

EMBRACING HERCULES / ENJOYING GANYMEDE: THE HOMOEROTICS OF HUMANISM IN GÓNGORA'S SOLEDAD PRIMERA

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In his manual on grammar and rhetoric titled *Elocuencia española en arte* (1604), Bartolomé Jiménez Patón discusses the five levels of meaning in a “fábula” — the literal, the moral, the allegorical, the anagogical, and the tropological — giving as example the myth of Perseus slaying the Gorgon. Curiously, he shifts myths when discussing the anagogical level. Instead of focusing on Perseus, he turns to Ganymede: “Anagógicamente es cuando por el rapto de Ganimedes entendemos el arrobado espíritu en contemplación de cosas celestiales, y que la sabiduría humana es ignorancia con Dios” (232). With one stroke of the pen, Jiménez Patón makes this youth from antiquity an apt subject of Counter-Reformation Spain, something that fits well with a treatise “de acusado corte contrarreformista” (Martín 11). Any hint of pagan otherness is censored, absented. The reader may know that Ganymede was abducted by Jupiter because of his beauty, but Jiménez Patón does not mention this. Mythographers such as Natale Conti had taken great care to transform Ganymede’s bodily beauty into spiritual greatness: “En efecto, Ganimedes es el alma de los hombres, a la que, según hemos dicho, Dios lleva junto a sí debido a su notable prudencia. . . . Pero, realmente, el alma más hermosa es la que no está en absoluto contaminada por las suciedades humanas y con las acciones vergonzosas del cuerpo” (695-96). Conti, then, counteracts any hint of sodomy, or what he calls the shameful actions of the body, with the spiritual beauty of the soul. While mythographers create lengthy apologies for Ganymede, rejecting his physical beauty in favor of spiritual splendor, Jiménez Patón simply eliminates all previous argument. The anagogical meaning is gathered from the youth’s ascent to the heavens, regardless of cause. No longer do we have a text that condemns the event, like the fourteenth-century *Ovide Moralise*, where the abduction is seen as: “Against law and against nature” (Saslow 42); nor do we have the Neo-Platonic apologetics of Conti. In Jiménez Patón, it is as if the erotic abduction never happened. This brief statement says

more about the anxiety over Ganymede in seventeenth-century Spain than the many of the lengthy apologies of the period.

The antique tale of Ganymede touched upon at least four main Christian anxieties: the uses of metamorphosis, the existence of a plurality of gods, the tangled relationships between gods and humans, and the consequent divinization of sexual practices between two males. In this myth, Jupiter had transformed himself into an eagle in order to take the handsome Ganymede to the heavens to abide with him. This event was not just an erotic abduction in antiquity; it also had imperial implications. As Leonard Barkan reminds us: "At the opening of the *Aeneid*, the boy is revealed to be a pivotal cause of the Trojan War" (19). Juno's hatred of the Trojans, then, has as much to do with Venus's triumph and the abduction of Helen as with the presence of Ganymede in the heavens, next to her husband Jupiter. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the fall of Troy leads to the birth of Rome. This new empire has Jupiter's blessings and is watched over by the god and his Trojan cupbearer. This imperial history, like Ganymede's sexuality, had to be explained or erased during the Christian era. While Helen continued to be seen as the cause of the war, Ganymede became an allegorical figure, a Neo-Platonic device, anything but himself, and nothing to do with eros or the Roman empire.

With the Renaissance, Italian artists began to remove the allegorical garments that hid the beauty and allure of the Trojan youth. They represented him naked, wrapped in the embrace of Jupiter as eagle.¹ From painting to poetry, Ganymede recovered his lost sexuality. He also, at times, recovered his place as marker of the transformation of Troy into the Roman empire.² This brief vision of imperial beauty was soon obscured by the Counter-Reformation, which forbade nudes, forgot Ganymede's relation to empire, and encouraged a return to medieval allegories when dealing with the pagan past. But the legacy of humanism persisted. As Ariosto warned Pietro Bembo: "Few humanists are without that vice which did not so much persuade, as force, God to render Gomorrah and her neighbor wretched" (Barkan 67-68). Humanists often equated sodomy with the study of the classics, the love of male youths for the passion for ancient books. And it is this humanistic homoeroticism that can be found in the works of a few learned Spanish poets starting with Juan de Arguijo.³ In this essay I will argue that this notion can also be found in Luis de Góngora's *Soledad primera*.

A few recent studies have highlighted Góngora's interest in homoeroticism, and particularly his utilization of Ganymede. Analyzing Góngora's sonnet "A Júpiter," Donald McGrady concludes that the insistence with which the mythological figure is compared to the re-

cently deceased Miguel de Guzmán, son of the Duke of Medina-Sidonia, suggests a same-sex orientation in the life of this ill-fated youth. McGrady confirms this interpretation through a reading of poems on the subject by Argensola, Paravicino and López de Zárate. Continuing this line of investigation, Luis Antonio de Villena has pointed to three sonnets by Góngora, where the figure of death is linked to Jupiter's eagle and the dead youth is compared to Ganymede. Villena relates these texts to Giambattista Marino's 1614 sonnet on the death of a youth, claiming that "su verdadero significado . . . es un laude de la belleza adolescente" (53). More importantly, Daniel L. Heiple has studied six references to Ganymede in the Spanish baroque poet, underlining Góngora's familiarity with the myth and his emphasis on the homoerotic aspects of the story. Finally, Paul Julian Smith has analyzed in detail questions of gender and sexuality in the *Soledades*, including a reference to Ganymede. But his emphasis on the confusion of genres and genders lead to conclusions far different from those of the present essay.

According to Robert Jammes, Góngora's attitude towards myth and the imitation of the classics is "creadora, original, que utiliza la mitología y la cultura clásica para prolongarlas, rejuvenecerlas e integrarlas a temas modernos" (284). In this context, I would add that three ancient tales that foreground same-sex male eroticism are utilized by Góngora in the first of the *Soledades*. Through contrastive opposition, they point to the intolerance towards this ancient practice in Counter-Reformation Spain. Góngora opens up a dialogue with the ancients, one that liberates homoerotic desire at the same time that it renews the Spanish language. His *Soledades*, then, make it possible to envision homoerotics through the beauty of a renewed language, one that evokes the ancient gods and heroes and their complex desires. The loves of Jupiter and Ganymede, Apollo and Hyacinth, and Hercules and Hylas adorn a narrative that culminates in a heterosexual marriage. This *frisson* between form and content serves to establish a fuller expression of the modes of desire and a closer link to ancient practices. In this manner, Góngora espouses a humanism that challenges present mores and practices while at the same time acknowledging ancient traditions of authority.

The complex style, the infamous hyperbaton, the varied hyperboles, the many tropes and figures, the new words and the transformation of the meaning of common words by returning to the Latin root, all served to create what has been called the "intolerable oscuridad" of the *Soledades* (Jammes 104). It is this very obscurity that serves to hide as well as foreground the homoerotic. From the very start of the poem, the telling of ancient myth is done in such a complex and alluring man-

ner that the reader is drawn to decipher its content and meanings as if she were setting out to understand the writings of the ancients. The time of year, the month of May, is presented through the intricate image of a bull grazing in the stars (“en campo de zafiros pace estrellas” v. 6). This astrological image of Virgilian provenance,⁴ which describes the zodiacal sign of Taurus, alerts the reader to the importance of the heavens and its lore in humanistic art and writings. Juan de Arguijo, a key predecessor for Góngora’s representation of Ganymede, had the ceiling of his library decorated with a series of mythological paintings. Surrounding the Assembly of the Gods at the center of the ceiling, were smaller mythologies, among them, a Ganymede. The homoerotic aspects of the painting are conflated with the astrological significance of Jupiter’s cupbearer. Most mythographers, as well as many poets, associated Ganymede with the water-bearer, the sign of Aquarius, taking their cue from classical writers.⁵ In spite of Jonathan Brown’s arguments to the contrary,⁶ I believe that there are a number of zodiacal signs displayed in Arguijo’s ceiling, signs that have a bearing on his personal horoscope: Virgo, Libra, Scorpio and Aquarius. Góngora’s poem, like Arguijo’s ceiling (and a series of sonnets associated with it), seems to have a strong astrological component which serves as home for the homoerotic. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to delve into the astrological program of the *Soledad primera*, it is important to note its presence and how it serves to place several homoerotic myths.

Immediately following the evocation of the sign Taurus, Góngora moves to character and place: a shipwrecked youth on a beach. He is described thus:

Cuando el que ministrar podía la copa
a Júpiter mejor que el garzón de Ida,
náufrago y desdeñado sobre ausente
lagrimosas de amor dulces querellas . . . (vv. 7-10)

As Smith asserts, the pilgrim “is defined with reference to the most common of homosexual myths . . . Such passivity is hardly compatible with the hero of epic” (52). What this critic fails to recall is that Ganymede is found at the very inception of the Virgilian epic. He is one of the causes of war. Góngora clearly emphasizes the attributes that make him dangerous. The pilgrim is compared to Ganymede because of his youth and beauty. As García de Salcedo Coronel makes clear in his 1636 commentary of Góngora’s *Soledades*: “Dijo que podía servir mejor la copa de Ganimedes para ponderar la hermosura del mancebo, pues fingieron los antiguos poetas que la ocasión del robo de Ganimedes fue su gran belleza” (Jammes 198 n. 8). The beauty of

this youth, which was the object of male desire, had already been noted by Arguijo, whose sonnet on the subject calls him “bellísimo troyano” (69, v.1). Góngora changes the more obvious “troyano” for “Ida,” a hill close to Troy where Ganymede would hunt. This placement of Ganymede connects him both to the site of epic and the place of rapture. The hill is closer to the heavens, the place where he will be taken by Jupiter. And Góngora replaces “bellísimo” with “garzón,” making the handsome pilgrim into an even more transgressive figure than the one in Arguijo’s sonnet. As Heiple has shown: “The term ‘garzón’ often carries a meaning of youthful passive sodomite” (222).⁷ The fact that this allusion to Ganymede appears immediately following an image of Taurus not only foregrounds the astrological, but also reinforces the erotic qualities of the myth. Taurus represented Jupiter’s transformation into a bull in order to enjoy the favors of Europa. Ganymede, the zodiacal sign Aquarius, also commemorates one of Jupiter’s metamorphosis, his transformation into an eagle in order to carry Ganymede to the heavens. Góngora’s pilgrim makes his appearance in the poem under a double sign, an ambiguous eros: Taurus and Aquarius. He is also doubly dejected: he has not only been shipwrecked but he has been jilted in love. Since the reader is given few hints of this pre-history, the ambiguity of desire is further foregrounded.

As the pilgrim reaches the shore, the poem continues to weave mythological images that suggest the homoerotic. The youth, tellingly, finds a home on the rocky beach where “halló nido / de Júpiter el ave” (vv. 27-28). The youth’s new home belongs to the eagle, the bird into which Jupiter had transformed himself in order to take Ganymede to the heavens. Evoking the many Renaissance paintings where naked youths are depicted, Góngora here shows the pilgrim nude on the beach. The myth of Jupiter’s love for Ganymede is now intermingled with a second homoerotic tale. As the youth’s clothes are washed to shore, the Sun sets out to dry them:

y el sol lo extiende luego,
que, lamiéndolo apenas
su dulce lengua de templado fuego,
lento lo embiste, y con suave estilo
la menor onda chupa al menor hilo (vv. 37-41)

The image of the sun utilizing its “sweet” tongue of tempered fire to lick dry the youth’s clothing while he remains naked on the beach is rather suggestive. We need not even think of Apollo/Sol’s propensity for the love of young men: “Various antique sources enumerate no fewer than sixteen young men beloved by the sun-god, the best known

of whom are Hyacinthus and the hunter Cyparissus" (Saslow 113).⁸ Here, the seductive language speaks its own tongue. The slow, soft manner in which Sol not only softly assaults ("embiste") the clothes, but also licks dry the fluids can be interpreted as the way in which Sol performs these tasks upon the naked youth, clothing being but a metonym for the body. Indeed, the last line of the stanza includes the verb "chupar," a term utilized in an erotic context in Spanish poetry of the Golden Age.⁹

It is hardly a coincidence that Góngora pairs the myths of Jupiter and Ganymede with that of Sol and a youth (thus reminding the reader of Apollo and Hyacinthus). As James Saslow has shown, Annibale Carracci painted between 1596 and 1600 the ceiling of the Farnese Gallery at the palazzo in Rome which includes both of these scenes. As this critic explains, "the homoerotic content of *The Rape of Ganymede* is underscored by its pairing with another scene representing *Apollo and Hyacinthus*. These two panels are further related by the poses of Hyacinthus and Ganymede, which are virtually front and back views of the same horizontal figure. . . . At least one observer found the ceiling's eroticism blatant and scandalous" (163). Góngora's poem omits mention of the pilgrim's position in the sands, although his nudity and the actions of Sol are as revealing as Carracci's paintings. The Count of Villamediana, a follower of Góngora, will use similar images in his play *La gloria de Niquea*. The figure of April comes on the stage riding a bull and intoning verses that imitate Góngora. She speaks of the celestial bull and proclaims her love of Sol. A descending eagle serves to recall Ganymede. Thus, Góngora's sequence of pagan loves, which includes two signs of the zodiac and the Sun became sufficiently well-known for Villamediana to use it in praise of Philip IV.¹⁰

As Góngora's pilgrim sets out to explore this new area upon which he has landed, the homoerotic images slowly begin to dissipate. Seeing a far-away light, he follows it like the needle of a compass which guide a ship to safe port. This light becomes for him terrestrial sons of Leda ("ya no de Leda / trémulos hijos" vv. 62-63). This is the third transformation of Jupiter evoked in the poem, recalling how the god metamorphosed himself into a swan in order to seduce Leda. Her children, Castor and Pollux became the zodiacal constellation Gemini as well as St. Elmo's fire, the saving light that appeared to mariners after a storm. As Góngora's pilgrim follows the light, he is following the myth of two brothers who loved each other so much that upon the death of one, the other went to the underworld to bring him back. Although an image of fraternal love, the embracing males often portrayed as the Gemini sometimes carried homoerotic overtones. The initial splitting of eros into Taurus (heterosexual) and Aquarius (sod-

omitic) has now blended into the ambivalence of Gemini, whose shifting images are of man-woman, fraternal care, and homoerotic attachment.¹¹

As the pilgrim approaches cabin and fire, he perceives "el can, ya vigilante" (v. 84). Is there a reference here to the constellation Canis Maior? Or can this be a reminiscence of the hound(s) Ganymede left behind as he ascended the heavens with Jupiter's eagle? Neither interpretation is particularly reinforced by the text as the pilgrim moves inland and away from homoerotic beginnings. Indeed the text slowly gathers heterosexual momentum as the pilgrim observes, hiding in an elm tree, the activities of a number of *serranas* who are coming down the mountain to attend a pastoral wedding (vv. 238-66). The description of the *serranas* is balanced by a narrative of the males who come separately, carrying gifts to the wedding. Once the two groups mingle, the pilgrim emerges from his hiding place and meets an old man among the group who will become his guide. The old man singles him out since he recognizes signs of shipwreck in the pilgrim's dress. The "viejo" had lost his son and his wealth in just such an accident. Only a passing allusion to the pilgrim's clothes returns the reader to the homoerotic beginnings: "que beberse no pudo el Sol ardiente / las que siempre dará cerúleas señas" (vv. 362-63). The old man recognizes the blue marks left by the shipwreck, which the Sun was unable to drink from the clothes.

It is at his point that the old *serrano* intones the much discussed "Discurso contra las navegaciones" (vv. 366-502). Although often glossed, few critics have focused on questions of gender and sexuality in the speech. Mary Gaylord views the lands plundered by the explorers as feminine, and emphasizes the act of violation. Elizabeth Amann adds a specific political dimension to questions of gender. She shows how the speech is divided into two parts: the first half concentrates on Spanish discoveries while the second foregrounds Portuguese explorations (Dias, Da Gama, and Magellan) (20). She goes on to conclude that: "Representation and intertextuality converge in Góngora to create a dichotomy between a virile, empowering West and a feminine and feminizing East," the former Spanish and the latter belonging to the Portuguese (24). While the old *serrano* may indeed be constructing "imperial illusions" (31), as Amann shows in her suggestive and illuminating essay, he also becomes the pilgrim's guide. In many ways, he is the elder Jupiter who lifts the youth to the heavens ("levantando al forastero" v. 515). The older man then proceeds to show his realm to the beautiful pilgrim/Ganymede.¹² As a bisexual "god" he will show the youth the joys of both heterosexual marriage and of homoerotic play. In political terms, he is the god who allows Troy to fall and yet

makes the city's descendants heirs to empire.¹³ The old man's ambiguous nature and attitudes must then be inserted into any discussion of the politics of exploration.

That night at the village, after the fireworks, the old man takes the pilgrim to a place among the trees where the guests sing and dance. Here, sexual ambiguity surfaces again. The topic is introduced through questions of gender. The surrounding trees, sacred to Hercules, are described as making tresses with their green hair (the leaves). The male image of Hercules contrasts with the female actions of the trees dedicated to him. This gender confusion may be clarified by the proximity of a reference to Phaeton (v. 655). Linking these verses, a reader might conclude that the trees are the Heliades, the sisters of Phaeton who were transformed into poplars. Although this can explain the gender shift in the trees, it does not take away the apparent opposition between Hercules's virility and his trees' femininity. Rather, it brings to mind Hercules own transvestism as he wore women's clothes and spun wool while living with Omphale. The questioning of gender, of how it is represented and how it is constructed, serves as prelude to a more transgressive passage. Among these gender-ambiguous trees the viewer may discover men and women: "Tanto garzón robusto" and "tanta . . . zagala" (vv. 663-64). Studying these verses, Smith asserts: "In such typically elegant and balanced parallelisms the antitheses of gender difference are subsumed and neutered by aesthetic equilibrium" (52). This balance exists even within the description of the males. Jammes specifies that: "El adjetivo compensa lo que podría sugerir de afeminamiento el sustantivo" (326). I would add that "robusto" may relate to the previous image of Hercules. But it is a Hercules with tresses. Here, the term "garzón" subverts the male robustness of Hercules through its connotations of effeminacy and sodomy. It brings to mind the Hercules dressed as a woman and the Hercules who abandoned the quest for the golden fleece in order to pursue Hylas, his young male lover. Furthermore, the term "garzón" recalls description of Ganymede at the beginning of the poem and brings up questions of sodomy. The poem then, repeatedly points to male effeminacy and associates it with homoerotic relations, those of Jupiter and Ganymede, and Hercules and Hylas.

In order to further enhance the homoerotic flavor of this moment, the poem introduces the figure of Sol, which had also compounded the erotics of the pilgrim's arrival upon the beach. Here, the sun although shining clear across the world in India, would have liked to transform itself into a small star in order to gaze upon "la menos bella" (v. 666). The feminine here seems to point to "zagala," a young woman. And yet, the sentence, like the sexual desire represented, is most am-

biguous:

Tanto garzón robusto,
tanta ofrecen los álamos zagala,
que abreviara el Sol en una estrella,
por ver la menos bella (vv. 663-66)

Trees of ambiguous gender hide both the “zagala” and “tanto garzón robusto.” Given Sol/Apollo’s sexual interest in both males and females, it is fitting that he would want to contemplate even the least beautiful (a female or an effeminate male) among the feminine trees of Hercules. It is also significant that this rekindled homoeroticism occurs at a moment in the poem when astrological imagery is also revisited. First, the fall of Phaeton brings about the transformation of his sisters into poplars, the trees of Hercules just discussed. Salcedo Coronel sees a linkage between this metamorphosis and the verse “del Ganges cisne adusto” (v. 668), since Phaeton’s cousin was transformed into a swan. He also became the constellation Cynos. This astrological image also relates to the happenings on earth since Cynos is next to the star cluster that represents Hercules in the northern sky. Furthermore, the proximity of the myths of Phaeton and Cynos within the text signals the corporeal union of these two figures. As Saslow asserts: “Ovid tells us that Phaeton himself loved his cousin Cynos, to whom he was joined even more closely by affection than by blood; the relationship seems implicitly that of lovers, on the Greek model” (58). And the Renaissance was quite aware of the homoerotic context of the myth of Phaeton. Michelangelo, for example, drew a Phaeton as corrective to his Ganymede. Both myths he used to describe his attachment to Tommaso Cavalieri. While the first expresses his passion, the second evinces his presumptuousness. Panofsky asserts: “That such a subjectively erotic interpretation of the Phaeton myth was possible in the sixteenth century, can be inferred, not only from Michelangelo’s own poetry, but also from a sonnet written about the same time by Francesco Maria Molza, a poet who moved in Michelangelo’s circles and was certainly acquainted with the Cavalieri compositions” (220). Astrological images once more adorn and validate the homoerotic.¹⁴

The third and final cluster of homoerotic images in the first *Soledad* occurs during the games that celebrate the rustic marriage. The male guests engage in three contests, wrestling, jumping, and running, all of which have homoerotic connotations. Smith argues that this “spectacle of the male body is explicitly proposed for the female witness” and thus allows for female desire to be “acknowledged and celebrated within the poem” (59). But I would argue that, in addition to female

desire, there is clearly a male gaze, one that looks upon other men with longing. After all, it is the old *serrano* who brings the young pilgrim to the games so he can watch them. And the other male guests watch and judge the contests. In this colosseum made of trees all eyes are upon the contestants. Images of effeminacy give way to Herculean strength – the trees are lacking in tresses. The first two contestants show off their muscles, hidden only by their body hair and a small cloth: “. . . Dos robustos luchadores / de sus músculos, menos defendidos / del blanco lino que de vello oscuro” (vv. 965-67). Such battles among naked men were not the custom in Spanish soil. Rather, the scene harks back to classical times, a period where the homoerotic was more easily sanctioned. By stressing the ancient, Góngora’s text once again marks the differences in erotic customs between his own time and the past which humanists sought to re-create.

In Góngora’s poem, the wrestlers’ exertions are described through images of erotic desire. Their struggle is viewed in terms of an embrace: “Abrazándose pues los dos” (v. 398). Their bodies are so intertwined in battle that they are compared to the elm and the vine. This is the image used by Vertumnus to persuade the nymph Pomona to marry him in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (14. 661ff). Even though she had countless suitors, Vertumnus succeeds. It should not come as a surprise, then, that this arboreal image was the preferred one for Golden Age poets when describing love and marriage, as George Erdman has shown. Góngora, then, introduces an arboreal image of marriage during a wedding celebration, but he transforms it into the homoerotic union of two wrestlers, clinging to each other.¹⁵

The two fighters are called “hijos de la tierra, / cuanto fuertes no Alcides” (vv. 973-74). Once again, Góngora brings up the strength of Hercules, acknowledging that these contestants may not be as powerful as the classical hero. But they are called sons of the earth, which clearly refers to Antaeus, a giant who forced all he came in contact with to fight him. He always won and killed his opponents until Hercules was able to defeat him. Knowing that he was the son of the earth, Hercules had to keep him from touching the ground so that he would not regain his strength. In the *Soledad primera* both contestants, as sons of the earth, stand erect (“cual pinos se levantan” v. 976)¹⁶ after being thrown down. By alluding to both Hercules and Antaeus, Góngora is pointing to the famous wrestling match between the two as described in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* (4. 590ff). This passage also served as model for numerous paintings and sculptures of the Italian Renaissance. Heiple, who has carefully studied visual and verbal representations of the battle, has concluded that they often reveal a homoerotic component.¹⁷ Góngora may have well been aware of this and thus alludes to the

fight in order to further emphasize the loving battle that takes place between these two clinging and embracing rustics.

Once the wrestling matchess are concluded, a "joven arrogante" (v. 982) defies others to beat him at the jump. Although there are no explicit homoerotic images here, the text includes one allusion that once again confuses the art of love with gymnastic contests. As he readies to leap forth, this proud youth: "Besó la raya pues el pie desnudo" (v. 995). In other words, he steps so lightly upon the line that marks the place from where he is to jump, that he merely kisses it. The verb to step ("pisar") is then included in the jump itself as his agility permits him to step upon the air ("pisó del viento" v. 997). Not only is the kiss an erotic image, but the reference to the foot serves to compound it. During the Spanish Golden Age, the beauty of a woman's naked foot was the subject of countless erotic descriptions, appearing, for example, in Lope's *El castigo sin venganza* and in Cervantes's *Don Quijote*. Studying the characterization of Casandra and Dorotea in these works, A. David Kossoff concludes that: "el pie era un poderoso atractivo erótico en aquella época" (386). Indeed, Constance Rose asserts that: "La mujer de pies desnudos es una mujer que se expone a todo y a todos, es una mujer sensual, quizás lasciva, que no se pone límites y que se abandona al placer sexual" (418). The foot fetish as described by Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and other writers is radically transformed by Gongora. Instead of belonging to a woman, the praised foot corresponds to a male youth. Such is the power of this fetish, that it is no longer a mere object of contemplation. It also desires as it lightly kisses the ground.

This transgressive foot leads us to the third and last contest, where the runners are said to have "pie de pluma" (v. 1031). Some twenty rustics compete in this race. They are to run one third of a mile, the goal being two elm trees. While earlier in the poem the poplar was called the tree of Hercules, now it is the elm that is consecrated to the hero as "hercúleos troncos" (v. 1049). Three of the runners take the lead and together they reach the elm trees and embrace them. This embrace recalls that of the elm and the vine, symbol of love and marriage, and used to describe the two wrestlers in the earlier contest. Thus, both wrestlers and runners engage in homoerotic embraces. The runners' embrace is described in abundant detail:

De la Peneida virgen desdeñosa
 los dulces fugitivos miembros bellos
 en la corteza no abrazó reciente
 más firme Apolo, más estrechamente,
 que de una y de otra meta gloriosa
 las duras basas abrazaron ellos
 con triplicado nudo. (vv. 1054-60)

The text here claims that the desiring Apollo had not embraced the transformed Daphne more tightly than these three runners now hug Hercules's trees. It is as if these runners desire the arboreal Hercules as much or more than Apollo desired Daphne. To further strengthen this homoerotic image, the poem shows that the tree is no mere symbol of the Greek hero, but actually contains him. The text explains that even if Hercules himself had eyes in every leaf of the tree, he could have never figured out which one of the three runners arrived (and embraced him) first. Thus, the reader is led to visualize Hercules within the tree, being embraced.

This race and the homoerotic image of the runners who hug the rough bark of Hercules serves as conclusion to the wedding celebrations and also to the first part of the poem. In tune with previous homoerotic displays, this one is also surrounded by astrological adornments. The god of marriage calls for the rising of Venus to signal the arrival of evening ("los rayos anticipa de la estrella, cerúlea ahora" vv. 1070-71), the time in which the wedded couple should retire to their abode in order to fulfill their desires in a loving embrace ("en los brazos del deseo" v. 1068). Thus, the poem weaves together a series of embraces: that of the wrestlers who are so close to each other as the wedded elm and vine, that of the three runners who embrace the trees of Hercules, and that of the wedded couple. These three moments serve to embrace a wider vision of eroticism that the accepted one in Góngora's time. The joyous description of heterosexual marriage also includes a celebration of homoeroticism, of a loving bond between males. The evening is presided over by Venus, goddess of love. It is she who watches from her flying charriot led by swans as the rustic couple move to a soft bed made of feathers from her swans. This "campo de pluma" is the site for "batallas de amor" (v. 1091). This last line not only captures the erotic climax of the poem and of the wedded couple, but also recapitulates other feathers and other f(l)ights. The "batallas de amor" are like the struggles of the wrestlers in the first contest, while the "campo de pluma" recalls both the winged foot of the jumper who kissed the starting line with his fetished foot, and the plumed feet ("pie de pluma") of the runners who embraced the arboreal Hercules.¹⁸

Under the sign of Venus, Góngora pens a poem where the feathers of desire write of different types of endeavors, of different practices and of different times. While narrating a tale that culminates in marriage, Góngora's images tell of a pilgrim of love whose beauty is greater than that of Ganymede, beloved of Jupiter. It is this pilgrim who witnesses not only the fulfillment of heterosexual love in marriage at the end of the *Soledad primera*, but also the many guises of the homoerotic.

Whether embracing Hercules or surrendering to Sol/Apollo, characters in Góngora's poem are engaged in acts of male eroticism. Complex allusions and descriptions enrich the poem, seeking the complicity of the readers and calling on them to enjoy Ganymede and the many celestial signs of pagan loves. The poem revives pagan practices through a new humanism that seeks to embrace the classics and to celebrate the homoerotic as one more aspect of the joyful wisdom of the ancients.

Notes

¹The transformation of Ganymede from allegory to object of desire begins with Michelangelo. But, as James Saslow asserts, "Parmigianino and Giulio [Romano] are responsible for more depictions of Ganymede than any other Renaissance artists . . . from plainly erotic illustrations to complex mythological or astrological narratives" (98).

²Ganymede is pictured by Giulio Romano in Mantua both as pointer to new sexual freedoms and as Trojan ancestor of the Gonzaga family. In seventeenth-century Spain, Rojas Zorrilla will play with the image of an imperial and sexual Ganymede in his two Numancia plays. See my study, "Numancia as Ganymede."

³On the homoerotic content of Arguijo's art and poetry see my study, "Deflecting Desire."

⁴This image appears in Dido's praise of Aeneas in the *Aeneid* (1. 608). This instance of imitation was first noted by Joseph Pellicer de Salas y Tovar in his *Lecciones solemnes a las obras de don Luis de Góngora y Argote* (1630). See Marasso and Jammes 590.

⁵Aquarius as Ganymede appears in Manilius, Cicero, Hyginus, Ovid, and Virgil (Allen 46). In *La Arcadia*, Lope de Vega explains: "Ganimedes, muchacho hermoso que el águila de Júpiter robó del suelo para copero de su néctar (Vir., 1, *Aenei.*), y la figura astronómica que llaman Acuario" (154 n. 54).

⁶In the absence of the other eleven signs, or even one of them, there seems no reason to think the band serves any purpose other than to highlight the balance. Arguijo was born on September 9, 1566. The sun does not enter the sign of Libra until September 22, thus eliminating any obvious astrological significance of the motif" (*Images and Ideas* 75 n. 24). However, I have argued that the band serves to highlight the equinox, while the figure of Astraea in the ceiling stands for Virgo, Arguijo's birth sign. See my study "Deflecting Desire."

⁷Heiple cites Corominas who shows how the term "garzón" in Cervantes means "mozo disoluto" and in Haedo "designa un sodomita mantenido por un señor árabe" (Heiple 220 n. 3).

⁸Heiple describes these lines: "In this case the reader in general gazes on the naked youth and imagines the personified rays of Apollo (mythological lover of Hyacinth) licking and sucking dry the beautiful naked youth and his soaked clothes" (227).

⁹See, for example, Francisco de Aldana's sonnet XII which begins with a scene of passion "¿Cuál es la causa, mi Damón, que estando / en la lucha de amor, juntos trabados / con lenguas, brazos, pies y encadenados" and leads from a crescendo to a moment of rest where the lovers are "de chupar cansados" (9). The "anatomical vividness" of the sonnet led Elias L. Rivers to note that such works go beyond lyricism to realism. It also prompted Otis H. Green to assert that: "Toward the end of the sixteenth century there appears in the lyric a greater freedom in these matters . . . there occurred in Spain a forward-moving change in taste that made it more seemly than before to express *lo sensual* in lyric verse" (Green 126-27). On "chupar" see also the anonymous sonnet which ends: "Bésame, vida, ya, si no te pesa, / apriete, muerde, chupa, y sea con tiento." The editors claim it might be based on a sonnet by the French poet Olivier de Magny, and that both the Spanish and French texts may have a common Italian source (Alzieu 209).

¹⁰On Góngora's images in Villamediana's play, see my study, "The Play's the Thing."

¹¹*La estrella de Sevilla* (1623-24), a play attributed to Claramonte and which may allude to the murder of Villamediana, uses the Gemini as one of the key images.

¹²"la piedad que en mi alma ya te hospeda / hoy te convida . . ." (vv. 520-21).

¹³The old *serrano's* speech repeatedly imitates and alludes to Virgil's *Aeneid* in order to emphasize the political aspect of Jupiter/Ganymede.

¹⁴There is a third astrological image that follows, which instead of relating to the homoerotic, serves to link this cluster of myths to the beginning of the poem. The men and women that stand among the poplars begin to sing dance. Their joyful movements lead not only the trees to dance, but also the most fixed of stars: "cruza el Trion mas fijo el Hemisferio" (v. 671). Thus, even the Pole Star, to which the Trion or constellation of the Bear point, is moving at the sound of this delightful earthly music. This last image can be linked to the astrological elements at the beginning of the poem where the shipwrecked pilgrim moves towards the distant light of a cabin as if it were the Pole Star ("Norte de su aguja" v. 82). The star which he once followed, now dances above.

¹⁵Cervantes also uses this image in a homoerotic context in *El amante liberal*, as Adrienne L. Martín has noted. Indeed, the portrayal of Cornelio as "effeminate homosexual" also includes a reference to him as "nuevo Ganimeses" (Martín 160).

¹⁶The notion of standing erect as pines may have sexual connotations.

¹⁷Heiple's paper on the subject, presented at an MLA Conference, was never published.

¹⁸The image of Icarus can also be woven into this bed of feathers. It is used to describe the unsuccessful jump/flight of one of the contestants (v. 1009).

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