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# LABERINTO

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“¡Ay, reino mal gobernado!”:

The Monarchy in Mira de Amescua’s *Las desgracias del rey don Alfonso, el Casto*

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Until relatively recently, the conventional wisdom regarding the *comedia* held that the vast and remarkable cultural production of Spain’s Golden Age not only mirrored its political dominance but served as imperial propaganda in the effort to project the Hapsburg monarchy, the Castilian language, the Iberian political and economic systems, and the Roman Catholic religion both at home and abroad.<sup>1</sup> More recent scholarship has found the relationship between imperial cultural production, politics, and society to be much more complicated, porous, and nuanced. Baroque art and literature teem with representations of racial and sexual diversity, class distinctions, and national identities, and the *comedia* is no different. Catherine Swietlicki has written that “Lope is capable of hearing the full presence of authentic alien voices, of tempering them by the oppositional process, and then writing the voices of the otherness with creative understanding” (219-20), and the same can be said for the genre as a whole. This willingness to explore and, at times, embrace, diversity in both political and cultural matters reveals not just an unwillingness to accept the imperial project *in toto* but an ongoing effort to criticize its aims and methods and expose the fissures, gaps, and inconsistencies in the monolithic imperial edifice. Even scholars who find it implausible that contemporary playwrights should have created openly subversive works performed in the center of empire still acknowledge that so many plays depict monarchs in a less than flattering light. Arsenio Alfaro, while asserting that the *comedia* served to instill in its audience “un fuerte sentimiento monárquico” (132), nevertheless concedes that the monarch on occasion falls short: “No todas las veces juega el monarca el papel de administrador recto de justicia o de gobernante concienzudo y responsable o de hombre virtuoso y magnánimo” (136). David Román believes that Philip IV viewed the theater “as a locale where the illusion of power could be constructed and maintained” (76) while simultaneously acknowledging the possibility that Calderón should write a play that is not just “a commentary on the events

of the period as well as the King's manner of style and governance" (78) but one that is, in more general terms, "critical of absolute power" (77).

Even plays that are based upon history convey multiple messages simultaneously. Historical facts, of course, cannot be changed, but in a work of literature they can be remembered, contextualized, ordered, ignored, forgotten, manipulated, and deployed in ways that have ends other than the accurate recounting of events. Drawing upon Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Barthes, A. Robert Lauer asserts that history, in theatrical form or otherwise, and despite factual references, is always a function of the writer's interpretation and imagination. For him, indeed, "the term historical play is a misnomer. At best, it may describe, in very general terms, a work which uses historical personages (or names) for the poet's aesthetic, moral, or political intentions" (17). Those who see the potential for literature to be used as political propaganda are not wrong when they note the ability of art to create, reinforce, and glorify the images and identities that nations hold of themselves and the relationships of individuals to the larger society. From Numancia to the Reconquest to discovery and expansion in the New World, Spain had amassed an impressive historical record on which to base a mythology of national identity that was syncretic in its nature, exceptional in its formation, and ordained by God to fulfill its goals. Given this material available to the playwrights, however, it is most curious that so many historical *comedias* focus on personal, secondary, and legendary aspects of the historical figures and events, often presented in a conflicted, ironic way. Guillén de Castro's *Las mocedades del Cid*, for example, focuses on the problems caused by the Cid's killing of Jimena's father over a point of honor. Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* demonstrates that in the hands of a master, it is possible to construct a play that at once praises the monarchs while simultaneously criticizing the rule by noble elites (Stroud 249-54, 257-59). Given these and other examples, such as Lope's *Las paces de los reyes y judía de Toledo* and even Tirso's *El burlador de Sevilla*, one is tempted to assert a definite trend in popular theater against the unalloyed veneration of the traditional elements of Spanish history—monarchy, nationalism, colonization, and political and religious warfare.

Among these notable examples of people, actions, and eras that represent missteps and lapses in this march toward hegemonic greatness, few can rival the uncertain and troubling reigns of Mauregato and Alfonso II, "el Casto," at the turn of the ninth century. In the many *comedias* written

about their reigns,<sup>2</sup> the former is depicted as a ruthless, obsessed usurper, willing to go so far as to sell his subjects into concubinage in order to attain power, and the latter as an unfortunate monarch whose weak, feckless, and irresponsible character led to repeated errors in judgment and statecraft. It is the tension between praise and criticism that this study hopes to explore by focusing on Mira de Amescua's *Las desgracias del rey don Alfonso el Casto*, written between 1598 and 1603 (Maldonado Palmero 359). Hardly one of the emblematic figures of Spain's glorious past, Alfonso is nevertheless credited with enough admirable achievements during the early centuries of the Reconquest for one to imagine a play that reminded his audience of his more positive contributions. One of Spain's two longest reigning monarchs,<sup>3</sup> Alfonso II counted among his achievements numerous victories against the Moors, first at Lisbon in 798 and later at Narón and Anceo in 825; the political reorganization of Galicia, León, and Castilla; the establishment of a court in Oviedo, where he built churches and a palace and donated the Cruz de los Ángeles to the Iglesia de San Salvador; and, at least according to tradition, the discovery of the tomb of Santiago at Compostela. Except for the appearance of the cross at the end of Act 3, and the incorporation of the legend of its creation by angels included in the somewhat dubious *Historia silense* (Alonso Álvarez 25-29), however, none of these exemplary actions are mentioned in the play. Limiting its scope to the first few turbulent years of his reign, the play pays considerably greater attention to a series of unlucky occurrences that indicate that his reign is not looked upon favorably by Fortune, his political ineptitude at manipulating and controlling the arrogant egos and seditious intrigues of his court, the usurpation of the throne by Mauregato, and the worrying detail that the very chastity for which he is known is a sign of a lack of virility.<sup>4</sup>

The play opens at a moment of celebration and national pride that only imperfectly conceals the significant political intrigue beneath. The death of King Silo in 783 brought about a power struggle between two descendants of Alfonso I: his grandson and the son of King Fruela, Alfonso, and Mauregato, the bastard son of Alfonso I and a Moorish woman. Supported by his aunt, Adosinda, Alfonso has been elected king, leaving Mauregato unrewarded and unsatisfied. At his first coronation, Alfonso promises to rule the lands bequeathed to him by the Romans and the Visigoths, to reunite the peninsula rent asunder by the failure of the "desdichado

Rodrigo" (103), and to astonish Spain with his great deeds (2-8). However, his misfortunes begin as soon as the symbols of his power are bestowed upon him: the crown falls from his head and the royal pendant breaks and tumbles to the floor. The sudden shift from glory and optimism to worry and trepidation not only leaves Alfonso shaken (174-75), it foreshadows a series of events beyond his control; almost everything that Alfonso does makes matters worse, and the few successes he has in the play are largely the result of characters far luckier and more competent than the king. Alfonso's own sister, Jimena, is secretly married to Sancho, the Conde de Saldaña, without the king's permission. Together they have a son, Bernardo,<sup>5</sup> who currently lives as a rustic with Gonzalo, Sancho's uncle (397), both to protect him from any negative repercussion of keeping Jimena and Sancho's marriage secret as well as to keep him unaware of his royal bloodline. Such secrecy serves as an indication not only of his sister's lack of trust in her brother, but Alfonso's general ignorance regarding things of importance even in his immediate family.

A second nexus of characters involves Elvira, one of Jimena's ladies-in-waiting, who has attracted the attention of both Ancelino, Sancho's nephew, and Suero, Gonzalo's son. During a dispute between the two suitors, Suero accuses Ancelino of lying (416). They reach for their swords, but Suero leaves rather than dishonor the court in such a way. In the course of Alfonso's investigation of this commotion, Ancelino does indeed lie, declaring that it was he who accused Suero of lying rather than vice-versa, thus dishonoring Suero. Alfonso has Ancelino imprisoned and attempts to reward Suero, but his bungled efforts to calm the situation and make things right only heighten the conflict. Alfonso twice proposes a marriage between Elvira and Suero. The first time Suero is so enraged and distracted by Ancelino's lie that he is unable to express his joy at this outcome, and Elvira perceives his unhappiness as indifference to her (528-29). The second time the king commands him, "Dadle la mano" (537), Suero misunderstands, thinking that the king wants him to shake hands with Ancelino, and refuses. What could have been a happy and just resolution ends badly as Suero exits without giving an explanation, leaving Elvira insulted and the king confused.

Ancelino, now imprisoned and furious at both Alfonso and Suero, decides to seek revenge against both men, thus ensuring that the misfortunes presaged by the crown and the staff will come to pass. He

escapes with a vow to be a “segundo Julián” (774); the reference to the overthrow of King Rodrigo, which ended the unified Gothic kingdom of Spain and opened the door to eight centuries of Moorish rule, is yet another indication that a hereditary monarchy is only as stable as its ability to fend off rivals and enemies. He leaves a note indicating his intent to bring an end to Alfonso’s reign by supporting one of the other “pretenses de su reino,” either “el valiente Mauregato, hijo bastardo del primer Alfonso” or “el conde de Saldaña, habiendo [un hijo] en doña Jimena, hermana de vuestra merced” (834). Alfonso reads Ancelino’s challenge, and, although he is concerned by the internal threats posed by such open hostility, he seems more surprised by the news that Jimena has a son, and he turns his attention away from both the Reconquest and the treason in his own court, focusing instead on his sister and her son. In an attempt to trick Jimena into revealing that she is married to Sancho, Alfonso proposes that his sister marry so that she might produce a royal heir. His plan fails—not only does she not admit her marriage, she insults him for not having children of his own; his chastity and purity, she alleges, are more appropriate for a woman (861-64)—so he pretends to poison her, ostensibly in order to protect his own honor (925-1009). Jimena reveals that she does indeed have a son, but she lies to Alfonso when he asks her directly if Sancho is the boy’s father (1004-5). The act ends as he orders Jimena to a convent (1036-39) and Sancho to a tower (1115).

Alfonso’s poor decisions and heavy-handed reactions in Act 1 have terrible consequences in Act 2. Ancelino leaves a shield, a lance, and a crown where Mauregato will be sure to find them. Mauregato puts on the crown and takes up the lance; he will depose Alfonso, whom he insults as “medio hombre y mujer” (1229). Ancelino echoes this barb at Alfonso’s lack of virility when he declares Mauregato to be the rightful “husband” who will know how to please León: “que el esposo que ha tenido, / como siempre casto ha sido, / no la ha sabido agradar” (1292-94). In what is perhaps an indirect criticism of trusting one’s *privados* always to have the king’s best interests at heart, Ancelino and his men pledge their loyalty to Mauregato (1347-49), who makes the promise for which he is most notorious: he will hand over 100 maidens to a Moorish captain in return for his support (1659-60).<sup>6</sup> Ancelino’s wrath has been completely transformed from personal revenge to open rebellion: “Si queremos matar, muerte daremos” (1696). Meanwhile, Jimena’s son, Bernardo, struggles to balance

his desire for Sancha, a young woman who rebuffs his amorous overtures, with his strong desire to be a soldier and fight the Moors (1375-1424). His deliberations are interrupted both by distant drums that inspire the young man to go with the army and by the appearance of Suero, who recounts the intrigues at court, his dishonor at the hands of Ancelino, and his failure to demand immediate satisfaction because he was too stunned and confused to respond. Bernardo offers to defend Suero's honor, describing himself in hyperbolic terms: "magnánimo gigante" (1575), "colérico elefante" (1577), "tigre" (1580), "leona" (1581), "mar con su tormenta" (1586), "toro" (1587), and "Rayo de esta nube" (1589). Given this show of bravado, it is impossible not to contrast Bernardo with Alfonso, whose indecisiveness led to so much of the drama. Likewise, Gonzalo is sorely disappointed that his son failed to defend his honor regardless of the king's threats (1548-54), and he banishes him from his table and his house until this shame has been eradicated (1612-14). Linking various subplots, Suero asks Bernardo to go to León to find out if Alfonso has imprisoned Ancelino.

In Alfonso's only appearance in this act, he hears the drums and shouts of Mauregato's forces offstage. He does not even know if the attacking army is French, Spanish, or Moorish, but he discovers that many *leoneses* are joining this attack upon his reign (1759-62). Alfonso admits that he is not a good king ("Sin duda no soy buen rey," 1767) and, hoping that his subjects will not abandon him "por malo que he sido" (1856), he finds himself alone, while Mauregato is triumphant: armed, crowned, with a lance on his shoulder, he declares to all that he is the ideal king (1801-4). Lamenting the loss of his kingdom, Alfonso exits the stage as he flees to Navarra where he hopes to amass an army and retake his place as king.<sup>7</sup>

The rest of Act 2 continues to tie together the various plot strands motivated by Alfonso's earlier decisions. In an effort to reclaim Suero's honor, Bernardo challenges Ancelino to a duel (1971-72). Ancelino and his men believe him to be nothing more than a *villano* and a *criado* (1987), unworthy of their attention; Ancelino is, after all, a king-maker ("hice rey a Mauregato," 2027) who does not retreat from a challenge. Nevertheless, there is something in his strength and resolve that causes them to respond to him with caution. In sharp contrast to his dealings with Alfonso, they opt not to cross the formidable young man. Making her first appearance since the middle of Act 1, Elvira reappears, this time pursued by Mauregato and the Moorish captain. The predicament in which she finds herself as the

object of desire of so many different men, is, in her view, entirely Alfonso's fault: "¡Ay, reino mal gobernado! / ¡República de mil yerros!" (2083-84). Bernardo again comes to the rescue, this time attempting to fend off the captain's unwanted advances. Surprised by his bravado and calling him a "monstruo de naturaleza" (2124), the Moors leave, and the act closes with an amorous duet: Bernardo declares his love for and protection of Elvira; recognizing him as the son of Jimena and Saldaña (2185), she leaves with the future hero, whose boldness and poise cause the historical Alfonso to pale even further in comparison.

Indeed, the axis around which much of the plot revolves in Act 3 is not the king but is, in fact, Bernardo. His interest in Elvira causes unhappiness for Sancha, who is disappointed that her beloved traded away her love for that of a woman of much higher social status, but Suero is delighted to see Elvira once more, and he is hopeful that he can reclaim both his lost honor and his lost love. Elvira restates her belief that all the problems, from the conflicts among former friends to the usurpation of the throne, are the fault of "el gran descuido de Alfonso, / y los pecados del reino" (2361-62), especially his decision to imprison Saldaña. For different reasons, Gonzalo agrees that the Christian nation is in grave trouble: "¡Qué miserias y ruinas / te vienen ya persiguiendo!" (2425-26). Fathers weep like children as mothers watch their daughters forced to depart for Moorish lands as payment for the Moorish captain's support of the usurper. No one appears to have the power or the will to stop this "bárbaro ofrecimiento" (2386), least of all Mauregato, who not only refuses to put an end to the abduction of young women but becomes more obstinate when pressed to intervene (2406-10). The usurper is an arrogant and menacing tyrant who vows to burn León to the ground if it doesn't do as he bids (2437-38), but, in a sudden turn of events, Mauregato sees his own funeral procession led by a demon (2483-84); just before he dies, he comes to understand that even a king is subject to forces beyond his control: "Quien mal hace, mal recibe; / [e]l que mal vive, mal muere" (2506-7). In yet another not-so-veiled criticism of *privanza*, Ancelino sees the death of the monarch as an opportunity, and decides to keep the king's death to himself in order to govern in his stead. Standing beside the king like a ventriloquist, he orders Sancho imprisoned (2538-39) and the Moorish captain taken into custody, all in an effort to reclaim Elvira for himself (2538-51). Just at the moment when Ancelino revels in the effectiveness of his "majestad fingida" (2494),

he learns of the return of Alfonso with a large army; as the consummate opportunist, he shifts his allegiance and feigns delight that León is now free of Mauregato (2615-23).<sup>8</sup>

As the play draws towards its conclusion, the action shifts quickly from one subplot to another. Alluding to his responsibility for all the misery that León has suffered (“mis degracias y destierro largos,” 2770) and demonstrating that his judgment is still flawed, Alfonso pardons the traitorous Ancelino (2789-90) while ordering Sancho to remain in prison. Suero complains that Alfonso was wrong when he misjudged the conflict between himself and Ancelino in Act 1, and he is wrong now. Stunned by the accusation, Alfonso orders the deaths first of Suero and then of Bernardo when the latter intervenes to defend Suero (2834-35) and question Alfonso’s decision to deny a faithful servant the opportunity to recover his lost honor while simultaneously and unjustly honoring traitors (2844-49). The king’s *degracias* continue as a French army arrives to take Oviedo (2862-63),<sup>9</sup> leading Alfonso to accept his responsibility for the turmoil of his reign: “Sin duda soy injusto, pues cristianos / no me dejan en paz” (2871-72). At last, Gonzalo reveals that Bernardo is also of royal blood, a fact that Alfonso suspected due to the young man’s impressive qualities (2993-94). Despite having just sentenced him to death, Alfonso now embraces Bernardo as a nobleman and a knight, grants him *privanza* (2998-3002), and sends him to victory against the invaders. To commemorate this success, Alfonso orders his silversmiths to fabricate the “Cruz de los Ángeles” for the Church of San Salvador.<sup>10</sup> The final loose ends are tied up when Sancha is revealed to be the king’s niece; she will marry Bernardo and Elvira will marry Suero. The play, and Alfonso’s misfortunes, come to an end as the cross descends, resplendent, from above; miraculously, however, it is not the work of silversmiths but of angels: “ángeles os labraron / con tan infinitas gracias, / sin duda que aquí os dejaron / por señal que mis degracias / con vuestra vista acabaron” (3362-66).

In an attempt to figure out what one is to make of this unflattering portrayal of the monarchy, one might note that it is informed by two well-established populist characteristics of the *comedia*, one theatrical and the other ideological. First, it is human nature that those without power like to see those with power cast in a bad light, so it is no surprise that, from Aristophanes forward, plays that show the misdeeds and failings of the

powerful have proved quite popular with theater-going audiences. At the same time, popular theater has curiously been the beneficiary of a certain exceptionalism, allowed to broach topics that in “serious” genres would not have been tolerated. Different monarchs may have allowed the theater greater or lesser leeway in its jabs at both the institution of the monarchy and certain individuals at court, but it was always a delicate matter to veer close enough to the line of acceptability to please the public without incurring the wrath of the king and his censors. One strategy, of course, was to displace the public’s attention from the reigning monarch to those at a considerable distance, either geographically (as in Calderón’s *La cisma de Ingalaterra*), or chronologically, as we see in this play by Mira. The reasons why any monarch would tolerate even such indirect criticism are many and, ironically, may have served the crown, from the theater’s ability to distract the public from the real-world woes of a bad economy and endless warfare, to the creation of a “free space” that allowed for a bit of political venting by proxy, to the possibility that even a lackluster monarch might look better in contrast to some truly cruel and incompetent kings of old. Indeed, depictions of royal ineptitude might actually serve to humanize the monarchy so that the powerless might cut their ruler some slack. Political theorists such as Rivadeneyra, who accepted the Catholic notion that one must always strive toward virtue, thus rejected Machiavellian political expediency and accepted “the fact that a monarch who is inexperienced, badly educated or ill-advised, or even temperamentally unsuited to the role, may have to learn on the job” (Thacker 174). In Margaret Greer’s terminology, it is quite possible that loyalty to the monarch and criticism of his actions and politics are not incompatible: “‘loyal criticism,’ if not ‘loyal opposition,’ remained possible in the court of Philip IV; in fact, particularly as the consciousness of crisis deepened with the advancing century, some subjects considered it an obligation, however delicate, of true friends of the royalty” (330).

While a strategy of constructive criticism is definitely possible, especially in a case such as that of Calderón, it is also quite possible that other playwrights, less dependent upon the monarch for their livelihoods and perhaps more humanist in their ideology, should have sought to express, however dislocated the actual subject of their works by time and space, more liberal criticism of absolute monarchical power. Indeed, one cannot deny the continued influence throughout the Baroque of Renaissance

humanism, which began the long and dangerous process of pointing out that hereditary monarchies and classes based upon accidents of birth were inherently contrary to the notion that all human beings, as theologians, philosophers, and even political writers noted, are born equal and all shall die equal. Jodi Campbell reminds us that, in his *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes “left no room for divine right as an element of kingly rule: kings were ordinary men chosen by their subjects, who then conferred sovereign power upon them” (2). More than a century earlier, especially in his *Adages*, Erasmus exposed the failings of monarchs; indeed, it has been argued that no scholar of early modern Europe did more to “mitigate the tyranny of princes” (White 5521). This political theory began at the turn of the sixteenth century and became praxis with the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth century and that continues today. Such a powerful and appealing notion clearly waned in the seventeenth century; as George Mariscal has noted, “the idea of an autonomous individual was limited in the seventeenth century to a humanist anthropology that had been significantly co-opted and transformed by residual discourses and by the mechanisms of the absolutist state” (38), but by no means did it disappear. Despite his many vociferous critics, Erasmus was widely read and admired by men of thought (White 5512), his ideas continued to be quite influential throughout the Golden Age, and it is virtually impossible to separate his philosophical ideas from a political agenda. Under the crushing weight of religious and political censorship, authors, and especially playwrights, were able to argue in favor of the idea that the true character of a nation lay in its people, not in those who, without the expressed consent of the people, happened to hold positions of leadership and superiority. They were able to do so by disguising their humanist ideals in plain sight in the public theater by strategically shifting the focus either geographically to other nations or historically to earlier periods. In other words, at the height of royal power coupled with religious oppression, Spanish thought, including its theatrical manifestations, continued, however tentatively, to lay the groundwork for further progress in the articulation of the rights of all human beings and the concomitant diminution of the notion that monarchs are divinely chosen, infallible, and omnipotent. It is no accident that in so many plays the king is presented as enormously flawed while the greatness of the Spanish character lies in those of lesser status, from Bernardo del Carpio, who spent his youth as a *campesino*, to the

Cid whose virtue and strength eclipsed that of Alfonso IV, and even in the villagers of *Fuenteovejuna*.<sup>11</sup> According to Luther, of course, Erasmus was quite capable of exposing error, but he did not know how to reach the truth (White 5520), and it is perhaps this facet of his political thought and its influence that explains why one often encounters criticism of the monarchy and the system of rule by patronage distributed in particular to the *privados*, but neither the authors nor the society that sheltered them were willing or able to take the next step to “reach the truth” and propose an alternative system of civil rule. Erasmus, and the literature that furthered his ideas, was not yet able to state openly its opposition to monarchy, but they paved the way for the more radical ideas of the eighteenth century. The *comedia*, in ways both subtle and not so subtle, and in defiance of so many other controlling social institutions, repeatedly strives to establish the principle that all human beings, including those of humble birth, are endowed with dignity, while the monarch himself may suffer from the failings inherent in human nature.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Even Maldonado Palmero's introduction to the 2005 edition of Mira's play used here notes that the "utilización del pasado podía servir como motivo de exaltación patriótica y cristiana, mostrando una España católica y triunfante, instrumento en muchos casos de propaganda bélica y nacionalista" (359).

<sup>2</sup> Alfonso's errors of judgment and statecraft are also the subject of Juan de la Cueva's *La libertad de España por Bernardo del Carpio* (1579); four plays by or attributed to Lope de Vega: *Las famosas asturianas*, most likely written between 1610 and 1612 (Morley and Bruerton 325), *Los prados de León* (probably 1604-6, Morley and Bruerton 381), *El casamiento en la muerte* (1595-97, Morley and Bruerton 218), and *Las mocedades de Bernardo del Carpio* (1599-1608, if it was in fact written by Lope, Morley and Bruerton 515); and two plays by Cubillo de Aragón, *El conde de Saldaña* and *Los hechos de Bernardo del Carpio, Segunda Parte del Conde de Saldaña*. In addition to being criticized *in absentia* in two of these plays (Lope's *Las famosas asturianas* and *Los prados de León*), Mauregato appears as the monarch in *Las doncellas de Simancas* (written before 1630 but probably not by Lope, Morley and Bruerton 449), which also mentions his rivalry with Alfonso, as well as in the play by Mira under consideration here.

<sup>3</sup> Alfonso VIII holds the title of most years spent as designated monarch (1158-1214), but if one discounts the twelve years of his reign spent in regency, Alfonso II becomes the monarch with the longest reign. Elected twice as king, in 782 or 783 and again in 791, his first, disputed reign was quite brief as the throne was seized by the illegitimate son of Alfonso I, Mauregato, who in turn was succeeded by Alfonso's cousin, Bermudo. His second reign lasted from 791-842.

<sup>4</sup> Alfonso's chastity is not just an indication of a lack of virility; that a monarch should refuse to produce an heir is an abdication of one of his principal duties. Hereditary monarchy relies upon the idea that power will properly pass indefinitely from a competent, legitimate king to his competent, legitimate heir (usually, but not always, a son). In Lope's *Los prados de León*, King Bermudo notes that he much preferred a life of religious contemplation, but he married and had two sons "por vuestro gusto" (434a), that is, in order to satisfy the obligation of his office. Even

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when the situation is quite different, and a king desires very much to produce a legitimate heir, much can go wrong, as was the case with the last two Hapsburg kings of Spain. A promising heir might not live long enough to occupy the throne, as was the case with Baltasar Carlos; the heir may eventually become king but be burdened by such physical or mental deficiencies as to cripple the dynasty and the state, as happened under Carlos II; whose inability or unwillingness to procreate brought an end to the Hapsburg dynasty in Spain.

<sup>5</sup> Bernardo del Carpio is never identified by his full name in the play, but one can assume that Mira's audience was familiar enough with his story to realize that Alfonso's nephew was, in fact, the legendary hero.

<sup>6</sup> This shocking, revealing, and eminently dramatic episode, which Mira presents as an important, but secondary, plot element that portrays the monarch as a figure of dishonor, humiliation, and barbarity, is more central to the plots of Lope's *Las famosas asturianas* and *Las doncellas de Simancas*. The bravery of the women of Asturias and León as the real heroes of the history of the Reconquest casts the monarchs in an even worse light.

<sup>7</sup> Mauregato's usurpation of the throne came so quickly and decisively after the initial, disputed election of Alfonso that most authorities do not even note that Alfonso served any time as king in 783.

<sup>8</sup> Once again, historical accuracy is sacrificed for dramatic purposes as the intervening reign of King Bermudo (789-91) is omitted completely.

<sup>9</sup> The arrival of the French army provides a strong literary resonance of yet another disgraceful episode in the reign of Alfonso II, his willingness to cede Christian Spain to France in return for protection from the Moorish forces. Although this aspect of the history and legend associated with Alfonso II is not explored in this play, it is quite important in Cueva's *La libertad de España por Bernardo del Carpio*, Lope's *El casamiento en la muerte*, and Cubillo's *El conde de Saldaña* and *Los hechos de Bernardo del Carpio, Segunda Parte del Conde de Saldaña*.

<sup>10</sup> The creation of the "Cruz de los Ángeles" also appears in Lope's *Las famosas asturianas* (365a-b). In Lope's version, rather than providing an opportunity to recount the legend of the angels, the question of how and where one might find competent silversmiths provides an occasion to discuss both the talents and the greediness of the Jews.

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<sup>11</sup> Burningham (22-23) reminds us that the driving force of aristocracies is honor, while that of democracies is virtue, and, indeed, in many of these characters we see play out the difference between honor (doing what one is told, doing what brings the most personal rewards) and virtue (doing what is right).



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