

## GÓNGORA REVALUATED

TWO anniversaries—a king's and a poet's—were commemorated in Spain last year: the four-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Philip II and the tercentenary of the death of Góngora. Philip II has remained a foreigner to the sensibilities of our liberal, democratic world. A generation hence, in all likelihood, he will stand out, fully understood as the representative of an ideal, embodied in a host of geniuses who lived their earthly life in the sixteenth century and whose works enclose for us many instructive suggestions for the problems facing us. El Greco, St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, Cervantes, Luis de León, el Brocense, Francisco Suárez, and many others flourished under the maligned monarch of the Spaniards. In painting, mysticism, jurisprudence, state polity, his century has nucleated fundamental notions from which we are now beginning to learn a great deal. As an illustration, we already have discovered and incorporated El Greco's masterpieces. Vitoria is one of the tutelary gods of the League of Nations. And our problem of the reconciliation of liberty and authority can receive many a hint from the up-to-the-present despised reign of Philip II.<sup>1</sup>

Góngora has a universal significance today. Three centuries of oblivion have been lifted from his hitherto anathematized works through the valiant efforts of modern scholars and writers in Spain and elsewhere. His tercentenary offered the advocates of Góngora an opportunity for the apotheosis of his long poetical masterpieces. Just as El Greco's paintings had been stored away in the cellars of the Prado museum,<sup>2</sup> and in time of need and of preparation the neglected Hispanized-Greek's genius turned

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Religious Character of Colonial Law in the Sixteenth Century of Spain* by Fernando de los Ríos, in *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy*, 1926, p. 481.

<sup>2</sup> See Meier-Graefe, *The Spanish Journey*, in particular pp. 108-109.

out to be the incarnation of values both plastic and spiritual of transcendental import, so Góngora's poetry and subsumed esthetics are coming into their own. Strictly speaking, Góngora's works as concrete objects were, like all the entities of the world, victims in the stream of time and space and existence. But as artistic objects they were eternal. Manipulating Whitehead's jargon, we may posit that works of art are eternal objects which have ingress into concrete wholes. In our case, Góngora's works get their values by entering the mind of the creative consciousness of today, there finding many a point of contact.

Góngora's sojourn in this world and the vicissitudes he met here do not enter into the scope of this article. Unfortunately, the reader of English has to be content with the meagre crumbs gathered into the short monograph, *Luis de Góngora y Argote, 1561-1627*, by Clara Louisa Penney, published by the Hispanic Society of America in 1926. Though she published her pamphlet a year after the main biography of Góngora saw the light of day in Spain, Miss Penney does not know anything about it. Nor does she seem to know anything about the valuable contributions on Góngora made by Alfonso Reyes. For all the facts and conjectures about Góngora's life and all the questions that have surged around his works, we have now the first thorough biography<sup>3</sup> written by Señor Miguel Artigas, a disciple of the late Menéndez Pelayo, the greatest Spanish scholar of the end of the nineteenth century and of the first decade of the twentieth. A succinct account of the outstanding events of Góngora's life can be got in the very able review of this work by Mr. Aubrey F. G. Bell, the English Hispanist, in *Litteris* (an international critical review of the humanities), December, 1926, pp. 199-208.

Like Velasquez, Góngora is known by his mother's surname. He was born in 1561 in Cordova, the home of Seneca, Maimonides, and many other illustrious men. Góngora entered the service of the Church at an early age

<sup>3</sup> *Don Luis de Góngora . . . Biografía y estudio crítico*, Madrid, 1925.

as a prebendary. True Andalusian to the very roots of his hair, he was accused by his superiors of lacking in decorum during the services in the Cathedral and of attending bull-fights. He studied in Salamanca, and, like his great contemporaries, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Quevedo, he endeavored to win the esteem of the grandees. For one reason or another, he was little successful, and frustrated in his desires he gave himself up body and soul to the writing of poems which, as soon as read in manuscript, became the center of Olympic controversies. In his lifetime he never authorized the publication of any of his works, but, just the same, everyone that counted took sides. In May, 1627, sorely sick and out of his mind, he died. Once he was foregathered to his ancestors, the essences he conceived became the subject of fights and of worship, and it seems that after three centuries his genius is only now receiving its due.

To the reader of English, some of Don Luis de Góngora's poetry is accessible in translation. As early as the seventeenth century, three Englishmen—Thomas Stanley (1625-1678), Sir Richard Fanshawe (1608-1666), and Philip Ayres (1638-1712)—transmuted a few of the verses of Góngora.<sup>4</sup> Only the purest short lyrics have been adequately garbed in our tongue. Again, in the nineteenth century, Archdeacon Churton devoted a two-volume work (London, 1862) in which we get samples of all the writings of the Cordovan swan. Though prosy in many of the translations, the Archdeacon, before any other European, had taken Góngora very seriously, and, true to the colors of his race, he tried to understand what everyone else spurned and despised.

No one ever questioned the genuineness of Góngora's genius as evinced in his shorter compositions. How could anyone throw aspersions on these lines?

"They are not all sweet nightingales,  
That fill with songs the cheerful vales;

<sup>4</sup> Read the erudite article *Three Translations of Góngora* by H. Thomas, in the *Revue Hispanique*, Volume 48, pp. 180-256, in which specimens can be seen.

But they are little silver bells,  
Touched by the wind in the smiling dells,  
Bells of gold in the secret grove,  
Making music for her I love."

(Translation of John Bowring.)

Góngora's worldliness is at its perfection in such a poem as only Housman could have written in our day:

"Let me go warm and merry still;  
And let the world laugh, an' it will.  
Let others muse on earthly things,—  
The fall of thrones, the fate of kings,  
And those whose fame the world doth fill;  
Whilst muffins sit enthroned in trays,  
And orange-punch in winter sways  
The merry sceptre of my days;—  
And let the world laugh, an' it will."

(Translation of H. W. Longfellow.)

This Góngora, whose sculptured head in the Hispanic Museum of America shows harsh and forbidding lines, could yet write a simple song about the Christ-child that has the haunting charm of a mystic's love for God:

"Today from the Aurora's bosom  
A pink has fallen—a crimson blossom;  
And oh, how glorious rests the hay  
On which the fallen blossom lay!"

(Translation of H. W. Longfellow.)<sup>5</sup>

Depreciatory meanings are associated with the nouns, adjective, and verb formed out of our poet's matronymic. The traits of his major works gave his enemies and those unprepared to understand him an opportunity of attacking the significations attached to *Gongorism*, *Gongorization*, *Gongoristic*, and to *Gongorize*. Góngora did not meet with much sympathy and understanding from his contemporaries. Some understood the complicated structure of his poems and could trace the allusions, of course, but as to the true esthetics of his works it is doubtful whether they came

<sup>5</sup> The ambitious reader may see the complete versions of the verses quoted and a few other poems in the valuable *Hispanic Anthology*, edited by Thomas Walsh, New York, 1920, pp. 267-277.

near intuiting them. Democracy's critics during the last century and the writers of text-books on literature, in spite of more than two centuries of time dividing them from Góngora, did not correct formerly prevailing mis-judgments and prejudices—rather they inherited the bundle of prejudices and retailed them off by expanding the strictures received. For Ticknor, Góngora was a poetical heresiarch, unworthy to number among the saints of poesy; for Spain's prodigious critic, Menéndez Pelayo, who embraced all of Spain's literary monuments as his domain, Góngora practiced literary nihilism; judicious E. Merimée denounced him as suffering from a virulent disease; Fitzmaurice-Kelly and his followers in Spanish belles-lettres have repeated these epithets and shot their poisoned arrows at the leprous monstrosity that Góngora seemed to them.

All the clap-trap of this criticism is summarized in an anonymous contribution which appeared under the title *Gongorism and Gorgonism* in the Literary Supplement of the *London Times*, May 19, 1927. The title itself betrays the attitude contained in this five-column leading article; it is a perpetuation of the perspectives of Góngora's work during the nineteenth century. Shelling it, we learn what had been known by all manuals of and dabblers in literature; to wit—Góngora's peculiarities were the climax of certain tendencies innate in the principal works of some very important Spanish writers. And the names of these—Herrera, Mena, and even Lucan and Seneca—are mentioned as sinners in this respect. Secondly, Góngora lived in a pessimistic age when the decline of Spain had pronouncedly set in and as a result artificiality and affectation were infecting the air. It would take us much afield to answer this argument of the English writer by saying that Velasquez lived contemporaneously with Góngora and yet seems free of the very affectation attributed to the poet. *Gongorism* was not peculiar to Castilian letters alone; within a certain circumscribed epoch, the same phenomenon was known as *Preciosité* in France, *Euphuism* in Elizabethan

England, *Marinism* in Italy, *Schwulst* among the Silesian poets in Germany. Of course, we may mention here the Greek Lycophron's writings as illustrating the characteristics known in Spain as *Gongorism*. In the fourth place, Góngora's failure to receive appreciation and create followers soured him; *ergo*, the vengeance he took by becoming as dense as a London fog. Finally, Góngora's genius was not feckless after all; thanks to him, the Spanish language acquired a new poetical vocabulary. Many of the Latinisms incorporated in his *Solitary Musings* and other major poems are current words in the vocabulary of the educated Spanish-speaking person. It can be collected, then, that the uncontrolled vehemence of Ticknor and similarly-minded confrères and the apparent calm of the *Times* article are indicative of fanaticism—the championing of certain accepted forms and styles to the exclusion of all others. There are heterodox poets as there are radical views in politics and dissenting doctrines in religion; that these have their legitimacy and their *raison d'être* has escaped the learned gentlemen.

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Praise of Góngora is not confined to a cabal of Spanish writers. Lovers of Góngora are found at present among all the creators of the literature of our age. About thirty young writers, mostly Spaniards but also a few foreigners—a Belgian, an Italian, some Frenchmen—sent their verbal wreaths to *La Gaceta Literaria*<sup>6</sup> for its number of June 1, 1927, specially dedicated to Góngora. In this issue, Carlos Boselli, the Italian critic, writes: "I say that not only Spanish literature but that of the whole world—guided by Parnassians and Symbolists and writers of the late nineties and futurists—is on the way to become Gongorized not only in verse but also in prose."

*Gongorism* in its non-pejorative connotations began to arouse interest when in their enthusiasm for new esthetic values the French symbolists discovered the poetical works

<sup>6</sup> *La Gaceta Literaria* is a fortnightly literary newspaper similar to the Parisian *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*.

of Góngora. Paul Verlaine, not knowing much Spanish, and Moréas, equally unlearned in the language of Cervantes, felt exquisite delectation reciting the last verse of the *Solitary Musings*. Only in juxtaposition with the preceding two verses of the first part of the *Solitary Musings* can the last verse in its essence, so much appreciated by Verlaine and his followers, be apprehended:

“. . . Amor una deidad alada,  
bien previno la hija de la espuma  
a batallas de amor campo de pluma.”

(Love, a winged deity, the daughter of the foam, for battles of love, prepared a field of feathers.)

Ever since then, a new appreciation of the dazzling genius of the Spanish Pindar or the Spanish Homer, as his admirers called him in his time, has sprung up. Góngora is nearer us today than he ever was to his own century. France has but lately produced her difficult poet in Mallarmé and contemporary Spain indicates Góngora as the precursor of intellectual poetry.

*Gongorism* meets with our enthusiasm not only because certain writers have burned incense to the author giving rise to this genre but because it is the summation of a fundamental attitude towards esthetic values. The present age, in the throes of becoming fully what it is still only in embryo, is characterized by its emphasis upon the elimination of everything smacking of *facilitism*, the key-note of the nineteenth century. In the four preceding generations, the arts, belles-lettres, and scientific thinking had an eye cocked on the half-educated; their appeal was made to the intelligence of people with slightly seasoned tid-bits of culture. The democratization of these pursuits lowered the standards of taste; a fearful care was taken to eradicate everything from the work of brain or heart that might prevent its immediate ingress into the understanding of the reader or the appreciation of the contemplator. Paul Valéry's smashing words anent the art of Anatole France very aptly point at this *facilitism*: "There was in his books consummately the art of skimming over the most serious

problems and ideas. Nothing in them arrested the glance of the mind, unless it was the very miracle of this absence of resistance. What could be more precious than that delightful illusion of clarity which inspires in us the feeling that we are growing richer without effort, are savouring pleasure gratuitously, are comprehending despite our inattention, are enjoying the spectacle without having paid to see it?"<sup>7</sup> This *ad captandum vulgus* policy has invited the logical reaction of exploiting new sources of expression: new attacks are directed against recalcitrant individual wholes in order that they may become objects for a poem, a scientific theory, or a musical composition.

If *facilitism* was the distinguishing mark of the past century, *difficultism* may be the trait that distinguishes us. By this neologism is meant the tendency evident in the formulation and content of the sciences which are becoming harder and more complicated to follow by anyone not thoroughly trained in logistics and in the involved processes required by them. Einstein's theory, Russell's *Principia Mathematica*, Alexander's *Space, Time, and Deity*, Whitehead's philosophical approach—in brief, the reasoning of physicists, mathematicians, and philosophers can no longer be the patrimony of average so-called cultured ladies and gentlemen, possessing one or even two academic degrees. The same phenomenon is observable in belles-lettres, music, and the plastic arts: Joyce, Proust, Paul Valéry, Hart Crane, Picasso, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Stravinsky, Antheil; the creations of these artists can be shared only by the few who take the trouble to study their motives and try to catch the rhythms inherent in their at-first-contact formless, disconcerting, inchoate books, pictures, statues, or compositions.<sup>8</sup> In view of this vital feature of our living

<sup>7</sup> Discourse in Praise of Anatole France, in the *Dial*, November, 1927, p. 362.

<sup>8</sup> Professor Ángel Flores of Rutgers University calls my attention pertinently to *The Wasteland* of T. S. Eliot as a neat illustration of the contention of this paper about *difficultism*. Aware of the nature of his poem, Mr. Eliot has wisely appended discreet notes to the poem to make it less forbidding and more understandable (*The Wasteland in Poems 1909-1925*, London, 1925, pp. 65-85; notes, pp. 86-92).

times, it is not at all strange that Góngora, who has this very trait, has found a ready audience among us for his hitherto misunderstood works. "Resistance to facility" (Albert Thibaudet's felicitous coin) is the motto on the standard of the vanguard hosts fighting the battles of the new esthetics. To help in this battle royal, Góngora is called out of the past.

Góngora belongs to the difficult artists, more difficult than Browning and as nonprehensible at the first reading as Mallarmé's *L'après-midi d'un Faune*. Detractors of Góngora have always chosen the wrong words to define his chief poems: *La Fábula de Polifemo*, the two *Soledades*, the *Romance de Thysbe y Piramo*, and the *Panegírico al Duque de Lema*; these they have called *obscure* and *incomprehensible*. "Góngora—all his true readers know it—is difficult but not obscure. Obscure is anything which does not sheaf together all the necessary elements for its understanding; difficult, that which in reuniting the necessary elements to be understood, requires from the person who might want to understand its intelligence, study, effort. Góngora is difficult as a mathematical theorem can be difficult before it is studied. But after a manly and determined reading, he turns out diaphanous, most clear, with a lyrical clarity which by dint of perfection and by dint of poetical exactitude approaches mathematical clarity."<sup>9</sup> *Difficultism* in him was willed as the following words attest, coming from Góngora himself or from a disciple immersed in the esthetic preoccupations of the master. Góngora was conscious of his technique and had to battle all the bands of critical harpies threatening to defile his verses forever. In answer to an anonymous writer who postulated *a priori* three market notes for any

Another great book of our age, this time a novel, comes under the category of *difficultism*. James Joyce, like Góngora but unlike Mr. Eliot, has not given the commentaries needed to penetrate into the scheme of his work, *Ulysses*. "I cannot pretend to understand all of the *Ulysses*; it is to Joyce himself that one must look for a complete guide . . .," writes Paul Jordan Smith, who has made an attempt to throw light on this work, in the preface to his book *A Key to the Ulysses of James Joyce* (Chicago, 1927).

<sup>9</sup> Dámaso Alonso in *La Gaceta Literaria*, cited above.

object to be considered good, namely, that it must be useful, honorable, and pleasure-giving, Góngora pits against him these words to justify his poetry, ". . . if understood by the learned, it ought to elicit prestige on my behalf, for no one can help admire the fact that our tongue has reached through my efforts the majesty and perfection of Latin . . . from which I have not omitted the articles as it appears to you and other gentlemen, but getting along without them when not needed, I should like you to tell me where they are necessary and what expression therein is not current in heroic language which must be different from prose and worthy of persons able to understand it. . . . I rejoice the more because I made myself obscure to the ignorant, for this is the distinction of learned men, to speak in such a fashion that to them it should seem Greek, since precious stones are not to be thrown to the swine."<sup>10</sup>

Góngora's *Soledades* and *Polifemo* were analyzed in his own times most searchingly, and a contemporary townsman of the poet, don Pedro Díaz de Rivas, singled out the sins that had been strung together as abounding in these non-popular poems. "Foreign words, hyperbaton, the use and abuse of metaphors, obscurity, hardness and slight analogy in the metaphors, unevenness of style, the use of plebeian words, repetitions, hyperboles, extensive prolongation of sentences, and redundancies of expressions." Amphibology and brachylogy and many other Greek syntactic diseases were pointed out by others. In spite of this formidable array of critics hostile to the poetry of Góngora, there soon arose an opposing army which for more than a century in Spain and Spanish-America, in true Spanish fashion, waged guerrilla warfare under the banner of the new esthetic dispensation against the enemies of Góngora. Like Talmudists of yore, they practiced hermeneutics about the arrangement of the words and their natural linkings. Syntactic difficulties, mythological allusions, correct punctuation, were some of the topics of this literary exegesis. Instead of clubs, model Robert Browning, there were

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Alfonso Reyes in his *Cuestiones Gongorinas*, Madrid, 1927, p. 176.

organized discussions, epistolary and verbal; pamphlets and books were given to the press—all for the elucidation of these snags. Alfonso Reyes, the erudite Mexican artist-scholar, former ambassador to Madrid, in his article in the *Revue Hispanique* (Paris, 1925, Volume LXV) on the necessity of returning to the commentators of Góngora, expresses this zeal of the Góngoraphiles thus: "The disciples of the poet would challenge each other about the solution of the hyperbaton, the clarification of a mythological allusion, the explanation of a quibble."<sup>11</sup>

Appreciation of Góngora did not merely consist in the vivisection of his poems and the skeletal structure of them. It went far beyond. After him, Spanish poetry assumed new contours and the poetical organism functioned differently. Mediocre as well as talented poets copied his subject-matter, his vocabulary, and the new style. Señor Gerardo Diego, a young man of letters, compiled in honor of Góngora a most suggestive poetical anthology in which are to be found fragments of lengthy poems and sonnets and short lyrics either dedicated to Góngora himself or inserted as samples illustrating the infiltration of *Gongorism* in those poems. Even enemies of Góngora—Lope de Vega and Quevedo—stepped willy-nilly into the rhythms of Don Luis. The great Andalusian poet is thus honored by his devotees as well as by his disparagers.

"Nothing more flattering to a poet than to hear from strangers' lips his own verses. A true homage that from one who in truth knows him, lives him, and loves him. From the ingenuous and painstaking cento, an ostentation of slavish submission and servile memory, passing from the over-worked scholia on favorite verses, a kind of musical variation on a rich and closely-knit theme, we can reach the amplifying paraphrase, the emulation of motifs, of developments or the simple grafting of verse, deliberately thrust into one's own verse,—something like a counter-sign or filigree against the light which does not hesitate to show the trademark with a certain pride of compaternity of spiritual lineage."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Cuestiones Gongorinas*, pp. 233-241.

<sup>12</sup> *Antología poética en honor de Góngora*, recogida por Gerardo Diego, Madrid, pp. 8-9.

Most of the poets represented in this golden treasury of Gongoristic verse bear names strange to the readers of English. However, we find among them the shining lights of the Spanish Parnassus, swinging in time from Lope de Vega to Rubén Darío (the greatest poet of Spanish-America and undoubtedly the most significant poet in the Spanish language after Góngora). Of the thirty-eight poets included, only eight lived in the eighteenth century and with the exception of Rubén Darío (1867-1916) no one of any importance in the nineteenth century wrote Gongoristic verse or remembered kindly the author of the *Soledades*. Surprise at this dearth subsides when we take the pulse of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries' main themes and yearnings. The eighteenth was forging the weapons of democracy with which the citadels of the *ancien régime* were to be demolished. Ideological concerns and pseudo-classicism were the literary norms—no wonder Góngora was tabooed. France was beginning to cast her spell over Spain and, consequently, *Gongorism* was looked at askance. The nineteenth, it goes without saying, was the century which saw the battering machinery at work and hence could not and would not read Góngora. Just when romanticism was triumphant, *Gongorism* could not show its head: the critics of the century scourged it with epithets—with such epithets as only the denizens of a *schimpflexicon* could rival. As a result of the emotional and psychical effluvium, culture, discipline, and the appeal to the brain, were quoted at ludicrous prices in the stock exchange of western civilization. Calderón, a thoroughbred of Gongorized poetry, was worshipped from the Schlegels to Shelley for his themes and his atmosphere but not for his language patterns.

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“Ya empieza el noble coro de las liras  
A preludiar el himno a tu decoro,  
Ya al misterioso son del noble coro  
Calma el Centauro sus grotescas iras.”  
(Rubén Darío on Góngora)

In the Botanical Gardens of Madrid, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Stéphane Mallarmé (September 11, 1923), a knot of the vanguard writers and artists of Spain observed a five-minute silence—a gesture of rare dedication to the esthetic attitudes toward polite letters which Mallarmé manifested in his work and conversations. Those present and many others there not in body but in spirit were adhering in their admiration of *Mallarmism* to tenets once staunchly subsumed in the work of their fellow-countryman, Góngora.<sup>13</sup> For Mallarmé, independent of Góngora, wrote poetry which is Gongoristic in its essence. Albert Thibaudet, undisputed authority on Mallarmé, says, “Góngora did not know the name of Lycophron, and Mallarmé never read a verse of Góngora.”

Honoring Mallarmé meant, in the last analysis, acceptance of Góngora. The disciplined youth of Spain, with its emphasis on intellect rather than on the soft layers of the psyche, had been preparing itself for the exploitation and savouring of the victories, niceties, and mysteries of meanings imbedded in Góngora's poetry. Scholars, like the Belgian Lucien-Paul Thomas (*Le Lyrisme et la Preciosité Cultistes en Espagne*, 1909, and *Góngora et le Marinisme*, Paris, 1911), the Mexican Alfonso Reyes (his various scattered studies now collected into book form, *Cuestiones Gongorinas*), the Frenchman Foulché-Delbosc (*Obras Poéticas de Góngora*, 3 volumes, published by the Hispanic Society of America), and the Castilian Artigas (chief biographer of Góngora), all these men had furnished the indispensable collectanea and commentaries needed for the chief task to be performed around a master poet. Ready to reject any compromise with romantic themes and forms, these intellectuals of occidentalized Spain became not only the exponents of the poetry of the Andalusian swan but are at present handling his technique and esthetics. The proclivities and temper of our age give the young artistic creators of Spain a coign of vantage whence can be got a

<sup>13</sup> See *El silencio por Mallarmé* in *Revista de Occidente*, November, 1923, pp. 238-56.

full-length perspective of the essentials of *Gongorism*. Pitched battles against *facilitism*, the cultivation of the metaphor for its voluptuousness and its own sake, the intellectualization of poetry—these are notes characterizing our age as well as the works of Góngora.

The *Revista de Occidente* is to Spain what the *Monthly Criterion* is to the English-speaking world and *La Nouvelle Revue Française* and *Commerce* are to France. Under the supple culture and genius of Ortega y Gasset, philosopher-essayist, this magazine has been advocating new ideas and ideals for the new facts surrounding us all. Unlike the other reviews, the *Revista de Occidente* publishes semi-philosophical books on art and esthetics. It was logical, then, for the best of Góngora and on Góngora to be published under its aegis. The popular vein of Góngora, his ballads known as *romances*, can now be read in a handy edition arranged by José María de Cossío, a devotee of *Gongorism*.<sup>14</sup> Here are to be found ninety-five ballads which include some of the best poetry ever written in Spanish. "The Spanish ballad is the literary form much exposed to wordy and hazy slopes, realistic and prosaic incontinence. In order to obtain his purpose of precision, of metallic fitness of the verse for perennity, the poet had to double up his care, overuse the file, fix rhetorical forms for their relief to prevent his syntactic artifices from crystallizing into commonplaces" (Sr. Cossío in his short preface). Again and again Góngora has been compared to a Janus, a poet with two antithetical faces, one young and the other wrinkled and frowning. Modern admirers of Góngora, Señor Cossío among them, maintain rightly that there is no such antithesis, and the *romance* that begins with "La ciudad de Babylonia," a ballad which narrates the fable of Piramus and Thisbe,<sup>15</sup> is singled out as supreme proof that Gongoristic elements are here as in every other ballad. "It is not doubtful that the talent of Góngora perfected its mastery and essayed its technique with the

<sup>14</sup> *Romances de Góngora*, Madrid, 1927.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 195-208.

practice of its sensibility and art, but to pretend a radical and equivocal change of esthetics in his poetical usages and exactly at the time in which his sensibility must have touched its goal is inadmissible and even more so referring the change chronologically to the publication of this book or that poem." (Sr. Cossío).

The *Revista de Occidente*, it is to be regretted, did not publish the *Polifemo*. This poem needs a preface and a translation of some of the difficult stanzas. Alfonso Reyes, in 1923, put forth in a very limited edition a beautiful booklet containing the *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea*. Churton translated only thirty-two out of the sixty-three eight-line strophes of the poem, in that way omitting some of the best verses.<sup>16</sup> The reader of French may get a real thrill by reading this great poem in Marius André's translation (*Fable de Polyphème et Galatée*, traduite de l'Espagnol et précédée d'une Ode à Góngora, Paris, 1920). Señor Artigas says of this poem, ". . . the *Polyphème* . . . is not a tenebrific poem as cackle the literary common-folk without having read it. It is possible that it might have been so for the readers of the seventeenth and even for those of the nineteenth century. Today whoever possesses a half-decent knowledge of classical culture and if, besides, he has followed with curiosity the movements of modern poetry and esthetics will surely find the octaves of the *Polyphème* clear."

A young scholar of Spain, Dámaso Alonso, published a rare book. For the first time, Góngora's masterpiece is printed in modern type and spelling with an unusual thing—a translation of the same poem into prose.<sup>17</sup> It is prefaced by the best essay on the poetics of Góngora. The *Solitary Musings* (Archdeacon Churton's suggested translation for the *Soledades*) constitutes the most difficult poem in the Spanish language. Góngora considered the poem his chief literary work and was much chagrined by the

<sup>16</sup> *Góngora, an Historical and Critical Essay on the Times of Philip III. and IV. of Spain*, with translations, by Edward Churton, London, 1862, 2 vols. For the *Polifemo*, see vol. 2, pp. 197-210.

<sup>17</sup> *Soledades de Góngora*. Editadas por Dámaso Alonso, Madrid, 1927.

reception meted out by those who had read it in manuscript, and on that score he burst forth into two biting, satirical sonnets. He aimed his arrows, dipped in gall, at Quevedo whom he brands a "pedant," an "angry man," "who sleeps in Spanish, dreams and snores in Greek." The upshot, as Góngora saw it, was that

"Light was the weight of censure, yet it flew;  
No road to fame was open; every tongue  
Maligned my verse as strange—more strange than new."<sup>18</sup>

Churton, who, single-handed, tried to rehabilitate Góngora for the educated opinion of England and America in the sixties of the last century, could not stomach this poem. Paladin-like, he defended the *Polypheme* and the rest of the poet's work, but the *Solitary Musings* appeared so outlandish to him that he could not see any brief for it. "It cannot be denied that this poem is exceedingly obscure. Persons and things are spoken of in such enigmatical phrases as have scarcely been employed by any other poet since the days of Lycophron . . . it is a study for the ingenuous but when the difficulty is mastered the impression is hardly one of pleasure. A long poem of this nature is too severe a trial of patience."<sup>19</sup> Rémy de Gourmont in *Góngora et le Gongorisme*<sup>20</sup> regrets "that in the poem *Solitary Musings* and still elsewhere there are parts of a great poet, unfortunately somewhat difficult to disentangle." Aubrey Bell in his review of Artigas' work also gives up the effort to penetrate into the schemata of this baffling composition. If the benevolence of competent men like these scholars is dampened in contact with this poem, what could be expected of the lesser fry?

Critics, scholars, and lovers of literature who have stigmatized Góngora as an obscure poet, involved in unintelligible poetic stuffs, can, according to Señor Dámaso Alonso, be divided into four classes: (1) those who have

<sup>18</sup> See Sonnets 1 and 2 *On the Censure Pronounced Against His "Lonely Musings"* in Churton's *Góngora*, vol. 1, pp. 278-9.

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 202-3.

<sup>20</sup> Article included in *Proménades Littéraires*, series 4, Paris, 1912.

never read Góngora; (2) those who have read him in wretched editions; (3) those who have read him without knowing Spanish sufficiently; and (4) those who may belong to classes (2) and (3) and be to boot congenitally incapable of poetical understanding. Churton, Rémy de Gourmont, and Aubrey Bell really belong to the second class, for they had not at their disposal the commentaries and interpretations of the poem written by Pellicer, Chacón, and Salcedo Coronel. The last-mentioned dedicated a whole volume of over three hundred pages to the *Solitary Musings* in which he explains the syntax and the mythological allusions. All lovers of Spanish literature must owe a debt of gratitude to the work of Dámaso Alonso. No one can now have any excuse to ignore Góngora's claim to immortality. He is the first to translate this work *from the Spanish into Spanish* (as perty put by Alfonso Reyes). Dámaso Alonso's translation is not without precedent. Jules Lemaitre began to translate Mallarmé's French in *Le Tombeau de Edgar Allen Poe* into French poured in the old moulds accessible to all. Suggestion may have come to the translator of Góngora from beyond the Pyrenees. Be that as it may, we have the original text at the beginning and the prose avatar at the end of the volume. Whoever is curious and alive may read the poem as Góngora wrote it, and in case of impediments he can trust Señor Alonso to help him out of uncomfortable passages. "Whoever wishes to savour the *Solitary Musings* will always have to read them as Don Luis de Góngora wrote them. My version does not pretend to substitute what cannot be substituted. What I give herein is a key that may facilitate the entrance to the work, but not the work itself. The *Solitary Musings* admit the translation of their logical meaning but not of their poetical signification. And this impossibility of translation or total substitution is the best proof of the poetical value of the *Solitary Musings*."<sup>21</sup>

It is unfortunate that we do not possess any complete clothing of the *Solitary Musings* in English. Thomas

<sup>21</sup> Dámaso Alonso's *Soledades*, p. 128.

Stanley in the seventeenth century worked at the task and produced only one-sixth of the whole. Here and there some of the poetry is transmitted but he could not completely imprison Góngora into his verse. Excepting the verse "Hills from the Sea, Seas from the Hills arise," (*sic*) Stanley failed.<sup>22</sup> Churton's summary of the subject-matter of the poem reads: "Góngora's *Solitary Musings* are in two cantos of irregular rime, containing rather more than two thousand lines. They describe a number of rural scenes, a rural wedding, rustic games, contests of skill in leaping, running, and wrestling; lives of fishermen, parties going hunting and hawking, all witnessed by a shipwrecked man who after escaping from the sea is kindly entertained by country people on the shore with whom he has found refuge. The poem appears to be unfinished as the hero's adventures are not wound up."<sup>23</sup>

A great lyrical poem this would have been which the fates prevented its author from finishing. He had delineated the plan, however; it was to consist of four symphonic movements: the solitary musings in the fields, those on the shore, those in the forest, and those in the desert. Only the first series was completed; it now comprises one thousand ninety-one verses. The second part in the unfinished form has nine hundred seventy-nine verses. Bucolism superseded; realism lyricised to the nth power; ideological elements are few and as scarce as in a fugue; these are the keynotes of the poem. Yet Dámaso Alonso brings so many cross-lights to bear on these major points that we get a wealth of suggestions and we see the poem differently. Pale indeed is Churton's summary next to this analysis of the natural motifs:

"For this creation the elements foregathered by Góngora had their necessary and sufficient actuality. They are not original elements—as old as the hills: nature on the seas, rivers, shores, islands, mountains; primitive life of goatherds, mountaineers, fishermen in the woods, villages, shepherds' huts; pleasant forces of humanity resolved in dances, songs and games, in wrestling

<sup>22</sup> *Three Translations of Góngora*, in the *Hispanic Review*, vol. 48.

<sup>23</sup> *Góngora*, vol. 1, p. 202.

matches, in sports of fishing and hunting; vigor, utility, and beauty of animals and plants—calves, partridges, rabbits, bees, doves, little gardens; and as a contrast, the disappointments of the pilgrim, the glories and disasters of ambition in wars and geographical discoveries, the evils of the courtier's life, envy, useless ceremonies, flattery, transitory favors and good graces. Through every part stands out in the *Solitary Musings* the theme of hatred of court life and praise of the pristine life and the golden age. Through every part there flows a Pan-like spirit of the exaltation of natural forces; under the most splendid words there beats the vital fire of fecund and reproductive nature . . ."<sup>24</sup>

The thematic features of the *Solitary Musings* are not the most essential aspect of the poem. Taking the close-fitting structure apart, Señor Dámaso Alonso finds three esthetic notes—*polymorphic*, *polychromatic*, and *polyphonic*. The poem has many "speeches, songs and choruses on one side and descriptions of all sorts on the other." Complexity of forms in the poem offers a festivity for the senses. "Nature in the *Solitary Musings* comes to be no more than a cortège of beautiful names: silver, crystal, ivory, mother-of-pearl, marble, diamonds, gold, porphyry, jasper, orange blossoms, carnations, roses, lilies." Góngora's poem teems with colors. Like the religious images of the Spaniards, tabooed in the Renaissance but very much beloved in the Iberic Peninsula for their polychromatic aspects, the *Solitary Musings* has absolute colors showing their hues everywhere. It is also polyphonic as the fountains of Aranjuez, Cordova, and Granada, immortalized in the composition *Gardens of Spain* by Falla. The poetical spectroscope of Góngora has few colors, but the shades of each are nucleated into acanthus, crimson, scarlet, coral, pink, rose, purple, ruby, kermes.

Góngora is near us because of his daring metaphors. Proust and his school have awakened the taste in us for the long metaphor in all its elaborateness. In the poems of Góngora, islands in a torrential river become "wooded parentheses in the sentence of its stream." The light of

<sup>24</sup> Alonso's *Soledades*, pp. 12 and 13.

shore fires is reflected in the waters of a river. Each wave is a lantern the enclosing glass of which is the water itself, whose light the very reflection which seems to burn within the water. Góngora, entirely forgetful of verisimilitude and proportion, takes a thread of his metaphor and carries it wherever it will.

"There six poplars, embraced by six ivy vines, were like six thirsi of that Greek god Bacchus . . . who covers with flowers the horns on his forehead. And like youths who hand in hand weave festive choruses in a happy country green, thus the six poplars form a ring or crown on the ground, whitened by dint of as many white lilies as bloom on it, lilies which the month of May had snowed in fragrant flakes, in spite of the thick branches of the six trees."<sup>25</sup>

Unpremeditated denunciation levelled at this metaphorical language under the pretext that it is not natural cannot be countenanced any longer. Rémy de Gourmont says with penetration, "Toute poésie est faite d'artifice." Ortega y Gasset, in his notes on Góngora, defines the very nature of poetry in the same way as de Gourmont: In the first half of the nineteenth century, Sismondi, in his then famous work *Literatures of South Europe*, when he broached the *Solitary Musings* and *Polypheme* oracularly declared, "These are all fictions without poetic charm, full of mythological images, and loaded with the pomp of fanciful and obscure phrases." This jumbled indictment can be answered only by the definition of poetry given by Ortega y Gasset: "Poetry is euphuism—to elude the everyday world of things, to see to it that our minds rub not against their habitual slopes, worn out by use, and through an unsuspected turn place ourselves before the aspect of the ever-present object hitherto unseen. The new nomenclature re-creates it magically, makes it primeval in vigor, virginizes it. A delight even greater than that of creation is that of re-creation! For creation puts a thing where there was none, but in re-creation we always have two, the new thing which we see get born unforeseen, and the old which we salvage

<sup>25</sup> Alonso's *Soledades*, pp. 200-201.

through it. A devilish operation this is indeed! Rejuvenation. Young Faust carrying within him the old Faust."<sup>26</sup>

Góngora is alive today because, in the words of George Santayana, fellow-countryman of the poet, "We shall live on in those ages whose experience we have anticipated." The pendulum has swung to the point where the elaboration of the metaphor, the independence of the metaphor, is once more a subject of predilection among creators of prose and poetry. All the young writers in Spain are working on the metaphor. The master of them all today is Ramón Gómez de la Serna who in his *Greguerías* has cultivated the metaphor for the metaphor's sake. Readers anxious to savour what *Gongorism* can be in prose may do so by taking a quick lunge into the *Dialogues in Limbo*, in the opening pages of which Santayana speaks of philosophies as emitting odors. Getting a thrill from his metaphor, glowing with delight, he expands it for a few pages. Thick with jungled details, Santayana's metaphor shows in its branchings the diffuse sense and sounds of words released from their cage. (Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, speaks of mind as being an aviary.) The ingot of thought is so small in comparison with its development that the metaphor is developed for the sheer pleasure that it may give. Similarly, Góngora is transported by the very mechanism of his simile so that he becomes irresponsible to the world of things nodding at him.

Góngora's poetry is sheer baroque. To avoid falling into the absurdities of pseudo-classicism, we must not use norms which jibe with the elements of proportion and Euclidian geometrizations but dovetail ill with Gothic architecture; when applied to the rococo the parameter or measuring stick for other styles will yield results so disappointing that the naïve will think the object measured at fault instead of the instrument. Rococo architecture has its own *raison d'être*, and for its understanding adequate concepts are needed *but not those borrowed from other*

<sup>26</sup> See his short essay, *Góngora, 1627-1927*, in his booklet *Espíritu de la letra*, Madrid, 1927, pp. 153-167.

*esthetic realms.* Góngora's poetry is rococo and should be enjoyed for its own sake. Here is an example of this style of over-ornamentation in Góngora's poetry:

"Come, Hymen, and see to it that the least common Cupids, sons of beautiful nymphs whom the woods hide, give to the air feathers of their wings, and while some others pour with their whitened quivers a rain not of arrows but of white musk-roses and a snowfall of orange-blossoms, others keep watch over the neat hamlet to free it from night-birds of ominous croaking and belated flight; others, in fine, flit in silence and in turn above the nuptial canopy, while the bridegroom, like a lascivious bee, sucks hybelean nectar of love from red and virginal acanthus flowers, from his sweetheart's lips. Come, oh, Hymen."<sup>27</sup>

Judged by current standards, the above is overloaded, but it is baroque literature and has qualities that are essentially poetical. Of course, this prose translation of a translation of the original can only hint at the joys contained in Góngora's verse, which are if anything prolix. Words serry each other and the compactness and their original arrangement produce a music which only Rubén Darío recaptures in Spanish poetry. Marcel Brion in his eulogistic appraisal of the poet<sup>28</sup> says, "The world of Góngora is constructed with stones and metals—of the rarest precious stones and with the best workmanship. It does not accept anything unhewn, it rejects the formless and does not begrudge elaboration to any object however modest it may be." Poetry in the *Solitary Musings* is tooled with a jeweler's care; every word is a stone studded in a pattern the purpose of which is not to go beyond itself, beyond the poetical justification in itself. Góngora's realm points very indirectly to the world of concrete wholes customarily apprehended in terms useful on the mart. "The poet is inclined to give us absolute sensations: the colorful is always presented with maximum purity of light; splendid objects under most limpid splendors; sound in the ultimate possibilities of harmony. Góngora does not wish even one form of his beautiful objects which he

<sup>27</sup> Alonso's *Soledades*, pp. 170-171.

<sup>28</sup> Góngora in *Les Cahiers du Sud*, October, 1927, pp. 180-189.

presents to admit a basis of comparison." Dámaso Alonso in his essay, as the foregoing shows, seems to be disconcerted by this behavior of Góngora's poetics.

Such idiosyncracies rub the sensibilities of the uninitiated person the wrong way because he is here confronted with a work the importance of which escapes him, yet it is the resultant of a theory of poetics which shows new possibilities. We begin now to understand that man has two natures,—the stark naked nature of his prehensile self which is least cumbered with the load of culture and the other self, the cultured, nurtured self which keeps him buoyed up, gravid with images, concepts, ideas, suggestions gathered from the artistic patterns inherited societally in books, objects of art, tales, ceremonies, and so forth. We are accustomed to the poetry prehended through the intuitions of the poets least burdened by the cultural baggage. In a strict sense, no poet sees his world free and naked, pristinely, with the self absolutely devoid of any fund of acquired images. Nevertheless, it is conceded that there are poets whose work moves in the realm of intuitions of psychic and so-called things of the world which are believed to have their existence in the outside. That poetry or art which calls to our attention objects familiar to us in language not too different from our everyday means of communicating with them seems natural and acceptable to all of us. Poetry pointing to the outside or inside worlds through media known to us makes up the great part of verse we generally read and judge. It would be going far afield to show the mechanism of this common type of poetry; it is no more natural than all the modern, futuristic, post-expressionistic art; it is conventional in the best meaning of the term.

Conceive now a poet who writes verse out of the poetical fund at hand. The artificiality and the newness of the result shock at first blush, but rightly comprehended a first-rate poet can create an imperishable world in the new fashion as in the old. Góngora belongs to this second class of poets who utilize profusely the cultural stock. We find

that the *Solitary Musings* does not contain original observations, psychical or philosophical, insight or mystical ecstasies. The free joy felt in describing the non-poetic or idea-less country people in the midst of celebrating a wedding in the inherited vocabulary of Graeco-Roman culture, the mastery of recalcitrant stuffs hammered and chiselled into images that shimmer with opalescent hues—these triumphs are captured in verse having the indelible imprint of genius. *Gongorism* in the *Solitary Musings* is a realm of poetical images woven into each other like patterns, configurations, without strong ligatures with the real objects projected in space or time. Hence, it should not surprise us at all that Góngora moves in a world of absolutes. Like non-Euclidian geometries, Góngora's poems are a world of discourse disregarding a complete correspondence between the poetical objects therein and the objects in space and time serving as points of reference. The intuitive poet may try to be concrete about what he feels and sees, and of him should be expected verisimilitude, a chiming with the traits observable to all, once our attention is called to them. But Góngora's aim does not encompass such designs; therefore, all his terms will be poetical absolutes as the eternal forms of Plato. Do not ask his metaphors, images, and constructs to be relativistic, earth of the earth—that they cannot be. A straight line is a straight line in Euclid; so are the qualities in the poems of Don Luis. It matters not that no straight line has ever been found in this curved universe; nevertheless, the straight line is good geometry. In the same manner, the poetic stuffs of Góngora are absolute; they are not attached to the world of perishable matter but are of the essence that is eternal. The objects of everyday life are transmuted into poetical images which were always associated with objects suffused with the ideal, the sublime. Góngora's art in transsubstantiating rusticity without the help of any philosophical ideology is perhaps open to stricture. Had his art been used to elaborate the question of being or not-being, or had he utilized psychological intuitions or

concepts, then Góngora would have been a constant companion. But why ask pears of the poplar tree? The poplar, "a pure tree" in that it serves not the needs of the market, has neither fruit nor even a proffered shade useful to anyone; yet its lithe leaflets are ethereal notes as the breeze plays them and, in the silence of the summer, the poplar punctuates the air with its pure form. So Góngora. *A pure poet for our rare moments* whose work devoid of much utilitarian content can delight our sense of the absolute.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>After this paper was written appeared Elisha K. Kane's *Gongorism and the Golden Age* (University of North Carolina), which differs so fundamentally from the thesis here presented that it must be considered separately.