

INTRODUCTION

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For a poet whose name and its derivatives have always been associated with obscurity and impenetrability, Luis de Góngora y Argote continues to enjoy significant visibility and presence at the new turn of the century. In the past fifteen years alone, his work has merited several new editions by Antonio Carreira, Robert Jammes, and Laura Dolfi, among others. New translations into English by Michael Smith and Philip Polack have appeared, as well as a new edition of Dámaso Alonso's classic study *Góngora y el 'Polifemo.'* Furthermore, a respectable number of articles are published every year alongside important book-length studies such as Kathleen Hunt Dolan's *Cyclopean Song: Melancholy and Aestheticism in Góngora's 'Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea'*, or Marsha Collins's *The Soledades, Góngora's Masque of the Imagination*. On occasion, Góngora even enters mainstream consciousness as in a recent *New York Times Magazine* advertisement for a furniture company. The advertisement features, as part of the decor for an elegant bedroom, a handsome red book (perhaps Picasso's drawings inspired by Góngora) that bears the name of the poet clearly visible in gold on the spine. That Góngora could simultaneously be the subject of serious scholarship and an "object" of decoration would perhaps not have surprised his contemporaries. Góngora was nothing if not a figure of contradictions with an infinite capacity to occupy diverse poetic spaces: from the rarefied pastoral landscapes of the *Soledades*, to the sensual mythological setting of *Polifemo*, to the scatological shores of the Río Esgueva. Ever since the virulent controversy over the "intolerable oscuridad" of his two most famous poems, several versions of the poet have competed for our critical attention.

The eight essays offered in this special volume of *Calíope* are representative of the multiform genius of the poet and the variety and vibrancy of Góngora studies at the beginning of the 21st century. The contributors, all well known and respected critics of early modern Spanish literature (although not all of them primarily *gongoristas*), approach the work of the Cordoban poet from a multiplicity of perspectives and methodologies: from time-honored philological analysis to feminist readings, from considerations of myth to the application of queer theory. Underlying this diversity in theoretical approximation and

modes of reading, we discover the extent to which the Gongorine canon has expanded in recent decades. Alongside the Petrarchan love sonnets and the *Soledades* and *Polifemo*, we now study—and, on occasion, teach—formerly overlooked aspects of Góngora's work including his theater, his scabrous verse (even at its most obscene), and his politics.

The organization of this collection does not follow a specific design. Nonetheless, I thought it appropriate for personal reasons to begin with the essay written by Gonzalo Sobejano. It was, in fact, Prof. Sobejano who first introduced me to the serious study of Góngora some twenty years ago when I was a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. In his contribution to this volume, Sobejano studies the profound impact that Góngora had on Baltasar Gracián. Not only is Góngora quoted numerous times in *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* as the preeminent example of elegance and wit, but there are also clear Gongorine echoes in the allegorical novel *El criticón*. Sobejano offers an explanation as to why Gracián never quotes from the *Soledades* and only briefly from the *Polifemo* in *Agudeza*, as opposed to the *letrillas*, *romances*, sonnets and even his plays which feature prominently. In what becomes an exemplary display of three levels of *ingenio* and *agudeza*, Sobejano reads Gracián reading Góngora. Furthermore, the author reminds us in his article of the enduring pleasure of uncovering the rhetorical underpinnings of a Góngora poem.

Laura Dolfi, who for a number of years has pioneered the study of Góngora's theater, provides here a useful introduction and overview of this, the least-known aspect of the poet's *oeuvre*. Her meticulously prepared editions of *Las firmezas de Isabela*, *El doctor Carlino*, and *La comedia venatoria* have inspired readers to take a second look at Góngora's curious flirtation with the dramatic muse and greatly facilitated and influenced my own work on *gongorismo* in the *comedia*. In the article included in this volume, Dolfi gives us a detailed account of Góngora's desire to create an alternative dramatic aesthetic to the one promoted by Lope de Vega and his followers. Góngora's *comedias* were not meant for the popular *corrales*, but were rather to be enjoyed by those who, like the readers of the *Soledades*, "tiene[n] la capacidad para quitar la corteza y descubrir lo misterioso que encubren" (*Obras* 1:296). Dolfi demonstrates that the interest in the theater closely paralleled Góngora's development as a poet; and, indeed, the composition of *Las firmezas* and *El doctor Carlino* coincided with one of the most creative periods of his career.

Many of the essays in this volume show a fruitful engagement with critical tradition and literary history, as the contributors more or less self-consciously situate their studies within broader comparative and theoretical contexts. Edward Friedman takes a doubly comparative

approach. He studies Góngora, Garcilaso, and Cervantes through the critical lens provided by Erich Auerbach in his classic *Mimesis* and Pedro Salinas' *Reality and the Poet in Spanish Poetry*. In the process of revisiting and commenting the work of these two influential twentieth-century critics, Friedman provides insights on the early modern writers' perception of art, nature, and "reality." Through a consideration of some of Góngora's poems such as "Inscripcion para el sepulcro de Dominico Greco," "De pura honestidad templo sagrado," and the *Polifemo*, Friedman pursues the importance of the artist as interpreter and inventor.

Mary Barnard takes a contemporary theoretical approach in exploring the workings of vision, desire, and identity in Góngora's *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea*. She complements a nuanced close reading of the poem with terms of analysis derived from Renaissance Neoplatonism, early modern theories of optics, and current feminist theory and psychoanalysis. Barnard convincingly demonstrates that the dynamics of specularization that take place in the text involve both the male and female gaze, and ultimately implicate the reader. Her discussion of the play of power implicit in the play of looks is especially suggestive, as is the psychoanalytic interpretation of Polyphemus.

Three of the articles deal exclusively with the *Soledades*. The articles by Marsha Collins and Carroll Johnson serve as bookends to a consideration of Góngora's most controversial work. Collins analyzes the opening scene of the first *Soledad* where the polyvalent image/metaphor of the labyrinth is introduced. This was an important image in early modern literature; and in Góngora, the labyrinth or maze becomes emblematic of the entire poem. Indeed, Collins argues, this metaphor provides the readers with a map or guide to the understanding and enjoyment of the poem. Through a process of dynamic imaging, aided by the Baroque figure of *enargeia*, the reader is forced in essence to "meander" through the poem as through a labyrinth where the ultimate meaning is ever elusive. In addition, Collins establishes a correspondence between Góngora's literary labyrinth and other landscapes and structures such as Renaissance gardens and architectural monuments.

Carroll Johnson's essay teases out the multi-layered allusions and shifting meanings and nuances implicit in the hawking scene that closes the second *Soledad*. He begins with a detailed consideration of the story Ascalaphus, the sole witness of Proserpina's abduction, who was changed into an owl as punishment for not reporting the crime. According to Johnson, there is a self-referential dimension at work in this episode, alluding ultimately to Góngora's peculiar conception of poetry. Of special interest is the association of the bird with the *peregrino*

hero of the poem and ultimately with the poet himself. Furthermore, Johnson considers some of the political implications of this poetic interlude, revealing Góngora's deeply ambivalent attitude toward the Court and the nobles on whose patronage he depended.

Likewise, Frederick de Armas uses a myth as a point of departure, this time the richly suggestive myth of Ganymede. Associated with the pilgrim/protagonist of the *Soledades* from the very beginning, the story of Jupiter's cup bearer was one that inspired some anxiety in the 17th century because of what de Armas calls its "divinization of sexual practices between two males." De Armas studies the notion of humanistic homoeroticism in the *Soledad Primera* and convincingly argues that the entire poem is suffused with sexual ambiguity. The use of a pagan setting, astrology and allusions to other myths that deal with same-sex eroticism all reinforce Góngora's apparent interest in homoeroticism, a topic that has of late received critical attention in Góngora scholarship. Particularly interesting is de Armas's suggestion that the very style of the poem, especially its obscurity, serves simultaneously to hide and to foreground the homoerotic.

Like de Armas, Adrienne Martín uncovers socio-political anxieties toward homosexual alterity as depicted in Góngora's satiric and burlesque verse. Starting with a discussion of Quevedo's virulent accusation of Góngora as a poet of sodomy and excrement, Martín considers the ingeniously varied sexual imagery deployed by Góngora to satirize transgressive sexuality: male and female homosexuality and also "deviant" heterosexual practices. Martín's analysis of the various obscene *letrillas*, *décimas*, and sonnets is contextualized within a discussion of social practices: the existence of a homosexual subculture, the Inquisition's persecution of sodomites, and the class-inflected means of punishment for "deviant" crimes. The workings of satire, Martín suggests, gave Góngora and other writers the opportunity to provide a contestatory poetic stance toward the phallogentric and misogynist attitudes in early modern Spain.

As is true of all anthologies, this compilation is necessarily partial and incomplete; and, in inviting these superb readers to contribute to the special issue of *Caliope*, I did not specify or suggest any particular topics or texts. Nevertheless, I am struck by the inclusiveness of the material covered in this volume. As these essays demonstrate, Luis de Góngora y Argote is a poet who continues to inspire active and creative readings. He bequeathed to his contemporaries and to readers in the 21st century, a versatile and creative style that continues to shape literary and critical discourse.

Works Cited

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