Studies of Góngora’s Petrarchism have generally focused on his early work: particularly the sonnets of the 1580s. At the end of his career, however, Góngora revisited the Petrarchan mode of his first period in a series of sonnets. In this article, I explore this return to Petrarchism and the attitude of the mature poet toward this poetic tradition. The essay focuses on three late sonnets which share a series of characteristics: ‘Al tronco Fillis de un laurel sagrado’ (1621), ‘Prisión de nácar era articulado’ (1620), and ‘Peinaba al sol Belisa sus cabellos’ (1620). In these poems, we will see how Góngora criticizes a careless and exaggerated Petrarchism, which sleeps on its laurels, and insists on the importance of agudeza (wit) in lyric poetry.

Keywords Góngora; Petrarchism; agudeza; Torquato Tasso

Discussions of Petrarchism in Góngora have tended to focus on his early poetry, particularly the sonnets written between 1582 and 1585. Composed shortly after his university studies, these poems draw on the works of sixteenth-century Italian
Petrarchists such as Bernardo and Torquato Tasso, Antonio Minturno, Luigi Grotò and Jacopo Sannazzaro. Often they begin with a quatrain that is almost translated from an Italian work and then veer off in a different direction. While these works generally allude to other texts as well, the initial quatrain gestures toward a privileged source, one against which subsequent divergences or borrowings should be read. Throughout his career, Góngora practiced an eclectic form of imitation, drawing on various authors, both ancient and modern.¹ These early works, however, seem to encourage a specific comparison, inviting us to read side by side the initial model and Góngora’s revision. In his later works – the larger compositions such as the Soledades and the Polifemo – Góngora moved away from this mode of imitation and adopted an even more radical eclecticism, creating dense webs of allusions in which no single model is privileged. Critics, consequently, have often considered Góngora’s early Petrarchist period as a moment of apprenticeship, a series of exercises in the lyric form.²

At the end of his life, however, Góngora wrote a series of sonnets in which he revisited the Petrarchan mode of his youth. This return to Petrarchism has hitherto received little attention in Góngora criticism but raises interesting questions: what is the attitude of the mature poet toward the Petrarchan tradition and why did he return to it in his final sonnets?³ In this essay, I will explore three of these poems – ‘Al tronco Filis de

¹ On eclectic imitation, see Greene, 1982, and Pigman, 1980.
³ Poggi (2002: 192) and Cipliajuskaite (Góngora, 1969: 161) have observed in passing this return to Petrarchism in Góngora’s late poetry. Alicia de Colombi points to Petrarchian echoes in a sonnet from 1622: ‘Al tronco descansa de una encina’ (1979: 303-05).
un laurel sagrado’ (1621), ‘Prisión de nácar era articulado’ (1620), and ‘Peinaba al sol Belisa sus cabellos’ (1620) – in order to understand Góngora’s stance toward Petrarchism and lyric poetry in his later years. In all of these poems, we will observe a similar pattern: a highly lyrical and aestheticized opening, with suggestions of auto-eroticism, followed by the introduction of an external element, which pricks, stings or pierces. In each case, the sharp object interrupts the self-absorption of the poem and gives a new awareness, life and tempo to the scene. In what follows, I will argue that these poems are metatextual works that insist on the importance of agudeza and self-consciousness in the lyric mode. Góngora, we will see, is not only a practitioner but also an early theorist of agudeza, who anticipates both the Italian and Spanish treatises on the subject.

‘Al tronco Filis de un laurel sagrado’

The most immediate source for Góngora’s ‘Al tronco Filis de un laurel sagrado’ is Torquato Tasso’s sonnet ‘Mentre Madonna s’appoggiò pensosa’, in which a bee confuses a woman’s lips with a flower. This motif also appears in Tasso’s pastoral drama Aminta (1573) in which Tasso rewrites a scene from Achilles Tatius’s Greek romance Leucippe and Clitophon. In Tatius’s episode, Leucippe cures her maid’s bee-stung hand by placing her lips close to the wound and whispering a magic formula. Inspired by this incident, her suitor Clitophon feigns a bee sting on the mouth and, when Leucippe repeats her cure,
takes advantage of their proximity to kiss her lips. Tasso’s version of this episode introduces the motif of the *ape ingannata*: the bee, mistaking Fillide’s cheek for a rose, stings her face, and Silvia resorts to a magic formula to cure her wound. The hero Aminta then resorts to the same ruse as Clitophon to extort a kiss from Silvia. This episode would in turn inspire Honoré d’Urfé whose *L’Astrée* draws on both the episode in the *Aminta* and Tasso’s sonnet: the bee-sting ruse inspires a character to compose a sonnet, which is a French reworking of ‘Mentre Madonna s’appoggiò pensosa’. Góngora would also draw on the scene in the *Aminta* in his unfinished *Comedia venatoria* (vv. 308-55). Given the close connection between the two passages in Tasso, therefore, it is likely that the *Aminta* is also in the background of Góngora’s sonnet. Indeed, his choice of the name Filis (the Spanish equivalent of Fillide) reinforces this connection.

Since antiquity, the bee has served as a symbol of imitation. Horace and Seneca imagined the writer as a bee who flits about drawing upon different flowers or sources. In these texts, the insect is a metaphor for eclectic imitation or *contaminatio*. The image, however, can also evoke imitation as a process of transformation (what Thomas Greene refers to as heuristic imitation). Seneca, for example, observes that just as a bee converts pollen into honey, the author transforms his models to make new works of art. In both

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8 See the ‘Histoire d’Eudoxe, Valentinian et Ursace’, in the second part of *L’Astrée* (D’Urfé, 1612-28).

9 On Góngora’s use of Tasso’s scene in the *Comedia venatoria*, see Dolfi, 2004.

10 In Tasso’s work the bee motif appears not only in *L’Aminta* and the sonnet discussed below but also in a madrigal titled ‘Un ape esser vorrei’.

11 On the use of the bee as a metaphor for imitation, see Greene (1982: 68) and Pigman (1980: 4-7). For an example in Góngora of the bee as a metaphor for ‘transformative’ imitation, see the description of honey (vv. 393-400) in his *Polifemo*. For an insightful discussion of this passage, see Torres, 1996a: 69-71.
Tasso’s and Góngora’s sonnet, we will see that the bee has a similarly metatextual function, though its meaning differs in the two works.

Let us begin by considering Tasso’s sonnet, which opens with a relatively clear and chronological account:

Mentre Madonna s’appoggiò pensosa,
Dopo i suoi lieti e volontari errori,
Al fiorito soggiorno, i dolci umori
Depredò, susurrando, ape ingegnosa:

Verses 5-9, however, move away from this straightforward chronology and objective narration:

Chè ne’ labbri nudria l’aura amorosa
Al sol degli occhi suoi perpetui fiori;
E, volando a’ dolcissimi colori,
Ella sugger pensò vermiglia rosa.

Ah troppo bello error, troppo felice!

In lines 3 and 4, the bee has already attacked, but in 7 and 8, the poet moves backward in time, giving us the logic behind the insect’s action and describing its flight toward the woman. At the same time, these verses introduce a more subjective perspective: where in the first stanza we have no access to the thoughts of the pensive woman, in the second we
enter the head of the bee, whose perspective offers a more lyrical vision. In the initial quatrain, the relation between the woman and the flowers is a metonymical association: a connection between inhabitant and place, between Madonna and the ‘fiorito soggiorno’.

In the second strophe, in contrast, it is a metaphorical association: in verses 5-6 the woman becomes a garden in and of herself. The description of the bee as ‘ingegnosa’ in line 4 prepares us for this defamiliarizing vision, for *ingenium* in the Renaissance was conceived of as a synthesizing faculty. In his *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia*, Vico defined it as ‘the faculty that connects disparate and diverse things’ (1988: 96). The bee, like an artist or poet, uses the faculty of *ingegno* to establish unusual correlations, to create a metaphor.

At the level of the plot, the bee and the woman are antagonists, the woman a victim of the bee’s aggression. The wandering of the woman in the garden – a prolonged activity – contrasts with the instantaneous action of the bee. The insect’s error, moreover, stands out against her thoughtfulness and meditation. Nevertheless, the diction of the octave establishes a subtle parallelism between the two figures through the repetition of words, concepts and phonemes. The terms ‘pensosa’, ‘errori’, and ‘lieti’, which appear in the description of the woman in the first two lines, reappear in the representation of the bee in verses 8 and 9: ‘pensò’, ‘error’, and ‘felice’. The word ‘errore’ has changed in meaning – in verse 2 it means ‘wandering’ while in 9 it points to a ‘mistake’ – but the repetition, as well as the iteration of the phoneme ‘vol’ in ‘volontari’ and ‘volando’, underscores the similarity between the bee and the woman: their carefree meanderings, their unimpeded flights of fancy, their joyous errancy.
This spirit contrasts with the mentality of the lover, who appears in the final lines of the sonnet:

Quel ch’all’ardente ed immortal desio,
Già tant’anni, si nega, a lei pur lice.
Vil ape, Amor, cara merce rapio:
Che più ti resta, s’altri il mel n’elice,
Da temprar il tuo assenzio e ‘l dolor mio?

Ironically, the bee is more of a poet than the poet-lover himself: the sestet, which focuses on the lyric voice, lacks complex imagery. Rather than establishing metaphors or poetic resemblances, the lover harps on inequalities and differences, on the opposition between his woes and the bee’s luck. Notably, Madonna herself disappears from the final stanzas as the poem devolves into a rivalry between the bee and the lover for the favours of Love.

The sestet echoes the octave in its opposition between sustained and momentary actions: the ‘tant’anni’ of the lover’s wait contrast with the instantaneity of the sting. But this is no longer a distinction between meandering thoughts and an epiphany (the bee’s ingenious metaphor) but rather an opposition between the lover’s and the bee’s relative claims to the woman. The bee has shamelessly jumped the queue, provoking the lover to denounce him to the god of Love. His complaint, moreover, is not a chivalric defence of the woman but rather a self-righteous reclamation of property and priority: unconcerned by the injury done to the lady, the lover bemoans the stolen honey. Where the focus of
the octave is cognitive (thoughtfulness, genius and error), that of the sextet is juridical: the theft committed by the bee and the injustice of Love.

While in theory a sting does not preclude a kiss (in the Aminta and Leucippe and Clitophon, indeed, it provides a pretext for one), the lover adopts a zero-sum logic: Madonna’s nectar can belong either to him or to the bee. In this sense, the honey could represent her virginity, which can be lost but once. We could also read the sonnet, however, as an expression of poetic envy: the lyric voice complains that another ‘ingegno’ has coined a daring conceit achieving a beauty to which he himself has long aspired.

Góngora’s poem, like Tasso’s, represents an amorous triangle. The bee’s rival, however, is not the lyric voice but rather a ‘sátiro mal de hiedras coronado’. This revision may be inspired by the episode in the Aminta, which is followed by a monologue in which a satyr plots to violate a beautiful woman under a tree. The opening of the satyr’s speech (vv. 724-36) takes up the image of the bee from the earlier scene:

Picciola è l’ape, e fa col picciol morso
pur gravi e pur moleste le ferite;
ma qual cosa è più picciola d’Amore,
se in ogni breve spazio? or sotto a l’ombra
de le palpebre, or tra’ minuti rivi
d’un biondo crine, or dentro le pozzette
che forma un dolce riso in bella guancia;
e pur fa tanto grandi e si mortali
In these verses, the satyr draws attention to two similarities between the bee and Love. The first is that Love, like the bee, has a sting, which the satyr has experienced first-hand in his response to Silvia’s eyes. But the passage seems to place greater emphasis on their common smallness, which allows them to enter ‘ogni breve spazio’. It is this ability to penetrate the smallest of places that will frustrate Góngora’s satyr as well: just as he is about to pounce, a bee flies into Filis’s mouth alerting her to the danger.

Like Tasso’s sonnet, the Spanish poem opens with a description of a beautiful woman, who rests in a garden:

Al tronco Filis de un laurel sagrado
reclinada, el convexo de su cuello
lamía en ondas rubias el cabello,
lascivamente al aire encomendado.

Góngora’s Filis and Tasso’s Madonna resemble one another in their self-sufficiency. In the Italian sonnet, the lady’s lips are a garden that grows beneath the sun of her eyes. Filis

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12 As Residori observes, the satyr’s speech draws on a poem from Pseudo-Theocritus in which a youthful Cupid attempts to steal honey from a hive and is stung by a bee. When he complains to his mother, she points out that he too is small and stinging (2003: 6). Tasso reworked this poem in his madrigal ‘Mentre in grembo a la madre Amore un giorno’.
too is a self-contained system: her blond hair lasciviously licks the curve of her neck.

What is in Tasso self-subsistence, however, has become in Góngora auto-eroticism. Pensiveness has given way to pleasure.

This eroticism continues in the second quatrain, which introduces the image of the mouth as a flower:

Las hojas del clavel, que había juntado
el silencio en un labio y otro bello,
violar intentaba, y pudo hacello
sátiro mal de hiedras coronado.

In this stanza as in the first, Góngora draws attention to a sensual juxtaposition: just as the hair licks the neck, the petal-lips touch one another, joined by silence. Tasso’s rose becomes in the Spanish poem a more carnal carnation. And Madonna and her flowerbed have become Filis (Greek for desire) reclining against a (phallic) tree trunk. Góngora’s syntax accentuates the erotic indolence of these verses. All of the sentences and clauses of the octave move from direct object (neck, carnation petals) to verb (licking, joining, violating) to subject (hair, silence, satyr). This structure, which places the object before the agent, lends a passivity and languor to the scene.

This idleness, however, vanishes in the sestet with the intervention of the bee:

mas la invidia interpuesta de una abeja,
dulce libando púrpura, al instante
previno la dormida zagaleja.

El semidiós, burlado, petulante,
en atenciones tímidas la deja
de cuanto bella, tanto vigilante. (1969: 161)

The structure of the sentences is now more active, moving from subject to verb to object.
And the eroticism described has become more penetrative: in line 10, the bee’s verb
(‘libando’) is encompassed by the words evoking Filis’s lips: ‘dulce púrpura’ (a sensually synaesthetic image). The ‘invidia interpuesta’ of the bee has not only entered Filis’ mouth but also ‘interposed’ itself in the very phrase that describes it. The repetition of the phoneme ‘in’ (‘invidia’, ‘interpuesta’, ‘instante’, ‘previno’) reinforces this penetration.13

But is Góngora’s poem simply a prurient rewriting of Tasso’s sonnet? An important difference between the Italian and Spanish versions lies in the setting of the scene: where Tasso describes a rather generic garden – a ‘fiorito soggiorno’ – Góngora specifies a laurel tree.14 This is a somewhat unusual detail, for often in his early love poetry, Góngora deliberately omits the tree of Apollo and Petrarch and favours other myths (for example, the transformation of the Heliades into poplars). In ‘Gallardas plantas que con voz doliente’ (1584), for example, Góngora takes up a verse by Bernardo Tasso – ‘senza invidiar lauri et olive’ – but eliminates the laurel: ‘sin invidiar palmas ni

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14 Góngora may be responding to a footnote in the 1592-93 Brescia edition of the Rime in which Tasso glosses the first verse of the sonnet: ‘Ad un tronco di Lauro, ò ad altra cosa si fatta’ (128).
And in the sonnet ‘Culto Jurado, si mi bella dama’ (1583), the lyric voice wishes for the beloved ‘no de verde laurel caduca rama,/ sino de estrellas inmortal corona’ (133). Nevertheless, in this poem, Góngora insists on the laurel, placing it in the very first line of the poem.

The initial image, moreover, underscores this reference to Petrarch. Filis’s golden hair scattered in the wind recalls one of the most famous poems of the Canzoniere: ‘Erano i capei d’oro a l’aura sparsi’ (RVF 90). This vision of the beloved is emblematic of Petrarch’s work: not only does ‘l’aura’ (breeze) pun on the name of his beloved – Laura – but the word ‘sparsi’ echoes the title of his collection, the Rime sparse. This poem was central not only to the Canzoniere but also to the poetic tradition that to which it gave rise. Almost every major Italian poet of the Renaissance would imitate this sonnet at least once: well-known rewritings include Pietro Bembo’s ‘Crin d’oro crespo e d’ambra tersa e pura’ and the octave of Torquato Tasso’s ‘Colei che sovra ogni altra amo ed onoro’. Perhaps the most important of these for Spanish literature, however, was Bernardo Tasso’s ‘Mentre che l’aureo crin v’ondeggia intorno’, which conflated RVF 90 with the carpe diem motif. This poem would influence one of the most famous poems of the Golden Age: Garcilaso de la Vega’s Sonnet xxiii, ‘En tanto que de rosa y d’azucena’, which inspired numerous imitations in its own right (Fernando de Herrera, Garcilaso’s commentator, wrote dozens of sonnets on the motif). Góngora himself would take up ‘Erano i capei d’oro’ as mediated by Bernardo Tasso and Garcilaso in his well-known poem ‘Mientras por competir con tu cabello’. ‘Al trono Filis’, thus, begins with a series

15 The verse comes from Bernardo Tasso’s sonnet ‘Quí dove meste il loro caro Fetonte piansero già’ (Book II, Sonnet 44).
16 See, for example, the following sonnets by Fernando de Herrera: ‘Poemas varios’ 42, 44, 49, 51, 74, 80; Algunas obras de Fernando de Herrera, sonnets 17, 20, 27, 33, 38, 41; Versos de Fernando de Herrera, Libro I, 31, 32, 34, 73, 74, 88, 89, 99, 121; Libro II, 42, 47, 107, 109.
of icons that gesture toward the Petrarchan tradition as practised by Garcilaso and his
imitators. By naming his heroine Filis (love) and placing her under a laurel tree, her
golden tresses undulating in the wind, Góngora clearly identifies her with a genre:
amorous lyric in the Petrarchan mode. Her antagonist, in contrast, represents a very
different type of literature: satire.\(^{17}\) The ‘sátiro mal de hiedras coronado’ poses not only
an erotic threat but also a literary one: that of satirical poetry, which is about to profane
the sacred laurel.

But what is the function of the bee in this metatextual commentary and how does
its role differ from that of Tasso’s insect? It is important to note that Góngora avoids the
motif of the *ape ingannata*. The comparison of the lips with flowers does not result from
the bee’s genius; indeed, it precedes the introduction of the insect in the poem. The bee
stings the mouth not because he mistakes it for a flower but rather out of ‘invidia
interpuesta’, a desire to foil the evil intentions of the satyr. In Tasso, the bee’s error
contrasts with the pensiveness of the woman, but in Góngora the insect serves to provoke
thought, to add consciousness and intelligence to the beauty of the initial scene. The bee
interrupts the auto-erotic and onanistic reverie of the opening verses – an exaggerated
lyricism that lends itself to satire – and attempts to make the genre aware of itself. If
Tasso’s bee stands for *ingegno*, a faculty that melds disparate realities, Góngora’s
represents *agudeza*: this bee does not delight in similarity, in the harmony between the
woman and the flower, but rather disrupts the harmonious scene under the laurel tree
introducing a dissonance, a prick, an element of *in caudum venenum*. Góngora’s poem
critiques a self-absorbed and unselfconscious lyricism, which has let down its guard and
opened itself to satire. Like Filis, this type of poetry sleeps on its laurels. The sonnet

\(^{17}\) Navarrete suggests that the satyr may represent the ‘notoriously ugly Quevedo’ (1994: 203).
seeks to wake up the genre, shifting it from unthinking eroticism to a sharp self-awareness. His poetic ideal is not just beauty but self-conscious beauty: ‘de cuanto bella tanto vigilante’.

In his *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, Roland Barthes describes the lover observing the body of his sleeping beloved and scrutinizing its various parts:

I am searching the other’s body, as if I wanted to see what was inside it, as if the mechanical cause of my desire were in the adverse body (I am like those children who take a clock apart in order to find out what time is). This operation is conducted in a cold and astonished fashion; I am calm, attentive, as if I were confronted by a strange insect of which I am suddenly no longer afraid. Certain parts of the body are particularly appropriate to this observation: eyelashes, nails, roots of the hair, the incomplete objects. It is obvious that I am then in the process of fetishizing a corpse. As is proved by the fact that if the body I am scrutinizing happens to emerge from its inertia, if it begins doing something, my desire changes; if for instance I see the other thinking, my desire ceases to be perverse, it again becomes imaginary, I return to an Image, to a Whole: once again, I love. (1979: 71)

Góngora’s octave illustrates this type of fetishism: it inventories the body of the sleeping Filis lingering on surface details. Ultimately, this perspective is not very different from the satyr’s perversion. The sestet and the bee seek to provoke a shift similar to the one
that Barthes describes at the end of this passage: a movement from voyeurism to dialogue and from the beloved as object to the beloved as other. The goal of the poem is to make lyric poetry ‘see the other thinking’ and begin to think itself.

**Prisión de nácar era articulado**

Góngora’s metatextual commentary in ‘Al tronco Filis de un laurel sagrado’ may shed light on another sonnet of the same period, which is one of his best-known compositions: ‘Prisión de nácar era articulado’ (1620). The two sonnets are similar in that they introduce a sudden, sharp pain in the tercets: just as Filis is stung by a bee, Clori pricks herself on a needle. Like ‘Al tronco Filis’, moreover, ‘Prisión de nácar’ begins with an extreme aestheticism and complex sentence structure:

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Prisión de nácar era articulado
de mi firmeza un émulo luciente,
un diamante, ingeniosamente
en oro también él aprisionado. (1969: 160)
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In these verses, Góngora resorts to a radical hyperbaton, which has traditionally been glossed as follows: ‘un diamante, émulo luciente de mi firmeza, era la prisión del dedo, siendo él mismo aprisionado en oro’ (Ciplijauskaité in Góngora, 1969: 160, n.1). The poem, that is, begins with a Russian-doll or Chinese-box image: the gold contains the

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18 For readings of this sonnet, see Blecua (1973) and Navarrete (1994: 201-03). The latter critic hints at a metatextual commentary in his observation that ‘[t]he ring drinking the blood of the lady’s beauty with its extensive field of intertextual references, suggests a gruesome revision of the digestive metaphor for imitation, used since Seneca’ (1994: 203).
diamond, which in turn contains the finger, described periphrastically as articulated nacre.

Interpretations and paraphrases of the poem almost always consider the parenthetical ‘de mi firmeza un émulo luciente’ to be in apposition to the diamond of verse 3. This, however, is not an immediate response to the poem. When we read the parenthetical description in the second verse, our first impulse is to attempt to relate it to what we have already seen in the first verse rather than to seek an antecedent in the third, which we have not yet read. If we follow this impulse, we might be tempted to read ‘de mi firmeza un émulo luciente’ as referring the ‘prisión de nácar’ of the opening line.

Mother of pearl, after all, is a hard and iridescent material. Most critical editions opt for the apposition, for diamond is an even harder and more lustrous material. But by placing the descriptor before ‘diamante’, Góngora introduces an interesting ambiguity into the poem.

I believe that we miss part of the eroticism of the poem if we disregard our initial impulse, the possibility that the finger is imitating ‘mi firmeza’. The traditional reading underscores the lover’s fidelity: the diamond emulates the loyalty and true heart of the lyric voice. The alternate reading, in contrast, suggests a more erotic scenario: Clori’s finger imitates another sort of male firmness. Read in this way, the passage suggests a scene of female masturbation. This reading is supported by the strangely inverted nature of the metaphor. We might expect that the lover, the lyric voice, would imitate the firmness of the precious stones in his fidelity to Clori. In these verses, however, it is the male firmness that is imitated. This inversion of our expectations intensifies the phallic overtones of the passage. Moreover, the disappearance of the ‘yo’ after verse 2 and
Clori’s attempt to cast off the ring in the second stanza – a symbolic rejection of men and marriage – suggests the extent to which the lover has been displaced, first by Clori’s finger and then by the needle of the sestet. As in the first quatrains of ‘Al tronco Filis’, Góngora evokes in these lines a self-contained eroticism. Just as Filis’s hair tickles her neck, Clori’s finger, a substitute for male firmness, fills the circular opening of the ring.

To the extent that the finger is a substitute or simulacrum, it is also a figure for the text itself. In an insightful article on Ronsard’s ‘Amour, je ne me plains de l’orgueil endurcy’ – the so-called dildo sonnet – Matthew Gumpert argues that the poem caused a scandal in the sixteenth century not so much because of moral injunctions against masturbation but rather because of ‘an abhorrence of imitation as that which poses as and threatens to take the place of the natural’ (2005: 26). For Gumpert, the dildo illustrates the tendency of the supplement to supplant the thing it is supplementing: the true scandal of the poem is that Ronsard’s heroine prefers her ‘godmicy’ to the real thing. The heroine’s pleasure in this substitute, Gumpert argues, ultimately reflects our own pleasure in the text, which is also a substitute and a supplement. The sonnet is itself a kind of dildo (2005: 31).

Góngora’s poem similarly underscores the relation between the substitute phallus and the text. The finger is described with words associated with literary terms: ‘ingeniosamente’ (from ingenium) and ‘émulo’ (from aemulatio). The use of the term ‘émulo’ exemplifies the scandal of the supplement. In theory, it is the poet who is imitating the ringed finger, representing a real object in the text. In these verses, however, it is reality that is imitating the poet. The ‘real’ has been displaced by the supplement (the text) and is no longer the privileged ‘original’.
We see this inversion as well in Góngora’s conspicuous use of dieresis, one of the more curious aspects of the sonnet. Critics have interpreted this feature in various ways. For Dámaso Alonso, the diacritical marks serve to emphasize ‘una virtud o una violencia latentes en el concepto designado: ‘dïamante’ (deslumbrante luz); ‘ingenïosamente’ (agudeza de lo ingenioso); ‘apremïado’, ‘impaciïente’, ‘insidïoso’, ‘invidïosa’ (violencia, asechanza o protesta contra un orden, un tiempo o un mérito)’ (1967: II, 178). Blecua notes how the dieresis tends to fall on ‘i’ and on words beginning with ‘in’, phonemes which he associates with pricking and piercing (1973: 58). Another interpretation, however, might be gleaned from the opening line of the sonnet. The adjective ‘articulado’ refers to the jointed segments of the white finger, but the term also applies to words themselves: to articulate is to enunciate something distinguishing clearly between syllables. That is precisely what the poem does with its dieresis: it insists on the pronunciation of each and every phoneme. The dieresis force us to read the poem in an unnatural way. Writing is normally an imitation (a supplement) of speech, but in this poem speech has become a simulacrum of the text: we read the words as they are spelled rather than as they are normally pronounced. Once again, the imitation (writing) supplants the ‘original’ (speech).

In almost all cases, moreover, the hiatus shifts the accent from the penultimate to the antepenultimate syllable. The diacritical marks, that is, produce a dactyl – Greek for finger – at the end of each word (‘indïano’, for example, ends in a long-short-short). Just as the finger points to the text (in its emulation and in the literary diction with which it is described), the text with its diereses also points to the finger. Both text and finger are supplements that supplant an original, be it reality or the lover.
Like ‘Al tronco Filis’, thus, ‘Prisión de nácar’ opens with an auto-erotic image that reflects a highly self-referential literary style. In dressing his text-finger up in an ornate diction and convoluted syntax – the ring – Góngora is representing metaphorically an overwrought and precious style, one in which language supplants reality. Both poems begin with a self-absorbed and self-pleasuring form of lyric, an over-the-top and fetishistic Petrarchism.

As in ‘Al tronco Filis’, however, the second stanza of the poem disrupts the idyll of the first:

Clori, pues, que su dedo apremiado
de metal, aun precioso, no consiente,
gallarda un día, sobre impaciente,
lo redimió del vínculo dorado. (1969: 160)

If Clori’s ring takes the place of Filis under the laurels, Clori herself takes the role of the satyr: just as he attempts to disturb the idyllic scene, so Clori seeks to undo the lyrical union of finger and ring. Clori’s impulse to strip the finger of its adornment suggests a plain and minimalist aesthetic, the style privileged by Góngora’s satirists. Notably, the finger is no longer described through periphrasis as an aesthetic substance (‘nácar articulado’) but is rather called straightforwardly by its anatomical (‘natural’) name: ‘dedo’. Finally, in contrast to the first stanza, which circles back on itself and has no active verb (the copulative ‘era’ serves to make what comes after it equal to what comes before it), the second quatrain is more direct, moving from subject to transitive verb
(‘consentir’, ‘redimir’). Clori, that is, introduces plot into the poem; with the second stanza, it shifts from predication to action.

The final stanzas, however, foil Clori’s de-aestheticizing project:

Mas, ay, que insidioso latón breve
en los cristales de su bella mano
sacrílego divina sangre bebe:

púrpura ilustró menos indíano
marfil; invidiosa, sobre nieve
c claveles deshojó la Aurora en vano. (1969: 160)

As in ‘Al tronco Filis’, Góngora saves his lyrical reverie from an opposed aesthetic (satire, minimalism) by introducing an element of agudeza.\textsuperscript{19} And just as the bee sting is subtly eroticized, so is the needle in these verses. The pin, deflowering Clori with its sharp point, seems to replace the finger-phallus of the first stanza. The final line reinforces this eroticism with the image of Dawn shedding the petals of a carnation upon the snow: a literal deflowering.\textsuperscript{20} The result of the pin’s intervention is a return to the plasticity and aestheticism of the first quatrain. Notably, Clori (the minimalist) disappears

\textsuperscript{19} Clori’s attempt to cast off adornment is foiled not only by the needle but also by the collapse of the distinction between depth and surface. In the octave, the poem sets up a distinction between the artificial coverings (the diamond and gold of the ring) and the skin that lies beneath. Clori’s goal is to remove the former to unveil the latter, the bodily depth. The tercets, however, convert the skin into a covering, discovering the blood that lies beneath it.

\textsuperscript{20} The second and fourth stanzas reflect one another in that each represents a female figure who removes something from an aesthetic object. Just as Clori removes her ring from her finger, Dawn plucks the petals from the flower. In each case, however, this aesthetic of subtraction is foiled by the needle, whose prick thwarts Clori’s attempt to divest herself of the ring and whose tableau surpasses that of Aurora.
from the sonnet in the last stanza just as the satyr-satirist exits the scene in the final tercet of ‘Al tronco Filis’.

It might be tempting to conclude that the poem has circled back on itself in these final verses: the sonnet, after all, begins and ends with highly aestheticized stanzas in which Clori is absent. Both the first and the last strophes, moreover, describe aesthetic rivalries: just as the lover’s ‘firmeza’ is emulated in the first stanza, so the needle’s tableau is imitated in vain by Aurora in the last. But though the end of the poem returns to the aestheticism of the beginning, it does so with a difference. For the needle deflates the opposition between action and predication established in the octave. The agudeza of the needle accomplishes something that the ingenio of the ring does not: it conflates action and metaphor, narrative (the prick) and plasticity (the aesthetic tableau of the final tercet).

This fusion of plot and image is represented as a sort of vivification. The needle produces its striking image – the contrast of red and white, crystal and blood – through an act of vampirism: by drinking Clori’s blood in a profane Eucharist. Her ‘divina sangre’ ‘redeems’ the aesthetic impulse of the first stanza by giving it new life (the needle is notably personified in these verses). The first tercet, that is, introduces an element of movement, transgression, piquancy, and life that is lacking in the opening stanza, dominated by the image of the prison and its imprisoning, circular structure.21 Just as ‘Al tronco Filis’ interrupts the static lyricism of its first stanza by bringing Filis back to consciousness – wakefulness and awareness of herself – the needle in ‘Prisión de nácar’ draws the vital force from the finger to make an image come to life. The needle, like the

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21 The first stanza begins and ends with a form of the word prison (‘Prisión’, ‘aprisionado’) (Blecua, 1973: 54), which encircle two prisoners (‘nácar articulado’ and ‘también él’), who in turn encircle the two prisons that contain them (‘diamante’ and ‘oro’).
bee, moves the poem away from the fetishism and auto-eroticism of its opening by introducing an element of *agudeza*.

**Peinaba al sol Belisa sus cabellos**

The third poem to be considered – ‘Peinaba al sol Belisa sus cabellos’ – celebrates the (much deferred) consummation of the marriage of Felipe IV and Isabel. Although the royal wedding took place in 1615, the union was not consummated until 1620. The sonnet evokes the long wait of the shepherd Fileno for his beloved Belisa (an anagram of Isabel). The poem opens with the image of Belisa combing her hair in the sun:

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\text{Peinaba al sol Belisa sus cabellos} \\
\text{con peine de marfil, con mano bella;} \\
\text{mas no se parecía el peine en ella} \\
\text{como se oscurecía el sol en ellos. (1969: 159)}^{22}
\]

In his commentary on Góngora’s poetry, Salcedo Coronel interprets verses 3 and 4 as a contrast between two contrasts: ‘Pondera el Poeta la blancura de la mano, que competía con el marfil, y la hermosura de sus rubios cabellos, que excedían los rayos del Sol, y así dize que no se manifestaba el marfil tanto en su mano, como el Sol se escurecía en sus cabellos’ (1636: 298). The lady’s hand, the antecedent of ‘ella’, is whiter than the ivory comb, which makes the latter stand out against it. But this contrast is not as great as that between the sun and her hair (the antecedent of ‘ellos’). The latter is so bright that the sun

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22 Góngora recycles the first quatrain of this poem from a sonnet that he dedicated to Doña Brianda de la Cerda in 1607: ‘Al sol peinaba Clori sus cabellos’.
seems to darken in its presence; it is literally and figuratively eclipsed. This reading depends on the assumption of a ‘tanto’ prior to the ‘como’ of verse 4 (Salcedo Coronel’s paraphrase inserts one).

Nevertheless, the ‘como’ in verse 4 might also be construed as ‘así como’ (just as): the comb disappeared in the hand (‘no se parecía’) just as the sun disappeared, ceasing to give off light in the presence of her hair. In other words, instead of emphasizing the contrast between degrees of difference, the lines may be emphasizing the similarity between two substitutions: the replacement of the comb by the hand and the replacement of the sun by the hair. Salcedo Coronel’s commentary, indeed, suggests a substitutional relation between the hair and the rays of the sun. The lady is ‘al sol’, he observes, either

porque los peinaba a sus rayos, o porque quiso significar, que los cabellos

[...] eran los mismos del Sol, repitiendo la sentencia que en un Romance dixo:

Los rayos le cuenta al Sol

Con un peine de marfil

La bella Iacinta un dia

Que por mi dicha la vi. (1636: 298; italics mine)

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23 This line may be an allusion to Garcilaso’s Sonnet XIII about Apollo and Daphne in which the latter’s hair makes gold seem dark: ‘los cabellos que al oro oscurecian’. By replacing the gold with the sun, Góngora is seeking to outdo his model: his beauty outshines not only the metal but also the god of lyric (the sun-god Apollo).
And in the same way that the hair may be read as the rays, the hand might be read as the comb: the placement of ‘peine de marfil’ and ‘mano bella’ in apposition to one another invites us to imagine at first that Belisa is combing her hair with her hand, a hand so white that it seems an ivory comb. If the comb does not appear in the hand, then Belisa seems to the observer to be running her fingers through her hair. The hand eclipses the comb, seemingly taking on its role, just as the hair eclipses the sun, becoming a beacon in its own right. The visual illusion increases the eroticism of the image: the woman is not simply coiffing herself but seems to be caressing herself as well.

In these verses, Góngora taps into a tradition of eroticized representations of women combing their hair. A possible model for the poem is a sonnet included in Lope de Vega’s *Arcadia* (1558), which compares Clavelia’s hair to a sea and her comb to an ivory boat: ‘Por las ondas del mar de unos cabellos/ un barco de marfil pasaba un día/ que, humillando sus olas, deshacia/ los crespos lazos que formaban de ellos’. At the helm of the boat is Love, who gathers the golden threads discarded by the comb: ‘iba el amor en él cogiendo en ellos/ las hebras que del peine deshacia/ cuando el oro lustroso dividía’.

In the sestet, Love recycles one of these strands to make a bow from which he shoots his ‘flechas amorosas’. Lope underscores the eroticism of this combing through his diction: the repetition of ‘deshacer’, the use of the word ‘coger’, the image of a ship dividing the seas and the suggestion of domination (‘humillando sus olas’) all evoke a scene of sexual mastery and deflowering (1975: 295-96). In a 1614 rewriting of the sonnet (‘Mentre la sua donna si pettina’), the Italian poet Giambattista Marino intensified the eroticism of

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this scene: here, the comb-boat ‘i frutti tremolanti e belli/ con drittissimo solco dividea’ (78). In these poems, the comb pulled through the hair is a phallus of sorts: a peine-pene upon which the lyric voice projects his fantasies.

In Góngora’s poem, Belisa amuses herself with her hand or her comb frustrating the desire of her impatient lover (Fileno). The second stanza of the poem intensifies the seclusion and intimacy of this scene, representing Belisa’s hair as a veil that hides the beauty of her eyes from the world:

En cuanto, pues estuvo sin cogellos,
   el cristal sólo, cuyo margen huella,
   bebía de una y otra dulce estrella
   en tinieblas de oro rayos bellos.

The only onlooker in this intimate scene is the stream, which serves as a mirror. In these verses, Góngora represents Belisa in her tocador as she sensually touches herself and touches herself up. Like the octave of ‘Al tronco Filis’ and the opening stanza of ‘Prisión de nácar’, thus, the sonnet begins with an intimate, precious, and slightly auto-erotic image. All of these images, moreover, are self-contained and exclude others: just as the tree is a ‘laurel sagrado’, which must not be profaned, and the ‘prisión’ confines the finger in concentric circles, Belisa’s hair enshrines her beauty, hiding it from observers and lovers.

As in the other poems, moreover, the sestet introduces an external force that will seek to disrupt the initial scene:
Fileno en tanto, no sin armonía,
las horas acusando, así invocaba
la segunda deidad del tercer cielo:
‘Ociosa, amor, será la dicha mía,
si lo que debo a plumas de tu aljaba
no lo fomentan plumas de tu vuelo’.

In these verses, the impatient Fileno begs Love (the second god of the third heaven) to hasten the consummation of his desire for Belisa. Just as ‘Al tronco Filis’ and ‘Prisión de nácar’ conclude with a sharp object that stings or pricks the heroine, the sestet of this sonnet introduces feathers, which stand metonymically for Cupid’s arrows. Fileno hopes that this weapon will penetrate the divide that separates him from Belisa.

This final allusion recalls the sestet of Lope’s poem, in which Love uses the heroine’s hair to make a bow for his arrows. Unlike Lope, however, Góngora points to the shortcomings of this weapon: the ‘plumas de la aljaba’, the feathered arrows of love, are not sufficient in Fileno’s case. Another type of ‘pluma’ is necessary. Lope’s poem is an allegory of the process of literary creation, the making of a love poem: Love is an artist, who collects materials from the beloved – beautiful strands – and weaves them into seductive texts, creations that bind the lover’s will: ‘grillos al albedrío, al alma esposas’ (1975: 295). Poetic creation is here a cumulative and transformative process. Góngora’s sestet hints at a similar metapoetic commentary: notably, he refers to the arrows as ‘plumas’. The feathers of Love’s quiver (‘plumas de tu aljaba’) are the quills of the lyric
tradition, the style represented in the self-reflexive and self-caressing scene of the octave. This style, stylus or quill, however, is by itself ‘ociosa’: leisurely but also fruitless and tedious. It must be complemented by another feather, the ‘plumas de tu vuelo’.

The sestet opposes two aesthetics, two types of pen: one associated with an object (the quiver) and the other with movement (flight). The static image of the octave corresponds to the former. Love has painted a beautiful still life, but it is fruitless without movement or life. As in ‘Al tronco Filis’ and ‘Prisión de nácar’, the sestet seeks to animate and waken a self-reflexive or self-enclosed scene. Just as the needle replaces Clorí’s finger in ‘Prisión de nácar’ and breaks with the circular, enclosed, and auto-erotic image of the opening verses, so the pluma of the final stanza will (Fileno hopes) displace Belisa’s peine-pene drawing her out of her self-contemplation.

All three of the poems that we have seen begin with an extreme form of aestheticism, which has fetishistic, onanistic, or self-referential overtones. In each case, however, the sestet breaks away from this static and self-absorbed style by introducing a sharp image, which stands for the aesthetic ideal of agudeza. The sonnets, thus, function as metatextual vignettes about the vivifying function of wit in lyric poetry. Góngora’s return to Petrarchism in his late works is an attempt to reinvigorate a fading poetic tradition, one that has fallen asleep on its laurels and opened itself to ridicule. In their emphasis on agudeza, these poems anticipate the sprawling treatises on wit and genius composed in the 1630s and 1640s by writers such as Matteo Peregrini and Baltasar Gracián. But unlike the latter, these sonnets practice what they preach: Góngora makes the case for wit with utmost wit.
Works cited


los Foros de Debate Góngora hoy celebrados en la Diputación de Córdoba.


Los estudios sobre el petrarquismo de Góngora generalmente se han enfocado en su obra juvenil: en los sonetos de los años 1580. Al final de su carrera, sin embargo, Góngora revisitó el petrarquismo de su primera época en una serie de sonetos. En este artículo exploramos esta vuelta al petrarquismo y la actitud del poeta maduro hacia esta tradición poética. El ensayo se enfoca en tres sonetos tardíos que comparten una serie de características: ‘Al tronco Filis de un laurel sagrado’ (1621), ‘Prisión de nácar era articulado’ (1620), y ‘Peinaba al sol Belisa sus cabellos’ (1620). En estos poemas, veremos que Góngora critica un petrarquismo exagerado y descuidado que se ha dormido sobre sus laureles e insiste en la importancia de la agudeza en la poesía lírica.

PALABRAS CLAVE Góngora; petrarquismo; agudeza; Torquato Tasso

Note on contributor