

Góngora

(Luis de Góngora y Argote)

Selected Sonnets

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Contents

‘When, at the rising of the sun, my nymph’	3
To A Rose	4
To A Very Pale Lady Dressed in Green	5
‘With such distinction, such grace’	6
‘What, out of ivory from the Ganges,’	7
A Lady’s Tears and Sighs.....	8
‘Sacred temple of pure honesty,’	9
‘From the crystal of your divine hand’	10
Inscription for El Greco’s Tomb	11
To A White Poplar Grove.....	12
To The Court Ladies asking Favour for Andalusian Gallants	13
‘Lovely and illustrious Maria,’	14
‘The sweet mouth that invites you to taste’	15
‘The white lilies, children of the Sun,’	16
Of Human Ambition.....	17
On the Deceptive Brevity of Life	18
‘While yet in competing with your hair,’	19
‘No ship, wrecked on some harsh reef,’	20
‘Oh, bright honour of the liquid element,’	21
To Cordoba	22
To The Guadalquivir	23
Of a Lady Pricked by a Ring	24
To A Girl, Now Become a Beautiful Lady	25
To Memory: Of Death and Hell	26
To A Grove of White Poplars.....	27
‘Green rushes of the kindly Douro wove’	28
Index of First Lines.....	29

'When, at the rising of the sun, my nymph'

(Al tramontar del Sol, la ninfa mía,)

When, at the rising of the sun, my nymph
Despoils the verdant field of flowers,
As many spring beneath her white feet
As she has gathered with lovely hand.

Wavelike is the breeze that flows
With fine gold, in illusory elegance,
Stirs the green leaves of dense poplars,
With the red light of breaking dawn.

But when she wreathes her lovely brow
With the various spoils in her dress
(Putting an end to gold and snow)

I swear her garland shines far brighter
Than flowers, and seems more star-like,
Formed of the nine orbs that light the sky.

To A Rose

(Ayer naciste y morirás mañana;)

Born but yesterday, to die next dawn;
Living so swiftly, who gave you life?
Being so briefly, you shine brighter,
Fresher for not being nothingness!

Though your vain beauty deceives you,
You must shortly see it fade,
Because within such beauty hides
The promise of an early death.

When a strong hand gathers you,
According to the gardener's laws,
A harsher breath will end your life.

Do not leave, may some tyrant guard you;
Prolong your birth now, through existence,
Who through existence bring your death.

To A Very Pale Lady Dressed in Green

(Cisne gentil, después que crespo el vado)

Noble swan, who left that frothing wake
Behind, whitening the water with foam,
Who shake your plumage, moistened
By sheltering reeds, in the golden sun:

Flakes of white snow in green meadows,
The lilies hidden amongst myrtles,
Curdled milk pressed through reeds,
A diamond set between emeralds,

Have no right to boast of their whiteness,
After white Leda in her green dress
Has displayed her graceful spirit to us.

She was such, her spirit quenched this fire
Of mine, and gave, in her garb and beauty,
Greenness to meadows, brightness to the stream.

'With such distinction, such grace'

(Con diferencia tal, con gracia tanta)

With such distinction, such grace,
This nightingale sings, that I suspect
She has a hundred thousand in her breast,
Whose sorrow, in her throat, finds voice.

And I think her a spirit, risen yet
Among the leaves of this green tree –
As if declaring her right –
In crying the horror done to her.

Put an end, now, to this complaint,
Since none denies you neb or feather,
To make your moan or utter stanzas,

Let him grieve alone, whom his Medusa
Turned to stone, so that he can neither
Cry his misery, nor find ease in change.

‘What, of the ivory from the Ganges,’

(¿Cuál del Ganges marfil, o cuál de Paro)

What, of the ivory from the Ganges,
White Parian marble, gleaming ebony;
What, of red amber, or refined gold,
Pure silver, or of glass, crystal clear;

Of perfect pearl, or finest sapphire,
Gem from the Orient, or ardent ruby;
What, out of all, in this present happy
Age, could skilled hand of the rarest

Sculptor shape, though his sweet
Labour and noble efforts were
A miraculous assault on beauty,

That was not merely a waxen Sun
Before your eyes, that form of his,
O lovely Chloris, my sweet enemy?

A Lady's Tears and Sighs

(Cual parece al romper de la mañana)

What seems to break from the morning,
Those white seed pearls on fresh roses,
Or those with artifice, sewn by hand,
Pearls embroidered on scarlet cloth,

Such seemed the beautiful tears
Shed by my sovereign shepherdess,
Over those miraculous cheeks,
Manna of blood and milk mingled.

Yield, in turn, among those tender tears,
An ardent sigh from out your breast,
Such as the harshest song might engender,

If a harsh song were enough to do so,
And witness what is done to a heart,
Which is wax to every tear and sigh.

'Sacred temple of pure honesty,'

(De pura honestidad templo sagrado,)

Sacred temple of pure honesty,
Whose foundation and noble wall
Of white nacre and hard alabaster,
Was fashioned by a hand divine,

Little door of precious coral,
Clear windows of sure gaze,
Where you transmute purest green
To finest emerald among men,

Lofty roof whose golden summits
In the glowing sun, as the eye moves,
Dress it in light, crown it in beauty,

Beautiful form, whom the humble worship,
Hear, with pity, one who sighs for you,
Sings your hymns; lauds your virtues.

'From the crystal of your divine hand'

(En el cristal de tu divina mano)

From the crystal of your divine hand
I drank the sweetest poison of Love,
Fiery nectar with which I burn my breast,
And think to quench, by absence, in vain.

Such, lovely Claudia, is the tyrannous
Lance of gold hurled from your calm gaze,
The more I am absent, the more the pain,
And the weaker my heart from its blows.

I weep aloud my exile from some link
Or other of your chains about the feet;
More free to wander, yet more lost.

When will the day come when by chance,
O well-born Seraph, you may loose
These iron knots, with crystal hands?

Inscription for El Greco's Tomb

(Esta en forma elegante, oh peregrino,)

O pilgrim, this enduring enclosure,
Of shining porphyry in gracious form,
Denies the world the most subtle brush
Than ever gave wood soul, or canvas life.

His name deserving a greater voice
Than rises from the clarions of fame,
Ennobles this field of sombre marble;
Revere it; before you go your way.

Here lies El Greco; Nature inherited
His art; Art his skill; Iris his colours,
Phoebus his light – else Morpheus his shade –

May this urn, despite its solid nature,
Drink tears, and whatever odours ooze
From the Sabeen tree's funereal bark.

To A White Poplar Grove

(Gallardas plantas, que con voz doliente)

Graceful trees, that with living voice
Sorrowfully mourned daring Phaeton,
And now without envy of palm or olive
Might wreath many a corpse's brow,

So that, from summer Sun's burning rays,
The pale chorus of lascivious Naiads
May seek your fleeting shadows more
Than the green margin of the hidden spring,

So that (despite the scorching season)
The rushing river's swift flow might kiss
Your roots (that once were human feet),

Mourn (since mad enterprises and vain
Ardours turn to you alone to mourn)
My ardour in love; my mad enterprise.

To The Court Ladies asking Favour towards Andalusian Gallants

(Hermosas damas, si la pasión ciega)

Beautiful ladies, if blind passion
Fails to fill you with disdain or anger,
Which shall view Andalusians without pity,
Which deny Andalusians her favour?

In all this earth, who begs more humbly,
Adores more truly, sighs more idolatrously?
Who tilts more gloriously in the square,
Slays the bulls, or plays on the reed?

In soirées, who draw most frequently
The sweetest eyes in all the salons,
If not the gallants from Andalusia?

Ladies judge them ever pre-eminent,
In the court, first among all for finery,
In the tournament, the first for valour.

'Lovely and illustrious Maria,'

(Ilustre y hermosísima María,)

Lovely and illustrious Maria,
While at every instant, to our sight,
Your cheeks reveal the rosy dawn,
Phoebus your eyes your face the day.

And while with graceful discourtesy
The wind stirs swiftly fleeing strands,
That Arabia might treasure in its veins,
And rich Tagus, in its sands, might bear,

Before, since Phoebus is eclipsed by time,
And bright day turns to darkest night,
Dawn flees from these mortal shadows;

Before what is now golden treasure
Outdoes the white snow in whiteness;
Enjoy, enjoy, the hues, the gold, the light.

'The sweet mouth that invites you to taste'

(La dulce boca que a gustar convida)

The sweet mouth that invites you to taste
A moisture that is distilled through pearls,
And without envy of that sacred liquor
Which the boy from Ida served to Jove;

Touch it not, Lovers, if you would live,
Since between the one lip and the other,
Sits Love, Amor, armed with his venom,
As between flower and flower a snake lies hid.

Don't be deceived by roses that at dawn,
You might think, dew-filled and fragrant,
Themselves, sprang from some noble breast,

Apples are of Tantalus, not these roses,
That swiftly flee the hour of inspiration,
And only leave Love's poison behind.

'The white lilies, children of the Sun,'

(Los blancos lillos que de ciento en ciento,)

The white lilies, children of the Sun,
That Spring grants us from age to age,
For whom on the banks of the Tagus
Gold's the cradle, pearls the nourishment;

The fresh roses, the wind ambitiously
Solicits with its flattering breeze,
Like one who hopes for noble petals
From some leaf or other, with lascivious breath;

Fall to your lovely feet, as all their beauty
So must. What might the hand that bears
Those flowers not do, if the foot does so,

Since your very splendour conquers snow,
Conquers the light of dawn, and since
In vain, for you, they breathe their scent?

Of Human Ambition

(Mariposa, no sólo no cobarde,)

Butterfly, not only not fearfully,
But recklessly and fatally blind,
You seek what the flame yet denies
The Phoenix set on keeping its wings,

Since repenting too late of the harm,
Soliciting splendour, you approach
That which shines, and in hope surrender
Your ragged plumage to that which burns.

There is a glory in all that sweetly
Yields the short-lived bee a grave;
Happiness crowns the crowning error!

My opposite ambition lacks such light;
Less active themselves, how much less
The ashes burn where smoke will scorch.

On the Deceptive Brevity of Life

(Menos sollicitó veloz saeta)

Less rapidly the arrow shall seek
Its destined target, sharply piercing;
The speeding chariot, on mute sand,
Will round the pillar no more silently

Than our life, swiftly, surreptitiously,
Races to its end. For he who doubts,
Even if he's a block bereft of reason,
Is warned by every sun he is a comet.

Carthage proclaims it, but do you see?
You are in danger, Lycius, if you still
Chase after shadows; embrace illusion.

You'll not be pardoned for these hours,
These hours that erode away our days
These days that gnaw away our years.

‘While yet in competition with your hair,’

(Mientras por competir con tu cabello)

While yet, in competition with your hair,
The sun lights burnished gold in vain,
While scornfully, in the open plain,
Your white brow confronts the lovely lily,

While to each of your lips, to cull them,
More eyes are drawn than to fresh carnations,
And while your noble throat, with new
Disdain, triumphs over shining crystal;

Delight in throat, hair, lips and brow,
Before that which in your golden years
Is gold, carnation, lily, shining crystal,

Not only turns to silver and sad violet,
But you and all of these together turn
To earth, smoke, dust, shadow, nothing.

'No ship, wrecked on some harsh reef,'

(No destrozada nave en roca dura)

No ship, wrecked on some harsh rock,
Ever reached the shore more gratefully,
No bird, escaping the outstretched net,
Ever reached the trees more desperately,

Never did lovely nymph on trembling foot,
Flee with such agitation, or distress,
From the green meadow, where a viper
Regaled himself, while hiding in the grass,

As I flee, Love, my feet no longer bound,
From that proud and lofty temperament,
Those golden tresses and the lovely eyes

Of my enemy, the one I praise in vain.
Farewell cruel nymph; with these remain,
Harsh rock, net of gold, bright meadow.

'Oh, bright honour of the liquid element,'

(¡Oh claro honor del líquido elemento,)

Oh, bright honour of the liquid element,
Sweetest stream of flowing silver,
Spreading water through the grass,
With scattered sound, in slow passage!

Since she, for whom I freeze and burn,
(When she looks in you) Love portrays
With all the snow and scarlet of her face
In your gentle, tranquil motion,

Pour on as you do; do not release
The flowing rein of that crystal bit,
With which you curb your swift current.

It would go ill for that great lord,
He of the moist trident, to be troubled
At taking so much beauty to his breast.

To Cordoba

(¡Oh excelso muro, oh torres coronadas)

Oh, tall battlements, and towers crowned
With all honour, majesty, and valour!
Oh, great river, mighty king of Andalusia,
With fine sands, though as yet no gold!

Oh, fertile plain, oh, high sierras,
Gracing the heavens, gilding the day!
Oh, my homeland, forever winning glory,
As much for its quills as for its swords!

If among those ruins and remains
That Genil enriches, Darro bathes,
Thoughts of you are not my nourishment

Then never let my absent eyes deserve
To see your walls, your river and your towers,
Your plain and hills, my land, oh flower of Spain!

(Note: The Genil and Darro are the rivers of Granada.)

To The Guadalquivir

(Rey de los otros, río caudaloso,)

King of all other mighty rivers,
You of bright fame, and crystal waters,
Who gird your brow, and flowing hair,
With a rough garland of shaggy pine,

Then fleeing your cavernous fount
Of Segura, in mountains nearer us,
To Andalusia's soil your royal road
Pursue, proud, swift, and foaming,

To reach me who, though famously
Enamoured of your fertile shores,
Humbly tread your sandy floor;

Say if, among the blonde shepherdesses,
You have seen, reflected in your waters.
Beauty like that of Chloris, or such grace.

Of a Lady Pricked by a Ring

(Prisión del nácar era articulado)

A prison of nacre, for a diamond
(The bright rival of my constancy)
Was wrought and, ingeniously,
Was itself imprisoned here in gold.

Chloris, who will not, with grace,
Let even the precious metal press
Her finger for a day, impatiently
Released it from its golden chain.

But oh, since that insidious gilt sliver
Drank sacred blood, sacrilegiously,
From the crystal of her lovely hand,

Crimson dye shows less on Indian
Ivory; and with envy, on the snow,
Dawn despoils carnations in vain.

To A Girl, Now Become a Beautiful Lady

(Si Amor entre las plumas de su nido)

If Love, among the feathers of the nest,
Stole my freedom, what will he do now,
Flying armed in your eyes, sweet lady,
Those eyes which are no longer veiled?

I was wounded there among the violets,
By an asp hiding now among the lilies;
You exercised the same force, as the dawn,
That now you exercise, as the risen sun.

Let me salute your light with plaintive voice,
Like a gentle nightingale in harsh prison,
Calling out its sorrows, though tenderly;

Let me tell how I saw your face, crowned
With rays; how your beauty set the birds
All singing; and set all the people weeping.

To Memory: Of Death and Hell

(Urnas plebeyas, tímulos reales)

These common urns, and royal tombs,
Enter in them, Memory, without fear,
Here where the executioner of our days
To unequal steps grants equal measure.

Consider these traces of mortality,
These naked bones and frozen ashes,
Despite the way their pious remains,
Gaze now towards the east, in vain.

Then descend the abyss, in whose depths,
Spirits blaspheme; in whose strong prison,
Eternal war is heard, and endless weeping,

If you would seek, my Memory, at least,
Within the depths of hell, to vanquish hell:
And from death: to free yourself with death.

To A Grove of White Poplars

(Verdes hermanas del audaz mozuelo)

Green sisters, of that audacious boy,
You whose tender feet and golden hair
The shore of the River Po imprisons
In green branches now, and solid roots,

Since not bones but his ashes only
Fell amidst the ruins of his flight,
And you saw his error widely traced
In showers of ardent flame on the sky,

Put an end to his maddened thought,
Who presumes no such chariot to drive,
Before your celestial beauty looses

Him to the winds, with rays of disdain,
And buries the remnant of his daring,
His disillusion, in a little plume of spray.

'Green rushes of the kindly Douro wove'

(Verdes juncos del Duero a mi pastora)

Green rushes of the kindly Douro wove
A sweet cradle for my shepherdess;
Pale palm-trees, if Tagus owns to you,
Shelter her shepherdess's cottage now.

A golden crescent moon shoots her arrows
At solid mountains and the living fields,
As they say the chaste huntress of Eurotas,
Fired, importunately, at wild creatures.

Her splendour clothed in white ermine,
The tragic shoes that clad this murderer,
Distinguish those white feet from snow.

Even such, harsh and wild, she employs
Only a single bow against the creatures,
Yet bends twin bows that threaten my life.

Index of First Lines

When, at the rising of the sun, my nymph.....	3
Born but yesterday, to die next dawn;	4
Noble swan, who left that frothing wake	5
With such distinction, such grace,.....	6
What, of the ivory from the Ganges,.....	7
What seems to break from the morning,	8
Sacred temple of pure honesty,	9
From the crystal of your divine hand	10
O pilgrim, this enduring enclosure,	11
Graceful trees, that with living voice	12
Beautiful ladies, if blind passion	13
Lovely and illustrious Maria,	14
The sweet mouth that invites you to taste	15
The white lilies, children of the Sun,.....	16
Butterfly, not only not fearfully,.....	17
Less rapidly the arrow shall seek.....	18
While yet, in competition with your hair,	19
No ship, wrecked on some harsh rock,.....	20
Oh, bright honour of the liquid element,	21
Oh, tall battlements, and towers crowned	22
King of all other mighty rivers,	23
A prison of nacre, for a diamond.....	24
If Love, among the feathers of the nest,	25
These common urns, and royal tombs,.....	26
Green sisters, of that audacious boy,	27
Green rushes of the kindly Douro wove.....	28