KARL McLAUGHLIN

8 Meaningful parallels for students: Golden Age poetic production as examples of talent shows and celebrity spats

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.
— Confucius

ABSTRACT
Obstacles to effective engagement by university students with Golden Age texts include their knowledge deficit with respect to the historical, literary and cultural contexts underlying the texts. Poor understanding of content and context can lead to demotivation, thus decreasing the potential for learning. Establishing meaningful parallels between aspects of seventeenth-century Spanish culture and readily recognizable facets of contemporary culture can help speak to students more effectively. The present paper explores ways to harness students' familiarity with TV talent shows and social media squabbles between celebrities to connect them with analogous Golden Age phenomena, particularly literary academies/poetry competitions and well-documented rivalries between famous figures. By helping students view the production of these key cultural phenomena through a prism to which they can relate more easily, a valuable foothold can be provided to stimulate their interest and encourage them to engage with Golden Age texts more actively and successfully.

Among the many experts who have succeeded in fostering a better understanding of the language and contexts of bygone periods is the British linguist and academic David Crystal, who is renowned for his methods for stimulating interest in Shakespeare among today's learners. As Crystal regularly emphasizes, Shakespeare is inconceivable for today's audiences without the Received Pronunciation accents of iconic actors such as Laurence Olivier, even if this is nothing like how such works were performed in their day. Successful strategies employed by Crystal to heighten student interest in The Bard and his period include, intriguingly, the revoicing of extracts with

the pronunciation and accents in which the original plays would have been staged. In this way, students rediscover the original sounds of the playwright's work.[1] This type of learner-centred, rather than teacher-centred, learning – with a focus on what students do, rather than on what is being done to them – is the hallmark of effective learning.[2]

Part of the success of these and similar initiatives is passion for the subject and the ability to have students see things from a different and, even better, a surprising perspective. The manuals of inspirational teaching tell us much about this crucial aspect of education. As teachers, we always aim to display our passion and, hopefully, have that same passion motivate our students. We make our courses personal, demonstrating why we are interested in the subject matter and the research that underpins it. So far so good: the problem arises when students do not identify with that passion because the topic that inspires it in *us* seems remote and unconnected to *their* view of the world. This difficulty can be further compounded by the perception of a lack of direct applicability of the learning. Teachers and educators have grappled for years, particularly in the current climate of multiple competing interests, with the question of how to persuade students of the (joys and) benefits of learning about subjects they consider to be outmoded and of little practical use. Rather than read a course text before or in class, many students choose to devote their time to perusing updates on Facebook and other social media. Bridging the time and knowledge divides that separate today's immediacy-driven students from the periods they are required to study can therefore seem an insurmountable challenge.

1 On the history of academic interest in Shakespearean phonology, see David Crystal, 'Early Interest in Shakespearean Original Pronunciation', *Language and History* 56/1 (2013), 5–17. For a detailed insight into the potential (and challenges) of using popular modern-day resources such as YouTube for participatory Shakespeare teaching and learning, see Stephen O'Neill, *Shakespeare and YouTube: New Media Forms of the Bard* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

2 An interesting discussion of a recent international collaborative initiative to motivate young learners to engage with the literature of their own and others' countries, including through the creation of online comics, live videos and animations can be found in Geoff Walton, Mark Childs and Gordana Jugo, 'The creation of digital artefacts as a mechanism to engage students in studying literature', *British Journal of Educational Technology* 50/3 (2019), 1060–~~10~~86.

Some preliminary words on motivation are appropriate at this juncture. As is commonly accepted, when faced with the opportunity to engage in a learning activity, a student determines, firstly, if the activity is one that is known to be interesting.[3] If it is, they engage in the activity. At the most basic level, to be intrinsically motivated means to complete a task because it is personally and internally rewarding, whereas to be extrinsically motivated means to complete a task for reward or to avoid punishment. Intrinsically motivated students work on tasks because they find them enjoyable. This intrinsic motivation can include, inter alia, a fascination with the subject, a sense of its relevance to life and the world, and a sense of accomplishment in mastering it. Among its many advantages, intrinsic motivation can be long-lasting and self-sustaining. Importantly, intrinsically motivated students are often deep learners who respond well when faced with a difficult and complex subject and are therefore a joy to teach. On the other hand, efforts at fostering such motivation can be slow to influence behaviour and usually require detailed and lengthy preparation.[4] The simple question 'What possible appeal might lie in Golden Age literature, beyond the appeal of getting a good mark?' is one that teachers of Spanish literature have pondered for years.[5]

At a very basic level, an obvious starting point – considering the gender make-up of a typical cohort of university students of Spanish – might be to devote more time to the study of female authors of the Golden Age. Yet by far the bulk of attention focuses on male authors, which is perfectly understandable if we bear in mind that 99 per cent of texts from the period were written by men.[6]

3 See James A. Middleton, 'A Study of Intrinsic Motivation in the Mathematics Classroom: A Personal Constructs Approach', *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 26/3 (1995), 255–57.

4 On motivation, see, among others, Matt DeLong and Dale Winter, *Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn Mathematics: Resources for Professional Development* (Mathematical Association of America, 2002), 163.

5 See, for example, the special issue of *Calíope* on 'Teaching Golden Age Poetry', ed. Edward Friedman, 11/2 (2005).

6 However, even scholars such as Barbara Mujica, who has done much to promote the cause of early modern women writers, acknowledge that a purely female focus would be a misrepresentation of the literature of the period and that there is no disputing the

Wolfgang Iser rightly draws the distinction between a contemporary reader, reading literature at the time it was written, and a historical reader, reading a text removed from the time it was written.[7] The task of engaging students therefore entails taking the text back to the time of writing to familiarize modern readers with the contexts in which it was produced. Clearly, dedicated Golden Age modules on undergraduate degree courses afford more time to stimulate interest and embed learning. However, an equally common scenario may be where the period, its literature and its culture have to be introduced in more general 'survey' modules. Needless to say, the approach will differ depending on the case.

One potentially useful way, in my opinion, would be not just to show what these contexts were but, where feasible, to draw comparisons with the real world or at least a world recognizable to our millennial students, one that includes talent shows, open mic evenings and, in general, 'putting oneself out there' using all available means. Was that so different to the seventeenth century? Could today's social media and similar phenomena prove the key to unlocking interest in a bygone age?

In essence, the question asked is 'What parallels, far-fetched or not, might be drawn to kindle student interest in Golden Age poetry?' For this, a cursory reflection on what captures young people's interest is needed. The ever-present TV in homes is an obvious starting point and a look at viewing figures for talent shows, coupled with the followings generated by associated social media spin-offs, indicates that such fascinations could be a valuable Trojan Horse.[8]

In terms of what drives wannabes to sign up to one or more of the current plethora of TV talent shows which adopt the same tried and tested formula across countless countries, various possible reasons have been advanced,

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value of maintaining the Golden Age canon: 'I do not envision undergraduate survey courses in which Leonor de Meneses replaces Cervantes or Angela de Azevedo supplants Calderón', in *Women Writers of Early Modern Spain. Sophia's Daughters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), ix.

7 Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

8 The metaphor is used here in the positive sense of a stratagem that causes a target to invite a 'foe' (the Golden Age, perceived as uninteresting) into its protected space.

including the performance experience, the desire to achieve industry exposure and the equally strong desire to build a fan base. Did similar motivations exist centuries ago? Granted, TV had not been invented but that is not to say there were no entertainment forums whose primary function was to uncover and showcase talent. Students brought up on a media-fuelled diet of talent shows would clearly have an interest in knowing which talent shows existed in seventeenth-century Spain.

Unequivocal evidence exists of the presence in towns and cities across Spain of established literary communities in the mid-seventeenth century. Poets interacted with other poets socially and intellectually, both in major cities and smaller locations. At a time when printing was still relatively rare and the amount of published poetry was much lower than the poetry that circulated in manuscript form, interaction often took the form of the direct sharing of verses among close friends.[9] Fast forward almost four centuries and we see a similar phenomenon, much more identifiable to the students of today, when only a small percentage of writings find their way into formal print. The 'labyrinth-like transmission flow' described by Frenk to refer to the ways in which Golden Age poetry passed from hand to hand can be likened to today's social media, with its restricted Facebook groups, not to mention Tweets and multiple retweets of words written by others.

There is every good reason to look at the lesser-known production of the day, particularly that generated by academies and poetry competitions, which were among the main talent show formats of Habsburg Spain, including Spanish dominions abroad. Authors such as Willard King and Jeremy

9 'El Siglo de Oro español fue una época de enorme actividad poética, una actividad que rara vez desembocaba en libros impresos y sí, frecuentemente, en manuscritos. El proceso de transmisión se ha venido describiendo así: garabateado por el poeta en un papel, el texto del poema era copiado por aficionados en papeles sueltos que, a su vez, volvían a copiarse y que eventualmente podían ir a dar, junto con otros, a un cartapacio y a un manuscrito de "Poesías varias de diferentes autores". Y este manuscrito, por su parte, servía para alimentar nuevas copias. En el curso de la transmisión el poema se desprendía casi siempre del nombre de su autor y circulaba anónimamente. Como casi nunca se conserva el texto original, lo que el editor moderno tiene frente a sí son los manuscritos y alguno que otro impreso, que manifiestan a las claras el laberíntico proceso de la transmisión'. Margit Frenk, 'Réplica a Antonio Carreira', *Acta poética* 34/1 (2013), 211.

Robbins, who have been instrumental in shedding light on the activities and popularity of Spain's literary communities of the century, have shown that many poets learned their trade by observing or taking part in academies and competitions, which saw a staggering amount of poetry produced to forge and maintain reputations.[10] As Carlos Gutiérrez reminds us, 'all writers pursuing social legitimacy in early modern Spain had first to fortify their social network, both in and out of the literary field'.[11] Cultivating social networks for status? Unheard of today!

The academies of Golden Age Spain adopted a wide range of forms, from sporadic and semi-permanent gatherings organized, in Robbins words 'wherever two or three poets were gathered together', to highly formalized literary circles sponsored by influential patrons.[12] To adapt the title of one of the most watched TV programmes in the United Kingdom, these events were very much a case of Strictly Come Versing.[13] Strict rules were imposed as regards verse forms, rhyme schemes and even grammatical rules (one academy, for example, obliged poets to end each line with an *esdrújula*). On many occasions, the exact wording of first and last lines of poems was determined by the organizers. Strict also were the topics, which ranged from the bloodletting of a lady's foot to more contrived and ridiculous situations which were outlined in the titles set.[14] Glosses, akin to some extent to personalized

10 Willard F. King, *Prosa novelística y academias literarias en el siglo XVII* (Madrid: R. A. E., 1967) and Jeremy Robbins, *Love Poetry of the Literary Academies in the Reigns of Philip IV and Charles II* (London: Tamesis, 1997).

11 Carlos M. Gutiérrez, 'The Challenges of Freedom: Social Reflexivity in the Seventeenth-Century Spanish Literary Field', in Nicholas Spadaccini, and Luis Martín-Estudillo, eds, *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 137–61, 143.

12 Robbins, *Love Poetry of the Literary Academies*, 7.

13 *Strictly Come Dancing*, a British television dance contest featuring celebrity contestants, has been running for over fourteen years and draws weekly audiences of up to 13 million. Its Spanish counterpart, ¡Mira quién *baila!*, has also been a major draw in Spain for many years in its different formats.

14 Robbins cites as an 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 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', Robbins, *Love Poetry of the Literary Academies*, 86.

cover versions of well-known songs today, were also hugely popular.[15] The complicated rules imposed by academy and competition organizers tested wit and imagination to the limit through the thematic straightjackets established by the secretaries, often with the additional requirement that contributions address bizarre and even ludicrous situations.[16]

A favourite topic of academies was verse portraiture.[17] Given its rigid format and stock metaphorical associations, the *pintura* was an ideal test of a poet's wit and ingenuity. The published proceedings of academies of the period confirm the important place occupied also by burlesque variations of the portraits, which were even more popular as topics than their serious counterparts, often obliging participating poets to stretch their imaginations to resolve paradoxes or bizarre additional challenges set by the organizers.[18]

Just as in talent competitions, strict rules existed to ensure objectivity on the part of judges. Without going to present-day talent show extremes of having the judges turn their chairs around so as not to be influenced by anything other than participants' voices, careful steps were taken to ensure anonymity. The record of one academy held in the late seventeenth century to mark the canonization of St Francis Borgia offers an abundance of

15 Trevor J. Dadson, 'El arte de glosar: las "mudanzas" de Antonio Carvajal y la tradición barroca andaluza', in Trevor J. Dadson and Derek W. Flitter, eds, *La poesía española del siglo XX y la tradición literaria* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2003), 125–53, 125–6.

16 '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, *Love Poetry of the Literary Academies*, 72. Poets who failed to comply faithfully with the strict rules of the 'asunto' would often be named and shamed in the closing *vejámenes*.

17 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.

18 For example, poets at the Academy 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 injected a local flavour into the proceedings by asking its members to come up with a 'Pintura de una fea, por apellidos de personas conocidas en Zaragoza'. See Aurora Egido, 'Las academias literarias de Zaragoza en el siglo XVII', in Manuel Alvar, ed., *La literatura en Aragón* (Zaragoza: Caja de Ahorros y Monte de Piedad de Zaragoza, Aragón y Rioja, 1984), 101–28, 121.

detail on all the arrangements, including the make-up of the judging panel and the rules for submission. These included the obligation to submit two unsigned copies (one for public display, one for the judges to consider), along with a third signed copy in a sealed envelope which was to be opened only when the judges had reached their decision.[19] The record of an earlier *justa* in honour of St Isidoro reveals that the names of the judges were not to be revealed in advance to prevent poets from trying to influence them ahead of the event.

It has been worth dwelling on the format and content of academies and competitions to draw out certain parallels which might to speak to the students of today. In general, the study of a representative sample of themes of academy verse could prove of interest as a means of encouraging engagement with Golden Age poetry and its contexts. Additionally, a cursory examination of a lesser-known academy would help establish the widespread popularity of these social and intellectual gatherings, while also revealing the degree to which poets in smaller locations were familiar with other academies, probably through travel or word of mouth.[20]

Having established potential parallels, the next question to address is how to bring these into the classroom. Here, multiple possibilities exist, including (bearing in mind the need to combine the acquisition of new knowledge with language learning and practice) the use of task-based learning

19 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).

20 A section of Ms 17517 in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid contains 'Poesías Vurlescas a una academia de Plasencia', which are preceded by a lengthy request to the organizers by one of the participants. The manuscript record is valuable for the intertextual clues it provides concerning participants' awareness of the topics set for other academies, as evidenced by the humorous complaint to the academy president that one of the three topics chosen – 'A una dama que riyendose se le cayeron los dientes postizos' – had been doing the rounds for so long that half of it had been eaten up by woodworm. As the poetry of Anastasio Pantaleón de Ribera reveals, a fuller version of the topic was one of four set for a *certamen* organized by one of the most famous academies in Madrid, held at the home of Francisco de Mendoza in May 1626. Anastasio Pantaleón de Ribera, *Obras*, ed. Rafael de Balbín Lucas, 2 vols (Madrid: CSIC, 1944), II: 129.

approaches.[21] After a small number of tutor-led seminars on general aspects of academies, *certámenes* and *justas*, students could be asked to imitate the style of the day and set *asuntos* – both serious and burlesque – for a fictitious academy. They could also judge poems from a real competition of the day, ranking the top three compositions in order and then matching their verdict with the actual results from published records of the gathering. They might even 'recreate' a seventeenth academy by performing the poems to an audience. More advanced groups could be tasked with composing short poems on a topic or completing missing lines from actual poems. *Pinturas* are also potential subjects of interest due to the present-day debate, driven largely by social media, surrounding the aesthetics of the female body and the beauty standards set for and by women. A study of a selection of Golden Age verse portraits offers an ideal opportunity to compare and contrast canons of beauty across periods and languages and, in passing, familiarize students with Petrarchan metaphor.

While some academies were regular affairs lasting considerable lengths of time, others were much shorter-lived, due in part to squabbles between rival poets.[22] The concept of rivalry provides another useful angle through which to foster interest among today's students in the literature of the Golden Age, which was characterized by various high-profile feuds among renowned figures. Equally importantly, rivalry offers another Trojan Horse for the delivery of sessions on the main schools of poetic thought of the day. Everyone loves a scandal, a fondness that has remained unchanged down the ages. Turn any page of a popular newspaper or scroll down on any social media and one is guaranteed to see the latest developments in much-publicized quarrels between well-known figures. Katy Perry vs Taylor Swift, Lady Gaga vs Perez Hilton, Kim Kardashian vs Bette Midler, Russell Brand vs Donald Trump, Donald Trump vs Kim Jong Un ... The list is endless.

Seventeenth-century Spain was no different, with considerable rivalry aired in private and in public between political figures. However, arguably the best-documented public squabble was of a literary nature and involved two

21 For an overview of the use of Task-based Learning, see Rod Ellis, *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

22 See, for example, Miguel Romera Navarro, 'Querellas y rivalidades en las academias del siglo XVII', *Hispanic Review*, 9 (1941), 494–9.

of the biggest names in the poetry of the age. As we all know – but students will not (yet) – the figureheads of two opposing aesthetic camps, Góngora and Lope de Vega, become embroiled in a long-running feud which went to the very heart of philosophies of poetry. Rather than approach the subject in a purely theoretical manner, with detailed lectures on the characteristics of *culteranismo* and *conceptismo*, or *populista* vs *elitista* forms of poetic composition, a fruitful way to embed the basic notions of each would be to focus on the actual feud and its ramifications. This might prove a stimulating avenue for students and even encourage self-study to establish the main figures in each camp. In addition, as we shall see, enmity and rivalry can be used to encourage exploration of other figures, including Cervantes.

Orozco Díaz's remark concerning Lope and Góngora – 'Cada uno se sentía observado por el otro y se mantenían así atentos a sus respectivas reacciones' – is an ideal starting point for a cursory look at an enmity that had poets and their patrons on the edge of their seats.[23] Although scholarship has moved beyond the binary classification of each as, respectively, the 'father of *comedia*' and 'father of *culteranismo*' (one representing *literatura mayoritaria* and the other *literatura de minorías*), and such pigeon-holing overlooks the numerous points of contact between the two, in terms of introducing students to Golden Age literature, the distinction can prove very helpful as a pretext for an overview of the two main schools of thought and of the importance attached to a debate that concentrated literary attention at the time.

Inaccurate as they may be, the aforementioned and simplistic antithetical oppositions are nonetheless useful if our aim is to provide brushstrokes for students on the essentials of a polarized debate. This is arguably better than muddying the waters for them by diluting the differences between the two poetic trends. Sweetening the pill of learning by focusing on sensationalism is, in this particular case, warranted. More importantly, if the content of a potentially dry subject has to be disguised in the form of polemic, so be it. As we shall see, it might even prove attractive to students in terms of encouraging additional work.

Just as Donald Trump and his North Korean counterpart escalated their political dispute to include attacks of a personal nature, the rivalry and

23 Emilio Orozco Díaz, *Lope y Góngora frente a frente* (Madrid: Gredos, 1974), 16.

mutual criticism between Góngora and Lope extended beyond purely literary aspects.[24] As is clear from the titles of several poems, little attempt was made to hide the identity of the enemy, an obvious example being Góngora's 'A la "Jerusalén conquistada" que compuso Lope de Vega'. In 'A la "Arcadia" de Lope de Vega Carpio', Góngora advises his rival to keep to what he is best at (theatre) and not engage with pastoral poetry, but the 'professional' attack is coupled with references also to Lope's adopted family crest and marriage to the daughter of a butcher.

Social media spats today indicate clearly the extent to which enemies monitor each other's posts and information closely. Similarly, the poetry of the seventeenth century reveals the detailed knowledge warring authors had of rivals' work. In some cases, a poet would include references to a rival's words in their own poem or even compose a parodic recreation (a form of satirical 'remake' today) of an enemy piece, inviting readers or, in oral performance contexts, listeners to compare the merits of each. A prime example is 'Ensíllenme el asno rucio' which pokes fun at Lope's 'Ensíllenme el potro rucio': the Góngora poem is only understandable with Lope's text uppermost in mind. In other words, such was the interdependence that they could not live without each other.

This, of course, was not the only rivalry between major literary figures of the day. Cervantes vs Lope was another well-known squabble. Here, students could be encouraged to engage in detective work to explore the reasons why close friends, said to have become acquainted in the home of Velázquez, became sworn enemies. A starting point would be to view the film by Manuel Huerga, *Cervantes contra Lope* (2016).[25] Students might also be tasked with identifying who cast the first stone in the dispute: was it Lope with his criticism of *Don Quijote* after being granted access to the work, as

24 Interestingly, Kim Jong-un's use of 'dotard' to describe his American adversary sparked a worldwide frenzy. Many rushed to consult the meaning of the term, which trended worldwide and spawned its own hashtag #dotard. An interesting exercise for students might to be trace the origins of terms used in poetic insult-trading in the Golden Age.

25 On the use of film and performance activities as a vehicle for kindling student interest in the drama of the period, see Charles Patterson, 'Lope on YouTube: Film Analysis and Amateur Video Production in a "Comedia"' *Hispania*, 98/3 (2015), 522–32. See also Duncan Wheeler, *Golden Age Drama in Contemporary Spain: The Comedia on Page, Stage and Screen* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

a friend, in advance of publication ('De poetas, muchos están en ciernes para el año que viene; pero ninguno hay tan malo como el Cervantes ni tan necio que alabe a Don Quijote')? Or was it Cervantes's displeasure at not having his *comedias* staged in Madrid, for which he blamed Lope's influence (hence his subtle jibe against *comedia* writers in *Don Quijote*)? Whatever the reason, the rivalry provides valuable material for an interesting study of clashing egos and of the transition from mutual praise to mutual hate. Parallels with contemporary swings in relationships, aired on social media, would be easy to establish and could be developed further through a student reconstruction of the insult-trading. Carrying out this activity using Twitter would add the extra (and very real-life) language challenge of condensing offences within a prescribed word limit.

To enable students to assume control of their learning, other task-based learning activities could be devised to further their knowledge of the literary contexts of rivalries. The opening lines of one of Quevedo's most scathing sonnets are ideal for an exercise in deciphering the malicious and belittling jibes, both personal and literary, hurled back and forward between poets. Just as today's spat-followers rush to check out the latest diatribes, followers of enemy poets would have been counting the days and hours to be able to access the latest instalments, including in manuscript form, of the war of words. These include the Quevedo sonnet, 'Receta para hacer Soledades en un día', which sets out all the ingredients needed to become a *culto* poet.[26] Additional ways of assisting with an understanding of the literary enmity and its various forms of manifestation would be to have students carry out further detective work and decipher the savage personal attacks in another famous Quevedo sonnet to his arch enemy, which opens with some of the best-known lines of the period's poetry:

> Yo te untaré mis obras con tocino
> porque no me las muerdas, Gongorilla,
> perro de los ingenios de Castilla,
> docto en pullas, cual mozo de camino.

26 Such recipes may even strike a chord with a generation brought up on popular TV programmes such as *The Great British Bake Off*, which attracts weekly audiences of several million.

Here, class exercises might consist of decoding the meaning of each line (the accusations of bad lineage, being a *converso*) and searching for evidence of anti-Semitism in the sonnet, including, of course, the 'nariz' of line 11, which provides a thematic link to other potential meaningful parallels for exploration.[27]

While fat shaming may not have been as popular as a phenomenon as it is today, particularly on social media such as Facebook and Instagram, public criticism of physical attributes in verse form was widespread in Golden Age Spain. Indeed, Góngora's aquiline nose featured much more prominently in another Quevedo poem, 'Érase un hombre a una nariz pegada', arguably his most famous burlesque sonnet. The witty piece provides ideal material for a creative class translation exercise, with individual or group renderings subsequently measured against the excellent version by Jorge Salavert, 'To a man with a big nose' (2008).[28] Belittling in seventeenth-century verse extended to physical stature also, with small men and women regularly targeted for attacks. The abundant examples in the poetry of the day make for interesting study, not just for the ingenious treatments of the popular topic, which was less a product of personal rivalry than a literary fashion practised in major cities and remote corners of the country, reflecting the pervasive nature of literary commonplaces, which was all the more impressive given the (by today's digital standards) slow forms of communication of the day.

A prime example of the conceptual wordplay deployed in such attacks is offered by a lesser-known author, the Extremaduran Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán (1618–c. 1684), in a stylistically accomplished sonnet replete featuring abundant reversals of terms, compressed allusions and ingenious puns, all of which contribute to the goal of poking fun at the subject.

27 These include 'tocino' (l. 1), 'muerdas' (l. 2), 'perro' (l. 3), 'rabí', 'judía' (l. 10), 'escribas' (l. 13), 'sayón' and 'rebeldía' (l. 14).

28 The use of translation to help students focus on language and creativity can take multiple forms. A creative exercise (which also familiarizes students with verse forms, syllable counts and rhyme schemes) is to complete missing lines of a good English rendering of, for example, Lope's 'Un soneto me manda hacer Violante', of which multiple versions are accessible on Internet.

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 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.[29]

A second sonnet in the manuscript containing this piece (BNM Ms 3917, fol. 386r) by an unnamed author on the very same topic (and the same man, Francisco de Arévalo) constitutes a strong indication that the theme may well have been a topic set for a competition or academy context. The subject of tiny men and women was a particular favourite in academy poetry. The Academy held in the home of Melchor de Fonseca in Madrid (1663) included one on the subject of 'Un hombre pequeño de cuerpo', with submissions including a burlesque ballad by Antonio de Espinosa beginning 'Liendre metida en calçones'. The man's tiny size enables him to shelter from the sun in the shadow of a fly, with the author adding further 'No has sido mala yerba / porque no has crecido nunca'.[30]

The tiny man theme extended also to epitaphs, another important but understudied characteristic of baroque poetry and an equally fertile area to

29 For a recent edition of this author's verse, see Catalina Clara Ramírez de Guzmán, *Obra Poética*, eds Aránzazu Borrachero Mendíbil and Karl McLaughlin (Mérida: Editora Regional de Extremadura, 2010). As noted above, given the gender profile of a typical cohort of students of Spanish, an increased presence of female authors may help counter the perception of a male-dominated portfolio of literary figures studied.

30 *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.

kindle interest among modern-day students.[31] Examples that spring to mind include Jacinto Alonso Maluenda's 'Epitafio a un hombre muy pequeño', which opens 'Tilde con alma imagino / que fuera la enana figura / que ocupa esta sepultura / más corta que un vizcaíno'.[32] Here, parallels with English poetry could be drawn to assist with student learning. As Claire Bryony Williams reminds us, 'epitaphs, some originally copied from tombstones, some composed solely for the page, also appeared in large numbers in printed poetry miscellanies suggesting that 17th-century readers wanted to read epitaphs alongside other popular forms such as the sonnet and the epigram'.[33]

Needless to say, obscure poets were a popular target of witty epitaphs, with arguably the most famous of all such epitaphs being Quevedo's *silva* against Góngora, which brings us back once again to the rivalry that conditioned much of poetic production in the period:

> Este que, en negra tumba, rodeado
> de luces, yace muerto y condenado,
> vendió el alma y el cuerpo por dinero,
> y aun muerto es garitero; [...]
> Éste a la jerigonza quitó el nombre,
> pues después que escribió cíclopemente,
> la llama jerigóngora la gente. [...]
> Fuese con Satanás, culto y pelado:
> ¡mirad si Satanás es desdichado!

Here too it is not difficult to imagine possibilities for active student engagement, for example, by identifying the attacks, both direct and veiled, on Góngora in the epitaph or, at a more advanced level, composing an epitaph in the style of the seventeenth century and beginning 'Aquí yace'. ...[34]

31 Sagrario López Poza, 'El epitafio como modalidad epigramática en el Siglo de Oro (con ejemplos de Quevedo y Lope de Vega)', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 85/6 (2008), 821–38.

32 Jacinto Alonso Maluenda, *Bureo de las musas del Turia en prosa y en verso* (Valencia, 1631).

33 Claire Bryony Williams, 'Manuscript, Monument, Memory: the Circulation of Epitaphs in the 17th Century', *Literature Compass* 11/8 (2014), 573–82.

34 Again the poetry of Alonso Maluenda offers an excellent model in the shape of his 'Epitafio a un poeta culto' (beginning 'Yace aquí un versificante'), which features in a

Capitalizing further on student interest in put-downs, a return to the academy contexts discussed earlier would allow exploration of a little-studied aspect of these popular literary gatherings: the closing *vejamen*. In its widest sense, the term meant any form of satire publicizing a person's physical and moral shortcomings. However, it had another, very specific meaning also: by the seventeenth century, the *vejamen* had become a formal component of academies and poetry competitions. In this eagerly awaited last piece of business on the agenda, a poet of reputed wit would deliver an oral satire on the participants and even on the academy itself. British and American students brought up on the blunt and controversial criticisms levelled at contestants in popular talent shows such as *American Idol* and *Britain's Got Talent* will readily identify with seventeenth-century Simon Cowell figures expertly proclaiming their scant regard for lacklustre performers.[35] The records of poetic competitions are replete with humorous attacks that would bring a smile to Cowell's face today. The attacks could refer to the quality of the poets' work, their reputation, their physical appearance, or a combination of all three, as the humorous put-down by Jerónimo Cáncer in his published *vejamen* of a 1640s Madrid Academy indicates.[36]

To sum up, as this contribution has endeavoured to illustrate, various aspects of Golden Age poetry which tend to receive less attention on university degree programmes offer multiple opportunities for creative, stimulating study by students, whether on dedicated Golden Age modules or as part of more general approaches to Spanish literature. The extensive possibilities offered by the richest period in Spain's literary history can and should be seized to encourage students to engage more actively with their learning.

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number of anthologies of satirical verse.

35 Similar figures identifiable by Spanish students include the scathing Risto Mejide on shows such as *Tú sí que vales* and *Got Talent España*.

36 'Vimos junto a nosotros un hombre tan feo que nos atemorizó; y mi camarada, que hasta entonces no había hablado palabra, dijo: ¡Jesús sea conmigo, y qué cosa tan infernal! ¿Quién es ese hombre tan feroz? – Este es D. Juan de Zabaleta, le respondí yo; es excelente poeta y ha escrito muy buenas comedias, aunque le sucedió un desmán en la comedia de *Aún vive la honra en los muertos*, que fue tan mala como esta redondilla dirá el suceso de aquel día: 'Al suceder la tragedia / Del silbo, si se repara, / Ver su comedia era cara, / Ver su cara era comedia'. Juan Carlos González Maya 'Vejamen de D. Jerónimo de Cáncer. Estudio, edición crítica y notas', *Criticón* 96 (2006), 87–114.

While standard lecture approaches are crucial for providing structured content and academic analysis of canonical authors and major themes, these can be complemented by additional thinking-outside-the-box strategies to stimulate interest, including seeking meaningful parallels capable of capturing the imagination of student cohorts hooked on present-day phenomena, including social media. Learning by doing through varied, creative and non-mechanical tasks can prove highly productive in retaining enthusiasm for subjects that, at first glance, may seem remote and of little value.

Transmission and performance of verses in the form of academies and competitions; rivalries and squabbles in lines as opposed to on-line; belittling satires and epitaphs; female participation, etc.; all can be included in novel approaches to the study of the period's poetry in a stimulating way to demonstrate to students the wealth of learning to be gained by spending time on a subject that may not hold much appeal initially but which, on closer inspection, constitutes a rewarding investment of time and effort. The published works of authors appearing on reading lists of literature courses are but the tip of an iceberg compared to the actual verse production of the century. Connecting old materials with the interests and realities of today's learners through meaningful parallels can prove an effective way of encouraging them not just to dip their toes in the water of Golden Age poetry but to take the plunge and explore aspects below the icy surface to gain a surprisingly refreshing experience. As the approach and examples outlined above seek to demonstrate, bringing unfamiliar perspectives to familiar themes enables us to offer a more accurate picture of early modern poetry and the contexts in which it was penned.