

**Sor Juana's *Primero sueño* in the Mirror of Gongora's *Soledades*:  
Utopian Meditations on the Palace, the Lighthouse, and the Play of Signs**

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The transatlantic critic par excellence, Andrés Sánchez Robayna, sets the tone for any discussion of the comparison between the two major poems of the Spanish and colonial Baroque, Luis de Góngora's *Soledades* (1612-26)<sup>1</sup> and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Primero sueño* (1692),<sup>2</sup> arguing that Sor Juana exalted the form of the extended *silva*, pioneered by Góngora,

en un poema que nos obliga a leer, en perspectiva, las *Soledades* como el poema que éste no es. [...] Tal vez no haya mayor *originalidad* que la de aquella obra que nos obliga a releer la tradición. Ningún poema como *Primero sueño* ha influido tanto sobre las *Soledades* (114).

In reaching such a daring conclusion, Sánchez Robayna implies a specular relationship between the two works, and one which allows the afterlife of a poem to inform the reading of its original iteration. I propose to continue his understanding of this specularity, but to recast its intrahistorical direction, drawing instead on more recent criticism of the *Soledades* to reinterpret selected imagery in the *Primero sueño*. In so doing, I will contextualize the comparison of the two poems within newer, historical approaches to the conflicted poetic expression of protest against Iberian colonialism and special oppression.

To conduct an even provisional review of the critical history of the *Primero sueño* is a more than daunting task, especially now that bibliographies of studies of the poem have themselves proliferated as a distinct genre<sup>3</sup>. But as a student of Góngora's *Soledades*, I can at least take sufficient account to offer a brief comparative overview that bears witness to the ways the criticism of the two works engages in a parallel specular relationship, despite acknowledging the obvious contrasts: while the *Soledades* is a utopian meditation<sup>4</sup> set upon the scaffolding of a pilgrim's wandering in a pastoral landscape, the *Primero Sueño* describes instead the dream of the soul while the body of the lyric speaker sleeps, in an explicitly philosophical journey and in a poem whose author is a woman, of the colony, and of a later poetic generation.

The current critical consensus testifies to structural and thematic parallels between the poems and more generally between the corpus of the two writers. Both poems draw on the expanded world of the age of discovery for their imagery, celebrating early modern science and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jammes dates the composition of the *Soledades* in several steps from 1612-1617, with the final 43 verses composed 1614-1626 (Góngora 1994, 20-21). The dates for Luis de Góngora's life are 1561-1627. I am Courtesy Assistant Professor of Spanish.

<sup>2</sup> 1692 refers to the date of first publication; based on previous conjectures, a recent editor, Alberto Pérez-Amador Adam, suspects that the date of composition for Sor Juana's *Sueño* was between 1685-1690 (27). The dates for Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's life are generally accepted as 1651-1695, although some have argued for 1648 as her actual date of birth.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Rosa Perelmuter's many contributions.

<sup>4</sup> In Beverley's words, "Góngora's wager in the *Soledades* is with creating a possible language that could begin to express the human condition as a utopian harmony of being and language, work and community, freedom and order, the human and the natural" (1980, 35). Cf Jean Franco's characterization of *Primero Sueño* as a utopian mediation (38).

New World novelties. If Góngora's poem has been called a *Wunderkammer*, such a cabinet of curiosities populated Sor Juana's cell, what Stephanie Merrim has called her "scene of writing," and became the raw material for her poetry (Merrim 215; Collins 20-21). Both poets, who were actively engaged in broader humanist circles, cultivate semiotic variety in all its forms, in allusions to print, sound and visual cultures, including explorations of perspective and perception.<sup>5</sup> Both poets also engage in the patronage systems of Church and court while maintaining a delicate posture of critique that provoked censure,<sup>6</sup> a dynamic expressed by parallels in their use of transgressive mythological figures, allegorizing their own writing process: the "vuelo atrevido" of Icarus in the *Soledades*, notably pairing with the heroic failure of Phaeton in the *Sueño*.<sup>7</sup> Finally, both poems have spawned various Neobaroque revivals, in concert with similar resurgences occasioned by anniversaries of publication and generational affinities. The contemporary surge of feminist criticism of Sor Juana, with its attention to her intellectual "self-fashioning"<sup>8</sup> against the grain of gender restrictions, presents yet another specular relationship, in the poem's reception during the marked rise of female scholars in the academy in only one generation. Indeed, Sor Juana's gender difference cannot be understated. One indication that Sor Juana's poetry arose out of what Víctor Pueyo has called the "normalization" of Gongorism is the fact that if her new poetry provoked controversy, it was not for the features which had made Góngora's work so shocking, such as violations of the conventions of genre, use of obscure neologism, or Latin syntax, but because she transgressed the role of a female religious in producing secular art.<sup>9</sup>

The path of Sor Juana from Góngora's model has been conceived in more formal terms, with cases of "echoes" of Góngora catalogued by Eunice Joiner Gates and Alfonso Méndez Plancarte (Sabat de Rivers 18). The genealogy of the extended *silva* has been considered in this trajectory, as it has been viewed as a new genre which allowed greater freedom of expression on the road to a modern lyric subjectivity (Ly; Montero Delgado and Ruiz Pérez). Yet I am also drawn to the argument for a broader perspective, in keeping with the greater contextualization provided by the

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<sup>5</sup> Emilie Bergmann's interventions on these topics are foundational; see, for example 2013b or 2013a, in which she points to the *Sueño*'s "metaliterary references to systems of signs: words, diagrams, and musical notes" (149). Betty Sasaki evokes this semiotic variety in Góngora's poem by calling the *Soledades* a "sea of signs." Similarly, Enrica Cancelliere catalogues Góngora's "stereotipie iconiche," while Dario Puccini extols Sor Juana's "immaginazione iconica" in parallel critical contributions. Lastly, although music has been an acknowledged "frame" for Sor Juana for some time (Arenal 1991, 126), we now know Góngora was a musician, as musical compositions were found interspersed with some of his poetry manuscripts, and have since been performed by the group Cinco siglos.

<sup>6</sup> Given the risks of criticism during the age of the Inquisition, Electa Arenal underscores the symbolic role of darkness in the *Sueño* as protective cover for mediations which might be deemed heretical, and both poets employed parallel "coding" for readerships trained to decipher their meaning; see Sasaki (163, 157), Grossi (146) and Arenal 1991 (132). Stephanie Kirk discusses pain as a feature of Sor Juana's writing, while Aída Beupied and others discuss her strategic muteness. These are also features of Góngora's work. In his "Soledad sonnet," Góngora compares his poem to a bird retreating to the woods, implicitly analogous to the softly moaning mythological figure Philomena, while pain, especially parental grief, is a current in the *Soledades*; see Rivers 1992a, Chemris 2016, 2008 (51-71), Beverley (1980, 79, 87) and Dana Bultmann.

<sup>7</sup> On transgressive mythological figures and allegorizing of the writing process in the *Soledades*: Beverley (1980, 87); in the *Sueño*: Arenal 1991 (127-29), Bergmann (1990, 160), Jean Franco (38), Verónica Grossi (29-46, 143) and Nicolás Vivalda, among others. On failure in the *Sueño*, see Merrim (235) and Findlen 2004b (353).

<sup>8</sup> This is the topic of Frederick Luciani's study; the term is Stephen Greenblatt's.

<sup>9</sup> As Bergmann writes, "Having chosen religious life as a setting for intellectual work, she found that the church objected to her studies in natural science, the secular area of speculative philosophy that could not be controlled by theological doctrine and would eventually challenge it openly" (1990, 155). There are many studies of Sor Juana's struggles as an intellectual; see for example, Merrim and Kirk.

studies of Mercedes Blanco and John Beverley, one which takes into account the *silva*'s association with the dark woods, enigma, and the hermetic, departing from Maurice Molho's dyad of *silva* and *selva* (40-63).<sup>10</sup>

One of Mercedes Blanco's most original contributions is her discovery of a previously unknown source text for Góngora's *Soledades*, and one with a strong link to the hermetic tradition. She ties Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499) to Góngora's use of hermetic Egyptian imagery in a recurring paradigm she calls "el verde obelisco" which populates the poem, related to the pyramid as a shape, to the motif of urban architecture in a pastoral setting, and to the theme of frustrated courtly ambition (2012a, 393-461). She notes that Colonna's text was published in Córdoba and was brought by a Cordovan humanist to Salamanca, where Góngora studied at the university amid *bas reliefs* sculpted from designs from the book's engravings. Adding to this her observation that Giambattista Marino incorporated elements of the book, she argues that it is quite plausible Góngora knew the work (451, 458).

Blanco points to thematic and linguistic correspondences with the *Soledades*. Colonna's text narrates the dream of one Poliphilo; asleep at dawn, he dreams of a pilgrimage, a mysterious initiation, a tour of an imaginary territory of gardens and monuments, replete with symbolic images, all in search for union with his beloved, named Polia (450). Here the plot of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* loosely parallels the wanderings of Góngora's lovesick *peregrino*. The text similarly evinces many notable correspondences in its experimental ambitions; in Blanco's words, these include, "una renovación de la lengua," "la creación casi *ex nihilo* de una lengua docta," "vocablos extranjeros," "transliteraciones de palabras griegas," and some unusual morphology and syntax (451-52). Thus, Colonna's enigmatic language as well as his hermetic plot, culled from Apuleius,<sup>11</sup> lend themselves to the arcane purposes of Góngora, who, in Blanco's words, marked the entrance into the world of the *Soledades* with "el obelisco verde" to signal "un mundo para los iniciados en su idioma" (460).<sup>12</sup> In such an appropriation of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, Blanco observes a resurgence of *fin de siècle* Quattrocento humanist hermeticism in Góngora, in a precocious anticipation of Sor Juana's engagement with Athanasius Kircher and of later utopian and aesthetic currents (460-61). Indeed, the book is revived in future

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<sup>10</sup> Beverley argues that "a *soledad* might be defined as an epico-lyrical narrative in verse, dealing with the theme of exile or pilgrimage and set in the wilderness or countryside. It is related to the prose *selva*, derived from imitations of Byzantine romance, which replaces pastoral and chivalric fiction in popular taste by the end of the sixteenth century. Pedro Espinosa was writing *soledades* in this sense before and after Góngora's poem. One could follow the development of the genre by studying the imitative works spawned by the *Soledades*: for example, Polo de Medina's parodic *Ocios de la soledad* (1633), Fonseca Soares's *Soledades* (c. 1650), Soto de Rojas's Andalusian *El paraíso* (1652), Salazar y Torres's *Soledad a imitación de Góngora* (1690), Sor Juana's *Primero sueño*, and León y Mansilla's *Soledad tercera* (1718)" (1980, 123, n. 8; see also 36-37, 43). On the *silva*, see also Rivers 1992b (91-108), Sánchez Robayna, Chemris 2008 (27-28, 49-50), Bergmann (2023).

<sup>11</sup> In Joscelyn Godwin's introduction to his contemporary translation of the text, *The Strife of Love in a Dream*, he cites Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass* as Colonna's primary source text (x) and summarizes the two books of the latter's work (xii-xiii).

<sup>12</sup> Godwin suggests how Colonna's language, with its singular neologisms, might be rendered literally in English, here in his description of the Fury: "In this horrid and cuspidinous littoral and most miserable site of the algent and fetorific lake stood saevius Tisiphone, efferal and cruel with her viperine capillament, her meschine and miserable soul, implacably furibund" (x-xi). Here, any reader in English translation of Góngora—or for that matter, of Lezama Lima's Gongorine prose—would feel right at home.

*avant-garde* projects, most notably by Aubrey Beardsley, whose drawings bear an uncanny resemblance to Colonna's woodcuts (Godwin xvi).<sup>13</sup>

Giorgio Agamben, in his classic volume on poetics, views the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* as a site of renegotiation of the relationship between the vernacular and Latin.<sup>14</sup> He argues that Polia in Greek means "the old woman" and can thus be considered an allegory for Antiquity, with Poliphilo in turn read as a "figure for the love of Latin" (47, 49). Medieval thought consigned Latin to the "perpetual and incorruptible" as a "language of knowledge," while the vernacular was intended for the "primordial and immediate experience of speech" as the "language of love" (53-54). For Agamben, then, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* marks the turning point in which Latin becomes historicized as a dead language, staging the relationship between Latin and the vernacular as "an amorous fight," in which the love between Polia and Poliphilo becomes a figure for the pure self-referentiality of language" (55, 59-60). Polia thus signifies "a dreamt language, the dream of an unknown and absolutely novel language whose existence lies in its textual reality alone" (60). Here Colonna anticipates Mallarmé's vision of the pure form of the poetic word,<sup>15</sup> and in a more immediate sense conflates the radical, utopian exploration of language with the erotic quest of Romance, in a way very much evocative of the *Soledades*. Colonna's work thus becomes yet one more contribution to Góngora's anthologizing, in fragmentary form, of a compendium of Renaissance and classical sources, which Beverley has identified (1980, 34, 43, 61, 105).

Blanco's paradigm of "el obelisco verde" recurs in Sor Juana's *Primero sueño* as a pyramid, continuing Góngora's engagement with hermeticism as she predicted, within the program of the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680). As Paula Findlen writes,

The world that Sor Juana presented her readers was an edifice built by Kircher. Its tallest natural monuments were his volcanoes; its tallest human monuments were the Egyptian pyramids and "that blasphemous, arrogant Tower" he had written of in his *Turris Babel* (*Tower of Babel*) (1679). It was a universe with a Kircherian geometry, illuminated by his optics within the perfection of a circle that contained "the sublime pyramid of the mind." (2004b, 354).

Bryce Maxey asserts that the engraved frontispiece of Kircher's *Ars magna lucis et umbrae* portrays a collection of images which populate Sor Juana's poem: the "linterna mágica," the "cámara obscura," and the convex mirror reflecting divine light, and that the book's cover depicts the intersecting pyramids of the *Sueño*'s opening lines (325, 324). Such a proliferation of similar images leads Paul B. Dixon to consider the poem a pyramid writ large in its structure of aspiration and "chiasmic return," echoed recursively in "quasi-pyramidal" figures (564). Sor Juana's pyramid could thus meet Blanco's definition of a paradigm as modeled by Góngora, a particular "agrupación de términos" in a "microsistema léxico" whose repeated use acquires

<sup>13</sup> The ambience of pagan eroticism in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* would accord not only with Beardsley but with that of Góngora's *Soledades*; see, for example, Armas. It also evokes the erotic pastoral of Rubén Darío and his circle (eg Pierre Louÿs). Sor Juana's eroticism is of necessity more cautious; see Bergmann on her representation of the rose in *Primero sueño* (1990, 162-63).

<sup>14</sup> Blanco mentions Agamben's essay briefly, noting, "Un hermoso ensayo de Giorgio Agamben sobre la dialéctica entre el latín y el vulgar, y la oposición entre lengua viva y lengua muerta desde Dante a Speroni (*Diálogo de las lenguas*, 1546), pone de relieve la lengua del Polifilo y el efecto de extrañamiento que produce," acknowledging a parallel, if different, effect of estrangement or defamiliarization in Góngora's poetic language (452).

<sup>15</sup> See Agamben (46).

attributes of a poetic language (2012a 307).<sup>16</sup> It also suggests a special subset of paradigm in the repetition of a specific shape. Emilie Bergmann's signaling of the related chiasmic structures of the intersecting pyramids and the projection lines of the "cámara obscura," "retina-like convex mirror of the ancient port of Alexandria" and "linterna mágica" points to variations upon the same sign, shown in different rotations (2013a). The relationship of these signs to the structure of the poem as a whole suggests the same "self-miniaturization" Beverley has observed in the *Soledades* (1980, 37) and as Bergmann points out, Verónica Grossi's sense of Sor Juana's poem as a *mise en abîme* (2013b, 123, citing Grossi 42).

Sor Juana's pyramids are understood to have drawn on Kircher's theory from his work, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* [*Egyptian Oedipus*, 1652-54] of "an Egyptian origin for ancient Mexico" (Merrim 162).<sup>17</sup> As Findlen writes,

The *Oedipus* traced the fate of hieroglyphic wisdom in virtually every known society.... Kircher helped his readers to see the commonalities within the overwhelming diversity of languages, faiths and cultures. He underscored the universality of Christianity, not only by upholding the argument—already discredited by Isaac Casaubon at the beginning of the century—that the Hermetic Corpus anticipated the truth of Christianity, but by finding analogous evidence of Christianity in far-flung parts of the world (2004a, 31)

Thus, Sor Juana's incorporation of the pyramid as a prominent image, a repeated paradigm, becomes a syncretic gesture, and as Merrim suggests, this syncretism common to Baroque creole texts interacts in a conflicted manner with a broader "historiographic syncretism" which, in turn, lends itself to "protonationalist projects" (160).

In such protonationalism, which Merrim associates most pointedly with José Sigüenza y Góngora's *Teatro de virtudes* (1680), but also with Sor Juana,<sup>18</sup> Mexican culture is validated by its connection to the original ancient theology of Egypt, the *prisca theologia*, theorized by "tenuous genealogies of the New World" based on imaginative historiographies which combine "biblical, classical, mythological and historical sources" (161). Merrim thus posits that creole Baroque culture "manages plurality" by engaging with "the historiographic syncretism that originated in the Old World" (150). It is precisely an "Old World," earlier version of historiographic syncretism which constituted the milieu in which Luis de Góngora operated. Therefore, we might well consider the parallels between Sor Juana and Góngora using the optic of historiographic syncretism, applying Stephanie Merrim's theoretical framework more broadly within a transatlantic and transtemporal scope.

### Parallel Humanist Circles

Blanco's observation of a Baroque resurgence of Quattrocento Humanism in Góngora is paralleled by a similar claim by the historian and anthropologist Carmen Bernand in her studies of Inca Garcilaso and his Cordovan humanist circle, which included Góngora (2011). If the Quattrocento philosopher Marsilio Ficino and his successors (Pico, Bruno and Campanella) used

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<sup>16</sup> The notion of "paradigm" was developed by Román Jakobson.

<sup>17</sup> The dates and translation are Merrim's (162).

<sup>18</sup> Merrim (176-82, 225). Merrim also points to Rafael Catalá's book regarding Sor Juana's suggestion of Mexican syncretic imagery, in the indigenous and classical symbolism of the eagle and in the iconography of the Virgin of Guadalupe (225). See also Arenal 1991 (131, 137).

hermeticism to create a vision of unity in a time of religious intolerance, hermeticism had a similar appeal for critically-minded writers and thinkers of the era of the Counterreformation. In Bernand's view, Góngora's circle was immersed in the world of antiquarians, Escorial librarians and translators associated with the vindication of confessional and colonial minorities: the judeoconversos, the Moriscos, and in the case of Inca Garcilaso, the mestizos and indigenous (2011).

Such vindication was implicated in the rise of the so-called "falso cronicón," a European version of syncretic historiography, exemplified by the Italian Dominican Annius of Viterbo's late 15<sup>th</sup> century invention of a chronicle allegedly written by the historical figure Berosus of Chaldea (García Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano 198; Bernand 2011, 5). This false history presented a pseudo-genealogy for Spain's Catholic kings, tracing "their royal line back to Egyptian Hercules, son of Osiris and grandson of Noah" (García Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano 198). Such "Egyptomania," the religious studies historians Mercedes García Arenal and Fernando Rodríguez Mediano argue, joined "the modern West directly to the Biblical East" and opened the door to patriotic competition in which "[e]very country, every city felt the need to provide itself with a national history that would match or outdo the ancient histories of Greece and Rome" (198). Here, we see a phenomenon which is indeed similar to the creole cultural nationalism Merrim described.

García Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano signal the confluence of invented histories for confessional minorities in Spanish cities, who sought validation under the cover of this wave of national and religious affirmation in an appeal to the Biblical East, if not specifically to Egypt. These included Jerónimo Román de la Higuera's false chronicle which allegedly "'proved' that there were Jews in Toledo before the death of Christ, thus exonerating them of the crime of 'deicide'" in the context of the *limpieza de sangre* statutes (202). Góngora's friend Pablo de Céspedes made similar claims for the Jews of Córdoba, alleging that the city was founded by sons of Noah (219; Bernand 2011, 15). He thus tied Jewish sacred architecture, specifically the Temple of Solomon, to the Cathedral of Córdoba, part of a larger project placing Spanish "sacred imperialism" on Jewish foundations (Rubio Lapaz 166).

Indeed, Solomism, a staple in both the hermetic tradition and later utopian visions, plays a key role in the validation of Iberian confessional minorities. Kevin Ingram has identified the figure of Solomon and the Old Testament decorative program for Philip II's Escorial basilica and library with the integrationist project of Christian Hebraists such as Arias Montano and Juan Bautista Villalpando (137-46). In a similar vein, Carmen Bernand associates Inca Garcilaso with "la moda salomónica" in his use of the features of Solomon's Temple to describe Coricancha, the Inca temple of the sun, in the *Comentarios reales*, and notes that he decorated his burial chapel with a painting linking Solomon's Temple, Coricancha and the mosque-cathedral of Córdoba (2006, 275, 279; 2011, 15). Finally, the "Lead Books," fabricated archeological finds held to be evidence for an early Arab Christianity in the hills of Granada, thereby vindicating the Christian heritage of the Moriscos, begin with magical "Solomonic" letters, evocative of hermeticism and talismans (García Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano 176-2; Ingram 146).

We can observe a continuity with Góngora's humanist circle in Sor Juana's appropriation of Solomism out of her own intellectual milieu, and, strikingly, to validate a legacy of female wisdom and being.<sup>19</sup> The converging and overlapping pyramids of the opening of the *Sueño*

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<sup>19</sup> On such a legacy, see Merrim (187). Electa Arenal points to Juana's "matristics," a term she borrows from the Norwegian theologian Kari Elisabeth Børreson, in her description of "a genealogy of female leadership" and knowledge in the *Neptuno alegórico* (2000, 181, 183), and Antonio Cortijo continues this exploration in his study.

form, momentarily, Solomon's Seal—a figure which she references in her writings<sup>20</sup>—, as if to bless the opening of the poem with a magical talisman, or even as a theatrical opening curtain to mark the rise of the female soul in its freedom with the fall of night. Electa Arenal, drawing upon Sor Juana's imagery across her corpus, identifies the two pyramids as Juana's Mexican pyramid intersecting that of St. Catherine's Egypt, establishing a syncretic genealogy and tradition of female knowledge (1991, 131). The opening also initiates the architectural structure of the poem, which Patricia Saldarriaga has identified as the female body cast as temple, citing Sor Juana's notable parallels with the treatise on Solomon's Temple of Juan Bautista Villalpando, the Christian Hebraist connected to Góngora's humanist circle and disciple of the builder of the Escorial, Juan de Herrera (29; 23-52).

### The Palace, the Lighthouse and the Play of Signs

In key passages of the *Soledades*, a poem which Betty Sasaki has notably called a “sea of signs,” Góngora evinces the same early modern anthropological curiosity before the diversity of human experience, in an earlier moment of Iberian exploration and colonization, that one sees in Sor Juana's application of the studies of Athanasius Kircher. Góngora's humanist mentor, Pedro de Valencia, corresponded with Pablo de Céspedes on ideograms and the origins of language, a fascination replicated in the representation of birds in flight in the *Soledades* as Greek letters in the sky (I. 602-11) and echoed, as Alfonso Méndez Plancarte points out, in Juana's own original contribution in the *Sueño* (vv. 943-49).<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Góngora incorporates frontispiece imagery and hieroglyphs in a way that parallels these structures in Sor Juana,<sup>22</sup> but importantly, as is to be expected, within his own historical and political context. He also draws on the imagery of hermeticism in ways that will highlight the historical ruptures and continuities between the two poets.

Building upon Sasaki's thesis that Góngora cautiously inserted political arguments into his poetry which were designed to interpellate a body of readers attuned to interpret his coded and fragmentary literary and cultural references, I have argued that the *Soledades* express a camouflaged protest against the expulsion of the Moriscos, with a special focus on the topic of parental grief, as the expulsion could include the separation of children from their parents (Chemris 2016). In expressing such a protest, Góngora appealed to his patrons in the Andalusian agrarian aristocracy—in particular, the House of Medina Sidonia—who valued the labor of their Morisco vassals, and to Pedro de Valencia, who had written a major treatise opposing the expulsion. He also appealed to those who opposed a more militant Iberian colonialism which promoted imperial expansion overseas, with its quest for precious metals, at the expense of the homefront and the development of agriculture.<sup>23</sup> These political concerns are expressed in Góngora's play of signs, in his use of the frontispiece and the hieroglyph.

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Both critics stand out for their command of Sor Juana's difficult Neolatin circumstantial production. On Sor Juana's erudition in Latin, see, for example, Cortijo (180-83).

<sup>20</sup> Cruz IV, 459, l. 794.

<sup>21</sup> On Valencia's correspondence, see García Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano (374-76). For Méndez Plancarte's notes on the passage, see Cruz I, 603, v. 949.

<sup>22</sup> In her appendix, Marie Cécile Bénassy-Berling reproduces the Mexican hieroglyphs from Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652-1654), as an important source for Sor Juana.

<sup>23</sup> There is a long critical history on the “discurso contra navegaciones” in the *Soledades*. See Sasaki and Blanco, 2012b (299-331) for key contributions.

Like Inca Garcilaso, who opened the *Comentarios reales* affirming “se podrá afirmar que no hay más que un mundo” (Bk. 1, Ch. 1), Góngora envisions world unity, albeit obliquely, in his depiction of the massive, singular ocean divided by the Isthmus of Panama:

el istmo que al Océano divide,  
y, sierpe de cristal, juntar le impide  
la cabeza, del Norte coronada,  
con la que ilustra el Sur cola escamada  
de antárticas estrellas. (*Soledades* I. 425-29)

Mercedes Blanco has teased out Góngora's play with a number of classical and cartographic sources in this passage, the most important of which are the Homeric “river-ocean” and Horapollus's first entries in his *Hieroglyphica*, a key text of the hermetic canon, the *ouroboros*, the snake biting his tale, representing the world or the universe (2012b, 353-60). Yet Góngora's sources may also include Andean iconography. I have suggested that Góngora might be reworking images from the heraldic shield Inca Garcilaso used in a frontispiece to introduce his *Comentarios reales*, analyzed in elegant detail by Christian Fernández (Chemris 2021a, 42).

Fernández notes the use of the crowned *amaru* (serpent) as an Inca royal symbol; he argues that Inca Garcilaso combined this image with a figure of European hermeticism, Mercury's *caduceus*, his staff of intertwined snakes, both as protective cover for a risky display of a banned Inca icon and for its own symbolic suggestion of prudent speech, with the intention of interpellating, cautiously, an Andean audience (96-127). Góngora's image obliquely suggests both features of Inca Garcilaso's heraldic figure. It hints at the crowned *amaru* by its reference to “sierpe...coronada” which is also, by inference, “sierpe antártica,” while simultaneously employing the cover of European hermeticism in its emphasis on the *ouroboros* figure. While this appropriation by Góngora is subtle, it does point to a sympathetic incorporation of a symbol of Inca Garcilaso's work, which notably contains, in a long, interpolated section of Book V, chapters 1-16, an implicit critique of contemporary Spanish reform projects, consistently offering the counterexample of Inca practice to the ills of Spanish empire. In this sense Inca Garcilaso not only appealed to the *arbitrista* spirit of Pedro de Valencia (who granted the aprobación for the second part of his work), as Bernand has argued; he outdid it (2006, 286).

Thus, just as Cervantes incorporated the catechizing form of the *lienzo* painting in the *Persiles*, itself based on indigenous communication practices, as Elizabeth Bearden has demonstrated, Góngora also creatively incorporates indigenous signs into his work. Another case would be his use of the paradigm of a ring of water surrounding a hill in his *Las firmezas de Isabela*, what Mercedes Blanco has termed a hieroglyph for the city of Toledo in the play (2012a, 264-86). I have noted that the figure is reminiscent of an indigenous city glyph and Javier Irigoyen García has observed that the figure at one point also becomes a turban, evoking the recently expelled Moriscos and reinforcing the dialogue among the Christian cast of characters staging their foundational hybrid identity (Chemris 2021a; Irigoyen García 386). The fact that the turban is superimposed upon the form of what might be construed as an indigenous city glyph illustrates, quite literally, Carmen Bernand's contention that Góngora's humanist circle read Spain's history through the prism of the conquest (2011, 20). It also represents Pedro de Valencia's claims about the indigenous nature of the Moriscos as original Spaniards: “son españoles como los demás que habitan en España, pues ha casi novecientos años, que nacen y se crían en ella” (81). Here we see another parallel with Sor Juana; Electa Arenal, after painstaking

research in emblem collections, draws the conclusion that two of Juana's hieroglyphic images in the *Neptuno alegórico* are invented and original (2000, 180-81).

A final case illustrates how Góngora and Sor Juana appropriate a common hermetic image in different historical contexts, in the parallels between the marble palace in the second *Soledad* (I, 691-705) and the figure of the Lighthouse of Alexandria in the *Sueño* (vv. 266-291). The marble palace has been generally understood as referencing the Medina Sidonia estate at Huelva from which the aristocratic troupe departs in procession at the start of the poem's falconry scene<sup>24</sup>:

en la cumbre modesta  
de una desigualdad del horizonte,  
que deja de ser monte  
por ser culta floresta  
antiguo descubrieron blanco muro,  
por sus piedras no menos  
que por su edad majestuosa cano;  
mármol, al fin, tan por lo pario puro,  
que al peregrino sus ocultos senos  
negar pudiera en vano.  
Cuantas del Océano  
el Sol trenzas desata  
contaba en los rayados capiteles,  
que, espejos (aunque esféricos) fieles  
bruñidos eran óvalos de plata. (*Soledades* II. 691-705)

The Lighthouse of Alexandria, a staple of the hermetic corpus, portrayed approaching ships in its mirror and becomes a metaphor in the *Sueño* for the mind's imagination, as a vehicle for fantasy to reproduce the imagery of the dream<sup>25</sup>:

Y del modo  
que en tersa superficie, que de Faro  
cristalina portento, asilo raro  
fué, en distancia longísima se vían  
(sin que ésta le estorbase)  
del reino casi de Neptuno todo  
las que distantes lo surcaban naves  
—viéndose claramente  
en su azogada luna  
el número, el tamaño y la fortuna  
que en la instable campaña transparente  
arregadas tenían,  
mientras aguas y vientos dividían  
sus velas leves y sus quillas graves—:  
así ella, sosegada, iba copiando  
las imágenes todas de las cosas,

<sup>24</sup> Beverley 1980 (108-9), Ponce Cárdenas.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Castellví Laukamp (133-51).

y el pincel invisible iba formando  
 de mentales, sin luz, siempre vistosas  
 colores, las figuras  
 no sólo ya de todas las criaturas  
 sublunares, mas aun también de aquéllas  
 que intelectuales claras son Estrellas,  
 y el modo posible  
 que concebirse puede lo invisible,  
 en sí, mañosa, las representaba  
 y al alma las mostraba. (342, vv. 266-91)

Both figures have been understood as hermetic archetypes and allegories of their respective poems as a whole. In John Beverley's words, the marble castle represents "hermetic artifice," and is "a symbol of the poem itself as an enigmatic object" (1980, 88, 108). Juana's lighthouse, in turn, engages in a "mirror painting" which Luis Castellví Laukamp calls a "*sui generis* talisman," embodying "Benjamin's notion of [...] the isolated, self-contained work that contains an image of the world" (150-51).

The list of hermetic sources Beverley and Castellví Laukamp mention also serves to unite these two poetic images. Beverley links the castle's "mirroring in its silver capitals" to "Campanella's design of the capital of the city of the sun" and to Góngora's sonnet on the Escorial, an edifice, he notes, which the art historian Franzsepp Würtenberger called "an architectural utopia."<sup>26</sup> Castellví Laukamp ties the hermetic imagery of Juana's lighthouse to Kircher's citations of Marsilio Ficino's *Corpus hermeticum*, to the *Picatrix*, to Campanella's *Città del Sole* (1623), and to Juana's own writing about the sacred architecture of Solomon's Temple in her *Respuesta* (142-50).

While these two figures may be linked as parallel images of a hermetic monument, the historical context of Góngora's figure marks their difference. In ways that would have unlikely been known to Sor Juana, the Escorial functioned as a political symbol in Góngora's earlier humanist milieu, for the squandering of resources in royal and ecclesiastical ostentation, first before the plight of the poor and then before that of the Moriscos.

The dukes of Medina Sidonia and Pedro de Valencia were both known to have had links to Lucrecia de León's prophetist confraternity, the Santa Cruz de la Restauración (Kagan 109, 127; Magnier 80, n. 136). In 1588, shortly before the proposed time of composition of Góngora's Escorial sonnet,<sup>27</sup> Lucrecia de León echoed peasant protests in her visionary critique of Habsburg pretensions, in dreams which criticized Felipe II for building the Escorial while oppressing the poor through taxation and selling off common land (Kagan 74, 81, 105). The sonnet was postdated to 1609, the year of the first proclamation of the Morisco expulsion, during the Chacón compilation of Góngora's corpus in the early 1620s.<sup>28</sup> This curiously anachronistic gesture may have been a kind of *vaticinium post eventum* (prophecy after the fact), designed to critique the measure retrospectively, at a time when the new favorite, Olivares, was anxious to undo the damage to the economy caused by the expulsion.<sup>29</sup> Such postdating would sharpen the

<sup>26</sup> 1980 (108); 1972 (220 and 220 n. 10, citing Würtenberger 147).

<sup>27</sup> See Antonio Carreira's notes to the sonnet in Góngora 2009 (156).

<sup>28</sup> On the "postdating" as an intentional gesture, see Chemris 2021b.

<sup>29</sup> On Olivares and the expulsion, see Dadson (193).

critique of the vanity of religious ostentation and regal excess which Luján and Waissbein have observed in the sonnet they characterize as a false *loa*.

The Escorial remained a figure of contrast in political and spiritual will into the expulsion debate. The anonymous document of the controversy, the “Discurso antiguo en materia de Moriscos,” compares the effort required to successfully evangelize the Moriscos to that which was employed to construct the Escorial, while using the practice of falconry as a symbol for the dedicated training required for their catechization. The *discurso* also elaborates what the Argentine historian Constanza Cavallero has called the *topos de Indias*, the critique of evangelizing in distant realms while rejecting the task at home, an argument also made by Pedro de Valencia. The topics of the document in their aggregate could inform the *Soledades* in its camouflaged critique of the Morisco expulsion.

The falconry scene of the *Soledades* begins with an episode of a *doral* or kingbird being flushed from the coastal reeds, using vocabulary charged with nationalistic and ecclesiastical connotations (Huergo 27). The Duke of Medina Sidonia had protested the Morisco expulsion and in particular its associated separation of families (Dadson 130). He and his son, the Conde de Niebla portrayed in the poem, patrolled the coastline in their hereditary duties. In this capacity the duke defied king’s orders and allowed Moriscos who landed on the shore to return (Álvarez de Toledo 92). Thus, the deceptively light episode of the expulsion of the kingbird recalls the protests and actions of Góngora’s patrons, while the theme of parental grief, evident in the *serrano*’s lament of a son lost at sea in his narrative of Iberian voyages of imperial expansion, is reinforced by imagery of Ceres’ s loss of a child in Góngora’s noted fragmentary incorporation of Claudian’s poem, *De raptu Proserpinae*, which I read as pointing symbolically to the tragedy of Morisco families torn apart. In this context, the mirroring capitals of the palace with which the hawking scene opens can also be construed, within the symbolic program of the anonymous *discurso*, as the Escorial, in its representation of the monumental effort required to catechize the Moriscos rather than expel them.

The association of falconry imagery with the debate over the fate of the Moriscos is also highlighted in a sermon given by Fray Hortensio Félix Paravicino, Góngora’s friend and fellow poet, on the occasion of the dedication of the collegiate church funded by the Duke of Lerma in October 1617. As Blanco points out, Góngora is known to have attended the celebrations marking the event, during which, as Jammes suspects, he may well have delivered his *Panegírico al duque de Lerma* (1617) to his patron (2012c, 53, n.50; Jammes 241). Paravicino’s sermon followed the prescribed liturgy of the Roman missal for church dedications, Luke 19: 1-10, which describes how a rich tax collector named Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus preach (2012c, 54). Seeing him in the tree, Jesus commanded him, “Make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Luke 19:5). Zacchaeus quickly descended, gave Jesus lodging and committed to charity. Thus, his story honors the building of a church—giving Christ a home—as a charitable and redemptive act.

This parable might have been considered in light of the fact that Lerma and his son, the Duke of Uceda, his daughter, the Countess of Lemos, and Lemos himself, all received extravagant shares of the confiscation profits from the expulsion (Lea 373), a source for the lavish donation of the church and Lerma’s outrageously ostentatious building program for the town.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, as Paravicino remarks in his sermon, addressing Zaccheus’s donation of his

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<sup>30</sup> Patrick Williams describes how the duke moved seventy cartloads of possessions to Lerma from Madrid to furnish his new buildings, which also included a large palace and the convent of San Blas: “Each cartload required five

goods to the poor and restitution to those he defrauded, “no tiene gracia la liberalidad quando persevera la injuria: que Dios no quiere despojos ajenos, sino dones propios” and continuing, “Y mucho murmurar de los Estrangeros si creen la inmortalidad, y vivir nosotros como quien no la cree” (136). I suggest that here Paravicino critiques, implicitly, Lerma’s role in promulgating the Morisco expulsion from which he amassed “despojos ajenos,” and expresses sympathies towards “Extrangeros,” thereby demonstrating the relative tolerance of Góngora, Valencia, and their circle.

Most relevant to our purposes, as both Francis Cerdan and Blanco point out, Paravicino’s sermon glosses the Latin bible verse on Zacchaeus’s descent with a hawking scene of its own, evincing many parallels with the recently circulated second *Soledad* with Góngora’s new addition of the falconry episode (Cerdan 273; Blanco 2012c, 58, n. 58). As for Cerdan, for Blanco, the sermon was a touchstone for courtly concerns of the moment, intersecting “un hervidero de críticas del gobierno.” (Blanco 2012c, 57; Cerdan 263, 269; see also Williams 321). If the sermon was a plea to the courtly congregation to surrender their souls to Christ, in the context of Lerma’s role in enacting the expulsion, it might also have resonated among the congregants as a parable of conversion on a national scale, underscoring the failure to evangelize the Moriscos.

If Lerma’s church was built from his lavish shares of profits from the confiscation of Morisco property in their expulsion, the duke also drew on the wealth of a “parallel colonialism” (to use Mercedes García Arenal’s term) in the Americas. This fact did not escape Góngora, who introduced the topic into his *Panegírico* to Lerma:

Desatadas la América sus venas  
De uno ostentó y otro metal puro.  
¿Qué mucho, si pisando el campo verde  
plata calzó el caballo que oro muerde? (392, vv.301-304)

As Joaquín Roses observes, Góngora also uses this image of America being bled of its gold and silver in his “Égloga piscatoria” on the tomb of the Duke of Medina Sidonia (1615) and in his “Nenias” on the death of Felipe III (1621).<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Sor Juana repeats the trope in her “Romance a la Duquesa de Aveiro.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, while Góngora and Sor Juana may diverge in their symbolic use of the figure of a hermetic edifice, a function of their different historical contexts, they converge in this case in their representation of different moments of Iberian colonialism in the Americas. This brings us to a final consideration, that of placing, briefly, our comparison of the two poems within a broader ideological framework.

### Parallel Colonialisms and Avant-Garde Hegemony

At first blush, Góngora and Sor Juana appear parallel in their heterodoxy. Both evince the same cautious irreverence in their defensiveness before the threat of censure. As Góngora writes, “que si mi poesía no ha sido tan espiritual como debiera, que mi poca Theología me disculpa, pues es tan poca, que he tenido por mejor ser condenado por liviano que por hereje,” while Sor

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mules to pull it; the value of the silver alone was reputedly some 800,000 ducats” (319). These three paragraphs on Paravicino’s sermon reprise material from Chemris 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Roses credits Dámaso Alonso for noting the parallel in the last case (364, citing Alonso).

<sup>32</sup> Méndez Plancarte cites the parallel in his notes to the *romance* (Cruz I, 412, vv. 93-6).

Juana proclaims, “una herejía contra el arte no la castiga el Santo Oficio, sino los discretos con risa y los críticos con censura” (Rivers 1965, 275). Similarly, both make parallel complaints regarding the requirements of patronage, which, in Jean Franco’s analysis, mitigated against anything resembling the expression of a modern authorial subjectivity; in Góngora’s case, it is metaphorical: “que aun de seda no hay vínculo süave” (*Soledades* II, 808) while in Sor Juana’s case it is quite explicit: “nunca el beneficiado puede tener el mérito de obrar libre” (IV, 386, as cited by Merrim 185). Both are parallel outsiders. Góngora is now proven to have had judeoconverso origins, including ancestors burned by the Inquisition, and may have also been illegitimate,<sup>33</sup> like Sor Juana. Finally, both Góngora and Sor Juana parallel in their ecumenism in the way they engage the problem of colonized and specially oppressed peoples.

Jean Franco writes of Sor Juana that “[s]he was uneasy about black peonage, and poems written in Nahuatl suggest a respect for indigenous culture that others did not share. Her sets of religious *villancicos*, many written in the various dialects of Mexico, suggest her ideal view of Empire as a prefiguration of the city of God in which all races would find a place” (51). Ecumenism had a dual aspect; on the one hand, it gathers the enslaved, the indigenous, and the Moriscos into a common Christian community, linked in Góngora’s Spain to the rise of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which countered the belief in the notion of *limpieza de sangre* (Pereda). On the other hand, Jesuit ecumenism refined global catechization into a more effective evangelization and consolidation of empire, employing native languages and a more culturally attuned approach. We might consider, in this regard, the figure of Ignacio de las Casas, the Morisco priest whose command of Arabic allowed him to better expose the crypto-Islamic project of Miguel de Luna, one of the reputed authors of the Lead Books, or the figure of Alonso de Sandoval, who ministered to the African enslaved while never opposing slavery.<sup>34</sup>

Góngora and Sor Juana’s approach to the Corpus Christi festival is illustrative of the complexities of their ecumenism. As Nicholas R. Jones has demonstrated, Góngora’s use of dialogue in *habla de negros* between African slave women in his *letrilla*, “En la fiesta del Santísimo Sacramento” (for Corpus Christi, 1609), incorporates the famous phrase from the Song of Songs, “negra sum, sed Ferosa” to portray black souls as equal before God (2005). This was an especially poignant gesture when one considers that the festival was held in the same year as the first edict of the Morisco expulsion (Jones 2005). Jones observes a similar “appreciation for black beauty and humanity” in Sor Juana’s *villancicos*, which also incorporate *habla de negros* (2018).

Sor Juana’s *loa* preceding her auto, *El divino Narciso*, was also written to be performed for the feast of Corpus Christi. Stephanie Merrim argues that the latter part of the *loa* “counters physical violence with a rational, syncretic form of conquest that successfully persuaded by elucidating the similarities between Indian sacrifice and the Catholic Eucharist” (192). Yet this “rational, syncretic form of conquest” remains (spiritual) conquest nonetheless, by letters if not by arms. Jean Franco and Patricia Saldarriaga have further argued that the play reprises Catholic orthodoxy in the iconoclasm debates, namely that, in Franco’s words, “Christianity replaces human sacrifice with abstract symbols” (51; Cf Saldarriaga 208-17).

Despite the efforts of Góngora and Sor Juana to “engage plurality,” to use Merrim’s term, they evince the limitations of their positions (155). It is telling that Sor Juana and Góngora, together with many in his humanist circle, all owned slaves at some point in their lives, and that

<sup>33</sup> See Soria Mesa and “El catedrático.” I will clarify that it was a common enough practice for families to place illegitimate children into the religious life and that neither illegitimacy nor converso ancestry guaranteed heterodoxy.

<sup>34</sup> On Ignacio de las Casas, see García Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano (29); on Sandoval, see More.

Góngora's patrons and his mentor defended the Moriscos, not out of any modern sense of religious equality, but because they were baptized Christians, productive vassals, and might pose a worse threat if they joined forces with their compatriots across the strait.<sup>35</sup> Nor can Sor Juana be removed from the project of the consolidation of New World conquest. Thus, while we should praise Góngora's defense of the Moriscos from expulsion and Sor Juana's courageous defense of the rights of women, as well as appreciate the efforts of both to defend confessional minorities and the indigenous, we should also recognize that these writers constituted cases of what John Beverley has understood as "avant-garde hegemony" (1993, 59).

*Primero sueño* can be better understood by setting it against its model, the *Soledades*, while this hermeneutic endeavor in turn depends on a deeper appreciation of historical context. The poems are products of two different poetic generations and moments in Iberian transatlantic history. Sor Juana appears to have inherited Gongorism primarily through Salcedo Coronel's commentaries and the work of Trillo y Figueroa (Gates 1044, Sabat de Rivers 55). Kircher was just beginning his ecclesiastical career in the year Góngora died, and while Sor Juana, we know from her prose, was well aware of the tradition of sacred oratory, she was probably not privy to the manuscript correspondence within Góngora's circle. It goes without saying that Sor Juana would not have had the same access to the historical documents that we have today, in the wake of the consolidation of history as a modern discipline and the advent of the modern archive. Thus, reading the *Primero sueño* in terms of newer historical contextualization of its precursor is as unavoidably presentist as Sánchez Robayna's suggestion that we read the *Soledades* through the lens of its sequel. Nonetheless, the study of the two works within the frame of the impact of the evolution of historiographic syncretism and hermeticism upon poetic form can help us to better appreciate Sor Juana's *magnum opus*. To recur to the observation by Andrés Sánchez Robayna with which this essay began, we might better comprehend the *Primero sueño* by casting it in sharp relief against the poem which it is not, Góngora's *Soledades*.

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<sup>35</sup> On slaveowning by Valencia, see Magnier (44); by Góngora: Jammes (202, n. 34); by Inca Garcilaso: Fuchs (74) and Varner (249-50); by Sor Juana: Bénassy-Berling (40). On the contradictions of Valencia's and Medina Sidonia's positions, see Chemris 2022 (68, n. 2).

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