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The Bagnios of Algiers / Los baños de Argel (1612)

Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616)

OVERVIEW

Dramatist Miguel de Cervantes was a Spanish patrician, soldier-sailor, tax collector, and literary author best known for writing the two volumes of one of most important literary works of Baroque literature, *Don Quijote* (1601, 1612). He was born in Alcalá de Henares and died in Madrid, both in the Castilian province of Spain. However, Cervantes also travelled extensively throughout his life. As a relatively young man, the author joined the Spanish and Italian armies in order to fight against the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in Northern Africa. He lost the use of his left arm fighting valiantly in the Battle of Lepanto (1571). On his way back from Italy in 1575, Cervantes and his brother were kidnapped by Algerian pirates and held for ransom. Cervantes remained in the bagnios, or Algerian baths for captives, for five years. In the latter half of his life, Cervantes remained mostly in Madrid and wrote several mini novels (known as novelas ejemplares) and many short and full-length plays. Despite his somewhat noble lineage, Cervantes lived most of his life in poverty until the success of the first volume of *Don Quijote*.

Play *The Bagnios of Algiers* (1612) is a full-length, three-act play about Christian captives in an Algerian prison, or bagnios. The available translation in English is that of Barbara Fuchs and Aaron J. Ilika. Despite the bleak premise of the plot, the tone of play varies from passionate to cheeky, with quite a bit of romantic intrigue and humor. As a result, the play is usually considered a comedia, or comedy in the broader Baroque sense of a non-tragedy. While the play was not staged during Cervantes's lifetime, it has enjoyed occasional productions in theaters throughout Spain over the years. Arguably, the most well-known production was directed by Francisco Nieva, himself a well-known avant-garde playwright, in 1979 for the National Dramatic Center. Clips of this particular production are available on Youtube (see link below):

Background As a tale of captivity, *The Bagnios of Algiers* is one of several works of Cervantes that draws from the author's own experiences as a kidnapped sailor in Northern Africa. Although Bagnios was not produced on stage before Cervantes's death, the themes and text of the play connected to other well-known plays and prose of the author's earlier works. The basic story of Bagnios relates to an earlier play about Algerian captives entitled *Los tratos de Argel*, or the *The Traffic of Algiers* (1585). This earlier play lacked dramatic action and read more like a story about the psychology of captivity. Bagnios often appears in scholarship about Cervantes's stories and plays in which Christian captives fall in love with Moorish or Turkish captors. The translation of Bagnios is published together with the *The Great Sultana*, a comedy about a Christian woman who falls for a Turkish sultan. In addition, one of the plotlines in Bagnios (the love story between the converted Moor Zara and the noble Christian captive Don Lope) was developed further in certain episodes of the second volume of Don Quijote.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE PRODUCTION

Changing Locations Cervantes does not provide very many stage directions in this play, and most of the stage directions that do exist pertain to entrances, exits, and the use of props (see below). Nonetheless, the settings of the action vary from beaches to the boats on the Mediterranean to the interiors of the bagnios and the Moorish palace. It follows, then, that any production would require visual cues to indicate the change of scene. For example, the sounds of the ocean and dark lighting might indicate the beach at night, while the scenes in the palace might include a Moorish arch or blue tiles.

Props The characters' use of objects is crucial in order to visually convey plot points to the audience. When Zara communicates with Don Lope and Vivanco, she passes them coins and letters via the cloth basket. The audience sees the bulging handkerchief hanging over the wall and knows that the prisoners are receiving contraband. The use of veils helps to obscure the female characters' identity, while other

strips of clothing mark the characters' assimilation into Moorish culture (like the garzon outfits) or capes. In addition, the display of crosses, beads, food, and other objects signals to the audience the religion and rituals of the characters—most notably, there are visual signs of Zara's conversion to Christianity.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Caurali	The captain of Algiers and husband to Halima
Yzuf	Spanish Muslim and informant of the captain
Cadí	Cruel guard and enforcer of the bagnios
Old Man	Christian captive who tries to protect his sons
Juanico	The Old Man's eldest son, also captive
Francisco(quito)	The Old Man's youngest son who is executed
Sexton	The priest captured with the old man and his sons
Fernando	Christian nobleman and palace slave captive
Costanza	Christian noblewoman betrothed to Fernando
Don Lope	Longtime Christian captive of the bagnios
Vivanco	Fellow Spanish captive and friend to Don Lope
Zara	Moorish noblewoman who converts
Halima	Consort to Caurelí and confidant of Zara and Costanza
Hazén	Turkish Christian who is executed

STORY

In the midst of the war for the Mediterranean in the late 16th century, a group of Spanish Christians are kidnapped and held for ransom in the Algerian prison, or bagnios. The Captain of Algiers, Cauralí, uses information given to him by the traitorous renegade Yzuf, to locate and surround the captives on the beach. Among them are an old man and his two sons, Juanico and Francisco, Tristán the sexton (priest), and a young betrothed couple, Fernando and Costanza. After seeing the pirates take off in a boat which may contain his beloved Costanza, Fernando hurls himself off of a cliff—but is picked up by one of the other boats later.

Once the Christian captives arrive at the bagnios, they meet a series of other prisoners, as well as Moorish servants who maintain the baths. Shortly after their arrival, Hazén, a Christian Turk, is taken off to be executed for the murder of Yzuf. The newcomers meet another group of Christian captives who have been trapped for some time: Don Lope, Vivanco, and Julio. In addition, there is a Jewish prisoner who interacts principally with the sexton.

While the Christian captives wait to be ransomed, they interact with, and in some cases, fall in love with, the Moorish noblewomen and servants who also reside near the Bagnios. Zara and Halima, a young Moorish maiden and Caurelí's consort, interact with Don Lope and Costanza, respectively. Zara sends a secret letter to Don Lope in which she promises to help him collect money for his ransom. When Don Fernando appears disguised as a Moor in the captain's palace, Costanza is attracted to him but vows to remain loyal to her future husband. Halima warns Costanza that it is dangerous to fall in love with a Moor, especially when the man is Muslim and the woman a Christian. However, Halima also expresses her desire to take Fernando as her lover. Zara, meanwhile, continues her plan to escape an arranged marriage, convert to Christianity, and marry Don Lope.

While Fernando and Costanza enjoy the relative peace of the palace, the Warden Pasha and the cruel guard Cadí abuse and torture some of the captives. Juanico and Francisco, the Old Man's sons, become targets for conversion and torture. The boys maintain their virtue and faith, with the result that Francisco dies tied to a pillar in a crucifixion-like execution.

Ultimately, only Osorio and the sexton manage to procure ransoms. As a result, Don Lope arranges for a Spanish boat captain to rescue everyone at night. Fernando and Costanza are reunited, and Zara leaves with Don Lope as his converted betrothed. Vivanco manages to guide them to the beach, and all are relieved at the prospect of escape and a happy marriage back in Spain.

SCENES (Note: The scene divisions are not marked in the translation; I divided up the action according to entrances, exits, and natural transitions indicated in the stage directions).

ACT I:

Scene 1: The Captain of Algiers and the renegade Yzuf sneak through the mountains at night and arrive at a Christian settlement in North Africa by the ocean. The Old Man and Tristán the sexton run out thinking that the Ottoman Turks have attacked. The Old Man looks to rescue his sons but can only find the young Francisquito. Caurelí forces the captives onto a waiting boat, including the young married Spaniard Costanza. Fernando, her husband, watches from a prominence but is not sure whether his wife was also captured. He panics and throws himself off a cliff.

Scene 2: The Warden of the Bagnios and his slave assistant call in the Christian captives from their forced labor. Among them are Vivanco and Don Lope, who debate whether it is better to be confined to the bagnios or work outside for hours on end. When they arrive at their cells, they spot a handkerchief containing something hanging from a pole. They discover gold coins inside and wonder who the benefactress is—and whether she is Christian or Moor.

Scene 3: Hazén, a Turkish Christian who lived in Spain, enters the cell. He tells Vivanco and Don Lope that he takes comfort in his faith and longs to return to Spain. Hazen also reveals that he is planning a mutiny with other prisoners. Don Lope praises Hazén's faith and asks him who lives in a nearby house. The Turk explains that is the home of a rich Moorish gentleman with a gorgeous daughter, and the daughter will most likely be married off to a future Moroccan sultan, Muley Maluco. Hazén indicates that Juana, a Christian elder woman of high virtue, raised the Moorish daughter. The Turk leaves the area and vows to come back.

Scene 4: Vivanco and Don Lope watch as the bagnio guards bring in a fellow Spanish captive who has tried to escape. The captive's ears were cut off as a punishment, but the Christian vows to escape. Suddenly, Vivanco and Don Lope receive another wrapped package containing 100 doubloons and a letter. In the letter, a Moorish woman named Zara vows to help collect enough money to ransom off any eligible Christian imprisoned there. She explains in the letter that due to her Christian upbringing, she wishes to marry and leave Northern Africa with her new Spanish husband.

Scene 5: Cauralí and Ysuf arrive at the prison with Fernando, whom they fished out of the sea during his attempted suicide, and the Old Man carrying his two sons. The sexton Tristan is still with them and jokes with the captors in a series of quips. The Moorish businessmen Cadí and Pasha look over and interrogate the prisoners in order to find strong men to row in the gallies or tradesmen that can maintain the streets and buildings of Algiers. When Ysuf approaches Hazén, the Turk stabs him and declares himself a Christian. As Ysuf dies, Cadí sentences Hazén to death by impaling.

ACT II:

Scene 1: Halima, Cauralí's wife, chats with Costanza, who has been turned into a palace slave in captivity. The two women discuss marriage, and Costanza mentions that she was betrothed in Spain. Halima retorts that she considers her own marriage its own sort of prison. Caurelí has taken Fernando as his captive servant, and the Captain reveals to his new subject that he is attracted to Costanza. Fernando agrees to help the Captain seduce the beautiful captive, and realizes upon entering that he has found Costanza. Caureli greet his wife and presents her with Fernando as the new palace slave. Fernando confirms that Halima's slave is his betrothed, and Costanza relates the story of how Yzuf betrayed the family and kidnapped her before a wedding could take place.

Scene 2: Zara enters the palace and reports that Hazén was just executed. Caurelí takes his leave but asks both Zara and Fernando to remain in his absence. Zara notices the new palace slaves. The Moorish women ask Fernando about Spanish culture, and the captive relates that most Spaniards are fiercely loyal and virtuous. When prompted by Zara and Halima, Costanza admits that she has fallen in love with the new Moorish captive.

Scene 3: The Old Man and Sexton, now dressed as captives, mourn their captivity but vow to remain Christians. The Moorish guards taunt the captives and tell them that Don Juan, the captain of the Spanish

forces against the Ottomans, will not save them. A Jewish captive also vows to keep his faith. The Christians admonish the Jew for his hairstyle and his refusal to help with manual labor, and the Jew reminds them that he cannot work on the Sabbath. The Old Man's sons enter dressed as Moorish garzons, but Juanico swears that he will remain a Christian despite adopting Algerian customs. The prisoners use their time together to sing and dance.

Scene 4: When Cadí enters during the song, he taunts the Old Man for not wanting to be separated from his boys, and he threatens to adopt Francisco. The boys vow to never bow to the guards' authority, and Cadí admires their moxey. Caurelí reminds Fernando to help seduce Costanza, and the captain promises his freedom if Fernando manages to convince her. Lope and Vivanco enter and discuss their imminent freedom. They remark that Zara has given them enough escudos to pay their ransom.

Scene 5: Four veiled women enter, and Lope and Vivanco cannot tell who are the Moorish maidens and who are the Christian captives. Zara, meanwhile, looks over the gentlemen and relates to Halima that the wasp of love has stung her. The literal sting provokes her to fling off her veil, at which point Lope falls desperately in love with her. The women continue interrogating and flirting with Lope, who admits that he is betrothed to a Moorish benefactress who wishes to convert to Christianity.

Scene 6: The sexton and the Jewish captive fight over a kosher stew and provide comic relief. Meanwhile, Fernando and Costanza meet each other and reveal their true identities. Fernando relates how he attempted suicide at the time of her capture, then was fished out of the ocean. As both start to plan, Halima and Cauralí enter and confront them for their treachery. Halima asks is Cauralí is trying to seduce Costanza, and the Christians deflect.

Scene 7: The boys Juanico and Francisco continue praying and vow to maintain their faith. They know that when Cadí returns, they may be coercer or even tortured. Cadí enters with Carahoja, and both guards decide that they will try to seduce the boys with pleasure rather than torture them.

ACT III:

Scene 1: The warden and guards watch as the Christian captives go to mass and rehearse a performance of Lope de Rueda's pasos (or skits). The sexton joins in with a monologue about forbidden love and Islam, and everyone realizes that he is imitating and making fun of Cauralí, who also watches the performance.

Scene 2: Suddenly, the performance is interrupted by an attack from the outside. The injured report that the Algerian battalion, also known as archies, have killed a number of guards and captives. One of the injured also relates that the Moors attempted to circumcise and convert Francisco, but he resisted. The guards crucified the young boy like Christ, and the old man cries out in anguish.

Scene 3: Halima, Zara and Costanza chat again about their forbidden loves and desires for marriage. Halima exhorts Zara to marry the sultan and enjoy her comfort as queen, but Zara asserts that she would rather marry for love and live at a lower station. When Halima leaves, Zara admits to Costanza that she plans to convert to Christianity.

Scene 4: The Moorish king visits the bagnios to get a report about the attack and the current captives. Cadí reports that he ended up killing the young boy because he refused to convert. The King interrogates newly arrived Christians whose boat went astray. The sexton and Jew take advantage of the inspection to stage a fake fight over a baby. The sexton argues that the Jew tried to steal his baby, and the King demands that the Jew pay him for the attempted kidnapping.

Scene 5: The Old Man arrives at the pillar where Francisco has been tied up. While not fully crucified, the young boy is on the verge of death. His father gives him last rites as he breathes his last breath.

Scene 6: Lope and the other Christian captives watch a marriage ceremony between supposedly Zara and Muley Maluco, but Zara has been substituted by Halima in disguise. Zara breaks away from the ceremony and enter Lope's cell. The two confess their love and make a plan to marry against Zara's father's will. Halima continues to dance with the sultan, but the Muley decides to postpone the wedding night until he has fully conquered his kingdom.

Scene 7: Osorio learns that the Order of Mercy has ransomed him, and the sexton reports that a group of Jews have agreed to fund his passage back to Spain. When Zara walks by, she drops a rosary and a cross in front of Halima. The consort warns Zara that she will be suspected of being a Christian convert. When Fernando enters, Halima accuses him of stringing her along. Fernando vows to meet her in the garden for a secret tryst. Costanza listens in and feel jealous.

Scene 8: the Old Man enters with Francisco's bloody bones wrapped in a handkerchief. The captives assemble as they wait for Lope to bring in a boat captain. Zara appears and runs to Lope. The sexton decides to join the group even though he has already been ransomed. Everyone boards the boat, and Don Lope gives an epilogue in which he proclaims that happiness, or a window and a garden, can even be found in captivity.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

FERNANDO

Fernando is a Christian nobleman who is dedicated to his fiancé, Costanza. He is both passionately impulsive and methodical. Fernando is also one of the braver Spanish captives, as he is willing to sacrifice his own safety to rescue Costanza. In addition, this Spanish lover is able to successfully manipulate his "master" Caurelí and the lusty Hamila in order to organize and execute the escape of several prisoners.

ZARA

Zara is the daughter of a rich Moor who lives close to the Bagnios; she is also engaged to be married to Muley Maluco, a future sultan. Like Fernando, Zara uses her wits to manipulate her fellow Moors while she makes arrangements to avoid her arranged marriage, convert to Christianity, and convince Don Lope to take her back with him to Spain. Along with her cleverness, Zara balances her seductive beauty with a sincere desire to convert. She is simultaneously traitorous (to her father and fiancé) and virtuous (in her efforts to rescue the Christians and marry Don Lope).

FRANCISCO (Fransiquito)

Francisco is the Old Man's younger son who, along with his older brother Juanico, is captured and held in the bagnios. As the youngest Christian captive, Francisco epitomizes the innocence, virtue, and bravery of naïve youth. He never strays from his faith despite the threats and torture of the guard. He swears throughout the play that he can resist and maintain his purity, despite the other's remarks that he is too naïve to know what awaits him. In the end, Francisco dies in an execution similar to a crucifixion and becomes the symbolic lamb of the play.

CAURELÍ

As the caption of Algiers, Caurelí holds vast power and influence. However, his leadership style is more practical and methodical than the more sadistic characters such as Calí. He kidnaps the Christians in the first scene, but he is willing to treat them relatively well as they wait for a ransom. Like his consort Halima, Caurelí lusts after the Christian captives. His desire for Costanza allows him to be manipulated by Fernando.

THEMES

<u>Society</u>

Religion Faith and conversion are arguably the most important themes of the entire play. The Christian captives' survival depends upon their ability to cling to their faith in Jesus, Catholic rituals, and the hope that the monastic orders in Spain will collect and deliver a ransom. In the actual bagnios, captives were allowed to attend mass and pray, which all of the Christian characters do several times. The prisoners fortify each other by extolling their love of God and vowing never to convert. The Jewish character, although portrayed as a manipulative liar, also clings to religious practices for comfort, including only eating kosher food and keeping the sabbath holy. Cervantes also presents the audience with two violent martyrdoms: the Turk Hazén and the young boy Francisco, both of whom are executed

(impaling and tied to a pillar, respectively) for refusing to renounce their religious beliefs and cultural practices. As the most devout convert of the play, Zara also exemplifies the power of religion. She embraces Christianity because her caretaker taught her the ways of Jesus and Mary, and her fervor gives her the courage to defy her arranged marriage to the sultan and to travel to a new land. In essence, her religious conversion offers an escape, much like the literal escape at the play's end.

Illustrative Moment: Francisco's Faith Inside the Bagnios

When he is alone with his brother, the young and pure Francisco vows to cling to his Christianity and fight any attempted conversion (be it religious or cultural). In this exchange from the end of Act II, Juanico warns his little brother about the perils of ostentatious faith within the prison walls:



Juanico: Stop throwing those nooses, for heavier ones await our throats.

Francisquito: You're scared of that, brother? I'll break them into a million pieces. Don't think that I'll become a Moor, even if this monster promises me silver and gold, for I'm a Spanish Christian.

Juanico: That's what I'm afraid of, and why I cry.

Francisquito: Because I'm young, you don't believe in my courage.

Juanico: That's right.

Francisquito: Well, know that I have divine strength to resist human tyranny. I don't know who counsels me with a quiet voice in my heart (for I don't hear it in my ear) and leaves me pleased and content to die; they tell me that I shall be a new Justus, and you a new Pastor, which I like.

The reference to Justus and Pastor presages Francisco's martyrdom in the next act. As the paragon of virtue and innocence, Francisco keeps his vow until he is killed at the end of the play in a virtual crucifixion. In this way, he exemplifies the lamb of God (Jesus) in his purest form.

Justice

Injustice The entire premise of captivity and ransom exemplify the injustices of the Mediterranean world in the late 16th century. The North African pirates and Algerian nation-states used the captives as slave labor to build their cities and maintain their infrastructure. For the rich captives, the pirates make money off of the ransoms collected from either rich relatives or monastic charities. For the poor captives (such as Cervantes and his brother), the unjust imprisonment can last years. In addition to the ransom economy, Cervantes also alludes to the affronts to the captives' virtue and honor, including rape and forced conversion. Even Zara must escape from her coercive engagement to the sultan.

Politics

War The backdrop to the ransom economy is the war between Spain (and sometimes Italy) with the Ottoman Empire of the 1500s. Cervantes and his brother were captured after having fought in the Battle of Lepanto and in serving the Italian army against the Turks. However, the bulk of the prisoners in this play were not soldiers, but rather Christians who are kidnapped from their villages on the coast. In this sense, the larger political context is the fall of the Moorish Empire on the Iberian Peninsula eighty years earlier. Whiel the Moors had established their empire over several centuries, the Christian Goths had fought to slowly gain territory. This long process was known as the Reconquista, or Reconquest, which the Christians officially "won" in 1492. Nontheless, the cultural and political influence of the Moorish caliphate lingered well past the Christian victory, and Cervantes explores the syncretism of different Spanish cultures throughout his oeuvre.

Relationship

Desire Much of the dramatic action in the play depends on the romantic and erotic relationships among the characters. Fernando and Costanza remain faithful in their love and devotion for each other, yet both flirt with their Moorish captors in order to plan their escape. Conversely, Caurelí and Halima

remain sexually attracted to their captives despite the binds of their marriage. Their desire for Costanza and Fernando, respectively, constitute two pillars of illicite desire: adultery and forbidden cross-cultural desire. Don Lope and Zara's attraction to each other becomes "purified" through Zara's conversion and Lope's promise to marry her. However, both characters are aware of the dangers and possible cultural condemnation for pursuing each other. Ultimately, legitimate couplehood is restored with Costanza and Fernando reunite (unsullied by Moorish desire) and Don Lope and Zara become engaged.

Appearance

Deception In order to survive the bagnios and escape, the prisoners must use their wiles to manipulate their captors. For Costanza and Fernando, survival depends upon flirting with their Caurelí and Zalima. In addition, Fernando disguises himself and hides his identity from Costanza in order to test her fidelity. Zara arranges for a stand-in during the arranged marriage ceremony, which constitutes yet another case of mistaken identity. For those characters who deceive and obscure, there awaits a happy ending. For those characters who do not hide their identities or faith, there is death.