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Fit To Be King?: Imprudence in Lope's *El duque de Viseo*

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ON AUGUST 27, 1484, JOÃO II OF PORTUGAL killed his cousin and brother-in-law Diogo, Duke of Viseu, with his own hand, stabbing him three times with a dagger. Just over a year earlier, on June 20, 1483, the Duke of Bragança was executed in a public square in Évora in accordance with the King's order, and his three brothers—the Marquis of Montemor, the Count of Faro, and the Chancellor of the Realm—were exiled into Castile. The charge against all of them was treason.

Circa 1609, Lope de Vega wrote *El duque de Viseo*, a play inspired by these events. *Viseo* is actually the first of three plays (written over a period of about seven years) dealing with the reign of João II. The other two plays, *El príncipe perfecto* parts I (1612–14, prob. 1614) and II (1612–18, prob. 1616), have been characterized by Melveena McKendrick as “the nearest Lope comes to writing a treatise on kingship” (55). Whereas the two parts of *El príncipe perfecto* function as a *speculum principis*, with João II presented as the model monarch, *El duque de Viseo* presents a negative depiction of the King. It is my contention that *El duque de Viseo* functions as the first part of a trilogy on kingship and that it should be read as a cautionary *anti-exemplum* highlighting the dangers of regal imprudence. With this new reading of *El duque de Viseo*, I contend that the issue of imprudence is central to understanding the play.

A brief summary of the historical events is in order. Unlike his father, Afonso V, who had enjoyed great popularity among the nobility of the Portuguese court, the newly crowned João was intensely disliked. This antipathy stemmed not only from the vastly different temperaments between father and son, but also from the antithetical approaches that each took to reigning. Whereas Afonso had been indulgent of the Portuguese nobility, his son sought to exert his authority over them. At the first *cortes* convened by João, the new king demanded complete subjugation of *all* subjects. The Bragança family in particular took offense. It considered itself superior to the other nobles of Portugal, more João's peers than his subjects. This attitude arose from the family's commonly shared blood line. The Braganças

and the King, as well as the Duke of Viseu, were all great-grandsons of João I Aviz, although the Bragança line was illegitimate. In addition, both the King and the Duke of Bragança were married to sisters of Viseu. In response to his displeasure at the new king's assertion of power, the Duke of Bragança began corresponding with Fernando and Isabel in Castile. This correspondence, which was taken to be treasonous, was a major factor leading to Bragança's execution. João most likely believed that Bragança's death would put an end to the treasonous rumblings around him. Instead, it fanned the flames of discontent. The plotting continued, and the eventual goal of the conspirators was to kill the King, to allow his only child (nine-year-old Afonso) to briefly succeed him, and ultimately to place the Duke of Viseu on the throne. Thanks to well-paid informants, João was fully aware of the plot. Unlike Bragança, Diogo was the King's first cousin and was second in line to the throne. As Mário Domingues notes, "o duque de Viseu era um parente da casa real, muito mais chegado do que o duque de Bragança, com todo o seu poder. Julgar um homem tão altamente colocado podia levantar obstáculos e criar situações de tal melindre, que resultariam talvez em proveito do acusado" (232). João, therefore, took matters into his own hands, trying, convicting, and executing Viseu himself.¹

In his dramatic rendering of these events, Lope follows tradition by linking the deaths of Viseu and Bragança. The first act of *El duque de Viseo* focuses on Bragança, who is referred to in the work by another title he held, the Duke of Guimarães (Guimarães in Portuguese);² by the end of Act II, the focus shifts to Viseu and his problematic relationship with Juan II. At first glance, Viseu and Juan seem to be drawn along the lines of the dichotomy of good vs. evil / protagonist vs. antagonist. The Duke and the King are antithetical not only in their characterizations but also in the other characters' reactions to them. The Duke of Viseu is valiant, magnanimous, noble, and beloved by the Portuguese people. In contrast, Juan II is cruel, jealous, unmerciful, unjust, insecure, and generally disliked. Notwithstanding these differences, a close reading of the text reveals that both men embody the same character flaw: they are both fundamentally imprudent. I shall return to this point below.

Another key element of the play is the question of treason. Whereas the chroniclers of the day (Rui de Pina in *Crónica de el-rey don João II* and Garcia de Resende in *Chronica dos Valerosos e Insignes Feytos del Rey Dom João II de Gloriosa Memória*) leave no doubt as to the guilt of both Bragança and Viseu, there is no treasonous plot in the play. Although the four Braganza brothers are disturbed by the despotic actions and treatment of their king, they are completely loyal to him:

GUIMARANS. Tú, y qualquiera noble igual,
al que es su Rey natural
debe este justo decoro.

Quede entre los cuatro aquí,
hermanos, determinado
que el Rey ha de ser amado
y servido. ¿Queda así?
TODOS. Sí. (43)³

This point is reiterated repeatedly. At no point in the play do they waiver in their loyalty to their king. Visco also openly expresses his loyalty to Juan: “Y suplico cuanto puedo, / . . . / que se trate bien del Rey, / que es nuestro dueño absoluto” (99–101). While they may disagree with his actions, they all fully accept Juan as their monarch.

In his depiction of an innocent Visco and Guimaráns, Lope is following popular history. As Francisco Ruiz Ramón has noted, “la poesía popular . . . desde el principio exaltó la inocencia de las víctimas” (23). This observation is borne out by the “Romance de la mujer del duque de Guymaraes de Portugal” in which Braganza’s widow berates the King for causing her husband’s death. The ballad begins as follows:

—Quéjome de vos, el rey, por haber crédito dado
del buen duque, mi marido, lo que le fue levantado.
Mandástemelo prender no siendo en nada culpado;
mal lo hicisteis, señor, mal fuisteis aconsejado,
que nunca os hizo aleve para ser tan maltratado,
antes vos sirvió, ¡mezquina!, poniendo por vos su estado;
siempre vino a vuestras cortes por cumplir vuestro mandado;
no lo hiciera, señor, si en algo os hubiera errado,
que gente y armas tenía para darse a buen recaudo,
mas vino como inocente que estaba de aquel pecado.
Vos, no mirando justicia, habéismelo degollado. (122)

Lope’s audience was highly likely to have been familiar with this *romance*.

In spite of Lope’s modification of the circumstances, the outcome in the play does not alter the historical reality: Guimaráns is still executed and Visco is murdered at the hands of the King himself. Lope is well known for his penchant for rewriting history in order to adhere to the poetic truth underlying each play rather than the historical truth (Ostlund 3). In general, seventeenth-century Spanish playwrights acceded to the Aristotelian notion that poetic truth was “a higher thing” (Butcher 35) than historical truth. Although João was remembered as “the perfect prince”—and in fact Lope later depicted him in that light as I will discuss below—this first portrayal of the Portuguese monarch is anything but perfect. One is led to question why the playwright altered history to the point that the King here is a villainous character, a “monstruo” in the words of Luis González del Valle (28). Also, why would he absolve Visco of any treasonous acts and yet still have him die at the hand of the King? These questions point to a

central issue of the play: Can an imprudent man be an effective king? Lope answers this question through an examination of the consequences of imprudence in both the King and the Duke. To illustrate this point, a more detailed look at the characterization of the two men is warranted.

In the early scenes of the play, the other characters comment repeatedly on the harshness or gruffness with which Juan treats everyone. To the Condestable's remark "¡Con qué aspereza!", his brother, the Duke of Guimaráns responds, "Pues, ¿a quién no trata así?" (37). In spite of his behavior, however, the brothers agree that "áspero o tierno, sea ley / en todo servir al Rey" (41) and, as noted above, the four sons of the Braganza family make a pact that "el Rey ha de ser amado / y servido" (43). It is clear, though, that their sense of loyalty is to the position, not to the man.

The Duke of Viseo, on the other hand, is widely admired and respected. Don Egas, in spite of his antipathy towards Viseo, describes him in the following terms:

mozo gallardo, cuerdo y generoso,
y lleno de excelencias y virtudes,
y, sobre todo, a quien el vulgo y plebe
idolatra y celebra . . .
.....
y le muestran en todas sus acciones
inmenso amor en obras y razones. (63)

Even the Queen, wife to Juan and sister to Viseo, expresses a stronger loyalty to her brother than to her husband: "Yo seré hermana fiel, / aunque me dio esposo Dios / tan severo y tan cruel" (139).

By the end of Act I, it is evident that the King is not in control of the court. Don Egas has been dishonored because Inés refuses to marry him after learning of his questionable lineage from the Condestable. Inés has been dishonored by having been slapped by the Duke of Guimaráns, who, as a result, has been sent to the tower, and his brothers have all been placed under house arrest. The King tries to artificially restore order through the realization of a marriage between Guimaráns and Inés, asserting that not only is it in the best interest of the individuals but also more importantly of the state. Generally speaking, marriage is the manifestation of order *por excelencia* in the *comedia*. However, both Inés and Guimaráns refuse to comply with the King's order. Juan II repeatedly invokes the principle of reason of state to justify his unjust actions (64), but this refusal implies that the King, in fact, does not know what is best for Portugal. Further, this episode raises the question, "If he does not command the respect of the nobility, how can he do so of the commoners?"

The differences between Viseo and Juan II are especially apparent in two juxtaposed scenes in Act III. The Duke has been exiled from the court

and is residing in a small village in his own lands. Viseo's presence has brought harmony to the *aldea*, and he is clearly beloved of the villagers. They invite him to participate in "el [juego] del rey" (155) and, not surprisingly, Viseo is named king and is honored with a crown made of laurel, flowers, and ribbon. He wholeheartedly enters into the game, at the same time acknowledging that it is only play. He names several of the villagers to "cabinet posts," and at the game's conclusion, he demonstrates his generosity by giving money to the other participants. The scene is one of harmony and peace, a utopia of sorts wherein rules an ideal "king"—Viseo. In contrast is the following scene in which Juan II names replacements for the titles previously held by the now exiled Braganza brothers, in what Stackhouse refers to as "an imaginary court to perpetuate the illusion of political continuity" (109). It is a vain attempt to repair the disorder caused by the King's ineffectual and flawed rule. The unhappiness and discord of the court are accentuated by the harmony previously observed in the *aldea* and become even more evident when a few scenes later the newly named replacements choose to decline the King's honor in respect for their exiled predecessors.

Ruiz Ramón has noted that Lope tended to depict monarchs as two major types. A majority correspond to the notion of a perfect prince: "son justos, buenos, protectores y honradores de sus vasallos, preocupados de la felicidad de sus súbditos, imagen de Dios en la tierra, llenos de piedad para con los inocentes, inmisericordes con los soberbios, autodominadores de sus pasiones, etc." (19). A lesser number of monarchs are in essence the antithesis of the first type; they abuse their power, and their actions often lead to the death of an innocent subject. João II as depicted in *El duque de Viseo* falls into this second category. As Ruiz Ramón notes, "el rey usa injustamente del poder, por miedo de perderlo" (23). In contrast, Lope's depiction of João in the two other plays dramatizing his reign follows the first model. These plays, *El príncipe perfecto* parts I and II, not only offer a vastly different image of the King but also have provided the epithet by which João is known in history: the perfect prince. According to Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, in these plays "Lope . . . se propuso presentar en Don Juan II el ideal . . . del príncipe prudente y justiciero" (157). Lope himself, in his dedication of Part II to don Alvaro Enríquez de Almanza, describes João II as "espejo verdaderamente de toda perfección" (117). Part I of *El príncipe perfecto* deals with João's succession to the throne and follows the historical record quite closely—with the exception that it omits the events depicted in *El duque de Viseo*. There is no mention whatsoever of either Viseo or the Braganza family. In Menéndez Pelayo's words, Lope only suppresses "los dos sangrientos episodios de Évora [the execution of Guimarães] y Setúbal [the slaying of Viseu], . . . que aquí deliberadamente omite para no afeiar con tales recuerdos la imagen del *Príncipe perfecto*, dechado y espejo de to-

das las virtudes monárquicas” (148). The fact that he wrote two plays which overlap chronologically but which differ so greatly one from another suggests that the historical context is not the focus, especially of *Viseo*, which focuses on the most negative moments of his reign.

While I agree with other critics of *El duque de Viseo* who note the political agenda it represents—McKendrick asserts that *Viseo* is a “statement of the dangers of absolutism” (127) while Kenneth Stackhouse sees the play as a “response to the demands of diplomacy” (103)—, as I have stated earlier, it is my contention that *El duque de Viseo* should be read as the first part of a trilogy on Juan II and that it is, in fact, part of the “treatise on kingship” McKendrick finds in parts one and two of *El príncipe perfecto*. It is not an anomaly in its negative depiction of the Portuguese monarch, but rather—in keeping with the tradition of the mirror of princes—reflects the consequences that can ensue when a king lacks a virtue essential for a successful reign: prudence. As Antonio Carreño-Rodríguez has noted, there was a proliferation of the genre of *speculum principis* in Spain following the death of Philip II in 1598 (218). Like many members of his audience, Lope came of age during the reign of “el rey prudente,” and prudence was a topic that would have had special resonance with them. Any reference to prudence would have caused Lope’s public to think of their former king and to compare him to his successor, Philip III, who was anything but prudent.

In the dictionary of the Real Academia Española published in 1737, “prudencia” is defined as “[u]na de las quatro virtudes cardenales que enseña al hombre a discernir y distinguir lo que es bueno ó malo, para seguirlo, ó huir de ello” (418). In *Tratado de la religion y virtvdas que deve tener el Principe Christiano, para gouernar y conseruar sus Estados* published in 1601, Pedro Ribadeneyra states that “the guide and mistress of all moral virtues of the Christian Prince ought to be prudence, which is that which rules and gives value and measure to all the others” (320). He goes on to make the following assertion, which is of particular relevance to this study: “It is certain that he who does not have prudence to rule himself will less have it to rule his household, his cities, provinces and realms” (321). Juan de Mariana dedicates an entire chapter to this virtue in his 1599 treatise *De Rege et Regis Institutione*, wherein he describes prudence as “a light to show the way into the future” (342). Both of these writers were contemporaries of Lope; indeed, Carreño-Rodríguez describes him as “admirador, lector y buen amigo de Juan de Mariana” (20). It is entirely plausible that he shared their concerns about the weaknesses in their monarch and that he wrote a work studying the negative results of the lack of this fundamental characteristic.

Imprudence can take many forms. In any of its possible manifestations, it is not a royal attribute. As McKendrick notes in her study of historical monarchs in Lope’s plays, prudence was one of the virtues expected of

princes during the seventeenth century in Spain (17). She further asserts that the King in this work neither exhibits nor acquires prudence or wisdom during the course of events in the play (130), noting that prudence is a quality of kingship “inscribed at the start as a condition of Juan II’s success and reinscribed at the last as a measure of his failure” (132); she does not elaborate further on the question of imprudence. Stackhouse describes *El duque de Visco* as a “dramatized accusation of imprudence directed against the king” (103) and briefly discusses Juan’s lack of prudence. Neither critic discusses this quality as it relates to Visco.

The play both opens and closes with a reference to prudence. In the first scene, Visco notes the need for “prudencia y cordura” in a king (36), while the final scene finds Don Leonardo reiterating this idea to the King:

Si como prudente y cuerdo
nos quieres oír, sabrás
que este traidor lisonjero [don Egas]
te ha puesto en tantas desdichas.

There are multiple textual references to the King’s need for prudence as well as examples of its absence. He unwisely allows his fears and insecurities to color his judgment. He imprudently believes the lies of his favorite, Don Egas, about the Braganza brothers without verifying his story elsewhere, in spite of the fact that “[p]ensar que estoy engañado / en lo que éstos han tratado, / me mueve el pecho a clemencia” (92). Egas lies to the King for purely selfish motives:

Con la lengua me ofendió;
con la lengua he de matalle,
porque puedan castigalle
las armas con que me hirió.
En él, con sus tres hermanos,
una venganza he de hacer,
que pudiera ejemplo ser
a los pasados tiranos. (56)

In the words of Concha Alborg Day, “. . . el monarca . . . cae víctima de la conspiración de Egas, en quien confía y cree” (747). In his treatise on kings, Mariana asserts that “the Prince . . . should not rely on himself . . . Rather he should in his duties ask the counsel of prudent men” (343). Don Egas, the antithesis of the type of adviser of which Mariana speaks, is anything but prudent. Criticism of an overly trusting monarch and imprudent advisers is a frequent theme in Lope’s plays written during the reigns of Felipe III and Felipe IV. In Jonathan Thacker’s words, “The *privado* is both cause and effect of bad kingship” (165). In McKendrick’s view, “Lope’s purpose [in this work] is clearly to reveal the danger . . . of favouritism” (38). Don

Egas capitalizes on Juan's insecurity on his newly inherited throne in his ploy for revenge, and the King readily believes that the nobility of Portugal is planning his overthrow in favor of his cousin:

Estos cuatro hermanos son
cuatro fuertes en mi tierra,
que para tiempo de guerra
han de ser la defensión
de este Duque de Viseo,
que aspira al reino sin falta,
porque de empresa tan alta
bastantes indicios veo. (93)

In the play, there is no conspiracy against the King, and the deaths of Guimaráns and Viseo are the direct result of Egas's plot and Juan's imprudent trust of his adviser.

Juan's desire to try to force a marriage between Inés and Guimaráns is another example of his imprudence. Given the ahistorical nature of this episode—the *romance* referred to above is evidence of the popular awareness of the Duke's married status, and the multiple children mentioned therein (“una hija que tengo” and “tres hijos que tenía”) evidence of its longevity, its inclusion is of dramatic and thematic relevance. McKendrick describes this intent as “an act of mean-spirited vengeance masquerading first as duty, then crassly as courtly compulsion, which mocks both grievance and justice with a punishment more painful to the victim of the crime than the blow that dishonoured her” (139). Juan asserts that the wedding must take place because Elvira, Viseo's beloved, so wishes, when in reality it is his own imprudent attempt to exert his power over the Braganza family.

Perhaps one of the great ironies of the play is that although Viseo advises his cousin to use prudence—“Cuando el Rey es prudente, no se informa / de alguno que transforma las verdades / en otras calidades diferentes” (134)—he himself is guilty of imprudence. Lope utilizes the common early modern *topos* of *ser/parecer* in this work to illustrate this point. Although, as Ruiz Ramón has noted, the dramatic Viseo may be completely innocent of aspiring to his cousin's throne, he *appears* to be guilty: “son sus mismas acciones y palabras inocentes quienes testifican contra él: unas palabras de amor, un juego de aldea, una figura de astrología . . . En suma, casi nada” (25). Since they all function to highlight the Duke's imprudence, these dramatic elements are anything but “casi nada.” Although each one in and of itself could be explained away, taken together they serve to condemn the Duke. The King learns of each one, and each acts as a mark against Viseo. His declarations of love to Elvira, the game in the village, and the astrological drawing all reflect conscious choices made by Viseo, and each serves to illustrate his lack of prudence. I will discuss each in turn. Taken

together, they suggest that the Duke was every bit as imprudent as the King and that Visco would have had a problematic reign had he actually ever become king.

Visco's most obvious lack of prudence is in regard to Elvira, a fictional character created by Lope in order to highlight the imprudence of both the King and Visco. Alborg Day minimizes the Duke's lack of prudence: "[e]l duque . . . sí que comete algunas imprudencias, como el visitar a Elvira de noche . . . , pero no merece, en absoluto, la muerte" (747). Luis González del Valle is more critical of Visco's behaviour with regard to Elvira: "En su amor por Elvira él pierde todo sentido de moderación" (35). When it comes to Elvira, Visco is led by his heart and not by his head. He returns time and again to the court to see her, thus defying the King's order of "[destierro] de la corte" (94) and thereby facilitating his capture and death. The final visit is made against the advice of both his sister, the queen (159–60), and his vassal, Brito (142–44). On the most basic level, these nightly visits are physically dangerous but the final one is even more so; Visco completely disregards his own safety in wanting to cross waters during a violent storm. His decision to confront nature, a force he cannot control, is anything but prudent. Another imprudent element of his relationship with Elvira is that, in keeping with the tradition of courtly love, he declares his devotion to her in hyperbolic terms. At one point Visco expresses his gratitude for her willingness to intervene on the Duke of Guiramán's behalf by declaring "El cielo, / de un Rey os haga mujer" (86). The relevance of this lies in the fact that until the dramatic King produces offspring, Visco is his heir (186).⁴ Thus Juan, who overhears this statement, interprets it as evidence that his cousin wants his throne. Finally, the Duke consciously keeps his nightly visits to Elvira, as well as his new residence in "la primera aldea / de mi tierra" (108), a secret from the King: "secreto pienso vivir" (126). The existence of these secrets suggests he may have even more to hide, such as a secret wish for the throne. And although Visco is aware of his cousin's fears, he does nothing to allay them other than assuring Juan of his undying loyalty.

As previously noted in the discussion of the game in the village, the villagers choose Visco as king. It is important to note that Visco's coronation and successful "reign" is witnessed by Don Carlos, who has come from the court with a letter from the Queen. After being crowned with a garland of flowers, Visco playfully responds "Ya soy Rey." Brito's less playful retort "Y era razón" elicits the Duke's unequivocal admonition: "Ni aun de burla habléis así" (158). It is not clear, however, whether anyone overhears this interchange. When shortly thereafter Don Carlos makes his presence known to Visco, there is no question that he has witnessed at least part of the game. However, neither of them makes any comment on it nor the "crown" the Duke still wears. Given the proximity of the village to the court, the King's suspicions, and the likelihood that Juan could easily

get reports on Viseo's activities there, the truly prudent thing would have been to never allow himself to be crowned, even if only in play. At the very least, he should have removed the crown while speaking with Don Carlos and reaffirmed his loyalty to the King, particularly since he knows that Don Carlos will immediately return to the court where Juan is sure to ask of his cousin's activities. Indeed, the King wastes no time in asking him, "¿Qué hace el Duque?" (167). Whereas the villagers and Viseo—as well as Don Carlos—never mistake the game for anything but play, the King does. When he hears Don Carlos's innocent narration of Viseo's life away from the court, Juan interprets his participation in the game as a reflection of his cousin's desire for his throne rather than the simple amusement it is: "¡Por qué de varios modos, / caminos y discursos me da el cielo / aviso del intento de este mozo!" (167). Viseo's "success" reinforces the image of his popularity among the Portuguese people and suggests in the mind of the King the possibility of their support of the young Duke in any future attempt to usurp his cousin's throne. Stackhouse points to this scene as "[t]he epitome of [Juan's] folly" (109) but, erroneously to my mind, does not assign any degree of blame to Viseo here.

The most significant example of Viseo's lack of prudence results from his decision to have his astrology written. While there is nothing in the chronicles to suggest a particular interest in astrology on the historical Viseo's part, it is certainly possible—even probable—that he would have entertained the same level of interest as was commonly held by his contemporaries. Astrology was enormously popular during Lope's day. As Charles Ganelin has noted, "Astrology and other divinatory arts were practiced on all levels of daily life in seventeenth-century Spain" (215). The comet of 1603 (just 6 years before the probable composition of this play) would have certainly sparked a great deal of interest in the stars. Thus, the reference to astrology was sure to excite the interest of the public. More importantly, it is directly tied to the issue of Viseo's death in the work.

The Duke requests his own astrology be written by a student who has studied astrology in the University. The request prompts the following query: "¿Queréis interrogación / o nacimiento?" (147). Herein we find reference to two types of judiciary astrology—"[t]he art of predicting the future from the configuration of the stars at birth" (De Armas 132 n.16)—studied and practiced during the Middle Ages, both of which had been prohibited by the Inquisition by Lope's day in *la regla novena* of the *Index et catalogus* of 1583.

Tambien se prohiben todos los libros, tractados y escritos, en la parte que tratan y dan reglas y hazen arte o ciencia para conocer por las estrellas y sus aspectos . . . lo por venir que esta en la libertad del hombre o los casos fortuytos que han de acontecer, . . . que son las partes de la judicaria que llaman de nascimientos, interrogaciones y elecciones. (Qtd. in Hurtado Torres 19)

In J. Vernet's words, *nacimiento* refers to that area of judiciary astrology dealing with "investigación del futuro del individuo, que se basa en el horóscopo levantado a partir de la hora, minuto y segundo . . . del nacimiento del consultante." *Interrogación*, in turn, "consistía en interrogar a las estrellas sobre hechos concretos que podían acontecer a las personas" (qtd. in Pardo Tomás 156). As Antonio Hurtado Torres has demonstrated, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Spain there was "una doble astrología. Una supersticiosa, perseguida, y otra «lícita»" (30). In all of the documents he examines, including Papal bulls and Inquisitional records, "interrogaciones" are categorized among the prohibited uses of astrology.

Viseo's response to the question "¿Queréis interrogación / o nacimiento?"—"Hazme, amigo, una figura / de mis desdicha o ventura" (148)—indicates that he wants to know his future. In other words, he asks for an "interrogación." Brito, in the dual role of *gracioso / conciencia del amo* is unequivocal in his reaction. He accuses the student of practicing a false science and Viseo of being a fool for giving it credence: "Por más cuerdo te tenía" (149). However, the Duke allows himself to be led by his curiosity.

While it could be argued that Viseo is innocently dabbling in an innocuous diversion, events from Lope's life suggest otherwise. A Papal bull of 1586 stated:

[C]ontra los que echan juyzios, natiuidades de los hombres, en los quales se atreuen a afirmar, que ha de suceder alguna cosa de los que son sucessos por venir contingentes, y casos fortuytos, o acciones que dependen de la voluntad del hombre, contra estos hombres . . . hagan Inquisition, y procedan, y los castiguen seueramente con las cenas Canonicas. . . . Y sin esto por la misma autoridad estatuyamos, y mandamos que contra los que a sabiendas leen, o retienen . . . tales cosas, por el semejante los mismos Inquisidores libre, é lícitamente procedan, y puedan proceder, apremiar y castigar con deuidas penas, sin que estoruen constituciones, y ordenaciones Apostolicas . . . (qtd. in Hurtado Torres 21)

The bull itself mandated that it be posted at the entrances of parochial churches and published annually "en lengua vulgar" (22–23). Lope's brother-in-law, Luis Rosicler, was brought before the Inquisition as a direct result of this bull. Although the charges against him were ultimately dropped, his practice of writing astrological figures is well documented, and Lope himself referred to him as "Luis de Rosicler, famoso astrólogo" (Caro Baroja 218–22). Julio Caro Baroja suggests the possibility that Lope's own position as "familiar del Santo Oficio" might have been a factor in his brother-in-law's acquittal (220). This first-hand experience with the consequences of dabbling in judiciary astrology makes this element of the play all the more compelling.

A desire to know the future can be seen as a man's attempt to usurp a power not corresponding to him. Mariana notes that "prudence is the power of the mind that looks ahead into every aspect, remembering the past, appraising the present, divining the future, surmising secrets from what is manifested" (342). However, the need is to divine the future based on the circumstances of the present, not the alignment of the heavens. One need only look at *La vida es sueño* to see what comes of a king's imprudent confidence in reading someone's future based on the alignment of the stars at his/her birth.

Due to carelessness on Viseo's part, his astrological drawing—which, of course, indicates that he will soon rule Portugal—falls into the King's hands. And for Juan, it is the final proof that his cousin seeks his throne. It is the one piece of "evidence" that cannot be overlooked or explained in Juan's eyes, and it is ultimately the catalyst of Viseo's death. Viseo does not read the horoscope on stage, but it is clear from his reaction upon learning that he has inadvertently given it to Elvira—"¡Que la figura le di!" (186)—that he is fully aware of its content. He is also aware of the fact that the King ordered Elvira to give the paper to him. The fact that Viseo held on to this astrological drawing is significant. It can easily be interpreted to reflect a secret hope that the horoscope come true. If he were truly loyal to the King, the prudent action would have been to immediately destroy the drawing rather than keep it on him "con otros papeles" (185).

All three of these manifestations of Viseo's imprudence—his relationship with Elvira, the game with the villagers, and the astrological drawing—occur in Act III, *after* Juan has clearly expressed to his cousin his suspicions regarding his desire for the Portuguese throne:

Advierte
que te he mandado llamar,
cuñado, para que temples
los deseos y esperanzas,
si de mi cetro la tienes. (135)

Immediately following this warning, Juan shows the Duke of Guimarán's corpse to Viseo in a scene that plainly establishes the need for Viseo to act prudently. It should be noted, however, that this necessity was established as early as the first scene of Act II, when Viseo noted something troubling about the King's treatment of him: "ha días . . . / que con mal gusto me mira" (82). Later in the same act, after telling Viseo of his plans to exile Guimarán's brothers, the King tells Viseo:

Pues no te asombres
de que también te aleje de mis ojos,
porque estás en la lista de sus nombres.
Y pues me das, cuñado, más enojos
que todos juntos, vete luego al punto. (106)

During the young Duke's final appearance before the King, his servant, Brito, advises him, "Ten prudencia" (194), but it is too late. His lack of prudence has brought him to his death, in spite of his innocence of the charges against him.

Visco's death is prefigured twice in the text. This first occurs when he continues to visit Elvira in spite of the inherent dangers. There are two possible routes, one by land and the other by water. Although he asserts that crossing by land is the more dangerous option, his decision to cross stormy waters in order to be with his beloved brings to mind the story of Leander, who died in a stormy sea while swimming to be with Hero. Just as Leander had done in the myth, Visco makes regular nightly crossings. The early successful crossings serve to heighten the suspense. Although he does not drown, his last crossing literally brings Visco to his death.

The second foreshadowing occurs when Visco hears a voice of warning in the night:

Del buen Duque de Visco,
 mancebo fuerte y gallardo,
 tiene mil quejas el Rey,
 con ser su primo y cuñado.
 Guárdate, Duque inocente;
 guárdate, Abel desdichado;
 que malas informaciones
 ensangrientan nobles manos. (180)

The reference to "Abel desdichado" is a clear biblical reference to the first victim of fratricide and prefigures Visco's death at the hand of his brother-in-law. Immediately following this voice is the apparition of the dead Guimaráns, who echoes but also clarifies the warning: "Guárdate del Rey" (181). Although Visco's reply reiterates his innocence—"¿Por qué he de guardarme, estando / inocente como estoy?"—he chooses not to heed the admonition. His reaction to the apparition is to reaffirm his innocence, thus putting in doubt the need to "guardarse." Receiving such warnings would suggest he was in God's favor, but not heeding them is yet another indication of his lack of prudence. McKendrick notes: "Dramatic tension and tragic inevitability demand that the warning be heard but not heeded; it is a promise of disaster rather than a guard against it" (141). I, however, see it as another example of Visco's imprudence, especially since it is the second warning he has chosen to disregard.

Multiple critics point out the tragic nature of *El duque de Visco*. Alborg Day contends that the work's "resultados son tan innecesariamente trágicos" (753). McKendrick, in turn, describes it as "the tragedy of a man fit to be a king and of a king fit only to be a man" (125). Thacker argues that "Visco might be considered the tragic hero although his role is a support-

ing one” (154). If this play is indeed a tragedy and Viseo is the hero, then it stands to reason that he must possess a tragic flaw that leads him to his death, a point not discussed by these earlier critics. As I have clearly demonstrated, in this work that flaw is imprudence. By changing the historical reality and making the Duke innocent of treason, Lope makes clear that the central issue is not Viseo’s innocence or guilt. He has not aspired to his cousin’s throne and for that reason does not deserve death. Throughout the final act of the play, Viseo has acted imprudently, and poetic justice—defined as “moral reward and punishment as a result of proper and improper choices, prudent and imprudent decisions” (Ganelin 216)—demands that his imprudence be punished.

Juan’s imprudence does not require the same punishment. While McKendrick asserts that Juan never learned either prudence or wisdom (132), I would argue that the final scene of the play suggests otherwise. As Juan de Mariana asserts, “from [experience] especially comes prudence” (343). The actions of the play—including the deaths of Guimarans and Viseo—provide Juan with that life experience. As Thacker notes, Juan “ends the play a wiser king, as his half-admissions and restitutory funeral provisions indicate” (170). Further, the death of Don Egas, who has contributed to the King’s lack of prudence, frees the King from his imprudence, allowing him to become the “perfect prince” he was remembered to be.

El duque de Viseo, then, is a study on the dangers of imprudence. Rebecca Bushnell has noted that “tragedy is performed to transform those who experience it” (2), that “our expectation [is] that knowledge might emerge out of the chaos of human suffering” (1). The lesson that Lope teaches in this drama is that any man, if he is to be truly fit to be king, must embody the virtue of prudence.⁵

Notas

- 1 The two known chroniclers of João’s reign were Rui de Pina, *Crónica de el-rey don João II*, and Garcia de Resende, *Chronica dos Valerosos e Insignes Feytos del Rey Dom João II de Gloriosa Memória* (the latter is considered by many to be a plagiarism of the first). Both had first-hand knowledge of João’s court. Resende rose from the ranks of page to become the king’s private secretary, while Pina was present at Bragança’s execution. In his study of the plays about João’s reign, Kenneth Stackhouse discusses Viseo in comparison to Resende’s work. Elaine Sanceau’s work, *The Perfect Prince* (1959), is the only English-language biography readily available. There has been a recent surge in Portuguese-language studies of his reign, including those by Alfredo Pinheiro Marques (1997), Mário Domingues (2005), and Luis Adão da Fonseca (2007). In addition, a 1689 Latin work by Manuel Telles da Silva, Marquês de Alegrete, has been translated and edited by Miguel Pinto de Meneses (1998).
- 2 I have chosen to refer to the historical figures by their Portuguese names and the dramatic characters by the Spanish versions used by Lope. One possible explanation of Lope’s choice of the alternative title for the Duke of Bragança is its use in a fifteenth-century ballad dealing with his death, “Romance de la mujer del duque de Guymaraes de Portugal” (Díaz Roig 122).

- 3 All quotes from the play are taken from the edition by Ruiz Ramón. Parenthetical references refer to page numbers.
- 4 Given that João's son and legal heir, Afonso, would become the first husband of the oldest daughter of Fernando and Isabel, Lope was certainly aware of his existence. In fact, their marriage is referred to in Part I of *El príncipe perfecto*, and the newlyweds appear as characters in Part II. His omission is clearly a reflection of dramatic poetics.
- 5 A preliminary version of this study entitled "Antithesis and Parallelism: The Characterization of the Duke of Visco and João II of Portugal in Lope's *El duque de Visco*" was presented at "A Spanish Odyssey: One Thousand Years of Iberian Literature and Culture" in Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 17, 2000.

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