

CATALINA CLARA RAMÍREZ DE GUZMÁN: LLERENA'S ACADEMY POET?

Karl McLaughlin, Manchester Metropolitan University

A surviving corpus of approximately 120 poems contained in two manuscripts in Madrid's Biblioteca Nacional (Mss. 3884 and 3917), coupled with multiple references elsewhere to a lost novella entitled *El Extremeño* and an unnamed *comedia*, also lost, demonstrate beyond doubt that Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán (Llerena, 1618-c.1684) was a prolific and versatile writer. The relative obscurity endured by this Extremaduran author for more than three centuries has been lifted to some degree in recent years by the only monographic thesis on her life and work¹ and the growing body of contributions by scholars such as Olivares and Boyce, Borrachero, Fox, Mújica and Colón Calderón, who have helped raise her profile as part of a general emphasis on female literary figures of Golden Age Spain.² This recent surge in interest has emerged with surprising speed compared to the relatively scant attention paid to the poet in the many decades that followed the publication of the first (and until very recently only)³ edition of her poetry in 1929 by Joaquín de Entrambasaguas. Equally surprising, it has not been accompanied by a similar degree of attention in her home region.⁴ Despite the valuable

¹ Karl P. McLaughlin, *'Defragmenting the portrait': Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, Extremadura's No Conocida Señora of the Golden Age* (PhD Thesis: University of Bradford, 2010).

² See, respectively, Julian Olivares and Elizabeth S. Boyce, *Tras el espejo la musa escribe. Lírica femenina de los Siglos de Oro* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1993); Aránzazu Borrachero, 'El autorretrato en la poesía de Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán (1618–post1684?)', *Caliope*, 12.1 (2006), 79-97; Gwynne Fox, *Subtle Subversions: Reading Golden Age Sonnets by Iberian Women* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2008); Barbara Mújica, 'Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán: "Si te he dicho que soy hermosa..."' in *Women Writers of Early Modern Spain. Sophia's Daughters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 274-82; Isabel Colón Calderón, 'Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán: autorretrato y erotismo', in *Venus Venerada: tradiciones eróticas de la literatura española*, ed. by José Ignacio Díez Fernández and Adrienne L. Martín (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 2006), 137-64. See also Bonnie Gasior, 'Women's Webs of Dialogic Poetry in Early Modern Spain', *Caliope*, 16.2 (2010), 45-64.

³ Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, *Obra Poética*, ed. with Introduction and Notes by Aránzazu Borrachero Mendibil and Karl McLaughlin (Mérida: Editora Regional de Extremadura, 2010). All quotations from the poetry of Ramírez de Guzmán in this article will be taken from this edition. For ease of reference, poem numbers (for example, XIX) will be given instead of full titles, unless the latter are specifically required.

⁴ She is not the only author from the region to suffer this fate. Although voiced many years ago, Antonio Rodríguez-Moñino's call for a concerted effort to fill the void of knowledge on Extremadura's collective literary heritage – 'existen postes de la red telegráfica pero no el tendido de la línea' (*Los poetas extremeños del siglo XVI* (Badajoz: Diputación Provincial de Badajoz, 1935), 4) – still holds true to a large extent today, despite notable efforts of late by local researchers such as Miguel Ángel Teijeiro Fuentes to fill the gaps with respect to the Golden Age.

efforts of recent years to situate Ramírez de Guzmán within the context of women authors of the period, relatively little investigation has been undertaken for the purpose of placing her work in the wider context of seventeenth-century verse. There is a need, therefore, to expand existing lines of inquiry by examining her work against the social and literary backdrops against which it was penned. Crucial questions such as *who* or, equally importantly, *what* she wrote for have received incomplete responses thus far.

The present article aims to shed further light on her work by attempting to situate her production in an important but as yet unexplored context, namely, the tradition of literary forums, particularly *academias*, in her home city and region. The task is not without its difficulties due to the paucity of surviving records of such circles in Extremadura. Indeed, as will be shown below, only one published account of a formal Academy has come to light (Badajoz, 1683), while references to similar celebrations in unpublished sources are few and far between.

The lack of surviving published works by local authors from the period represents a formidable obstacle when trying to piece together an accurate picture of Llerena's literary scene and the place occupied therein by Ramírez de Guzmán. However, as we shall see below, other sources – including the poems of the author and her local contemporaries – provide unequivocal evidence of the presence of a numerous group of poets in and around this provincial city, which boasted a sizeable representation of the Spanish social sectors traditionally associated with literary pursuits (professionals, clergy, affluent classes, etc) and was home to a flourishing community of writers.

The growing status of Llerena from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, culminating in the granting of its city charter by Philip IV in 1641, attracted a large number of *letrados*, *licenciados* and *escribanos* keen to pursue careers in public affairs, together with numerous aspiring middle and upper-class families. An important *Plaza de Armas* also, it was home to a large contingent of army officers and served as the occasional residence of the aristocratic commanders of the region's forces, particularly after the outbreak of the war with Portugal in 1640.⁵ Llerena's ecclesiastical importance was unquestionable and its numerous convents and monasteries ensured a permanent presence of large numbers of learned clergymen. One of the earliest to be created in the country (1485), its Inquisition tribunal was the third largest in Castile, its jurisdiction

⁵ The town's military importance is referred to in Calderón's *El Alcalde de Zalamea* (Act I, Scene II), in which the Captain and his troops are ordered to await in Zalamea de la Serena the arrival of their general, Don Lope, from Llerena (approximately 60 km to the north).

covering more than five hundred towns and an area of over 40,000 km². With a population of around 10,000 and a buoyant economy, Llerena offered healthy career prospects for the new breed of middle-class bureaucrats who were making their presence felt strongly in Spanish society. Llerena was proud of its literary heritage as the birthplace of renowned figures such as Luis Zapata de Chaves (1526-1595), author of the panegyric *Carlos famoso* and *Miscelánea*; the soldier and historian, Pedro Cieza de León (1518-1554), author of the *Crónica del Perú*; and Juan Soropán de Rieros (1572-1638), the learned doctor whose *Medicina española en proverbios* was published in 1616. The evidence points, therefore, to the existence in seventeenth-century Llerena of an ‘ambiente y una tradición propicios a la formación cultural de Catalina Clara y al fomento de sus aficiones literarias.’⁶

Abundant documentary evidence indicates the prominent role occupied in local life by the family of Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán. Her father, Francisco Ramírez Guerrero, was a highly influential member of the Llerena community during the first half of the seventeenth century. A close friend of various aristocrats, including the Count of La Puebla,⁷ the Marquis of Dragón de San Miguel and the Marquis of Monesterio, he maintained excellent relations also with some of the town’s highest authorities. Diego de Leyna, the governor of Llerena, acted as a witness to his marriage in 1609 while many years later Francisco Ramírez de Haro, governor between 1641 and 47, was a regular visitor to the family home in the Puerta Nueva. Acquired by the poet’s grandfather in 1607 and valued half a century later at over 10,000 ducats, the house was one of the most impressive in the city and hosted musical evenings to entertain distinguished visitors.⁸ In view of the family’s social position, one can safely assume that it would have been used also as a venue for literary gatherings, possibly including formal and informal academies, not least given that poetic tradition within the family.

That Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán became imbued with a literary spirit should come as no surprise given that within her own family a poetic tradition can be traced without difficulty. Although best known as a politician and administrator, her

⁶ Arturo Gazul, “Nacimiento y familia de una poetisa llerenense”, *Alcántara* 17 (1949), 4.

⁷ Alonso de Cárdenas, Count of La Puebla, acted as godfather to Francisco’s fourth child, Juan, born in the spring of 1614.

⁸ Lorenzo Gutiérrez de Valverde, a visiting Inquisitor, complained that the governor was biased towards the Ramírez de Guzmán brothers and was therefore not a reliable character witness in their application to become *familiares*: ‘El gov[ernad]or de esta ciu[da]d ... favorece a los pretend[ien]tes con exceso hallandose en su casa con muchas cenas y solfeando con sus herm[an]as a el brasero’, AHN, *Inquisición*, Legajo 2727, ‘Carta de Lorenzo Gutiérrez’, 24 December 1642.

illustrious great-uncle (who was only thirty-five years her elder), the humanist Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado,⁹ – almost certainly the cousin to whom she sent an early poem (VII) seeking advice on how to improve her style¹⁰ – was an author of some repute, with several published works in the early seventeenth century.¹¹

The poetic tradition was not confined to the more distinguished branch of the family and indirect evidence suggests it existed much closer to home also. The aforementioned Francisco Ramírez Guerrero is listed alongside Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado, Antonio de Monroy y Zúñiga and other figures from Extremadura in Fernando de Vera y Mendoza's *Panegyrico por la poesía* (Montilla, 1627) as being among those who 'merecen eternal alabanza e imitacion'.¹² In addition to his poet daughter, at least two of Francisco's other offspring engaged in literary pursuits. Pedro Antonio is praised by Catalina Clara for his talents – 'Están como dos hermanas, / armas y letras en ti' (XV, 13-14) – although nothing of his writings has survived.

Fortunately, more concrete evidence is available from several sources of the literary *aficiones* of her other brother, Lorenzo, whose practice of poetry is alluded to specifically ('pues sabes tú que los dos / nos entendemos a verso') in a poem penned by his sister on the subject of his imprisonment for disobeying ecclesiastical orders to cut his long hair (CX, 11-12). The only surviving poem by Lorenzo, a 120-line ballad written to his great-uncle, Marcos Ramírez de Prado, Bishop of Michoacán in Mexico, appears in one of the two manuscripts containing his sister's poetry.¹³ The ballad is not the only proof of the literary activities of Lorenzo Ramírez de Guzmán, who appears to have moved in local literary circles and participated in discussions of contemporary authors. A group of poems appearing next to the above ballad in the same manuscript provides

⁹ Close ties were maintained with this distinguished branch of the family. In January 1625, Lorenzo, then a prominent member of Philip IV's Council, designated Francisco as his representative in matters relating to his application for appointment as a familiar of the Inquisition, including payment of all Inquisitors' fees.

¹⁰ The *décima*, entitled 'Inviando a mostrar una silva, que fue la primera que hizo, a un pariente' opens as follows: "Primo, cuando no por míos, / por poeta platicante, / de mi musa vergonzante / corregid los desvaríos". During the investigations into Lorenzo's background, various witnesses testified that the two families addressed each other as 'primos'.

¹¹ Lorenzo, whose surviving poems include the famous 'Respuesta al memorial de Don Francisco de Quevedo', and his brother Alonso are described as 'dos ingenios singulares' in a 28-line eulogy by Lope de Vega in the *Laurel de Apolo*. For a detailed background on this illustrious family, see Joaquín de Entrambasaguas, *Una familia de ingenios: Los Ramírez de Prado* (Madrid: CSIC, 1943).

¹² For details of the *Panegyrico*, see Carmen Fernández-Daza Álvarez, 'Noticias inéditas de la vida de Fray Fernando de Vera y Mendoza', *Revista de Estudios Extremeños*, 50.1 (1994), 87-105.

¹³ Ms 3917, the sixth volume of an 11-volume series bearing the collective title *Parnaso español*, contains works by some of the best-known authors of the day, including the Count of Villamediana, Juan de Salinas, Juan Pérez de Montalbán and Francisco López de Zárate. The full poem by Lorenzo Ramírez de Guzmán is reproduced in Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, *Obra Poética*, 426-430.

valuable clues concerning the existence of a poetic community in Llerena at the time and it is worth dwelling on these verses for the important information they offer.

On 17 January 1650, shortly before Lorenzo departed to begin a fresh life in the New World,¹⁴ Cristobal González Gallego wrote from the nearby town of Ribera del Fresno to seek news from his friend and fellow-poet, Antonio Valdarrago, in Llerena.¹⁵ The poetic letter, a *romance* based on a succession of proverbs and colloquial expressions, is of interest for its references to what appears to have been a circle of local poets, including Lorenzo:

Deseo saber de ti
(cúpleme aqueste deseo)
cómo están los dos amigos,
Don Francisco y Don Lorenzo,
gloria éste de los Guzmanes
si aquel lo es de los Arévalos,
y los demás que con la
etcetera comprehendo. (Ms 3917, fol. 375v)

González Gallego asks to be brought up to date not just with news of mutual friends but also with the activities of the circle, which gathered at night to discuss poetry, including the works of the late Góngora, and attended musical evenings in local convents:

¿Hay conversación de noche?,
¿Háblase sobre el comento
del insigne cordobés cuyo
estilo siempre es nuevo?
¿Vase a los trucos de día
o al dulce divertimento
de la música suave
las tardes a los conventos?¹⁶

¹⁴ Lorenzo was the subject of considerable scandal when he fathered an illegitimate child with a servant at the family home. A speedy marriage to a man from a neighbouring town was arranged for the young servant and Lorenzo emigrated to the Americas a short time later. For details of the close relationship between Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán and her illegitimate nephew, who was brought up by a local priest, see *Obra Poética*, 32 and 38-39.

¹⁵ Valdarrago appears to have been a neighbour of the Ramírez family, judging by a reference in another poem in the same section, an anonymous self-portrait which ends 'yo me llamo Don Antonio / y vivo a la puerta nueva' (fol. 387v).

¹⁶ Although the question marks are missing in the manuscript, this section of the long ballad is a series of questions addressed to Valdarrago.

Clearly a key member of the group, González Gallego – ‘el Menor de Valencia’ as he calls himself in his poems¹⁷ – provides the common link with several poets from the area who were contemporaries of the Ramírez de Guzmán siblings. Judging by the number of his compositions in Ms 3917 and various others addressed to him or written about him,¹⁸ he appears to have been the best-known and most active of the local authors and corresponded not only with his near neighbour but with friends further afield, including one Sancho de Arévalo in Seville, who also knew Valdarrago.¹⁹ Proof that González Gallego resided in Llerena or at least spent time there around this period can be seen in the closing lines of another poem in the section, the witty verse portrait of a certain ‘Doña Cardo’ (fols. 377r-378r), which concludes as follows:

Pongamos fin a estas coplas
que van pasando de treinta,
mi reina lo dicho dicho
a seis de mayo en Llerena.

González Gallego clearly had a predilection for the burlesque, which is the common denominator of the pieces appearing in the manuscript.²⁰ Not all his production was of this nature, however, nor were his literary activities confined to his immediate circle. Years later, in 1671, along with renowned poets such as Calderón, Francisco de la Torre and Antonio de Solís, he took part in the *certamen* organised by Madrid Jesuits to mark the canonisation of St Francis Borgia, earning third prize for a poem submitted to *Asunto XII*.²¹ The record of the competition commemorating the canonisation is of interest for the information it offers concerning the contributions by a small number of other authors

¹⁷ The name likely refers to his membership of the Order of Friars Minor, which had a convent in Valencia de las Torres, a few kilometres north of Llerena, although it may also have been an academy pseudonym.

¹⁸ The fact that he is referred to in the titles only as ‘el menor de Valencia’ suggests the compiler of this section of the manuscript knew him personally and considered unnecessary the use of his proper name.

¹⁹ ‘Baldarrago’ is mentioned by name in one of González Gallego’s poems to Arévalo (Ms 3917, fol. 380v).

²⁰ In the aforementioned verse portrait he refers humorously to his twin hats as a member of a religious order and poet: ‘Lo sucio de mi sotana / le dirá que soy poeta, / que mal pudiera andar limpio / nombre que con ‘po’ empieza’. (Ms 3917, fol. 377v). A certain amount of misogyny is evident also in his representations of women as fickle characters. He warns Valdarrago: ‘No hay que fiar de ninguna, / siempre les place lo nuevo, / y es como candil a aire / la que por firme tomemos.’ (Ms 3917, fol. 376v)

²¹ Another participant from Extremadura, José de Santa Cruz (the author of a poem praising Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán’s *El Extremeño*), was awarded second prize in the same section. For details of the competition see Ambrosio Fomperosa, *Días sagrados, y geniales, celebrados en la canonización de S. Francisco de Borja, por el colegio imperial de la compañía de Jesús de Madrid y la Academia de los más celebres ingenios de España* (Madrid: Francisco Nieto, 1672).

from the province of Badajoz, including the governor of Llerena, José Carrillo de Toledo, whose ballad earned first prize in a separate section.

Another member of the circle of poets based in or around Llerena was Juan Blanco, who hailed from the small town of Villagarcía de la Torre, like Ribera del Fresno just a few kilometres from Llerena. A *licenciado*, Blanco was probably a member of the ranks of educated officials attracted by Llerena's employment opportunities. Ms 3917 contains one poem by him, a 56-line *romance en ecos* addressed to González Gallego:

Ya señor Menor Gallego,
llego a ver que valerosa
osa mi Musa en perversos
versos darse a cualquier obra. (Ms 3917, fol. 247r)

The playful tone and content of the piece suggest it was intended to entertain his colleague and fellow poet rather than for dissemination. Indeed, its primary purpose appears to be to offer distraction for the absent González Gallego and inform him of Llerena's celebrations in honour of the city's patron, the Virgen de La Granada (15 August). Blanco expresses his sadness at the prospect of spending the annual festivities alone without his friend:

Me tienen con gran cuidado
dado a una inquietud penosa
no sabiendo a quien me arrime
y me quite las congojas. (Ms 3917, fol. 247v)

It has been worth dwelling on this sole surviving record of verse exchanges between the above poets given the unequivocal evidence it offers concerning the presence in Llerena of some form of established literary community in the mid-seventeenth century, when Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán was active as a writer. The poems represent a valuable addition to the scant information available in the literature on local writers of the day. It is highly improbable that Ramírez de Guzmán would have been unaware of the existence of such a coterie, not least since her brother Lorenzo was a member prior to his departure for the New World. Even bearing in mind the overtly male banter (and occasional misogyny) manifested in some of the exchanges, the wit and humour that characterise the poems are very much in keeping with her own style and it is possible that she too may have participated in similar exchanges.²²

²² A reference to a 'menor de Valencia' appearing in a humorous piece ('A la preñez de una dama') addressed to an unborn child may well be a further indication that she knew González Gallego: 'Vente a

Even if it cannot be established beyond the level of highly plausible hypothesis that she played a part in the activities of this particular group, we do know for certain that Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán corresponded with local poets and had access to their verses. In some cases, poems penned by others led her to compose pieces on similar themes, as indicated in the title of the philosophical poem LXXIII, ‘Redondillas, por haber visto otras a el mismo asunto’, which deals with the struggle between reason and passion. From evidence contained both in her poems and in other parts of Ms 3917 it is clear that she exchanged verses with (and lent her novella *El Extremeño* to) two local writers, Jerónimo de Sola and Juan de Almezquita. A poem erroneously attributed to her by Entrambasaguas indicates that *El Extremeño* was borrowed by Sola and passed on to his friend Almezquita, who was also privy to an exchange of verses between Sola and Ramírez de Guzmán concerning the novella.²³ Other local authors to appear in her verses include a blind poet, to whom she dedicates a *décima* (LVIII) in response to praise received from him, and a certain ‘Albano’, whose poem she acknowledges she had read (LV, beginning ‘Vuestra *décima* he leído’).

Llerena’s literary community was by no means an exclusively male affair. Ramírez de Guzmán circulated her poems to female friends also and, just as her verses were requested by acquaintances, so too did she request compositions by other women, even some not well known to her, as the title of XXIV, ‘Pidiéndole a una señora, que no trataba mucho, una *décima* que había hecho en oposición de otra mía’, indicates clearly. Occasionally, the delays suffered in receiving her works back from loan prompted her to pen a poetic reminder to reclaim them: in a poem written to enquire about the health of the hypochondriac husband of a friend, the poet seizes the opportunity to request the return of a booklet of her verses.²⁴

Having established the presence of a community of poets in and around Llerena and drawn out clear connections between Ramírez de Guzmán and other local authors,²⁵ it is

nacer a Llerena / y busca aquí a tus comadres; / No seas menor de Valencia, / que allá irás en siendo grande’ (CXIV, 73-76). For an overview of the burlesque and satirical features of Ramírez de Guzmán’s poetry, see *Obra Poética*, 65-75.

²³ For example, Almezquita repeats some of the expressions used by the poet in her *décima* to Sola (CIX^b).

²⁴ ‘Ese libro que dichoso / mereció ser vuestro objeto, / bien se ve, que no es discreto / cuando se ve venturoso. / Ya tiene al dueño invidioso / con tan gustosa asistencia, / y faltando la paciencia, / señora, a estorbarlo vengo / pues las dichas que no tengo / no ha de gozar en mi ausencia’ (LXXXV, 11-20).

²⁵ For details of exchanges with poets from further afield, see Karl McLaughlin, ‘Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán y Vicente Díaz de Montoya: Un curioso intercambio literario’, in Juan Pablo Almendro Trigueros et al. (eds.), *Silva de estudios en homenaje a Mariano Fernández-Daza, IX Marqués de la Encomienda* (Badajoz: Centro Universitario Santa Ana de Almendralejo, 2009), 269-80, and María José Osuna Cabezas and Inmaculada Osuna Rodríguez, ‘Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán y Fernando de la

appropriate now to turn our attention to another aspect which merits exploration in seeking to further contextualise her work: the possible existence of, and her likely participation in, academies and similar forums in her home city around this time. Before examining her production in this specific context, some preliminary remarks on these important manifestations of Spain's literary life of the Golden Age are appropriate.

By the early seventeenth century academies had become, to quote Willard King, 'verdaderas fábricas de producción de versos', with staggering amounts of poetry penned specifically for them.²⁶ Originally designating formal institutions created by aristocratic patrons as an outlet for Renaissance humanist preoccupations, the term came to acquire in Spain a much looser meaning, designating not only formal gatherings of intellectuals but also more occasional reunions for a range of purposes, including poetry readings. As González Maya notes:

Estas reuniones de amigos o academias podrían considerarse como una representación del espíritu festivo o escapista de la época y obedecían a variados intereses. Desde la plataforma para ambiciones más elevadas hasta la simple reunión de amigos, donde reinaba la camaradería o la búsqueda de premios. Muchos fueron los participantes en estas reuniones y pocos los que las ignoraban.²⁷

As the literature on this literary phenomenon demonstrates clearly, the academies of Golden Age Spain adopted a wide range of forms, from sporadic and semi-permanent gatherings organised 'wherever two or three poets were gathered together' (Robbins, 1997: 7) to highly formalised literary circles sponsored by influential patrons, who were often cultivated members of the nobility with a keen interest in the arts, not to mention a strong desire to further their own reputation by creating a prestigious network of literary figures around their person.

Torre Farfán: dos romances cruzados a cuenta de una comedia desconocida de la escritora', in Luis de Gómez Canseco, J. Montero, and P. Ruiz Pérez (eds.), *Aurea poesis. Estudios para Begoña López Bueno* (Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba, 2014), 393-410.

²⁶ The most important academies of the period have received detailed attention from authors such as King and Egido. See, respectively, Willard F. King, *Prosa novelística y academias literarias en el siglo XVII* (Madrid: Anejos del Boletín de la Real Academia Española, 1963) and Aurora Egido, 'Las academias literarias de Zaragoza en el siglo XVII', in *La literatura en Aragón*, ed. Manuel Alvar (Zaragoza: Caja de Ahorros y Monte de Piedad de Zaragoza, Aragón y Rioja, 1984), 101-28. For a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, see the seminal work by Jeremy Robbins, *Love poetry of the literary academies in the reigns of Philip IV and Charles II* (London: Tamesis, 1997).

²⁷ Juan Carlos González Maya 'Vejamen de D. Jerónimo de Cáncer. Estudio, edición crítica y notas', *Criticón* 96 (2006), 88.

Although very little documentary evidence has come to light on such activities in Extremadura, it would only be natural to assume that the region would have differed little to other parts of Spain in following the nationwide fashion for literary circles that characterised the Golden Age and was particularly pronounced in the seventeenth century. The popularity of such institutions the length and breadth of the country has been highlighted by Robbins, who draws attention to one of the primary motivations for their existence in provincial towns and cities:

As with the desire of nobles to become patrons of academies, the broader appeal of these literary circles in the provinces was consciously linked to a desire to emulate the capital. In an increasingly centralised state, the capital and its court became the focus of cultural attention: to hold an academy was to emulate the literary mode of the capital and the Court itself, with its penchant for academies (1997: 31).²⁸

We have already seen above, from the reference by González Gallego, that some form of regular gathering took place in Llerena that included discussion of contemporary poetry. Was Llerena, a thriving city with a long-standing literary tradition, any different to other towns and cities in Spain in the mid-seventeenth century in terms of forums of this type? Sadly, the published literature on the academies of the period records just one such institution in Extremadura: the Badajoz Academy of 1683, which was held in the home of Manuel de Meneses Moscoso and attended by a broad assortment of politicians and other local personalities, particularly army officers.²⁹

However, a manuscript in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid provides unequivocal evidence of the celebration of an academy in Extremadura just over three decades earlier. A section of Ms 17517 contains ‘poesías Vurlescas a una academia de Plasencia’, which are preceded by a lengthy request to the organisers by one of the participants. The title of the request, ‘Petición p[a]ra la Academia primera del año de 1650’, indicates that the gathering was one of a number held in Plasencia around that time. The manuscript record is valuable not just for the evidence it offers of a hitherto unknown forum held in one of

²⁸ Robbins adds that, even after the most renowned circles had ceased their activities, ‘academies continued to play a dominant, and arguably the predominant role, in the literary life of the country’ (33). Zuese draws attention to differences in terms of the type of participant between courtly academies and their provincial counterparts and underlines the latter’s role in providing intellectual stimulus and camaraderie with other local writers. See Alicia R. Zuese, ‘Ana Caro and the Literary Academies of Seventeenth-Century Spain’ in Anne J. Cruz and Rosilie Hernández (eds.), *Women’s Literacy in Early Modern Spain and the New World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 191-208.

²⁹ See Miguel Angel Teijeiro Fuentes, “La Abadía cacereña o la Academia literaria de los Alba”, *Revista de Estudios Extremeños*, 59 (2), (2003), p. 572

Extremadura's most important cities but also for the intertextual clues it provides concerning participants' awareness of the subjects of other academies. The anonymous author complains in his light-hearted petition to the academy president that the three topics chosen – 'Quien mereze mas, Filis que ama obligada o Laura por inclinazion'; 'A una mariposa que yendose à abrasar un ayre la apagó la luz'; and 'A una dama que riyendose se le cayeron los dientes postizos' – were too well-worn and the academy should choose new ones. Referring specifically to the third topic, he bemoans the fact that it had been doing the rounds for so long that half of it had been eaten up by woodworm:

Al uno por lo menos de puro Viejo se le cayeron los dientes y de andar hechado por estos rincones la mitad de él se comio la carcoma. El asunto era a un Viejo que quitando el sombrero a una dama se quito juntam[en]te la cauallera, y la dama de risa se escupio los dientes postizos: este pelarse descomedido y este desdentarse de risueño, fue antiguamente el asunto entero, pero ya deue lleuarse el Rey mitad de asuntos como mitad de juros (182v-183r).³⁰

As the poetry of Anastasio Pantaleón de Ribera reveals, the same topic was one of four set for a *certamen* organised by one of the most famous academies in Madrid, held at the home of Francisco de Mendoza in May 1626.³¹

Turning our attention back to Llerena, it is important to bear in mind that, while a small number of towns and cities in Extremadura already had printing presses by the mid-seventeenth century, Llerena's first press did not open until 1745, which might help account for the paucity of knowledge available on local writers and academy-type events, although it should be recalled also that many gatherings of this type were essentially oral affairs.³² We can only hypothesise as to the likely venues for such forums in Llerena and surrounding parts, although prominent aristocrats with local connections who were known for their artistic and literary pursuits, such as the Marquis of Dragón de San

³⁰ The anonymous petitioner asks the academy president to order that the bones of the topics be buried and not disturbed for another 500 years, and composes a witty epitaph for inclusion on their headstone.

³¹ 'Asvnto IV. Tenga por precepto (en los Versos que gustare a poeta) una satira a cierto galan que quitandose el sombrero a su dama, se le derramo, quando menos la caballera; a la dama tambien, que riendose recia deste desaire, se le cayó media docena de dientes postizos'. See Anastasio Pantaleón de Ribera, *Obras*, ed. Rafael de Balbín Lucas, 2 vols. (Madrid: CSIC, 1944), II: 129.

³² Egido is among those to highlight orality as an important feature of literary forums such as poetry competitions: 'La voz en las Justas no era letra manuscrita sino para ser dicha y cantada y escenificada como en el drama'. See Aurora Egido, *Fronteras de la poesía en el barroco* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1990), 159. See also Mercedes Blanco, 'La oralidad en la justa poética', *Edad de Oro* 7 (1988), 33-47.

Miguel,³³ Marquis of Estepa,³⁴ the Count of La Puebla del Maestre,³⁵ and prominent public figures, including the above-mentioned José Carrillo de Toledo, governor of Llerena, may well have acted as patrons or hosts. A strong contender also would have been Francisco de Tutavila, Duke of San Germán and commander of the Spanish forces in Extremadura during the war with Portugal.³⁶ It is worth noting that one of Ramírez de Guzmán's longest compositions, the 202-line 'Romance al Duque de San Germán' (CXII), is the sole example of a *culteranista* panegyric among her surviving poems. The stylised, formulaic litany of the Duke's virtues and achievements,³⁷ together with the hyperbole-filled allusions to his bravery (as well as to the beauty and virtues of his wife), suggest that the poem may well have been penned for a formal gathering hosted by, or in honour of, the Duke:

Del glorioso San Germán,
milagros cante la fama
y, coronista, su pluma,
eternice sus hazañas [...]
Triunfo de su bizzarria
la rebelde Lusitania,
si no la obliga el agrado,
la conquistara por armas.
Goce de su Rey mercedes

³³ The ties between Ramírez de Guzmán and Antonio de Mendoza e Híjar, a close family friend and the subject of poem CII, are of particular interest given that a now lost *comedia* written by her was passed on by the Marquis to the Sevillian author, Fernando de la Torre Farfán, for his views. Mendoza e Híjar and Torre Farfán coincided as officials (*juez* and *fiscal*, respectively) at a *justa poética* on the subject of the Immaculate Conception in the Andalusian capital in August 1653. The unfavourable comments by Torre Farfán on the *comedia* prompted an angry poetic retort from the Llerena writer. For details of her recently-discovered 108-line ballad and Torre Farfán's reply, also in verse, see María José Osuna Cabezas and Inmaculada Osuna Rodríguez, 393-410.

³⁴ Adán Centurión. Poem XXXIII by Ramírez de Guzmán is a eulogy of the Marquis. For details of this cultured aristocrat's literary pursuits, see *Obra Poética*, 212.

³⁵ Don Diego de Cárdenas, Count of La Puebla del Maestre, a town in the province of Badajoz, was himself a poet and his circle of acquaintances included Juan de Salinas. Ramírez de Guzmán's surviving poems include one on the subject of the absence of the Count and his wife (XCIX). Her father, Francisco, was the personal representative of the Countess of La Puebla and administered the noble family's properties in Extremadura for many years. As noted earlier, the previous count, Alonso de Cárdenas, was godfather to the poet's brother Juan, born in 1614.

³⁶ The Duke occasionally hosted theatre performances in his Badajoz home in the middle of the century. See Fernando Marcos Álvarez, *Teatros y vida teatral en Badajoz: 1601-1700: estudio y documentos* (Madrid: Tamesis, 1997), 55-56.

³⁷ The poem conforms very closely to the canons of such eulogies, including the extolment of the lineage of the Duke, the lengthy catalogue of his qualities and military successes, and the desire that his achievements will be remembered eternally.

cuantas le presenta hazañas,
que el blasón de merecerlas
acompaña el de lograrlas.

De Capitán General
el bastón que trae por gala
sea báculo a que se arrimen
las grandezas que le aguardan.

Ser grande, sea la menor
merced con que satisfaga
el cuarto Felipe, el Grande,
finezas son bien logradas.

¡Vivas más años que el tiempo!
y sus heroicas hazañas
sin conocer el olvido,
mejores fénix renazcan. (CXII, 1-4, 53-72)

As owners of one of the most impressive houses in Llerena, the poet's own family were also ideal candidates to host cultural events, including meetings of poetic circles. Cultural gatherings of the day commonly included a literary component, often in the form of improvised competitions in which invited participants would test their wit and ingenuity by composing verses on topics set by the hosts or organisers. As a reputed local writer, Ramírez de Guzmán would certainly have taken part in and may even have led events in the family home, perhaps coinciding with visits by her illustrious relative and renowned poet, Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado.

The evidence concerning Ramírez de Guzmán's participation is, admittedly, circumstantial but the possibility has to be considered a very strong one in view of the active literary community in Llerena and the social environment in which the writer and her family moved. The social function of such gatherings in Spain was of the utmost importance and would have been no less paramount for a family that had demonstrated extensive preoccupation with its social rank down the years.³⁸ As noted earlier, from the

³⁸ Robbins (1997) underlines the need to view academies 'as a social phenomenon in which poetry is the medium for both entertainment and social interaction' (p. 23) and the poetry written for them as 'a means to a social end' (p. 27). The application by Ramírez de Guzmán's grandfather, Antonio Núñez Ramírez, for the title of *hijodalgo notorio* for himself and his son within a few years of arriving in Llerena was clearly an attempt to consolidate the family's social position. The poet's mother, Isabel Sebastiana de Guzmán, was highly protective of her social status and often took the opportunity to remind others of her family ties to nobles. The archives of the Military Order of Santiago record a bitter dispute between Isabel and another

documents relating to her brothers' application to become Inquisition *familiares*, we know that the family regularly entertained distinguished visitors with musical evenings, most likely as a means to assert its social status.³⁹

We need, therefore, to look to her works for further support for our hypothesis. While there is no way of knowing if the lost *El Extremeño*, with its pastoral context and combination of poetry and prose, fell within the genre of 'novelas académicas pastoriles' (King, 1963: 113) based on, or written for recital at, academy gatherings, the profile of her surviving verses corresponds to a significant degree to the subjects of a number of well-documented academies, whose topics ranged from the purely trivial and blatantly burlesque to the more serious. A substantial number of Ramírez de Guzmán's poems recall the tone and content of formal and non-formal academies and could readily be accommodated in the published records of such celebrations during the seventeenth century, such are the thematic and stylistic similarities.

A favourite topic of academies was verse portraiture.⁴⁰ Given its rigid format and stock metaphorical associations, as an academy exercise the *pintura* was an ideal test of a poet's wit and ingenuity, even if for every worthy and original composition there were numerous monotonous repetitions of the standardised descriptions. The stylised portrait format was a great favourite also of Ramírez de Guzmán, whose surviving works include no fewer than eight *retratos* in a variety of metres ranging from *seguidillas* to *silvas*. It is more than conceivable that at least some were composed for formal poetic gatherings, given her strict adherence to prescribed rules such as the pastoral charade to maintain the pretence of a communal life in the countryside, including the use of a bucolic name for the subject and the exhortation to the shepherd audience to come and listen to the description, and the pretend element of secrecy in the form of hints (*señas*) of the identity and characteristics of the lady:

Si me preguntáis, zagales,
para libraros del riesgo,

prominent woman over status and lineage during a visit to the wife of the governor of Llerena. For details, see *Obra Poética*, 23. The potential loss of a horse to the war effort, and the resulting inability to use the family carriage for social calls, prompted a witty *décima* by Ramírez de Guzmán to the requisitioning officer (XCII).

³⁹ See note 8 above.

⁴⁰ For a detailed treatment of portrait verse in Spain, see Gareth Alban Davies, "'Pintura': Background and sketch of a Spanish seventeenth-century court genre", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 38 (1975), 288-313. For a discussion of the important place occupied by *pintura* poems in the production of Ramírez de Guzmán and clear evidence of her familiarity with the prescribed rules of the genre, see McLaughlin (2010: 193-232).

las señas de Antandra, ved
que aun en ellas hay veneno. (XXVIII, 1-4).

The published proceedings of academies of the period confirm the important place occupied by burlesque variations of the portraits, which were even more popular as topics than their serious counterparts and often obliged the participating poets to stretch their imaginations to resolve the paradoxes or additional challenges set by the academy secretaries. Two examples will suffice to illustrate these at times bizarre formal requirements: poets at the Academy held in the home of Melchior de Fonseca de Almeida on 13 February 1661 were tasked with producing a ‘Pintura de una dama hermosa, pintandola fea y dexandola hermosa’, while the Academy hosted by Francisco de Borja y Aragón, Prince of Esquilache, a key social gathering in Zaragoza in the 1660s, injected an eminently local flavour into proceedings by asking its members to come up with a ‘Pintura de una fea, por apellidos de personas conocidas en Zaragoza’ (see Egido, 1984: 121).

Burlesque treatment is a hallmark of more than one of the Ramírez de Guzmán *pinturas*. The poems, which are among her most original compositions, have merited considerable critical attention as examples of the Llerena poet’s tongue in cheek treatment of the poetic canons of female beauty, although they have not yet been considered in the possible context of a deliberate display of virtuosity for an academy-type forum, where the humour-filled descriptions would doubtless have received warm applause, not least because of the gender of the author. One of the pieces (II), which features a male poetic voice as its primary purpose is to deflate the clichéd style employed by gallants in addressing the object of their attentions, makes clear that the portrait will be far from the standard type:

El resto está echado:
no hay que hablarme, que estoy determinado.
Yo me he de enamorar, señora Musa,
y pues que tanto retratar se usa
la dama que se quiere,
yo he de hacer en ensayo de do diere. (II, 1-6)⁴¹

⁴¹ According to Robbins, elements of self-referentiality in such portraits, including invocations to the muses and the use of expressions such as ‘he de pintar’ and ‘he de hablar’, are a likely indication of what he denotes ‘academic compulsion’ (124).

The poet plays with her audience throughout the witty piece through a series of interjections designed to facilitate rhyme ('Y enamorado Amor (aquesto es cierto), / la miró boquiabierto') or, more commonly, to congratulate herself on her artistic ability at having shunned the standard clichés to convey beauty ('Y no es poco primor haber pintado / ojos verdes sin prado'). Elsewhere, in another example of metatextual commentary on the literary task in hand, a trait also identified by Robbins as an important hallmark of academy verse,⁴² she admits that some of the comparisons drawn may not be overly flattering to the subject:

Dejo, pues, este pleito, aunque pendiente,
porque me llama retratar su frente:
más limpia y escombrada
que una casa robada...
pero a tan linda frente, concepto más pulido es conveniente:
digo pues, mis señores,
que es páramo de flores. (II, 25-32)

At first glance, an obvious candidate for inclusion in the popular academy exercise of burlesque self-portraits in verse would appear to be Ramírez de Guzmán's humorous portrayal of herself in poem XLIX, particularly its parodies of well-trodden Petrarchan conventions such as the use of stylised flowery metaphors to depict the various parts of the female face:⁴³

Si es de azucena o de rosa
mi frente, no comprehendo
ni el color,
y será dificultosa
de imitar, pues no le entiendo
yo la flor [...]
No hallaré falta a mi boca,
aunque modesto el desdén

⁴² 'A further important distinguishing feature of academy poetry and one intimately connected to the projection of a textual persona is metatextuality. Metatextual commentary on the literary task in hand, made using the first person, becomes an institutionalized characteristic' (Robbins, 102).

⁴³ The style and content of this 138-line piece recall burlesque academy self-portraits such as that by Antonio de Solís beginning 'Mi Retrato me ha pedido / La Academia Mantuana'. See Antonio de Solís y Ribadeneyra, *Varias poesías sagradas y profanas*, ed. Manuela Sánchez Ragueira (Madrid: CSIC, 1968), 151-53. Here, with no small amount of humour, Ramírez de Guzmán unapologetically refuses to self-identify with the 'incomprehensible' sensuous rose/lily tandem made famous by Garcilaso in Sonnet 23.

me lo mande,
porque el creerlo me toca,
y dicen cuantos la ven:

“!Cosa es grande!” (XLIX, 25-30, 61-66)

However, annotations made by the copier of the poem in manuscript 3884, coupled with the presence elsewhere in the same manuscript of a *décima* entitled ‘Habiendo enviado un retrato en verso a su hermano, que le escribió se le enviase’ (poem LII), suggest it may have been penned in response to a request from her brother and not for a poetic gathering.

In addition to actual *pinturas*, the subject of authors ‘talking to portraits’ was also popular in academy contexts. Examples include the aforementioned Badajoz Academy of 1683, to which Alonso de Morales contributed the sonnet ‘Fabio ausente habla con su retrato, enbiandosele a Lisi’. Ramírez de Guzmán’s ‘Soneto a un retrato de una dama’ (LXX), a dramatic dialogue in which the poetic voice reflects on truth and fiction, could conceivably have been written for a poetic gathering. Robbins identifies ‘debate poetry’ in which authors resolve paradoxes, dilemmas and conundrums, particularly those framed around sets of antithetical terms, as an important feature of academy verse during the period. Several such features are present in the Llerena author’s elegantly-constructed dialogue with the portrait of the absent lady, which focuses not on its representation of beauty or as inspiration for amorous sentiment, but on its potential as a vehicle to convey disillusionment. In typical baroque fashion, including multiple antithetical plays and paradoxes (shadow/sun; life/death; body/soul, etc), Ramírez de Guzmán engages in an ambivalent reflection which shifts from an apparent extolment of the achievement of the inanimate portrait in reflecting beauty to a harsh attack on the painting as an artistic fiction that fails to capture the superlative reality of the subject. Although capable of deceiving the senses (sight), a more distanced perspective brings an awareness of what it really is, namely, appearance, illusion, fiction:

Retrato: si eres sombra, ¿cómo imitas
al sol de más lucientes resplandores?
Muerto ¿cómo están vivos tus colores?
Sin vida, ¿cómo tantas vidas quitas?
Sin cuerpo, ¡muchas almas acreditas!
Sin alma, ¿dónde forjas los rigores?
Si Clori es sin segunda en los primores,
¿cómo darle segunda sollicitas?

Eres una apariencia que recrea
(gozada de los ojos solamente)
una ilusión alegre de la idea,
un engaño que finge en lo aparente,
una ficción que el gusto lisonjea,
mentira, al fin, que a la verdad desmiente. (LXX)⁴⁴

The thematic similarities with academy verse extend far beyond portrait and portrait-related poems, as we shall see below. As King has demonstrated, triviality was a characteristic feature of such forums:

Tenemos que admitir que, con ciertas meritísimas excepciones, la “erudición” académica era trivial, trillada y de segunda mano; se repetían cansadamente los mismos temas: lugares comunes de la crítica literaria, el análisis de los vicios y las virtudes o de la psicología del amor (1963: 102-03).

The works of Anastasio Pantaleón de Ribera record the topics of one of the most famous academies of the period, held in May 1626 at the home of Francisco de Mendoza (brother-in-law of the Count Duke of Olivares) and attended by Solórzano, Bocángel, Gabriel del Corral and other well-known poets. Among the subjects set to test poetic ingenuity were ‘un soneto describiendo cierto desmayo de Clori sangrada’⁴⁵ and ‘un romance jocoso relatando las quejas de un joven galán que no ha sido capaz de atrapar a una dama coja’. The verses of Ramírez de Guzmán include several on the subject of the blood-letting of women (for example, XXXV, XXXVI, and LXXX), while the ‘cojo’ theme is the subject of a satirical *romance* (XLII) dedicated to a nun who succumbed to a very persistent lame suitor. Nuns and their strange gallants were a popular theme of academy verse as well as a topic of poetic *certámenes* held in convents.⁴⁶ Ramírez de

⁴⁴ The resonances with Sor Juana’s poetic meditations on portraiture are evident even from a cursory reading of this sonnet. However, a detailed analysis of the poem, arguably one of Ramírez de Guzmán’s most accomplished pieces, is beyond the scope of this article. Interesting discussions of Sor Juana’s poetic considerations of painted representations of beauty include Emile Bergmann’s ‘Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz: Dreaming in a Double Voice’, in *Women Culture and Politics in Latin America* (Seminar on Feminism and Culture in Latina America) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 151-57.

⁴⁵ ‘The subject of blood-letting, frequent in non-academy verse, was even more popular within the academies throughout the century’ (Robbins: 78-79).

⁴⁶ Among the poems submitted to an academy held at the Salamanca home of Francisco de Aldana, Count of Salas, were *quintillas* by Domingo de Rocha Ferrer on the topic ‘A una monja que haziendo cara a todos se enamoró solo de un Calbo’. See José Simón Díaz, *Bibliografía de la literatura hispánica* (Madrid: CSIC, 1950-), 4, 1573 (9). For references to convent competitions, see José Deleito y Piñuela, *La vida religiosa española bajo el cuarto Felipe. Santos y pecadores* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1952), 113. Ramírez de Guzmán’s close links to local convents in Llerena, which commissioned poems by her for various religious occasions, and her satirical treatment of fickle nuns are discussed in *Obra Poética*, 70-72.

Guzmán's fun-filled admonition to a specific Llerena nun, María Gago, whose amorous conquests appear to have been common gossip, may conceivably have been penned specifically for a gathering of either type:

Más que por el apellido,
por la elección eres gaga,
pues cuando tantos te siguen
un cojo sólo te alcanza.

Cuando dijiste este escojo,
tus pretendientes pensaban
que no era amor que tenías,
sino pulla que le echabas.

Él es el Diablo Cojuelo
y es evidencia bien clara
que, más que con sumisiones,
con tentaciones te ablanda.

No es bien que escojas a un cojo
ni que a quien tu dueño llamas,
como la mala costumbre,
tenga la pierna quebrada (XLII, 13-28).⁴⁷

As noted earlier, the complicated rules established by academy and competition organisers tested wit and imagination to the limit through the thematic straightjackets imposed by the secretaries, often with the additional requirement that contributions address highly bizarre and even ludicrous situations.⁴⁸ The highly contrived titles of a number of pieces by Ramírez de Guzmán conform closely to the category of poems identified by Robbins as academy-specific and can be considered examples of 'the many pieces which have come down to us with no clear indication that they originated in an academy, but whose detailed specificity suggests that they did' (86).⁴⁹ Obvious

⁴⁷ Examples of bizarre courtships abound in the academy poetry of the day. See, for example, Polo de Medina's ballad 'Escrito en la Academia a un hombre muy viejo que galanteaba a una niña' which satirises an old man for his courting of a young girl and parodies the conventional terms of endearment used for the beloved: '¿Con qué requiebro imaginas / galantear? Que llamarla / tu vida es pronosticar / que se ha de morir mañana'. See Adolfo de Castro (ed.), *Poetas líricos de los siglos XVI y XVII*, vol. 2 (Madrid: BAE, 1951), 181.

⁴⁸ 'Within the academy, it is not only the poet's skill and ingenuity which is on show, but also that of the Academy secretary who has invented the topic' (Robbins, 72). Poets who failed to comply faithfully with the strict rules of the 'asunto' would often be named and shamed in the closing *vejámenes*.

⁴⁹ Robbins cites as a typical example the Hurtado de Mendoza ballad entitled 'Estando un caballero con una señora y una hija suya, avisaron que estaba allí un astrólogo, de que ella gustaba mucho, y fue necesario

candidates include poem IV, with its 59-word title ‘A una hija de un sargento mayor, que, entrándola monja, la dijo su padre que, si no gustaba de serlo, que el rey la daría un hábito de Santiago como a otras dos hermanas suyas; y a todas las llaman ‘sargentas’. Convidaron a comer a una Marquesa y a un hombre muy desigual, y a la fiesta llevó soldados’, and poem VIII, a *décima* entitled ‘Respondiendo a un hombre que escribió un papel a dos damas, enviándoles un dinero en cuartos para que le comprasen de hilo de plata, y diciendo que enviaba a dos la comisión porque cada una estorbaba a la otra cobrar la media annata’.

Furthermore, the frequent use of pastoral names by Ramírez de Guzmán to designate the subjects of many poems (Anfriso, Clori, Lauro, Tisbe, Píramo, etc) coincides closely with the practice of academy poets, who would ‘conceal’ the subjects and targets of their compositions, particularly those of a witty nature, behind such pseudonyms. One such target, the tiny ‘Felicio’ – so small that he confuses the senses (he can be heard but not seen!) –, is the subject of one of her most acclaimed pieces (CXI) and may well have been the brunt of verses written for a specific gathering in Llerena. In a delightful display of Quevedesque satire,⁵⁰ Ramírez de Guzmán pokes fun at the diminutive stature of Francisco de Arévalo, who, as noted above, was one of the men (along with her brother, Lorenzo) after whom Cristóbal González Gallego enquired in his poem written from Ribera del Fresno.

Mirando con antojos tu estatura,
con antojos de verla me he quedado
y, por verte, Felicio levantado,
saber quisiera levantar figura.

Lástima tengo al alma que, en clausura,
la trae penando cuerpo tan menguado.
Átomo racional; polvo animado,
instante humano, breve abreviatura,
di si eres voz; pues nadie determina
dónde a la vista estás, tan escondido

que se escondiese, y también la hija, y en la pieza a que se fue halló a la moza, que se ofendió de que hubiese entrado donde ella estaba’ (86). For references to typical academic titles in the work of Bocángel and sources for comparison elsewhere, see the section on academy poetry in Gabriel Bocángel, *La lira de las Musas*, ed. by Trevor J. Dadson, (Madrid: Cátedra, 1983), 73-80.

⁵⁰ The prominent place of satire in the academies of the day is highlighted by José María Ferri Coll in ‘Burlas y chanzas en las academias literarias del siglo de oro: Los Nocturnos de Valencia’, in *Actas del XIII Congreso de la AIH, Vol. I (2000)*, 327-35. See also Robbins, 10-11.

que la más perspicaz no te termina,
o cómo te concedes al oído.
En tanto que la duda se examina,
un sentido desmiente a otro sentido. (CXI)

The resemblances between this stylistically-accomplished sonnet,⁵¹ with its reversals of terms, compressed allusions and ingenious plays on words, which Adrienne Martín considers a perfect example of the Llerena author's skill in the art of *motejar*,⁵² and a second sonnet in Ms 3917 (fol. 386r) by an unnamed author on exactly the same subject constitute a strong indication that the theme was a competition topic or one set in an academy-type context.⁵³ Considered alongside the content and tone of the anonymous poem, Ramírez de Guzmán's wickedly humorous portrayal suggests that the two witty pieces were penned by friends, perhaps with the acquiescence of Arévalo himself, whose high opinion of himself as a poet and critical views of others ('de las coplas ajenas gran censura, / de sus propios conceptos muy pagado') are referred to in the second piece.

It would, of course, be erroneous to view all academy or *certamen* verse as burlesque or satirical. As Robbins notes in his authoritative work, love poetry played an important part in the proceedings also, with poems based on Petrarchan tropes extremely common. One of these tropes, the sleeping beloved, is the subject of Ramírez de Guzmán's 'A unos ojos dormidos, en nombre de un galán' (XXVII), which concludes with what appears to be a popular refrain, a possible indication that the poem was written for a set topic.

*Tus ojuelos, zagala,
me tienen muerto.
Si dormidos matan,
¿qué harán despiertos? (XXVII, 65-68)*

⁵¹ It is, perhaps, no coincidence that José Manuel Bleca chose this sonnet as being representative of the work of Ramírez de Guzmán for his anthology of verse from the period. See *Poesía de la Edad de Oro*, 2: *Barroco* (Madrid: Castalia, 2003), 368-69.

⁵² See 'Female burlesque and the everyday' in Julián Olivares (ed.), *Studies on women's poetry of the Golden Age. Tras el espejo la musa escribe* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2009), 117.

⁵³ The topics set for the 1663 Academy held in the home of Melchor de Fonseca in Madrid included one on the subject of 'un hombre pequeño de cuerpo'. Among the submissions was a burlesque ballad by Antonio de Espinosa beginning 'Liendre metida en calzones'. The man's tiny size enables him to shelter from the sun in the shadow of a fly. The author adds further 'No has sido mala yerba / porque no has crecido nunca'. See *Academia que se celebró en casa de Don Melchor de Fonseca de Almeida, en cuatro de febrero, siendo Presidente él mismo, Secretario Don Juan de Montenegro y Neira, y Fiscal Don José Berné de la Fuente, Aposentador de su Majestad, en la real Junta de Aposento* (Madrid: Francisco Nieto, 1663), fol. 35r.

Glosses of well-known poems were also a regular component of academies.⁵⁴ Although only a small number appear in the surviving poetry of the Llerena author, one of these ('Sólo el silencio testigo', XXV) provides a further association with academy verse given the strong likelihood that the original gloss, attributed to Diego de Silva y Mendoza, Count of Salinas, featured in several Madrid academies of the day.

The indications discussed above are, it is hoped, sufficiently solid to establish a connection linking Ramírez de Guzmán to an academy environment of some form. It should be emphasised at this point that, despite the patriarchal context of the period, academies, *certámenes* and other forums such as *justas poéticas* were far from exclusively male affairs. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that they played a key role in fostering the emergence of women poets, providing an outlet for female creativity.⁵⁵ Despite King's assertion that 'las mujeres desempeñaron en las Academias de España un papel mucho menos importante que en las de Francia e Italia' (59), women did play a substantial part and may even have been accorded a place of prominence. Referring to the popular French 'salons' around the same time, MacLean notes the important role played by women on account of their tact and discretion, which probably helped bring out the best of the circle, encouraging others to shine, rather than attracting attention to themselves. Perceived by their male counterparts as models of good manners, female participants were well placed to act as intermediaries between guests holding opposing ideas.⁵⁶ Whether this held true for Spain to the same degree is unclear. Either way, by the middle of the century the female presence in poetic gatherings was well established. To quote Profeti, 'en vez de *parir y criar* [...] algunas mujeres en la España del Siglo de Oro participan en Justas y Certámenes, obteniendo a veces premios'.⁵⁷ One possible explanation for this phenomenon, as Walliser notes, may have been that literary forums were generally

⁵⁴ 'La glosa fue una actividad estrechamente asociada con las academias literarias y con las academias de reuniones de palacio o corte, donde un grupo de participantes o amigos se juntaban cada semana o cada dos semanas para practicar su ingenio delante de los demás, amigos y críticos a la vez.' See Trevor J Dadson and Derek Flitter (eds.). *La poesía española del siglo XX y la tradición literaria* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2003), 125-26.

⁵⁵ As Zuese notes, 'Because of the difficulty in obtaining information about women's participation in academies, it has been thought that women had little or no role to play in them. In some cases, however, information has been overlooked or forgotten [...]' (196).

⁵⁶ For a detailed discussion of the role of women in the salons, see Ian MacLean, *Women Triumphant: feminism in French literature. 1610-1652* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

⁵⁷ The 'parir y criar' reference is to Lope de Vega's much-quoted jibe at women poets in *La Dama Boba*: '¿Quién la mete a una mujer / con Petrarca y Garcilaso, / siendo su Virgilio y Taso / hilar, labrar y coser? / Casadla y veréisla estar / ocupada y divertida / en el parir y criar'. See Maria Grazia Profeti, 'Mujer y escritura en la España del Siglo de Oro', in Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz and Iris M. Zavala (eds.), *Breve historia feminista de la literatura española (en lengua castellana)*, (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1993), 2: 235-84 (247).

deemed harmless and more a domestic affair than a public act, which could account for the lesser opposition to female participation than might be expected.⁵⁸

Describing a fictional academy of the ‘mayores ingenios de Sevilla’, although probably based on an actual forum given the amount of detail included, Vélez de Guevara’s *El Diablo Cojuelo* (1641) mentions the presence of ‘algunas mujeres con manta de medio ojo sentadas en el suelo’ who played a purely passive role as observers, in contrast to Ana Caro Mallén, who played an active part by reading a *silva* dedicated to Lope de Vega.⁵⁹ It will be recalled also that arguably Spain’s most famous female author of the period, María de Zayas, first came to prominence as a poet before turning her hand to novellas and participated in a number of Madrid academies and poetry competitions in the 1620s, as well as a Barcelona academy approximately two decades later.⁶⁰

Various studies of the poetry of the century have also drawn attention to the role of women not just as participants but also as possible hosts of meetings. According to Dadson, Antonia de Mendoza (the ‘Antandra’ of Gabriel Bocángel’s poetry) probably attended the meetings of the *Academia de Madrid* and may even have ‘run a literary salon in her home, of which Bocángel was an assiduous member’.⁶¹

Evidence contained in published accounts also records the participation of female poets in competitions held in towns and cities across the country to mark significant public events such as the births and deaths of royals. By way of example, seven women, among them Ana Abarca de Bolea, contributed to the *Contienda poética que la Imperial Ciudad de Zaragoza propuso a los ingenios españoles [...] en el fallecimiento del Serenissimo Señor, Don Balthasar Carlos de Austria* (Zaragoza, 1646), while poems by local authors Antonia de Anaya y Maldonado, María de Chaves y Sotomayor and Beatriz

⁵⁸ ‘Quizás una de las razones que ayude a explicar la amplísima participación femenina dentro de estos círculos sea que en parte estas reuniones se considerasen intelectualmente ‘inofensivas’, debido al carácter doméstico de las mismas, puesto que siempre se celebran dentro de la casa de algún personaje – dama o caballero – de reputación probada.’ See Marta Walliser, *Recuperación panorámica de la literatura femenina en lengua castellana (hasta el siglo XVII)*. Unpublished PhD thesis (Boston College, 1996), 253.

⁵⁹ For details of the participation of Caro and other female poets in literary academies and other learned circles, see Zuese (2011).

⁶⁰ The anonymous author of the prologue to Zayas’ *Novelas amorosas* (1637) refers to her as ‘honra de nuestra España (a quien las doctas Academias de Madrid tanto han aplaudido y celebrado)’. For references to her academy participation, see Kenneth Brown, ‘Doña María de Zayas: Escribiendo poesía en Barcelona en época de guerra (1643)’, *Dicenda. Cuadernos de Filología Hispánica* 11 (1993), 355-60 and María de Zayas, *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, ed. Julián Olivares. 3rd ed. (Madrid: Cátedra, 2007), 13-15.

⁶¹ Trevor J Dadson, *The Genoese in Spain: Gabriel Bocángel y Unzueta (1603-1658). A Biography* (London: Tamesis, 1983), 65-66.

de Solís featured in the University of Salamanca's tribute to the recently-deceased Philip IV two decades later.⁶²

It was not only royal deaths that prompted competitions. The birth in 1657 of Philip Próspero, son of Philip IV, triggered a national outpouring of literary commemorations and was marked the length and breadth of Spain by numerous *certámenes* and *justas poeticas* consisting not just of poems in honour of the newborn Prince but also descriptions in verse of local festivities. Llerena's celebration of the auspicious occasion lasted several days and is recorded in great detail by Ramírez de Guzmán in her longest poem (CIII: 'Relación en coplas de pie quebrado de las fiestas que celebró Llerena a el nacimiento de el Principe Nuestro Señor Don Felipe Próspero'), which she wrote for an absent female friend. Although no record has survived, the possibility that she participated in one or more competitions organised as part of the city's *fiestas* is a distinct one.⁶³

Lastly, an easily overlooked reference in the lengthy title of one poem (LXII) offers a further possible clue to female participation in an academy or similar forum in Llerena. Like the two examples of academy-specific titles referred to earlier, the 78-word title – 'Respondiendo a un soneto de un hombre ridículo cuyo apellido era Castaño, que habiéndolo dado una dama un vejamen en que él no acertó a responder más que se holgaba de ser el instrumento de la conversación, y la antífona (y esto refirió tantas veces que se hizo reparo particular), salió muy obligado de una que le picaba con más disimulo, y le envió un soneto gracioso con un hermano de la tal, mostrándose en él muy agradecido' – is so detailed and contrived that it could easily have originated in an academy setting. Of additional interest is the mention of the *vejamen*. In its widest sense, the term meant any form of satire publicising a person's physical and moral shortcomings but it had another, very specific meaning also: by the seventeenth century, the *vejamen* had become a formal and compulsory component of academies and poetry competitions.⁶⁴

In this last and usually most eagerly-anticipated piece of business on the agenda, a poet of reputed wit would be appointed to deliver an oral satire on the participants and

⁶² See Francisco de Roys y Mendoza, *Pyra real que erigió la mayor Atenas a la mayor majestad; la Universidad de Salamanca, a las inmortales cenizas, a la gloriosa memoria de su Rey y Señor D. Phelipe IV el Grande* (Salamanca: Melchor Estévez, 1666).

⁶³ For an interesting discussion of such events as community manifestations of allegiance to the regime, see Robbins (47-48).

⁶⁴ For the origins of the practice, see Abraham Madroñal Durán, 'Sobre el Vejamen de Grado en el Siglo de Oro', *Epos: Revista de Filología*, 10 (1994), 203-32.

even on the academy itself.⁶⁵ From the title of poem LXII, it would appear that a female participant entrusted with the job of delivering the *vejamen* used it to ridicule a certain ‘Castaño’, whose response led to further jibes, this time from Ramírez de Guzmán. Her contribution, which Castaño’s gullibility led him to believe was generous towards him, prompted him to send her a sonnet expressing his gratitude, to which she in turn replied with another cruel sonnet based on the multiple associations of his surname.⁶⁶ The reference – if our interpretation is correct – is a valuable one, given the absence of documentary evidence of academy-type forums in Llerena during the period, let alone of the possible participation by women in such gatherings.

The evidence presented in this article, while some of it circumstantial or based on analogies with similar situations in the rest of Spain, strongly suggests the existence of a local literary community and points also to the celebration of poetic forums in the city and its area of influence during the period Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán was writing. The multiple clues contained in her surviving production offer more than reasonable grounds to believe that at least some of her verses were penned for such occasions and it is a matter of regret that no formal records of local academies or similar gatherings have survived to shed further light on the activities of Llerena’s circle of poets, particularly the woman who has, in recent times, become its most studied member.

⁶⁵ The satirical tradition is referred to in Calderón’s *auto sacramental*, *El Sacro Parnaso* (1659) in which Regocijo announces he is about to commence his *vejamen*: ‘Adsum, y pues es decente / que a lo grave en estos casos / siga lo jocoso, empiece / el vejamen, y ninguno / se me enoje y se me queje’ (Scene XVII).

⁶⁶ Ramírez de Guzmán’s familiarity with the tone and style of *vejámenes* is evident in the ballad penned to Torre Farfán following his criticism of her *comedia*. In the words of Osuna Cabezas and Osuna Rodríguez, ‘Dentro de la línea de argumentación que vertebraba el intercambio poético, con el sevillano insistiendo en haber emitido juicio bajo expresa petición del marqués, y Ramírez de Guzmán quejosa del rigor y modo de la crítica, no dejan de ser significativas las analogías parciales de tono estilo y estrategia retórica de estos dos romances con los vejámenes de justas y academias, muy especialmente en su forma de diluir el conflicto en medio de fórmulas de cortesía y expresiones de amistad’ (395).