

## Article

# “One Kind of Water Brings Another.” Teresa de Jesús and Ibn ‘Arabi

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**Abstract:** Mystical literature and spirituality from 16th-century Spain engage religious images from the three most prominent religions of al-Andalus—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism: among others, the dark night, the seven concentric castles, the gazelle, the bird, the *sefirot*’s encircled *iggulim* or towering *yosher*, the sacred fountain, ruins, and gardens. Until the 20th-century, however, scholarship read these works mostly as “Spanish” mysticism, alienated from its Andalusī roots. This comparative study deploys theological, historical, and textual analysis to dwell in one of these roots: the figure of the garden’s vital element, water, as represented in the works of Teresa de Jesús and Ibn ‘Arabi. The well-irrigated life written by these mystics underscores the significance of this element as a path to life, knowledge, and love of and by God. Bringing together scholarship on Christian and Sufi mysticism, and underscoring the centrality of movement, flow, and circulation, this article pieces together otherwise disparate readings of both the individual work of these two figures and their belonging in a canon of Andalusī/Spanish mysticism. The weaving of these threads will offer readers a different understanding of early modern religion, alongside traditional readings of Spain’s mystical literature and its place in the global context.

**Keywords:** Spanish mystical literature; Teresa de Jesús; Ibn ‘Arabi; Christian/‘Spanish’ and Sufi mysticism; comparative theology; gardens; life; knowledge; path; proximity to God

## 1. Introduction

“For each limb or organ there is a particular kind of spiritual knowledge stemming from the one source, which is manifold in respect of the many limbs and organs, even as water, although a single reality, varies in taste according to its location, some being sweet and pleasant, some being salty and brackish. In spite of this it remains unalterably water in all conditions, with all the varieties of taste.” (*Ibn al-‘Arabi* 2015).

In the late 1400s AD four events aligned to change the religious and cultural landscape of what had been known by different people as Hispania, Iberia, and al-Andalus: the “discovery” of the Americas; the publication of the first Spanish grammar, “partner of empire;” the Expulsion of the Jews from Spanish soil, and the transfer of Granada—the last Muslim Kingdom of the Peninsula—from Sultan Abū ‘Abdi-llāh Muḥammad ath-thānī ‘ashar, the last ruler of the Nasrid house, to Isabel and Fernando, Catholic Queen and King. Anyone remaining within the geographic confines of the modern Church-State of Spain was forced to convert to Catholicism, the official religion, and the first half of the 16th century witnessed myriad conversions (*Havrey* 2005; *Catlos* 2014). By the late 1560s the *Recopilación de las Reyes destos Reynos*, first unified legal compilation of the Peninsula, inaugurated Spain’s centralizing code of citizenship organized around the backbone law of the land, “De la Santa Fé Católica” (On the Holy Catholic Faith):

“The Holy Mother Church teaches, and preaches, that every faithful Christian reformed by the holy Sacrament of Baptism firmly believes and simply confesses that there is one only true God, eternal, immense, unchanging, omnipotent, ineffable, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit three Persons and one essence, substance, or nature: the Father unattainable, the Son engendered, by the Father alone and the Holy Spirit breathed from high simplicity, proceeding likewise from the Father, and the son in essence, equal in omnipotence: and one beginning principle of all visible and invisible things.” (*Recopilación*, Lib. I Tit. 1 Ley 1; my translation)

Despite the powerful rhetorical charge of this “First Law” and subsequent Laws “Laws” regarding the clearly defined hierarchical theological and political directives for Spanish citizens to profess their exclusive alliance and devotion to Catholicism, the lives of crown subjects in the Peninsula unfolded in many different directions. It was as if Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Bezels of Wisdom* foreboded, from 13th-century Murcia, that the Spanish body would be one, and that its organs and limbs—like different bodies of water in relation to the main source—would stem from one source, but would have a “particular kind of spiritual knowledge.” There is ample evidence that substantial numbers of crypto-Muslims and *conversos*—*anusim* publicly declared their adherence to the Holy Catholic Faith while at the same time they continued to practice their Islamic or Jewish faith in underground spaces and secret times (Havrey 2005, pp. 102–21).<sup>1</sup> Against all odds, and true to their faith as best as they could in a soil declared inhospitable for their religion, the perseverance of these individuals and their communities preserved religious pluralism inside the peninsula. Be that as it may, the importance of their lives and voices has remained covered for centuries under the aegis of one national Catholic unity. The movement known as Spanish mysticism is one more example of this kind of survival of religious pluralism in 16th-century Spain and partial reception thereafter.<sup>2</sup> In an era when moral virtue and religious rituals and iconography were heavily regulated to favor a Catholic gestalt (food, clothing, movements, inspirational figures, devotional imagery, and rituals, among others), mystics in Spain engaged in traditions from the three most prominent religions of al-Andalus—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. With this hybrid approach to religious life, they shaped a rich spiritual legacy being fully revealed only in the last century by scholarly work like that found in this special issue of *Religions*. Among numerous other images and practices, 16th-century mystics in Spain imagined and wrote of the dark night, the seven concentric castles, the gazelle, the bird, the *sefirot*’s encircled *iggulim* or towering *yosher*, ruins and gardens, and the sacred fountain to inspire others to seek their own spiritual paths.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard Pym’s important edited collection of essays on various aspects of morality establishes a radical critique of conventional readings of Spanish history as fully compliant with this powerful rhetorical mainframe of Catholic-only virtue and morals. According to Pym (Pym 2006), the imperative tone and register of official documents—such as the *Recopilaciones* were, as well as the series of Edicts, published and delivered by *pregoneros* (town criers) throughout the peninsula to make these laws known to all citizens—they did not “map unproblematically onto the complex topography of everyday life, or the immediate experience of Spaniards,” in which voices of skepticism, subversion, irony, survival, and other modes of resistance abounded (p. ix).

<sup>2</sup> I emphasize “Spanish mysticism” to question the perception that the literature and history of these mystics is exclusively Spanish, which may seem to mean that they were produced in, or that it may only be significant for, an exclusive religious or linguistic sense, nationalist spirit, or imperial tone and register. These texts were produced in Spain mostly by Catholic monastic figures, to be sure; however, as it has and continues to become apparent, the spirit and the letters of their legacy is far from monolingual, monocultural, or inspired by one dogma alone. No doubt, to call them Andalusī mystics would not be fully correct, given the political changes that the Capitulation of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada brought about after 1492. To decolonize the expression, the present study intently deploys the expression “Spanish mystics” as figures that inscribe the historical memory of al-Andalus in their literary and theological works.

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Robinson (2006, 2013) and Conde Solanes (2020) are two amongst many other scholars who have analyzed the fertile Medieval soil upon which the survival of this religious and spiritual pluralism is founded. Robinson’s work shows how Iberian spiritual traditions such as the one of the “Cristo de la Cepa” (devotional figure of Christ carved in vine wood) were forged in Al-Andalus by the influence of 9th century Sufi mystics such Abū ‘l-Muġīth Al-Ḥusayn bin Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj and Sahl al-Tustarī from Persia, and ‘Abd Allah b. Masarra, from Córdoba; Conde Solanes also points out that sustained devotional practices like this one reveal the existence of legacies “guarded in medieval Spain by Benedictine and Dominican monks whose main mission was converting Jewish and Muslim souls to Christianity” (Conde Solanes 2020, p. 4). The devotional system structured by trees of love and knowledge, key signs of the spiritual and artistic Andalusī garden, and their influence on Castilian devotional practices is explored thoroughly by Robinson (2006).

The ties that bind Spanish and Sufi mystics are, no doubt, numerous; at once, they are quite complex and, because of that, they require rigorous comparative theological, historical, and textual analysis.<sup>4</sup> Such analysis is particularly difficult because the means of transmission of ideas and practices of spirituality produced by the figures who compose these two groups has only recently begun to be analyzed. Given the histories of conflict and violence in the name of religion that characterized the latter Middle Ages and the Renaissance in Spain, and the underground religious practices such as those noted above, these means of transmission have proven hard to find. It may seem that Sufi and Spanish mystical practices did not bridge the religious divide. With that premise in mind, this study analyzes how water, a key material and spiritual element represented in the mystical works of Ibn ‘Arabi and Teresa de Jesús, makes the theological worlds of Islam and Christianity overlap and, when read together, grow substantially.<sup>5</sup> The method here, then, is not one designed to contribute to the question of how the ideas of a Sufi mystic were transmitted to those of a Spanish mystic. The comparative approach is deployed here not to prove how their shared ideas travelled from 13th-century Murcia to 16th-century Ávila, or from a Medieval to a Renaissance spiritual journey, but rather to focus on reading their ideas together to explore the ways in which their separate and corresponding versions of water expand, and not limit, spiritual growth. To be clear, the “mutual” influences noted here between the works of these two mystics do not point to a two-way cycle of synchronous literary or religious exchange between them, or to an imagined scenario of one, the other, or the two having read each other’s work; given the span of almost four centuries that separate them, that is simply not a logical choice.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, because my argument does not seek to tease out an exact replica of the represented element of water in their texts, or an authoritarian one-way influence of Ibn ‘Arabi over Teresa de Jesús (hereafter identified by her last name, De Jesús), or a posteriori, vice versa, the present reading will explore the ways in which their texts mutually inform each other in their representing water and its loving meanings, while discerning the respective contexts of production of these works. The well-irrigated life written by these mystics underscores the element of water as a path to life, knowledge, and love of and from God, as it foregrounds the spiritual value of movement, flow, and circulation. With the sign of water, readers can piece together otherwise disparate readings of both the individual works of these two figures and their belonging in a revised continuum of Andalusi and Spanish mysticism.

## 2. Teresa de Jesús’s Four-Way Water

Pay attention to the Most High’s saying: “It is watered with one water” (Q. 13:4). The earth is one, but the tastes, fragrances, and colors differ. (Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya/The Meccan Illuminations* (III, 231, Chapter 351))<sup>7</sup>.

Teresa de Jesús, a leading Spanish mystic, publicly declared and lived according to her affiliation with the Catholic Church. In 1622, about forty years after her death, Pope Gregory XV canonized her and she came to be Santa Teresa de Ávila for some, De Jesús for others, or just plain Santa Teresa for others; a few years later she was named Patron Saint of Spain by King Philip IV, which placed her next to St. James, *Santiago Apóstol*. By virtue of her theological contributions and religious writings, Pope Paul VI granted her and Catherine of Siena the degree of Doctor of the Church in 1970; they were

<sup>4</sup> Recent debates about the beginnings of Sufi mysticism in Al-Andalus make the landscape of crypto-religious practices in 16th-century Spain even harder to read. See Yousef Casewit’s “The Rise of the Andalusi Mu’tabirūn” (Casewit 2017, pp. 57–90). Francis X. Clooney’s model of deep learning and comparative theology (Clooney 2010) across borders has inspired much of the thinking behind the present comparative study; the errors, of course, are all mine.

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of water in Islamic and Christian heterodox cosmogonies from the Ottoman Period, see Stoyanov (2001).

<sup>6</sup> Muḥyi al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-‘Arabī (560/1165–638/1240) is named here by his more common name Ibn ‘Arabi, and Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada (1515–1582), more commonly known as Saint Teresa of Avila and named here by her nom de plume, Teresa de Jesús, and de Jesús thereafter. On the names of Teresa de Jesús and their critical importance, see Carrión (1994, pp. 43–67).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Jaffray (2008, n.p.).

the first two women to receive such an honor (Slade 1970; Bilinkoff 1989). Alongside her devotion to the *Santa Fé*, she lived and wrote not fully adhering to the religious exceptionalism and isolation promulgated by the *Recopilación* in the mid-1500s. Instead, she developed a literary and religious ethic that, at odds with the expressed will of the Church State, conjugated signs and practices from different spiritual and religious traditions. The words from Chapter XIX of her *Book of Life* cited in the title illustrates this revelation: “un agua tray otra” (one kind of water brings another) (pp. 138, 109).<sup>8</sup> With this sentence De Jesús concludes an extensive meditation on the image of the garden, a metaphor she develops to refer to the heart, and the importance of irrigation, or prayer, for its well-being. Her texts repeatedly say that water equals prayer, and in wrapping up her theological articulation of the garden, a sort of paradise regained, that one kind of water-prayer brings about (*tray-trae*), carries, or attracts another kind. The sorrow and pain that brought tears to her life before she built her own garden are conjugated with the waters of the source, the well, the fountain, the river, and rain—a liquid universe that she, like any of her readers, can learn to manage if they know how water can transform their tears into life. This conjugation of water, garden, and prayer opens up a way for readers to meditate on the significance of this element as a path to life, knowledge, and love of and from God. This well-watered garden grew in the context of underground religious pluralism in which De Jesús lived, and in which Sufi mysticism was more present than history has led readers to believe.

De Jesús devoted a good part of her life to reform the Discalced branch of the Carmelite Order in Spain; to that effect, she founded seventeen convents organized to support the welfare and betterment of spiritual life for women. She wrote four major volumes: *Book of Life*, *Way of Perfection*, *Interior Castle*, and *Book of Foundations*. Because of her religious experiences and the programs she instituted in her convents, her male confessors were adamant that she should write them down; the fact that her first book spent decades in the hands of the Holy Office of the Inquisition granted her writings a judicial-confessional layer that has not gone unnoticed by scholars (Llamas Martínez 1972; Egido 1986; Slade 1995, pp. 9–29). With the confessors palpably present in her life and narrative works, she openly spoke to her sisters, the nuns who lived in her reformed convents with whom she mobilized a highly sophisticated communication network that Alison Weber termed a “rhetoric of femininity” (Weber 1990). Because of her Jewish lineage, her work has been associated with Semitic traditions (Álvarez 1995; Connor 1986, pp. 43–81; López-Baralt 1985, pp. 120–41, 156–60). Because of her being a subject of the Church State in 16th-century Spain and a key reformer of the Carmelite Order, her work has been associated with Catholicism and, more often than not until recent times, with the “Spanish Golden Age”, an era traditionally characterized—as Carlos Conde Solares aptly notes—as “the political and imperial heights of Spain” (Conde Solanes 2020, p. 1).<sup>9</sup> Because of the imagery of her books, such as the darkness of the soul, the seven concentric castles, the little bird, spaces such as ruins and gardens, as well as the design of her convents and her approaches to spiritual life, her work has been also associated with Islamic traditions (Asín Palacios 1946; López-Baralt 2002, 1985, 1981; Carrión 2017, 2016b, 2016a, 2013, 2012, 2010, 2009). Additionally, because her writings and conventual reform charted such new territory for women to define prayer, humility, and virtue, her work still provides great inspiration for many communities of women the world over (see (Dorgan 2015; Pérez 2013), among others).

The *Book of Life* and the *Interior Castle* place water at the center of De Jesús’s spiritual quest. As a result, communities who read her closely and organize their spiritual lives with those readings in mind focus on the importance of this sign in spiritual life. Carol Ann Chybowski, for instance, offers

<sup>8</sup> Hereafter cited as *Life* (De Jesús 1995). The first page number in parenthesis corresponds to the original version in Spanish, quoted from the edition by Father Silverio de Santa Teresa O.C.D. (De Jesús 1915); unless otherwise noted, the quotes in English are from the translation by Edgar A. Peers (De Jesús 1995).

<sup>9</sup> For a small, yet representative sample of analysis of the literary and spiritual work of De Jesús favoring these heights, which constitute the vast majority of the reception of her work until a century ago, see (Ricard 1965; Dickens 1970; García de la Concha 1978). For a fuller bibliography of these strands of reception, see (Carrión 1994).

an economic synopsis of “St Teresa of Avila’s Four Waters” which, she notes, are “based on her own experiences with mystical prayer. It is a path that we all must follow each in our own way as we make our journey home to God” (Chybowski 2015). The cultivated path begins with dipping a bucket into a well in the first stage; thereafter, it moves on to adding a water wheel to alleviate the labor’s hardship; in the third stage a river or a stream appear, further lifting the spirit of the gardener; and finally, the blessed rain, and the letting go of the work to allow oneself be wrapped by God’s rain. Immersed in a liquid journey, the gardener works through labor, distractions, spiritual advancement, difficulty, recollection, and sheer will to leave behind the deserted soil and reach a lush landscape of spiritual plenitude. The Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles compare De Jesús’s water world with scriptural passages (the Book of Genesis, John 4: 10, 13–14 and Mark 10: 17–31), and with the works of John of Ruysbroeck and George Bernard Shaw, to highlight how that life of irrigation and prayer marks a sound path to know the gift of God (Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles 2015).

This experiential knowledge brought about by water contrasts with the little attention paid by scholarship to this important unit of Spain’s mystical legacy. Scholars have analyzed copiously the presence and meanings of gardens in Spanish cultural history, from the tradition of the *hortus conclusus* in Iberian Hebrew rhymed narratives and Berceo’s *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* to the sexual landscape represented in the paternal *huerto* of *Celestina*, among others (Dexter 2007; Alchalabi 2004; Bailo 2016; Snow 2000).<sup>10</sup> There is also substantial scholarship about the centrality of gardens in life and culture in the peninsula; thus, for instance, the sophisticated Medieval hydraulic and irrigation systems that informed Spain’s entrance to engineering modernity (Glick 1996), the singular presence of Islamic gardens, especially in what came to be the modern region of Andalucía (Ruggles 1997, 2003), and the design and development of royal gardens in El Escorial and Aranjuez to foster the early modern industry of water distilleries (Rey Bueno 2004, 2009), among others.

Only a few scholars have underscored the critical importance of gardens in the works of Spanish mystics (Lottman 2010; Carrión 2012, 2013). The work in which De Jesús more copiously uses the word *agua* is her first one, the *Book of Life*, although the *Castle* also devotes important passages to the presence and meaning of water for the heart. For the sake of brevity, this study will focus on the representation of water in the *Life*, structured as a four-way space and medium.<sup>11</sup> Used over 70 times between Chapter 6 and Chapter 22, this term forges a semantic field with which the author spells a pathway from tears of sorrow to a universe of joy and plenitude organized in four levels: underground water from the well, water extracted by mechanical devices, water flowing in a river or stream, and water from rain. These four stages of water, moving from below-ground level to high-up in the atmosphere from whence it falls as rain, correspond with ways to irrigate the soul that, in turn, are equivalent to four stages of labor, knowledge, and love in the garden; encompassing them all, a corresponding frame to that of the four stages of water stands a structure of four degrees of prayer. The first one, characterized by heavy labor and a foundation of sorrow and pain, asks readers to imagine themselves a gardener who lowers a bucket into the depths of a well to obtain water. Citing water as an element that after her near-death experience in Chapter 5 she could not even tolerate, De Jesús’s voice eventually turns to a desire to reach the Prayer of Quiet. To that end, in Chapter 11 she suggests that a book may help focus on prayer, but that for her, “to look at a field, or water, or flowers” serve to remind her of the Creator, to awaken her, and to recollect herself (*Life* p. 66). The book she is given, Augustine’s *Confessions*, does not quench her spiritual thirst because saints fall once and recover, but she falls many times and does not seem to go anywhere in life.

<sup>10</sup> Liz Herbert McAvoy (2014a, 2014b) and Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (2014) offer important feminist critiques of the tradition of the *hortus conclusus* in Northern European literature.

<sup>11</sup> The representation of water in the *Castle* lends itself to the possibility of a comparative theological reading with the buildings and gardens of La Alhambra. See Carrión (2017).



Because she is a woman “writing simply what I am commanded,” she would prefer not to engage comparisons, but spiritual language requires that she does so and, hence, she turns to the basic practice of prayer:

“The beginner must think of himself as of one setting out to make a garden in which the Lord is to take His delight, yet in soil most unfruitful and full of weeds. His Majesty uproots the weeds and will set good plants in their stead. Let us suppose that this is already done—that a soul has resolved to practice prayer and has already begun to do so. We have now, by God’s help, like good gardeners, to make these plants grow, and to water them carefully, so that they may not perish, but produce flowers which shall send forth great fragrance to give refreshment to this Lord of ours, so that He may often come into the garden to take His pleasure and have His delight among these virtues.” (*Life*, p. 73).

In this first stage of prayer where the paradise lost of the garden first appears, De Jesús immediately underscores the importance of water. Water not as a possession, as a commodity to trade, or as an entity to contain and control—that is the work of men. Rather, she literally conjugates water as a verb, *regar*, to irrigate, as proactive work that flows with knowledge and will to grant life to the garden of the soul: “Let us consider how this garden can be watered, so that we may know what we have to do, what labor will cost us, if the gain will outweigh the labor and for how long this labor must be borne” (*Life*, p. 73).

Here, the garden adopts the classic form of the four directions that also harbor four ways to irrigate; both reader and gardener must remember that they are already inside the first stage of the garden, where pain and sorrow prevail, a rhetorical strategy to which she will return in the *Interior Castle*, where she tries to explain how one is to enter the space in which s/he already is, and how to reach the innermost chamber where the Lord sits, and whence the mystical union is bound to happen. The secret to that paradox, De Jesús will reveal in the *Castle*, is to know that this chamber has many other mansions above and under, everywhere, where the Lord is with, for the castle is the soul and anyone, especially the nuns reading her text, can roam free in that space. The map is clear, while the maze is thick: there are four stages of the garden, which are four ways to irrigate, and four ways to pray.

“It seems to me that the garden can be watered in four ways: by taking the water from a well, which costs us great labor; or by a water-wheel [*noria*] and buckets [*arcaduces*], when the water is drawn by a windlass [*torno*] (I have sometimes drawn it in this way: it is less laborious than the other and gives more water); or by a stream [*río*] or a brook [*arroyo*], which waters the ground much better, for it saturates it more thoroughly and there is less need to water it often, so that the gardener’s labor is much less; or by heavy rain, when the Lord waters it with no labor of ours, a way incomparably better than any of those which have been described.” (*Life*, p. 73).

Alas, the application of these ways of watering is not quite as easy or simple as the layout seems. In fact, the first part of the garden, with the well at its core, is a place of fatigue, labor, distractions, “aridity, dislike, distaste and so little desire to go and draw water” that may drive both gardener and prayer to give up (*Life*, p. 74). In this desert, where echoes of despair may be heard, loss and sorrow may jeopardize the quest; however, the text reminds gardening readers of His Majesty’s capacity to keep “the flowers alive without water” and to make “the virtues grow” (*Life*, p. 74). Water, in this case, shall be tears “or, if there be none of these, tenderness and an interior feeling of devotion” (*Life*, p. 74). Devotion here is fueled by humility, and through a series of reiterations of gestures of patience echoing the death of Christ in the Cross, St Jerome in the desert, and other Christian devotional imagery, the text encourages readers to not give up, but rather to think of the “firm foundation” being laid for the garden (*Life*, p. 75). Only this way all gardeners, prisoners in this dry land, and more precisely “poor women like myself, who are weak and lack fortitude” shall be able endure the pain and sorrow

that extends through this three-chapter stage, to be able to find themselves literally in greener pastures (*Life*, p. 75). The watering and the garden, as we shall see, harbor the connection between the Christian characters of the narrative with the Sufi mystical signs.

Chapter 14 opens with a memory of the earlier description of the second degree of prayer, in which the structure of the windlass and buckets saves on labor so the gardener may be “able to take some rest instead of being continually at work” (*Life*, p. 86). In this stage, “grace reveals itself to the soul more clearly” while faculties recollect, remember with grace, and they move to the inner space where the gardener can do her Prayer of Quiet (*Life*, p. 86). The windlass and buckets move water with significantly less work from the gardener, transforming the place into a space where she can focus on receiving the grace of God. Will is captive, like the water in the buckets and, in turn, the buckets in the windlass. At the same time, other faculties—memory and imagination—join in the collection of water and recollection of the mind and soul, and as this second degree of prayer unfolds, the tears of despair and sorrow turn into a joyful flow, a “water of great blessings and favors which the Lord gives in this state,” which makes the little buds of virtue grow stronger (*Life*, p. 87). In this space the common best practices of gardening—pruning, weeding, rooting—move center stage and temperature moves in, with the cold of winter being a decisive factor, as it was in the lands where De Jesús moved in life. When winter is coming, the text says, the spark planted earlier by God begins the fire that will warm up the place. Chapter 16 moves on to the third degree of prayer, the “third water” that flows without mechanical structures, a section of gardening life where labor dwindles to open up to pleasure, sweetness, delight, ineffable joy, and the water of grace that “rises to the very neck of the soul” in the fruition of God (*Life*, p. 95).

In this area of the garden the Creator of the water irrigates the soul boundlessly, yielding a fusion of the soul and the Lord reminiscent of the Hebrew *Song of Songs*. Humility fuses with joy, and an inexplicable event takes place: “what the poor soul could not acquire, even if it labored and fatigued its understanding for as much as twenty years, this heavenly Gardener achieves in a moment; the fruit grows and ripens in such a way that, if the Lord wills, the soul can obtain sufficient nourishment from its own garden” (*Life*, p. 99). The death-in-life and the sorrow present in the first degree of prayer, that point of despair where the tale of Melibea ends, is transformed in Chapter 18 of the *Life* into the fourth and last water, where another death takes place: that of the soul to the world. In this space “there is no feeling, but only rejoicing, unaccompanied by any understanding of the thing in which the soul is rejoicing” because here grace rains onto the soil/soul (*Life*, p. 95). The great reward of this rain may come in abundance, granted by the Lord when the will has been relinquished in prayer to Him, oftentimes “when the gardener is least expecting it” (*Life*, p. 104). The benefits for the soul of this kind of water are the greatest one can imagine in prayer. The following chapters address various possible caveats one can find in the application of this watering system; in the end, however, De Jesús concludes this segment of her mystical journey stating that the water is a key element for spiritual life.

### 3. Ibn ‘Arabi’s One and Many Ways of Water

“But here it is like rain falling from the heavens into a river or a spring; there is nothing but water there and it is impossible to divide or separate the water belonging to the river from that which fell from the heavens.” St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle* (De Jesús 1961, p. 132).

The chronological, theological, and gender gaps that separate Teresa de Jesús from Ibn ‘Arabi are sizeable. He left Spain to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1193, a journey that Claude Addas calls “the voyage of no return” because that first incursion led him to multiple travels around the Maghreb, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Palestine, and Syria, where he met the saints of his time and read books that marked his path, and because these experiences in turn led him to an inner voyage guided by his learning Sufi doctrines, sainthood, disciples and tribes, servitude and the nocturnal voyage, as well as teachings and legacies of the prophets, the unicity of Being, and the Seal of the Saints, among others (Addas 2000). De Jesús, on the other hand, travelled merely inside the peninsula once she started the Discalced Carmelite reform at a point late in her life, but did not have the encompassing exposure

to other areas of the world like Ibn 'Arabi, or experiences comparable to those he acquired in North Africa and the Middle East. At once, from the distant points in space and time in which they lived and wrote, a common practice of questioning borders emerges in their works; after all, both of their lives were marked by cultural difference and religious reform.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, De Jesús negotiated her Jewish lineage with memories of Al-Andalus and a mandated Catholic profession and devotion; Ibn 'Arabi, on the other, negotiated his Sunni lineage with Shia Islamic circles where his writings became popular, as well as Jewish and Christian stories and characters that commonly appear in his writings. Readers inside and outside the convents De Jesús reformed read her books, while Ibn 'Arabi's "teachings quickly spread throughout the Islamic world, and they kept on spreading wherever Islam went, from Black Africa and the Balkans to Indonesia and China," spanning into languages other than Arabic, such as Urdu, Turkish, and Persian (Chittick 2007, pp. 2–3). At the very core of their lives, they shared a number of interests and vocations, amongst which mysticism, writing, and theology stand out. In their theological education they also shared ground, for despite their formal education and the differences that separate them, they both favored friendship and their own experience when it came to religious training and growth. Rather than deriving their own religious principles and practices solely from a formal school of theology, both De Jesús and Ibn 'Arabi developed sophisticated theological structures by wondering, engaging discussion with others, and especially by devoting themselves to the spiritual path. As Scott Kugle notes that is characteristic of Sufi mysticism, both of these authors aimed to love God and to be loved by God than to articulate theological arguments to be debated or turned into law (Kugle 2007, p. 1).

In this life of loving devotion, water plays as much a critical role for Ibn 'Arabi as it does for De Jesús, if the two mystics articulate this role in different narrative and spatial ways. Ibn 'Arabi does not structure levels to irrigate the garden of the soul in four ways, as De Jesús does; however, his articulation of water as a spiritual path enumerates as many areas of representation, which Angela Jaffray recognizes as "life, knowledge, *sharī'a*, and purification" (n.p.). However, to say that the structure of garden segments, types of irrigation, and degrees of prayer precisely crafted by De Jesús in the *Life* is the same as the four areas of meaning of water represented in various books by Ibn 'Arabi is, in a nutshell, comparing apples and oranges. At once, the structured ways in which Ibn 'Arabi inscribes water in his understanding of the spiritual path is as much of critical importance to his quest to love God and be loved by God as it would be for De Jesús. Springing from the verse from the Qu'rān "It is watered with one water" (13: 4), his *Meccan Illuminations* engage the many waters of divine intention, ranking in excellence, essential oneness, and perceptual diversity; divine intention "is like water," and the many different flavors in fruits and vegetables occur both despite and because the one water that irrigates them, yielding a variety of tastes, fragrance, and colors, as well as a natural paradox, all indebted to one water. No doubt this most voluminous work by Ibn 'Arabi grants significant meaning and weight to water, as other of his works do. However, as it happened with the *Life* in relation to all the other works by De Jesús where water surfaced, the book where Ibn 'Arabi articulates a more tangibly structured approach to water is in the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* or *Bezels of Wisdom*, where the splendor of 27 prophets is generated by means of a different gemstone equal to a divine virtue (such as patience, oneness, heart, or being) and, in some cases, clearly defined by water.<sup>13</sup> As in the previous section, for the sake of brevity this section will concentrate on reading water in the *Bezels*.

According to Todd Lawson, each one of the 27 bezels that thread this book in as many chapters "is given to a particular community in the narrative and poetic person of a particular prophet. The bezel or prophetic reality is shaped to receive the particular divine virtue in the same way the mark of friendship on Ibn 'Arabi's back was shaped to receive the prophetic seal on the back of the Prophet

<sup>12</sup> Manuela Ceballos argues that the issue of borders, and especially a clear understanding the porosity of such borders, is a critical one for the interpretation of the works of Sufi and Christian mystics from Al-Andalus and North Africa (Ceballos 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Hereafter cited as *Bezels*. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes in English are from the translation by Binyamin Abrahamov.



Muḥammad” (Lawson 2016, p. 35). In other words, inside the structure of their individual chapters, these gemstones speak of relations between each prophet and their communities; as a whole, though, they establish a “rhyme of friendship” or “identity-blurring that may occur through the imitation of the Prophet,” which here “is between the particular prophet and the Divinity” (Lawson 2016, p. 36). This structure is a sonorous rhyming space in Arabic that reveals a community of prophets related to each other, as Lawson points out, in alphabetical order and in a non-hierarchical manner: “As a special group of *awliyāʾ* (all messengers and prophets are *awliyāʾ* but not all *awliyāʾ* are messengers or prophets) they comprise the linguistic elements, the spiritual vocabulary, for the new/old language and revelation of Islam in which every community that has ever existed has had a prophet and in which each prophet speaks to their community in that community’s language” (Lawson 2016, p. 37). The non-hierarchical circulation between them, signaled in the rhythmic pattern of poetic rhyme and alphabet strikes in the titles, harbors echoes of the garden and Mansions that De Jesús will lay out four centuries later, where readers could find themselves and at once lose themselves in the lull of poetic prayer:

The wisdom of divine praise in Noah’s teaching is:  
 Hikma subūḥiyya fī kalima nūḥiyya  
 The wisdom of divine mercy in Solomon’s teaching is:  
 Hikma raḥmāniyya fī kalima sulaymāniyya  
 The wisdom of divine Being in David’s teaching is:  
 Hikma wujūdiyya fī kalima dāʾūdiyya  
 The wisdom of divine uniqueness in Muḥammad’s teaching is:  
 Hikma fardiyya fī kalima muḥammadiyya. (Lawson 2016, p. 36)

This is certainly not a random circulation; language, prophet, community, God, the *walī* and Muḥammad, as Lawson notes, constitute a tightly interlocked tapestry of correspondences and relations in the *Fuṣūṣ*, “truly, an ocean without shore, that attests to the reality and veracity of the vision” and the glue that weaves them into that one tapestry of *walāya* or loving friendship is *sarayān*, meaning “current, flux, circulation, emanation, and permeation” which causes rhythm, movement, and beauty (Lawson 2016, p. 37, 45).

The bezel of “the prophetic wisdom that exists in the essence of Jesus” conjugates aspects of water and, more particularly, its flow or circulation after leaving the source, with the spiritual path. Right after the bezel of “the wisdom of predetermination in the essence of Ezra”, and right before the bezel of “the wisdom of mercy in the essence of Solomon”, Ibn ‘Arabi places the chapter on Jesus, the only one bearing prophetic wisdom because, as Chittick points out, his prophecy is eternal (Chittick 1984, p. 25). To characterize that timelessness of Jesus and his prophecy, Ibn ‘Arabi uses a term related to liquidity: “This measure of life which permeates things is called divine nature (*lāhūt*), and human nature (*nāsūt*) is the substrate in which this spirit dwells. *Nāsūt* is called spirit, because of that which inheres in it” (Bezels, p. 105; my emphasis).<sup>14</sup> The intertwining of water in this narrative articulation of divinity is even more palpable in Yoshihiko Izutsu’s translation: “The (universal) Life which flows through all things (*wa sarat al-ḥayāt fīhi*) is called “divine aspect” (*lāhūt*) of Being, while each individual locus in which that Spirit (i.e., Life) resides is called the “human aspect” (*nāsūt*). The “human aspect”, too, may be called “spirit”, but only in virtue of that which resides (*al-qāʾim*) in it” (quoted by (Lawson 2016, p. 46); my emphasis). The eternal life of Jesus permeates and flows, like water, from the divine nature or aspect to exist essentially or permanently, to inhere, to reside in who receives him.

The incarnation of Jesus in the Bezels is the point at which water fully surfaces in this chapter: “the body of Jesus was created from the real water of Maryam and the imaginary water of Jibrīl, which pervaded the moisture of his breath, because of the breath of an animate being contains humidity, and element of water in it. The body of Jesus was composed of imagined and real water” (Bezels, p. 105).

<sup>14</sup> For a comparative philosophical analysis of water as life in Taoism and Sufism, see Izutsu (1984, pp. 141–51).

The birthing scene generates a sustained meditation on spiritual breath, revivification, luminosity, loftiness, and the attributes of what Ibn 'Arabi will call the Perfect Man mobilized by water as process, as element, and as divine essence. "The cosmos," says Ibn 'Arabi, "emerged in the form of its originator, that is, the divine breath. When it is hot, it rises, and when it is cold and humid, it falls, for precipitation belongs to coldness and humidity, and when it is dry, it is stable without trembling. Precipitation drives from coldness and humidity" (*Bezels*, p. 108). This scientific articulation of the divine origin and subsequent flux of water seems to fuse *walāya* and *wilāya*, those terms of relation and command, of love and authority that preoccupied Ibn 'Arabi and other mystics.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand water freely circulates, like the friendship or relationality indicated by *walāya*, while on the other, the immutability of the originator who is the bearer of authority indicated by *wilāya*, both fusing in the act of creation.

Alongside Jesus, several prophets mobilize their gemstones by means of water, thus forming a discrete body of knowledge within the larger ocean without a shore. Thus, for instance, "The bezel of the wisdom of the unseen exists in the essence of Job" (*Bezels*, p. 132). Job's gemstone chapter begins with an encompassing view on water: "Know that the mystery of life permeates through water, since it is the root of the elements and foundation (*'anāṣir, arkān*). For this reason God makes "of water every living thing" (Qur'ān 21:30) [ ... ] And the root of everything is water" (*Bezels*, p. 132). Indeed, for Ibn 'Arabi water is the material that sustains life. The Throne, like The Castle for De Jesús, is heart and center of all spiritual activity.<sup>16</sup> That space and material of divinity rests on water "because it was composed of water; it floats on the water, and the water preserves it from beneath" (*Bezels*, p. 132). Water sustains the world, and it signifies knowledge. The gemstone of knowledge exists in the essence of Moses, as he possesses "many kinds of wisdom" (*Bezels*, p. 156). Encoded in an interpretation of the story of Moses, Ibn 'Arabi offers the correspondence of water and knowledge:

"As for the wisdom of putting him (Moses) in the ark (*tābūt*) and throwing him into the river, (its meaning is the following): The ark alludes to his humanity, while the river is the symbol of the knowledge he attained through his body. Only via the body, composed of the four elements, can the human soul be supplied with the faculties of reasoning, sensation, and imagination. [ ... ] When he was cast into the river in order to attain different kinds of knowledge through these faculties, God taught him that even though the spirit which directs him is his ruler, the spirit directs him through these faculties." (*Bezels*, p. 157).

As De Jesús would see the gardener's death of the self to receive the rain of God, Ibn 'Arabi sees the immersion in the waters of knowledge experienced by Moses when he is put in the ark and cast in the river as "an external form of destruction," a moment in his life that, at once, saves him from getting killed later (*Bezels*, p. 158).

Moses, the man named after the Coptic *mū* (water) and *sā* (tree), brings life to Pharaoh and his wife, only to be woven into a thick tapestry of exaltation of wisdom where Adam, Pharaoh, and al-Khiḍr play roles with water, knowledge, life, and death. Noah's bezel of wisdom of exaltation engages transcendence, limitation, and restriction, and it how curtailing the flow of his call to his people—a flow that could have combined the call for a transcendent God and an immanent God—made them run and not listen to his call. By not combining both calls, Noah resorts to the Qu'ranic quote "He will send down abundant rain from the sky for you" but fails to reveal that the rain represents various kinds of intellectual knowledge and, because of that, rain and knowledge end up "far removed from the fruits of reflection" (*Bezels*, p. 39). Because of their heeding his call, Noah's folk ends up perishing in the very same waters of the sea of knowledge of God.

Knowledge and love must be part of the process of immersion into water, so the spiritual path can be cleared to move towards the union with Allah. For Angela Jaffray, water plays more than

<sup>15</sup> Vincent Cornell thoroughly examines the critical importance of these "semantic fraternal twins that coexist symbiotically, like yin and yang" to understand sainthood in Morocco (Cornell 1998, p. 1).

<sup>16</sup> On the heart of the faithful as The Throne of the All-Merciful, see Nasr (2002).

a mere supporting role to other theological narrative units (like character, place, action, and so on). In her teasing out Ibn 'Arabi's vision of the One and the Many she argues that water holds powerful clues, because it "performs a function in Ibn 'Arabi's writing that is analogous to his treatment of Islam, the Qu'ran, and the prophet Muhammad" (n.p.). As water is one of four elements, Islam is one of four monotheistic religions noted in the Qu'ran, alongside Judaism, Christianity, and Sabianism. For the faithful, water is as much an element tied to scientific discourse, pregnant with formulas, abstractions, or engineering material objects such as wells, watering holes, windlasses, or oases, as it is a metaphysical principle, because "it stirs the imagination as a polyvalent symbol expressing many things" (Jaffray 2008, n.p.).

#### 4. Conclusions

Water, indeed, stirs the imagination and unfolds in a protean manner to mean many different things in the written works left for us by Teresa de Jesús and Ibn 'Arabi: life, path, fuel for prayer, knowledge, death, process, origin, and divine breath, amongst many others. In their many books devoted to writing about the spiritual path and their experiences of love for and from God, they inscribe various versions and forms of water that present their readers and spiritual interlocutors with ways to envision and grasp, intellectually and somatically, such divine love. Water, then, is not merely an element to manage or control or to know rationally; as Lawson points out, water is that sign and element by virtue of whose permeation and constant flow "all of the various oppositions are resolved, dissolved and even reversed. In short, the fearful symmetry of our lives is shown to be ephemeral while the substance of our lives, *walāya*, is shown to be timeless and permanent" (Lawson 2016, p. 48). This timeless and permanent meaning of water certainly shares symbolic and semantic ground with the theological and legal aspects of Baptism, the Christian Sacrament designed to bring divine life to a believer, and to secure a permanent presence of God in their soul. Ibn 'Arabi also mentions the ritual aspect of ablution as a means to cleanse and ready the body to receive God. These are ritualized and institutionalized approaches to water that no doubt occupy an important place in the beliefs of these two mystics.

However, water is also a source of life, knowledge, *poesis*, beauty, and a path to experience and express their love of God and the love of God for them. As such, water is nexus, structure, link, source, and channel of and for the spiritual path. Humility and piety are atoms that constitute this element, and so is relating to others such as the confessors, the nuns, and God in the case of De Jesús, or to the prophets, the members of their communities, and God in the case of Ibn 'Arabi. This relationality is marked by a desire to communicate the centrality of water, prayer, and knowledge in terms of beauty. Although their works are both written in narrative form, the previous pages show the benefits of reading them both as *poesis*, for beauty is an integral part of the happening of water as a spiritual path and in a believer's spiritual path. Rhyme, structure, patterns, numbers, and relations between signs and peoples compose the systematic aspect of these spiritual strands. By letting the life of the body and spirit negotiate divine and human, *walāya* and *wilāya*, humidity and dryness, one bezel and the other, a prophet with the other, or a segment of the garden with the other in constant motion, flowing like and with water, readers can capture a substantial part of their message.

Much work remains to be done to fully understand the impact and meaning of water in relation to gardens, prophecy, friendship, authority, sainthood, sacraments, rituals, and so on, both in Christian/Spanish and Sufi mysticism. Hopefully, the growth experienced in Andalusī studies in the past few decades will continue to reveal discoveries in the ways of transmission of Andalusī Sufi mysticism and its continuum in latter historical periods in the Iberian Peninsula. Until that time, the evidence provided by these mystical texts offers proof of a textually-based dialogue with imagery provided by their authors to fuel their spiritual quest and that of their readers. The presence and meaning of water in the works of these two and other mystics can be interpreted as an invitation to loosen up the reins of strict national, religious, historical or philological argumentation, a sign in their texts that, when read in dialogue with each other, can contribute to a better understanding of the great

spiritual paths they built. Alongside the Cristo de la Cepa, the bird, the seven concentric castles or mansions, and myriad other mystical signs and symbols that link Christian/Spanish mysticism with Sufi mysticism, water shows another instance of how these great spiritual legacies inform each other. With four ways, or one and many waters, every believer can find their own way to and with God. With Ibn ‘Arabi, I conclude reciting from the *Fuṣūṣ*: “If the believer understood the meaning of the saying “the color of the water is the color of the receptacle”, he would admit the validity of all beliefs and he would recognize God in every form and every object of faith.”<sup>17</sup> Let us let them flow together.

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