

THE GOTHIC ANAMORPHIC GAZE:  
REGARDING THE WORTH OF OTHERS

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... saw the Aleph from everywhere at once, saw the earth in the Aleph, and the Aleph once more in the earth and the earth in the Aleph, saw my face and my viscera, saw your face, and I felt dizzy, and I wept, because my eyes had seen that secret, hypothetical object whose name has been usurped by men but which no man has ever truly looked upon: the inconceivable universe. I had a sense of infinite veneration, infinite pity.

Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph*<sup>1</sup>

A sense of infinite veneration, in the presence of a small object that contains the divinity, and of infinite pity, when witnessing the divine essence being revealed in the image of a woman, seem to overcome the Moor that gazes upon an icon of the Virgin in the Escorial manuscript of the *Cantigas de Santa María* (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> The scene illustrates

<sup>1</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "The Aleph," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking, 1998), pp. 283–4.

<sup>2</sup> Fol. 68v of MS. T.I.1. The *Cantigas de Santa María* is a collection of more than four hundred poetic compositions in Galician-Portuguese, dated to the 1270's, which has come down to us in four manuscripts. Two of them—MS. T.I.1 (Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio), and MS. Banco Rari 20 (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale)—once formed part of a single fully illustrated luxury edition, produced between 1275 and 1284, featuring musical mensural notation to guide the performance of each individual song. Most compositions are narrative poems (*cantigas de miragre*) recounting miracles performed by the Virgin and her images. Each *cantiga* is illustrated in a six-panel grid (33.4 cms. × 22.3 cms.) which occupies the full length of the page. Songs whose final digit is 5 are longer stories and, with few exceptions, they are expanded visually in two sets of six panels facing each other on opposite pages. Every tenth song is a *cantiga de loor* (song of praise) where King Alfonso X of Castile (r. 1252–84), self-proclaimed troubadour of the Virgin, acts as mediator between Mary and his audience, commenting upon her virtues through the language of courtly love and introducing issues of Marian theology and Christian dogma. For a description of the four manuscripts of the *Cantigas*, with particular attention to MS. T.I.1, see the volume of essays accompanying the facsimile edition, *Alfonso X el Sabio, Cantigas de Santa María. Edición facsímil del Códice T.I.1 de la Biblioteca de San Lorenzo de El Escorial. Siglo XIII*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Edilán, 1979); for a detailed description of the Florence codex (MS. B.R. 20), see the facsimile edition, *Alfonso X el Sabio. Cantigas de Santa María. Edición facsímil del códice B.R. 20 de la Biblioteca Centrale de Florencia, siglo XIII*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Edilán, 1989). For a

the story of a Muslim man who took a statue of the Virgin from the Christians as war booty. Enchanted by the beauty of the image, he kept it in his house and “often went to gaze upon it and reason to himself that he simply could not believe that God would become incarnate nor be born of a woman . . . and walk among common folk.”<sup>3</sup> He defiantly pledged, however, that he would convert to Christianity, if God manifested his power through the image. “The Moor scarcely uttered this,” recounts the poet, “when he saw the statue’s two breasts turn into living flesh and begin to flow with milk in gushing streams.”

The miniatures illustrating this miracle introduce substantial variations on the written text by offering a revealing look at the Moor’s intimate universe (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> In the room where he looks daily at the image—rendered as an icon instead of the statue described in the text—his wife and son lovingly embrace in a way that resembles the painted Virgin and Child (panel 4). This similarity is still more marked in the following scene (panel 5), where we observe the Moor falling on his knees at the sight of the lactating icon while, simultaneously, his wife breastfeeds their baby. In perusing the miniatures,

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remarkable study of the *Cantigas* as a source of historical information about the king, his family, and the events of his reign, see J. F. O’Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas de Santa María: A Poetic Biography* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998). O’Callaghan’s book also offers a selective overview of the extensive literature related to the *Cantigas* on issues such as dates of composition, theories of authorship, sources, and others. As this literature is long and quite repetitive, rather than overloading the critical apparatus of this article with a strain of bibliographical references, I will often refer to O’Callaghan’s book whenever he provides an updated review of previous studies on any specific topic. For additional information on Alfonso X, see A. Ballesteros Beretta, *Alfonso X* (Barcelona: El Albir, 1984); J. F. O’Callaghan, *The Learned King. The Reign of Alfonso of Castile* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); and H. Salvador Martínez, *Alfonso X, el Sabio: una biografía* (Madrid: Ediciones Polifemo, 2003). For an insightful assessment of Alfonso X’s cultural enterprises, see F. Márquez-Villanueva, *El concepto cultural alfonsí* (Madrid: MAPFRE, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> The standard edition of the *Cantigas* is W. Mettmann, *Cantigas de Santa María*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Castalia, 1986–9). Quotations from the *Cantigas* are taken from the English prose translation by K. Kulp-Hill, trans., *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X, the Wise* (Tempe, AZ.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000). This translation is based on the standard edition and follows, as I do in this essay, the numbering of the cantigas established by Mettmann.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of basic art historical questions regarding the illuminations of the *Cantigas*, such as stylistic influences and rhetorical structure of the visual narrative, see Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, “Imaxes e Teoría da Imaxe nas *Cantigas de Santa María*,” in *As Cantigas de Santa María*, ed. Elvira Fidalgo (Vigo: Edicións Xerais de Galicia, 2002), pp. 247–330.

our shifting of attention from the mother and son to the Virgin and Child—both intentionally displayed facing the viewer—triggers a play of resemblance. At this moment, the locus of representation moves from the parchment onto the spectator's subjective consciousness, where the Moor's inner experience may be actively reconstructed. By creating this thread of visual associations, the illuminator successfully involves the viewer in a perceptual stage that exists outside the narrative linearity of the miniatures and displays a constant fluctuation between subjective perception and narrative distance. Semantically and ontologically, the space thus entered can be defined as one of *intimate exteriority*. *Extimacy*—a neologism coined by Lacan to problematize the shifting binary oppositions between outside and inside, container and contained, that permeate the intersubjective structure of the unconscious—can be recalled as a critical term in order to delineate the elusive space of signification that is both generated within the visual narrative matrix of codex and, at the same time, intentionally connected to the phenomenal world of the spectator.<sup>5</sup> The icon of the Virgin in the Moorish household dramatizes how the concept of *extimacy* functions here, not only from the point of view of representation but also from the point of view of identity: it signals “the presence of the Other and of its discourse at the very center of intimacy.”<sup>6</sup>

In the visual configuration of the miniatures, this movement from narrative to *extimate* space requires an anamorphic view, the location of the adequate perspective through which a series of associations that substantially enriches the meaning and worth of the object being

<sup>5</sup> The term *extimité* occurs several times in Lacan's seminar; see, for instance, J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 129. The concept was later elaborated by Jacques-Alain Miller in his 1985–6 seminar, where he emphasized the uses of *extimacy* to describe the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other,’—expanding on Lacan's definition of the Other (the unconscious) as “something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me” (J. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 71). Accordingly, in Miller's words, “*Extimacy* says that the intimate is Other—like a foreign body, a parasite—. . . The subject contains as the most intimate of its intimacy the *extimacy* of the Other” (J.-A. Miller, “Extimité,” in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure and Society*, ed. M. Brachner [New York: New York University Press, 1994], pp. 74–87, esp. 76). In my analysis, *extimacy* works as an operative concept at two levels, both from a formal point of view—in relation to the “extroversion” of the visual configuration of *Cantigas*—and conceptually, in relation to the unstable boundaries of identity and otherness that characterize in the work.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, “Extimité,” p. 77.

regarded becomes possible and meaningful. This gaze cuts obliquely into the frame of the miniature, launching a second dimension of representation, which exists somewhere between the interior operations of the mind and the exteriority of narrative discursivity. Through the abandonment of the simple frontal viewpoint that frames the icon as a cryptic token of an alien culture, and the adoption, instead, of a slanted perspective that connects the image it bears to the emotional semantic field associated with the mother and son, a transfer of love ensues. As the alterity of the icon is absorbed and re-inscribed within the space of domestic tranquility, the Moor's affective universe becomes now linked to the symbolic order of Christian worship. In this process—whose full implications I will outline in the first section of this essay—a new faith emerges, one that finds its grounding, through vision and memory, in the realm of resemblance.<sup>7</sup>

The difference between the text of this miracle and its illustrations regarding the reasons for the Moor's conversion bears important consequences. The subtle staging of the illuminations suggests that what triggered conversion was not the wonder-working power of the image, as the text claims, but, rather, the capacity of the intended viewer to observe the perfect *mimesis* between a strange external image and a familiar internal one. Such difference betrays the existence of two distinct socio-cultural points of view from where the textual and the visual originate. In fact, the literary version of this miracle, said to have happened in the Holy Land, is common to other collections of Marian miracles, such as Gautier de Coincy's *Les miracles de Notre Dame*, and reflects the standard Northern rhetoric, offering testimony that the Virgin is more powerful than 'their' God. The illustration of this story in a thirteenth-century manuscript of Gautier's *Miracles* adheres to the textual narrative presenting a sequence of two simple scenes that leads directly from vision to conversion

<sup>7</sup> Anamorphosis is a valuable concept for the analysis the multiple dimensions encoded in the visual structure of the *Cantigas* as it plays out the interconnection between the diverse cultural background of the spectators and the capacity of objects to conjure up multiple meanings. It is through anamorphosis that we are able to enter the dimension of *extimacy*, where the process of conversion occurs—a simultaneous position inside and outside that determines the way the Moor relates to the intercultural symbolic and material universe around him. On anamorphosis, see J. Baltrusaitis, *Anamorphic Art*, trans. W. J. Strachan (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977); see also J. Lacan, "Courtly Love and Anamorphosis," in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 139–54; and Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), pp. 98–100.

(Fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> It is only when we peruse stories that occurred in an Iberian context, where local history and legend intersect, that the nuanced and sophisticated conceptualization of cultural interaction that emerges in the *Cantigas* miniatures, also appears explicitly thematized at the level of the text.

In *cantiga* 205—a miracle set during the siege of a Muslim frontier fortress by Christian troops—the enigmatic gaze that stages the play of resemblance in the illuminations of *cantiga* 46 becomes, indeed, the main protagonist of the story.<sup>9</sup> The set of miniatures features, in the upper register, the Christian camp facing the Muslim citadel (Fig. 4).<sup>10</sup> Within the citadel stands a tower that has been set ablaze during the assault, and, on top of it, a Moorish woman who has taken refuge there with her child. As the story goes,

Master don Gonzalo Eanes de Calatrava, who diligently waged war on the Moors in God's service, and also don Alfonso Tellez . . . ordered an all-out attack upon the tower, and when they saw that the tower was completely destroyed and noticed that Moors seated between the merlons, she looked to them like the statue of the Holy Virgin Mary depicted with Her Son held in Her arms.

They and all the other Christians who saw her felt pity and imploringly raised their hands to God to save the two from death, even though they were pagans. Because of this, God performed a great miracle.

In the middle register, we witness how “the side of the tower . . . slid down to earth on a great open plain, so gently that neither mother nor child was killed, harmed or shaken,” and, as the right panel shows, “the Holy Virgin Mary, to whom the Christians prayed for the Moors' sake, set them down in a meadow.” Finally, in the lower register, a Christian knight brings the Moorish woman into a church and shows her a statue of the Virgin—her own mirror image and the source of her salvation. As a result, she decides to convert and receives baptism alongside her baby.

<sup>8</sup> MS Fr.F.v.XIV.9, fol. 103v (St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia). For this manuscript, see I. P. Mocretova, *French Illuminated Manuscripts of the 13th Century in the Collections of the Soviet Union, 1270–1300* (in Russian) (Moscow: Iskussivo, 1984), pp. 102–47; T. Voronova and A. Sterligov, *Western European Illuminated Manuscripts of the 8th to the 16th Centuries in the National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg* (Bournemouth: Parkstone Press, 1996), pp. 66–67. For a brief comparative discussion of Gautier's *Miracles de Notre Dame* and the *Cantigas*, see Rocio Sánchez Ameijeiras, “Imaxes e Teoría da Imaxe nas *Cantigas de Santa María*,” pp. 264–268.

<sup>9</sup> For the historical context of this miracle, set around the time of the fall of Córdoba (ca. 1236), during the reign of Alfonso X's father, Fernando III, see O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas*, pp. 89–90.

<sup>10</sup> Fol. 6r of MS. B.R. 20.

Here, the transfer of love through resemblance becomes the main theme of the story. The worth-bestowing anamorphic gaze reaches the object through the likeness of the Virgin—a mediating image which is presented, at the same time, as the screen where the individual outside the community may find the blueprint for successfully adopting an identity within. Resemblance with the Virgin offers, literally, a new life: through Mary, the Christians regard the life of the Moorish woman as a life worth praying for; and also through Mary, the Muslim woman herself regards the Christian future she is tendered as a life worth living.

These two miracles set the stage for the theater of interaction that I will explore in this essay. They offer a glimpse into the conditions that facilitate an intercultural exchange held in the midst of a hybrid visual regime, where Christian images were discussed by Muslims and Muslim beliefs were pondered by the Christian population. In the socio-cultural mosaic of thirteenth-century Castile each social and religious group existed in constant contact with all the *others*—gazing eye to eye like the protagonists of these two stories—and was obliged to continually revise not only its image of them, but even its vision of itself, thus rendering contingent ideas that went unchallenged in the rest of Christian Europe. Reality and divinity were apprehended and represented through the merging of modes of discourse traditionally separated by political and linguistic boundaries. From this environment there emerges what I shall call the Gothic anamorphic gaze—a gaze informed by experience and direct knowledge of cultural and religious diversity, rather than by dogma and ingrained stereotypes of alterity. As I have briefly shown, this gaze becomes manifest primarily in the visual matrix of the *Cantigas*, submitting the text—more tied to the Christian tradition and to the common *topoi* running through European medieval culture—to a notable revision. In the ideas and values that emerge from this difference, we discover a consistent program of cultural approximation towards the Muslim minority—one which is ultimately driven by a political agenda of national integration.

In this sense, the *Cantigas* conforms to Alfonso's strategic approach to the diversity of his kingdom as it was enunciated in his monumental law code, the *Siete Partidas*:

Christians should endeavor to convert the Moors by causing them to believe in our religion, and bring them into it by kind words and suitable discourses, and not by violence or compulsion; for if it should be

the will of Our Lord to bring them into it and to make them believe by force, He can use compulsion against them if He so desires, since He has full power to do so; but He is not pleased with the service which men perform through fear, but with that which they do voluntarily and without coercion, and as He does not wish to restrain them or employ violence, we forbid anyone to do so for this purpose; and if the wish to become Christians should arise among them, we forbid anyone to refuse assent to it, or oppose it in any way whatsoever.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, there is in the *Cantigas* an openness towards the Other which is unprecedented in the Middle Ages, and can be more clearly compared, favorably in some respects, to certain modern “enlightened” colonial practices, from the British rule in India to the American occupation of Iraq. In these cases, control and acculturation are always promoted through the promise of a better life, which unfailingly coincides with the model proposed by the colonial power and requires, as basic condition, the full participation in its socio-economic structures of production and consumption. As in the modern examples, domination is implemented in the *Cantigas* through a combined strategy of seduction and repression. Concepts such as happiness, health, compassion, and salvation are inextricably linked, through propaganda, to the social model put forth by the dominant power, implying that the failure to comply with that model causes their loss. According to this rhetoric, the idea of what a good life is has been determined by others, the only choice left to the ‘conquered subject’ is either to ‘gratefully’ live it or become collateral damage in the grand scheme of history.

The *Cantigas* presents the audience with myriad testimonies to the happiness that ensues from espousing the proposed model—a community under the protection of the Virgin. The image of Mary is made a focal point that encapsulates a universal idea of divine love that transcends religious boundaries. The Virgin becomes accessible, acceptable and apprehensible in terms of experience, informed by subjective intercultural data, as is reflected in the two aforementioned examples. One could say that, by exercising an anamorphic gaze, the Moor in cantiga 46 is able to discover the *Aleph* in the icon. Like the *Aleph* imagined by Borges, the likenesses of the Virgin in the *Cantigas* are figures that aim at containing the world at large,

<sup>11</sup> Part. VII, Tit. XXV, law II. S. Parsons Scott, trans., *Las siete partidas*, ed. Robert I. Burns, 5 vols. (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) vol. 5, pp. 1438–9.

both in its infinite variety and its single universal truth, from the private to the social, in the midst of the Christian community and the Muslim *aljama*. They absorb meaning through resemblance and unify diversity into a totalizing representation of the divine truth, which is offered as guiding principle for the achievement of happiness and salvation. As a whole, the collection stages a national utopia, which is articulated and promoted through the creation of a virtual space of resemblance with contemporary reality where the audience might find paradigms to regulate and reconcile the tensions arising within a fluid and unstable social structure. In the process, they are compelled to channel their hopes along the teleological axis that leads invariably to Marian devotion and to an allegiance to Her favored interlocutor, Alfonso X.

This essay develops in three stages, each centered on a scene of *looking* in which the anamorphic gaze generates a vision of the world that has been largely overlooked in traditional scholarship. That vision defies the formal and conceptual paradigms commonly associated with Gothic art and culture as they have been construed and defined through a narrow look at the art of the North. It reveals a world much more human in its contradictions and much more fluid in its aspirations than it has been allowed to exist in the academic construction of the Gothic period. At the core of each section is a single scene: a Moor gazing at an icon (Fig. 1), a father looking into his son's eyes (Fig. 11), and a mother confronting a statue of the Virgin (Fig. 15, panel 3). When exploring the complex web of formal and conceptual connections among these three illuminations, a parallel history of the culture and society of the Gothic starts to come to light. It is a history that does not spring primary from texts but from vision and its objects. By following the direction of the anamorphic gaze, we may begin to comprehend the subtle mechanisms through which the phenomenal, the psychological, and the social conflate when the subject enters a field of vision permeated by alterity.

#### *The Mystic Mirror: Reflection and Embodiment*

She lived at Seville. When I met her she was in her nineties and only ate the scraps left by people at their doors. Although she was so old and ate so little, I was almost ashamed to look at her face when I sat with her, it was so rosy and soft . . . She was indeed a mercy to the world . . . One day I built a hut for her of palm branches in which to



perform her devotions . . . I have seen various miracles (*karamat*) performed by her.<sup>12</sup>

The ostensible strangeness of a Muslim man being seduced into seeing the divinity in the image of a woman might be expelled by exploring the popular religiosity of Islamic Spain on the eve of the Christian conquest. In his *al-Durrat al-fakhirah* (The Precious Pearl), the Andalusian Sufi Ibn Arabi delineates, through a series of biographical sketches, a landscape of influence, spanning from his native Murcia, on the Christian frontier, to Damascus, where he died in 1240. Among the persons who helped him along his path towards divine illumination, Ibn Arabi singles out numerous women whose spiritual prowess and devotion to God elevated them to a status of sainthood among the common folk. Estranged both from religious and political authorities, these women—such as the one named Nunah Fatimah referred to in the passage quoted above—led their existence among the poor and the lower classes, offering counsel by channeling divine wisdom.

Nunah Fatimah belonged to a community of *living saints* who made God visible to a Muslim population accustomed to God's imageless presence. By holding diverse occupations such as teachers, sellers of pottery, traders of henna, farmers, and beggars, they created multiple sites of belief within the social fabric. Their veneration was inspired by their beneficial actions, in the form of miraculous healing, and from their words, which flowed into the ears of the population in poetic recitations where music and dance carried messages of hope and spiritual bonding.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> R. W. J. Austin, trans., *Sufis of Andalusia. The Ruh al-quds and al-Durrat al-fakhirah of Ibn Arabi* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), pp. 143–6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Arabi's autobiographical narrative opens a window onto a world that was soon to undergo a dramatic change and, in the process, become a transformative influence in Mediterranean Christian culture. The rapid expansion of the Christian kingdoms towards the south in the first decades of the thirteenth century provoked the agglutination of most of those communities under a new political order. In 1243, three years after Ibn Arabi died in Damascus, his native Murcia fell into the hands of Alfonso, while the latter was still a prince. Soon afterwards, in 1248, the Christian expansion reached its zenith as Alfonso entered Seville at the side of his victorious father, Fernando III. While Muslim religious and political leaders fled to North Africa and to neighboring Granada, most members of the working classes remained in their land. Christian rulers, interested in keeping them—to sustain the economy of those regions—issued laws to protect them and allow them religious freedom. See R. Valencia, "La emigración sevillana hacia el Magreb alrededor de

Inspired by the popular sensibility of his native al-Andalus, where, in his formative years, Ibn Arabi saw reflections of God and his miraculous powers in women such as Nunah Fatimah, he went on to state in his *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom),

Contemplation of the Reality without formal support is not possible, since God, in His Essence, is far beyond all need of the Cosmos. Since, therefore, some form of support is necessary, the best and most perfect kind is the contemplation of God in women.<sup>14</sup>

Faithful to this conviction, he created a mystical system containing a principle of universal love centered on a female figure called Nizam (*Harmony*). Both a real maiden whom Ibn Arabi met in Mecca and a theophanic entity that unifies his mystical system, he often refers to Nizam as the “Virgin most Pure” and the “sublime, essential and sacrosanct Wisdom.”<sup>15</sup> Nizam’s transformation from human to theophany—which recalls, incidentally, the process that Beatrice undergoes in Dante’s *Commedia*—helps us to understand the fluid dynamics of divine embodiment that occurs in the *Cantigas*.

In fact, the collection stems from Alfonso’s effort to incessantly record testimonies to the *real presence* of Mary in the midst of the community and her active participation in human affairs. In cantiga 342, one of the numerous stories devoted to *acheiropoieta* (images not made by human hands), the poet spells out a pantheistic vision of divine emanation in the material world in terms not unlike those expressed by Ibn Arabi in the passage quoted above,

*Rightfully can God reveal the likeness of Himself or of His Mother in His creations, for He formed them.*

1248,” in *Actas del II Coloquio Hispano-Marroquí de Ciencias Históricas “Historia, Ciencia y Sociedad” Granada, 6–10 Noviembre de 1989* (Madrid: M.A.E. Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Árabe, 1992), pp. 323–27; and R. I. Burns, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia: Societies in Symbiosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> R. W. J. Austin, trans., *Ibn al-Arabi. The Bezels of Wisdom* (London: SPCK, 1980), p. 275.

<sup>15</sup> The fundamental work on Ibn Arabi’s mystical theology is Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone. Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); see also Claude Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993); William C. Chittick, *Imaginary Worlds: Ibn al-Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994); and Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999).

For creating things in the form they have today or in many other forms, God made not, nor makes any effort, gives not any thought to shaping them, for He has great power to begin them as well as to finish them.

Therefore, if He causes images to appear on stones, no one should be amazed at this, not likewise in plants, for He causes them to grow and gives them many colors to appear beautiful to us.<sup>16</sup>

The discovery of the multiple forms in which the Virgin materializes in the world is the central theme of many miracles and is at the core of the aforementioned *cantiga* 205 (Fig. 3), where the body of a Muslim woman is made, in a sense, into the material support through which Mary becomes visible.

At this moment, let us reenter the private space of the Moor gazing at the icon of the Virgin in *cantiga* 46 in order to pursue the question of divine embodiment from a theological perspective. When looking at the icon, the Moor saw two figures who were fully accepted within the broad parameters of the Muslim faith and, more specifically, at the level of popular religion in thirteenth-century al-Andalus. Mary's central place in Islam is established in *suras* 3 and 19 of the Qur'an, especially in verse 3:41 where the angel of the Annunciation says to Mary: "Oh Mary, truly God has chosen you and purified you and chosen you over the women of mankind."<sup>17</sup> The theological significance allotted to Mary in Islam was well known by Christians, as is attested in *cantiga* 329, which relates a miracle that the poet claims to have heard from the Moors themselves,

A large army of Moors invaded all the land around there [Tudia, southern Spain] and did much damage. With all they had stolen, they made a camp there around the church, and from their possessions

<sup>16</sup> This *cantiga* 342 also stresses the relationship between the internalization of Marian imagery and the subsequent recognition of her presence in the world of nature through resemblance. This connection is made explicit by Alfonso in another *cantiga* that also retells a story of *acheiropoieta* (*cantiga* 29): "We should always keep in our minds," exhorts the refrain, "the features of the Virgin for the hard stones received their impressions." Here Alfonso advocates the interiorization of the figure of Mary, by keeping her likeness always present in one's mind, as if the human body was the material support for an *acheiropoieton*.

<sup>17</sup> A. J. Arberry, trans., *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), *suras* 3:30–40, 19:15–35, 21:85–95, 66:10; see O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas*, p. 87; Nilo Geagea, *Mary of the Koran. The Meeting Point between Christianity and Islam* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1984); Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Chosen of All Women: Mary and Fatima in Qur'anic Exegesis," *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981); and *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Maryam."

they took gold and silver coins which they placed on the altar in honor of the Holy Virgin from whom God was born.

For, according to what Muhammad gave them written in the Qur'an, the Moors firmly believed, there is no doubt of it, that She became with child by the Holy spirit without suffering any violence or harm to Her body, and thus conceived as a virgin. After She became pregnant, She then bore a male child and afterward remained a virgin. Furthermore, She was granted such a privilege that God made Her more honored and powerful than all the angels there are in Heaven.

And so, although the Moors do not respect our faith, they hold that all this about the Holy Virgin is absolutely true. Therefore, the Moors went to pray in Her church, and each one placed some of what he had on the altar.

Although this miracle was not illustrated, we find a visual counterpart for its theological digression in the set of illuminations for another cantiga that elaborates a similar theme. We observe a sultan marking with his finger the *sura* of the Qur'an dedicated to Mary, as well as a group of Moors offering gifts to an image of the Virgin inside a church (Fig. 5, panels 3 and 6).<sup>18</sup>

Besides the figure of *Maryam*, the Moor saw in the icon a representation of her Son, *Isa* (Jesus), who is not only one of the most important prophets in the Qur'an<sup>19</sup> but one that held a special place in Andalusian Sufism. Among Ibn Arabi's Sufi masters, there was, in fact, a widespread Christic devotion. Ibn Arabi himself claims to have been inspired to take the path of illumination in the presence of Jesus. He confesses in his *Futuhat*, "He [Jesus] was my first teacher, the master through whom I returned to God . . . He prayed for me that I should persist in religion in this low world and in the other, and he called me his beloved. He ordered me to practice renunciation and self-denial."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Cantiga 165 is illustrated in two sets of miniatures displayed on facing pages (fols. 221v and 222r of MS. T.I.1). The protagonist of the story is Baybars Bundukdari who in 1260 seized power in Egypt by assassinating the former ruler, Kutuz al-Muzaffar. The poem relates how Baybars, during the siege of Tortosa on the Syrian coast, was informed by his troops that the Virgin was actively protecting the city by sending heavenly soldiers to oppose him. When Baybars realized that there was a *sura* in the Qur'an confirming the virginity of Mary, he decided to end the campaign and offer donations to the local church. See O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas*, pp. 96–7.

<sup>19</sup> See Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991); and Tarif Khalidi, ed. and trans., *The Muslim Jesus. Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur*, p. 39; also see pp. 33–73, for an overview of the Christic character of several sects in Andalusian Sufism.

The two separate phenomena I have described so far—the popular belief in holy men and women, healing agents of God, and the theological tradition of devotion to Mary and Jesus—intersect in the image of the icon and create the background that facilitates its acceptance within the parameters of Muslim popular religiosity. In this respect, the process of associative signification revolving around the icon of the Virgin that takes place in *cantiga* 46 reveals much about the phenomenological and pragmatic dimensions of Alfonso's policy of approximation towards the Muslim community. Mary and her miracle-working images expand their significance beyond the limits of Christian doctrine and occupy a devotional space centered on a feminine idea of divine presence. In so doing, they are able to penetrate religious barriers and converge with Muslim modes of popular piety.

Many stories in the *Cantigas* refer to the miraculous power of Marian images in shrines of recent foundation within the newly conquered territories, opening the possibility that the collection as a whole might have been intended to promote a new geography of divine agency aimed at replacing *other* sites of belief within the social fabric, such as the network of miracle-working holy men and women which is documented in Ibn Arabi's narrative. Indeed, with the advance of the Reconquest, likenesses of Virgin and Child multiplied in sacred spaces formerly devoid of images. In *cantiga* 292, Alfonso recounts how his father carried a statue of the Virgin with him during battle and how, whenever he conquered any city from the Moors, he placed her image on the main gate of the mosque. Some of those sacred images became centers of theatrical displays such as the lavish funerary monument of Fernando III, built by Alfonso in the main nave of the former Sevillian mosque.<sup>21</sup> *Cantiga* 292 refers to a miracle involving this mausoleum, which was dismantled in the early modern era during the construction of the new

<sup>21</sup> For the mausoleum, see O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas*, pp. 50–55; and J. Martínez de Aguirre Aldaz, "La primera escultura gótica en Sevilla: La capilla real y el sepulcro de Guzmán el Bueno (1248–1320)," *Archivo español de arte* 68 (1995): 111–29. For the interior arrangement of the cathedral-mosque of Seville in the thirteenth century and the original placement of the mausoleum, see T. Laguna Paul, "La capilla de los Reyes de la primitiva Catedral de Santa María de Sevilla y las relaciones de la corona castellana con el cabildo hispalense en su etapa fundacional (1248–1285)," in *Maravillas de la España medieval: Tesoro sagrado y monarquía*, ed. I. G. Bango Torviso, vol. 1 (León: Junta de Castilla y León, 2001), pp. 235–51.

cathedral, and contains a brief description of it.<sup>22</sup> It featured an inscription in Latin, Castilian, Arabic, and Hebrew, praising the one “who conquered the city of Seville, the head of all Spain.”<sup>23</sup> Above the tomb there was a tabernacle set with jewels where an image of the Virgin and Child, covered with silver and dressed in red mantles, pelisses and gowns, was displayed. Below the tabernacle were the mobile statues of Fernando III and Queen Beatriz, lavishly dressed and seated on silver thrones.

On the anniversary of Fernando’s death, the mausoleum was the meeting point of the celebrations. Inside the church, ensembles of Christian and Moorish musicians played while the elegies composed by members of his troubadourial court were recited to a multi-ethnic audience, among them the Muslim vassals of Castile and foreign ambassadors. On one occasion, the ruler of Granada, Ibn al-Ahmar, sent a large delegation of notables bearing large white candles to place around Fernando’s tomb.<sup>24</sup> This awesome setting—a former mosque transformed into a cathedral dedicated to Holy Mary and populated with Christian images and *automata*—was probably the intended primary stage for the *Cantigas*. Alfonso stated in his testament that the *Cantigas* be sung on the feasts of the Virgin in the church where he was to be buried—that church was to be the former great mosque of Seville, where, in fact, the *Cantigas* manuscripts were kept until the sixteenth century.

In this hybrid space, and in front of a multi-ethnic audience, the spectacle of the *Cantigas* would have exerted its power. Persons such as the King of Granada, his subjects, and the large Muslim population living in the former capital of Islamic Spain would have listened to stories that could provide multiple elements of identification. In that ritual space of collective celebration, the *Cantigas* would have performed a transformative function in the audience by inducing the

<sup>22</sup> It relates how Fernando III appeared in a dream to the treasurer of the cathedral of Seville as well as to the goldsmith who manufactured a ring for his enthroned statue and ordered them to remove the ring and place it on the image of the Virgin. Unfortunately the illustrations for this cantiga on fol. 12r of MS. B.R. 20 were left unfinished and only completed tentatively with coarse outlines at a later date. For the completion of these miniatures in the mid-fourteenth century and its relation to a campaign to canonize Fernando III, see Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, “La fortuna sevillana del Códice Florentino de las *Cantigas*: Tumbas, textos e imágenes,” *Quintana* 1 (2002): 257–73.

<sup>23</sup> See O’Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas*, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

redefinition of identities or social roles. Many of those individuals could have listened to stories of people like themselves whose anxieties, fears, and flaws were mitigated by the compassion of the Virgin, here presented as head and protector of an inclusive national identity.

The beautiful miniatures illustrating cantiga 181—whose refrain contains the message that reverberates throughout the collection: “The Virgin will aid those who most love Her, although they may be of another faith and disbeliever”—seem to evoke the ensemble of fashions, insignia, and languages that gathered in the cathedral of Seville during the celebrations of Fernando III’s anniversary. Panel 4 shows the triumphal gathering of Muslim and Christian soldiers marching together under the banner of the Virgin (Fig. 6).<sup>25</sup> This image recalls the intended effects brought about by the performance surrounding the *Cantigas*. The active role of the audience in the rituals—their collective movement—contributed to the creation of a heightened sense of community.

If a possible environment for the *Cantigas* was within the enclosure of the mosque-church of Seville, it was ultimately through performance on the public stage that the collection was intended to exert its full propagandistic and proselytizing function. The boldness of the project, giving music such a preeminent role in the king’s pious artistic undertaking, reflects a culture in which instrumental music and poetry were much more than entertainment, and where entertainment itself was considered a fundamental and beneficial part of life. While this sensibility accords with Alfonso’s participation and support of the culture of the Galician-Portuguese troubadours, in its religious dimension, however, it cannot be separated from the hybrid character of the society where it flourished. In the thirteenth-century, Muslim mystics and preachers started using popular poetic and musical forms such as the *muwashshaha* and the *zajal* as vehicles for the expression of mystical thoughts. In their proselytizing efforts, they organized gatherings where those compositions were performed with musical accompaniment. Such was the case of a contemporary of

<sup>25</sup> Fol. 240r of MS. T.I.1. This cantiga is set during the siege of Marrakesh, last stronghold of the Almohad caliph al-Murtada (d. 1268), by the emir of the Marinids, Abu Yusuf (1258–1286). According to the story, the caliph received the recommendation to bring into battle a banner of the Virgin that was housed in the local church. With the aid of the Virgin and the Christian community, he defeated the aggressor, see O’Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas*, pp. 135–37.

Alfonso, the Sufi al-Shushtari, who developed an important poetic oeuvre in the neighboring kingdom of Granada, where he had emigrated after the Christian conquest of Seville.<sup>26</sup> It seems more than probable that Alfonso realized the persuasive power of music to bridge the distance between the cultures of his kingdom and effectively bring people into his vision of a utopian nation under the protection of the Virgin. In fact, the songs were intended to be disseminated through public performances, as is explicitly stated in the concluding verses of cantiga 172 “from this story we composed a song for the minstrels to sing.” Performance by minstrels becomes, in fact, the celebrated theme in the illuminations of one the most important editions of the *Cantigas*, contained in the so-called *codex princeps* (Escorial, MS. b.I.2). Cantiga 120—a song in which the king summons all who believe him to praise the Virgin, because “they will be so well rewarded that they will never desire more”—is fittingly illustrated in this manuscript with a scene showing a Christian musician playing alongside a Moor (Fig. 7).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For an edition and Spanish translation of al-Shushtari’s poems, see F. Corriente, *Poesía estrófica (cejeles y/o muwassahat) atribuida al místico granadino as-Sushtari (siglo XIII d. C.)* (Madrid: CSIC, Instituto de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Arabes, 1988); also see, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Sushtari.”

<sup>27</sup> Fol. 125v of MS. b.I.2. (Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio). The illuminations of this codex are devoted exclusively to musical performance. Every tenth cantiga is prefaced by a square miniature of the length of a text column featuring one or two musicians as they interact with their instruments and with one another. The forty miniatures of the codex reproduce in detail a great variety of instruments—fiddles, zithers, shawms, bagpipes, etc.—which are being handled by minstrels that are depicted with a high degree of individuality; see R. Álvarez, “Los instrumentos musicales en los códices alfonsinos: su tipología, su uso y su origen. Algunos problemas iconográficos,” in *Alfonso X el Sabio y la música* (Madrid: Sociedad española de musicología, 1987), pp. 67–95. Nine years after Alfonso’s death, the multicultural character of the Castilian musical court appears documented in the financial records of his son, Sancho IV, which list 13 Christian musicians, 13 Moors (among them two women), and one Jew; see, J. Ribera, *Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain: Being La música de las Cantigas*, trans. E. Hague and M. Leffingwell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1929), pp. 142–59. The Arabic influence in the music of the *Cantigas* has been a controversial issue since the groundbreaking study of the Islamicist Julián Ribera, who argued for an extensive presence of Arabic melodic and poetic forms (e.g. *zajal*) in the Alfonsine works. Heated debates in favor and against that influence have recently developed into more balanced assessments of the inescapable imbrications of each cultural tradition with the other; see H. H. Touma, “Indications of the Arabian Musical Influence on the Iberian Peninsula from the 8th to the 13th Century,” in *Alfonso X el Sabio y la música*, pp. 137–50, and J. T. Monroe and B. M. Liu, *Ten Hispano-Arabic Strophic Songs in the Modern Oral Tradition: Music and Texts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 1–34.



The diverse social, ethnic, and religious groups that made up the *Cantigas*' performers and audience were compelled literally and figuratively to look and listen to each other. As Lawrence Kramer writes,

Deeds of music seek receptive listeners. As part of its illocutionary force, the music addresses a determinate type of subject and in so doing beckons that subject, summons it up to listen . . . Listeners agree to personify a musical subject by responding empathetically to the music's summons. Their pleasure in listening thereby becomes a vehicle of acculturation: musical pleasure, like all pleasure, invites legitimization both of its source and of the subject position its sources address.<sup>28</sup>

The miniature that illustrates the same cantiga 120 in MS. T.I.1 could not reflect more clearly the dynamics of authority and legitimization through entertainment and pleasure that Kramer describes (Fig. 8).<sup>29</sup> Alfonso kneels before Mary and directs a group of musicians and dancers, by pointing to himself ("those who believe me") and to Mary, to join him and perform in Her honor.

Through music and dance, the *Cantigas* evokes an image of Paradise on earth within the coordinates of Castilian contemporary life. Paradise—a place where "God is always joyful and smiling"—is represented as a land of palm trees where music is being played in honor of God—an indirect allusion to Andalusia, and specifically to Seville, which, as I have pointed out, was the 'natural' environment for the production, performance, and reception of the *Cantigas* (Fig. 9).<sup>30</sup> Honoring the diverse audience that the collection attempts to reach, the Virgin offers entrance into a Paradise that is imagined by combining different pictorial traditions. In fact, the compositional template structuring that "Gothic" vision may have originated in Islamic manuscript illuminations—in particular in manuscripts of al-Hariri's *Maqamat* (Fig. 10).<sup>31</sup> Paradise in the *Cantigas* is, visually and conceptually, a place of convergence.

<sup>28</sup> L. Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 21–22.

<sup>29</sup> Fol. 170v of MS. T.I.1.

<sup>30</sup> Fol. 145r of MS. T.I.1.

<sup>31</sup> London, British Library, MS. 1200, fol. 68r. For a description of this manuscript, dated 1256, see O. Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 12–13. The compositional similarities between several scenes of the *Cantigas* and miniatures of the *Maqamat* are explored in detail in my forthcoming book *In the Shadow of the Gothic Idol*.

*The Space Between: Still Love and the Poiesis of the Community*

What are days for? . . . We used to know the answer to that. Days were for living, for working, for the rituals of normalcy that make up the way of life we have come to know as American. These days had their ups and downs; they had their surprises and shocks. But they had as well a sense of reliability or modest predictability. We barely noticed these small moments of routine that, strung together, formed the ballast of a culture: the commutes to work, the family outings . . . and household chores. They acquired a rhythm that, although we easily forgot, took a revolution to begin, a civil war to resolve and dark and bloody wars to defend. And so this security built slowly upon itself, broadening and deepening until we took it for granted, the threats to it always remote and, though involving us, not about us.<sup>32</sup>

In an unfurnished room, a man welcomes the return of his family with extended arms (Fig. 11). His eyes, anxiously seeking those of his son, signal a moment of abandonment in which the characters cease to inhabit their physical environment as they plunge into one another's consciousness. Every element in the visual field has been reduced to its essentials, as if to direct the viewer's attention away from pictorial signs and onto the invisible semantic kernel of representation: the empty patch of vellum that mediates between father and son. Left unpainted, the surface of the parchment has been freed from symbolic and decorative concerns, becoming a transitive space, a nexus that allows for the generation of emotional density as a purely relational affair. By submitting pictorial language to silence—a silence that foregrounds a resistance to discursivity and to textual imposition on the visual—the artists have discovered what lies beneath the vellum as a page and reinvent it as a stage. In effect, they regarded the narratives they were commissioned to illustrate as scripts which elicited a *mise-en-scène* along the lines of theatrical *mimesis*, rather than texts that demanded to be translated into images which function as a parallel visual gloss. Like performance, these images emanate from the creative imitation of the emotional and physical responses operating in phenomenal reality. In the *Cantigas*, visual meaning emerges from the interaction of characters that are fully aware of the reality of other selves, not in symbolic or allegorical

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Sullivan, "This Is What A Day Means," *The New York Times* (September 23, 2001).

terms, but rather in psychological and emotional ones. The emptiness of the parchment—its nature as a *milieu*—makes possible the visualization of introspection and interior depth, that is, of sentience as a definition of being.<sup>33</sup>

The formal and conceptual importance of this miniature cannot be overestimated. It is painting outside of the grammar and syntax that characterizes most of the art of its time, from the images accompanying the *Roman de la Rose* and the miracles of *Gautier de Coincy* to the *Bible moralisée*. Instead of enforcing a symbolic reading in terms of a complex language of substitutions, this scene lends itself to immediate consumption, pushing without resistance its emotional weight into the viewer's mind to the point, as we will see, of rendering irrelevant the religious message supported by the text that it intends to illustrate.

Cantiga 139, to which this miniature belongs, tells an edifying story of mortality overcome and the attainment of mystical union and eternal bliss. Yet, in approaching the images that illustrate it, we confront a tragic tale of life lost, love interrupted, and inconsolable grief (Fig. 12).<sup>34</sup> In the visual representation of the text, the artists manipulated the spirit of the letter to the point of its negation, transforming a parable of Christian deliverance from the toils of earthly life into a unsettling vision of the marginality of human happiness in the face of God's providential will. The rupture undertaken in the visual discourse reveals a profound shift of attention—attention that now concentrates on the dramatization of the conditions of a sentient humanity over the presentation of a Christian narrative of salvation.

In this cantiga, Alfonso elaborates poetically the popular tale of a little boy who was granted Paradise for his devotion to Jesus:

Concerning this, I wish to relate to you a marvelous and mighty miracle which this Virgin, Mother of God, performed for a lady who went to the church of Her who, we hope and pray, may be on our side and let us see Her face in Paradise where God grants bliss and joy to those who please Him.

<sup>33</sup> For a study of the etymological, philosophical, and literary aspects of the term "milieu," see Leo Spitzer, "Milieu and Ambiance," in *Essays in Historical Semantics* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1948; rpt. 1968), pp. 179–316.

<sup>34</sup> Fol. 195r of MS. T.I.I.

This lady took with her a little boy, her son, who was very young, and gave him in offering to the Virgin so that She might keep him from harm and misfortune and cause him to say and know good things. The child, as I learned, was eating his bread. He ran up to the figure of the Holy Child on the statue and said: "Do you want a bite?" The figure of the Virgin discreetly said to Her son: "Tell him without hesitation not to be afraid, but ask him to dine with you where there is always singing and pleasure and be rid of the cursed devil condemned for his wickedness." When She said this, the statue of Christ replied to the little boy: "You will eat with me tomorrow in Heaven, and after you have seen me, you will dwell with me forevermore where you will hear the saints sing, which drives away care and woe." And so it was accomplished, and the little boy died and went straight to God.

The lyrics shun the implicit cruelty of the miracle by glossing over the anguish of the boy's untimely death and shifting the focus forward to a description of the joys of Paradise. The child, the text implies, was rewarded by being spared the contingencies of human life, where "the cursed devil" jeopardizes happiness, and by introducing him without delay to the eternal delights of Heaven. Conversely, of the six scenes chosen by the artists to illustrate this miracle, five focus on the aspect that the text so consciously evades: the loving bond between parents and child and the grief brought about by its rupture. Furthermore, and also contrary to the lyrics, Paradise itself never enters the visual field and, instead, we are left with a snapshot of the uncontrollable despair of a broken family.

The two lower panels epitomize the radical reversal undertaken in the design of the visual program. If they had faithfully attempted to give visual expression to the lyrics, the artists might have chosen a pair of scenes similar to the one that concludes *cantiga* 41 (Fig. 13).<sup>35</sup> One panel features death as a momentary state of mourning, immediately superseded by the following scene where the blessed soul enters Heaven, an image that fits closely the verbal description of Paradise in *cantiga* 139. However, instead of this predictable solution, the artists decided to explore the emotional rather than the spiritual consequences of the plot by exercising a backward and intimate look at the environment struck by tragedy and by keeping, simultaneously, its theological justification out of the visual discourse. Instead of a proleptic view of Paradise, we witness the charming, but apparently inconsequential, domestic scene with which I began

<sup>35</sup> Fol. 59v of MS. T.I.1.

this section: the moment in which the father greets the return of his family from church by enthusiastically extending his arms to embrace his son. Parental love is framed here to heighten the dramatic effect of the final scene, where we witness no eternal happiness but, rather, the tragic collapse of quotidian bliss. Visually, intimacy takes precedence over transcendence, loss over gain, past happiness over future beatitude.

A comparison between the image that was edited out—Paradise—and the one that was inserted instead—home—helps us to understand some of the implications of the substitution. Both are transitive moments in which the child moves toward a source of nurturing love. One scene features his reception into his father's arms, the other his passage into the Father's bosom. The latter is supported by a textual tradition, as it appears reflected in the lyrics, which, in turn, is given visual expression according to a pre-established set of iconographic conventions—it is symbolic, proleptic, dogmatic, and transcendental. The former originates in the interstices of the text. It springs from the artist's comprehension of the emotional consequences of the plot on the stage of experiential reality—it is descriptive, immediate, factual, and intimate. Two main questions emerge from this discussion. Why should intimacy and the quotidian be more important than transcendence and the eternal in the overall artistic scheme of the *Cantigas*? And how does the central visibility given to the sphere of everyday life in the *Cantigas* diverge from current notions about Gothic art, in particular, those which tend to explain this type of imagery through discourses of marginality?<sup>36</sup>

The *Cantigas*, like most of the art of its time, proposes a model to achieve existential completion in the search for spiritual fulfillment and happiness. However, while in works such as the *Bible moralisée*, such fulfillment is permanently deferred, through typology, to a transcendent beyond,<sup>37</sup> or in others such as the *Roman de la Rose* circulates elliptically in the sphere of allegory,<sup>38</sup> happiness in the *Cantigas*

<sup>36</sup> See M. Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); and idem, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> See M. Camille, "The Book of Signs: Writing and Visual Difference in Gothic Manuscript Illumination," *Word & Image* 1.2 (1985): 133–48; and idem, "Visual Signs and the Sacred Page: Books in the *Bible moralisée*," *Word & Image* 5.1 (1981): 111–30.

<sup>38</sup> For an introduction to the *Roman de la Rose*, see J. V. Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

is made and unmade within the sphere of the quotidian and in the midst of the community. The *Cantigas* attempts to display a coherent view of man's place in Creation and his path to salvation, but rather than expressing it under the grid of allegory, it does so through the configuration of a harmonious texture of reality.

In effect, the *Cantigas* presents the viewer with levels of reality and emotional textures that hardly find a place in medieval art. There is a certain similarity of effect between the new framing reflected in the art of the *Cantigas* and the rhetoric of still life painting. In his meditations on still life, Norman Bryson observes,

From one point of view, the worldly scale of importance is deliberately assaulted by plunging attention downwards, forcing the eye to discover in the trivial base of life intensities and subtleties which are normally ascribed to things of great worth . . . From another point of view, the result is that what is valueless becomes priceless . . . attention itself gains the power to transfigure the commonplace, and it is rewarded by being given objects in which it may find a fascination commensurate with its own discovered strength.<sup>39</sup>

Let us consider an instance in the *Cantigas* of what I shall call *still love*. Cantiga 178 revolves around the feelings of a child facing the death of his beloved pet (Fig. 14).<sup>40</sup> The prevention of the child's grief becomes the central concern of all the characters involved in the story, from his parents' futile attempts to conceal the pet's sudden death, to the final intervention of the Virgin bringing it back to life. In a series of subtly staged scenes, the illuminators engage us in an emotional journey through the child's eyes. In the first panel, the little boy receives a gift from his father—a mule that has just been born in the farm. As the father introduces his son to his new pet, the boy, exhibiting both curiosity and shyness, partially hides behind him. Panel 2 features the moment when the father discovers the mule's corpse in the stable, while outside his wife tries to prevent her son from witnessing the event. To this end, the father

1969). For an insightful study of *ekphrasis*, vision and self-reflexivity in the *Rose*, see S.G. Nichols, "Ekphrasis, Iconoclasm, and Desire," in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose*, ed. K. Brownlee and S. Huot (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 133–66. For a psychoanalytic examination of the structure of courtly love, see S. Žižek "Courtly Love, or, Woman as Thing," in *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 89–112.

<sup>39</sup> N. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked. Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 64.

<sup>40</sup> Fol. 237r of MS. T.I.1.

takes the boy with him to the fields (panel 3) but he inevitably finds out. Despite the fact that the mule had been partially skinned when the boy discovers what has happened, resolution triumphs over despair, and he tells his mother he wants to offer his pet to the Virgin. Disregarding his mother's warning that he should not present the Virgin with a dead animal, the boy takes off his belt, measures the mule's corpse and makes a candle of the same length for the shrine of the Virgin of Salas (panel 4). Finally, when the father reaches the shrine and lights the candle on the altar (panel 6), back on the farm (panel 5), the mule resuscitates and receives food from its owner's hand.

By giving visibility to the minute details that determine individual happiness, the miniatures offer a model in which human emotions are valued. Animals themselves become the protagonists of several *cantigas*—their pain, tribulations and happiness are rendered in anthropomorphic terms and shared with their owners and other members of the community.<sup>41</sup> To a great extent, the *Cantigas* opposes the visual economy of medieval art and turns its lens onto the overlooked interstices of human emotion. When moments such as the ones I have discussed—only a fraction of the hundreds to be found in the *Cantigas*—enter the field of vision, they bring with them a frame for reflecting upon a category of emotions that generally finds no reason for existence in medieval art, other than lurking in the margins of sacred discourse.

These scenes cannot be discounted as products of a marginal interest for the ordinary or an intrusion of vernacular imagery at the outskirts of the ecclesiastical master narrative but, on the contrary, play a key role in the expression of a specific conception of human existence, one that fosters a reconfiguration of narrative syntax and

<sup>41</sup> The pantheistic compassion that emerges from miracles involving animals seems to reflect a Franciscan piety—a piety that can be felt as a diffuse, although not determinant, source of inspiration throughout the *Cantigas*. There was, in fact, a substantial Franciscan presence in Alfonso X's court, led by his secretary and close advisor, Gil de Zamora (Iohannes Aegidius Zamorensis)—a Franciscan friar who studied in Paris, perhaps with Bonaventure. To Alfonso he dedicated the *Liber Mariae*, which contains 78 Marian miracles. He also wrote treatises on music, history, theology, and rhetoric. For a biography of Gil de Zamora, see Manuel de Castro y Castro, ed., *Fray Juan Gil de Zamora, O.F.M., De preconiis hispaniae* (Madrid: Universidad de Madrid, 1955); for the *Liber Mariae* and its connections to some miracles in the *Cantigas*, see F. Fita, "Poesías inéditas de Gil de Zamora," *Boletín de la Real Academia de Historia* 6 (1885): 379–409.

representational means and one which has strong political and social implications. Unlike other contexts in which we can find snippets of the quotidian in medieval art, such as saints' lives, prayer books, calendars or other collections of Marian miracles, the representation of aspects of daily life in the *Cantigas* is not ancillary and fragmentary but a central constituent in the expression of a comprehensive vision of human life, of the relational character of social identity, and its religious dimensions. The cultural and political function of the *Cantigas* is inseparable from its aesthetic dimension. Alfonso's determination to promote a *poiesis* of the community fostered the development of a pictorial language that emphasizes the transitive elements of visual signification as a way to flesh out in images the elusive and overlooked threads which generate the matrix of daily life. It thematizes states of union and integration ranging from purely physical elements such as sex, to the constitution of the family, the creation of friendships, reconciliation, social bonding and, ultimately, as we will see in the next section, conversion.

The relation between daily routines, communal life, and national identity is easily overlooked.<sup>42</sup> Only by experiencing the confusion that ensues from their collapse, does their grounding importance become evident. Never has this been more clearly documented in recent history than in the shock that overcame Americans in the wake of the September 11 attacks. The following days witnessed the struggle of journalists and commentators trying to gauge the extent and nature of what was lost. It is in this context that Andrew Sullivan reflected on these issues in the New York Times article partially quoted at the beginning of this section, which continues in the following excerpt,

To arrive from elsewhere onto American soil was always and everywhere a relief. It presaged the joy of security again, of family and friends and faith and work. We knew what days were for; and knew also that even when disaster struck or news shocked, the days them-

<sup>42</sup> These issues have been discussed in relation to questions of political power, commerce, and practice by Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S.F. Rendall (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1984). Since its inception in the mid-1970, *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) has become an important area of historical inquiry, shedding light on the multiple human agents involved in the fabric of history. For an introduction, see Alf Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, trans. W. Templer (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1995).



selves would encompass what we had to deal with. They would bracket us, shield us, support us.

As any immigrant knows, this was the thrill of this country, its irresistible pull, its deepest promise. It was a symbol that the world need not always be the impenetrably dark place it has often been. It was a sign that someplace, somewhere, was always secure—as powerful an icon to those outside this continent as those within it.<sup>43</sup>

In the *Cantigas*, Alfonso shows his subjects what days are for. Days are for praying, for celebrating, for loving, for building, and shows them also that all these small moments which form the ballast of society will be forever preserved from the agents that threaten to destroy them by the active presence of the Virgin in the midst of the community. That unbreakable bond between the Virgin and the kingdom, which the *Cantigas* incessantly records, was Alfonso's "deepest promise" to his subjects. "It was a symbol that the world need not always be the impenetrably dark place it had often been," and "a sign that someplace, somewhere, was always secure—as powerful an icon to those outside as to those within it." Alfonso's extension of that promise to those outside is the subject of the following section.

*The Politics of Compassion: Expanding the Iberian Dream*

Try to imagine, yourself, how I could have kept  
Tears of my own from falling for the sake

Of our human image so grotesquely reshaped,  
Contorted so the eyes' tears fell to wet  
The buttocks at the cleft. Truly, I wept,

Leaning on an outcrop of that rocky site,  
And my master spoke to me: "Do you suppose  
You are above with the other fools even yet?"

Here, pity lives when it is dead to these.  
Who could be more impious than one who'd dare  
To sorrow at the judgment God decrees?"

*Inferno* XX, 20–30<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Sullivan, "This Is What A Day Means."

<sup>44</sup> Robert Pinsky, trans., *The Inferno of Dante* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994).

Dante's tears at the sight of the distorted bodies of the diviners in *Inferno* XX contain the kernel that might ultimately lead to a radical questioning of faith. They express a compassion for God's victims whose danger Virgil immediately detects, compelling him to reprimand Dante with unprecedented harshness: "Who could be more impious than one who'd dare to sorrow at the judgment God decrees?" Being the part of the *Commedia* where humanity's emotions, weaknesses and struggles are most movingly portrayed, *Inferno* also provides the path along which the pilgrim, and the reader, are blustered by intense portraits of pain and must learn to accept without dispute the severity of God's judgment. Virgil is the figure that keeps Dante from turning compassion into indignation in the face of God's active infliction of pain. The pilgrim must overcome emotion in the face of suffering, leave compassion aside and align his own wrath with that of God, fully accepting a religious order in which punishment and pain constitute the necessary premises upon which God's omnipotence and righteous judgment are grounded. As a whole, *Inferno* offers a penetrating portrait of man's struggle to reconcile human suffering with divine justice, the reality of pain and the fact that pain ultimately exists because God allows it.

The complexities of this struggle are dramatized with both subtlety and boldness throughout the spectrum of similarities and differences between the lyrics and the illuminations of cantiga 76 (Fig. 15).<sup>45</sup> It is the story of a devoted woman whose son was wicked, "a bold thief, a gambler, and a brawler" (panel 1). During one of his escapades, the son was caught with stolen booty, arrested and condemned by a judge to the gallows (panel 2). "Crazed with sorrow" upon learning of her son's death, the woman went to a Marian shrine, stood before the altar and angrily said to the statue: "You are powerless if you cannot revive my son." "When she said this," explains the poet, "she became so furious that she went to the statue and seized the Child and wrested it from Her arms screaming: 'I shall have this one until I see my own come back alive and well with no illness or injury'" (panel 3). Immediately, the Virgin resurrected the woman's son, who appeared in the church and harshly rebuked his mother for having taken Jesus from the Virgin (panel 4). In response, the woman returned the Child to the statue and "entered

<sup>45</sup> Fol. 113r of MS. T.I.1.

a religious order to serve the Virgin better.” The irreverent facts of the story—a woman who rebels against a legal judgment, puts the blame for the death of her delinquent son on the Virgin, and consequently manages to successfully blackmail the Virgin into performing a miracle of resurrection—are mitigated and given moral validation in the refrain, which contains the basic message of the story: “Whoever would separate the statue of the Virgin from that of Her Son is foolhardy, without a doubt.” The conclusion of the miracle, having the woman enter a convent to serve the Virgin as atonement for her actions, is in accordance with the moralizing teaching of the refrain.

It is precisely the conclusion—the element that tames a story of defiance through the imposition of Christian punishment and atonement—that was changed in the illuminations. In effect, as the caption of the last panel explains, “This is how the *son of the good woman* entered a monastic order.” Not only is the woman spared punishment in the miniatures, but also the captions retell the story so that she is cast in a positive light, using the epithet “good” when referring to her. There is no mention of the idea expressed in the refrain nor of the son’s condemnation of his mother when he came back to life.<sup>46</sup>

Such a radical reframing of the story responds to the same principles that guided the transformation staged in the illustrations of *cantiga* 139 (Fig. 12). While the lyrics offer a normative Christian framework for the acceptance of suffering, the miniatures bring to the fore the essential paradox that lies at the heart of religion: the difficult reconciliation between the omnipotence of a compassionate God and his recurrent failure to relieve humanity from pain. They

<sup>46</sup> The story retold in the captions reads as follows:

Panel 1: How the son of a good woman was a gambler, a thief and a brawler.

Panel 2: How they caught the son of the good woman in a theft and they hung him for it.

Panel 3: How the mother of the executed man took the Son from the image of Holy Mary so that She would give her son back.

Panel 4: How Holy Mary resurrected the son of the good woman and sent him to the church to be with her. [The gesture with which the son addresses his mother in the miniature, which, according to the lyrics, would be one of condemnation and disapproval, becomes here, in light of the caption, just a gesture of greeting and, at most, advice to return Jesus to the Virgin].

Panel 5: How the good woman returned Her son to the image of Holy Mary.

Panel 6: How the son of the good woman entered a monastic order.

place us on a stage similar to Dante's in *Inferno* XX, although here eliding Virgil's role (which is represented in the lyrics by the chastising voice of the resurrected son) and enacting the plot so that a passionate reproach of God's neglect to avert human suffering is not only accepted, but ultimately rewarded. It is, in essence, a retelling of the story from the point of view of sentience rather than from a moral or religious standpoint.

The interpretation of pain in the *Cantigas* fluctuates, dialogically and dialectically, between the realm of sentience and the domain of religion. Religious paradigms for the understanding of human suffering are rendered contingent in the miracles, when channeled through characters who exhibit an remarkable interior depth and personal agency—one that is directly related to their own experience of pain. Detailed accounts of illnesses in the *Cantigas* serve to highlight Mary's healing power and her compassion for those who suffer. Statements presenting the Virgin as the one "who wins health for us from God and gives us joy" (cantiga 367) are echoed by myriad characters that testify in unison to her miraculous interventions. The scenes of individual healing depicted in the narrative miracles are condensed in beautiful tableaux illustrating verses from the lyrical songs, which underscore Mary's compassion. As I have pointed out, her message of mercy reaches the people through Alfonso's voice—an aspect that is emphasized visually in multiple miniatures, such as a scene from cantiga 170, where the king unveils before his audience one of those tableaux and tells them that the Virgin "should be praised by everyone in the world, for some She saves, others win pardon, and She brings peace to the world" (Fig. 16).<sup>47</sup>

The close relationship between the king and Mary in these miniatures, where one functions as the voice, interlocutor and messenger of the other, permeates throughout the *Cantigas* in numerous portraits in which Alfonso's enlightened poetic persona replaces clerical authority in the presentation of Christian doctrine: in cantiga 140, for instance, the king himself instructs a host of bishops and ecclesiastics, commanding them to sing the praises of the Virgin (Fig. 17).<sup>48</sup> Taking into consideration Alfonso's multiple appearances in his functional duality as divine troubadour and spiritual guide, as well as the ecumenical and didactic religious message articulated

<sup>47</sup> Fol. 227v of MS. T.I.1. Cfr. Figs. 8 and 9.

<sup>48</sup> Fol. 196r of MS. T.I.1.

through his poetic voice, we might arrive at an understanding of the close relationship between the personal, the religious and the political in the *Cantigas*. Nowhere is this convergence most clearly felt than in the instrumentalization of compassion as a strategy to promote conversion.

Cantiga 167 offers insight into the effects that the dissemination of those miraculous stories of healing surrounding Marian shrines was intended to provoke on the Muslim population (Fig. 18).<sup>49</sup> Weakened and desperate after the death of her son, a Muslim woman decides as a last resort to emulate her Christian neighbors by going on a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgin of Salas. Such an undertaking, which even involves making a wax figurine of her diseased son as an offering to the Virgin, appalls the other members of the Muslim community who struggle to convince the woman to change her mind. The grieving mother, however, falls into the net of hope cast by the Christians with their miracle stories. At the end of her successful quest for healing, she converts and adds one more testimony to the strain of voices promoting the cult of the Virgin. The refrain contains the central message of the story proclaiming that “The Virgin will aid whoever trusts in Her and prays faithfully to Her, although he be a follower of another law.”

This multiplying and ever-expanding polyphony of testimonies to the healing power of the Virgin is inscribed in the structure of the *Cantigas*, where many miracles mirror each other, repeating the same circumstances although with different protagonists. The Muslim woman of cantiga 167 was probably responding to miracles such as the one retold in cantiga 171 (Fig. 19).<sup>50</sup> It is the story of a woman whose son is resurrected and promises the Virgin of Salas that “because I have always received without fail all I ever asked for you, I shall therefore seek to make known this miracle, one of the most marvelous among all your glorious works.” It is noteworthy that the culmination of the story is not just the miraculous resurrection but also its *dissemination* throughout the community. Accordingly, the last panel shows, as the caption indicates, “How they made this miracle known to all people and praised much Holy Mary.” There, we see a mendicant friar preaching before a gathering of the faithful as he points dramatically to the revived boy and to the statue of the Virgin.

<sup>49</sup> Fol. 224r of MS. T.I.1.

<sup>50</sup> Fol. 228v of MS. T.I.1.

The miracles offer modes of behavior for people in distress to manage critical situations—pathways towards healing which irrevocably lead to Mary. Suffice it to cite cantigas 107 and 191 as additional examples of echoing and mirroring, in terms of cause and effect within a conversion strategy. Cantiga 191 tells the story of a woman who was trying to descend from her house, located atop cliff, down to a valley in order to get water from a spring (Fig. 20).<sup>51</sup> Swept off by a strong wind and falling rapidly (panel 4), she cried out to the Virgin for help and miraculously landed unharmed (panel 5). The poet concludes, explaining that “she got up and gave praises to the Blessed Virgin, and this miracle became known throughout all Spain.” Accordingly, the set of miniatures culminates with a scene showing, as the caption indicates, “How this miracle was preached in all the land and they praised much Holy Mary.” Among the people who heard this miracle could have been the Jewish woman we encounter in cantiga 107 (Fig. 21).<sup>52</sup> When facing a similar situation, she said “Oh, woe is me, how can anyone who falls from here remain alive unless it be God’s will? But you, Queen Mary, in whom Christians believe, if it is true, as I have heard, that you succor the unfortunate women who are commended to you, among all the other guilty women, come to my aid, for I have great need. If I remain alive and well, I will, without fail, become a Christian at once, before another day dawns.” The illuminations, like most stories of conversion, conclude with the dramatic staging of baptism.

The general purpose of the collection is revealed in the way these cantigas reflect instances of behavioral emulation performed by persons when they find themselves caught up in similar critical situations. By displaying a wide array of personal stories of triumph over adversity with the help of the Virgin, the *Cantigas* sought to trigger mimetic responses that culminated in integration into the Christian community, here portrayed as a safe haven sheltered from pain. Illness becomes the symbol of the failure of the old faith and health the reward that comes from embracing the new one.

<sup>51</sup> Fol. 251r of MS. T.I.1.

<sup>52</sup> Fol. 154r of MS. T.I.1. For this cantiga, see John Esten Keller, “Daily Life as Presented in *Canticles* of Alfonso the Learned,” *Speculum* 33 (1958): 484–98; and Albert I. Bagby, “The Jew in the *Cantigas* of Alfonso X, el Sabio,” *Speculum* 46 (1971): 670–88.

It is not a coincidence that most miracle stories thematizing conversion are addressed to the female population, and that they generally involve issues regarding procreation and the well being of children. For instance, cantiga 89 tells the story of a Jewish woman who has problems during her pregnancy and cannot give birth (Fig. 22).<sup>53</sup> The text emphasizes her suffering and helplessness in the situation, “she lay there more dead than alive, crying and moaning and considering herself a miserable creature, abandoned in her great pain, in despair of living, for no medicine would help her.” In the end, thanks to the Virgin, she was able to give birth and “She told how her son was born and all her body was restored to health.” The Virgin’s intervention to solve problems of infertility and bring about the resurrection of children is a recurrent theme in the *Cantigas*, one that should be understood in the context of Alfonso’s repopulating policies. Promoting an expansion of the Christian population, either through procreation or conversion, was fundamental to facilitating the consolidation of the conquered territories. Alfonso issued multiple laws to encourage the settlement of Christian colonists in Andalusia and Murcia, both in the former Muslim cities and in cities of recent foundation.<sup>54</sup> Muslim mothers and their children, susceptible canvases onto which to inscribe identity, constituted privileged targets to activate the models of *becoming* proposed by the narratives.

In sum, religious conversion provides entrance into a community which is articulated and promoted primarily as a *biopolitical* space, that is, as a nation whose constitution promises priority for the protection of the life of its members in their status as biological entities.<sup>55</sup> As I have noted, through their more than two thousand miniatures,

<sup>53</sup> Fol. 131r of MS. T.I.1.

<sup>54</sup> O’Callaghan, *The Learned King*, pp. 189–95.

<sup>55</sup> The concept of biopolitics was introduced by Michel Foucault in the last section of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, see *History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 133–59; and later elaborated in some of his final lectures. He defines biopolitics as “the endeavor . . . to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, race . . .” See idem, “The Birth of Biopolitics,” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. P. Rabinow, trans. R. Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 73–9, esp. 73. For a discussion of this concept and its analytical value, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

the *Cantigas* manuscripts put forth an utopian fantasy where happiness, rather than being postponed as in traditional Christian teleology, substantiates in multiple moments of joy that punctuate human existence. The Virgin assumes the total care of the population and it is the protection that she promises what defines the contours of the community—a nation understood as space of living whose members are joined in their common pursuit of happiness within the parameters of earthly existence.

The key political role played by the figure of the Virgin in this project of acculturation through the promise of a better life can be further clarified by recalling Slavoj Žižek's analysis of ideology. In asking what sustains the identity of a given ideological space, he points out that,

... the multitude of 'floating signifiers', of proto-ideological elements, is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain 'nodal point' . . . which 'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning. . . . This 'quilting' performs the totalization by means of which . . . [these elements] become parts of the structured network of meaning. . . . What is at stake in the ideological struggle is which of the 'nodal points' . . . will totalize, include in its series of equivalences, these free-floating elements.<sup>56</sup>

The Virgin in the *Cantigas* constitutes the “quilting point” or “knot of meanings”—“the signifier to which things themselves refer to recognize themselves in their unity.” Her image holds together the ideological space of the nation that Alfonso endeavors to forge out of a complex and diverse reality. The stories contained in the collection offer a wide array of role models with which the spectator could identify and subsequently find a way to access the new cultural and religious order proposed by Alfonso—one which addresses, in present time, the daily needs, worries, and hopes of its members.

For the multiple interconnections and the dynamic engagement between the world outside and the artistic discourse contained in the codex, the *Cantigas* constitutes the most complex, sophisticated, and ambitious expression of political praxis aimed at implementing a project of national formation ever articulated in the Middle Ages. On account of its nature as a major royal commission, the scope and ambition of its visual apparatus, and the objectives and claims to

<sup>56</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, pp. 87–8.



impose itself on the social fabric by providing an overarching model to regulate life, the *Cantigas* can only be compared to the *Bible moralisée* in the corpus of Gothic manuscript illumination. Artistically, conceptually, and theologically, the *Cantigas* is as ambitious as the *Bible moralisée* but, while the *Bible moralisée* was a rather old-fashioned project for its time, the art of the *Cantigas* encapsulates the very essence of the meaning of modernity in the cultural and artistic panorama of the thirteenth century.<sup>57</sup> This modernity lies in a radical transformation of Gothic visual language through the redefinition of its central mechanism of visual signification: analogy.<sup>58</sup> Unlike the codified typological structure of the *Bible moralisée*, the *Cantigas* detextualizes the operative principles of analogy and relocates them in the phenomenological domain of vision. In that domain, through the chain of resemblances generated by the anamorphic gaze, we discover aspects of Gothic visual culture that have been largely neglected.

In fact, the complex world of the *Cantigas*—where the other is a constitutive part of the self, where religious dogma is questioned against considerations of individual happiness, where sacred images fluctuate between diverse faiths, where the polarization between high and low is constantly transgressed—poses numerous challenges to traditional epistemological paradigms regarding the Gothic. The *Cantigas*, like Dante's *Commedia*, stems from a similar cultural context—a Mediterranean world where the clash between East and West was being waged, not through reified theological arguments but in the aesthetic strength of their respective cultural productions. This aesthetic strength resides in the power to move, to draw audiences into a vision of the world made palpable through sentience and experience.

The final scene of this essay brings us to a chamber on fol. 100r of MS. B.R. 20 (Fig. 23). Surrounded by knights of the Order of

<sup>57</sup> Here I am using the term “modernity” as a hybrid between its medieval usage—*modernitas* designating “the present time”—and also its later conceptualizations, referring to an art that tries to break new ground and stands at outer limits of the concerns of a specific cultural moment.

<sup>58</sup> The classic study on analogy in medieval thought is Robert Javelet, *Image et ressemblance au 12<sup>e</sup> siècle, de saint Anselme à Alain de Lille* (Paris: Éditions Letouzey et Ané, 1967); for a study of resemblance as a vehicle for intertextual rewriting, see Paul Vincent Rockwell, *Rewriting Resemblance in Medieval French Romance. Ceci n'est pas un graal* (New York and London: Garland, 1995). For a meditation on the poetics of visual analogy, see Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2001).

the Star, Alfonso looks ecstatically at an invisible presence.<sup>59</sup> He raises his hands as if to grasp an elusive patch of vellum framed by fading traces, which were originally intended as outlines for the painting of a statue of the Virgin. Left unfinished, this representation becomes an emblem of the *Cantigas* and a metaphor for the transformation that Mary undergoes therein, where she becomes a polymorphic and malleable image capable of adopting multiple roles that fluctuate at various levels in the cultural crossroads of the Castilian kingdom. Alfonso sustains a *space of representation* which is both *Aleph*, from the point of view of religious belief, and *nodal point*, from the perspective of political ideology. Such an insubstantial image, seized and construed by the holder of power, encapsulates the Void at the center of religion—the “hypothetical object whose name has been usurped by men but which no man has ever truly looked upon.”

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<sup>59</sup> For the short-lived military Order of the Star, founded by Alfonso X, see O’Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas*, pp. 159–62.

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 1. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 68v, detail (photo: Orónoz).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 2. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 68v (photo: Orónoz).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 3. Gautier de Coincy, *Les miracles de Notre Dame*. St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, MS. Fr.F.v.XIV.9, fol.103v.

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 4. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS. B.R. 20, fol. 6r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 5. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 222r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 6. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 240r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).



[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 7. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. b.I.2, fol. 125r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).



Fig. 8. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS T.I.1, fol. 170v (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 9. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 145r (photo: courtesy of Edilián).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 10. **al-Hariri**, London, British Library, MS. 1200, fol. 68r  
(photo: courtesy of the British Museum).



Fig. 11. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 195r (photo: Orónoz).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 12. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 195r (photo: Orónoz).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 13. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 59v (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 14. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 237r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 15. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 113r (photo: Orónoz).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 16. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 227v (photo: courtesy of Edilán).



Fig. 17. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 196r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).



[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 18. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 224r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]

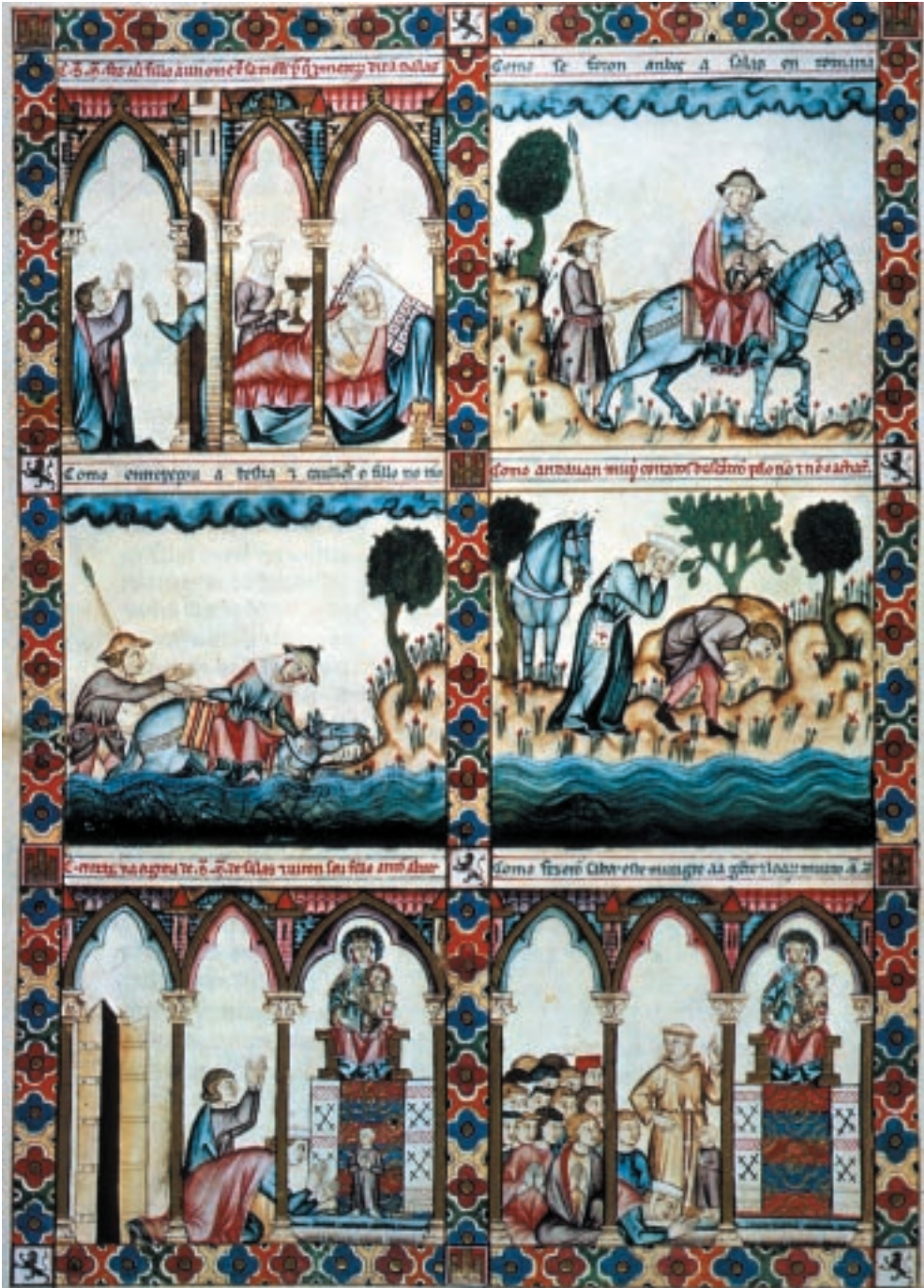


Fig. 19. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 228v (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 20. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 251r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 21. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 154r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 22. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 131r (photo: courtesy of Edilán).

[PRADO-VILAR]



Fig. 23. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS. B.R. 20, fol. 100r (photo: Orónoz).