Critics have often observed that the function and image of the nightingale varies considerably from one context and period to another. The bird can be represented as male or female, as happy or mournful, as nocturnal or diurnal, as a figure of love or of poetry. When it serves as a metapoetic symbol, moreover, it can represent either speech or writing. In some texts, the nightingale sings a song of unearthly beauty; hidden in the foliage of a tree or bush or shielded by the darkness of night, the bird is voice detached from vision, pure orality. In others, however, the nightingale is associated with the classical myth of Philomela, a mute figure who resorts to weaving to tell her tale. The traditional association between weaving (in Latin, texere) and textuality and the emphasis on her voicelessness suggest that Philomela is a writer of sorts.

Not only does the representation of the bird vary but so does the mythology surrounding it. In an early Boetian account, echoed in Homer’s Odyssey (XVI, 216-218), the nightingale is the metamorphosed form of Aedon, a jealous mother, who, seeking to eliminate her rival’s eldest son, kills her own instead. In a later Attic version, she is Procne, whose husband, Tereus, rapes Philomela and then cuts out her tongue to keep her from revealing his infidelity. Philomela, however, weaves his transgression into a tapestry and shows it to her sister Procne, who takes revenge by killing her son, Itys, and feeding him to his father, Tereus. When Procne is later transformed into a nightingale, her song is a lament for the child she murdered. In Roman versions of the myth, most notably Ovid’s, it is not Procne but Philomela, the rape victim, who becomes the nightingale. Still another tradition demythologizes the story altogether. In last book of Virgil’s Georgics, Orpheus’ grief over the loss of
Euridice is compared to that of a nightingale who mourns the death of her fledglings, stolen from her nest by a farmer:

qualis populea maerens philomela sub umbra
amissos queritur fetus, quos durus arator
observans nido implumis detraxit; at illa
flet noctem, ramoque sedens miserabile carmen
integrat et maestis late loca questibus implet.

[even as the nightingale, mourning beneath the poplar’s shade, bewails the loss of her brood, that a churlish ploughman hath espied and torn unfledged from the nest: but she weeps all night long, and, perched on a spray, renews her piteous strain, filling the region round with sad laments.] (I, 232-33)

This version retains the grieving mother of the Procne story but eliminates the metamorphosis offering a more realistic backstory for the bird’s haunting song.

As M. R. Lida de Malkiel has shown, Virgil’s representation of the nightingale influenced many Spanish poets of the Golden Age.\(^2\) The most well known echo of Virgil’s passage appears in the Égloga Primera of Garcilaso de la Vega (1501-1536), in which the shepherd Nemoroso laments the death of his beloved Elisa:

Cual suele el ruiseñor con triste canto
quejarse, entre las hojas escondido,
del duro labrador que cautamente
le despojó su caro y dulce nido
de los tiernos hijuelos entretanto
que del amado ramo estaba ausente

y aquel dolor que siente
con diferencia tanta
por la dulce garganta
despide que a su canto el aire suena,
y la callada noche no refrena
su lamentable oficio y sus querellas,
trayendo de su pena
el cielo por testigo y las estrellas:
desta manera suelto yo la rienda
a mi dolor y ansí me quejo en vano
de la dureza de la muerte airada:
ella en mi corazón metió la mano
y d’allí me llevó mi dulce prenda,
que aquél era su nido y su morada.
¡Ay, muerte arrebatada,
por ti m’estoy quejando
al cielo y enojando
con importuno llanto al mundo todo! (220-21)

Garcilaso’s nightingale is a figure of orality, of perfection in singing. Hidden among the leaves, she is perceived as pure sound, and the form of her song is perfectly suited to its content. Although she uses no words, she conveys her feeling seamlessly to the sky and the stars, which become witnesses to her grief. This harmony between form and content and between the nightingale and Nature is mirrored in the perfect simile between the bird’s situation and Nemoroso’s. Each component of the tenor finds its analogue in the vehicle: the farmer is now “la muerte airada”; the nest, the lover’s
heart; the fledglings, “mi dulce prenda” (Elisa); and the mournful nightingale, the shepherd who laments in song. Being like the nightingale, in Garcilaso’s poem, means being able to sing, having the power to give full expression to one’s grief.

Garcilaso’s use of the figure contrasts with that of Luis de Góngora (1561-1627), who represents the nightingale in three of his love sonnets: “Ya que con más regalo el campo mira” (1583), “Con diferencia tal, con gracia tanta” (1584) and “Oro no rayó así flamante grana” (1623). In these poems, his main subtext is not the passage in Virgil’s *Georgics* but rather the mythical story of Procne and Philomela. In all three cases, moreover, the bird represents not speech but the threat of silence, of stifled communication or writing. Here, to be like the nightingale is to find oneself mute or limited in one’s expressive range. The perfect simile between the nightingale and the poet, moreover, breaks down in Góngora. Although these poems draw a likeness between the poet and the bird, they ultimately stress the differences between them. Where in Garcilaso the human and avian singers complement and echo one another, in Góngora one often supplants the other. This essay will examine how Góngora uses the figure of the nightingale to define his own writing and poetics and to explore issues such as mimesis, imitation and influence.

“*Ya que con más regalo el campo mira*” (1583)

In “*Ya que con más regalo el campo mira*,” the nightingale appears in the opening stanza, which serves to establish the temporal setting of the poem:

Ya que con más regalo el campo mira
(pues del hórrido manto se desnuda)

purpúreo el sol y, aunque con lengua muda,

suave Filomena ya suspira.
In these verses, Góngora combines two traditions surrounding the bird. On the one hand, the passage echoes medieval representations of the nightingale as the harbinger of spring: the bird is heard precisely as the winter landscape begins to thaw.⁴ On the other hand, the reference to the “lengua muda,” the melancholy verb “suspira” and the use of “Filomena” recall the Ovidian myth of the rape victim reduced to silence.

Philomela’s silent sighing contrasts with the project of the lyric voice, who in the remainder of the poem invites a friend to join him in song:

```
templá, noble garzón, la noble lira,
honren tu dulce plectro y mano aguda
lo que al son torpe de mi avena ruda
me dicta Amor, Calíope me inspira.

Ayúdame a cantar los dos extremos
de mi pastora, y cual parleras aves
que a saludar al Sol a otros convidan,

yo ronco, tú sonoro, despéremos
cuantos en nuestra orilla cisnes graves
sus blancas plumas banan y se anidan. (129)
```

The music evoked in these stanzas is defined in three ways. First, the lyric voice describes its production: the inspiration and dictation of the Muses and the accompaniment to be provided by his friend. Then, he mentions the content of the song: “los dos extremos/ de mi pastora.” Salcedo Coronel interprets these extremes as the beauty and indifference of the beloved, but Góngora himself gives us no real information (II, 338). Finally, the lyric voice imagines the reception of the music, its effect on the audience: the “cisnes graves” will wake up and, if they resemble their analogues in the simile of the first tercet, will join the humans in song. To use M. H.
Abrams’ terms, we might say that Góngora describes the expressive, mimetic and pragmatic aspects of this song.

It is noteworthy, however, that emphasis lies much more on the production and transmission of the song than on its subject matter. The focus of these verses is a chain of influence and imitation: Love or Caliope inspires the “avena ruda” of the lyric voice, who prompts the “noble lira” to follow his lead, all of which will inspire the “blancas plumas” of the swans of the Betis. “Plumas” in these verses (as in the next poem that we will examine) has a double sense here: it refers at once to the feathers of the swans and to the pens of the poets whom they represent. Salcedo Coronel, thus, interprets the final line of the poem as a desire “que a ejemplo suyo lo hagan los demás poetas del Betis” (II, 336). The singing of the lyric voice is represented not as amorous expression—the venting of pent-up feeling—but rather as a literary project, an attempt to inspire imitations. The “pastora” may be the cause and subject of the poem, but she is overshadowed by the textual chain in which the lyric voice inscribes his song.

Góngora’s poem has a circular structure. Its first and last stanzas describe natural scenes, while the two middle stanzas evoke human art. The frame represents Nature as silent and intimate. In the first quatrain, the countryside seems to be waking up from a wintry nap, casting off a blanket of snow. The diction of undressing (“se desnuda”) gives a sense of intimacy to the scene. Similarly, the final tercet evokes the toilette (bathing) and slumber of the swans, which the musicians hope to awaken. Both scenes are quiet; the only sound is the sighing of Philomela’s mute tongue. The project of the lyric voice jars with this silent intimacy: the lover’s goal is to broadcast his song through multiple voices and instruments, however raucous they may be. His self-description as an “ave parlera,” moreover, contrasts
with the “lengua muda” of the nightingale. Where the middle of the poem emphasizes orality (speaking, singing), the frame hints at writing through the use of the word “plumas” and the reference to Philomela’s mute expression.

These associations are to a certain extent counter-intuitive. We might expect Nature to be identified with voice and the poet’s craft with writing or silence. Góngora, however, inverts these expectations. This inversion is compounded by the role reversal at the end of the poem. The “ya que” clause in the first stanza suggests a causal relation between the changes in Nature and the decision to make music in the second quatrain. The awakening of Nature in the spring, it would seem, permits or inspires the awakening of the poetic voice. At the end of the poem, however, this causality is inverted: here it is the lyric voice, the singer’s art, that will rouse Nature, the swans of the Betis, from their sleep. We might expect the voice of Nature to inspire the poet’s art, for his song to be an extension of the natural harmony, but this is not the case: it is his song that wakens the swans whose “blancas plumas” become an extension of human art.

The treatment of the myth of Philomela at the beginning of the poem reinforces this logic. The use of the words “muda” and “aves parleras” recalls Martial’s epigram about the nightingale (no. 75): “Flet Philomela nefas incesti Tereos, et quae muta puella fuit, garrula fertur avis” (“Philomela laments the crime of incestuous Tereus: she who was a silent maiden is acclaimed as a [talkative bird].”) (II, 465-66; translation modified). In Góngora, however, Philomela’s tongue is mute even after her transformation. The “parlera ave” in the Spanish poem is not the nightingale but the lyric voice. The poet, in a sense, reenacts Philomela’s metamorphosis, converting himself into a bird and supplanting her as the “garrula avis.” In Garcilaso’s eclogue, the poet is an analogue of the nightingale (“just as she
sings, so do I”). In this sonnet, in contrast, the lyric voice usurps the nightingale’s role (“she doesn’t sing it but I do”). What is a mirroring of two voices in Garcilaso becomes the replacement of one voice by another in Góngora. It is not the nightingale who echoes the poet but rather the poet who speaks for the mute bird. It is not Nature’s voice that inspires art but rather art, the human singer, that gives a voice to Nature, the nightingale.

This supplanting of Nature by art is clear as well in the analogy of the sestet, which functions in a somewhat strange way. The simile draws a comparison between bird behavior and human behavior. We could restate verses 10 to 12 as follows: “just as birds invite other birds to greet the sun, so let us (humans) rouse ...” At this point, we expect that the direct object of “despertemos” will be human, something other than a bird. In verse 13, however, the object turns out to be “graves cisnes.” An analogy normally takes the form “just as A does to B, so C does to D.” Góngora’s verses, however, work differently: “just as A does to B, so C does to B.” In a simile, the emphasis usually lies on imitation: C’s treatment of D imitates A’s of B. Góngora’s scenario, in contrast, suggests a replacement: it is C instead of A that is acting upon B. The lyric voice and his friend are standing in for the “parleras aves”; the human song is supplanting the natural one.

Góngora’s poem could be read a miniature representation of the poetic process. Characteristically, he situates his own poetic production between two written texts: Philomela’s writing and the “blancas plumas.” His work belongs to a textual chain. His representation of his own contribution as song (orality) may seem surprising given this emphasis on writing, but it gives us a sense of how Góngora envisions the relation between his work and his model. His creation gives life and voice to the silent page of the past (Philomela’s mute tongue), one that can no longer
speak for itself. His own song, however, will in turn be supplanted by that of the swans, whose “plumas” will give it a new voice and life. Each new page substitutes for and gives voice to a silent tongue (text) from the past.

“Con diferencia tal, con gracia tanta” (1584)

Written just a year later, “Con diferencia tal, con gracia tanta” resembles “Ya que con más regalo” in that the poet adopts the position of Philomela. But where in the earlier poem human song gave voice to the silent nightingale, in this sonnet it is Philomela who gives voice to the poet and overcomes his muteness. In contrast to the first quatrain of “Ya que con más regalo,” the opening stanza of “Con diferencia tal” evokes the variety and the expressive power of the nightingale:

Con diferencia tal, con gracia tanta
aquel ruiseñor llora, que sospecho
que tiene otros cien mil dentro del pecho
que alternan su dolor por su garganta.

The nightingale’s song is so beautiful and varied that the lyric voice imagines that she has a hundred thousand birds within her chest. This speculation is a reflection upon the sources and influences that contribute to the nightingale’s art. The relation between the song and its sources is represented here as a form of ventriloquism: a hundred thousand birds are singing through her voice. The nightingale is simply a vehicle—a body, a throat—through which their grief can be expressed. Like “Ya que con más regalo,” “Con diferencia tal” evokes a textual chain: just as in the former the Muses inspire the lyric voice, who in turn, with the aid of his friend, prompts the swans’ song, the hundred thousand birds provoke the song of the nightingale.
In the second quatrain, the lyric voice continues to make speculations, but the
diction and emphasis of the poem change:

\[ y \text{ aún creo que el espíritu levanta} \]
\[ \text{como en información de su derecho—} \]
\[ \text{a escribir del cuñado el atroz hecho} \]
\[ \text{en las hojas de aquella verde planta.} \] (134)

Whereas the preoccupation of the initial quatrain is aesthetic (the production of such a
beautiful sound) and sentimental (“llora”), the diction of the second is juridical:
Philomela presents a legal brief (“información en derecho”) against her brother-in-law
Tereus. The two stanzas also differ in the medium that they describe: where the first
focuses on orality (singing), the second describes an act of writing, playing on the
double sense of the word “hojas” in Spanish (leaves, pages). Finally, the emphasis
shifts in these verses from the many to the one, from the plurality of voices (“otros
cien mil”) to the single “espíritu” of verse 5. Where the nightingale’s weeping is the
expression of the woes of many other birds in the first stanza, the second stanza
reasserts the primacy of her grief.

It is noteworthy that these verses seem to confuse the “before” and “after” of
Philomela’s metamorphosis. Just as in “Ya que con más regalo” Philomela retains a
“muda lengua” even after her transformation, so in “Con diferencia tal” she continues,
as a bird, to write her denunciation of Tereus (or at least seems to do so). This
confusion between the pre- and post-metamorphosis states is clear as well in the first
tercet:

\[ \text{Ponga, pues, fin a las querellas que usa} \]
\[ \text{pues ni quejarse ni mudar estanza} \]
\[ \text{por pico ni por pluma se le veda.} \] (134)
These verses continue the legal diction of the second quatrain. As Salcedo Coronel explains, “pico” and “pluma” refer to “los modos con que se defienden las causas, y pleytos, informando de palabra, o por escrito,” and “mudar estanza” is a technical term for moving proceedings to another “Audiencia, ó Tribunal” (II, 354). The nightingale, in other words, is able to lodge a complaint both orally and in writing. These verses are somewhat surprising in light of the myth, in which Philomela weaves (and metaphorically writes) her complaint because she cannot speak. Here, however, the nightingale is capable of both speech and writing. She can express herself by “pico” and by “pluma.” Once again, Góngora fuses the “before” (Philomela as weaver-writer) and “after” (the nightingale as singer) of Ovid’s story.

Philomela’s double capacity serves to underscore the double incapacity of the lyric voice:

y llore sólo aquel que su Medusa
en piedra convirtió, por que no pueda
ni publicar su mal ni hacer mudanza. (134)

These final verses convert the sestet into a contest of misery. The nightingale might voice a grief so profound that it seems the composite of a hundred thousand woes, but the situation of the lyric voice is graver still, for he cannot express himself at all. The bird, he argues, should stop complaining, for at least she can complain. The expressive incapacity of the lyric voice is reflected in the use of pronouns in the tercet. Whereas in the octave the “yo” makes a series of conjectures about “aquel ruiseñor,” in the sestet he refers to himself as “aquel” and ceases to use first-person pronouns and verbs. The lyric voice and the bird, it seems, have traded places. Devoiced at the level of both grammar and content, the poet now occupies the position of the mythical Philomela.
The voicelessness of the lyric voice calls into question the status of the text that we are reading. For if the lover has been paralyzed by his Medusa-like beloved and can express himself in neither speech nor writing, who then is speaking in this poem? Who has “published” his grief? Is the text itself the song of the nightingale, who has agreed to the lover’s request and now laments his fate? The final verses suggest that the ventriloquism suspected in the initial quatrain is in fact the source of the poem itself. The lyric voice, in other words, might just be one of the hundred thousand birds whose woe passes through the vocal cords of the nightingale. The final stanza, thus, upends our initial assumption about the poem. In the first stanzas, it seems that the lyric voice is singing the grief of the nightingale. At the end of the poem, however, their roles reverse, as she becomes the putative “author” of his (and Góngora’s) text.

It is interesting to reread the first quatrain in light of this question of authorship. The multiple birds that seem to contribute to the nightingale’s song could be read as a metaphor for the many models or sources that inform Góngora’s own composition. The presupposition of the quatrain is that for the nightingale’s sound to be so powerful it must be transmitting a hundred thousand voices. This suggests that a text derives its force from the diversity and multiplicity of the sources on which it draws. The lines suggest an eclectic form of imitation. Fittingly, it is precisely when Góngora describes the many birds singing through the nightingale’s that we are most aware of the voices echoed in his own poem. In glossing these verses, Salcedo Coronel notes their similarity to the passage (cited earlier) from Garcilaso’s Égloga (“con diferencia tanta”) and traces the motif to Book IV of Virgil’s Georgics and to Book 16 of Homer’s Odyssey. He adds that “Infinitos Autores se valieron de la misma comparación, que por no ser a proposito deste lugar dexó de referir” (II, 353).
Salcedo Coronel’s “Infinitos Autores” is an apt gloss for Góngora’s “otros cien mil dentro del pecho.” The many birds in the sonnet seem to point to the many sources of these verses.

Góngora’s treatment of the nightingale motif, however, is significantly different from that of Virgil or Garcilaso. The latter writers represent the nightingale as an analogue of a suffering lover: Orpheus mourning Euridice in the Georgics and Nemoroso lamenting Elisa in the Êglogas. The emphasis lies on the parallelism and similarity between tenor and vehicle: their shared sorrow, singing and solitude. The nightingale’s song in these poems is an extension of the poet’s own, a harmonious accompaniment. Góngora’s poem also points to a similarity between the lover and the bird, but the basis of the comparison is not their singing but rather their expressive limitations: just as Philomela was once deprived of her tongue, so the lover has lost his ability to express his grief. The bird that is a symbol of song and a sound full of meaning in Virgil and Garcilaso serves in Góngora at the same time as a figure of silence, of speech suppressed. A second difference between Garcilaso and Góngora lies in the treatment of the analogy. Where Garcilaso underscores the perfect symmetry between the tenor and vehicle of his metaphor, Góngora introduces an imbalance into the formula: the nightingale’s powers of expression, limited though they may be, exceed the poet’s, and the need for his grief to be expressed is more urgent.

The nightingale in Virgil and Garcilaso serves as a supplement, a natural echo of the lover’s song. Góngora, in contrast, represents the relation between the lover’s song and the nightingale’s as an either/or or zero-sum game. The bird can sing either his woes or her. The poem suggests that any note dedicated to the latter is a note taken away from the former. The harmonious chorus of Garcilaso’s poem, an example of the Renaissance harmony between art and Nature, becomes in Góngora a
competition, almost an *aemulatio* in grief. The lyric voice is imitating Philomela’s story and one-upping it in impotence and woe. He out-nightingales the nightingale in his silence and expressive limitations.

The relationship between the lover and the nightingale in “Con diferencia tal” recalls a sonnet by Fernando de Herrera published in his 1582 collection, *Algunas obras de Fernando de Herrera*:

```
Suëve Filomela, que tu llanto
descubres al sereno i limpio cielo:
si lamentaras tú mi desconcielo,
o si tuviera yo tu dulce canto,
    yo prometiera a mis trabajos tanto,
qu’esperara al dolor algún consuelo,
i se movieran d’amoroso zelo
los bellos ojos cuya lumbre canto.

    Mas tú, con la voz dulce i armonía,
cantas tu afrenta i bárbaros despojos;
yo lloro mayor daño en son quexoso.

    O haga el cielo qu’en la pena mía
tu voz suene, o yo cante mis enojos
    buelto en ti, russeñol blando i lloroso. (384-85)
```

Like Góngora’s lyric voice, Herrera’s laments that the nightingale sings her woes rather than his own and longs for her to voice his grief. Both sonnets, moreover, emphasize the differences between the bird and the lyric voice: the nightingale sings more sweetly, but the lover suffers “mayor daño.” Where Herrera’s tells, however, Góngora’s shows. Herrera states explicitly that he cannot sing well. Góngora, in
contrast, demonstrates the lover’s inability to express himself by eliminating the first-person pronoun in the sestet: the lyric voice literally loses his voice.

Herrera’s sonnet draws a distinction between two possible relationships between the lover and the nightingale: one of transfer and one of transformation. In the octave, the lover proposes a transfer of form or content: either the nightingale will sing the lover’s content (grief) or he will take on her form (her beautiful singing voice). When his desire is not fulfilled, however, he begins to long for a more radical solution: that he himself might be transformed into a nightingale (“buelto en ti, russeñol blando i lloroso”). Góngora’s poem also seems to call for a transfer: the lover wants to give the nightingale his content. As we have seen, however, the end of the poem suggests that the sonnet itself (the lover’s lament) is being sung through the nightingale. The lyric voice seems to have become a bird, one of the many who sing through the nightingale. The metamorphosis that is merely desired in Herrera’s poem is realized in Góngora’s at a structural level. Once again, Góngora shows what Herrera merely tells.

Both poems introduce the idea of becoming the nightingale, but this transformation has a very different meaning in each case. Herrera, following the tradition of Garcilaso and Virgil, makes the nightingale an emblem of beautiful song. In his poem, to become the nightingale is to sing well. Góngora, in contrast, underscores the expressive limitations of the nightingale by recalling her denunciation of Tereus. Góngora’s insistence on Philomela’s difficulties paves the way for his final fusion with the bird. To become the nightingale here is to take on her silence. Herrera’s poem introduces an element of imbalance and frustration into the lover’s relationship with the nightingale, but he does not depart from the Renaissance representation of the bird as an aesthetic ideal. Góngora, in contrast, converts the
nightingale’s problematic relationship with speech and writing into a metaphor for the poet’s own frustration with the limitations of his medium.

“Oro no rayó así flamante grana” (1623)

The association between the nightingale and poetic insufficiency is clear again in one of Góngora’s final love sonnets, “Oro no rayó así flamante grana” (1623), which begins with a complex comparison:

Oro no rayó así flamante grana
como vuestra purpúrea edad ahora
las dos que admitió estrellas vuestra aurora,
y soles expondrá vuestra mañana. (162)

In these verses Góngora compares and contrasts two forms of beautification (Salcedo Coronel glosses “rayar” as “hermosear”). This notion of aesthetic enhancement is reinforced by a textual allusion: Góngora’s “vuestra purpúrea edad” echoes Virgil’s “lumenque iuuentae purpureum,” the youthful glow that Venus confers upon her son when he first approaches Dido in Carthage:

restitit Aeneas claraque in luce refulsit,
os umerosque deo similis; namque ipsa decoram
caesariem nato genetrix lumenque iuventae
purpureum et laetos oculis adflarat honores;
quale manus addunt ebori decus, aut ubi flavo
argentum Pariusve lapis circumdator auro.

[Aeneas stood forth, gleaming in the clear light, god-like in face and shoulders; for his mother herself had shed upon her son the beauty of flowing locks, with youth’s ruddy bloom, and on his eyes a joyous
lustre; even as the beauty which the hand gives to ivory, or when silver
or Parian marble is set in yellow gold.] (I, 282-283)

In Virgil’s passage, Venus is the artist and Aeneas the aesthetic object. In the sonnet, however, the hyperbaton and omission of the verb in the relative clause create an ambiguity as to who is beautifying whom. Salcedo Coronel interprets the lines as follows:

No así rayó el oro en flamante grana, como ahora ilustran vuestra
purpúrea edad las dos estrellas que admite vuestra Aurora, y expondrá
soles vuestra mañana: Esto es, no hermoseó el oro la flamante grana,
más ilustremente que hermosean ahora vuestra niñez los hermosos ojos
que son hoy estrellas, y serán después en vuestra juventud lucientes
soles. (II, 457-58)

In this reading, the beloved’s eyes give light to her youth. Biruté Ciplijauskaité, however, offers a different reading in the Castalia edition of the sonnets: “la
reluciente grana no brilla al sol cuanto vuestra florida edad hace brillar vuestros ojos,
estrellas en vuestra niñez y promesa de soles en vuestra juventud” (162, fn. 1-2). The poem, thus, creates an ambiguity as to whether youth gives luster to the eyes or vice versa.

In the second quatrain, the lyric voice introduces himself and contrasts his role with that of the nightingale, evoked indirectly as the most cultivated of birds:

Ave (aunque muda yo) émula vana
de la más culta, de la más canora,
en este, en aquel sauce que decora
verdura sí, bien que verdura cana.
In this stanza, the hyperbaton once again introduces several interpretative possibilities. One option is to take “verdura” as the subject of “decora”: the greenery embellishes the weeping willow. Another possibility, however, is that the antecedent of the relative clause is not the “sauce” but the nightingale (“la ave más canora”): the bird is decorating the greenery in this willow or that one just as Philomela writes in the “hojas” in “Con diferencia tal.” As in the first stanza, Góngora describes a process of beautification (decorating) in which the distinction between the subject and object is unclear. Is Nature beautifying the nightingale’s setting or is the writerly bird (an analogue of the poet) enhancing the beauty of Nature?

In the tercet, the characters of the first two stanzas (the lady and the lover) come together as the lyric voice resolves to evoke the beauty of the beloved:

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insinuaré vuestra hermosura: cuanta
contiene vuestro albor, y dulce espera
en horas no caducas vuestro día.
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The project of the lyric voice in these verses contrasts with his self-description in the second quatrain. In the latter, he represents his art as an emulative one: he is imitating and seeking to rival (however futilely) the work of another artist (i.e. the most “cultivated” of birds). In the first tercet, however, he is not imitating art but reality. With the *volta*, the poem moves from an emulative and decorative vision of art to a notion of mimesis, of art as a mirror of Nature.

It is tempting to read the poem as a story of diminishing aesthetic ambition. The poem begins with a bold analogy, but its sense is muddled by the syntax. The subsequent two stanzas could be seen as a reaction to (and commentary upon) this initial attempt. Recognizing that he is no nightingale, the lyric voice reduces his literary ambition: henceforth, he will attempt only to insinuate the beauty of the
beloved, for he is unable to capture it fully. The last stanza could be read as a final renunciation of this project:

Responda, pues, mi voz a beldad tanta;
mas no responderá, aunque Apolo quiera,
que la beldad es vuestra, la voz mía. (162)

Even with the help of Apollo, the lyric voice finds himself speechless before the beauty of the beloved.

As with the earlier stanzas, however, the final tercet lends itself to multiple readings. The traditional one, that of Salcedo Coronel, supports the idea of diminishing ambition: “Pero no podrá ser esto, aunque Apolo quiera, inspirándome su furor, porque es vuestra la beldad, y mi voz no puede, siendo mía, celebrarla dignamente, por ser desigual a tan alto assunto” (II, 451). In this reading, the “que” at the beginning of verse 14 has a causal force (Salcedo Coronel inserts a “porque”). This, however, is not necessarily our first impression of line. Without the added “porque,” the initial impulse is to read the final verse as indirect discourse: “no responderá que la beldad es vuestra, la voz mía.” If we interpret the line in this way, the lyric voice is rebelling against Apollo (and the dictates of gallantry), refusing to attribute the beauty to the beloved rather than to his own poetry. He is renouncing the mimetic ideal expressed in the tercet (the notion of his text as mere mirror) and reasserting the beautifying function of his art.

The opening stanzas of the poem insist on the notion of aemulatio. In the first quatrain, the beauty of the beloved triumphs aesthetically over the “oro” and “flamante grana,” and in the second the lyric voice emulates the nightingale, though futilely (“émula vana”). The notion of a competition between artists is central to the poem. The ambiguity in the final tercet suggests a similar aemulatio between the poet
and his object, between the beauty of the voice and that of the beloved. Here, however, the victor is not clear. Just as the opening quatrains blur the distinction between the artist and the aesthetic object, so the final lines raise the question of who is beautifying whom. Does the poet’s aesthetic achievement derive from the beloved’s beauty or is his verse beautifying her?

In the poems examined above, Góngora departs from the representation of the nightingale in Virgil and Garcilaso in his insistence on the difference between the bird and the poet. In “Ya que con más regalo,” the nightingale is mute while the lyric voice is raucous. The roles are reversed in “Con diferencia tal” and “Oro no rayó,” in which the bird’s expressive singing contrasts with the muteness of the lover-poet. Where Virgil and Garcilaso create a parallelism between the human and avian singers, Góngora consistently creates an opposition.

Rather than echoing one another, the bird and the poet exist in a relationship of dependence: one gives voice to and in a sense supplants the other. In “Ya que con más regalo,” it is the poet who perpetuates the mute page of Philomela, while in “Con diferencia tal,” the nightingale “publishes” the grief of the lyric voice. Góngora often creates an ambiguity around the direction of this dependence or influence. Is Nature inspiring the artist of is the artist ghost-writing Nature’s script? Does Philomela’s sighing inspire the lover’s song in “Ya que con más regalo” or does he awaken Nature (the swans) with his singing? Does the nightingale give voice to the poet in “Con diferencia tal” or does the beauty of her song depend on his (on the richness of the bird sources within her chest)? “Oro no rayó” similarly revolves around the question of who embellishes whom. Does art owe its beauty to Nature or vice versa? The
seamless mirroring of the nightingale and bird in Garcilaso’s eclogue disappears in Góngora, as the relationship between art and Nature becomes a problem or rivalry.

This emphasis on substitution and unclear attribution reflects the writerly vision of the nightingale in Góngora’s poetry. Written texts, after all, introduce a disconnect between the author and his words. The writer is a silent figure who depends on a reader’s giving voice to his text. In “Ya que con más regalo,” the lyric voice occupies the position of this reader, transmitting and perpetuating a page from the past. In “Con diferencia tal,” in contrast, the lover is the writer who can no longer speak for his work and who must resign himself to being the source of another’s song. The juxtaposition of speech and silence in the myth of Philomela allows Góngora to probe the frustrations and rewards of this situation. Through the nightingale, he captures both the expressive limitations of the written word as well as the rich textual chain to which it gives rise.
NOTES

1 For a taxonomy of representations of the nightingale in Classical and Spanish poetry, see Albert R. Chandler and Zapata.

2 On the influence of Virgil’s nightingale on Golden-Age Spanish poetry, see Lida de Malkiel, 100-118.

3 On the image of the nightingale in Góngora, see Lida de Malkiel, Poggi, Chaffee, O’Reilly and Zapata.

4 On the “strofa primaverile” in troubador poetry, see Rivella.

5 See Abrams, 1-29.

6 “Hojas se llaman las de los árboles, y a su semejanza también las de los pliegos de papel en que se escribe.” Salcedo Coronel, II, 354.

7 As Zapata notes, “mezcla Góngora la actitud de Filomela como personaje mitológico antes de la metamorfosis («a escribir del cuñado el atroz hecho») y como ave tras ella («en las hojas de aquella verde planta»)” (46).

8 In this respect, I disagree with Poggi’s observation that “Góngora logra construir una analogía casi matemática entre el canto del ruiseñor y el del poeta: es decir, en sentido técnico, entre los saltos de nota del primero y el contrapunto que en sus versos (mejor diría en sus números) crea el segundo” (258).
WORKS CITED


