

Alban K. Forcione. *Majesty and Humanity: Kings and Their Doubles in the Political Drama of the Spanish Golden Age*.

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For some time now, scholars have been refocusing their attention on the social and political content of Spanish Golden Age literature, discovering there a degree of dynamism greater than that conceded in the wake of Maravall's emphasis on its programmatic nature. Prodigious, both in terms of its erudition and analytical depth, *Majesty and Humanity* brings our reflections on the political imagination of

the *antiguo régimen* to a new height. The representation of kingship in the *comedia*, the main focus of the work, is illuminated in all its literary and cultural density. Organized around Lope de Vega's *El villano en su rincón* and *El Rey Don Pedro o El Infanzón de Illescas*, the study situates these in relation to other contemporary dramatic, poetic, and novelistic treatments of rulership, thus complementing focused analysis with a broad vision of the larger literary corpus. Ample consideration is, in the process, lent to the nature and function of royal image-construction in the realms of political theory, theology, court ceremony, and palatine art (relevant illustrations are included). Within this composite cultural matrix, Lopean drama is viewed as foregrounding the tensions lying at the core of early modern absolutism: between the mythical and the human personas of the king, between courtly domestication and bucolic escape, between rational self-containment and unsubdued violence.

Interested, specifically, in how Lope's *comedias* aim a refractory lens at absolutist divinizations of rulership, the study leads into this question with an introductory chapter that includes readings of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and Cervantes's *Viaje del Parnaso* as epochal counter-myths. Contesting the epic and cosmic aggrandizement of kingship projected in much triumphal iconography, statuary, and ritual, these works, it is contended, point to the "phantasmagoric" (5) emptiness of the official royal image, as viewed from the perspective of a de-centered subjectivity. In a similar vein, it is argued, the dramatic works under examination are fundamentally concerned with the disrobing of majesty. Against the traditional stance that Lope's theater upholds a propagandistic agenda, Forcione opens a fascinating window on its role as a critical reflection on the unstable relationship between ruler and subject.

The next chapter, which focuses on *El villano en su rincón*, grapples with the play's emphasis on the humanity of the king. Appropriating the conventions of romance, argues Forcione, Lope inventively overcomes the "the radical dualism underlying the traditional conception of the monarch as a 'geminated' or 'two-bodied' figure, split irreconcilably between divine and human identities" (31–32). The royal protagonist's movement between courtly center and pastoral periphery is read as dramatizing a self-conscious process of royal refashioning. In direct contrast to the myth of the ubiquitous and all-powerful royal gaze propounded in regal pageantry, here the final reaffirmation of political legitimacy is founded on the realization of the king's fallibility. The reinsertion of the king at the center of power, in other words, symbolizes the organic incorporation of his mortal self, discovered at the margins of power, a conception that is, moreover, associated with doctrinal mirrors-of-princes. The philosophical-ethical context of Lope's emphasis on the king's humanity is, in turn, adumbrated from a sociological perspective: the peasant protagonist's refusal to be in the sovereign's presence and the consequent subversion of the social hierarchy that this denotes are provocatively tied to the emergence of an individual subjectivity resistant to the centralizing ambitions of the emergent modern state.

This line of thought is further developed in the following chapter, concentrating on the darker incarnations of resistance to the “civilizing process” as reflected in *El Rey Don Pedro en Madrid*. In opposition to facile readings of this play as reifying centralized power, it is held that the work signals an attraction to the violent irrationality associated with premodern forms of dominion. Arguing that Don Pedro seeks “fullness of being” (127) in the chaotic forces of feudal brutality, Forcione grounds the cultural genealogy of this subversion of statist order in the medieval tradition of the Spanish warrior king, as well as in the Gongoresque sublime. The aesthetics of violence and unbounded excess are also explored in contrast with the poetics of control displayed in equestrian portraits of early modern kings. Suggesting that Lope’s troubling anatomies of rulership anticipate the end of monarchical cult, Forcione concludes with a commentary on how this concern plays out further in Calderonian drama, in its splintering of the Christian political order.

The distinctiveness of this study, I would emphasize, lies in its relentless avoidance of simplification, in its utter command of Baroque multiperspectivism. While highlighting the incremental political skepticism of the *comedias* under consideration, never does it lose sight of their protean vitality. Much more than a whittling down of royal magnificence into its opposite, the doubling of majesty is shown to be a generative process that resists neat symmetry and interpretive closure. Exposed before us in infinite array are the workings of a cornucopian hermeneutic that restlessly weaves together death and life, political decline, and aesthetic transformation. Beautifully written and magisterial in its luxurious intertwining of literary, cultural, social, and political analysis, *Majesty and Humanity* is a must for all scholars of the Baroque.

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