

BACKGROUND AND BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

Spain in 1492 was the most powerful, fearsome kingdom in the world. Its empire and Conquistador armies reached into Italy, France, Flanders, Portugal, North Africa, and with the voyages of Columbus, to the New World in North America.

With the fall of the last Moorish stronghold of Granada in 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella instituted a paranoiac program of ethnic cleansing beginning with the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews, followed by threats to the indigenous Moors, and under the infamous Inquisition, an unrelenting persecution of Christians suspected of heresy.

Overnight hundreds, perhaps thousands of Granadians who had lived together in tolerance and harmony, even friendship, for 700 years, were rounded up and burned at the stake in an effort to enforce devotion to Catholic orthodoxy and ensure loyalty to the Spanish crown.

The stage play, **1492**, is about four friends – a Christian nobleman, a Jew, a Muslim, and a Christian converted from Judaism (Converso) – caught up in the horror of this time. Each in his own way tries to cope with the rising hysteria, exhibiting courage and making moral choices in the struggle against the terror.

At the beginning of the play, the Jew, Mosen, attempts to flee to North Africa and is murdered by the secret police, *Hermadad*. Since he was not allowed to take his possessions with him, his friend, Cavallero, a Jew converted to Christianity (a Converso), agrees to keep his jewels for him. Cavallero is shortly arrested when the *Hermadad* find the jewels and accuse him of being a false Catholic. A subsequent edict expels the Muslims, and Abdullah, a Muslim is pursued. The Christian nobleman, Gaspar de Alzado, lends him his horse to escape, and when Abdullah is apprehended and the horse identified, Gaspar, too, is arrested.

Gaspar has many powerful connections, including his cousin, Fernando de Bobadilla, who has a personal friendship with Queen Isabella. Gaspar's wife, Gracia, persuades Bobadilla to intercede with the Queen on Gaspar's behalf. Torquemada, the inquisitor, who is present at the audience with the Queen, persuades her to not allow Gaspar to be freed.

Thus, with Mosen dead, and Cavallero, the Converso, in jail, together with the Muslim, Abdullah, and the nobleman, Gaspar de Alzado, Torquemada attempts to force their "confessions." They are tortured (on stage), and brought to the stake to be burned. With the flames licking around them, each not only refuses to "confess", but insists, instead, upon their innermost feelings and identities. The Jewish Converso, reverts to his Jewish identity and damns the executioners in Hebrew; Abdullah, the Muslim, damns them in Arabic, and the nobleman, Gaspar de Alzado, damns them in their own language (on stage, it will be English)

The damnations, as the men burn, are an indictment of Empire Building – with its inevitable sins of pride, arrogance, unrestrained exercise of power, a clear metaphor for the chaos and horror of today's world. Gaspar's final cries sum it all up:

GASPAR

Yes, light the fires! And many more! And the kingdom will come down. As sure as the mightiest have fallen before – because of their sins – of *pride*, *arrogance* – and *relentless resolve* that only *they* hold the key to salvation – and in their greed for *empire* and riches, imposing their sanctimony, their own *self-righteous convictions* on the rest of the world, *Spain* will fall!

(HE cries out in pain, but continues)

The smoke has all but engulfed him.

His voice comes through the fog)

This kingdom will *fall*! And all this – *destruction* – all in the name of bringing *righteousness* to the world. Even to those infidels, those who by our standards are lost, misguided, or even *evil* in the eyes of God. This kingdom will *destroy* them by fire and the sword, but in so doing will destroy its own Christian ideals! *Everyone* who does not acquiesce and share the same belief in the true – God! What a terrible sin of *hubris*.

(HE cries out)

What a mockery of Christianity! False priest! False monarchs! May *God damn you all*!

GRACIA

Gaspar! I love you!

GASPAR

(A last cry of desperation and love)

Gra-cia!

(A final SCREAM from GASPAR)

Agh-gh-gh-gh!

(GRACIA screams)

THE END