‘El Homero español’: Translation and Shipwreck

Christopher D. Johnson

Musing on the innumerable ‘versiones homéricas’ Borges affirms: ‘The present state of his works is like a complex equation that represents the precise relations of unknown quantities. There is no possible greater richness for the translator.’ Contemplating one telling iteration of this ‘complex equation’, the present essay traces how the Odyssey and the figure of Odysseus survive, even thrive, in translation and imitation in late Renaissance Spain. It does so principally by considering the fate of Homer’s text and hero in the verse – the iconic ‘Pasos . . . perdidos’ – of Luis de Góngora’s Soledad primera (1613). The extent to which Góngora ransacks the classical tradition for his matter and style was dissected even as the Soledades circulated in manuscript. But that Góngora’s narrative of a shipwrecked, wandering pilgrim and his infamous poetics of errancy might participate in the literal and allegorical task of translating Homer’s epic to Imperial Spain has been largely ignored.

To ponder this task, however, we need to ask more generally how the Homeric legacy and Odysseus’ mobility, curiosity, and ingenio (wit) were figured by a nation obsessed by the risks and rewards of the translatio imperii. Many sixteenth-century Spanish readers of Homer still depended on digests, such as the Ilias Latina (c. 70ce), a ‘crude condensation of the Iliad into 1070 hexameters’. This formed the

basis for Juan de Mena’s delightful 1442 version of the *Iliad* ‘en romance’, which influences Góngora’s invention, as well as Alonso de Ercilla’s epic, *La Araucana* (1589). While still very much a digest, Mena’s text amplifies many episodes as well. His adaptation also signals an important break with the medieval custom of using Dictis and Dares as the chief Homeric sources. *La Araucana* chronicles the Spanish conquest of Chile with great sympathy for the resisting Indians. Mena’s Homer seems to have been drawn on by Ercilla in his extended similes, though his debts are mainly to Virgil, Lucan, and Ariosto.

But the first in Spain to engage Homer philologically and as a comparandum in the classical tradition was the great Spanish classicist and humanist, Hernán Núñez de Guzmán (known as Pincianus or El Pinciano; c. 1475–1553). In addition to penning an influential *Glosa* (1499) of Mena’s *Laberinto de fortuna*, Pincianus produced celebrated editions of Pliny the Elder, Seneca, and Pomponius Mela; he also laboured on the *Biblia poliglota complutense* (1517). Pincianus’ example was not generally followed, as Spain never really developed an autonomous trend in Greek studies. A generation later, the reception of Homer was made chillier on the peninsular, as throughout Europe, by J. C. Scaliger’s encyclopedic *Poetices libri septem* (1561), given its learned but relentlessly invidious comparison of Homer with Virgil. Still, Scaliger’s rigour reflects a wider historical change: in the latter half of the sixteenth century a discernable shift occurs away from a chivalric Homer – a notion that persisted in the *libros de caballerías*, the books that turn Quixote’s brains – to a more textual, classicized Homer, thanks to the availability of newer, better editions and the influence of Italian humanist criticism, but also the presence of other epic models (i.e., Virgil, Lucan, Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso). With this said, Spanish appropriations of Homer complicate and partially resist the larger European trend in which allegorical approaches to reading epic were increasingly spurned in favour of more philological, historicist ones.


Such complication is exemplified by Alonso López Pinciano (also known, confusingly, as El Pinciano) (c. 1547–1627), who though a devotee of Scaliger, praises Homer as an ‘autor divino’, and claims, following Pliny and Plato, that the Greek poet was not only the happiest man in antiquity but also the most philosophical. Keen to adapt cinquecento ideas about mixed genres, however, he treats the Odyssey as a ‘tragico-commedia’. In this he may also have in mind Fernando de Rojas’ Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea, better known as La Celestina (1499, 1516). And, perhaps thinking of polytropos (literally ‘much-turned’ or ‘much-travelled’, but figuratively meaning ‘versatile’ or ‘wily’), Homer’s epithet for Odysseus, Pinciano describes the epic hero as ‘un varón consumado en todas cosas’ (‘a man consummated in all things’).

A slightly earlier and more explicit figuration of Odysseus as polytropos occurs in the Prologue to Cristóbal de Villalón’s 1557 Viaje de Turquía, a semi-autobiographical travel narrative, which a modern editor has perceptively subtitled La odisea de Pedro de Urdemalas. Villalón writes:

Aquel insaciable y desenfrenado deseo de saber y conocer que natura puso en todos los hombres, César invictíssimo, subjetándonos de tal manera que nos fuerza a leer sin fructo ninguno las fábulas y fictiones, no puede mejor executarse que con la peregrinación y ver de tierras estranías, considerando en quánta angustia se enzierra el ánimo y entendimiento que está siempre en un lugar sin poder extenderse a especular la infinita grandeza deste mundo, y por esto Homero, único padre y autor de todos los buenos estudios, habiendo de proponer a su Ulixes por perfecto dechado de virtud y sabiduría, no sabe de qué manera se entonar más alto que con estas palabras:

Ayúdame a cantar ¡o musa! un varón que vio muchas tierras y diversas costumbres de hombres.
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(That insatiable and unbridled desire to know and learn that nature gave to all men, most invincible Caesar, subjecting us in such a manner that it forces us to read fables and fictions without profit, cannot exercise itself better than in travelling and viewing foreign lands, especially if we consider how much anxiety imprisons the spirit and understanding when it remains in one place without the power of extending itself to contemplate this world’s infinite majesty. And this is why Homer, the unique father and author of all worthy studies, needing to depict his Ulysses as the perfect exemplar of virtue and knowledge, could find no better way to do this than by using these words . . .

Help me to sing – O muse! – of a man who saw many lands and myriad ways of men.)

Here Villalón re-energizes the moral value of fables and fictions by making Homer and his hero exemplary of the Aristotelian commonplace that to be human is to desire to know. Odysseus becomes an avatar of epistemological curiosity and ‘cultural mobility’.13 And while polytropos is only glossed here, on the first page of the actual dialogue Villalón merges his own identity with that of the principal character of his narrative, Pedro de Urdemalas, who is called ‘Polítropo’.14 In this way, even as he visits the humanist topoi of man as ‘Proteus’ and as ‘chameleon’, Villalón makes polytropos synonymous with peregrino, which in addition to meaning ‘pilgrim’ could also be used adjectively to describe something ‘strange’ or ‘foreign’.15

Villalón then goes on to compare the travels of his dedicatee, Philip II (‘César invictíssimo’) to Odysseus’. But very soon he is quoting Virgil, who subtly mixes praise and blame throughout the Aeneid, and, as much recent criticism has underscored, can be quite sceptical of the imperial project:

Dize Dido en Virgilio: Yo que he probado el mal, aprendo a socorrer a los míseros; porque cierto es cosa natural dolernos de los que padeçen calamidades semejantes a las que por nosotros han pasado. Como los marineros, después de los tempestuosos trabajos, razonan de buena gana entre sí de los peligros pasados, quién el escapar de Scila, quién el salvarse en una tabla, quién el dar al trabés y naufragio de las sirtes, otros de las ballenas y antropófagos que se tragan los hombres, otros, el

14 Villalón, p. 95.
15 Covarrubias glosses peregrino as ‘el que sale de su tierra en romeria a visitar alguna casa santa o lugar santo’. As for the adjective, a ‘cosa peregrina’ is a ‘cosa rara’. See Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, Tesoro de la lengua Castellana o Española (Madrid, 1995), p. 814.
huir de los corsarios que todo lo roban, a mí me ayudará a tornar a la memoria, la cautividad peor que la de Babilonia, la servidumbre llena de crueldad y tormento, las duras prisiones y peligrosos casos de mi huida.16

(Dido says in Virgil: *I who have suffered evils learn to succour the miserable; for surely it is a natural thing to commiserate with those who suffer calamities similar to those we have suffered. As with sailors, after tempestuous travails, eagerly recounting among themselves past dangers, who escaped from Scylla, who saved himself on a plank, who capsized and shipwrecked in the Syrtes – others speak about whales and anthropophages who swallow men, others of flight from the corsairs who plunder everything – it will help me to recall my captivity worse than that of Babylon, my enslavement full of cruelty and torment, the harsh prisons and the perilous details of my escape.*)

Villalón begins by translating from *Aeneid* 1.630: ‘non ignara mali misera succurrere disco’. That he should have Dido rather than Aeneas speak in this autobiographical moment suggests where his sympathies lie. And that he rejects Aeneas’ Stoic ethos in favour of empathy for the shipwrecked and victims of other ‘calamidades’ hints strongly at his wariness toward imperial rhetoric.

Again, Odysseus was in late Renaissance Spain both allegorized and made into an *exemplum* of various sorts, whether of *ingenium*, ‘astucia’ (‘slyness’), or patriotism. By allegory I mean a programmatic, continuous figure that finds correspondences between literal and figurative meaning. By *exemplum* I have in mind a rhetorical example meant to serve a didactic, demonstrative point.17 The ingenious emblem maker and valiant lexicographer Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco portrays Odysseus, in one of the entries of his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611), as exemplary for his intelligence and, strikingly, his uprootedness. In the entry for *asno*, which is in equal parts narrative, natural history, humanist commentary, etymology, and folk wisdom, Covarrubias writes:

Una figura humana con cabeza de asno significaba, cerca de los egipcios, el hombre ignorante y necio, abatido y de servil condición. Poca diferencia desto significar la cabeza del asno al que no ha salido de su

16 Villalón, pp. 89–90.
17 Of the vast critical literature on Renaissance allegory and exemplarity, *Thinking Allegory Otherwise*, edited by Brenda Machosky (Stanford, CA, 2010), contains a variety of approaches to interpreting allegory. For exemplarity, see the articles dedicated to the ‘crisis of exemplarity’ in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59 (1998), 557–624. As an example of allegory, see Dante’s depiction of Ulysses’ journey in *Inferno* XXVI. As an example of exemplarity, in *The Defense of Poetry* on ‘the force of love of our country hath in us’, Philip Sidney urges his readers to ‘see Ulysses, in the fulness of all Calypso’s delights, bewail his absence from barren and beggarly Ithaca’.
tierra, porque los que andan por las ajenas se preguntan de lo que han visto a ser hombres, y por esto alcanzó Ulises nombre de sabio y excelente varón, como le canta Homero en los primeros versos de su Odisea, en la versión:

_Dic mihi musa virum, captae post tempora Troiae,_
_Qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes._

La razón de esta similitud es porque el asno es bestia, aunque provechosa, para servicio ordinario, inútil para largo camino, semejante al hombre terrenero que no se sabe despejar de la teta de su madre, a que parece aludir la bendición de Israel a su hijo Isachar, Génesis, cap. 49: ‘Issachar asinus fortus accubans inter terminos, vidit requiem quod esset bona, et terram quod optima et supposuit humerum ad portandum, factusque est tributis serviens.’

(A human figure with the head of a donkey signified, among the Egyptians, an ignorant, foolish man, having a miserable, humble status. Not very different from this is to call someone a donkey head who has never left his fields, because those who travel in foreign lands learn to be men from what they have seen, and for this reason Ulysses earned the title of a wise and excellent man, as Homer sings in the first verses of his Odyssey, in the version:

_Dic mihi musa virum, captae post tempora Troiae,_
_Qui mores hominum multorum vidit et urbes._

The reason for this analogy is because the donkey, though beneficent, is a beast for quotidian tasks, not useful for long journeys, similar to the stick-in-the-mud who does not know how to detach himself from his mother’s breast, to which it seems that Jacob’s benediction to his son Issachar (Genesis 49:14–15) alludes: ‘Issachar is a strong ass, crouching between the sheepfolds; | he saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a slave at forced labour.’)

Relying on Horace’s quotation in the _Ars poetica_ (141–2) for the Homeric lines, Covarrubias delineates here the forking paths facing the sons of the impoverished Spanish nobility and those commoners who would rise to a higher place: whether to stay at home in Spain to work the land, serve at court, enter the clergy, or sail away and try one’s fortune at war or in the New World. (Among those who chose the last option were Cortés and Pizarro.) In doing so, he also resists the temptation of allegorizing the ass for its philosophic

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18 *Teoro*, p. 129.
qualities, a temptation that Erasmus, Rabelais, and Bruno were unable or unwilling to spurn. 19

If Covarrubias prescribes seeing the world, Góngora is far more ambivalent. Dubbed ‘El Homero español’ by one of his first editors, Góngora transforms Odysseus’ wanderings, in the so-called ‘navigation’-excursus (366–506) of the Soledad primera, into a baroque cautionary tale of imperial folly. Góngora and his commentators rely on Homer and the Homeric tradition to push epic hubris toward pastoral ambivalence, as they transform the polytropic Odysseus into a rural ‘peregrino’, a secular pilgrim estranged from court and colonies. 20 In the process, I would argue, Odysseus becomes an avatar of poetry whose difficulty and obscurity require in the reader a new kind of *metis*, an ingenuity and interiority that in the course of the seventeenth century will eventually merge with a strong current of scepticism about the ability to know and value the things and events of the external world.

Spoken by a Nestorian ‘politico serrano’, an eloquent old man, who has lost his son at sea, the excursus begins grimly:

¿Cuál tigre, la más fiera
que clima infamó hircano,
dio el primer alimento
al que, ya deste o de aquel mar, primero
surcó, labrador fiero,
el campo undoso en mal nacido pino,
vaga Clicie del viento
en telas hecho, antes que en flor, el lino? 21

(What tiger, the fiercest one that made Hircanian climes infamous, suckled the man, fierce peasant who, for the first time, ploughed the wavy field of this or that sea in an ill-born pine tree, a mobile Clytie of the wind, transformed into sails of linen rather than into a flower?)

Strengthened by the verb *infamar*, the old man’s outraged incredulity prepares the way for a long, negative epideixis of the search for treasure in the New World, aptly labelled an ‘excración’ by the contemporary

19 See Nucci Ordine, Giordano Bruno and the Philosophy of the Ass, translated by Henryk Baranski in collaboration with Arielle Saiber (New Haven, CT, 1996).

20 An exception is José García de Salcedo Coronel’s edition of and commentary on the Soledades (Madrid, 1636), which invariably cites Virgil instead of Homer as the epic authority, and where Scaliger serves as the principal theoretical authority.

21 Luis de Góngora, Soledades, edited by Robert Jammes (Madrid, 1994), lines 366–73. All citations are from this edition.

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commentator José Pellicer de Salas y Tovar.22 Refashioning Dido’s reproach to Aeneas as the latter is about to set sail from Carthage,23 Góngora, instead of representing the choice between love and empire, continues his recusatio from conventional epic and Petrarchan modes to cultivate his idiosyncratic version of pastoral.

In general, then, in terms of imitatio, the most obvious models for the ‘navigation’-excursus, an ‘epica trágica in miniatura de la Conquista’,24 are the Aeneid, Seneca’s Medea, Virgil’s fourth Eclogue, Horace’s Odes 1.4 and 1.14, and Camões’ Lusiadas. Robert Jammes underscores Camões’ influence, but would distinguish Camões’ broad condemnation of ‘cobiça’ or thirst for glory from Góngora’s narrower attack on the ‘codicia’ for precious metals.25 Pellicer cites Camões together with numerous other intertexts as possible sources for Góngora.26 As for Horace, his ‘O navis, referent’ – which Quintilian (Inst. 8.6.44) interprets as a political allegory warning against the dangers to the ship of state from civil wars, or, as others have read it, as an allegory in which an older woman is set to re-embark on love’s stormy seas – resonates with particular force in Góngora’s figuration of the thirst for empire as a kind of eros gone mad.27 Os Lusiadas (1572), with its prophetic Old Man of Belem and giant Adamastor both warning against the follies of navigation, is another important source. A fusion of Homer’s and Ovid’s Polyphemus, part Cassandra, part Anchises, Adamastor acknowledges the extraordinary audacity of the Portuguese (‘Ó gente ousada . . . navegar meus longos mares oussas’), but still judges it to be unnatural (‘. . . vens ver os segredos escondidos | Da natureza e do húmido elemento’), and so predicts an endless succession of shipwrecks.28 Still, Camões also asserts that Vasco da Gama’s deeds surpass those of Odysseus (‘Cesse tudo a que a Musa antiga canta’).

22 See Pellicer, Lecciones solemnes a las obras de Don Luis de Góngora y Argote, Píndaro Andaluz, Príncipe de las poéticas liricas de España (1630; reprint Hildesheim, 1971), pp. 429, 447. As the full title indicates, Góngora here is made to imitate Pindar, not Homer.
23 Aeneid 4.365–7: ‘Nec tibi diva parens, generis nec Dardanus auctor, | perfide; sed duris genuit te cautibus horrens | Caucasus, Hyrcanaeque admorunt ubera tigres.’ Dryden’s memorable translation is: ‘Not sprung from noble blood, nor goddess-born, | But hewn from harden’d entrails of a rock! | And rough Hyrcanian tigers gave thee suck!’
25 Robert Jammes, La obra poética de Don Luis de Góngora y Argote, translated by Manuel Moya (Madrid, 1987), pp. 473–4. Reading the ‘navigation’-excursus, Jammes acknowledges the presence of the Odyssey and Camões, but he also returns to his main theme that myth allows Góngora an audacious, convenient vehicle for ‘sentimientos personales, preocupaciones modernos’. Góngora both condemns and admires ‘las navegaciones’; but ‘una reconstitución arqueológica de las aventuras de Ulises no le interesaba’.
28 All quotations are from Os Lusiadas, edited by J. D. M. Ford (Cambridge, MA, 1946).

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Quo outro valor mais alto se alevanta’), because they are based in fact and experience rather than ‘empty fables’. Thus Homer and Virgil are outdone:

Que por muito e por muito que se afinem
Nestas fábulas vãs, tão bem sonhadas,
A verdade que eu conto, nua e pura,
Vence toda grandiloqua escritura!

(5.89)

(For however they try and try to polish their empty fables, so well dreamed, truly, the tale I tell is naked and pure, and trumps all grandiloquent writing.)

Yet within the tangled, intertextual skein informing the rhetoric of Góngora’s ‘montañés prolijo’ (‘prolix mountain-dweller’, 505), threads taken directly from Homer are also to be found. Homer’s influence is first evident in a typically tendentious simile by which Góngora amplifies the Hircanian tiger’s ferocity until the creature becomes a sea ‘monster’ whose bellicosity reaches new extremes:

Más armas introdujo este marino
monstruo, escamado de robustas hayas,
a las que tanto mar divide playas,
que confusión y fuego
al frigio muro el otro leño griego.

(374–8)

(This marine monster, whose scales are robust beeches, brought more arms to remote shores, separated by so much sea, than the confusion and fire brought to Phrygian walls by that other Greek plank.)

Here the ability to sail the sea renders the explorer’s ship more lethal than ‘el otro leño griego’, the horse devised by Odysseus’ guile.29

With this fine hyperbole, the ‘leño’ bearing the poem’s protagonist, the peregrino, to shore at the poem’s beginning (15–21), now becomes a lethal literary artifact, a monstrous weapon of war. But it also emblemizes how Góngora tends to sacrifice verisimilitude and ransack literary traditions for ethical ends.

A second Homeric inflection occurs when, after playing on the mutability of the motion of the compass, Góngora fixes the ship’s attraction to an eroticized North Star.30 Alluding to Tifis, Palinurus, and

29 While the Odyssey ascribes the actual building of the horse to Epeios, the idea seems to have been Odysseus’ (8.487). The Posthomerica of Quintus Smyraneus (editio princeps 1504) confirms this. See also line 397, where Góngora means by leña only ‘ship’.

30 Pellicer (pp. 432–43) glosses the lines alluding to the magnetic compass with a lengthy explication of its origins and use such that Góngora is placed in direct dialogue with a mob
Hercules, he forebodingly inscribes the *Plus ultra* motif into his lyric geography. The ‘Píloto . . . Cudicia’ outflanks all the renowned captains of myth and epic, as he subjugates the limits of terrestrial space to his will. ‘Cudicia’, greed, propels the voyages of Columbus (413–29), Pizarro (430–46), Vasco da Gama (447–65), Magellan (466–502), and their ‘selvas inconstantes’ – a neat metonymy for the explorers’ ships – that sail beyond the reach, and defy the prudence, of ‘el Sol’. For his part, rhetorically riding hyperbaton and hyperbole, Góngora offers a sophisticated early modern reworking of the anti-navigation *topos*, such that the novel *res* of the voyages of discovery, quantitatively and so also qualitatively, supplant epic poetry’s venerable subject matter.

Yet not only does ‘Greed’ remake the most brilliant Neoplatonic symbol, but Neptune is then ‘violated’ by Columbus’ three ships, whose ‘banderas | siempre gloriosas, siempre tremolantes’ (‘banners always glorious, always fluttering’) brave the ‘plumas ciento’ (‘hundred feathers’, i.e., the arrows) of the Caribbean natives, who are dubbed ‘Lestrigones’ (424). While one of Góngora’s commentators defends this surprising nomination by citing Strabo, more obviously, Odysseus’ voyage becomes emblematic here of the risks and rewards of the voyages of discovery and conquest. In the late Renaissance, that is, natives still fight back and sailors still greedily undermine their captain’s best-laid plans. No wonder, then, that in the dedicatory stanzas of the *Soledades* Góngora urges his noble addressee to leave the hunt, forget the epic ‘trompa’, and enjoy instead the ‘dulce instrumento’ of Euterpe, that is, his pastoral lyric (33–7).

Góngora’s labyrinthine *imitatio*, however, does not directly signal in what form or even how closely he read the *Odyssey*. At least three different Latin translations would have been available to him. There was the *ad verbum* 1538 *Odyssey* by Andreas Divus, whose *katabasis* Pound would later rewrite in his opening *Canto* (‘Lie quiet Divus. I mean, that of ancient and early modern cosmographers from Eratosthenes and Pliny to Isaac Casaubon and Gregorio García.

31 Salcedo Coronel (n. 18), sigs 99v–100r. Then he quotes from Juvenal’s *Satyricon* on the same theme. Likewise, Pliny, Horace, Jacobus Cruquius (a humanist commentator on Horace), and Denys Lambin (the French translator and commentator on Lucretius) are consulted before he concludes: ‘Lo que me parece es, que los Lestrigones habitaban en Campania, los Cyclopes en Sicilia, y los Antropófagos en Scita: y porque todos comían carne humana, confundieron los Poetas, y antigos’ (sig. 100v).

is Andreas Divus, | In officina Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer. | And he sailed, by Sirens and thence outwards and away | And unto Circe.

Second, widely circulating was the 1577 commentary and revision of Divus’ literal translation by Spondanus, which George Chapman was to rely on in his Homeric translations. This encyclopedic text produced by the young Jean de Sponde, whose French lyrics Gérard Genette reads as epitomizing Baroque hyperbole, polishes somewhat Divus’ literal version, though Sponde’s real interest is not translation but rather the explication of Homer’s poetics. He tends to avoid allegoresis or the kind of frequently specious etymological reasoning practiced, for example, by his contemporary, the linguist Johannes Goropius Becanus. Third, there was the Latin translation generally ascribed to Raffaele Maffei, first published in 1510 in the wake of Valla’s partial translation of the Iliad, and then reprinted several times in the course of the sixteenth century. Though its opening lines are in verse, the vast majority of this widely-circulating translation is in prose.

There is, too, the translation of the Odyssey into Spanish by Gonzalo Pérez, first published in 1556. Dedicated to Felipe II, to whom he ascribes all the virtues Homer finds in a ‘buen Príncipe’, Pérez’s La Ulyxea, a blank verse translation in hendecasyllables, was by most accounts widely diffused, lauded, and imitated. In the Dorotea (IV.2), for example, Lope de Vega praises the translator, and he apparently signals his own debts in works like La Circe (1627), where he refers to ‘Gonzalo Pérez, excelente traductor de Homero’.

For example, in his Praefatio Sponde discusses Homer’s origins and weighs various apocryphal opinions. He ends by mocking Goropius’ attempt to link Odysseus with Old Testament figures. For more on Goropius see Anthony Grafton, Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1550–1800 (Cambridge, MA, 1991), p. 100. Though it pays scant attention to Sponde’s dependence on Divus, a fine recent study of Sponde’s edition is Christiane Deloince-Louette, Sponde: Commentateur d’Homere (Paris, 2001). Findler and others, however, ascribe this translation to Valla’s student, Francesco Artimo, who, on Pius II’s orders, is said to have completed in 1458–60 Valla’s partial prose translation of the Iliad (1442–4) and then translated the Odyssey. Valla only translated the first sixteen Books; his work was first printed in 1474. Also potentially available to Góngora was a Latin version by Aenulius Portus (Lyons, 1584).

And reprinted six years later (Venice, 1562), in the edition I cite here. That Gonzalo Pérez (1500–1566) was indeed the translator, but had the assistance in revising his translation of two other Spanish Hellenists, Juan Páez de Castro (c. 1512–1570) and Francisco de Mendoza y Bovadilla (1508–1569), is confirmed by Luis Arturo Guichard in ‘Un autógrafo de la traducción de Homero de Gonzalo Pérez (Ulyxes XIV–XXIV) anotado por Juan Páez de Castro y el Cardenal Mendoza y Bovadilla’, International Journal of the Classical Tradition, 15 (2008), 525–57.

Alberto Manguel, in Homer’s The Iliad and The Odyssey: A Biography (New York, 2007), comments that it was ‘hardly distributed’ (p. 111); but Palli Bonet (n. 7) more accurately underscores ‘el gran influjo que ejerció esta traducción, pues muchos escritores de nuestro Siglo de Oro conocieron a Homero a través de ella’ (p. 18).
Comparing a manuscript version of the translation housed in Bologna with several published versions, Luis Arturo Guichard contends that Pérez probably relied mainly but not exclusively on the Divus translation. Indeed, La Ulyxea tends to amplify and adorn the literal Divus. Writing to the King, Pérez himself insists on a certain kind of fidelity:

> for the author owes me one thing, and this is that I have been a faithful interpreter of his moral sayings ['fiel interprete en la sentencia'], which has cost me no little labour, and those that may know Greek will realize this, and those who do not know it will be indebted to me at least for they will read in this language the greatest poet of the Greeks. And your Grace, together with all those who read, will see that he is such as I say, if one doesn’t stop with the husk, and reads spiritually, and not only with the movement of the tongue. For certainly there are things in him so profound, and secrets so hidden, that very wise men, after having read him many times, have not hit upon them. And I might even be excused for giving your Grace this advice, since while with your great and divine judgment, you will grasp the way one has to read such an excellent author, it will be useful to those that do not have such an exalted understanding, in order that they read with more caution than they use when reading books of tall tales and humorous inventions ['los libros de patrañas, è invenciones de burlas'], from which no fruit is extracted, neither for human life, nor for good manners, nor for other things worthy of generous spirits.

Leaning here on the tradition of allegorical commentaries and scholia, Pérez points to the same Augustinian *topos* that Góngora, in the so-called *Carta en respuesta*, employs to defend his difficulty and to inspire the reader’s hermeneutic labours.

Yet while Pérez invites here an allegorical interpretation, in practice his translation promotes the rhetoric of exemplarity. For even as he contrasts the *Odyssey* with ‘los libros de patrañas, è invenciones de burlas’ and lauds its spiritual and ethical rewards for the reader, Pérez opens the door to a reading of Odysseus as a kind of noble *picaro* who for all his vagabondage possesses prudence rather than cupidity. Such a reading is encouraged, I think, by the publication of *Lazarillo de Tormes* in 1554 as well as the translation’s opening lines:

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38 Guichard, p. 539 n. 32.
41 Leaning on an admittedly broad notion of intertextuality, Joseph V. Ricapito compares the two texts in ‘Classicity in the Spanish Golden Age: Gonzalo Pérez’s Translation of
Dime de aquel varón, suave Musa,
Que por diversas tierras y naciones
Anduvo peregrino, conociendo
Sus vidas y costumbres, después que huvo
Ya destruido á Troya la sagrada:
Que navegó por mar tan largo tiempo,
Passando mill trabajos y fortunas,
En su animo prudente desandando
Salvar sus compañeros, y su vida.
Mas no bastó á librárselos su deseo,
Que por su poco seso perecieron,
Por comer sin respeto aquellas vacas,
Que el soberano Sol tanto preciava,
Y así el día de su vuelta nunca vino.
Desto de cualquier parte que quisieres
Me comunica Musa algo que cante.

Here a shipwrecked exile’s journey is framed by the theme of greed (in light of the feast Odysseus’ men make of Helios’ cattle), that is, by ‘deseo vano y ciego’ (‘blind and vain desire’) – exactly the subject of Góngora’s ‘navigation’-excursus. By harping on deseo, Pérez’s translation moralizes the epic without allegorizing it in the manner of Juan de Mena or legions of classical, medieval, and Renaissance commentators.42

While Pérez uses ‘peregrino’ here adverbially, Góngora, as we saw above, makes an actor, a protagonist, out of it. Moreover, just as


42 For the tradition see Robert Lamberton, Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition (Berkeley, CA, 1989).
the beginning of Pérez’s *Ulyxeia* is echoed thematically in Góngora’s ‘navigation’-excursus, there are strong thematic parallels between Books 5–6 of the *Odyssey* and the beginning of the *Soledad primera*. In both texts the exiled hero-pilgrim is shipwrecked and then must swim to shore clinging to a board; ignorant of where he has landed, he eventually makes his way inland where he receives hospitality, where stories are told, but where love is postponed or remains vicarious. True, no Nausikaa-figure appears to aid Góngora’s *peregrino*, but he does later attend an elaborate wedding in which the poet remakes numerous amorous *topoi*. More generally still, as with the Calypso episode in Book 1 of the *Odyssey*, from the outset of the *Soledad primera* a failed love interest spurs the action, such as it is, in Góngora’s ambiguous poem.

Even if there is no conclusive evidence that the Greekless, infamously Latinate Góngora directly imitates Pérez’s *Ulyxeia* here, all these resemblances momentarily pull the *Soledades* toward epic while, conversely, they underscore the numerous domestic elements in the *Odyssey*. That upon washing ashore the *peregrino* finds no man-eating, hospitality-flaunting Cyclops nor stingy, abusive suitors, but rather is received warmly by ‘rusticos’, confirms not only that Góngora is working with various imitative models but also that he is modifying epic conventions. To be the Spanish Homer means in part to explore then reject Homer’s solutions, to recreate language and landscape for their own sakes, to be polytropic with words, images, and ethical perspectives. Indeed, the epic moments and echoes in the *Soledades* are nearly always ironized, deconstructed, and remade as parts of Góngora’s maze of self-referential meaning.

Such reflexivity, seemingly, proves intertextual as well in the opening lines of the dedicatory poem to the *Soledades*:

\[\text{Pasos de un peregrino son errante}
\text{cuantos me dictó versos dulce Musa,}
\text{en soledad confusa}
\text{perdidos unos, otros inspirados.}\]

(Steps of the pilgrim, wandering, are verses, such as the sweet Muse dictates to me: in confused solitude, some are lost, others inspired.)

43 Jammes, *Obra poética*, p. 483 n. 22, allows that there is a ‘paralelismo entre la *Odisea* y el comienzo de las *Soledades*’, but then explains it as arising from the influence of Dio Chrysostom. Yet Vilanova establishes, with help from Salcedo Coronel, that Góngora mined *La Ulyxeia* for the *Polifemo*, which was published in the same year as the *Soledades*. See, for example, his gloss on one of Góngora’s myriad hyperboles at 1.439.
Góngora seems to echo Divus’ opening lines:

Virum mihi dic musa multiscium qui valde multum
Erravuit, ex quo Troiae sacrum urbem depopulatus est:
Multorum autem virorum vidit urbem, et mentem cognovuit:
Multos autem hic in mari passus est dolores, suo in animo,
Liberans suamque; animam, et reditum sodorum.

By translating the Homeric ‘πλάγγος’, ‘he wandered’, as ‘erravuit’, Divus inflects the morally neutral notion of being driven from one’s course, or wandering, with connotations of error, falsity, and delusion. For his part, Góngora appears to borrow the ‘peregrino’ from Pérez’s *Ulysses* and the ‘erravuit’ from Divus, transforming the one into a protagonist and the other into a poetics of errancy. As such, the subsequent ‘navigation’-excursus becomes less an ideological critique and more a series of wonder-provoking *exempla* of how to lose one’s way. For here his ‘dulce Musa’ heralds loss and inspiration, a solipsistic poetic space, a ‘soledad confusa’, where the pilgrim’s ‘steps’ (pasos), which double for his own prosody or poetic feet, lead away from empire, convention, and back to the local, back home to Góngora’s Ithaca, the farm near Córdoba, where, exiled from court, he wrote the Baroque’s most emblematic verse. Branded as immoral or even insane by his enemies, the *Soledades* are the period’s most polytropic, exorbitant, and yet nostalgic poems. Indeed, if I might be allowed a Borgesian gesture and the right to collapse historical differences for a moment, they are poems about the Odysseus who pretends to be mad in order to dodge the draft for the war at Troy, the Odysseus who ploughs a field with a team made up of an ass and an ox, until he is found out by his fellow soldiers who, by placing the baby Telemachus in front of the plough, force him to abandon his ploy.

Ronsard signals in the Preface to the *Franciade* (1572) that he aspires to be the ‘Homère françois’. Góngora made no such pronouncements. He had no need to, for his contemporaries were quick to brand him. Manuel de Faria e Sousa dubs Góngora ‘the
Mohammed of poetry’ for his violations of decorum.⁴⁸ For his peregrine style and diction, Lope accuses him of revelling in the curse of Babel. By contrast, the editor of Góngora’s first posthumously published volume of collected verse titles the volume Obras en verso del Homero español.⁴⁹ And though the paratext to this edition, Al Lector, strangely makes no mention of Homer, López de Vicuña does echo the commonplace praise of Homer when he calls Góngora ‘nuestro Poeta, primero en el Mundo’, which, as Timothy Reiss notes, ‘could mean “best”, “original”, or merely first in time and so excusable as to his faults’.⁵⁰

Pedro de Valencia, on the other hand, whom Góngora invited to read a manuscript version of the poems in 1613, compares Góngora’s style in the Soledades unfavourably with the obscuritas of Pindar and Ovid. Valencia also invokes Demetrius’ caution about hyperbole, which reproaches a neo-Homeric poet for having goats browsing on the rock the Cyclops hurled at Odysseus’ ship. While friendly commentators read Góngora as drawing deeply from the classical tradition, for them this tradition, generally speaking, only obliquely includes Homer. This is certainly true for José García de Salcedo Coronel’s Obras de don Luis de Góngora comentadas (1636). In his commentary on the ‘navigation’-excursus, Strabo’s exegesis of Homer plays a far greater role than Homer’s own text. This may be because J. C. Scaliger is one of Salcedo’s chief authorities; but more likely it is due to the nature of his didactic, authorizing task. Salcedo’s commentary effectively leans on Strabo’s argument, which became a commonplace in the Renaissance, that Homer was the founder of the science of geography, and that the poet invests Odysseus with knowledge of all kinds. By adorning the hero’s wandering in the Odyssey with myth and marvels, Homer would both please and instruct; but he does so on the basis, Strabo insists, of ‘actual knowledge’ about the peoples and places he describes.⁵¹

Determined to authorize their poet by tying him to the classical tradition, Góngora’s commentators also ignore imitations closer to home. For example, Cervantes, too, finds the fruits of pastoral after a Homeric shipwreck. Viaje del Parnaso (1614) refashions Odysseus’ voyage past Scylla and Charybdis as an element in Cervantes’ satire of contemporary poets. In order to avoid shipwreck and the ‘greedy

⁴⁸ Lusiadas de Luis de Camões, princepe de los poetas de España … Comentadas por Manuel de Faria i Sousa, 2 vols (Madrid, 1639), I, iii.135.
⁴⁹ Edited by Juan López de Vicuña (Madrid, 1627).
⁵⁰ Reiss, p. 259. Vicuña’s preface situates the edition in an imperial context. His argument is rather conventional save for a filiation of Góngora with Seneca and Lucan.
⁵¹ Strabo, 1.2.10. On Strabo and Homer, see Manguel (n. 37), p. 35.
waves’, Mercurio urges his cargo of poets to imitate Calypso’s lover, the ‘prudent pilgrim’ (‘el prudente peregrino | amante de Calipso’); hence he offers up a ‘poeta desdichado’ (‘unfortunate poet’) to satisfy Scylla’s maw (3.223–73). Later on Cervantes invidiously compares the gardens of Alkinoos (Od. 7), ‘en cuyas alabanzas | se han ocupado ingenios sutiles’ (‘in whose praises, subtle wits have busied themselves’) to one encountered by the same troupe of poets now led by Defio (3.421–32). Cervantes may be drawing here on Virgil or Ovid; but it is just as likely that Pérez’s translation is his source.52

Meanwhile, Góngora’s bitter rival, Francisco de Quevedo, champions Homer over Virgil throughout his career, partly because he aspires to that ‘admirable astucia’ shown by Odysseus in the Cave of Polyphemus. Partly because of religious and nationalist motives, too, he never misses an opportunity to heap abuse on Scaliger.53 Though Quevedo also rails against the voyages of discovery and the greed that motivates them, he mockingly rejects the extravagant semantic and syntactical transformations that Góngora employs to blame them.54 Similarly, trying in part to prove Góngora’s lack of decorum and precision, Lope writes La Circe, an epyllion in three cantos of 154, 108, and 154 octaves, that would, like his many comedias, delight more than instruct. While clearly indebted to Pérez’s translation, La Circe is far more Ovidian than Homeric.55

Finally, though appearing too late for use by Góngora’s commentators, Baltasar Gracián’s proto-Bildungsroman El Criticón (1651–7) commences with a shipwreck that recalls both Góngora’s description of his pilgrim’s misfortune and Odysseus’ travails off the coast of Phaikia: ‘Aquí, luchando con las olas, combatando los vientos y más los desaires de su fortuna, mal sostenido de una tabla, solicitaba Puerto un náufrago, monstruo de la naturaleza y de la suerte’ (‘Here, struggling with the waves, combating the winds together with his fortune’s suffocating air, ill-sustained by a plank, the shipwrecked man, monster of nature and fate, sought land’).56 Here polytropos becomes monstrous as Gracián begins the task of fashioning a satiric, sceptical

52 See Palli Bonet (n. 7), pp. 120–2. In Don Quijote, 1.25, Quijote, preparing to punish himself in the Sierra Morena to prove his love for Dulcinea, explicitly indicates he is imitating Odysseus.
53 In España defendida (1609), Quevedo attacks Joseph Scaliger for his Protestantism (‘mala fe’) and for calling Quintilian, Lucan, and Seneca ‘Pingues isti cordubenses’. On Quevedo’s various uses of Homer, see further Palli Bonet, pp. 135–8.
54 See especially ‘El escarmiento’ (#11) and ‘A una mina’ (#136) in Quevedo, Poesía original completa, edited by J. M. Blecua (Barcelona, 1996).
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exemplum for a court and culture no longer certain of its values. Put another way, El Criticón confirms Hans Blumenberg’s insight that shipwreck is a primary site of theoretical speculation, even if in the course of Gracián’s Bildungsroman no safe place emerges on land to stand and watch – to remain immune, that is, from the inevitable catastrophe.57 Translating his protagonists, Andrenio, along with his teacher, Critilio, from an idealized state of nature to the perils of the courtly life, Gracián explicitly imitates the ‘alegorías de Homero’ while thoroughly satirizing contemporary conventions and ideology.58

Still, from our historical distance of almost 400 years, Góngora’s imitation of Odysseus’ shipwreck – an imitation that ultimately refuses allegory in favour of a more difficult, immanent poetics – is the most polytropic account of the dynamics of translatio, be it of empire, in literature, or simply that undertaken by ships navigating the sea. In the wake of Gonzalo Pérez’s 1556 vernacular translation of the Odyssey, a route was opened for novel stylistic and ideological appropriations of Homer just in time for Góngora’s ambivalent version of the shipwreck narrative.

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58 El Criticón, p. 63.