

# LOPE DE VEGA'S "ALCIDES NUEUO" AND SATAN'S SECT: A CASE FOR LOCAL READINGS

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**L**ope de Vega addressed the following sonnet to Philip III ("Al rey nuestro señor") shortly after the death of the latter's father, King Philip II:

Alcides nueuo, en cuyos ombros tiernos,  
Mientras descansa el gran Filipo Atlante,  
Cargan dos mundos, porque sois bastante,  
Si los huuiera, para mas gouiernos.

Objeto de los cielos sempiternos,  
Como el espejo al Sol, luz en diamante,  
Iupiter Español, Cesar Infante,  
Mas digno de viuir siglos eternos.

Aqui, donde mi Isidro fue nacido,  
Nacistes vos, tan bien auenturado,  
Quanto deueis de estarle agradecido.

Vuestros antecessores le han honrado,  
Ya Reyna en Dios, si Labrador ha sido,  
Iuntad el cetro a su diuino arado.

Lope includes this sonnet as front material in the first edition of his *Isidro*, a long hagiographic poem composed between 1596 and 1598.<sup>1</sup> Philip II died in September of 1598 and the "aprovacion" page that precedes the sonnet carries the date "a 22. dias del mes de Enero 1599" (sic), suggesting that the sonnet might have been written in the final months of 1598. At least on the surface, the sonnet appears to suggest little about the debates over statecraft or the mounting economic crisis that met the new king as he ascended the throne. As most dedicatory sonnets, it seems hyperbolic, if only conventional, in its flattery of the king: mythological allusions to Hercules ("Alcides"), Jupiter, and the burden of Atlas; the equation of king and sun, king and God; the request that Philip honor Madrid's humble patron, Isidore the Ploughman. We can, of course, read this sonnet as a cultural artifact, a typical dedicatory/hortatory poem, and it would be completely comprehensible given the general historical context with which the reader expects to confront early modern poetry of this sort. The poem's formulaic mythological allusions and regal apo-

theosis, set against the backdrop of the early modern concept of the kings' two bodies, might suggest an equally formulaic interpretation: Lope, availing himself of the poetic tradition, seeks to reconcile the Habsburg dynasty with the saintly peasant, thus celebrating the simple virtues of the Castilian countryside and the glories of the empire that was born there.<sup>2</sup> Such a poem, it could be argued, might just as easily have been written at the beginning of the reign of Philip II or of Philip IV. Nevertheless, it was written during the opening months of Philip III's reign. While the sonnet is a product of the more general historical context to which we have referred, it is also the product of that specific "moment" at the end of 1598. The goal of this study, then, is to demonstrate that reading "Alcides nueuo" in the context of that specific historical moment charges the poem's commonplaces with local significance.

As I will explain more fully in the next section, political writers in late sixteenth-century Spain were concerned with how Philip III, Spain's first new king in more than forty years, would rule an empire that was becoming increasingly unmanageable. That the prince should rule ethically and morally was an issue of the utmost importance for many writers in Spain and abroad because of the specter of Machiavellian political thought and the spread of Reason of State as a governing principle throughout the courts of Europe. The end of Philip II's reign had been turbulent, marked by the defeat of the Invincible Armada (1588), ongoing religious war in Flanders, open rebellion in Aragon (1591-92), an outbreak of the plague, and economic crisis.<sup>3</sup> Much of the blame for this was placed on what was perceived as an immoral governing principle and the divine retribution it incurred. The late 1590s were a moment in history when even the efficacy of the monarchy's unquestioned authority came under question.<sup>4</sup> It is no surprise, then, that a poem addressed to Philip III in late 1598 should reflect concern about the form that his government might take. By examining the political discourse of the late sixteenth century we can understand how the poetry reflected, or how Lope might have appropriated, such discourse on this particular occasion. In the section that follows, I will describe the historical context and the competing political discourses that provide the context for Lope's sonnet to Philip III.<sup>5</sup>

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When the Jesuit Pedro de Rivadeneira wrote his *Tratado de la religión y virtudes que debe tener el príncipe cristiano* (1595) to the young Prince Philip, he made a point of rejecting the pragmatism with which many officials of the time approached statecraft. In late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spain, the term *político* referred to the "practitioners or theorists" of Machiavellian policy (Fernández-Santamaría 43). Rivadeneira referred

to them simply as "la peor y más abominable secta que Satanás ha inventado" (452).<sup>6</sup> Inspired in part by Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the *políticos* believed that moral and ethical questions were secondary to the interests of the state. Fadrique Furió Ceriol, for example, wrote to Philip II that goodness ("bondad") is the best armor of all, but that the prince is like the musician, "el qual (aunque sea grand vellaco) por saber perfectamente su profesión de música, es nombrado mui buen músico" (92). Thus the *políticos* found it possible for a ruler to be a "mui buen Príncipe, pero mui ruin hombre" (Furió Ceriol 92).<sup>7</sup> Machiavelli himself writes that "it must be understood that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things which are considered good in men, being often obliged, in order to maintain the state, to act against faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion" (65).

Machiavelli is perhaps infamous for his assertion that "the end justifies the means" (66). The "end" for the *políticos* was the preservation of the prince and the prosperity of the state, an end which would later be referred to as reason of state. Rivadeneira, however, attacked the *políticos'* version of "reason of state" on moral grounds. Particularly offensive for him was the use of religion as a "medio," or means, to a political, agnostic "fin." While one goal of "gobierno político" is worldly happiness, the "último fin" or final end should, according to Rivadeneira, be the happiness of eternal life (459). Rivadeneira claims that only God can truly preserve the state since all the power ("potestad") that princes have comes from God (459). The "verdadera razón de estado" is that which preserves the law of God not man; the *políticos* are, therefore, at fault because they "apartan la razón de estado de la ley de Dios" (Rivadeneira 453).

Dissatisfaction with Machiavellian politics was not uncommon among treatise writers of the late sixteenth century. Botero wrote in 1589 that he "was moved to indignation rather than amazement to find that this barbarous mode of government had won such acceptance that it was brazenly opposed to Divine Law, so that men even spoke of some things being permissible by Reason of State and others by conscience" (xiii-xiv). After the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572), Innocent Gentillet wrote that Machiavellian counsel "C'est la principale et plus grievé maladie dont la pauvre France est ajourd'hui affligée" (20). Unlike Botero's *Reason of State* or Gentillet's *Anti-Machiavel*, however, Rivadeneira's treatise explicitly draws on a belief in divine providence and free will. Rivadeneira devotes chapters IX and X of the treatise's first book to God's providence over things, beings, and kings, explaining that human beings have free will ("tener libre albedrío y ser señor de su voluntad"), but for that same reason are all the more responsible for their actions (469). Divine providence is attentive ("es muy atenta") and fair, if it is true that God rewards the virtuous and punishes the wicked, as Rivadeneira claims:

“ha de haber premio para el bueno y castigo para el malo” (469). For a prince, then, to use unethical “means” or have a less than moral “end” in mind is deleterious because divine providence exacts its retribution not only temporally but (more importantly) eternally. Rivadeneira opposes moral virtue to the political virtue of Machiavelli’s prince, and divine providence to the pagan fortune of Machiavelli’s “arte político puro . . . desprovidencializado” (Maravall, *Teoría* 233).

In the Spain of the 1590s this rhetoric was a plea for a return to the utopian world of politics that, according to Rivadeneira and others, must have existed before Machiavelli and his brood corrupted the courts. The ethicists<sup>8</sup> nostalgically looked back on Spain’s Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, from the distance of almost an entire century: Rivadeneira tells us that “con su gran religión y valor echaron a los moros y a los judíos de España, y establecieron en ella el oficio de la Santa Inquisición” (453). The moralists of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spain idealized the past and longed to return to the rigid moral criteria for what constituted good and evil, criteria which were somehow less complicated. For Rivadeneira religion and valor are equated with one another as positive forces allowing a nation to justify the expulsion and persecution of “moros” and “judíos.” It mattered little that the 1490s were just as morally ambiguous for the statesman living in that time as the 1590s were for the *políticos* and Rivadeneira. It is an interesting historical irony that the “moral majority,” as we might call it today, of the 1590s should appeal to the reign of Ferdinand of Aragon for its inspiration. Machiavelli uses Ferdinand as an example of a successful ruler, but for more practical, political reasons, interpreting the reconquest of Granada, the “foundation of his [Ferdinand’s] state,” as a political maneuver to keep “the minds of the barons occupied” (82). What Rivadeneira and others might call a glorious feat, the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, Machiavelli calls a “pious cruelty,” underscoring political rather than religious convenience, because Ferdinand undertook great “enterprises . . . always under the pretext of religion” (82).

Rivadeneira, however, had a providential view of history and saw the Catholic monarchs’ success as a result of their religious fervor, interpreting Ferdinand’s defense and augmentation of the Catholic faith as an end in itself rather than a “pretext.”<sup>9</sup> The Spanish Empire’s recent reversal of fortune would have left the *políticos*, who seemed to use religion as a means rather than an end, more vulnerable to the reactions of Rivadeneira and others. The domestic economic crisis and recent foreign disasters such as the loss of the Invincible Armada, the unquelled rebellion in the Low Countries, and unsuccessful campaigns in France, left Spaniards with questions about the administration of the empire.

For Rivadeneira one of the most telling examples of God’s provi-

dence over mankind and the nations was the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. He blamed the bad end to which the Invincible Armada had come on the means with which it was undertaken. In a letter to an anonymous minister of King Philip II, Rivadeneira wrote:

Aunque los juizios de Dios N[uestro] S[eñor] son secretísimos, y por esto no podemos ciertamente saber el intento que su divina Mag[estad] ha tenido en el tan extraordinario sucesso que ha dado a la armada tan poderosa de su Mag[estad], todavía el ver que en vna causa tan suya y tomada con tan sancta intención, y tan encomendada en todos estos reynos, y tan desseada y procurada de toda la Yglesia Cathólica; no ha sido servido de acudir a los piadosos ruegos y lágrimas de tantos y tan grandes siervos suyos, nos haçe temer que [h]ay graues causas por las quales Dios N[uestro] S[eñor] nos ha embiado este trabajo y que por ventura él durará mientras que ellas duñen. ("Ignoto" 105-06)<sup>10</sup>

Why should the Invincible Armada be so smitten by the heretical Queen of England if its success was so desired and sought after ("desseada y procurada") by the Catholic Church, if its intention was so holy ("tan sancta intención")? This was a question that would plague the Spanish Empire throughout the 1590s. John H. Elliott, in fact, devotes a section of his history of imperial Spain to "the crisis of the 1590s," stating that "the psychological consequences of the disaster were shattering for Castile" (288).

Had God abandoned the king and people chosen to protect the true faith from heresy? Rivadeneira's answer is fairly simple and follows logically from his theological perspective on providence. If, as Rivadeneira tells us in his 1595 *Tratado*, under the power of "la providencia que Dios tiene del hombre" there is to be "premio para el bueno y castigo para el malo" (469), then God has his reasons for denying victory to the Spaniards. The judgment of God may be "secretísimo," but it does not take a prophet to figure out that "there are serious reasons ("graues causas") for which God has sent this travail" (Rivadeneira, "Ignoto" 105-06). Rivadeneira conjectures that the king and his ministers are responsible for the "graues causas." According to Rivadeneira, God did not abandon the mission with its "sancta intención," but rather God abandoned the king and his ministers for their less than holy intentions. In Rivadeneira's third of six possible causes for the Armada's defeat, he asks his addressee to have the king take a hard look at his dealings with England to see if they were conditioned more by reason of state ("seguridad de su estado") than by zealous devotion to the Catholic faith ("Ignoto" 108-09). Rivadeneira then goes on to counsel the king's minister to make sure that God is second neither to personal interests nor to interests of state: "procure en todos sus consejos y deliberaciones tener siempre por

mira y blanco principal la honra y gloria de Dios; y que con ella nivele y mida todo lo demás que toca a interesse o estado" ("Ignoto" 109). This is in direct contrast to the advice offered by Furió Ceriol, who counseled the king to move with caution in the name of the state (Bleznick, "conceptos" 40).

Rivadeneira implored the king and his ministers to take a more ethical course in all of their affairs. In the 1590s, after repeated failures in France and the Netherlands, the revolt in Aragon (1591-92), and the escape and persecution of the long imprisoned Antonio Pérez (a painful reminder for the whole realm of the nefarious undertakings in Philip's court a decade before), Rivadeneira turned his attention away from an ailing king and increased his efforts to influence a young and, as yet, untested prince.

We see in Rivadeneira's dedicatory remarks to the prince his exasperation with the moral depravity of the *políticos* and his hope that Philip III would not fall under their influence as Philip II had done for a time. While Rivadeneira is generous in his praise of the policies of Ferdinand, Isabel, and Charles V, he has little to say about Philip III's father (presumably because of his many virtues): "Pues del Rey nuestro señor es mejor callar que hablar poco, habiendo tanto que decir" (454). Instead, Rivadeneira tries to impress upon the prince the weight of his future responsibilities and the dangers of the *políticos* that so shaped Philip II's reign:

El ser y poder del rey es una participación del ser y poder divino, y así requiere favor del cielo y divino para poderle dignamente sustentar. Todo el mundo tiene hoy puestos los ojos en vuestra alteza, por las muchas partes que son menester para sostener la monarquía, y llevar la carga de tantos y tan grandès reinos como vuestra alteza espera heredar después de los largos y bienaventurados años del rey, nuestro señor, y no menos por la turbación y calamidad de los tiempos que corren por nuestros pecados, de herejías y errores, inventados por hombres amigos de sí mismos, crueles, viciosos y desalmados, que tienen por ganancia la perdición ajena, y por propio interés la destrucción de toda religión y virtud. Entre los cuales, la peor y más abominable secta que Satanás ha inventado es una de los que llaman políticos (aunque son indignos de tal nombre), salida del infierno para abrasar de una vez todo lo que es temor y piedad de Dios, y arrancar todas las virtudes que son propias de los príncipes cristianos. (452)

This is the political context in which Lope would write his "Alcides nuevo" sonnet. All eyes are on the prince not because he has a "participación en el ser y poder divino," but because of the people's anxiety about the "carga de tantos y tan grandes reinos" falling on one person's shoulders. Moreover, everyone ("todo el mundo") is concerned ("y no menos") by "la

turbación y calamidad de los tiempos." The perpetrators of such widespread calamity are heretics at home and abroad, but also, and Rivadeneira seems to emphasize this with his "entre los cuales, la peor y más abominable," the *políticos*, Satan's own sect.

While the rest of Spain experiences "a palpable economic crisis" (Kamen 309), it is the anxiety about Spain's new king and his possible manner of conducting the affairs of the empire that become palpable when we read the pages of Rivadeneira: there is a certain terror at the thought of the *políticos* holding sway over the crown. Questions about Philip III's fitness for ruling the empire only exacerbated the existing anxieties; Philip II is said to have expressed this sentiment on his death bed: "God who has given me so many kingdoms has denied me a son capable of ruling them" (qtd. in Lynch 17). Whereas Rivadeneira considers the monarchy a divine institution, he knows that the king is a man and the greatest threat to the interests of the state is the possibility that this man could come under the influence of that "peor y más abominable secta que Satanás ha inventado" (452).

The anxiety expressed in Rivadeneira's dedication about the form that Philip III's administration of the empire would take and more generally about the "turbación y calamidad de los tiempos" is also expressed in Lope's work. Around the time that Lope's *Isidro*, including the "Alcides nuevo" sonnet, was published (winter 1599), our poet wrote *Fiestas de Denia*.<sup>11</sup> This long narrative poem (192 octaves in two cantos) relates the festive occasion of Philip III's visit to Denia, near Valencia where he was to await the arrival of his future queen, Margaret of Austria. As the reader might expect, Lope's *Fiestas de Denia* is prolix in its adulation: the sun hesitates in deference to the king (1.9; 1.75) and heretics on distant shores tremble when Philip III steps into a boat (1.86). And yet we see constant reminders of the nagging questions in the back of Spain's collective mind after the death of Philip II: Philip III's "tiernos años" (1.81), for example, or the "mil bárbaros vestiglos" (1.82) that threaten the reign. Karl Vossler notes Lope's unabashed sycophancy in this poem, calling it a "torrente de palabras y alborotado afeite de lisonjas" (48), and so it would appear that Lope can be hopeful about his king and the prospect of a new century: "Oh divina esperanza, luz y amparo / del nuevo siglo" (1.82). But, this divine hope for the empire, "de los futuros hechos testimonio" (1.81), will first have to take up the sword:

Espada que en un príncipe tan justo  
Las sectas inducidas del demonio  
Ha de segar, y como Alcides luego,  
A los cortados cuellos poner fuego . . . (1.81)

Lope's "sectas inducidas del demonio" in this context probably refers to the foreign threat of the Turks or Protestants. Nevertheless, domestic threats would provide the context for the sonnet in question, threats from another of Satan's "sectas," the "peor y más abominable" according to Rivadeneira. It is, perhaps, the sect of Machiavellian *políticos* and their "tyranny" over men that motivated Lope to address a sonnet to his new king, the new Alcides or prospective tyrant killer.

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Even works tainted with the "afeite de lisonjas" (Vossler 48) are capable of reflecting concerns about Spain's problems and, consequently, anxiety about the new king's ability to deal with them. Through a close reading illuminated by the political context described above, it is possible to see these anxieties as they are played out in the "Alcides nuevo" sonnet.

Alcides nuevo, en cuyos ombros tiernos,  
Mientras descansa el gran Filipino Atlante,  
Cargan dos mundos, porque sois bastante,  
Si los huuiera, para más gouiernos.

The first quatrain refers to the new king and the awesome task he has inherited from his father. Alcides is a reference to Hercules, one of the Iberian peninsula's first legitimate kings according to some traditions, who in his journeys from Greece founded the city of Cadiz and beheaded (after three days of hand-to-hand combat) the giant Gerión who ruled tyrannously over the entire region between the Tajo and Duero rivers.<sup>12</sup> Lope names Philip III a new Hercules, "Alcides nuevo," calling attention to Philip's quite recent accession to the throne and at the same time to his most ancient claim to that throne, a throne supposedly legitimized by Hercules.<sup>13</sup> Though he is a successor in the Habsburg line, whose monarchy in Spain was not yet a century old, he is also the most recent manifestation of a divine institution, a fact that the first line of the next quatrain echoes: "Objeto de los cielos sempiternos." There is, however, a note of anxiety about the capabilities of "Alcides nuevo," and we see evidence in the first line of the sonnet: "cuyos ombros tiernos." The tender, untried shoulders of this ruler certainly have a Herculean task before them: to carry two worlds, not just one as Atlas did. Lope's "Filipo Atlante" in line two equates Philip II with Atlas, now resting. But Philip II, as his father before him, left two worlds for his son to govern because the Spanish empire was an American as well as European empire. Rivadeneira's "llevar la carga de tantos y tan grandes reinos" resonates here and, much as Rivadeneira might have done, Lope ends the quatrain on a positive



note, assuring the new Hércules, whose "ombros tiernos . . . cargan dos mundos," that he could do it even if there were more to govern: "porque sois bastante, / si los huuiera, para mas gouuernos." Lope is optimistic here as he is in *Fiestas de Denia*.

At the beginning of the second quatrain Lope gives the reader a reason why he should have so much confidence in those delicate shoulders and their ability to take on the burden of Atlas, reminding Philip III, as Rivadeneira did, that the king is God's minister on Earth:

Objeto de los cielos sempiternos,  
Como el espejo al Sol, luz en diamante,  
Iupiter Español, Cesar Infante,  
Mas digno de vivir siglos eternos.

This quatrain resonates with the language of Rivadeneira's *Tratado*: "el buen rey," Rivadeneira tells us, is "vicario y ministro" of God (470) or, a "participación del ser y poder divino" (452). Lope calls him the "Objeto de los cielos sempiternos." Rivadeneira also tells the prince that a king is "como otro sol en el mundo, y un dios en la tierra" (470). Lope's "el espejo al sol, luz en diamante" echoes the rhetoric used by Rivadeneira, but modifies it ever so slightly to produce an unexpected effect. Indeed, Lope invokes the commonplace that the light provided by the king is not only nurturing as the sun, it is brilliant, dazzling as the light reflected and refracted when cast on a diamond; however, Lope's use of the mirror demonstrates a different property of the king's light: that it can be manipulated in powerful ways.

The light in the diamond astonishes us and the sunlight reflected in the mirror can beckon us from afar, but it can also blind us if we are too close, and even burn if reflected in a certain way. Lope's contemporary Sebastián de Covarrubias notes that the "espejo es símbolo del verdadero amigo, que, consultado, nos responde verdad," but he also records the following: "En el arte de fabricar los espejos ay cosas maravillosas; porque los cóncabos, recibiendo los rayos del sol, encienden qualquiera materia que se les aplique" (554). One of the more interesting of the entries on the uses of the mirror is the following: "Gente perdida y dada al demonio, con su ayuda representan en un espejo todo lo que desea ver el consultante" (Covarrubias 554). The associations inherent in the word "espejo" are analogous to those that Rivadeneira adopts when referring to the *políticos*: the *espejo/político* seems to be a true friend, but used demonically (i.e. without proper means) can produce a desired end or, worse, use the king's power ("los rayos del sol") to "abrasar de una vez todo lo que es temor y piedad de Dios" (Rivadeneira 452) as concave mirrors that "encienden qualquiera materia que se les aplique."

While Rivadeneira's king is just another sun ("otro sol"), Lope points out that the king is more than a mirror image of the sun, which would be "espejo del sol" in a less ambiguous verse. When the word "espejo" is used to mean "reflejo" (reflection) it is common to see the construction "espejo de." Carlos Fernández Gómez, in the "espejo" entry of his *Vocabulario completo de Lope de Vega* (2: 1,125) records four uses of the word "espejo" in which the connotation is that of a reflection rather than simply a mirror. In all four cases ("espejo de las facciones del alma," for example) the preposition "de" is used. The anomalous form "espejo a," used in this sonnet, implies something other than a simple "reflection of the sun." As I read it, Lope's king is the mirror that harnesses the sun's power rather than just the reflection itself. The images in the next line, those of the Spanish Zeus and the youthful Caesar, lend credence to this interpretation because they are images of power. Moreover, these images do not simply convey the message that the king has power, but that a king's power is frequently abused: Jupiter, or Zeus, used his powers more frequently to satisfy his lust and Julius Caesar, if indeed this verse is not a metonymic allusion to all Roman emperors (some lustier than Zeus himself), attempted to parlay his military conquests on behalf of Rome into absolute rule over Rome. Lope, certainly, was not ignorant of the possibility of an ironic reading that the allusion to Jupiter might encourage: his own poem about Jupiter and Europa characterized Jupiter, who had turned himself into a bull in order to deflower the nymph Europa, as deceitful, an "engañoso toro" (*Rimas* 1: 377) and in *La Arcadia* of 1598 we find a description of Jupiter, who, "sintiéndose abrasar por la belleza de Alania, guardaba el fin de las fiestas con ánimo de satisfacer su torpe deseo" (98-99; emphasis mine). With regard to the "César" reference, in *Fiestas de Denia* Lope refers to Philip III as a Caesar, but qualifies the appellation, possibly to avoid ambiguity: Philip is a "César Católico" in the prologue, for example, and a "nuevo César de mayor ventura" (1.95) before Lope refers to him consistently, simply as a "César" in the second canto. In the "Alcides nuevo" sonnet, however, he is "César infante," calling attention to his youth while not mitigating any possible negative connotations that "César" would have had for contemporary readers. Just such a negative connotation is to be found in book 1, chapter 2 of Juan de Mariana's treatise on kingship, which was—like the "Alcides nuevo" sonnet—published and dedicated to Philip III in 1599: "Thus Ninus, Cyrus, Alexander and Caesar, who were the first to form and found empires, seem not to have been lawful kings, not to have subdued monstrous tyrants who had raised their heads throughout the world, not to have done away with vices, as they wanted it to appear, but to have done a thorough job of plundering" (116). Despite the Renaissance assimilation of Greco-Roman motifs into "divine" contexts, I believe the references to pagan models of power (or

abuse of power) stand out here when we remember that this sonnet is to be found at the beginning of the *Isidro*, a hagiographic poem in which the poet promises to avail himself of Christian motifs rather than the conventional mythological allusions of epic poems or pastoral novels. Should his "voz y plectro" fail him, the poet of the *Isidro* asks that the muses of Arcadia stay away and that the Virgin come to his aid:

No venga Fauno, ni Dría,  
ni el pan del arcadio suelo,  
sólo ayuden a mi celo  
la Cristifera María  
y el pan que bajó del cielo. (575)

This is a far cry from the pantheism employed by Lope in *La Arcadia*, published just months before the *Isidro*. It points, again, to the conspicuousness of the pagan allusions in the "Alcides nuevo" sonnet.

For all of the potential abuse of power that these allusions to Caesar and Jupiter might imply, though, Lope still closes out the quatrain with the verse "Mas digno de viuir siglos eternos." Lope creates a great deal of tension in this verse, completing the circle that the quatrain traces from the "Objeto" of the sempiternal heavens to eternity itself. "Objeto," however, is a generic word that abstractly renders the concept of kingship as a divinely established institution. This abstract word forces Lope to provide more concrete evidence and he does so in the middle verses of the quatrain with a concatenation of heroic epithets. But, as we have seen, the images he chooses to employ betray a less than God-like side of this divine institution. The human attributes of the pagan Jupiter and Caesar, along with the possibly demonic use of the mirror, help to undermine the *arcana imperii*, the mysterious (supposedly divine) nature of the king's temporal power. It is as if Lope were trying his best to show the king as the "objeto" of Providence, but only succeeding in proving the irreconcilable differences between the *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena*.<sup>14</sup> The last verse of the quatrain brings the king back to divine providence, the *civitas Dei*, with the promise of everlasting life. Nevertheless, in a universe where divine providence is fair in its distribution of justice (and Rivadeneira assures us ours is just such a universe), the "mas digno de viuir siglos eternos" does not follow logically from the demonic connotation of the mirror or the pagan images of Jupiter and Caesar. Hence, the verse creates tension.

Again, though, we must look to Lope's contemporaries to provide the context for understanding just what Lope might mean by this verse, for we have only to look ahead to the sonnet's sestet to know that the king is no more deserving of eternal life simply because he is powerful in a temporal domain. Fray Alonso de Cabrera, the king's official homilist

("Predicador de Su Magestad"), in the sermon that he delivered in October of 1598 in honor of the recently defunct king, asks his audience: "Ubi sunt principes gentium?" His answer gives a bleak prognosis for the princes of the Earth who did nothing but hunt and watch their treasuries swell: "a los infiernos descendieron" (694). So why should a king such as this be "Mas digno de viuir siglos eternos?" The answer is that he is not, neither for Lope, nor for Cabrera, nor for Rivadeneira.

Rivadeneira tells us that there must be "premio para el bueno y castigo para el malo" (469) and the king is no exception. All of the king's Caesar-like power, all of the divine investment in the institution to which Lope refers in this quatrain comes with enormous responsibility. The king must carry those two worlds on his shoulders and carry them well in order to deserve eternal life. Should he do so, however, his reward will be all the greater in heaven; he is, therefore, "Mas digno de viuir siglos eternos." As Rivadeneira put it, "los buenos reyes y príncipes han de alcanzar mayores y más excelentes premios de Dios que la otra gente común; porque, si el premio se debe a la virtud, mayor premio se debe a la mayor virtud" (470). The key is to be a "buen rey," a good king, not just any king. The king may be a "participación del ser y poder divino," but he still requires "favor del cielo" (Rivadeneira 452).

Lope's otherwise conventional allusion to the pagan god Jupiter—a god with such an established reputation as the protagonist of the bawdier episodes of Greco-Roman mythology—acquires added significance in this context: Philip III is a "Iupiter Español," with all the negative connotations that might imply, but in order for him to be "digno de viuir siglos eternos" he must be more like the Christian God, "mirando y conservando el bien común, como lo hace Dios" (470). The quatrains in this sonnet, therefore, seem to express uneasiness with the weak, human side of a king (especially a young one with "tiernos ombros") whose responsibility is so great (no less than "dos mundos"), at the same time that they remind us of the divine institution to which the king is heir ("Objeto de los cielos sempiternos . . . Mas digno de viuir siglos eternos"). With all the power that God has bestowed on him, the king is human and the possibility that he might abuse or simply neglect his power is, thus, a real one.

The "white space" between lines 8 and 9, where the "turn" normally takes place in a Petrarchan sonnet, is the focal point for the anxious energy experienced throughout the realm.<sup>15</sup> Lope capitalizes on the natural tension that the sonnet creates in its transition from the quatrains to the sestet. The quatrains suggest that the subjects' anxiety is less about the institution than about any mortal's ability to undertake such an Atlantean burden, revealing this anxiety in its juxtaposition of images: some images reinforce the providential source of temporal power while others call to mind the frailty and corruptibility of the human beings en-

dowed with such power. At the end of verse 8 ("... siglos eternos") the tension is at its greatest, for the promise of eternal life seems to suspend (for all eternity?) the resolution of this poetic tug of war between the divine institution and the human body.

The sestet begins with a radical shift from "cielos sempiternos" and "siglos eternos" to the simple "Aqui." Lope shifts his emphasis away from the tension created by the dual nature of the king, a real tension mirrored by the poetic tension built up over the course of the first eight verses of the sonnet. The king is called down out of the clouds and presented by Lope with a "here and now":

Aqui, donde mi Isidro fue nacido,  
Nacistes vos, tan bien auenturado,  
Quanto deueis de estarle agradecido.  
Vuestros antecessores le han honrado,  
Ya Reyna en Dios, si Labrador ha sido,  
Iuntad el cetro a su diuino arado.

"Aqui" refers to the birthplace of Isidore the Ploughman, which happens also to be the site of Philip III's court: Madrid. And how grateful the king ought to be to have been born in such a place, because of the enormous honor accorded to Madrid's natives by the birth of such a saintly man ("Quanto deueis de estarle agradecido"). The discourse of blood-purity appears to be just beneath the surface (as always in Spain's Golden Age), but what is interesting here is Lope's intentional confounding of class relations with the discourse of religion. Philip III, as a king, may be "Mas digno de viuir siglos eternos," but the poor, illiterate Isidore is already enjoying eternal life, reigning in God ("Ya Reyna en Dios").

The sestet could, of course, be interpreted as an attempt to establish blood-purity rather than class as a basis for Spanish national identity; a convenient means of incorporating the peasant class, the *cristianos viejos*, "to reinvigorate the monarchical apparatus and the aristocratic culture that sustained it" (Mariscal, "Symbolic" 147).<sup>16</sup> The discourse of blood-purity was, after all, often employed for rhetorical purpose in Lope's time. Rivadeneira, as we will remember, praised Ferdinand and Isabella for driving out the Moors, expelling the Jews, and establishing the Inquisition in Spain. As with any text, there is a multitude of discourses that inform this sonnet (blood, class, and religion among them);<sup>17</sup> however, I would submit that the sestet responds more to the poetic context which the sonnet as a whole provides and that the sonnet, in turn, is conditioned by a particular set of political circumstances, which I believe have less to do with blood or class than with kingship and, more specifically, with the problem of governing ethically. That the rhetoric of religion

should figure strongly in this context is natural. As we have already seen, the reaction against Machiavelli and against the concept of "reason of state" as the sole consideration in good government contributed to the continued subordination of statecraft to theology in early modern Spain.

The comparison between the peasant ruling as saint in heaven and the king ruling on Earth seems to call into question the distinction between the classes, but here again Lope toys with poetic tradition. The figure of death as the great equalizer is a common one in Peninsular literature, producing if not some of the most beautiful verses in the Spanish language (such as those Jorge Manrique writes in his *Coplas a la muerte de su padre* in which he employs the *Ubi sunt?* motif to advantage) at least some of the most sobering (as in Gil Vicente's *Auto de la barca de la gloria* or Calderón's *El gran teatro del mundo*). Alonso de Cabrera tells us in his sermon that "El más triste pastorcillo vivo es mejor, y vale más y puede más que el mismo Alejandro muerto" (695). Lope wrote his "Alcides nuevo" sonnet within weeks, perhaps days, of this sermon, but goes beyond the simple metaphor of death as the sea into which all rivers, regardless of size, must eventually spill their waters ("Nuestras vidas son los ríos / que van a dar en la mar").<sup>18</sup> While Lope does indeed want Philip III to keep in mind that death is necessary for the transition from the *civitas terrena* to the *civitas Dei* to take place, the poet chooses to emphasize the "here," the *civitas terrena*, where everyone has to live and where Philip III will have to rule. As Rivadeneira reminds us, the goal of "gobierno político" is that the king's "súbditos sean bienaventurados acá con felicidad temporal," but that the power given to the king by God should also lead his subjects to the eternal *civitas Dei*, "a la cual esta nuestra temporal [potestad] mira y se endereza como a su blanco y último fin" (459). While "Aqui," the king should not only employ his power with the goal of temporal felicity, Lope presents the king with one way in which he can rule "in the midst of the ungodly" (as Augustine would have put it) and still keep his sights set on that "blanco y último fin," eternal happiness: honor a saintly man as his predecessors have done ("Vuestros antecesores le han honrado").

The word "Aqui" is such an important one in the transition from quatrains to sestet, at the turn of the sonnet, because it helps Lope remind his king that, though he is the "objeto" of the heavens, he is not yet in heaven enjoying "siglos eternos," but here where a lowly worker once lived. While "Aqui," as we have seen, "Alcides nuevo" should perform less like Jupiter or a *político* and more like a saint: "Tuntad el cetro a su diuino arado." Lope appeals less to the discourse of class antagonism between king and peasant, between "cetro" and "arado," than to the discourse of religion.<sup>19</sup> In my interpretation, the emphasis here shifts from Isidore's plow to the adjective "divino." Class is certainly a consider-

ation: Isidore "Ya Reyna en Dios, *si Labrador ha sido*" (emphasis mine). I feel, however, that Lope uses class here to underscore the importance that "el favor del cielo," as Rivadeneira called it (452), plays in the "cielos sempiternos" as well as "Aqui." To put it into Augustinian terms again: even "in the midst of the ungodly" Philip must always have in mind the "eternal seat," symbolized in this sonnet by Isidore, lest he become consumed by "the lust of rule" (Augustine, *The City of God* 129).

Francisco Márquez Villanueva notes that Lope's own *Isidro* with its humble eponymous protagonist takes part in a longing for a golden age of ethical behavior (50). Lope proposes Isidore, his Christian comportment, and the utopian social order implied by such comportment as an alternative to the "advenimiento, ominoso para Lope, de una sociedad compleja y diversificada conforme a las exigencias de la modernidad" (Márquez 61). Once again the desire for simplicity, for a social order without moral ambiguity is present as a counterpoint to the social reality that the more pragmatic *políticos* recognize and turn to their advantage. In his study of Isidore in Lope's work, Márquez Villanueva comments that the sestet of the "Alcides nuevo" sonnet gives the *Isidro* and Lope's advocacy of Isidore the Ploughman as a new patron for Spain a "valor 'programático'" (53). However, he later states:

El Fénix se niega a adentrarse en el pensamiento político y económico de su tiempo. Lo conoce sólo en esbozo, pero ello le basta para captar, clarividente, una modernidad que desprecia al mismo tiempo que le desasosiega hasta lo más recóndito de su ser. La clave es que Lope no va a remolque de captar ninguna realidad de aquel orden: por el contrario marcha delante de ella, en un intento de evasión, y busca a la vez las maneras de configurarla a su gusto. (87-88)

It is possible to read the sestet as a utopian construct, part of a purely lopesque "isidrisimo," a literary "panacea para toda suerte de males" (Márquez 124). Nevertheless, after examining the sestet in conjunction with the sonnet's quatrains and their relation to political/theological discourse of late sixteenth-century Spain, we find an entirely different phenomenon occurring: the reader's eyes are opened to the conflicts and tensions that the text itself has created.

"Modernidad" and its corresponding "realidad" are a source of consternation for our poet and yet, at least in this sonnet, he does not "marcha delante de ella, en un intento de evasión." Lope is a poet, and that he reconfigures reality "a su gusto" should not be surprising, but here the concerns and solutions that Lope expresses march alongside those of many of his contemporaries. Read in isolation, the sestet offers a solution that appears to be part of a utopian vision invented by Lope, yet it is actually a text/site on which Lope allows the political discourses employed by

contemporary treatise writers to play themselves out. Lope's sonnet expresses a common (common in late sixteenth-century Spain) reaction to the divorce of statecraft from theology carried out by Machiavelli in the second decade of the century and exacerbated by the *políticos* throughout the reign of Philip II.

We might think of the sonnet as simply one attempt among many to record the dissatisfaction felt throughout Europe and particularly in Spain with the prospect of a political "science," a statecraft, devoid of any moral or ethical considerations. Indeed, it appears that for Lope, as for Rivadeneira, politics were still in the realm of theology and, therefore, the political ought to have been taken together with the ethical. But, as Welles and Warren remind us, "Poetry is not substitute-philosophy; it has its own justification and aim. Poetry of ideas is like other poetry, not to be judged by the value of the material but by its degree of integration and artistic intensity" (124). Lope expressed his ideas by way of a Petrarchan sonnet rather than a treatise, which allowed him to channel (poetically) his concerns about the king's potential to rule unethically and to express the lingering doubts the poet may have had about any human's capacity to rule divinely at that crucial moment in Spanish history. The sonnet form is, no doubt, at a disadvantage if the goal is to provide practical or "programmatic" advice, and yet it is certainly a moving, more immediate vehicle for expressing the anxieties and conflicts that accompany such advice. The expression of those anxieties, revealing themselves verse by verse, provides the "artistic intensity." One of Lope's contemporaries, commenting on the possibilities of the sonnet form, claims that "It serves whatever ends one may wish: praising or castigating, persuading or dissuading, counseling and arousing."<sup>20</sup> If the measure of a good sonnet were the ability to do any one of those tasks well, then how much better would Lope's sonnet be for having done almost all of them. This is, of course, not the only measure of a good sonnet, but it points to the effectiveness of "Alcides nuevo" in one respect: the way in which it encapsulates, in fourteen verses, a whole treatise's worth of praise, reproach, persuasion, dissuasion, counsel, and encouragement.

Recently critics have noted the fallacy of interpreting poetry as a window onto the soul of the poet—poetry being governed as it is by form, convention, and the weight of tradition rather than emotion.<sup>21</sup> And yet it is not enough simply to take into consideration the conventional language and poetic commonplaces at the poet's disposal; the comprehension of any text is driven by context. Understanding the local context in which this sonnet was written reveals the depth that even the workaday laudatory sonnet acquires on closer inspection, thereby demonstrating that poets are constantly reshaping conventional language with local meaning. This is not to say that the poetic conventions used by the poet



are less important than the historical moment in which he uses them. It does, however, suggest that we can better understand *how* the poet uses those conventions if we attempt to read the poem locally. This localization is by no means absolute, as the Shakespeare scholar Leah Marcus reminds us, it is "bound to be provisional in that it will inevitably be limited by the tools we are able to bring to it" (38). This is certainly the case with the sonnet in question, for while I have read "Alcides nuevo" in one local context (anti-Machiavellian political discourse, Philip III in the opening months of his reign), that does not preclude the possibility that the sonnet may take on different meaning in other local contexts. For example, the fact that Lope dedicates the book in which this sonnet is included to the city of Madrid might suggest another local context. How would this sonnet to Philip III be read by the inhabitants of Madrid?<sup>22</sup> The answer to this question would, of course, be an article in itself, but the question points to the fact that each new local reading, rather than exclude other possible readings, charges the poem with additional meaning.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The edition of the *Isidro* that I will cite throughout is the edition of Federico Sainz de Robles (*Obras escogidas* 2: 673-676) with its modernized orthography. I cite the sonnet as it appears in the facsimile of the *princeps* (Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1599), retaining the sixteenth-century orthography. Regarding the composition dates for the *Isidro*, see Rennert and Castro 132.

<sup>2</sup>This is, more or less, the traditional way in which Lope's works have been received in the last century of criticism: Lope is a "cantor del sistema en cientos de comedias y poemas, el cantor de la belicosidad de la España de los Austrias" (Rozas 527), "expresión de la unanimidad española" (Montesinos 294), "el más grande poeta de la conformidad" (Alonso, "Lope" 196).

<sup>3</sup>Capital starvation and overtaxation were two of the reasons for Spain's economic crisis in the 1590's, and both were the direct result of Philip II's imperialism. There was a third cause . . . a run of harvest failures . . . In the towns of Old Castile, all three problems . . . became acute from 1595 onward" (Parker 180); "Perhaps 600,000 died in Castile during the great plague of 1598-1599: almost 10 percent of the total population" (Parker 180). See also Elliot 285-300; Lynch 1-16.

<sup>4</sup>For example: in 1597 a canon of Jaén was recorded as saying "if we in Spain were governed by a republic as in Genoa or Venice, perhaps there would be no need for all of this" (qtd. In Kamen 309).

<sup>5</sup>I do not intend this essay as an in-depth survey of anti-Machiavellianism in Spain, though I will touch upon some of its characteristics as they occur in Pedro de Rivadeneira and as they relate to the poetry in question. For a more complete picture of Machiavellianism and the reactions it provoked in Spain, see Birely, esp. 111-35 on Rivadeneira; Bleznick, "Spanish Reaction"; Maravall, *Teoría* 227-72, 363-411; Maravall, "Maquiavelo"; Escalante; and Fernández-Santamaría.

<sup>6</sup>The edition I cite in this study (in *Obras escogidas*) was published in 1868 and was

modernized, at that time, to reflect the standard orthography of the nineteenth century. I have modified this edition further to reflect current Spanish orthography.

<sup>7</sup>Though Furió Ceriol was one of the first Spaniards to conceive of kingship as a science or craft, as did Machiavelli, he did maintain some fundamental differences with the Florentine. Furió Ceriol “innegablemente se oponía a la falta de rectitud moral que representaba Maquiavelo” (Bleznick, “conceptos” 33).

<sup>8</sup>I employ the term “ethicist” here as used by Fernández-Santamaría to distinguish between political realists (the *políticos* who followed Machiavellian practices) and those who opposed the “divorce of politics from religion,” to whom Fernández-Santamaría refers as the “ethicist school” in which Rivadeneira played a formative role (5-6).

<sup>9</sup>Rivadeneira sought to interpret secular events in terms of providential history, believing that God revealed himself to man through secular signs. For more background on this view of providence (a result of the Augustinian separation of *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena*), see Pocock 31-48. For a description of the epistemological traits that would allow for the interpretation of history in eschatological terms, see Foucault 17-45.

<sup>10</sup>Modern Jesuit editors have titled this letter “Ignoto viro principii” (“To an Unknown Man of the Prince”). I have maintained the orthography and punctuation of this edition, a transcription of the 1588 document.

<sup>11</sup>The full title of the poem is *Fiestas de Denia al rey católico Filipo III deste nombre* and it was originally addressed to “la excelente señora doña Catalina de Zúñiga, vireina (sic) de Nápoles” (465) on behalf of her son, the Marquis of Sarria (“por excusar al Márques, mi señor” [465]). The edition of *Fiestas de Denia* that I cite is to be found in *Colección escogida de obras no dramáticas* (465-74) and all subsequent parenthetical references are to canto and octave numbers.

<sup>12</sup>This episode is told in chapters 4, 5, and 7 of the *Primera crónica general*.

<sup>13</sup>On the Habsburgs appropriation of the figure of Hercules, see Ángulo Iñíguez 126-27.

<sup>14</sup>Augustine, in his preface to book 1 of *The City of God*, tells us that the “glorious city of God . . . as it still lives by faith in this fleeting course of time, and sojourns as a stranger in the midst of the ungodly, or as it shall dwell in the fixed stability of its eternal seat” is his theme, but that he “must also speak of the earthly city, which, though it be mistress of the nations, is itself ruled by its lust of rule” (129). On the difference between *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena*, see Pocock 31-48. Pocock tells us: “It was on their expertise in statecraft, in the *arcana imperii* or secrets of power, in judging the fluctuations of times and seasons, events, circumstances, and human wills, that outstandingly successful rulers, like Philip II of Spain—*El Prudente*—or Elizabeth I of England, based their claim to a mysterious and quasi-divine authority. The Sphere in which they operated was that of the inscrutable providence of God, and success in that sphere seemed providential” (28).

<sup>15</sup>On the convention of the “turn” in the Petrarchan sonnet, see Fussell 115-16.

<sup>16</sup>George Mariscal applies this theory to the Spanish *comedia* in general and, in particular, interprets the *Comedia de Bamba*: “The juxtaposition of a corrupt aristocracy and the ‘good peasant,’ that is, a peasant who embodies *lo godo* or ‘pure Spanishness,’ is less a consequence of the dramatist’s class allegiances than of the fact that in this play the discourse of class is effaced by those of blood and na-

tion" ("Symbolic" 155).

<sup>17</sup>With regard to political rhetoric, Rebecca Bushnell reminds us that "Any given text—poem, play, treatise, or tract—may be composed of different political languages and views, often quite contradictory" (xi). For a review of the way in which Spanish texts were formed by often contradictory discourses, see Mariscal, *Contradictory* 30, 31-98.

<sup>18</sup>The metaphor is, of course, from verses 25-26 of Jorge Manrique's coplas. Manrique develops the theme along class lines in this particular stanza, referring to "señoríos" as well as "ríos caudales," "medianos," and "chicos" (48; vv. 27-33). Manrique tells us that all of these rivers "allegados son iguales / los que viven por sus manos / e los ricos" (48; vv. 34-36).

<sup>19</sup>For the often confusing presence of religion and class as motivating factors in any Spanish text from the Golden Age, see the discussion in Mariscal, *Contradictory* 31-39.

<sup>20</sup>From Rengifo's *Arte poética española* (qtd. in Trueblood 88). For more on the function of the sonnet in Lope, see Trueblood 86-114 (esp. 86-91).

<sup>21</sup>For more on the mediation of emotion by convention and rhetoric in Golden Age poetry, see Smith 43-77; on this process in Lope, see Gaylord Randel; Novo.

<sup>22</sup>For more on Lope and his Madrileñan context at this time, see Wright's study of the *Isidro*

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