PREFACE

During the writing of my first book, *San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam* (Colegio de México/University of Puerto Rico, 1985), it became clear to me that the work I had been doing for that book was only the beginning of a much larger project which would take many years to complete, for the influence of Islam on the mysticism of St John of the Cross is but a very limited example of the immense and powerful impress made by Islamic culture on Peninsular letters as a whole. This impress, in fact, rather than superficial as that trope implies, increasingly appears to be part of the very essence of Spanish culture. We now see that it is imperative for those of us in the field to follow in the first brilliant steps taken by Miguel Asín Palacios when he inaugurated the comparative study of Hispano-Arabic literature in Spain, and the book the reader now holds is a modest homage to the remarkable work of Asín Palacios, which even today goes largely uncomprehended.

That said, I must still warn the reader that this collection of essays is in no way to be seen as exhaustive, for it is obvious that following out all the tracks and traces of Islam in Spanish literature is the work of many volumes, and of many generations of scholars. My plan has been, rather, to dedicate the first pages of this study to a survey of the general phenomenon of the interweaving of Semitic threads—both Arabic and Hebrew—into the fabric of Spanish culture, and in the remaining chapters to offer a sampling of studies which I hope make some original contribution to the field. I would hope, too, that the essays collected here might serve to show how widespread and significant the impact of Islam has been on Hispanic literature throughout its long history, and also to serve as an index of all that remains to be done in comparative studies of these two traditions.

Neither the basically Islamic astrological knowledge of the shrewd Archpriest of Hita nor Spanish mystical literature—St John of the Cross, St Teresa de Jesús, the anonymous author of the famous sonnet "*No me mueve, mi Dios, para quererte*"—can be fully understood without taking into account their Muslim contexts. For years, critical orthodoxy has marvelled at the extraordinary "originality" of some of the most important symbols of Peninsular mysticism: we have only to think of the seven concentric castles of the soul, of the.
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solitary bird of contemplation, of the dark night of the soul. Yet often these images are not original at all—we have simply performed but a partial reading of the Spanish mystical texts. When we turn to the mystical or spiritual authors of Islam, we immediately find that the pieces of the puzzle begin to fall into place—the seven interior castles are a commonplace of medieval Sufism; the solitary bird is of Persian lineage; and the dark night of the soul is prefigured not only by Ibn ʿAbbād of Ronda but by Nifārī and Lāhījī as well. It seems, then, that a great part of the supposed “originality” of some Spanish writers consists not in “inventing” this complex mystical imagery, but rather in adapting it, in their own unique way, to their own literary ends.

It is important, moreover, to rescue from oblivion the unexpected counterpart of the Hispano-Moorish novel, which is so memorable for its lovely yet unsettling euphemisms. This counterpart is Moorish-aljamiado literature, written clandestinely by the Moors of the sixteenth century in Spanish using Arabic characters. Any reader who even superficially looks into these wrenching dissident texts will never again read the Abencerraje or Guerras civiles de Granada with the same eyes.

And last, I take it as most significant that this Islamic presence in Spain is still dramatically alive today in the work of Juan Goytisolo, who is without doubt the foremost novelist currently writing in Spanish. In more than one sense, Arab culture is an experience as vivid and immediate for Goytisolo as it was for his admired predecessor Juan Ruiz. Therefore, I have chosen to close this book with a study of Goytisolo’s novel Makbara.

I wish to express my gratitude to those institutions which have made this study possible: to the University of Puerto Rico, which provided me with two years’ leave, various course-load reductions, and secretarial assistance in the preparation of the text; to the American Council for Learned Societies, which granted me a fellowship in 1981–82 so that I could accept the position of visiting scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University; and to the Guggenheim Foundation, which made possible a very fruitful period of research (in 1982) at Yale University in New Haven. I must also acknowledge my debt to the National Endowment for the Humanities, without whose initial aid in a long journey of study and in quest of manuscripts in Europe and the Orient (in 1976) the
writing of this book would have been very much more difficult.

It is impossible here to thank all the colleagues, Hispanicists and Arabists alike, who have counselled, advised, and tirelessly supported me. I would, however, like to make public once more my eternal thanks to Raimundo Lida, for whose inspired teaching during my Harvard days, ever more distant, I will forever be in debt. Each one of these pages is, in its humble way, owed to him. I dare to think that Raimundo Lida would have been pleased to see that this book takes up the thread of those researches which Miguel Asín Palacios left incomplete on his death in August, 1944. One day Professor Lida made this enigmatic statement in class: "If all the literary production of Spain were to be lost, and only ten books could be saved, I would save one of Asín Palacios'." Though at the time I considered this admiration exaggerated, the years have led me to share it wholeheartedly.

My special gratitude goes out to Stephen Gilman, another of my Harvard teachers, whose courage and critical integrity opened my eyes to the extraordinary cultural complexity of Spain, and who taught me to read, without naivety, the texts of the Siglo de Oro.

And last, I would like to express my loving thanks to Arturo Echavarría Ferrari, my husband and colleague, for having managed with so much affection and patience to endure my constant "Arabesques," and to my mother and sisters, for the exaggerated faith with which they have awaited the appearance of these pages.

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