

# Undermining Exoticism: The Memory of al-Andalus and Fluid Identities in Lope de Vega's *Comedias Fronterizas*

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Early modern Spanish literature set before the fall of Granada (1492) that features characters from medieval al-Andalus has thus far been considered to be either idealized and thus 'maurophile' or exoticist and thus 'maurophobe'. This article instead proposes a reconsideration of the true extent of 'exoticism' in early modern medievalist literature by offering a new reading of three of Lope de Vega's *comedias* that feature Andalusí characters. *El cordobés valeroso*, *Pedro Carbonero* (1603), *El bastardo Mudarra* (1612) and *El remedio en la desdicha* (1620) all depict religio-cultural identity as contingent and move beyond aristocratic maurophilia in portraying broad panoramas of Andalusí society. These history plays subvert extant politicized readings of early modern literature featuring Muslim characters, in their ambivalence and scepticism towards the capacity of religio-cultural identity to define self and other, precisely because of the reality of Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages.

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Lope de Vega's (1562–1635) renowned and prolific output includes over five hundred plays or *comedias*. Those that feature Muslims from medieval al-Andalus, though numerous, have been relatively neglected in scholarship versus the rest of the playwright's oeuvre. Lope was not alone in depicting the lives of medieval Muslim Andalusis: early modern Spanish poetry, novels and theatre had frequent recourse to Iberia's medieval and multicultural past as subject matter, from the anonymous novella *Historia del Abencerraje y la hermosa Jarifa* (1565) to the *romancero morisco nuevo* pioneered by Lope himself amongst others.

Scholarship continues to debate the way in which medieval Muslims are portrayed in early modern literature. On the one hand, some consider these texts *en masse* to be 'maurophile', offering a peaceful rewriting of history after the

prohibition of the practice of Islam in Spain from 1500 and, later, the expulsion of the *moriscos* — descendants of Muslim Andalusis converted to Christianity — in 1609. Maurophilia connotes both the aesthetic appropriation of Moorish material culture in the early modern period as well as the concomitant literary genre that positively portrays Muslims, privileging ‘aristocratic cultural compatibility over the suspicion of religious difference’.<sup>1</sup>

Barbara Fuchs locates maurophilia in the sixteenth-century Counter-Reformation context where there arose a tension between acknowledging Andalusí culture as part of national history and constructing a homogeneous, Catholic image for the nation.<sup>2</sup> For Luce López-Baralt maurophile literature was potentially political, ‘a phenomenon of artistic and human double-talk on an immense scale’ given it revindicated Spain’s Islamic past during a time of increased hostility towards *moriscos*.<sup>3</sup> Others such as Christina Lee reject the categorization and suggest that the same literature portrays Muslims as ‘depraved, unscrupulous, and fundamentally unredeemable’ because early modern texts ‘always underline the cultural difference of the Moor’.<sup>4</sup> Israel Burshatin suggests that the ‘benign maurophilia’ claimed for the genre is a pernicious form of Orientalism, marked by ‘superficially flattering depictions’ of Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

This article uses Lope’s historical *comedias* to demonstrate the limited utility of both approaches to medievalist early modern literature. Firstly, the literature usually described as either maurophile or maurophobe is not thoroughly intersectional: both are largely used to connote literature that depicts aristocratic Andalusis and not literary depictions of broader societal panoramas of medieval Iberia, which are in fact offered up by *comedias*. Secondly, both only operate effectively in one context: that of early modern Counter-Reformation Spain. As critical lenses, they decode medievalist texts solely using their compositional context, rather than considering them diachronically with medieval Iberia in mind. Alongside maurophilia and maurophobia, Orientalism is a similarly unhelpful way in which to conceptualize Lope’s portrayal of Muslim Andalusis. Edward Said’s canonical work overlooks the Iberian Peninsula and has a ‘monolithic and monologic’ view of the Middle Ages:<sup>6</sup> its application to Spain presupposes a perception of Muslims as exotic, overlooking their presence as citizens on the Iberian Peninsula for hundreds of years.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Fuchs, *Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Luce López-Baralt, *Islam in Spanish Literature*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (Leiden: Brill, 1992), p. 250.

<sup>4</sup> Christina Lee, *The Anxiety of Sameness in Early Modern Spain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 184; p. 187.

<sup>5</sup> Israel Burshatin, ‘Playing the Moor: Parody and Performance in Lope de Vega’s *El primer Fajardo*’, *PMLA*, 107 (1992), 566–81 (p. 566).

<sup>6</sup> Sharon Kinoshita, ‘Deprovincializing the Middle Ages’, in *The Worlding Project: Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalization*, ed. by Rob Wilson and Christopher Leigh Connery (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2007), p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> See Julian Weiss, ‘El postcolonialismo medieval: líneas y pautas en la investigación de un problema

This article instead proposes to reconsider the true extent of ‘exoticism’ in early modern medievalist literature by offering a new reading of three of Lope’s *comedias* featuring Andalus. *El cordobés valeroso*, *Pedro Carbonero* (1603) (CV), *El bastardo Mudarra* (1612) (BM) and *El remedio en la desdicha* (1620) (RD) all depict religio-cultural identity as contingent and move beyond aristocratic maurophilia in portraying broad panoramas of Andalusi society. Though officialized discourse such as legislature imposed hard borders between faith groups, the *comedias* in question depict something that can be deemed closer to real world experience and perception of the Iberian Middle Ages, where official policy did not always dictate social relations. Their intercultural frontier setting means that they respond ambivalently not just to Muslim Andalusi identity, but to religio-cultural identity as a marker of difference, undermining exoticism in the process. Precedent for a fluidity of religio-cultural identity in the medieval period is found in literature depicting Andalusi-Castilian interaction, notably the epic, in which Andalusis are constituent members of collective, fluid power structures.<sup>8</sup>

The inadequacy of extant theoretical frameworks thus results from a failure to take into account the multiple temporal contexts at work in these plays, namely the medieval and early modern periods. Instead we ought to read Lope’s medievalist *comedias* in light of what Florencia Calvo calls ‘pluritemporalidad’: when texts engage with the past and thus create multiple layers of meaning.<sup>9</sup> The *comedias* invoke medieval relationships between Christian-Castilians and Muslim-Andalusis, which were predicated upon both peaceful coexistence and conflict as well as cross-cultural military and interpersonal alliances.<sup>10</sup> In addition to reconsidering the *pluritemporalidad* of these *comedias*, I build

histórico’, in *Literatura Medieval y Renacentista en España: Líneas y Pautas*, ed. by Natalia Fernández Rodríguez and María Fernández Ferreiro (Salamanca: SEMYR, 2012), pp. 177–200. Weiss outlines the deficiencies of Orientalism for Iberia and notes how Said later published essays on al-Andalus to fill this blatant lacuna in his work yet fell into the trap of ascribing to it an idealized model of coexistence.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the *Poema de mio Cid* (c. 1207) and *Siete infantes de Lara* legend (1274).

<sup>9</sup> Florencia Calvo, ‘Diálogos con el teatro clásico español. Texto, escena y teoría’, in *III Congreso Internacional de Literatura y Cultura Españolas Contemporáneas* (La Plata: Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2014), p. 2. ‘Pluritemporality’. All subsequent translations are my own.

<sup>10</sup> While the coexistence of Christianity, Islam and Judaism in medieval Iberia is often referred to as ‘convivencia’, the term idealizes and generalizes religious tolerance over a long period. See Maya Soifer, ‘Beyond Convivencia: Critical Reflections on the Historiography of Interfaith Relations in Christian Spain’, *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 1 (2009), 19–35. Soifer departs from the dichotomy of ‘tolerance’ and ‘persecution’ and reassesses the complexity of religio-cultural interaction throughout the Iberian Middle Ages. See also David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Nirenberg demonstrates how violence and exclusion do not preclude peaceful coexistence. Cross-cultural alliances were moreover common in the Iberian Middle Ages, the most famous example being the real — and later legendary — Cid, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, a mercenary soldier who fought for both Christian and Andalusi kings. See Joseph O’Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 205. Finally, medieval legislature was often contradictory and ambiguous in its attempt to delineate borders between groups; for example, Alfonso X’s *Siete Partidas* focuses on Christian conversion to Islam rather than the restrictions relevant to Muslims living in Castile. See Peter Linehan, *Spain 1157–1300: A Partible Inheritance* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), p. 95.

upon Carrasco Urgoiti's call for the recategorization of these plays which to a seventeenth-century audience were known as *comedias de moros*, though this genre presupposes conflict with Christians.<sup>11</sup> Carrasco proposes an additional genre, the *comedia morisca*, which idealizes the 'noble Moor'.<sup>12</sup> Yet the anachronistic imposition of either *comedia de moros* or *morisca* still constitutes a polarized and unnecessarily conclusive judgment on the portrayal of Muslim characters and their interaction with Christians. Instead it is more helpful to consider any and all of Lope's *comedias* that depict medieval Andalus interacting with Castilians as *comedias fronterizas*: a new taxonomy I propose, predicated upon intercultural interaction, border-crossing and exchange that spans the entirety of the Middle Ages. *Comedias fronterizas* take the frontier location as an intercultural space of exchange and interaction, in which people construct identity in interaction with other cultural groups.<sup>13</sup>

It is under this umbrella term that I consider *CV*, *BM* and *RD*. *CV* tells of Pedro Carbonero, a *fronterizo* soldier who earns his living crossing the border to Granada capturing Muslims and freeing imprisoned Christians aided by his multiple alliances with a variety of Granadan Muslims from the lower classes to nobles. *BM* takes its plot from the medieval epic legend *Los siete infantes de Lara*. It tells of the death of seven noble Castilians in battle with an Andalusí army in the late tenth century, orchestrated by their uncle Ruy Velázquez who is in alliance with the Muslim ruler Almanzor, and it is ultimately avenged by their half-Andalusí half-brother Mudarra. Finally, *RD*, like *CV*, is set in fifteenth-century Granada and is partially based on the novella *Historia del Abencerraje*. The Abencerrajes were a noble Granadan family who were executed by the king following a treacherous and deceptive plot by competing nobles. The surviving Abencerraje, Abindarráez, courts Jarifa in the play, and a parallel plot depicts another Christian *fronterizo* Rodrigo Narváez who pursues an obstructed relationship with Alara, a Muslim woman.

All three depict religio-cultural identity as contingent and evolving, and thus overturn the polarized notions of maurophilia and maurophobia or anachronistic Orientalism. Religio-cultural identity is adaptable and adoptable at the level of costume, appearance and language. This also extends to linguistic identity markers, as characters variously characterize themselves and others as *cristiano*, *moro* or the more culturally-ambiguous *andaluz*. Secondly, they depict unwavering Christian-Muslim alliances or relationships, the development of which serves to undermine the mutual perception of difference predicated upon religio-cultural identity. In the three plays religio-cultural identity functions at the surface level of costume and language, both of which can be adopted and performed by anyone. This has been gestured to in scholarship but

<sup>11</sup> María Carrasco Urgoiti, 'La frontera en la comedia de Lope de Vega', in *Actas del Congreso la Frontera Oriental Nazarí como Sujeto Histórico (S. XIII-XVI)*, ed. by Pedro Segura Artero (Almería: Instituto de Estudios Almerienses, 1997), pp. 489–99 (p. 489).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492.

<sup>13</sup> See Antony Pym, *Negotiating the Frontier: Translators and Intercultures in Hispanic History* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2000), pp. 4–5.

not elaborated: José Montesinos finds in *CV* ‘la asimilación de lo musulmán a lo español, la inclusión de lo exótico en el mundo normal de la comedia’.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Case notes that in *RD* ‘there is a balance between Christian and Moor not equalled elsewhere in Lope’s dramas’.<sup>15</sup> I reframe Case’s idea of ‘balance’ as the questioning and undermining of the solidity of religio-cultural identity as an essential determiner of difference, building upon Jonathan Thacker’s idea that *comedias* ‘[unveil] a knowledge of the importance of role-play to society; society’s artificial, constructed nature’.<sup>16</sup>

Relatively few details are usually given in *comedia* manuscripts regarding costume, so it is pertinent that the three plays in question detail costume changes based on religio-cultural identity. *CV*, *BM* and *RD* feature Christian and/or Muslim characters wearing the other culture’s dress and functioning within that milieu — indeed in *CV* the plot pivots on dress and disguise — which exposes the arbitrary nature of religio-cultural identity as it can be performed aesthetically. This idea builds upon Fuchs’ work on Cervantes’ characters who in performing another gender or religion ‘challenge the attempt to identify and categorize “proper” Spanish subjects’ and thereby question essentialized categories.<sup>17</sup> Yet Lope distinctively engages diachronically with medieval al-Andalus: while Cervantes evokes the homogenizing Counter-Reformation context of early modern Spain, Lope depicts a period in which to interact with Muslim Andalusí society was not subversive or exotic; his ‘cultural cross-dressing’ is an early modern reflection of medieval frontier life.

In *CV* Pedro’s work as a *fronterizo* is made possible through disguise: ‘él va en hábito africano’.<sup>18</sup> Pedro reveals his capacity to fashion his own identity when he first meets his love interest Rosela in captivity who asks ‘¿Sois cristiano o moro?’ to which he responds ‘Soy quien solo tu bien pretende’.<sup>19</sup> His disguise is effective and grants him audiences with Granadan nobles and royalty where he plays the role of ‘el moro extranjero’.<sup>20</sup> Pedro’s men and Rosela also adopt Andalusí clothing to move in and out of Granada. Rosela begins Act II in Andalusí dress after a short break in performance after which Lope exploits the possibility that an audience may forget that she is in disguise. Costume also progresses the plot in *CV* and is a method adopted by Christian and Muslim alike. Pedro’s Andalusí ally, the noble Cerbín, suggests that ‘todos hemos de

<sup>14</sup> *El cordobés valeroso, Pedro Carbonero*, ed. by José Montesinos (Madrid: Centro de estudios históricos, 1929), p. 178. “Muslim” is assimilated into “Spanishness”; the exotic is part of the normal world of the *comedia*.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Case, *Lope and Islam: Islamic Personages in his Comedias* (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 1993), p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Thacker, *Role-Play and the World as Stage in the Comedia* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), p. 177.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Fuchs, *Passing for Spain: Cervantes and the Fictions of Identity* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Lope de Vega, *El cordobés valeroso, Pedro Carbonero*. (Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Cervantes, 2002), I: 77 <<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/pedro-carbonero--o/>> [accessed 30 June 2019]. ‘He wears African dress’.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 622–23. ‘Are you Christian or Moor?’, ‘I am who you want me to be’.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 95. ‘A foreign Moor’.

tomar / de moros del campo el traje' in order for them all to escape the wrath of the Granadan king who wants to put Cerbín to death.<sup>21</sup> The performance of religio-cultural identity extends to episodes in which conversion is discussed. Pedro's Andalusi vassal Hamete considers conversion and does so because 'Y estar bona, porque al fin / comer jamón, beber veno'.<sup>22</sup> Here Christianity, like Islam throughout the play, is conceptualized as a physical performance (in this case, through eating).

*BM* similarly unveils how religio-cultural identity is constituted in costume. After Mudarra's Christian parentage is revealed, he journeys from Córdoba to Castile to meet his father and avenge his fallen half-brothers. Mudarra's conversion is a slippery process that, when viewed through the postcolonial lens of mimicry, operates on a behavioural and physical, rather than spiritual, level. Mimicry is outlined by Altschul as 'not only to imitate but at the same time to, paradoxically, resist the dominant power, allowing for the observation of subversion and modification'.<sup>23</sup> In the context of Mudarra's banishment from Córdoba, Castile must be denoted a 'dominant power', as on arrival he declares 'fuerte es Castilla'.<sup>24</sup> In his conversion Mudarra mimics Castilian behaviour yet retains what he chooses of Muslim Andalusi identity. After his uncle Almanzor decries him as 'bastardo' and 'bárbaro' whilst still in Córdoba, Mudarra quickly casts Islam as nothing more than a costume: 'no quiero sus bárbaros turbantes'.<sup>25</sup> In viewing Almanzor and the physical accoutrements of Islam as *bárbaro*, after being subjected to the same insult himself, Mudarra acknowledges how subjective conceptions of 'foreignness' are. After leaving Córdoba he is then included within 'nuestros moros',<sup>26</sup> a dismissive and possessive attitude towards his Andalusi identity. Once in Castile, Mudarra establishes a pattern of disguise and revelation, setting the terms of his own conversion based upon the reactions of others. He thus mimics Christianity while retaining his Muslim identity, a process that enables his assimilation into the Castilian ruling class while resisting complete Christianization.

When Mudarra meets his niece Clara, he then attempts to verbally convert himself in reaction to her fear of his Andalusi dress:

Cristiano soy, que sólo en Dios confío;  
presto veréis que el árabe turbante  
y el africano capellar desvío.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 302–03. 'We all ought to put on Moorish country dress'.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 689–90. 'And in the end it'd be a good thing, because I could eat ham and drink wine'.

<sup>23</sup> Nadia Altschul, 'The future of postcolonial approaches to medieval Iberian studies', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 1 (2009), 5–17 (p. 12).

<sup>24</sup> Lope de Vega, *El bastardo Mudarra y los siete infantes de Lara*, ed. by Delmiro Antas (Barcelona: PPU, 1992), III: 2412. 'Castile stands strong'.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 2248. 'I don't want to wear their barbaric turbans'.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 2405. 'Our Moors'.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 2527–29. 'I am Christian, for I believe only in God. Watch as I remove my Arabic turban and my Moorish capellar'.

Religious identity is thus a costume that can be cast on and off at will. On arrival in Castile Mudarra also meets Lope, a Christian vassal of his father's family, who subsequently dresses in Andalusí clothing to appear as a vassal of Mudarra from Córdoba. He then reveals himself and removes his Muslim costume when in the final scene he declares 'no soy moro / Lope soy de Vivar, el asturiano'.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, in both *CV* and *BM* characters transform their arbitrary religio-cultural identity for socioeconomic gain. While Pedro's motives for entering Granada in disguise soon evolve into concern for his Andalusí friend Cerbín, initially he dresses as a Muslim in order to run his business; Hamete too considers conversion to Christianity to live a better life in Castile with Pedro. Meanwhile Mudarra converts in *BM* to not only meet his real father but to also become a vassal of the Count of Castile.

In *RD* a poignant instance of costume change occurs when the frontier captain Rodrigo Narváez falls in love with a married Andalusí woman Alara. Rodrigo's vassal Nuño encourages him to pursue a relationship and offers to cross the border into Coín dressed as a Muslim to deliver a letter and bring her back. Nuño claims 'bien su arábigo sé' and 'pondré unos almaizales / y hecho moro, iré a Coín'.<sup>29</sup> For Nuño, 'hecho moro' is an aesthetic and linguistic process rather than one connected to birth-right or belief. Rodrigo and Nuño then ask an Andalusí servant to write to Alara in Arabic, as 'la letra cristiana / ¿cómo la podrá entender?'<sup>30</sup> Rodrigo curiously refers to his language as 'la letra cristiana' in opposition to the more secular terminology of 'arábigo' used earlier. Religion is thus conflated with culture and undermined as a belief system; instead it connotes other mutable systems such as language. Nuño later returns to Christian territory in Act II still 'en hábito de moro' in a humorous scene in which the audience shares in his deception of Rodrigo who believes he is Muslim.<sup>31</sup> The plausibility of Nuño's disguise on both sides of the border and his desire to 'probar mis fuerzas' reveal how performative and flimsy religio-cultural identity is.<sup>32</sup>

This is moreover emphasized by Rodrigo's inconsistent treatment of Andalusí Muslims throughout the play: as lovers, friends, enemies and strategic allies. These multifarious relationships mean his designation of the disguised Nuño as 'enemigo' is arbitrary and nonsensical. Nuño then continues the charade by calling himself the Moor Marfuz, to which Rodrigo responds 'creo / que eres famoso y gran hombre / aunque nunca oí tal nombre'.<sup>33</sup> Nuño is able to invent a

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., III: 3065–66. 'I'm no Moor, but Lope of Vivar, the Asturian'.

<sup>29</sup> Lope de Vega, *El remedio en la desdicha*, ed. by Francisco López Estrada and María Teresa López García-Berdoy (Barcelona: PPU, 1991), I: 543–46. 'I know their Arabic well', 'I'll put on one of their veils and, dressed as a Moor, I'll go to Coín'.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., I: 553–54. 'How will she understand the Christian language?'

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., II: 1161–65. 'In Moorish dress'.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., II: 1164–65. 'Try my luck'.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., II: 1184–86. 'I believe that you're a powerful and famous man, though I've never heard such a name before'.

persona and ascribe importance to it and Rodrigo believes him, self-fashioning religio-cultural identity through both costume and language.

Religio-cultural identity is moreover adopted linguistically through self-identification or proposed conversion, unveiling the ease with which it is possible to move between categories. In *CV*, the eponymous *fronterizo* Pedro is described as fluent in Arabic and has an Andalusi vassal, Hamete, who moves between Castilian and Arabic by using an *aljamiado* (mixed) dialect throughout. While Hamete brings comic relief to the play, and is in part a stock *gracioso*, his role goes beyond the stereotype in his reassurance and sage advice: 'Nonca el fortuna a vós nega, / Pedro, on ventoroso fen'.<sup>34</sup> Language is also used to denote Pedro's ambiguous religio-cultural identity as a result of his border crossing: in the autographed manuscript Lope himself refers to him as *andaluz* in the dedication, as does Rosela in Act II. The same indeterminate designation is used in *RD*, as Rodrigo Narváez identifies as a liminal figure somewhere between al-Andalus and Castile: 'Aquel fronterizo fuerte, / aquel andaluz temido'.<sup>35</sup> Later the Abencerraje knight Abindarráez also refers to himself as *andaluz*.<sup>36</sup> Andalusi is therefore a cross-cultural designation of identity that supersedes and thus undermines the solidity of *cristiano* and *moro*.

The process of Mudarra's conversion to Christianity in *BM* also occurs in language, rather than a change in belief. At the start of Act III Mudarra plays chess with the man he believes to be his father, Almanzor. The two have a disagreement, leading Almanzor to lose his temper and declare Mudarra to be '¡Bárbaro, extraño / de nuestra sangre y nobleza, / y de nuestra misma ley!'<sup>37</sup> 'Bárbaro' paradoxically denotes foreignness in a familiar context: Almanzor attempts to demarcate the boundaries of Andalusi identity to exclude Mudarra. Yet Mudarra has, as far as we know, happily grown up in Córdoba and has fitted in to the extent of being considered valiant<sup>38</sup>. His religio-cultural identity is thus changed on the whim of his uncle: his identity is controlled by others and is not an essential characteristic. When he later meets his blind father Gonzalo Bustos, Mudarra pretends to be an outsider and speaks of himself in the third person, describing himself as 'entre cristiano y moro',<sup>39</sup> acknowledging the possibility to be both or neither. Mudarra's conversion encapsulates *BM*'s portrayal of cultural identity as mutable and conditioned by both dress and language, epitomized by Mudarra's self-proclamation that ends the play, 'ya soy cristiano'.<sup>40</sup>

A third way in which difference predicated on religio-cultural identity is

<sup>34</sup> Lope de Vega, *El cordobés*, II: 324–25. 'Fortune will never desert you, Pedro, you've got luck on your side'.

<sup>35</sup> Lope de Vega, *El remedio*, I: 565–66. 'That strong frontiersman, that feared Andalusi'.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 1502–03.

<sup>37</sup> Lope de Vega, *El bastardo*, III: 2093–95. 'Barbaric! A stranger to our blood, nobility and faith!'

<sup>38</sup> See *Ibid.*, III: 2049.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 2713. 'Between Christian and Moor'.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 3070. 'Now I am Christian'.

undermined is the normalcy of intercultural relationships. In *BM* the plot's progression is conditional upon Ruy Velázquez's respectful alliance with the Andalusí king Almanzor. Gonzalo Bustos is then imprisoned by Almanzor at Ruy's bequest and pursues a relationship with his sister Arlaja. Arlaja establishes her agency in her demand to be Gonzalo's jailer because of 'con qué afición mira [Almanzor] tus cosas, cristiano'.<sup>41</sup> At no point does Arlaja hint at a crisis of faith in her fondness for Gonzalo. In *CV* Pedro goes beyond mere intercultural alliance to friendships that become crucial to his success as *fronterizo*: he befriends and works with both Hamete, a lower-class Granadan, and the noble Abencerraje Cerbín. Cerbín values their relationship and calls him 'Pedro amado',<sup>42</sup> while Pedro defends the importance of Cerbín to him to his sceptical vassals.

In *RD* Christian-Muslim cooperation is celebrated from the outset as news of a peace treaty has broken and cross-cultural relationships are central to the plot. Rodrigo treats his Andalusí captive Arráez kindly and releases him; evidence of mutual respect rather than arbitrary animosity. The two discuss what Arráez was doing when captured and Rodrigo empathizes with his relationship problems. Arráez is the husband of Rodrigo's Andalusí love interest Alara, and when the truth is revealed Rodrigo refuses to betray his new friend: 'la ofensa de mi honor temo',<sup>43</sup> demonstrating the value placed upon the friendship. This then comes to a head in the play with Rodrigo assisting the Andalusí noble Abindarráez whom he meets in battle to return to his love Jarifa. Akin to his relationship with Arráez, their friendship is borne out of a mutual comprehension of lovesickness, an experience that has no religio-cultural affiliation.

Though it is beyond the remit of this article, in addition to the construction of identity at the level of language and costume and intercultural relationships, the three plays also undermine religio-cultural identity as a marker for difference by de-emphasizing the practice, ritual and language of both Christianity and Islam. They moreover focus on internal conflict as opposed to clashes across religio-cultural lines and emphasize religio-cultural alliance; the obvious examples being the mass beheading of Granadans and Castilians in *CV* and *BM* respectively; deaths orchestrated by those from the same cultural milieu. The presence of Muslim-Christian warfare in both plays appears inconsequential versus the central internal conflicts.

To conclude, it is apropos to consider whether in portraying religio-cultural identity as fluid, adoptable and thus an unreliable marker of difference Lope makes a socio-political statement about his contemporary Spain in light of the marginalization and then expulsion of *moriscos*, as Fuchs has argued for Cervantes. While this is a reading that cannot be discounted, the medieval

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., II: 1135–36. 'The sympathy Almanzor has for your predicament, Christian'.

<sup>42</sup> Lope de Vega, *El cordobés*, III: 509. 'Beloved Pedro'.

<sup>43</sup> Lope de Vega, *El remedio*, II: 1263. 'I fear the damage that'd be done to my honour'.

context of *CV*, *BM* and *RD* is a crucial differentiator. In contrast to extant politicized readings of early modern literature featuring Muslim characters — as either maurophile or maurophobe — these history plays are ambivalent towards and sceptical of the capacity of religio-cultural identity to define self and other precisely because of the reality of Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages.