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Spanish Academies of the Golden Age

M. CARL GIBSON*

Although the *Real Academia Española* was not founded officially until 1714, this "founding" was merely an official sanctioning of a long tradition of *academias* which flourished all through the previous century. Most of the great writers, poets, and artists of the Golden Age belonged to or took part in one or more of the then small, informal gatherings known as *academias*, which were not unlike the *salon* so popular in France during the same period, from which the official French Academy grew. Lope de Vega, Quevedo, Cervantes, Calderón de la Barca, and Guillén de Castro all took active part in one or more of these groups. For example, in some extant letters written by Lope de Vega, we find numerous references to these *academias* and to his part in them. He also included scenes in his *comedias* which either parody or reflect the *academia* of his day. Reference will be made to some of these later.

It seems likely that the Spanish tradition of *academias* of this early period was the result of a convergence of three distinct influences or traditions: (1) the Italian *accademia* which had its beginnings in the fifteenth century, (2) the Jesuit schools of poetry to which secular students were admitted, and (3) the very early custom common among the Moors of holding gatherings where poetry was cultivated. These Moorish academies were either revived in Spain during the Renaissance or never really ceased to exist.

The word *academy* is of Greek origin, coming from the word *Akademeia*, the name of a grove on the Cephissus near Athens, sacred to the hero Academus, and containing a gymnasium. It was here that Plato, whose country home was nearby, delivered his lectures, hence the school of philosophy which he founded took on the name of the "Academy."

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In Renaissance Italy there were three main centers where the *accademie* flourished: Florence, Naples, and Rome. The ancient custom of celebrating the memory of Plato by an annual banquet, after an interval of 1200 years, was revived in Florence by Lorenzo di Medici (1469-92). Nine men were invited to the villa at Careggi, where, at the end of the banquet, Ficino read his translation of all the seven speeches in the *Symposium* and they were discussed by five of the guests.

In the meetings of this Florentine Academy, lectures and discussions were presented on a variety of classical and modern writers: Plato, Petrarch, Dante, Horace, Virgil, Pliny, Plotinus, Aristotle, Homer, Ovid, Terence, Cicero. In 1522 the Academy was suppressed, but was restored in 1540, its new aim being solely the study of the Italian language..

The Academy at Naples came into existence during the reign of Alfonso of Aragon (1442-58), the magnanimous patron of learning. The center of the Academy was the poet Antonio of Palermo, better known as Beccadelli (1394-1471). Its place of meeting was an open colonnade looking out on the street of Tribunals. When Alfonso died the Neapolitan Academy was organized as a club under the influence of the poet Pontano (1426-1503). One of the ablest members of the Academy was Sannazaro (1458-1530). Most of the members were poets.

The Academy at Rome owed its origin to Pomponius Laetus (1425-1498), a pupil of Valla. He was the ruling spirit of the Academy. The members of that body assumed Latin names, and celebrated the foundation of Rome on the annual festival of the *Palilia*. They revived the plays of Plautus. The members of the Academy included Platina, who later became the librarian of the Vatican, and Sabellicus, who became the praefect of the Library of San Marco in Venice.

In 1468 the Roman Academy was suppressed by Paul II on the grounds of its political aims and pagan spirit. It was revived under Sixtus IV in 1482, and it flourished under Julius II when it was given a *Dictator* and a *Comitia*. Under Leo X it included the most brilliant members of the literary society of Rome: Bembo, Sadoleto, Paolo Giovio, and Castiglione. Meetings were held in the Circus Maximus or on the Quirinal, where a simple repast would be followed by the delivery of Latin speeches and the recitation of Latin poems.

By the first part of the sixteenth century there were many academies in Italy. Among the most famous was the *Accademia della Crusca* in Florence, its purpose being the purification of the language. As its motto it had: "Il più bel fiore ne recogli." In 1612 it published a vocabulary which still has much authority in Italy.

Another famous one was that of the *Arcades*, founded in Rome in 1690 by Gravina. It issued a monthly bulletin and cultivated history, archaeology, and literature. It had correspondents in many places in Europe, especially Spain, and its members used strange Arcadian names. Moratín called himself Inarco Celenio and Ramón de la Cruz, Larisio.

The Italian academies often adopted distinguishing names. Some of the names used in various cities in Italy include Sena, *Intronati* (the enthroned ones); Ferrara, *Elevati* (the elevated ones); Genova, *Oziosi* (the lazy ones); Padua, *Dormenti* (those asleep) and *Infiamati* (those inflamed); Venice, *Uniti* (the united ones); Parma, *Innominati* (the unnamed); Milan, *Sconditi* (the hidden); Perugia, *Insensati* (the senseless); Luca, *Oscuri* (the dark ones); Naples, *Ardenti* (the ardent ones); and in Palermo, *Accesi* (the lighted ones).

Literary academies were also known to the Spaniards of the Renaissance, for Alfonso X had assembled similar literary gatherings in Toledo and in Seville. The Spanish Arabs also had academies in Cordoba, Seville, Valencia, Granada, and other cities, in which not only poetry, but history, philosophy, medicine, and other sciences were cultivated. The famous *Consistorio de la Gaya Ciencia* presided over by D. Enrique de Villena in Barcelona for the ancient troubadours of the fifteenth century was nothing more or less than a big academy. Moreover, Juan Andrés claimed that the Arabs in Spain had poetic academies even before modern Spain, Italy, or France:

Italia celebra por fundador de las Academias poéticas a Jaime Allegretti de Forli; pero los Arabes la tenían mucho antes, no solo de poesía, donde unicamente se versificaba, sino tambien de buenas letras en general, donde encontraban honrosa acogida versos, prosas y quanto pertenece a la amena literatura. Las Academias de Cufa y Bassora fueron las más famosas entre todas; y quantos libros hablan de las cosas arábicas están llenos de sus alabanzas. Y por consiguiente no solo las academias poéticas de Italia, sino también la célebre academia francesa, la española y otras semejantes

que tanta fama han dado a la literatura moderna, pudieron tomar por modelo a las arábicas tan anteriores a ellas.¹

Notwithstanding the great academic activity in Italy and the earlier Arabic gatherings, Karl Vossler, in his *Lope de Vega y su Tiempo*, associates the development of the academy in modern Spain with the religious schools of the Jesuits. In the year 1560, the Jesuits began admitting secular students into their establishments, among whom was Lope de Vega, and in these institutions, systematic schools of poetry were cultivated. In describing the academy, he states:

Eran curiosas entidades, medio eclesiásticas, medio mundanas, en las que se seguía cultivando el arte del verso cortesano y de escuela, caballeresco, humanístico y teológico. . . . En las cortes de los príncipes y en las escuelas de religiosos, principalmente las regentadas por Jesuitas, es donde en España verdaderamente se nutre la academia en tiempo de Lope. . . .

Son los Jesuitas los primeros que someten a un cultivo sistemático la llamada poesía de escuela, y en su desarrollo posterior a los torneos poéticos y a las llamadas academias. La academia escolar de los colegios jesuíticos es, según lo prescrito en la *ratio studiorum*, una asociación científica de estudiantes especialmente dotados que en determinados momentos se reúne bajo la presidencia de un maestro para ejercicios científicos privados. De aquí procede la academia española privada del siglo XVII y fines del XVI, cuyo ejemplo más conocido es la Academia de los Nocturnos de Valencia.²

¹"Italy honors as the founder of the poetic academies James Allegretti di Forli; but the Arabs had academies much earlier, not only poetic, where they only composed poetry, but also academies of literature in general, where poetry, prose, and all other forms of creative literature were cultivated. The academies of Cufa and Bassora were the most famous of all; and all books which deal with Arabic culture are full of praise for them. And therefore not only the poetic academies of Italy, but also the famous French Academy, the Spanish, and other similar ones that have given so much fame to modern literature, could take as a model the Arabic academies which were so much earlier than they." Juan Andrés, *Origen, Progresos y estado actual de toda la literatura*, (Madrid: Antonia de Sancha, 1784), I, 461-2.

²"They were curious entities, half ecclesiastic, half secular, in which they cultivated the art of courtly, scholarly, chivalric, humanistic, and theological poetry. In the courts of the princes and in the schools of the religious orders, especially those sponsored by the Jesuits is where the academy was nurtured in Spain during the era of Lope. . . .

The Jesuits are the first to develop a systematic cultivation of what is termed scholarly poetry, and in its development are prior to the poetic tourneys and academies. The scholastic academy of the Jesuit schools is, according to what is written in the *Ratio Studiorum*, a scientific association of especially gifted students which at determined times meet under the auspices of a teacher for private scientific exercises. From this comes the private Spanish academy of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, whose most well-known example is the Academy of the Nocturnos of Valencia." Karl Vossler, *Lope de Vega y su Tiempo*, (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1933), p. 86.

Besides these *academias escolares*, says Vossler, were the academies which were formed in imitation of the Italian *Accademie*, the first one being founded in Madrid in 1585.

However great the influence of the Arabic academies and Jesuit "academias escolares" may have been, it is evident that the biggest growth of Spanish academies in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was due to the Italian influence.

The most famous and most important Spanish academy outside of those of Madrid were the *Nocturnos* of Valencia (which Vossler says came from the Jesuit tradition), founded by D. Bernardo Catalán de Valeriola in October of 1591. Between 1591 and 1594 this academy met 88 times, and 805 compositions were read in verse, 85 in prose, composed by 50 different authors. All members adopted names which had allusion to the night and its phenomena. The president was called *Silencio* (silence), Gaspar de Aguilar took the name *Sombra* (shadow), Guillén de Castro, *Secreto* (secret).

The academy usually met weekly, generally on Wednesday, and in the meetings the poets would read eight or ten poems, there would be a discourse in prose, and maybe some improvised oral dissertations. Such subjects as medicine, mathematics, blindness, the left hand, the laurel, ignorance, melancholy, cholera, madness, carnival, the hands, cowardice, fat men and women, the life of a *pícaro* (rogue), etc. were treated in terms of praise. Sometimes the members directed negative works against court life, women, secrets, beauty, liberty, honor, etc. Other times they touched on such strange subjects as *Secreto's* discourse on "como se ha da granjear un galán a una dama" (how a suitor should win his lady), or on horsemanship, or "averiguando la historia del Papa Juan VIII" (verifying the history of Pope John VIII). Ofttimes the subject was paradoxical, such as "de las excelencias y provechos de la enfermedad" (concerning the benefits and advantages of sickness), or "probando que los pobres son más liberales que los ricos" (proving that the poor are more generous than the rich). The poetry, written in all known forms, dealt with both religious and profane subjects, particularly love casuistry.

Although very little is known concerning some of the academies in other parts of Spain, we do have references to some of them. There are a few vague bits of information on the *Academia de los Ociosos* (Academy of the Idle Ones) which

was established in the capital of Aragon in 1608. We know, for example, that those attending the first meeting were: Galcerio, Anfriso, Felino, Africano, Marsio, Fileno, Silvano, Montoso, El Deseoso Caminante, Redolino, El Indeterminado, and Sireno. Similar academies were established later in Huesca, Seville, and Toledo.

In Madrid, the earliest academies of which we have record were those called the *Academia de los Humildes* and the *Imitatoria*, the names being about the only thing that is known about them. The latter, evidently known also as the *Academia de los Imitadores*, is referred to by Cervantes in *Coloquio de Cipión y Berganza*, where Berganza makes reference to Mauleón, "poeta tonto y académico de burla de la Academia de los Imitadores." The first ones about which there is any more information were those established in 1611 by Diego Gómez de Sandoval and in 1612 by D. Francisco de Silva.

The first of these was organized on the occasion of the death of Queen Margarita in November of 1611, when a distinguished group of poets and writers met at the home of the Count of Saldaña for the purpose of "plañir en verso el suceso lutuoso" (lamenting in verse the mournful event). Lope de Vega was among them, and contributed with his *Canción a la muerte de la Reina doña Margarita*. He was made the secretary of the group but did not attend for too long a time. We have bits of news concerning the academy from his letters. In a letter dated November 19, 1611, he wrote:

El de Saldaña ha hecho una academia, y ésta es la primera noche. Todo cuanto se ha escrito es a las honras de la Reyna, que Dios tiene. Voy a llevar mi canción, que me han obligado a escribir, bien que temeroso de mi ignorancia entre tales ingenios. El ordinario que verá V. Ex^a lo que hubiera más digno³

And in a later letter:

No he podido, Sr. Exmo., cobrar las canciones de Hortensio (Fr. Hortensio Félix Paravicino y Arteaga), y assi van en su lugar esas mías: . . . Yo las escribí para la academia del Sr. Conde de Saldaña; fué la primera el sábado pasado,

³"Count Saldaña has formed an academy, and this is the first night. Everything that has been written is in honor of the queen, whom God has taken. I am going to take my *canción*, which they have obligated me to write, although I am fearful of my ignorance among such geniuses. You will see the most worthy of those that are presented. . ."

llamamos a las seis y vino a las diez; salieron tales poemas, de hambre, cansancio, frío, lodos y quejas, que no sé si habrá segunda; aunque me hicieron secretario y repartieron sujetos.⁴

In a letter dated November 30:

La academia del sábado fué razonable; sólo tuvo mala para mí salir a hora que no lo fué de escribir a V. Ex^a. . . . En ella estuvieron Feria, Pastrana, D. Antonio de Avila y otros de menor jerarchía. No se disputó nada, porque era fiscal el de Saldaña, y es más bien intencionado que el Rector de Villahermosa. . . . Esos sonetos llevé yo a la academia; fué el sujeto a una dama Cloris, a quien por tener enfermos los ojos, mandó el médico que la cortasen los cabellos⁵

And in December he wrote:

La Academia vive todavía y los señores la hacen honor. Pero yo no voy ya, sino que envió mis sonetos a la Santísima Virgen, que es la verdadera dama para un hombre de mi edad. Pluguiera a Dios lo hubiera sido siempre.⁶

It seems that this academy failed shortly afterwards, but in 1612 the second one mentioned came into existence which was more famous. It was founded by the brother of the Duke of Pastrana, Francisco de Silva y Mendoza, and was at first called *El Parnaso*, but this name was later changed to *Academia Selvaje* after the name of its founder. Besides Lope de Vega, who was known by the name of *El Ardiente*, others who attended were Cervantes, Vélez de Guevara, and Pedro Soto de Rojas. It became the custom, after the model of an academic discourse by Torquato Tasso, to open the sessions with a Latin oration on the art of Spanish versification. From time to time musical numbers were presented by the musician Vicente

⁴"I have not been able, your Highness, to recover the *canciones* of Hortensio (Fr. Hortensio Félix Paravicino y Arteaga), and so in their place I am sending these of mine: . . . I wrote them for the academy of the Count of Saldaña; last Saturday was the first meeting. We went at six and he came at ten; such poems were presented, about hunger, fatigue, cold, mud, and complaints, that I don't know whether there will be a second meeting; although they made me the secretary and handed out subjects."

⁵"The academy of Saturday was reasonable; the only inconvenience it caused me was to have to go out instead of writing to you. At the meeting were Feria, Pastrana, Antonio de Avila, and others of lesser hierarchy. There were no arguments because Saldaña was fiscal, and his intentions are as good as those of the Rector of Villahermosa. . . . I took these sonnets to the academy; the subject was a lady named Gloria, who, because of having eye trouble, was ordered by the doctor to have her hair cut. . . ."

⁶"The academy still lives, and the gentlemen do it honor. But I no longer go, but instead send my sonnets to the most holy Virgin, who is the proper lady for a man of my age. I wish she had always been."

Espinel and the other musicians who attended. But in March the learned academicians became querulous, and as Lope writes:

Las Academias están furiosas; en la pasada se tiraron los bonetes dos Licenciados; yo leí unos versos con antojos de Cervantes, que parecían huevos estrellados malhechos.⁷

The incursion of Mars into the kingdom of the Muses (as Lope expressed it) put an end to the Selvaje Academy.

It is supposed that Lope also participated in many other academic organizations of which we know nothing. The novelist Alonso de Castillo Solórzano tells of an Academy of Madrid, called at first *La Peregrina*, which met at the home of Sebastián Francisco de Medrano during the years 1617 and 1618, which Lope attended, as did most of the best known poets of the court, including the king himself, Felipe IV. This academy ceased to exist in 1622 when its founder and president was ordained a priest. It then passed into the hands of Francisco de Mendoza and was known as the *Academia Mantuana*. According to Cotarelo⁸, it was this academy that Lope favored with the reading of his *Nuevo Arte de hacer comedias*, but Morel-Fatio disagrees:

On ne sait à quelle académie Lope a voulu faire l'exposé du nouveau système dramatique; pour ma part je ne serais pas éloigné de croire que le poète n'a pas entendu s'adresser à aucune compagnie en particulier, mais qu'il parle aux lettrés en général, à ceux qui avaient coutume de se réunir en *academias* pour se lire leurs vers.⁹

This organization endured until the middle of the century, when its name was changed to *Academia Castellana*. It was from these humble beginnings that Felipe V, in 1714, following the example of his grandfather, Louis XIII, made an official Spanish Academy.

The Academy played an important part in the lives of many of the Golden Age poets. Quevedo took part in some of them,

⁷"The academies are furious; in the last one two licentiates threw their caps; I read some verses with Cervantes glasses, which looked like badly fried eggs."

⁸Emilio Cotarelo y Mori, "La fundación de la academia española" in *Boletín de la Academia Española*, I, 14.

⁹"It is not known at which academy Lope made the exposition of his new dramatic system; as for me, I shall not give up thinking that the poet did not intend to address any particular group, but that he spoke to the learned in general, to those who were accustomed to meet in academies to read their verses." Morel-Fatio, *L'Espagne au XVI^e et au XVII^e siècle*, (Heilbron: 1878), p. 29.

and we have some of his works which they inspired. He also attended the *Selvaje* and presented a *Memorial* to that group. It was the custom in the academies to gloss verses extemporaneously, to write *romances* on predetermined subjects, to define a familiar object in a brief prose passage, utilizing both imagination and genius. For example, the *Alabanzas de la moneda* by Quevedo:

El dinero para hermoso tiene blanco y amarillo, para galán tiene claridad y refulgencia, para enamorado tiene saetas como el Dios Cupido, para avasallar las gentes tiene jugo y coyundas, para defensor tiene castillos; para noble, león; para fuerte, colunas; para grave, coronas; y al fin, para honra y provecho lo tiene todo.

El dinero tiene tres nombres: el uno por fuerte, el otro por útil, el otro por perfecto. Por fuerte se llama moneda, que quiere decir munición y fortaleza; por útil se llama pecunia, que quiere decir pegujal o granjería gananciosa; y por perfecto se llama dinero, tomando su apellido del número deceno que es el más perfecto.¹⁰

Another composition by Quevedo, but with a little more vulgar flavor, is his *Gracias y desgracias* . . . the contents of which do not lend themselves to a paper of this nature.

One of the pleasures of the academy which spread into the various courts and salons was to pose and answer riddle questions. This was not only amusing to the participants, but helped consume the long idle hours of the non-working nobility. The riddles fell into numerous categories, examples of which are the following:

I. Concerning the water in the sea:

1. How much water is there in the sea?
2. How deep is the sea?

II. Pertaining to time and space:

1. How many stars are there in the sky?

¹⁰Money has white and yellow for the beautiful, it has clarity and refulgence for the gallant, it has arrows like the god Cupid for the lover, in order to conquer peoples it has a yoke and yoke-straps, for the defender it has castles; for the noble, a lion; for the strong, columns; for the serious, crowns; and finally, for honor and progress it has everything.

"Money has three names: one for strength, another for utility, and another for perfection. For strength it is called *moneda* which means munition and fortification; for utility it is called *pecunia*, which means a small fund or profitable husbandry; and for perfection it is called *dinero*, taking its name from the number ten which is the most perfect."

2. How many seconds in eternity?
3. How much time has lapsed since Adam?
4. How many people in the world?
5. How many leaves on a particular tree?

III. The value of a thing or of a person:

1. What is my worth?
2. What is the king's beard worth?
3. What is the world's worth?

IV. Questions on miscellaneous subjects:

1. What is the distance to poverty?
2. To whom is fortune nearest?
3. What am I thinking?
4. What are they doing in hell?

Although the academy was attended primarily by members of the idle nobility, and particularly by poets, artists, and musicians they were known and enjoyed by the lower classes as well, and any opportunity to take part in them, even vicariously, was welcomed by these classes. Since Lope de Vega cultivated the taste of the masses, the academy was for him a rich source of inspiration, especially for his plays. He refers to them constantly, both to specific academies and to academies in general. In the pastoral novel *La Arcadia* the shepherds and shepherdesses hold an academy (Book II) in which music and verses are presented:

Presidía en estas juntas el sabio Benalcio, y el discreto Tirsi, y ayudaban con su música y versos Celso el poeta, Danteo el historiador, y Gaseno, el esposo de Amarilis: el Rústico las alegraba con sus donaires y Frondoso con sus agudezas; Alcino y Menalca las honraban, el uno durmiendo y el otro contemplando; Melibeo, Silvio y Enareto escuchaban, y la hermosa Isabella, Lucinda, Leonisa, Celia, Anarda y Julia eran los extremados sujetos a quienes las academias se dirigían.¹¹

¹¹"The wise Benalcio and the discreet Tirsi presided at these gatherings, and Celso the poet, Danteo the historian, and Gaseno the husband of Amarilis helped with their music: Rustico entertained with his witticisms and Frondoso with his cleverness; Alcino and Menalca honored them, the one by sleeping and the other through contemplation; Melibeo, Silvio, and Enareto listened, and the lovely Isabella, Lucinda, Leonisa, Celia, Anarda, and Julia were the ones to whom the academies were directed."

At the very end of Book V, Belardo, speaking to the *Zampoña* mentions the "academias de cortesanos sutiles, donde el ornamento del hablar casto desprecia la utilidad de la sentencia."¹²

Lope refers to a real academy in act one, scene three, of *La Dama Boba*:

Otabio: Ayer sus librillos vi,
papeles y escritos varios;
pensé que debozionarios
y desta suerte le hí:
Historia de dos amantes
sacada de lengua griega;
Rimas de Lope de Vega,
Galatea de Cervantes,
el Camões de Lisboa,
los pastores de Belén,
Comedias de don Guillén
de Castro, Liras de Ochoa,
Canzión que Luis Vélez dijo
en la *Academia del Duque* (2126)
*de Pastrana . . .*¹³

This Duque de Pastrana is Ruy Gómez de Silva y Mendoza (1588-1626). Espinel describes him in *Marcos de Obregón* (part II, descanso XI) and he is praised by Cervantes in his *Viaje del Parnaso* (Chapter VIII, near the end).¹⁴ He was Ambassador in Paris and Rome under Philip III and IV. The academy here mentioned was doubtless the *Academia Selvaje*, which Lope himself had attended.

Another specific mention of an actual academy is found in his dedication of the *Laurel de Apolo*, where he refers to the *Academia de Madrid*.

Lope's plays abound in references to academies. In *La niña de plata* (Act III, scene iv) the author enlivens a dull moment with an academic discussion on poetry between D. Juan and his *lacayo*. In *La moza de cántaro* (II, iii) we find an academic scene of the type to be found in the salons. An amusing squabble begins, which is reminiscent of some of the meet-

¹²"The academies of subtle courtiers, where the ornamentation of speech scorns the usefulness of the sentence."

¹³"Yesterday I saw his little books, various papers and writings; I thought they were prayer books and so I read: the *Story of Two Lovers* taken from Greek; *Rimes* of Lope de Vega, *Galatea* by Cervantes, *Camões* of Lisbon's *Pastores de Belén*, comedies by Guillén de Castro, *Liras* by Ochoa, a *canzión* which Luis Vélez presented in the Academy of the Duke of Pastrana."

¹⁴Rudolph Schevill, *The Dramatic Art of Lope de Vega*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918), p. 314.

ings of the real academies. In *El guante de doña Blanca* (Act II, scene i et passim) the palace is transformed into an academy and the courtiers recite in honor of the successful retrieving of doña Blanca's glove.

There are numerous other plays which have academic scenes. In *El Perseo* Lope presents three sonnets to "una dama Cloris, a quien por tener enfermos los ojos, mandó el médico que la cortasen los cabellos," which were recited in a pastoral academy. This is an interesting treatment, for these poems had been used in a real academy by the poet himself, as we read in one of his letters. He is taking an actual academic presentation and placing it into an imaginary setting.

In *La viuda valenciana* (III, viii), three men, in order to pass the time, discuss, in an academic manner, whether they will sing, or compose offhand satire or a poem on lovers. In *Si no vieran las mujeres* (I, vii) there is an academic discussion on what is the greatest passion. A prince in prison in *Lo que ha de ser* (I, viii) conducts an academy with his friends. Their session includes music, verses, witty criticisms, etc. In *El saber puede danar* (II, xvii and xxi) a prince holds an impromptu academy, proposing such riddle questions as "What is the most hateful thing?" and "What do men desire most?" All those present attempt a solution. Lope is careful, in this case, to let the audience know that a real academy is in session and they are witnessing it.

In *La Doncella Teodor*. Teodor proves that she is the wisest person in the kingdom by emerging victorious from a series of questions.

Q. ¿Y la más fiera?

A. La verdad.

Q. ¿Cuál es la cosa más fuerte?

A. La muerte.

Q. ¿Cuál buena y mala?

A. La lengua es mala y es buena.¹⁵

El milagro por los celos, *El paraíso de Laura*, and *Los amores de Albano y Sismenia* all have an academic atmosphere.

¹⁵Q. What is the strongest thing?

A. Truth.

Q. And the cruelest?

A. Death.

Q. What is both good and bad?

A. The tongue is bad and good.

But the comedy which is based, perhaps more than any other, on an academy is *El mayor imposible*. Queen Antonia, the wife of the king of Aragón, is in Italy with her court while her husband the king is at the wars in Flanders. She is lonely and sick with the *quartana* (a recurring ague). Hopeful that entertainment will cure her and help pass the time, she proposes an academy where there is music, poetry, glossing of verses, and riddles. The question arises: "What is the most impossible thing?" and the queen maintains it is to guard a woman who does not want to be guarded. Roberto disagrees, saying that it is not impossible, but easy, for he has been guarding his sister for these many years. Lisardo, who is secretly in love with the sister, Diana, determines to help the queen prove her claim. The play concerns itself with the methods which Lisardo uses to get into Roberto's home through guarded entrances, with how Diana, also in love with him, aids him, how they live together in Roberto's home for many days, though in complete innocence, and how Lisardo, when discovered escapes the servants.

Finally Lisardo kidnaps (the victim being more than willing) Diana, enlisting the aid of Roberto(!) to conduct her through the streets to his home. At a final session of the academy, Roberto, who realizes too late that Lisardo has his sister, clamors for revenge at the feet of the king. The plot is then explained to him. Lisardo has brought the chaste Diana to the queen, where she has lived in luxury, and the whole plan shows Roberto that the queen was right. Roberto is finally forced to admit that the "mayor imposible" is to guard a woman. Lisardo and Diana get married, of course.

The comedy is completely dominated by the academy. It begins with a session and ends with a session. The whole action of the play revolves around the riddle question posed in the first session. In using the academy, Lope was appealing to the people, for he was giving them material from actual life: something they knew about and liked. It gave the lower classes a chance to participate in and enjoy a leisure which pertained mostly to nobility.

It is possible that literally hundreds of groups met in various cities and in various homes about which we know nothing. We are fortunate that Lope de Vega, Cervantes, and others made reference to the ones they were connected with in their letters and in their artistic productions. And although these

academies were private enterprises, and did not have any official function until 1714, they were a very important part of Golden Age culture and literature. From the academies and the salons came the literary criticism which helped establish the literary trends of the period. Most writers found it most convenient to make concessions to prevailing academic taste.

Spain was particularly favored by being the recipient of the various academic traditions, and this without doubt contributed to the richness of her literary output of the Golden Age. The Italianate influence brought her the best in Renaissance thought and form, the Arabic influence contributed the philosophy, the maturity, and the learning of the East, and the Jesuit influence brought a tradition of scholarship and perfection.