

# NIHILISM AND IMPOSTURE IN THE LIGHT OF THE SPANISH BAROQUE

by Luis SÁEZ RUEDA (Granada)

The era of the Baroque was affected by the profound changes that arose from the rift between the Middle Ages and the beginning of modernity. In this transition, the idea of being as an organic, centred and closed All-One fell apart, while a dynamic, pluralist and open understanding of reality appears. The Baroque is located on this crossroads and therefore in its articulation it assumes various tensions. I begin with the thesis that the Baroque view is based on the affirmation of a creative aporia, according to which the real is simultaneously a complete whole and a nothingness. The ontological supposition of such an aporia involves what I call *aporetic nihilism*. Focusing on the Spanish Baroque, I will maintain that this aporia is not incompatible with the affirmation of an ontological and epistemological normativity. Having said that, such normativity should distinguish between true reality and illusion, and, above all, between rectitude and imposture — the latter meaning deception on a stage of pure appearance. The overcoming of imposture, according to the

Luis SÁEZ RUEDA (1963) is Full Professor in the Department of Philosophy II at the University of Granada, Spain. Recent publications: *Tierra y destino* (Barcelona: Herder, 2021); “El olvido heideggeriano del ser (como génesis intensiva): A propósito de la disolución fenomenológico-aleteológica de la *physis*,” *Araucaria: Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política, Humanidades y Relaciones Internacionales* 23, no. 48 (2021): 79-100.

Translation from Spanish by James Hayes. This work has been carried out in the context of the Research Project “Herencia y actualización del Barroco como *ethos* inclusivo” (PID2019-108248GB-I00 / AEI / 10.13039 / 501100011033), funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain.

conclusions of this study, takes place through two complementary channels: the effort of *ingenio* — the definition of which I explain below — and the heroic attitude. Both show that (ontological) imposture has at its base the blind acceptance of the oneiric character of existence. The reasoning that leads to this result uses, fundamentally, the work of Baltasar Gracián, the Cervantine bastion — *Don Quijote* — and elements from the work of Calderón de la Barca.

The development of the argument first involves specifying a *uniformizing nihilism* and an *imposture by mediocrization* that derive from the circumstances of the era, two phenomena that the Spanish Baroque confronts (Section 1). Then I examine one of the most widespread interpretations of this Baroque — what I call *oppositional nihilism* — according to which the infinite whole and the nothingness of the world form a mutually exclusive opposition. This perspective presupposes, in my opinion, a link between the Spanish Baroque and a *moral imposture* (Section 2). Through these analyses, I forge a path, gradually, to the thesis that I will defend (Section 3).

## 1. AN INTRODUCTORY PROBLEM: UNIFORMIZING NIHILISM AS THE ENEMY

The aporia (productive and creative) between all and nothing is in contrast with an aporia of beginning, against which the Baroque soul fights fiercely. It is an unproductive and suffocating aporia, consisting of the subjugation of the differential plurality of the world to the identity imposed by the circumstances of the age. On the one hand, an *infinitezation of the world* has taken place, since the Renaissance, which broke the previous boundaries of a closed and stable unit in many ways. This imploded geographically, due to the discovery of a new space *plus ultra*: cosmologically, due to the interpretation of the universe as infinite; anthropologically, due to contact with a plurality of cultures; and religiously, through the rupture with doctrinal unity and the sudden emergence of multiple interpretations. This experience, spilling over the boundaries of the closed cosmos, was now made unlimited, even

generating awe and a sensation of sublimity.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, all this differential plurality of the infinitized world was levelled out through blind and anonymous dynamisms. Firstly, due to capital, which regulated in a universal way and by virtue of its own inertia. Secondly, realist politics predominated, constituted by large managed powers, which in the Spanish case is particularly abstract. In general, the experience of a world shot through with ungovernable and unavailable processes is widened.<sup>2</sup> To this we need to add, lastly, the triumph of a scientific revolution that, despite its brilliance, darkened the qualitative richness of the world, shrinking it through the dream of the *Mathesis Universalis*, of a knowledge that made all things equal according to the parameters of “order and measure,”<sup>3</sup> and which, since Galileo, has extended to all that is knowable. This means that the differential, open and unlimited character of the real tends to be levelled out in an identity consisting of the equivalence of all things.

In all this structuring of the world, the Baroque sees a flight from the qualitative and organic order originating in Christian theological culture, and experiences it as a sign of a nihilist reduction in the society and culture of the era. This is — one might say — a *uniformizing nihilism*. *El Criticón* by Baltasar Gracián — the most important theorist of the Spanish Baroque — magnificently condenses this decadence in its first *crisis*. The organic “concert” of the difference and plurality of the real<sup>4</sup> make way for an artful and uniform arrangement<sup>5</sup> that is also expressed in human uniformization made up of “evenly-matched madmen.”<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, the world is deprived of the true whole that organizes it, which flees away from it: Falsehood signs the “banishment” of the Truth.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bernat Castany Prado, “Sublimidad y nihilismo en la cultura del Barroco,” *Revista de Filosofía* 37 (2012): 91-110.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (London: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 1951), chap. 6, § 2.

<sup>3</sup> René Descartes, *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, ed. Charles Adam et Paul Tannery, IV, 378: “Ordo vel mensura.”

<sup>4</sup> Baltasar Gracián, *El Criticón*, in *Obras Completas*, ed. Santos Alonso (Madrid: Cátedra, 2011), part I, third *crisis*, pp. 826-27. The parts of *El Criticón* will be cited in Roman numerals and the “*crisis*” in Arabic numerals.

<sup>5</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 2, p. 824.

<sup>6</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 6, p. 856: “Orates igualados.” “Orate” is an archaic term meaning “mad.”

<sup>7</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, VI, p. 860.

The world, finally, ends up becoming “a zero,” all “air and vanity.”<sup>8</sup> And this emptying makes an imposture of the world, a lie of itself: it is a *mundo inmundo* (a “sordid world”).<sup>9</sup>

If imposture, in its most general sense, is a falsification of reality through deception, one could say that uniformizing nihilism produces an *imposture by mediocritization*: by the loss of all ideal of elevation. The world has become an empty nothingness and human beings, having fled from the truth, can no longer adapt to the present world and its strategic interests. They no longer aspire to be elevated to eternity,<sup>10</sup> thus “this is not an age for men,” nor are there heroes in the world anymore.<sup>11</sup> Everything is false, a theatre without reality,<sup>12</sup> in which selfish and strategic interest prevail: “they want to be everything and in the end they are less than nothing.”<sup>13</sup>

Against these phenomena, the Spanish Baroque wishes to recover truth and rectitude, which have fled from human finitude toward transcendence. This divine transcendence now constitutes the whole that was expelled from the emptied world, as well as the infinite, which is no longer expressed in the earthly, but has withdrawn to the extramundane. So how can the present nothingness connect again with the whole that fled; how can the world relate with the infinite? This is, to my mind, the fundamental question of the baroque.

## 2. CRITIQUE OF THE EXCLUSIVE WHOLE-NOTHING OPPOSITION AS KEY TO THE BAROQUE

One of the most widespread interpretations about the Baroque maintains that it confronts the nihilist emptying that I have described by converting the very opposition to which this supposedly gives rise —

<sup>8</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 6, 857 and 858.

<sup>9</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 6, p. 863: A “mundo inmundo.”

<sup>10</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 5, p. 851.

<sup>11</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 6, p. 853: “[...] no es este siglo de hombres.”

<sup>12</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 6, p. 853: “Lo quieren ser todo y al cabo son menos que nada.”

the exclusive opposition between worldly nothing and transcendent whole — in a subtle re-spiritualization of the world through representative procedures (2.1.). I will attempt to show that this perspective is only partially correct and that it is not adequate for confronting nihilism and imposture; rather, in contrast, it intensifies them (2.2).

### 2.1. *The Re-Spiritualization of the World Out of Oppositional Nihilism*

Let us suppose for a while the idea that the infinite whole and the nothingness of the world are mutually exclusive. With the true whole fled to the transmundane, the richness of its plurality and difference is made apparent: it is confusion. It happens that none of these spheres touches the other. The impossibility of touching god in the world becomes equivalent to the impossibility of touching reality in a world without God. This rift is what, according to Eugenio D'Ors, is expressed by the pictorial motif of *Noli me tangere*, of the “do not touch me” stated by Christ resurrected, in scenes by Durero, Titian and others — a state of rupture that represents an “algorithm of the Baroque.”<sup>14</sup>

Other central themes of the Baroque tie in here, such as the radical fugacity of all beings and events and the complete vanity of the world, a certainty to which the road of disillusion leads. Disillusion, in the sense of having illusion removed, is the source of a negative truth, whereby everything is a dream, as the famous play by Calderón de la Barca declares. Only the hero who holds this view is elevated to what persists and lasts: “So if this means / my disillusion [...] / let us turn to the eternal.”<sup>15</sup> If the Spanish baroque human being knows herself, it is not through the Cartesian truth of the *cogito*, but in the extent to which she recognizes herself as a *viator* being that tries to rise to the eternal in a world become theatre.<sup>16</sup> This is a dual attitude. On the one hand, as Díaz-Plaja writes, it is given to living in unavoidable theatricality, in the “exuberant layer of scenography covering the most appalling

<sup>14</sup> Eugenio D'Ors, *Lo barroco* (Madrid: Tecnos/Alianza, 2002), 37; cf. 117-18.

<sup>15</sup> Calderón de la Barca, *La vida es sueño* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2020), 191, verses 2977-78 and 2982: “pues si esto toca / mi desengaño [...] / acudamos a lo eterno.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Gracián, *El Criticón*, II, 4, p. 992.

nihilism.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, this nihilism is coherent with an ethics of elevation to the transmundane. The unitary discovery of the oneiric unreality of the world and of eternity as desire is what leads to being heroically moral, in the midst of total spectrality: “that even in dreams / you do not stop doing good.”<sup>18</sup>

The contradiction between the nothing and the whole has to be completed, for its fuller understanding, with the parallel contradiction between the finite and the infinite. The god of this Baroque is, of course, the theological-Christian god. However, the previous oppositions determine that god be understood through a clarification that proves essential. It is divinity from the viewpoint of its withdrawal with respect to the finite world. But such an act of removal turns it into a *deus absconditus*, a hidden god, retreated to its inaccessible “incomprehensibility.”<sup>19</sup> All this shows that the *unreality* of the world is its ultimate truth, that the only truth of the world has for its contents the falsity of this one,<sup>20</sup> and that *human* morality finds its basis there: artifice, appearance and falsehood cease to be deception, revealing its true vain nature.<sup>21</sup>

According to the above, the Baroque fights the nihilism that it comes up against in the era (*levelling nihilism*) by means of a new theological-ontological nihilization that consists in preventing the nothingness of the world passing itself off as truth. I shall call this attitude *oppositional nihilism*, because it nihilizes the world, enlightening it from its opposite, the infinite. However, this view of the world from its radical otherness produces, at the same time, its re-spiritualization, which constitutes the creative reverse of its nihilization. The Baroque, in effect, presents itself — from this perspective — as an ingenious and profound way of intervening in the world that does not leave it as it is. We shall say, for now, that *ingenio* is a creative and inventive capacity that seeks the underlying

<sup>17</sup> Guillermo Díaz-Plaja, *El espíritu barroco* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1983), 67; cf. 52-67.

<sup>18</sup> Calderón, *La vida es sueño*, 159, verses 2146-47: “que aun en sueños / no se pierde el hacer bien.”

<sup>19</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 3, p. 833.

<sup>20</sup> Javier de la Higuera Espín, “Lo insoportable de la verdad,” in *El mundo de Baltasar Gracián*, ed. Juan Francisco García Casanova (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2002), 303-42 (p. 305, 320).

<sup>21</sup> de la Higuera Espín, “Lo insoportable de la verdad,” 341.

unity of the multiplicity of relations that appear in the world — it looks for a “harmonious correlation” between all of them.<sup>22</sup> This harmonious correlation is not present in the world, as it is coincident with the whole, which has been removed from the finite and has become the transcendent. *Ingenio* thus acts as though it placed itself in the perspective of the infinite transmundane. *Ingenious* thought, therefore, is an intelligence that rediscovers the infinite in the finite (which has been closed upon itself and emptied).<sup>23</sup> Eugenio Trías has called this Baroque operation the “theatrical staging of the Infinite,”<sup>24</sup> the interweaving of beings and phenomena in a labyrinthine scene in which the infinite is not present, but is connoted, in such a way that it tacitly provides a comprehensive perspective of what is dispersed in the finite and offers a unitary meaning. As per Deleuze, “the existent [is] to be thought of as deriving from infinity,”<sup>25</sup> so that the essence of the Baroque would be neither to succumb to the illusion nor to abandon it, but to *realize* something in the illusion itself, communicate a spiritual *presence* to it that gives a unity to its fragments.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2. *The “Imposture by Heteronomy,” Condition of Oppositional Nihilism*

There are some particularly convincing elements of the interpretative perspective I am undertaking here that are worth highlighting. The power of the Baroque lies, in effect, in its vigorous capacity to confront the emptying of the world, reconstituting it in the form of a theatre that possesses — so to speak — spiritual volume and density and not only apparent confusion. And this is achieved by contemplating it from the infinite. This perspective destroys the objectified reality and substitutes

<sup>22</sup> Gracián, *Arte de ingenio*, in *Obras Completas*, II, 146.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Javier de la Higuera Espín, “El barroco y nosotros: Perspectiva del barroco desde la ontología de la actualidad,” in *Actas del Congreso Internacional Andalucía Barroca*, ed. Alfredo J. Morales (Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía, 2008), vol. 4, 105-114 (pp. 109-11).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Eugenio Trías, “Escenificación del infinito (interpretación del Barroco),” in *Lo bello y lo siniestro* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1996), 161 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *El pliegue: Leibniz y el Barroco* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1989), 165. (Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (The Athlone Press: London, 1993), 128.)

<sup>26</sup> Deleuze, *El pliegue*, 160.

it for another that is constructed through allegory, which — as I will examine in greater detail below — establishes relations of analogy between beings and events. Thus, the idea of art as imitation of an exterior reality is overcome. The formation of the world is made to depend on the immanence of a system of meaningful relations inspired by the gaze from the infinite, which makes the *natural* formation of the apparent world implode and critically transgress it, imposing an excess of *super-natural*ity, as well as an *ultratelia* that uproots the events from their apparent purposes and links them to its secret meaning for eternity.<sup>27</sup> As opposed to Maravall's lugubrious interpretation, according to which the disillusion in this era leads to attitudes of adaptation to factual and strategic powers,<sup>28</sup> what Severo Sarduy attributes to the Spanish Baroque as a revolutionary key is now revealed: the effect of threatening the established space of meaning.<sup>29</sup> This *simpatia entis*, moreover, refers its deep unity to an ineffable infinite, thus introducing an *illusio colectiva* or shared *phantasmagoria* permeated by the invisible and the mystical. Thus, what Rodríguez de la Flor calls "preadamitic reunification in the One"<sup>30</sup> is attained, along with a presentiment of the infinite through the inconceptualizable numinous, all of which makes it possible to speak of this Spanish-Portuguese South as the *Metaphysical Peninsula*.<sup>31</sup>

However, this view seems partial. If the depth that the Baroque gives the world is only a *construction* through representative means, it is not possible to attribute a *real* immanence to it. The infinite, on which such depth depends, remains exterior to the world. The drastic opposition between the infinite whole and the worldly nothingness makes the baroque view a fictional transformation of the world, despite the re-spiritualization that it brings about. If there is no intramundane truth prior to the allegorical construction, such a construction coincides with the scenic space of *impostura* (imposture). In Spanish, similar to English,

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Fernando Rodríguez de la Flor, *Barroco: Representación e ideología en el mundo hispánico. 1580-1680* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2002), chap. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. José Antonio Maravall, *La cultura del barroco* (Madrid: Ariel, 1990), 415.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Severo Sarduy, *Ensayos generales sobre el Barroco* (México/Buenos Aires: F.C.E., 1987), 209.

<sup>30</sup> Rodríguez de la Flor, *Barroco*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Fernando Rodríguez de la Flor, *La península metafísica: Arte, literatura y pensamiento en la España de la Contrarreforma* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1999).

“impostura” means “deception with the appearance of truth.” Delving further into the detail of its meaning, in my view *imposture* consists of the self-interested self-presentation (conscious or not) of a human being not as they really are: that is, their appearance as an *other* that is different to how they really are and for the purpose of attaining personal gain. With this in mind, the suspicion arises that the Baroque, and Hispanic, understanding of the world implies, astonishingly, that imposture is the essential state of the human being. Naturally this is false, but the interpretation of the Baroque that I am critiquing did not, in my opinion, possess the arguments to overcome this hypothesis. I will try to make this problem clearer to continue with my line of argument. In the Hispanic Baroque, each and every being in the world — and thus every human being — possesses a relational essence. In the baroque art oeuvre, which incorporates this view, every character and every phenomenon adopt a way of being by virtue of the context in which they appear and of the connections with the beings that surround them. Each context is a perspective. Being is always perspective, an objective perspective, belonging to reality — just as in Leibniz every monad is with regard to the whole of the world. That whole, in the Spanish Baroque, is absent in the mundane: it only exists in the divine infinite. According to this — as I see it — every mundane being, rather than an identity with itself, is an internal difference: it is its appearance as another self. When it occupies a specific place on the stage of the world, it is being itself only insofar as it is in reference to its possible others. This effect is pursued by baroque writing by continuously introducing analogies that define a being as a function of others and, often, the entire contextual whole with a very different, imaginary or real other. This is the effect of allegory in most of the plays of the time, but it can occur in the novel. Every character, therefore, is shown not as a being with Parmenidean essence, but as a being that is continually transformed with the devising of the scene and the contextual meanings. The world often appears thus in Gracián: its being is that of Proteus, ever-changing.<sup>32</sup> As Benjamin has shown, while the symbol is the incarnation of the Idea and expresses a momentaneous totality *equal*

<sup>32</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 7, p. 866.

to itself, allegory introduces the Idea in intramundane connections. Thus the meaning of every being is re-sent, when the intention is to describe it, to extremely diverse contextual relations, with which all being is the *self's other*, any other.<sup>33</sup> A baroque work, therefore, gives rise to a kind of *madness of seeing*.<sup>34</sup> However, if this is so, in the case of human beings, then each is, in themselves, an imposture when appearing on the stage of the world. Each one is an *alterutrum*, Gracián tells us: *him and other*, that is, who he appears to be and he who, from some point of view, is in another way even the opposite. Something similar occurs with the desire for truth. This is lost in continuous referrals, and leaves more confusion than clarity: he who seems to possess a prodigious understanding will not say a word — Gracián says — that does not enclose a mystery and that refers to a hundred things.<sup>35</sup> We could come to the conclusion, therefore, that every existence involves an *inexorable imposture*. Yet this is not the case, for the Baroque is not satisfied with the mere dissemination of perspectives. The description of each being aspires to find the harmonious and eternal unity of its perspectives. This unity does not, of course, belong to the world but to the transmundane infinite. *Ingenio* seeks (as we shall see) to capture this intimate unity, although it never ever attains it and the process becomes infinite. Although absent in the world, this essential unity of every being with itself is presupposed as an underlying harmony between the points of view that constitute it (an organic harmony). Thus, the imposture is not inexorable. Only appearance makes it appear as such. On this premise, the baroque thinker can declare that there is not only appearance but also essence in the finite and therefore that all human beings possess a moral essence, consisting of aspiring to the totality that they themselves are an ideal and aspired-to totality. Raising oneself toward the eternal is to attain the “wholeness” that one potentially already is.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedmann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a.m.: Suhrkamp, 1989), vol. 1, final part (“Allegorie und Trauerspiel”).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *La folie du voir: Une esthétique du virtuel* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), 91-131.

<sup>35</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, III, 4, p. 1158. Cf. 1156-60.

If, in the theory that I am questioning, this process of multiple and differential meaning, by which every being is their other, is a pure artificial construction that the baroque individual carries out to fill the emptiness of the world and respiritualize it, then the hypothesis of an *inexorable imposture* is indeed confirmed. From this, the only option is to see the ideal unity of the perspectives and the moral wholeness implicated in aspiring to the eternal as artifices of the baroque human being to fill their void. The assumption of values that tend to the eternal would only be thinkable as a heteronomous praxis (dependent on a dogmatic theology) and never as the expression of an autonomous adjustment of the human being to their own condition (their very essence). Exorcizing the inexorable imposture is only possible through another imposture, the *imposture of moral heteronomy*: human beings would be lying if they presented themselves as *viator* beings inclined to elevate themselves to eternal values that they lay claim to, for it cannot be considered that they possess a tendency of this type in themselves. Rather, at most, they have a religious orientation that they receive in an exogenous and acritical way.

If the Baroque, in contrast, is a normative conception of existence, as I argue, it is therefore necessary to admit that the infinite is not — for this conception — completely exogenous and opposed to the world, but rather belongs to mundane existence such as it is. It thereby follows that, by belonging to the world, the human being receives an “essential” being that is not merely “apparential,” as well as an autonomous motivation in aspiring to the eternal. Every being is itself and its other, that is true; but, at the same time, they tend toward an essential and harmonious unity. What, then, is the imposture in this other theory, which takes the infinite to be inherent in the finite? All human beings, thinking baroquely, live on a stage or theatre that is coincident with the world. On this stage, they adopt extremely diverse “roles”: each interior is a multitude of characters that differ from one another (always one and the other of self). The imposter is the human being that firmly believes in the characters that they represent in the world. They believe in every one of them when representing them and, therefore, whenever they wish to appear as a “himself” or “herself,” they lie. The king, for

example, believes that he is king and that he is a husband and a warrior, and so on. Yet as king he can defend values that are very different to those he puts into practice as military general or as husband and father. The baroque human beings save themselves from this continuous lie when they become aware that the world is — superficially — a stage and that all is vanity. This is what the baroque hero does. They cease adhering to their own illusory and falsifying characters and find a way toward their self, toward their internal unity, which is ideal and eternal. They do not believe in any of their perspectives by itself — this is fundamental — but only in a unity that relates them coherently and harmoniously, even if attaining it means death. Their essence is not an identity with their self but is difference and relation based on an organic coming together, which is the goal of the whole and moral person. In this sense, *ingenio*, which is an effort to understand worldly relations as a whole with meaning, not atom-sized events and specific things; it is intelligence that the complete human being attempts to enact. In contrast, the imposter believes in each one of their atomic perspectives and, therefore, lies in each and every one, whether knowingly or not. The imposter believes in an identity with their self, the identity that each particular scene of the theatre of the world confers upon them. Thus, they are a falsehood in each case, diluted into a variable multiplicity without a meeting of representations that contradict one another and affirm the interests and strategies of each type of staging. In this regard, they do not apply *ingenio* and its relational function, they do not grasp its coherent unity, to which they would have to aspire with effort. The baroque human being affirms that the world is illusion; the imposter is the one who does not become aware of it. In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate this in greater depth.

The lack of recognition of the infinite as internal to the world has led to sceptic positions with the Baroque that even end up explicitly revoking its intrinsic normativity. Certain standpoints conclude that the allegorical structure rests on a sceptic nominalism without substance.<sup>36</sup> Others attribute an artificial philosophy to the Spanish Baroque that

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Karl Blüher, *Séneca en España* (Madrid: Gredos, 1969), 530-31.

had its distant forebears in the Sophists.<sup>37</sup> One notable point of view is held by Jankélévitch, who maintains a phenomenalist stance, according to which the Spanish Baroque has no interest in being, in order to exclusively consider its modes,<sup>38</sup> by which the value of pretence and dissimulation had the function of creating a false mystery and of causing an internal labyrinth that, in reality, is empty and that serves the organization of deception<sup>39</sup> out of narcissism.<sup>40</sup>

The scepticism of these positions has its roots in the oppositional logic “all *or* nothing.” However, the relation between world and infinite in the Baroque is not oppositional, but inclusive — as I will now try to show.

### 3. THE NORMATIVITY OF APORETIC NIHILISM AND IDENTITARY IMPOSTURE

Regarding the previous perspective, I believe that, for the Spanish Baroque, the real is all *and* nothing simultaneously. This aporia is what gives the Baroque soul a tragic nature.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, the infinite divine itself is experienced in an aporetic way: it is the truly real and eternal that the baroque human being takes as their refuge against deception and, at the same time, an *absconditus* being that cannot, therefore, show itself as such a refuge except when there no longer is a world: after death. On the other hand, the world is everything, because it has its foundation in the divine, and nothing, because this foundation has been removed. The quality of *absconditus* does not coincide with that of *otiosus*, a central tenet of Deism; it is a *Deus revelatus* that is manifest in the world but that,

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Clément Rosset, *La antinaturalaleza* (Madrid: Taurus, 1974), 199 ff.; Giuliano Borghi, *La política e la tentazione tragica* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1991), 55 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Vladimir Jankélévitch, “Apariencia y manera,” *Cuaderno Gris*, época II, n° 5 (1992): 76-87 (p. 76).

<sup>39</sup> Jankélévitch, “Apariencia y manera,” 84.

<sup>40</sup> Jankélévitch, “Apariencia y manera,” 87.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Lucien Goldman, *Le dieu caché* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), particularly part I, and Bolívar Echeverría “Meditaciones sobre el barroquismo I: Alonso Quijano y los indios,” in *Modernidad y blanquitud* (México D.F.: Ediciones Era, 2006), 183-93.

paradoxically, in the act of that manifestation is removed. The removal of the divine in the same act by which it penetrates the world is constitutive of it.

### 3.1. *The Infinite Immanent to the World*

That the infinite is present and absent in the world simultaneously is shown in that this is considered a cyphered reality whose deciphering proves never-ending by principle. It is susceptible to deciphering because it possesses a *logos*, an immanent order, that comes from the divine. But the deciphering becomes an infinite task because the divine, as unitary whole, has withdrawn. The world is abysmal. The infinite is certainly *present* in the world as inexhaustible difference and multiplicity, but it is *unpresent* as absolute totality. It refers, in this aporetic way of being, to an infinity of connections between the multiplicity of the different. One could say, as per M. Merleau-Ponty, that it is an *infinite infinitely infinite*, because it belongs to every particular being and, at the same time is taken as the whole of relations, a whole that cannot have restriction or limit in an *ultima ratio*.<sup>42</sup> The removal of the infinite as absolute whole is a *nihil positivo*; it is an operational removal, thanks to which the infinite of the world remains open, itself, infinitely. A nihilism therefore pertains to the Baroque, one that we could call *aporetic*, because it involves a nihilization of the world simultaneous to the affirmation of its own positive being, which is that of its infinite qualitative richness.

Only in this way can it be understood that one can speak of two infinities, not only in Pascal but also in the Spanish Baroque: the microscopic, which is the *cyphered world*, as an endless book, in hieroglyphs and in unending parataxis; and the telescopic, the total book from which one sees virtually, because it underlies all expressions as the hope of a deciphering that never happens and that ends in complete silence.<sup>43</sup>

Few allegorical passages are as lucid in this regard as that from *El Criticón* in which the “Decipherer” undertakes his task of interpretation

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris : Gallimard, 1960), 186-87.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Benito Pelegrín, *Figuraciones de l'infinito: L'âge baroque européen* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 195-389.

and the search for truths,<sup>44</sup> confessing to Critilo that it is impossible for him to finish his task because the cyphers are infinite in the world.<sup>45</sup> Later on, Critilo adds that the Decipherer is the personification of deception, which allows him to decipher but not to decipher himself.<sup>46</sup> There is an intricate truth in the theatrical device, an intramundane truth.<sup>47</sup> And this truth, thanks to the fact that it keeps its totality removed or unpresent, becomes infinitely interpretable.

The aporetic unity of everything and nothing constitutes an essential trait of the adventures of *Don Quijote*, where it is expressed in an especially tragic and melancholic form. Here the pristine ideal and a completely emptied reality are not in opposition. Rather, the aporia belongs to this reality. In the face of the chimeras of the novels of chivalry, Cervantes makes Quijote say that history is sacred and that it has to be truthful.<sup>48</sup> The ideal that Don Quijote pursues is not presented to us as a chimera. It permeates the reality in which he acts; it goes beyond the purely factual and expresses the possible or virtual contained within it.<sup>49</sup> For the pursuit of the ideal organizes a multitude of scenes in the world, in each of which the “given” reality is distorted by quixotic eccentricity. In the light of this eccentric gaze the factual scenes are thrown into confusion and show a more real being: the madness of Quijote reveals the senselessness and appearance of what takes place in the world. This *intramundane* ideal of Don Quijote overwhelms the world with its excess and wants to elevate it to an infinite value. But such an infinite lacks a name, unless it is that of the indefinite word “heaven” or that of a “Dulcinea” that is always removed: it becomes *absconditus*. The world is everything, by having that which is revealed

<sup>44</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, III, 4, pp. 1147-1163.

<sup>45</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, III, 4, p. 1152.

<sup>46</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, III, 5, p. 1165.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Javier García Gibert, “Artificio, una segunda naturaleza,” *Conceptos* 1 (2004): 13-33 (p. 21).

<sup>48</sup> *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, ed. Francisco Rico (Barcelona: Instituto Cervantes-Crítica, 1998), II, chap. XVIII, p. 772). Henceforth, I will cite in the following way (using this example): *Don Quijote*, II, XVIII, p. 772.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Pedro Cerezo Galán, *El Quijote y la aventura de la libertad* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2016), 92.

through the ideal for genuine truth. And it is nothing, because this ideal is an infinite that is continuously removed as totality.

This aporia, however, is constitutive, *it makes the world*, opening an infinite in it: an interminable number of possible scenes. And on this background of infinitude, Cervantine perspectivism is based. In the course of Quijote's adventures and his changeable scenes, the characters and concrete realities receive different descriptions that depend on circumstantial viewpoints, in such a way that their being is disseminated in a relation of differences that never attain a totalization.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.2. Normativity: *Ingenio* and Foolishness

We can now ask ourselves whether the baroque soul entrusts itself to the differential and changeable infinite without qualms. If so, it would not be very different from the *liquid* soul of the current age, as referred to in the work of Zygmund Bauman. The answer is negative. The Spanish Baroque constitutes quite an effort to articulate the differential and infinite plurality of the world from the point of view of eternity. Here the interpretative perspective that I have examined was correct, although mistaken in asserting that such articulation is a construction. It is, rather, a *reworking* of the infinite opening immanent to the world. And it is the capacity of *ingenio* that is destined to carry out such a task.

*Ingenio* — which I referred to above — is not just one faculty among many, but also the highest expression of intelligence in the context of the Baroque. In a very basic sense, *ingenio* is a human power for finding creative solutions to the problems that reality poses. It is a practical power that deals with the problematic nature of the world and allows the individual to operate in it, because “being” is, in the Baroque, “to operate” (*operari*). *Ingenio* invents ways of “working things out” in the world. Thus it is a non-regulable capacity, as it has no basis in a priori universal or general rules; rather, it invents a rule of behaviour in the same act of action without turning to a previous rule. However, in order

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Leo Spitzer, “Perspectivismo lingüístico en el *Quijote*,” in *Lingüística e historia literaria* (Madrid: Gredos, 1995), 135-87.

to undertake this inventive solution, ingenio must understand how contexts, which always include a multiplicity of beings and specific relations between them, are configured. Ingenio is, therefore, fundamentally a relational capacity. Upon first contact with the world, the human being makes images of the specific things that surround them, but this initial knowledge only captures an atomic multiplicity of the real and because of this is kept in pure appearance. This is so because for the baroque human being, the reality of each being lies in the relation it holds with other beings. Understanding the world is, therefore, grasping connections between what exists. These connections are not reducible to causal relations, nor to formal-logic relations, but to relations that make a set of beings a living, organic totality. What matters, for example, to Cervantes, is not exactly the empirical aggregate of characters in the work (Don Quixote, Sancho and those people they meet on their way), but the encompassing totality of life that they make up in each context, which is a unity that we would today describe in hermeneutic terms: a shared “world of meaning.” Ingenio, for this reason, is an *ars inveniendi* that is capable of inventing contexts in which the realities of the world form a meaningful whole that encompasses them. It is this that the baroque creator tries to carry out in a work of art. Nonetheless, we must add that this encompassing *world of meaning* that artistic ingenio invents tries to reproduce an order that, supposedly, nature itself, as *physis* or *natura naturans*, would have established — that is, an “autoteleological order.” For this, the *ingenium*, which for Latin speakers was a synonym of nature and the equivalent of the Greek *physis*, already forms part of nature itself — as Hidalgo Serna argues — and is extended in the human being.<sup>51</sup> The inventive character of ingenio, in this sense, is tied to its discovering nature: it discovers how the real is brought about (always as a set of beings). It is therefore understood that ingenio is not merely a rhetorical faculty but — as Huarte de San Juan argued in that period — the capacity to engender within itself true figures of things, attaining, in its highest intensity, the *ingenium excellens cum mania* of

<sup>51</sup> Emilio Hidalgo Serna, *El pensamiento ingenioso en Baltasar Gracián: El concepto y su función lógica* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1993), 76; cf. 79-85.

which Plato spoke (*Ion*, 543-44), through which poets are elevated toward the divine.<sup>52</sup> In a baroque world that is experienced as appearance and deception, ingenio, by trying to capture the true reality of things, understands them as a true whole. Given that this true whole of the world has fled to the transcendent, ingenio penetrates into the infinite *absconditus*. In the case of Don Quijote, ingenio is the creative power to produce an imagining of the infinite ideal to which reality needs to be driven. This is realized through an attainment of what binds people or things in a specific totalizing context. That this ideal is removed and that ingenio ultimately has to fail is an advantage, as it makes it possible to open an infinite number of narrative possibilities.<sup>53</sup> Ingenio, therefore, casts a gaze upon the world from a perspective that wishes to be elevated to the divine infinite, although it does not fully achieve it: as Gracián states, it possesses a “glimmer of divinity” and becomes the “sun of this world in cypher.”<sup>54</sup>

This elevation of ingenio is not carried out on the margins of the world, but — as follows from the above — from within it and against the habitual and established mode in which realities appear: it gets into the mundane differential plurality and prevents it from being degraded in its pure, deceitful and contingent appearance, harmoniously encapsulating this plurality and therefore elevating it to the eternal and infinite. The result is the “concept,” which is beyond analytical discernment, since it is comprehensive, organic and rebuilds not exactly things but — as Gracián states — the objective relations between things, their correspondences.<sup>55</sup> For this, ingenio uses analogy: it makes analogies between the multiple realities and thus gives them a unity. But as such unity only exists in the infinite whole, the concept leads the sensible in the world (which is diffuse) to its immanent and eternal idea, and, although this is never offered in a complete and clear way (because it is

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Huarte de San Juan, *Examen de ingenios*, ed. de Guillermo Serés (Madrid: Cátedra, 1989 [1594]), chap. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Aurora Egado, “La fuerza de ingenio y las lecciones cervantinas,” in *Boletín de la Real Academia Española*, vol. 96, no. 214 (2016): 771-194.

<sup>54</sup> “La sutileza de ingenio, sol de este mundo en cifra [...], vislumbre de divinidad.” Gracián, *Héroe*, in *Obras Completas*, primor III, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Gracián, *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, in *Obras Completas*, II, 55.

the transcendent infinite), it constitutes an aspiration that reconfigures the world out of its inner ideal. It does not thus coincide with the intellectual subsumption of the multiple in a pure universality; it looks for subtle, underlying links, relations, in a language that ties the search for the truth with the search for beauty.<sup>56</sup> Hence its place is not in institutional professorships of knowledge but in a life that thinks about itself, including the continuous dialogues and soliloquies of Don Quijote.

From the practical point of view, ingenio is accompanied by a lucid and real confrontation with the problemativeness of the world, in such a way that this is not absorbed by social facticity and its instrumentalist tendencies. In contrast to these, it is a question of articulating the multiplicity of phenomena in the world according to a coherence that shows the intrinsic value of the whole: that value that makes them worthy of reaching eternity. And, in that dynamism, ingenio is linked to heroism. In Gracián, ingenio is tied to a moral activity of renunciation, discipline, combat, disillusion and continuous self-overcoming, which determines that his ideal is embodied in a *hero in mourning*.<sup>57</sup> Don Quijote involves an eccentric heroism that, as I have shown, throws the social order into confusion and reveals, through acts of disillusion, other perspectives that, in their whole, give voice to the eternal. This is why the Knight of La Mancha — who wishes to uphold the truth, even if he must give his life to defend it<sup>58</sup> — sees the need “to touch appearances with one’s hand in order not to be deceived.”<sup>59</sup>

The opposite of ingenio is foolishness (*necedad*), which the baroque soul struggles against. As Roland Breuer has shown, this does not entail error, or a lack of intelligence, but a renunciation of intelligence that places us in nonsense.<sup>60</sup> We are exposed to it constantly: it is the state because of which we immerse ourselves in realities that are marked by global indifference, so that we forget “to acquire a being, to endure, not

<sup>56</sup> Gracián, *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, in *Obras Completas*, II, 442.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Pedro Cerezo, *El héroe de luto: Ensayos sobre el pensamiento de Baltasar Gracián* (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2015), 153-64.

<sup>58</sup> *Don Quijote*, II, XVIII.

<sup>59</sup> *Don Quijote*, II, XI.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Roland Breuer, *Autour de la bêtise* (Paris: Garnier, 2015), 224.

to be further broken apart,” and we sink into an ontological distraction.<sup>61</sup> Viewed from the Baroque, this situation of foolishness coincides with the downfall of ingenio, by which mundane realities and their relations, deprived of their mysterious referral to the eternal and infinite, end up being naturalized; they remain retained in that brainless quotidianity that, as Jean-Luc Nancy shows, insists on its eternal and banal return, styleless and without profundity.<sup>62</sup>

This world of foolishness coincides, objectively, with that which the baroque soul comes across from the beginning and against which it rebels: that of uniformizing nihilism. Subjectively, foolishness possesses many faces, but perhaps we should note the one according to which men who lose the ability to reflect upon the self no longer fall into the error, but rather they do not use reason; and, “as they don’t have it, they don’t admit it,” meaning that they come to opine without any sense at all, “being perennial in judgement, which is the most qualified foolishness.”<sup>63</sup>

Yet one can try to escape from foolishness at the same time as tacitly falling into it. Two possibilities arise here, the consequence of a breaking from the aporetic combination between whole and nothingness. The first of these is the unconditional affirmation of a particular whole. The subject, in this case, is incapable of being aware of the fact that the whole has been removed. They rise, therefore, to a purported closed knowledge and give it armour, bearing it everywhere and annulling the differences between life perspectives and settings. “Insufferable fool who wishes to regulate all objects by their concept.”<sup>64</sup> This is a false seriousness, empty but swollen up.<sup>65</sup> They are thus incapable of recognizing their limits and, therefore, of laughing at themselves,<sup>66</sup> which is something that Cervantes

<sup>61</sup> Breur, *Autour de la bêtise*, 58: “[...] acquérir un être, perdurer, ne plus s’éparpiller.” Cf. 56-59.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, “Fragments de la bêtise,” in *Le temps de la réflexion: De la bêtise et des bêtes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 14 (quoted in Roland Breur, *Autour de la bêtise*, 222).

<sup>63</sup> Gracián, *El discreto*, in *Obras Completas*, XIV, 310: “como no la tienen, no la admiten [...], quedando perennales en juicio, que es la más calificada necedad”; cf. pp. 309-311. “Perennial”: perennial, continuous, unending.

<sup>64</sup> Gracián, *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, in *Obras Completas*, 101, p. 373: “Insufrible necio el que quiere regular todo objeto por su concepto.”

<sup>65</sup> Gracián, *El discreto*, XVI, 315.

<sup>66</sup> Gracián, *El discreto*, XVII, 317.

does excel at achieving, projecting himself on Don Quijote and putting himself under the gaze of the risible. As Cerezo shows, Cervantes combines infinite and finite without falling into any absolute extreme. On the one hand, he melancholically contemplates his own sorrow (for not being able to attain the infinite) *sub specie aeternitatis*, because he feels in this way that he participates indirectly in eternity. The humourist who accompanies him, on the other hand, makes up for that extreme by making fun of the *sub specie aeternitatis* gaze itself.<sup>67</sup>

This first form of foolishness is analogous to what Breeur, following Sartre, calls “spirit of seriousness.” Limiting their view to a narrow conception, the fool refuses any otherness (and distraction) and ends up giving everything the same importance. Opposed to this is the foolishness of idiocy, dominated by an ingenuity that joins with the most trivial and that nevertheless believes itself to be original.<sup>68</sup> Seen from the Baroque, this second foolishness is one that despises all forms of elevation to the infinite and makes a virtue of it. It becomes part of an existence that does not aspire to the eternal and, nonetheless, makes it a continuous source of apparent works of genius. In Gracián’s terms, it is the foolishness of the *hazañero* (histrionic or boastful figure) who belittles heroic elevation, boasting of his shallowness as though he were capable of great deeds.<sup>69</sup> And for Don Quijote, it is the foolishness of the “courtly knights,” who pass through the entire world looking at a map.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.3. *The Physis of the World and the Ontological Imposture as a Dream without Consciousness*

Keeping oneself safe from foolishness involves, in the Spanish Baroque, maintaining the aporia between the whole and the nothing, an aporia that opens a differential infinite in the interior of the world. However, we still need to ask how it is possible, keeping foolishness at a distance, to discern between the true and the apparent and false. For

<sup>67</sup> Cerezo, *El Quijote*, 317-18.

<sup>68</sup> Cfr. Breeur, *Autour de la bêtise*, 223-24.

<sup>69</sup> Gracián, *El Discreto*, XX, 326.

<sup>70</sup> *Don Quijote*, II, VI.

to say that the world is all and nothing in unison is akin to stating that everything is truth and lie at the same time. So to my previous reflections on the infinitude of the world I must now add the link between this and the nature of reality as *physis*.

The infinitude that the baroque human being finds in finite reality is, as we have seen, aporetic. The infinite belongs to this reality but, as totalization, withdraws from it. And as we have seen, this withdrawal becomes constitutive and productive of an abysmal infinitude. *Physis* is, precisely, a depth that makes itself: *natura naturans*, in the language of the medieval. *Physis* does not have a “presentable” *arche* in its depth that could serve as foundation. This implies that there would be an *arche* of such an *arche*, and so on ad infinitum. For this reason, Anaximander thought of *apeiron* as the last layer of *physis*: the indefinite and unlimited that is limited and definite when individualized in concrete singular realities. Seen from the Spanish Baroque, this *apeiron* is the infinite of the world with no possibility of totalization, inconceptualizable depth that comes to be mystery and sublimity, *infinito infinitamente infinito*.

In the Spanish Baroque, God is the “supreme Artificer.”<sup>71</sup> The term *Artifex* connotes the divine with the characteristics of a maker in whom the supreme power of art is recognized. And this line of interpretation acquired unusual vigour in the theory of art deployed in the Spain of the Golden Age.<sup>72</sup> The world, as infinite, is self-creating *physis*, which is consistent with the fact that the 17th century is, in general, a century in which an *ontology of power* takes precedence: being is active strength, power to operate.<sup>73</sup> Thus *ingenio* arises in the human being as a prolongation of that natural power, even coming to perfect it.<sup>74</sup> As the Dedication to *El Héroe (The Hero)* reads, if nature makes “wonders,” art makes “miracles.”<sup>75</sup> This implies that the human being is not only a

<sup>71</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, I, 2, p. 824.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Javier García Gibert, “Artificio, una segunda naturaleza,” *Conceptos* 1 (2004): 13-33 (p. 18).

<sup>73</sup> Cfr. Maravall, *La cultura del barroco*, 369.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Cerezo, *El héroe de luto*, 56-57.

<sup>75</sup> Gracián, *El héroe*, 71.

character in a play; she is, at the same time, “substance,” as long as this is understood functionally. Deleuze has convincingly shown that the baroque subject is not a substrate, but a unity of depth and manners — that is to say, power that is expressed in modes of operating. Linguistically, manners indicate events expressed in the verbal infinitive: action or passion in act.<sup>76</sup> The content is, in Gracián’s words, the “capacity” (*caudal*) of the person, which is expressed in their ways of acting and confronting the problemativeness of the world, in such a way that the hero is he who becomes “king of his capacity” (“*rey de su caudal*”).<sup>77</sup>

This unity between capacity in depth and ways entails aporias with regard to the truth. One of them is that which exists between *aparecer* (“appear”) and *parecer* (“seem”). The essential real coincides with its appearing or manifesting and, thus, by the exterior one knows the interior, because it is the fruit of capacity.<sup>78</sup> But this appearing can always be converted into an intentional and false appearance, that is to say, in a mere semblance. A second aporia is that which is offered between “artifice” and “pretence.” We could say that the human being, to the extent that their *being is to operate* (*operari*), is radically artifice: artistic expression of their capacity. The whole of nature, as the work of an *Artifex*, is artifice. And so are the products of ingenio.<sup>79</sup> However, artifice can become “pretence,” because being directed not by the appearing in itself, but by the semblance, gives rise to a use of art as deception.<sup>80</sup> There is, thirdly, an aporia between “dissimulation” and “simulation.” Dissimulation is inevitable, because the baroque “self” recognizes itself surrounded by an abysmal infinite, as is the world in general. In this sense, the Baroque has developed a whole *sigetics* aimed at protecting the silent depth of the self against the invasion of the external world.<sup>81</sup> The need of the appearance brings with it the urge of an *ocultissimus*

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), chap. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Gracián, *El héroe*, IX, 86-87. In Gracián, the word “caudal” means both the “act of being” and the intensity or potential of this act.

<sup>78</sup> Gracián, *El Discreto*, XXII, 329.

<sup>79</sup> Gracián, *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, II, 442.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Gracián, *Oráculo manual*, 175, pp. 395-396.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Aurora Egido, *La rosa del silencio* (Madrid: Alianza, 1996), cap. 2, 48-66.

*homo*, who is possessive about their inner labyrinth.<sup>82</sup> But if dissimulation leads to not saying the whole truth, simulation leads to stepping onto the path of falsehood.<sup>83</sup>

Having reached this point, we might ask how the Baroque distinguishes between truth and falsehood and, correspondingly, between appearance and semblance, artifice and pretence, dissimulation and simulation. The advance in truth depends on the aforementioned deciphering exercise of the abysmal profundity of the world, but this exercise is infinite. In other words, for the Spanish Baroque, the border between the opposites we began with will never, in finitude, be determinable. However, this does not imply scepticism. It is possible to advance in the truth and in the fight against falsehood, pretence and simulation. And the advance proceeds in two simultaneous ways, as I have already begun to analyse: through ingenio and heroic action.

Let us leave the problem of heroic action for later and consider, one more time, the meaning and scope of ingenio. Awareness of the theatrical show of the world can never emerge, since, for the Spanish Baroque, being *is* its appearance, and therefore is its showing itself in representation upon the stage. But this stage that the world consists of can be abandoned to deceitful strategic intentions, or it can revolve around an ingenious ordering that opens up, from its own interior, the “glimpse” of the infinite; and in this last case, it will make truth and rectitude advance. I should add here that, given that the infinite does not consist exclusively of an unassailable transcendence, but forms part of the worldly *physis*, the way toward truth consists both of an ascent toward the “eternal” and a deepening into the world. In this last sense lies the path toward a scene that expresses the *natura naturans* of the world, the creative power intrinsic to appearance. It is this last organization of experience through ingenio that, in my opinion, is governed by what Gracián called “good externality,” which involves a resistance to deception.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, although the truth will never be separated from

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Fernando Rodríguez de la Flor, *Pasiones frías: Secreto y disimulación en el barroco hispano* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2005), 24-37, 130-133.

<sup>83</sup> Gracián, *Oráculo manual*, 210, p. 406.

<sup>84</sup> Gracián, *Oráculo manual*, 130, p. 382.

its opposites, for the baroque soul the advance in truth, while unending, is possible if the human being offers up resistance through ingenio.

Human resistance to the lie and its variations is something that must be presupposed in the search for truth. Imagining a situation in which this search loses all its meaning is what one might call *ontological imposture*. What would such an imposture consist of? We can deduce from the above that it does not coincide with the inevitable ambiguity that exists between the truth and its opposites. This ambiguity is inherent to the formation of the world and is not separated, as we can see, from an internal normativity. Roland Breeur is right in conceiving of imposture, in general, as the dissolution of the very distinction between truth and falsehood, nature and artifice, original and copy, and, in summary, of all the oppositions that make it possible to talk of a substantiality of the real.<sup>85</sup> From the point of view of the Spanish Baroque, it would in effect be an annulling of the difference between appearance and semblance, as well as the other oppositions that I have examined. And that annulling consists precisely of the dream,<sup>86</sup> which is the sphere in which reality and the unreal are confused.

Descartes responds to the hypothesis that everything is a dream with the certainty of the *cogito*. In the Spanish baroque experience, the dream has unceasing disillusion as its antagonist. The most profound journey in the world comprises the one that goes from “Deception upon entering” to “Disillusion upon exiting.”<sup>87</sup> In the middle is all the work of ingenious deciphering. It follows from this that the recognition that everything is a dream does not coincide, in the Spanish Baroque, with the recognition of the emptiness of everything. The encounter with the nothingness of life and the desperate rebellion against this is a Calderonian theme that is widespread in his work. In *Life Is a Dream*, the disillusion that makes Segismundo express the vanity of everything that happens in this life is accompanied by a rebellion against nothingness. If the world is all deception, then it resembles an undeserved punishment that makes him ques-

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Roland Breeur, *Lies-Imposture-Stupidity* (Lithuania: Vilnius, 2019), 69.

<sup>86</sup> Roland Breeur also refers to the dream as confusion of truth and appearance (which is the basis of imposture). Cf. Breeur, *Lies-Imposture-Stupidity*, 64.

<sup>87</sup> Gracián, *El Criticón*, III, 4, p. 1163.

tion, puzzled, what crime he has committed by being born (verses 103-112). As Antonio Regalado has shown, the lucid and surprised understanding of the world as a dream is interwoven with the feeling of being hurled to the world and its mystery. The conscious dream of self presupposes not the emptiness of being but the lack of a foundation or ultimate reason of being of the world, in a gesture that foreshadows authors contemporaneous to the movement of existentialism.<sup>88</sup>

The baroque hero is convinced that life is a dream. That is to say, the hero is convinced not of the complete emptiness of the world but of the vanity of human beings, who cling to finitude and do not know that the value of this lies in infinitude. However, the hero has become aware of this terrible condition of existence through the painful process of disillusion. Their heroism lies in the decision to pursue, despite such a searing experience, the eternal, and to fight for attaining a glimpse of the infinite, against all odds, in the midst of the mundane stage. For Don Quijote, the world is run through with enchantment, as if it were run by a *deus malignus* that deceives when it wishes. Yet his madness does not prevent him from knowing that he dreams, that is, that he is under the influence of the enchantment. Hence, he says to Sancho:

I know and believe that I am enchanted, and that suffices to make my conscience easy, for it would weigh heavily on me if I thought I was not enchanted, and in sloth and cowardice had allowed myself to be imprisoned in this cage, depriving the helpless and weak of the assistance I could provide, for at this very moment there must be many in urgent need of my succor and protection.<sup>89</sup>

For the Spanish Baroque, the radical imposture, the ontological, consists of escaping from consciousness of the dream. It consists of dreaming without knowing it and declaring, in praxis, the dream as reality. In such a case, the human being does not doubt about herself, she believes blindly in her “role” within the theatre of the world. Such is

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Antonio Regalado, *Calderón: Los orígenes de la modernidad en la España del Siglo de Oro* (Barcelona: Destino, 1995), 69 ff; 103-12.

<sup>89</sup> Translation by Edith Grossman. “Yo sé y tengo para mí que voy encantado y esto me basta para la seguridad de mi conciencia, que la formaría muy grande si yo pensase que no estaba encantado y me dejase estar en esta jaula perezoso y cobarde, defraudando el socorro que podría dar a muchos menesterosos y necesitados que de mi ayuda y amparo deben tener a la hora de ahora precisa y extrema necesidad” (*Don Quijote*, I, XLIX, p. 560).

the imposture. And it is equivalent to falling into vanity with respect to oneself, which does not, in my mind, consist of a simple self-confidence but in an annulling of the very distinction between self-confidence and distrust. The doubt about whether the world is a dream does not lead, in the imposture, to a consciousness of dreaming, but rather that, in it, the dangerous appearance of the doubt is invoked with its radical eradication: "All narcissists are fools, but those of spirit with incurable foolishness, because the disease lies in the remedy itself."<sup>90</sup>

Human beings thus lose the generosity that would make it possible to let the truth out of the self in freedom, in that common infinite that needs to be deciphered and articulated with ingenio.<sup>91</sup> Human beings live in this vanity if they have no knowledge about their own theatricality. This is the profound meaning, it seems to me, of the well-known verses of *Life Is a Dream*: "and in the world, to end, / all dream what they are, / although none understand it."<sup>92</sup> The imposture is, from this point of view, a blind affirmation of the identity of the world with itself, of the theatre that it consists of. It is an emptying of the world, which we could call *identitary nihilism*.

## CONCLUSION

In the Spanish Baroque, imposture has the aspect of a break from the aporeticity of the world, which does everything and nothing at once (aporetic nihilism). Epistemologically, this is an annulment of the aporias in the midst of which ingenio seeks an articulation that is worthy of experience: aporia between truth and falsehood, appearance and semblance, artifice and pretence, dissimulation and simulation. Ingenio

<sup>90</sup> Gracián, *El héroe*, XVII, 96: "Todos son necios los narcisos, pero los de ánimo, con incurable necedad, porque está el achaque en el remedio."

<sup>91</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Vérité et existence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 117 (quoted in Roland Breeur, *Autour la bêtise*, 127): "Toute vérité est pourvue d'un dehors que j'ignorerai toujours — said Sartre in line with this —. Ainsi, l'attitude de la générosité, c'est de jeter la vérité aux autres pour qu'elle devienne infinie dans la mesure où elle m'échappe."

<sup>92</sup> Calderón, *La vida es sueño*, 160, verses 2175-77: "y en el mundo, en conclusión / todos sueñan lo que son, / aunque ninguno lo entiende."

pursues, in the midst of the aporeticity of the world, relations between the phenomena whose whole would give a glimpse, from itself, of the eternal. Imposture is not an error of ingenio, but its complete collapse; and in this sense it coincides with foolishness. Without aporeticity, the world is transformed into an identity with itself, but not as a null nothingness or a rich whole, nor as a complete lie or a truth without cracks, but as a world without emptiness and without wholeness, without falsehood and without truth: a dream that does not know itself. The imposture thus lies in an identity of the world (scenic) with itself (identitary nihilism).

On the practical level, the imposture consists of not struggling against that vanity of the subject that originates in the dream without consciousness. The baroque hero personalizes the repudiation of vanity and opens up, because of this, the infinite space of reality upon which ingenio must conduct its deciphering, also infinite. The actions of Don Quijote upset the naturalized events; they problematize the appearance of truths; they oblige the dream to make itself conscious of itself. The baroque hero thus fights the imposture, letting a space for reality appear, for that reality that wishes to elevate to the impossible infinite and extract from the depth of the world: reality as *intrahistory*, in Unamuno's term.<sup>93</sup>

For the Spanish baroque hero, the world is infinite run through by the nothingness of its impossibility. With every deed they experience disillusion, and, little by little, any Quijote, of yesterday and of today, begins to recognize the impossibility of their ideal. In this tragic melancholy, however, the *Caballero de la Triste Figura* (*Knight of the Miserable Appearance*) does not reach disillusion regarding the ideal itself, but is disillusioned of the effect of his efforts, in a real world that is opposed to the realization of such an ideal.<sup>94</sup> The hero responds to the oneiric indifference of imposture, in which all distinctions between the true and the false disappear, by tragically confronting the all and the nothing

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Miguel de Unamuno, "El Caballero de la Triste Figura. Ensayo iconológico," in *Obras Completas*, ed. Ricardo Senabre (Madrid: Biblioteca Castro, 2007), vol. 8, 257-78.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Cerezo, *El Quijote*, 239.

of the world and, thus, the set of its derived aporias. Out of aporia and dispute the hero makes the condition of the fight for the infinite truth. They open an infinitude in reality, that infinitely infinite infinitude of heroic deeds through which the human being tries to attain the impossible eternal. It is precisely in their necessary failure that their victory takes place.

KEYWORDS: Baroque, Spanish Baroque, imposture, nihilism, *ingenium*, infinity, identity.

#### SUMMARY

This essay is an analysis of the Spanish Baroque in its relation with the phenomena of nihilism and imposture. The central thesis argues that this Baroque presupposes an *aporetic nihilism*, according to which the reality of the world is constituted by the unity between plenitude (whole and infinite) and nothingness. This nihilism, according to the essay, is normative and enables the advance in truth and moral rectitude through the exercise of *ingenio*, from the theoretical point of view, and through heroic praxis, on the practical level. Critical analysis makes it possible to expose an *identitary nihilism* tied to foolishness, as a rupture from *ingenio*, and *ontological imposture*, consisting of dream that is unconscious of itself. Throughout the argument, I analyse the *uniformizing nihilism* and *imposture by mediocritization* which the Spanish Baroque opposes, and I undertake a critique of *oppositional nihilism*, interpreting baroque ontology as exclusive opposition between the infinite whole and the nothingness of the world, and I conclude by justifying a baroque *moral imposture*.