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Karin Gundersen

Men er det egentlig et argument? Hvilken betydning har det hatt for respondentens fremstilling av de andres lesninger at det var denne oversettelsen de leste? Bortsett fra at han kommenterer noen feiloversettelser (men det finnes feil i alle oversettelser), kan jeg ikke se at lesernes versjon av verket har hatt betydning for hvordan han plasserer dem i resepsjonsetetisk kontekst. Her skal jeg også minne om at den første danske oversettelsen baserte seg på den første originalutgaven, som i seg selv var meget slett, delvis fordi de siste bindene kom ut posthumt og altså utenom Prousts kontroll. Altså: Hvis det faktum at danske lesere frem til nå har brukt en dårlig oversettelse, hvis dette faktum har hatt betydning for resepsjonen, er det en interessant observasjon som burde ha vært utdypet. I motsatt fall ville man måtte medgi at selv om oversettelsen av Proust er noe annet enn Proust selv (som respondenten også understreker, 51), selv om man ved å lese en oversettelse får et sekundært forhold til originalen, som dermed kommer på avstand, så vil et stort og udødelig verk som Prousts *À la recherche du temps perdu* bane seg vei gjennom selv den sletteste oversettelse. Det er vel et paradoks eller iallfall et kontraintuitivt faktum, vel verdt en diskusjon eller meditasjon.

Helt til slutt et grunnleggende estetisk spørsmål som angår romanens form. Respondenten sier (28) at *På sporet av den tapte tid* er en ufullendt roman, og han gjentar dette flere ganger senere uten å gå inn på hva han mener med det. Er det fordi de siste bindene ikke ble korrekturlest av Proust selv? Eller er det noe annet som ligger til grunn? Og dessuten, gir dette begrepet (ufullendt) mening når vi snakker om Proust? Tatt i betraktning den stadig ekspanderende formen på denne teksten, der Proust bare fortsatte å skrive inn stadig nye fortellinger mellom begynnelse og slutt, skulle jeg mene at hans roman prinsipielt er uendelig, og at denne uendeligheten er en estetisk form. Det er grunn til å tro at hvis Proust ikke hadde hatt så dårlig helse og hadde levd noen år til, ti eller femten eller tyve år til, ville *På sporet av den tapte tid* bare ha fortsatt å vokse. Et så spesielt konsept kan etter mitt syn ikke forenes med forestillinger om fullendt versus ufullendt.

Disse kommentarer og innvendinger skal dog ikke skygge for det faktum at Neal Ashley Conrad Thing har skrevet en solid og spennende avhandling, som andre Proust-forskere vil ha glede av og man trygt kan innlemme i fagets kunnskapsbase.

Adam Wickberg Månsson, *Cultural Techniques of Presence. Luis de Góngora and Early Modern Media*. Institutionen för kultur och estetik, Stockholms universitet. Stockholm 2016.

The final goal of *Cultural Techniques of Presence* is to carry out an investigation of the ‘materiality’ of Early Modern poetry. The essay is organized around a central hypothesis: Spanish poetry in Góngora’s times depended upon “cultural techniques”, a concept developed by some present-day scholars and thinkers. Adopting Gumbrecht’s motto of “a farewell to interpretation”, Adam Wickberg Månsson believes that the task of criticism has to be displaced from the identification of meaning towards the material conditions and the technical forms of meaning constitution. For Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, cultural objects are not to be considered as mere structures of meaning, and the process from which these structures of meaning emerged must be reconstructed. Such a process consists in a series of operations requiring a network of actors and is made possible by a set of cultural techniques. Both ‘actors’ and techniques are human and not human, according to a dichotomy repeatedly stressed in Adam Wickberg’s prose. Basing his method on these premises, he avoids treating the texts as something abstract, ideally isolated and independent of material conditions of production and transmission. This conception happens to be strikingly appropriate for Góngora’s poetry and the culture of his era, a turning point between Medieval Christianity and Modernity.

Luis de Góngora (1561–1627), who endured harsh criticism for his longest and most ambitious poems, *Fábula de Polifemo* and *Soledades*, was nevertheless held in the highest esteem among Spanish poets of his century and resumed that position again in the 20th century after 200 years of neglect. He lived almost forty years under Philip II (deceased in 1598) and passed away at the beginning of the long reign of Philip IV (1621–1665). During the first two decades of this latter reign, the monarchy of Spain was dominated by the strong personality of the *valido*, or royal favourite, don Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke of Olivares. Olivares deeply admired the slow and cautious, methodical and scrupulous style of government introduced by Philip II. Like

his royal model, he carried out the arduous task of governing the vast and pluralistic Spanish monarchy by systematic recording of deliberations and decisions: he amassed folders, files, archive, maps and accounts; he drafted rules and protocols. As capable rulers taking their duties seriously, both were perfectly aware that they needed an unprecedented development of recording techniques. Only in this manner could the full knowledge of the complex world that depended on their decisions be gathered and preserved there. The records of the Hispanic world had to cover a huge territory, as well as a great period of time. The historical past, from biblical and classical Antiquity onward, was a repository of moral and political exemplary cases, but it was also something more relevant: a heap of myriads of privileges and exceptions, legal rules and precedents. The legitimacy of a law, right, opinion or value was linked to its seniority, even if it did not depend exclusively on it. Indeed, these Early Modern rulers, for fiscal and ideological reasons, tried in every possible way to increase the power of the State over society through institutional and legal innovations and reforms. Hence the nicknames *el rey papelero* the paper king, Philippe II or Archduke of Writers (*archiduque de los escribientes*) for the Count-Duke of Olivares.

At the highest political level, Spain displayed during this period an obsession with the written word: its technicalities (hence the sophistication of calligraphy manuals, *manuales de escribientes*), its specialists (secretaries), its places of storage, archives and libraries. Because kings and favourites were aware of the huge importance of cultural techniques of writing, they strove to control the flow of the written word, subjecting books and printing to strict regulations, often by repressive and brutal methods. But at the same time they tended to monopolize writing in its most refined forms, encouraging and protecting those who excelled in its techniques: calligraphists, archivists, secretaries, librarians, cartographers, historians. Poetry itself emerges as one of these refined techniques of writing, and it is not surprising that men of knowledge — scholars, secretaries, librarians etcetera — during this era were also poets, occasionally or permanently. Poetry is a cultural technique of memory, from Homer onwards; it struggles against loss and dispersion, it collects and condenses, it retains memory of the ephemeral, embedding it in a discursive order.

Any extensive reader of Early Modern poetry

would intuitively subscribe to this approach. And yet before this PhD nobody, as far as I know, has asserted it in such a general, clear and thorough fashion. Adam Wickberg Månsson claims that in Early Modern Spain a close alliance existed between poetry and royalty, and more broadly between poetry and power. This second claim of his work, more widely known than the first and actually consensual among scholars, is perfectly true. Much remains to be done to back up the idea and to see how this alliance works.

Obviously those general insights about poetry in Early modern Spain have deep implications for the understanding of particular poems. When we read a Góngora sonnet as an ideal entity, regardless of material circumstances of media and transmission, we are frequently disappointed to find a commonplace meaning to it: for instance, the fragility and brevity of life, the evanescence of wealth and beauty. But to reduce the poem to such a banal wisdom would amputate it of its substance and reality. The lines we read today in a modern edition have been artificially isolated from the process from which they emerged. If we examine such a process by a careful historical and philological reconstruction, the poem regains a part of its original magic; it was intended not only to express a meaning but also to keep a presence alive.

What we know as the poetry of Luis de Góngora, what we can hold as a well-defined whole in the editions of his Complete Works (progressively improved to the best current edition by Antonio Carreira in 2000), is the result of a late stabilization that actually had not been achieved before the twentieth century. It was only in 1921 that the scholar Foulché Delbosq published the poems on the basis of the Chacón manuscript discovered after centuries of oblivion. From this time onward, the poet's texts were step by step moulded into a canonical form (although we are still waiting for an edition of Góngora that deserves to be called critical).

By focusing on this and other notorious facts, Wickberg Månsson points out that this poetical corpus had been unstable from its very beginning. Góngora's poetry was an object sought and desired, rather than possessed. He himself did not keep written records of his poems; he wrote several versions, he allowed friends to copy these different versions. That is true not only of his short texts, sonnets, stanzas, couplet songs (*letrillas*) and *ballads* (*romances*), but even of the longest and most

challenging works, such as the *Soledades*. These copies were in turn copied: the poems ran from hand to hand, moving continually away from the author's control, enduring alterations, suffering debasement and corruption. Therefore they had to be rediscovered, restored, sometimes rewritten, operations that the poet himself was ready to take on in his old age. He did so because he desperately lacked money and hoped to improve his situation by selling his poetry to a publisher and bookseller, or by dedicating it to some powerful aristocrat, such as the Duke of Alba or the Count-Duke of Olivares. He also did this because he yielded to the urging of friends. Those friends, as don Pedro Cárdenas y Angulo and especially don Antonio Chacón, became unofficial secretaries, archivists, collectors, who strived to possess a faithful and extensive collection of the poet's compositions. They wished to record these rhymes that Muses, daughters of memory, dictated to the poet. Each poem, since Góngora did not publish it, did not even possess a copy of it, was stored faithfully only in his excellent and lively memory. For this reason it was essential for his friends and admirers to seek out copies and to preserve them. But the problem of perpetuating an unalterable trace of something alive and mortal (the memory of a man) did not have a unique and satisfactory solution. The printing press involved the intervention of unfaithful and low-skilled copyists, typographers and censors. A more radical opinion was to consider printing a betrayal of the poems, a debasement into merchandise. Soon after Góngora's death, his works were collected and printed by editors and commentators who had managed to collect copies of a significant number of texts ascribable to the poet, but of disputable authenticity. The royal and ecclesiastical powers, in Europe and particularly in Spain, mistrusted the printed book, as a potential vehicle of heresy, irreverence and subversion among the faceless and nameless multitude. This mistrust was shared by some of the most renowned poets — including Góngora himself, although for other reasons.

However, manuscripts were not the ideal way to store and preserve poetry either. The vast majority of the hundreds of surviving codices containing some or many Góngora's poems can now be found the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* or in number of public libraries scattered across Europe and America; but they were originally in the hands of anon-

ymous collectors. These *codices* were indeed private anthologies, sometimes very carefully and neatly formed, more frequently shabby and neglected, intended in most cases for the pleasure of an individual owner. Their content was shared by reading aloud or by borrowing and copying. Successive copies generate increasing divergence. To tackle the issue, an ideal solution was found around 1625 by one of the elderly poet's close friends, don Antonio Chacón, a rich and learned gentleman and courtier. He compiled an exceptional manuscript under the poet's supervision: on beautiful parchment, in exquisite italic script attributed to the best calligrapher of the times, Pedro Díaz de Morante, an almost flawless text, richly bound in three volumes. They were to be presented as a precious gift to the Count-Duke of Olivares, reputed to be the greatest patron of the arts and letters. One year after Góngora's death Chacón offered this manuscript to the *sacrarium* of Olivares' library, a magnificent and famous collection dear to the statesman, who ultimately failed to secure its perpetuity.

And yet, this method of conservation of poetry is similar to that of the Egyptian funeral practice: it maintains but sets aside, in a secluded and solitary place, the security of which is largely illusory. The library, which the Minister strived to protect against the threat of dissolution, was actually dispersed after his wife's death, and the manuscript was lost for three centuries. Meanwhile Góngora's poetry was printed and reprinted, commented, profusely imitated, torn into pieces and re-composed by pastiches, parodies and centos. But there was no complete stabilization, no indisputable publication. Everyone knew Góngora's poetry, but nobody could grasp it.

The facts summarized in the preceding lines have been well known to the specialists since the first half of the 20th century. And yet, before Adam Wickberg Månsson's dissertation, nobody had stated the case in such a neat and dramatic fashion. Nobody before him had tried to understand Góngora's poetics taking into account the concrete destiny of his texts. The conception, meaning and aesthetic values of poetry were considered independently of their material traces. In some cases, it could be improper or misleading to relate narrowly the material fate of the object to the understanding of the work of art. But for Góngora the contrary is true, as explained above. His poetry was fraught with questions of transmission from

the very beginning. It was treated by its creator as something living, changing and ephemeral; nevertheless he took care to ensure its complexity and perfection in form and content. He emulated and recreated with outstanding skill the greatest poets of the Italian Renaissance and of Greek and Roman Antiquity (Tasso, Martial, Claudian, or even Virgil and Homer) as if he himself hoped to become a venerated and immortal classic. As Wickberg Månsson shows, this contradiction has never been grasped and even less taken seriously by Góngora's criticism, but it is all the more significant, as many of his poems are precisely about conservation, recording and memory issues. Most pieces of poetry quoted and analysed in the dissertation were written in praise of collections, portraits, tombs, or history books. They deal with monuments to the glory of someone or something. In the terms used in this dissertation, portraits, tombs and other monuments are cultural techniques of presence: they give life to what is missing and transient or ephemeral. Those things are not mere representations but remnants, relics, evidence of the actual and material existence of something.

According to Wickberg Månsson, many of Góngora's pieces of poetry (and those of his contemporaries) duplicate such techniques by referring to them. They stress whatever is concrete and material in these objects, the canvas of the paintings, the Duke's chest against which he held a miniature with his wife's portrait, the marble or bronze of the tomb, the smell of incense and the smoke of wax candles around queen Margaret's catafalque. The sonnets highlight physical operations, such as colours deposited by the brush on the canvas or a pen that draws on paper. The poet mentions materials and operations, emphasizing their sensory qualities, such as colour, shine, weight, hardness or softness. He uses deictic pronouns feigning actual presence: *este, estos, esta*. Although he bestows on them a moral or allegorical meaning, he nevertheless conveys something that is before or beyond meaning: that is what Gumbrecht, under Heidegger's spell, calls presence.

In short the thesis develops a very strong argument, in spite of a few points that remain somewhat vague and debatable. First, Wickberg Månsson sometimes takes what poems say a little too literally, as if their referents were real beyond any doubt and as if the poet's task was always to record something that was once in front of him or around

him, like a notary, a clerk or a secretary. The truism according to which a poem is made of words, however obvious, should not be forgotten. Words are always words, and they are not more material if they refer to material things than if they mention abstract concepts; not more convincing and more able to affect us if they speak of an actual reality than if they deal with something entirely contrived. Even if it clings to some object, such as the engraving on the marble tomb or an inscription under a portrait, the poem transcends these material supports, and by nature does not need them. Once it is separated from them, nothing differentiates its content from fiction, and its purpose becomes entirely independent of the reality from which it sprang originally. For generations of readers, the poems resist the disappearance of the material supports for which they were intended. The same thing happened with Greek epigram, which once derived from epigraphy. The sonnets quoted in the thesis are nothing but epigrams. While there is a discussion of epigrammatic poetry and its tradition, it is not developed as much as could be expected. Let us consider a few concrete examples.

On a sonnet that feigns to be a kind of funeral inscription or epitaph for the tomb of El Greco ("*Esta, en forma elegante, oh peregrino*"), Wickberg Månsson affirms that some critics (such as myself) stress the imaginary character of the tomb while others, like Gilbert Dubois, try to prove that Góngora hints at the tomb of the famous painter in the church of Santo Domingo in Toledo (221). I wish to recall the unmistakable fact that El Greco's funeral was a very simple one and that the monumental tomb in shining porphyry described by the sonnet has absolutely nothing to do with the modest reality. Indeed, porphyry is the material used in Roman emperors' sarcophagi, and only a few wealthy and powerful kings, popes, princes and prelates in medieval and modern Europe (especially Italy) could emulate this sumptuous practice. The vast majority of people, even nobles, were simply buried in an excavation, which in the best case was covered or closed with a slab of stone, rarely of marble. This slab had no particular shape since it was flat and square. In the case of el Greco, no trace was found of such a slab. So the elegantly shaped "urn" of porphyry ("*en forma elegante, de pórvido luciente dura llave*") described in the sonnet is inconceivable for a painter of moderate fortune. Not only is it unbelievable, but improper, for economic, social and even moral reasons. Why then construct such a fic-

tion? I put forward the hypothesis that Góngora could know (through many channels and especially by reading the famous Vasari's *Vite*) that Michelangelo, the prince of great artists, indeed had a red marble tomb, with an elegant shape, in the church of Santa Croce in Florence. What was possible in the wealthy Florence of Cosimo de Medici was not possible in Toledo where the painter lived the best part of his life and died in 1614. In Toledo, and in other cities of Spain, there were rich and cultivated men of the Church and of letters who could appreciate the force and originality of El Greco's paintings, but no patrons capable of equalling Italian princes and cardinals in opulence and magnificence. By his own declarations we know that Domenico Theotocopulis had the highest idea of his art and regarded himself as superior to Michelangelo; perhaps a few admirers looked on him as such. He was a magician of colour and light, whereas Michelangelo was only a master of *disegno*. Making up for the lack of unprejudiced and generous patrons, poetry was free to do him justice, granting him the imperial sarcophagus that reality had denied him: one may state that the sonnet implements cultural techniques of presence, but it must be highlighted that this presence is an illusion, a dream and not a reality. The fiction or the unreality of such a tomb must be recognized by the reader; it is part of the meaning as it hints to immaterial values: the demiurgic quality of El Greco's art, or the supremacy of art over nature. An important aspect of the meaning of the text is in short incompatible with the "presence", if this presence is to be understood literally.

Something comparable happens when Quevedo dedicates a sonnet to a lover's ashes in an hourglass, imitating (or rather translating freely) a Neo-Latin poem of the Italian humanist Amalteo. Wickberg Månsson asserts that this playful composition refers to objects that have actually existed; "there is no way to exclude the existence of these physical objects" (232). Yet there is every reason to exclude them. In the Christian world, the precept of burying and the prohibition of burning the dead bodies was based on the main characters of the New Testament that are buried to maintain the integrity of the body awaiting the Last Judgment. Cremation was condemned early because it went against the dogma of the resurrection of the body and its exclusion was maintained by all Christian churches after the Reform. In fact, the practice was banned in Europe from the end of Antiquity to the nineteenth

century. Therefore, in Góngora's time, in Spain as in Italy and elsewhere, cremation was uniquely a literate and erudite reference to the ancient world, like the Parnassus and other Pagan symbols and rituals. On the other hand, poems about ashes in an hourglass, including Quevedo's sonnet, do not refer to death in general, but deal with a lover's death. The man whose ashes are enclosed in the hourglass was not burned by the actual flames that burn mortal bodies, but by the flames of love. Everything in these poems is metaphor, fiction and game, a simulacrum of presence, an image, a dream and a symbol.

As a last example, an anonymous composition entitled "*A un libro blanco*" ("To a white book") found by Wickberg Månsson in a manuscript, quoted and studied on pp. 237–240, definitely speaks about cultural techniques of memory. But the "white book" (*libro blanco*) to which the sonnet refers has nothing to do with a "memory book" (*libro de memoria*), a kind of notebook used in the Early Modern period exhumed from oblivion by Roger Chartier: that is, "a small object made of pieces of coated hard leaves on which one could write with a stylus without the need of ink or table, and then erase and reuse as needed", "an object of personal and intimate use" (238). Certainly in the final line of the sonnet the anonymous poet states that he will treat the *libro blanco* or white book as a *libro de memoria*. Wickberg Månsson suggests that the book would be white because its leaves were covered with white wax. Again the proposed interpretation is too material or too literal. A "libro blanco" does not mean a book that is white: in fact paper is generally (and was at the time) white or whitish; therefore this colour is not specific to any kind of book. *Libro blanco* is an expression lexicalized to denote a large notebook or register containing acts like borrowing, receiving, removing, giving, paying and so on, kept for juridical or accounting purposes. In the CORDE (*Corpus diacrónico del español*), a big online database of the *Real Academia Española*, there is evidence that the expression was already used during the seventeenth century with this meaning, even if not frequently. The poet applies it metaphorically and wittily to his love. The sonnet's witticism is based on the great distance between love affairs and the materiality of accounting and recording. These examples point out that adoption of the cultural techniques perspective, perhaps too rigidly understood, obscures the many important aspects of poetry that aim not to keep memory of the real, objective, living things, but to

invent the memory of what has never existed or to simulate the physical presence of what is purely conceptual and symbolic.

A further motive of regret is the absence of a broader contextualization. The invention of the archives, the concern for calligraphy and for the art of the secretary, the princely libraries, the art collections and cabinets of wonders, were already cultivated by many late medieval princes, particularly in Burgundy, Italy and France. As for royal archives, they are as ancient as Egypt, Assyria and others ancient Near Eastern empires, although they used stones, clay and papyrus instead of parchment or paper. Consequently, one could expect a further analysis of what distinguishes the case of the Spanish monarchy. Yes, sixteenth-century Spain seems to have known unprecedented bureaucratic development, but its particularities should be described.

Another point that deserves to be developed concerns the relationship between the singular and the typical, the individual and the collective. On one hand, the dissertation proposes a large and beautiful construction, a system that embraces the culture of an era, and the immemorial role of poetry as a medium of presence and as a guardian of memory. On the other hand, the illustrations of the thesis are based on Góngora (combined with some other writers such as Quevedo, the count of Salinas, Paravicino); and the examples are taken exclusively from encomiastic and epigrammatic sonnets. And yet the poetry of Góngora and his contemporaries encompasses a great variety of topics, forms and genres. The lack of proportion between the vast range of the theoretical model and the limited number and uniformity of the examples on which it relies weakens the scope of the thesis.

These remarks do not intend to discredit a doctoral dissertation that is extremely lively, intelligent and very pleasant to read. It approaches problems which are now fashionable among critics, but is never anachronistic. It discusses its issues with scientific rigour. On the whole, this very stimulating and interesting dissertation deserves to be published and to become known by specialists of Early Modern Spain, of Renaissance and Baroque poetry and more broadly by a public interested in the new methods in the field of Humanities.

Mercedes Blanco