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Article abstract

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SARAH FINLEY

Sor Juana and the Countess of Villaumbrosa

Junto con Cristina de Suecia y la duquesa de Aveiro, la condesa de Villaumbrosa María Petronila Niño de Porres Enríquez de Guzmán es una de tres intelectuales coetáneas del catálogo de mujeres doctas en la Respuesta a Sor Filotea *de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. A pesar de la prominencia política e intelectual de las otras dos, investigaciones anteriores ignoran a la condesa. Mi ensayo responde con la primera biografía intelectual de María Petronila. Profundiza en las redes transatlánticas de Sor Juana y también destaca a una erudita que permite indagar la presencia femenina en los círculos letrados de la temprana modernidad.*

Palabras clave: *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Condesa de Villaumbrosa, escritura femenina, epistolaridad, redes transatlánticas*

Along with Christina of Sweden and the Duchess of Aveiro, the Countess of Villaumbrosa María Petronila Niño de Porres Enríquez de Guzmán is one of three contemporary thinkers from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's catalogue of learned women in the Respuesta a Sor Filotea*. Despite the other two's political and intellectual prominence, prior research overlooks the Countess. In response, my study presents the first intellectual biography of María Petronila. It deepens understanding of Sor Juana's transatlantic networks and also draws attention to a scholar that lends insight into women's participation in lettered circles throughout the early modern world.*

Keywords: *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Countess of Villaumbrosa, women's writing, epistolarity, transatlantic networks*

In spring of 1691, a Hieronymite nun toiled in her comfortable, two-story cell in Mexico City's Convent of San Jerónimo y Santa Paula. Bells tolled to announce meals or recreation, but the sister likely ignored them and instead remained deeply focused on her task. From time to time, perhaps a servant brought chocolate or something to eat. Sor Juana could not spare the energy to socialize with companions or convent visitors. She desperately needed to protect her reputation by responding to "Sor Filotea," the author of a

published letter that criticized her scholarship as unfitting for a religious vocation. Likely resigned to the knowledge that the time to defend her writing and pursuit of learning would one day arrive, the nun took up her most effective weapon: the pen. With elegant prose, she defended her intellectualism and that of women everywhere, portraying the insatiable thirst for knowledge as exemplary and a divine gift. In the middle of the missive, Sor Juana listed women celebrated for their learning or their historical roles in Biblical and Classical sources. She wrote carefully and understood the weight of her task, although mistakes in the inventory may be a sign of the author's heightened nerves.[1] The poet concluded her catalogue with a flourish. There, alongside intellectual heroines like Saint Catherine of Alexandria and her convent's patron Saint Paula, she named three contemporary scholars, each with a healthy dose of political clout: "Sin otras que omito por no trasladar lo que otros han dicho (que es vicio que siempre he abominado), pues en nuestros tiempos está floreciendo la gran Cristina Alejandra, Reina de Suecia, tan docta como valerosa y magnánima, y las Excelentísimas señoras Duquesa de Aveyro y Condesa de Villaumbrosa" (Juana Inés *Respuesta* 78-80).[2] Who are these women, and what was their importance for Sor Juana?

Like the famed New Spanish poet, the Duchess of Aveiro María de Guadalupe de Lencastre and Queen Christina of Sweden were well-read women who used knowledge and position to make their way in a man's world. The Duchess was one of the most significant artistic and missionary patrons of the Luso-Hispanic enterprise. She was born into a prominent Portuguese family whose lineage had links with the powerful Braganza clan and England's House of Lancaster. She married the Duke of Arcos, Manuel Ponce de León, at the late age of thirty-five and moved to Spain. Due to the tense political relationship between Spain and Portugal during the Portuguese Restoration War, the marriage contract stipulated that the couple's Spanish and Portuguese properties would remain separate. In 1673, María de Guadalupe inherited her family's Portuguese titles, including the Duchy of Aveiro. She returned home to oversee them, leaving Ponce de León in Spain. The position was a turning point because it afforded the Duchess freedom to pursue her intellectual interests. Luís de Moura Sobral observes:

> desde prácticamente el comienzo de su matrimonio, María Guadalupe se encontraba a la cabeza de un importante patrimonio, independiente de las posesiones y riquezas de su marido. Ello le ha permitido apoyar la evangelización de regiones lejanas (China, Japón, Filipinas, América), y desarrollar proyectos más personales o más íntimos que tenían que ver con una curiosidad intelectual que se alargaba prácticamente a todas las áreas del conocimiento. (63)

Indeed, from her seat as Duchess of Aveiro, María de Guadalupe established a rich library and art collection that reflected her intellectual passions. Moura Sobral observes that seventeenth-century accounts celebrate in particular the Duchess's talents as a painter, linguist, and polymath (73). She was also active in Jesuit intellectual and missionary circles, corresponding with such figures as Eusebio Kino and collaborating with proselytization efforts in Asia and the Americas. Finally, María de Guadalupe supported women's scholarly networks, and she was surely instrumental in connecting Sor Juana with the lettered Portuguese nuns of the Casa de Placer. For all this, it is clear that the Duchess took advantage of her title and position to break with gendered paradigms of her day and aid others in doing the same.

For her part, Queen Christina of Sweden ascended the throne at the age of six, refused to marry, and famously abdicated in 1654. She converted to Catholicism just two years later and traveled throughout Europe in pursuit of scholarly and diplomatic endeavors before settling in Rome. Christina was a voracious scholar; her palace housed a sizeable library and even a laboratory. Some of the finest minds of the day, including Descartes, Leibniz, and Athanasius Kircher, fed the Queen's boundless intellect. There is little doubt that, for Sor Juana, Christina's scholarly accomplishments and devotion to the Catholic faith made her an ideal figure to invoke in defense of women's learning.

Despite fascinating biographical details about the Duchess and the Queen, scholars know little about the third woman in Sor Juana's contemporary catalogue, the Countess of Villaumbrosa María Petronila Niño de Porres Enríquez de Guzmán. Efforts to reconstruct the transatlantic networks that supported the poet and other female scholars shed significant light on the topic. First, references to female patrons in Sor Juana's poetry are useful for drawing out transatlantic exchanges. Perhaps the best-known examples of such networks are from the nun's oeuvre itself, which includes pieces dedicated to benefactresses and women that she admired. For example, Romance 37 celebrates the Duchess of Aveiro. Likewise, numerous occasional works offer a glimpse into Sor Juana's deep friendship with Leonor Carreto, vicereine of New Spain from 1664-73 and the Countess of Paredes María Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga, vicereine from 1680-86. Finally, one of the best-known pieces that Sor Juana penned in honor of a woman that supported her is Loa 384, "Encomiástico poema a los años de la excma. Sra. Condesa de Galve," which commemorates Elvira de Toledo's birthday. She was vicereine from 1688-96.

Complementary to poetic references, recent archival work has lent significant insight into the feminine literary networks in which Sor Juana

participated on both sides of the Atlantic. Notably, Georgina Sabat de Rivers's groundbreaking work in *En busca de Sor Juana*, Stephanie Merrim's *Early Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, Stephanie Kirk's *Convent Life in Colonial Mexico*, Lisa Vollendorf's chapter "Across the Atlantic: Sor Juana, *La respuesta*, and the Hispanic Women's Canon" in *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*, and Jeannie Gillespie and George Antony Thomas's separate research on the Duchess of Aveiro have all advanced understanding of intellectual women connected to Sor Juana. Furthermore, Hortensia Calvo and Beatriz Colombi discovered and published correspondence between the Countess of Paredes and her cousin the Duchess of Aveiro that mentions Sor Juana. Finally, a collection of some of Sor Juana's last works, the *Enigmas ofrecidos a la discreta inteligencia de la soberana assemblea de la Casa de Placer por su más rendida y aficionada Soror Juana Inés de la Cruz, Décima Musa* (1695) captures an intriguing literary exchange between the New Spanish nun and her lettered sisters throughout Spain and Portugal, who formed part of a network called the Casa de Placer.

Despite such advances, María Petronila remains a mystery. José Pascual Buxó refers to her as "la ignota condesa de Villaumbrosa" (109), and Pamela Kirk Rappaport observes of the reference in the Respuesta: "It is not known why Sor Juana would mention her here" (311, n. 27). In a study of Peninsular noblewomen connected to Sor Juana, Georgina Sabat de Rivers remarks:

> [L]a monja menciona en la Respuesta, al final del catálogo de mujeres ilustres y junto a la duquesa de Aveiro, a la condesa de Villaumbrosa, pero tampoco de ella he podido hallar nada aunque a su marido [Gabriel] Maura [y Gamazo] le menciona mucho como personaje importante en la política del gobierno de Carlos II. (105)

In the critical edition and translation *The Answer/La Respuesta*, Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell include the following note about the Countess: "Little is known of her. She was patron of an Andalusian Dominican nun (Sor María de la Santísima Trinidad), whom she helped found a convent about 1670. The nun dying soon thereafter, her biographer dedicated his account to the Count and Countess of Villaumbrosa in 1671" (130, n. l. 884). My essay responds to these enigmas with a biography of María Petronila that draws out possible links with Sor Juana. Using paratextual references and primary sources that include five of the Countess's letters, I develop a portrait of a well-read polyglot with political and scholarly influence in seventeenth-century Spain and beyond.

The eldest daughter of the second Count of Villaumbrosa, García Niño de Ribera, and Francisca Enríquez de Porres, María Petronila, and her sister

Antonia lost their parents at a young age. As was customary for noble orphans, the girls spent several years in the custody of their mother's uncle, Antonio Enríquez, Bishop of Málaga. There, María Petronila and Antonia grew up alongside older cousins that were also in the bishop's care. They surely gained a brother in Alonso (Fray Alonso de Santo Tomás), illegitimate son of Felipe IV and Constanza de Ribera y Orozco. Alonso became Antonio Enríquez's ward following his adoptive father's death in 1634 and remained there until leaving to take Dominican orders in 1646. The Spanish court favored Fray Alonso de Santo Tomás, and he went on to hold important ecclesiastical positions, including Bishop of Málaga from 1664-92. The theologian's bond with María Petronila persisted into adulthood. His backing was instrumental in founding the Aracena Convent of Jesús, María y José that the Countess supported.

Likewise, the bishop took another nephew under his wing: painter Juan Niño de Guevara. Juan's father Luis was captain of the guard for Antonio Enríquez, and as such, moved his family from Aragón to Málaga with the bishop in 1634. Antonio Palomino observes that Enríquez took an interest in his young nephew's talent and helped him gain entry into Miguel Manrique's famed painting workshop (667). Perhaps contact with Málaga's circle of painters influenced María Petronila's later interest in visual art. Indeed, the Countess was an accomplished painter herself, and her family collection included works by several of Niño de Guevara's peers (Burke and Cherry 792). Although we can only speculate about the formative nature of these early years, there is no doubt that María Petronila and Antonia enjoyed a lively, intellectual upbringing in Antonio Enríquez's household.

The sisters' stay in Málaga, however, was short-lived. Antonio Enríquez died in 1648, and their care fell to another uncle: politician and Marquis of Montealegre Pedro Núñez de Guzmán. Núñez de Guzmán was a powerful intellectual in the Spanish court during the end of Felipe IV's reign and the early years of Carlos II's sovereignty. After graduating from Salamanca's Colegio Mayor de San Salvador de Oviedo in 1633, he began a law career that led him to Seville. There, in one of the Spanish empire's most important ports, the budding politician served as attorney and magistrate on the Council of the Indies, *asistente* of Seville, and *presidente* of the Casa de Contratación. Later, Pedro Núñez moved to Madrid, where he assumed a position with the Chamber of Castile in 1662. Finally, in 1669, the nobleman assumed the powerful *presidencia* of the same council, a position that allowed him to have the monarch's ear. He would remain in this post until his death in 1678.

Pedro Núñez's rigorous education and rapid ascent in the Spanish court lend insight into the shrewd political mind that determined María Petronila

and Antonia's next steps. As the sisters' new guardian, the Marquis busied himself securing the family holdings. The eldest daughter María Petronila would inherit the Villaumbrosa property and titles, and consequently, her marriage was of utmost importance. As Grace Coolidge observes, female successors such as María Petronila generally wed cousins or uncles in order to keep property in the family (238). With these customs in mind, Núñez de Guzmán took logical steps to secure his role in the family. In 1652, he married twelve-year-old María Petronila in an arrangement brokered by the bride's uncle Baltasar Barroso de Ribera, III Marquis of Malpica.

The Marquis of Malpica is an important familial tie between the Countess of Villaumbrosa and Sor Juana's protector the Countess of Paredes. First, Baltasar Barroso de Ribera's marriage to Ana Apolonia Manrique de Lara y Luna linked the Riberas to the powerful Manrique de Lara family. Additionally, Baltasar Barroso de Ribera's nephew and successor Antonio Gaspar Pimentel Barroso de Ribera wed the Countess of Paredes's sister Josefa Gonzaga Manrique de Lara on January 11, 1680 (Sousa 91). The relationships that bound these two families appear strong, for when Vespasiano Gonzaga died in 1687, he included the IV Marquis of Malpica (Pimentel Barroso de Ribera) among the estate executors (Calvo and Colombi 198, n. 12).

By all appearances, the Count and Countess of Villaumbrosa's marriage was a fruitful union, with intellectual and political benefits for each. Antonia continued to live with the couple as Núñez de Guzmán's ward and María Petronila's companion until her own marriage to the Marquis of Villesca Gaspar Constantino Melo de Portugal y Vilhena. Meanwhile, María Petronila and Pedro Núñez had four children: Martín (1658), García (1661), Francisca Angela (1664) and Manuela (1669).[3]

Núñez de Guzmán's political roles afforded power, influence, and alliances in the Spanish court. These privileges were not only advantageous to the Count; they extended to his wife as well. Indeed, when Núñez de Guzmán's political ascent led the family to Madrid, both partners benefited from heightened court visibility. For instance, *Dignidad de las Damas de la Reyna. Noticia de su origen y honores por un devoto* (1670), an etiquette manual penned in María Petronila's honor, suggests that she was a well-respected model of decorum in Mariana of Austria's networks.

As part of the Queen's court, María Petronila would have come into contact with other noblewomen whose status and economic situation afforded the same intellectual liberties. Intriguingly, several of those who coincided with the Countess in Mariana of Austria's female networks were also connected to Sor Juana. Diego Crespí de Valladaura Cardenal's account of Mariana of Austria's inner circle is helpful for reconstructing such

intersections. First, the Countess of Paredes María Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga was a lady-in-waiting from 1653-75 (Crespí de Valladaura Cardenal 127). The period coincides with Núñez de Guzmán's most powerful years and also with the issue of *Dignidad de las Damas de la Reyna*. Since it was customary for experienced women serving at court to mentor younger companions, such a relationship between two learned women seems likely.

María Luisa de Toledo, daughter of the Marquis de Mancera Antonio de Toledo and Leonor Carreto, also served as a lady-in-waiting while the Countess of Villaumbrosa was closely linked to the royal family. Crespí observes that María Luisa was a member of the court from 1664-73 (146). Since the dates overlap with the Marquis of Mancera's tenure as viceroy of New Spain, the position was likely to have been honorary, not requiring María Luisa's physical presence.

Connections like these helped to forge powerful alliances in early modern Spain, and the Count and Countess of Villaumbrosa used their political clout to secure advantageous positions for their children. For example, Crespí remarks upon their oldest son Martín's pivotal visibility in court, where he served as *menino bracero* at age sixteen. For this coveted position, the Queen hand-selected a young gentleman to lend an arm for support at formal events. Just a year later, Martín became gentleman-in-waiting to Carlos II. Thanks to Pedro Núñez's influence, the Count and Countess's firstborn went on to enjoy a distinguished military career, first as captain of the German and then Spanish Guards (Crespí 217). Likewise, Martín's marriage to the Marquis of Balbases's daughter Teresa Spínola y Colonna was strategic, for it established familial links with the powerful Genovese Spínola family.[4]

The Archive of the Ducal House of Albuquerque in Cuéllar preserves four 1676 letters between the Countess and Teresa's mother Anna Colonna about the wedding. Three are from Colonna and one is from María Petronila herself. The epistles highlight the women's formalized friendship as well as their feminine agency in the seemingly masculine political sphere. Moreover, they showcase the Countess's role as a patron of the arts, for María Petronila asks Anna Colonna for a portrait of her daughter Teresa:

> [Y]o con mucho anhelo de ver cumplido el termino de la esperança, de tener por aca a mi hija a donde la asista con el cariño de mi obligacion y mientras llegase este casso quisiera que V. e. me anticipara el gusto de verla por medio de un retrato suyo como el que V. e. me advirtiera del color que lleva mas el gusto de mi hija para que Martin no ecceda de el. (ACDA 508, no 3, fol. 331-32)

The Marquise of Balbases responds that she will send the portrait soon. In the meantime, she encloses a drawing of her daughter and a swatch of fabric in a color that favors her:

> [E]n enbiarla el retrato que me pide de Theresa en quadro, quando hay ocassion de hazerlo, pero en el interim no he querido dilatar el embiar a Ve la muestra de esse dibujo con la confianza que tengo de que apadrinandole Ve con su cariño tendrán mejor colorido los defectos del original que no puede enmendar el arte. También envió a Ve la muestra del color que mas suele agradar a mi hija. (fol. 328-29)

The quotidian exchange describes "el casar por retrato," a practice among monarchy and higher nobility that privileged the betrothed's portrait in courtship and eventual union. In all likelihood, Martín and Teresa spent little time together before marrying, for their political alliance took precedence over personal attraction and compatibility. Here, it is particularly interesting to note the mothers' role in commissioning the portrait, for it illustrates matriarchal agency in brokering such agreements.

To this end, María Petronila and Anna Colonna's correspondence about Teresa's portrait highlights the role of female art collectors in early modern Spain. The topic is worthy of scholarly attention, as Charlene Villaseñor Black argues: "In the context of early modern Spain, the collecting activities of royal and noble women certainly deserve additional investigation, as their collections have frequently been attributed to the initiative of their more powerful, famous husbands" (93). Villaseñor Black's observations invite researchers to look beyond primary sources that attribute a family's material holdings to the male head of the household. The perspective can lend insight into the role of Pedro Núñez's famed library and other intellectual holdings.

Like many Spanish nobles of his time, the Count owned a formidable art collection that his widow and children inherited, including works by Peter Paul Rubens and Titian. In fact, Marcus Burke and Peter Cherry reproduce a list of the 115 pieces that García Niño de Guzmán received from his father's estate. Among works with religious or classical themes, depictions of Spanish daily life, and portraits of noble figures from around Europe, the inventory includes "otro quadro de la Reyna soecia," surely a representation of Queen Christina of Sweden (Burke and Cherry 795). Given the Countess's scholarly inclination and her interest in visual art, it is tempting to read the Queen's place in Núñez de Guzmán's collection as a sign of his wife's influence. Perhaps Christina herself sent the portrait out of friendship or for political reasons. After all, the monarch maintained ties with the Spanish

court following her abdication, and Sébastien Bourdon's equestrian portrait of her was a gift to Felipe IV.

Along with other scholarly accomplishments, there is also evidence of María Petronila's artistic skill. Palomino includes her in his list of distinguished female painters in *El museo pictórico, y escala óptica*: "la excelentísima señora condesa de Villaumbrosa pinto con primor" (187). Moreover, nineteenth-century Scottish historian Sir William Stirling-Maxwell celebrates her painting in an account of Spanish artists: "Maria de Guadalupe, Duchess of Aveiro, an accomplished linguist and a lover of letters, likewise painted with taste; and Doña Maria de Abarca and the Countess of Villaumbrosa, were celebrated for their skill in taking likenesses" (629). Just as in Sor Juana's *Respuesta*, Stirling-Maxwell lists the Countess alongside the Duchess of Aveiro.[5] The association may indicate that both formed part of a Luso-Hispanic network of learned women, that included María de Guadalupe, María Luisa, María Petronila, Sor Juana herself, and the poet's eight Portuguese defenders from the Casa de Placer.

Complementary to her engagement with visual art, the Countess of Villaumbrosa was a reputable scholar with access to plenty of material. Pedro Núñez was a well-known bibliophile, and the Countess continued to maintain the family library after his 1678 death. To this end, José Maldonado y Pardo's partial catalogue offers a glimpse into the collection that fed María Petronila's nimble mind. First, French grammar books and treatises for learning Hebrew, Italian, Latin, and Greek are evidence of her reputation as a linguist. There is also a strong selection of learned religious women's biographies and histories, including: María de Jesus de Ágreda, Luisa de Carvajal, and Sor Margarita de la Cruz. Such volumes resonate with the portrait of Christina of Sweden (renowned in Spain for her Catholic conversion) and the couple's support of the Dominican convent in Aracena to suggest interest in exemplary female intellectuals. Of no lesser importance, science, mathematics, and natural philosophy treatises hint at María Petronila's abilities in these fields.

It is especially notable that the Villaumbrosa library has volumes in common with those identified as part of Sor Juana's collection, including the complete works of Athanasius Kircher as well as Pietro Cerone's *El melopeo y maestro: tractado de música theorica y pratica: en que se pone por extenso; lo que uno para hazerse perfecto musico ha menester saber* (1613). Such similarities deepen the possible intellectual kinship between the Countess and Sor Juana, as well as the poet's transatlantic network of women scholars. To this end, Moura Sobral highlights the Duchess of Aveiro's interest in book history and notes that her library inventory includes a copy of Maldonado's account of the Villaumbrosa collection (68). At the very least,

the Duchess knew of the Count and Countess's intellectual fame, and it is not unlikely that she corresponded with Pedro Núñez, María Petronila, or both.

Complementary to the family library, there is actual evidence of the Countess's reading habits. Libraries at the University of Salamanca as well as the Complutense University of Madrid preserve volumes with her signature: "Ego Maria Petronila Niño Enrriquez de Guzman Comitissa Ville Umbrose hunc legi librum à prima usque ad ultimam paginam." ["I Maria Petronila Niño Enrriquez de Guzman Countess of Villaumbrosa have read this book from the first to the last page."] The intellectual diversity of extant texts with María Petronila's autograph illustrates the depth of her studies and complements accounts of her scholarly accomplishments. They include regional histories like André Du Chesne's *Historie Francorum scriptoris coaetanei* (1636-49) and John Leslie's *De origine, moribus, et rebus gestis Scotorum libri decem* (1578) as well as treatises on natural philosophy such as Miguel Sabuco's *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre* (1588).[6]

Besides being an avid reader, the Countess of Villaumbrosa was also an important literary patron. Indeed, the number of volumes penned for the Countess indicates her status and prominence as an arts benefactress. In a study of book dedications to early modern Spanish women, Nieves Baranda observes:

> [P]erhaps the most defining characteristic of the dedication is the creation of a bond by means of which the author seeks a benefit or wishes to pay a debt of patronage typical of the nobility. In these cases, the recipients are powerful women, from the highest nobility, to whom the author expresses a debt of service. (23)

To this end, honorary texts to María Petronila are useful for reconstructing her intellectual network. Furthermore, they lend insight into the scholarly topics that she pursued, just as Baranda notes: "there must … be an affinity between the book's subject and the interests or life of the addressee" (25).

The most well-known dedications to María Petronila are those of Pierre Paul Billet, a French instructor living in Madrid. Given the Countess's high social standing, a friendship would have been strategic for Billet. In fact, it appears that the Parisian cultivated just such a relationship with María Petronila, for he penned two works in her honor. First, Billet dedicated the Zaragoza edition of *Gramática francesa* (1673) to the noblewoman, who likely funded its publication and took an interest in the subject.[7] Billet also offered his translation of Maria Mancini Colonna's memoirs *La verdad en su luz, o las verdaderas memorias de Madama Maria Manchini, Condestablesa Colona* (1677) to María Petronila. The paratext cites the Countess's mastery of French as one motive for dedicating the translation to her: "Parecerá

inadvertencia dedicar a vuestra excelencia la traducción de las memorias de la excelentísima señora condestablesa Colona, siendo V. Exc. tan perita en el idioma en que primero se escrivieron, que dudo si V. E. sabe con más primor el suyo" (Mancini, *La verdad* fol. 1v-2r). Additionally, Billet notes that the Spanish aristocrat is the logical recipient of his dedication because of "la estrecha amistad que tiene con V. Exc. la Excelentísima Condestablesa" (Mancini, *La verdad*, fol. 2r-2v). In light of Billet's observation, the circumstances surrounding *La verdad en su luz*'s publication and social connections forged during Mancini's stay in Madrid deepen understanding of the women's friendship.

Maria Mancini's path to Spain was littered with intrigue. The Italian noblewoman's uncle Cardinal Jules Mazarin brought her to Louis XIV's court in France as a girl with the hopes of brokering an advantageous marriage. There, Mancini received a thorough education among the *précieuses*. As Sarah Nelson remarks, she "was recognized as a *précieuse* with considerable wit and a passable knowledge of literature" (1). While Maria's intellectual accomplishments are notable, her infamous love affair with the Sun King is prominent in historical accounts. When the romance ended, Mazarin arranged his niece's marriage to Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna, Prince of Paliano and Constable of Naples. Nelson notes that Maria's refusal to carry any more children after the birth of the couple's third son negatively affected the union and eventually caused Maria's departure (4). Estranged from her husband but still subject to his authority, Maria moved throughout Europe and finally, to Madrid, where Colonna's political and familial connections kept him abreast of her activities until he moved to Spain in 1678.

Meanwhile, the Countess of Villaumbrosa maintained an active Madrid social life following Pedro Núñez's death. In all likelihood, some outings included Maria Mancini, whose learnedness and Francophilia surely would have caught María Petronila's attention. Indeed, the Countess highlights friendly gatherings as an antidote to loneliness in a letter penned to none other than Mancini's husband, Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna, in 1679: "Las novedades por aca son muchas fiestas en el lugar i mucha soledad en las viudas que no hallan ni un proberbio la noche de S. Juan" (Niño de Porres Enríquez de Guzmán f. 30). Amid familiar greetings and formal conventions of the day, the Countess remarks several times that she finds herself once more in debt to Colonna. Might Colonna have offered political or economic assistance to the newly-widowed María Petronila? Additional correspondence between the two could clarify the circumstances of their relationship and also shed light on Maria Mancini's role in the scholarly networks connected to the Countess.

During her time in Spain, Mancini penned her French autobiography, *La Vérité dans son jour, ou les véritables mémoires de. M. Mancini, connétable Colonne* (1677), in response to apocryphal memoirs that circulated the previous year. Scholars have not determined the author of the offending texts. According to Patricia Cholakian and Elizabeth Goldsmith, editors of *La Vérité dans son jour*, however, some believe that Maria's brother-in-law Paolo Vicenzo Spínola y Doria, the Marquis of Balbases, was responsible. They observe that Spínola's "unattractive appearance and dour personality had been mocked by Marie on more than one occasion" (Cholakian and Goldsmith 9). Of course, the Marquis of Balbases was also the father of Martín Guzmán's wife, Teresa. If indeed Paolo Spínola had a tense relationship with his sister-in-law, the matter may not have been kept private. The familial connection beckons further investigation of the political and personal motives that underlie Billet's dedication of *La verdad en su luz* to the Countess. Given María Petronila's prowess in French, might she have helped Maria to pen the original text?

La verdad en su luz and *Gramática francesa* are not the only literary dedications that shed light on the Countess's social and intellectual life. In addition to Billet, the Jesuit astronomer Joseph Zaragoza (1627-79) offered his *Esphera en comun celeste y terraquea* (1675) to the noblewoman. At the time, Zaragoza was a mathematics professor at the Imperial College in Madrid, and his circles undoubtedly intersected with María Petronila's. The dedication compares the Countess to the sun, noting that her intellect enlightens those around her and draws them into its path:

> Pero como las inteligencias mueven las Espheras Celestes sobre su centro, la superior de V.E. si juzgare, que esta merece dar vueltas, influyendo alguna luz en los que la miraren, puede con vn leue impulso darle continuo movimiento, asegurando con su perpetuo curso vna duración eterna, y lucimiento, si se ha de proporcionar con su origen, no menos que infinito. (Zaragoza 2)

Continuing, Zaragoza lauds María Petronila as a polymath whose comprehensive knowledge of diverse subjects renders her fit to lead the chorus of muses like a female Apollo:

> Repartieron los antiguos todas las facultades entre la nueue Musas, a quien presidia Apolo: con mas razón si previeranla sobre humana comprehension de V.E. la veneraran Presidenta de las nueue, ó del preciando el numeroso Coro, adoraran todas las Ciencias en sola vna Deidad. No le parecerá hyperbole á quien considerare, que en quatro meses aprendió V.E. lengua Francesa, en pocos mas la Latina, y todas con perfeccion. Poco es esto para quien admira los progresos Matematicos en menos

de seis meses, dexando vencidas la Arithmetica, Geometria, Esphera, y Astronomia, cuya inmensa altura haze ya vanidad de verse rendida al sublime ingenio de V.E. (3)

Zaragoza's description of the Countess's scholarly achievements reiterates her linguistic capacities in French and Latin. Furthermore, the astronomer draws out María Petronila's command of arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. The statement indicates the Countess's scientific inclinations and thus supports Gillespie's observation that that like the Duchess of Aveiro and Sor Juana herself, María Petronila followed the debate that unfolded between Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora and Eusebio Kino about the 1680 and 1681 appearances of Halley's Comet (306).

The Countess of Villaumbrosa's patronage extended to other areas as well, and her influence belies strong political agency. For instance, María Petronila and her husband significantly contributed to the efforts of Sor María de la Santísima Trinidad (1604-60) to found the Aracena Convent of Jesús, María y José. The Count and Countess met Sor María in Seville, when the nun traveled to the city specifically to ask for ecclesiastical support to build the Aracena convent. Over time, Pedro Núñez and María Petronila developed a strong personal relationship with Sor María that moved them to aid her in founding the monastery, as Francisco Javier Gutiérrez Núñez and Salvador Hernández González observe. Indeed, Saint Catherine of Sienna appeared to Sor María in a vision and asked her to pray for the safe arrival of one of the Countess's children. Upon delivery of a healthy baby, Núñez de Guzmán and María Petronila's childhood companion, Fray Alonso de Santo Tomás, wrote the Cabildo of Seville in order to obtain a license to found the Aracena convent (433-34). María Petronila describes the process in a letter to Antonio de Lorea:

En cuanto a la licencia tanto en afirmo, que j'e eu apliò [sic] profecía de la Santa en mi entender, por las circunstancias, que todos corrieron por mi mano. Pues aviendo venido Cristobal Lopez diferentes vezes a la solicitud de que mi tio [Pedro Núñez] fuera al Consejo y con su voto se asia zará el buen sucesso, no lo puedo conseguir, por no darle luego su salud: y ser el ibierno rigoroso. Ultimamente despechado, me propuso escriviesse papeles a todos los Señores de la Camara, para facilitar su negocio: Y por olvido después de escritos los dexé mucho tiempo sin firmar: asta que el viendo que se continuaba el rigor de el ihierno, por instancias volvió a pedirlos, y se resola o en que aunque misterio se allasse en el Consejo, se viesse en el con el riesgo de perderle, por alla se congojada consta dilación. Y estando ya todo dispuesto, no se que embarazo tuvo, que lo impidió. Y de esos accidentes sucedieron algunos; asta que mi tio fue al Consejo donde se voto el negocio: y e confirmo la profecía de la

Santa Madre siendo assi que todos los medios que a lo vltimo puso nuestra confianza fueron en contrario. (qtd. in Lorea 284)

The Countess's account emphasizes her role in garnering support for the convent and offers evidence of political gumption, even at a relatively young age. Indeed, this is the portrait of a noblewoman who shrewdly levied her position and family connections in order to further causes that she deemed worthy.

In 1671, Antonio de Lorea authored a spiritual biography of the Convent of Jesús, María y José's founder and dedicated it to María Petronila, Sor María's friend and benefactress: "Sabe el mundo de los favores que V.E. izo en vida, y las onras con que después de muerta a venerado a la Venerable Madre Sor María de la Santísima Trinidad" (Lorea 1). In addition to the paratextual reference, Lorea's work notably contains two letters from María Petronila to abbess Sor Ana de Santo Domingo. The first, from 1662, laments the death of Sor María and asks for a piece of her finger as a relic. The second, dated February 11, 1669, is much shorter. It congratulates Sor Ana for receipt of the license to found the Aracena convent and reiterates María Petronila's continued friendship and devotion to the project. In the 1662 epistle, promises of further support and details about various family members' health illustrate the women's intimate friendship. Furthermore, the noblewoman's sorrow before Sor María de la Santísima Trinidad's death is palpable:

[E]l Viernes no nos vamos por averle dado un catarro grande a mi tio, de que a estado dos veces sangrado pero ya está bueno y me a dicho que por no tener la cabeça para escribir, no responde a su carta de V. M. Que tiene muy en la memoria la fundación y ará todo quanto estuviere en su mano con sumo gusto y yo ofrezco lo mesmo de muy buena gana, y lo aré con la fineza que devo V. M. Me escriviera lo que tengo de azer: y fie de mi, que por diligencia ninguna no a de quedar. Mucho consuelo e tenido con un quaderno que tengo de algunas cosas raras de la Santa Madre Trinidad, que me le dio un Religioso Cartuxo, pariente de V. M. (Maria Petronila Niño de Porres y Guzmán, qtd. in Lorea 283)

Once more, the Countess's agency stands out. First, she keeps track of the family's social (or perhaps spiritual) obligations and also comments authoritatively on her husband's health. Second, it is evident that María Petronila is a driving force behind the convent's founding. Just as in her letter to Lorea, here the Countess underscores her role in reminding Pedro Núñez to write or sign documents to move the project forward.

There is no doubt of the Countess of Villaumbrosa's scholarly and political influence in seventeenth-century Spain and beyond. By way of conclusion, court lawyer Melchor de Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán penned a laudatory text in her honor that synthesizes the qualities my biographical sketch highlights. First, the writer likens María Petronila to the Virgin Mary, a common conceit of female exemplarity. In line with the day's conventions, the opening paragraphs underscore the Countess's beauty and lineage. Nevertheless, much of Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán's description focuses on María Petronila's intellect and scholarly activities as models of feminine virtue. As such, he relates them to the Virgin: "Significa asimismo el nombre de *María*, ser señora, Governadora, Maestra, y Guía, que todo esto denota en las lenguas, Hebrea, Caldea, Siria, y Griega. Y todos convienen á V.E. como se verá, discurriendo por cada uno" (Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán 5). The remainder of the piece develops each comparison in order to illustrate the Countess's exemplarity.

With respect to María Petronila as Governor, Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán praises the noblewoman as an intellectual leader whose learnedness contributes to her duties as head of the household. To this end, he lists the Countess's exemplary qualities:

> Mostró V.E. desde luego vn natural admirable, para emplear los beneficios sobrenaturales, dócil a la enseñança, puntual en las obligaciones, afable en el trato, grave en la mesura, modesta en las acciones, suave en las costumbres, agradable en la conversación, recatada en las palabras, devota en los exercicios, constante en los propósitos, atenta en las consideraciones, tierna en los sentimientos, compasiva en los afectos y retirada en los bullicios. (5-6)

The list first highlights María Petronila's aptitude for learning and then emphasizes characteristics like obedience, moderation, modesty, and faith. Harmony and balance are especially important themes. As Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán remarks, they align with beauty and thus resonate with connections between physical and moral composure in early modern political treatises.[8]

Continuing, he approaches María Petronila's didactic capacities from a maternal perspective so that they support the Marian comparison:

> La calidad de Maestra (que toca a todas las Madres) tiene en V.E. vn realze más dilatado, y concedido á muy pocas, que es el averse inclinado á las letras, y estudiado, como de las antiguas, lo testifica vn texto del Derecho, donde la Gloria refiere mujeres muy estudiosas, y se halla tan adelantada, que puede hazer ostentación en todas, imitando a las muy celebradas, y prefiriendo a otras, con que ha podido exercer el

loable ministerio de Maestra de sus hijos, y le puede continuar. (Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán 7)

A catalogue of learned religious and noblewomen follows the declaration. Among these figures, Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán draws out three categories. First, he names female instructors, including Cecilia Enríquez, a Valladolid noblewoman that educated her seven sons, and Beatriz Galindo, Isabelle of Castile's tutor. The detail suggests that like these role models, María Petronila was a noted educator. Next, Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán lists celebrated women linguists and further evidences for the Countess's considerable language skills. Earlier details about the noblewoman's education likewise emphasize her aptitude in this area: "A que junto V.E. aver aprendido latinidad, y ocupadose en la lectura de varios libros, en que cultivo su raro entendimiento, y salió diestra para discurrir en qualesquier materias … y para luzir en las acciones, y habilidades permitidas a las Señoras en el estado de donzellas, y de casadas" (6). As elsewhere in the document, the author is careful to remind readers that María Petronila's scholarly activities align with ideals of learned noblewomen.

Finally, the lawyer cites authors like the nun Francisca de los Ríos, who "fue excelente Latina, escrivió varias cosas; y en particular (siendo de doze años) traduxo de latin en Castellano la vida que escribió de si la Veata Angela de Fulgino con toda elegancia" (Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán 8). Along with Francisca de los Ríos's work as translator, the list features sacred and secular writers like tenth-century German poet Hrosvitha and English regent Catherine of Aragón, to whom Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán mistakenly attributes devotional texts *Prayers or Meditations* (1545) and *The Lamentation of a Sinner* (1547).[9] Although scholars have not yet recovered the Countess's scholarly writing, Cabrera Núñez de Guzmán's deliberate focus on woman writers here strongly indicates that she published as translator, author, or both.

In sum, the Countess of Villaumbrosa's prominence in transatlantic lettered networks is clear. As the wife and widow of a powerful politician and intellectual, she had access to vast scholarly resources, including a sizeable library and art collection that reflect her interests as well as her husband's. Inventories from these holdings include works on exemplary women scholars and French language, two areas of particular importance for the Countess. Book dedications, a laudatory text, and extant tomes with María Petronila's signature as reader illustrate a breadth of intellectual pursuits. Among these are philosophy, astronomy, and mathematics. Finally, María Petronila's personal relationships lend important insight into her personal and scholarly life. Efforts to arrange a strong marriage for her

son Martín evidence the noblewoman's political shrewdness, and her correspondence with Lorenzo Colonna also illustrates agency among the European elite. Additionally, family ties, court positions, and intellectual interests link María Petronila to erudite women like the Countess of Paredes and the Duchess of Aveiro.

Such details clarify Sor Juana's reference to María Petronila in her catalogue of learned women in the *Respuesta* and also highlight the Countess's role in early modern scholarly circles. In this way, my biography of María Petronila Niño de Porres Enríquez de Guzmán responds to Mónica Díaz's observation that: "[w]hat becomes evident is that beyond the reading and interpretation of texts, it is necessary to explore the networks of support and the intellectual sisterhoods that could have existed" (38). Despite the questions that a profile of the Countess of Villaumbrosa may answer for Sor Juana studies, it nevertheless also raises a puzzling query about the *Respuesta*'s list of women scholars: why would the poet include Queen Christina, the Duchess of Aveiro, and the Countess of Villaumbrosa while omitting one of her most stalwart defenders, the Countess of Paredes? After all, María Luisa penned one of the laudatory poems that prefaced *Enigmas ofrecidos*, and her extant letter to the Duchess of Aveiro reveals a well-educated and informed woman, particularly in social and political arenas. Indeed, Calvo and Colombi note: "María Luisa da amplias muestras de un intelecto vivo y curioso" (28). Given the Countess of Paredes's role in groups like the Casa de Placer, her absence from the *Respuesta*'s list of women that Sor Juana admired seems notable. Might the omission of such an important figure in the poet's life indicate a personal or political nuance of the *Respuesta*'s authorship that scholars have not yet considered? Was the nun seeking to protect her friend from the epistle's impact upon her supporters in New Spain? Further scholarship is necessary to answer such questions and also to develop understanding of the transatlantic intellectual ties that linked the Duchess of Aveiro, members of the Casa de Placer, the Countess of Villaumbrosa, the Countess of Paredes, and, of course, Sor Juana herself.

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NOTES

1 For instance, line 877 mentions "Nuestra reina Doña Isabel, mujer del décimo Alfonso, es corriente que escribió de astrología" (Sor Juana 78). In their annotations to Sor Juana's epistle, Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell

hypothesize that the nun refers to either Violante de Aragón, Alfonso X's wife, or Isabella of Castile (129, n. l. 877).

2 All citations of the *Respuesta a sor Filotea* are from Electa Arenal and Amanada Powell's translation and critical edition *The Answer / La Respuesta*.

3 Martín, García and Francisca survived to adulthood; however, the only reference to Manuela is a note of her birth in the Real Academia de Historia's Salazar and Castro Collection (f. 224). There is no news of her marriage, and she does not appear in either the Count or Countess's will. Therefore, it is likely that the couple's fourth child died at a young age.

4 The union is also of interest for identifying even more connections between María Petronila and the Countess of Paredes. Teresa Spínola's brother and heir to the family title Carlos Felipe Spínola y Colonna married Tomás de la Cerda's niece Isabel María de la Cerda y Aragón in 1682, just a year after Martín de Guzmán wed Teresa Spínola. Calvo and Colombi's volume includes fraternal correspondence from Tomás de la Cerda's brother and Isabel's father Duke of Medinaceli Juan Francisco de la Cerda (193-203). Among other topics, Juan Francisco shares family updates with his brother, and it is therefore likely that news of Isabel's marriage and perhaps also of her husband's family reached the viceregal couple, already in New Spain at the time.

5 For an overview of María de Guadalupe de Lencastre's engagement with visual art, see Moura Sobral (64-67).

6 At the time, *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre* was known at that time as the work of Oliva Sabuco, whose name appeared on the title page.

7 Antonio Gaspar Galán and J. Fidel Corcuera Manso note: "Todas las gramáticas y vocabularios que se publican en este período para aprender la lengua francesa están dedicados/encomendados a personas de relevancia social, lo que no era en ocasiones sino una continuación natural de las relaciones profesionales de sus autores como maestros de lenguas" (xxx, n. 20). The dedication of the 1673 *Gramática francesa* appears related to the Countess's patronage, for Billet issued a second edition in Madrid in 1688 with a tribute to "Al curioso," instead of the original homage to María Petronila.

8 Sara Gonzalez has drawn out this idea's prominence in political theory from early modern Spain (92).

9 In reality, Henry VIII's sixth wife Catherine Parr is the author of the cited texts.

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