

2014

Taking Matters into Their Own Hands: Heroic Women of the Early Reconquest in the Spanish Comedia

Matthew D. Stroud
Trinity University, mstroud@trinity.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/mll_faculty



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Stroud, Matthew D. "Taking Matters into Their Own Hands: Heroic Women of the Early Reconquest in the Spanish *Comedia*." *Bulletin of the Comediantes* 66.2 (2014): 55-66.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Modern Languages and Literatures Department at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern Languages and Literatures Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

Taking Matters into Their Own Hands: Heroic Women of the Early Reconquest in the Spanish *Comedia*

Matthew D. Stroud
Trinity University, San Antonio



ew moments in Spanish history are viewed more harshly in the *comedia* than the uncertain and troubling period at the end of the eighth century in which the new Christian kingdoms of the north were poorly served by two monarchs: Mauregato, the bastard son of Alfonso I and a manipulative usurper willing to betray his subjects for personal gain, and Alfonso II, a weak and untrustworthy leader whose repeated errors in judgment and statecraft could have resulted in French control of Asturias and León. It is hardly surprising that at least nine different *comedias* by four different playwrights¹ should have focused on the unhappy events of the early Reconquest in order to contrast, in ways both subtle and not so subtle, the incompetence and malfeasance of these kings with the virtue, dignity, and heroism of their subjects, as well as to imply comparisons, flattering or otherwise, with the reigning Habsburgs.² At least equally noteworthy are the heroic actions of women in three of these plays as they defy their king, flout cultural norms, take up arms to defend themselves, endure extraordinary pain and suffering, and ultimately change the course of events and ensure the future glory and independence of Spain.

The action of *Las doncellas de Simancas*, a play of doubtful authorship but commonly attributed to Lope de Vega (Morley and Bruerton 448-49), takes place in the context of the legendary exchange in which one hundred Christian maidens are to be sent to Córdoba each year, an arrangement agreed to by the odious Mauregato to further his political ambitions and to keep the Moors at bay (*Doncellas* 397b).³ Highlighted against this historical backdrop is the plight of the people of Asturias and León who are forced to deal with situations beyond their control that put their allegiances, both personal and national, to the test. Like his fellow countrymen, Íñigo López is appalled by the king's deal with the enemy. Chafing under the obligation to obey the king's commands, he declares his rebellious support for the claims of "mi legítimo Rey, / que es Alfón," that is, Alfonso II, against the "tirano," Mauregato (400a).⁴ Motivated not just by the

immorality and dishonor inherent in the king's pact with the Moors but also by his love for Leonor, he attempts to liberate the women being rounded up for transport, and, in the process, is captured by Abdalá, the Moor sent to collect the maidens. Abdalá is intrigued that Íñigo would risk his life for a woman; he releases his prisoner as an act of kindness and also to have a chance to defeat him when he is not weakened by love and grief (401a).

Unaware of Íñigo's actions, the women of Simancas discuss love, their fate, and their disappointment in the men who are supposed to protect them. Unaware that her suitor has risked his life in order to save her and the other women, Leonor, Íñigo's beloved, and her sister, Elvira, squabble over Íñigo's absence. Leonor loves him, but she is horrified that he has been seen with the Moors. She is both terrified by the peril in which the king has placed his subjects and shocked by the unwillingness of her countrymen to defend their women. Unable to understand how the men could betray their women in such a fashion, she insults him along with all the other men of León who are willing to go along with this exchange: what kind of man, she asks, would aid in such a betrayal? Indeed, she declares that no man who would go along with such an arrangement is worthy to be called a man and that she would not give her hand to any man who did not put an end to this outrage (402b). Almost immediately, Íñigo's servant, Lope, enters to tell her that his master was captured trying to do as she wished and stop the Moors, news that causes her to feel profoundly guilty that she had questioned him (403a-b).

Íñigo and Abdalá, the latter now dressed as a Christian, make their way to town. Abdalá brings into sharper focus Leonor's status as an exchange object without will or agency of her own, a unit of currency to purchase something of value, when he reveals to Íñigo that he has enticed Homar, the Caliph of Africa, to support his bid to succeed Abderramán with the offer of his choice of the young women brought back to Córdoba from Asturias. To ensure the integrity of this exchange, Homar had sketches made of the loveliest young women in Spain and the one who most attracted his attention turns out to be Leonor. Since Abdalá's future political power depends upon Homar's backing, he is willing to make considerable concessions in order to have Leonor given over to him; to that end, he proposes to let six maidens go if Íñigo will arrange for him to have Leonor (407b).

Íñigo finally returns to his beloved, but their reunion is not a happy one. He would like to help liberate six young women, but not at the cost of Leonor's freedom (410a). Leonor regrets that her urging Íñigo to fight the Moors had any part in what has happened; she did not really want him to go into battle because life without him would be no better than death (410b). In an effort to find a way out of their dilemma, Íñigo proposes a solution: since only maidens are to be sent into concubinage, he asks for Leonor's hand in marriage. This clever plan faces difficulties from the outset, however. First, as they embrace, Íñigo's dagger falls

and wounds Leonor's hand. She says that the wound is nothing, vows that she is more than willing to seal their love with blood, and then, in a foreshadowing of what is to come, wraps the hand in a cloth (411b). Then, when Abdalá figures out what Íñigo is up to, he threatens the Christian with death if he marries Leonor (413a). Asserting that he would do what he could to keep any woman safe from servitude, Íñigo asks Abdalá if he might purchase his freedom with gold instead of Leonor (414a), further underscoring Leonor's exchange value.

King Mauregato, who happens to be hunting nearby, complains bitterly about his unhappy reign. Is he not the son of Alfonso el Santo? Is his reign illegitimate? Why does everyone hate him and even call him a bastard? (415a). If he had not had to compete with his rival, Alfonso, he would not have had to seek aid from the Moors and send the tribute of the hundred virgins (415b). Enrique, the king's advisor, informs Mauregato that seven virgins are to be selected for tribute from a nearby village, but warns him that the tribute is the reason for all the resistance from his subjects; Nuño de Valdés, the father of Elvira and Leonor, is one of the leaders of the resistance. To help Íñigo, Lope calls out for the villagers to attack Abdalá, who is dressed as a Christian (416a). Observing what appears to be an attack on a Christian nobleman, Mauregato orders his men to defend the victim (416b), thus effectively attacking Christians to protect a Moor. He quickly discovers that the nobleman is his friend, Abdalá, who asks the king to give him Leonor (417b).

Mauregato agrees as he further laments the sad state of his reign: "¡...grave maldad cometí, / grande afrenta de mi reino! / ... / ¡Vasallo soy, no soy rey! El Moro reina, yo no!" (418a). Enrique is disgusted with the king's decisions, but he nevertheless announces to the villagers that they must turn over seven of their young women, including Leonor and Elvira (419b-20a). Leonor's immediate reaction reflects her shock and fear: she hugs Elvira and begins a discussion of love and death with Íñigo during which she becomes dazed and unresponsive. She speaks of Íñigo in such a way that he cannot tell if she is speaking of him or someone else:

piendo
mi patria, mi amada tierra,
mi padre, mi propio ser
y a un esposo que me espera,
que le adoro, y que me estima. (421a)

She quickly regains her composure, however, and urges Íñigo to save himself and to look after her father in her absence. As Enrique and his men escort her off to captivity, Íñigo vows to pursue them and reclaim the woman he loves (421a-22b).

This transitory moment of dissociation is the precursor to the substantial transformation of the women from objects to subjects as they stand up to Mauregato, spark a popular revolt, and rally the men to join them in order to

right an egregious wrong. This process unfolds in several steps. Having been taken for transport by Enrique (422b), the women realize that neither their passive resistance nor the efforts of Íñigo and the other *leoneses* will deliver them from a terrible fate brought on by Mauregato's "tiranía" (424a), so they take it upon themselves to kill two Moorish guards and arm themselves. Leonor exhorts the other maidens to take the responsibility for their honor, their bodies, their souls, and their lives literally into their own hands:

aquí sólo en vuestras manos,
y en estas armas está
el ser tuyas o el ser vuestras;
el honor, la vida, el ser
y el alma vais a perder. (424b)

If they are to have any chance at freedom, they must be prepared to sacrifice. As they understand it, the Moors only want paragons of Christian beauty, perfect and complete in every way, so Leonor convinces them to sever their own hands in order to make themselves undesirable while at the same time presenting their bloody wounds as symbolic of their resolve to resist being taken at all costs (424b, 425b-26a). Despite this shocking self-mutilation, Abdalá declares that he still finds them desirable, so Elvira responds that they are prepared to cut themselves to pieces; they would rather die as martyrs than live as concubines (427a). Íñigo questions how the men of León can stand idly by when the women are willing to take such extraordinary measures to defend themselves (427a-b). Not unlike the situation in *Fuenteovejuna*, it is the women who stir the men to action through convincing arguments, withering shame, and their own personal examples of bravery, ferocity, and sacrifice.

In the final, and somewhat surprising, turn, while the men fight Abdalá and the other Moors, the women turn their wrath ("rigor fiero," as Mauregato terms it, 429a) on the king. Joining Íñigo's earlier support for Alfonso, they enumerate the king's failings directly to his face in the harshest of terms: "esas entrañas traidoras," "[t]u reino... más triste, más indigno," "esta torpe maldad," "este agravio," "locura... manifiesta," "grave delirio"; as an "ave rapante," Mauregato deserves their "vengativos rigores" (428b-29b). Leonor laments the death of her father, whom she praises as a man of valor, in stark contrast to the perfidious Mauregato (429b-30a). Realizing that these women have prevailed through their strength and sacrifice, Mauregato is prepared to offer Abdalá seven replacements, but Leonor demands the safety of all the women of the village. The play ends in triumph, thanks to the heroic deeds of the "siete mancas" (431b) of the village, to be henceforth forever known as Simancas, and seven hands will be added to its coat of arms.

Shifting the action from the reign of Mauregato to that of Alfonso II, Lope's *Las famosas asturianas* (1610-12, according to Morley and Bruerton 325) also

depicts the transformation of a young woman from an object of the desires of the men who control her destiny to a hero of the Reconquest against the backdrop of the tribute of the hundred maidens,⁵ and, in the process, presents a strikingly different way in which the heroic protagonist spurs the men of Asturias and León to action. Sancha, who appears from the outset as a *mujer varonil* and a *bella cazadora*,⁶ finds herself in a most unheroic, but quite familiar situation of a woman in the *comedia*: she is furious that her father, García de León, has arranged a marriage for her with Laín de Lara, a man she does not love. On a fateful trip into town, she catches sight of Nuño Osorio, a nobleman to whom she is instantly attracted, learns of the appalling tribute, and discovers that Audalla, the ambassador of Almanzor, is currently in León to collect the maidens. Alfonso, who previously needed Osorio's help to gain his freedom from house arrest by his own nobles, prizes his virtue and is appalled by the arrangement he inherited from Mauregato: no king worthy of the crown would betray his subjects, especially young women, in such a fashion (345a). His resolve wavers, however, when he is confronted with the Moorish threat to invade León with a hundred thousand troops if he fails to deliver them (345b). Nuño advises the king that acceding to this overt extortion would irrevocably dishonor both his name and his reign, but Teudo, another advisor, is more pragmatic: it is better to lose a hundred young women than the thousands of men who would surely be lost in such an attack by the Moors. These different opinions reflect the ambivalent role of women in society. On the one hand, the king, the fathers, and all those men who are tasked with protecting women see them as precious gifts and indispensable partners. When faced with the prospect of defeat at the hands of an overwhelming enemy, however, they seem more than willing to sacrifice the same women for the greater good: "¿Qué importan las mujeres / si por negallas mueren cien mil homes?" (Lope, *Famosas* 346a). Bruce R. Burningham notes, however, that women may be viewed as exchanged objects, but they are not considered to be completely devalued as human beings: "Had the Moors merely demanded one hundred chests of gold coins . . . , who can doubt that Nuño would have easily handed the treasure over" to the Moors? (26). Deciding between the two options presented to him by his advisors, Alfonso agrees with Teudo and sends Nuño—angry and offended, but obedient—to accompany the young women to Córdoba (346b).

Like Leonor in *Las doncellas de Simancas*, Sancha is not content to let herself be taken away passively by the Moors; if the men who are supposed to protect her are unable or unwilling, she will take the necessary measures to defend herself. She dons armor and goes to León with some field hands in order to help defend the city against the enemy (347a-48a). García, worried about the well-being of his daughter, pleads with her to adopt another solution: if she marries, she will be eliminated from the pool of eligible maidens, so he implores her to reconsider marrying Laín de Lara. She counters that if she must marry, she

would prefer to take Nuño as her husband; not wishing to disobey her father, she asks for six months to decide (349a). When Osorio arrives, both father and daughter mistakenly believe he is there to ask for her hand in marriage (354a). It is only later, during a skirmish with the Moors, prompted by Láin's late-night attempt to serenade Sancha, that Nuño confesses that he is there to accompany the young woman to Córdoba (367a). Stunned, García laments that it would be better never to have been born than to experience such a loss in his old age (357a). Sancha reconsiders her opinion of Nuño, belittles him for such overt aid and comfort to the enemy, and declares that she wishes she had never seen him, much less fallen in love with him (358a-b).

Against the law and her honor, Sancha is to be a Moorish concubine, all because of the deal struck by Mauregato (358b-59a),⁷ and upheld, because of political expediency and personal cowardice, by his successor, the noblemen of León, her countrymen, and even her own father. Resisting sadness and despair, Sancha realizes that she must rely solely upon her own devices in order to avoid a terrible fate brought on by the collective failure of the men who are supposed to protect her. Indeed, for Harriet P. Boyer (480-81), none of the principal men is a model of medieval masculinity. Not only is Alfonso famously chaste, but Tello declares that he has never seen Nuño Osorio in love nor heard of any "amoricos" associated with him (351b); García reports that the thirty-year-old Láin confessed to him that "non ha conocido fembra alguna" (348b). Even García, who is the father of Sancha, is too old to protect his daughter (348b). As Sancha says good-bye to her father, the best plan he can seem to devise is to extol his daughter's virtues to Audalla in a resigned hope that she will become a Moorish queen who will perhaps be allowed to rear her children as Christians (359a-b). Her frustration mounting, Sancha undertakes a most striking strategy from both personal and dramatic perspectives. To the consternation of the men, Sancha appears in public with her limbs uncovered. Nuño finds such behavior disgraceful (362a), but Sancha offers a logical explanation. No man would allow this abominable exchange of the women under his protection to take place (359b); therefore the *leoneses* do not deserve to be called men. Since it is not shameful for a woman to appear undressed in the company of other women, she reasons, she has merely behaved in a manner befitting a woman in the presence of other women. It is not until she is in the presence of those whom she considers to be the only real men around, the Moors to whom she is to be delivered, that she returns to dressing modestly and belittles her countrymen who fail to protect her. Revealing an ironic attitude regarding women, the strong, resolute Sancha insults them by calling them "fembras, mujeres y damas" (363b; cf. Boyer 483). Burningham notes this interesting inversion of the role of the *mujer varonil* (29). Sancha does not renounce her femininity, like Solmira in *El último godo*; she "steadfastly refuses to allow herself the 'masculine' option of directly confronting her enemies." Where

the familiar *mujer varonil* essentially masculinizes herself by donning men's clothing, Sancha feminizes the men by exposing her body, in the process obliging them to embrace "the masculine violence necessary for the protection of feminine civilization."⁸

Like Laurencia in *Fuenteovejuna*, Sancha not only shames the men into taking up arms against the Moors to protect their daughters, she also exhorts the women to join the men in defeating the enemy (Boyer 482), as the Moor Amir later relates:

las mujeres
con piedras y con espadas
hicieron tan altos hechos,
tan espantosas hazañas,
que de quinientos que fuimos
apenas los cien escapan. (366a)

The more significant effect of Sancha's heroic action is to convince the king to listen to Nuño as the latter, at great personal and political risk, stands up to his king and refuses to turn the maidens over to the Moors: "home moriré, non fembra, / como los que dan las parias" (367a).⁹ The king, shamed by the resolve of his subjects, both noble and common, men and women, renounces for good the pact made by Mauregato; after all, what good is the promise of men if "las fembras solas bastan / a defenderse a sí miesmas" (367b)? Thus, in Lope's version of the history, the proximate cause of the Battle of Clavijo is the resistance to the tribute by the women themselves, who have rendered a great service to the nation by inciting the otherwise resigned men to action. For Boyer (480-81), this significant shift in chronology, motivation, and execution of a signal battle of the Reconquest was a deliberate effort on the part of Lope to put into greater relief the relative impotence of kings and noblemen to defend their homes and their nation without the aid of God (it was at this battle that Santiago Matamoros made his first appearance in support of the Christian forces), the common folk of Spain, and, most importantly, women. Indeed, by bringing all elements of Christian society together to defend Spain from the Moors, Clavijo marks a reawakening of the Reconquest after a period of lassitude and decay, and it is the women who are shown to be essential participants in the narrative arc of Spanish history.

The third play under consideration here, Álvaro Cubillo de Aragón's *Hechos de Bernardo del Carpio, segunda parte de El Conde de Saldaña*, focuses on a very different, but no less worrying, aspect of Alfonso's reign.¹⁰ Once again—or still—willing to compromise the long-term well-being of his subjects and his realm in exchange for protection from the Moors, the king has proposed inviting the French to assume control of Asturias and León under the leadership of Charlemagne. So unpopular is the idea with his subjects that he decides to send his nephew, the legendary Bernardo del Carpio, to inform the French that

he must renege on the earlier proposal, thus effectively changing what was a bilateral conflict between Christian Spain and Moorish Al-Andalus into a three-way struggle with the addition of the unfortunate rivalry between Christian kingdoms. Monzón warns his master, Bernardo, that serving as an emissary of Alfonso has a dangerous precedent: just look what happened to the Conde de Saldaña, Bernardo's father, whom Alfonso tricked into serving as an ambassador to Barcelona only to have him blinded and imprisoned for the crime of loving the king's sister and having given her a son (99a). The first appearance of Bernardo's wife, Sol, is marked by behavior consistent with that of a supportive wife. As they exchange a sad and tearful good-bye, she is worried for her husband's safety as he prepares to confront the French. Immediately after Bernardo's departure, however, she finds that she cannot send him to an uncertain fate in battle by himself. Not only will she follow him, but she will fight alongside him: "Yo he de seguir á Bernardo. (...) / Pelear para vencer / Es el único remedio" (103c).

On the battlefield, Bernardo is astonished to see Sol arrive in the company of other women, and even more impressed that they are dressed "en arma," "con sombreros y espadas" (105c). Sol relates her reasons for joining the effort: she was his mother's servant, she is Bernardo's wife, she loves him so much she has to go with him, and women are no less patriotic than men, "celosas / De la patria como nobles, / Leales como españolas" (105c). Pledging their loyalty and obedience to Bernardo, the women are willing to shed their blood for Spain (106a). Bernardo's servant, Monzón, observes that not only do Spain's women join the fight against the French, but the women of Spain are more formidable than the men of France; how can Spain lose, asks Bravonel, Bernardo's Moorish ally, when it has these amazing women? (106b). As the battle begins at Roncesvalles, and the Spanish women enter, swords drawn (107c), Roldán is astounded by their bravery. Responding to his amazement, Sol declares that they are not content to remain in their tents; they want to join the fight even though it will surely claim many lives (108a). Roldán refuses to fight the women, and, as repayment for a previous favor, sends troops to accompany the women back to the Spanish side (108b-c), but Sol, now sidelined from the battle, still has a role to play. While Bernardo fights Roldán one on one, she rallies the Spanish troops to fight the French: "Hoy es día de vencer / O morir; ninguno vuelva" (109a). So important is Sol to the Spanish effort that Bernardo credits her presence for his victory:

Tú me ayudaste á vencer,
Tú la victoria me diste; ...
Tan tuya, Sol, es la gloria,
Tan poco me debo á mí. ... (109c)

Almost immediately, the alliance with the Moors unravels as the allies dispute their respective contributions to the victory. Bravonel says that he alone

defeated the twelve peers, and he wants all the credit. Once again, the women warriors are ready to side with Bernardo:

SOL. Contra los moros, ¿quién duda
 Que podemos ayudarte
 Las leonesas amazonas?

LEONOR. Ahora es tiempo de emplearse
 Nuestros aceros: conozca
 El mundo nuestras lealtades. (110b-c)

Thanks to the presence and spirit of the heroic Spanish women, Bernardo—and Spain—defeat not only the French but the Moors as well.

There are several possible reasons for the importance of women characters in these historical plays, among the most obvious of which are those that are frequently cited as the motivations for the presentation of women warriors and other *mujeres varoniles* in the *comedia*. In particular one notes the sheer dramatic interest created by the presence on stage of extraordinary women who undertake great and important feats (McKendrick 311) coupled with the well-known crowd-pleasing opportunity to present women on stage in less confining clothing, a fact that did not escape the attention of the playwrights or the censure of the moralists (Bravo Villasante 181-82, 186-87, 209-15). Yet another motivation involves the ever-popular dramatic mixture of sex and violence, seen here from a number of perspectives. The maidens of Simancas choose to sever their own hands rather than submit to being concubines, and their actions prompt the men to counter sexual violence with military violence. Likewise, the actions of Sol at Roncesvalles leave no doubt that women are capable of taking up arms to defend themselves, their families, their countrymen, and their nation; in the view of Thomas Case, these “exceptional women ... surpass the male leadership of their times and exemplify the great virtues of the Spaniards of the Reconquest” (215). Some of this may have to do with a Renaissance conception of women as full partners in the human condition, coupled with the memory of and reverence for the reign of Isabel la Católica; after all, if her political and military abilities had a great enough impact on popular culture to change forever the rules of chess by granting the greatest power to the Queen (Gil Bera), and if her personal and moral attributes were sufficient for her subjects to call her “santa” both during and shortly after her death (Dumont 215-24), then surely her legacy would open the door for an appreciation of the actions of other women in the establishment and expansion of a unified, Catholic Spain. Also significant in these plays, as has been noted, is the historical license with which the playwrights approached the events of these plays together with the conflation of history and legend in the foundational myths of empire. Few of the principal plot elements highlighted in these plays are based upon historical evidence, but national identities almost never limit themselves to provable facts.

As A. Robert Lauer has noted, “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). From the idealized and romanticized image of the Visigoths, to the appearance of Santiago Matamoros at the Battle of Clavijo, to the many apocryphal deeds of the Cid recounted in the *romances*, the Spanish Empire revered its more glorious but less factual tales, and a focus on women proved to be a popular and effective way to humanize, exalt, and flesh out the bare bones of its history. By recasting these events as taking place under two of the least revered Spanish monarchs, Mauregato and Alfonso II, both Lope and Cubillo take the opportunity to level veiled criticism at the notion of hereditary monarchy¹¹ while simultaneously putting forth a humanist worldview in which the true foundation of the state and the real heroes of the Reconquest are not the sometimes feckless and irresponsible monarchs, but the Spanish people, both men and women.

Notes

1. The plays include one by Juan de la Cueva (*La libertad de España por Bernardo del Carpio*), one by Mira de Amescua (*Las desgracias del rey don Alfonso el Casto*), two by Álvaro Cubillo de Aragón (*El conde de Saldaña [primera parte]* and *Hechos de Bernardo del Carpio, segunda parte de El conde de Saldaña*), and five by Lope de Vega (*Las doncellas de Simancas*, *Las famosas asturianas*, *El casamiento en la muerte y hechos de Bernardo del Carpio*, *Las mocedades de Bernardo del Carpio*, and *Los prados de León*).

2. Anthony Watson has presented convincing evidence that the political situation in Cueva’s *La libertad de España por Bernardo del Carpio*, in which Alfonso II seriously considers delivering the new Christian kingdoms of Spain into the hands of Charlemagne, is intended to strike resonant chords among the people concerned about Felipe II’s determination to annex the kingdom of Portugal (81-99). Although the roles are reversed (Alfonso’s León y Asturias is to be swallowed up just as Portugal will be by Castilla), his point is clear:

Perhaps the play is better interpreted as a warning to Spain of what may happen (as something similar happened once before) if she enters into a private agreement with another monarch against the will of his people: a popular patriot may emerge to lead the Portuguese people to another Aljubarrota as Bernardo led *his* people to Roncesvaux. (Watson 93)

3. Even if one assumes that there is some historical basis to the legendary tribute of the hundred Christian maidens, the chronology of the events in question is substantially distorted in these plays. Mauregato, king of Asturias from 783 to 789, apparently entered into an agreement to send the maidens every year in exchange for Abderramán I’s help in his wresting control of Asturias and León from the legitimate son of Fruela I, Alfonso II (Aguado Bleye 479). Bermudo I, who followed Mauregato, succeeded in substituting money for the maidens in exchange for peace with the Moors. Reyes García asserts that Alfonso II, king from 791 to 842, not only did not agree passively to the tribute, but actually decided it was better to fight the Moors than to turn over to them the daughters of his subjects, and, after killing the Moorish captain Mugaith at the Battle of Lodos, he succeeded (32). It was only later that Abderramán II imposed the tribute of the maidens again on the Christian north, obliging Ramiro I (king from 842 to 850) to agree to his demands (Reyes García 33) or inspiring Ramiro to resist (Rodríguez Díaz 171). According to the legend, it is during this second era of the tribute that the town of Simancas decided to rebel by sending maidens whose hands had been severed (that the young women mutilated themselves is strictly legendary). This act of rebellion inspired the Christians to oppose the Moors at the Battle of Clavijo (844), in which the Christians prevailed with the legendary help of Santiago Matamoros.

4. The legitimacy or illegitimacy of Mauregato’s reign adds to the tension between the two monarchs, but even in this messy royal succession one notes the vital role played by a woman. Both Mauregato and

Alfonso were descendants of Alfonso I, *el Católico*. Alfonso I had four children, among whom were Fruela I, who reigned as king from 756 to 68; Adosinda, a daughter and the wife of Silo; and Mauregato, allegedly the illegitimate son of Alfonso I and a Moorish captive. Upon the death of King Silo in 783, Alfonso briefly occupied the throne in 783 amid widespread belief that his aunt, Adosinda, had manipulated the power vacuum to the benefit of her nephew. Supported by those who saw Alfonso I's remaining son as a more rightful heir to the throne, despite the condition of his birth, Mauregato deposed Alfonso the same year, causing the latter to take refuge among his mother's relatives in Álava. It was only later, after a cousin, Bermudo I, had occupied the throne from 789-791, that Alfonso again became the undisputed monarch, ruling until 842.

5. In addition to focusing on Alfonso II's reluctant willingness to maintain the terms of Mauregato's agreement with Córdoba, *Las famosas asturianas* also includes the more startlingly anachronistic substitution of Abderramán I (emir of Córdoba, 756-88) by Almanzor, who was never officially the Caliph of Córdoba but who, as Hisham II's *bajib* (a position, like that of *valido*, that grew from that of chamberlain to chief minister), amassed so much power that, as a kind of Moorish equivalent to the Felipe IV's Conde-Duque de Olivares, effectively ruled Córdoba from 976 until his death in 1002. Moreover, Lope shifts the Battle of Clavijo from 844 (under Ramiro I) to the time of this play during the reign of Alfonso II (364a-b).

6. For Boyer, Sancha's appearance is accompanied by several mythological associations (482). As a *bella cazadora*, she is identified with the goddess Diana or Artemisa, who served as the patron and model of the Amazons, whose distinguishing attributes were their warlike natures and their exposed breasts. Because Sancha inspired the Christians to advance the goals of the Reconquest, Boyer even goes so far as to compare Sancha to Iphigenia, whom Artemisa saved to be the founder of a new race, and Theseus, who put an end to the tribute that the Greeks sent to Crete, thus establishing a new dynasty and an era of abundance. For more on the figure of the *bella cazadora* in the context of her larger study of the *mujer varonil* in general, see McKendrick 242-61.

7. Curiously, although *Las famosas asturianas* is quite clear that Mauregato was the king of León who established the tribute of the hundred maidens (338a), Burningham (184n18) asserts that Lope recasts this character, who never appears on stage during the play, "more as a bureaucratic functionary of the Moors than as the uncle (not to mention political rival) of the play's Asturian king, Alfonso II."

8. Burningham (27) cites Edward Buscombe's observation: "A society without violence, a society fit for women, can only be established *through* violence" (59). Boyer comments that Sancha's nudity reveals not just the truth that the men by themselves are unable to protect themselves, their women, their property, and their lands, but that no victory, no history is possible without their feminine essence (482).

9. Much of the play revolves around Nuño's dilemma between obeying the king's order to deliver the women to the Moors and his own sense that such a betrayal of the weakest and most vulnerable members of his society is morally repugnant. Burningham categorizes these two competing models of behavior as the Caballero and the Cowboy, defining the former as "quintessentially a feudal paladin who rightfully owes his fealty to the hierarchical military order in which he serves" and the latter as a "solitary figure who owes his allegiance solely to God, to himself, and to the downtrodden, and who applies a rigorous, though largely self-imposed moral code to every situation" as well as "a symbol of the Hapsburg monarchical order ... motivated chiefly by *pundonor* (a self-motivated sense of personal dignity), demanding 'preferences and distinction' for himself and rendering them to others when due" (22). He goes on to note that the situation in which he finds himself pits "Nuño's chivalric sense of honor (the notion that a man's word is his bond even to those not worthy of the gesture) against his chivalric sense of duty to protect the weaker elements of society" (24). Indeed, shamed by Sancha, Nuño finally commits to disobeying his king and fighting the Moors "even if it means execution at the hands of King Alfonso" (25).

10. Once again, the chronology suffers for the sake of dramatic effect. The Battle of Roncesvalles occurred in 778, before either Mauregato or Alfonso had become king, and considerably before any nephew of Alfonso, such as the legendary Bernardo del Carpio, had reached a sufficient age to be the hero of the battle who killed Roldán and other French noblemen.

11. Even scholars who see the *comedia* as loyal to and supportive of the monarchy must nevertheless agree that the depiction of royal actions and policies is decidedly mixed. Case notes that Lope was a loyalist (211) who, as a patriot, was quite concerned by the weakness of Philip III and the "deplorable state of affairs" in which the Duque de Lerma "assumed almost complete control of the government" (214). Despite asserting the *comedia*'s "fuerte sentimiento monárquico" (132), Arsenio Alfaro admits

the kings in these plays are not always presented as righteous and just administrators, conscientious and responsible governors, or virtuous and magnanimous men, and that such personal failings often reflect those of the contemporary Hapsburgs (136-37). In his study of *El secreto a voces*, David Román finds it possible that Calderón's work is "a play critical of absolute power" (77) and "a commentary on the events of the period as well as the King's manner of style and governance" (78). Margaret Greer believes 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).

Works Cited

- Amado Bleye, Pedro. *Manual de historia de España: Prehistoria, edades antigua y media*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1969.
- Boyer, Harriet P. "Las famosas asturianas y la mujer heroica." *Lope de Vega y los orígenes del teatro español. Actas del I Congreso Internacional sobre Lope de Vega*. Ed. Manuel Criado de Val. Madrid: EDI-6, 1981. 479-84.
- Bravo Villasante, Carmen. *La mujer vestida de hombre en el teatro español (Siglos XVI-XVII)*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1955.
- Burningham, Bruce R. *Tilting Cervantes: Baroque Reflections on Postmodern Culture*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2008.
- Buscombe, Edward. *Stagecoach*. London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1992.
- Case, Thomas. "A Time for Heroines in Lope." *The Perception of Women in Spanish Theater of the Golden Age*. Ed. Anita K. Stoll and Dawn L. Smith. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1991. 202-19.
- Cubillo de Aragón, Álvaro. *Hechos de Bernardo del Carpio, segunda parte de El Conde de Saldaña. Dramáticos posteriores a Lope de Vega*. Vol 1. Ed. Ramón de Mesonero Romanos. Biblioteca de Autores Españoles 47. Madrid: Atlas, 1951. 97-110.
- Dumont, Jean. *La "incomparable" Isabel la Católica*. Madrid: Encuentro, 1993.
- Gil Bera, Eduardo. "Inención del ajedrez moderno." *El Boomeran(g)*. 18 Oct. 2010. Rpt. "Queen Isabella and the Invention of Modern Chess." Trans. Mike Escárzaga. *Essay and Science: Contemporary Spanish and Latin American Thought*. No. 9 (2011). Web. 16 Oct. 2012 <<http://www.essayandscience.com/article/9/queen-isabella-and-the-invention-of-modern-chess/>>.
- Greer, Margaret Rich. "Art and Power in the Spectacle Plays of Calderón de la Barca." *PMLA* 104 (1989): 329-39.
- Lauer, A. Robert. "The Use and Abuse of History in the Spanish Theater of the Golden Age: The Regicide of Sancho II as Treated by Juan de la Cueva, Guillén de Castro, and Lope de Vega." *Hispanic Review* 56.1 (1988): 17-37.
- Morley, S. Griswold, and Courtney Bruerton. *Cronología de las comedias de Lope de Vega*. Trans. María Rosa Cartes. Madrid: Gredos, 1968.
- Reyes García, Alicia María de los, and María Victoria Santos de Martín Pinillos. *Mujeres en el campo de batalla*. Madrid: Ciudadela, 2009.
- Rodríguez Díez, Matías. *Historia de la muy noble, leal y benemérita Ciudad de Astorga*. Vol. 1. Astorga: Porfirio López, 1909.
- Román, David. "Calderón's Open Secret: Power, Policy, and Play in *El secreto a voces* and the Court of Phillip IV." *New Historicism and the Comedia: Poetics, Politics, and Praxis*. Ed. José A. Madrigal. Boulder, CO: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1997. 69-82.
- Vega Carpio, Lope Félix de. *Las doncellas de Simancas. Obras de Lope de Vega*. Vol. 16. Ed. Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo. Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 195. Madrid: Atlas, 1966. 395-431.
- . *Las famosas asturianas. Obras escogidas*. Vol. 1. Ed. Federico C. Sainz de Robles. 3 vols. 4^a. ed. Madrid: Aguilar, 1964. 335-67.
- Watson, Anthony I. *Juan de la Cueva and the Portuguese Succession*. London: Tamesis, 1971.