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Cervantes and Don Quixote

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Life and Literature: Tolerance in Cervantes' Works

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When an author is consciously preparing himself to create a work of literature some specific momentary circumstances alone do not play a role for the deployment of his creative skills even though they strongly influence it, however other factors such as the environment in which he has lived and his experiences are also very important. The years of captivity, along with those during his stay in Italy, were significant for Miguel de Cervantes' spiritual and intellectual life. It is a well known fact that if the years spent in the army were decisive for Cervantes, imprisonment, as an extraordinary event of his life, has left an indelible mark on his entire literary oeuvre.

In October, 1571 Cervantes heroically fought in the Lepanto war where he was injured by three gun shots, one of which left him with a handicap on his left hand. After recuperating from the grave injuries, he went on the Tunis, Corfu and Goleta expeditions, among others, as a soldier. In 1575, on his return to Spain with letters of recommendation from the Viceroy Duque de Sessa and the Captain General Don Juan de Austria, the galley Sol, on which he was traveling along with his brother Rodrigo, was seized by the *berberisco* pirates. Taken to Algiers, he suffered five long years of captivity during which he tried to escape on four

occasions, but was unsuccessful. His brother Rodrigo was soon rescued, but it was not that easy for our writer due precisely to those letters of recommendation that were found in his possession. They thought he was an important person and demanded a large ransom of 500 *escudos*, an exaggerated amount considering his family's economic means. Later, he was rescued by the Trinitarian Fathers.

During the five years his imprisonment in Algiers, Cervantes had the opportunity to get to know first hand the customs and ways of life of another culture. In no way I am intending to minimize the hardships that Cervantes must have gone through during his captivity, there are many evidences that can testify the sufferings and adversities of the prisoners.

León de African, during one of his visits to the city of Tetuan, confirms to have witnessed three thousand Christian slaves sleeping at night chained to the bottom of underground pits.

The description that father Contreras made of the dungeons that he visited in 1539, in Tetuan, were very similar to the ones in Algeria, and reveals a terrifying reality:

Three leagues under the earth were the dungeons which looked like those places where time had stood still, with *seguiles* around, and in the highest part of it, there was a lamppost with a grill. From these places or prison cells, there are some who communicate through narrow passages. In these dungeons enter neither air nor sun-rays; they cannot see the sky and hardly see the light. [...] The presence of filth and dirt is notable by the continuous presence of so many people. The intolerable stink was certified to me by one of the redeeming Christian Fathers., who after staying there for a while, with the captives, went out senseless. [...] A mat in the name of a bed. Nude people put up in iron chains with fetters,

rings and other cruel prisons, among them there are some heavy and large iron bars, which are called *alcandras*, tied the extremes to two chains. In these iron fetters, they are made to put their legs, separating one with another by a stick. During summer, being a hot region and having so many people in such a narrow place, they were scorched due to heat. In this place the captives, if they do not go out to work, live in the day and the night. If they go out, they are released for work in the afternoon and they are made to return to their dungeon early; and during the time they roam out for a walk they carry with themselves an iron chain in their leg. Even when they are ill, their living condition is not improved, nor do they have different comfort.

Ione can cite any number of testimonies to prove the point, for example *Escuela de trabajos* by Gabriel Gómez de Losada (Madrid, 1670) from which the following excerpt is taken:

[...] They don't put every one in oar and in this way, the others are left behind for the service of the city, of their homes and their gardens and to many of them, they bring with iron chains and iron rods.... Moreover, they sleep in the dungeons with their chains... many with chains till their soldiers bring wood, carry to their ovens the bread to cook. They sweep and clean frequently their courtyards (pp.91-92).

[...] They are never short of any work, because if the employer has nothing in which to engage them, they are being obliged to earn the daily income or that they may work in the activities of their friends or their neighbours and many times they are being told that they should look for necessary sustenance for themselves and in this way they live like camels who sustain

themselves by air and due to this reason they walk all so thin and disfigured that they hardly move their legs ... The bed is the surface of the earth or at the most a piece of mat, and they are unable to find any employer who would ask its ill slave where you have pain?, how are you? Or do you need something? Even when they are ill, they are made to work... and if they are tired and they take rest by throwing themselves on soil, they're made to get up by the thrashing of stick... (p. 96).

We have testimonies that are taken from Cervantes' own works. It is obvious that in these works one has to keep in mind that in them there is a literary transformation, and great use of aesthetic construction¹.

It is true that in other places that were close to the borders (Alkazar, Tetuan, Larache or Salé) the prisoners remained in underground dungeons and, almost always with chains in their feet, because "The closeness of Christian places made their escape easier for those captives with anxieties to undertake the adventure", as remembered by Jerónimo de Mendoza in *Jornada de África*, published in Lisbon in 1607. But this was unusual: some of them

¹ In *El trato de Argel*, a prisoner decides to escape, because his master made him suffer a terrible life of hunger, nakedness, weariness, and cold; and he cannot wait for his family to pay his ransom because they are of humble origin; inside information which he himself could only have experienced. But the desperate cry of the prisoner Aurelio, which is how the book begins: "Triste y miserable estado! / Triste esclavitud amarga...!Oh, purgatorio en la vida, / infierno puesto en el mundo", as shown by Zimic, it recalls the written verses describing the entrance into Dante's Inferno. In *El gallardo español* Cervantes supplies the moor Alimuzel with expressions of complaint ("¡Oh triste y dudoso estado / insufrible de sufrir..."), that are dictated by love, similarly to those that he supplies the prisoners with in other works.

lived in private houses, and others were hired by their owners for domestic service or other tasks, depending on their individual skills. It was not uncommon for prisoners to enjoy a relative freedom to move around and even to worship. This did not stop to amaze Spaniards:

And still another thing, if you notice,
That it is more than admiration,
And because these dogs without any faith
Leave us, as one sees,
To save our religion.²

So, as noted by Clemencín, "Probably during that age they would not have permitted Moor as captives in Spain". From Cervantes' writings we know that they celebrated some holidays that included theatrical performances. It is important to keep in mind that the prisoners represented a commodity, they were a currency in exchange for money or spices, and their masters had to be careful of not damaging such human goods. Some prisoners were more valuable than others because it was expected to get a higher ransom for them. Even though by mistake, this was also Cervantes' case due to the letters of recommendation that made him captive. The suffering and hardships –except the sufferings that come with the lack of freedom– that Cervantes had to go through in Algiers were probably not greater than those he had to undergo during his years as a soldier.

By this I mean that Cervantes, during his years in captivity, did not live with his back against the world that surrounded him; he had the opportunity to get to know first hand the life and

² *Los baños de Argel*, in Cervantes, *Teatro completo*, ed. Sevilla Arroyo and Rey Hazas, Madrid, Planeta, 1987, p. 254.

customs of the Ottomans, of the Moors, of the Jews, of the renegades, of the Christian prisoners and, later, when he conjures up the plots to his stories (*El trato de Argel*, *Los baños de Argel*, *La gran sultana*, *El gallardo español*, the story of the prisoner in the *Quijote*, Ricaredo's tale in *La española inglesa*³, *El amante liberal*), the experiences he lived through are present. At some point, the Cervantine "Captives' Comedies" have even been overrated as historical and biographical documents⁴.

Therefore, we can actually talk about a direct, external, first hand experience and influence that Cervantes presents in his works: customs, descriptions of garments, scenes of brilliant exoticism, geographical places, and technical, nautical terms used with much precision⁵; nothing escapes this captive's sharp observation, which he left us in his works with a monumental display of data about the life of the prisoner.

³ In *La española inglesa*, the tale about Ricaredo is saturated with autobiographical references that are related to Cervantes: the banker with whom he clears his money, the place where his "faluga" was captured, his place of captivity in Algiers and his rescue by the Trinitarian Fathers. During the battle between Ricaredo's flotilla against the Turkish fleet in the beginning of the novel it is mentioned that the Turkish galleys belonged to Arnaut Mamí the pirate, the same who was in charge of the three galleys that attacked the *Sol* in 1575: this is the galley Cervantes was on.

⁴ Captivity as a literary theme based on the reality of the 16th century was not omitted from the time period prior to Cervantes. Francisco Lopez Estrada studied, a few years ago, captivity as a theme in the romances and in the story of Abindarraez. But in the *Abencerraje* as in the novel of Ozmin y Daraja by Mateo Aleman, the theme of captivity was surrounded by Renaissance idealism.

⁵ In *El amante liberal*, in a final battle Hazan and Alf's ships attack the Muslim judge's ship; Cervantes shows that he is knowledgeable of places, ships and technical nautical terms. See in Agustín G. de Amezúa, *Cervantes creador de la novela corta española*, 2 vols, Madrid, CSIC, 1956, 1958, pp. 54-55.

Here I would like to make some observations about an influence less visible, but not less important: did the richness and values of the meeting of two cultures leave some mark on the Cervantine personality and work?

During the five years that Cervantes lived in Algiers he experienced an environment of tolerance: the coexistence of cultures, of ethnic groups – Turkish, Andalusians or Moriscos, Moors (sometimes it was difficult to set them apart from the Andalusians and they used both terms together: Andalusian Moor), Arabs, belonging to different religions: Muslims, Jews, Christians, which was not usual in Spain during Felipe II's last years, and that it necessarily influenced his particular view regarding major human problems.

During the Sixteenth century in Spain, the fissure that separated the community of the Moriscos (Muslims that converted to Christianity just to keep up appearances most of the time) and the Christians grew deeper, as is evident in the great number of inquisitorial proceedings. The concern over ethnic cleansing was an obsession and it acquired unprecedented, extreme dimension: eating pork kept one from any suspicion, and refusing it could be dangerous⁶. For these reasons, a man of high intellectual capacity or that showed any interest for specific subjects could have been the target of malevolent comments: subtle wit and intellectual activity were Things of the Jews (*cosa de judíos*)⁷

⁶ These ideas have been developed in Javier Salazar Rincón's, *El mundo social del "Quijote"*, Madrid, Gredos, 1986.

⁷ The intellectual occupations and the basic culture become so suspicious that, according to the humanist Mal Lara in his *Filosofía vulgar*, "es señal de nobleza de linaje no saber escribir su nombre".

Cervantes mocks these generalized and ridiculous opinions. For Cervantes, to be an old Christian does not predetermine people's character, and thus, it should not be in itself a defining feature. What sets men apart is their behavior: "He is not a person more than other if he does not work more than other". Sancho can become count by just being an old Christian⁸, and in *El retablo de las maravillas* Cervantes makes use of a known folk theme in order to ridicule those that, like Sancho, have "four fingers of substance of The Old Christian".

Sancho doesn't need more than that to become governor: "Learning, " replied Sancho , " isn't something I have very much of, because I don't even know the alphabet / but all I have to keep in mind, to be a good governor , is the *Christus* [cross] all the alphabet books start with,..."⁹. And those aspiring to become mayors in the 'entremés' of *La elección de los alcaldes de Daganzo*, are of the same opinion. When the student asks Humillos if he knows how to read, he replies:

No, certainly not,
Nothing that they will find in my lineage,
that there are persons with so little seat,
that they set to learn these illusions,
which take the persons to the fire...

⁸ "Que yo cristiano viejo soy, y para ser conde esto me basta" (*Quijote*, I, 21); "aunque pobre, soy cristiano viejo..." (*Quijote*, I, 47); "eso allá se ha de entender con los que nacieron en las malvas, y no con los que tienen sobre el alma cuatro dedos de envidia de cristianos viejos, como yo los tengo" (*Quijote*, II, 4); "que si hubiera dicho de mí cosas que no fueran muy de cristiano viejo, como soy, que nos habían de oír los sordos..." (*Quijote*, II, 3).

⁹ *Quijote*, II, 42.

He doesn't know how to read but knows other things that, in his opinion, are more valuable:

I know by hard
All four orations and I worship them,
Each week four and five times

And, when they ask him if he was planning to become mayor on that basis, he says:

With this and with being I an Old Christian,
I dare to be a Senator Roman.¹⁰

The idea of equality and dignity among human beings is present throughout Cervantes' work. Cervantine criticism positions itself in relation to this idea regarding the usual concept of honor during his time period. In *El trato de Argel*, he has Aydar, the pirate, explain the ease with which numerous Christians were made prisoners:

and the soldier most lucid,
the most thin and most brawny,
then he shows himself nude
and of the lobster grabbed.
But there lies the honor
the Christian in so much extreme,
who ties oar in a trance
and to him it appears that it is the dishonor;
and meanwhile they there
in their own's ground are honored
we, captive among them,
arrived without any honor here¹¹.

¹⁰ M. de Cervantes, *Entremeses*, ed. C. C. García Valdés, Madrid, Santillana, 1997.

And Cervantes' judgments are even more critical when the drama caused by the loss of one's honor is in question. Hence, the unconventional endings of his plays those are due to certain problems love which is quite contrary to the endings found in contemporary theatres.

The ironic attack against illiteracy (the *Quijote* had already been interpreted by Spaniards of the time as a satire against ignorance and credulity¹²) and the refusal accept the existing notions of honor portray a marginal personality. In his edition of *El pensamiento de Cervantes* by Américo Castro, Rodríguez Puértolas includes a book by Rosenkranz that illustrates these statements: "Cervantes was a true Spaniard; but the critical spirit that he had, the genius reformer that he was, which encouraged him to criticise strange things for his country. It is unique in him, and precisely this precisely in this, establishes the universality of

¹¹ Cervantes, *Teatro completo*, ed. cit., p. 868.

¹² This is how it is shown in the anecdote narrated by the Morisco of Tazator, today Testour, (Tunisia) Juan Pérez, alias Ibrahim Al-Taybili, that took place in Alcalá de Henares, during the fairs of 1604: A Morisco goes with an uncultured Christian, one of those Christians that doesn't know "*ni leer, ni comprenden los escritos que nos han legado los antiguos y nuestros antepasados, y en los cuales, aunque sean obra de infieles, hay mucho que ver y mucho que aprender*". The Morisco buys books written by various authors, among them one by Pero Mexía and fray Antonio de Guevara. The Christian doesn't recognize these authors and reprimands the Morisco for not buying *Palmerín de Oliva*, *Amadís de Gaula*, *Don Belianís de Grecia*, and others that are based on true stories and are about the extraordinary courage of those knights. A student that was there says: "*nos ha salido un nuevo Don Quijote*", he is referring to the fact that the Christian is only knowledgeable of books that belong to a type of genre and believes, like Don Quijote, that they are true stories. This anecdote is taken up by Jaime Oliver Asín in "*El Quijote*" de 1604. With it he tries to prove that Cervantes' novel was famous about the middle of the year 1604 (the fair of Alcalá used to take place in August).

his philosophy, the rationalist liberty of his judgement, the humaneness of his poetry"¹³. The contrast between Cervantes and the usual manner in which the Spaniards of his time reasoned was noted some time ago, although no one was searching for explanations with regards to his experiences during captivity.

Cervantes continuously exposes religious orthodoxy (we would have to first allow the amputation of the hand with which he wrote *Exemplary Stories* "If whoever reads could be inducted with evil thought or desire" and in the first part of *Don Quixote* similarly is said: "no one will discover a dishonest word nor a thought which will be less than catholic," and displays tolerant and respectful attitude towards the Muslim should stand out. Such impartiality and objectivity of Cervantes' writings are indeed are astonishing.

A Morisco, Cidi Hamete Benengeli¹⁴, is the author of *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, and, although he is a Morisco, Cervantes doesn't hesitate to proclaim that he is wise: "Really, it seems to me, my dear college graduate, that in order to write histories and other such books, no matter of what sort, you have to have a good head and a mature understanding"¹⁵, and describes him as "Precise examiner", "Genious among historiographers", "Muslim philosopher", who repeats "*Almighty Allah may bless us !*

¹³ Barcelona, Noguer, 1972, p. 71, n. 97.

¹⁴ Since 1501 no Muslims officially existed in Spain. They were all baptized and made Christians that were subdued to the Christian authorities'. Higher or lesser level of tolerance towards that reality that was known to all to be fictitious. In 1560, under Felipe II, when such tolerance ceased towards that fictitious reality, the rebellion of the Moriscos' broke out in the Grenadine Alpujarras. After the rebellion many of the Moriscos were taken up as slaves, others ended up in Berberia.

¹⁵ *Quijote*, II, 3.

¡Almighty Allah may bless us!" three times: the *bismil'lah* that Cervantes probably would have listened to five times a day being sung by the "muezzin" from the mosques in Algiers. Cidi Hamete can conjure up high-level thoughts like any Christian. Or so says Cidi Hamid, Muhammadan philosopher: "for there are many who, without the light of true faith to show it to them, nevertheless fully comprehend the fickleness and instability of this mortal life and the endless reach of eternity toward which it looks..."¹⁶ This is how Cervantes thinks, but his irony is soon made known when Don Quixote and Sancho find out that the author of the book is a Moor, they are appalled, since "This made him feel a bit better, though it still bothered him that the author was a Moor, to judge by the name "Sidi", for truth simply could not be expected from Moors, because they were all cheats, swindlers, and wild-eyed troublemakers. He was worried that his lovemaking might have been treated indecently, damaging his Lady Dulcinea del Toboso's modest reputation."¹⁷

Such a distancing on Cervantes' part reaches its most crucial moment in the play *El gallardo español*. In it, as in Cervantes' work in general, nationality, and a practiced religion, in itself, are not the factors that determine a characters' goodness or villainy: Alimuzel is a Moor, but he doesn't look like one when it comes to good manners and refined emotions towards Don Fernando de Saavedra, who is a Christian (Alimuzel will say: "The Christian is not at all enemy, on the contrary yes!"; don Fernando assures Alimuzel: "The law which divides / our friendship does not impede/ to show noble heart"); Buitrago is Christian, but is vulgar, rude and greedy; the Christian Oropesa, with his greed he attacks

¹⁶ *Quijote*, II, 53.

¹⁷ *Quijote*, II, 3.

Arlaxa and Alimuzel's village, "Rich and without any harm venture", and is appalled because Don Fernando is on their side and has fought against "cristianos" ("Either Don Fernando is mad or already Christ is the enemy"). But Don Fernando, in Cervantes' view, has not fought against Spanish Christians: he defended some human beings that are Moors against a greedy individual who is Spanish and calls himself a Christian. (At a given point Don Fernando will combat like a hero in defense of the city and his people). And there are two more details that can be referred to where Cervantes' ironic comment can be perceived: one of them, from -the Moor- Alimuzel's own lips, in his challenge -which shows traces of the romances about the siege of Zamora- against those of Orán:

Muhammad has not brought me here
to verify in the field,
if his sect is good or bad,
for that, he has to be careful.¹⁸

The other is Captain Guzman's farewell and also Alimuzel's own goodbye:

Guzman - Your Mohammad, Ah!, may take care of you.
Alimuzel- Your Christ may be with you.¹⁹

One way or another, friendship, respect, and tolerance is present without keeping track of neither religious nor ethnic differences.

For Cervantes to be a Christian, in itself, did not mean anything. There are good Christians and bad Christians, good

¹⁸ *El gallardo español*, in *Teatro completo*, ed. cit., p. 21.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 30.

infidels and bad infidels. In *La española inglesa*, the protestant queen Isabel tolerates and favors the Catholic Isabela. When a chambermaid tells the queen that Isabela "was so Catholic and so Christian, that none of her persuasions, who were many, was unable to become successful in changing her catholic belief. The queen answered that it was the reason for her respect, as she knows how to maintain the belief, which her parents had taught her."²⁰ The queen's tolerant compassion and nobility towards the chambermaids' speech is seen as an excuse to murder Isabela: "The Queen ordered to detain her maid and to lock her up in a place, close to the palace, with the intention of punishing her according to her offense, given the fact that she ask for her pardon saying that by killing Isabela, she was offering sacrifice to heaven, removing a catholic from the earth..."²¹.

Moors, Protestants and Christians are portrayed tolerant as well as savage. It is not the practiced religion that distinguishes men but their good deeds. A renegade is a good person because he has always been good to Christians, in other words, he has witnessed a certain human behavior from those that surrounded him²². Sancho would say the same of another renegade: "... and I trust the renegade, who seems to me a very good man, with his heart in the right place."²³. The Moors inflict cruel tortures on an imprisoned priest. This shows the unspeakable inhumaneness that men are capable of, but cruelty is not only present in the Moors. They do it in retaliation against the Morisco to whom "The just

²⁰ Cervantes, *La española inglesa*, in *Obras completas*, ed. A. Valbuena Prat, Madrid, Aguilar, 1960, 11^o ed., p. 866.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² See in *Quijote*, I, 60.

²³ *Quijote*, II, 64.

inquisitors condemned to fire" in Valencia²⁴. And if it is true that Moors traffic with human merchandise, it is also known that they are not the only ones: prisoners give themselves away in exchange for three *escudos*; and, the prisoners' own family refuses to pay the ransom. Greed and cruelty are not exclusive of an ethnicity or a religion. Cervantes outsmarts those that brag about being good men just because they are old Christians to the extent that the devil himself is seen as a good man and even a good Christian:

"By God and my conscience," responded the Devil..."

"Clearly," said Sancho, "this devil must be both a good man and a good Christian, or he'd never have sworn 'By God and my conscience.' And Cervantes confirms by the mouth of Sancho himself that in all the parts there are good and bad persons: / begin to see that even in Hell there must be decent people."²⁵

In *La gran sultana* Cervantes also questions the assumption that religious affiliation determines the moral and civic value of the individual. He makes the sultan and Catalina overcome differences of social and religious nature by showing that relationships among people of different beliefs and cultures are possible. Thus, although the marriage between the sultan and Catalina is not real due to the circumstances, as Canavaggio points out, it is a symbol of "An enthusiastic exaltation of tolerance, of love, and peace between people of the world"²⁶ or, as noted by

²⁴ See in Stanislav Zimic, *El teatro de Cervantes*, Madrid, Castalia, 1992, study dedicated to *Los tratos de Argel*, especially pp. 45 and 46.

²⁵ *Quijote*, II, 34.

²⁶ Zimic, p. 202.

Adolfo Marsillac, "a song snatched away from the tolerance"²⁷. What is essential to the problem of the play, the conflict between Christianity and Islam, is that is portrayed not as a problem, but as an accomplished harmony. The same process of harmony takes place between two people of different religions in the tale about the prisoner from *Don Quixote*²⁸.

I intended to bring to light the tolerance, the generosity, and the impartiality with which Cervantes judges human beings, as he is guided by the manner in which they act and not by the religion they practice or their respective ethnicity.

There are books that can be alluded to that allege the opposite, and at least some Cervantine specialist has done so²⁹, not keeping in mind Cervantes' context and irony. In the works that are closely related to his stay in Algiers there is a deep sense of religion, because for Cervantes Christianity represents the freedom and the sense of nation against captivity by the Algerian Turk³⁰.

²⁷ I don't agree with some critics (Joan de Sagarra, *El País*, 9-IX-92) that consider that the very tolerant sultan, according to Marsillac, is not willing to grant his dame the freedom that she is begging for and for a moment she thinks that it has been granted to her: "*Levanta, señora mía, / que para ti no se extiende / la merced que quiero hacer, / pues, si lo quieres saber, / sólo a varones comprende*". Because in the text what is being said is: "*Levanta, señora mía, / que a ti no te comprende / la merced que quise hacer; / y, si la queréis saber, / a los esclavos se extiende, / y no a ti que eres señora / de mi alma, a quien adora / como si fueses su Alá*" (vv. 2424-2431, p. 442 from Sevilla and Rey's edition). I think that there has been a misinterpretation of the text.

²⁸ Zimic (*op. cit.*, p. 190) has noticed a different reaction during similar circumstances: Catalina's "Christian" father in *La gran sultana* and the Moor Agi Morato, Zoraida's father, in the tale about the captive.

²⁹ Morel-Fatio judges Cervantes to be intolerant because, every time he talks about the Moriscos he does it with contempt and hate.

³⁰ During his captivity, according to his partner Antonio de Sosa, Cervantes "se ocupaba muchas veces en componer versos en alabanza

Perhaps, due to this, Turks are not portrayed under a positive light in Cervantine texts, and Cervantes longs for a war like action against those ship raiders³¹. Moriscos themselves recognize: "we went to the Barbary and settled in a town in Algeria, which was like going to live in Hell itself."³² In the *Persiles*, some of the Moriscos leave with the Turks thinking that they will soon become their rescuers "They began to feel the poverty which threatened their change and the dishonor in which they or their wives and their sons were put". *The Moors themselves wished* "More than the Christian captives, their wives and children, who will be the subject of the Turks who will suffer ill treatment and receive other tyrannies."³³

It is certain that Cervantes doesn't speak well of the Turks, but he seems rather humane and well inclined towards those who held him captive for five years, and I don't think that the animosity against the Turk, which Cervantes reveals at some point, can be defined as a form of intolerance.

Another characteristic of intolerance, found in Cervantes, is the slanderous writings against the Moriscos present in *The Dogs' Colloquy*. It is perhaps a reflection of the most generalised

de nuestro Señor y de su bendita Madre, y otras cosas santas y devotas; algunas de las cuales comunicó particularmente conmigo". (P. Torres Lanzas, "Información de Miguel de Cervantes, de lo que ha servido a S. M. y de lo que ha hecho estando cautivo en Argel", in *RAMB*, XII, 1905).

³¹ In the *Epístola a Mateo Vázquez* and in *El trato de Argel*, he urges the king to fight against the Algerian Turks, scourge of our sea towns; he doesn't think it's right for Spain to be wearing itself out from fighting against civilized Christians. Also, Lope de Vega in *Los milagros del desprecio* has a character say: "Bien mirado, ¿qué me han hecho los luteranos a mí?"

³² *Quijote*, II, 63.

³³ Arch. de Simancas. Estado. Leg. 1122, f.º 64.

opinion that circulated throughout the country during his time. Such an opinion was based on reasons of economic rivalry or due to misunderstanding than due to religious reasons, somewhat similar to how it is spoken today about immigrants or the cruel mockery which the Jews are the object of in the Cervantes' plays, *Los baños de Argel* and *La gran sultana*. The verger's cruel mistreatment of the Jew in *Los baños de Argel* loses its weight given people's different character: the Jew is an honest person, completely firm on his faith in contrast to the verger's "opportunistic" Christian religion. The Jew shows great personal dignity to the injustices of the world of which he is a victim; he shows sincere sympathy with human sufferings, irrespective of nationality or religious affiliation. The verger's mockery represents a foolish passion which Cervantes ridicules. That is how the Muslim judge understands it when he notices: "*From Spaniards this and more can be expected*". And, we do not really know where the unfathomable sea of Cervantine irony can lead to.

Cervantes himself was conscious of the fact that the years in captivity could have in the development of an individual's personality. In *El amante liberal* the young Leonisa and Ricardo have matured as a result of their experiences in captivity. Leonisa has turned into a thoughtful and mature young lady, and in Ricardo there is a significant change, a moral transformation: his arrogance and violence disappears and are replaced by generosity. He gives up Leonisa and gives her to Cornelio, although Cervantes gives a happy ending that the reader expects, because Ricardo has also learned that his generosity has a limit which is Leonisa's free will. He cannot be generous with that which doesn't belong to him, and Leonisa is not his. Cervantes makes a double assertion about freedom: physical freedom, from captivity ("That is one or one of

the major issues which one may have in this life, return, after a long captivity, healthy and safe to the Motherland”), and a couple’s moral freedom.

All of this reflects Cervantes' understanding and vision with regard to the human condition that on any terrestrial latitude is displayed with same inclinations, and it responds to the same stimulus.

In Cervantes' works there is high regard for basic human, ethical and social problems, relevant even today and as I have said in the beginning, it could be thanks to the richness and values of two cultures imbibed by our author during the years of Algerian captivity, where, as mentioned in the prologue to his *Exemplary Stories*, “He learnt to have patience in adversities”.