

# CONTINUITIES OF GÓNGORA IN DARÍO'S SWAN POEMS: ON THE POETICS OF RAPE, COLONIALISM, AND MODERNITY

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Crystal Chemris  
Southern Oregon University

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The 1927 revival of Luis de Góngora is an important conjuncture in the modern appropriation of the poet's work, but our appreciation of the event should not obscure the fact that the Gongorine resurgence on the peninsula had in fact deeper roots in the poetry of Latin America. As Roberto González Echevarría has pointed out, Góngora's "rediscovery" actually began across the Atlantic in the work of modernista poets José Martí and Rubén Darío and the essayist Alfonso Reyes (195). Rubén Darío's participation in French Symbolist circles, together with his exercises in imitation of Golden Age models, well equipped him to contribute to the revival of Góngora in advance of the tricentenary, most notably in his famous "Trébol" sonnets (272-74).<sup>1</sup>

I do not, however, propose to focus on this specific case of Darío's self-conscious poetic celebration of Góngora; rather, I will attempt to demonstrate how a more general understanding of ideological and aesthetic continuities in Darío's work can provide valuable opportunities for the contextualization of Góngora's poetry within the evolution of the modern.

Several parallels emerge in comparing the circumstances and concerns of Góngora and Darío. These include a parallel historical positioning at moments in the rise of the city, leading to an aesthetic parallel in the cultivation of the pastoral mode, a similar problematic of subjectivity in the context of parallel avant-garde cultures, a secularization and eroticization of religious discourse, a similar display of proliferation of cultural artifacts, of pastiche, virtuosity and the cultivation of language and the writing process.<sup>2</sup>

My treatment of these parallels will converge in a discussion on the use of rape imagery by the two poets, in which I will draw upon

recent scholarship on Góngora's major lyric poem, the *Soledades*, and engage with Iris Zavala's noted work on Darío's "swan poems." My hope is to demonstrate a trajectory of the aesthetic expression of the trauma of colonization, in poetry produced out of obverse experiences of imperialist violence and historical impasse, and in the process offer a new framework for evaluating the modern resurgence of Góngora.

I will begin by defining the central dynamic of Góngora's *Soledades*, as it is mapped out in his two sonnets on their reception. In each case, Góngora establishes the poem as sign, hieroglyph, elaborated as an allegory of writing through iconic figures, both classic and contemporary. In the first, his initial canto is represented as a statue of Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, in a sustained allegory of its procession through the streets of Madrid. In the second, more definitive sonnet,<sup>3</sup> the *Primera soledad* is represented as a caged bird which flees the court to return to the silent refuge of the Virgilian woods. The freed bird, recast as the widowed turtle dove of the ballad tradition, "aconseja apacibles desvíos al mismo bosque incierto," offering the harmony of art as solace in the face of the uncertainty of the woods. The poem ends with a wish that the dove freely lament her beloved spouse with a mournful voice, "que tan sorda oreja tiene la soledad como el desierto." These final tercets establish a tension which will define the *Soledades* as a whole, between the idealizing language of art and the voicing of pain at the center of this edifice of containment, the Baroque "corteza" alluded to by Góngora in his polemical defense of the poem. The political cry for reform of the exiled consul of the woods becomes expressed as a dialectic of muteness and mourning.<sup>4</sup>

In this ambivalent cultivation of lyric emotion, the *Soledades* have been read as "an epic amplification of lyric pastoral themes" (Walker 373) but as failed epic, elaborating in the language of poetry an opposition to Spain's imperial ventures, which had decimated the domestic economy and which had incurred real human costs for Góngora's fellow Andalusians.<sup>5</sup> The aesthetic and ontological manifestations of the Spanish imperial crisis are played out in a dynamic of violence and eros in the poem, which is framed by images of mythological divine rape, symbolic of Hapsburg conquest. The appetites of aristocratic bellicose violence are gargantuan; in the poem's dedication, the duke's hunting evokes battlefields stained with blood.

As Mary Gaylord has shown, the imagery of exploration is eroticized; so too the imagery of the hunt. Blood issuing from the bodies of animals penetrated by weapons is described in erotic and ornate terms, in a secular version of the "cruel decorativeness"<sup>6</sup> associated with the portrayal of martyrs in Jesuit aesthetics. The death wish of the courtly lover is projected onto the natural world, as the poem's wandering *peregrino* asks that the sea and mountains correspond to the size of his failed aspirations in love by serving as his funeral urn and monument. Yet if the *peregrino* identifies with the world encompassing, rapacious appetites of empire, he also is identified with erotic victimization. In an appeal to the sexually transgressive culture of the *noblesse de cour* who were his patrons, Góngora links his pilgrim to Ganymede, the icon of male homosexual beauty who was abducted by Jupiter.<sup>7</sup> The *peregrino's* inert gaze upon the violent dismemberment of the crow in the display of falconry, read as an allegory of European war (Beverley *Aspects* 93, 99-100), suggests the traumatic dissociation of the rape victim, a variant of what Cynthia Marshall has identified as the "self-shattering" of the early modern subject.<sup>8</sup>

The breakdown of the epic subject, his solitude, parallels the crisis of Spanish imperialism in a poem which allows us to catch a glimpse of the violence at the heart of the cultivation of beauty as a symbol of power.<sup>9</sup> Sara Castro Kláren has stated that the narratives of the Spanish invasion, conquest and colonization of America "all drip with blood" (117-18) and I will argue in turn that this blood surfaces in the *Soledades* in the "bleeding jewels" of Góngora's poetry as a kind of negative to the "writing of violence" of the conquest narrative (Rabasa cit. in Castro Kláren 118),<sup>10</sup> with Góngora's defamiliarization of divine rape imagery implicitly highlighting the mass rape of indigenous women as the traumatic underside of epic furor (See Chemris, *Soledades* 53-54).

The trajectory—and obverse side of this dynamic—can be observed in Darío's poetry. The unresolved consequences of the conquest, as Zavala has argued, are expressed in Darío's response to the events leading up to and including 1898, a quilting point in which the Spanish-American war defines North America as the new imperial threat facing the former Spanish colonies. For Zavala, the allusion in Darío's "Caracol" (289-90) to the rape of Europa can be recast as "el rapto de América," a symptom of modernity repeated in the imagery of divine

rape in his swan poems (*El rapto* 141). Building on Zavala's thesis and the work of John Beverley, as well as on the classic studies of Arturo Marasso, Ángel Rama and Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot, I will now progress through Darío's swan poems and related works with an eye to demonstrating parallels with "el cisne andaluz."

The swan in Darío's poetry is seen as an icon of the Parnassian landscape of the mind, a utopian space which cultivates an avant-garde opposition to bourgeois materialism in a modern pastoral. One vehicle for expressing this anti-materialist sentiment is, paradoxically, the celebration of aspects of the former glory of the older feudal estates, the nobility and clergy.<sup>11</sup> Where Góngora reworked the Renaissance revival of antiquity as his cultural capital, Darío cultivates a stylized absolutism of the French court as well as a false Gothic, in a poetic version of the various "neo" revivals in the architecture of the turn of the century city.<sup>12</sup> For example, one of Darío's earlier swan poems, "Blasón," dedicated to a *marquesa*, displays the trajectory of the emblem tradition in Góngora in a play on heraldic form:<sup>13</sup>

El Olímpico cisne de nieve  
con el ágata rosa del pico  
lustra el ala eucarística y breve  
que abre al sol como un casto abanico.

En la forma de un brazo de lira  
y del asa de un ánfora griega  
es su cándido cuello que inspira  
como prora ideal que navega.

Es el cisne, de stirpe sagrada,  
cuyo beso, por campos de seda,  
ascendió hasta la cima rosada  
de las dulces colinas de Leda. [...]

El alado aristócrata muestra  
lises albos en campo de azur,  
y ha sentido en sus plumas la diestra  
de la amable y gentil Pompadour. (188)

The swan's wing is described in sacramental terms: "ala eucarística," as Darío, in a parallel with Stéphane Mallarmé, cultivates a religion of art and eroticism, continuing the pseudosacerdotal quality of Góngora's secularization of the poet-*vates* in his "Carta en respuesta."<sup>14</sup> The swan's

rape of Leda occurs as he ascends the “campos de seda” of her body, echoed in the line “lises albos en campos de azur,” a phrase which combines the heraldic and Góngora’s “campos de zafiro” with the azure of Mallarmé’s own swan poem.<sup>15</sup> The figure of the swan is repeatedly transformed as a visual sign: his neck becomes the fluted side of a lyre, the handle of an urn, and a curved prow, in a very plastic form of metalepsis which recalls Gongorine technique.<sup>16</sup>

A second poem from *Prosas profanas*, the much-celebrated “El cisne,” further develops the cultural associations of the swan, again in a cultivation of a very Gongorine second degree of metaphor:

Fue en una hora divina para el género humano.  
 El Cisne antes cantaba sólo para morir.  
 Cuando se oyó el acento del Cisne wagneriano  
 fue en medio de una aurora, fue para revivir.  
 Sobre las tempestades del humano oceano  
 se oye el canto del Cisne; no se cesa de oír,  
 dominando el martillo del viejo Thor germano  
 o las trompas que cantan la espada de Angantir.  
 ¡Oh Cisne! ¡Oh sacro pájaro! Si antes la blanca Helena  
 del huevo azul de Leda brotó de gracia llena,  
 siendo de la Hermosura la princesa inmortal,  
 bajo tus blancas alas la nueva Poesía  
 concibe en una gloria de luz y de armonía  
 la Helena eterna y pura que encarna el ideal. (213)

While many have identified the various swans Darío builds on to celebrate Richard Wagner’s—those of the Hyperborean Apollo, Horace, Ovid and the Parnassians—,<sup>17</sup> I will suggest a further resonance in the poem, a secondary reading which supplements the conventional one and which can be inferred through amphibology, another Gongorine feature which arises out of the poetry’s semantic density. The final tercets can be read to predict the birth of Darío’s new poetry, figured like Wagner’s opera and (not incidentally) like the “nueva poesía” of Góngora, as classical revival and reform.

If before, Helen emerged from Leda’s egg “de gracia llena,” now “la Helena eterna y pura que encarna el ideal,”—Helen, revived with all her cultural associations to date—will conceive the new poetry under the wings of the swan, renewed with all its cultural connotations from

Jupiter to Wagner.<sup>18</sup> The swan's possession of Helen proclaims that this new poetry will be born not only of rape but of incest as well, in a coupling of signs which includes the additional transgression of secularizing the Immaculate Conception and the Annunciation: she is, as in the "Ave Maria", "de gracia llena."<sup>19</sup> This alternative reading of the final tercets is well within the Symbolist spirit of the profanation of the Catholic liturgy and of increasing degrees of sexual transgression, including incest. Regarding the latter, one need only recall Mallarmé's "Autre evantail," which describes both the poet's daughter holding a fan and, covertly, the quivering space of the vulva, "another fan," celebrated by Darío as the enigmatic "rosa sexual."

The association of the swan with the rape of Leda continues in various poems of *Cantos de vida y esperanza*: "Leda" (276) where the rape occurs in a pastoral setting, to the voyeuristic delight of Pan, and in "Los cisnes" III and IV (264-65). In "Los cisnes III" the lyric speaker identifies with the rapist:

Por un momento, oh Cisne, juntaré mis anhelos  
a los de tus dos alas que abrazaron a Leda,  
y a mi maduro ensueño, aun vestido de seda,  
dirás, por los Dioscuros, la gloria de los cielos.

Es el otoño. Ruedan de la flauta consuelos.  
Por un instante, oh Cisne, en la obscura alameda  
sorberé entre dos labios lo que el Pudor me veda,  
y dejaré mordidos Escrupulos y Celos.

Cisne, tendré tus alas blancas por un instante,  
y el corazón de rosa que hay en tu dulce pecho  
palpará en el mío con su sangre constante.

Amor será dichoso, pues estará vibrante  
el júbilo que pone al gran Pan en acecho  
mientras un ritmo esconde la fuente de diamante. (264)

Here the furtive rape in the woods ("la obscura alameda,") recalls the violation of Philomela. In "Los cisnes IV" the rape of Leda is extolled in triumphant terms:

¡Antes de todo, gloria a ti, Leda!  
 tu dulce vientre cubrió de seda  
 el Dios. ¡Miel y oro sobre la brisa!  
 Sonaban alternativamente  
 flauta y cristales, Pan y la fuente.  
 ¡Tierra era canto, Cielo sonrisa!

Ante el celeste, supremo acto,  
 dioses y bestias hicieron pacto.  
 Se dio a la alondra la luz del día,  
 se dio a los búhos sabiduría,  
 y melodías al ruiseñor.

A los leones fue la victoria,  
 para las águilas toda la gloria,  
 y a las palomas todo el amor.

Pero vosotros sois los divinos  
 príncipes. Vagos como las naves,  
 inmaculados como los linos,  
 maravillosos como las aves.

En vuestros picos tenéis las prendas,  
 que manifiestan corales puros.  
 Con vuestros pechos abríis las sendas  
 que arriba indican los Dioscuros.

Las dignidades de vuestros actos,  
 eternizadas en lo infinito,  
 hacen que sean ritmos exactos,  
 voces de ensueño, luces de mito.

De orgullo olímpico sois el resumen,  
 ¡oh, blancas urnas de la armonía!  
 Ebúrneas joyas que anima un numen  
 con su celeste melancolía.

¡Melancolía de haber amado,  
 junto a la fuente de la arboleda,  
 el luminoso cuello estirado  
 entre los blancos muslos de Leda! (265)

Her rape becomes monumental, creating a ripple effect throughout creation, establishing a new covenant between gods and beasts in a celebration of the artistic process: as Zavala points out, the white thighs of Leda, like the immaculate wings of the swan, represent the blank page (*Rubén Darío* 127). The epochal proportions of the act dramatize historical conjuncture, suggesting a parallel with Yeat's famous poem on the mythic coupling.

These poems describe the *modernista* trajectory of early modern pastoral, now no longer a landscape of Platonic amorous plaint, but instead what has been viewed as a more intimate, private sphere garden of sexuality outside bourgeois family norms.<sup>20</sup> The cruel woman of Petrarchism is replaced by her successor in the Decadent movement; the freedoms of the *noblesse de cour* are replaced with a bohemian world of prostitution, pornography and androgyny, including an association with a parallel “Sapphic avant-garde.”<sup>21</sup> In poems such as the first “Nocturno” of the collection, Darío, like Góngora, portrays the obverse of the celebration of divine rape in his depiction of the trauma of the rape victim, in this case to describe his own catastrophe of consciousness:

Quiero expresar mi angustia en versos que abolida  
dirán mi juventud de rosas y de ensueños,  
y la desfloración amarga de mi vida  
por un vasto dolor y cuidados pequeños.

Y el viaje a un vago Oriente por entrevistados barcos,  
y el grano de oraciones que floreció en blasfemia,  
y los azoramientos del cisne entre los charcos  
y el falso azul nocturno de inquerida bohemia.

Lejano clavicordio que en silencio y olvido  
no diste nunca al sueño la sublime sonata,  
huérfano esquiife, árbol insigne, obscuro nido  
que suavizó la noche de dulzura de plata. . .

Esperanza olorosa a hierbas frescas, trino  
del rui señor primaveral y matinal,  
azucena tronchada por un fatal destino,  
rebusca de la dicha, persecución del mal. . .

El ánfora funesta del divino veneno  
que ha de hacer por la vida la tortura interior,  
la conciencia espantable de nuestro humano cieno  
y el horror de sentirse pasajero, el horror

de ir a tientas, en intermitentes espantos,  
hacia lo inevitable, desconocido, y la  
pesadilla brutal de este dormir de llantos

¡de la cual no hay más que Ella que nos despertará! (270)

The allusion to the “obscuro nido” suggests, again, the story of Philomela, but here revealing the violence behind the previously



heralded sexual conquest in terms such as “desfloración” and “azucena tronchada.” The oblique allusion to Philomela offers another parallel with Góngora; her story, while never explicit in Góngora’s *Soledad* sonnet or the longer work, hovers over them like overtones in music, in their description of muteness and mourning in the forest or in the woven testimony of the Arachne tapestry embedded in the wedding chorus of the first *Soledad* (I. 832-44).<sup>22</sup> The obliqueness of the reference is itself a feature of a parallel avant-garde project: the invitation behind Góngora’s “apacibles desvíos” and Darío’s “azoramientos del cisne entre los charcos” is to look beneath the “corteza” of poetic language.

The trauma of consciousness becomes the trauma of imperialist domination in Darío’s explicitly political swan poem, the most famous of the series, “Los cisnes” I, in which the swan’s neck becomes a question mark, sign of the poet’s interrogation of his people’s political future:<sup>23</sup>

¿Qué signo haces, oh Cisne, con tu encorvado cuello  
al paso de los tristes y errantes soñadores?

¿Por qué tan silencioso de ser blanco y ser bello,  
tiránico a las aguas e impasible a las flores?

Yo te saludo ahora como en versos latinos  
te saludara antaño Publico Ovidio Nasón.

Los mismos ruiseñores cantan los mismos trinos,  
y en diferentes lenguas es la misma canción.

A vosotros mi lengua no debe ser extraña.

A Garcilaso visteis, acaso, alguna vez. . .

Soy un hijo de América, soy un nieto de España. . .

Quevedo pudo hablaros en verso en Aranjuez. . .

Cisnes, los abanicos de vuestras alas frescas  
den a las frentes pálidas sus caricias más puras  
y alejen vuestras blancas figuras pintorescas  
de nuestras mentes tristes las ideas oscuras.

Brumas septentrionales nos llenan de tristezas,  
se mueren nuestras rosas, se agostan nuestras palmas,  
casi no hay ilusiones para nuestras cabezas,  
y somos los mendigos de nuestras pobres almas.

Nos predicán la guerra con águilas feroces,  
gerifaltes de antaño revienen a los puños,  
mas no brillan las glorias de las antiguas hoces,  
ni hay Rodrigos ni Jaimes, ni hay Alfonsos ni Nuños.

Faltos de alimento que dan las grandes cosas,  
 ¿qué haremos los poetas sino buscar tus lagos?  
 A falta de laureles son muy dulces las rosas,  
 y a falta de victorias busquemos los halagos.

La América Española como la España entera  
 fija está en el Oriente de su fatal destino;  
 yo interrogo a la Esfinge que el porvenir espera  
 con la interrogación de tu cuello divino.

¿Seremos entregados a los bárbaros fieros?  
 ¿Tantos millones de hombres hablaremos inglés?  
 ¿Ya no hay nobles hidalgos ni bravos caballeros?  
 ¿Callaremos ahora para llorar después?

He lanzado mi grito, Cisnes, entre vosotros,  
 que habéis sido los fieles en la desilusión,  
 mientras siento una fuga de americanos potros  
 y el estertor postrero de un caduco león . . .

. . . Y un Cisne negro dijo: "La noche anuncia el día",  
 Y uno blanco: "La aurora es inmortal, la aurora  
 es inmortal!" ¡Oh tierras de sol y de armonía,  
 aun guarda la Esperanza la caja de Pandora! (262-63)

In the swan's pastoral idyll, he proclaims art as compensatory for the failure of history: "a falta de victorias busquemos los halagos," as Spanish America inherits the consequences of Spain's defeat in 1898 at the hands of the United States: "La América Española como la España entera / fija está en el Oriente de su fatal destino." Here, Darío revisits a sentiment he originally voiced from the other side of the Atlantic in his "Trébol" sonnets, in which he offered the "colonia" of Velázquez and Góngora as artistic *coloni* (i.e. as cultivators of poetry) in compensation for Spain's loss of colonies.<sup>24</sup>

An earlier poem, "A Colón" (308-9) sets the stage for "Los cisnes I" by figuring the original European penetration of America as a corruption of indigenous virgin land and pastoral innocence:

¡Desgraciado Almirante! Tu pobre América,  
 tu india virgen y hermosa de sangre cálida,  
 la perla de tus sueños, es una histérica  
 de convulsivos nervios y frente pálida. (308)

Zavala aptly characterizes its opening reference to the “india histórica” as an image of the Real which arises in trauma, as a symbolic memory of the past which unfolds the future, in the repetition of this original colonial rape of America through Manifest Destiny and the U.S. victory of 1898. Thus she argues—and here I will note a parallel with Góngora—Darío’s effect is to reveal the “symptom,” the pain behind the illusion of progress, and he does so through a subversive enactment of a scene of rape associated with a myth of national origins.<sup>25</sup>

While I find Zavala’s insights compelling, I will argue that one needs not overstate the case. I disagree, for example, with Zavala’s claims that Darío displays an anti-imperialist appetite, as if to rape the gods, in “Los cisnes III,” where the lyric speaker assumes the transgressing body of Jupiter (*Rubén Darío* 126-67) or that Darío accentuates hope in “Los cisnes IV” where Góngora accentuates violence (118). While I agree that Darío is aiming for an effect of sublation, in both poems woman is victim, and the portrayal of rape as an allegory of writing works to accentuate female silence, a patriarchal manifestation of the “writing of violence” of which José Rabasa speaks.<sup>26</sup> The reading of the “india histórica” should also be tempered; Zavala is correct to associate hysteria with the trauma of rape, but this association was only made by Sigmund Freud in very limited professional circles (in 1896) well after the 1892 composition of “A Colón,” and was hastily retracted in the face of their overwhelmingly negative response to his testimony to the realities and psychic consequences of childhood sexual abuse (see Masson 191). In any case, Darío was not likely to have sympathized with the seduction theory, given his own use of prostitutes.<sup>27</sup> But as a quilting point which retrospectively illuminates the contradictions of the moment, the figure of the “india histórica” is indeed as evocative as Zavala suggests.

Darío’s characterization of political failure in Latin America is further described in “A Colón” in terms of song, the music of poetry: “día a día cantamos la Marsellesa / para acabar cantando la Carmañola.” The Carmañola was a song of the Red Terror of the French Revolution, but Darío seems to be using it to evoke the White Terror of Thermidorian reaction. He laments that the *mestizo* masses, despite their aspirations, end up singing to the tune of the revolutionary terror, a repetition of the model of coup d’état and dictatorship. This failure

of democracy could not be more visible than on the question of race; the limits of Black Jacobinism in the Caribbean were defined by European and American protection of the slave trade, with the United States' agrarian revolution delayed as a result until the Civil War, concluded less than thirty years before this poem.<sup>28</sup> The constraints on Darío's own articulation of racial pride were thus not insignificant, and his association of African and indigenous racial characteristics ("la mulatez intelectual", "la chatura estética"<sup>29</sup>) with artistic mediocrity should be understood in this light. Similarly Góngora, while exoticizing the indigenous victims of colonization, is apparently silent in the *Soledades* on the expulsion of Spain's own North African Moors, although his Sacramonte sonnet suggests a parallel assimilation of the Moors into national myth after the fact of their violent suppression.<sup>30</sup>

Beverley is correct to locate the parallel between the two poets in a similar, but obverse, historical positioning of displaced artisans at different stages of the development of the capitalist market and points of decline of the Spanish empire; Góngora writing in the age of mercantilism and Darío, Spain's colonized "other" in the age of imperialism; Góngora expressing the limits of an outmoded agrarian aristocracy, Darío the contradictions of a comprador bourgeoisie caught between an assertive nationalism and entrenched oligarchical interests.<sup>31</sup> Their proclamation of the new—"la nueva poesía"—is countered by their aesthetic expression of historical impasse and decadence, their idealization of sexual conquest countered by the poetic expression of pain. Beverley and Zavala characterize the poets' respective impasses as forms of traumatic repetition within variants of the political unconscious;<sup>32</sup> perhaps another way to read their parallel swansongs<sup>33</sup> for a future that never arrives is through the prism of the introduction to Karl Marx's *18th Brumaire*.

In the opening of his text, Marx states, "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce" (Tucker 594). He is alluding to the coup of Napoleon I of the first French bourgeois revolution and its parody by his nephew fifty years later. Marx argues that while the first revolutionaries found in "the ideals and art forms" of antiquity "the self-deception that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations

of the content of their struggles" (596), such a recycling of the idealizing imagery of the past to buttress a now decrepit bourgeoisie could only reinforce the effect of its obsolescence.

Góngora's new poetry was born at the end of the Renaissance revival of classical forms, a time when the false consciousness of imperial destiny—the Spanish colonial project—was buttressed with the recycling of the ideals and art forms of antiquity, the Hapsburg emperor cast as the "last descendant of Aeneas." Darío's panegyric to the Guatemalan dictator Estrada Cabrera was framed as a celebration of Athenian democracy, complementing the president's construction of lavish imitations of temples to Minerva as a way of shoring up the image of his decrepit regime (see Gyurko). The ancients they revived were also subject to notions of political and aesthetic decay; remember, Góngora was criticized for reviving the wrong classical poets, those decadent neoterics (Collard 70-72). And so the question arises, is all this revival merely simulacral? Or should a distinction be made across modes of production between ebullient and decadent imitation?

Marx closes his discussion of the theater of history<sup>34</sup> by asserting that the next social revolution "cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future" (597). I believe what Marx is saying here is that a truly new poetry would express aesthetically a new mode of production and is hence unimaginable until the revolutionary transformation of society. Indeed, *can* we imagine the poetry of a society which has transcended oppression and the drama of sexual violence?<sup>35</sup>

The question of the birth of a new poetry of new social relations is what is finally posed in the meeting of Baroque aesthetics and nineteenth-century historicism occasioned by Darío's revival of Góngora. In the meantime we are left with the contradictions of the avant-garde: the hysterical repetition of ever more frenzied proclamations of the new in the face of the intransigence of the old, a kind of feedback loop in which the most technically sublime poetry is written over the silence of rape and conquest.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Joaquín Roses' essay on Darío in *Soledades habitadas* for a recent study of these sonnets which includes a good summary of the critical history. See also Alejandro Mejías López on the problematic reception of *modernismo* on the peninsula. All references to Darío's poetry are to the Mejía Sánchez edition.

<sup>2</sup>Ángel Rama addresses these issues in Darío's poetry in his excellent introduction to the Mejía Sánchez edition. On Góngora and the Baroque city, see Beverley, *Aspects* 77; see pgs. 3, 4 and 6 of this essay for particular discussions of religious discourse and of the avant-garde.

<sup>3</sup>Antonio Carreira now lists the first as a probable attribution. References to the *Soledades* refer to the Jammes edition; references to other poems and letters of Góngora are to the Carreira edition of his *Obras completas*.

<sup>4</sup>See Beverley, *Aspects* 79, Maurice Molho 63-81, Gaylord, "Footprints" and recently, Dana Bultmann for extensive readings of this sonnet. Robert Jammes, "Retrogongorisme" 71 notes that the "queja" variant discussed by Molho was a typographical error in the Millés' edition.

<sup>5</sup>See Beverley, *Aspects* 7 and Elias Rivers 857. Important studies on Góngora and the New World beyond these include Beverley's writings on colonial Gongorism in *Essays*, Enrica Cancelliere and Roses. Carmelo Samonà 124 makes the noteworthy comparison between the opening of the *Soledades* and the *Naufragios*. For a full discussion of the generic tensions in the poem, see Chemris, *Góngora's Soledades* 26-38.

<sup>6</sup>This is Harold Skulsky's term, shared with me in conversation in 2002 and used with permission.

<sup>7</sup>See Frederick De Armas and Paul Julian Smith on the significance of the homosexual attributes of the *peregrino*. On the culture of the *noblesse de cour*, see Lucien Goldmann 107.

<sup>8</sup>This paragraph summarizes arguments made in Chapters 2 and 4 of Chemris, *Góngora's Soledades*.

<sup>9</sup>For Beverley, the references to the bounty of conquest which decorate the *Soledades* as metaphors create the effect of "magical accumulation," a masking of the real relationship of consumption and production between metropolis and colony (*Essays* 80-82).

<sup>10</sup>Samonà 124 makes the noteworthy comparison between the opening of the *Soledades* and the *Naufragios*. "Bleeding Jewel" was the subtitle of Chemris' dissertation, a reference to the aestheticization of pain in the poem.

<sup>11</sup>See especially Zavala, "Turn of the Century" 290 and Beverley, *Literature and Politics* 54-59.

<sup>12</sup>Gutiérrez Girardot 113-18 and Rama, "Prólogo" 24 describe this context.

<sup>13</sup>See Marasso 58 on the heraldic in the sonnet and Ciocchini, Taylor and Nelson on the emblem tradition in Góngora.

<sup>14</sup>See Chemris, *Góngora's Soledades* 48 on Góngora's letter. The difference is that while Góngora anticipates the scientific "disenchantment" of the world, Darío cultivates its post-Cartesian "re-enchantment." See Joshua Landy and Michael Saler's recent anthology of essays on the notion of secular re-enchantment.

<sup>15</sup>"Le Vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui": Stanley Burnshaw provides Henri Peyre's close reading of this classic sonnet.

<sup>16</sup>On Gongorine metalepsis, see Chemris, *Góngora's Soledades* 93.

<sup>17</sup>Marasso 115-17 is most thorough here. He also suggests Darío was building on his contemporary Pierre Louys' story, "Leda."

<sup>18</sup>Here Darío continues the trope of creation as insemination (Van Meter) from the "Palabras liminares" with which he introduced the collection.

<sup>19</sup>The conventional reading is that "la Helena eterna" (a new incarnation of Helen) will be born of the union of Wagner's "cisne" and "la nueva poesía" (Marasso 116, Javier Herrero 44; Herrero 43 notes the association of Helen with the Virgin without drawing the same conclusions as I do). The implication is that Darío's new poetry, following Wagner's lead, will give rise to the rebirth of Hellenic beauty.

<sup>20</sup>Rama, "Prólogo" 36, 38; Gutiérrez Girardot 56; on Darío specifically, Zavala, "Turn of the Century" 294, *Colonialism* 69.

<sup>21</sup>See Amanda Powell and Dianne Dugaw on the notion of a "Sapphic avant-garde" in the early modern; see Zavala, *El rapto* 288-92 and Praz 318-19, 374 on the figure of the lesbian in the Decadent movement.

<sup>22</sup>In Ovid's telling of the tale, Philomela is raped by her sister Procne's husband, Tereus, who then cuts out her tongue to silence her and locks her in a tower in the forest. Philomela reveals the truth of her experience in a tapestry embroidered in red and white, which she has delivered to Procne. Procne and the women of her household rescue Philomela, dressed as Bacchantes on the feast of Bacchus. They then devise a plot of revenge, tearing apart Procne's son Itys, cooking him for dinner, and serving him to his father. Once Tereus has eaten his son's flesh, Philomela enters with Itys' head and his wife confesses the plot. As they flee the enraged Tereus, Procne is changed into a nightingale, Tereus into a hoopoe (with its helmet-like head and lance-like beak) and Philomela is turned into a songless swallow, although traditionally poets have associated Philomela with the nightingale (Powell 300). On the Arachne tapestry, see Chemris, *Góngora's Soledades* 55-57. Interestingly, Darío conflates this myth with a poetic allusion to the "Alegoría" sonnet in "Trébol": "y tu castillo Góngora, se alza al azul cual una / jaula de ruiseñores labrada en oro fino" (274).

<sup>23</sup>Zavala makes a point of Darío's transcending the Romantic "I" to construct a collective consciousness ("Turn of the Century" 303-4).

<sup>24</sup>Dámaso Alonso 542 interprets the "veste oscura" as a reference to "[e]l reciente descalabro colonial."

<sup>25</sup>Here I am summarizing her arguments in “Darío y el rapto de América,” and “Darío y la histerización del discurso modernista,” two chapters in her book *El rapto de América y el síntoma de la modernidad*. See also Beverley’s discussion of “A Colón” and other poems by Darío in *Literature and Politics* 54-59.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Barbara Johnson, “Muteness Envy”: “Once again, an ‘aesthetics of silence’ turns out to involve a male appropriation of female muteness as aesthetic trophy accompanied by an elision of sexual violence” (136).

<sup>27</sup>See Rama, “Prólogo” 9 on this and 44-45 on Darío’s machismo in general.

<sup>28</sup>Sibylle Fischer describes the effect of the international slave trade on the development of Haiti; the American Civil War ended in 1865; see Gutiérrez Girardot 49 on the notion of a U.S. agrarian oligarchy in the south.

<sup>29</sup>“Prefacio” of *Cantos de vida y esperanza* (243); Rama, “Prólogo” 17 remarks on “las teorías europeas de la época, mayormente telúricas o racistas, que condenaban sin remisión a los pueblos mestizos de la América tropical.”

<sup>30</sup>Góngora exoticizes the indigenous in metaphors of the trophies of conquest such as the reference to the Incan queen’s necklace (II. 61-68). Alfonso Callejo (130-31) suggests that Góngora’s praise of the aristocrats’ falconry over the Indian’s simpler bird hunting techniques (II. 775-82) functions as ironic commentary, thus anticipating the discourse of the noble savage. Góngora’s posture is more critical in his “Égloga Piscatoria,” in which the statue América’s veins are bled of its mines’ gold and silver, its marrow sucked dry by “interés ligurino”; like Montaigne, here Góngora locates the cannibals in Europe, in this case in the banks of Spain’s rivals. Regarding Góngora’s ostensible silence on the expulsion of the Moors, see Beverley, *Essays* 28, Chemris, *Góngora’s Soledades* 36 n. 31 and a most recent evocative contribution by Humberto Huergo 26-28; see Fuchs 113-17 on Góngora’s Sacramonte sonnet.

<sup>31</sup>Beverley discusses the notion of impasse in the Hispanic Baroque as well as the parallels between Góngora and “anti-bourgeois bourgeois intellectuals of post 1848 Europe” such as Darío in *Essays* 12, 71, 84, *Una modernidad obsoleta* 25 and *Literature and Politics* 55. See Beverley, *Essays* 58 on the competition of the poets of the petty aristocracy for a place in the imperial state/ecclesiastical hierarchy; Cf. Gutiérrez Girardot 47 on fin du siècle poets being forced onto the market as journalists, diplomats etc.

<sup>32</sup>Beverley, *Una modernidad obsoleta* 25, asks, “¿No sería el barroco una forma de *neurosis* cultural de América Latina en su época—no completada—post-colonial?”; Zavala: see n. 19.

<sup>33</sup>Rama, “Prólogo” 46, characterizes Darío’s *afrancesado* poetry as a swansong of Spanish metrics, much as Góngora closed a period of Italianate reform. Here I am taking advantage of the double meaning of swansong as both announcement and eulogy, to reinforce the notion of impasse as a form of temporal collapse.



<sup>34</sup>In writing this phrase I am struck with the possibilities for reading Borges's story, "Tema del traidor y del heroe," as a backshifted commentary on these passages from Marx and, along with "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quixote*," as a frame for contemplating the modern revival of the Baroque.

<sup>35</sup>As Sanda Munjic aptly remarks, on the parallels between sexual and historical violence, "It is necessary to examine to what extent these two stages—a private sphere sexual fantasy that reproduces as pleasurable the historical violence in the theatre of the bedroom, and a public stage of history that enacts its own, unfeigned violence—operate according to the same rules" (293).

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