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**TITLE:** Imperial Asturias: The Politics of Space in Lope de Vega's *Las famosas asturianas*

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**ABSTRACT:** My essay explores the relation between space and politics in Lope de Vega's *Las famosas asturianas*, a play published in 1623 in part eighteen of his *comedias*. The play, set in the mountains of Asturias during the reign of Alfonso II (760-842), allows Lope to revisit the original landscape of the *Reconquista* and shape it according to the demands of Hapsburg ideology, which understood the nation as an ever-growing polity set to constantly expand its borders. Lope's use of images of growth and spreading to depict and emblemize the Asturian landscape adheres to this all-encompassing model of the nation and validates the imperial present of Hapsburg Spain by inscribing expansion into the nation's origin

**KEYWORDS:** Lope de Vega, Space, Empire, Reconquest, Asturias

**RESUMEN:** Mi ensayo explora el uso político del espacio que Lope de Vega hace en *Las famosas asturianas*, obra que aparece publicada en 1623 en la parte XVIII de sus comedias. Esta obra, cuya acción tiene lugar en las montañas de Asturias durante el reinado de Alfonso II El Casto (760-842), permite a Lope regresar al espacio geográfico original de la Reconquista y adaptarlo al modelo expansivo de nación adoptado por los Habsburgo. La caracterización constante que Lope hace del territorio asturiano como un espacio destinado a ensanchar sus fronteras se adhiere claramente a este modelo de construcción nacional para legitimar en última instancia el presente imperial de la España de los Habsburgo a través de un episodio lejano de su pasado legendario.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Lope de Vega, espacio, imperio, Reconquista, Asturias

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## Imperial Asturias: The Politics of Space in Lope de Vega's *Las famosas asturianas*

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*"If anyone sets out, therefore, to organize a state from the beginning, he needs to examine whether he wishes to expand it like Rome, in dominion and power, or whether it is to remain within narrow limits."*

(Machiavelli, Discourses I, 6)

Early modern Spanish historiography developed a distinct interest for all things Gothic and made a special effort to bring the Visigothic past to life for its readers. "Indeed," as one scholar has recently put it, "one could say that it is the construction of the Gothic past that separates Renaissance Spanish historiography from its closer and more influential models, Florentine and Venetian humanistic historiography of the fifteen and sixteenth centuries" (Binotti 43). Thus, while Italian historians tiptoed through the long centuries of *tenebras* following the fall of Rome and the occupation of Romania by the Gothic barbarians, their Spanish counterparts basked in post-Roman history and used the legends surrounding the heroic resistance of the Visigoths of Asturias after the Arabic invasion of 711 to feed a long-standing narrative of national consolidation and territorial expansion.<sup>1</sup> These legends attracted also the attention of poets and playwrights, who used the material collected in chronicles and the *romancero* tradition to create a sizeable corpus of literature devoted to reinforcing the belief in an imperial Iberia whose origins dated back to Visigothic times.<sup>2</sup> Works belonging to this corpus typically depict the Visigoths of Asturias as the original founders of the Spanish royal dynasty and present their actions as the very embodiment of the virtues that early modern historians identified as distinctive of the Spanish national character (religious

devotion, ethnic integrity, and a superior capacity for heroism in the face of adversity), making thus Visigothic Asturias a veritable *lieu de mémoire*, a place where past and present met and where the Hapsburg monarchy could find a powerful source of legitimization for the expanding polity it had decisively contributed to develop.<sup>3</sup>

This effort to accommodate the Visigothic past to the imperial present of Hapsburg Spain was not limited, however, to ethnic, religious, and dynastic considerations. Space and its symbolic representation contributed also in no small measure to the construction of an imperial continuum that, stretching back across the centuries, presented the Hapsburg state as one destined from its beginnings to "expand like Rome, in dominion and power," as Machiavelli wrote in his *Discourses*.<sup>4</sup> This reliance on space as a valuable tool to represent and promote Spain's "manifest destiny" becomes apparent in the depiction of the old Asturian and Leonese kingdom that Lope de Vega articulates in *Las famosas asturianas*, a play written between 1610 and 1612 and published in 1623 in part XVIII of his *comedias*. The play, simply referred to as *Las asturianas* in the list of works Lope recognized as his own in the second edition of *El peregrino en su patria* (1618), is set during the reign of Alfonso II *El Casto* (791-842), who, according to legend, was forced to send one hundred maidens every year to the

caliph of Córdoba in order to avoid being invaded by the Moorish forces surrounding his kingdom.<sup>5</sup> This well-known episode of Spain's legendary past allowed Lope to revisit the original geographical scenario of the Reconquista and shape it according to the demands of Hapsburg ideology, which understood the lengthy and intermittent fight against Islam in medieval Iberia as the first step in a long, divinely-sanctioned process that would take the Spanish banners to the far reaches of the world. In Lope's play Asturias is a territory bound for expansion, and this critically reinforces its role as both founding and legitimizing vehicle for an empire that searched in the Gothic past for "nuevas imágenes... que explicaran y ensalzaran la posición alcanzada en el presente" (Wulff 18).

This search for self-affirming images in Visigothic lore and history was made all the more urgent in *Las asturianas* by the growing sense of decline that had spread through Spanish society when the play was composed. The early decades of the seventeenth century saw Hapsburg Spain on the retreat in many fronts and contemplating for the first time the notion of curtailing its imperial ambitions. This was the result of the new policy of non-aggression adopted by the new king, Philip III, and his *valido*, the Duke of Lerma, who, faced with an insurmountable financial crisis, had signed a peace treaty with England in 1604 and a humiliating truce with the Dutch rebels in 1609. The more restrained role this policy imposed on Spain as an imperial power sent the country into "an orgy of national introspection" (Elliott 300) and led many writers and intellectuals of the period, as Veronica Ryjik has argued, to propose a return to the values of the Reconquista as a means to reawaken Spain's imperial consciousness and to legitimize its recent history:

Enfrentados con el declive de un imperio que sólo hace medio siglo gozaba de una hegemonía incuestionable en el mapa europeo, los intelectuales de la época a menudo se refugian

en la idealización del pasado glorioso... explican el desastre actual por la desviación de los valores propios de aquella edad heroica y propagan el retorno a estos valores como única solución. (39)

The impact that this return to Gothic values had on Spain's understanding and embracing of its imperial destiny is clearly emphasized in *Las asturianas*, I will contend, in a number of scenes in which space is made to occupy the center of dramatic attention. The critical importance of these scenes has been overlooked by scholars, whose interest in the play has been very scarce and limited mostly to issues of race, gender, and national identity.<sup>6</sup> The stark set of contrasts (moral, religious, linguistic) that Lope establishes between Christians and Moors and his touting of gender conventions by making Doña Sancha, the central female character of the play, a beacon of "masculine" daring explains why critics have been overwhelmingly drawn to these specific aspects of the work, but, as I hope to demonstrate in these pages, space also plays a key role in shaping the political message of *Las asturianas*, which seeks to validate expansion as an original, defining feature of the Hapsburg state through the retelling of an episode of the remote past.

The pivotal contribution of space to this operation of ideological validation can be first gleaned in the frantic scene of pursuit that opens the play, which features King Alfonso running through the streets of León to escape a murder attempt by the local nobility. Alfonso, who has just arrived in León to assume the responsibilities of government after a short exile in Navarra, takes refuge in a nearby monastery and is forced there into confinement by his pursuers, a situation very similar to the one his kingdom will face a few scenes later when the Moorish troops commanded by Audalla arrive in León and surround the city while they wait for the king to pay the annual tribute to the caliph of Córdoba. The proleptic value of this opening scene

clearly underlines what will in fact be the running theme of the play: the overcoming of enclosure and the rejection of spatial limitations. This theme will acquire its full political import in Act III, when Doña Sancha stirs the Leonese men into action and persuades them to take arms against the invading Moors, but its significance can already be glimpsed at the outset of the play as Alfonso is quickly released from the monastery by the Asturian don Nuño Osorio, who, with a small band of followers, puts the king's pursuers on the run and swears loyalty to the new monarch. To express his gratitude, Alfonso appoints Nuño as mayor of León, a gesture that triggers the following enthusiastic response from the Asturian leader:

Nuño: Yo vos beso por el don  
la mano, y el pie también.  
Fágabos Dios, rey sesudo,  
tan temido y acatado,  
que tenga vueso reinado  
al más envidioso mudo.  
.....  
Veáis las vuestas banderas  
sobre las aguas del Tajo,  
aunque vos cueste trabajo  
el conquistar sus fronteras.  
Y si vos socede bien,  
lleguen a Guadalquivir,  
y aun al mar oso decir,  
que puedan nadar también.  
Crezca vuestra renta al año  
Treinta mil maravedís.  
(1.338-39)<sup>7</sup>

This speech by Nuño at the beginning of the play is critical for recognizing the central role of space in *Las asturianas* and for understanding its value as a political instrument. Nuño presents the newly-arrived monarch with a new, grand vision for the kingdom of Asturias and León, a vision that turns confinement into expansion and puts this small, beleaguered territory on an imperial course by making conquest its *raison d'être*. Given Alfonso's shaky hold on power at this point, such vision may seem hopelessly optimistic or unduly ambitious, but the audience is

quick to realize its critical significance a few scenes later, when Alfonso enters the *alcázar* in León to take possession of the building as his official residence. The speech the king delivers at this momentous event clearly shows him embracing Nuño's vision and committing himself to it as he solemnly swears by the *casuella* or holy robes of St. Ildefonso to expand his kingdom beyond the Tagus and to take his banner all the way to the African shores:

Fago voto solene a las relicas  
y a la casuella santa de Ilefonso,  
con todas las demás santas y ricas,  
de procurar ponerle en riba el Tajo,  
porque espante los moros andaluces,  
sin perdonar cansancio nin trabajo.  
Este león salió de la montaña,  
magüer que non se crían en Asturias;  
y así, sospira por salir de España.  
En África los hay; allá sospecho  
que volverá, no digo que vencido,  
mas a triunfar con vitorioso pecho.  
(1.344)

It is important to notice that this plan of programmatic conquest is communicated to the Asturian and Leonese aristocracy (and, by extension, to the play's audience) before Audalla and the Moorish envoys arrive in León to demand the payment of one hundred maidens that will guarantee the survival of Alfonso's kingdom. The image of Asturias as a territory destined for expansion that Lope elaborates in *Las asturianas* is therefore present in the play right from the beginning and is not the result of a natural response against foreign invasion or the spontaneous desire to safeguard the homeland, as some critics have argued. To view Nuño and King Alfonso "not as rapacious subjects who jealously covet someone else's object, but as protective mediators who must safeguard what is ignobly coveted by others" (Burningham 139) is to seriously misread Lope's play and to distort its political message. Lope does not view expansion simply as a reactive phenomenon triggered by external aggression or the

intolerable demands of an invading culture, but rather as an inherent feature of the territory that shapes its history and, by extension, that of the nation. It is also important to realize that the expansive scenario Alfonso outlines in this speech is not confined to the geographical borders of his kingdom or those of the nation as understood by the play's audience. The king, likened here to the lion that flutters in his royal banner, yearns to leave Spain—"sospira por salir de España"—and set foot on Africa "a triunfar con vitorioso pecho." Lope links thus an early, legendary episode of the Reconquest to the first phase of overseas expansion in the history of early modern Spain, a phase defined by the request made by Queen Isabella of Castile to her heirs, Doña Juana and Prince Philip of Hapsburg, in her 1504 testament: "que no çesen en la conquista de Africa e de pagnar por la fe contra los ynfieles" (qtd. in de la Torre 47). Seen from this perspective, Alfonso's plan for the enlargement of his kingdom becomes a sort of *figura* or typological forecasting of the imperial efforts of post-Isabeline Spain, making thus Asturias the seed of an historical teleology that will materialize centuries later under the Hapsburgs with the conquest of Orán, Algiers, and other posts on the North African coast.<sup>8</sup>

This effort to "imperialize" Asturias and connect past and present through the use of space is clearly reinforced in the play through the emblematic use Lope makes of the character of Doña Sancha, a young and bellicose *asturiana* who refuses to be delivered to the Moors in exchange for the political survival of her kingdom. Critics have traditionally seen Doña Sancha as an example of what Melveena McKendrick has called *la mujer varonil*, a popular female type found in seventeenth-century Spanish *comedias*, particularly in those of a historical nature, where women are sometimes given the ability to perform manly activities (warfare and hunting, for instance) or to assume certain masculine traits (physical strength, courage, etc.).<sup>9</sup> While Doña Sancha fits perfectly the *varonil* type due to her love of the outdoors and her

skill as a warrior and huntress (in Act I, for instance, we see her holding a spear and chastising a bear she has just killed and in Act II she is presented pursuing Moors through the mountains of Asturias), there is more to her than the mere embodiment of a stage typology. Lope's audience is quickly made aware of this when, early in the play, Doña Sancha is compared to a lion by Don Laín de Lara, a refined gentleman from León who woos her and asks for her hand in marriage: "¿Vaste a León? Bien faces; que ese nome / conviene a tu cruel naturaleza; diamante que no hay sangre que te dome" (1.341). Don Laín's analogy foreshadows the one King Alfonso will use later on in his speech at León's *alcázar*, but, more importantly, it establishes a deep and long-lasting connection in the play between Doña Sancha and the Asturian-Leonese kingdom, a territory identified with the royal emblem of the lion. This connection is made more evident when Doña Sancha's family name, León, is first mentioned in the *comedia* by Don García, her father, who tells his daughter about his plans to have her married to Don Laín de Lara. Don García's discourse, built on paronomasia, reflects the "gout prononcé pour la sémantisation du nom propre" (17) that, as François Rigolot has observed, is typical of the literature of the period and underlines the political significance of the relation between onomastics and territory in Lope's play:

Doña Sancha: Nunca he sido  
desobediente, ¡oh padre!, a tus  
quereres.  
¿Qué estado, al tu pracer donarme  
quieres?  
Don García: El de casada, hija de mis  
ojos, para que el abolengo de mi casa,  
ya que non se dilate por varones  
del apellido León, leones,  
se destiendan por fembra tan leona,  
que más face honoranza que baldona.  
(1.348)

Because Doña Sancha's family name coincides with that of the geographical setting of the play, the charge given to her by

her father to extend the family lineage must be interpreted not only in biological but also in geopolitical terms. The *leones* that Don García imagines *destendiéndose* or disseminating through Doña Sancha's body express thus more than the genealogical ambitions of an elderly paterfamilias; they also embody the inherently expansive nature of a kingdom "que sospira por salir de España," as King Alfonso put it in Act I, and whose final goal is to extend its borders beyond the sea.<sup>10</sup> Implicit in Don García's wishes for a long and fruitful descent, therefore, is a process of territorial expansion in which the local—the ancestral home or *casa solar*, in this particular case—and the global cohere and join destinies from the beginning. This merging allows Lope, once again, to create a powerful link in the play between past and present, for, as Joan Ramón Resina has argued, the same combination of internal consolidation and external expansion defined the Hapsburg project of a universal and "integrated" monarchy under Charles V:<sup>11</sup>

Only under Charles V's was Spain's political unity truly realized. His was the first integrated Spanish monarchy, and it is certainly not irrelevant for understanding subsequent Spanish history that the state thus created was from its very inception more than a nation state: Spain came into being as an empire. (293)

This expansive drive that, according to Resina, defines the imperial state designed by the Hapsburgs is clearly foreshadowed in *Las asturianas* in the dual role assigned to Doña Sancha as *fembra* and *leona*. If the latter makes Doña Sancha a living emblem of the territory on account of her fierceness and family name, the former makes her a guarantor of its capacity for growth and expansion by depicting her as a *generatrix* or *mater populi*.

This generative or procreative role assigned to Doña Sancha echoes to a certain extent the representational pattern found in

other national history plays written by Lope, in which, as Veronica Ryjik has noted, women are frequently portrayed "como reproductoras biológicas de los miembros de la comunidad étnica o nacional" and are therefore made to represent "los límites simbólicos de la comunidad" (45).<sup>12</sup> Those limits, however, are not merely symbolic in *Las asturianas*, for Doña Sancha incarnates in very tangible terms the desire to overcome enclosure that we identified as the central theme of the play. This becomes apparent in the dialogue she maintains in Act I with Don Laín de Lara, her polished and unmanly Leonese suitor, right before leaving for León to witness the festivities preceding King Alfonso's coronation at the *alcázar*. The setting of the dialogue, the mountains surrounding Doña Sancha's *casa solar* in Asturias, inspires this Iberian amazon to make a passionate defense of her active lifestyle and to state emphatically her dislike for domestic spaces, which she finds oppressive and contrary to her nature:

Laín: El cultivado jardín  
 conviene a la tierna dama,  
 que non la nevada sierra,  
 que como al home la guerra,  
 acuciadora de fama,  
 tal a la fembra la paz,  
 el estrado y la labor.  
 Doña Sancha: Damas que cuidan de  
 amor  
 fallen sentadas solaz.  
 Yo, Laín, en este sino  
 y en este planeta fui  
 nacida al mundo, que a mí  
 non me alegra el oro fino  
 en el dosel y el estrado,  
 ni menos la mora alfombra,  
 sinon la apacible sombra  
 que facen olmos al prado.  
 Más precio esperar aquí  
 que un jabalí fiero asome,  
 que oír blanduras de un home,  
 puesto que fembra nací. (1.340)

Considered within the specific onomastic framework of *Las asturianas*, Doña



Sancha's rejection of "el cultivado jardín," "el dosel," and "el estrado" reflects more than the standard departure from the spatial constraints of gender typically associated with the *mujer varonil* in early modern Spanish drama. The status granted to Doña Sancha as living emblem of the territory makes it possible for the audience to interpret the spatial references in her speech not only as a statement of gender defiance, but also as a defense of the expansive impetus that defines the land that she embodies and as a rejection of the spatial and geographical restrictions imposed on it by political subjection. That rejection is underlined by the reference to "la mora alfombra" that Lope includes in Doña Sancha's speech, which clearly points beyond the narrow limits of the home and alludes to the political situation of the Asturian and Leonese kingdom, hemmed in by the forces of Audalla and subject to the authority of the caliph of Córdoba. To the Moorish carpet that adorns the snug and restricted space of the home, Doña Sancha opposes "la apacible sombra que facen olmos al prado," expressing thus a firm dislike for borders and enclosed spaces that anticipates the political destiny of her kingdom—a destiny that is already unfolding, as Audalla explains to his men in Act I:

Pues quédese la gente en este monte,  
 en tanto que [Alfonso] las parias nos  
 concede;  
 que somos pocos para estar tan cerca,  
 y cada día crecen los cristianos  
 en número, valor y atrevimiento  
 y bajan de esas sierras ciento a ciento.  
 (1.342)

Just as Doña Sancha rejects the cozy life of domestic confinement offered her by Don Laín de Lara, her fellow countrymen refuse to live within the borders established in the mountains by the enemy. That refusal, turned almost into a political motto by King Alfonso in the speech he delivers at the *alcázar* ("Este león salió de la montaña..."), is also hinted at in the contrast between "el cultivado jardín" and "la nevada sierra" that Don Laín

makes to highlight the wild and unwomanly behavior of Doña Sancha. Her dislike of the former and preference for the latter is clearly in tune with the running theme of the play, for, as landscape historian J. B. Jackson reminds us, gardens are symbolically related in Western culture to the idea of enclosure and their traditional meaning in modern Indo-European languages "seems to indicate less what our dictionaries define as 'a plot of land used for the cultivation of flowers, vegetables, and fruit' than it does an enclosure or container" (20-21).<sup>13</sup> Sebastián de Covarrubias, the famous seventeenth-century Spanish lexicographer, echoes this traditional meaning in his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana* (1611), which includes the following etymology for the word *jardín*: "Otros van más a lo castellano, y dizen que jardín es *quasi* guardín, *quia est hortus conclusus*" (712). Given that Covarrubias cites this particular etymology as the one closer or more familiar to speakers of Castilian, it is reasonable to think that Lope's audience was alert to the spatial implications of Doña Sancha's rejection of "el cultivado jardín" and was able to discern the political meaning implicit in that rejection.

That type of awareness would have been reinforced by the clarion call to expansion attached to Doña Sancha's questioning of Don Nuño's manhood at the end of the play. Don Nuño, asked by King Alfonso to escort Doña Sancha and deliver her to Audalla, is shocked on his journey to the Moorish camp when he sees all the Asturian maidens remove their clothes in front of his men and get dressed later on at the sight of their Cordoban captors. When asked about this strange behavior, Doña Sancha, speaking on behalf of the women, explains that the purpose of this action was to embarrass the Asturian men and to elicit from them a more virile response in defense of their kingdom:

Atiende, Osorio cobarde,  
 afrenta de homes, atiende,  
 porque entiendas la razón  
 si non entenderla quieres.

Las mujeres non tenemos  
 vergüenza de las mujeres;  
 quien camina entre vosotros  
 muy bien desnudarse puede,  
 porque sois como nosotras,  
 cobardes, fracas y endebres,  
 fembras, mujeres y damas;  
 y así, no hay por qué non deje  
 de desnudarme ante vos,  
 como a fembras acontece.  
 Pero cuando vi los moros,  
 que son homes y homes fuertes,  
 vestíme; que non es bien  
 que las mis carnes me viesen. (1.363)

Doña Sancha's gesture is so effective that it persuades Nuño and his men to disobey the king and, with the help of the Asturian maidens, to fight the Moors and defeat them in battle. Later on, when informed about Nuño's victory, King Alfonso decides also to take a more aggressive stance against the invaders and, taking his cue from the women, to declare war against the caliph, a war that will unlock the borders of his kingdom and set in motion the process of expansion he so enthusiastically embraced in his speech at the *alcázar*. Behavioral changes associated with gender—in particular the assumption of a more “masculine” role by the king and Don Nuño—are therefore closely linked at the end of the play to a shift in attitude towards the territory that privileges conflict and expansion over subjection and enclosure. This change of attitude allows the play to come full circle in terms of its theme, for Alfonso's decision to come out of his palace and fight the caliph clearly echoes the image of the king coming out of the monastery and facing his enemies on the streets of León that Lope introduced at the start of the *comedia*. The fact that territorial confinement gives way at the end of the play to war and a future of unbridled expansion validates also the image of the Asturian banner stretching down to Andalusia and the North African coast that Nuño presented to the king in Act I. Lope's echoing of these expansive images at the close of the *comedia* confirms their centrality to the political message of *Las asturianas*, a play whose primary

purpose is to validate the imperial present of Hapsburg Spain by inscribing expansion into an episode of the legendary past. This act of inscription, as I have argued in these pages, is made possible through a refashioning of space that allows Lope to link past and present and to identify a small stretch of territory in northern Iberia with the collective destiny of the imperial state established in Spain by the Hapsburgs. This latter aspect becomes especially important in light of the relation between geography and identity politics in the period when the play was written. The strong sense of locality that defined the relationship between territory and identity in early modern Spain and the decentralized model of government adopted by the Hapsburg monarchy did little to foster attachments at the suprarregional level. As one historian of the period has argued, “the concept of community current in Renaissance Spain reinforced the sense of belonging and obligation towards the locality [e.g. the city] . . . but contributed little to a theory of association between the city . . . and the kingdom, and *a fortiori* between one kingdom and another” (Thompson 128).<sup>14</sup> In this disjointed political scenario the articulation of a coherent form of collective sentiment became of paramount importance to fill in the ideological gap left by the actual practice of power in the territories governed by the Hapsburgs. Lope's play takes a significant step in that direction by promoting an idea of the state that, centered on the unifying theme of expansion, helped bring cohesion to a polity sundered by the local and regional forces that made up its motley political tissue.

## Notes

<sup>14</sup>The use of legendary and historiographical material related to Visigothic Iberia was central for the development of a coherent narrative of the nation in medieval and early modern Spanish historiography. As Veronica Ryjik has recently put it, “A partir de las primitivas crónicas asturianas de finales del siglo IX, España se concibe como un reino



que estuvo unido bajo el poder de los godos, que se desintegró con la invasión musulmana y cuya perdida unidad debe ser recuperada por los reyes cristianos, que se consideran herederos directos de la dinastía goda” (9-10). For a more detailed treatment of the use of Visigothic sources, myths, and legends in Spanish historiography, see Clavería, Maravall 299-335, Tate 68-73, Catalán, Linehan, Hillgarth, De la Fuente Merás, and Ríos Saloma.

<sup>2</sup>Scholars usually employ the term “mito goticista” to describe the ideological operations at work in this diverse corpus of literature, which comprised a wide variety of genres: ballads, folktales, plays, epic poems, etc. For some fine analysis of how this myth worked, see Francisco Márquez Villanueva’s discussion of Miguel de Luna’s *Verdadera historia* del Rey don Rodrigo (1589) and Michael Gerli’s commentary on the historiographical and ideological context of Cervantes’s “historia del cautivo” (*Don Quijote* I. 37-42).

<sup>3</sup>I use the term *lieu de mémoire* here in the specific sense given to it by French historian Pierre Nora, who speaks of “the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (7).

<sup>4</sup>The relation between Roman and Hapsburg expansion was constantly exploited, as Marie Tanner and Thomas Dandeleit have pointed out, by writers, artists, and historians throughout the early modern period. It is important to keep in mind, however, that political analogies with Rome often coexisted with proud assertions of Gothic ancestry and that, along with Roman lineage, “similar foundational value was uncritically given to the array of early legends surrounding the Gothic aristocracy’s exile in the mountains of Asturias after the Arabic invasion” (Binotti 40). To this it should also be added, as Cuart Moner observes, that “La *Hispania Romana*, por brillante que hubiera sido su trayectoria, no había pasado de ser una parte del Imperio, una provincia sometida [...]. La *Hispania Gothica*, en cambio, había sido un reino unido e independiente que había sobrevivido al mismo Imperio” (65).

<sup>5</sup>This, according to the legend, was a situation Alfonso had inherited from his predecessor, Mauregato, who is openly reviled in Lope’s play: “Mauregato socedió, / bastardo y de tal estilo / ¡mala su memoria sea!” (1.338).

<sup>6</sup>With the exception of Burningham, who focuses on gender and political analogies between *Las asturianas* and the Hollywood Western, there are no single monographic studies written on the play. Ryjik devotes a few lines to *Las asturianas*

in a recent book on Lope’s historical drama and Cartagena-Calderón does the same in his study of masculinity in the *comedia*. The lack of attention given to this play is revealed also by the fact that there are no critical editions of the text.

<sup>7</sup>All quotes from *Las asturianas* are given with the page number in which they appear in the Aguilar edition of Lope’s *Obras escogidas*. I follow this practice due to the lack of critical editions with verse numbers.

<sup>8</sup>Alfonso’s speech may have had a significant compensatory value for Lope’s audience given the very modest success of Spain’s imperial effort in the Maghreb. As historian J.H. Elliott has remarked, “North Africa remained throughout the sixteenth century the Cinderella of Spain’s overseas possessions—a land unsuited to the particular characteristics of the conquistador” (56).

<sup>9</sup>Doña Sancha would specifically belong to the category of the *mujer guerrera* within the taxonomy created by McKendrick for the *mujer varonil*. McKendrick sees this particular type as having little more than an ornamental role in the plays in which it appears: “Compared with the Amazon and the woman leader, the ordinary *mujer guerrera* of the seventeenth-century Spanish stage is an insignificant creature, and her appearance is on the whole as unremarkable as that of the commonest form of the *mujer vestida de hombre*, the female page” (207-08). My analysis of Doña Sancha will serve to correct, I hope, McKendrick’s view.

<sup>10</sup>Because of the expansive scenario it condenses and allows the audience to envision, Doña Sancha’s name performs a role similar to that of the ancient exemplar in Renaissance humanism. According to Hampton, “the [humanist] reader who comes upon the name of a heroic ancient exemplar in a text has come upon a single sign which contains folded within it the entire history of the hero’s deeds, the whole string of great moments which made the name a marked sign in the first place. Expressed differently, we might say that the name is a noun with a verb phrase (the various great deeds) condensed inside it” (25).

<sup>11</sup>Fuchs sees this duality as inherent to the notion of empire: “As a polysemic term with a rich history, therefore, *imperium* denotes both internal control of a polity and external expansion beyond that polity’s original boundaries” (72).

<sup>12</sup>Ryjik focuses her discussion on the characters of Solmira and Florinda in *El último godo*. Her opinion is informed by Nira Yuval-Davis’s exploration of the relation between gender and nationalism in *Gender and Nation*.

<sup>13</sup>Doña Sancha's preference for the openness of the sierra over the restricted space of the home is also apparent in the complaint expressed by Don García in Act II about the disobedient behavior of her daughter, who ignores his injunction to stay home and guard the family estate in order to scourge the nearby *monte* in search for Moors: "Porque por el monte va; / y lo que yo le pedí era defensar la casa" (1.347).

<sup>14</sup>Henry Kamen arrives also at a similar conclusion: "In Spain there was little consciousness of the 'nation' and daily reality was centered almost exclusively on the local community. Social ties were formed not at a national but at a regional level, and loyalties were heavily localized, fundamentally in the rural village (*pueblos*) but a broader level in cantons (*comarcas*) and towns" (249-50).

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