

Article

Don Quixote and Saint John of the Cross's Spiritual Chivalry[†]

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Abstract: Despite its ludic appearance, “The adventure Don Quixote had with a dead body” (part I, chapter XIX) is one of the most complex pieces of Cervantes’ famous novel. In the midst of a dark night, the Manchegan knight errant confronts an otherworldly procession of robed men carrying torches who transport a dead “knight” on a bier. Don Quixote attacks them to “avenge” the mysterious dead man, discovering they were priests secretly taking the body from Baeza to Segovia. He wants to see face to face the relic of the dead body, but humbly turns his back, avoiding the “close encounter”. Curiously enough, his easy victory renders him sad. Cervantes is alluding to the secret transfer of St. John of the Cross’ body from Úbeda to Segovia, claimed by the devoted widow Doña Ana de Peñalosa. However, Cervantes is also establishing a surprising dialogue with St. John’s symbolic “dark night”, in which he fights as a brave mystical knight. Concurrently, he is quoting the books of chivalry’s funeral processions and the curiosity of the occasional knight who wants to glance at the dead body. Furthermore, we see how extremely conversant the novelist is with the religious genre of spiritual chivalry, strongly opposed to the loose fantasy of the books of chivalry. Unable to look at St. John’s relic, an authentic knight of the heavenly militia, Don Quixote seems to silently acknowledge that there are higher chivalries than his own that he will never reach. No wonder he ends the adventure with a sad countenance, gaining a new identity as the “Caballero de la Triste Figura”.

Keywords: books of chivalry; books of spiritual chivalry; dark night of the soul; Caballero de la Triste Figura (Knight of the Sad Countenance); St. John of the Cross



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And so, Señor, it's better to be a humble friar, in any order at all, than a valiant knight errant (II, VIII: p. 508).¹

1. A Bit of History: The Transfer of Saint John of the Cross's Remains from Úbeda to Segovia

We are in the middle of a *dark night* in the year 1593. It is literally the middle of a *dark midnight* since we have a record of the time of the events. The remains of Saint John of the Cross are furtively transferred across isolated and deserted lands from Úbeda, where he died, to Segovia. The Court Marshal, Don Juan de Medina Ceballos, is guarding the remains, now turned into relic, along with the guards and companions who are carrying it on a litter. They avoid the main path to Madrid so as not to be seen, and take different lanes and detours through Jaén, Martos, and Montilla. When they arrive in Martos, on a high hill, not too far away from the road, a man appears unexpectedly and shouts loudly: “Where are you carrying that corpse, you wicked mob? Leave the friar’s remains you are taking away . . .”² (Pasquau 1960, p. 2).³ This startling appearance “made the Marshal and his companions feel so fearful and alarmed that their hairs stood on end”⁴ (Fernández Navarrete 1819, pp. 78–79). Later, down the road, when they reach a deserted field, another man appears unexpectedly and, once more, the entourage is asked to give an account of

what they are carrying: Medina and his companions answer they have superior orders to remain undercover, but the man keeps asking them questions. In the middle of these disturbing encounters, the person carrying the bier notices that the small box containing the Saint's remains is surrounded by shining lights.

The upsetting night scene sparkled with strange lights inevitably conjures up "the adventure Don Quixote had with a dead body" (I, XIX), which is transferred by men draped in mourning from Baeza to Segovia. In the middle of the dark night, the gentleman bursts onto the road where the entourage, muttering and holding burning torches, is carrying the mysterious "dead knight". I have quoted Don Quixote's literal words, and they should be noted since his way of referring to the enigmatic corpse as "knight" does not seem fortuitous. The gentleman couches his lance, positions himself in Rocinante's saddle, and, raising his voice, complains to the "shirted men" (making reference to the priests dressing surplices who escorted the dead body): "Halt, O knights, or whomsoever you may be, and give an account of yourselves: from whence you come, whither you are going, and whom you carry on that bier . . ." (I, XIX, p. 136). Don Quixote's appearance and questioning closely concur with the testimony of the first witnesses who declared about the life of the venerable Friar John of the Cross in the deposition for his beatification process.

Did Cervantes know about the surreptitious transfer of the Reformer's remains that took place in mid-1593, two years after the Saint died?⁵ That is what many Cervantists believe, based on the pioneer study of Martín [Fernández Navarrete](#) (1819), the first scholar who suggested the connection between the Reformer's historical transfer to Segovia and the episode in chapter XIX of the first part of *Quixote*. It is highly probable that Cervantes was aware of the events, since he was in Úbeda for the wheat harvest in 1592, the year after the friar's death and right before his remains were furtively carried to Segovia in the middle of the night ([Sánchez 1990](#), p. 21). The events around the death of the future Saint John were so notorious that they would inevitably reach his ears: on the one hand, he was Saint Teresa's Reform companion and confessor, who died in the odor of sanctity, and, on the other hand, he was the author of a profound mystical work with no precedents in the Peninsula. The clandestine transfer of his body aroused a heated dispute between Úbeda and Segovia, where he was secretly taken after dying unexpectedly from a "pestilential fever". Let us remember the cause of his death, for I will refer to it later.

Doña Ana de Peñalosa, who received spiritual direction from the Saint and was the addressee of *The Living Flame of Love*, is the person who plans the removal of the body from the convent in Úbeda where he was buried. The devoted widow, to whom Saint John addresses his last letter, had arranged with Friar Doria, Prior General of the Carmelite Order, that wherever Saint John died, his body would be transferred to Segovia. She wanted him to rest in the monastery he had founded in his hometown along with his brother, the Royal Council judge, Don Luis de Mercado. Naturally, the task would not be easy as Úbeda was logically reluctant to resign the Saint's corporeal relic. However, after he died, Doña Ana made the appropriate diligences with Friar Nicolás de Jesús María, Vicar General of the Reform, so that the body could be transferred without any suspicion to Segovia, his hometown ([Rodríguez Marín 1949](#), chp. IX, pp. 226–30).⁶

The secret transfer was planned to be performed nine months after the Reformer's death; yet, the people involved found out that the body was "so incorrupt, fresh and intact, and with such a wonderful fragrance and aroma, that the transfer was postponed, and the body was covered with lime and soil so it could be verified later without any issues"⁷ ([Fernández Navarrete 1819](#), p. 78). Already in mid-1593, Court Marshal Medina Ceballos, who was sent from Madrid "with a high sense of justice", found out that the body was leaner and drier, but with the same "fragrance and aroma, so he placed the remains in a suitcase to hide them better"⁸ when they removed the body from the convent (Ibid.). The "suitcase" was actually a wooden box, but as it "was [. . .] small, they folded the legs for the body to fit in, and thus he was carried".⁹ However, the story continues, because Úbeda did not surrender the body and established a dispute with Segovia. The serious misunderstanding over the Reformer's remains reached Rome: in 1596, Clement

VIII issued a Papal Brief *Expositum nobis fuit* that ordered for the body to be brought back to Úbeda. Even though the request was quite explicit, Úbeda could not manage to get the body back: Bishop Don Bernardo de Sandoval y Roxas promised he would comply with the Brief, but he considered it convenient to treat the complex issue in a friendly way. The diplomatic negotiation brought so many delays that the final decision about the transfer was prolonged. Úbeda finally settled for a hand and a tibia of the Reformer's body (Pasquau 1960, p. 2).¹⁰

2. Cervantes and the *mystici majores* of the Golden Age: St. Teresa of Jesus, Fr. Luis de Leon, and St. John of the Cross

Such a bitter litigation, which became known even in Rome, was probably noticed by Cervantes, especially if we consider that he was an admirer of the Spanish mystics, who were his contemporaries. Through Calliope (Cervantes Saavedra 1903, *Galatea*, Book VI), Cervantes sings a panegyric that leaves no doubt about his literary devotion to Friar Luis de Leon:

FRAY LUIS DE LEÓN it is I sing,

Whom I love and adore, to whom I cling. (*Galatea*, p. 240)

The same can be said about Mother Teresa of Teresa of Jesus (1946), whose works had been edited by the famous Augustinian: on the occasion of her beatification in 1614, while he was writing the second *Quixote*, Cervantes composes in his old age a song in which he celebrates, quite knowingly, the Reformer's mystic ecstasies:

One could say that you were born in Alba;

since the just are born where they die.

From Alba, o Mother! You left for Heaven:

Pure, beautiful dawn,¹¹ followed by the clear day of immense joy;

that you enjoy Him is just fair,

in ecstasies divine,

on all roads

where God knows how to guide a soul,

to give her as much of Him as she can hold,

and even broadens and dilates and makes her bog

and with soft love

to Him and of Him holds her and enriches¹²

Yet, and despite the fact that he wrote saintly poetry during his Algerian captivity, "the precise contours of Cervantes' religiosity have yet to be identified" (Iffland 1995, p. 2630). Few aspects are more elusive than the intimate spirituality of Spain's main novelist. In any case, the mystic revelations of St Teresa that Cervantes celebrates in verse form let us know that he was not a total stranger to the high mysteries of the soul. This familiarity with the spiritual world is also evident in Don Quixote's descent into the Cave of Montesinos (*Quixote*, II, XXII–XXIV). In spite of its being a parody, critics have read the adventure as an initiatory scene. Cervantes subsumes the hidalgo from La Mancha in an altered state with oneiric overtones and has him discover that inside the cave—his own inner self—there is a transparent crystal castle.

Of course, there are plenty of shiny castles in chivalry novels (*Amadís de Gaula* and *Florisel de Niquea* (Silva 1584), among others, come to mind); yet knights errant do not find them in states of deep introspection, but in the midst of their adventures instead. Don Quixote's fortress is, on the contrary, an "interior castle", and the precise lexicon and stylistic turn in the description resemble too closely that of St. Teresa's opening lines of her

Interior Castle. Where she says, “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” (*Interior Castle*, p. 201), Cervantes says, “Then there appeared before my eyes a royal and sumptuous palace or castle whose walls and ramparts seemed to be made of clear and transparent crystal.” (*Quixote*, II, XXIII, p. 605) Such is the very place where Montesinos takes Don Quixote; thus, the strange psychic adventure takes place, just as St. Teresa’s, inside a crystal castle.

The apparent parody of the Teresian symbol is a strange homage that Cervantes pays to the Saint. I insist on the intertextual dialogue with St. Teresa because a while later, behind the crystal walls of the castle, Don Quixote glimpses a strange procession. Belerma heads the pageant of mourning maidens. The charmed lady who leads the procession wears a long white turban and carries a relic in her hands—Durandarte’s mummified heart—while she sings lamenting dirges along with her maids. It could be a convent procession, only that the strange nuns’ headdresses have become sinister Turkish turbans within the enchanted cave.¹³ What is more, Belerma’s face is that of a middle-aged woman, beetle-browed, brittle colored, and with large eye bags. Such a description could recall Fr. John Misery’s 1576 description of St. Teresa, when she was already 61 years old.¹⁴ Legend holds that after seeing the painting, the saintly woman exclaimed, “God forgive you, Fr. John, since you had to paint me, you could have made me less ugly and eye-crusted”. What cannot be denied is that the painting shows a mature woman’s face, brittle colored, particularly thick brows, red lips, and deep eye bags. Such irreverence should not shock us: as José Gaos has pointed, Cervantes’ transformation of mystic writing into picaresque may seem irreverent, but it allows us to see that the novelist did not limit his parody to chivalry novels (Gaos 1979, p. 74). James Iffland observes this, and analyzes the carnivalization of the dead body episode: “This is exactly the point. And since Cervantes probably harbored affection, at a certain level, for the very genres he parodied, why cannot the same hold true when he turns his attention to mystical texts?” (Iffland 1995, p. 264). Even if we assume, with Américo Castro ([1925] 1972), that Cervantes must have been in love with the chivalry genre he parodied—no one reads passionately and with such attention to detail a genre that bores him—it is not difficult either to understand that behind these religious parodies there is an unconfessed love, an equivocal admiration. Maybe, also, an unconcealed spiritual nostalgia. I shall return to this point later.

I suspect that St. John’s texts, which circulated in manuscript, just as Fr. Luis’, would call Cervantes’ attention. Even if the Reformer’s works saw light in 1618 (except for the “Canticle”), it was usual practice to distribute copies of St. John’s writings among the Carmelite convents (Brenan 1973, p. 166). It is also possible that the manuscripts—or news about their content—may have reached Cervantes through her older sister, Luisa of Belén, who was a nun in Alcalá de Henares, where St. John was a Rector (Cannavagio 1987, p. 37).

The truth is Cervantes’ obsessive allusions to the cryptic lexicon of the dark night suggest he had a somewhat precise knowledge of St John’s work. Vicente Gaos (1971) and Arturo Marasso (1954) find echoes of St. John’s nocturnal vocabulary in Don Quixote’s night excursion in search of adventure, in Chapter II of the first part. Is this a spiritual knight who begins a *peregrinatio animae* in search of God? Don Quixote, as we will prove, seems to know about such nightly divine chivalry; Gaos even considers that the Reformer’s nocturnal lexicon is also present, though in a parodic fashion, in Maritornes’ meeting with the mule driver, which happens in the middle of a dark night.¹⁵

In his 1995 essay, Iffland carries out a detailed textual study that connects the dead body scene with the technical vocabulary in St John of the Cross’s *Dark Night*. His meticulous analysis excuses me from going further into this, though I must say that the obsession with St. John’s technical vocabulary was evident to me, too, each time I read it. It is difficult for a reader well-acquainted with the saint’s verses to not recognize that Cervantes must be alluding to the works of the Carmel Reformer. Of course, he did so between the lines, since it was a dangerous matter to quote from St. John of the Cross, whom St. Teresa referred to as “*mi senequita*”,¹⁶ in the same carnivalesque fashion as that employed in Don

Quixote's and Sancho's *funny book* (Russell 1969). Cervantes bordered on impropriety and even sacrilege.

He was risking the possibility of being found suspect of heterodoxy. This is because in those times, it was not easy to allude to St. John of the Cross, who was impeached *post mortem* due to the parallels found between his writings and those of the *alumbrados*.¹⁷ Several followers of St. John kept his name in strict silence when they quoted his poems.¹⁸ Friar Agustín Antolínez (1554–1626) comments on St. John's *Canticle*, his *Flame*, and the *Night* without ever mentioning the author; and up to this day, St John's scholars—Dom Philippe Chevalier, Ángel Custodio Vega, Jean Krynen, among others—debate such a strange omission. The omission is repeated by Sister Cecilia del Nacimiento (1570–1646), a Carmelite nun from Valladolid whose *Liras de la transformación del alma en Dios* (*Lyre on the Transformation of the Soul in God* [our translation]), commented on in two volumes, clearly show an imitation of St. John of the Cross. Like Friar Agustín, the nun never mentions her poetic mentor. They all ran the risk of self-incrimination, as the “heresiarch” Miguel de Molinos knew well when he in turn does not mention the name of the “doctor de las nada” (“doctor of Nothings”) to whom he owed much of his contemplative thought.¹⁹ It is thus highly probable that Cervantes knew he was stepping on dangerous grounds by approaching St. John's writing, at once sacred and dangerous.

In spite of his literary discreetness, just like Molinos, Friar Agustín Antolínez, and Sister Cecilia, Cervantes did not hesitate to establish a hidden dialogue with the Carmel Reformer in the “dead body” episode. The obsessive and apparently unnecessary repetitions of the word “night” betray a conscious literary reference, even if it may have parodic overtones. It is hard to think that Cervantes' nocturnal *leit motiv* would indicate only the hour marking the beginning of the adventure of the shirted men carrying the mourning litter. The novelist seems to be imitating the special textual pattern of the *Dark Night* in which St. John's repetition of the word “noche” again and again leads us to understand that he is alluding to a technical mystic symbol and not just to the end of the day. What is more, the word “adventure”, repeated throughout the passage, resembles phonetically the “venture” with which St. John's Bride begins her nocturnal journey, searching for that Beloved she knew so well.

Of course, the joy of the poet from Fontiveros—“dichosa ventura” or “happy chance” (*Dark Night*, vol. 1, p. 29), “happy night” (*ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 30), or “night more lovely than the dawn” (*ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 30)—contrasts with the “horror and fear” felt by Cervantes' characters when they plunge into the dark night. Sancho trembles as if he were under the effects of mercury and as “if he had quatrain fever” (*Quixote*, I, XIX, p. 136). Both characters believe the strange scenery to be supernatural: the mourners who carry torches and pray softly recall the apparitions (“*estantiguas*”),²⁰ that is, a nightly procession of souls wandering in the wood. Don Quixote's hairs stand on end, believing those are “demons from hell” (I, XIX, p. 138). I will say more about the gentleman's fear, which is as unusual as it is eloquent.

Iffland (1995, pp. 243–44), on the other hand, observes that Cervantes' narrator underlines the night's involving darkness: “and so night fell, bringing some darkness with it” (I, XIX), “the dark of the night did not allow them to see anything at all” (I, XX, p. 141), “the night, as we have said, was dark” (I, XX, p. 141), and “the darkness of this night” (I, XX, p. 142). He rightly concludes that “this is by far the darkest night of the entire work, including part II” (Iffland 1995, p. 243).²¹ As may well be expected, St. John also insists on the darkness of his Night—the wandering Bride advances blindly, unseen and not seeing anything, only, paradoxically, she rejoices in the thick darkness.

Cervantes' nocturnal black hole is studded with otherworldly, threatening lights. “A great multitude of lights that looked like nothing so much as moving stars” (I, XIX, p. 135) pluck the thick darkness and paralyze master and squire with fear. The “lumbres” (lights) seem “phantoms” to Sancho; though we should not forget that the term is also associated to the sect of the “alumbrados”, condemned by the Holy Office. It is obvious that the strange floating starts recalling St. John of the Cross' “Dark Night” poem: “Without light

or guide save that which burned in my heart" (*Dark Night* vol. 3, p. 30). St. John alludes to a strange supernatural light, suspended inside the nocturne Bride's soul, which guides her towards herself in an impossible circular and mystic road. However, Cervantes seems to be making reference not only to the mysterious light which turns St. John's "dark night" into a prodigious *chiaroscuro* that reminds us of Rembrandt and El Greco) but also to the experience of the historical transfer of the Saint's body. The "burning torches" of Cervantes' shirted men who carry the "dead knight" across the fields would be the same as those brought by the guards of St. John's body lighting the path to Segovia. Yet, we should not forget the most significant parallel of all: the "very bright lights" suspended around the small, improvised box. They remind the reader of the lights the driver of Fontiveros' priest testified he had witnessed. That historical midnight was also crowned by supernatural stars, and contemporaries of the event must have commented on the portents of this strange sight.

The specific details of Don Quixote's night adventure—one of the few in which he is victorious—points to the fact that the whole episode is a reflection upon religious and ecclesiastical themes and even upon mystic themes. We know that the gentleman, defying fear, his lance at the ready, confronts the mourners with questions. He believes someone has killed the "knight" they carry, and that the misdeed calls for chivalrous vengeance, or perchance the shirted men themselves have done a wrong deed that calls for punishment.

The main mourning "knight" spurs his horse to advance and evade the impertinent stranger, but the mule is "skittish" and throws him to the ground. Furious at not getting specific answers, Don Quixote attacks the marchers with his spear, but the shirted men, fearful and disarmed, ran away with their lighted torches. The scene reminds the reader of a carnivalesque act where chaos reigns and the identity of the revelers remains blurry.

Yet the scene, as said earlier, soon acquires ecclesiastical overtones that render it still more unsettling: Don Quixote is battling priests, and now "sacrilegiously" charges against Bachelor Alonso López—a counterpart of the historical court bailiff Juan de Medina—who has a broken leg and lies on the floor (a curious ailment indeed: St. John of the Cross died precisely of an infection in his left leg). The Bachelor, who holds sacred orders, lets Don Quixote know that they are carrying the knight, who died in Baeza, to be buried in Segovia. Cervantes did not want to mention Úbeda explicitly, so he sets the death in nearby Baeza. Apart from this, attention should be paid to the identity adjective Alonso López uses to refer to the dead man: he is a *knight*. It could well be that he is another priest, since he was guarded by a whole custody of them. Yet, this is not the case: being a "knight", he suddenly becomes a soul brother of the Manchegan gentleman, a veritable knight errant. I will return to this significant point.

Don Quixote insists on his questions and has a burning desire to avenge his alter ego's death; but López informs that no one has killed the knight, since he died of a "pestilential fever" (I, XIX, p. 138). These are the same "fevers" that caused St. John of the Cross' death; probably a septicemia that spread from the leg to the rest of his body. Don Quixote is paralyzed by the answer: "since he was killed by the One who killed him, there is no other recourse but to be silent." (Ibid.) Not even a chivalrous battle is possible against God.

The Bachelor warns Don Quixote that he is now excommunicated "for having laid violent hands on something sacred" (I, XIX, p. 140).²² He quotes Trento's dispositions in Latin, and it is strange that Don Quixote says he does not know Latin, for on other occasions it seems that he does. This is one of the proofs of the growing "Sanchification" of the literary character. Using a parodic ecclesiastical casuistic in a strict sense, Don Quixote argues he has not put his hand but just his spear on the corpse. Probably, the hidalgo suspects he has gone too far in his casuistic sarcasm, and immediately, he protests of his orthodox Catholicism.²³ However, his exaggerated declarations do not seem convincing enough. Don Quixote has not been in a church since the outset of his adventures, and even if he commends himself to God and to Dulcinea before starting his most daring adventures, he is not really pious: he neither prays fervently nor searches for spiritual guidance like his hero Amadís. As we shall see, Don Quixote's spirituality in this scene is

not orthodox—Cervantes submits orthodoxy to parody—but it is rather associated with the sacred. As we shall see, in brief, the Manchegan knight errant will confront sanctity itself.

Meanwhile, Sancho, with his well-known appetite, has taken advantage of the situation to unload the generous provisions of a pack mule the priests were bringing. Iffland (1995, p. 254) considers that such a carnivalesque detail may imply a satire against some of first followers of the Carmelite reform, who betrayed St. John of the Cross's ascetism. Might Don Quixote be avenging the Saint and defending the Carmelite Reformation *al suo modo*? Is the Manchegan gentleman liberating St. John, prisoner of a Church entrenched in tradition and given to excess? Does the knight errant's Erasmian soul feel offended by the traffic of a corpse that has turned into a relic? Everything is possible: *todo puede ser*.

3. The Chivalrous Overtones of the “Dead Body” Episode. Cervantes and Spiritual Chivalry Errant

3.1. Traditional Chivalry Novels

So far, we have analyzed the intertextual dialogue in which Cervantes engages with Saint John of the Cross's nocturnal verses and with the historical transfer of the Saint's remains to Segovia. Critics have also been examining the close similarities that exist between the adventure depicted in chapter XIX and chivalry novels for a long time. Since it is a widely studied subject, I will refer to it briefly. Diego Clemencín (1947) follows Fernández Navarrete (1819), who was the first one to suggest the possibility that the secret transfer of Saint John's corpse inspired the adventure that Cervantes portrays in chapter XIX, and highlights a possible intertextual dialogue that Cervantes has with chapters LXXIII and LXXIV of *Palmerin of England*, with chapter CXXVII of *Amadis of Gaul* (Rodríguez de Montalvo 1803), and with chapter XLIII of the third part of the *chronicles of Don Florisel de Niquea*. If we read chapter LXXIV of *Palmerin of England*, “Of what befel [sic] Florian of the Desert in the adventure of the dead body in the litter” (Morais 1807, *Palmerin of England*, vol. II, p. 5), the first similarities are revealed:²⁴ the title of the adventure, alike Cervantes', hints at a “dead body”. Florian of the Desert, Palmerin's brother, is wandering around a deserted place when he observes that three sorrowful squires are approaching; they are carrying a litter with a corpse draped in mourning. When he removes the pall, he uncovers the stiff body of a gravely wounded knight and wonders (as curiously as but less violently than Don Quixote) who it was. He soon learns that it was Sortibran the Strong, killed by four knights in an act of treachery, whose death was still unavenged. It is a good opportunity for Florian of the Desert to avenge his death, the same heroic deed that Don Quixote would have wanted to perform in favor of his “dead knight”. Critics have noticed the names of Palmerin's knights: “the Strong” and, in particular, “Florian of the Dessert”, which Cervantes associated with the ascetism of the Discalced friars, who meditated with “strong” spiritual courage in “deserted” places (Iffland 1995, p. 247). As we know, Cervantes does not give the “dead knight” a specific name: he seemed to be as discreet as the contemporary writers were regarding Saint John of the Cross.

Yet, there are possible similarities, which are less apparent, between the above-mentioned Quixotic scene and the novel *Florisel de Niquea*. In chapter XLIII (p. 43), Third Part, “four horses were carrying a litter mounted by four dwarfs. The litters were covered with a rug [. . .] and there were two heavily armed, strong and robust men leading the way, and twelve resembling knights followed behind.”²⁵ Clearly, this procession of physically disproportionate beings may not seem to be closely related to the adventure of Don Quixote; however, the physical abnormality of the escort of the dead body being transferred would ring a bell in attentive readers of chivalry errant literature. Is this another intertextual joke made by Cervantes about the mourning priests that were on their way to Segovia?

It is relevant to stress the fact that both this scene of *Florisel* and the previously mentioned scene of the *Palmerin* take place in broad daylight, while the “dead body” scene described by Cervantes is characterized just by the frightening dark night. In this respect, there is another interesting literary source that Arturo Marasso (1954) wields regarding the

nocturnal Quixotic scene: the *Aeneid*, which was translated into Spanish by Hernández de Velasco, an author widely read by Cervantes. The text describes the mourning procession of the recently deceased Turno, organized by Aeneas, which winds its way with burning torches in the midst of a “silent night” (Sánchez 1990, p. 16).

Alberto Sánchez (1990, p. 21) concludes that *Don Quixote* unequivocally depicts not only traits of chivalry myths, but also narrative details that coincide with the historical transfer of Saint John of the Cross’s remains to Segovia. I agree with my former professor Sánchez: Cervantes seems to establish a simultaneous dialogue with Saint John’s life and literature and, concurrently, with chivalry novels. Both intertextual dialogues coexist in a harmonious yet quite complex literary fusion.

Having said that, scholars (except for Iffland 1995, pp. 247, 257, 265) have not focused on another possible literary source of the nocturnal scene of Cervantes: spiritual chivalry. As we will see, Cervantes also invokes this genre, which is of the essence of understanding his mysterious nocturnal scene.

3.2. Spiritual Chivalry: An Essential Literary Source for Chapter XIX of *Don Quixote*

When chivalry novels, a fantastic literary genre, captured the Spanish editorial market early in the 16th century, the defenders of the religious genre of spiritual chivalry reacted adversely (Herrán Alonso 2005). An illustrative example of these first pious renaissance books is the *Libro de la Cavallería Cristiana* (*Book of Cristian Chivalry* [our translation], 1515), written by Franciscan friar Jaime de Alcalá. He had an edifying goal in mind, since his hero is a Christian knight of exemplary virtues. Clearly, the idea of a paradigmatic knight, who is foreign to the sexual superfluity of *Tirant Lo Blanc* and to the loose morals of *Amadís*, was already known in the Peninsula. It is important to remember the *itinerarium sacri amoris* represented by Ramon Lull’s *Blanquerna*, which includes the delicate *Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, written by the Majorcan Blessed in imitation of the Sufi marabouts. Through this work, Lull portrays his own eremitic experiences and many of his mystical intuitions. Furthermore, in his *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, he claims that the “ofici de cavaller és de mantenir e defendre la santa fe catòlica” (Lull 1936, p. 100).²⁶ It is important to also consider the *Book of the Knight Zifar*,²⁷ which is thought to be the first Spanish book of chivalry. It was written during the first part of the 16th century by a still unknown author²⁸ who, like Lull, proves to be acquainted with the Islamic tradition of spiritual chivalry.²⁹ The prologue of the work reveals a pious pattern: “This knight was baptized with the name of Zifar and afterwards was called the Knight of God because he was ever close to God and God was always with him in all his deeds” (Nelson 1983, *The Book of the Knight Zifar*, p. 6). Even though some scholars classify the *Zifar* as a “divine book of chivalry”, Felicidad Buendía disagrees with this classification since it includes the pious renaissance works that are contrary to the depraved morality and absurd imagination of traditional books of chivalry (Buendía 1960, p. 43). Buendía presumes that Cervantes must have read *Zifar* during his youth, since Ribaldo’s practicality and expressiveness seem to anticipate Sancho Panza’s simplicity.

During the 16th century, the vicious opposition to books of chivalry by pious moralists grows. They consider these imaginative novels to be inordinate, useless, vain, and morally doubtful, and thus its counterpart, edifying chivalry, is continuously strengthened. In spite of the plentiful output of this contestatory new genre, spiritual chivalry is far from being deeply studied. So much so that Enric Mallorquí Ruscalleda (2016, p. 380) believes that it is “one of the most forgotten and darkest chapters of Spanish literature.”³⁰ Jorge Checa (1988, p. 50), however, offers “the starting signal for the study of the genre”³¹ in 1988 (Mallorquí Ruscalleda 2016, p. 374) with his study on *Caballero del Sol* (*Knight of the Sun*), by Pedro Hernandez de Villaumbrales. From that moment onwards, the studies that deal with spiritual chivalry proliferate due to the contributions of scholars such as Estrella Ruiz-Gálvez Priego, Pierre Civil, Pedro Cátedra, and Emma Herrán Alonso, among other critics.

By now we have a representative *corpus* of these Renaissance “divine” chivalry novels, which will definitely grow in the future with new editions and studies. Some examples of the most outstanding works, either written or translated into Spanish, are the previously cited book *Libro intitulado Peregrinación de la vida del hombre, puesta en batalla debajo de los trabajos que sufrió el Caballero del Sol* (Book called “Pilgrimage of the life of man, sent into battle through the lifeworks that the Knight of the Sun had to endure”) ³² (1552), by Pedro Hernández de Villalumbrales; *Le Chevalier Deliberé* (*The Resolute Knight*) by Olivier de La Marche, translated into English by Lois Hawley Wilson & Carleton W. Carroll (1999); *Libro de caballería celestial del pie de la Rosa Fragante* (*Celestial Chivalry from the Foot of the Fragrant Rose*) (Amberes 1554); *Libro del caballero cristiano* (*Book of the Christian Knight*) by Juan Hurtado de Mendoza (1570–1577?); *Batalla y triunfo del hombre contra los vicios* (*Battle and Triumph of Men Against Vices*), written by Andrés de la Losa (1580); *The Pilgrimage of Human Life* (1992) and *Historia y milicia del caballero Peregrino, conquistador del Cielo* (*History and Militia of the Pilgrim Knight, Conqueror of Heaven*) (1601), by Friar Alonso de Soria. Some of these narratives are weaved as spiritual epic poems whose protagonists are abstract forces in order for illiterate Christians to understand them. An example of this is *The Pilgrimage of Human Life*, which tells of the initial journey of a pilgrim errant, accompanied by the beautiful lady Grace of God, who knights him as the “Caballero de las virtudes” or Knight of Virtue. ³³

This fictionalized spiritual militia is related to the literary–doctrinal tradition of the *homo viator* and the *peregrinatio animae* (Herrán Alonso 2007). It is also connected to the ancient Arthurian tales and to the search for the Holy Grail as a representation of a lost world. Connections can also be found with the ascetic simile of the ascending mountain. These themes send us back to previous renaissance divine chivalry novels, such as the book *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, written by Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Divine Comedy*, by Dante, and the *Handbook of a Christian Knight*, by Erasmus. Certainly, the peninsular writers excelled in writing manuals on spiritual warfare: let us remember Friar Luis de Granada, Friar Alonso de Madrid, Francisco de Osuna, and even Saint John of the Cross, whose work *Ascent of Mount Carmel* was influenced by *Ascent of Mount Sion*, written by Bernardino de Laredo. Perhaps the most representative example of this mystical militia is Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the spiritual soldier that, together with St. Teresa, was an avid reader of books of chivalry. As well as St. Teresa, he knew that it was feasible to make them “divine” and apply them to the heroic pilgrimage of their own souls.

In Spain, we can still find echoes of the literary tradition of these dauntless pilgrims of spiritual paths in Moorish works such as *Las coplas del alhichante* (*The Couplets of the Alhichante*) (meaning “pilgrim”), written by Puey Monzon, which narrates a pilgrimage to Mecca and its transcendent significance. The quintessential example of this genre is *Tratado de los dos caminos* (*The Treaty of the Two Paths*), written early in the 17th century by an anonymous Moorish author who was a refugee in Tunis. The protagonist, or *homo viator*, of the long allegorical novel has to choose between two symbolic and forked paths: the path of virtue, full of sufferings and hardships, and the delightful path of perdition (Galmés de Fuentes et al. [1975] 2005). ³⁴

Even though the connection between the theme of the soul’s pilgrimage and the divine books of chivalry still needs to be studied (Mallorquí Ruscalleda 2016), undoubtedly, these literary genres have a lot in common, so much so that Dámaso Alonso ([1951] 2008, p. 224) stated with certainty that “there exists a divine chivalrous climate in 16th-century Spain.” ³⁵

4. Cervantes and Saint John of the Cross’s Nocturnal Spiritual Chivalry

It is hard to believe that this vast literature of spiritual chivalry did not attract Cervantes’s attention. For a start, he knew well the *peregrinatio animae* leit motiv because both Cervantes and Lope de Vega, author of the *Pilgrim of Castile*, experimented with the pilgrimage of religious and amatory overtones that characterized the Byzantine novel. His posthumous *Persiles and Segismunda*, Counter-Reformist in nature, describes the pilgrimage of the two protagonist sweethearts that travel from the northern isles (read Protestant),

where they are originally from, to Papal Rome, where they get their “legitimate” canonical marriage.

However, the author of *Quixote* shows us that he is even more deeply familiar with the spiritual chivalry genre. In Chapter VIII, part II, the noble knight of La Mancha, together with Sancho, ponders his role as knight errant, and he states that true knights must seek eternal glory rather than worldly fame: “Christians, Catholics, and knights errant must care more for future glory, eternal in the ethereal and celestial spheres, than for the vanity of the fame achieved in this present and transitory world” (*Quixote*, II, VIII, p. 506). Suddenly, Don Quixote, who has not been very devout throughout his adventures, closes ranks with a spiritual devotion nearer to that of Knight Zifar’s or Knight of the Sun’s, or the dead “knight” Saint John of the Cross’s.

Let us not forget that the episode of the dead body deals precisely with the transfer of a valuable corporeal relic and that critics have associated Don Quixote’s libertarian and lay conduct with Erasmus’s religious attitudes (Bataillon 1966). When the gentleman of La Mancha ponders with Sancho on religious issues like the veneration of the saints’ relics, he treads, as was to be expected, on thorny ground. When he talks with his squire about the issue, it is not surprising when Sancho, a veritable “cristiano viejo” or “old Christian”, defends the traditional ecclesiastical stance: “[. . .] these prerogatives [. . . are] what the bodies and relics of the saints have, and with the approval and permission of our Holy Mother Church, they also have lamps, candles, shrouds, crutches, paintings, wigs, eyes, and legs, and with these they deepen devotion and increase their Christian fame; the bodies of saints or their relics are carried on their shoulders by kings, and they kiss the fragments of their bones, and use them to decorate and adorn their private chapels and their favorite altars” (*Quixote*, II, VIII, pp. 507–8).

Sancho illustrates his words by referring to the beatification or canonization of “two discalced friars, and the iron chains they used to bind and torture their bodies are now thought to bring great good luck if you kiss and touch them, [. . .]” (*Quixote*, II, VIII, p. 508). He concludes: “And so, Señor, it’s better to be a humble friar, in any order at all, than a valiant knight errant” (Ibid.) There is no other interpretation for this ethical truth: Sancho invites Don Quixote to exchange his chivalrous trade for the religious one, advising him “that we should begin to be saints, and then we’ll win the fame we want in a much shorter time” (Ibid.). The peasant apparently becomes the spokesperson of the Counter-Reformation Church: he is a friend of relics, which curiously belong to the “discalced friars” like Saint Teresa’s Senequita,³⁶ whose veneration ensured blessings of all kinds. However, the most significant issue around this episode is that the squire unexpectedly defies Don Quixote to become a saint, thus bringing up his chivalry errant to the highest position in the spiritual order.

This is such a far-reaching challenge that Don Quixote, no matter how valiant he is, knows well he cannot accomplish. And he gives up beforehand, admitting to Sancho his most intimate truth: “[. . .] we cannot all be friars, and God brings His children to heaven by many paths: chivalry is a religion, and there are sainted knights in Glory” (*Quixote*, II, VIII, p. 508). Sancho does not give up and replies that there are more friars than knights errant in heaven. Let us notice that he continues emphasizing the religious term “friar” instead of “priest”: the squire, who often shows hints of wisdom, surely knew well why he posed his subtle distinction. Don Quixote, who usually had the last word in the verbal exchanges with his servant, concludes: “[There are] many [knights errant] but few who deserve to be called knights” (Ibid.). It is impossible to forget that the “dead body” of chapter XIX is referred to as “knight”. Not only does Don Quixote name him this way, as was to be expected, but also does Bachelor Alonso López, who led his funeral procession. He thus distinguishes his minor orders from the those of the deceased he escorted, of “lay” condition though socially higher. Curiously enough, the body of a *knight* was transferred by clergymen: the text never clarifies this incongruity.

However, those who called the deceased “a knight” were right. It was precisely this way that the friar of Fontiveros referred to himself. In his prose commentary to his poem

“Dark Night of the soul”, he admits having fought as a symbolic knight during “that war of the dark night” (St. John of the Cross 1990, *Dark Night of the Soul*, book II, chp. XXIV, vol. 2, p. 203).³⁷ Both Saint John and Don Quixote fight in the middle of the night. It is appropriate to remember that the discussion the knight of La Mancha and his squire had about the issue of sainthood and chivalry takes place again in the context of a night. Don Quixote was searching for the impossible in the midst of darkness: he was trying to find his beloved Dulcinea of Toboso. Ultimately, he wanted to reach Transcendence in the midst of the dark corporeal world. Whether at random or not, this adventure, like the one of the mysterious knight’s “dead body”, occurs in the middle of a *dark night*, and just like the historical transfer of the remains to Segovia, the Toboso adventure takes place at *midnight*. “It was on the stroke of midnight” (*Quixote*, II, IX, p. 533), the narrator solemnly announces at the beginning of the next chapter, resorting to the first verse of an old ballad, “Count Claros of Montalbán’s romance”.

Curiously, both Quixotic night paths end up in the Church: “We have come to the church, Sancho” (*Quixote*, II, IX, p. 509). Additionally, although we know that he has come across the church building in Toboso, we know he has crashed against a lot more: against the dogmatic structure of the hardened ecclesiastic institution of his time, represented in Part I, Chapter IX, by the priests draped in mourning, well-versed in casuistry and bearers of generous saddlebags.

Saint John of the Cross was, however, some other kind of ecclesiastic, one that Cervantes could have liked instinctively. He was an alienated dissident that, as his mentor Saint Teresa, fought like a hard-working knight to reorganize the monastic structures of his time and to bring them to an ascetic life and, above all, to purest contemplation. Cervantes must have known about this when he “avenged” the saintly little friar on his guardians, who were highly greedy, cowardly, and orthodox: Saint John of the Cross’s fictionalized followers themselves would have betrayed the Reformation and all the heroic purity that it implied. Does Cervantes also avenge, after Erasmus’s position, those who would reach glory by possessing the saintly dead body relic? As is well known, the “relic” of St John’s body was pulled apart so that both cities, Úbeda and Segovia, could boast having a part.

I have already pointed out that Saint John of the Cross, in line with a spiritual chivalry, had declared himself a “striving knight”. However, differently from Don Quixote, his is an *ad intra* mystical combat that occurs deep in his inner soul. During the *dark night* of his pilgrimage, he confronts “a painful disturbance, involving many misgivings, imaginings and strivings which the soul has within itself [. . .]” (*Night*, book II, chp. IX, vol. 7, p. 133). To defend himself, the knight errant soul entrenches itself in the symbolic interior castle of his impregnable spirit, protected by fences and walls, and from there he holds an allegorical strife against the devil, enemy of the soul, that in the “Spiritual Canticle” is called “Aminadab”.³⁸ This evil spirit is defeated in the apotheosis-like final verse of the poem, where, once again, Saint John depicts this inner fight as a chivalrous combat much like Saint Gregory’s and, especially, much in the style of the Maghrebi Sufis that inspired Ramon Llull:³⁹ “For none saw it/Neither did Aminadab appear/And there was a rest from the siege/And the cavalry/came down at the sight of the waters” (St. John of the Cross 1961, *Spiritual Canticle*, book II, chp. XL, p. 484). When the poet tells us that the castle fence or fortified walls “rested”, he means that the passions and appetites of the soul have been defeated, and it is no longer fought by “opposing parties” (*Canticle*, book II, chp. XL, vol. 4, pp. 485–86). The cavalry, on the other hand, “comes down”, that is, it “rests”, it obliterates itself, and it vanishes before the purest waters of the soul when in total union with God (*Canticle*, book II, chp. XL, vol. 5, p. 486). Nobody dares to trespass the sacred sphere of the transforming ecstasy: Saint Teresa knew well about this, and she declared the innermost mansions of her symbolic *Interior Castle* to be impregnable. When, in his poem “Dark Night”, the poet tells us about “the turret breeze”, insisting on another term associated with fortified castles, he suggests again that the soul is safe within the symbolic fortified castle, breathing God’s high “breeze”. As we all know, the “breeze” or “breath” is a common *leit motiv* that different spiritualities use for representing the mystical

experience of Wholeness: the *Logos*, the breath, the Spirit, the *pneuma*, the *prana*, the *ruah* of the contemplative Jews, or the *ruh* of the Sufis. At the end of the “Night”, St John indirectly states that nobody can combat the soul or defeat it, because it is in union with God. The poet’s transcended chivalric knight errant is always victorious.

Yet, the combat is always rigorous. So much so that the Reformer of the order of Mount Carmel compares it to the pitched battle of a knight against a metaphorical dragon or a seven-head “beast”:

which makes war therewith against each one, and strives therewith against the soul in each of these mansions, wherein the soul is being exercised and is mounting step by step in the love of God. And undoubtedly if it strives faithfully against each of these heads, and gain the victory, it will deserve to pass from one step to another, and from one mansion to another, even unto the last, leaving the beast vanquished after destroying its seven heads, wherewith it made so furious a war upon it. (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, book II, chp. XI, vol. 10, p. 211)

The Reformer outlines this beast allegory in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, one of the treatises he uses to comment on his poem of the “Dark Night of the Soul”. The ascetic fight with the seven-head monster precisely takes place in darkness when “the soul sings of the happy chance which it experienced in stripping the spirit of all spiritual imperfections and desires for the possession of spiritual things. This was a much greater happiness to, by reason of the greater difficulty that there is in putting to rest this house of the spiritual part, and of being able to enter this interior darkness, which is spiritual detachment from all things, whether sensual or spiritual, and leaning on pure faith alone and an ascent thereby to God.” (*Ascent*, book II, vol. 1, p. 163).⁴⁰ In the *dark night*, the body is obliterated and becomes, metaphorically, “dead”: let us remember that the Cervantine “dead body” adventure also occurs in a dark night.

Had Cervantes heard of the symbolic *motif* of this night strife that the mystical knight had fought in his inner self against a seven-head “beast”? It is quite curious that Don Quixote takes for himself the same ascetic combat simile as Saint John does when he assures Sancho that the knight errant must kill the seven deadly sins symbolized by wicked giants. What the Manchegan gentleman explains to his squire reveals a detailed knowledge of chivalrous asceticism:

We must slay pride by slaying giants; slay envy with generosity and a good heart; anger with serene bearing and tranquility of spirit; gluttony and sleep by eating little and watching always; lust and lasciviousness by maintaining our fealty toward those whom we have made mistresses of our thoughts; sloth by wandering everywhere in the world, seeking those occasions when we may become famous knights as well as Christians. (*Quixote*, II, VIII, p. 506)

It seems Don Quixote wants to model his combatant chivalry towards “the divine”, hoisting his sword against the seven deadly sins. Likewise, let us not forget that, just as Saint John, Don Quixote fights ascetically, or at least he dreams of doing so, in a dark midnight.

It is not an easy contest either for Don Quixote or for Saint John. The Spanish Reformer, a knight errant at night, confesses that “deep is this warfare and this striving, for the peace which the soul hopes for will be very deep” (*Night*, book II, chp. IX, vol. 9, p. 134). Saint John was not beyond the terrifying fears that tormented Don Quixote and Sancho when they came across the “dead body” in an utterly dark night. Saint John interprets the “awakening night fears” of his “Spiritual Canticle” as the emotions aroused by the demons against which the soul strives: “because by means of [the terrors of the night] the devil tries to diffuse darkness in the soul, [so that the devil] may obscure the Divine light wherein it is rejoicing” (*Canticle*, book II, chp. XX, vol. 9, p. 363). However, the soul is already in its sweet inward sleep, and the “night terrors” cannot awaken it, “since it is deeply recollected and closely united with God” (*ibid.*). That is why it moves around confidently, “in darkness and secure”, in the “guiding night”, “a night more lovely than

the dawn". This jubilant serenity in the darkness of the night is something that will never be granted to Don Quixote, who moves through the night with shivers down his spine. As we will see later on, he will end up acquiring a metaphorical *Sorrowful Face*.

5. A Little More about Saint John of the Cross's Initiatory Dark Night Strife

I should refer at least briefly to the quite complex symbol that Saint John of the Cross and the mystic Muslims⁴¹ called "the dark night of the soul" since certain shades of this notorious nocturnal simile are of great interest to Don Quixote's adventure, which I have been following closely. Generally speaking, the reader is more acquainted with the spiritual night in its purgative and purifying sense, and in fact, it is this similar mystic dimension that has been precisely studied by experts such as Evelyn Underhill (1961), William James ([1925] 1986), and Juan Martin Velasco (Martín Velasco 1999).⁴² In this arduous stage of mystic life, some contemplatives—though not all of them—undergo an almost unbearable inner dryness and spiritual grief, though an immensely enriching one, because it implies a process of growth. Both the sensual desires and an appetite for the flesh are purged here, and the soul is strengthened on its highest level. In modern times, this stage is associated—*toutes proportions gardées*—with a depression or a state of spiritual exhaustion: the soul has undergone its ecstatic experiences in such an intense manner that it is struck by an alternate state of desolation. Both Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint John of the Cross repeatedly refer to the torments and doubts that occur during this hard stage of the mystic journey. However, Saint John knows well how useful this purifying experience in darkness is: "the soul becomes enlightened in the midst of all this darkness" (*Night*, book II, chp. XIII, vol. 1, p. 149), assures the *Dark Night of the Soul*, and he adds in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* that "here we call them (the purgations or purifications of the soul) nights, for in both of them the soul journeys, as it were, by night, in darkness" (*Ascent*, book I, chp. I, vol. 4, p. 56). It is within the purifying parameters of "this spiritual night" that we should understand the chivalrous ascetic strife that Saint John as well as Don Quixote undertake at night against the seven-deadly-sin beast. Both of them intended to purge the soul of its vices to gain the celestial Jerusalem.

However, St. John's symbolic *night* does not end here. It has a much deeper symbolic dimension that somehow can bring more light upon the scene of the "dead knight". This divine night of the unknowable leads to a converging ecstasy, or better, it is part of the experience of ecstasy. It is by turning off—by "darkening"—the senses and the reason that we may have the direct experience of God. Even language has to be annihilated. God is experienced only when we are blind to the spatial-temporal coordinates of this corporeal world. Let us remember that the mystic experience is an altered state of consciousness in which the contemplative experiences a Wholeness beyond time, space, and language. The transcendental knowledge of the living God is not gained by means of discursive reason. Reason is in a state of confusion, for it has been "darkened".

It is not by chance that when Saint John of the Cross begins celebrating his ecstasy in the middle of the "Canticle", it suddenly becomes dark. The "crystalline font" that springs up in the Bride's path, a symbol of mystical initiation, twinkles in the darkness because it has a "silvered surface". There, the traveler stops his pilgrimage to see reflected in the water the "eyes desired" that she "bears outlined in her inmost parts." Saint John knows very well that "the soul becomes enlightened in the midst of all this darkness, and the light shines in the darkness" (*Night*, book II, chp. XIII, vol. 1, p. 149). It is worth noting that the poet no longer says that the soul "is purified" but instead "enlightened". In fact, when "the soul has remained in darkness as to all light of sense and understanding, going forth beyond all limits of nature and reason" (*Ascent*, book II, chp. I, vol. 1, p. 88), it "will see supernaturally" (*Ascent*, book II, chp. IV, vol. 7, p. 95) and will enter "this narrow path of obscure contemplation" (*Ascent*, book II, chp. VII, vol. 13, p. 105). This darkness is celebrated, not endured. "The higher and more divine is the Divine light, the darker is it to our understanding" (*Ascent*, book II, chp. XIV, vol. 13, p. 126): this is precisely the reason why all mystics become aphasic in the midst of the ecstatic trance, because their

language is insufficient. In his *Coplas a lo Divino* or the *Ballads "a lo divino"*, Saint John refers to this phenomenon: "Just when this flight of mine had reached its highest mark/my eyes were dazzled so/I conquered in the dark".⁴³ However, this nocturnal darkness is not frightening, and that is why the soul can really rejoice and say "in darkness and secure". I think that the verses in both the "Dark Night of the Soul" and the "Canticles" are the happiest ones in Spanish literature, and this is confirmed in the poet's lexis of overflowing joy: "Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than the dawn". Certainly, this is not Cervantes's terrifying "dead body" adventure. Strangely enough, St. John's symbolic soul is disguised—"by the secret ladder, disguised"—to celebrate her secret wedding night. However, the masks behind which the mysterious protagonist of the poem hides strongly point to the immense abysses of her true identity. The entire poem revolves around this joyful encounter with herself, with the culmination of her transcended identity in God. The soul discovers that she is infinite, like the limitless night that masks her and blinds her mercifully in a corporeal manner. As Nietzsche said: "Whatever is profound loves masks. Every profound spirit needs a mask." The mask, indeed, "bares more than what it covers"⁴⁴ (Vélez Estrada 1989, vol. 190, p. 304). The Bride, as we know from the comments on the poem in the treatise of the Dark Night, had "changed [her] garments" and "disguised [herself] with three liveries and colours" (book II, vol. 15, p. 159). If we uphold the definitions by the Royal Spanish Academy and María Moliner (1994, vol. 2, p. 252), the livery was not only "a suit handed over to servants",⁴⁵ but also "the uniform worn by squads of knights in public celebrations."⁴⁶ Therefore, the Bride or nocturnal soul has acquired a new "chivalrous" identity that announces her new or, rather, newly obtained self. The "livery and disguise" that she wears are, according to Saint John, of three allegorical colors, white, green, and red, that represent the chromatic emblems of the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Covered with the chivalrous, allegorical, and distinctive livery worn by those who have ended their journey on Earth, the soul rests securely in utter darkness, safe from any vicissitude and extremely joyous. Let us not forget her condition: blessed. Her Beloved will recognize her, invested in the emblematic colors acquired on her nocturnal journey.

I have lingered on the disguise, symbolic of the new profound identity that the St. John's Beloved acquires in her pilgrimage because, strangely, Don Quixote will also take on a new identity among the shadows. Instinctively, we all know ourselves better in the dark: to reflect and pray undisturbed from any distraction, we usually close our eyes. That is to say, we usually darken the outer senses. It is Sancho who "reveals" to his master his new chivalrous identity in the middle of the dark night. The gentleman emerges as The Knight of the Sorrowful Face because, when, from among the shadows, the squire looks at him thoroughly, under the light of a burning torch, he warns him that "[his] grace has the sorriest-looking face [he has] seen recently, and it must be on account of [his] weariness after this battle, or the molars and teeth [he has] lost" (book I, vol. 19, p. 139). It is quite curious that Don Quixote, in one of the very few chivalrous battles in which he has easily triumphed without even a scratch, displays such a sad face before Sancho. He does not brag about his triumph nor does he celebrate it. The "weariness after this battle" seems to have undermined his soul, and this sad despondency reflects metaphorically on his face. We already know that it was not a simple strife: the Manchegan gentleman dared to walk on the delicate path of spiritual chivalry, and in doing so, he addresses unspoken dimensions of his own inner soul. He is measuring himself against the mystery of Transcendence.

Don Quixote meekly takes on his new identity, and he thinks the author in charge of writing down his "famous" deeds has inspired Sancho. As it is known, ancient knights took their names from their military victories—in that way, they received nicknames such as "The Knight of the Burning Sword", "The Knight of the Unicorn", or "The Knight of Death". The Manchegan gentleman identifies so deeply with his state of sorrow that he promises to depict on his shield "a very sorrowful face" as his emblem (book I, vol. 19, p. 139). Sancho, who now has the final say, dissuades him, assuring him that all he must

do is to uncover his face: Don Quixote represents himself; he is the living symbol of his own ontological sorrow.

However, far before Don Quixote, Deocliano called himself “The Knight of the Sorrowful Face” in the third book *La historia del muy esforzado y animoso caballero don Clarián de Landanís* (The Story of the Very Strong and Spirited Knight Don Clarian of Landanis). Nevertheless, Deocliano was not ungraceful or inelegant, since the painting on his shield showed a damsel of strange beauty, whose expression was very sad: “and as a sign of this, one hand was on the heart and the other cleaned the crystalline tears shed by those beautiful eyes”.⁴⁷ It is indeed curious that Don Quixote takes on a female chivalrous identity. However, so did Saint John, as the typical rhetoric of spiritual literature always uses the female gender to refer to the soul. Therefore, the literary alter ego in the “Night” and the “Canticle” is always a damsel. Nonetheless, the symbolic “damsels” that work as distinctive mask to Don Quixote and Saint John present very different characteristics: one is “sorrowful” in her “face” while the other one could not be happier. “Kindled in love” and “happy” like the night that covers her, St. John’s damsel culminates her night wandering “transformed in the Beloved.” Thus, she shares God’s own “face”, whose vast beauty is instilled in all living creatures: [He] “Left them, by his glance alone, clothed with beauty”. The “Sorrowful Face” has no place in this mystical and joyful space. Cervantes must have surely known about this.

6. Saint John of the Cross: Inverted Mirror of Don Quixote?

Let us dig still further. Once the night adventure has finished, Don Quixote comes up with an odd idea: to confront the “dead body” of the knight in the litter. The “spiritual knight” Saint John of the Cross, turned into a coveted relic, would preserve, according to the devout tradition, some of the sacred halo that is typical of a saint. It is not the first time that the Manchegan knight measures himself up in the mirror of his interlocutors: it is impossible to forget when he fixes his gaze on Cardenio, his true ontological brother. Crazed like Don Quixote, ambushed like him by love, and with a truly mistreated appearance, Cardenio holds such an ontic relationship with *The Knight of the Sorrowful Face* that the encounter turns out to be very revealing. With a gallant air, the aged knight errant heads for the ambushed Cardenio and embraces him “as if he had known him for some time. [. . .] The other man, whom we can call *The Ragged One of the Gloomy Face*—as Don Quixote is *He of the Sorrowful One*—allowed himself to be embraced, then stepped back, placed his hands on Don Quixote’s shoulders, and stood looking at him as if wanting to see if he knew him, not less astonished, perhaps, at the face, form, and arms of Don Quixote than Don Quixote was at the sight of him” (I, XXIII, p. 182). Both knights seem to examine themselves until they discover they are geminated in an “ontological” mirror. They recognize each other, and they identify with each other, for both their vital misfortune and their ruined physique are the same.

Don Quixote now wants to fix the same inquiring gaze of ontic overtones on the body of the dead “knight”. Cervantes dialogues closely with the *Palmerin of England*, since, in Chapter 74 of the first part, the Florian knight did likewise: he raised the pall that covered the mortuary remains that the three squires carried in the litter, and he discovered a body lying in green armor, soaking with blood and horribly mutilated by the severe blows he had received in battle. This moves him to great compassion, and he asks who the dead knight is. He turns out to be, as we know, Sortibran the Strong. “Strong”, as we know, also was the symbolic striving knight Saint John of the Cross.

It seems that Don Quixote, mimicking Florian, wants to know more about the identity of the “dead knight.” However, there is no one he can ask, since the “shirted” priests have fled. The gentleman gets ready to look at the knight’s body, as if he wanted to measure himself up against its owner and recognize himself in his chivalrous symbolic mirror. To accept this adventure in the order of the being requires extreme bravery, but Don Quixote, as it is known, has never been daunted by danger. The moment appears propitious, as the litter with the remains was abandoned by the runaway priests. Nothing stands between

the *Knight of the Sorrowful Face* and the spiritual knight's corpse: everything is ready for the unparalleled encounter. The narrator states succinctly: "Don Quixote wanted to see if the body on the litter was actually bones or not" (I, XIX, p. 140). What is this? Don Quixote of La Mancha rummaging through relics? Did he know, perchance, that St. John's body had not been transferred to Segovia before due to its freshness, and that its smell was so good that the bailiff of the court, Medina Ceballos, had to throw lime at it and wait for another year so that its transfer to Segovia was viable? Did the anachronistic knight errant want to compare the saintliness of the "knight" by observing the state of the "incorrupt" corporeal relic? Clearly, we have moved away from the scene of the *Palmerín*, gruesome but yet typical of the rhetoric of the harsh combats of the cavalries. I suspect that there is more to it, since it seems incongruous that Don Quixote becomes a simple examiner of abandoned bones. By laying his eyes on the "dead knight", what the Manchegan knight will actually do is examine the inscrutable mysteries of death,⁴⁸ of the afterworld, and of saintliness. Furthermore, by symbolically confronting Saint John of the Cross, he is measuring himself up against the saintliness of the "divine" mystical "knight". Don Quixote confronts himself with the limits of his own chivalry errant. When we look in depth at the *Other*, we discover our own true identity. It is when we make use of someone else's mirror that we manage to understand ourselves better.

However, the challenge is excessive, and Don Quixote does not accept it. The magnitude of this adventure seems to intimidate him. Sancho, momentarily turned into the "master" of his will, prevents the ontological encounter due to practical reasons: he reminds the gentleman that they are already safe; the people draped in mourning have been defeated, and hunger is pressing: "as they say, let the dead go to the grave and the living to the loaf of bread" (I, XIX, p. 140). Sancho puts his faith in this world, not in the other one. Of course, not wanting to look at a dead person at night and in a deserted area falls in line with his profile of a fearful farmer: let us remember the mortal terror that tormented him when he believed he was seeing spook lights and otherworldly apparitions. Don Quixote, who had defeated his ecclesiastic "adversaries" so rapidly, is now defeated by the "Sanchification" to which his own squire subdues him: "since it seemed to Don Quixote that Sancho was right, he followed him without another word". Astonishing, but true: Don Quixote, silenced, seems to measure himself better with Sancho, hungry for thick corporeal life, than with the dead knight in the litter. "Don Quijote is literally 'anchored' by Sancho Panza".⁴⁹ It is easy to imagine his sense of personal defeat when he moves away from the litter of the unknowable corpse to resume his uncertain path. It is at this moment that he truly earns his nickname "The Knight of the *Sorrowful Face*". He is a sorrowful defeated man in the spiritual order.

I do not suppose much. It is Don Quixote himself who, in the second part of the novel and after observing some saints carved in relief, humbly accepts his subordinated place before the mystery of saintliness. The character displays a broad culture regarding spiritual chivalry, since he comments knowingly on the images that some farmers designed for the altarpiece they were erecting in their village.⁵⁰ When reaching Saint George's carving, Don Quixote informs that he was one of the best knights errant the "divine militia" ever had; he thinks that Saint Martin, who divided his cape with the poor man, was another "Christian seeker of adventures".⁵¹ For him, Saint James was "one of the most valiant saints and knights the world has ever had, and that heaven has now" (II, LVIII, p. 834). As for Saint Paul, he was "a knight errant in life." In the Don Quixote's imaginary, saints are knights, just like the anonymous knight surrounded by priests whose sacred bones—those that Saint Teresa claimed "would perform miracles"—he dared not look at. It seems that now that the gentleman has observed saintliness at length—even tempered by its representation in wooden reliefs—he feels ready to admit the inferiority of the chivalry errant he professes in the face of heavenly chivalry: "these saints and knights professed what I profess, which is the practice of arms; the difference, however, between me and them is that they were saints and fought in the divine manner, and I am a sinner and fight in the human manner" (II, LVIII, p. 834).⁵² Don Quixote is then a knight of Earth, not of Heaven; a sinner, not a

saint; a warrior of the day, not a spiritual fighter in the dark night. His itinerancy, no matter how earnest it is, constitutes a chivalrous pilgrimage *ad extra*, not *ad intra*, like Saint John of the Cross's.

By opening before us the deep soul of the Manchegan gentleman, always frugal when sharing his authentic spiritual concerns, the episode of the “dead body” has given us unexpected clues. In this bewildering adventure, Cervantes merges with extraordinary skill the historical event of the transfer of Saint John's body to Segovia, arranged by Doña Ana de Peñalosa, with the literary *leit motiv* of the transfer of a dead knight, present, as we have seen, in more than one knighthood novel.

The novelist pays tribute to the spiritual chivalry errant, in which he seemed to be as conversant as his anachronistic gentleman was. The “dead knight” of the litter—i.e., Saint John of the Cross—closed ranks with the “divine” literary warfare tradition that was so in fashion back then, the very one that opposed the books of chivalry, full of literary fantasy, that Don Quixote intended to resurrect in the seventeenth century. The night adventure turns out to be a literary piece of the highest complexity: between lines, Cervantes is pressing the Manchegan knight's fantastic dreams to the limits. The *hidalgo* silently acknowledges that there are higher chivalries than his own that he will never reach. Don Quixote, who “fights in the human manner”, could not measure himself up against the mystical chivalry of the humble friar who was his contemporary. With the passing of time, this mystic would be reach sainthood as an authentic knight of the heavenly militia. No wonder then that Don Quixote, unable to approach face to face the mystery of the Sacred which St. John represented, ends the adventure with a sad countenance. From now on, *et pour cause*, he will be known as the “Caballero de la triste figura”.

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Notes

- ¹ All quotes from *Don Quixote* have been extracted from the English edition of *Don Quixote* (Cervantes Saavedra 2003) translated by Edith Grossman. The first Roman number indicates Part I or Part II of *Quixote*; the second Roman number indicates Chapter (TN).
- ² Our translation.
- ³ The quoted words were said by Francis of St. Hilarion during the deposition of the Saint's Beatification. Fernández Navarrete (1819, pp. 78–89) quotes with a different version the words said by the first man who interrupted the entourage: “where do you take the Saint's remains? Leave them where they were . . . ” [Our translation]. The scholar also explains that when the guards tried to silence the second shouting person with money, “they found that he had disappeared” (Ibid.) [Our translation].
- ⁴ Our translation.
- ⁵ For extended bibliography about chapter XIX of the first part of *Quixote*, see (Jaime [1995] 2008).
- ⁶ Rodríguez Marín (1949) based his thesis on chapter XVI of *Historia del Venerable Friar Ivan de la Cruz, primer descalzo carmelita* (History of the Venerable Friar Ivan of the Cross, first Discalced Carmelite) by Friar Jerónimo de San Joseph (1641).
- ⁷ Our translation.
- ⁸ Our translation.
- ⁹ Apud Pasquau (1960, p. 2); our translation. The author quotes a manuscript kept in the Carmelite convent of Úbeda.
- ¹⁰ Gerald Brennan (1973, pp. 101–2) specifies that Úbeda received an “arm, a foot and a few fingers”.
- ¹¹ Alba is the name of St. Teresa's birthplace, and it also means dawn.
- ¹² Sánchez (1990); our translation. The original poem is “A los éxtasis de Teresa de Jesús” (“To St. Teresa's Ecstasies”) (Cervantes Saavedra 1981).
- ¹³ The descent into the cave of Montesinos has clear Islamic overtones, as several critics have agreed. One of the most recent studies is Wilnomy Zulayka Pérez (2015)'s “La representación del viaje iniciático sufi: una simbología cifrada en la Cueva de Montesinos del Quijote” (18–19 May 2015), presented at the Congreso Cervantes, el Islam y los moriscos, organized at Murcia University by Arabist scholar Pablo Beneito: Pérez's paper is still unpublished, but is available at <https://tv.um.es/video?id=72711&serie=15661&cod=a1b1c1d3&idioma=es>. (accessed on 18 April 2017).
- ¹⁴ This curious coincidence was suggested by Prof. Dennis Madrigal during a course on *Don Quixote* I taught at the University of Puerto Rico some years ago.

- Alberto Sánchez (1990), following Martín Fernández Navarrete's pioneering work (1819), proposes that what matters more than these stylistic and formal parallels, is the memory of the historical event when the Carmelite priest was transported from Úbeda to Segovia in 1593, as stated above.
- Senekita or "little Seneca", after the saint's wide range of knowledge and small height (TN).
- Friar Basilio Ponce de León defended the Reformer *post-mortem* from these and other accusations.
- About the theme of St. John of the Cross' name being silenced among close followers, see (López-Baralt 1985, 1998, p. 87ff).
- About Molinos, Eulogio Paco's *Defensa de la contemplación* (Molinos 1988) and José Ángel Valente's *Guía espiritual* (Molinos 1989) may be consulted.
- See Redondo (1983, 1998) and Alvar (2009) for the tradition of "estantiguas".
- Iffland (1995, p. 255) expands this observation on the importance of the night in Chapter XX, where Don Quixote and Sancho, still in the midst of darkness, hear the sound of water. This brings us to the "fountain well which flows and runs" (St. John of the Cross' "Song of the Soul Rejoicing in the Knowledge of God by Faith", *Complete Works* (Cruz 2015), p. 415) and even to St. John's "fount of crystal", which having "silvered surface", necessarily appears in the middle of the night (St. John of the Cross *Canticle*, p. 44). It is difficult to think that there would not be in these chapters a conscious intertextual dialogue with St. John of the Cross, on Cervantes' part.
- Curiously, such excommunication links Don Quixote to St. John of the Cross, who was excommunicated several times by his own Carmelite order.
- About Don Quixote's excommunication, see (Lumbreras 1952).
- Some of these similarities have been highlighted by Martín de Riquer (1962, 1967), Luis Andrés Murillo (Murillo 1978) and Avelle Avelle Arce (1979), among others.
- Our translation.
- Regarding this book by Llull (Johnston 1990).
- Critics vacillate between spelling Cifar or Zifar.
- Mallorquí Ruscalleda (2016) suggests that the possible author is the cannon from Toledo Ferran Martínez. For authorship purposes, see the edition of the *Book of the Knight Zifar* by Charles L. Nelson (1983). The literary genre of Islamic mystical chivalry is highly significant, and its influence on the European genre is far from being studied. Mallorquí Ruscalleda (2016, p. 383) acknowledges that "the concept of spiritual chivalry poses an additional problem since it could be mistaken for a concept that arises from Sufism, *futuwwa* [. . .]; the extent and manner in which such Islamic influence is revealed still need to be defined." [Our translation].
- There is a traditional epic-chivalry narrative "developed by oral narrators during the early stages of Islam, which has been collected by the genre known as *al-sira*" (Galmés de Fuentes et al. [1975] 2005, part I, p. 16). This tradition reached Spain in the 16th century, as evidenced in *El libro de las batallas* (*The Book of Battles*), which was edited by Galmés in two volumes (Galmés de Fuentes et al. [1975] 2005). Such book is stylistically and thematically connected with the European books of chivalry, such as *Amadis* and the *Palmerin*. Predictably, this chivalry genre soon undergoes a mystical turn, widely studied by Henry Corbin (1995), among other authors. I have particularly explored the remarkable coincidences between the technical vocabulary employed by this mystical chivalry and the one used by the Spanish mystic, in particular that of Saint John of the Cross's (López-Baralt 1985, 1998, 2000). Iffland considers these studies in his quoted essay of 1995. This ancient Islamic divine chivalry literature is so renowned that even the Peruvian writer Luis Enrique Tord makes use of it in his fable *Cide Hamete Benengeli, coautor del Quijote* (*Cide Hamete Benengeli, Coauthor of Don Quixote*) (Tord 1987). In this fable, he pictures the mysterious Cide Hamete Ben Gelie meeting Cervantes in the prison of Seville, to whom he narrates many divine chivalrous tales from his Islamic tradition and therefore helps to inspire *Don Quixote*.
- Our translation.
- Our translation.
- This book by Pedro Hernández de Villalumbrales should not be confused with the book *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* by John Lydgate.
- I have used the quoted studies of Herrán Alonso and Mallorquí Ruscalleda to assemble the short representative list of this divine chivalrous narrative.
- Ancient Islamic tradition, both in Arab and Persian, is incredibly rich; it describes the returning journey of the soul of the meditative person, during which it experiences dangerous adventures through foreign imaginable spaces. It is well-known that European tradition owes a lot to the Islamic tradition (this is the case of Dante, Llull, Knight Zifar, Saint John of the Cross) but it has not been deeply studied yet, as Mallorquí Ruscalleda (2016) stated.
- Our translation.
- The identity of these discalced friars is still unknown, although some scholars think one of them could have been the Franciscan Saint Diego de Alcalá. Saint John of the Cross's beatification process had not begun yet, but it was not difficult to predict it would start soon, given his general saintly fame.

- 37 All the quotations from the *Dark Night of the Soul*, *Spiritual Canticle*, and *Ascent of Mount Carmel* throughout Sections 4 and 5 have been extracted from Allison Peers's editions and translations of these works [TN].
- 38 About the origin of this name, see (López-Baralt 1985, vol. 89, p. 273).
- 39 About these thematic parallels, see (López-Baralt 1985, p. 89, 2000), among others.
- 40 For the parallels between this warlike imagery and the Sufi knights errant, see (López-Baralt 1985, p. 90, 2000).
- 41 Miguel Asín Palacios (Asín Palacios 1933) was the first one to associate the *dark night* simile with Sufi spirituality, especially with Ibn Abbad de Ronda's work. See (López-Baralt 1985, p. 89, 2000) and especially (López-Baralt 1998, p. 147ff).
- 42 For the lexical variations of the Sanjuanist *dark night* symbol, see (Mancho Duque 1982) and, for the Cervantine adventure darkness, see Casaldueiro (1966).
- 43 Translation by Frederick Nims (1959).
- 44 Our translation.
- 45 Our translation.
- 46 Our translation.
- 47 [Our translation] I quote from the notes made by Luis Murillo (Murillo 1978) in note 18 of the edition of *Don Quixote* that I have been working with.
- 48 For more information on the subject, see H. R. Patch (1956), and, for additional bibliography, consult Carlos Alvar (2009).
- 49 Iffland (1995, p. 257) refers to the fact that Sancho ties Rocinante's forelegs together with his donkey's halter (part I, chp. XX, p. 141), but his comment applies closely to this failed encounter with Saint John of the Cross's body.
- 50 It is interesting that "the saints", both in these carvings and in the body of the divine knight, are, first, covered, since the carvings are protected by cloths that prevent them from being seen, and the zealous guards that carry Saint John's bones protect them from the "men who were recklessly curious" in the road. The carvings and the "dead body" were indeed moved from one place to another so that the encounter between them and Don Quixote is necessarily short: a brief encounter with the sacred.
- 51 Cervantes treats the scene with sarcasm, as Don Quixote says that Saint Martin gave the poor man just half of his cape for it was winter.
- 52 Iffland (1995, p. 265) quotes this passage in note 9.

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