

What Kind of Monster Are You, Galatea?

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It is to be expected that Lacan speak in the style of Góngora.
William Egginton, *The Theater of Truth* 97

Half a century ago, Claude Lévi-Strauss found an original way out of a problem that the study of myths presents: if the myth is one, but the renderings of the myth are many, we must either dispel the notion of unity, or void the renditions of any content which in itself would imply another myth. Lévi-Strauss in *The Raw and the Cooked* found music as the analog (*ana-logos*: akin to *logos*, but not quite it) to the grammar of the myths.¹ Of course, Lévi-Strauss follows the logic of this grammar by adapting his own composition—his book—to the syntax of music. But he knows only too well that such an approach is only valid in a world in which every movement of every symphony is there already. “The method I am following is legitimate only if it is exhaustive,” he states (147). But in his own writing he is deconstructing such a symphony, because he is writing, and the grammar of writing (let’s say with Derrida *grammatology*) assures us of only one thing: that every written “equivalent” of music is bound to produce only unfinished symphonies. Perhaps Lévi-Strauss was right: in myths we recede to undifferentiated “meaning.” In writing, however, *différance* takes over:

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when we enter the realm of writing, we exit the realm of music (or of poetry, perhaps), and signifiers begin to cluster around Great Attractors. Or maybe he was wrong, and the Symbolic—the Thetic—penetrates deeper than we thought, leaving for the pre-symbolic semiotic very little space even in myth, or in poetry, or in music.²

I will be looking for monsters in a poem. This puts me in the same conundrum from which Lévi-Strauss felt he had to extricate himself: how to even begin to speak (about) the monster using the very rules that every monster breaks. Can a monster inhabit Literature? Or is “lurking” rather than “inhabiting” the proper verb for the monster? I will be speaking of monsters in myths (Polyphemus and Galatea) already metamorphosed into literature (and even into “classics”) by Ovid, as re-elaborated by the most problematic of all Spanish poets, Baroque or otherwise—Góngora—in his *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea*.³ This poem, coupled with *Soledades*, forms the main corpus of the still-going controversy around the poet, and around his—or anyone’s—radically “different” poetry. Actually, it is poetry itself that was put under the microscope when Góngora’s *Soledades* and *Polifemo* started circulating in Madrid in or around 1613.

Recent criticism has focused more on *Soledades* as a more paradigmatic example of the Baroque issues commonly discussed in our time. *Soledades*’s “open” structure in contrast to the “closed” *Polifemo*; the former’s originality, as opposed to the “version” nature of the latter; the fact that in his own time *Soledades*, more than *Polifemo*, occupied both friends and foes of Góngora, etc. All this and much more results in our paying attention to the wild *silva* rather than to the ordered *octavas*. It may prove extremely interesting to study in detail and in depth why do we have this preference for studying *Soledades*. It might be interesting to find out just what the differences between both poems say about the Baroque: which one (re)presents the Baroque better or which one *fight*s the Baroque with more determination. But my purpose here is to address the issue of monsters in *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea*. By doing so, it may very well turn out that in this issue can the explanation be found of why, in the opinion of Góngora’s fiercest critic and therefore best reader—Juan de Jáuregui in his *Antídoto contra la pestilencia de las Soledades*—the *Polifemo* was “even worse” than the *Soledades*.⁴

The old story of Polyphemus and Galatea is, of course, a story which takes place in a world in which monsters are the norm, and, as in all myths, even the normal. Even if the characters were not in themselves monsters, the very framing of the story together with so many other *metamorphoses* makes it a monster story. One thinks of Kafka, and how Gregor Samsa’s monstrosity, being so obvious, being an insect, does not affect in itself the title of the story, which emphasizes metamorphosis—the process—over the “content” or “product” of such process.⁵

It would seem, however, that the monstrosity shared by all creatures in the Greek mythical world sticks to Polyphemus as if he (it) were some kind of Great Attractor of everyone else's monstrous features. This epistemological slippage finds its maximum expression in Góngora's most classic commentator—Dámaso Alonso—but Alonso is not alone in this monopolization of monstrosity by the Cyclops. Let's start with his point of departure for his analysis of the poem (*Góngora y el "Polifemo,"* I, 224–26): Alonso opens a section entitled “El contraste de lo bello y lo monstruoso” (The Contrast Between the Beautiful and the Monstruous): “De un lado, lo lóbrego, lo monstruoso, lo de malaugurio, lo áspero, lo jayanesco; de otro, lilio y plata, lo albo, lo cristalino, lo dulce, la belleza mortal. Tema de Polifemo; tema de Galatea” (On one hand, the dark, the monstrous, the bad-omen-carrying, the rough, the giant-like; on the other, lily and silver, crystal, sweet, mortal beauty. Theme of Polyphemus; theme of Galatea). “En nuestra *Fábula* al tema de Galatea está opuesto el de Polifemo” (In our *Fable* Polyphemus's theme opposes Galatea's).

In the same vein, studies on monstrosity in the *Polifemo* center all monstrosity around the one-eyed monster, and take it away from all the other characters. Thus Rafael Núñez Ramos amplifies Alonso's paradigm from a structuralist-semiotic perspective.⁶ Núñez Ramos's study is interesting, because it discovers the structural identity between the supposed “opposites.” Kathleen Hunt Dolan goes one step beyond, tracing back the opposition Polyphemus/Galatea to the opposition Saturn/Venus (107ff). For Dolan there is a polarity, but still “monster” is opposed to “beauty.”

And yet, the only time that the word “monster” is mentioned in the entire *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea* is in Stanza 31, and it is in relation to Galatea, not Polyphemus:

Entre las ramas del que más se lava
 en el arroyo mirto levantado,
 carcaj de cristal hizo, si no aljaba,
 su blanco pecho, de un arpón dorado.
 El monstr[u]o de rigor, la fiera brava,
 mira la ofrenda ya con más cuidado,
 y aun siente que a su dueño sea, devoto,
 confuso alcaide más, el verde soto.

(The loftiest myrtle boughs, whose lover part / The stream most deeply washes, Cupid seeks; / Her ivory bosom for his golden dart / A crystal sheath, if not a quiver, makes. / The stubborn monster yields, the savage heart / Melts at the proffered gifts, and then there wakes / The thought that still the leafy grove may cover, / A jealous guardian, this devoted lover.)

“Monstro de rigor” (or “monstruo,” depending on the editor’s use of the older or more modern Spanish word) is what the poetic voice calls Galatea. “Stubborn monster” is Cunningham’s translation, but there are probably better renditions of what “rigor” means. “Monster of rigor,” or “monster of disdain,” or “monster of non-desire” could be some of them. Its meaning, of course, is the all-too-familiar image of the desired but undesiring lady: the *dame-sans-merci*; the one who is immune to love. Let us notice how it is precisely at the moment of “taming” such a monster that Galatea is so called. But for now let us proceed with the overview of critics and monsters in Góngora’s poem. All critics see the cliché. Everyone sees a cheap, overused Baroque metaphor for a disdainful woman. It is easy to dismiss Galatea’s monstrosity as merely a semi-fossilized metaphor, or semi-ossified trope. Actually, critics tend to dismiss the one commentator who stops and thinks about the use of “monster” in the poem: Pellicer. Pellicer stops and dedicates a lengthy commentary, noticing how the poem refers to Galatea as both “monster” and “fiera” (wild beast), and how it is crucial to distinguish between them—and not treat them as synonyms—because “Here *monster* and *wild beast* are different things. Beasts are formed in accordance to nature, and monsters because of its error” (201–2). Jorge Guillén notes this in his unfortunately unfinished edition of Góngora (193), but does not elaborate. But both Alonso and José María Micó completely forget to comment about “monster,” preferring to comment, however, on how others have considered “humorous” or even ridiculous Pellicer’s attention to the detail.⁷

Little if any importance is given to this curious fact: that in a poem which clearly has a monster, and furthermore a monster opposed in his (its) monstrosity to Galatea, the only time that the word “monster” comes into play is when it is applied to Galatea. The fact that the mention constitutes a cliché makes critics miss Galatea’s monstrosity completely. I will come back to this state of affairs, but first I will try to justify this dismissal in view of how for both ancient and modern monster typologies Galatea doesn’t fit comfortably.

As for the old, Hesiod, that chronicler of ancient super-human who-dates-whom (but then our own gossip press or Spain’s *revistas del corazón* are chronicles of monsters) gives a list of the descendants of Nereus and Doris (the Nereids). Most of them he simply names (Ploto, Eucrante, Sao, Anfitrite, etc.), but to some names he adds a qualifier. Galatea’s is simply “Galatea the beautiful” (Hesiod 103; my translation). Being beautiful already because being a Nereid is not enough: other Nereids are qualified as having “fair hair” or “rosy arms.” Galatea’s beauty is not a synecdoche, but a totality. Essence more than attribute. No wonder, then, that this beauty is opposed to monstrosity. We do have monsters whose lure and danger is in their beauty (Circe, the Sirens), but such beauty is counterbalanced by a dark side (Circe bewitches; the Sirens eat you). Galatea, however, is pure beauty.

As for the modern, when one contrasts Polyphemus with J.J. Cohen's "Seven Theses on Monsters," one can see that all shoes (monsters have an unspecified number of feet/tentacles/fangs) fit.⁸ Cohen actually has Polyphemus as the epitome of "geographic monster" (the Guardian of the Border) (13–14) but forgets Galatea. Of course, he is thinking of a Polyphemus without Galatea: the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*. Moreover, Polyphemus is not easy to find in a Table of Contents of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, because his story is not his, but that of Acis and Galatea. It is Góngora who alters the cast credits in a subtle fashion, making a *Fable of Polyphemus and Galatea* where there had been a story of Acis and Galatea. This brings us to another of Cohen's points: the monster as scapegoat (11ff). In the *Odyssey*, Polyphemus does exhibit this feature: he is, after all, the one who pays for the sins of all the Cyclops having being blinded by "No-one." But in the story that he shares with Galatea, it is Acis who is the obvious sacrificial lamb. In any case, Galatea does not seem to be a scapegoat, just as she wasn't—apparently—a "geographical monster" either. As for the other aspect of escaping ("The monster always escapes"; 4–6), it is Acis again who never quite dies, being metamorphosed into a river. Unless, of course, that river is a strange one: one that transforms him into a son-in-law, making him go back to a womb that has been *politically* altered from Mother's womb. And this is exactly what happens. Acis in Góngora's poem "a Doris llega, que, con llanto pío, / yerno lo saludó, lo aclamó río" (reaches Doris who, with pious weeping, / hailed him as son-in-law, claimed him as river; stanza 63, my translation).⁹ This river goes back to the Ocean, the river that, as Hesiod described it when he describes Doris and Galatea, "goes back to itself" (103). Acis, then, suffers a strange case of resurrection: one into self-circulating, undefined substance . . . but the same substance that Galatea—Doris's daughter—is made of. Now we are going somewhere—or nowhere: into the realm of pure circulation. So much for that other aspect that Cohen mentions ("The monster dwells at the gates of difference"; 7ff). Polyphemus embodies this threshold of difference, and this dwelling (it was the description of Polyphemus's cave in all its darkness and terror that triggered Alonso's partition between "Tema de Polifemo" and "Tema de Galatea"; I, 224–25). But outside of Polyphemus, difference dissolves in a liquid circularity.

This brings me to another one of Cohen's fine points: "The monster's body is a cultural body" (4). Indeed it is. Pellicer, for all his pedantry and ridiculousness, was right: when speaking of monsters, nature has nothing to do with them—or worse: nature has *some-thing* to do with them, but cannot complete them. Monster is a failure of nature: it is that failure of nature that we call "culture." Here Galatea begins to show her monstrosity, as long as we trust Góngora's poem, which calls her a monster, and not the vast majority of commentators, who posit monstrosity as far away from her as possible.

One curious feature of Galatea's story, already present in Ovid but highlighted in Góngora's poem, has to do with another of Cohen's theses on monsters: "The monster as harbinger of category crisis" (6–7). The mongrel is one of the extreme categories of the monster. From dragons to extraterrestrials born of human mothers, to satyrs, centaurs, and fauns, to the obsession of American racists such as Rush Limbaugh which reveals itself in expressions like "Halffrican-American" applied to President Barack Obama, the mongrel is a million times worse than the "pure" other. Still, it is Acis, not Polyphemus, who epitomizes the mongrel in the *Polifemo* (stanza 25):

Era Acis un venablo de Cupido,
de un fauno, medio hombre, medio fiera,
en Simetis, hermosa ninfa, habido

(Acis was an arrow from Cupid, / born from a Faun, half man, half beast
/ to the beautiful Nymph Simetis; my translation.)

The monstrous offspring of an already monstrous father is, however, even more beautiful than Galatea. Being "an arrow from Cupid," Acis is meta-beautiful. Not an object, but a *carrier* of desire.

Which brings me to my last check of monstrosity: fear as desire (Cohen 16ff). What is striking in Galatea's case is that she appears to inspire desire, but not fear. Monsters are objects of desire. One could actually say with Lacan and Žižek that objects of desire (*objet a*) are monsters, and that especially "monstruos de rigor" like Galatea (dames-sans-merci) are monstrous *objets a* (Žižek 89). But Cohen's point is that fear dominates the situation, with desire being a necessary offshoot. The pattern works for Polyphemus. In stanza 30—just before the stanza in which Galatea is dubbed a monster—we glimpse Galatea's unconscious longing for the monster. Acis has left an entrapping gift. Galatea finds it, and the first character that she thinks of is Polyphemus. There is denial, of course (produced by areas "above" the subconscious, which—we know from Freud—does not know "no"), actually a quadruple denial, with Góngora emphasizing the irony, but there it is, desire of the Cyclops coupled with the ugliness that we should expect from the monster, opposite to Galatea's only defining feature—beauty: "No al Cíclope atribuye, no, la ofrenda; / no a sátiro lascivo, ni a otro feo / morador de las selvas" (No, she does not attribute the offer to the Cyclops; / nor to a lascivious Satyr, nor to any other ugly / forest-dweller; my translation).

Polyphemus behaves exactly as Cohen suggests. We desire him, but the desire is coupled with the horror. Galatea, on the other hand, is desired, but not feared, or, if so, the fear, as in Lacanian analysis, is tied to the unattainability, the impossibility to be beheld, attached to extreme beauty, not to extreme ugliness.

Desire without fear. It is, of course, an impossibility. As Fernando Savater put it in his analysis of Víctor Erice's film *The Spirit of the Beehive*, there are always risks in the initiation to the Spirit. Even the mystics tell of horror and abjection when looking for the Loved One. In Erice's magnificent film, *Ana*, the little girl protagonist, is instantly attracted by Frankenstein's monster, which she sees in the Boris Karloff classic version, around 1940 in Franco's Spain. The lure is irresistible, to the point of being oblivious of all fear. Monsters kill little girls—she knows that from the film—but she loves that monster, looks for him, and finally finds him. She brings him food and clothing—of course, she can't tell the difference between Frankenstein's monster and the escaped prisoner that takes refuge in the abandoned barn, because spirits have no bodies except as a disguise. Like Galatea, this Spanish version of the Frankenstein monster is desirable before being horrible. But then, here is where Galatea's monstrosity may reside. In Erice's film, the Spanish rural police force, the Guardia Civil, finds and kills the fugitive in the middle of the night. Now: here is *rigor*. Here is the feature attached to Galatea's monstrous being. The *rigor* lurks *below* the monster. Far from being a feature associated with Galatea's disdainful mistreatment of would-be lovers, *rigor* is a feature of Fascism—but not only of Fascism: it is a feature of *both* discipline and punishment, as Foucault would put it. It is *rigor* that we must fear.

Rigor defines Galatea as object of desire, but rigor is not contained in her body. Hers is a cultural body, to whose generation nature has little to contribute—this was Pellicer's insight—and whose properties revolve around being “the most beautiful of Doris' daughters” (“Ninfa, de Doris hija, la más bella”; stanza 13). But that property of hers is called “rigor,” and that is what lurks beneath it all.

But let us return to the usual appraisal of “monstruo de rigor” as a simple, cheap, overused image of the loveless woman. It can be reappraised in a Lacanian sense as the trope for an irresistible object of desire coupled with an automatic mechanism of rejection. Such monstrosity alone subsumes insurmountable problems to any scheme of Law/superego, or to any successful construction of a Lacanian Real, but the fact remains that it is viewed as an overused, cheap, merely decorative trope in the poem. In order to ascertain more sharply just what kind of monster Galatea is, in a world of monsters in which Polyphemus is not the monster but simply just another monster, I would like to show how the “monstrosity by disdain” is used as something under which a deeper monstrosity lurks (lurking is what monsters do, just as “smiting” is what gods do). To show this I will give two examples of how the same “monstrosity by disdain” is used, in the same cliché form, by at least two other Baroque Spanish poets, and, more importantly, how both these poets show this predictable monstrosity as a mere veil to dress/undress a deeper monstrosity in the woman to which the first monstrosity is ascribed.

In Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna*, the Comendador tries to seduce Laurencia before her disdain (a synonym of *rigor* according to Góngora's mainstream commentators) "pushes" him—the obvious monster of the play—to try to possess her by force. His words: "Aquesos desdenes toscos / afrentan, bella Laurencia, / las gracias que el poderoso / cielo te dio, de tal suerte / que vienes a ser un monstro" (786–90) (That unpolished disdain is an affront, / o beautiful Laurencia, / to the gifts that heaven gave you, / in such a way that you come to be a monster; my translation). Not only the more dangerous monster—the Comendador himself—lurks behind the cliché trope, but at the climax of the play we find that Laurencia is indeed a different kind of monster. She will be at the head of the mob-lynching of the tyrant, being compared to an Amazon "eterno espanto del orbe" (1791–93) (eternal awe—or terror—of the world; my translation).

In Calderón's *La vida es sueño* (Life is a Dream), it is Rosaura's horse that is endowed with monstrous features precisely in order to hide two monsters: Segismundo and Rosaura herself. She enters Poland and she will become "tratante de desdichas" (1180) (a merchant of misfortune) for the kingdom. But her monstrous agency is hidden by the alleged monstrosity of Segismundo (in his father's prescience and in his own self-analysis), and transposed to her horse. Segismundo compares himself to a beast "monstruo de su laberinto" (140) (monster of its own labyrinth), and is dubbed a monster by his father before he is even born: "vio que rompía / sus entrañas atrevido / un monstruo en forma de hombre" (670–72) (she saw a monster in human shape ripping her womb). Rosaura's horse, at the very beginning of the play, is similarly likened to a monster—a hippogryph—and scapegoated for Rosaura's own monstrosity.

Given the ease with which monsters hide other monsters in the Baroque, it would appear that Góngora calling Galatea a monster of rigor is both a banality and a body under which other, bigger and meaner monstrosities lurk. One significant irony: in these stories with multiple monsters, only Polyphemus—and maybe the Comendador—are ugly.¹⁰ The other monsters, Segismundo, Rosaura, Laurencia, and, of course, Galatea and Acis, are beautiful creatures, and the ultimate mongrel, the ultimate *mestizo* Acis is beyond beautiful, with the monstrous superpowers—superheroes are monsters too—to seduce the un-seducible Galatea: an arrow from Cupid.

So, what kind of monster lurks in (beneath, within: the spatial coordinates of monsters are difficult to map, like in myths or dreams) Galatea? One clue can be given by the fact that in Góngora's poem, in contrast with Ovid, she is silent. And to be silent is a feature of that Lacanian *objet a* that Žižek talked about.¹¹ In Ovid, she is the narrator of the story. Having a voice, she is as far away from monstrosity as can be.

But the key to understanding what monster lurks in Galatea is to be found in the effects of the monster, on how what the monster *does* is what makes it a monster. And in this, what we find in Góngora's poem is that we

have two opposing forces in Sicily: one which benefits agriculture but is harmful to navigation/commerce (Polyphemus), and another one, who is harmful to agriculture but good for navigation/commerce (Galatea). Only beyond the horizon of the always-individual heart—broken or not—do we see the world. The big world. Hearts can be mended. Galatea’s monstrosity as *objet a* can be cured, and—like gays in the eyes of the religious right—is in fact “cured by love” once Acis seduces her and “tames” her (even dragons can be tamed according to Hollywood; monsters can actually live together on Sesame Street). But Góngora is not a “conservative” like Lope, who cures even the Amazon in *Fuenteovejuna*, even *bobería* in *La dama boba* with love/marriage. The cure of love can come, in the *Polifemo*, only at the expense of the life of Acis. Only after his sacrifice does Doris acquire a son-in-law.

The key to understanding Galatea’s monstrosity is to be forged from that point in which scholars have kept ignoring the fact that it is to her that Góngora applies the word “monster.” In an impeccable comparative study of Góngora’s poem vis-à-vis Ovid’s story, Melinda Eve Lehrer sees how Galatea and Polyphemus are balanced in the monstrous quality of disturbing Order. Lehrer (33ff) sees clearly that if in stanzas 19–20 and 15–16 what we find is “adoration” for Galatea akin to the adoration that the Cyclops himself feels for her, in stanzas 21 and 22 what we have is “the young men abandoning their plows and flocks for love of her” (33). Polyphemus—especially the Polyphemus of the *Odyssey*, but also this Polyphemus—is the archenemy of navigation. Apparently he has met his match: Galatea is the archenemy of agriculture. Polyphemus had helped agriculture as much as he had prevented commerce. Thanks to Polyphemus

Pellico es ya la que en los bosques era
mortal horror al que con paso lento
los bueyes a su albergue reducía,
pisando la dudosa luz del día. (stanza 9)

(To make the giant’s cloak the woods must cede / The mortal fear of
him who, plodding late / To drive his [oxen] on their homeward way, /
Treads the uncertain light of dying day.)

Even castration (oxen) as a precondition for (agri)culture is the work of the Cyclops. Thanks to him, the cultured land lives. In contrast, the sea becomes uncrossable because of him. Not only does he eat Odysseus’s men, but he disturbs the very deities of the sea:

La selva se confunde, el mar se altera,
rompe Tritón su caracol torcido,
sordo huye el bajel a vela y remo. (stanza 12)

(The tree-tops toss, the surges crash and grind, / His trump of twisted
nacre Triton breaks, / Fear wings with sail or oar the deafened boats.)

Galatea, on the other hand, has this effect on agriculture:

Arde la juventud, y los arados
peinan las tierras que surcaron antes,
mal conducidos, cuando no arrastrados
de tardos bueyes, cual su dueño errantes;
sin pastor que los silbe, los ganados
los crujidos ignoran resonantes,
de las hondas. (stanza 21)

(Youth is on fire, and while the ploughman's share / Scratches the soil
instead of furrowing, / Ill-drawn or worse, behind a lazy pair / Of
bullocks, like their master wandering, / The sheep, to whom no shepherd
whistles, hear / No more the crack of the resounding sling.)

But this is not all. Polyphemus himself is altered in the most unimaginable way. He, who was fear itself for any sailor, for the love of Galatea has rescued a shipwreck, and has given refuge in his abode to a Genoese merchant—of all people. The Genoese: the embodiment of money, of flux of capital, of destruction of *real* estate. “Segunda tabla a un ginovés mi gruta / de su persona fue, de su hacienda” (stanza 57).

It is curious how here Cunningham erases the Genoese in his translation (just as he had erased the castrated bulls of Stanza 9, making them “cattle”) making him not even “a merchant,” but simply “a sailor.” (Here is the translation, with me restoring “Genoese” where he says “sailor”: A second plank that day my grotto made / To save a [Genoese's] person and his gold.)

So Galatea is the monster who hurts agriculture (“natural” economy) and, by exercising her powers on Polyphemus, helps commerce and moneylending (the most radically “cultural” producing-machine). Galatea, in other words, is the monster lurking underneath economic depressions, and presiding over the self-perpetuating flux: money itself, that space of criminal deterritorialization that Deleuze and Guattari saw only so well.¹² Not only Galatea hurts agriculture, but prevents Polyphemus from hurting commerce; she turns Polyphemus from his “natural” monstrous being, who eats sailors and whose song makes sailors flee as fast as they can, into a protector of Genoese merchants. His dark cave is now a safe haven.

If Polyphemus is a monster of castration, Galatea is the monster who opposes such castration. She is the pulsion-machine of desire, in flux, in maritime, liquid, flux. The only one to profit from the entire set of monstrous actions is that Genoese merchant. Polyphemus suffers; Sicily

suffers; poor Acis, who thought of himself as the tamer of the monster, is sacrificed, annihilated. But someone wins. “Constructed on decoded flaws that constitute its profound tendency or its absolute limit, capitalism is constantly counteracting this tendency, exorcizing this limit (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 362). Yes: Galatea is an exorcist, a monster of monsters. Far more horrifying and powerful than Polyphemus. If, as Egginton said (97), “it is . . . to be expected that Lacan speak in the style of Góngora,” it may also be to be expected—surprisingly—that Góngora and Deleuze and Guattari speak the same monstrous images of capitalism. The *Polifemo* may be, indeed, *worse* than the *Soledades*, as Jáuregui feared, warning us.

Poor Acis—that “arrow of Cupid,” that meta-machine of desire. Annihilated, and re-channeled as a docile stream, not into the Oedipal womb of mother, but into the theater of horrors of mother-in-law. *Caudal* is the Spanish word for both “stream” and “wealth.” Galatea has caused desire to flow when culture demanded castration. This is exactly what capitalism did, and does: it re-channels the entire flow into destruction in order for surplus-value to exist. While poor Acis is thus metamorphosed—reterritorialized—and everyone mourns, and Polyphemus is still unhappy, and nobody grows anything anymore in Sicily, the Genoese is safe-saved, and Doris gains a son-in-law.

While Polyphemus is a son of Neptune, but a land monster, and Acis is the mongrel of a faun and a nymph, Galatea is pure sea, pure liquid. Only her mother (a sea entity) is mentioned. We know from Hesiod that she is the daughter of Triton, but that is not mentioned in Góngora’s poem. Only the woman—the liquid—is she: pure liquidity, pure circulation, shapeless commodity, money. The market has triumphed over the land; Wall Street over every street. Galatea liquidates everything she touches: her lover, Acis, is turned into a river which loses itself in the sea (no: in Doris. The poem does not say “Al mar llega” (he arrives at the sea), but “A Doris llega.” (he arrives at Doris). The sea, that primordial “smooth space” was, after all, the first to be mapped, charted, striated by mercantilism (Deleuze and Guattari 478ff).

Expanding on an old idea of mine (that Góngora’s *Soledades* is as close as it comes to being a *nomadology* as opposed to a *history*), it may very well be that the *Fábula de Polifemo y Galatea* is a *mythoanalysis*, a refocusing of ancient mythemes in light of new threats and new taboos.¹³ As with psychoanalysis or with schizoanalysis, it is a matter of analyzing (i.e., breaking apart) its subject matter, by *doing*—rather than just “saying”—or by *saying-as-doing*, as myths say/do, and also poetry says/does. The monster lurking in (or beneath, within, inside) Galatea attracts Góngora’s poem, fascinates it, lures it. The monster, actually, is embodied in the poem, as Jáuregui feared and felt.

Both Polyphemus and Galatea create and re-create striated spaces. Polyphemus has his cave in which he gathers goods—very unusual for monsters, who usually collect remnants of things, such as skeletons, in their caves—and only fights the competition from ships and navigation (Odysseus or that unnamed ship that flees from his music in Góngora’s poem). But Galatea performs the striation on the sea, the smoothest of surfaces. Two *nomads* are sacrificed: Acis and that poor beast whose skin accompanies the castrated bull’s gonads as the opposite symbol of surplus-value (*minusvalía* we could say in Spanish). Both of these nomads came with their *war machine*. The wild beast’s is obvious; Acis’s is not so obvious, because it is a seduction machine. But the vocabulary of the poem is decidedly military: “Galatea lo diga, salteada” (stanza 38) (Let Galatea say it, assaulted); “paces no al sueño, treguas sí al reposo” (stanza 39) (not peace to sleepiness, but truce to rest), etc. The poem also creates/destroys striated spaces. Its stanzas, as opposed to the smooth space of the *silva* in the *Soledades*, are grooves, regularly spaced, symmetrically traced. But Góngora’s monstrosity as a poet (everybody since Jáuregui and Quevedo to our present day agrees on it) breaks all grooves and trespasses all territories.¹⁴

Even though Polyphemus is a hunter-gatherer, rather than a peasant-shepherd, his nomadic threat is deflected to the beasts he hunts: they—not him—are “mortal horror.” Polyphemus, far from harassing the peasant’s oxen, allows them to practice agriculture in peace, in a clearly confined space: “los bueyes a su albergue reducía” (he was bringing the oxen back into their barn). Galatea, conversely, de-striates the fields: “los arados / peinan las tierras que surcaron antes” (now the plows barely comb the fields that were properly plowed before). But by extending the power of desire-production to Polyphemus (especially to Polyphemus), she makes him relax his own nomadic mechanism of sea-re-smoothing, by helping the Genoese merchant. Strange irony: in order for the sea to be *smooth* in the Deleuzian-Guattarian sense, *storms* have to occur, but the song (Polyphemus’s song) that is so bad for navigation stems from the same mechanism of desire that saves the Genoese, and is caused by the peculiar monstrosity of Galatea—her *rigorous beauty*.

All monsters are cultural, yes. But some of them have a body that is all too real. Some monsters inhabit—or lurk in—myths; others guard several Lacanian liminalities of “the Real”; others still are literary creatures, but others flood every nook and cranny of space, constituting Reality. Now: Reality might be Spirit, as in Hegel, or only a gruesome, grotesque undead, but it is Death, and, in our times, as Agustín García Calvo liked to say, administered Death.¹⁵ The nuclear threat is such a ghostly Reality: not true at all, but all-too-real to the dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yes, there is Godzilla too, but that does not exorcise the dark monster in protons and neutrons and stuff. There was Gregor Samsa, but there was anti-Semitism and Nazism. For Ana in *The Spirit of the Beehive* there was a Spirit who was

not a ghost and who was her friend, but there was an all-too-real “monstruo de rigor”: Fascism. Then there is Galatea the beautiful, but the uglier, more destructive monster from our collectively fabricated Reality lurks in her wake.

Notes

1. This epoch-making book is thus structured, with sections entitled “The ‘Good manners’ Sonata,” “Fugue of the Five Senses,” and so on.
2. Julia Kristeva (*Revolution in Poetic Language*) puts this space of pre-symbolic semiosis in contact with the Poetic. It is curious that, a keen analyst of poetry himself, fully conscientious of how poetry depends on patterns of the body such as rhythm or repetition, Lévi-Strauss puts poetry quite afar from myths in his book, maximizing, on the other hand, the distance between poetry and music. Lévi-Strauss insists on the “meaning” of music, on the Thetic, while Kristeva, on the contrary, minimizes the Thetic in poetry, making it be language used against itself, in search of (mother’s) body.
3. I will be using and quoting from Damaso Alonso’s edition *Góngora y el “Polifemo,”* Vol. III, unless otherwise indicated. For the English translation, if nothing is indicated, I will be using Gilbert F. Cunningham’s translation in Alexander Parker’s 1977 study, but at times I will provide my own translation, and will indicate so.
4. In Jáuregui’s *Antídoto*. Jáuregui’s title can be translated as “Antidote Against the Pestilent Poetry of the *Soledades*.” “Y con ser tan pestilente y perjudicial esta obra [*Soledades*], es aun peor, si peor puede ser, el *Polifemo*” (78) (As pestilent and harmful as the *Soledades* are, the *Polifemo* is even worse, if it is possible to be worse). On how Góngora’s fiercest critics are indeed his best readers, see the section “La soledad en construcción” of my *Quehaceres con Góngora*.
5. Any *Star Trek* aficionado knows how aliens are more or less humanoid-looking, in direct proportion to their otherness. Next to humanoid comes “non-human but still recognizable as some form of mammal”; next comes “reptilian”; at the extreme of otherness, to the point of not being able to use the “universal translator” come the “insect-like” creatures.
6. “Todas las connotaciones que matizan, individualizan y enriquecen el tema BELLEZA (Galatea) surgen por oposición de los lexemas que configuraban el tema MONSTRUOSIDAD (Polifemo)” (231) (All the connotations that fine-tune, individualize and enrich the theme BEAUTY (Galatea) arise in opposition to the lexemes that configured the theme MONSTROSITY (Polyphemus). Words in all caps appear like that in the quoted text.
7. Alonso: “Cuesta se ríe de las explicaciones—¡nada menos que veinte columnas!— que dedica a esta voz el incansable Pellicer. Chistoso pasaje de Cuesta (vol. III, 695) (Cuesta laughs at the explanations—all of twenty columns!—that the tireless Pellicer spent on this word. Funny bit, Cuesta’s). Micó: “El endecasílabo bimembre que abre la segunda semiestrofa . . . contiene una ponderación no meramente formal, pues es sabido que ‘las fieras se forman por gusto de naturaleza, y los monstruos por error suyo’ (Pellicer, que enristra veinte columnas de erudición a propósito del cultismo *monstro*)” (57–58) (The bi-membered, hendecasyllabic line opening the second half of the stanza . . . contains a not merely formal distinction, because it is

- known that “beasts are formed in accordance to nature, and monsters because of its error.”—Pellicer, who lines up twenty columns of erudition apropos the Latin-originated word *monstro*).
8. I am referring, of course, to the first chapter of *Monster Theory* (3–25), which I will be paraphrasing, not necessarily in order, in this section.
 9. For the implications of this abrupt change of mother into mother-in-law, see my “Yerno lo saludó.” I also speak of the matter in a previous volume of *Hispanic Issues*.
 10. I have participated in a staging of *Fuenteovejuna* several times as an amateur of theater. I have even played the Comendador. I have always kept in my mind an open question: whether the Comendador is ugly or attractive. The overwhelming majority of directors cast someone ugly, or fat, or old—even repulsive—as Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, such as it would suit a tyrant who rapes women. I have, however, always been tempted to see in the Comendador a handsome man, precisely to accentuate his monstrosity, which does not stem from being ugly, or fat, or repulsive-looking, but from somewhere else.
 11. An interesting study on how language/silence affects desire in relation to women during the period of disintegration of Courtly Love that finds its highest expression in *La Celestina* is Michael Gerli’s *Celestina and the Ends of Desire*. See especially chapter 6 and the Introduction, 6ff).
 12. I am using from now on some of the fundamental ideas of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. I am not quoting from specific pages, but simply paraphrasing and applying their general ideas, or, rather, tropes for saying the unsayable. It is academicians that turn into categories the metaphors that thinkers find.
 13. See *Quehaceres con Góngora* 130. Also see Deleuze and Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 23.
 14. There is, of course, no space here to speak about the monstrosity of Góngora’s poetry. But I assume that the reader is familiar with the issue, at least enough to know that, maybe with the exception of Jammes’ French school, every modern scholar finds in Góngora’s poetry what his detractors found back in the 1600s: an absolute lack of proportion, an abuse of language, a tweaking of every trope. That Góngora’s poetry is monstrous is not the issue here, being as plain as Polyphemus’s monstrosity, which wasn’t the issue of this essay either.
 15. García Calvo died not long ago, and with him dies a unique thinker who never had his fair share of attention in America. For the issue of the falsehood of reality, and of administering Death, I recommend, from his vast production, *Contra la Realidad*.

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