Ausiàs March's Imitatio Christi: The Metaphysics of the Lover's Passion

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It would be a truism to state, flatly, that Ausiàs March (ca. 1397-1459), the Valencian poet of time-honored renown, is not a household name in the English-speaking world. That truism aside, we hasten to add that March's enduring reputation as the nonpareil Spanish lyricist, whose career sails the tides of the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, is well-established and, by all accounts, well-deserved. He spent virtually his entire life either in Valencia or in its immediate surroundings. In March's time, thanks to no small extent to the poet's own impressive accomplishments, that prosperous Mediterranean seaport developed into a thriving cultural center[1]. March's extant production -one hundred and twenty-eight poems, commonly known as *cants*- was written in his native Valencian, a variant of Catalan[2]. As is well known, within just a few years after March's death, this language lost its officialdom and prestige. Here we cannot and need not go into the complex reasons for the decline of Catalan as a medium of high culture. Suffice it to say that the very nature of that decline and the attendant demotion of Catalan to the status of a minority language destined Ausiàs March to a limited readership. Moreover, the sheer difficulty of his subject matter, the challenge that his introspective analysis presents even to the most seasoned scholar, and, above all, the sophistication of his style, which follows in the tradition of the troubadouresque *trobar clus* and anticipates seventeenth-century *conceptismo* à la Quevedo, are among the factors that militate to transform that limited readership into a select one. This notwithstanding, March is an author of a high caliber -so high, in fact, that his fame, not surprisingly, transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries and can withstand the test of time. Both in the Catalan and in the Castilian domains his contemporaries held him in high esteem and so did prominent authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Riquer 2: 258-67). The admiration that March inspired in stellar literary figures is epitomized by the following statement, proffered by none other than Lope de Vega: "castísimos son aquellos versos que escribió Ausías March en

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[1] In *Poetes, moriscos i capellans*, Fuster goes into an ample discussion of the cultural life of the Valencian society during the fifteenth century. Fuster provides a historical perspective on the same subject in *Nosaltres els valencians* 25-58. For a bird's-eye view of the early period of Catalan literature see Roca Pons 1-48, and Cocozzella, "The Catalan Tradition: The Other Spanish Literature" 61-70.

[2] For a general review of Ausiàs March's life and literary production, see Riquer 2: 471-568 and Ferreres 1-41.

lengua lemosina..." (Quoted in Riquer 2: 266).

Perfunctory though it may sound, Lope's encomium is sincere and right on target. In accord with Lope de Vega, one would argue that Ausiàs's verses are, indeed, most chaste by virtue of the alter ego the Valencian poet fashions for himself. The reader may easily recapture the fundamental process involved in March's projection of himself into his artistic alter ego. It is a natural process of impersonation. In one poem after another Ausiàs employs his lyric devices to probe into the gallant's psyche, tormented by the conflicts, passions, and a myriad other vicissitudes that a lover is heir to. The persona of such a tormented lover, with whom March fully identifies, is, in effect, the author's self-portrait. This portrait becomes March's engrossing concern and lifelong obsession. What distinguishes March's artistic enterprise is the long-range slant he accords to the aforementioned impersonation. At the heart of such a dramatic representation of the lover there lies a metaphysical infrastructure, which leads, as we will soon find out, to a veritable canonization of the persona in question.

Here we begin to discern the epiphany of the lover sanctified. In its multifarious overtones the phenomenon encompasses the conjoining of the two mainstays of Ausiàs March's esthetic and ethics: on the one hand, the ideals and values that constitute the legacy of the troubadours and, on the other hand, the tenets of Scholastic metaphysics which March assimilates as an important component of his educational background. From the troubadours March inherits the notion of the "mártir de amor", whence he elaborates the characterization of a memorable personage. The latter strikes us as a kindred spirit of the poet of our own age, whom Susan Sontag calls "exemplary sufferer" (52). Ausiàs's "exemplary sufferer", to borrow Sontag's felicitous phrase, is a perfected human being, idealized as the martyr in the cult of Eros, enshrined in the mythic paradise or the "abode of the blest".

The rationalistic verve that vitalizes Ausiàs's *cants* attests to the other mainstay of his lyricism mentioned above: the discourse of Scholasticism. As part of that discourse Ausiàs capitalizes upon the principles of *hylemorphism* -the *hyle* and *morphe*, that is, better known by the Latin nomenclature of *materia* and *forma*. He exploits the potential of the *materia-forma* dialectic and transfers its mechanics to the realm of literary creation. *Hylemorphism*, then, provides the key not only to the organic cohesiveness of March's ideological system but also to his special talent for metamorphosing the dynamism inherent in that system into a lyrical function. In addition, *hylemorphism* undergirds the symbiosis between the transcendent ideal of the troubadouresque "saint of love" and its immanent counterpart, the flesh-and-blood individual, who strives to transform suffering into an instrument of perfectibility. It is precisely this dialectic between the transcendent and the immanent that Ausiàs has in common with the host of poets represented in the Castilian *cancioneros* and, in general,

with many other writers, who flourished in the Iberian Peninsula during the first half of the fifteenth century. March shares with such popular authors as the novelists Juan de Flores and Juan Rodríguez del Padrón the orchestration of two motifs, which Antonio Prieto, apropos of Juan Rodríguez's masterpiece, *Siervo libre de amor*, calls the "caso normativo", eminently exemplified in the heroic protagonist (the canonized Ardanlier), and the "caso concreto", embodied by *el amador* Juan Rodríguez himself (Prieto 36-7). Beyond these fundamental affinities with the *cancionero* poets and kindred authors, Ausiàs March, in the final analysis, lays bare the metaphysics of a complementary interaction, perceivable at the very core of the lover's existence. The interaction may be postulated as follows: the *caso normativo* (the ideal lover) is to the *caso concreto* (the specific authorial persona) as, in the hylemorphic system, *forma* is to *materia*.

An intriguing example of the integration of hylemorphism and literature occurs in an extended simile incorporated into one of Ausiàs's earliest compositions. Charged with complex connotations, the passage in question -stanzas ii and iii of Poem 5 (vv. 9-24)- sets in operation the dialectic between the divine and the human aspects of the lover's existence. Because of their special significance, a full quotation of the two stanzas is in order:

II

Axí com Déu, qui no·l plach descobrir
stant enclòs en lo virginal ventre,
e quant isqué defora d'aquell centre,
may lo Setan lo poch ben discernir,
ans, quant en ell veya·l cors de natura,
creya de cert aquell no ésser Déu,
mas ja retut son sperit en creu,
sabé·l mester que paradís procura.

III

Per mals parlés he tret saber e cura
de retenir lo foch d'amor sens fum,
e per açò he cartejat volum
d'aquell saber que sens amor no dura.
Viscut he molt sens ésser conegut
per molts senyals que fictes he mostrats,
mas quant seré per hom foll publicats,
serà ben cert lo tart apercebut. (1: 150)[3]

[3] In this and the subsequent references to March's text, the ciphers demarcated by the period refer,

In his seminal study on the role of analogy in the poetry of Ausiàs March, Robert Archer employs the key terms -image and referent- and the overall schema that I borrow for the present analysis[4]. In this passage the reticence on the part of both God (the "image" proper in stanza II) and the poet's persona (the "referent" in stanza III) to reveal a crucial aspect of one's very being constitutes the basis of the analogy: just as the Divine Maker, in His eternal providence, formulates a plan of concealing His presence, normally shown through grace and other manifestations of the love of "agape", so Ausiàs March, in the guise of the human *poietes* or creator, must devise a method of retaining his "flame" of love ("lo foch", v. 18) "sens fum" (v. 18), that is to say, free of histrionic demonstrations. Other less explicit points of correlation include the coincidence of a belated revelation of identity, which can occur at long last only after both the Divine poet-lover and His human counterpart have been made victims of misunderstandings and persecution: the ultimate epiphany of the Godhead takes place only after the Son of God is nailed to the cross in the wake of Satan's misconceptions and machinations; likewise, the poet will reach the highest fulfillment as a true lover only after his persona has endured the ignominy of a fool's reputation resulting from the intrigues of the "mals parlés" (v. 17).

The extended simile develops the main terms of the analogy which, in accordance with Robert Archer's method, may be charted as follows:

IMAGE

1. Hides in the Virgin's womb
2. Unrecognized by Satan
3. [Falsely characterized by Satan]
4. Crucified
5. By his passion and death manifests the way to attain Paradise (the "mester que paradís procura".)

REFERENT

a. Hides his pure love ("amor sens fum") behind fictional signs ("senyals... fictes")
b. Unrecognized by his fellow human beings
c. Victimized by slanderers ("mals parlés")
d. Regarded as a fool
e. [By his suffering he has become the living witness of the road to salvation.][5]

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respectively, to the volume and pagination in Rafael Ferreres's edition.

[4] For a specific example of the innovative method of analysis I am referring to here, see the commentary on March's Poem 42 (Archer 98-9).

[5] Following the schema proposed by Archer, I have indicated between brackets the points which remain only implicit (not overtly developed) in the parallelism inherent in March's analogy.

The salient feature of this analogy rests upon a paradox: item e under Referent, which, as I have indicated in the schema, receives no explicit illustration, turns out to be an important counterpoint motif which reinforces the metaphysical basis of the entire comparison. The enigmatic statement "lo tart apercebut", which concludes the entire stanza pertaining to the "referent", epitomizes the progression of learning and the enhancement of understanding attested by the various forms of *saber* and the other verbs of perceiving scattered throughout said stanza. The reiteration of the *verba cognoscendi* highlights the steps by which the poetic persona's sense of awareness evolves from the primary stage of those prudential strategies instigated by a calumniator's malice. The lover's awareness begins from that ad-hoc skill ("the saber e cura") conceived to thwart the mischief of the "mals parlés", and culminates at the level of the highest wisdom born of the poet's arduous initiation in *Amor*'s ways and steadfast meditation on his own "book of good love" ("volum/ d'aquell saber que sens amor no dura"). The nature of that wisdom remains elusive because it defies facile exegesis; its overall perspective, nevertheless, bespeaks assurance, certainty, keen insight. Its path leads unequivocally to a sense of complementation between a *caso normativo* and a *caso concreto*, exemplified, specifically, in the point of contact between the divine (or deified) and the human.

Let us reexamine the dynamics of each stanza integrated into the extended simile under consideration here. The tenor of the first stanza which may be called apocalyptic (its main thrust is born of God's plan to reveal Himself to man through the crucified Christ) is counterbalanced by the epistemological orientation of the second stanza which illustrates the struggle of a human being -in this case, the poet's persona- to perfect himself and transcend his limitations by virtue of infused or acquired knowledge. At the metaphysical level, the trajectories of this apocalyptic/epistemological dynamics (the descent of God to man through revelation and the ascent of man to God through the spiritual pilgrimage motivated by the search for wisdom and illumination) mark by their conjugation the encounter between time and eternity. The simile provides a broad paradigm for how the infinite and transcendental order of being, source of all love, fulfills the *vivencia* of the individual lover (the poet's persona), who, all the while, functions as the exemplary Everyman redeemable through the "saber que sens amor no dura".

In the conjoining of the two stanzas resides Ausiàs March's poetic assertion of a key metaphysical phenomenon. To put it in terms of the simile we have just analyzed, the image component, emblematic of the *caso normativo*, "informs" its counterpart in the referent, the embodiment of the *caso concreto*, just as in the Aristotelian system adopted by the Scholastics, *morphe* (*forma*) brings to fruition the various potentialities

inherent in *hyle* (*materia*). The foregoing analysis leads us to formulate an overall definition of Ausiàs March's aesthetic, which exhibits the primary characteristics of syncretism and lyricism all in one. As a determinant of that aesthetic, Saint Augustine's influence is of paramount importance. Apparently, Ausiàs's syncretism is well within the tradition of the Augustinian cosmic synthesis, which harmonizes distinctive orientations of Eros and Agape. Anders Nygren's observations quoted by Martin Cyril D'Arcy reflect the thinking of many theologians to the effect that Augustine "lives on the frontier of two separate religious worlds, those of Hellenistic Eros and primitive Christian Agape, and his significance lies chiefly in the fact that these worlds really meet in his person and form a spiritual unity" (D'Arcy 74). The chief bearings of the Augustinian unified vision of love are recaptured in the anagogic intentionality of the natural/preternatural dialectic, which characterizes Ausiàs's exploration of the lover's experience.

In this context the probing into Ausiàs's notion of the "volum/ d'aquell saber que sens amor no dura" may yield rewarding insights. Amédée Pagès glosses over the far-reaching impact of Ausiàs's symbolism. He suggests as a background for Ausiàs March's "volum" such widely-read works as John of Garland's *Facetus*, Chrétien de Legouais's *Ovide moralisé*, Benoît de Sainte-More's *Roman de Troie* (available in the Catalan translation of Guido delle Colonne's version), the *Lancelot* and other *romants* of the *matière de Bretagne*, and, last but not least, Chapelain's *De amore* (228-30). Pagès, nevertheless, does not attempt to fathom the depths of March's inspiration. Much more significant than the sources enumerated by Pagès is the passage by which Dante conveys the perpetual creativity and the love of God as it informs the entire universe:

> Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,
> legato con amore in un volume,
> ciò che per l'universo si squaderna. (*Paradiso* 33.85-7)
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> ('Within its depths I saw ingathered, bound by love in one volume, the scattered leaves of all the universe.') (Trans. Carlyle-Wicksteed 605)

For Dante's powerful image Natalino Sapegno points out various Thomistic sources - specifically *Summa Theologiae* I, q. IV, 2, *De Ente et Essentia* 4, and *Contra Gentiles* 1.28 (Sapegno, ad loc.). In addition, I would maintain that, in one important sense, the kinship between Dante's and Ausiàs's treatment of the book symbolism rests upon the coincidence of both on one principle of Christian doctrine, also highlighted in Augustine's thought: the trajectory of *Agape* and *Caritas*, which descends from God

to man and comes to full fruition in the mystery of the Incarnation. D'Arcy quotes directly from Augustine in order to illustrate the signal implications of God's life-giving outreach to mankind. The following passage warrants special consideration:

> Through the Incarnation we are drawn into the magnetic field of the eternal world and may taste something of the sweetness of the heavenly life... When God gives himself to us in Christ, He gives us at once the object we are to love and he caritas with which to love it. The object we are to love is Himself, but Caritas is also Himself, who by the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in our hearts. Even the fact that we love God is itself entirely a gift of God. (Quoted in D'Arcy 77)

A closer analysis of Ausiàs's extended simile under consideration here will bring to light these Incarnational overtones of Augustinian origin, even though they may not be apparent at first reading.

A complementary facet of this Augustinian synthesis is the dynamic of conversion, a pivotal phenomenon in Christian spirituality. For this phenomenon William R. Cook, Ronald B. Herzman, and John Freccero underscore Augustinian sources and a version by Dante. Cook and Herzman dwell upon the all-important role of the "book" as initially manifested in the motif of the conversion in Augustine's *Confessions* and eventually parodied in the episode of Francesca and Paolo in Dante's *Inferno* (5.73-142). Commenting upon the key *locus* in which Augustine describes his own conversion (*The Confessions* 147-8; ch. 8), Cook and Herzman conclude that

> The influence of the passage, and implicitly the influence of the *Confessions* as a whole, can be seen by the frequency with which the passage is referred to in subsequent works. It is used in literature as an icon -a definitive emblem- of radical conversion. (97)

Ausiàs must have been familiar with the fundamental paradigm that Augustine illustrates in more than one dramatic occasion. The book, it bears repeating, plays an indispensable role in that paradigm. From Augustine's testimony we learn that the biography of Saint Antony of the Desert, written by Saint Athanasius, and Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans (specifically 13.13-4) triggered, respectively, the conversion of Augustine's friend and that of Augustine himself (Cook and Herzman 90-7). By the same token, in accordance with Dante's aforementioned passage, the book of Lancelot

in the role of a panderer -"Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse" (*Inferno* 5.137) 'the book, and he who wrote it, was a Galeotto' (trans. Carlyle-Wicksteed 34)- prompted for Francesca and Paolo a conversion in reverse, so to speak: one from virtue to eternal damnation (Cook and Herzman 97-8).

In the light of these captivating examples, we may safely assume that the "volum/ d'aquell saber que sens amor no dura" is the prime determinant that moves March's persona -the individual lover- on the way to the radical transformation of his life[6]. Moreover, as handled by Ausiàs March, the ambivalent symbolism of the book -now as instrument of man's conversion to divine life, now as an image of God's love for man- transcends the distinction that some have made between the "mythos" and the "logos" of Eros. D'Arcy employs this terminology in his critique of Nygren's jaundiced view of the transformation undergone by Eros under the influence of Plato and the Platonists. D'Arcy explains that, in Nygren's judgment, "the mythos becomes a logos; what was essentially a wild and irrational passion is converted into an excessively rational religion" (68). Enlightened poets like Ausiàs March help us realize that the contrast that disturbs Nygren and cohorts becomes neutralized thanks to the intuition of the interaction between the irrational (or emotive) and the rational in matters of love. At the core of Ausiàs's world view we discover the "volum/ d'aquell saber que sens amor no dura" -a notion of the universal book which encompasses not only the erotic impulse energizing the "conversion" explained above but also the intellective operation of a mind illumined by God's grace. Together with the metamorphosis inherent in the Augustinian concept of sanctified passionate love, Ausiàs's "volum" recaptures the insight that marks the climax of Dante's contemplation. Thus, Ausiàs elaborates a poetic which integrates, on the one hand, the characteristic "mythos" of Eros of Augustinian lineage and, on the other hand, the enhanced understanding of the "logos" in line with Dante's vision. This is precisely the vision, for which, on the basis of those mighty lines -"nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna/ legato con amore in un volume"- both William W. Jackson and Charles S. Singleton (cf. the commentary on *Paradiso* 33.85-7) recognize an essentially intellectual constitution[7].

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[6] Occasionally Ausiàs depicts in no uncertain terms the conversion he has in mind. In stanzas V and VI of Poem 18 (vv. 33-48) he compares his persona, intent upon the achievement of absolute beatitude, to Saint Paul transported by God to ecstatic contemplation and to the philosopher -possibly Crates, the cynic (cf. Bohigas, notes ad loc.)- who "per muntar al bé qui no·s pot perdre" ('in order to soar to the good that cannot be lost') dumped all his worldly possessions to the sea. As he advanced in years Ausiàs apparently lost his youthful enthusiasm and, as Torras i Bages puts it, his "convulsió epilèptica d'amor" ('love's epileptic convulsion') (332). He learned, instead, to rely heavily upon the direct intervention of the Almighty. The opening stanza (vv. 1-8) of one of Ausiàs's late compositions -Poem 105, commonly known as "Cant espiritual"- reflects a most intense moment in the persona's quest for true conversion (cf. March 2: 126).

[7] Jackson makes the following observation:

> This is the conclusion of the whole. The Vision of God is intellectual. Love still survives

This perception of "volum" as logos, underscored in the light of Dante's prototypic treatment of the very "topos" of the book, dovetails with the Christological dimension of Ausiàs depiction of his persona's "askesis". Thus, Ausiàs dramatizes the lover's longing for the union with God. It is instructive to bear in mind, as yet another significant aspect of March's background, the logocentric ideology fraught with Incarnational overtones, derived from Raimon Llull, the thirteenth-century luminary from Majorca. Robert Pring-Mill quotes Llull to indicate that all corporeal creatures find their fulfillment ("sa fi") in the glorified and beatified human body just as the latter attains its consummate realization in God Himself (131). In his sagacious commentary Pring-Mill draws out a corollary from Llull's text and brings to light its Christological and Incarnational implications:

> Tot això [the hypothesis concerning the perfectibility of all material creatures through the human body glorified] afecta també, com és natural, la doctrina cristològica, en quant Jesucrist -que havia participat a la *creació* del món- esdevé l'home en el qual aquest món ateny la seva fi millor, quan Ell s'encarna per a la *recreació* del gènere humà. Hi ha més: mentres en l'home tan sols es participen el món material i el món espiritual, en Jesucrist tots dos participen directament en el tercer, el món diví. Com el Beat ens diu, en formular la seva cristologia sots la metàfora d'arbre en l'Arbre de Jesucrist de *l'Arbre de Ciència*: "Aquest... és arbre en qui participa lo creador ab totes creatures, en quant són ajustades abdues les natures [divina i humana] en unitat de persona". (131-2)

When brought to bear upon March's extended simile, which has been analyzed here, these key loci of Lullian doctrine illustrate a fundamental coincidence between the two authors. Ausiàs March's text, to be sure, does not include any reference to a specific source. The Valencian poet, nevertheless, elaborates a framework in which Llull's Christology provides the necessary bearings. There can be little doubt that Ausiàs March moved within that framework with the ease and deftness bred of true familiarity. Indeed, by leafing -"fullejant", as he confesses- through the "volum" that has piqued our curiosity, Ausiàs's poetic persona has come to grips, through the mediacy of Llull and Augustine, with the quintessential Johannine theology of the primordial Logos. Ausiàs could not have failed to take into account the seminal

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in the sense in which it is defined in the *Convivio*, as the spiritual union and conjunction of the subject with the object of love; but this union is intellectual. (24)

prologue to John's Gospel:

> In the beginning was the Word:
> the Word was with God
> and the Word was God.
> He was with God in the beginning.
> Through him all things came into being... (John 1.1-3)[8]

Indeed, the paradigm embedded in this most crucial and influential of Christian texts could not be lost on Ausiàs March, the author who has been identified as "filosop-poeta" or "poète-philosophe"[9]. As we hark back to March's extended simile, we realize how astutely the poet has developed that paradigm by riveting our attention upon the very act of the creative imagination. Just as God created the universe by a reflection upon the "Word" incarnated in the Second Person of the Trinity -"The Word became flesh, he lived among us" (John 1.14)- in a similar fashion Ausiàs qua *poietes*, by a process of projection onto his own persona, engages in an act of "re-creation" in imitation of God.

Ausiàs March's conjugation of theology and artistry would be less than complete if such an enlightened author did not stretch the reaches of his intellect and imagination beyond a mere rehash of Christian doctrine. In fact, Ausiàs's mention of the cross -"mas ja retut son esperit en creu" (5.15)- betokens an exploration of that mysterious field where creation mutates into an act of love, where love is consummated in ultimate self-immolation and, reciprocally, suffering becomes sublimated in love. Christ, the Word Incarnate, the epitome of all Creation, the model of human creativity, sacrifices himself out of love; by the same token, Ausiàs's persona, the poet's "re-creation" of the Second Person of the Trinity, assumes a Messianic role of sorts by virtue of his exemplary suffering.

At this level, Ausiàs's ingenious analogy unveils the existential link not only between the human and divine *poietes* but also between the Passion of Christ and the role of the poetic persona as the aforementioned "exemplary sufferer". In that link resides the measure of true love. Ausiàs provides an intriguing insight into the metaphysical and theological bases of his mimesis of the Passion. What begins as an ordinary, natural impulse of Eros becomes sanctified. As the communion with the loving God is prefigured in the complementary bond between human *hyle* and divine *morphe*, the suffering of the human lover becomes, in effect, an "Imitatio Christi". Perhaps belatedly, as Ausiàs himself would remind us -cf. "serà ben cert lo tart

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[8] The English translation belongs to *The New Testament of the New Jerusalem Bible*.

[9] The soubriquets come, respectively, from Josep Torras i Bages and Pagès: see Archer 12-3.

apercebut" (5.24)- we may now ponder the justification of Ausiàs sainted Eros through radical involvement in the "Passion" in the Christian acceptation of the term. Ausiàs contributes in no small measure toward erasing the boundaries between Eros and Agape. He reveals to us how one aspect of love can blend and evolve into the other. The following observation by the noted French medievalist, Etienne Gilson, may be applied, I believe, to Ausiàs's vision of divine love:

> For if man is an image of God... [the] more like God he makes himself the more he fulfills his own essence. Now God is the perfection of being, who knows Himself integrally, and loves Himself totally. If man is fully to realize his virtualities and become intregrally himself he must become this perfect image of God: a love of God for God's sake. For him whose thought moves on the plane of likeness and analogy, which is that of creation, the supposed opposition between love of self and love of God has no *raison d'être*. (Quoted in D'Arcy 111)

By insisting on the divine nature of the lover's experience -by transforming, that is, that experience into an *Imitatio Christi*- Ausiàs March presents his own version of what María Rosa Lida de Malkiel calls the *hipérbole sagrada*. This leads us to recognize that Ausiàs's highest artistic achievement -the ultimate fruit of his enlightened intuition- finds its appropriate manifestation in the paradox which lies at the heart of his vision of Christianity. Highly paradoxical it is, indeed, that he should accentuate the orthodoxy of his or his persona's religiosity precisely through the medium of the hyperbole, which by its very nature is a paradox, that is a distortion of the orthodox cult. Ausiàs March's depiction of his persona's sublimated eros can deepen our understanding of how the condition of other lovers portrayed by various Spanish writers of the fifteenth century reflects the "Passion" of Christ. Commenting upon the plight of one such lover -Leriano, hero of Diego de San Pedro's *Cárcel de amor*- Bruce W. Wardropper states that

> El aspecto positivo del amor es la pasión. La vida de Jesucristo constituye el máximo ejemplo de amor perfecto en el sufrimiento; no se debe, por tanto, a una casualidad que la pasión de Leriano y la de Jesucristo tengan puntos de semejanza. (176)

Wardropper's perceptive comments find, I believe, a solid corroboration in the insights

yielded by Ausiàs March, a poet-philosopher or philosopher-poet of true genius, who, by his syncretic lyricism can "glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven" in a manner worthy of the bard described by Shakespeare in a memorable passage of *Midsummer Night's Dream* (5.1.4-17).

Lope de Vega, it bears reiterating, is right in his remarks about Ausiàs March's verses. They are *castísimos* insofar as they attest to the conversion from the carnal to the spiritual. We have discovered that Ausiàs March envisages that conversion as a hylemorphic function. It is God who acts as the *forma* (*morphe*) in relation to the *materia* (*hyle*) embodied in the human lover. Ausiàs intuits that the symbiosis between the human and the divine is effected, metaphysically, through the mediacy of suffering. The passion born of Eros is perfected, that is, comes to its full realization, thanks to its participation with Christ's Passion. By his deft handling of the primary symbol of conversion, the "volum" in its multifarious creational overtones, Ausiàs March prepares us for an ultimate epiphany: his self-portrait as "exemplary sufferer" and "lover canonized".

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