

Imagining Istanbul: Sentiment and Subversion in *La gran sultana*

Jessica R. Boll
Carroll University

While Cervantes' manifold adventures in the Mediterranean have been decidedly well documented both by the author himself and by biographers and critics, this literary and scholarly attention has centered primarily upon the lands and waters surrounding the Barbary Coast, Italy and the islands off the eastern fringes of Europe. The Cervantine connection to the Ottoman capital, on the other hand, has been much less explored territory. Although Cervantes was never in Istanbul, he nonetheless depicted the space with great affect in his drama *La gran sultana doña Catalina de Oviedo* (1615). Not only a framework for the complex sub-plots of the play, the city takes on a decisive role in the text. With *La gran sultana*, Cervantes joins the multitude of writers compelled to portray an urban center that has captivated imaginations for centuries for its striking beauty, complicated history, underlying melancholy and the inexplicable sense of longing that the space continually evokes. Despite his lack of immediate experience in the capital, Cervantes aptly captures the fundamental sentiments of the city space in a subversive drama that overtly challenges conventional notions of the Mediterranean.

La gran sultana interweaves three separate story lines that trace the fates of Catalina, a Spanish, Christian captive who subsequently captivates the Grand Turk, Lamberto, a Transylvanian, Christian male who disguises himself as a female in the imperial harem in order to reunite with his beloved Clara, and Madrigal, a Spanish, Christian captive who repeatedly declines opportunities to escape from Istanbul as a result of his forbidden relationship with a Muslim woman.¹ The three story lines converge in the final scenes of the play when the Sultan chooses Lamberto (alias "Zelinda") to produce him an heir to the Empire. Clara ("Zaida") desperately turns to Catalina for help, and in the final scenes of the drama all players unite as Lamberto cleverly accounts for his masculinity and deludes both the Sultan and the *cadí*. At Catalina's command (and as a result of her newly announced pregnancy), the captives are freed, Catalina is venerated for bearing the future of the Ottoman Empire, and the city rejoices at the prospect of an *otomano español* as heir to the throne.

Emblematic spaces of Istanbul notably constitute the backdrop of each scene of the drama. It is within one of the most representative places in the city, the harem of the sultan's palace, that the characters and sub-dramas ultimately coalesce. This spatial framework provides the setting for the principal drama between Catalina and the Grand Turk and the sub-plot concerning Lamberto and Clara, while Madrigal likewise penetrates the harem

¹ Although undoubtedly fictionalized by Cervantes, history is replete with accounts that parallel the principal drama between a Christian captive and the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Most notable is that of Haseki Hürrem, known as "Roxana" or "Roxelana" in the West, the only legal wife of famed 16th-century ruler Süleyman the Magnificent. A Christian captive from the region that is today Ukraine, she was brought to the seraglio in Istanbul on account of her beauty and came to exert considerable control over the entire Empire after she was freed from captivity and made sultana. Like Catalina, she bore the Sultan's children, including the eventual heir to the Empire, Selim. Other renowned sultans likewise had relationships with and ceded power to Christian women, to the extent that the mid-16th century is often referred to as the *Kadinlar Sultanatı*, the Sultanate of Women, for the series of concubines whose marked authority resonated both within and beyond the walls of the imperial harem (Freely 207).

walls through his (feigned) abilities as both tailor and musician, eventually participating in the wedding celebrations involving Spanish dance, poetry and song. Exemplifying the city, the Empire, and the entire imagined East for the Western audience,² the harem's maintained presence and fundamental role in the drama is thus multiply indicative. The three story lines of the drama significantly converge in the symbolic *serrallo* of the palace as the action culminates in the final act of the text.

Along with the harem, the Saint Sophia mosque is another iconically Istanbulite element of the setting that augments the drama's *costumbrista* climate. Referenced numerous times throughout the text, it is part of the story's backdrop from the beginning of the play. In the initial dialogue of the opening scene, in fact, the mosque is highlighted and categorized as one of the Empire's most impressive sites: "Hoy hace la zalá en Santa Sofía, / ese templo que ves, que en la grandeza / excede a cuantos tiene la Turquía" (I.37-39). The building's size, architecture and history make it one of the most famed and revered structures of the city, and its ideological and functional transformation from church to mosque makes it the ultimate realization of spatial miscegenation.³ An ideal pennant of Istanbul for its confluence of religions, cultures and historical time periods, its mention at the onset of the drama is thus dually significant for the structure's symbolic importance as representative of the city itself and emblematic of cultural dynamism.

While the principal framework of the harem and the repeated allusion to such evocative sites as the Saint Sophia undeniably add to the spatial and cultural specificity of the text, the most tangible presence of the city is felt in the opening and closing scenes of the play. Juxtaposed against the restrictive walls of the seraglio, the play commences and concludes in the colorful, crowded, cosmopolitan streets of Istanbul.⁴ The city itself, in

² Rana Kabbani points to the harem-as-empire metaphor common to Western art and literature: "This edifice became a metaphor for the whole East, fulfilling as it did a bulk of European fantasy needs. These descriptions were a self-perpetuating *topos*, repeated and copied again and again since they corresponded exactly to Western expectations" (42). Crimes of passion, abused women, and jealous, domineering male figures were common motifs in art and literature depicting the Orient, and the sexual connotation of the harem was associated with this violence compulsorily linked to the East. Cervantes manipulates the space of the harem, however, by depicting a penetrable space in which Lamberto's presence, Catalina's power, and festive Spanish song and dance infiltrate the historically sacred and well-guarded living quarters. For more on the Cervantine presentation of the harem in *La gran sultana*, see Jessica Boll, "Violating the Harem: Manipulation of Spatial Meaning in Cervantes' 'La gran sultana'"

³ The Saint Sophia (also known as the Hagia Sophia or the *Aya Sofya* in Turkish) was originally built as a church by the Emperor Justinian in 532AD at the site of two previous churches of the same name that had been earlier destroyed by riots. It was the largest cathedral in the world for nearly a thousand years, during which time it served as the religious focal point of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Upon Ottoman conquest of the city in 1453, the building was reappropriated and immediately converted into a mosque. To this day it is considered the epitome of Byzantine architecture, and although it has subsequently been transformed into a public museum, both Christian mosaics and Koranic verses continue to embellish the interior walls.

⁴ An important element of the city's cosmopolitanism – and that of the Mediterranean in general – is the *lingua franca* spoken throughout. Cervantes calls attention to this common lexicon in *La gran sultana* early in the first act: "[A]quí todo es confusión, / y todos nos entendemos / con una lengua mezclada / que ignoramos y sabemos" (I.178-81). Salec's assessment of the linguistic amalgam here as "confusión" is analogous to Antonio de Sosa's description in *Topographia e historia general de Argel*, in which such confusion is further compounded by the poor pronunciation and lack of grammar of the Turks: "Y juntando a esta confusión y mezcla de tan diversos vocablos y maneras de hablar, de diversos reinos, provincias y naciones cristianas, la mala pronunciación de los moros y turcos, y no saben ellos variar los modos, tiempos y casos" (116). More than the "confusion" of the communication, however, it is remarkable that this complex mix of languages was employed and understood to such an extent, considering the context.

fact, is presented before either the main characters or the primary story lines are introduced: spatial references initiate the drama as Roberto (an undercover Christian dressed *a lo griego*) and the Turkish renegade Salec observe the Islamic ceremony of the *zalá*.⁵ Roberto has come to Istanbul in pursuit of Lamberto and is awestruck as Salec describes the public adoration and purification ceremony before them. He promptly articulates a sense of wonder with regard to the entire context in which he finds himself: “Cosas he visto aquí que de admirables / pueden al más gallardo entendimiento / suspender” (I.25-26). When Salec explicitly asks of his impressions of the milieu, Roberto responds: “Que no creo a la verdad, y pongo duda en lo cierto” (I.53-54). The Spaniard openly acknowledges his amazement at the surroundings and is bewildered by the urban spectacle he witnesses.

This opening scene is described theatrically in which Roberto and Salec function as spectators who observe from afar and whose indicative conversation undermines religious opposition from the drama’s initial dialogue. It is the most descriptive, most exotic and arguably most Turkish scene of the text, inundating the audience upon their first encounter with the city space. Turkish dress (those in the procession are all dressed *a lo turquesco*), architecture (explicit mention is made here of the grandeur of the Saint Sophia) and the overall atmosphere of the city (pages and garzons flutter around the Grand Turk) are described to such an extent that the space is effectively reconstructed from the opening pages of the play. As noted by Luciano García Lorenzo, in less than fifty lines Cervantes foregrounds the exotic context of the drama and highlights the city as a space of cultural fusion, and this spatial detail is meticulously maintained throughout *La gran sultana* with explicit directives specifying dress and props until the final curtain descends.⁶

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau asserts that distance permits the city subject to best interpret the urban environment, and this is precisely the perspective of Roberto and Salec in this first scene.⁷ In effect, the city is presented in the style of landscape art in which background elements fuse with those in the foreground, exemplified here by the descriptions of buildings in the distance, such as the Saint Sophia

⁵ Countless texts of the era –both fictional and “historical”– contain descriptions of the Ottoman sultans in the context of their frequent processions throughout the city. As exemplified in *La gran sultana*, the majesty and grandeur of both the Grand Turk and of the sites of Istanbul are among the most commonly underscored elements of such narrations. Replete with military salutes, music, banners and animals, the arrival/departure/parades of the sultans were spectacles to behold. For first-hand accounts of such processions from a Turkish perspective, see Evliya Çelebi’s *Seyahatname*.

⁶ García Lorenzo points specifically to the ambient character of the opening scenes of the play, as well as the detailed stage directions presented at the onset of the drama: “Con menos de cincuenta versos, Cervantes ha ofrecido un cuadro que la imaginación del lector puede completar adecuadamente, un cuadro que, naturalmente, tendría que ir acompañado de la pertinente escenografía con el fin de acentuar el exotismo de unos vestidos, de unos objetos, de una arquitectura, incluso del físico de unos personajes convertidos en ‘peregrinas’ figuras para el español de aquel tiempo [...]” (207). García Lorenzo further notes that the richness of this scenography contrasts the scarcity of such atmospheric detail in the dramatic works of many of Cervantes’ contemporaries.

⁷ Describing the view of Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center, de Certeau writes of the advantage of “seeing the whole” in terms of urban perspective and says of the city spectator: “His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more” (92). Although Roberto and Salec lack the vantage of elevation, they are enough removed from the scene as to be able to “read” and analyze the complexity of setting, becoming anonymous subjects of the city and affording them a “fiction of knowledge” of both space and spectacle.

and the sultan's palace, alongside an account of the procession that passes directly in front of the characters –close enough that Salec must bow his head in reverence to the Grand Turk. Roberto and Salec are integrated into the Turkish community by their proximity to the procession but at the same time maintain a critical distance in order to effectively observe and comment on the scene. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan points to the destruction of binaries and the incorporation of the individual as two fundamental aspects of landscape art, applicable here in terms of the cityscape of Istanbul:

Aesthetically, landscape satisfies a human need for harmonious resolution between such basic binaries of human experience as vertical and horizontal, foreground and background, illumination and darkness. Furthermore, in landscape, people find deep satisfaction in being both attached and detached, for landscape is neither embeddedness in locality nor a God's-eye view of the world but a position somewhere in between. (175)

Here the resolution of the binary between foreground and background serves to couple the characters with the city while simultaneously allowing both city and characters to stand alone as distinct, foundational elements of the work. By situating this first scene in a main artery of Istanbul and presenting detailed, notably Istanbulite features of the space as landscape art from the very onset of the drama, Cervantes thus underscores the city while challenging the assumed dichotomy of the Mediterranean by including a Christian in the distinctly Muslim aggregation –yet another “harmonious resolution” of “basic binaries” as explicated by Tuan.

The decidedly symbolic assembly of the religiously assorted cast, epitomized in this initial scene in which Christian Roberto, Turkish renegade Salec, and a silent *alárabe* congregate, is a common element of cultural interfacing found often in Cervantine literature. In *El amante liberal* (1613), for example, Cervantes again blurs the distinction between “Turkish” and “European” via a markedly multicultural repertoire. Sicilians Ricardo and Leonisa unite in Nicosia, Cyprus, recently conquered by the Turks. Apart from the *cadí*, the “Turkish” characters are no less European than these Italian captives, however. Ricardo befriends renegade Mahamut, favored slave of the pasha and fellow Sicilian who longs to return to Christian lands. Halima, wife of the Turkish *cadí*, is herself a Greek renegade. Even the Turkish pashas, Ali Baxá and Hazán Baxá, are Italian renegades.⁸ As in *La gran sultana*, the culturally diverse ensemble of *El amante liberal* highlights the fluid nature of the early modern Mediterranean context and the difficulty of delineating fixed identities in such a composite setting.

Given the significance of the street as exemplary of the city space, as the primary site for communal interaction, and as a fundamental aspect of the Ottoman urban design, it is thus of considerable import that Cervantes begins *La gran sultana* with such a striking street scene.⁹ The drama concludes with another momentous, albeit brief, scene in

⁸ Sosa's account of the rulers of Algiers in Chapters 1-30 of the second part of the first volume of *Topographia* (“Epítome de los reyes de Argel”) shows that this was, in fact, common practice in Ottoman history. The Algerian kings, including founders Aruch and Cheridin Barbarroja, were predominantly renegades, or sons of renegades, of foreign descent.

⁹ André Raymond points to the significance of the street in the Ottoman context. As the site of economic activity –the explicit focus of both the city center and the entire Empire– the street was an integral space within the urban setting. Furthermore, Ottoman cities were highly compartmentalized, and the street served as the link between distinct quarters that housed various facets of the population. As Ottoman cities were

Istanbul's famed streets. As Madrigal departs for Madrid, he emotionally takes leave of the city via exclamations of admiration and bittersweet farewell:

¡Adiós, Constantinopla famosísima!
 ¡Pera y Permas, adiós! ¡Adiós, escala,
 Chifutí, y aun Guedí! ¡Adiós, hermoso
 jardín de Visitaz! ¡Adiós, gran templo
 que de Santa Sofía sois llamado,
 puesto que ya servís de gran mezquita!
 ¡Tarazanas, adiós, que os lleve el diablo,
 porque podéis al agua cada día
 echar una galera fabricada
 desde la quilla al tope de la gavia,
 sin que le falte cosa necesaria
 a la navegación!¹⁰ (III.2925-2936)

The list would have continued had his comrade Andrea not indicated that it was time to depart. To this reminder Madrigal responds that although he is well aware of this fact, three hundred things remain to which he must direct his sweet good-bye: “Ya lo veo, y no me quedan / sino trescientas cosas a quien darles / el dulce adiós acostumbrado mío” (III.2937-2939). Despite years away from Spain, Madrigal shows certain remorse at having to leave Istanbul behind. It is a surprising reaction considering the circumstances under which he arrived at –and abode within– the city. It is unexpected, too, that it is not the separation from his Muslim lover that he laments at this critical juncture (at whose complete command he earlier and unequivocally declared himself: “[...] aun todavía tengo el yugo / al cuello, todavía estoy cautivo, / todavía la fuerza poderosa / de amor tiene sujeto a mi albedrío” [I.494-498]), but rather embarkation from the city itself. Furthermore, his seeming enthusiasm to return to Madrid is quickly exposed as more a desire for personal fame and the recognition of a lucrative professional opportunity than a true longing to be back in the Spanish capital:

[...] Ven, que muero

primarily radiocentric in design, streets thus connected periphery to economic core while simultaneously defining intra-urban communities.

¹⁰ Albert Mas has analyzed this farewell speech of Madrigal in his account of Turks within Golden Age Spanish literature and has identified the specific sites referenced within Istanbul. “Pera” was a suburb of Galata, the foreigners’ *barrio* and the city’s diplomatic center. “Permas” is thought to refer to the small boats that transported the city’s inhabitants across the Golden Horn, between commercial Galata and the political center of the city, and only mistakenly capitalized in the process of printing. “Chifutí” appears to allude to the Jewish district of the city, whereas “Guedí” is suggested to be an alteration of “yedi”, meaning “seven” in Turkish, possibly referring to the neighborhood of Yedi-Kulé (“Seven Towers”) where the sultans’ captives of choice were housed. This district was the first part of the city visible from the Sea of Marmara, the last if the city was approached from the west, and thus a symbolic element in the foreign imagination. The “jardín de Visitaz” was a well-known garden in the city, and the “Santa Sofía” was internationally celebrated as one of the world’s great architectural achievements, as explained above. Only the famous arsenals –“Tarazanas”– are cursed by Madrigal, who presumably suffered directly from the well-constructed weaponry and impressive ability of the Turks to do corsairing in the Mediterranean (Mas 422). García Lorenzo calls attention to the overall affect that Madrigal expresses with regard to Istanbul in this scene: “[E]l tono [...] pleno de admiración y de asombro ante los lugares que han enmarcado su vida reciente, un tono que llega incluso al afecto por la ciudad y a cierto dolor por la partida” (212). García Lorenzo surmises Madrigal’s farewell to be representative of Cervantes’ own sentiment regarding the Ottoman world, a mix of fascination and justifiable aversion.

por verme ya en Madrid hacer corrillos
 de gente que pregunte: “¿Cómo es esto?
 Diga, señor cautivo, por su vida:
 ¿es verdad que se llama la sultana
 que hoy reina en la Turquía Catalina
 y que es cristiana, y tiene don y todo,
 y que es de Oviedo el sobrenombre suyo?”
 ¡Oh! ¡Qué de cosas les diré! [...] (III.2905-2913)

He plans to spread the story of Catalina by bringing it to the Spanish theater, fulfilling the double role of author/actor and comically declaring his intention to represent the same “character” in Madrid as he did in Istanbul –retrospectively rewriting his experience and reducing the space of the city to the Spanish stage.¹¹ Throughout Madrigal’s spatial discourse the remoteness of Madrid is juxtaposed with the immediacy of Istanbul, and any nostalgia or nationalism that Madrigal does direct toward Spain in the play is so hyperbolic that it serves more as a parody of the political rhetoric of the era rather than as true exaltation of the Iberian Peninsula.¹²

Madrigal’s farewell speech highlights his undeniable emotional attachment to Istanbul. He expresses a perceptible and intimate connection to the city in this seemingly peripheral scene, a notable affection considering his history with(in) the city. Significantly, the despair of separation and the affinity that Madrigal feels toward Istanbul are not unique to this text. Rather, the related and intimately linked sentiments of longing and melancholy have been recurrently associated with the Ottoman capital.¹³ These feelings – not exclusive to Istanbul but coupled explicitly with it – have been expressed in art and literature both by

¹¹ Ana María Rodríguez Rodríguez discusses the converse idea of the cities of Algiers and Istanbul acting as stages upon which captives are transformed into actors that must represent a distinctive identity within their new, unfamiliar context: “En Argel y Constantinopla, lugares de cambio y ambigüedad, donde las apariencias son engañosas y nada es lo que parece ser, los individuos se transforman en actores de su propia vida, adoptando en el escenario de la ciudad un nuevo papel, si bien sin anular completamente su identidad previa” (163). Rodríguez Rodríguez goes on to discuss that the idea of the individual as a “representation” is explicit in the comedy put on by the captives in *Cautiverio y trabajos de Diego Galán* (bk. I, ch. 3), which parallels the performances within *La gran sultana* presented to the Sultan (Madrigal explicitly relates the biography of Catalina) and Madrigal’s intention at the end of the drama to again represent the story of the sultana once back in Spain. In all cases, the individual is split into multiple selves and must embody different roles depending upon the needs and circumstances of the particular situation. For Rodríguez Rodríguez, such division becomes problematic when the captive must reintegrate into Spanish society and attempt to reunite a dual identity.

¹² The very name *Madrigal* nods to the native city of the comic figure (as well as to the word *madrigado*, signifying “guile” or “artfulness,” as noted by P. Lewis Smith), and his correspondingly caricatural Spanish nature is underscored upon his very introduction in the first act. The Italian spy, Andrea, asks: “¿No sois vos español?” (I.506) To this Madrigal responds with a lengthy descant: “¿Por qué? ¿Por esto? / Pues por las once mil de malla juro / y por el alto, dulce, omnipotente / deseo que se encierra bajo el hopo / de cuatro acomodados porcionistas, / que he de romper por montes de diamantes, / y por dificultades indecibles / y he de llevar mi libertad en peso / sobre los propios hombros de mi gusto, / y entrar triunfando en Nápoles la bella / con dos o tres galeras levantadas / por mi industria y valor, y Dios delante, / y dando a la Anunciada los dos bucos, / quedaré con el uno rico y próspero, / y no ponerme aora a andar por trena, / cargado de temor y de miseria” (I.507-521). After such a reply Andrea no longer questions the captive’s nationality, “¡Español sois, sin duda!” (I.522), to which Madrigal returns: “Y soylo, y soylo, / lo he sido y lo seré mientras que viva, / y aun después de ser muerto ochenta siglos” (I.523-525).

¹³ Esra Akcan calls attention to Freud’s notable contribution to the term “melancholy”, explicitly signaling loss as the main cause of the disposition.

those separated from the space and those remaining within it. Termed *hasret* (insatiable longing) and *hüzün* (communal melancholy) in Turkish, both are definitively communicated in *La gran sultana* as Madrigal prepares to depart from the city; the inexpressible, unexpected, general sense of longing that permeates the space itself, on the other hand, resides in the features themselves – the ancient ruins, the dilapidated edifices and the crumbling foundations – that manifest the city’s lost past. This overwhelming loss – evident on virtually every street corner – in turn creates a melancholic air that characterizes the city. Esra Akcan notes the bifold genealogies of melancholy in which melancholy either is internal to the subject who experiences it or emanates from the very object toward which it is outwardly directed, arguing that Istanbul’s *hüzün* result from the combination of the two traditions (41). The synergetic melancholy that results from this combination is both reflective and reinforcing: “The urban landscape and the memory of the lost civilization imprinted on the city’s ruins become the illustration of the melancholic mood of individuals” (42). In *La gran sultana*, Madrigal’s internal, subject-derived melancholy couples with the city’s object-derived melancholy (radiating from the aforementioned locales within the text, such as the converted Saint Sophia), as Cervantes astutely captures the emotive essence of both the space and those within it.¹⁴ Because the object in this case is precisely the urban landscape itself, the sensations of *hasret* and *hüzün* pervade the city and envelop Istanbul as much as its abundant waterways.

Contemporary Turkish author and academic Orhan Pamuk dedicates a chapter of *Istanbul: Memories and the City* precisely to the feeling of *hüzün* that defines Istanbul. According to Pamuk, the city’s *hüzün* can be felt in the city walls, along the Bosphorus and in the markets. It infuses the city along its streets, in the air, within the crowds and in the cemeteries. Of Arabic origin, the word conveys “a feeling of deep spiritual loss”, yet the melancholy of Istanbul isn’t necessarily a negative quality (Pamuk 90). In Islamic culture it is a valued, praised and honored characteristic that is based in Sufi mysticism. It is a state of mind, a way of looking at life in which the individual is led closer to Allah through his/her very suffering. It is a distinctive quality that paradoxically enamors its sufferers and draws them to the city space.

Pamuk prefaces *Istanbul* with a quote by 19th-century Turkish journalist and short-story writer Ahmet Rasim: “The beauty of a landscape resides in its melancholy.” It is this melancholy – a melancholy stemming from centuries of perdition, change, and alternating tides of opulence and demise – that novelists, poets and painters from around the world have strived to capture in depicting Istanbul and what ironically attracts them to the city in the first place. This tacit ache that hovers above the streets creates a sense of loss and longing that is discernibly articulated by Madrigal as he bids farewell to the city to which he was initially brought unwillingly. Whereas the Cervantine captive laments his impending departure – notably melancholic for his separation from, rather than his

¹⁴ It is ironic that Madrigal is the one to directly articulate this melancholy, yet it may be precisely for this (seemingly) auxiliary, comedic role that he is given license to express such sentiment. While mention is made of Catalina’s melancholy upon her initial captivity and arrival to the city (“profundas melancolias / la tuvieron sin color” [I.555-556], “no ha tres días / que de sus melancolias / está libre esta española” [I.569-571]), it is Madrigal who explicitly conveys the melancholy to which Pamuk and Akcan refer. Although Madrigal’s flippant humor dominates his character throughout much of the drama (see Canavaggio’s “Sobre lo cómico en el teatro cervantino: Tristán y Madrigal, bufones *in partibus*” for the ways in which Madrigal both parallels and deviates from the archetypal *bobo renacentista* and *gracioso lopesco*), his nostalgic farewell to Istanbul is particularly significant to the underlying meaning of the play.

confinement within, the Ottoman capital— the city’s pervading sense of longing is overtly manifested in the strata of architecture that have witnessed both celebrated conquests and crushing defeats. It is a pungent, caustic sense of loss and longing that provides anomalous pleasure in the city’s affliction —“sad joys” in which “pain and death [merge] with beauty” (Pamuk 114). While the *hüziin* described by Pamuk is no doubt coated by extra layers of loss, a fallen Ottoman Empire atop the composite legacies of ancient Byzantium and Constantinople, a similar essence of loss, an analogous melancholy of a vanished/vanishing past, and a parallel ensuing longing defined the city as much for early modern captives as it does for the contemporary inhabitant.¹⁵ Incredibly, the character of Istanbul evokes an emotional attachment that is independent of the nationality, religious affiliation or time period of those who experience the space. Evident in fiction, testimony, music, culture and daily life, it is a communal sentiment as all grieve for and with the city.

As he discusses the melancholy of the city and beauty that results because of, rather than in spite of, this melancholy, Pamuk relates his own personal experiences and accordingly reflects on the idea of belonging to/within a place.¹⁶ While Madrigal expresses an ostensibly illogical yet undeniable attachment to Istanbul, Pamuk spends his life trying to understand the anomalies of his city and his own place within it. He acknowledges a certain detachment from the city as he is forced to give up ownership of the space: “I realize ‘my’ city is not really mine” (288), and then further elaborates: “As I waver back and forth, sometimes seeing the city from within and sometimes from without, I feel as I do when I am wandering the streets, caught in a stream of slippery contradictory thoughts, not quite

¹⁵ Other notable examples include the protagonists of Diego Galán’s *Cautiverio y trabajos de Diego Galán* (the original manuscripts are assumed to have been written between 1626 and 1648) and the anonymous *Viaje de Turquía* (1557). Both texts markedly extol Istanbul, despite the state of captivity of their narrators. Galán is held in Ottoman territory for 10 years, the majority of which time he spends in Istanbul, and he dedicates the longest chapter of his narration to the grandeurs of the city to which he was brought against his will. The protagonist of *Viaje*, Pedro de Urdemalas, likewise spends the majority of his captive years in Istanbul, and he, too, devotes a lengthy chapter to praising the city. In addition to these explicit sections of accolade, acclaim of the city infuses both works in their entirety and the texts especially stress the opulence, abundance and multicultural nature of the Ottoman capital. Furthermore, the protagonists of both texts express clear longing for the space when separated from it and nostalgically look back to their days in the city after having returned to Spain. Galán longs to return to the city while at sea, mourns the vanished Christian past that he sees at every turn, and even likens returning to Istanbul to returning to his homeland: “tan contentos [estábamos al regresar a Constantinopla], que cuando la dimos vista nos pareció llegar a nuestra patria” (229). In *Viaje*, Pedro also nostalgically remembers his days in Istanbul as he relates his adventures to his Spanish comrades. Both characters parallel Madrigal’s affection and attachment to the city while their texts lavish attention on the space, much like *La gran sultana*.

¹⁶ In a 2006 interview, Pamuk refers to Walter Benjamin’s theory that there are two kinds of city books: those written by outsiders, which tend to be exotic, and those written by inhabitants of the city, which tend to be autobiographical. Furthermore, Benjamin asserts that the enthusiasm for seeing a city from the outside is the exotic/picturesque, while for the city’s inhabitants “the connection is always mediated by memories” (Pamuk 240). Pamuk claims that although his initial objective was not to write his own life story, his book was destined to become just that: “[M]y intention was not to write an autobiography, but, to be honest, my city book was going to be autobiographical anyway” (Mirze 180). City and self become inseparable as the division between the individual and the space that he/she inhabits evaporates. Pamuk explicitly refers to this connection in the beginning chapter of *Istanbul*: “I’ve accepted the city into which I’ve been born in the same way that I’ve accepted my body [...] and my gender [...] This is my fate” (7). He later reiterates and reinforces the intimacy of this relationship: “If I see my city as beautiful and bewitching, then my life must be so too” (56). For Pamuk, city and self are inherently coupled and in his book he explicitly projects personal memory onto the urban landscape.

belonging to this place and not quite a stranger” (289). It is similar to the disjointed feeling faced by Madrigal –not quite a part of the city, yet not a mere visitor. Whereas Pamuk explains: “Sometimes one’s city can look like an alien place” (317), Madrigal experiences the converse effect in which someone else’s city can begin to look and feel like one’s own.

Despite the conspicuous antagonism between the Spanish and Ottoman Empires, profound emotional attachment and the related affects of *hasret* and *hüzün* are notions clearly expressed in *La gran sultana* and in other early modern Spanish texts that explicitly portray –and exceedingly laud– Istanbul.¹⁷ Ideological alignments shift and identities become blurred in the culturally conflated urban space and as a result of intimate encounters with the presumed enemy. The deliberately asymmetrical structure of the drama both reflects and categorically serves the purpose of dissolving assumed oppositions, resulting in the same obscurement of systematic dichotomies that has historically defined the Ottoman capital. Susana Hernández Araico notes this overall asymmetry in which the stories of the captives are intermingled with scenes that emphasize the power of the Sultan, and the entire drama presents subsidiary imbalances that are transmitted through a series of successive, antonymous perspectives and unconventional reversals of power (158). In the initial street scene, for example, emphasis on the tyranny of the Grand Turk is juxtaposed against the humility of those who beg his pardon in the ceremony of the *zalá* (and subsequently, against his servility to his own slave Catalina), while Christian Roberto is presented alongside the Turkish renegade Salec. In the very next scene Catalina speaks with the eunuch Rustán, again a Christian interacting with a Turk but here is also added the complication of gender and the opposition of fertility versus impotence. Next is introduced the principal drama of the text, the relationship between the Sultan of the Empire and his Christian slave, Catalina, while the *madrileño* Madrigal simultaneously seeks to avoid punishment for his parallel, albeit inverted, relationship with a Muslim woman from Istanbul. Furthermore, both Catalina and Madrigal upset the assumed power dynamic and exert unexpected authority over the distinguished figures with whom they interact, as Catalina is explicitly granted absolute control of the Empire and Madrigal’s proclaimed ability to understand bird-song –and accordingly disclose or suppress their negative commentary– renders the *cadí* vulnerable to the captive. Lamberto’s masculine presence within the feminine confines of the harem likewise presents a noteworthy, oppositional assemblage within the drama’s third story line. In each of the distinct plot lines of the drama, then, paradoxical convergences create a markedly destabilized discourse. Cervantes establishes a series of thematic antitheses – Christian versus Muslim, Spaniard versus Turk, masculine versus feminine, influential versus effete, punishment versus pleasure, submission versus resistance –only to ultimately question the very notion of dichotomous paradigms. Such underlying depolarization can be expanded to serve as a reflection of the city of Istanbul and a commentary on the entire Mediterranean– a motif of both the subversion and inversion of assumed dualities that Cervantes predicates throughout his literary repertoire.

As exemplified in *Don Quijote*, an additional binary subject to Cervantine exploitation is that between “reality” and “fiction”. *La gran sultana* engages with this kaleidoscopic distinction in order to –again– expose the artificial nature of unmitigated polarization. Imagined characters interact with(in) concrete spaces, invented story lines

¹⁷ See footnote 15 for examples of these sentiments in *Cautiverio y trabajos de Diego Galán* and *Viaje de Turquía*.

parallel real relationships, and historical figures penetrate the pages of the play.¹⁸ The drama ends with the promise of a theatrical representation of the story of Catalina, a representation that will bridge the two sides of the Mediterranean and one that fuses playwright and performer, real-life and fictional selves. Again, it is the seemingly subsidiary Madrigal who proves to be a capital agent as he weaves “fact” with fiction and –arguably– mirrors Cervantes himself.¹⁹

Most notably ambiguous along the fact-fiction continuum, nonetheless, is the fact that Istanbul *itself* must have seemed an illusory place to Spanish audiences, in spite of the spatial specificity of the text. As voiced by Roberto at the onset of the play, the city’s implausibility comes –ironically– from this very specificity: the drama presents a place beyond the bounds of the familiar and distinctly contrary to the Iberian context. Compared to all other European cities of the time period, in fact, Istanbul was unparalleled in terms of both sheer size and the diversity of its massive population.²⁰ As an enclave for foreign merchants, it was further unmatched in terms of economic enterprise.²¹ People and products from around the world assembled at this continental interface to create a dramatic amalgam of material goods, cultures and religions in acute opposition to early modern Spain.²² Whereas Istanbul’s locale and politics readily absorbed foreigners and thereupon begot a legendary axis of cultural exchange, Spain paired an insular geography with exclusivist, homogeneous ideals that contrasted sharply against this intensely cosmopolitan context. The magnitude and character of the Turkish metropolis that Cervantes presents would thus have been understandably inconceivable –presumably fictionalized– for those isolated in Iberia.

¹⁸ Both Francisco López Estrada and Agapita Jurado Santos note the mention of Alonso Martínez in *La gran sultana*, real inventor of Spanish dances (127). López Estrada likewise cites the reference to Morato Arráez, the renegade that assisted Cervantes during his captivity in Algiers and the character that supposedly brought Catalina to the Sultan’s harem in the play. Explicitly quixotic in character, employment of such names parallels the way in which Don Quixote mixes historic figures with the fictitious knights that populate his library.

¹⁹ For P. Lewis Smith, “Madrigal’s narration of the story of Catalina de Oviedo is a means of parading his undeclared identity [as Cervantes]” (80). Here Madrigal reflects Cervantes as shrewd playwright and throughout *La gran sultana*, as García Lorenzo contends, he does so in his competing and seemingly contradictory sentiments in regard to the Ottoman context. Playfully and in true Cervantine style, however, the author’s potential *portavoz* has proved himself to be particularly adept at the art of deception.

²⁰ At the beginning of the 17th century Istanbul was the largest city in Europe, with a population of 700,000 inhabitants. The next closest city, Paris, housed less than half that amount (300,000), while Naples placed third (275,000). Within Spain the largest city was Seville, home to only 135,000 people, followed next by Toledo with a mere 80,000 inhabitants.

²¹ The district of Galata, established in the 10th century, housed most of the city’s foreign merchant population. The first Ottoman census, for example, recorded 9,486 Muslim Turkish, 4,127 Greek, 1,687 Jewish, 434 Armenian, 267 Genoese and 332 European families from places other than Genoa, and all of the latter two groups lived in Galata (Freely 188). This district, along with neighboring Pera, continues to be the most diverse and the most European part of contemporary Istanbul.

²² López Estrada highlights the contrariety between the two contexts and the ensuing effect on the drama: “Todo cabe en la Constantinopla que es el marco de la comedia: la variedad de su población (turcos, griegos, cautivos, espías, cristianos, judíos) y la diversidad de los lugares evocados, las diferentes costumbres de las gentes y las ceremonias en el palacio del Gran Turco con el abigarramiento de la pluralidad de sus habitantes, que habrían de constituir algo tan diferente a los usos de España: eunucos, garzones [...] favoritas en número crecido, bajáes y cadíes, todos vestidos –como se pudiera– a la usanza oriental, poniendo el color y el exotismo sobre las tablas en el gran espectáculo que implica la obra para su cometido dramático” (43). For audiences in Spain, nothing would seem beyond the bounds or outside the realm of the possible in Istanbul.

Compared to other urban depictions in Cervantine literature, Istanbul's role in *La gran sultana* further stands out for its continued and symbolic presence throughout the text. Whereas Don Quixote's monumental procession through Barcelona in chapter 62 of Part II of *Don Quixote* is the only urban setting in the work –arguably indicative of the protagonist's fundamental incompatibility with urban space– reference to Istanbul permeates *La gran sultana*. Explicit spatial description interlaces with the plot lines of the play, while Barcelona is only briefly and indirectly evoked via such emblematic elements as the printing press and the sea as the city frames the *caballero's* final adventures. The urban context is both more overt and more ubiquitous in *La gran sultana* despite, or perhaps precisely because of, its unfamiliarity and implausibility for the Spanish audience. As with *Don Quixote*, many other Cervantine works similarly allude to city space without assigning it the omnipresence or significance appointed to Istanbul in *La gran sultana*.

The final scenes in which the captives are freed and Madrigal takes his emotional leave of the city are realized within a festive atmosphere uncommon to Spanish theater of the era. Yet another example of Cervantes' calculated manipulation of the spatial backdrop, such an ambience serves both to disrupt the established implications of the setting and redefine dramatic technique. Instead of the conventional restoration of order that typically closes the *comedias* of this time period, the work ends in a disorganized, unsettled, quasi-carnavalesque manner. Even during the prior wedding celebrations at the start of the final act, Catalina seductively dances for the Grand Turk amidst a chaotic and commotive background.²³ Furthermore, the dilemmas of both Madrigal and Lamberto are resolved via explicit lies, Madrigal saving himself from sentenced death by claiming to have the power to interpret birds and to teach languages to an elephant,²⁴ and Lamberto convincing the Grand Turk that Muhammad has only just transformed him into a male as a result of years of unfulfilled aspirations to be a man while worshipping as a devoted Christian (another playful cultural inversion by Cervantes, as it is the Islamic faith – perceived to be permissive of male homosexuality– that ultimately allows realization of Lamberto's heterosexual masculine desires).²⁵ Both characters thus overcome presumably hopeless circumstances by (ridiculously) deceiving one of the most powerful and revered figures of the time period. Moreover, only Madrigal intends (semi-reluctantly) to return to Spain at the close of the play, and the lack of any religious conversions leaves unresolved the ideological disparities between Catalina and the Grand Turk. The heterogeneity that is so rejected within the Iberian Peninsula effectively becomes the permanent condition of the

²³ Florencio Sevilla Arrollo and Antonio Rey Hazas explain the dances referred to in this scene in the footnotes of the play. Madrigal plans to sing “[m]il zarabandas, / mil zambapalos lindos, mil chaconas, / y mil *pésame dello*, y mil folías” (III.2115-16). All are lewd performances that involve bawdy corporal movements and loud music (Sevilla Arrollo and Rey Hazas 432).

²⁴ Metin And discusses the foreign fascination with both birds and elephants in the Ottoman Empire in his chapter “The Sultan's menageries” in the section of *Istanbul in the 16th Century: The City, The Palace, Daily Life* that focuses on the sultan's palace (148-50). Most of the sultans' animals were gifts from other countries, and were included in many foreign accounts describing the Ottoman Empire for the fact that the writers/travelers had never before seen such species. Thus the comic inclusion of the expected eloquent elephant further adds to the *costumbrismo* of the drama.

²⁵ Western accounts have repeatedly depicted the spaces and practices of Islam as both permissive and promoting of (predominantly male) homosexuality. As a site of sexual liberation, the Orient was further associated with images of sodomy, seduction, polygamy, orgy, exhibitionism, and overall sexual excess, often linked explicitly to the harem. For a detailed study on the exoticization/eroticization of the “other”, see Irvin Schick's *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alteritist Discourse*.

drama with promises of future generations of cultural assimilation. The pregnancy of Catalina will realize the genesis of an *otomano español*, a direct attack against the racial purity that was so emphasized by Counter-Reformist Spanish ideology.²⁶

The commencement of the drama in the city street, epitome of both freedom and community, immediately defies spatial expectations of a tale of captivity. Three acts later the audience is left without any restoration of normalcy, as the Christian protagonist becomes sultana and the multicultural subject is converted into an accepted and celebrated norm. Thus the conspicuous city setting – a city defined by its singular geography and its interwoven layers of religions, cultures and historic eras – combines with the seemingly incongruous, melancholic sentiments of the (quasi-) *gracioso*, the convoluted plot of the drama and the unforeseen conclusion of the text to deviate from both the anticipated presentation of Ottoman themes and theatrical conventions of the Spanish Baroque. In the majority of Europe during this time period, the Ottoman context was habitually associated with images of savagery, violence, splendor, luxury and military prowess, alongside the denigration of Islam and the exaltation of Christianity. While some of these motifs are undeniably present in *La gran sultana*, most are initially introduced in order to be fundamentally undermined.²⁷ Ultimately it is the compassion and tolerance of the Grand Turk (simultaneously shown to be both prudent and foolish, generous and tyrannical), and the harmonious, absorptive and cosmopolitan nature of the city, that dictates the outcome of the narration.

Content thus parallels context as the transgressive nature of the text mirrors the transgressive nature of the space within which the action takes place. Summarily noted by Francisco López Estrada, “En Constantinopla todo es posible” (41). As the characters concurrently approach the supposed “other” – both physically and ideologically – and are effectively converted into the “other” – via marriage and procreation – de Certeau’s idea of “practicing space” by simultaneously “being the other” and “moving toward the other” is fully realized within the confines of Istanbul.²⁸ Even the designation of the work itself – echoed in the street cheers at the conclusion of the play – fuses Spanish name with Turkish

²⁶ López Estrada argues that it is precisely because of the far-removed setting of Istanbul that Cervantes is able to break literary conventions and deny the audience the expected conclusion of conventional tales of captivity: “Lo que sucedía en *La Gran Sultana* no pertenecía al dominio del Islam que había sido español, y que tan metido estaba en la vida de la nación, sino que se radicaba en las puertas del Oriente lejano, del que emanaba la atracción que venían ejerciendo desde siglos las prodigiosas noticias que llegaban de China, la India y el Islam asiático, y que tenía su puerta de Europa en Constantinopla” (33). Instead of the captive-returns-to-Spain/liberty scenario, the curtain descends amid salutations hailing the newly pregnant Christian sultana. The Spanish audience tolerates this ending due to the very fact that Istanbul was – and always had been – beyond the bounds of the Spanish Empire and such transgression thus presented no threat to national discourse, affect or agenda.

²⁷ Although the text seems to champion Christianity via Catalina’s unwavering affiliation – notably without denouncing Islam – Jurado Santos points to the fact that Christianity is mentioned forty-eight times throughout the play. She argues that this excessive mention effectively desacralizes the doctrine, undermining the religion’s solemnity through such hyperbolic employment while outwardly exalting it (45).

²⁸ De Certeau here likens the experience of place to that of a child standing before a mirror. The child “sees itself as *one* (it is *she* or *he*, seen as a whole) but *another* (*that*, an image with which the held identifies itself), what counts is the process of this ‘spatial captation’ that inscribes the passage toward the other as the law of being and the law of place. To practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is, in a place, *to be other and to move toward the other*” (109). Recognizing the other within thus allows a reconciliation of the individual with his/her context, as well as a resolution of the divide that separates an individual from his/her (supposed) adversaries.

title. Space is thus practiced throughout the drama as the Christian element is incorporated into the Ottoman context and a new, compound perspective emerges.

Although at times loci of prejudice and oppression, cultural contact zones such as Istanbul also serve as catalysts of syncretism and render it difficult to maintain impervious divisions.²⁹ The cosmopolitan nature of such cities challenges dichotomous organization, as unstable identities thwart efforts to establish categorical oppositions. When distinct nationalities, ethnicities and religions are forced to spatially unite, as they were in early modern Istanbul, assumed demarcations often dissolve to expose a composite subject – precisely the “mayor ser” for which the Sultan advocates in the play (II.1209). By situating *La gran sultana* in such a culturally porous space – a space of proven economic, social, sexual and even amorous possibility, despite the injustice, tyranny and violence that undoubtedly occurred – Cervantes rejects traditional binaries and explicitly denies exclusivist national discourse. Exploiting the parallels between ambiance and action, the shortcomings of Spain’s orthodox objectives are exposed through calculated spatial presentation and its ensuing negotiation. As much geographically as thematically, antagonisms unite in the city to the extent that antitheses initially introduced in the play are patently obscured.

The characters of the drama ultimately triumph precisely for their adaptability and tolerance – distinguishing qualities of the city itself. Adapting to the Turkish context, captive Catalina acquires power over her own destiny, over the will of the Sultan and over the entire Empire.³⁰ Allowing Catalina to maintain her Christianity, the Grand Turk is able to both wed and produce an heir with the woman that he desires – expressly recognizing that “nunca son bien logrados / los que se toman por fuerza” (II.1280-1281).³¹ Transposing gender, Lamberto is granted the opportunity to unite with his beloved Clara, escape from imprisonment and subsequently assume power of Rhodes. Not only do the iconic spaces of Istanbul frame the action, then, the city itself serves as driving force in order to destroy perceived dualities and expose the ideological fluidity of the early modern Mediterranean

²⁹ Néstor García Canclini notes this function of cities: “Otra de las entidades sociales que auspician pero también condicionan la hibridación son las ciudades. Las megalópolis multilingües y multiculturales... son estudiadas como centros donde la hibridación fomenta mayores conflictos y mayor creatividad cultural” (22). Moisés R. Castillo specifically points to Istanbul as such a place that blurs the self/other divide: “En zonas de contacto cultural como Argel o Constantinopla no podemos preservar la fantasía social de que entre el Uno y el Otro haya una diferencia intrínsecamente radical” (220).

³⁰ The Grand Turk immediately cedes control of the Ottoman Empire to Catalina upon their initial encounter, proclaiming: “De los reinos que poseo, / que casi infinitos son, / toda su jurisdicción / rendida a la tuya veo; / ya mis grandes señoríos, / que grande señor me han hecho, / por justicia y por derecho / son ya tuyos más que míos” (I.716-723). He goes on to order complete obedience to Catalina in the seraglio, and grants her the power to liberate all captives: “Suelta, condena, rescata, / absuelve, quita, haz mercedes, / que esto y más, señora, puedes: / que amor tu imperio dilata” (I.776-779). Her newly acquired status is notably independent from her religion, as the Sultan is untroubled by her devotion to Christianity: “Que seas turca o seas cristiana, / a mí no me importa cosa” (I.728-729). Catalina’s expressed concern that religious difference is too much of a divide to overcome, that “no junta bien amor / dos que las leyes dividen” (I.746-747), is explicitly rejected. The Grand Turk effectively negates their manifest differences, declaring: “Iguales estamos ya” (I.768), and this egalitarian insistence continues throughout the rest of the drama.

³¹ This passing yet charged statement can be divergently applied to the circumstances of both the time period and the author. Perhaps Cervantes is subtly commenting on his own captivity, the dogmatic policies/politics of Spain, or the bellicosity of many of the intercultural encounters in the Mediterranean. It is worthy of note that such sagacious insight – conceivably reflective of Cervantes’ own posture – comes here from the mouth of the Grand Turk.

—along with the complex reality of the only city in the world to geographically court two continents. Characterized at once by its singularity and its plurality, Istanbul has historically been a shared space of continual contact and mutual interdependence. And despite contemporary assumptions of perpetual conflict and absolute discord, Cervantes continually points to the empathy and ambiguity that permeated the entire early modern Mediterranean as moments of exchange, compromise and accord were interspersed among interactions of tension, contention and outright warfare.

The Ottoman context is never far from the surface of Cervantes' writings. Themes of confinement, liberty and free will pervade his works as captives endeavor to dictate their own destinies and *hidalgos* attempt to escape ordinary lives through extraordinary literature. Whereas Don Quixote ambiguously initiates his adventures “[e]n un lugar de la Mancha”, however, in a town whose name the narrator prefers not to recall, there is no mistaking the setting of *La gran sultana*. Istanbul exerts a discernible presence throughout the drama and significantly influences the actions and attitudes of the protagonists. The very story lines depend upon the city, whose meaning is both expressed and negotiated by the players who find themselves within the confines of the Ottoman capital. As an interface between Spaniard and Turk, Christian and Muslim, and (perceived) Occident and Orient, the city demands intercultural interaction and such contact necessarily precipitates the re-evaluation and re-imagination of presumed divides. Never having experienced the legendary city first-hand, Cervantes nonetheless is able to veraciously pen the sites and sentiments of the space and adeptly employ these eccentricities of Istanbul to —again—subvert the discourse of his contemporaries.

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