping off all the

2 “E io dissi, e l’anima urlò: ‘Non voglio chiedere perché non sono degna...’”

3 “...sembravo a me stessa totalmente indegna, e di fatti lo ero.”

4 “all’istante furono aperti gli occhi dell’anima”

5 “mi fu suggerito per ispirazione”

6 “all’improvviso l’anima fu accesa da un solo amore”

7 “mi furon dette parole molto piacevoli”

8 “l’anima fu rapita e vide... fu tolta da lì e fu illuminata”

9 “E avvenne, per volontà di Dio, che in quel tempo morì mia madre, che era per me un grande impedimento. E poi morì mio marito; e tutti i miei figli in un tempo brevissimo. E perché avevo cominciato quella strada predetta e avevo pregato Dio che morissero, ne ebbi grande consolazione, voglio dire della loro morte.”

clothes by Francis of Assisi. Even Angela gets gradually rid of her goods, until her final and total liberation. Letting go means recovering the freedom a soul enjoyed at its creation. From this point of view, the mystic woman is an example of the true Franciscan medieval spirituality based on love of poverty, humility and self-denial.

On the background of the reading, one can observe an attempt to tell the experience as faithfully as possible despite the inability to express the mystical experience or its intensity through language (the so-called *ineffabilitas* or ineffability). It is a distinctive sign for mystical literature characterising specific author's formulations. E.g. Angela says: "it is not possible to describe the joy that takes possession of the soul in that moment"¹⁰ (XI, 2), "an interior delight much higher than what one could describe or tell"¹¹ (XI, 1), "such a joy you cannot report"¹², "indescribable [joy]"¹³, "inexpressible joy"¹⁴ (XI, 3), "unspeakable"¹⁵ (XII, 4; XV), "impossible to reveal"¹⁶ (XVI, 16), "it grieve me that I cannot manifest you whatsoever or of it. It is not a thing that can be touched or imagined; it is ineffable"¹⁷ (XIX, 8), "...now I am describing it with imprecise words, because it was quite different than how one can tell it" (VI, 2), "my tongue is truncated"¹⁸ (XXII, 17).

The author's thematising of her untraditional experience also leads to research and use of "new words" acting as mediators. It is a way that is also emphasized in John of the Cross: the language of the mystic is reminiscent of a child babbling. As a child, the mystic wants to express what they are experiencing (in connection with God); but they are too young to understand and they are not able to state things as they are. Nevertheless, the mystic cannot and doesn't want to keep silent (similarly to Jacopone of Todi *O iubelo del core* [O exultation of the heart], Laud 76) (see Asti 2006, 281).

In Angela, this aspect is even more distinctive, because her words are mediated by a scribe – which makes even more difficult to seize the informative value of the given experience. A testimony of this can be found in the words of the mystic woman to her scribe: "In your words I recognise my thought, but the way you wrote it is very obscure, because your words does not transmit what they should contain; that's why I say your way of writing is obscure"¹⁹ or "You transcribed the worst and the nothingness; you didn't write a word about the best feelings of the soul"²⁰ (II, 19). Furthermore, in certain cases Angela refuses to report more about a given situation or she implicitly explains that it is about the substance of God's being and acting: "But

10 "[l]a gioia che si impossessa in quel momento dell'anima non si può descrivere"

11 "un diletto interiore ben superiore a quanto si possa descrivere o raccontare"

12 "tale gioia che non si può narrare"

13 "gioia indescrivibile"

14 "gioia indicibile"

15 "inenarrabile"

16 "da non si dire"

17 "...mi duole di non saperne dire di più. Non è cosa tangibile, non appartiene all'immaginazione; è ineffabile"

18 "la lingua è tronca"

19 "Nelle tue parole riconosco il mio pensiero; ma la redazione è oscurissima, perché le parole lì usate non trasmettono le cose che dovrebbero contenere; ecco perché chiamo oscuro il tuo modo di scrivere."

20 "Hai trascritto il peggio e il nulla; del meglio che l'anima sente, non hai detto parola"

of the things which I beheld on that table, I can say nothing but what I have already said"²¹ (VIII, 3), "the more you experience God, the less you can talk about Him; the closer you touch the infinite and the inexpressible, the less you can talk about it"²² (XIX, 15; see also XIX, 8 below).

The figurativeness of the mystical experience could probably be more easily conceived by means of contrasts, paradoxes or repetitions with minimum alterations in the following sentence. The contrasting verbalisation is articulated in different forms in religious and religious-mystical systems, but also in aesthetic or philosophical conceptions and theories, from the Middle Ages up to modern days. Fruition experience and interpretation of reality through opposites have their anthropological motivation, resulting from our elementary human experience (Plesník et al. 2008, 307). Angela witnesses: "[the soul] sees all and sees nothing"²³ (XXII, 17) or

Then, all of a sudden, she was filled with love and inestimable satiety. Although she was satiated, this event caused an inestimable hunger; all her members were disjointed and her soul languished and desired to fly away. She wished neither to see nor to feel any creature. She didn't speak and didn't know what she could have said; she spoke in her interior and asked God not to let her languish in such a death, because she thought life to be death. [...] not to suffer this death which is this life, but to reach the One whom she felt in her interior²⁴ (XVI, 3).

Her spiritual journey is extending between God and the "I", between love and nothingness, as opposite poles of a unifying element – the un-known. The side effect of transcendental experiences (i.e. mystically perceived presence of God) is – at the same time – a feeling of inexpressible odours. The mystical experience is often correlated with images of light and beams (symbols of God), and also with other signs of Transcendence: enormousness or superabundance of Divine Love, goodness, and mercy. In line with other mystical literary works, Angela describes God as fullness, brightness, great beauty or aggregate of all good (as if God is the sum and the peak of all goodness and beauty). The consideration about God's essence through personal experience of infused knowledge leads to a continuous strengthening of the understanding of the transcendent; after each single additional experience, the intellect or intelligibility (*intellectus*, *intelligere*) of the mystic woman is growing further (see Pozzi 1992, 138).

21 "Ma di tutto ciò che mi fu dato di vedere sopra quella mensa, non posso dire più di quanto ho già detto"

22 "quanto più si sperimenta Dio, tanto meno se ne può parlare, più si tocca l'infinito e l'indicibile, tanto meno se ne può parlare"

23 "[l'anima] [non] vede nulla e vede tutto"

24 "...fu riempita di amore e sazieta inestimabile, che, benché sia sazieta, genera però una fame acutissima, così sconfinata che tutte le sue membra si disgiungevano e l'anima languiva e anelava alla fine. Non voleva più sentire e vedere nessuna creatura. Non parlava e non sapeva che cosa avrebbe potuto dire; parlava dentro di sé, implorando in se stessa che non la si facesse venir meno per una morte simile, perché stimava questa vita una morte. [...] che non le facessero patire questa morte che era questa vita, ma che la facessero giungere a colui che sentiva in sé."

In the optics of contrasts, we can introduce one of the most beautiful pieces of mystical literature – the vision in which Angela perceived God as an almighty and humble being at the same time, as a being that is personal and transcendental at the same time, i.e. as an unimaginable synthesis of unexpressed power and profound humility:

Afterwards [God] added: “I want to show you something of my power.” The eyes of my soul were immediately opened. In a vision I saw the fullness of God in which I could see and comprehended the whole of creation – that is, what is on this side and what is beyond the sea, the abyss, the sea itself, and all the rest. And in all that, I could perceive nothing except the presence of the power of God, in a way which is totally indescribable. My soul, filled with wonder, cried out: “The world is pregnant with God!” And I embraced the whole of creation like a small object – what is on this side and what is beyond the sea, the abyss, the sea itself, and everything else – but the power of God overflowed and fulfilled everything. And He told me: “I showed you something of my power.” And I understood that after this I should better understand the rest. He then said: “Behold now my humility.” I was given an insight into the deep humility of God towards man. By comprehending such an unspeakable power and by seeing such a deep humility, my soul was completely astonished, and esteemed itself to be nothing at all. And in its nothingness, it did not see anything but haughtiness²⁵ (IX).

Typology of visions

Underhill (2004, 321) defines the intellectual vision as something hardly understandable, spiritual, amorphous; something the human mind is not looking for, but it is already positioned before it; something that is perceived by the whole inner person by means of a sort of special sense, which is neither sight nor feeling, but has the nature of both of them (the eyes of the soul). It is confidentially close, but indescribable. It is defined, but indefinable:

Sometimes God comes into the soul without being called; and He instils into her fire, love, and sometimes sweetness; and the soul believes that it is in God, and is delighted. But there is no certainty about this; the soul does not see God, but it perceives His grace,

25 “Disse dipoi: ‘Ti voglio mostrare qualche cosa della mia potenza.’ All’istante furono aperti gli occhi dell’anima. E vedevo una pienezza di Dio, nella quale abbracciavo tutto il mondo, vale a dire di là dal mare, di qua dal mare e l’abisso e il mare e il resto. E in tutto ciò non discernevo se non la potenza divina in un modo inenarrabile. L’anima, piena di ammirazione, gridò dicendo: ‘Questo mondo è pregno di Dio.’ E abbracciavo il mondo intiero come fosse una piccola cosa, cioè di là e di qua dal mare e l’abisso e il mare e il resto, come fosse poca cosa; ma la potenza di Dio eccedeva e riempiva il tutto. E mi disse: ‘Così ti ho mostrato qualche cosa della mia potenza.’ Capivo che da qui in poi avrei capito meglio il resto. Allora mi disse: ‘Adesso guarda la bassezza.’ E vedevo una così profonda bassezza di Dio riguardo all’uomo, che l’anima, mettendo a confronto quella potenza inenarrabile e quella profonda bassezza, era piena di meraviglia e reputava se stessa un nulla, e nel suo nulla non vedeva in sé che superbia.”

in which it delights. God comes again to the soul, and speaks words full of sweetness, in which the soul has great joy, and feels God. [...] And the soul feels that God is mixed inside it and keeps company. And beyond this, the soul receives the gift of seeing God. God says to the soul: "Behold me!" and the soul sees Him dwelling within it. The soul sees Him more clearly than one man sees another. For the eyes of the soul see a plenitude about which I cannot speak: a plenitude which is not physical but spiritual; and I can't say anything about it. And the soul rejoices in that sight with an ineffable joy; and this is a clear and steady sign that God actually dwells in the soul...²⁶ (XIX, 2–3, 7–8)

It seems that the intellectual vision is narrowly correlated with the awareness of God's presence and it is more faithful and more convincing than corporeal vision (similarly in Teresa of Ávila). There are also other ways in which God appears to man in his interior and is recognised by him – e.g. ointment and embracing.

Passive figurative visions, spontaneous interior images that mystic person is looking at without active participation may have symbolic or personal form. Through symbolic form, the mystic is aware that the truth is shown under the shape of a picture (Underhill 2004, 325, 330). Many visions like that have such a complicated symbolic character (Hildegard of Bingen) that their explanation requires great intellectual efforts and interpretation. Sometimes it comes together with the vision itself. The poetic figurativeness allegorically expresses the contact with the supernatural and the reconstruction of such experience at time when the Transcendence is not yet visible enough (but only a shadow or a reflection of Divinity is observable). Such an explanation is provided – e.g. – by Dante's Beatrice in the *Divine Comedy*, in the description of the river of light (*Paradise XXX*, 61–81). Angela describes this vision, for example, as the state where God led her and lifted her. She wasn't even able to desire or to pray for something like that. Her consensus is not necessary in this case (Chladný Hanoš 1945, 43).

Whereas the passive vision is an expression of thought, perception or desire of a deeper "first person", an active figurative vision expresses some changes in this "first person" or it is connected with some spiritual crisis. The "first person" is acting in some way; it is not just a passive spectator. This may concern different forms of dreams at different levels, e.g. the way to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise as in Dante. Here Underhill (2004, 330) classifies even the figurative visions of Francis of Assisi and of Catherine of Siena in the moment of the appearance of the stigmata, of the piercing in Teresa of Ávila, the mystic marriage of Catherine of Siena and Christ.

26 "Talora Dio viene nell'anima non chiamato. E mette l'anima in fuoco, in amore, talvolta in soavità; l'anima suppone che sia Dio e si diletta in lui. Ma non è certa che sia nell'anima, cioè non vede lui nell'anima, ma vede la sua grazia, nella quale si diletta. Dio viene di nuovo nell'anima e le parla parole dolcissime nelle quali prende gran diletto; e lo sente, e ne prende gran piacere. [...] E sente che Dio si è mescolato in lei e fa compagnia con lei. Ora le vien concesso di veder Dio. Perché le viene detto da Dio: 'Guardami'. E allora vede che ha preso forma in lei. Lo vede più chiaramente di quanto un uomo possa vedere un altro uomo. Perché gli occhi dell'anima vedono una pienezza di cui non posso parlare, in quanto vedono una pienezza non corporea ma spirituale, di cui non posso parlare. In quel vedere l'anima gioisce. Questo è segno certo e manifesto che Dio è in lei. L'anima non può guardare altro che lui..."

Active figurative vision can also have mere intellectual character like for example in Angela (see above).

Figurativeness of transcendental experiences

It is interesting to note that Angela does not report the traditional symbols of the ladder, roads, arcs or castles (normally used as unifying elements of the mystical journey). The early passages are dominated by the motif of poverty. In the optic of the spiritual way, it implies a gradual renunciation to material goods. Nevertheless, it is rather an element inherent to narration, not really an independent unifying symbol. When poverty is achieved, this element is no longer a motor of the action. The mystic woman just recalls it a couple of times, but in a more marginal manner. The typical mystical images of Christ's heart (seen by the mystic woman in her dreams) or God's eyes (shining in the host) are rather sporadic. Angela described a small interior room, where no joy is getting in, no sorrow, no delight from any virtues, no other things at all, but only an aggregate of all good (XXIII, 19). A sort of analogous element can be found in Teresa of Ávila, in the image of the castle and its mansions (see Kučerková – Režná 2016, 61–72). A specific and unique example of figurativeness in Angela is the vision of the table (in Italian: *mensa*) without beginning and without end. She saw what she calls indescribable fullness of God, fullness of Divine Wisdom (VIII) or love on the shape of a sickle: “This love came close to me, like a sickle”²⁷ (XVI, 2). Despite this similitude, the figurativeness cannot be interpreted as something that is directly measurable or perceivable through exterior senses.

The images of the spouses and of motherhood

A topos treated also in other works of European (mainly female) religious literature is the image of the spouses and of motherhood.²⁸ Through these images, the mystic woman expresses love, affection, literally loving or motherly feeling (“she said she had kissed Christ's breast... then she kissed his mouth... from which a delightful fragrance emanated, impossible to describe... then she placed her cheek on Christ's cheek. And he put his hand on her other cheek and pressed her closely to him”²⁹ XV; “I see those eyes; I see that beautiful face, so willing to kiss me”³⁰ XXII, 26). And there

27 “vide che le si era fatto vicino [amore] a somiglianza di una falce”

28 The image of the spouses is present also in male authors. Pozzi (1992, 29) explains that – in that case – the term “spouse” does not refer to the whole person (as in female mystics), but only to the soul of the male mystic.

29 “disse di aver baciato il petto di Cristo... gli baciò la bocca... su quella bocca colse un mirabile, inenarrabile, diletto odore... poi posò la sua guancia sopra la guancia di Cristo. Allora Cristo posò la sua mano sopra l'altra sua guancia e la strinse a sé.”

30 “Vedo quegli occhi, quella faccia tanto piacevole, tanto disposta a baciarmi.”

is also the sadness of an abandoned mother under the cross, the lamentations over Christ's dead body (images relating to the *via crucis*). It is necessary to stress that these feelings are reciprocated. The visions also describe God's love for the mystical person (and for mankind in general), which is manifested in two ways: (i) as love between partners; and (ii) as feeling of parents for their child – e.g.: “My daughter who are sweet to me... love me, because I greatly love you and much more than you love me”³¹, “My sweet daughter and spouse, [...] I love thee better than any other who is in the valley of Spoleto”³² (III, 2). Christ often calls her “beloved” (*amata*) (XVIII, 7). In this context Christ gives her the promise of love: “Oh, my daughter, who are sweeter to me than I am to you. [...] You have the ring of my love and you are promised to me”³³ (III, 13). The strongest moments in figurative terms are the expressions referring to the *theosis* (deification) such as: “You are I and I am you”³⁴ (XXII, 25), “...I have found a place to rest in you; now you, in turn, find your rest in me”³⁵ (III, 2).

Darkness

Chladný Hanoš (1945, 9) perceives in Angela the echo of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and of his words “darkness of God” (*tenebra Dei*), because God is “inaccessible light” for our intellect, which can be practically identified with the gloom. The relative unknowability of God is narrowly related also to the *ineffabilitas* of the mystical experience. Mystic people are almost breathless. Their tongue is not able to utter any words for describing what they experienced, saw, or felt. Angela is experiencing an intimate encounter with God, like in the darkness; and she is completely embedded in it. Here, God symbolises the greatest goodness. All the rest is only darkness and non-love (see XII, 3; XXII; XXIII). In this context, Pozzi (1992, 184–192) distinguishes the vision of God-Man and God in the darkness. These two concepts are separated, but completely independent one from the other. The first item is peculiar for marriage mysticism (*m. sponsale*), the second one rather for mysticism of being (*m. dell'essere*). The topic of darkness was later elaborated more in depth by John of the Cross (1542–1591) in the *Dark Night* (*Noche oscura*).

Angela's feeling can be defined as self-denial and need of repentance – both for her sins and for the sins of the whole world, as she felt their strain. Mystical experiences often show overlapping of sense of guilt and pain for Christ's passion, ending up in a sort of “deep-felt” love for the martyred God-Man – by keeping in mind the fact that Christ has both human and divine nature, which is also the starting point for salvation of mankind through Christ's suffering on the cross.

31 “Figlia mia, a me dolce... amami, perché tu sei amata molto da me assai più che tu non ami me.”

32 “Figlia e sposa mia dolce. [...] Io ti amo più di ogni altra che sta nella valle spoletina.”

33 “Figlia mia, più dolce a me ch'io non sia a te. [...] Tu hai l'anello del mio amore e sei promessa a me.”

34 “Tu sei me e io sono te.”

35 “...io mi sono collocato in te, tu allora collocati in me.”

Via crucis

The events relating to the passion, suffering, and crucifixion of Christ are frequently treated in the text. The mystic woman recalls these events in an obsessive manner, as witnessed by the high number of references in the text, but also by the manifoldness of reproduction of the scenes: contemplation of Christ crucified and dead, Eucharistic ecstasy, reflections about the divine union. In this sense, it is possible to define the work as Christocentric, with strong aspiration towards Franciscan spirituality, emphasised mainly by the image of poverty (incl. the poverty of Christ himself).

It is necessary to note that the mystic woman saw Christ in different forms: living (e.g. as a beautiful 12-year-old boy full of sublimity, but also as a baby wrapped in “swaddling clothes” in *Instructiones* I, 7), and then suffering, bleeding, crucified, and dead on the cross. The image of the body is stylized as a metaphor for the food incarnated in the Eucharist (in this regard, it is interesting to notice a description of the change of taste of the host, that is no longer bread, but “it certainly has the taste of meat, but of a meat that has a very flavourful taste – I don’t know to what I could compare it in this world”³⁶; XVIII, 7); or as a metaphor of Christ’s side, similar to Catherine of Siena: once, during prayer, Christ showed himself closer by inviting her to touch his wounded side with her mouth; and she drank his blood and understood that it is a purifying blood for her (I, 14). In other passages, she describes that the soul has the impression of getting into Christ’s side with joy and delight (XI, 2). Elsewhere, we also find the image of Christ as a doctor helping people (the ill – the sinners), in the context of his healing and purifying blood poured out for us – by encouraging us to “wash our robes”. Angela’s picture of the cross as a bed (XXII, 31) is similar to that of other mystics – e.g. in Jacopone of Todi (“la croce è lo mio lecto” [“the cross is my bed”]); *Como l’anima priega li angeli che l’insegnino ad trouar Iesù Christo* [How the soul entreats the Angels to teach it how to find Jesus Christ], Laud XLII, 49). Christ puts into her the cross and love for God – both elements that shall be an eternal sign for her. It is as though the mystic feels the cross even in her body and melts because of that feeling.

A unique vision describes crucified Christ as though he were literally removed from the cross: fresh red blood pours from Christ’s wounds, the joints of all his limbs are completely disconnected, his tendons are loose and his body is deformed. The experiences embodying the passion of Christ often cause physical pain also in the mystic woman herself, but the immense suffering of Christ and its cognition generate in her a new dimension of never-ending love and joy. She is not able to describe the consolation she feels from Christ’s hands and feet nailed to the cross (XI, 2); she would like to see pieces of body torn by nails (V, 1); when Christ bowed his head on her shoulders and showed his throat and arms, her sadness changed into joy; and it was not possible to witness the “beauty of that throat” (ibid.; see also XVII).

36 “ha sì un certo sapore di carne, ma di altro genere, saporitissimo: non so paragonarlo a cosa di questo mondo”

Sadness and joy alternate as opposite emotions within the same experience and, at the same time, they are unified in this experience because they are connected by the same fact, the same event. In one vision, she sees Christ and his most holy soul suffering because of various horrible pains, incl. corporal pain. She also sees his mother's pain. It is a process of building awareness of man's own concrete sinfulness through visualisation (similar to Dante's *Inferno* [Hell]).³⁷ In Angela, the vision of the suffering of Christ is simply punishment and gratification at the same time, because it leads to awareness of sins and consequent purification. Christ also shows to the mystic woman how his suffering is leading man to God. All human errors and injustice must be perceived in this optic, as a manner of self-knowledge and purification already in this world.³⁸

Conclusion

For centuries, various types of literature (not only religious) show the occurrence of thematised experiences that, due to their transcendental nature and impenetrability for human (linguistic and mental) means, are *a priori* condemned to remain only misty concepts in the perception of reality. Despite their intrinsic paradox, they are always captivating the readers and offer quite personal (or even privileged) experiences, elaborated at different levels of author's peculiar figurative inventiveness. The figurativeness of Angela of Foligno toggles between tradition and newness. Nevertheless, unlike other historically older mystics, her imagery is not metaphorically masked or obscure. For this reason, her texts are still interesting, even today. They help the readers open the door to a closer encounter with God. Through her personal experience, the mystic woman shows how to be led by her mystic testimony – in the optic of Christian faith – and how to reach values like poverty, humbleness, humiliation of man's ego, but also respect for God and for His creation. All aspects that are often forgotten in today's bustling world. Angela's description of God's never-ending love and goodness open the way to a personal and individual reflection about the meaning of all this in man's life, also with regard to his relation with God. The pain and deception that Christ mirrors in the visions of the mystic woman lead the readers to deeper awareness of Christ's human nature (God and Man) and sentiments relating to that. To a certain extent, it is a break in the medieval concepts of authoritativeness of the Divinity and insurmountability of the distance between the human and the divine. Despite several centuries separating us

37 As for Dante's *Inferno* see Šavelová, M.: *Danteho Peklo: idey a interpretácie* [Dante's *Inferno*: ideas and interpretation] (2014) and *Odhalovanie Danteho intelektuálnej biografie* [Discovering Dante's intellectual biography] (2016).

38 A similar reflection is presented by Rusnáková (2015, 55) in the context of the works by Catherine of Siena.

from the concrete testimony of the mystic woman, her simple images are still clearly showing the strong potential of our inspiration, even for our spirituality.³⁹

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THE FIGURATIVENESS OF THE LANGUAGE OF ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA

Edita Hornáčková Klapicová

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at analyzing *The Interior Castle* of St. Teresa of Ávila using a stylistic approach. *The Interior Castle* was inspired by the author's vision of the soul as a diamond in the shape of a castle containing seven mansions, which she interpreted as the journey of faith through seven stages, ending with union with God. The stylistic analysis of the chosen text combines intuition and detailed linguistic analysis of the text. The form and style of the text are an integral part of the work's meaning and value. In our analysis of *The Interior Castle*, lexical and syntactical expressive means and stylistic devices are discussed in order to explore the figurative meanings of the language employed.

KEYWORDS

Stylistic analysis. Lexical and syntactical expressive means. Stylistic devices. Figurative language.

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Literary stylistics can be regarded as a study of the fusion of form with content or the analysis of creative language used in literary works. While analyzing a text, one is interested in particular syntactic choices made by the author, while recurring preference for certain sentence patterns or repetition or frequency of certain words belonging to a particular lexical set are seen as features of style measured in terms of deviations from the norm (Niazi 2013, Smetanová 2017). Language, through choices of meaning, can represent a particular view of the spiritual world. Our concern in Stylistics is how the spiritual world is apprehended or conceptualized in a style of writing (or mind style) representing the world view (Smetanová 2016).

This paper aims at analyzing *The Interior Castle* (*Castillo Interior o Las Moradas*) of St. Teresa of Ávila written in 1577 using a stylistic approach and showing the unity

between the content and the form and between the thought and the expression. *The Interior Castle* was inspired by the author's vision of the soul as a diamond in the shape of a castle containing seven mansions, which she interpreted as the journey of faith through seven stages, ending with union with God. The stylistic analysis of the chosen text combines intuition and detailed linguistic analysis of the text. The form and style of the text are an integral part of the work's meaning and value¹. In our analysis of *The Interior Castle*, phonetical, lexical, and syntactical expressive means and stylistic devices, as well as modality and cohesion are discussed in order to explore the figurative meanings of the language employed. The individuality of the writer reveals itself through the election and treatment of certain expressive means and stylistic devices which repeat in the text. The author uses them in order to intensify the logical and emotional sense of the expression and makes the reader feel that which the author wishes him or her to feel.

Methodology

This paper uses the approach of modern stylistic analysis. The first step was to identify the extratextual factors: the type and function of the text, the publication of the text, the purpose of the author, and the recipient of the text. The second step was to identify the intratextual factors: the genre, the topic, the structure of the text, the lexical level, the syntactic level, modality, cohesion, and coherence and show how the different expressive means and stylistic devices present in the text served the author to achieve a certain aim, whether to transmit information, express emotions or psychological states, or make the reader feel something or encourage him or her to act in a specific way.

The expressive means and stylistic devices analyzed in this paper can be found primarily in the first two parts of *The Interior Castle: Prologue* and *The first dwelling places* (*El prólogo* and *Las moradas primeras*).

Extratextual factors

The Interior Castle is a doctrinal book and is considered the most representative work explaining the mystical process. The book was written by Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada, known as Teresa of Ávila or Teresa de Jesús, in 1577. It was written after Teresa had been receiving visions and spiritual experiences for over ten years. Upon request from her superiors, Teresa wrote *The Interior Castle* in the Carmelite convent

1 For defining *value* see Knapík 2020.

in Toledo as a guide for the whole community (Pilar 2014). It is written in form of a discourse addressed to the Carmelite nuns.

In order to achieve divine union and complete grace, it is necessary to overcome seven trials, dwelling places or stops. The first three intend to abandon all the earthly things and the next three open a way to illumination to arrive at mystical union in the last dwelling place (Mata Induráin 2014).

The metaphor of a castle is one of the most successful expressive means used in spiritual literature to explain the reality of the mystical rise. The writer compares the human soul to a castle with many chambers which represent the heavenly life. The aim of the author is to help the reader achieve union with God in the seventh dwelling places and experience the intensity of joy which the soul can feel in this phase of spiritual life.

Intratextual factors

Genre and structure of *The Interior Castle*

The Interior Castle has the characteristics of narrative, oratory, and autobiography. In general, it is considered a doctrinal book. The narrative elements present in the book are a) narrator; b) plot; c) characters; d) setting; and e) literary language or style. The book offers the reader a subjective approach to contemplative reflections on life expressed through different literary figures, which help to communicate the content in a more powerful way. The text is full of loving imagery and produces a certain sensual atmosphere.

The elements of oratory present in the work are a) moving someone strongly towards an end; b) persuade in order to induce, move or obligate someone to believe or do something (Kosturková – Knapík 2018); c) its content is the Word of God; d) it contains unity – the message consists of different parts and sections, it contains a variety of ideas but all of its parts, sections, and ideas create one whole; e) the ideas are presented in a logical order; f) it is simple; g) it is relevant, practical, and compelling.

The story of *The Interior Castle* is narrated by a protagonist narrator, who tells the plot in the first person (I), assuming the main role of it. The narrator tells her story with full awareness of herself, so she uses personal and subjective language, allows herself to make personal references and digressions, and above all she can only tell the reader what she knew at that time. The narrator expresses her opinion, asks herself questions and manifests her subjectivity as she tells the story in the first-person singular. Therefore, the text also has characteristics of an autobiography.

The author proposes the existence of a series of interrelated internal states, like seven concentric dwellings, through which she goes in her internalization process. She uses the allegory of the interior castle to describe the inner world and the allegory of the dwellings, rooms or pieces that make up the castle as a description of the route to be taken to access the depths of the inner space and achieve spiritual union with God (Pilar 2014).

After a vision, Teresa describes the path of spiritual growth as a castle all made of diamond and very clear crystal, where there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many abodes. To achieve divine union, complete grace, one must pass seven tests, dwellings or stops. The first three try to abandon all earthly things, the next three affect enlightenment to reach the mystical union in the last one (Mata Induráin 2014).

The main characteristics of the literary style of St. Teresa of Jesus are simplicity and sincerity. Her prose is written in colloquial Spanish; she hardly retouched her writings, which always have an appearance of spontaneity, of prose written with great ease. It is in effect, an ascetic prose, simple, unadorned, presenting the apparent neglect of spoken prose. In short, her style stands out for its expressiveness, grace, and delicacy, which are exceptional (Sánchez-Castañer 1987).

The style in the work of Saint Teresa of Jesus is conditioned by the intention of her writings. It has been said of her that she was a “writer by obedience” since it was never her intention. If she wrote, she was guided by a deep conviction in the need for a transformative change within the Church towards simplicity, fighting the corruption that most monastic orders had reached. Her love for the nuns who lived in her order and their need for advice always guided her, which she repeatedly stated in her work. For this reason, all the works of St. Teresa of Ávila are written in simple Castilian Spanish, free of all artifice, in prose (although she also composed poetry), in an informative tone despite the complex subject matter she addresses (Mata Induráin 2014).

The author expresses the desire to communicate her mystical experiences² and that path of spiritual growth taken to the extreme. Imagination and affectivity, as well as realism and loving dedication to the spiritual, mark her literary style (Sánchez-Castañer 1987).

The text is intertwined with references to the Bible and full of images, symbols, comparisons, and other means that the author uses to bring supernatural reality closer to the earthly creature. The number of the dwelling places itself seems to be symbolic, because seven is the number of perfection in the biblical understanding, and thus complete union with God requires the perfection of the soul. We believe that the path along which St. Teresa leads can be instilled, because the author often implores the Holy Spirit³ for guidance at the beginning of each chapter. She admits that due to poor physical health and lack of time, she does not remember exactly what

2 For defining *mystical experience* see Kučerková 2020.

3 For instance, “Today while beseeching our Lord to speak for me because I wasn’t able to think of anything to say nor did I know how to begin to carry out this obedience...” (Chapter 1, 1)

she wrote in the previous chapters, she complains about severe headaches, and claims that only then do her words and explanations can be true if God is reflected in them. Moreover, the language used by the author in her work is similar to the language God speaks to His people through the Scriptures: it is timeless, full of images and symbols, likened to understanding inner things on the basis of certain parallels with the external world.

The text has characteristics of both oral and written language.

The oral form is manifested by an emotional language that includes typical colloquial words and phrases and intensifying words (interjections, words with high emotional meaning and empty words). There are also syntactic structures with a tautological subject and detached constructions.

The characteristics of written language are manifested through the use of literary language, technical terms and their definitions, clear explanations of concepts, coherence and cohesion, the use of conjunctions, adverbial phrases and other means that serve to join the sentences. The work contains complex sentences and units such as: text, paragraphs and suprasentential units. The professional vocabulary (of the Catholic doctrine) facilitates the process of decoding information.

One of the main functions of the text is the appellative function, that is, to transmit the author's will and desire to teach, guide, advise, and encourage a person to fight for the achievement of union with God. The second function is the expressive function that consists of transmitting a state of mind to the reader. The third function of the text is the referential function, that is to represent or transmit content, concepts, and judgments. The most important function of the text is the communicative one, which is revealed by the writer's effort to influence the behavior, thought, feelings and conscience of the reader. This function is also manifested by the expression of the author's emotional interest and by the exposition and transmission of abstract thoughts and of the knowledge of singular (spiritual) phenomena in form of concepts.

The work consists of the Prologue, The first dwelling places (2 chapters), The second dwelling places (1 chapter), The third dwelling places (2 chapters), The fourth dwelling places (3 chapters), The fifth dwelling places (4 chapters), The sixth dwelling places (7 chapters), The seventh dwelling places (4 chapters) and the Epilogue.

There are two thematic lines: the autobiographical (Kučerková – Režná 2014) and the doctrinal. There are three schemes that offer the reader three levels of reading: a) read the story of Teresa: her castle; b) read the message of the symbol or overlapping symbols that make up the work; and c) read it as a lesson in spiritual theology and high Christian life.

Results

The phonetic level

Although the text is written in form of prose, there are some phonetic expressive means and stylistic devices whose function is to create a pleasant acoustic effect. One of such figures occurring in the text is euphony.

Euphony is a pleasant and harmonious sound, generated by the occurrence of vowels and consonants within the same word or between neighboring words, e.g. “lo dará o será”, “por ignorancia y no por malicia”, “en tan poco procurar con todo cuidado conservar”.

The lexical level

At the lexical level we identified three types of vocabulary: colloquial words (with an emotional function, for example “bestialidad” [“bestiality”], “alimaña” [“vermin”]), neutral (“dignidad” [“dignity”], “cuerpo” [“body”]) and literary (“virtud” [“virtue”], “Dios” [“God”], “misericordia” [“mercy”]). The lexical items include terminology from the Catholic doctrine, Biblical words, poetic and literary words, and lexical expressive means and stylistic devices.

The author uses different types of lexical relationships: *synonymy*, *antonymy* and *hyponymy*, especially at the level of technical words and theological terms. We identified 10 types of lexical expressive means and stylistic devices: *metaphor* (“alma” [“soul”] and “castillo” [“castle”] refer to “hombre” [“man”]; “rey” [“king”] refers to “el Señor” [“the Lord”], “su Majestad” [“His Majesty”]; “barro” [“mud”] refers to “miseria del hombre” [“man’s misery”]; “reptiles tóxicos” [“toxic reptiles”] refer to “sequedad” [“dryness”] and “pensamientos malos” [“bad thoughts”]; “puerta del castillo” [“door of the castle”] refers to “oración” [“prayer”] and “contemplación” [“contemplation”]), *metonymy* (and *synecdoche*), *interjections and exclamations*, *epithet*, *simile*, *paraphrase* (“God himself created us in his image and likeness”), *hyperbole*, *meiosis*, *quotes*, and *allusions*.

We studied the lexical units that St. Teresa used to describe the spiritual way. We classified them according to different lexical fields. In *The Interior Castle* it is possible to identify several lexical fields, the elements of which are key to understanding the spiritual way. For instance, the lexical field “camino espiritual” [“spiritual way”] includes words such as “cruz” [“cross”], “sufrimiento” [“suffering”], “purificación” [“purification”], “sacrificio” [“sacrifice”], “amor” [“love”], “oración” [“prayer”], “camino” [“way”], “virtud” [“virtue”], “Jesucristo” [“Jesus Christ”], “servir” [“serve”], “guía espiritual” [“spiritual leader”], “lucha” [“struggle”], “humildad” [“humility”],

“obediencia” [“obedience”], “arrepentimiento” [“repentance”], “unión” [“union”], “voluntad de Dios” [“God’s will”], etc.

In the work of St. Teresa of Ávila certain lexical units can be observed, by which the author clearly indicates the ways and stages of the way, which is spiritual, and which leads to the center of the soul, where God resides. In Teresa’s vocabulary there are expressions about the inner struggle that one must undergo in order to purify oneself and to be able to advance on the way to the Supreme Good. Then there are words and phrases that metaphorically describe the interior castle, or “space” in which God dwells. These include words that describe God and his attributes, elements of animate and inanimate nature, the qualities and condition of man with regard to his sinful nature, but also the good that comes from the effort to purify himself, recognize and confess his sinfulness and fulfill God’s will.

The central theme is prayer, that is, communication with God. Teresa classified seven stages of prayer and she coined new terms in order to name specific concepts. She used many synonyms and the reader must be careful to assign the appropriate concept to a specific term.

The syntactic level

At the syntactic level we identified these types of sentences: complex, simple, compound, coordinated, subordinate and juxtaposed. The syntactic expressive means and stylistic devices present in the text include repetition, addition or deletion of words, and alteration of the order of words.

We found 20 types of syntactic expressive means and stylistic devices: *detached constructions*, *parallel constructions*, *enumeration*, *climax*, *antithesis*, (*lexical and synonymical*) *repetition*, *anaphora*, *epiphora*, *emphatic inversion*, *gradation*, *periphrasis*, *asyndeton*, *polysyndeton*, *ellipsis*, *rhetoric questions*, *litote*, *paraphrase* (“as in heaven there are many mansions”), *framing*, *personification*, *synesthesia* (“oír a Dios”, “oír el ruido” [“hear God”, “hear noise”]).

Modality

The author’s judgment of the probabilities or obligations involved in what she is saying is often formulated in *The Interior Castle* through various types of modality. Teresa uses language in order to mediate her thoughts, attitudes, opinions, and desires to the reader.

These types of modality can be found in *The Interior Castle*: a) *Epistemic modality* uncovering whether something is likely/certain or unlikely; b) *Perception modality* delivered by verbs of perceiving, such as “see” and “hear” with the meaning “understand to be true”; and c) *Deontic and boulomaic modality* indicating the necessity and desirability respectively of the proposition in the utterance.

Coherence

The text is coherent, since the statements of which it is composed refer to the same reality. They focus on a common theme and respond to the reader's knowledge of the world. The meaning of utterances is linked in a discourse. Semantic features are incorporated into the text which has the aspects of a discourse. Meaning is structured through various stylistic organizations in the language of St. Teresa of Ávila and the reader experiences the meaning in the language when he encounters various patterns and deviations in the process of his reading. The writer focuses on mind style or the thoughts, emotions, and experiences related to spiritual growth of the protagonist.

Cohesion

The text is also cohesive. The statements are interconnected or cohesive with each other. The author uses the means of recurrence (coreference) and deixis to achieve the principle of cohesion in the text. Recurrence is manifested through lexical repetitions, anaphora and epiphora. Deixis is manifested through the use of pronouns and adverbs referring to elements located in space and time.

The author constantly refers to "a person", "a certain person", "that person"... very well known to the author, to whom the things and graces and experiences referred to in the book have been happening. Only occasionally is "that person" associated with another unnamed person who "was a man": a veiled but transparent allusion to Fray Juan de la Cruz. Well, "that person" is the author. The reader can be sure that he is going to take a tour of the rooms of Teresa's castle, guided by her. You are invited to penetrate and travel your soul. To follow the days of his spiritual journey and the layers of his spirit, even the most secret layers of his inner depth.

Cohesion in *The Interior Castle* takes place through the use of various lexical and syntactical devices like syntactical parallelism, inversion, fronting, use of lexical sets, compounding, stylistic consistency, etc.

The richness of figurative language in *The Interior Castle*

In *The Interior Castle* the author talks about the nature of the human soul. She compares it to a warrior castle, well anchored in the rock of one's own body and inside populated with life and problems. The castle must undergo a process of internal illumination, struggle, and conquest. In order to express and communicate these ideas, Teresa of Ávila employed figurative language often consisting of a combination of several types of expressive means and stylistic devices in one passage of the text (Example 2).

Example 1: *Metaphor*

The author uses metaphors of interior castles, dwelling places and others.

...es considerar nuestra alma como un castillo todo de un diamante o muy claro cristal, adonde hay muchos aposentos, así como en el cielo hay muchas moradas.

[It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places.]

The writer uses this stylistic device with an emotional, persuasive, and cognitive function. Through metaphor the author transmits lively imagination that transcends the literary meanings of words and creates images that are easier to understand and respond to than to the literary language. Metaphorical language activates imagination and the writer used it with the aim to express her emotions and impressions more effectively.

Example 2: *Epithet. Enumeration. Climax. Rhetorical question. Synonymic repetition. Hyperbole. Emphatic inversion. Litote. Metaphor. Synecdoche. Paraphrase. Modality. Coherence. Cohesion.*

Que si bien lo consideramos, hermanas, no es otra cosa el alma del justo sino un paraíso adonde dice Él tiene sus deleites. Pues ¿qué tal os parece que serás el aposento adonde un Rey tan poderoso, tan sabio, tan limpio, tan lleno de todos los bienes se deleita?

[For in reflecting upon it carefully, Sisters, we realize that the soul of the just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight. So then, what do you think that abode will be like where a King so powerful, so wise, so pure, so full of all good things takes His delight?]

Epithet. (“alma del justo”, “un Rey tan poderoso, sabio, limpio, lleno de todos los bienes”)

The epithets used in the text help to create an atmosphere of objective evaluation, while in reality they carry the subjective attitude of the author. This stylistic resource is based on the interaction of logical and emotional meaning of a word, phrase or attributive sentence that is used to characterize an object and point it out to the reader.

Enumeration. (“sabio, limpio, lleno de todos los bienes”)

By means of this stylistic device the qualities of God are named one by one in such a way that they produce a chain. In the text they generally have the function of emphasizing something and even producing climax.

Climax.

There is a gradual increase in significance, importance, and emotional tension in expression in this passage.

Rhetorical question. (“Pues ¿qué tal os parece que serás el aposento adonde un Rey tan poderoso, tan sabio, tan limpio, tan lleno de todos los bienes se deleita?”)

It is a statement expressed in form of a question that carries a strong emotional meaning. The writer thus expresses different types of judgments.

Synonymic repetition. (“tan poderoso, tan sabio, tan limpio, tan lleno de todos los bienes”)

This stylistic device is used in the text for emotional intensification. It also shows the state of mind of the writer. The function of repetition is to make a logical emphasis necessary to draw the reader’s attention to the key words of the utterance.

Hyperbole. (“un Rey tan poderoso, tan sabio, tan limpio, tan lleno de todos los bienes”)

The author uses this stylistic device as a deliberate exaggeration of essential attributes of God.

Emphatic inversion. (“...adonde un Rey tan poderoso, tan sabio, tan limpio, tan lleno de todos los bienes se deleita”)

Emphatic inversion is based on a violation of word order in a sentence with the aim to emphasize a part of it. In this passage it is used for emotional intensification. While the final position of the clause introduces new information, the initial position carries emotional emphasis.

Litote. (“no es otra cosa el alma del justo sino un paraíso”)

The use of a negative construction in this passage serves to establish a positive characteristic of the soul of the just person. This type of construction has a stronger impact on the reader than affirmative expressions.

Metaphor. (“el alma”, “paraíso”, “el aposento”)

The metaphors of “soul”, “paradise”, and “abode” have an emotional, persuasive, and cognitive function. Through these metaphors the author was able to transmit lively imagination that transcends the literary meanings of words and creates images that are easier to understand and respond to than to the literary language.

Synecdoche. (“el justo”)

A part (“el justo”) is made to represent the whole (“una persona justa”).

Paraphrase. (“lleno de todos los bienes”, “el alma del justo es un paraíso adonde él tiene sus deleites”)

It is a paraphrase of a passage from The Book of Proverbs 8:31: “[La sabiduría] tiene sus delicias en habitar con los hijos de los hombres.” [“Rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.”] The writer frequently uses paraphrase of the biblical text.

Boulomaic modality. (“qué tal os parece que serás el aposento...”)

It shows the attitude of the writer in what is being communicated in terms of her scale of values.

Coherence.

The statements in the passage focus on one topic and respond to the reader's knowledge of the spiritual world.

Cohesion. (“El” – *deixis*, “tan-tan-tan” – *lexical repetition*)

The author uses the means of recurrence (coreference) and deixis to achieve cohesion in the text.

Conclusion

Vocabulary consisting of colloquial words and expressions, neutral words, literary language, and specific terms; various types of lexical relationships; complex, simple, compound, coordinated, subordinate and juxtaposed sentences; phonetic, lexical, and syntactic expressive means and stylistic devices; modality; coherence and cohesion are a set of elements creating an individual style of St. Teresa of Ávila in *The Interior Castle*. This particular language serves to fulfill the author's aim to explain the reality of spiritual growth and help the reader achieve union with God.

A unity between the content and the linguistic form can be observed in the text.

The individual style of the writer is manifested through vocabulary choice, syntax, and phonetic, lexical, and syntactic expressive means and stylistic devices that are repeated in the text and serve to intensify the logical and emotional sense of expression and provoke feelings in the reader.

The limitations of this research are that the stylistic analysis of *The Interior Castle* is based primarily on a fragment of the text. Therefore, in order to obtain more complete data about the author's individual style and the role of the figurative language found in the text, it would be helpful to conduct a stylistic analysis of the whole work.⁴

4 This text is an outcome from the grant VEGA 1/0514/19 *The Poetics of Mystical Experience and the Literary Forms of Mystagogy*.

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CHAPTER FIVE

MYSTICISM OF BEING IN THE WORLD



A PROBE INSIDE THE POETIC FORM OF MYSTICISM OF SLOVAK ROMANTIC MESSIANISTS

Petra Kaizerová

ABSTRACT

The Slovak Romantic Messianism is perceived by us as a phenomenon growing from a specific current epochal situation relating to a relatively rich tradition, which existed in the Slovak cultural context already in previous historical periods. By considering the characteristic features of production, its existence was often relativised. Nevertheless, it represents an important testimony of a concrete epoch. Its artistic implementation (perhaps today more than in the past) is being well appreciated, thanks to its interesting form and to its expressive and narrative strength or value. By focusing our attention on its expressive and thematic means, it is possible to prove that the authors tried to mediate a mystical experience to the readers. As mystagogues, they introduced and initiated the readers to the mysteries of God's plans aiming at transformation of this world. In this sense, through their literary production, they invoked and prayed God to give them a chance to live a direct mystic experience in the reality. By pursuing this purpose, they filled their poetry with curious archaisms and neologisms (the so-called self-creation of language). They gave way to a speculative etymologism and poetical forms. Generally, they were syncretically styling poetical shapes. And they often exploited experiments or complex strophic structures.

KEYWORDS

Romanticism. Messianism. Messiah. Redemption. Nation. Mysticism.

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The Slovak Romantic Messianism, with its expressional and thematic means, is perceived by us as a phenomenon growing from a specific current epochal situation relating to a relatively rich tradition, which existed in our cultural context already in

previous historical periods. By considering the characteristic features of production, its existence was often relativized also by contemporary authors in the period of origination and operation of this movement. Its special poetics did not enjoy positive echoes at the very beginning.

From today's perspective, messianistic thoughts appear as a very specific element of their epoch; nevertheless, the texts in which these thoughts are reflected, were almost unknown to people living in that historical period (and even when they were known, they were often ignored or refused). For this reason, to a smaller extent, they were recorded in the spiritual life of the Romantic generation but did not play such an important role in it. If we try to return to messianistic thinking (in the image of Slovak Romanticism) the real position it deserves, then we must take into account that its influence on epochal (and not only epochal) large collective consciousness does not appear too strong (Goszczyńska 2005, 270). As a paradox, Slovak literary Messianism is more appreciated by our contemporary epoch. Today, it is being given more attention in the expert audience environments. Its artistic and ideal message is exalted and its developmental merit in the history of Slovak literature is re-evaluated. It is once again a subject of reading and it paves the way to supertemporal communication.

The conditions for the origination of literary Messianism in the context of Slovak Romanticism were very favorable. After the 1848–1849 Revolution, the Slovak national revival (generated by the forces that were pushing forward the European continent back then) fell into a deep crisis, with stagnation and disillusion because of the failure to implement the expected plans. Despite the undeniable efforts of the main representatives, the vision of a freer Slovak future remained unfulfilled. The search of new ways for affirming the Slovak ideals was practically vanished under the pressure of the absolutism of the government.¹ In the territory of current Slovakia there was another solid clue, which played a relevant role. The whole romantic generation was building its bases on it: it was the faith in God and in the Divine Providence – the sanctification of national goals as a divine scope in a larger context.

The representatives of the national revival were strongly connected to their religious faith; not by chance, many of them were priests. Faith and God inspired and supported the poetical production of a wide generation of Romantic messianists like Michal Miloslav Hodža (1811–1870), Samo Bohdan Hroboň (1820–1894), Mikuláš Dohnány (1824–1852), Jozef Podhradský (1823–1915), Peter Kellner Zábaj Hostinský (1823–1873) and partially even Pavol Hečko (1825–1895), Pavol Dobšinský (1828–1885), Samuel Ormis (1824–1875), Viliam Pauliny-Tóth (1826–1877), etc. (many of them with connection already to their pre-revolution trends). Let's remind the consternation, scandal, and complaints caused by the works of Hroboň and Hodža sent to the *Concordia* almanac in 1857 (despite the fact that they were transmitted

1 We are thinking about Bach's absolutism, which the Historians place more or less in the years 1849–1860.

on direct request of its editors Jozef K. Viktorin [1822–1874] and Ján Palárik [1822–1870]).

By analyzing the literary production of Slovak romantic messianists, we start from the understanding of the concept of Messianism as a mindset that had its origin in Judaism and – after gradual deepening – became one of the characteristic signs of Jewish spirituality. Its main essence resides in the expectation of the arrival of a human and supernatural being on earth, which shall start the era of salvation. It is about “faith in the salvation of man, nation or the whole mankind through the Messiah elected by God, i.e. the Anointed One” (Dupkala 2003, 7). Here, we have a chance to observe one of the basic features of Messianism – the aspect of “election”, because the Jewish nation is elected by God. This concrete aspect, in later centuries, will suit the spirit of the national revival epoch and the development of national ideas.

In linguistic terms, the word “Messianism” came from the biblical word “Messiah”, from the Hebrew “Mashiach”, Greek “Christos” – and it means “the Anointed One”. “The expression is a noun derivation from the verb ‘mashach’ meaning ‘to anoint’. In most of the cases, it is anointment with oil. By analyzing the number of passages in which this element is reported, we notice that it is an important religious act. Anointment with oil is actually consecration, i.e. designation for ministry and for serving God” (Heller 1994, 20). Later on, the act of anointment was carried out with the aim of limiting an exceptional spot or a sacred stone as a symbol or localization sign of a concrete place to be used for supernatural contacts with the higher sphere. Then, it started to be gradually connected with the ritual of consecration of ceremonial elements; only later in time, it began to be used for symbolical marking of an extraordinary and elected being (Somolayová 2010, 615–616).

“The prophets present the Messiah – first of all – as the ideal king. Then, with the painful crises of the exile and destruction of Israel, Messianism acquires a new characteristic; it becomes more spiritual. The prophets mediate a new image of an eschatological sovereign sitting on the throne of King David. They don’t see the Messiah only an authoritative ruler, but as a mediator, a pastor, and a peacemaker” (Poliaková 2008, 19).

“Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall graze, together their young shall lie down; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the viper’s den, and the child lay his hand on the adder’s lair” (Is 11:6–8). The condition for this “heavenly life” is the right relationship with God and the right knowledge of God. This thesis is taken back by messianistic authors, who believe that the Slovak people can reach their redemption not through concrete actions, but as a blessing “from above”, within the frame of a renovated Pan-slavism.² The aim was supposed to be reached through

2 Polish Messianism elaborates also the thesis of eligibility of the nation (of course, the Polish nation), to be considered as key factor for the revival of the entire world. In the context of Polish literature, Messianism has a dominant position and was not refused by contemporaries.

direct divine intervention – with the descent of an abstract, ideal being – Messiah. In this way, the national revivalism acquires a utopian character.

In the context of Slovak literary Romanticism, Messianism has been, so far, an object of research prevalently with regard to the production of its two main representatives: Samo Bohdan Hroboň³ and Michal Miloslav Hodža⁴. At the beginning, its production resounded only in Slovak creation of literary realism: “The character of Hurban’s Holan⁵ (from Vajanský’s epic work ‘Flying Shadow’ [Letiace tiene]) goes so far that he is abhorred by the author himself. In him we feel greatness of spirit and true prophetic essence” (Krčméry 1976, 235). He is also target of satyr and parody in some literary works (e.g. in the already mentioned Vajanský’s *Flying Shadow*, but also in Vajanský’s *Kotlín*, in Ferienčíková’s short story *The Philosopher and the Poet* [Filozof a poeta], in Kukučín’s *Sacrifice* [Obeta]). Only later on does he receive some respect in Kukučín’s novel *Lukáš Blahosej Krasoň*. Romantic Messianism was taken into consideration by Slovak literature rather than by literary history. Only in later years, romantic Messianism stops being targeted by literary parodies and gets out of the field of view of belle-lettres (Čepan 1973a, 97).

Michal Eliáš has very precisely and concisely described the interest of literary science and history in Slovak romantic Messianism: “There is no satisfactory knowledge about literary history of the features of the literary current called Messianism” (Eliáš 1973, 5). In the past, scholars used to write more about the life of our romantic messianists and less about their literary production. The figure of the main representative of Slovak Messianism (Samo Bohdan Hroboň) was treated for the first time by Svetozár Hurban Vajanský in a necrologue reporting facts about his life events: “Hroboň put an end to his active life and was cast away to a silent and beautiful shore; but he stayed true to his ideals, pure as mountain crystal; the fire burning inside him did not disappear, despite his fatal anachoretic retirement, but he remained faithful and strong in what he has lived for” (Vajanský 1956, 331).

The approach of Slovak literary history in the assessment of messianists’ production is more precisely defined by statements concerning Samo Bohdan Hroboň: “Lost in countryside solitude, he was more and more deeply immersed in his visions and thoughts. His poetry – which resonated with the metal sound of the Old-Testament prophets – got stuck in dark apocalyptic labyrinths...” (Vlček 1953, 192) Štefan Krčméry sees in Hroboň a special creative potential. “As far as Hroboň is concerned, people believed that he stands highly above the average, but he tends to wander around” (Krčméry 1976, 234). Critics and scholars often based their judgments on simplified interpretations of the issue of Slovak Messianism: “It is not at all correct to agree with the depreciating verdicts by some contemporaries and then by part of positivist oriented science” (Mráz 1948, 174). A similar situation – as for the

3 Samo Bohdan Hroboň was a Slovak folklorist, translator, linguist and poet.

4 Michal Miloslav Hodža was a Slovak linguist and poet.

5 Holan is the name of literary figure.

assessment and consideration of Messianism – is observed also in the 1960's in Slovakia.

Only Oskár Čepan tried to implement a more systematic approach to research on the conception of Slovak romantic Messianism. He observed the great influence of Messianism in the romantic literary milieu and he tried to define it from a temporal point of view, according to the theories of his time.

It originated from old buds immediately after the revolution, in the depressive circumstances of the 1850's. Through literary activism of Samo Bohdan Hroboň and Jozef Podhradský, this literary orientation experienced its patriotic Romanticism. Covered by the mantle of literary realism and piously tolerated by the main leaders of the new generation, it humbly kept acting until the period between the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Coincidentally, in the first decades after the revolution, it took up not only the role of guardian of the ancestral traditions of romantic "spirit", but also the role of predictor and announcer of the expected cataclysmal political transformations – although in a veiled form (Čepan et al. 1965, 93).

During the 1970's, Čepan's opinions about the issue of Slovak Messianism began to significantly change, thanks to his systematic research: "It existed since the very beginning of the Romantic movement. Therefore, it is not an additional product of the post-revolutionary depression and disappointment left by vanished hopes" (Čepan 1973a, 98).

As for the development of romantic thoughts in Slovakia we can see two resultant forces: on the one hand, the pragmatic and thematically accommodating romantic programme affirmed mainly by Štúr and Hurban; and on the other hand the messianistic uncompromising "unity of spirit" represented by Hodža and Hroboň... Both these currents did exist from the very beginning of Slovak Romanticism (Čepan 1973b, 139).

The first type of Slovak Romanticism, the so-called national Romanticism, in the track of Hegel (objective realism) "subordinated art to the interests of the national spirit and to practical aspects of social activity (pragmatism)" (Čepan 1993, 74). The second type of Romanticism, messianistically oriented, in the name of Schelling (subjective idealism) "absolutized the poetical aspect of the interpretation of reality. In compliance with the law of identity between individuals, nature, the universe and the Absolute, in the field of art it found a synthesis of all things that are separated in the field of nature and of history" (Čepan 1993, 74).

The early monolith opinion about the romantic period (represented by "Štúr's followers" or the so-called "Štúr's school")⁶ was interrupted and replaced by a pluralistic model of the Slovak literary Romanticism, with two parallel ideal forms. Slovak Romanticism did not show only two different aspects in the relation between

6 Ludovít Štúr (1815–1856) was a Slovakian revolutionary politician and writer, leading figure in Slovak romanticism.

“spirit and objectiveness”, but – in simplified terms – it included two versions of romantic mindset: the first one had a national and pragmatic character; and the second one was metaphysical and messianistic.

Nevertheless, Cyril Kraus does not really agree with Čepan’s outputs. According to Kraus, Čepan – in his more recent works – does not show an objective point of view about the Slovak Romanticism and he is consciously misrepresenting it. In the past – for ideological reasons – the national type of Romanticism was highly appreciated (i.e. pragmatic Romanticism, according to Čepan’s terminology), whereas Messianism was mostly evaluated with negative attributes. Čepan not only emancipated messianistic Romanticism, but he also elevated its value, by limiting the significance of the so-called pragmatic or national-oriented Romanticism (Somolayová 2010, 627–628). Kraus warns that Čepan overestimated the concept of Messianism in its relationship with traditional national Romanticism; and consequently set Messianism to an equal position as that of the so-called pragmatic or national-oriented Romanticism. According to Kraus, the mutual alignment of both lines looks like a partial obscuration of the national-oriented Romanticism. Kraus doesn’t agree with Čepan’s “denial of spirituality” in the analysis of national-oriented Romanticism. Kraus clearly states that “spirituality is present also in the ‘pragmatic Romanticism’, but it has a different character, and it is manifested in a different way than by ‘romantic Messianism’” (Kraus 1999, 13).

Slovak literary science is not too inclined to accept a pluralistic model of Romanticism, both because the term “Štúr followers” indicates the whole generation of Slovak Romanticism and because of the “unwillingness to accept the romantic Messianism in the Slovak context represented a much more solid phenomenon than what has been so far acknowledged” (Somolayová 2010, 629). In his later research, Kraus openly admits and recognises the presence of the messianistic current within the frame of Slovak Romanticism. “Poetry of Slovak messianists – essentially visionary – constitutes a specific current within Slovak literary Romanticism” (Kraus 2007, 341). Nevertheless, it is not possible to state that Kraus is perceiving it as exactly equivalent to the national-oriented Romanticism. Interpretatively, he mainly focuses on texts that represented the core literature of the period of Slovak Romanticism; and he declares that Messianism is not really part of this core (Kraus 1999, 13). An excursus of the perception and classification of Slovak literary Messianism in the national history of literature shows that the messianistic production remains part of a vivid debate within Slovak literary history, thanks to its specificity.

The Messianists based their production on an already existing tradition from Renaissance and Humanism, notably Jakob Jakobeus⁷, and – later – also Ján Kollár⁸. Indeed, even Ján Kollár was inspired, amongst other things, by the messianistic orientation of the Slavic philosophy of his epoch (mainly Polish) and by Herder’s

7 Jakob Jakobeus (1591–1645) was a Slovak writer, historian and poet.

8 Ján Kollár (1793–1852) was a Slovak writer, classicist and pre-romantic poet.

“glorious message” about the special position (and mission) of the Slavs in future (Dupkala 2003, 42–43).

Slovak Messianism was theologically motivated and affirmed the idea of a Christian Slavism – correlation and interpenetration of Christianity and Slavism, destined to guarantee a humanising progress of mankind. This idea is expressed through a penchant for religious mysticism, fatalism, and visionariness. It creates a parallel between the suffering of Christ and the suffering of the Slovak nation. The core of this thought and approach was formed notably in the so-called Levoča school; and it is designated with the term “Levoča asceticism” – with a total affirmation of the spiritual principle at the detriment of the objective and material aspect. The development of the messianistic element is related to this. The main messianistic motifs in their artistic shape were for example: the image of a cursed country (sleeping nation or ill nation); the need of defining a hero, a liberator, and a saviour; frequent allusions to Popolvár as the youngest and the weakest Slavic brother (a possible direct identification of the “small and weak” Slovak nation); and there is also another strong recurrent motif: the predestination to accomplish a great heroic act that shall bring a radical change for the world, on the basis of Christian and humanistic principles (Kamenčík 2015, 114).

In this context, we cannot forget that the messianists did not completely separate from the romantic source. They were also often using elements and motifs of folk literature – even with regard to new circumstances of their time. They would take folkloric conceptions of the hero from fairy tales, and they would use them to describe the Messiah, regardless of the degree of blasphemy or sacredness, in the sense of fulfilment of the redemption-related mission. In this way, in their poetry the implemented also Slavic mythology and Pagan divinities (as regular figures present in the poems).

Probably, the polemic opinions and debates concerning the production of Slovak literary messianists have their origin in the mere form of such production. The detachment from “world objectivity” is coded in the poetic plan. The illusive pan-spirituality is shaped through the selection of imagery elements referring to the spirit itself, not just to create a suitable atmosphere, but also to mediate a mystical “experience” – perceived by the authors as real soundness. They reach this effect by filling their poetry with curious archaisms and neologisms (the so-called self-creation of language). They give way to a speculative etymologism, poetical forms. Generally, they are syncretically stylizing poetical shapes. And they often exploit experiments or complex strophic structures.

Vlastimil Kovalčík notes that, in an experimental epoch (end of the 1850’s), Samo Bohdan Hroboň worked with words based on the principle of the associative grid; and – in doing this – he applied proceedings that are demonstrably anticipating Velimir Khlebnikov (word formation, magic of numbers, number formation, sagacity or meta-language). He states that poems like *Obraz* [Picture] or *Rozpejánok* [Small song] didn’t have any analogy in the world poetry of that time. The same applies

also with regard to the so-called absolute poems, where the author is not interested in the conceptual and logical meaning of the words, but in their acoustic (musical) and graphical (figurative) usage. Even in this case, Hroboň anticipated the German poet Christian Morgenstern who wrote such poems at the end of the 19th century. Morgenstern was immediately publicly known, whilst Hroboň was kept under silence. This initiative matches the proceedings of the current so-called concrete poetry (Kovalčík 2010, 546–547).

Such poetical expressive tools are found to some extent in practically all messianists; and we should consider that they resulted from a different basis and scope than later artistic avant-garde. Their aim was not really re-evaluation, denial, or the spreading of irritating debates about the existence and the function of poetical art. The messianists were rather “researchers of the expression”. They had different priorities: “addressing God” and involvement of the national cause in God’s plan. The poetic language became a means of dialogue with God. Probably, just because of this fact, it was not accepted in its simple form inspired mainly by folk literature.⁹

The “mysticism of language” is probably manifested in the most significant manner in Samo Bohdan Hroboň. On the basis of a detailed research, Lubica Somolayová identifies him on the axis of professionalism – magic. She considers his orientation close to a hallucinating language that gets formed involuntarily and unintentionally. It is a sort of language generated in a modified state of conscience, trance or mystical revelations. It is like an effort to create a perfect universal language of the Slavs (Somolayová 2008, 200–201). By the means of this specific language, it is possible to invoke God and present Him personal pain as the pain of the whole nation, by praying Him to put in place effective remedy. These are the basic motifs that are resonating not only in his poetry but also in other authors, in different versions. In the concrete case of this author (as well as in other messianists) the range of recipients is quite limited. Moreover, there is also another relevant factor playing a key role: the large volume of the messianistic compositions (e.g. a composition by Michal Miloslav Hodža called *Matora* [according to the author, the family along the maternal line – P. K.] from 1853–1857 contains 20.400 verses).

The poets often evoke the mystical atmosphere as a positive change in the course of history. We can prove it through the verses of a Hroboň’s poem called *Ária kajúca* [Penitential Aria]. By means of the narration of personal suffering, the lyrical subject reflects the suffering of the whole “cursed” Slovak nation – tormented by an abysmal eternal darkness, as in a prison full of lamentations. The lyrical subject regrets his sins and responds through adoration – „Ach! spomni precaj, Otec milosti“ [“Oh! Don’t forget, Father of Grace”] (Hroboň 1991, 161), „učiň si i mňa i rod môj svojím“ [“may I and my house be Yours”] (Hroboň 1991, 164) – in order to achieve change:

9 The romantic messianists did not renounce to inspirations from folk literature; to a lesser extent, they exploited its poetics and took up some of the motifs of folk literature (mainly the motif of cursing, heroism, and heroic acts).

„Zmeň ma na svetlo, na hudby znenia,
vyveď ma mrežou z temna väzenia“

[“Change me in light, in music playing,
remove the grid and get me out of the darkness of this prison”] (Hroboň, 1991, 162).

The author maneuvers classical mystical figurativeness based on sensory perceptions. Thus, lamentation (as a negative auditive sensation) and darkness (symbolically representing human unconsciousness) lead the reader to a new experience to be directly felt in real life. Light becomes a symbol of knowledge. Music shows its perfect harmony and is capable of furnishing proofs of the states of beatitude that can be achieved by human beings and that are directly related to mystical autopsy. Perhaps, also because of this, the title of the poem refers to the musical genre of aria. Even other messianists show this kind or artistic enjambments. E.g. Hodža denotes some of his poems with the neologism “pejan” (*Pejan ranný* [Morning song], *Pejan slovenský* [Slovak song]). They are a sort of hybrid creation, made up of chants, odes, and prayers. But we can also mention other poets like: Viliam Pauliny-Tóth, Mikuláš Dohnány, Peter Kellner-Hostinský, etc.¹⁰

Hroboň's conception of mysticism is closely related to physical perception. From negative sensations (mostly pain), it goes towards a more spiritual dimension (liberation from pain and carnality thanks to divine intervention). Basically, the lyrical subject is not directly describing mystical experiences. Nevertheless, he is heading towards mystical experiences in several forms. He is directly living them. He invites the readers to live them and acts as mediator. It is actually the same understanding as in the eschatology of Millennialism (or Millenarianism or Chiliasm) according to which Christ – after his return (parousia) shall really rule on earth for one thousand year. It appears like a real inherent law and Hroboň is concretely defining and circumscribing it (e.g. in the poem *Svatopomstopej*¹¹, he calls on God by shouting apocalyptic visions reminding the “End time”).

10 We observe that – in the case of poetic art – even in ancient times authors have always considered possible connections of poetry and music on the basis of rhythm, melody, etc. The song – as a poetic genre – was appreciated by both types of Slovak Romanticism, although matters and forms were different.

11 Approximate translation: “sing in the name of holy vengeance” (it is a personalized title).

V sile najsvatejšej pomsty...
 zodvihni sa víchrobúrou
 od voztoku, sudca zeme!
 Pust' úžas na pýchy plemä;
 zrúť veľmore hromobitia
 na rúhavé národy,
 na besúnske potvory;
 ohňomorom spál tyranstvo,
 že užiznie tvoja zem...
 až dotiaľ, ó, bezbožníci!
 (Hroboň 1991, 169)

In the strength of the holiest vengeance...
 hit storm-tempest
 guard, judge of the earth!
 Desert, amazement for the breed of pride;
 tumble ocean thunderstorm
 over blasphemous nations,
 over raging monsters;
 burn the tyrants with fire-sea,
 and your earth will be quenched...
 yes, that far, oh ungodly!

As we have already mentioned, the above reported verses confirm that Hroboň speaks with the strong iron voice of Old-Testament prophets. The verses do describe the way in which transformation shall take place and its results. The lyric subject appeals and calls on the Old-Testament God who appears, in many respects, irreconcilable and punishing. This is the way we should also perceive the motifs of connection between the natural elements and the transformation of the world, in the shape of neologisms. Indeed, there is no storm (in the common meaning of this word), but there is a storm-tempest which our human senses do not fully know yet. Here, a specific role is played also by auditory perception, through cumulation of consonants provoking cacophony as sign of bad omen and forboding. Similarly, another composed locution – fire-sea – represents two destructive elements. Blasphemous nations are described as raging monsters. The original adjective is “besúnsky”, which we can perceive as a derivative of the word “besný” [mad, rabid], “besnejúci” [raving, raging].

His invocation and appeal to God is resulting from an exposed inevitability, which is reached once again by using neologisms (like the verb “zajagúriť”). Lubica Somolayová has meticulously studied the form and presence of mysticism in Hroboň's poetry. In most of the cases, when she interprets his neologisms or archaisms she makes a morphematic, morphologic, and etymologic analysis; and she notices that onomatopoeia plays an important role in the formation and derivation of new words. Even in the above reported case, we notice that a non-existing verb in the Slovak lexicon does evoke exhortation to act, by means of its suffix. It is a very specific and divine expression, not so easy to understand with our senses and not yet fully experienced by man. “Zajagúri” can be freely translated it as “intervene”. Nevertheless, by considering the previous verse (where the form “zajagaj sa” [shine] is reported), it appears like a sort of connection of the already mentions meanings, enriched with the disharmonious consonant “r” (which – in the given context – evokes something ruining, devastating, and blasting in its full destructive strength).

The poet exponentiates his call with a climax supported by the adjectival superlative prefix “naj”. In graphical terms, it is set apart through the use of capital letter at

the beginning of the word – which represents the highest and absolute degree of attribution: The Holiest, the Most appalling! Almighty! Interpunction (as exclamation marks) allows the evocation of the intended impression of loud immediacy.

Praboh Otec, Syn, Duch svätý!
Svatopomstou samokliaty,
zajagaj sa v sile pomsty;
zajagúri, Najsvätejší,
zajagúri, Najhroznejší!
Zajagúri, Všemohúci!
V sile najsvätejšej pomsty...
(Hroboň 1991, 169)

Almighty God, Son, Holy Spirit!
Holy vengeance and self-curse,
shine in the strength of the vengeance;
intervene, you the Holiest,
intervene, you the Most appalling!
Intervene, the Almighty!
In the strength of the most holy vengeance...

Consequently, even the victory of the Slovak people (intended as “one-thousand-year kingdom” and the creation “of new heaven and new earth”) is described with the same stormy, obscure, and depressive atmosphere.

A frequent motif in the poetry of messianists (appearing in different forms) is the destruction of the world based on prophecies and visionary messages. This is the way in Hroboň evoked the feelings of awe and fear. In his case, the apocalyptic or chiliastic visions are strongly inspired directly by St John’s Book of Revelation. This New-Testament book describes things that shall imminently occur, not from the point of view of time, but from the point of view of God. It is the final stage of salvation history. It is possible to state that Hroboň’s lyrical subject is a mystagogue introducing the reader to the secret of world transformation. He is a prophet predicting historical inevitability of decay and ruin, before the establishment of a perfect and rightful world order. Let’s report the verses that – in my opinion – represent the most frequently quoted passage of *Svatopomstopej*:

Plesajte, zeme pevniny,
Tatier svätých vozvýchiny.
Plesajte, prarodné víly,
tajomných dolín sily...
Môj ide k vám prabožský Syn,
prabytný Svaroh Hospodin.
Ustúpteže svetov svety,
ustúpteže vekov veky
(Hroboň 1991, 176)

Exult, lands of the earth,
sacred hills and heights of the Tatra mountains.
Exult, mother fays,
forces of secret valleys...
My divine Son is coming to you,
distinct Mount of the Lord.
Step aside, worlds of the world,
step aside, ages of the age

The author is considering these phenomena in a national and supranational context, where he replace the eligibility of a single nation with the supranational idea of pan-slavism.

The poetry of romantic messianists may appear masculine because of the preferred use of male grammar gender, but the concepts of “Tatra mountain” and “mother” are seen as a suffering maternal fluid over her child: cursed and demolished Slovak – Slavic nation. Probably this role was played by the vivid devotion for the Mother of Jesus – the Virgin Mary – which was quite strong in Slovakia¹² (despite the fact that Marian devotion was present mainly in Catholic milieus in Europe and Hodža was a Protestant)¹³. In his poems we find marvellous adoring calls on Mary in triadic shape, e.g. in the *Pejan skalného ducha* [Song of the strong spirit]: virgin – mother – woman:

Ó, matislavo, ó, Mária!
 Všemoci teba neprečaria:
 Ty svätodušná milostena,
 Všahdy si panna – matka – žena.
 Oroduj za to srdce biedno...
 (Hodža 2010, 326)

Oh glorious mother, oh Mary!
 No powers can bewitch you:
 You are holy in spirit and grace,
 you are everywhere virgin – mother – woman.
 Pray for this distressful heart...

We have presented several specificities of the expressive and thematic repertoire of messianists even by means of quotations from poems of Hroboň and Hodža, which is deemed as representative in terms of orientation; and we have also tried to show the way these specificities work. In their poetry, the above mentioned authors very often exploited imperatives, exclamations, etc. Their works are then extraordinary appellative, which is – in a certain sense – in contrast with the basic idea of poetical art (notably lyrics directed to the interior of people and subjectively tuned). The messianists do link these two trends together. They want the mystical experience to become reality, this is the main aim of their poetry; and with this purpose and prayer, they not only invoke God, but they also invite Him to answer their invocations.

Of course, articulated poetical images (even more complicated because of the linguistic coding) became a target of polemic literary debates; and – back then – the romantic Messianism was perceived as a pathological phenomenon, also because of its demanding fruition requirements and its “utopian” semantic message. Even today, it is not easy to read messianistic texts. Decoding of single poetical images is often impossible. Therefore, when we try to interpret the poems, we tend to proceed in an associative and contextual manner. From the point of view of today’s thoughts, we consider this as a legitimate approach. The poetry of romantic messianists (with its poetic arsenal) has the potential to reach modern readers thanks to its deepness. It can offer an alternative viewpoint on the world and on the position of Romanticism in Slovak literature. Nevertheless, at time of its origin, the artistic imagery of messianists

12 The truthfulness of this thesis is witnessed by the fact the Patron of Slovakia is actually Our Lady of (the Seven) Sorrows (in Latin Mater Dolorosa). In this case, Mary has a title that refers to her sorrows and pain she had to suffer, without possibility of active intervention in Jesus Christ’s life events.

13 Unlike most of Western Europe, in the Protestant milieu of Slovakia, Mary used to play an important role as the woman who was elected by God to be the mother of Jesus – and this was manifested in her veneration and devotion.

was disputable. Back then, people were – indeed – more inclined to simplicity of meanings and clear approach to national issues in practical terms and according to real limits. Many messianistic poems remained unpublished, just as manuscripts. For this reason, they were only gradually discovered by the readers (or sometimes they were not revealed at all). In many cases, they ended in archives as documents witnessing their authors' dreams and desire of freedom and equality of nations as God had established.¹⁴

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14 This text is an outcome from the grant VEGA 1/0514/19 *The Poetics of Mystical Experience and the Literary Forms of Mystagogy* and it was translated by Enzo Passerini.

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THE POETICS OF RECONCILIATION IN FRENCH LITERARY WORK OF THE 20TH CENTURY

FROM MARIE NOËL TO SYLVIE GERMAIN

Václava Bakešová

ABSTRACT

Because of the Holocaust, World War II is the focal point for capturing spiritual experience in the 20th-century literature. How did the transformation of French spiritual literature from the poet Marie Noël in the 1st half of the century to the novelist Sylvie Germain at its end come about? Using examples from their work, this paper shows both authors' sources of inspiration and highlights the means of expressing spirituality of a person going through an inner struggle. Although the authors describe a dark night, both of them they have a desire to overcome it, to reconcile with God, with the world and with themselves.

KEYWORDS

The theme of spirituality in French literature. Mysticism of everyday life. Spiritual struggle. Poetics of reconciliation. Marie Noël. Sylvie Germain.

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Can we connect our everyday life with mysticism and experience ordinary things with a spiritual overtone? What role can literature and its means of expression play in this connection? The example of some French authors shows that the above-mentioned planes of life: the ordinary, mystical, and literary, can be connected and create a whole that integrates perfectly into the mosaic of all literary work as a small but inseparable part. The mosaic of trends in the 20th-century French literature is really varied; especially the genre of the novel develops in many different forms, both

in the interwar period and in the second half of the century. The so-called Catholic novel represented by authors such as Georges Bernanos or François Mauriac has a permanent place in this mosaic, but there is also the “mystical” novel (e.g., Christiane Singer or Sylvie Germain) which enters literature at the turn of the 20th and 21st century and brings a new spiritual dimension. In addition to the prose writers who contributed to the development of the novel, several French authors described their Christian spiritual experience in poems as well, for example Paul Claudel, Pierre Emmanuel, and also the poet Marie Noël. World War II is undoubtedly a significant milestone in the journey of capturing such experience, because after the Holocaust, spiritual life can no longer be described in the same way as before. How, therefore, did it come to the transformation of French spiritual literature from the poet and “mystic” of everyday life Marie Noël in the 1st half of the century to the novelist Sylvie Germain and her “mystical novel” at its end? Using examples from their work, we will show both authors’ sources of inspiration in context and highlight the means of expressing spirituality of a person going through a spiritual struggle and striving for inner and outer reconciliation.

Marie Noël and her spiritual struggles

The poet Marie Noël (real name Marie Rouget, 1883–1967) came from the Burgundian city of Auxerre. She can be considered a *mystic of everyday life*. As a single woman without higher education, she helped in the running of the family, town, and parish, but at the same time experienced a rich inner spiritual life. Similarly to St. Teresa of Ávila, her life and work show that mysticism is deeply connected with ordinary life. As Mircea Eliade writes in *The Sacred and the Profane*, one’s desire to live the sacred assumes to be profoundly rooted in the profane (1994, 22). Marie Noël expressed her artistic talent initially only privately by writing down her poetic and spiritual inspirations. Her poems became a source of hope and encouragement for her contemporaries living in the atmosphere of strict morality of Jansenism. Throughout her youth, she experienced inner struggle and religious anxiety. Her spiritual director, Fr. Mugnier (see Diesbach 2003; Mugnier – Noël 2017), a priest who supported many artists in Paris, advised her to write down as accurately as possible everything she lived through without being bound by conventions. That is why we find even sentences like: “My God, I don’t love you, I don’t even wish to, I find you boring. Maybe I don’t even believe in you. But do look at me when passing”¹ (Noël 1998, 41). Fr. Mugnier recognized the poetic talent of Marie Noël and divined that what was not understood by her contemporaries would be an important testimony about an inner struggle of an artist in future times. Marie Noël not only adopted the habit of

1 “Mon Dieu, je ne Vous aime pas, je ne le désire même pas, je m’ennuie avec Vous. Peut-être que je ne crois pas en Vous. Mais regardez-moi en passant.” All quotations are translated by Terezie Nerušilová.

composing a personal diary, which had a therapeutic effect, but she also wrote poems in which she prayed for people around her whom she served and who needed help.²

François Mauriac, the winner of the 1952 Nobel Prize, comments in his *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* (1965; *More Reflections from the Soul*, 1991) on Marie Noël's *Notes intimes* (1959; *Note for myself*, 1968) and compares her to St. Therese of Lisieux by underlining the similarity of their experience: they had both gone through a period of darkness and aridity in relation to God and recorded this experience in writing, expressing thus an unspeakable content. As Michel Manoll confirms in one of the poet's biographies (1993), Marie Noël never shared the painful moments of loneliness, spiritual struggle, and darkness of the senses with her loved ones so as not to frighten them. It was in her notes that she sought reconciliation with God, herself, and the outer world. She also advised the readers to keep their feelings hidden, which brings her closer to another mystic, Mother Teresa, the Saint of Calcutta, whose darkness came to light only after the publication of her personal correspondence (2007).

With Marie Noël, the theme of the crisis of faith as a personal testimony again enters 20th-century French literature. She resumes the trend from the turn of the century when dozens of conversions to Catholicism took place in France and many authors recorded their spiritual experiences (Joris-Karl Huysmans, Paul Claudel, Francis Jammes, Max Jacob, and others). The period of the spiritual dark night had also been written about (e.g., St. John of the Cross) but in the time of Marie-Noël it was an uncommon topic, especially when related to the strict lay environment. The search for the slightest sparkle of light in the days of darkness and struggle for faith adds more depth to Marie Noël's poems, as well as her openness and effort not to lose hope. If her poetry seems to be but a sweet song to the Lord, after reading *Notes intimes*, everything passes into a completely different realm. Marie Noël particularly emphasized the two so-called periods of hell: (1) three-day hell (remembrance of February 1913) and (2) seven-weeks-and-several-years hell (1920–1922). Excerpts from these two personal crises demonstrate the depth of the author's experience and her ability to capture in words even the slightest movement of the soul. Marie Noël builds on the spiritual experiences of ancestors, but also describes the reality as a present-day one, deep, and solvable unless one resigns.

(1) From the three-day hell:

The collapsed God. All the light upside down. The death of everything. / The death of myself when I was God in my deepest heart. Sadness without hope. Eternal doom... Damnation. / The collapsed God. For three days and three nights I tried to restore him. How? I opened in vain the books that revealed him to us, the stories of people so similar

2 Example of intercession through poems: "Ils souffrent. Je ne sais où trouver le remède // A leur sort ni comment leur ôter leur douleur. // Mon Dieu, votre pitié voit plus clair que la nôtre. // Je les apporte à vos genoux l'un après l'autre : // Délivrez-les du mal, mon Dieu, chacun du sien... // Moi, Seigneur ? O mon Dieu, je n'ai besoin de rien" (Noël 1969, 246).

to me saying nothing true unless my view deceives me. All the foundation stones were scattered³ (1998, 103).

(2) From the seven-week hell:

It was a big battle: the hour of the Dark Powers – the month of hell, the month of all pain, the month of all death. The destruction of the body, the destruction of the soul, and the only survivor, the only human, desperate lament of the heart, which was surprisingly just interrupted by a single word – not even – of human tenderness. Those who starve will be killed by one morsel. / Yet everything took place in the silence of the torture chamber, in the quietest and darkest famine of the Interior Castle. Upstairs, in the inhabited halls, no one heard anything. / And in these depths happened the only great journey of my life, my descent into the abyss, my adventure, my danger. I had to go there to return, burdened by human fate, instead of staying forever clean and asleep in my garden where the Cross gave me refuge. / I was returning from there slowly along a poor, very long, direct path: obedience⁴ (106).

The letters to Fr. Mugnier were another place where the poet could share freely the experience of daily struggle for love and hope. In her greatest solitude, Marie Noël asks questions that show her Christian vision of the world and often spring from a both existential and spiritual crisis. On December 19, 1923, for example, she writes:

Here I am sending, Father, my spiritual inventory at the end of the year: little faith, intermittent experience, and no love. Especially no love at all. And that is my downfall. – I used to love so easily, I didn't even notice it, my heart bore everything, everything! Now loving step by step, [...] day after day is a difficult matter of will. I am beginning to understand that love is a virtue⁵ (Mugnier – Noël 2017, 116).

- 3 "Dieu écroulé. Toute lumière renversée. Mort de tout. / Mort de moi-même qui étais Dieu au plus profond de moi-même. Deuil sans espoir, Perdition éternelle... Le Dam. / Dieu écroulé. Trois jours durant, trois nuits, j'essayai de le reconstruire. Avec quoi? En vain je rouvrais les livres qui nous l'ont révélé, ces récits d'hommes pareils à moi qui ne raconte rien de vrai qu'avec l'erreur de ma vue. Toutes les pierres de fondation s'en allaient en poussière."
- 4 "Ce fut une grande bataille : l'heure de la Puissance des Ténèbres – Mois d'enfer, mois de toutes peines, mois de toutes morts. Destruction du corps, destruction de l'âme et seul survivant, seul humain, le cri désespéré de cœur qui venait de briser par surprise un seul mot – et même pas – de tendresse humaine. Ceux qui meurent de faim, une bouchée les tue. / Mais tout se passe en silence dans la chambre des supplices, l'oubliette la plus sourde et muette du Château Intérieur. En haut, dans les salles habitées, personne n'entendit rien. / Et ce fut dans cette profondeur le seul grand voyage de ma vie, ma descente aux abîmes, mon aventure, mon danger. C'est là qu'il me fallait aller pour revenir, chargée de destinée humaine, au lieu de rester à jamais pure et endormie dans mon petit jardin où la Croix m'abritait. / J'en revins peu à peu par un pauvre chemin très long, tout droit : l'obéissance. Moins qu'un chemin, une corde obscure qui vous soutient au fond du puits. Je ne l'ai pas lâchée. Je ne savais rien, je ne disais rien, je subissais, j'obéissais."
- 5 "Et voilà Monsieur l'Abbé, mon inventaire spirituel de fin d'année : Peu de foi, une expérience intermittente, pas d'amour. Surtout pas d'amour. C'est là qu'est ma ruine – Autrefois, j'aimais si facilement, sans s'en apercevoir : mon cœur portait tout, soulevait tout ! Maintenant aimer pas à pas, [...] jour par jour est une œuvre difficile de volonté. Je commence à comprendre que la charité soit une vertu."

In terms of genre, *Notes intimes* rank among autobiographical spiritually tuned writings known in literature since *The Confessions* of St. Augustine. According to Xavier Galmiche (2001, 95–113), Marie Noël is influenced from two sides, by the diary tradition which reached its peak in the 19th century but declined in the first half of the 20th century, and by the intellectual converts of late 19th century who wrote mainly about their spiritual struggles. Her thoughts are composed as they come to mind, often rhythmized, written in indented lines, thus giving the reader space to think. *Notes intimes* are in a way ahead of its time and join a new wave of the so-called *writing about self* (Viart – Vercier 2008, 27–28).

Marie Noël spoke to God in her own words and with complete openness, which was uncommon in French at her time, addressing him in both a formal [*vouvouement*] and familiar [*tutoiement*] way. God and the saints used to be addressed formally, and it is hard to find texts before Vatican II also using the familiar form. After all, one French version of the Hail Mary prayer is still widespread in the formal way (*Je vous salue, Marie*, the newer version being *Réjouis-toi, Marie*). An informal relationship with God can be found also in the writings of the already mentioned St. Therese of Lisieux who recorded a conversation on this topic with her sister as follows:

“Do you prefer to address Jesus in a formal or familiar way?” I answered I prefer the familiar one. She continued, relieved: “I also prefer to address him like that, it expresses my love to him better. I never address him formally when talking to him alone, but in my poems and written prayers, I don’t dare use the familiarity”⁶ (2015, 82).

Marie Noël also switches the two variants. Although she uses the familiar address less often, it can be found in some of her texts – it tends to appear in moments of childish confidence when she addresses the person of Jesus Christ (1998, 172), although not systematically. In moments of fear and uncertainty, she prefers to keep distance provided by the usual formal address. *Notes intimes* are therefore texts where both versions alternate according to the current mood of the writer, with the formal address dominating.

Sylvie Germain and her desire for reconciliation

As mentioned in the introduction, World War II interrupted the frequency of texts depicting the inner spiritual experience in greater depth. After the Holocaust, it was necessary to go rather through an external view of the horrors that man is capable of, and also to search for a new meaning, the latter being promoted most by Viktor

6 “Aimez-vous mieux dire tu ou vous en priant Jésus ?” Je lui répondis que j’aimais mieux dire : tu. Toute soulagée, elle reprit : “Moi aussi, je préfère de beaucoup dire tu à Jésus, cela exprime mieux mon amour et je n’y manque jamais quand je parle à Lui seul, mais dans mes poésies et les prières qui doivent être lues par d’autres je n’ose pas.”

E. Frankl and his logotherapy (e.g., Frankl 2006). Between the poetic experience of Marie Noël and the mystical novel of Sylvie Germain (*1954), both seeking the meaning of life in their lives, surroundings, and characters, there are number of other authors who write about the same literary theme but are not mentioned here for lack of space. The theme of reconciliation, which has traditionally been associated mainly with the religious context, now enters the novel. In the spirit of Marie-Hélène Boblet's text, this period can be called post-religious and post-lay because: "questions connected with the mystery of human faith and soul are no longer the subject of dogmas or cults but are found in novel and hermeneutic research"⁷ (2011, 35–36).

The theme of reconciliation, introduced by Sylvie Germain into the postwar French literature, is one of the distinctive features of her work. This aspect is manifested on three main levels: (1) finding peace after tragic events, mainly in her first novels *Le Livre des nuits* (1985; *The Book of Nights: a novel*, 1993), *Nuit d'Ambre* (1987; *Night of Amber*, 2000) and *Jours de colère* (1989; *Days of Anger*, 1993): the reconciliation happens always through the birth of a child who is a symbol of new hope, (2) forgiving parents for their fatal mistakes in novels about the search for identity such as *Magnus* (2005; trans. 2008) and *La Chanson des mal-aimants* (2002; *The Song of False Lovers*, 2004) or other family members, for example, in the novel *L'enfant Méduse* (1991; *The Medusa Child*, 1994) and (3) accepting a difficult and painful situation in order to achieve a new of life (*L'encre du poulpe*, 1998 [The Ink of Octopus], *L'inaperçu*, 2008 / *Hidden Lives*, 2010) or biography of *Etty Hillesum*, 1999). Besides that, all the pains of the world are grasped by the hands of a weeping woman on the streets of Prague who will touch them and reduce their intensity (Germain 1992).

The protagonists of the first three novels are crushed, tested, humiliated, but they always find a space through which their hope is restored, often through the birth of a child. When this event touches old traumas, it always works as a surgery bringing relief and soothing injured emotions. The author emphasizes that new life is a sign of new hope, and the reader is thus expecting that even the character of *La Nuit d'Ambre*, a great criminal full of hatred since childhood, will be saved. And indeed, in the grand finale, a child appears near to him: his own son about whose existence he had no idea. The relationship between the two characters is not easy to create due to the many evil deeds that have affected their family's past. Yet face to face with an innocent and suffering child, the father realizes the horrors of his life and decides to commit suicide in a forest. He, however, meets a foreigner there with whom he fights in a long and exhaustive way, analogous to Jacob's biblical wrestle, and although he loses, inwardly he is not defeated and experiences inner reconciliation and change of perspective. He understands that he no longer has to spread hatred and that his own wound from childhood has healed, which gives the relationship with his son a new dimension. "He was looking at him. And his gaze was calm and direct"⁸ (Germain

7 "[...] un siècle post-religieux et post-laïque", "les questions du mystère et de l'âme ne sont plus l'objet de dogmes ni de culte, mais des territoires d'exploration romanesque et d'investigation herméneutique".

8 "Il [le garçon] le regardait. Et son regard était apaisé, et droit."

1987, 409). The natural world around the characters also sings the peace of this night, evoking Christmas liturgy with its message of salvation for man through the birth of the Child of God and the desire of peace for people of good will.

In several novels by Sylvie Germain, we find the necessity of forgiving one's parents who have made fatal mistakes affecting the adult lives of their children. The concerned characters long to achieve the promised land and peace of mind, and that is why Laudes-Marie (*La Chanson des mal-aimants*) and Magnus set out to search for their identity by wandering throughout France and other parts of the world. Their destiny appears as a mixture of "unexpected images, a set of short, inspired moments, a game of shortcuts, a set of words, thoughts, but also silence, emptiness and surprise"⁹ (Landrot 2009). As Alain Goulet observes, these novels present a quest for reconciliation which finally happens in great freedom and ends with a beautiful motherly smile. In an interview with him, Sylvie Germain presents the philosophy of almost all her writing:

I like the word reconciliation. I think it is a very nice word, just like the word consolation. Facing up to the tirelessness of evil and misery in this world, we must strive to find meaning and seek reconciliation with the world looking at it from as many angles as possible. One of the first things we need to do is uncover our own propensities for evil, the ability to commit evil. [...] It is necessary, even if we are on the side of the victims, to acknowledge and measure the potential of evil in us to prevent its attack and spread¹⁰ (Germain – Goulet 2006, 260).

Recently, Sylvie Germain's work has been marked by a change in style. Now the author emphasizes the impact of indifference on interpersonal relationships and focuses more on the qualities of her characters which influence their further development. This can be seen for example in the novel *L'inaperçu*. The aspect of reconciliation appears here through the acceptance of a difficult situation, which makes it possible to achieve a new life. The author was deeply affected by the fates of those who were born for nothing and for no one; they went unnoticed (see Germain 2008, 16): the poorest, but also people surrounded by incomprehensible luxury. In her texts she searches for Christian values which would help people live the fullness of life already on Earth, and not only after entering eternal life. It is important to cite here the biography of a young Jewish intellectual Etty Hillesum who fully realized this: history did not allow her to fulfil the desire to become a writer, but she sacrificed her dream and helped others in prison camps for Jews. At the same time, she discovered in her heart the joy

9 "...un [patchwork] d'inattendus, un assemblage de brefs moments d'inspiration, un jeu de courts-circuits, un ajustement de mots, d'images, de pensées – et de silences, de vides, d'étonnements."

10 "J'aime bien ce mot *réconciliation* ; je trouve que c'est un très beau terme, comme aussi le mot *consolation*. Envers et contre l'acharnement du mal, du malheur en ce monde, il faut essayer de trouver du sens, et chercher à se réconcilier avec le monde en le regardant sous le plus grand nombre d'angles possible. Déjà, une des premières choses à faire, c'est de travailler à dépister en soi-même ses propres tendances au mal, sa capacité à le commettre. [...] Il est indispensable, même si on est du côté des victimes, de prendre acte et mesure de la potentialité de mal en nous, afin d'en prévenir l'assaut, de l'empêcher de déferler."

of Christianity, a joy that spread around her despite all the present evil. She fought the hatred with a smile. “Joy remains while the soul is tormented by sorrow and pain. God is present in human tears, and Etty Hillesum, like Sylvie Germain, uses the ink of tears to write a book about the living and the dead”¹¹ (Badré 2003, 110).

Conclusion

Neither her religious crisis, nor fatigue and illness stopped Marie Noël from continuing her daily service to her family. Her poetry and later personal notes show that this everyday life was filled with an extremely rich inner life and spiritual struggles comparable to the life of mystical authors of classical spiritual literature, St. John of the Cross or St. Teresa of Ávila. The author leaves this experience to future generations who, thanks to her authenticity, can find consolation, encouragement, and the way to God. Also, Sylvie Germain ranks with her theme of reconciliation among new spiritually oriented authors of the 21st century. With her, according to Nathalie Heinich, we get from mystical writing to the mysticism of writing, specific to the present time (2000, 322).

Although both authors bring attest to the experience of the dark night in their work, each in her own way, whether through poetry, personal diary, essay meditations or words of novel characters, they both have the desire to overcome darkness, to be reconciled with God, with the world and with themselves.

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11 “La joie demeure alors que l'âme se brise de chagrin, de douleur. Dieu est dans les larmes des hommes et Etty Hillesum comme Sylvie Germain utilisent l'encre des larmes pour écrire le livre des vivants et des morts.”

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SANJUANIST MOTIFS IN THE POETIC WORK OF ERIK JAKUB GROCH

Jana Juhásová

ABSTRACT

One of the key poets of Slovak post-November poetry was shaped in the Komúna dissent group headed by philosopher and artist M. Strýko during the communist regime. Operating in dissent supported the radicality of his poetic gesture and lifestyle, the image of an active, evolving individual freed from the senselessness of civilization, and also the idea that it is possible to integrate evil into a higher good. These ideas also form branches to the sanjuanist motifs and intellectual solutions that are close to Groch. The article seeks these penetrating places with special attention on the symbol of the journey and pilgrimage, and at the same time points to Groch's creative updates of one of the most famous spiritual teachings of the West.

KEYWORDS

Erik J. Groch. St. John of the Cross. Komúna dissent. Journey. Spiritual pilgrimage.

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The Czech translation of Erik Jakub Groch's collection *Em / Infinity* (2021, orig. 2006, 2007) from the publisher Dauphin is supplemented in online booksellers with a short portrait of the author. The poet is characterised as a sad and hopeful loner, a unique melancholic, an incurable lyricist and a romantic (Dohňanský 2001). Tadeáš Dohňanský presented Groch as he is likely understood by readers who do not integrate any spiritual element into the poet's work. If, however, the recipient tunes into this feature, a different, layered and more complex world will be revealed to him (see also Gavura, 2014).

Erik Jakub Groch (1957) is the key representative of Slovak post-November spiritual lyrical poets. His precision work with the aesthetics of a text, the link to French poststructuralism as well as his ability to express the spiritual experience implicitly, without the automatic buttress of the language of theology, make his

poetry attractive even for the secular reader. In the *PLAV* [Platform for Literature and Research] survey organised on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in Slovakia, Groch was evaluated as a major author and his collection *Druhá naivita* [The Second Naïveté] (2005) – which was also an anthology of the author's first creative stage (in addition to new texts, the poet also included in it a selection from collections since 1991) – was evaluated as one of the best books of poetry of the last thirty years in Slovak literature (Barborík 2019).

Prior to publication of his debut in 1989, at the time of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, Groch was active in the dissident group *Komúna*, in the city of Košice, led by the Christian philosopher and artist Marcel Strýko (1955–1994). This was a community linked to the Prague underground around philosopher Egon Bondy and other Czech dissidents. Strýko's special contribution to the Christian-motivated ideal of thinking was the conviction that evil is a component of the higher good, because it helps to make it visible and to develop: “So long as this world is whole, reasonable, the best, then everything that is in it, even if by chance evil and imperfect, is here only because in the end it is intended for some final good ultimate good” (Strýko 2020). Strýko took from Zen Buddhism the idea of the need for inner emptying, which creates in a person a disposition for fulfilment by God: “the courage to overcome EVERYTHING, to transcend even oneself, far into the unknown, alluring light” (Strýko, 1996a, 107). By losing the self, a person also attains pure consciousness (Strýko 1996b, 12). Both ideas are, to varying degrees, also developed in Groch's poetic work and generate the prerequisites for the conjunction with sanjuanist inspirations.

Radoslav Passia characterises *Komúna* as a community founded on the connection of Christian spirituality and free thinking (2021). In his artistic expression, Groch couples individualised spirituality with poetics close to those of the beatnik and the lonely runner. He puts emphasis on the intensity of poetic language, the radical gesture, and an inclination towards natural, non-civilization values. The urban environment, belonging among the socially marginalised, the revolt against the forced and the bourgeois demonstrated in his debut *Súkromné hodiny smútku* ([Private Hours of Mourning], 1989) and in the introductory part of the third book of *Bratsestra* ([Brothersister], 1992), was later replaced by natural loneliness, in which the subject winds up in the role of a new-age eremite and pilgrim. The new literary gesture accompanied in 2000 his desertion of his family and social ties and the big city environment and the establishing of an alternative lifestyle (the author at that time added the civil name Erik to his confirmed name Jakub) in the village of Uloža, located in the heart of the Levočské vrchy Mountains, where the artist still lives today (see also Pariláková 2012, 13–17).

A permanent feature of the poet's neo-avant-garde associations is also the intermediate references to artistic and musical inspirations as well as a notable intertextuality characterised by acknowledged or implicit references to the work

of kindred thinkers and artists (B. Pascal, M. Heidegger, J.-F. Lyotard, P. Celan and others). Among them, of note is a group of Christian mystics (St. Francis of Assisi, St. John of the Cross, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Benedict Labre, Marie Lataste), who together with the modern metaphysical poets (W. Blake, Cz. Miłosz, E. Dickenson, L. Glücklich) demonstrate Groch's interest in questions of spirituality and the integration of the creative gesture into the process of spiritual search. The poet demonstrated this interconnection in one interview he gave: "I think this is one of the conditions of poetry: it must bear within it information about salvation" (Chrobáková 1998, 14).

Cross-references to the work of Carmelite saints and poets – St. John of the Cross and John's spiritual daughter, St. Thérèse of Lisieux (see the epigraph to the collection *To [It]*, 2000, 7; the poem *Terezka* [Thérèse], 2005, 55; the poem *Šnúrka a konáriky* [Twine and Twigs], 2008, 17) – spur the reader to examine in Groch in more depth the sanjuanist inspirations, which constitute one of the most well-known traditions of Western Christian mysticism. John's emphasis on the individual experiencing of man's relationship to God, also perceived as the path to inner freedom, and the integration of darkness into the context of light at once create connections to several and newer spiritual tendencies. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasise that the search for contiguity between the Baroque mystic and the contemporary artist does not bear the elements of a follower; we can talk about the use of certain stimuli that Groch reaches for based on the proximity of the artistic and spiritual nature.

The spiritual concept of St. John of the Cross

John of the Cross (1542–1591) established himself as a poet after escaping from the Toledo prison (1577–1578), where he had been taken captive by monastic brothers who did not agree with his reform. Exposed to an existential situation, nearly on the verge of death, which he describes as a dark night, he passed through a phase of inner purification and union with God (Cummins 1994, 7). John's purification does not take a primarily moral form (in the sense of self-improvement or acquiring of moral credit) (2 DN 3, 3; also Stinissen 1997, 43–45); the saint himself describes it as a gift of self-liberation, the losing of the "I" in God, whom he perceives as the centre of the individualised being (including natural being) (SC 11, 3). The cleansed "I" recognises that symbolised boundary experiences, such as the night, were an essential component of the path to unification; thus, looking back on them is positive ("¡Oh noche que guiaste! / ¡Oh noche amable más que el alborada! / ¡Oh noche que juntaste / Amado con amada, / amada en el Amado transformada!" ["Oh dark of night, my guide! / Night dearer than anything all your dawns discover! / Oh night drawing side to side / The loved and lover – / She that the lover loves, lost in the lover!"]), John of the Cross 1981, 43). He captured the mystical experience directly in the 31 stanzas

of the poem *The Spiritual Canticle*, to which he later added others (3 + 5) (Kohut 2000, 6). He records this experience through a different perspective in two shorter poems – *The Dark Night* and *Living Flame of Love*. For each poem, the saint created – at the request of monastic brothers, sisters, or donors – a theological text of the same name, and he also interprets the first two stanzas of *The Dark Night* in the book *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. While in the *Ascent* he describes the activity on the part of man (symbolised as wandering through the night, climbing a mountain), in the book *The Dark Night* the activity of God, who “walks to meet” man, is emphasised (SC 22, 1; F 3, 28). From this perspective, the soul remains in a state of passive submission towards the oncoming tensions (emptiness, loneliness, disintegration, melancholy, loss of meaning, the inability to speak); after them, however, a brightness comes, which John describes as the flame of love or the fusion of two souls. Arranging the writings in the order *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (A), *The Dark Night* (DN), *The Spiritual Canticle* (SC) and *The Living Flame of Love* (F) also enables the division of John’s spiritual journey into three stages: 1. purification, referred to as the night of the senses and the night of the spirit (the phase of seeking and overcoming obstacles), 2. spiritual engagement and 3. spiritual marriage (the phases of a deepening union with God) (Kohut 1998, 47–48).

John captured the pattern of wandering visually in an image called the *Mountain of Perfection*. In the drawing, three paths lead to the mountain where God resides, situated in a golden section – the path of material goods, the path of spiritual goods, and the path of “nothingness and all” – but the first two disappear below the summit; only the path of “nothingness and all” leads to the goal, in which losing everything is the acquisition of God, and therefore the acquisition of everything, but now in a new context (Kohut 1999, 11–13). For John, this is not primarily a matter of denying sensual and spiritual goodness, but of gaining inner freedom regarding them, acquiring a holistic dimension. In both his poetry and his theological treatises, the saint struggles with the inability of language to adequately express this dynamic experience. He often gets hold of it by using paradoxes and polarisations: everything – nothing, light – darkness, joy – suffering, gain – loss, or through richly saturated symbols (a journey, the night, betrothed love, a flame), which variously capture the same but complexly communicated experience.

We find references to all four of John’s symbols in the work of Erik J. Groch, analogously incorporated into the image of the dynamic spiritual path. While states referencing melancholy, loneliness and deficits have a similar symbolism in John – night, twilight, homelessness, a veiled or projective vision of phenomena (I examined the subject of Groch’s melancholy in a separate study; see Juhásová 2020) – the contemporary poet alternates John’s flame with images of a clear, clarified vision capable of perceiving the details of being in complex contexts or as saturated, strongly intense phenomena (see Marion 2007, 393). In this article, I will selectively focus on the motifs of the journey and pilgrimage from the first anthology of the poet

(a collection from the years 1991–2005), which also integrate other symbols from St. John within them. An analogous trajectory can also be seen in the forthcoming second of Groch's anthology, *viety* [something like “windtences”, “sentences brought by or said to wind”], which was published in 2021.

The journey and the pilgrimage of E. J. Groch

The journey and the pilgrimage are among the key motifs of Groch's poetry. We find them in all his collections, frequently modelled in story form with the use of episodic qualities, while elsewhere in pure lyrical reflections. The motivation for their centralisation may be an inclination towards the ideas of M. Strýko about the active principle of being and the soul: “God [is] a source of activity (although determined) directly in every being” (Strýko, 1996a, 18). Even though the poet changes his poetic approaches and the linguistic grasping of what is communicated (he uses fairy-tale, romanticising, poetic, naturalistic, anaesthetic, post-structuralist, metamodern and other inspirations), the analogous ideological principles vary in the poems. Nakedness, emptiness or nothingness are emphasised in the area of figures or in the position of lyrical subject (Groch signed one of the collections with the pseudonym “nil”, 2018), the focused perception of the presence and submission to God, which is thematised as love, breath/breathing, being/entelechy of being, or the all-permeating principle of movement/events (e.g. the poems *Prosba cestou po zelenom znamení* [Plea along the Path of the Green Signs], *Entelechia nezábudkovej cesty* [The Entelechy of the Forget-me-not Road], 1992, 30, 31; poems *Nosenie* [Carrying], *Ventil* [Valve], 2005, 51, 74; in St. John F 4, 16). The author favours a non-anthropomorphic, more abstract grasp of the divine-human relationship, by which he also differs from John's images inspired by the nuptial mysticism of the *Song of Songs*, although in several places in the saint's work we also find support for alternative solutions of the love symbol (e.g. SC 27, 1). Groch replaces the closeness of partners as an image of unification with the varied Aristotelian principles of potentiality and momentum (V. Kofroňová also finds this principle in St. John 1995, 8–9). God revives and perpetuates material existence. A different expression of the relationship is the motif of the heart or the pearl, in whose hiddenness God resides („Na samom dne srdca Srdce horí. / Kto miluje schádzaním, stúpa z Hory.“ [“On the very bottom of the heart, the Heart burns. / He who loves by coming together ascends from the Mountain”], Groch 2005, 59; in St. John F 1, 12). The so-called reciprocity of seeing/vision has a special standing in Groch as mutual perceiving, affirming, and gifting with the beauty of (predominately natural) being, which reflect the creative gesture by their elementality, the presence of God in being (e.g. the poem *Kto vstupuje do môjho oka* [Who Enters into My Eye], 1992, 59–60; *Svetlo slz* [The Light of Tears], 2005, 79). In John's writings and in

poetry, we come across, by analogy, God's "loving regard" (SC 32, 9; also the 32nd stanza of *The Spiritual Canticle*, 2nd redaction: "Cuando tú me mirabas, / su gracia en mí tus ojos imprimían:" ["When You regarded me, / Your eyes imprinted in me Your grace:"], 1981, 72). The relationship is a statement of self-transcendence towards the cosmic unity of being, a holistic view, which Groch also thematicises in his poem *Druhá naivita*: „Zložiť okuliare a už nevidieť písmená, iba / knihu, z ktorej rastie strom, a o chvíľu ani strom nie, / len vtáka, ktorý sedí na strome, / a nakoniec ani toho nie, len jeho spev, ktorý / odvráti čistý, prostý zrak.“ [“To take off the glasses, not see anymore / The letters, just a book, from which there grows / A tree, then no longer a tree but a bird that perches, / And at the end not even a bird, / Just song averting pure and lucid eyes.” Trans. by J. Gavura and B. Welch.] (2000, 28) Negative values (analogous with the poetry of St. John of the Cross) are integrated into a process leading to states of harmony and joy, or the subject resolutely with a vision of finite light, persisting on the path despite obstacles and failures (poem *Vlčie maky* [Common Poppy], 2000, 16).

Tensive and detensive states are not captured as a single linear trajectory in Groch, the author moves in multiple tensive-detensive cycles (the first culminates in the collection *Bratsestra*, 1992; the second in the collection *Druhá naivita*, 2005; the third with the last section, *turgenev*, in the forthcoming collection *viety*, 2021), and the tensive occupies a relatively significant space in Groch's work. It will not escape the reader's attention that the poet compiled the book *Druhá naivita. Zbrané a nové básne a príbehy* [The Second Naïveté. Collected and New Poems and Stories] (2005) such that he placed the selection from the tensive collections – *To* (2000) and *Lacinéma* (2001) – in the first part of the book, and he regrouped older texts, but with a light modality – from the collections *Baba Jaga: Žalospevy* [Grannie Jaga: Elegies] (1991) and *Bratsestra* (1992) – with new poems (2005) into the final sections. He also framed these tensive parts (sections 2 and 3) with detensive parts (sections 1, 4, 5, 7); thus, the overall atmosphere of the collection rings harmonious and creates an allusion to the three-phase journey of St. John of the Cross, including the culmination typical for him – man remains in a state of desire, but a complete union with God is not possible. The last poem, *Láske* [To a Love], completes Groch's poetic pilgrimage with the following words: „Nemyslím na prach, čo nemôže milovať. / Nikdy som nechcel iné, len sa ťa dotýkať, / vnikať do teba a jesť ťa, ako jeme slová. / Teraz vidím, že si všade a vo všetkom. / Príď a vlož prst do prázdna medzi nami.“ [“I pay no heed to dust that is loveless. / I never wanted anything but the touch of you, / Entering you and eating you, as we eat our words. / Now I can see you everywhere and in everything. / Come and put your fingers in the empty space between us.” Trans. by J. Gavura and B. Welch.] (2005, 102) In tune with the title of the collection, the return to a childhood devotion, to human meekness and smallness in God in a great intimate cosmos is highlighted.

We already come across the motif of the journey in the incipit of Groch's first collection *Súkromné hodiny smútku*: „Až sa raz konečne zbalím, / odídem, na juh za slnkom“ [“Once I have finally packed, / I'll go, to the south for the sun”] (1989, 4). Although the text initially stirs beatnik associations, corresponding to the prevailing atmosphere of the debut, in the context of his other work we can already speak about the buds of a spiritual, and specifically a sanjuanist, orientation. Immediately in the second poem of his debut, we read: „CELÉ SLNKO, OD SVETLA K SVETLU / až po ústup tieňov a k novému svetlu / som sa postil, som bdel, som sa / hľadal. / To hľadanie bolo také úprimné a čisté, / že som ho v tej chvíli pomenoval / cestou.“ [“THE ENTIRE SUN, FROM LIGHT TO LIGHT / up to the retreat of shadows and to the new light / I fasted, I was awake / I was seeking. / That seeking was so sincere and pure / that in that moment I named it / the journey.”] (1989, 7) In the poem *Čisté blues* [Pure Blues], situated „ďaleko od mesta“ [“far from the city”], the journey is thematicised with many stones and a lot of dust, but the lyrical subject is labelled as carefree, „[...] s vetrom / a s rukami vo vreckách.“ [“[...] with the wind / and with hands in pockets.”] (1989, p. 21) In *Báseň pre ponáhlačov* [Poem for Hustlers], silence and listening to the silence (in a state without movement) is associated with progress (1989, 39).

In the subsequent collections, Groch developed motifs of pilgrimage into several poems as well as appealing story texts, where we observe a strengthening of the spiritual dimension. The text *O človeku* [About Man] from the collection *Bratsestra* (1992), which is also repeatedly found in other books, once renamed as *Príbeh* [Story] (*Druhá naivita*, 2005; the poet places it at the front of the collection in a separate section as a key interpretive text), later published under the title *Píšťalkár* [Piper] (*Píšťalkár*, 2006; this is the publication of two older texts – *Píšťalkár* and *Dievčatko so zápalkami* [The Girl with Matches]) has acquired a special place among them. Groch introduces the same-named third section of the collection *Bratsestra*, in which the text is found for the first time, with a sanjuanist quote: „Nocou, nocou hľadáme prameň, / smäd je naším jediným svetlom.“ [“By night, by night we seek the spring, / thirst is our only light.”] (1992, 39) The quote is based on the paradoxicality of phenomena, a characteristic principle of John's perception of things, which is also inscribed in Groch's poetic optics. The permanence of this feature is also emphasised by the epigraph of the previous book *Baba Jaga: Žalospěvy*, the author of which is S. J. Perse: „A odrazu sa pre mňa všetko, kde ešte dymí téma ničoty, mení na silu prítomnosť“ [“And suddenly everything where the subject of nothingness still smoulders changes for me into strength and presence”] (1991, 5), as well as the following book, *To*, which is inscribed by the Carmelite Saint: „Od toho, čo vidíme a nejestvuje, musíme ísť k tomu, čo nevidíme a jestvuje“ [“From what we see / and does not exist, / we must go towards that / we do not see and though it exists”] (St. John of the Cross) (2000, 7).

Groch's text *O človeku* [About Man/Story] places the figure of a naked, wandering, whistling man resigned to the current moment at the centre of the narration. To the

question of passers-by who could disrupt his life („A prečo sa neoblečieš?“, „A kam ideš?“, „A prečo si pískaš stále tú istú pieseň?“) [“Why don’t you get some clothes?“, “And where are you going?“, “And why have you been piping the same tune all the time?”], he repeatedly replies: „Nikdy som o tom nerozmýšľal.“ [“Never thought of it.”] (1992, 50) In a confrontation with three angels, who so boast of goodness, modesty, and silence that their wings start to turn yellow, the man remains internally free. The conclusion associates a sanjuanist interpretation of the drawing of the *Mountain of Perfection*: „A keď prišiel k úpätiu vysokej hory, ani mu nenapadlo zastaviť sa. Iba kráčal a pískať si a stúpaj, až bol odrazu celkom hore, na samom vrchu hory. Ale pretože o tom nikdy nepremýšľal, stúpaj ďalej.“ [“He came to the foot of a high mountain but it did not enter his mind to stop. He walked on, piping, and climbing higher and higher until suddenly he reached the top, the summit of the mountain. But because he never thought of it, he went higher.” Trans. by J. Gavura and B. Welch.] (1992, 51) In the poem Groch confirms one of the key ideas of the Carmelite saint – that bias towards the self, towards rationality and exaggerated volunteerism are obstacles on the path to God. The contemporary poet is also inclined towards the values of faith, hope and love emphasised by the saint in other poems („Vidieť znamená prestať premýšľať o sebe.“ [“Seeing means to stop thinking about oneself.”], Groch 2001, 16; „omnoho, omnoho viac ako presnosť úsudku je láskavosť / úsudku, [...]“ [“much, much more than the exactness of judgment is kindness / of judgment, [...]”], 19).

Another story close to the context of John’s composition *The Spiritual Canticle* and its theological interpretation is *Domov* [Home] from the collection *To*. This prose poem can be divided into three internal parts. The poet also indicates this demarcation graphically – a triple-varied refrain starting with the phrase „Môj domov je...“ [“My home is...”]: „V uzlíku, kolíšucom sa na mäkkej palici z javora, nesiem si domov.“ [“In the bundle, swaying on a supple staff from a maple-tree, I am carrying my home.”] „Čo je v uzlíku. Katechizmus z trpkého viniča.“ [“What is in the bundle. Catechism from a sour vine.”] „A na dne uzlíka, celkom osobitne, žalmy viazané v koži z Treblinky: Mein Gott!“ [“At the bottom of the bundle, completely separate, the psalms bound in the skin from Treblinka: My God!”] (Groch 2000, 23) On the principle of homonymy, the author connects homelessness marked by the motifs of individual limitations and collective guilt with the positively perceived motif of the journey as the potential for spiritual growth; the journey is a gesture towards self-transcendence: „Môj domov je cesta.“ [“My home is the journey.”] (ibid.) While the introductory part associates the phase of purification, the following part connotes imaginary spiritual engagements. God enters human emptiness and fills it with His presence. The author applied one of the frequent, above-mentioned poetic methods: he transcends the passive, human principle with the active, the divine, which gives life and movement to the passive: „Zároveň ma ustavične ktosi píska, ako chce. A spieva si ma.“ [“At the same time someone is constantly whistling me, as he wishes. And he sings me.”] „A zároveň akoby do mňa ktosi zhlboka vdychoval dušu, takže

zvučím všetkými píšťalami z mojich vysýchajúcich kostí; krehučké pergamenové gajdy v rukách toho-ktorý-je.“ [“And at the same time as if someone breathes in my soul, so I sound through all my bones, fragile, bagpipes of parchment in the hand of the one-who-is.”] (ibid.) In the final part, united by the motifs of a song and a rose, Groch develops the principle of divine penetration of humanity („A zároveň ma ktosi odovzdane vzniká a premieňa a rastie. A zároveň ma tichučko vykračuje a našľapuje. A zároveň ma kráča.“ [“And at the same time someone has been yieldingly creating, changing and growing me. And at the same time is walking me and stepping me.”], ibid.), but at the same time he emphasises the sanjuanist dimension of God’s beauty (*hermosura*). Beauty has the potential to heighten the image of harmony, deepening the closeness of the spirit and God, which in St. John is associated with a so-called by spiritual marriage: „Môj domov je pieseň.“ [“My home is a song.”] „Môj domov je spiaca ruža, práve sa rozvíjajúca.“ [“My home is a sleeping rose, just opening.” Trans. by J. Gavura and B. Welch.] (ibid.)

Conclusion

Groch alternates the symbol of the flame, which John links with the last phase the working (the disorder) of God (of the Holy Spirit) in the disposed heart with motifs of clarified sight, clear vision (free from the veil of mist or projectivity), but also saturation of visual phenomena. Clear sight perceives familiar things differently, penetrated by resplendence, in more detail, with a greater intensity of colours, synesthetically, with the capability of their cosmic overlap, as, for example, in the poem *O milosti* [On Grace]: „A s akou radosťou hľadím do tváre / šedivého vtáčika, na jeho poskakovanie, / [...] // s nesmiernou nehou, až možno jasom / sa dívam na jeho zobáčik, do tváre božej, [...]“ [“And with what joy I look into the face / of a grey bird, at its jumping about, / [...] // with immense affection, perhaps luminance / I look at its beak, into the face of God, [...]”] (2005, 68). Groch’s use of diminutives is also part of his poetic hyperbolization; in the section *Nosenie* (*Druhá naivita* collection) also subtle irregular rhyming, aesthetically guarded pathos, the clash of natural motifs with the subtle, elsewhere the stellar or cosmic. The resulting impression of these approaches is a familiarity or harmonising loftiness.

The dynamics of the spiritual path inspired by St. John of the Cross is also reflected in Groch into the concept in the poetic record, the act of writing. This is described as a patient, resigned waiting for a poem. In the poem *Písanie* [Writing] the clarified text is perceived as a gift, a record of disposed consciousness: „Takto vyzerá tvoja práca; v belgickom svetri, / s rukami skríženými alebo na stehnách, čakáš. // Ticho ešte nežiarí, ale už stúpa nad podlahu. / Ako jazmín misku rozprestrel si hárok buničiny.“ „[...] *poesis* znamená *tvoriť z ničoho*.“ [“This is what your work is: in your

Belgian sweater / You wait, hands crossed, or placed on the thighs. // Silence has not yet blazed but it expands across the floor. / You spread out a sheet of rough paper: a bowl of jasmine.” “[...] *poesis* means to *create from nothing*.” Trans. by J. Gavura and B. Welch.] (2000, 9) Groch does not camouflage tensive phases by slipping into patterns; he acknowledges them in the form of a ruptured and fragmentary notation, through the incompleteness and circularity of images, complex projectivity or large gaps between texts (see especially the collection *nil, úvod* [nil, introduction], 2018; *melanchólia neviem* [melancholy I don't know], 2019). On the contrary, the clarified corresponds in the text to the harmonic, the clear, the saturated and the anthemic.¹

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CHAPTER SIX

VISUAL ARTS AND TRANSCENDENCE



TASTING THE MILK OF CELESTIAL KNOWLEDGE

NOTE ABOUT THE RHETORIC OF THE PORTRAYAL OF THE SACRED IN ALONSO CANO'S PAINTING *THE LACTATION OF ST. BERNARD* (1653–1657) FROM THE NATIONAL GALLERY IN PRAGUE

Pavel Štěpánek

ABSTRACT

This is an attempt of interpretation of a picture that draws from mystical tradition. It is about the comprehension of a topic in a painting by the Spanish artist Alonso Cano (1601–1667, Granada), from the National Gallery in Prague (O 14 690) *Lactatio S. Bernardi* – presenting the miracle of lactation, in which the Virgin Mary is squirting milk from her breast into the mouth of St. Bernard of Clairvaux (a historically very famous saint and major representative of the Cistercian Order). Traces of iconography lead up to the Coptic Church, where the typology of the milking Virgin was probably first originated (*Galacto Trofusa* in Greek or *Maria lactans* in Latin). The starting point is perhaps the portrayal of the virgin goddess Isis milking her son Horus. In many cultures, milk symbolises physical and spiritual food (e.g. the Milky Way evoking the ancient myth about spurted divine milk). On the other hand, milking is also present in the Old Testament as the image of special blessing; it is a symbol of eternal beatitude and wisdom. The dream/vision of her milk is then – apart from the rest – a sign of abundance, fertility, love, and fullness. The lactation of St. Bernard is an allegory of the penetration of the divine science in the soul. Thanks to this act the saint receives God's guide, which he can then discharge into his writings.

KEYWORDS

Alonso Cano. *Lactatio S. Bernardi*. *Virgin Maria lactans*. Symbolic of milk.

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During an exposition of new acquisitions at the Wallenstein Riding School in 1983, the National Gallery in Prague presented a masterpiece by an Italian (or perhaps even Spanish) painter of the 17th century: the *Madonna and Child with St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Peter, and the donor* (O 14 690, 39 × 56 cm), purchased two years before [Fig. 1].¹ The entire composition resulting from the type *Sacra Conversazione* and – partially – even the variety of colour actually correspond to Italian (specifically Venetian) conception. Carmines, ochres, and body colours with strong accents of ultramarines are quite close to the Venetian colour palette. On the other hand, the tints of the white robe and the black colour of the donor's clothes are rather witnessing about Spanish painting modes, notwithstanding the generally expressive harmony that we usually connect to the Spanish conception of painting. The loose and here-and-there sketchy manuscript certainly refers to 17th century (Štěpánek 1985, 12–13). In my following researches, I managed to establish and publish (*ibid.*; see also Štěpánek 1988, 566–567) the attribution of this painting, as then accepted also by the international expert audience and recently confirmed by consulting the author of a dissertation thesis about Cano² before the classification in the collection catalogue of Spanish art, within the Collection of Old Masters at the National Gallery in Prague (Štěpánek 2019, 45–46).

The key to this painting is offered to us by a true Italian masterpiece, Titian's *The Virgin and Child with Saints Dorothy and George* (Prado)³ dating back to about 1515, on the basis of its luminous chromatic solution and masterly fluidity of shapes, expressed with plastic explicitness. The dating is established by Wethey. Cagli – Valcanover (1969, 80) also date the work back to 1508–1516, by also referring to other opinions, e.g. Palucchini. With regard to our case, one fact is of fundamental importance: since 1593 (i.e. the year when Philip II decided to transfer our masterpiece to El Escorial and when we also have the first mention of this painting)⁴ it permanently remained in the Spanish Royal Collections. Thus, during the 17th century, it could serve as inspiration only for painters who had access to such collections.

The painter literally took not only the Madonna and the Child from Titian, but also the compositional scheme separating the background with a curtain. Only the surrounding characters were changed. Before the sky, where cloud form is copied, the

- 1 For more details see Štěpánek 1988, 566–567. This text was the basis of further researches and elaboration.
- 2 Alexandra García Pérez, author of a dissertation work named *Valoración de la obra pictórica de Alonso Cano: estudio de su autenticidad y originalidad*, defended at the University of Seville in 2015 – after personal consulting based on photography – recommended dating the painting to the top Granadan of the painter, i.e. 1653–1657.
- 3 Wethey 1969, fig. 13 and n. cat. 65, p. 109; *Catálogo de las Pinturas. Museo del Prado* 1963, n. cat. 434, p. 702 identified. Harold E. Wethey (1969, 109) and *Catálogo de las Pinturas* (1963, 702) identified the saint with St. Catherine (with a question mark), according to the old opinion of the chronicler P. Sigüenza. On the other hand, Cagli – Valcanover (1969, 80) report that the saints are St. Ulf and St. Brigid. The notification about the restoration of the painting (incl. its removal from the basis) was published in the *Boletín del Museo del Prado* (1984, V, 15: 207) (it was mentioned as Madonna with Child and two saints, n. cat. 434 and was dated back to about 1516).
- 4 H. E. Wethey (1969, 109) mentions that – already at that time – there were some uncertainties about the identity of the female saint, who is defined only as “Venetian saint” in the sending record.



Fig. 1. Alonso Cano: *The Lactation of St. Bernard*.
National Gallery, Prague.

(Pavel Štěpánek: *Spanish painting and sculpture of the 13th to the 19th Century*.
Illustrated Summary Catalogue. National Gallery in Prague. 2019, s. 45.)

painter placed St. Peter⁵ and changed the group of characters in compliance with the topic: a stream of milk directed from the breast of the Virgin into the mouth of St. Bernard [Fig. 2], according to a description of a dream this saint had had (Roig 1950, 61). Breast milk is a symbol of reward for his eloquence in the defence and worship of the Name of Mary.⁶ St. Augustine wrote: “The mother is the Church and her breast are the Laws of the Holy Scriptures whence comes all milk of holiness” (Senger 1955 [Boczkowska 1980, 20, 22]). St. Augustine – in his *In Epistolam Joannis Ad Parthos Tractatus Decem* – writes about breastfeeding children: who is born again as a child is weak; they must diligently suck milk from their mother’s breast and then they begin to grow.

5 During the latest restoration works at the National Gallery, X-ray examination revealed that in the first layer of the canvas St. Peter was looking at the opposite side, i.e. in the direction of the donor. It is not clear why the position of St. Peter’s head and his glance were later changed.

6 *Catálogo*, no cat. 978, p. 449 in the description of this topic in Murillo. The 1996 printed edition of the Prado Catalogue – *Museo del Prado. Catálogo de las pinturas*. Madrid 1996, n. cat. 434, p. 404–405 – mentions the painting as *Madonna with Child and St. George and St. Catherine* (?).



Fig. 2. Alonso Cano: *The Lactation of St. Bernard*.
National Gallery, Prague, detail.

In Boczkowska's opinion, it is possible to understand this scene in the following way: Mary, as Mother of the Church, feeds people on earth with the milk of her breast. It is the allegorical liquid of life, just like she fed her son. Child physiological dependence on their mother (from whom the first liquid of life is poured) has become a metaphor of Christian doctrine, by displaying the connection between mankind and its mother – Mary-Church – who feeds her children with her milk of good counsels and moral teachings, so that people can take the difficult way of their Father-Christ (Logos). Mary's milk and Christ's blood are drinks of life. They are two stages of transformation and initiation for all Christians. According to another – alchemical – meaning, Mary's milk symbolises a white alchemical substance that is mixed with the red blood of Christ. In alchemical treatises, we find a depiction of Mary feeding her child as an allegory of the connection between the philosopher's stone and white tincture.

The topic of lactation is frequent in several Spanish painters. Amongst the many examples, let's mention Alonso Cano and his *Madonna appearing to St. Bernard* in the Prado [Fig. 3], previously in the collection of the Duke of Hernani) or Juan Carreño de Miranda (Guadalajara), and many others.⁷ Before focusing more in depth on our topic, let's just briefly remind the main biographical points of Alonso Cano. When 66-year old painter, sculptor, and architect Alonso Cano died in 1667 and left a numerous group of extraordinary Spanish artists, his contemporaries already considered him as one of the greatest and most versatile artist in 17th-century Spain. He was compared to glorious and very popular artists like El Greco, Velázquez, Ribera, Murillo [Fig. 4], and Zurbarán. He was probably (and still is today) more known as sculptor than as painter, thanks to his extraordinary realistic xylography.

7 H. Wethey (1955, 166) dates the painting back to 1658–60. Carreño's masterpiece is reproduced in the book by Jesús Barretini Fernández *Juan Carreño de Miranda* (1962). Madrid.



Fig. 3. Alonso Cano: *The Lactation of St. Bernard*.
The Prado Museum, Madrid.



Fig. 4. B. E. Murillo: *The Vision of St. Bernard* (1655).
The Prado Museum, Madrid.

The early stage of his production (similarly to Velázquez, his friend, fellow student, and – for a while – even colleague as court painter) was marked by tenebrism, with significant alternation of light and shadow, by enlightening the head and the hands of the displayed person. Cano also had his apprenticeship in the same workshop as Velázquez (by the painter Pacheco, in Seville). After 1638 (when the Grand Duke Olivares named him court painter and when – in the royal collections – he discovered the works of Titian, Veronese, and Ribera who worked in Italy) his paintings became more aerated and more light transmitting. The teachings of the Venetian masters are clearly shown in the painting of the *Immaculate Conception*, today preserved at the Museum of Vitoria (Spain). With this piece he reached the peak of his artistry. In Budapest, his painter's qualities are shown by a fragment of a painting with a representation of the Virgin Mary and two monumental paintings: *Noli me tangere*, and *St. John the Evangelist at Patmos*. Even the Dresden Museum owns one of his masterpieces – a painting of St. Paul, from the Madrilénian period (about 1645).

In 1644, the wife of the artist was murdered. The murderer fled and the painter was accused of committing that crime. For this reason, he moved to Valencia and, then, often changed his place of residence. Eventually, he settled in his native city of Granada (1652). When the accuses were lifted, he started to carry out a specific function at the cathedral (“racionero”); in 1658 he was consecrated as priest in Salamanca.

The main character of Cano's painting exposed at the National Gallery in Prague (St. Bernard) is an important saint venerated by the Catholic Church. His name is still today commonly used in various contexts. The most popular of them is the Saint Bernard dog, whose name derives from the refuge of St. Bernard (in the Swiss Alps) where they bred dogs for rescuing wandering pilgrims (Holub – Lyer 1978, sub voce). Apart from that, it is necessary to remind at least a few basic data about his person. He was born near Dijon (France) in 1090, as the son of a Burgundian nobleman named Tescelin de Saur; and he died in Clairvaux in 1153. After his mother's death, together with some of his brothers and friends he decided to join the almost extinct monastery of Cîteaux (that gave the name to the Cistercian Order). Thus, he became the second founder (or the renovator) of the Cistercian Order. As an organiser and reformer of monastic life, he founded 68 monasteries. In their architecture (notably in churches) he refused excessive splendour and decoration. Within the reforming activities of religious life, he tried to maintain precise rules for preaching and poverty. He was engaged in ecclesiastical questions at the maximum level, notably when he successfully ended a serious papal schism, confuted the theories of many heretics (e.g. Abelard), and was a vocal advocate of crusades. In this regard, in 1147, he sent a letter also to the Bohemian prince Wenceslas II and convinced him to participate in the crusade (the crusade ended unsuccessfully). He also became a consultant of several European rulers. And he was one of the most important mystics of the Western world. He was a famous preacher and writer: he wrote a collection of homilies and various sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary. The acme of his production is considered to be

the *Sermones super Cantica canticorum* [Sermons on the Song of Songs]. Due to his numerous theological essays, homilies, and letters, he was called *Doctor mellifluus*; and for his immense devotion for the Virgin Mary (as shown by his writings) he was also known as *Citharista Mariae*. Here, we cannot treat all his rich and versatile iconography or list all the activities thanks to which he was named Doctor of the Church in 1830 (Rulíšek 2005, sub voce).

As for the main topic of this paper, let's remember that lactation (in Latin *lac, lactis, lactatio*, from *lactare* – i.e. breastfeed or nurse) (Holub – Lyer, 1978, sub voce) indicates, in this case, a process of production and mixing of milk in the mother's body after the childbirth; but in the broadest sense of the word it means nourishment and protection.

How was the topic originated? According to one of the possible versions, one day Bernard of Clairvaux was praying with some young monks and they were singing a Latin chant called *Monstra te esse matrem* [Show that you're a Mother]. Suddenly, the Mother of God appeared, put aside her baby for a while and pushed her breast by squirting milk into the mouth of St. Bernard. When the ecstatic state ended, Bernard observed that milk tasted like honey. Here, the interpretation is correlated to his title *Doctor Mellifluus*, because his teaching was as sweet as "honey". These legends impressed artists of various epochs (notably in the 14th century). The topics described by these legends (especially the lactation) were actively maintained up to the end of the 18th century (see also Majewski 2019; Tomás 1998).⁸

The story is recorded for the first time in an anonymous collection of examples (*exempla*) called *Ci nous dit* (1313–1330): the bishop of Châlons had to visit Cîteaux. Bernard was then a young monk and the abbot gave him the task of welcoming the bishop with a sermon. He got a little scared because of the importance of the role entrusted to him. So he began to pray before a picture of the Virgin Mary. He prayed for so long time that he fell asleep. While he was sleeping, the Virgin Mary appeared and gave him the charisma of eloquence, by moistening his dried mouth with some milk from her breast. According to another legend, one day St. Bernard was praying before a statue of the Virgin Mary and said: "Show that you're a Mother!" – the statue came to life and squirted milk from her breast directly into the mouth of St. Bernard. So, the lactation of St. Bernard is an allegory of the penetration of the divine science in the soul. Thanks to this act the saint receives God's guide, which he can then discharge into his writings.

Another version of this story tells us that St. Bernard was sleeping and felt how the Virgin Mary is feeding him from her breast. Finally, there is also a story explaining that the Virgin helped St. Bernard by healing his ocular inflammation with her breast

8 For the painting of *Lactatio Bernardi* see https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lactatio_Bernardi. With regard to literature concerning mystical interpretation in Spanish art, see notably Victor I. Stoichita: *El ojo místico. Pintura y visión religiosa en el Siglo de Oro Español* (1996); José Álvarez Lopera et al.: *Figuras e imágenes del Barroco. Estudios sobre el barroco español y sobre la obra de Alonso Cano* (1999); Pierre Aubé: *Św. Bernard z Clairvaux* (2019).

milk (breastfeeding is not only about nursing, but also refuge and sense of safety). All stories are considered as miraculous. Due to the sensitiveness of the topic, the artists do not generally perceive this event as a direct encounter between St. Bernard and the Virgin Mary, but rather like something that happens in a dreamy atmosphere where a statue or a painting of Mary “comes into life” for a short while. In Late Baroque, there are works that display a direct apparition of the Virgin to St. Bernard, but this occurs in his small study room (*studiolo*), by emphasising the relation between the imaginary element and the study (see also Bredero 1996; Godinho et al. 2007; Verão 2009).⁹



Fig. 5. Unknown painter: *The Lactation of St. Bernard*.

As painting topic, the lactation spread – although we don’t know why – notably in the Iberian Peninsula, much earlier than in other countries. An early interpretation of this topic dates back to the end of the 13th century, with an altarpiece of St. Bernard in the Templar Chapel in Palma de Mallorca (today Museum of Mallorca) [Fig. 5]. The early traces of this figurative “erotic” poetic presentation is observable,

9 For an interpretation of milk, see Jiří Franc: *Alegorie růží a lilii* [s.a.], Manuel Mora Morales: *La Virgen de la Leche, ¿erotismo o misticismo?* (1) [s.a.]; and articles “Virgem Amamentando” and “Unexpected Forms of Adoration: The Virgin Mary in European Imagination” (2015).

understandably, in the Bible, concretely in Isaiah (66:10–11): “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. *For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance.*”¹⁰ Milk emphasises Mary’s motherhood and represents spiritual food for mankind. At the same time, it is used to provide a mystical explanation of how St. Bernard achieved such a high level of erudition and wisdom. It is also necessary to remember the meaning of one of the most popular prayers of that epoch *Memorare*.

Table from the altarpiece of St. Bernard (end of 13th century), from the Templar Chapel, Palma, Mallorca. Currently exposed in the Diocesan Museum in Palma de Mallorca.

It would also be reasonable to remind the words of St. Paul (1Cor 3:1–3), with regard to evangelisation of Pagans: “But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?”¹¹

Symbolically, we can understand the words of Pope Francis on 13 January 2014 when he authorised and recommended breastfeeding also in churches during services, even in the Sistine Chapel.¹²

Amongst the Madrid artists who had access to the royal collections, the first of the ranking was Diego Velázquez and then the second position belonged to Alonso Cano. By means of their works, both the above mentioned painters “provide a full sense to the Baroque transformation of painting” (Orozco Díaz 1968, 14). In 1640, after a fire devastated the royal palace, Cano was actually entrusted by Philip IV to find (together with Velázquez) suitable painting to replace the burnt or damaged works of art. Cano started to restore 160 paintings; and more paintings were added to this number from the former royal residence in Valladolid. Cano was always proud of this job. Many years later, in 1658, he reminded this service to Philip IV in a letter from Granada, in which he sought the king’s support in his controversy with the Granada canons (Wethey 1969, 18). During the restoration works, Cano had a chance to study in depth the style of Venetian painters. He got acquainted with their products only thanks to his access to the Spanish collections; and he “fell in love” with their masterpieces.¹³ Of course, this factor did influence the change in his painting

10 Quotation translated from *Bible* (1979, 66).

11 Transcription of English biblical quotations in this article is according to online *Bible* (English Standard Version 2016). See also *El Nuevo Testamento* [online] and *Czech version of Bible* [online].

12 In this regard, please see the official report also in our print entitled “Papež František vyzval matky, aby během křtu v Sixtinské kapli kojily” [In a baptism ceremony in the Sistine Chapel, Pope Francis encouraged mothers to feed their babies if they were hungry] (2014). This encouragement by the Pope is also a reminder of the dignity of human body.

13 H. Wethey (1969, 4, 89, 91 and 131) warns that Cano might have admired some of Titian’s works as copies or in graphic supports (or perhaps he had access even to some drawings of the Italian painter).

technique. This experience explains the artist's transition from Sevillian tenebrism to Venetian illusionism (*ibid.*). He also grew fond of Correggio, when – in 1644 – the Neapolitan viceroy (the Duke of Medina de las Torres) brought *Noli me tangere* as a gift for Philip IV. A testimony of this is reported in Cano's Budapest painting: Philip IV transferred Correggio's painting to El Escorial in 1657. A mention of this is reported by the chronicler P. de los Santos in the same year (see also Wethey 1969, 57).¹⁴

First of all, let's try to briefly describe the visible elements: the artist portrayed the donor (probably per order). The donor kneels on the left side, dressed in black Spanish official clothes, with a simple flat neckerchief (so-called *golilla*) – this simpler element started to be used after the ban of the complex starched ruff (in Spanish *gorguera* or *lechuguilla*) at the beginning of the 1620's. The reason behind the ban was the effort to reduce the expenses related to such ruffs, within the frame of a larger project of decrease of representation costs in a period of national crisis. The main scope of the painting is the miracle of lactation, i.e. the moment in which the Virgin Mary squirted milk from her breast and moistened the mouth of the monk wearing a white Cistercian habit. It is not only a saint, but also a significant historical figure – St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a major leader of the Cistercian Order, who also traced the outlines of the Rule of the Knights Templar.

The Virgin Mary protects the saint with her maternal milk; analogously, the donor seems to be under the protection of St. Peter, who holds one hand on the donor's shoulder and lifts his other hand towards the sky (represented by an aperture above St. Peter's head), by holding his keys – symbol of the access to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Prague painting shows that the figures are typical of Cano's style, notably because of their succinct rendition and colour, albeit they are influenced by a pattern. Formal analogies can be found – e.g. – in the head of St. Anthony of Padua (in the Munich Alte Pinakothek), in a painting displaying St. John of Capistrano and St. Bernardine of Siena (in the Museum of Granada), in the figures displayed in the Death of Saint Francis (Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, in Madrid), and after all even in the already mentioned painting of the Virgin with St. Bernard and the donor (Prado). A typical element of Cano is the rhythm and the organisation of figures, notably if we compare this with the Circumcision (in the church of St. Mary Magdalene in Getafe). In 1984, in an exhibition called "Murillo and the Andalusian artists of the 17th century" (from the Hermitage collections), an interesting painting was exhibited portraying the Virgin appearing to a monk from Soriano. The figure and stature of this monk are similar to those of St. Bernard (Kagane 1984, 32). Of course, Alonso Cano was not the only expert to focus on the study of Venetian painting (there was also, and mainly, Diego Polo). But Cano went so far that his works were almost mistaken for the works of Titian himself (Pérez Sánchez [s.a.], 351–355) –

14 A portrait of P. de los Santos by Claudio Coello is part of the collections of the National Gallery; previously, before the restitution of the Lobkowitz collections, it was loaned to the Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region in Nelahozeves.

although a number of compositional, typological, chromatic, and drawing-relating congruencies witness of the authorship of Cano.¹⁵ By the way, it is a significant and interesting testimony about Titian's influences on the Madrid school between the first and the second half of the 17th century. At the same time, it also confirms the possibility of identifying many other high-quality and relevant masterpieces present in Czechoslovak collections as works of Spanish provenance.¹⁶

The topic of lactation is more subtle and we should return to its artistic beginnings. It is difficult to provide exhausting explanations about the meanings of the five displayed figures (incl. Christ Child). Historical development and iconography go through complex turns, whose traces are leading to the Coptic Church (in Egypt) (Royt 2005, 202; see term "Panna Maria" [Virgin Mary]). The topic of *Galacto Trofusa* (in Greek) or *Maria lactans* (in Latin) probably originated in this environment [Fig. 6]. The researchers look for connections with the portrayal of the virgin goddess Isis milking her son Horus [Fig. 7].

15 Pérez Sánchez (1985, 55) publishes the painting by adding a note (19) stating the attribution we consulted about. In the meanwhile, my fifteen-line report was published, as an abstract of the congress in honour of Harold E. Wethey, held on 13 February 1986 (unfortunately, I was not able to travel and participate in this congress). See note 3.

16 Within the frame of preparations for the exhibition of Spanish art from Czechoslovak collections for the Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava as well as for other exhibitions – as part of a series of exhibition organised by the Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region concerning the 17th and 18th centuries.



Fig. 6. *Galaktotrophousa*. Byzantine icon.
Source: The Sinai Icon Collection. Princeton University.



Fig. 7. *Isis milking Horus*. Egypt.
Source: Association of Spanish Egyptology.

On the other hand, the lactation of Christ has its justification also in the Holy Scriptures (Lk 11,27 as well as the apocryphal Gospel of James).¹⁷ It is also observed that the oldest display of the topic decorates the apses of Egyptian monasteries (e.g. the Monastery of St. Jeremy in Sakkar – about 500 A. D.). As far as the Czech environment is concerned, a sample of this topic is represented by the statue of the Virgin Mary from Konopiště [Fig. 8] (about 1370).



Fig. 8. *Nursing Madonna from Konopiště* (about 1370).
National Gallery, Prague.

¹⁷ Luke 11,27: "A woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you! But he said: Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!"

If we look closer on the lactation of St. Bernard of Clairvaux by the Virgin – i.e. the *Lactatio S. Bernardi* (Royt 2005, 198) we must agree with Gerd Heinz-Mohr (1999, 159, sub voce) when he states that milk represents physical and spiritual food in many cultures, as witnessed by several heroic epic tales. In ancient times, Christians considered the acceptance of believers in the Church through baptism as their birth; and the sacraments were considered as their spiritual food (i.e. the period of physical growth in the early life years of a child). Even Hercules received milk from Hera, in this case it symbolises adoption and at the same time humility and immortality). This is probably the reason why Cano painted also the goddess Juno, recently acquired by the Prado in Madrid. And there is also another narrowly correlated theme of Roman origin: the *Charitas Romana*, illustrating an old legend according to which the daughter of a death-sentenced man visited her father in jail and gave him milk she had after the recent birth of her child [Fig. 9]. When this fact was publicly revealed, the sentenced man was pardoned (Štěpánek 1979, 133–135). The milky way (galaxy [Fig. 10]) also evokes the ancient myth of milk squirting from the breast of a goddess.

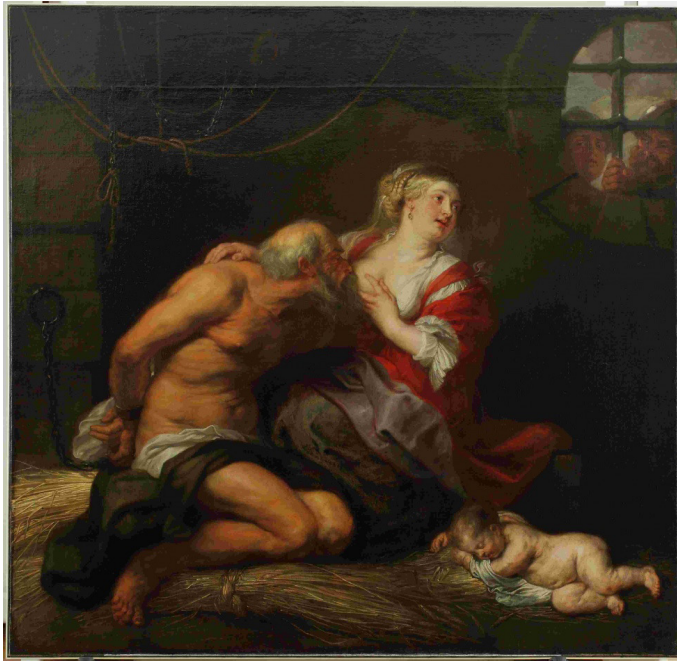


Fig. 9. P. P. Rubens (?): *Caritas Romana*.
Siegerlandmuseum, Germany.



Fig. 10. Tintoretto: *The Origin of the Milky Way* (1580).
National Gallery, London.

In the Middle Ages, there was a particular veneration for the milk of the Virgin Mary. It is known that in many places in Italy, France, and Spain Mary's milk was exposed as a relic. Lurker (2005, 302) reminds that – as first nourishment of a newborn baby – milk is as important and vital as water. In early Christianity, milk and honey had the meaning of medicinal remedy for reaching immortality (*Bernard Mellifluus...*). Didier Colin (2009, 39) reminds that the dream about milk is a sign of abundance, fertility, love, fullness, and light-heartedness. The images depicting the Virgin Mary sending a beam of milk from her breast to saints (e.g. Bernard of Clairvaux) are a symbol of extraordinary blessing.

In our conclusion, we can observe that what our languages (Czech and also Slovak) define as supernatural is not at all unnatural, but it is simply a miracle – beyond our sight (Novotný 2021, 8)¹⁸. Here, we can remind the word appearing in the call for papers, i.e. *mystagogy*. It is not only interpretation of mystery, narrated through the experience of a mystic person as stated in the note of our conference. In another sense of the word and by following another interpretation, it is rather simple “introduction to mystery”.¹⁹ If the second word – “mysticism” – can be described as experience with God's presence, then we reach the boundaries of our lexical and visual ways of

18 The article concerns Adolf Kajpr.

19 A special acknowledgement goes to prof. ThDr. Ladislav Tichý from the Faculty of Theology of the Olomouc University (Czech Republic).

interpretation. Even the Pagans – before Christianity – knew both of these concepts: mystagogy and mysticism. Nevertheless, Christian theologians used both trends of understanding for enriching spiritual life. From an artistic point of view, it is possible to interpret – e.g. – a picture with a religious motif according to the feelings of the author.

If we follow the definitions of official dictionaries, first of all Rupert Berger (2008, 310; ad vocem *Mystagogie*), we discover that this Greek word originally indicated the guidance of initiated people (i.e. those who were already integrated and needed assistance), their introduction to interior comprehension and their live experience of the mystery and of life. With regard to our main subject of interest (i.e. Christian mystagogy), it developed notably in relation to initiation. Let's think, first and foremost, about missal homilies of the Holy Week.

The doctor and pathologist Frank González-Crussi (2008, 61) rightly reminds us that *to see means to believe – and to believe means to see*. When symbols begin to be interpreted, the way is paved for various and heterogeneous solutions. Of course, also the interpretation of the word “milk”. The ideal connection of milk and heaven is visible also in the concept of “Milky Way” and in ancient mythology, where a galaxy is created with a squirt of divine milk from a goddess' breast. We find a connection even in the Christian Way of St. James.²⁰

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²⁰ This fact is recorded in poetical terms in a film by Luis Buñuel *La voie lactée* [The Milky Way] that I had a chance to watch at the Valladolid film festival in 1969.

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[RE]READINGS OF THE PERFECT

MYSTICISM OF JAMES LEE BYARS

Juan Agustín Mancebo Roca

ABSTRACT

The complex contextualization of the work of James Lee Byars (1932–1997) in contemporary artistic practices was determined by its timelessness in both form and concept. Considered by Kevin Power as one of the key artists of the second half of the twentieth century alongside figures such as Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol, his legacy seems to have declined probably because of the discomfort caused by the approach to his work, since any previous consideration and attempt at cataloging, escapes through the loopholes on which they are based.

Byars' performances and pieces were mostly structured around the cryptic concept of perfection. The artist's mission, in this case, takes on the roles of a shaman and a magician who questions the illegibility of a world whose materialism seems to have expelled any consideration of the sacred, thus articulating a work that, far from providing answers, raises questions about the ultimate meaning of life. Gold, geometry, time (and its transience), space (re-signified by his cultural heritage), language and the body expressed a proposal in which installations and actions are the instruments he uses primarily to question us about the big questions. Byars in this sense has been considered a mystic, since he places us at the doors of a new perception to make us uncomfortable and provoke us, to transmit us the questions about being in the world.

This article is modulated on the poetics of the work, thought and actions of James Lee Byars, one of the few contemporary artists who can be defined as mystic in the broad sense of the word and for whom the sacred, contrary to the current of unidirectional thought, is inherent to the contemporary subject.

KEYWORDS

Mysticism. Perfection. Culture. Sacred. Image.

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It seems that everything that could be said on the world of images has already been written. The surprising *years of vertigo* that made up the last quarter of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century, or what amounts to the same thing, the narrative that descends from utopia to disenchantment, built a dialectic in which discourses ended up folding in on themselves. Once that chronology was overcome, the evolution of the different stages of the image has remained anchored in a sort of *perpetuum mobile* from which there is no escape in sight.

As Peter Bürger (1936–2017) pointed out, the assumption of the hegemonic proposal of the avant-garde has caused an exhaustion in visual practices that survive in self-absorption as mere metalinguistic and self-referential exercises. Although it is true that recent technological micro-revolutions have fostered other investigations and other formats on visuality, beyond the digital *trompe l'oeil* we coexist with the survival of the *avant-garde* imposture transubstantiated to our days.

In a period in which artistic narratives are running out of steam, it is necessary to vindicate the proposals based on otherness that have been developed since the 1960s and whose originality subverts the hegemonic procedures. Probably, one of the artists who has distinguished himself by stressing the absolute individuality of the historical movements and groups of the second avant-garde was the American James Lee Byars (Detroit 1932 – Cairo 1997). Far from any methodological reading, his work is uncomfortable in the context of the history of contemporary art. If our system is determined by that kind of archival evil that permanently leads us to establish catalogs of all kinds and to classify any document, Byars' contextualization is nullified, or at least, it is not possible to place it clearly in any space due to the elusive purity of his discourse: "He has never, so to speak, belonged to anything" (Power 2002, 104).

The enigmatic, subtle and elegant praxis of the American creator was tangentially situated on the border of the elementary lines of action of post-World War II art. His eccentric baroque style was out of tune with a modern approach that tends to distrust the immediate experience of beauty (Fuchs 1994, 37). Furthermore, his conceptual specificity made him a disturbing element for all those tendencies in which, rather forcibly, he could be pigeonholed: pop art, minimalism, body art and conceptual art, although it is true that in any of them his discourse would implode, highlighting his *outsider* condition. In the representational context, he borrowed from the aforementioned trends and integrated them into his work without paying obeisance to them. But his contrariness does not only come from the historiographic character itself, as it is necessary to refer to him as a creator whose essays transgress the specific field of art to enter the sacred and the transcendent. In this sense, silence and isolation are the *sine qua non* condition of the mystic who distances himself from the world to surrender to thought.



Fig. 1. James Lee Byars: *The Giant* (1975).
Collection M HKA, Antwerp.

This narrative of difference has led Kevin Power (1944–2013) to consider Byars together with Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) and Andy Warhol (1928–1987) as the three essential figures of the art of the second half of the 20th century. It is at least symptomatic that the art critic places him next to two artists who have represented the tension between the material and the spiritual, between old Europe and the emerging America, exemplifying the two antithetical conceptions that dominated the art scene of their time and whose legacy and influence is still far from being extinguished. If posterity has amplified the legacy of Beuys and Warhol, it has not been so in the case of Byars, whose legacy has had a fate inversely proportional to that of the former, his work being circumscribed not so much to the variants of mass consumption art but to specialists and scholars of the subject.

Aesthetics of disappearance

We do not know for sure if the American's ultimate intention was to become part of the silence and oblivion beyond the *noisy* condition imposed by modernity. While Warhol and Beuys opted for their omnipotent presence, Byars, who defined himself as *The World's Most Famous Unknown Artist*, did precisely the opposite, disappearing – or at least masking himself –, hiding in the cloak of pseudo-anonymity and keeping silent with an implacable honesty with his artistic project. In this case, the perspective and recognition of Byars' figure closes again, as in the conditioning factor of his identification in the historical discourse, since he had no antecedents, did his work independently and was not succeeded by disciples or collaborators. Joachim Sartorius placed him in a sort of third generation of twentieth-century art to project himself into the present after Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys and Marcel Broodthaers: “here Duchamp was the father, Beuys and Broodthaers represent the second generation, and Byars the third with an open perspective towards the twenty-first century” (1999, 219). Beyond plastic influences – which he had – the American creator only recognized the authority of Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), Albert Einstein (1879–1955) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951).



Fig. 2. James Lee Byars: *The Spherical Book* (1986).
MACBA Collection, Barcelona.

It is true that epistemologically James Lee Byars was close to Beuys' proposal. In fact, as has been mentioned, both will seek the transformation and transcendence of the human being through action, word and image as attested, among other actions, by the renowned performance they staged in Krefeld in 1978. Some of the most conservative critics have even considered their strategy closer to shamanism than to the artistic condition itself, such was the energetic tension that articulated their split between the material and the spiritual. In this context, the reference to Warhol's figure in this triad might seem a posturing. But if we were to pay attention, as Estrella de Diego (1958) has suggested, to the tragic determination of the last Warhol, when he became aware of his *finitude* and began to glimpse the catastrophe, to see beyond the glitter box and to readapt the discourse of contemporary helplessness as the essential line of his ultimate proposal, we might wonder, moving away from the hegemonic lines of thought, if we are not dealing with three artists who finally wonder about the existential condition of man.

Because, beyond proposing answers, any cultural document establishes the need to question itself and to establish a process that through the sensitive reaches and conditions the intellectual. It is true that the sign that has characterized the last century, beyond any preconceived discourse, is that of artistic proposals that, far from being located in a closed context, questioned us about the very nature of the represented structure. The *opera aperta* in which, as Umberto Eco (1932–2016) pointed out, the role of the spectator is as relevant as that of the artist in order to establish a link between the two. The image is no longer a closed code as it was in classicism, but is configured as a hermeneutic process that demands the participation of the spectator and that pronounces itself on different levels of reading, bifurcating into as many interpretations as there are receivers of the work.

The hybridization of East and West

Despite his “exuberant American energy” (Power 2002, 104) James Lee Byars was influenced by the nomadic nature of his travels and his philosophy. The artist traveled to almost every continent and, after studying philosophy, psychology and art at Wayne State University, he moved to Kyoto in 1957, where he would travel back and forth to the United States for the next decade. In Japan he came into contact with Shinto rituals and the No Theater whose characteristics would be transferred to his work: slowness, delicacy, spirituality and the value of small gestures that would permeate a proposal determined by the search for the limits of perception.

His stays in Japan took place between 1957 and 1968, where he stayed near the Temple of the Golden Pavilion and which would initiate another of the guidelines of his life journey: living in spaces determined by a particular historical, artistic and

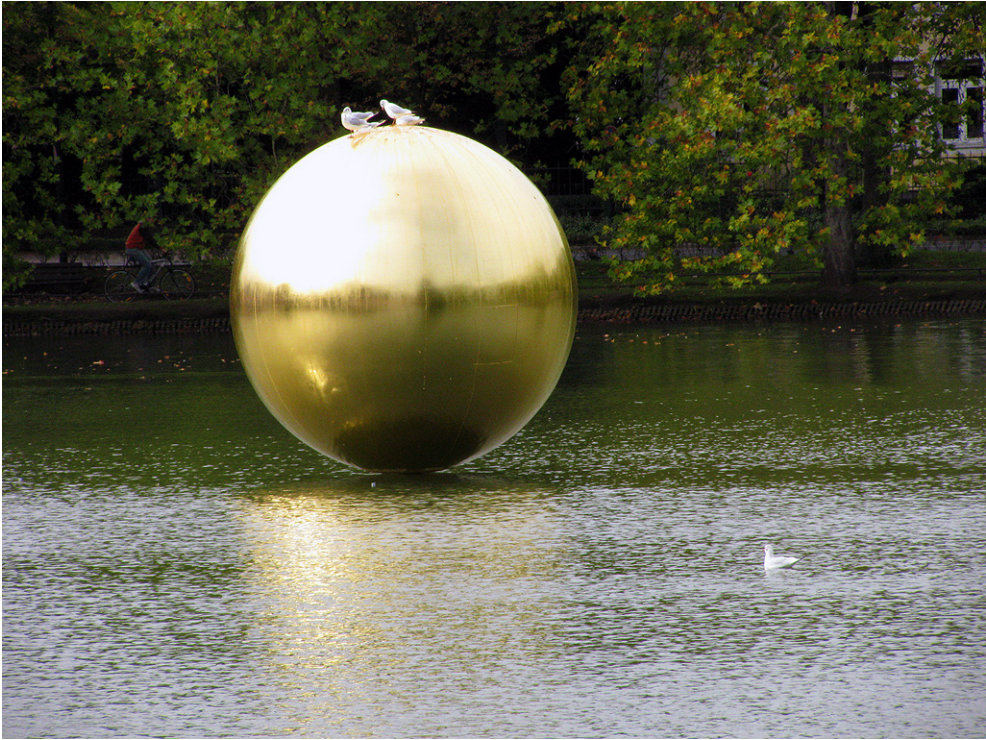


Fig. 3. James Lee Byars: *The Perfect Axis* (2010).
Park Benrath, Düsseldorf.

philosophical legacy. In Japan, Byars imbibed Eastern philosophies while teaching English to Buddhist religious people in that curious bridge between Kyoto and New York. In Kyoto he learned to work with paper and the sounds of paper, developing the notion of the ethereal and where he “became convinced that isolated concepts could be aesthetic objects” (Sartorius 1999, 2018).

The American’s praxis established a symbiotic relationship capable of nodal articulation of two contrary spheres. In this sense, dependencies and quotations between the different cultures and philosophies in which he participated and whose contact and hybridization would constitute other argumentative profiles of his proposal were constant. “Byars,” writes Heinrich Heil, “was in love with the East and the West. He enthusiastically pursued the various paths to perfection of both cultures and brought them together in his art in his own way” (1999, 206). Eastern essentialism will lead him to the determination for pure figures and colors, to a visual language based on simple forms that carried symbolic connotations such as the geometries of the circle, the cylinder and the pyramid among others.

He was concerned with the choice of materials obeying antagonistic criteria: on the one hand, the durable and sumptuous and, on the other, fragility and delicacy, emphasizing their symbolic aspect. As Haenlein recognizes, he structured his work with a reduced number of *leitmotifs*: “there are performances, there are spheres, there are hemispheres, columns and colors: gold, black and white, and finally red. There is a certain sense of musical key in the artist” (1999, 202).

In the permanent search for the ultimate meaning, James Lee Byars researched primitive myths and ancient religions from which he extracted mythological references that he adapted to his discourse. The reinterpretation of other religions led him to a new assessment of the sacred and the transcendent. As Angélica Oliveira has pointed out in this regard, “from the Orphic and Egyptian traditions he extracted the understanding of a total cosmogony using the circle to represent the concept of transcendence in an earthly world for the metaphysical plane of existence” (2018, 105).

With his installations, his object work and above all with his performances, Byars succeeded in carrying out the utopian avant-garde program of the elimination of the barrier between art and life, or at least, that in his artistic practice there would be no distinction between one and the other: who else was James Lee Byars but the body that triggered the epistemological springs of artistic practices in which a perpetual interrogation is transposed? Moreover, that motif claimed the dynamism of the very action of thinking, constituted from a serene and lucid reflection on Eastern movements and philosophies in a discourse that intertwined with Western culture in a proposal slightly situated in the conceptual and the experiments of the ephemeral and the vindication of the instant. And, in this sense, the great topics of James Lee Byars’ work were three: the question, perfection and death.

The question is the question

The fascination with the question coincided with his Carnegie-sponsored doctoral studies at the University of California: “There began my deep interest in the idea of the question. I wondered if there really would be such a thing as a chronology of a person’s feelings” (Power 1994, 174). That dialectic sought the total synthesis of information in which he posed questions to interrogate us about being and the very experience of existing, leading the viewer to reflect on his vital condition, his temporality and finitude, as well as on the contextual relationship with cosmic time – in a sense close to the Italian *povera* artists – and on the sacredness of existence, since for the American, death – or the cancellation of consciousness – is as sacred as life itself. In that sense, the question claims temporality in the instant in which it is posed. In fact, this transitory relationship has to do with the very idea of his



Fig. 4. James Lee Byars: *Golden Tower* (2017).
Campo San Vito, Venice.

artistic development, since Byars restricted it to his own vital circumstance, claiming that his death would cancel his work. The question, therefore, is something alive, a dynamic entity that refers to Cartesian interrogation: one of the extensions of consciousness and an illuminated capsule of infinite questions in which the human being interrogates ontology.

The question operates as an instrument for the search for truth. In fact, Byars was not only concerned with the philosophical background but also with the great scientific preoccupations of the contemporary subject. Just as he dialogued with religious people, he also dialogued with scientists. The question itself was the objective in which each and every one of the questions is transferred and in which, of course, there was a sacred background that at the same time had to do with the scientific.

The question also had to do with the witnessed event. Byars always appeared dressed in a peculiar way, halfway between baroque and dandy, between artist and magician, as a way of calling attention to his figure in order, again, to search for meanings in a world full of questions. The costume was in turn an extension that served to connect people's thoughts, in order to link them together through questions: "The world is determined by questions, not by their answers, because if they do not

raise new questions, they are useless, because they mean stagnation. I can repeat the question, but do I have the courage to ask it? This is the answer given by Byars” (Deecke 1999, 212).

Allegory of the perfect

It could be said that the idea of perfection obsessed Byars throughout his career. Perfection, in that sense, or at least as the American artist understood and conveyed it, could only be instantaneous. Therefore, Byars’ language paid attention to ideas that allegorically symbolized it, exemplified in the ephemeral and the solemn. His production, described as baroque eccentricism, sought beauty and how it could establish through it a link with the sacred. The idea of perfection, therefore, was transferred to the quality of the image itself. In spite of its actuality, Byars’ plastic art was linked to artistic processes derived from tradition, whose expressions used materials that divinized the *spiritual* character of the image. In this sense, it is necessary to point out the implications that permeate between the Western and Eastern philosophical tradition, the former represented by the sumptuousness of the materials and the latter by the delicacy (fragility), in which, once again, his formation between two worlds was evident: that of a Westerner enthused by Eastern culture.

Therefore, his is a *mestiere* linked to the processes of the past – and that dimension of the production of the image makes him once again an atypical creator – but whose enunciative power would be in accordance with the contemporary world, configuring what could be called a new actuality of the past or a mention to past practices to articulate and define the present. This oratory, which played with and altered artistic codes, conveys the sensation that his pieces and performances were situated – they situate us – outside of time as if it were an archeology of the present based on the reconstruction of past procedures.

The powerful staging, the scenographic drift and the quasi-religious symbology claimed the innocence of the observer as an act of faith. In their perpetual dialogue with the above, Byars’ installations and performances reproduce a kind of false estrangement, a sensation of recognition and absence, which would link his praxis with the metaphysical tendencies and the return to order of the twenties and thirties of the last century.

This sensation, characteristic of Byars’ staging, is amplified in the symbolic spaces in which it is represented. Byars, apart from the specific rhetoric of the gallery and the art museum – and in this sense it must be specified that he knew and interacted with the springs of the museum and the art market – looks for specific elements in places that reflect the aesthetic and conceptual perfection that are mostly related to the sacred. It is not strange that a large part of his work is installed in temples – with



Fig. 5. James Lee Byars: *The Death of James Lee Byars* (2019).
Santa Maria de la Visitazione Church, Venice.

his special predilection for monasteries, churches and all kinds of religious buildings – which re-signify and increase the enunciative power of the pieces. The perfect as a link with the totality refers not only to the work, but also to the environmental space that contains it.

The idea of the perfect becomes, on the other hand, a perpetual questioning of the world. Hence it is transcribed in the instant, an approach that has to do with prespecialty and in which the difference between the work and the artist is indistinguishable. The perfect is, in turn, the vindication of the actuality of the moment, of the breath in which the body and work are transubstantiated into the artistic fact in relation to the very nature of life and that challenges the mere fact of existing in the face of the absolute cancellation of death.

Therefore, one of his archetypal images would be the sphere, as a perfect geometric element and, in turn, as an allegory of natural cycles and the passage of time understood by Byars as the process of transformation of the body. The artist, on the other hand, transferred the religious elements to his own presence in a particular liturgy in which he tried to create perfect works – or that referred to the idea itself – in an imperfect world and that could only exist as an allegory of perfection without ever embodying the total concept.

Death and epiphany

The impostured strategy of disappearance presages the ultimate conditioner of the idea of death. Byars began working on it in 1975 with *The Perfect Epitaph*, a piece performed in Bern in which he rolled a red lava rock through the city (Ottmann 2004, 17). In another work, the performance *The Perfect Death of James Lee Byars*, the artist lay down on the gold-painted floor in one of his golden suits, creating a visual trompe l'oeil effect in which his body, confused with the golden scenery, became invisible (17). And in this area, we penetrate into the third of the lines of argument in which all his work takes shape. In this sense, it is worth mentioning that contemporary art has banished the idea of the sacred, as if the discourse of modernity had been built from an essentially materialistic point of view. Despite its exclusion in art and in life, the idea of death is present in his discourse since it is an inherent part of the vital process. For this reason, in 1975 the artist wrote: “I am a momentary man”, underlining the instantaneousness of consciousness and the ephemeral nature of existence in order to emphasize the sacredness of his praxis. Death, like sex, is taboo and modernized Western societies increasingly conceal its presence, displace it and hide it.

On the contrary, James Lee Byars perpetually interrogates it. The artist envisioned it as the definitive event in his piece *The Death of James Lee Byars*, developed between 1980 and 1990, a reflection on the subject's feeling of his finitude in which he

establishes a stripping in favor of an epiphany. As Angélica Oliveira has pointed out, “for Byars, the antinomy between the visible body and the disappearing body would reveal the true problematic of the sacralization of the artist’s image. In short, it would be a ritual act by means of which the boundary between the human body (mortal) and the divine body (immortal) would be marked” (2018, 104).

His demise is articulated as the end of the transit, of the nomad arriving at his destination. After having lived in New York, Kyoto, Bern, the Swiss Alps, Los Angeles and the southeastern United States, James Lee Byars died in a hotel in Cairo in the spring of 1987 in a space that looked at the pyramids, architectural elements created with the idea of defying time in their implicit idea of eternity.

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TRACING THE ABSENT

HILMA AF KLINT'S MYSTICAL LANGUAGE

Mónica Sánchez Tierraseca

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to study the mysticism of the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) in relation to her religious experience and her searching for existential answers through contact with divine entities. Although the identity of these figures is not clear, we are aware of their familiarity with Christian beliefs. Thus, in this paper we attempt to approach Af Klint's Christian, metaphysical and anthroposophical message by analysing her notebooks. Particularly, we focus on the symbolic aspect of one of them made between 1919 and 1920, entitled *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichens*.

KEYWORDS

Abstract art. Antroposophy. Contemporary art. Hilma af Klint. Mysticism. Symbolism.

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The diversity of ways in which mystical experience can manifest itself makes it difficult, and probably risky, to establish a single and exact definition of mysticism. In this paper we use the term “mysticism” to express a spiritual phenomenon whose nature, as Rudolf Steiner said it in the preface to the second German edition of his book *Christianity and the Mysteries of Antiquity (Das Christentum als mystische Tatsache und die Mysterien des Altertums, 1910)*, “can only be apprehended if the knowledge of that [spiritual phenomenon] springs from the sources of spiritual life itself” (1984, 7–8).

The title assigned to this work refers to the most astonishing aspect of Hilma af Klint's artwork. As Iris Müller-Westermann points out, “Hilma af Klint's work is based on the awareness of a spiritual dimension to our existence that was largely

marginalized in an increasingly materialistic world” (2013, 33). In other words, the Swedish artist intended to represent the plane of existence not visible to eye, ineffable, by the combination of colors, forms, symbols, and words. Thus, “Tracing the Absent” alludes in several ways to Af Klint’s skill in figuring her mystical knowledge of the world.

In accordance with this observation, the main aim of this paper is to study the characteristics of Hilma af Klint’s mystical experience by analyzing her work. Specifically, this analysis has been carried out on her notebooks, paying special attention to the notebook entitled *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichens (Blumen, Moose, Flechten, 1919–1920)* and considering the continuous interrelation between word and image.

Although paintings and drawings predominate in her artistic production, she often includes words to complement the images or facilitate their comprehension. Furthermore, in one of her creative periods she used automatic writing considering it the most precise method of representing what the spirits communicated to her during the trance-like state. This method of creation would be used other times in her paintings, so we consider that both means are closely linked, being inseparable most of the time.

A pioneer in darkness

Nowadays it is hard to find a study about Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) that does not begin with a mention of the problem of her public recognition. The Swedish-born artist has become a paradigmatic figure due to the long time that her paintings remained hidden, in the shadows, and she has also become a starting point for research in current academic trends. As a result of these studies which mainly attempt to equalize the female position in art history with the male one, we can now affirm that Af Klint is known for her vast artistic production as an abstract painter, even if this consideration has come too late. Since the end of the last century, we find the inclusion of the Swedish artist in some art history’s books published with increasing regularity. She is mentioned in works such as *Cosmos – From Romanticism to Avant-garde* (Clair – Cogeval – Théberge 1999), *Artiste Médium* (Amaru – Alleguede 2014), or *Esoterismo y arte moderno: una estética de lo irracional* (Gómez 2019).

What is most striking in many of these studies is that her name does not appear in any encyclopedia about contemporary art, nor are there any references to her in studies of twentieth-century painting. There are two reasons for this. On one hand, Gertrud Sandqvist emphasised in the lecture “When Spirits are guiding Your Hand” pronounced on 23 August 2010 at the Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts that at the beginning of the twentieth century we find a change of paradigm

in the area of painting and in all the world. Until then, as Arantza Pardo says, “academies were formed by men and thought that women only painted as a hobby until they got married” (2017, 78).

On the other hand – and perhaps this is the most decisive reason for the artist’s fate –, when she was almost seventy years old, she made many of her original notebooks disappeared. It is not known what happened to them, whether she burned them, threw them into Lake Mälaren or destroyed them sheet by sheet (Almqvist – Belfrage 2020, 21). Was it a sudden and impulsive act, or maybe one of the spiritual entities she was contacting told her to do it? We do not know and we may never know it. However, the event was compounded by another impediment to her work seeing the light of day.

In parallel to making part of these creations disappear, Hilma verbally notified her nephew and sole heir, Erik af Klint, of the prohibition to show her work until after her death (Sarriugarte-Gómez 2019, 88), as she felt that society was not ready to understand it. It was in 1932 when she decided to inscribe in her notebooks the symbols “+x” and explained that “all works that carry this sign should not be opened until 20 years after my death” (Almqvist – Belfrage 2020, 28). As she wrote in *Letters and Words Pertaining to Works by Hilma af Klint (Symboler, Bokstäver och Ord tillhörande Hilma af Klints målningar)*, a notebook in which she describes the complex system of symbolic language she uses in her visual works, “+” represents “superphysical thought” while “x” refers to “superphysical imagination (the symbol of the astral world)” (Klint 1932).

Because of these circumstances, the first opportunity to see her paintings in public was in 1986, not twenty but forty years after her death. The event took place at the exhibition “The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985” held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. However, it was at a later exhibition at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 2013 and curated by Iris Müller-Westermann and her assistant Jo Widoff that the Swedish artist was established as one of the pioneers of abstract art.

Due to the estimated dates and those that have been verified in the notebooks collected, Hilma af Klint anticipated abstraction with her work, preceding Vassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich, to whom this dogma has been academically attributed. In spite of this, Jesús Díaz Bucero and María Dolores Sánchez Pérez suggest that both Hilma’s works and those of these artists have value as pieces of art, so that their paintings would not lose their value when Af Klint’s appear on the scene, because the originality that gives real value to a work of art is non-circumstantial (2015, 36).

In any case, the issues surrounding this problem have detracted attention to other aspects that deserve the same emphasis and, therefore, many questions about the life and work of the Swedish artist are quite complex and require an in-depth analysis poorly studied yet.

Hilma af Klint's paintings

It is useful to point out a few episodes of Hilma af Klint's life in order to understand her work in context. Firstly, it should be mentioned that she grew up in the traditional Christian values instilled in her home, feeling from an early age an intense attraction to esotericism. As the grandson of Hilma af Klint's brother, Johan af Klint, stated in a communication, her motivation to connect with the other world began when she was eighteen years old, and it was after the death of her sister Herminia that she tried to "seek contact with her sister's soul, to help her to accept that she was dead and to make it easier for her to leave this world" (Sarriguarte-Gómez 2019, 89).

As an adult she would have different experiences with spiritualism until she met the Theosophical Society. This ideology irrevocably molded the thought of the artist, who went on to join the Society and was later influenced by Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy. Steiner was known for his scientific and philosophical theories to which he added a spiritual component after experiencing what he described as a personal encounter with Christ. As a consequence of this encounter, he developed the Anthroposophy that interested Hilma af Klint to such an extent that, from 1925 onwards, the artist abandoned painting to devote herself entirely to anthroposophical studies (Arantza Pardo 2017, 82–83), so that it is not possible to find paintings or notes for the period 1925–1930 (Hillström 2013, 279). By that date, she had produced more than a thousand works, including the conventional landscapes and portraits for which she was known in her circle and the spiritual paintings for which she is known today.

Hilma af Klint joined the Stockholm School of Arts, Design and Crafts in 1879, where she first made contact with spiritualist milieus and the Theosophical Society in the Swedish capital. Later, between 1882 and 1887, she trained as a painter at the Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts, where she earned money by selling botanical drawings, portraits and landscapes in naturalistic style: "With a sense of broad-mindedness and impartiality, the artist opened up to what she saw in front of her, whether people, landscape, or plants. Nature seemed to be perfect just as it was, and therefore did not have to be improved but simply observed" (Müller-Westermann – Widoff 2013, 37). As she was producing these commissions, she was working clandestinely on her more personal pieces that are usually classified in series because she usually focused on a theme or idea on different canvases or supports.

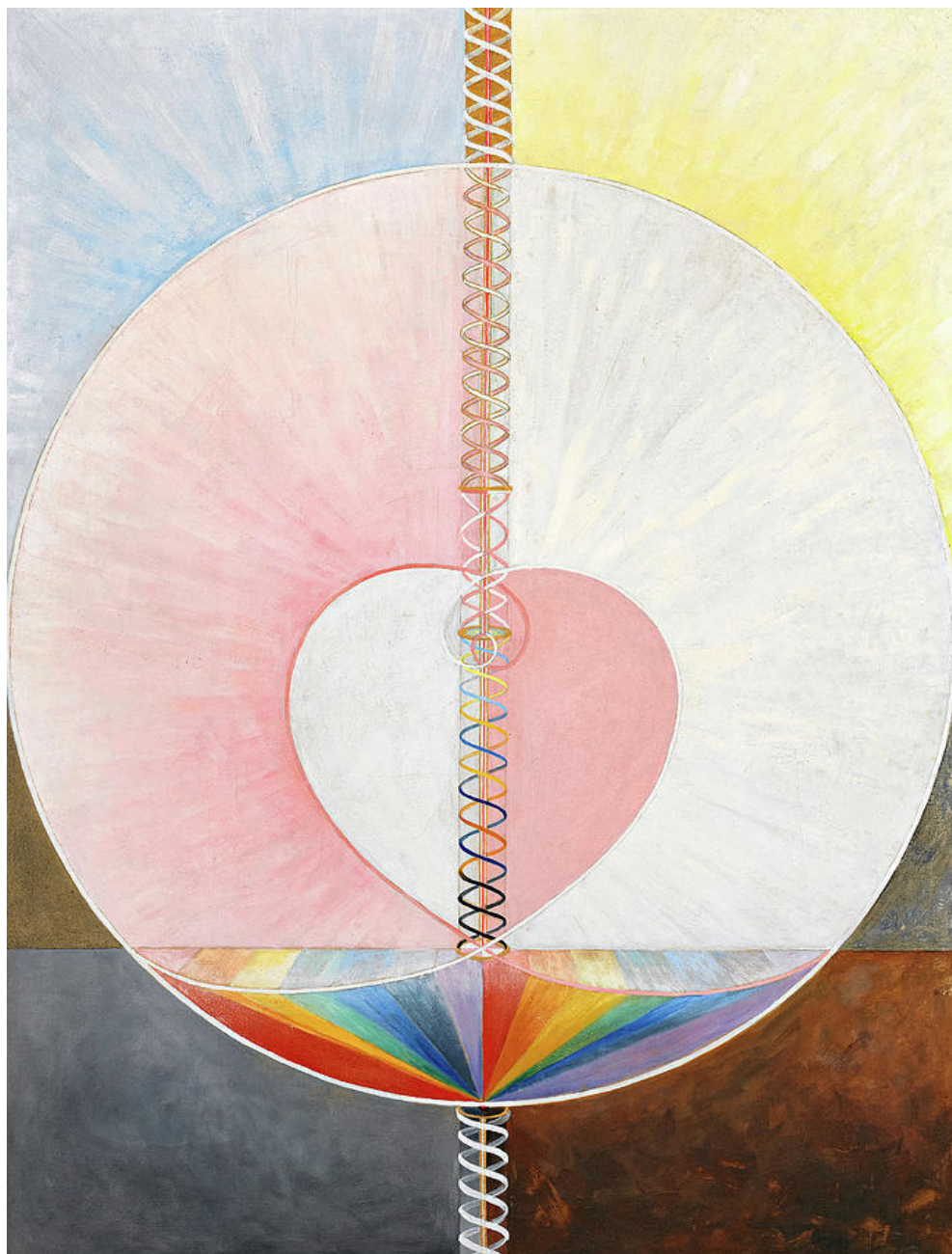


Fig. 1. Hilma af Klint: *The Dove, No. 1, Group IX/UW* (1915).
Cortesy of Hilma af Klint Foundation. Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden.

From 1906 to 1915 she created the series of *Paintings for the Temple*, consisting of 193 paintings organized into various sub-themes. The first group included a set of paintings in which she confined herself to the colors yellow, blue and green, entitled *Primordial Chaos* (1906). This was followed by *The Ten Largest* (1907–1908), consisting of ten large paintings in which she depicted the four stages of life from infancy to old age using symbolic language, and *The Dove* (1915) (Almqvist – Belfrage 2020, 21–24) [Fig. 1]. The artist stated that the works were made in a context beyond the physically visible, as her hand was directed by spiritual entities: “The pictures were painted directly through me, without any preliminary drawings and with great force. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict; nevertheless, I worked swiftly and surely, without changing a single brushstroke” (Müller-Westermann – Widoff 2013, 38). In this collection she deals with themes such as duality, universal unity, macrocosm and microcosm, trying to make visible by automatic drawings what exists on a level that eye cannot see.

However, between 1908 and 1912 she interrupted painting in order to study Christianity in depth, and this was reflected in the later groups. With *The Swan and the Dove* and *Parsifal*, she initiates an irreversible process towards sacred geometry, expressing the much looked-for unity by means of Christian symbols which become more and more recognizable, with an emphasis on the dove, the swan, the Latin cross and the contrast between black and white [Figs. 2–3]. In the second she also focuses on the search for knowledge, with particular attention to the circularity of the process, a clear recurrence of Christian mystical language.



Figs. 2–3. Hilma af Klint: *The Swan*, No. 1 (left) and No. 8 (right), Group IX/SUW (1915).
Cortesy of Hilma af Klint Foundation. Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden.

Notebooks and mystical language

Hilma af Klint's visual artwork reveals a continuous contact with religion and mysticism. We have discussed her paintings, but how does this relationship show up in her notebooks, and what results of her research were so significant that she wrote down the "+x" symbols and asked for them to be covered up?

In added to all of that mentioned above, one event in the artist's life and work that took place between 1896 and 1907 stands out. In those years Hilma became involved in spiritual practice in a more personal way as a member of the group The Five [De Fem] or "The Friday Group" [Fredagsgruppen]. The five friends met weekly for religious discussions that concluded in séances. Photographs of the rooms where the meetings took place show different altars with highly symbolic objects of a nature. One of them shows a table draped in white tablecloth and decorated with roses, lilies and palm leaves, as well as candles and a crucifix in the center. Above and on the wall is the image of Christ kneeling in Gethsemane (Sarriugarte-Gómez 2019, 91).

Usually, one of them went into a trance to communicate with sacred spirits and wrote down the messages given to her by these entities, which they named and distinguished clearly. It was at this time that she started practicing automatic writing, which later developed into automatic drawings. When the group disbanded, Af Klint continued to contact these spirits and they instructed her to paint some of their pictures.

From all these investigations of non-visible planes, a notebook that Hilma made between 1919 and 1920 is particularly original. In 1927 the artist decided to donate the original to the archive of Natural Sciences at Rudolf Steiner's Goetheanum in Dornach, which proves that the contents demonstrated in this notebook were of particular importance to her (Burgin 2018, 160). *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichens* is not a notebook written by mystical experience, but a notebook in which Hilma af Klint describes all her knowledge obtained from these experiences.

Even though it contains generalized information, it constitutes evidence of the continued presence of Hilma's mystical language as she uses several Christian concepts. Her annotations are arranged with an interesting aesthetic intention. In the manner of a diary, she makes a symbolic drawing and inscribes a brief explanation of its meaning. The artist distributes the notes in an astonishingly harmonious way: she divides the pages into two sections, top and bottom, so that when the notebook is opened, the notes are ordered in a quadrangular pattern. With them she makes numerous allusions to concepts such as love of life, paternal and fraternal care, balance, harmony, willpower, humility, hope and many others, which she calls "directional lines".

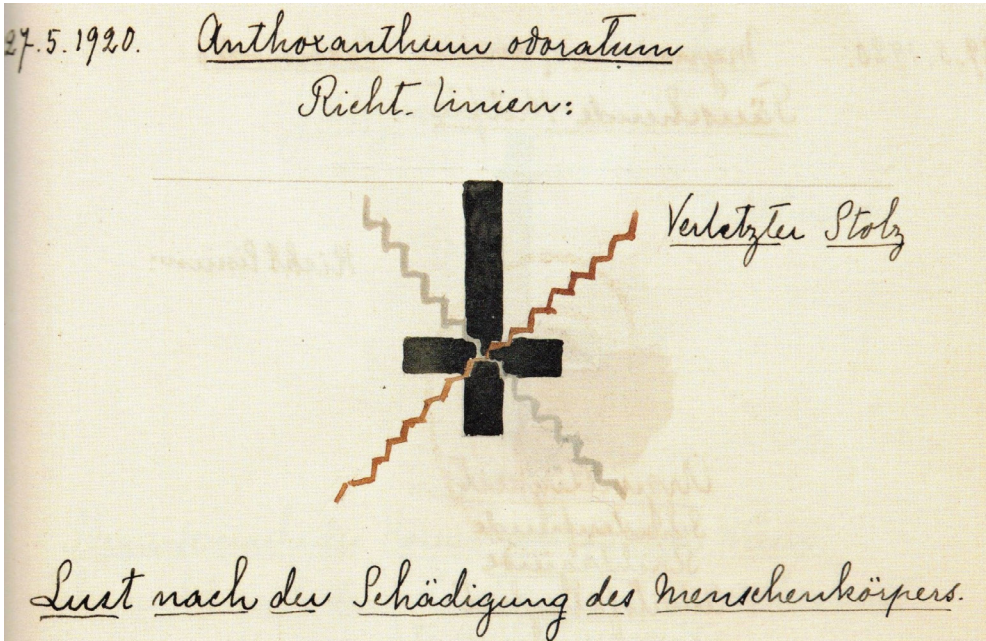


Fig. 4. Hilma af Klint: from a work on *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichen* (May 27, 1920).
Cortesy of Hilma af Klint Foundation. Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden.

In May-June 1920, in *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichens*, she completed a collection of descriptions of Christian symbols dominated by a Latin cross in different perspectives and dimensions and of different colors to which she gave meaning. Thus, in the space dedicated to 27 May [Fig. 4], we found that an inverted cross traversed by lightning bolts represents “injured pride [and] desire for injury to the human body” (Klint 1920, 55).

Among these Christian revelations we also find the design of four concentric circles supported by the following description: “xxxx Into this field enters he who desires truth/ xxx Into this field enters he who believes in truth/ xx Into this field enters he who follows truth/ x Into this field enters he who forgets everything because of truth” (Klint 1920: 52). Each of the verses depicts one of the circles, from outer to inner. In other words, each circle represents a closer approach to the truth, so the inner one contains all of them.

On the following page, the artist draws the same design, but now she places four x’s in the position of the cardinal directions in the second inner circle [Fig. 5]. According to the inscription for each mark, the x’s represent the four Evangelists. In this way, she adds the next clarifications:

John, more than the others, possessed belief in his ability to receive awareness / Mark tried to show that earthly bliss can be won only through distribution of the power of

one's own being / Matthew. Grateful reception of enlightenment / Luke tried to show that dullness can be overcome through a desire for the elevation of the life of feelings (Klint 1920, 53).

The position of each mark suggests that these biblical figures are located in the concentric circle identified on the previous page with the description: "...who follows truth." Indeed, as followers of Jesus, Hilma considers that they follow truth. Moreover, she draws twelve connecting lines between this circle and the internal one. By this she implies that the first circle refers to Jesus, as he is the only one "who forgets everything because of truth", and in the second circle are not only the Evangelists but all the apostles of Jesus. In this way the artist represents her own interpretation of searching for the truth, which could only be God, as one of the results of her research into divine nature and her mystical experiences.

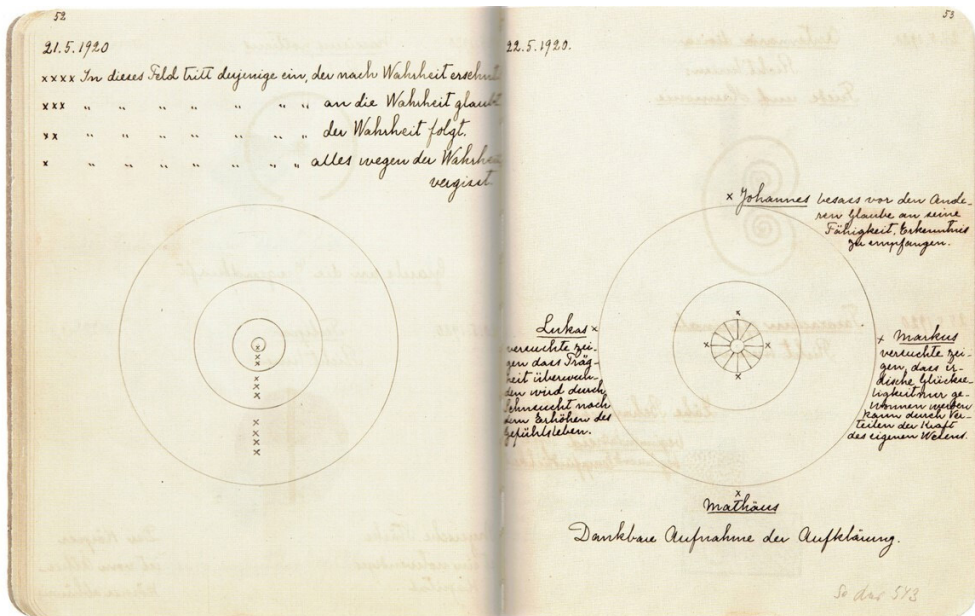


Fig. 5. Hilma af Klint: from a work on *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichen* (May 21, 1920).
Cortesy of Hilma af Klint Foundation. Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden.

Conclusion

Hilma af Klint explored new horizons at the beginning of the twentieth century and developed abstract imagery even before the so-called precursors of abstract art (Müller-Westermann – Widoff 2013, 33). According to the above, we can affirm

that mysticism in Hilma af Klint's artwork refers to her religious experience and her process of searching for answers about existence by contacting supraterrrestrial spirits. Although the identity of these beings is not clear, their affinity with the Christian religion is certain. Her notebook *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichens* compiles the results of her research into the origin of natural things. Our analysis shows that these investigations are related to the search for and representation of the absent in a spiritual and divine sense.

The artist aims to illustrate a spiritual dimension of existence combining Christian elements with metaphysical and, in particular, anthroposophical ones. In a certain way her work could be reflected in the words of Rudolf Steiner: "Just as the physical eye owes it to the sun that it can see what is within the reach of its visual power, so the Christian mystic says to himself: 'I lift up my inner self so that I may behold the Divine'" (1984, 164). Definitely, dullness of senses caused by the ecstasy of the Way of Union implies some difficulties to describe the experience and what Hilma af Klint did to achieve this was to combine shapes and colours with symbols and words.

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THE MYSTICAL MEANING OF THE TABLE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

REINTERPRETATION OF THE LANGUAGE OF GIVING AND RECEIVING

Eva Pariláková

ABSTRACT

The author interprets two forms of figurativeness of the mystical experience – the touch of man with the spiritual world, God, and the experience of amazement at being – by analysing the symbol of the table in contemporary art. The author first identifies the figurativeness of the fragmentary experience contrary to the mystical experience. Subsequently, she examines the mystical table in the icon of the *Trinity* by Andrei Rublev as a symbol of sacred hospitality and the eucharistic sacrifice. She also examines the icon's philosophy as a meeting of the human and the transcendent world (Florensky, Trubeckoi, Evdokimov etc.). Finally, she explains the signs of the figurativeness of the mystical semantics of the table in three contemporary paintings (Jakabčič, Podhorský). These include, for example, Christian allusions, visual minimalism, white colour, contemplative immobility, mysterious to paradoxical imaginations, or the expressive-symbolic use of red and blue.

KEYWORDS

Mystical meaning of the table. Andrei Rublev's *Trinity*. Contemporary art. Integration of paradoxes. Visual minimalism. Meaningfulness of being. Amazement at being.

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In my study, I will try to answer the question of when the motif of the table is transformed into a potentially mystical symbol. In other words, how this everyday object participates in evoking the figurativeness of mystical experience. At the same time, I will indicate two possible forms of this figurativeness, which however cannot

be completely separated from each other because they intersect. These are mysticism as an expression of man's touching the spiritual world, God, and mysticism as an experience of the sanctity of life and amazement at being.

The “laboratory” table – the antithesis of mystical experience

Paradoxically, I have decided to start with a work that expresses a complete contradiction to the mystical experience. Although I will continue to work mostly with fine art, it is a poem in prose called *Still Life* by Polish author Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998). This comparison is possible not only in view of a certain analogy between the lyrical and artistic image, but also the name referring to the traditional artistic genre. The poem reads:

With thoughtful carelessness, they scattered on the table those shapes violently torn from life: a fish, an apple, a bunch of vegetables mixed with flowers. To this they added a dead leaf of light and a little bird with a bloodied head. That bird clutches a little planet in its fossilized claws, composed of emptiness and occupied air.¹

What understanding of life is conveyed by the motif of the table in this poem? It is a laboratory table, a “table-storage space”, even a “table-chaos”, which represents a purely pragmatic relationship with the world, a fragmentary vision and its consequences. The original meaning of the Slovak word *zátišie* [still life] is: 1. a quiet, secluded place, 2. an aesthetic grouping of objects, 3. an image of inanimate objects grouped usually on a table.² From the above definitions, the poem resonates primarily with the third: It is certainly not a peaceful collection of things, but their being inanimate and accented, a decrease in their value, which is primarily associated with the fact that they are plucked from their original context of life and chaotically placed on the table. This degradation is also evident from the various expressions that name the way in which the elements are manipulated – “scattered”, “added”, “violently”, “torn from”, “bloodied”. This indicates a significantly increasing aggression, at the same time, since in terms of its genre it resembles both a rational description of the workflow and a marked alienation from these particular objects and things (they are referred to only as “shapes”). The seriousness of the situation is demonstrated when spirituality and death are devalued: The metaphor of the “dead leaf of light” sounds

1 Trans. from Slovak into English by Eva Pariláková, inspired by translation of Alissa Valles, Czesław Miłosz and Peter Dale Scott (2008). Trans. from Polish into Slovak by Marián Milčák and Peter Milčák: „S premyslenou nedbanlivosťou vysypali na stôl tie tvary násilím odtrhnuté od života: rybu, jablko, hrst' zeleniny pomiešanej s kvetmi. K tomu pridali mŕtvy list svetla a malého vtáka so skrvačenou hlavou. Ten vták zvierá v skamenených pazúroch malú planétu vytvorenú z prázdnoty a obsadeného vzduchu“ (2009, 87). This article was translated by Richard Swales.

2 <https://slovník.juls.savba.sk/>

like a sad dramatic attraction, because by breaking away from its source, the essence of spirituality has actually been destroyed. The image of a small bird with a bloodied head, in addition to a similar total negation of the spirituality (the bird as a symbol of soul, spirit) evokes not only a symptom of extreme brutality and numbness (to kill a small bird), but also a certain morbidity (to exhibit the injured dead body). In this way, the motif does not act as a symbol of meaningful sacrifice, since it only serves as the object of a painting (which can also be a hidden criticism of how art can be used to destroy living reality).

Further evidence of this deadly distancing is the use of a third-person plural to express a lyrical subject. It is a concealed “they”, representing us, the people who treat the world in this way as a kind of used and worthless, in Buber’s sense (see Buber 2005). The lyrical subject in question only puts or scatters the individual objects on the table, but does not sit at the table, so does not have a fundamental involvement in things. Most worrying, then, is the reason for such an approach, which is called “thoughtful carelessness”. A careless, negligent person is one who does not pay enough attention to someone or something, a person that is tepid, indifferent, unaware; who is, at the same time, a person who is disordered. Synonymously, this word even refers to terms such as confusing, non-harmonious, superficial, or even bad.³ Above all, however, the cause of concern lies in the fact that such a relationship with the world is “thought out”, that is, with a deliberate and important role of human thinking. However, it is precisely such a one-sided, rather pragmatic approach to the world that makes a person an alienated being expressed by the pronoun “they”. There is no act of giving and receiving, just taking from life. It is therefore an external, prey-mechanical relationship to the world, as labelled by Pavel A. Florensky (2011, 228). The consequence for mankind is then the loss of movement, the death of life (the image of fossilized claws), its emptiness and the impossibility not only of spirituality, but even of existence itself. Just as expressed by the final image of the planet with occupied air (there is an etymological link in Slavic languages between breathing and spirituality) (see Bor 1993). So when is the table motif transformed into a mystical symbol?

Mystical table of the icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev – sanctified hospitality and the eucharistic sacrifice

If we were looking for a picture to be the archetype of a mystical table, it would surely be the table on Rublev’s icon of the Trinity [Fig. 1]. This icon depicts God in the form

3 Cf. <https://slovník.juls.savba.sk/>

of three Divine persons (hypostases) sitting together around the table on which a chalice lies with the head of a calf, or lamb. Several interpretations state that they are depicted in a dynamic relationship of giving and receiving mutual love. It is this relationship that translates the table into a hospitable and eucharistic space and the chalice with the slaughtered animal into sacred gifts of sacrifice.



Fig. 1. Andrei Rublev: *The Trinity* (1411 or 1425–27), tempera, 142 cm × 114 cm.
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Mystical symbols of the icon

At this point, the aim is not to address all the comprehensive meanings of the icon. I will therefore focus on the main features that confirm the figurativeness of the mystical experience. Most viewers confirm that the image is saturated with a special radiation, a contemplative and peaceful atmosphere, but also a distinctive, silent secret associated mainly with the triple depiction of a single God. In that regard, Špidlík states: “The apophatic, that is to say, the silence on the inner reality of the Trinity, concerned not only the inability of the human language to pronounce it, but above all the astonishing enormity of the Trinity itself, the acceptance of this astonishing secret” (Špidlík – Rupnik 2004, 25).

The ability of a work to suggest a mystical experience is already made possible by the nature of the medium – it is an image that, by its character, distorts the common causality, the linearity of thought. The picture is silent. It speaks, but in its own language. An icon is understood as an image-word that is not painted but written, so it is a specific type of language. The etymology of the word icon also indicates its mystical basis – it means not only “depiction”, “form” or “parable”, but also “seeing”, “revelation” and “vision” (Luptáková 2011, 9). The icon’s philosophy then reveals its harmonising potential, its ability to unify paradoxes. It is a visual transformation of the whole being into a transformed, sacramental state through composition, colours and above all golden light. It is also reported that it is an eschatological vision of the world, transfiguration, radiation of traditional living forms, a place to meet “face to face”. According to Trubeckoi, “the icon is the artistic incarnation of the ideal, deeply meaningful being” (Luptáková, 2011, 44), Florensky considers “the icon is the supreme artful symbol of spiritual reality, the which is not just a ‘window’ into another world, but itself is the witness of this world” (2000, 9). Špidlík says that the icon is “a fact in which divine and human permeation in mutual communication captures the work of redemption in history in its truest features” (2004, 11).

I will now briefly list other, rather formal, signs of mystical experience in the icon: understanding gold as an expression of divinity and transformation into godhead (“the mysticism of icons is the mainly mysticism of the sun”, “the golden colour of sun denotes the centre of divine life”; Trubeckoi 2011, 82); exploiting the inverted perspective with which the icon draws the viewer into his being, opening up in depth to infinite eternity; the absence of shadow as an expression of the reality of salvation, which arises from the gradual application of brighter layers to the initially dark elements and figures; the calm immobility of the figures, which refers to contemplation and the achievement of real inner joy and freedom. In this context, about the essence of the icon, Evdokimov says:

Religious art in the West is the art of depiction, while in The East it the art of the present time. The icon is an open window into an unseen world, and the technique of its creation requires it to progress from the first dark outline, into which brighter parts are

added, thereby giving an ever brighter light till it achieves the brightness of the reflective splendour of the divine secret. There is no shadow here, because in a changed world everything descends into pure transparency, nothing bad can be hidden. No source of light is here, because the icon itself is a painted in light and it becomes what it is at the cost of a slow emergence towards the light (2013, 26).

Mystical symbols (of the table) of Rublev's *Trinity*

What are the other, now specific signs of mystical figurativeness in Rublev's *Trinity* itself? Here, too, we are witnessing its unifying action, that is, its ability to integrate semantic paradoxes. I will mention at least three: 1. The icon expresses the mysterious fact of the three-in-one essence of God, as stated by Špidlík (2004, 26) "it is a community and a single thing". (This is shown by the three figures of angels, who, despite their different position at the table and the colour of the clothes, have the same face and are connected through the blue colour of the garment as an expression of their spirituality, divinity.) 2. The image expresses eternity, but with linear reading from left to right, it expresses the history of spirituality/salvation at the same time – from the Father, through Christ to the Holy Spirit. 3. The icon tells the old-testament story of Abraham and Sarah and the new-testament story of Christ simultaneously. Thus, the meeting of profane and sacral as sacred hospitality, which ultimately gives a new life, intersects with the encounter of the three-in-one God with mankind through the dynamic relationship of Love with its highest expression, eucharistic sacrifice.

The potential of the mystical meaning of the table in Rublev's icon is then represented by its central position and vibrant gold colour. It is a light dominant and at the same time highlights the chalice itself with the sacrificial animal. However, the true mystical sense of the table begins to be manifested only with the presence of God's three hypostases and the dynamics of their mutually peaceful views. As viewers, we are directly involved: Our gaze goes from the chalice to the hand of Christ above it, then to the whole figure (Christ is connected in red with the chalice – so we have the eucharist expressed twice – as a sign of a mystical paradox). Christ looks at the Father, the Father at the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit again returns its gaze on the table with a chalice, while in front of the table it seems as if there is still a blank space left as a silent challenge for the viewer themselves. Each of God's hypostases has a chalice and has participation in the eucharistic sacrifice, but each participates in it in a different way, which is also indicated by the different proximity of hands to the table. The side figures even act as if they are sitting on the table, physically touching it, as an even more formable expression of this community of Love.

In the above-mentioned signs of the figurativeness of the mystical experience of Rublev's icon, there is also indirectly a fundamental difference in the understanding of life compared to that evoked by the still life motif in Herbert's poem. Herbert's still life depicts a crowded table with degraded things that carry indistinguishability,

chaos and a dramatic absence of meaning. However, the almost empty table with a chalice in Rublev's *Trinity*, also referred to as "life-giving", brings closer the mystical experience of the reawakening Love and Harmony between God and man, or the whole universe, integrating it into the meaningful relationships of being. In this way, Marina Luptáková states: "All basic materials used in iconography are chosen with a great deal of attention. 'Cain's' incompetence of sorting, negligence and satisfaction with what he did first time is unacceptable and seen by icon painters as the sin of indiscrimination, of mixing all things" (2011, 39).

The symbolic table with allusions towards mystical experience

I will now focus on three contemporary paintings in which mystical experience can be referenced through the motif of the table. However, this is more about the allusions, which are associated with the diminishing or even absence of explicit signs of Christian symbolism. I will interpret one in more detail, I will reflect on two only briefly.

Michal Jakabčič: *White Dream (Picture)* (1983)

The first work has a dominant white colour and therefore is characterized by an atmosphere of peace, silence and meditative immobility – despite the dramatic black area and the evocative inanimateness of the bird [Fig. 2]. Before I point out that a distinctive version of the mystical experience is shown here, I shall first interpret the semantics of the table and the objects that are laid out on it. It is the still body of the bird, which is upside down – that is, in the space of the black side of the table, coloured dark – that signals that the symbol of the table will express the essence of being as the combined duality of life and death. The suggestiveness of displaying a table consists in integrating the narrower black area at the bottom, which is associated with negativity, difficulty and extinction with a larger top that is white and refers more to life and a world filled with light. We are already offered a first reference to the mystical understanding of being, in which life seems to have grown out of darkness and death, or perhaps darkness is an essential part of it.

That the table could represent life is also signalled by the possibility of reading elements on the table from left to right, where the cups refer to our various possibilities and inequalities at birth (although one glass is higher, the other already has a plant in it as a symbol of growth), and the dead bird signals that eventually life ends in death



Fig. 2. Michal Jakabčič: *White Dream (Picture)* (1983), oil on canvas, 105 cm x 120 cm.
Private Property. Author of photography/reproduction: Peter Paško.

for all. The two glasses also refer to the need for a close interpersonal relationship, again as mutual giving and receiving, and the motionless bird to a kind of mysterious and necessary sacrifice.

If we continue to read further linearly, another element is the figure seated on the right. She is directly related to the things on table, and according to her calm expression, it seems like she understands the nature of life. The figure seems somehow angelic, childish and feminine, a bit like a Christological figure (her sitting at a table with glasses and with the dead body of a bird leads us to reflections on the archetype of the eucharist and to the image of *The Last Supper*). The figure's eyes are blankly blue, evoking heaven and spirituality, looking up at us, but not at us. It's like they're saying something about our living space, its nature that we don't see yet. It is so obvious from the image that there is more than the "table story" – there is an entire white background that occupies most of the area of the image, thereby emphasising immenseness, openness and a hopeful perspective. However, it also acts intensively as a kind of mysterious spiritual space, as confirmed by the

symbol of the butterfly referring not only to the soul, but also to the resurrection. The fact that such a spiritual space is constantly present here is also signalled by the fact that its white colour permeates all the elements present (except the black side of the table, which, however, is embedded in the white environment). This points to their transformed inner state similar to the spiritual state of the figures and elements on a traditional icon, which are symbolically transformed by golden brightening. It is the peculiar figure resembling of Christ that, with his position at the table and the view up, becomes a kind of mediator between the paradoxical duality of life and death, growth and extinction, and this hopeful reality of a white-transformed world.

Rastislav Podhorský: *Small ends healing* (2013)

In the triptych by Rastislav Podhorský the figurativeness of the mystical experience becomes even more hidden [Figs. 3–4]. The calm kneeling of the figure on the table with a white napkin is reminiscent of prayer, but also a eucharistic sacrifice. This is confirmed not only by the brown T-shirt of the male figure, but also by two other scenes belonging to the triptych, on which the figures complete the missing ends of the bread with parts of their bodies. The hands of an invisible figure also contribute to the mystery of the act, which support the young man's knees so that he is able to kneel. A kind of banal gymnastic exercise turns these spiritual features into a peculiar mystical experience of being as a paradox that the instability of a person's life is mysteriously received, balanced and harmonized in the act of humility and giving sacrifice.

Rastislav Podhorský: *Untitled* (2019–2021)

In the third image from the same author, we see an incomplete portrait of a figure in a red dress sitting behind a table, which has a bowl filled with similarly coloured liquid just in front of it [Fig. 5]. Despite the fact that only part of her head is shown, it seems as if she's turning to call someone. The bearer of the figurativeness of the mystical experience here is primarily the mass of red colour, which ceases to be the surface of ordinary clothes, but mysteriously changes from a symbol of physicality to real blood, the basic fluid of our physical being. Such a bowl is therefore no longer just an ordinary drink, but again refers to the eucharistic symbol – a chalice filled with wine. At the same time, the original concept of sacrifice as an ordeal is also recreated here, evoking a direct, corporeal even naturalistic, interference with the human body. The fact that it is a mystical giving is later confirmed by the paradoxical but for that all the stronger point of the image: In the area of the chest, or perhaps the heart of the figure, there is an oval drip formation of sky blue colour, which reveals to us a kind of deeper layer of the body of the figure. So it's as if giving ourselves to others enables us to reveal our true spiritual essence.





Figs. 3–4. Rastislav Podhorský: *Small ends healing* (2013), oil and pencil on paper, 29,7 cm × 21 cm. In the author's archive. Author of photography/reproduction: Rastislav Podhorský.



Fig. 5. Rastislav Podhorský: *Untitled* (2019–2021), acrylic, ink and pencil on paper, 17 cm × 23 cm. In the author's archive. Author of photography/reproduction: Rastislav Podhorský.

Conclusion: the world as a mystical table of amazement at being – from still life to little corners

At the beginning of the study, I stated that I would point to one more form of mystical experience. Mysticism as an experience of the sanctity of life and amazement at being. I will therefore conclude my thinking with a short reflection of Czesław Miłosz's poem *By a Spring*, which expresses it in this more universal form. At the same time, it is fundamentally different from the experience in Herbert's poem *Still Life*. The poem reads:

Clear water glistens on the stones
during spring in the middle of a high forest.
In the sun, ferns glitter on the shore,
the leaves grow into immense shape,
lances, swords,
hearts, shovels,
tongues, feathers,
grooves, teeth,
saws – who will say it all.
And those flowers! Whitish inflorescences,
blue goblets, sparkling stars,
roses, tassels.
Sit and watch
how bumblebees drill, at dragonfly flights,
sharp takeoffs of the flycatcher bird,
the rush of the black dung beetle in a tangle
of stems.
It seems to me that I hear the voice of the
demiurge:
“Be silent rocks as in the first day of creation,
or a life conditional on death
and the beauty that intoxicates you.”

(Miłosz 2014, 13; trans. by Richard Swales)

Priezračná voda žblnká na kameňoch
na jar uprostred vysokého lesa.
V slnku sa na brehu trblietajú paprade,
lístie sa vrši do nesmierneho tvaru,
kopijovité, mečovité,
srdcovité, lopatkovité,
jazykovité, perovité,
drážkované, zúbkované,
pílkovité – kto to všetko vypovie.
A tie kvety! Belavé súkvetia,
modré kalichy, iskrivožlté hviezdy,
ružičky, strapce.
Sediť a pozerat',
ako sa zvrátajú čmeliaky, na prelety vážok,
prudké vzlety muchárika,
náhlenie čierneho lajniaka v spleti
stoniek.
Zdá sa mi, že počujem hlas
demiurga:
„Buď nemé skaly ako v prvom dni stvorenia,
alebo život, ktorého podmienkou je smrť
i tá krása, čo ťa opája.“

(trans. into Slovak by Marián Milčák
and Peter Milčák)

The lyrical subject here observes in detail and tenderly the small natural elements in their original context, which brings him the experience of amazement over being – its variety, colour, meaningful dynamics, but also mysterious order. The uniqueness of the experience is also confirmed by the hyperbolised expression of “immense”, the awareness of the limited nature of his own human language (“who will say it all”) and the euphoric emotionality expressed by a brief exclamation, disturbing the usual

syntax (“And those flowers!”). Finally, this method of observation is translated by the lyrical subject into a peculiar internal state that already transcends his immediate visual perception and reveals to him the deeper position of reality captured by a kind of inner hearing (“it seems to me that I hear the voice of a demiurge”). It is a mystical experience of beauty as amazement at the interconnectedness and meaningfulness of being, of which lowness is also a natural part (the image of the rush of the black dung beetle) and death. Part of the verse “the beauty that intoxicates you” metaphorically expresses the analogy between enchantment and intoxication, while at the same time re-evoking wine as a symbol of the eucharist. The lyrical subject is in a state of receiving, not taking, and the world understands it as a mystical table filled with gifts. This penetrates to the very source of the mystical experience, and the original motif of the spring as a source of water in the poem suddenly turns into a symbol of God’s presence, which gives everything life.

A small rectangle is placed on the front of the Eucharist table of Rublev’s icon. According to traditional interpretations, it symbolizes the universe. This element refers to the fact that the whole created world is included in this deep triple mystery of Love. That mystery, which the lyrical subject in Miłosz’s poem is revealed for a moment, in the hopeful period of spring, by subtly observing the natural little corner by one clear spring.

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Rastislav Podhorský: *Small ends healing* (Zacelenie končekov, 2013), oil and pencil on paper, 29,7 cm × 21 cm.

In: <http://www.rastislavpodhorsky.sk/>

Rastislav Podhorský: *Untitled* (2019–2021), acrylic, ink and pencil on paper, 17 cm × 23 cm. In:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=4271212566232588&set=pb.100000316599595.-2207520000.&type=3>

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