

Unlucky, Unwise, or Just Unworthy? The Monarch in Mira de Amescua's

*Las desgracias del rey don Alfonso el Casto*

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The debate continues over whether or not the *comedia* served as imperial literature, and this is perhaps particularly true of historical plays. There are, of course, many incidents in the long and glorious history of Spain, from the resolve of the residents of Numancia to the creation of a vast, global empire, that not only naturally lend themselves to dramatization but cast the Spanish imperial project in a positive light. At the same time, it is impossible to overlook the fact that so many of the most iconic historical plays appear to present the pertinent facts from points of view that range from ironic to subversive. Rather than take another look at such plays as Guillén de Castro's *Las mocedades del Cid* and Lope's *Fuenteovejuna*, this paper focuses on a more run-of-the-mill play by Mira de Amescua, *Las desgracias del rey Alfonso el Casto*. One of Spain's longest reigning monarchs, Alfonso II of León amassed a rather impressive list of accomplishments: he defeated the Moors at Lisbon; he oversaw the political reorganization of Galicia, León, and Castilla; he established Oviedo as the capital of Asturias; and, at least according to tradition, he discovered the tomb of Santiago de Compostela. Virtually none of this information appears in Mira's play, which focuses upon his exile after his first ill-fated reign as king, his dubious ability to discern and impose justice, his inability to control his own subjects at court, and, of course, his suspect lack of a marriage and children. Such a puzzling depiction of what could have been a model of medieval fortitude in the early centuries of the Reconquest not only seems to undercut the notion that this *comedia* in particular, and all *comedias* in general, serve to rally the public around the empire and its monarch, it appears to cast the king, and the monarchy, in the worst light possible, and this paper will explore the possible dramatic, political, and philosophical reasons for this viewpoint.