

# FANTASY AND THE HONOUR CODE: LOPE'S "LA VIUDA VALENCIANA" AND "EL CORDOBÉS VALEROSO PEDRO CARBONERO"

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**Resumen:** Las obras de Lope pueden ser consideradas poco realistas, pero distan mucho de ser pantallas de humo. En este artículo se estudia cómo los escenarios de la fantasía de Lope y cómo los protagonistas de *La viuda valenciana* y *El cordobés valeroso Pedro Carbonero* se las ingenian para salvar los obstáculos del código del honor áureo y resuelven o suavizan para la audiencia las dificultades de vivir con honor en el Siglo de Oro.

**Resumo:** As obras de Lope poden ser consideradas pouco realistas, pero distan moito de ser pantallas de fume. Neste artigo estúdase como os escenarios da fantasía de Lope e como os protagonistas de *La viuda valenciana* y *El cordobés valeroso Pedro Carbonero* fan para salvar os obstáculos do código da honra áurea e resollen ou suavizan para a audiencia as dificultades de vivir con honra no Século de Ouro.

**Abstract:** Lope's plays are widely considered to be unrealistic but they are still far from being smoke screens. This article discusses how Lope's fantasy scenarios and the fantasies that his protagonists in *La viuda valenciana* and *El cordobés valeroso Pedro Carbonero* devise in order to circumvent the obstacles of a very real honour code, do little to resolve or soften for the audience the vagaries of living with honour in the Golden Age.

**Palabras clave:** Lope de Vega. Honor. Fantasías. Maurofilia.

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Lope's *La viuda valenciana* (1595-1603), one of the urban comedies of the first part of his production and *El cordobés valeroso Pedro Carbonero* that dates from around 1603 have the differences in theme and style that his work is known for. A good deal of the social psychology of the times can be gleaned from the love tangles of the first while the second, inspired by a folk song<sup>1</sup> is the adventure of a free lance Andalusian Christian fighter who befriends Muslims, rescues Christians lost in the Nasirid territories and intervenes in a dispute between the Abencerrages and Zegrís in Granada. These are unconventional protagonists who surprise us with the manner in which they maneuver in a socially structured world where men and women, Christians and Muslims were expected to know their place and

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<sup>1</sup>The verses are transcribed in an article by María Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti, "Apuntes sobre el mito de los Abencerrajes y sus versiones literarias", *Meah, Sección árabe – Islam* 47 (1998) p. 74.

the laws of their society. However, Lope's dramatic tendencies have been explained by critics like Américo Castro and Zamora Vicente as indicative of a majoritarian consensus that celebrated machismo and the triumphalist vision of a monarchical seignorial state that valued blood purity. The presence of Muslim protagonists was to further highlight the superiority of Castilian values and Christian valour.<sup>2</sup> According to this line of scholarship, Lope's proactive peasant heroes and radically inclined heroines were unreal as they were very low in the pecking order in sixteenth century Spain in everything except their claims to blood purity or virtue, yet Lope's skilful "refraction" of social roles made for a comfortable theatrical situation because everyone got what they wanted to see. The nobility did not have to worry about a potential peasant revolt or wayward women. The former were appeased by the cathartic entertainment on stage and the latter would see their convictions thwarted by an unsupportive society.<sup>3</sup>

While much indebted to José Antonio Maravall's insights on the nature of the baroque in his memorable *The Culture of the Baroque*, I differ on the extent to which dramatists and intellectuals in this period were such avid and effective guardians of the established order. Maravall admits the laxity and "deviance" inherent in plays like *La viuda valenciana*, but avers that Lope and others played a dirigiste role in directing popular taste by their wily appeal to the "extrarational levels" of the audience and "in making use

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<sup>2</sup>"Los moros que salen en el teatro lopesco, aparte de los casos de burla ingenua, están tratados como un episodio más del tradicional heroísmo, de los valores inmanentes del castellano", Alonso Zamora Vicente, *Lope de Vega, Su vida y su obra*, Madrid: Gredos, 1969, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup>"Comienza a dibujarse el horizonte frente al cual se hizo posible la "comedia" de Lope de Vega: la hombría sexual, la machedz, como índice de la dimensión individual de la persona; la fé en la creencia ancestral y sin tacha, como signo de la dimensión cristiano-social del español imperativo, triunfante sobre los no cristianos dentro de su tierra, sobre los protestantes en Europa y contra toda forma de religiosa discrepancia, en un sueño delirante de dominación universal". Américo Castro, *De la edad conflictiva, Crisis de la cultura española en el Siglo XVII*, Madrid: Taurus, 1976, p. 94.

of these novelties as a vehicle, the persuasive propaganda in favor of the established order was more easily introduced".<sup>4</sup> Though the theatre attracted multitudes and had to be a consensual performance, it had double registers of existence. It might have promoted the honour code, yet in also including all the 'deviances' that characterised seventeenth century Spain, it became difficult to deduce a moral kernel that might hang over the performances. In this I concur with Melveena McKendrick that there has to be a distinction between the propagation of social mores and propaganda<sup>5</sup> and Lope in his choice of subjects as well as the vicissitudes they lived through was an unlikely defender of the establishment. Even though he preferred prudent finales yet the questions that he managed to raise and the disquiet he must have provoked in a far from homogenous audience are enough indicators of his own ambivalences.

Felipe Pedraza Jimenez points to the 'mil detalles ociosos' that pepper Lope's plays and give a realistic twist to the plot despite the very obvious make - believe situations. But even he maintains, that the latter forestall any similarity to a work like *La Celestina* with its all too evident questioning of the moral order.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque, Analysis of a Historical Structure*, Trans. Terry Cochran, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, p.227.

Maravall also writes, "Lope, once more the representative par excellence of baroque culture, this Lope who was so committed to preserving the interests of the absolute monarchy and its seignorial base, wrote in an outburst of anarchic freedom: "Put no limit to taste" (*Quien todo lo quiere*) But Lope knew very well that this appeal to free taste was to leave the mass devoid of resistance in the face of the effective shaping activity of the expedients that baroque culture placed in the hands of the artist and, consequently, of the individuals in power for whom the artist worked", p. 140.

<sup>5</sup>Melveena McKendrick, *Playing the King Lope de Vega and the Limits of Conformity*, London: Tamesis, 2000, p.6.

<sup>6</sup>"Esta pasión evocadora es la raíz de otra aparente contradicción. En su teatro encontramos, por un lado, un eficaz sentido dramático que concatena todos los elementos de la obra para mantener la tensión; por otro, el poeta introduce en los parlamentos y en la caracterización de los personajes mil detalles ociosos, que en apariencia no contribuyen al progreso de la acción, y cuyo único papel en la obra literaria es, según definió Barthes,

In *The Plague of Fantasies*, Slavoj Žižek gives us some helpful advice when reading apparently fantastic and unreal situations. Instead of interpreting fantasy as a way to obviate horror, he maintains that the relationship of fantasy to the real is much more ambiguous than made out to be because fantasy while concealing unpleasant reality, creates the very instruments that wisen us to what is sought to be repressed.<sup>7</sup> My paradox as a reader hinges on the seemingly innocuous minutiae that abound in *La viuda valenciana* and *Pedro Carbonero* (Pedraza Jiménez's 'mil detalles ociosos'), the masks and identity swaps, the trivia that lightens and distracts the action but that is riddled with an ideology that seems to undo the conformist message that is often attributed to Lope and his unreal 'phantom' protagonists who create situations and play roles fighting to maintain an autonomy till they are made to fall in line at the end. Despite this denouement, the memory of their struggles lingers on and Lope can be considered subversive because he insidiously throws light on the restrictions that society imposed on individuals.

In the words of Žižek:

What we are thus arguing is not simply that ideology also permeates the alleged extra —ideological strata of everyday life, but that this materialization of ideology in external materiality reveals inherent antagonisms which the explicit formulation of ideology cannot afford to acknowledge: it is as if an ideological edifice, if it is to function 'normally', must obey a kind of 'imp of perversity', and articulate its inherent antagonism in the externality of its material existence".<sup>8</sup>

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ser el "significante del realismo". Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez, Lope de Vega, *Pasiones, obra y fortuna del "monstruo de la naturaleza"*. Madrid: EDAF, 2009, p.182.

<sup>7</sup>"However, the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy cannot be reduced to that of a fantasy –scenario which obfuscates the true horror of a situation; the first, rather obvious thing to add is that the relationship between fantasy and the horror of the Real it conceals is much more ambiguous than it may seem: fantasy conceals this horror yet at the same time it creates what it purports to conceal, its 'repressed' point of reference...". Slavoj Žižek, "The Seven Veils of Fantasy" in *The Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso, 1997, p.7.

<sup>8</sup>Žižek, *ibid.* p.4.

In the opening lines of *La viuda valenciana* there is a discussion between Leonarda, a widowed noblewoman and her uncle on the utility and vanity of mirrors as Leonarda's maid Julia has mistakenly brought one when she was asked to bring a painting. The conversation initially centers as often it did between the two on the question of marriage and a prospective husband for Leonarda but veers around to this beauty object that the heroine abhors as she feels it bears a connection with external appearances. She says:

Juzgarás a liviandad  
 Hallarme con el espejo;  
 Que suele ser conocida  
 La mucha de una mujer  
 En irse y venir a ver  
 Después de una vez vestida.  
 Y yo conforme a mi estado,  
 Hago en eso más delito.  
 (I, p. 50)<sup>9</sup>

But this show of chastity and other ostentatious habits like reading and promoting Fray Luis de Leon's *La perfecta casada* are ploys to deflect attention from any worldly traits that could be attributed to her. In fact, as we learn, she has a habitual preference for objects that hide and camouflage external reality like the masks and hoods she will later use to cover her own face and that of Camilo the young noble with whom she wants to have a liaison outside of the bonds of matrimony. These are the objects of "external material reality" imbued with an ideology that is at odds with the play's ending. Leonarda's life situation, as we gather, does require some ingenuity to manage. She is a widow in a patriarchal society where her uncle continually admonishes her to marry a second time to avoid the gossip of the locals who will not hesitate in linking her to servants and all kinds of undesirables besmirching her honour, no small matter in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain where careless words could undo a life and reputation.

<sup>9</sup>Lope de Vega, *La viuda valenciana*, ed. José Luis Aguirre, Madrid: Aguilar, 1967 p.50.

¿Adónde te esconderás  
De la envidia y vulgo vil?  
(I, p.53) <sup>10</sup>

Leonarda however is steadfastly negative in her attitude, an example of the *mujer esquiva*, the woman who shies away from marriage or has ideas of her own on when and who to marry. She points out the disadvantages of second marriages and maintains that potential suitors would woo her for the considerable income she has, only to leave her later for other women. Marriage would also hamper her desire for self realization.

But a chance encounter with a young noble Camilo upsets all her plans and though her volte-face surprises her servant Julia who she had lectured on how to resist one's will and inclinations,<sup>11</sup> she declares to her and Urbán that she cannot go on living now with the same equanimity ("sufrir el fuego insufrible"). On the subject of marriage, her views remain unchanged.

No me tengo de casar  
Si el mundo está de por medio (I, p.71) <sup>12</sup>

Leonarda's trajectory is like that of other Golden Age heroines (Belisa in *Los melindres de Belisa*) who have exhibited similar strength of purpose when faced with limit situations where the roles they are expected to play in life seem suffocating though the new roles that they invent for themselves go against all their earlier upbringing.<sup>13</sup> Leonarda too looks for a way out of the impasse to get her way ("aplaçar esta llama cruel [...] sin perder mi punto y fama"). She is so successful in her endeavour that her maid exclaims,

<sup>10</sup>Lope de Vega, (footnote 9) p. 53.

<sup>11</sup>Lope de Vega, *op. Cit.* (footnote 9) p.48 and passim.

<sup>12</sup>Lope de Vega, *op.cit.* (footnote 8) p.71

<sup>13</sup>See Jonathan Thacker, *Role Play and the World as Stage in the Comedia*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002, p.107.

Por extraño modo has hecho  
 Tu gusto sin que tu honor  
 Quede manchado y deshecho (III, p.178) <sup>14</sup>

By dedicating this play to his lover Marta Nevares, Lope laid bare the rules of the game one had to play to be accepted in society and conjoined the *comedia* with social life and the drama of his own life. According to Teresa Ferrer Valls,

Lope ofrece aquí una visión desmitificadora y cínica del concepto de honra, que anticipa la de la *comedia*. Desentraña ante los ojos del público las reglas de un juego social. La honra es el tributo que hay que pagar por vivir en sociedad. Y Lope ofrece a Marta la regla de oro para jugar ese juego, poniendo como ejemplo ante la joven viuda, el de otra joven viuda, la protagonista de la *comedia*, Leonarda, cuyo nombre coincide significativamente con el del pseudónimo utilizado para la Dedicatoria: “Discreta fue Leonarda (así lo es VM y así se llama) en hallar remedio para su soledad, sin empañar su honor, que como la gala de nadar es saber guardar la ropa, así también lo parece acudir a la voluntad sin faltar a la opinión”. <sup>15</sup>

One could have it both ways in life and in art for some time at any rate is what Lope seems to be saying and Marta Nevares who was saddled with a jealous husband and had borne Lope a son is advised to follow the example of his heroine Leonarda who had the courage to make her own rules despite the prevailing honor code. The world Lope lived in is like the stage on which he made Leonarda perform. He made his heroine trim her scruples and prudishness commensurate with the times and hoped the same for Marta Nevares. <sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Lope de Vega, *op. cit.* (footnote 9) p.178

<sup>15</sup>Teresa Ferrer Valls, “La viuda valenciana de Lope de Vega o el arte de nadar y guardar la ropa”, in Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez (ed.): *Doce comedias buscan un tablado, Cuadernos de teatro clásico*, 11 (1999), pp. 15-30.

<sup>16</sup>In this regard Maravall's writes about “the topos of the world as a stage”, of “the human being as an actor, of life as a comedy” (...) about how we must adapt our behaviour to a world whose condition is similar to the stage representation: it is an entity that is transitory, ultimately illusory, but certain and evident while harsh, precisely when we have to organize our relation with this world. This is explained, by a type of social conditioning,

In *Role Play and the World as Stage in the Comedia*, Jonathan Thacker affirms that experiments with social life and mores were first tried out in the theatre and the foibles of stage protagonists bore considerable relation to the angularities and qualities of real life people in Golden Age Spain. People played roles in real life to dissimulate in a society where honour and others' opinions were paramount just as they did in the plays where protagonists did not just appear on the stage, they also acted out roles. A misjudgement in real life or a bad performance of a chosen role could cost one dear in life as well as in art. But by playing one's cards well i.e. playing a double role, one could be anti system and subvert roles that one had been assigned in life.<sup>17</sup>

It is the carnival season in Valencia and the ubiquitousness of masks and hoods tempts Leonarda who is busy making plans on how to meet Camilo, the noble who has taken her fancy. But she also faces the problem of how she will disabuse him of any notions of marriage or long lasting romance and for this she hits upon the idea of sending a masked Urbán, to bring Camilo to her house with his face covered with a hood. She advises Urbán to tell Camilo that a woman awaits him who he can enjoy without encumbrances just so long as he talks to her tenderly.<sup>18</sup> The mask and hood

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the fact that in the baroque the boundaries between actor and spectator, between the daily world and the world of illusion came to be very fluid". José Antonio Maravall, *op.cit.* (footnote 3) p. 199.

<sup>17</sup>Jonathan Thacker, *op.cit.* (footnote 3) p. 11.

<sup>18</sup>

Pues con esta licencia,  
 Ponte una ropa extremada  
 Y una máscara, y camina  
 A hablar aquese galán,  
 Y dile en disfraz Urbán  
 Que una dama se le inclina,  
 Y que le hable tiernamente,  
 Y que le podrá gozar.  
 Lope de Vega, (footnote 9) p.80

play an ideological role here though they are considered pure utility or decorative. When Julia questions her inventiveness and asks how she has happened on these objects, Leonarda replies that it is love and then describes how it has unfettered her life that now flows untrammelled by obstructions:

Yo he sido como río detenido  
que va, suelta la presa, más furioso;  
y es lo mas cierto que mujer he sido. (I, p. 82)<sup>19</sup>

Her actions now make her almost a “mujer varonil”, the conquering woman and nowhere is this more evident than in the contrast with her weeping suitors who bemoan her indifference. When Urbán narrates the plan to Camilo, the latter though fascinated by the thrill of adventure is put off by the hood that he will have to wear. He remarks that it seems strange that such a beautiful woman would want to hide her face because after all, the eyes and gaze heighten pleasure but Urbán insists that this is the way of all fantasies. Imagination is the key according to Urbán, suggesting to the audience that it is not what one sees that is real but what one deduces or imagines. The allusions to the absence of light, the need for appearances and masks, of a “love without light” and of a hunter who cannot see the hunt in Camilo’s words are constant in this dialogue between Urbán and Camilo.<sup>20</sup> A long monologue by Camilo indicates well the region of light and shadow that the protagonists inhabit.

Son esas divinidades acá ciertas fantasías  
son unas noches sin días  
y unas mentiras verdades  
son unos gustos inciertos  
y un buen manjar sin sazón  
una fiesta en confusión  
y unos sueños que son ciertos. (III, p. 152)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Lope de Vega, *op.cit.* (footnote 9) p.82.

<sup>20</sup>Lope de Vega, *op.cit.* (footnote 9) p. 110.

<sup>21</sup>Lope de Vega, *op. cit.* (footnote 9) p. 152.

Dreams that are real, lies that become truths are like a confusing feast where all prior identities are kept in abeyance. Baroque society was a society in transition between the medieval and modern worlds and riven with caste and class divisions. Fantasies could have been expected to dissolve these contradictions and antagonisms, to help one forget the harshness of a monarchical seigniorial regime as Maravall surmised. But Leonarda's mask induced fantasy that she uses to shield herself from reality is complex. In hiding something, she creates a parallel world with its own contradictions that obliquely reveal those of her society. The role she takes on is brittle and not destined to last and her intention can be said to have failed at the end because circumstances make it impossible for her not to marry Camilo but she has still successfully subverted the rules of the game and Lope has thrown light on how absurd he considered the institution of marriage, a bulwark of this honour obsessed society. Leonarda imitates the behaviour of a virtuous woman and then enacts a total parody of this attitude, revealing to us her cloistered situation and how she had to twist rules in order to survive the way she wished. Like in other Golden Age comedies, love is the subversive force that acts against what society deemed acceptable.<sup>22</sup>

Although passion is what drives Leonarda, she is no self-indulgent damsel when in a contretemps. Urbán's mask falls off at an inappropriate moment and her identity is in danger of being discovered if Urbán is seen

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<sup>22</sup>As Thomas O'Connor tellingly puts it, "This discovery of subversion in the Comedia led to a new wave of publications whose leitmotif eventually became an undermining of patriarchy and patriarchal values. While I understand the reason for finding subversive elements in many Spanish plays we need to stop and ask ourselves, "What is being subverted"? In my view the Comedia may indeed be subversive but primarily of those authoritarian and established values that deny validity to individual experience which lies at the core of European heritage. Spanish comedia affirms truly humane and humanistic values. The comedia incorporates into Spanish theater the essentially Western concern for the individual with particular regard for his or her experiences of love. Thomas O' Connor, *Love in the "Corral", Conjugal Spirituality and Anti Theatrical Polemic in Early Modern Spain*, New York: Peter Lang, 2000, p. 7.

near her house or if it is found out that he is her servant. Leonarda has no qualms in ordering Urbán to go to her cousin's house so that people will associate him with her. Urbán warns her of the cruelty of her action as her innocent cousin will be under suspicion but she tells him it is the way of the world. We again get a glimpse of the dog eat dog world in which Leonarda lived.

Así la fama se estima  
 si cuando te acuchillaban  
 delante al otro ponías  
 de quien favor recibías  
 y los otros en el daban. (III, p.168)<sup>23</sup>

Unbridled egoism, the terrible feeling that one had to look out for oneself even at the cost of a loved one were characteristics of the times Leonarda lived in. Maravall describes the disillusionment of the age of the baroque but also the aggression that stemmed from the sense of inadequacy and led to the creation of soulless protagonists who devoid of tenderness, functioned as spiritual monads, each trying in isolation to gain an edge over the other.<sup>24</sup> Lope's dedication of the play to his mistress, urging her to follow the example of Leonarda, has been considered a cynical gesture. However, perhaps it is possible to take a more lenient view keeping in mind the way that the institution of marriage with its rigid honour code which disadvantaged women, was an alliance based on convenience. Lope's undermining of the institution was an assault on the established order. So successful were these plays that it is viable to imagine that the public identified with these situations and the possible ways to get out of them. Fantasy taught the public how to desire and people who felt trapped in their lives and could feel a sense of empathy with Leonarda.

<sup>23</sup>Lope de Vega, . cit. (footnote 9) p. 168.

<sup>24</sup>Maravall, *op. cit.* (footnote 4) p.203.

It could be surmised that Lope's plays provoke and whet one's longing for the radical climax but in the end fall short as the contradictions are too great to be sustainable. But his incredible situations are also an indication he gives on how to interpret the laws of his society. Leonarda by following her passionate instincts has broken the sanctity of marriage to which in the end she is entrapped. But her rupture with tradition is undeniable. At times, what is truly subversive is not an open rebellion, with fantasies playing the part of what might have been, but doing what one wants despite the law. Leonarda's actions pervert the law and this is manifest to all. It would be wishful thinking to imagine that Lope marries off Leonarda as a concession to the system after she has wrecked all ideas of its sanctity.

Lope's *El cordobés valeroso Pedro Carbonero* has been described as a 'frontier' play, in which protagonists fascinated and seduced by a religion and culture at odds with their own, have their essentialist characteristics whittled down. A synthesis of cultural traits is privileged leading Maria Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti to place it among a group of plays that laud 'convivencia' rather than hostility and wonders what they reveal about Lope's real feelings about the blood statutes and racial purity and the effect of such performances on his audience.<sup>25</sup> Written at a time when the conquest of Granada was more than a century old and the city was filling with Christian immigrants, mudejares, renegades and opportunists, all thronging the province still considered a 'frontier', the inspiration for the creation of his protagonists must have come to Lope from the mix of cultures that was still a characteristic of the city even though his play is based on events before the fall.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>María Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti, *Vidas fronterizas en las letras españolas*, Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2005 pp. 179-192.

<sup>26</sup>David Coleman offers a description of the city "Even as late as 1572 in the aftermath of the second rebellion of the Alpujarras. Granada's municipal councilors continued explicitly to refer to their city as a frontier city. Second: Post-conquest Granada obviously long remained a cultural and religious frontier zone in which elements of traditional Iberian,

*Pedro Carbonero* can be read with multiple perspectives and if the eponymous hero embodies the soft Christian qualities of loyalty to friends he can also be seen as a champion of feel-good Christian heroism when he valiantly dies at the hands of the Nasirid army. Lope thus approaches a sensitive subject from a safe vantage point and if he aroused disquiets in the audience, he could also be redeemed as his play can have equivocal messages depending on one's experiences and ideology. Here, as in the earlier *La vida valenciana*, the phantom fires of inconformity that are initially stoked are soon smothered by a prudent finale but their mere inclusion is subversive in a medium like a play where audiences could be impacted and expected to discuss what they had just seen and heard.

The play opens with two protagonists discussing the strange exploits of a warrior from Velez de la Gomera, a Moorish rampart in north Africa, who surrounds himself with a motley group of characters and makes forays into enemy territory to rescue Christians who have been taken captive as well as take hostage Muslims who he feels can do better for themselves on the other side. Pedro Carbonero is a kind of Robin Hood who helps the poor recover lost loved ones and receives little or no compensation for his death defying adventures. His Moor capturing activities make him a hero in Christian territory or a "Christian Alexander" in the words of Rosela the woman whose rescue he was entrusted with and who decides to become his companion. In portraying this filibustering protagonist who even dares to intervene in the famous internecine conflict between Abencerrajes and Zegrís sometime in the XVth century in the Nasirid kingdom, Lope

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Islamic and Christian faiths and practices met, coexisted, blended and frequently clashed. Third: Post-conquest Granada long housed a particularly fluid and dynamic frontier society distinct from the more established social orders or many of Spain's other major cities particularly those to the north. Like many frontier communities Granada not only suffered from political instability but it also offered many of its residents a variety of possibilities for social and economic advancement". *Creating Christian Granada, Society and Religious Culture in an Old World Frontier City*, Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2003, p.3.

attempts a crossover story of multi-faceted characters who clearly did not regard the new border as a hindrance or a divide that could affect the lives they wanted to lead. Pedro Carbonero is a misfit in the dominant narrative of an age that valorized any forays into Muslim territories as a crusade. Indiscriminate in his choice of friends and companions, he befriends Cerbín, the Abencerrage who is under suspicion of plotting against the king and his band of guerrilla fighters includes a wine guzzling Hamete unsure of his identity as Christian or Moor who has taught Pedro the Arabic language and how to pass off as a local Granadan. Like Leonarda in another context, he marches to a different tune, undeterred by the official line on relations with Muslims and is an aberration for his times and profession. Hamete, a former horse thief from Baba Mejí, who Pedro has enticed to join him is his Muslim counterpart. Pedro who refers to himself as “the Spanish Cordoban”, is a man from the borderlands, open to the cross currents of two cultures. He takes knowing risks and his life leaves itself open to betrayal as his heroic exploits have aroused wonder on both sides. His sense of self is thus based on his love for adventure and he sees himself as a bridge between the Christian and Nazari culture. This is manifested when he offers Cerbin the hand of friendship saying.

Bencerraje,  
ningún hombre en tu linaje  
amigo traidor ha sido.  
Fama teneis por el mundo de nobles; toma esa mano  
de caballero africano,  
en quien amistades fundo. (I, 750-755)<sup>27</sup>

Though these lines could reflect characteristics of Maurophilia, the elevation of the noble Moor, Pedro’s affinity is more to the land and the mountains where he lives and to the friends he chances to make rather than

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<sup>27</sup>Lope de Vega, Lope, *El cordobés valeroso Pedro Carbonero*, Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes [www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/)

a deliberate design to appropriate important Muslims. In effect what Pedro Carbonero has done is create an in-between space of friendship where there is a border. He admonishes the Nasirid king to spare the Abencerrages to whom he owes his throne as without them the Christian forces would have vanquished him much before:

Que si no hubieran nacido  
bencerrajes ya el cristiano  
tuviera el cetro en la mano  
que con sangre han defendido. (II, 109-112)

At this point Pedro Carbonero obviously sees his role as saving the Muslims from themselves, something that even his companions like Tadeo consider crazy. In disguise and with his face darkened, (a veces estoy tizado más de sangre que de carbón)<sup>28</sup> he tries to explain his job of border crossing in times of war to the incredulous people he meets along the way. He lives off wars but if the king of Spain were to announce a ceasefire he would rather breed horses and sell them across borders. As he explains to Cerbin, he has only taken hostage those whom he has fought face to face and has never deceived nor tricked anyone.

Con lazo de eterno amor  
vivo de industria en la guerra  
no he llevado desta tierra  
hombre que tenga valor.  
Si allá no le he cautivado  
cuerpo a cuerpo, aquí no ha sido  
por mis palabras vendido  
ni de mi ingenio engañado. [...]  
Si allá no hay guerra algún año,  
que el Rey la tregua concede,  
por no estar ocioso en casa  
a buscar la vida vengo [...] (I, 756-770)

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<sup>28</sup>Lope de Vega *op. cit.* (footnote 7) Act I, Lines 641-645.

With no exclusive attachment to any kingdom, he gets involved in the internal affairs of the Nasirids purely because the life of his new found friend Cerbín is threatened. The conflict between two groups of Muslims: the much envied Abencerrages who were famous for their noble lineage and the Nasirids, the ruling sect to which the king Almanzor belongs takes place, in Lope's version of history during the time of the Catholic King Ferdinand. Lope here uses an old legend and a folk song about the slaughter of the illustrious Abencerrage tribe in the last years of the Nasirid dynasty, well documented in literary texts but with discrepancies surrounding the name of the king who ordered the massacre. Lope thus garnishes a historical fragment with his own fiction and names the king Almanzor who is in all accounts jealous and misguided enough to have acted against his own interests merely on the basis of a suspicion that his queen Alindaraja is plotting his overthrow alongwith two Abencerrage soldiers. One of Carbonero's men, Tadeo, is also made the courier of an incriminating letter planted on him by the conspirators Sarracino and Almoradí that the king chances upon. In the ensuing bloodbath most of the Abencerrages are put to the sword but Pedro Carbonero and his men disguised as 'moros del campo' manages to save the life of Cerbin.

Almanzor soon discovers the real conspirators and restores Cerbin to his former high position in the administration. Meanwhile Pedro Carbonero carries on with his earlier filibustering life in the mountains but a woman Zulema denounces him to the king and Cerbín is sent at the head of a body of troops to fight him. Cerbin's warnings to his friend to flee are ignored and Pedro Carbonero is fated to die at the hands of the friend he had saved. It is plausible to see Pedro as a Christian hero loyal to his friends till the end. But when we remember Lope's 'mil detalles ociosos': Pedro's love of freedom, his desire to be in camouflage to avoid detection, his Muslim accomplices and his quixotic support for a Muslim group that bolstered the

Nasirid kingdom, our certainties about the significance of the play begin to wane. Pedro Carbonero wavers between boundaries, he feels attracted by another culture and yet is betrayed by Zulema to the Nazari king. These were the complimentary facets of his adventurous desires that he was unprotected against. In the earlier work, Leonarda cloaks her subversive desire with masks the way Pedro tries changing his identity in enemy territory to feed his love for adventure. In both works there is a connection between untrammelled desire that is unlawful and hence subversive due to the prohibitions of a monarchical seignorial regime and an empire in a crusade against the Muslims. Through incredible plots, Lope reconstructs history or daily life to speculate on what might have been or suggest different threads in an oft told story from history and his fantasies haunt the scene where desire has been repressed.

Americo Castro and José Antonio Maravall's vivid descriptions and analysis of the society that Lope lived in have been immensely enlightening to scholars of Spanish Golden Age literature. Latterly, various scholars hesitate in categorizing him as one of those who engineered their success because of their collusion with power or by cynically playing to the audience. While Maurophilia, the category in which a play like *El cordobés valeroso Pedro Carbonero* would be fitted, has been shown to harbour latent dissent as pointed out by María Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti and Luce López Baralt,<sup>29</sup> Lope's views on kingship and his seeming conformity to those he

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<sup>29</sup>María Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti quotes José Antonio González Alcantud who states that some of these plays represent, "la convivencia frente a la neutralización, comprensión frente a superación o dominio, tolerancia frente a excomunicación, conversión frente a combate, absorción frente a eliminación y el dejarse seducir por ciertos aspectos de la cultura ajena". Quote taken from *La extraña seducción. Variaciones sobre el imaginario exótico de Occidente*, Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1993, Chap. 4 cited in María Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti, *Vidas fronterizas en las letras españolas*, Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2005, pp. 179-192.

Luce Lopez Baralt writing on Maurophilic texts says, "Los textos 'maurófilos', como dejamos dicho, también proponen entre líneas el cese de la discriminación social para los

was beholden to in the nobility have also come in for scrutiny by Melveena McKendrick and Elizabeth Wright who have suggested that Lope's radical initial propositions in his plays and his later 'sell out' are to be understood in the context of the social orthodoxy of his times and the censorship that the Inquisition could exercise. A veneer of accommodation was essential for anything to get into print or be performed. In her reading of *La viuda valenciana*, Teresa Ferrer Valls shows the connection between the heroine's predicament and Lope's own life situation which was far from being a model of social propriety for the times. In my analysis of two very different plays I have tried to throw light on Lope's inadvertent subversive intent. Though the intellectual Leonarda fails to outwit society and gets married, Lope's resolution of the plot is patently false. Pedro Carbonero on the other hand is made to die to pay for all the years of unstructured freedom he enjoyed and only then does he get the halo of a Christian hero. But when the curtains came down at the end of a play, there must have been those in the audience who missed Leonarda's premarital spiritedness or Pedro Carbonero's free-wheeling allegiances and perhaps this glimmer of alterity is what Lope might have hoped for.

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moriscos y sus descendientes: esta medida ayudaría a integrar con dignidad ese sector de la población a una sociedad a la que servían y con la cual en muchos casos incluso se identificaban". *Huellas del Islam en la literatura española*, Madrid: Hiperión, 1985, p. 171

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