



A BILINGUAL EDITION

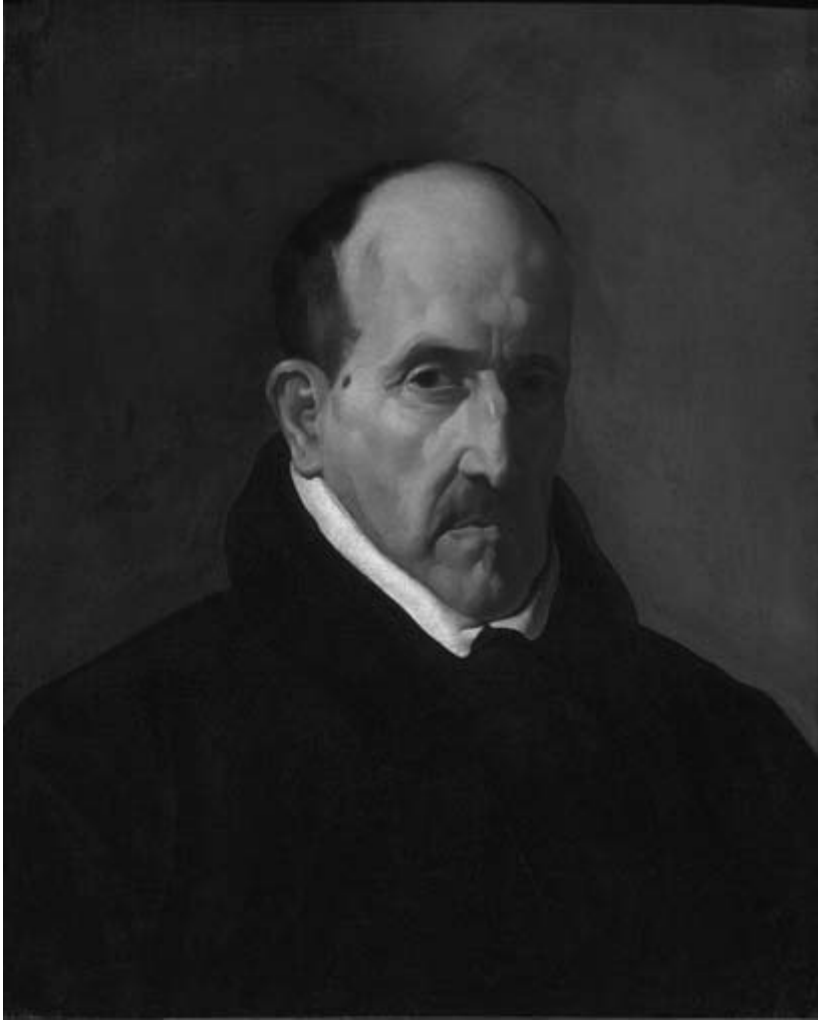
SELECTED POEMS

L
Luis de Góngora

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

John Dent-Young

SELECTED POEMS OF LUIS DE GÓNGORA



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John Dent-Young has also translated from Chinese. He is co-author, with his son Alex, of the full English version of the Chinese classical novel the *Shuihuzhuan* (often known in English as *The Water Margin*), published in five parts under the titles *The Broken Seals*, *The Tiger Killers*, *The Gathering Company*, *Iron Ox*, and *The Scattered Flock*.

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✦ *For Esther*

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·§[INTRODUCTION]§·

This selection is a limited introduction to the varied poetry of Luis de Góngora, described as “the Spanish Homer” in the title of the first published edition of his work and still considered by many to be Spain’s greatest poet. Contemporary with Shakespeare, he was both famous and controversial in his lifetime and still is today. His name produced a literary term for an involved and Latinate style, Gongorism, yet he was first known for ballads and songs written in the popular tradition that runs through Spanish poetry from its earliest beginnings. His later style was attacked and parodied by contemporaries like Lope de Vega and Quevedo, but it was also widely defended and imitated, influencing, for example, Calderón and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Mexico’s first Spanish-language poet. Like Cervantes, who was a little older but published his work during the same period, Góngora ended his life famous but impoverished. Unlike Cervantes, his fame later underwent a partial eclipse before he was taken up again in the twentieth century by the modernists, including García Lorca, and by one of the great critics of the time, Dámaso Alonso. His influence can also be seen in the work of modern Latin American poets and novelists.

After a good deal of rereading and trying at the same time to bypass traditional controversies, I have been struck by two aspects of Góngora. First is the extent to which he lives his poetry and his poetry defines him. Although, for example, he wrote a good many sonnets in the Renaissance manner describing beautiful and unrequiting women or praising noblemen and bishops, he also wrote a good many others dealing with quite ordinary matters: among the subjects are gifts from friends; journeys; a gentleman who couldn’t tell a ballad from a sonnet; the poet’s insulting reception by a lady in Cuenca; a satire on a gentleman dressing for some festivities; viewing

the bulls before a bullfight; a nobleman's collection of jewels, pictures, and horses; some unusually cold weather in Andalusia with ice and snow at the time of the king's visit; and a request to a friend in Toledo to send some apricots, or if there were none left, a barbel or an eel from the Tagus. The picture that emerges has the variety and ordinariness of real life, with a Spanish perspective that would almost fit it for a modern tourist guidebook.

More important, Góngora puts himself into his poems. Sometimes, as in "Hanme dicho hermanas" (no. 14, "Sisters, they tell me . . .," the poem addressed to some nuns) he does this directly, though it is a carefully and mischievously constructed self-portrait, obviously not to be taken at face value. Likewise, the innocence of "Hermana Marica" (no. 2, "Marica, my sister") is manipulated to create a humorous, unsentimental impression of childhood and prepare the ground for a shock at the end. The creation of a consistent poetic personality plays a big part in Góngora's poetry. Even an obviously staged performance like "Andeme yo caliente . . ." (no. 3, the *letrilla* in praise of home comforts, "Just let me be warm and easy") accords with what Jammes calls Góngora's nonconformism and announces the preference for simplicity over self-importance and artificiality that (perhaps paradoxically) is central to his complex later work (*Letrillas*, ed. Jammes, 115).

The author is also dramatically present in the humorous asides that occur when he is telling a story, in the playful choice of a word or an image, and in the occasional flourishes of pedantry that he is so fond of introducing. When Pyramus is imagining how the lion must have torn Thisbe apart and scattered her beautiful limbs, the poet muses in parentheses: "ivory, call them, divine? I'll call them divine *and* ivory" (no. 42, 11.409–10). In the *Solitudes*, probably his least playful work, there are humorous touches, apparently gratuitous, as when the pilgrim reaches shore and donates the plank that saved him to the rocks, since "even cliffs can be mollified by signs of gratitude" (*que aun se dejan las peñas / lisonjear de agradecidas señas*, *Solitude* I, 11.32–33). I think some of Góngora's contemporary critics found such intrusions irrelevant; objections were certainly made to some of the colloquial phrases he uses, when they add nothing to the content but are important indicators of a speaker's attitude. To us, from the other side of modernism, all this is less surprising and also may seem reminiscent of the framing fictions of *Don Quixote*.

While the relationship between the poetic personality and reality is quite confusing (as presumably Góngora wanted), on a simpler level some poems are easy to collate with his life. The sonnets on bullfighting, for example, relate to one of his lifelong interests. Or consider another sonnet in which he appears to accuse a nobleman of leaving town because of not wanting to repay some money Góngora lent him. According to an early commentator's

note, this accusation of stinginess is in fact just a friendly joke. The gist of it, loosely translated, is this:

Written when the Count of Villaflor delayed repaying Don Luis some money he had borrowed while gambling.

The worthy Count, without more ado,
packed his stuff and loaded the mule with baggage.
Farewell, my ducats, I wish you bon voyage;
obviously I've seen the last of you!

He'll change you into a greyhound, just you see,
that a page will trail behind him on a lead;
for it all goes in support of the canine breed,
what he gets denying the church and fleecing me.

To string a man along, that's the Count's fashion,
and as for the ladies, he leads them quite a dance.
What a simpleton I was to lend him money!

Still, if the proverb's true, you know, it's funny,
but the more fool, the greater is my chance
Santa Maria will come to me in a vision.

What the proverb says is that the Virgin Mary appears to simpletons, and it is used of someone who has a piece of undeserved luck. But Santa Maria was also the name of a servant of the Count who was sent round to pay his gambling debts. In addition to the neatly turned joke, the sonnet serves to remind us that Góngora was notoriously fond of gambling and other relatively frivolous pursuits.

Born into a well-off family in Córdoba, Góngora showed early promise and was sent to study law in Salamanca in 1576, when he must have been about fifteen. While there he was accused of misbehaving, devoting most of his attention to cards, profane poetry, plays, and actors. It is quite hard to relate the severe countenance in Velázquez's famous portrait to Góngora's youthful personality; but if it was painted in 1622, less than five years before his death, the subject had reasons for seeming weary and bitter. By 1581 he was back in Córdoba and had taken minor orders so he could work for the cathedral chapter, following his uncle in the post of *rationero* or prebendary. A few years later he was reprimanded by the bishop for talking during

services, attending bullfights and frequenting actors, writing profane poetry, and generally behaving like *un mozo*—"a young hooligan," one might say. He seems not to have been greatly worried because he replied that it was impossible for him to have been talking during the chanting of the office since the cleric on one side of him was deaf and the one on the other never stopped singing. He admitted the bullfights but said he went to them in the company of men who were his seniors, while actors came to his house, he explained, because of his love of music. He admitted the poetry too, but said he was partly exonerated by the fact that many of the *letrillas* attributed to him were written by others.

It is not difficult to see that Góngora was determined to reserve his greatest efforts for what was always to be most important to him, the art of poetry, and that his character and interests set him on a course of opposition to authority. Given his position as a functionary of the church, he needed to be clever and stubborn to pursue his aims. It might be an exaggeration to invoke the Inquisition here, but it is worth remembering that when Góngora went to Salamanca the older poet, Luis de León, had probably just returned to the university after four years in the cells, where he narrowly escaped torture. Admittedly Góngora's sins were more worldly than theological (and therefore less seditious), but when the first collection of his poems was published by Vicuña shortly after his death it was almost immediately banned by the Inquisition.

Góngora seems to have become known as a poet quite early on, when his poems must have been sung and transmitted orally. From the 1590s his work was included in various collections of ballads. There were thirty-seven of his poems in Pedro Espinosa's famous collection, *Flores de poetas ilustres de España*, published in 1605. Probably it was his reputation as a poet that enabled him to dismiss criticisms of his way of life relatively lightly. Possibly, as his fame and poetic ambition grew, he was protected also by his love of ambiguity, punning, and metaphor, his inexplicitness. Although he was willing to have a go at almost anyone and made many enemies, it would have been difficult to attribute any really dangerous views to him. He was, after all, the son of a lawyer and had studied law himself, and the cathedral employed him on what might be described as diplomatic missions.

It seems typical of Góngora's character too that he was both meticulous in the revision of his work and careless of its preservation, so that when the poems came to be collected by Antonio Chacón, who worked on the manuscript with Góngora just before the latter's death, some had been lost and the authenticity of others was doubtful. It has been said that the Chacón manuscript would be conclusive proof of what was and was not written by

Góngora, but for one problem: Góngora himself could not always remember what he had written, and he had not kept copies. (This uncertainty worked against him in other ways, too: in the banned edition the most scurrilous poems are said to have been by other people.)

Chacón's manuscript and Vicuña's abortive edition of 1627 are the two main sources for Góngora's work. There is a story behind the banning of Vicuña's edition. One of many enemies Góngora made during his life was a Jesuit called Juan de Pineda. Pineda was one of the judges in a poetry competition, or poetic joust, held in 1610 to celebrate the beatification of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Góngora failed to win the prize and in another sonnet (attributed rather than canonical) addresses the matter thus:

¿Yo en justa injusta expuesto a la sentencia
de un positivo padre azafranado?
Paciencia, Job, si alguna os han dejado
los prolijos escritos de su Encia.

I take this to mean something like—

“So in this unjust joust am I to be judged
by an intransigent ginger Jesuit?
Patience, Job—if you've any left
after the prolix scribblings of His Boringness.”

Father Pineda, who apparently was red-haired and had written a long book on Job, had his revenge when he denounced many poems in the Vicuña edition and it was banned.

Many of Góngora's poems can be related to journeys he made on cathedral business, or perhaps to visit patrons: Granada, Salamanca, Ayamonte near Huelva, Palencia, the court at Valladolid and later Madrid, Monforte in Galicia and Cuenca are all reflected in sonnets or ballads that he wrote. It seems also certain that the landscape and themes of *Polyphemus* and the *Solitudes* draw on sights and sounds and people he encountered on these travels. Both these long poems are much concerned with nature and country life, the *Solitudes* in particular proposing an ideal of natural simplicity in preference to the pretentiousness of court life and the greed of empire. Although this idea is closely linked to the Greek and Latin views of the classical golden age, and Góngora was especially well read in Latin, the essence of the poem is observation of real country pursuits and praise of what is not flashy or fashionable or grasping but traditional and well crafted.

These long poems, on which Góngora staked his poetic reputation, can also be linked to his life. In 1607 he was in Madrid attempting to obtain justice for his sister, whose eldest son had been killed in a street brawl in Córdoba. He had no success, and the *tercetos* he wrote at this time express his disillusionment with the court and nostalgia for country life. Some years earlier he had rented a place outside Córdoba, the Huerta de Don Marcos, where there were many fruit trees. The tenancy was for his lifetime and that of the nephew who succeeded him as prebendary; there would obviously have been a subtenant to farm the land, but it must have represented something that had a strong emotional hold on Góngora. When he returned to Córdoba in 1610, after his frustrating residence at court, he rented a house in the Plazuela de la Trinidad and shortly after handed over the cathedral job to his nephew. We can assume that it was during this period that he wrote *Polyphemus* and the *First Solitude*, the poems in which he developed the extreme form of his complicated syntax and idiosyncratic style of metaphor that would be argued over by critics and followers for the rest of his life and beyond.

While early commentators record which poems Father Pineda disapproved of on moral grounds, the real battles were more about Góngora's style than his moral content. The first and most vehement critic of this was Juan de Jáuregui, who wrote the *Antídoto contra la pestilente poesía de las "Soledades . . ."* ("An Antidote to the pestilential poetry of the *Solitudes* addressed to the author in order to defend him against himself"). This was a response to the privately circulated *Solitudes* and *Polyphemus*, and it accused Góngora of writing unintelligible nonsense. It was quickly answered by Góngora's friends and allies, and battle commenced. Among Góngora's critics were two great contemporaries, Lope de Vega and Quevedo. Góngora's self-justification included claims that he sought to raise Spanish to the level of perfection of Latin, that he did not write for idiots, and that difficult poetry had the great merit of sharpening the reader's intellect. Somewhat more mysteriously he suggested that the objective of the human intellect is to know truth, and the greatest delight will be experienced when, forced to speculate by a difficult literary work, the intellect glimpses through the obscurity "asimilaciones a su concepto," which I take to mean some intimation of ultimate truth. These ideas are put forward in a letter thought to be from Góngora (though Jammes [*Soledades*, ed. Jammes, 614] expresses doubts about the authenticity of the Góngora letter, or at least part of it) replying to one by a critic, possibly Lope de Vega. What is clear is that Góngora proposed the highest possible aims for his poetry and defended it obstinately against criticism.

Although there was opposition to what became known as the new poetry and to *cultismo*, the use of unusual, Latinate syntax and vocabulary, Góngora had many admirers and defenders in his own time and after his death. Modern editions have frequent recourse to the seventeenth century commentaries of people like the Duque de Rivas, the Abad de Rute, Pellicer, and Salcedo Coronel to elucidate difficult passages. On the other hand, it cannot have escaped attention that this churchman's poetry contained little direct reference to Christianity, and "temple" is a much more frequent item in his vocabulary than "church." To some modern readers the sexual innuendo and scatological humour will probably be even more shocking, but here we must probably give some weight to changing ideas of acceptability.

The second aspect of Góngora's work that has struck me is its unity. This point is worth making simply because there has been a tendency to see Góngora in two halves: a simple Góngora of popular ballads and satires and the difficult, *culto* Góngora, author of the supposedly unintelligible later poems. Yet in the "difficult" work one comes across many expressions and images that have occurred in other Góngora poems, from all stages of his production. One of the earliest sonnets, ascribed to 1582, addresses a crack in the wall, like the one Pyramus and Thisbe spoke through, describing it as the lists where the speaker's hopes joust with his lady's disdain. Six years later he writes a sonnet in dialogue form where one of the participants is the lists of Madrid, which gentlemen should use to train their fighting skills but don't because they are too busy parading in the Paseo del Prado. The 1582 sonnet continues by begging the crack in the wall to be discreet and propitious because the speaker doesn't want his love affair to hang as a trophy on cruel destiny's tree, language that recalls ballad 10 in this collection and stanza 30 of *Polyphemus*. The sonnet ends by comparing the crack in the Babylonian lovers' wall to a *barco de vistas*, a boat used for holding international negotiations on neutral ground. The whole Pyramus and Thisbe story is told in the ballad written in 1618 (no. 42), where Góngora develops this *barco de vistas*, the ship image, as a metaphor for his go-between.

There are certain classical myths and stories that Góngora reverts to again and again, like the disaster stories of Icarus and of Phaeton, for example. Stories such as these, together with linguistic expressions from classical literature ("the snake in the grass" from Virgil is a favorite), are so firmly fixed in Góngora's mind that he continues to play with them throughout his poetic career, trying them in new combinations to make new connections and yield new ideas. In a sonnet of 1615 he advises a young man to study and strive for fame, and not let idleness be "a snake among the flowers" instead of "in the grass," flowers serving as a homage to the youth

of the person he is addressing. Themes and images also repeat themselves. The praise of simplicity that later is so central to the *Solitudes* occurs in the *letrilla* of 1581 (no. 3). The *Solitudes* are partly a collage of experiences and locations that Góngora has described elsewhere: storm and shipwreck, shepherds, country food and wine, birdsong, rivers, and girls bathing, lying on the grass, and dancing. It includes many favorite sights: beautiful Andalusian horses, the flight of hawks, the color of red and white wine mixed, a river winding through fields, the rising sun dispelling mists, pools of water on the seashore sparkling in the sunlight (this last image, which occurs in the *Second Solitude*, suggests the scenery of the Coto de Doñana, the great nature reserve between Seville and the sea). The pilgrim, the protagonist of the poem, has been a subject of endless discussion—as to what exactly he is and why he is there—but the word “pilgrim” occurs in other poems, and the pilgrim’s song of complaint in the *Second Solitude*, with its Icarus image, is echoed or foreshadowed in various ballads and sonnets.

All these myths, stories, and expressions are a common thread running through the different poems, the simpler ones and the more complex, the serious and the burlesque. There is also more unity of tone than one would expect between these different types: to put it simply, Góngora’s serious poems contain humor and his humorous ones are serious—serious in their exuberance, in their delight in language. There is really no reason to think of two Góngoras. His entire oeuvre is pervaded by a consistent poetic personality, even if a facet of this personality is a relish for wearing different masks. Behind the role-play is the voice of one who analyzes words and ideas, not taking their meaning on trust, and believes in both the importance of his art and the beauty of the world.

Commentators have pointed out that Góngora uses every rhetorical figure there is. These rhetorical figures are not adornments but ways of examining and renewing the words that compose them. One of Góngora’s tricks is to jump, with a kind of *Alice in Wonderland* logic, from a metaphorical meaning to a more literal one, which conjures up a new range of comparisons. Another is to use a metaphor in a literal way as if it were the ordinary name for the thing. Thus “boat” is “pine,” and “crystal” becomes the common name for any of the following: “water,” “girl,” “arm,” “face,” and “beauty.”

It may be objected that there is an inconsistency of attitude in Góngora’s work that is more important than questions of language. Surely there is a world of difference between the cynicism of the Belerma ballad (no. 6), on the one hand, and on the other the romantic stories of Angelica and Medoro (no. 22) or of Acis and Galatea in *Polyphemus* (no. 41)? Many feel that Góngora’s burlesque treatment of such famous love stories as Hero and

Leander or Pyramus and Thisbe somehow devalues the more serious poetry. R. O. Jones (*Poems of Góngora*, ed. Jones, 21), for one, finds the comic ballads “disturbing” because they are so different from Góngora’s “exquisite poems on love.” He does, however, propose a tentative solution: “Is Góngora’s target the folly of useless ideals? Probably . . .” This does not seem to me to go far enough or to get the emphasis quite right. Góngora exploits or parodies all the literary conventions of his time, from pastoral and chivalresque fiction to the popular ballad and even his revered classics. He does so because they are part of the literary scene, there, like Everest, to be conquered, or to be used as materials for his craft to work on (there is no denying the competitive element in Góngora’s character). The view, deriving from Romanticism, of poetry as purely the expression of emotion undervalues Góngora’s technical skill and playfulness.

Even when he is not mocking, Góngora will often alter a myth for some expressive purpose. In the song near the start of the *First Solitude*, the modern Narcissus is criticized for “seeking echoes and disdaining fountains,” for running after flattery and love when he would be better employed contemplating his own reflection; the original moral of the story has been turned on its head. In *Polyphemus*, Galatea is described as *pavón de Venus* and *cisne de Juno*, “Venus’s peacock” and “Juno’s swan.” But the peacock is Juno’s emblem, while the swan belongs with Venus.

There is still some cogency in the criticism that Góngora’s love sonnets show little feeling. It has been noted that he manages the language and form of the Renaissance sonnet brilliantly but without any sense of real passion. Certainly many of the sonnets sound like exercises and are in part imitations, but quite often there is a twist that points the topic in a less conventional, or certainly a less amorous, direction. The earliest of the sonnets in Ciplijauskaitė’s edition compares the beloved with a building: foundation, walls, a coral doorway, emerald windows or portholes, which are all conventional Renaissance metaphors for beauty of face and form. It is rather mechanical, like painting with numbers. For once Father Pineda has a point when he calls it “mad exaggeration of the profane poets, which in the mouth of a priest is all the more intolerable and inexcusable, especially when combined with other excesses” (*Sonetos Completos*, 118). Yet Dámaso Alonso finds this sonnet one of Góngora’s most emotional. I think Alonso must be responding to a sense of excitement in the movement of the verse, the key to which is perhaps in the fourth line: *fue por divina mano fabricado*—this beautiful building was created by a divine architect. Moving smoothly through its catalog of beauties (or architectural features), the poem reaches a conclusion in ambivalently religious and perfectly balanced terms: the poet begs

the beautiful idol whom he humbly adores to hear him as he “sings your hymns, recites your virtues.” Divinely created beauty has been matched by Góngora’s beautiful arrangement of words and their music; this is the source of the excitement. Góngora’s attitude to love poetry is probably revealed in his advice to the young man in a sonnet of 1615, when he tells him to snatch a feather from Love’s most painful arrow and use it as a pen to become famous. Even so, ambition was to be weighed against a firm grasp of reality. Some of the practical difficulties of romance are strikingly epitomized in the ballad that begins with “*Noble Disenchantment*” (no. 10), where for instance the speaker picks up a pebble to throw at the window and gets his hands covered in filth—hardly surprising in streets that were probably not much cleaner than the cloacal rivers of Castille that Góngora enjoyed describing.

A more important question arises in relation to the *Solitudes*. The idyllic vision of simple life, the criticism of commercial greed and imperial ambition, and the intellectual and aesthetic excitement aroused by the new discoveries sit a little awkwardly with one another. The urge to go beyond the known world brought the cruelties of the Spanish conquest to the New World; it was also, however, a big step for mankind. Linked to the beauty of the Spice Islands anchored in the dawn sea—in the East, that is, but how expressive this is of the excitement of travel!—is irreparable loss, the old man’s loss of his son and also, we might want to add, the loss of the world’s innocence. We should be wary, however, of trying to reconcile contradictions that Góngora himself could not solve or to clarify the mysteries that he himself suggested it might not be possible to view clearly. Góngora and his contemporaries were brought up in the spirit of humanism and despite the general seventeenth-century tendencies toward cynicism and religious reaction that historians have observed, there must surely have been a genuine tension between admiration for human advances and revulsion toward some of the results. These are, after all, equations that we have not solved in our own time. Perhaps if Góngora had completed the *Solitudes* he would have reflected more light on such problems.

In much of Góngora’s poetry awareness of transience and death underlies other human concerns, while nature holds the balance, converting the busy deceptions of the world into tranquillity or the festive contemplation of beauty. Time gives “green consolations (as I have translated line 221 of *Soledad I*).” But in the poems of the 1620s the mood seems increasingly sombre. In a sonnet of 1620 about the portrait a Flemish artist was painting of him, Góngora expresses fears that the portrait will not last, but then concludes that things last better than men:

Los siglos que en sus hojas cuenta un roble,
árbol los cuenta sordo, tronco ciego;
quien más ve, más oye, menos dura.

[The centuries an oak tree counts in its leaves,
it counts them dumbly, as a tree it's deaf and blind;
man sees and hears, and yet lasts so much less.]

In the great sonnets of 1622–23 the disillusionment seems to be heartfelt. These are perhaps the most deeply emotional poems Góngora wrote. His sojourn in Madrid had proved a failure. The patrons who were his last hope were dead or disgraced. His own life was on a steep downward curve. Before the end, unable to pay the rent, he was thrown out of his house. According to the story it was his old enemy Quevedo who owned the house, having bought it and several others in the same street, then Calle del Niño, now called Calle de Quevedo. After suffering a stroke, Góngora finally returned to Córdoba, where he died in 1626. It is not even clear where he was buried. Much later, a body that was found and dug up was thought to be his. There was originally no plaque to commemorate him.

The difficulty of Góngora has been exaggerated. He can be simple and direct, even in later poems: one has only to look at sonnet no. 23, the 1603 sonnet on arriving in Valladolid, or “A Carnation Has Fallen” (no. 34), the 1621 Christmas carol. Even in his complex style, the difficulties of the word order can be mitigated by paying close attention to the system of balance and contrast; the significance of allusions and myths can often be elucidated by further reading in Góngora’s work because one poem illuminates another. Startling metaphors require us to look closely at the objects and situations being described. Góngora’s preoccupation with words led to a heightened observation of ordinary objects. His style may seem abstract, but closer reading shows simple objects revealed under an intense light. The effect is almost the reverse of Velázquez’s skill with paint, which produces at a distance an impression of heightened reality, but in close-up is as unrepresentational as an abstract painting. This is not the only parallel between poet and painter, who must have met when Velázquez, visiting Madrid for the first time as a young man not much known outside his native Seville, painted the portrait. In his earlier work Velázquez also uses mythological subjects, like Bacchus, Vulcan, and Ariadne but accommodates them so completely to the life around him that people hesitate to give them their original titles: the painting of Bacchus is commonly known as *The Drinkers*, that of Arachne, as *The Spinners*. The impression most viewers take away

from these paintings is of the faces of ordinary people and a sense of the vitality of their involvement in work.

In its forms, ideas, and vocabulary Góngora's poetry draws heavily on precedent and yet it manages to be intensely personal. He became famous because he was popular; his poetry was earthy and traditional as well as witty and learned and in its peculiar way avant-garde. He himself believed he was writing for an élite. Nowadays that is unfashionable, and perhaps we can change it in a way that Góngora himself might have appreciated if we say that his poetry is for the alert.

Finally, a brief note on the translation. My aim has been to produce versions that can be read on their own, and in the more difficult works like the *Solitudes* to clarify the narrative without oversimplifying or losing all the richness of metaphor. My hope was that I could rescue Góngora from his role as textbook example of the Baroque and give him a human voice. I have tried not to sentimentalize the poems or to make too big a change in their form. Different poems have required different strategies, according to their center of gravity and different possibilities and impossibilities: I have indicated some of the reasons in the notes. I have cross-referenced some of the notes in order to support my sense of a joined-up Góngora. What I would like above all is to have caught the down-to-earth aspect of Góngora's poetry and the seriousness of his approach, whatever the mood and tone of a particular poem.

Special thanks are due to all my patient and encouraging readers and advisers, and particularly Martin Murphy, Simon Ellis, and Maria-Elena Pickett, to all of whom I owe many good suggestions.





“For remember, fools, from behind / Opportunity’s shown bald” (poem no. 8).
Alciato’s was one of the books of emblems that were popular in the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries, especially as a source of poetic images.

Alciato, *On Opportunity* (1621), emblem no. 122.

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THE SHORTER POEMS

Introduction

The ballads (*romances*), sonnets, and *letrillas* in this section are printed in chronological order, as given in the editions of Antonio Carreño, Biruté Ciplijauskaitė, and Robert Jammes, respectively. I have selected poems that I hope will show not only the variety of Góngora's poetry but also the continuity: forms and images are repeated throughout a poetic career that continued until almost the end of his life, and although his style develops in complexity it is as recognizably his in the earlier as it is in the later poems.

For ease of reference, I have given titles to the English versions, although there are usually no titles in the Spanish.

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