vagarosamente, com uma ternura calada e uma felicidade recôndita que se assemelharam mais que nunca ao amor” (p. 118).

17. Outro aspecto vinculado ao Poder da Mamãe Grande é o cadeado, que marca os quartos traseiros dos animais de sua propriedade.

18. A crítica surge aqui, então, na degradação do sublime, procedimento frequente em García Márquez, cujo exemplo mais notável é o anjo de “Um senhor muito velho com umas asas enormes”, incluído em A incrível e triste história da Cândida Etrândita e sua avó desalmada. A mesma desmistificação é feita com a avó, conforme vimos, em CE.

The Production of Solitude:
Góngora and the State

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What was involved in the seventeenth century debates on Gongorism and in its reception by the literary elite of the Spanish imperial state and ideological apparatus was not simply a matter of style. The much argued question of Góngora’s formalism meant not the absence of political and social concerns—as the contemporary usage of the term suggests—but rather the relation of a certain way of doing poetry to the dominant ideology and to the society which represented and reproduced itself in and through that ideology. Poetry was still regarded as a legislative discourse; aesthetics questions were thus inseparable from ethical ones, and these in turn from the concrete institutions and operations of the civil society at large. In these terms, it is appropriate to consider Gongorism in its specificity as what Althusser has called an ideological practice.

Gongorism has in the seventeenth century a Janus-like nature. On the one hand, it is violently attacked by the humanists of the Counter Reformation as a form of radical heresy. For Cascales, Góngora is “Mahoma de la poesía española”; Quevedo boasts “yo te untaré mis versos con tocino / porque no me los muerdas, gongorilla”; the Inquisition prohibits the sale of the first published edition of Góngora’s poems, for several years (Lope de Vícuna’s Obras en verso del Homero español of 1627). On the other, after the poet’s death Gongorism rapidly becomes an accepted, even “official,” poetic manner in the Spanish Court and the Colonies. In the Justas poéticas of the Vice-royalties, no one aspiring to patronage and protection via a well wrought sonnet or ode can afford to remain innocent of Gongorist culturanismo. It serves Calderón in his effort to fashion a didactic state theater and Gracián’s neo-scholastic aesthetics and politics. The Conde Duque de Olivares has Góngora’s works transcribed on parchment for his private library.
ha de ser diferente de la prosa y digno de personas capaces de entendere) ... 

Demás que honra me ha causado hacerme escuro a los ignorantes, que esa es la distinción de los hombres doctos, hablar de manera que a ellos les parezca griego, pues no se han de dar las piedras preciosas a animales de cerda.

There are several things to notice here. One is the idea of the poetry "causing" (creating/signifying) honor; two the idea of poetry as a labor, a trabajo to use Góngora's word or what later Gongorists like És Pinosa Medrano would call a fabricación, a making; three the point about the nobility and perfection of Latin; four, the claim that his departures from normal usage and syntax are justified by the requirements of a heroic language, worthy of those capable of understanding it (i.e. those who possess honor). Ordinary Spanish—what Góngora calls "el romance" in the letter—is seen as a language which must be instrumentalized because it has fallen from "la perfección y alzera de la latina." Góngora's "trabajo" is to have sublimated it, extended and refined its expressive and ordering capacity, by incorporating into it the complex periods of Latin syntax and a new range of words and concepts. "El romance" thus attains in the artifact the status of a heroic or epic language because it becomes, thanks to the poet, an instrument for knowing and representing the contingencies of Spain's national destiny (because epic is the discourse of the state), contingencies which are to be met by the "personas capaces," the aristocracy and its retinue in the state and ecclesiastical apparatus. The poet's achievement "causarme ha autoridad" because it is like the Latin political essay or ode a formal sign of the measured subtlety and innovation—what Gracián later called arte de ingenio—required for rule.

The equation which is implicit in this argument is of the mastery of language, a task the division of labor accords to the specialized techniques of the poet, and of the mastery of government and economy. Góngora seems to assume that the division between mental and manual labor still corresponds to the distinction between the noble and the non-noble. But what about the problem of non-noble persons of letters, of which there were obviously many in seventeenth century Spain? The exclusionary character of Góngora's defense of difficulty is crucial here ("hablar de manera que a ellos les parezca griego"), since the manner of his poetry prohibits those who may be functionally literate but lack sutileza, are not "doctos," from appropriating the text. Nevertheless, there is a ambiguity we will have to return to: it is not clear that one possesses sutileza simply by virtue of blood nobility, since to be a "docto" requires a specific "trabajo." Indeed the passage seems to suggest that the hidalgos of the "Carta de un
amigo” (who raised the question of honor in the first place) may be fairly counted among the “ignorantes.”

This is not a defense, as Dámaso Alonso and the modernist canon on Góngora has tended to assume, of a “puro placer de formas.” Rather it indicates the existence of a situation where questions of poetics have become involved with a social reality—state power and the estamental definition of class and caste—poetry as a social practice corresponds to, both as a means of representation and/or legitimization of authority and as a means of educating the consciousness of the ruling class, of translating through the reception and assimilation of the text an aesthetics into an ethics and tactics.

Who, then, does Góngora concretely address in his poetry? We can begin our answer with Pierre Vilar’s definition of Hapsburg absolutism as “imperialism, the highest stage of feudalism”:

La conquista española funda una sociedad nueva, porque instituye el mercado mundial y porque permite—al derramar sobre Europa un dinero barato—la acumulación primitiva del capital. Esta sociedad, sin embargo, no puede desarrollarse mas que contando con unas fuerzas productivas acribilladas y con unas relaciones sociales nuevas. Es lo que ocurrirá en el Norte de Europa. En España, en cambio, o mejor: en Castilla, las clases dirigentes han realizado la conquista del Nuevo Mundo como hicieron la Reconquista hispana: a la manera feudal… Así el imperialismo español ha sido en realidad la “etapa suprema” de la sociedad que el mismo ha contribuido a destruir.

This definition implies a number of things which are important for our discussion. First, that the Baroque state in Spain is a class dictatorship, a dictatorship of the feudal aristocracy, but in particular of the most powerful, chauvinist and imperialist fraction of the aristocracy, that group—the grandes—which has through the newly consolidated state apparatus been able to connect its power and fortune to the colonial and domestic primitive accumulation and which, therefore, is properly a mercantilist and monopolistic aristocracy. Moreover, the absolutist feudal state is not the same thing as the pre-Hapsburg feudal state(s), nor is its economic basis the same. Seventeenth century Spain is a society flooded with bullion from the colonies, subject to a continuous process of inflation, and dominated by a generalized commodities market. There is a huge state and ecclesiastical bureaucracy, whose nominal nobility or “honor” becomes increasingly ambiguous in the push and shove of inter-bureaucratic competition. Rent in kind or labor services has been generally replaced by money rent, resulting in either the dispossession from the land of masses of peasants who emigrate to

the urban centers in search of work or welfare or their proletarianization as day-laborers, jornaleros. (According to Bennasser’s demographic studies, 15 to 20 per cent of the population is chronically unemployed.)

Second, Hapsburg absolutism and imperialism implies the marginalization of large sections of the traditional aristocracy (as in the case of the petty aristocracy of the Comunidades rebellions). Because a primitive accumulation has taken place, because social life is thus increasingly mediated by money and the marketplace rather than the production for use of the “natural” economy of pure feudalism, class and caste status is subject to a double, and for many hidalgos a contradictory, determination. On the other hand, because feudal caste restrictions continue in force (as in the proof of purity of blood used to exclude not only the non-old Christian but more extensively the non-noble from office), this determination is still estamental; political and economic power continues to depend on title and privilege and cannot be attained in a purely entrepreneurial fashion. On the other hand, as Don Quijote or Lazarillo’s impoverished escudero illustrate, a title by itself means little in a society where money has become the generalized form of exchange and where one’s hereditary estate is subject to mortgages and leins. The idea of quality as a natural corollary of nobility of blood tends now to be overdetermined by the requirement that some form of entrepreneurship and/or specialization is necessary, that the hidalgo as much as the picaro is bound to el medro—the quest for office—and must seek to “arrimarse a los buenos.” Góngora, coming from a titled but economically obscure provincial Andalusian family, is one of these marginalized aristocrats. He must insert himself in the circles of power from the outside.

The marginalization of the petty aristocracy and the personnel needs of the imperial state and ecclesiastical bureaucracy explain in part the tremendous growth of Spanish universities in the sixteenth century and the function of that curious figure somewhere between the Renaissance courtier and the Jacobin known as the letrado, the person of letters. Between 1459 and 1620 18 new universities are created in Spain and 5 in the colonies, making a total of 28 in Góngora’s day. In Castile proper they enrolled, as Richard Kagan has shown in his studies of the phenomenon, around 20 to 25,000 students at their height: that is, about 2 to 2.5 per cent of the total male population between the ages of 15 and 24 (to which would have to be added several thousands more studying in the increasingly popular Jesuit colleges). Moreover, Kagan observes, “since students stemmed largely from the nobility, particularly the numerous hidalgo class
which may have constituted up to one tenth of Castile’s total population, perhaps as many as one quarter to one third of Castile’s young noblemen may have received some form of university or university-level education,” making Castile along with England Europe’s most highly educated nations at the time.8

The standard major by the end of the sixteenth century was Leyes—canon law—because a degree in Leyes was an all but automatic ticket into the state and ecclesiastical apparatus. Góngora chose Artes—humanities—which was tending as today to become marginal in terms of effective demand. Nevertheless, the central role of intellectual labor in Spanish feudal-imperial society still put a premium on literary skill: not in the sense that like Cervantes (who eventually had to depend on his writing for a living) Góngora could or wanted to market his poetry. Quite the contrary, it is part and parcel of his aesthetics that his works circulate privately and in manuscript, that they evade the status of a commodity, that they they be “no para los muchos.” Who are the implied “pocos,” however? The other letrados, because without a university education no one was going to make much headway with Góngora’s poetry. And not only the letrados in general, but the most refined and/or powerful among them, because, as we have seen, “no se han de dar las piedras preciosas a animales de cerda.” In these terms, the difficulty or sutileza of an aesthetic artifact signifies an aristocratic sublimation on the part of both receiver and emitter, an “autoridad.” What is transmitted, however, is not only a sign of class ascendency but also a technique of class power. The poem is an exercise which refines and empowers the intelligence of the ruler(s), as Góngora explains elsewhere in his letter of defense:

...y si la obscuridad y estilo intricado de Ovidio ... da causa a que, vaciando el entendimiento en fuerza del discurso, trabajándose (pues cree con cualquier acto de valor), alcance lo que así en la lectura superficial de sus versos no pudo entender; luego hase de confesar que tiene utilidad avivar el ingenio, y eso nació de la obscuridad del poeta.

The poem appeals to the clientelism of the patrons—the grandes—in the centers of power: the Court, the imperial urban network, the Viceroyalties. It claims to provide a means for the ritualization and pseudo-universalization of these centers of power, a heroic language or discourse of state; it creates between poet and prince and against “los muchos” what Hernan Vidal has called a “comunidad lingüística diferenciadora”9 in which each concedes to the other an equality of status and a mutual dependency ( hopefully for the poet in terms of money or position).

But there are obvious problems with this calculus of aristocratic reciprocity and sublimation. Though poet speaks to prince in terms of equality, using the familiar “tú,” their relationship is patently asymmetrical, just as Don Quijote’s with the Duke and the Duchess in Part II. Moreover, as we have seen, the sublimation requires a “trabajo” on the part of both poet and reader. The difficulty of the language forces the reader to “trabajar el discurso”—work the language. Yet this insistence is dissonant with the estamental principle that the nature of the aristocrat is properly to appropriate the work of others, that his social function is military (i.e. governmental in the broader sense), that his paradigmatic form of recreation is therefore hunting. (In the dedicatories to both the Polifemo and Soledades Góngora insists on the pastoral convention of a suspension of the hunt, as if to suggest by metonymic displacement that the reading of the poem represents an alternative form of practice.) Aristocratic behavior demands a logic of consumption rather than of production: hence the contempt for manual labor characteristic of the Spanish nobility which trickles down into other strata of the population during the Golden Age (the picaro’s aversion for productive employment, for example). But there is clearly a sense in which Góngora is conscious of his activity as an arsensal activity in which the work expended on form is seen as productive or value-creating labor, rather than simply recreation or expression of a pre-existing “natural” quality. By the same token, he enjoys depicting in sharp detail the techniques and forms of labor of the serranos, labradores and pescadores who populate his country landscapes: There is no urgency here, as in the more purely aristocratic pastoral of Garcíaoso, that the pastoral require a suspension of labor or its attenuation. (Herding sheep in the convention of Renaissance pastoral is more a form of leisured appropriation—the economies of the Age of Gold—than a specific technique and practice. That is what allows the fiction that the shepherds are transposed aristocrats, a fiction which would clearly collapse, as it does in Don Quixote, if the shepherd were rendered as an actual jornalero, living by the sweat of his brow.)

We return here to the ambiguity of who is “docto” and who isn’t in Góngora’s audience. The poem selects its audience: the select. An aristocracy of letters, an aristocracy of blood, or both? “Ya muy entrado el siglo XVII el letrado seguía siendo un ser indefinible, es decir, huérfano de una clara definición social,” comments Jaime Concha. He continues:

Ser noble, ser sacerdote, ser ganapán, eran cosas muy nítidas, aristotélica y escolásticamente nítidas en la conciencia colectiva del periodo. No así el
letrado, cuya práctica social no encajaba plenamente dentro de la mentalidad excluyentemente nobiliaria de los estamentos dominantes. ¿Se puede ser letrado sin ser noble? Constituye la actividad de las letras, sobre todo de las letras profundas relacionadas directamente con el derecho y la jurisprudencia, una sabiduría autónoma que se justifique a sí misma? En el tiempo, las reacciones a estas preguntas oscilan en un abanico de posibilidades que va desde la básica postulación del letrado-noble hasta un débil conato ideológico de reconocer la especificidad técnica de tal praxis intelectual.

We have seen that Góngora regards his poetry as a means of self-insertion into the dominant centers of wealth and power in his time. His defense is a Baroque version of the older topic of the poet as vates—prophetic bard but also legislator of civic consciousness. But is there also a sense in which his activity, by its very specificity (the cultivation of difficulty), leads him to question the logic of this dominance? (I am thinking as I write this of an observation in a recent essay by Herbert Marcuse: "The inner logic of a work of art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions.")

Let me bring forward another problem in the argument of Góngora’s letter. Góngora claims to be fashioning a heroic language; but he uses it dissonantly to describe not epic subjects or the urban centers of imperial power but rather the everyday life of the countryside. The anomaly was not lost on his critics. Neo-aristotelian literary preceptism permitted epic or quasi-epic discourse a hyper-complication of image, syntax and usage so that the style of imitation might express the complexity, elevation and universality of the subject, as Góngora properly notes. But his poetry is to all appearances strictly bucolic, in the words of one Baroque critic, “concurso de pastores, bodas, epithalamios, fuegos.” So Góngora’s sutileza was held to fail not only because it was seen as nugatory or formalistic but because at best it worked towards an idealization of “cosas humildes”—ordinary things. This sense of what we termed a desgarrón afectivo—a cleavage between signifier and signified—was to become the major premise of the anti-gongorista current in Spanish criticism.

In a number of senses, however, the anomaly indicates precisely why Góngora’s manner did come into general acceptance, became “officialized,” after his death. The epic stage of Spanish imperialism—the Conquest—had been completed by the end of the sixteenth century. In fact, under the pressure of the English and the Dutch and internal discontent the empire was entering the phase of contraction which would reach its culmination in 1898.

The problem of Lerma and Olivares and the Baroque apparatus was how to maintain the unity of his massive empire with its contradictory diversity of peoples, classes and forms of social and economic life on a feudal basis. To put this another way, the problem facing the state was to create/maintain an imperial civil society in which the function of letras—jurisprudence, pedagogy, culture, political discourse, religiosity, etc.—overlies and attenuates the need for rule by naked force—armas. And here was where Góngora’s heterodoxy in epicalizing (in the manner of imitation) “cosas humildes” came readily to hand, because Góngora was preserving the scope of epic (its ordering and monumentalizing function) in a situation where epic action per se was no longer seen as possible or desirable. In place of an anachronistic military epic, Gongorism offered a new genre in which ordinary activities of social production and reproduction (agriculture, artwork, marriage, leisure, etc.) could be duly recorded and universalized.

It is important to bear in mind, that when Góngora or the literary Baroque in general launch into their customary celebration of nature and the life of the countryside they are to some extent evoking an absence. The rise of the great cities as corporate monopolies, market centers and collective legal seigneurs fostered by absolutist centralism and mercantilism involved, as John Merrington reminds us, “not only a massive shift of human and material resources in favor of urban concentrations, but also a conquest over the countryside, which becomes ‘ruralized’, since it by no means represented in the past an exclusively agricultural milieu. From being a center of all kinds of production, an autonomous primary sector that incorporates the whole of social production, the country becomes ‘agriculture’, i.e. a separate industry for food and raw materials.” If solitude is for Góngora the image of a human and natural space which has not yet been colonized, not yet subjected to the tyranny of “metros homicidas,” the pastoral has also lost its status as a self-sufficient landscape outside of and immune to the contingencies of history. To fashion a heroic language to depict pastoral themes is to historicize the pastoral. This implies that however much the city is apprehended as an alienating, usurping modernity from the perspective of a nostalgic feudalism, the countryside is no longer a complete human context, since it has been demographically, culturally and economically impoverished. It must be, so to speak, “worked up,” given the lineaments of a utopia. Robert Jammes notes “qu’en présentant (le) idéal de vie rustique Góngora ne prédit pas évoquer la masse des paysans dans son ensemble, mais
seulment les plus riches d'entre eux";14 Bruce Wardropper that in Gongorism "the natural life consists, paradoxically, of subjecting Nature to the discipline of Art. Cultivation is not, as the myth of the Golden age would have it, an abuse of Nature's prodigality... The relation between Art and Nature is not one of being but of becoming."15

Moreover, the Baroque alabanza de aldea, menospresc an de corte entails only a nominal contradiction between city and countryside in which the real contradiction (exploitation of the countryside by the city, of agricultural production by aristocratic consumption) is mystified. As Noël Salomon has shown, the representation of the achievement of political legitimacy in the Baroque comedia necessarily involves the immersion in the bucolic which will serve to indoctrinate the ruler in the principles of economic prudence and moral virtue.16 To govern well, he must know his people's capacity for freedom, the nature and extent of their suffering, the "other" possibilities of life and community which still persist in the countryside. But as an aristocrat he has become urbanised, a cortesano. The geometric and social labyrinth of the city hides these experiences from him; he must leave it, leave his class identity, become for awhile ("dejate un rato hallar del pie acertado") Góngora asks of the Duke of Béjar in the dedication of the Soledades) "one of them." The pastoral thus no longer lies outside of history. It is secularised; it becomes a tableau to be read on the panels of the Court. The hero returns from exile in a confused solitude—soledad confusa—to govern. Walter Benjamin explained in his analysis of the teleology of Baroque tragedy:

What is peculiar about the baroque enthusiasm for landscape is particularly evident in the pastoral. For the decisive factor in the escapism of the baroque is not the anathesis of history and nature but the comprehensive secularization of the historical in the state of creation... The Spanish theater delights in including the whole of nature as subservient to the Crown, creating thereby a veritable dialectic of setting. For on the other hand the social order, and its representation, the Court is, in Calderón, a natural phenomenon of the highest order, whose first law is the honour of the ruler.17

This may help us answer part of our original question: How does Gongorism, heterodox in its inception, come to be the model aesthetic discourse of the state and ideological apparatus, especially in the Colonies where the problem of legitimization of power is most crucially decisive and difficult? Answer: it is a form of colonization by letras not armas. It is a technique, a simulacrum of new forms of political practice (Gramsci: "Machiavelli is called the artist of politics") which correspond to the need to elaborate

hegemony in and through civil society in a period of imperial stabilization and contraction. The condition is that which Benjamin called the "dialectic of setting" involve the return of consciousness to the center of political power, the city, the reconciliation of opposites (city/countryside, universal/indigenous, poet/prince, authority/society) in a new and more all-embracing unity. As we shall see, however, this reconciliation between discourse and state typical of Colonial Gongorism is not possible in the case of Góngora himself.

This kind of Gongorist metaphor will be familiar to everyone: the spray of water from the prow of a boat is the pearl necklace of an Inca queen, the nets of some fishermen are Dedalus's labyrinth, honey is Minerva's liquid gold, cottage cheese is "los blancos lilius de la Aurora," etc. We might call such metaphors "mercantilist" to the extent that they seem to imply a transmutation of ordinary objects of use of perception into appropriately sublime or luxurious expressions of exchange value. What is characteristic in the aesthetic discourse of the Colonies is how Gongorist metaphor and syntax is appropriated and used to conceal through its verbal alchemy the real sources of wealth and goods in the labor of the indigenous masses (e.g. in Balbuena's Grandezas mejicana). This is part of its service as an ideological practice to the ruling class: it is a technique for fetishizing wealth and authority, which appear as if automatic reflexes of some providence built into reality rather than as determinate products of human elaboration carried out under very particular and exploitative relations of production. Metaphorical decor becomes in Colonial Gongorism a veritable theory of magic accumulation which masks the real "primitive accumulation" and makes it appear to be harmonious with the religious and aristocratic assumptions of Spain's imperialist ideology.18

The problem is that, as we have seen, Góngora himself was hyperconscious of the status of his discourse as itself a piece of labor. Moreover, he was someone who identified both in person and in practice with the anti-mercantilist current in Spanish economic thought, what Vilar calls the cuantitativistas as opposed to the bullionistas.19 Góngora entrusted the critique of the Soledades, for example, to another letrado called Pedro de Valencia, among other things the author of a treatise on economics in which we may read the following:

Piensese que el dinero mantiene las repúblicas y no es así; cada uno ha de labrar su parte. Ahora los que se sustentan con dinero, dado a renta, inútiles y ociosos son, que quedan para comer lo que otros siembran y trabajan.20
Arbíbristas like Valencia or González de Cellorigo in his *Memorial* (1600) were foreshadowing the later doctrine of the Physiocrats that value sprang from nature and from agricultural production exclusively, that manufacturers, merchants, and the rentier aristocracy, not to speak of the parasitic bureaucracy of Church and state, merely manipulated or consumed this value in a sterile way. Against the mercantilists, they held that gold and money were merely tokens of value therefore, rather than value itself and attacked the idea that the accumulation of precious metals should be the over-riding goal of absolutist economic policy. From this point of view, there is some sense in which Góngora is not simply assimilating in his metaphors and poetic decor the "cosas humildes" of rural life to the mercantilist assumptions of an urbanized aristocracy. When he calles honey "Minerva's liquid gold," he seems rather to be indicating that the honey is the value, the gold its expression. "The point seems clear," noted R. O. Jones. "This is the wealth of Nature, better than all the illusory riches of the Indies."21 But since mercantilist assumptions are hegemonic and the basic mechanism of imperial absolutism takes the form of an accumulation of wealth in the urban centers at the expense of the countryside, the colonies, and/or the direct producers, Góngora's poetry retains an element of dissidence, suggests not so much the glorification of the *status quo* as the proposition of a rudimentary alternative political economy without concrete political bases. Its task is thus not only to flatter the intellect of the ruler, but to *seduce* it, to make it more like the poet and the poem. The text is a mirror of princes not in the sense that the aristocrat sees what he is but rather what he should be.

What this rudimentary political economy implicit in Góngora's aesthetics consists of I think we can answer summarily. It is a variant of what Marx and Engels called (in a different historical context) "feudal socialism" ("half lamentation, half lampoon: half echo of the past, half menace of the future").22 Góngora, as we have seen, is conscious of his activity as in some sense *productive*, but not productive of exchange value. To be "raro" something must be "no comprado": "la comida prolija de pescados, / raros muchos, y todos no comprados"—*Soledad segunda*. Over and over Góngora's tropes will counterpose value use to exchange value. One might speak in the case of his own poetics of the aristocratic fetish of a highly-wrought form seen as noble or sublime because it eludes the comprehension of the vulgar and is situated outside the arena of the market and of money as a means of possession and a determinant of status and power. This consciousness leads him to an identification with an "otherness" outside of his estamental definition: with nature and with the direct producers of agricultural wealth who are the protagonists of his major pastoral poems. As in the case of nineteenth century feudal socialism, his poetry proposes implicitly in choice of subjects and its manner of imitation the possibility of an alliance between a section of the aristocracy which shares an anti-mercantilist critique and these masses of direct producers, an alliance to be sure led by "los pocos" acting feudally, that is paternalistically, for their dependents (perhaps in particular by the young Conde de Nebla who appears in the dedication of the *Polifemo* and at the end of the *Soledad segunda*, described as "en modestia civil real grandeza"). It is worth noting that such a movement actually does come about, and that in 1640 a section of the Andalusian aristocracy led by Góngora's patrons the Medina Sidonia, following the example of Portugal and Catalonia, undertakes an uprising to break the region away from the Castilian-Hapsburg center as an independent republic. But the uprising fails—a testimony in part to the limitations of a "feudal socialism."23

This brings us to a final point I want to touch on: Góngora's relationship to the problem of Baroque historicism. Góngora's critics were fond of noting his apparent inability to complete several of his major projects, due they speculated either to neurasthenia or to the vanity of attempting a discourse so clearly dissonant with literary convention. But it would be more correct to speak in so fastidious a poet of a deliberate incompletion, a constructed incompleteness. "In Baroque allegory it is the *facies hipocratica* of history that lies like a frozen landscape before the eyes of the beholder," argued Walter Benjamin.24 The meditation on the period of a day, the cycle of the agricultural year and its symbolic coincidence with the topic of the four ages of man, the cycle of the rise and fall of empire depicted in the Classical myth of the Ages of Metal, the taste for assembling together the extremely distant and the near, the archaic and the modern, the mythic and the real, the natural and the courtly, the moment of origin and of apotheosis: all these are staples of the Gongorist conceit and mark it as an essentially historicist form of representation. This is part of what Góngora means in his claim to have elaborated a "lenguaje heróico." His poetry aspires to be the discourse of history—*historia conficta*—in a way which rivals and displaces the function of traditional epic. History, in turn, is the process which produces the apotheosis of the mercantilist-absolutist city, civilization as monument, as centralized accumulation and political power. History is what leads to the present, to the ideologized Absolute of Church and state and the established patterns of life and work.
But the meditation on history also has a problematic dimension in the discourse of the Spanish Baroque, since it addresses a situation in which there is a growing collective sense that Spain has entered its Iron Age, a period of irreversible crisis and decay. “If all the great empires, including the greatest of them all, had risen only to fall, could Spain alone escape?” asks J. H. Elliott, trying to define the mood of the early seventeenth century. “The idea of an infinite cyclical process by which all living organisms were subject to growth, maturity and decay was deeply embedded in European thinking,” he continues. “The organic conception of the state in the sixteenth century reinforced the analogy, and history confirmed it.” How to deal with a situation in which history is seen as a necessary and sublimating process and at the same time as a sort of entropy tending to reduce the architectonic consolidation of state power to the status of a ruin.25

Quevedo’s ultramontane stoicism is one solution. Like Nietzsche or the Tory Radicals of the nineteenth century, he sees history as the dimension of the vulgar and thus the impermanent. History is money and money has corrupted everything, is literally and figuratively shit. Góngora’s mannerism in particular is an exemplar of this corruption; it is an “inflationary” phenomenon. The true aristocrat has to practice an ascetic withdrawal through the aesthetic strategy of the concepto which provokes a sensation of desengaño, an understanding of the difference between appearance and reality. The withdrawal into self, however, is also a means of establishing (more accurately: revealing, since they are eternally present) the principles of the good and the true—the política de Dios—which may then be brought forward to inspire and instruct the state to correct the situation of decay. The means of correction is to return Spain to the reactionary utopia of a feudal status quo ante in which nobleman fought, priest prayed and peasant labored without the benefit of money wealth, luxury consumption, letrados, merchants, gongorism and what one historian has called the “inflation of honor,” the retaling of titles of nobility by purchase or bribe. What this implies is an annulment of history per se which becomes mere appearance, concealing the foundations of a feudal estamental ordering of society, an ordering impervious to time because it mirrors the civitas dei. The passion of Christ—the moment when history is fulfilled, when the awaited messiah comes, when the divine and the human are joined—is seen anachronistically as coincident with the establishment of feudalism in its pure form. Therefore, for the person who sees truly there is literally nothing new under the sun. History has happened (Mallarmé: “La Nature a lieu”).

Spain’s decadence is merely a dream which has to be woken up from. “Y los sueños sueños son,” Calderón would console; “And dreams are simply dreams.” The Puritan poets might seem to offer a contemporary alternative which points forward rather than backwards. They address a class which is beginning in the seventeenth century to exercise its ideas and practices with increasing authority. Their poetry expresses and in turn helps to form this authority, its images of history and community, its political economy, its personal ethics and style, its sense of revolutionary legitimacy. Beyond their parallel withdrawals to the “solitude” of nature or of the scholar’s study they are able to intuit the transfiguration of the absolutist city into a “new Jerusalem,” and they bend their art and their lives to serve its birth.

But Góngora has neither Quevedo’s rectionary faith nor the Puritan’s confidence that history is on the side of their revolutionary vision. The crisis of Hapsburg absolutism is a sterile and genocidal one: “en su propio solar, en Castilla y hacia 1600, el feudalismo entra en agonía sin que exista nada a punto para reemplazarle.” Góngora’s characteristic persona is the pilgrim who represents a form of aristocratic homelessness and marginalization: “náufrago, y desenfado sobre ausente” (Soledad primera). He is the seeing eye of a mobile pastoral as he travels in search of some point of reconciliation with his destiny. This must involve inevitably the recognition of those he considers his legitimate peers: the return to the city and the company of the Court. His story, the movement of the Gongorist trope, implies a movement from region to nation, from periphery to center, from wilderness to civilization. But the restoration to the city demands a transposition of its initial status as an alienated and alienating dimension of experience for the poetic subject. This is felt to be impossible or implying a debasement, a loss of honor (since it is the arena of money and the market), however, and the transposition can never be completed in a satisfactory manner. What is needed is a new image of political legitimacy discovered in the exercise of bucolic exile (i.e. in the process of reading the text—“trabajando el discurso”). But such an image is not available in a coherent or historically viable form. To be genuinely national feudal socialism would have to concretely ally peasant and aristocrat against the absolutist center. Such an alliance is not finally possible because it would entail the need for the aristocracy to attenuate or abandon the feudal relation of production in which their income and status depends on the exploitation of peasant labor (as Engels pointed out in his famous critique of Lassalle’s
Franz von Sickingen). Góngora’s cultivation of difficulty is rather a substitute for a direct political practice which is no longer possible. At the same time that it expresses a new sense of value and civil society, it limits his audience to a diminishing elite of connoisseurs. This is what E. L. Rivers calls a “pastoral paradox”: “Góngora gives us a new vision of the world of nature by creating enigmatic verbal artifacts which can be deciphered only by the humanistically educated, constantly alert intellectual... (a vision) which the blissfully ignorant peasant is not even aware of perceiving.” Góngora’s readers are finally like himself, isolated and contradictory figures like the anti-bourgeois bourgeois intellectuals of post-1848 Europe (Baudelaire’s metropolitan flaneur, Flaubert).

Góngora’s self-conscious “trabajo” of elaborating a new poetic manner exists side by side with a process of historical change and crisis which is constantly eroding its premises. This explains why on the level of form all that he is capable of producing is a text in which the equation of necessity and probability required by an ending remains indeterminate and in which the ideological closure of discourse and ideology, poet and state cannot be made. This explains also why ruins are for Góngora and the Baroque in general what Starobinski calls “a minor form of idyll: a new union of man and nature, through the intermediary of man’s resignation to death.”

But such a discourse, despite moments of erotic or utopian plenitude, is also a tragic form of idyll with a peculiar deadness at its heart: a reverie before the encroachment of oblivion, the epitaph for a nation and a decadent class, an acknowledgement like Don Quijote’s final disillusion that the attainment of wholeness, the transfer between art and life, is not possible in the present, that it requires other human actors, other forms, other beginnings. The dialectics of Gongorism are a paralyzed dialectics. In the guise of transcendence, Góngora’s cultivation of difficulty ultimately betrays its own ostentatious and mechanical hollowness and reveals itself as a form of mourning. The style is a mask: “Mourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives a world grown empty in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction in contemplating it.”

This is perhaps both the appropriate symbol and measure of the narcissistic grandeur and sadness of the task which Góngora undertakes: the production of solitude.

NOTES
3. I cite both the “Carta de un amigo” and the “Carta en respuesta” from the versions given in Ana Martínez Arancón, La batalla en torno a Góngora (selección de textos) (Barcelona: Bosch, 1978), whic I think are better than those in the Millé y Giménez, Góngora, Obras completas (Madrid: Aguilar, first edition 1941).
6. On these points see J. A. Maravall’s recent “La función del honor en la sociedad tradicional,” Ideologies and Literature II, #7 (1978), 9-27.


19. In another of the essays included in *Crecimiento y desarrollo*.

20. Cited by P. Vilar in *Crecimiento y desarrollo*, p. 204.

21. R. O. Jones, Introduction to his *Poems of Góngora* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1966), p. 28. About Góngora’s depiction of the Conquest in the miniature epic interpolated in the *Soledad primera* he adds: “The perversion of nature—mal nacido pino—brings only disaster: not merely shipwreck but . . . discord and war. Seafaring impelled by greed is not only debased but finally profitless: a moral order is broken together with the physical one and only disaster can follow.”

22. *Manifiesto of the Communist Party*, part III, 1(a). Marx and Engels refer to the nineteenth century critique on the part of some sections of the English and European aristocracy of the evils of industrial capitalism. They add, however, that feudal socialism is an unstable and contradictory phenomenon, because “in pointing out that their mode of exploitation was different from that of the bourgeoisie, the feudalists forget that they exploited under circumstances and conditions that were quite different and that now are antiquated. In showing that, under their rule, the modern proletariat never existed, they forget that the modern bourgeoisie is the necessary offspring of their own form of society.”


25. J. H. Elliott, “Self-Perception and Decline in Early Seventeenth Century Spain.” *Past and Present*, 74 (1977), p. 48. On the theme of entropy in Baroque historicism, Benjamin commented: “This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world; its importance lies solely in the stations of its decline. The greater the significance, the greater the subject to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance. But if nature has always been subject to the power of death, it is also true that it has always been allegorical. Significance and death both come to fruition in historical development, just as they are closely linked as seeds in the creature’s graceless state of sin”—Origen, p. 166.


27. Frederick Engels, letter to Ferdinand Lassalle (May 18, 1859), in Marx-Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress, 1975), pp. 110-13. Marx in his own critique of Lassalle’s play added: “In so far as Sickingen . . . struggles against the Dukes (his demarche against the emperor can be explained only by the fact the emperor transforms himself from the emperor of knights into the emperor of duke), he is simply a Don Quijote; although historically justified. The fact that he begins the revolt under the guise of a feud among the knights only means that he begins it as a knight. If he were to begin it otherwise, he would have to appeal directly and at once to the cities and the peasants, that is, to those very classes whose development amounts to the negation of knighthood”—letter to Lassalle (April 19, 1859), in Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski (eds.), *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art* (New York: International General, 1974), p. 107.

