Hebrew and Arabic Literature of Medieval Iberia
Juan de la Cuesta
Hispanic Monographs

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Introduction

This volume brings to light a series of studies inspired by the conference, “Wine, Women and Song,” that took place at the University of California at Berkeley in the spring of 2000. The conference provided a forum for topics in medieval Iberian literature and its legacy in the Spanish Colonial tradition. One of our primary goals in organizing this conference was to bring together specialists who represented the various traditions that together formed medieval Iberia. With this conference, we brought together Hispanists, Latin Americanists, Arabists and Hebraists working on topics in the medieval Iberian tradition—a much talked about idea that is seldom realized.

In recent years, the focus of medieval Spanish studies has changed. In light of various interpretations of multiculturalism in the U.S. and abroad, there has been a move toward the inclusion in university curricula of literary traditions previously excluded from the canon—and consequently, the classroom and the academic press. As a result, working in medieval Iberian literary studies now also

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1 The conference was sponsored by several divisions of the University of California, Berkeley, including: The Spanish Studies section of the Institute for European Studies, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Bancroft Library, and the Townsend Humanities Institute. Additional support was received from the Judah L. Magnes Museum and the Jewish Federation of San Francisco. We would also like to thank Prof. William Brinner for his assistance in organizing this event.
often means the study of all the peninsula’s literary traditions, Latin, Romance and Semitic. There are now several scholars such as Samuel Armistead, Francisco Márquez Villanueva, Luce López Baralt, Consuelo López-Morillas, Dwayne Carpenter, and Luis Girón Negrón who have come to work not only in the field of medieval Hispanism, but also within Arabic, Hebrew, Cultural and Women’s Studies. This new face of medieval Iberian studies is, in large part, the legacy of Américo Castro’s vision of medieval Spain. It was, in fact, the unfailing guidance and support of one of Castro’s star pupils, Samuel Armistead, who, through his continual support, not least of which was his weekly seminars, inspired the organizers of the conference. Perhaps no other Hispanist currently working in the field has influenced the field to the extent that Prof. Armistead has. He has provided many of us working in medieval Iberian Studies, both beginning assistant professors and advanced senior faculty, with an understanding of the immense complexity and variety of medieval Iberian literature and culture, a culture that encompasses far more than just Castilian written texts. Accordingly, this conference was designed to reflect this increasingly interdisciplinary nature of medieval Iberian studies and to provide a forum for papers dealing with the Semitic Literature of medieval Iberia.

This volume, like the conference that inspired it, provides a forum for papers dealing with the Semitic Literature of medieval Iberia, highlighting not only its relationship with the dominant literary tradition of Christian Spain, but also its influence in the various literary manifestations and traditions to which it has given rise in Spain and the Americas. Chief among the papers collected in the present volume is Samuel Armistead’s contribution, which deals with a genre in which both Jewish and Christian traditions intersect, the romancero. His essay on the bowdlerizing of the Sephardic romancero explores how one of the most traditional nationalistic genres, the romancero, becomes a unique vehicle for Sephardic identity. Sarah Portnoy’s analysis of the subversive nature of sex in the Peninsular Spanish and Sephardic romancero compliments Armistead’s assertion that the romancero has been and continues to be a genre in which taboo themes of sex and violence flourish, despite publishers’ best attempts to censor them in print.
Both of these studies open a new avenue of investigation in the field of *romancero* studies, one in which new readings of formerly censored aspects of this venerable tradition can be academically studied and discussed.

In addition to studies of the influence of Semitic culture on poetry composed in Spanish, there are several essays dealing with the Hebrew and Arabic poetry composed in medieval Iberia. David Wacks explores the tension between sacred and profane—so characteristic of Hebrew Andalusi authors—in the language of the *Song of Songs* as it appears in the poetry of the Iberian philosopher and poet Abraham ibn Ezra. Michelle Hamilton examines how medieval Iberian authors of Hebrew *maqāmāt* adapt tropes from contemporary Hebrew poetry, (here, that of the beautiful Gentile temptress) and incorporate them in sophisticated social critiques of contemporary Judeo-Spanish society. Adriana Valencia and Shamma Boyarin contribute a study of several *muwaššahāt* and their *jarchas*. They offer a detailed reading of the *muwaššahāt* and explain how the themes and images of the final *jarcha* fit into the entire poem. Such readings are innovative when compared with those characteristic of traditional Spanish Studies, that traditionally study the *jarcha* in isolation. Here Valencia and Boyarin study the *jarchas* in the context of the Hebrew and Arabic *muwaššahāt* of which they are a part.

In the same vein, Douglas Young discusses traditional themes and imagery from the Arabic *khamr ḥayya* (wine poetry) in the *maqāmāt* (rhymed verse narrative) of the Andalusi author, Muhammad al-Saraqūsti. While the *maqāmāt* genre is still largely unknown to medieval Hispanists, Douglas shows that these Arabic *maqāmāt* have striking parallels with the first romance narratives of the Peninsula, and most likely had a tremendous impact on the later, better known works of medieval and Golden Age Spanish Literature such as the *Libro de buen amor* of Juan Ruiz and the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

The Semitic cultural presence in medieval Iberia continues into the early modern period, and is reflected in the thematic and stylistic choices, as well as the ideological agendas, of Christian authors and musicians. Cristina Guardiola has contributed a study of the representation of interreligious sexual relationships between Christian
men and Muslim women reflected in medieval Castilian chronicles. The chroniclers felt it important to add details of the Christian nobleman’s conquest of not only land, riches and “pagan” souls, but also the beautiful exoticized Other in the figures of the Jewess and the mora. In this way, the newly Christian, male-dominated discourse of post Reconquest Spain is written as the domination of the bodies of Jewish and Muslim women.

The problem of how to articulate Spain’s Semitic past is also reflected in lyric poetry and its musical settings. Mary Quinn has contributed a pioneering study on the anxiety of otherness in the world of music, an overlooked, yet tremendously valuable avenue of investigation that elucidates passages in Spanish works from the thirteenth through the sixteenth century—works that mention the Arabic instrumentation and performative technique of Spanish Christian musicians and poets working during Spain’s Golden Age.

Finally, Sergio Waisman brings our topic across the Atlantic and into modernity. His discussion of the impact of medieval Arabic frame narratives such as A Thousand and One Nights in the work of Argentine authors Jorge Luis Borges and Ricardo Piglia bears testimony to the enduring cultural legacy of medieval Iberia in Latin America.

All of these studies take into account the multi-lingual and cultural nature of medieval Iberian society and are exemplary of how fruitful and important such interdisciplinary studies can be to medieval Iberian Studies. The appreciation of the Arabic and Hebrew traditions of medieval Iberia and their importance in the formation of later Renaissance and Golden Age Spanish literature expressed in these papers, is the result of both Américo Castro and Samuel G. Armistead’s pioneering work. Without these two figures, medieval Spanish Studies would be a very different field. It would be just that, medieval “Spanish” Studies, a much more limited and confining field, one in which many of us would not currently be working—having been banished instead to other seemingly unrelated and distant realms—Jewish Studies, Near Eastern Studies, Comparative Literature and the like. Fortunately we may now speak of Medieval “Iberian” Studies, an inclusive field that appreciates the complexity, diversity and richness that was medieval Iberian Literature and Culture.
We would also like to gratefully acknowledge the participation in the conference of several scholars whose papers do not appear in this volume. Our keynote speakers were Professors Raymond P. Scheindlin (Jewish Theological Seminary), whose address dealt with the pilgrimage of the Andalusí Hebrew poet Judah Halevi, and Ross Brann (Cornell University), who spoke on Jewish Andalusí cultural identity. Several faculty members from U.C. Berkeley gave generously of their time, presenting original papers on topics in medieval Iberian literature. Professor Robert Alter spoke on the Hebrew wine poetry of Shmuel Hanagid. Professor James Monroe spoke on a zajal (Andalusí Arabic strophic poem) of Ibn Quzmān, and Professor Charles Faulhaber gave an illuminating talk on vernacular Romance manuscript translations of Hebrew and Arabic texts in medieval Iberia. Scholars from other public universities in California also participated: Professor Dwight Reynolds (U.C. Santa Barbara) spoke on the history of the muwaššah from a socio-musicological point of view, and Professor Michael Cooperson of U.C. Los Angeles gave a paper on Tawq al-ḥamāma by late 11th century Andalusí thinker Ibn Ḥazm. Finally, bringing our topic into the present day, Professor Jacobo Sefamí of U.C. Irvine spoke on the work of contemporary Latin American Sephardic author Isaac Chocrón.

As is already clear by this point, without the pioneering work of many tireless and more talented scholars who have gone before us, we might never have conceived of, nor brought to fruition, this project. We humbly carry out our work in the shadow of the late Américo Castro, whose groundbreaking work radically changed the landscape of medieval Hispanism. Castro is followed by our own teachers (among them his own students), Samuel Armistead, James Monroe, and Charles Faulhaber, the accomplishments of whom we cannot begin to do justice here, and without whose inspiration, tutelage and guidance we might never have dared to delve into the sometimes complex, occasionally obscure, but ever-fascinating world of medieval Iberian literature.

Lastly, the publication of this volume has been made possible by a generous grant from the Hellman Family Philanthropic Fund (a donor-advised fund of the Jewish Community Endowment Fund of the Jewish Federation of San Francisco), and by the patient
cooperation of Professor Thomas Lathrop of Juan de la Cuesta—
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November 2003
In 1957 I began a research project with my friends and colleagues, Joseph H. Silverman and Israel J. Katz, aimed at collecting, studying, and editing the traditional Judeo-Spanish narrative poetry of the Sephardic community of Los Angeles. Initially, we thought of this project in very modest terms. Our first University research grant came to a grand total of some $17.50, for the purchase of a few reel-to-reel tapes. But the initial results of our field work turned out to be so startlingly successful that, what had begun as a sideline, would soon become a lifelong mission—if not an obsession—, a mission that would eventually take us from Los Angeles, to San Francisco, Seattle, New York, Spain, Morocco, and Israel. From its modest beginnings, our collection, counting only narrative poetry, would come to consist of around 1,500 traditional romances (many of medieval origin),

1 I would like to express my personal thanks to Michelle Hamilton, Sarah Portnoy, and David Wacks for their superb organization of this splendid conference and the exquisite care which they have lavished on every detail, to make of it for us a very pleasant and intensely interesting meeting. I am most grateful.

In regard to our Sephardic research, I must also remember here, with unending gratitude, the consistently enthusiastic encouragement of several senior colleagues at UCLA and elsewhere: among others, the great folklorist, Wayland D. Hand, the great medieval historian, Lynn White (both at UCLA), and, in Paris, Paul Bénichou, the great pioneer of modern scholarship in Judeo-Spanish and Pan-Hispanic ballad studies.
together with very substantial collections of traditional lyric poetry of various types, folktales, memorates, and proverbs, as well as abundant linguistic materials in various dialects of Judeo-Spanish, which, if they have not already ceased to exist, are certainly now at the very edge of extinction. These materials were recorded from Sephardic informants who originated in Bosnia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Israel, and Morocco.²

As our collection began to grow and to develop, two immediate goals needed to be achieved: One was to attain control of pertinent bibliography concerning Judeo-Spanish oral literature and the other, equally important goal was to explore the relationship of the Sephardic ballad tradition to the other geographic subtraditions of the Hispanic Romancero: Castile, Portugal, Cataluña, the Canary Islands, Spanish America, the Portuguese Atlantic Islands, and Brazil. Much of this research could, of course, be done and indeed was done through archival work, but I soon began to realize that, if I were to do justice to the Judeo-Spanish texts we were collecting, it would be indispensable, as well as enormously interesting from a comparative perspective, if I could also have some firsthand experience in collecting ballads from traditional singers in Spain (if not also from singers in Portugal and in America). Consequently, I determined to take advantage of every possible opportunity to collect romances in Spanish rural communities—first of all—as a sort of “control,” a comparative perspective that might shed new light on our Sephardic field work. Soon, of course, I also came to view the Spanish material in terms of its own intrinsic value. Over the years, consequently, I have collected Spanish ballads in the Provinces of Zamora, Salamanca, Ávila, Cáceres, Guadalajara, Soria, and Logroño—as well as from Leonese, Extremeño, and Andalusian informants living in Madrid and from ballad singers in Northeastern Portugal and

² Concerning our collaborative Judeo-Spanish project, see Armistead, Katz, and Silverman, Folk Literature of the Sephardic Jews II, 4-23 (abbrev. FLSJ). For the disappearance of Judeo-Spanish, see Harris and my review in Language in Society.
inhabitants of Spanish-speaking enclaves in Louisiana.3

The very first Spanish village where I did field work was Arroyo de la Luz, in the Province of Cáceres (Extremadura). This turned out to be a very good choice: Here was a still vigorously alive ballad tradition with abundant and excellent texts, proudly and enthusiastically sung by numerous singers. I spent three days in Arroyo—June 21-23, 1963—and, during that time, I collected some 78 versions of 58 different romances. Before visiting Arroyo, I had, of course, already done extensive field work among Eastern Mediterranean Sephardim in the U.S. and with North African Sephardim in Morocco. Naturally, I had also read through and indexed a good number of collections of romances from the Peninsular traditions and especially from the Province of Extremadura. But, in Arroyo, I encountered something that was quite new to me: Here were some very serious, very dignified, very worthy Spanish peasant ladies, who, without batting an eye, were singing quite scandalous songs, the more colorful passages of which, I for one, had never heard or even read before. Obviously there was something quite wrong with my printed sources.

Let us now cut for a moment to Victorian England. As James Reeves has observed: “[T]he words [of late 19th- and early 20th-century British folksongs] were [often] far from acceptable to the tastes of the polite world ... [T]here was [in them] a sense of unregenerate pagan enjoyment of natural functions in love and courtship” (Idiom 8-9). In Victorian England, this simply would not do at all. British folklorists, working at the very beginnings of Folklore (or, as some now prefer to call it: Folkloristics) as a modern field of inquiry, had no support and no subsidies. If the results of their field work were to be published, at all, they would have to be made suitable to the tastes and standards of educated, polite society. Consequently, the printed, “scholarly” versions of British folk songs were systematically bowdlerized, at very great cost to our clear understanding of what these songs are all about—songs, which, in many cases, have now disappeared from living oral tradition. In the

3 For more detailed accounts of this field work, see Armistead, “Ballad Hunting” and Louisiana ix-xviii.
words of Albert Lloyd, writing in 1967: “Until quite recently, in the 
printed collections of traditional song, ... there has been an almost 
complete expurgation of erotic detail, resulting in false suppositions 
and sour recrimination, with a rear guard of dear souls, defending the 
notion that all folk song is as sweet as lavender, against the onslaught 
of raw young militants convinced that a rich treasure of pornographic 
balladry is being kept from us by a folklorists’ conspiracy” (Lloyd 
195). Fortunately for subsequent serious scholarship, the massive 
authoritative manuscripts of Cecil Sharp have survived at the Forbes 
Library in Cambridge and, as selectively and rigorously edited 
(obviously, without bowdlerization) and published by James Reeves, 
they give us a very different picture from the shamelessly expurgated 
versions adapted to the prim, puritanical tastes of the turn of the 20th 
century.4

Did something similar also happen to Spanish narrative folksongs 
on their way to the printer? My impression is that, in Spain, the 
situation was not quite as bad as in Victorian England. Yet how else 
to explain my surprised reaction, at first contact with authentic oral 
texts in Arroyo de la Luz? More frequently, perhaps, by abbreviation 
or absolute omission, but occasionally, too, by outright and 
outrageous bowdlerization, some Spanish ballads have certainly 
suffered a fate similar to that of the English folksongs.

In the space that remains, I will comment, briefly, on two quite 
extreme cases of bowdlerization: El vendedor de nabos (The Turnip 
Vendor) clearly is a late romance, that, all the same, has achieved very 
wide circulation in Castilian-speaking areas of the Peninsula and also 
in Morocco, among Spanish Jews, undoubtedly, in this latter case, 
thanks to massive Spanish immigration during the late 19th and early 
20th centuries. Manuel Manrique de Lara noted down the version we 
reproduce here as no. 1c during his astoundingly successful ballad-
collecting expedition to the North African Sephardic communities in 
1915-1916. Notably, this late, modern Peninsular ballad had become 
part of the repertoire of one of the greatest contemporary ballad 
singers in Tetuán, Maqnín Bensimbrá, who was later to sing also for

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4 Concerning bowdlerization of English and American books, see Perrin.
Américo Castro, during his Moroccan field work in 1922-1923. El vendedor de nabos attests to relatively little verbal variation from one geographic area to another. The reference to Berbería, in Manrique’s version (text 1c), adds a characteristic Moroccan note to what is, otherwise, a thoroughly modern Peninsular ballad. El vendedor de nabos is what has come to be known as a “vulgate” ballad (romance “vulgata”), a ballad that, with relatively little variation, is sung in essentially the same form throughout its—in some cases very extensive—geographic range. We could easily cite a good number of examples of such ballads from Spain, Spanish America, and the Sephardic East. In modern Spanish slang, the turnip has very specific phallic connotations and the ballad can only be understood in such terms. Angela Capdevielle’s consistently bowdlerized ballad collection from Cáceres Province, published in 1969, gives us a truncated and cloyingly puritanical rewriting, in which the subversive...
In addition to Moya's Argentinian text (here, text 2b), there are three Nicaraguan versions edited by Mejía Sánchez (94-96). The great Juan Alfonso Carrizo seemingly could not bring himself to include the version he collected in Tucumán (I: no. 65). After a mere three verses, our access to his text is blocked by a line of dots, and Carrizo provides no bibliography of variants, as, by contrast, is the case with other romances he published. The grand prize for expurgating Spanish American traditional literature must, however, go to the editors of the Revista del Instituto Nacional de la Tradición (Buenos Aires), who, in editing Justino Cornejo’s “Adivinanzas ecuatorianas,” systematically omitted all riddles with a double meaning (“según es regla general” in the journal) (303n), but have, all the same, listed in their proper place, all the numbers referring to such riddles in the original manuscript (!!!). At an opposite extreme is Antonio Paredes Candia’s Bolivian collection, which includes full texts, accompanied by uninhibited drawings. Robert Lehmann-Nitsche’s monumental and authoritative Adivinanzas rioplatenses is already thoroughly enlightened and is far ahead of its time.

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in regard to sexual matters, as well as in references to death and violence. But Morocco, in contrast to the East, was very near Spain and a certain ballad topos, very well known in the Peninsular tradition, seems to have been enormously attractive to the Moroccan Sephardim. A strong anti-clerical tone emerges in many Christian-Spanish ballads and the same is also true of the Portuguese tradition.

In the Sephardic East, Greek Orthodox priests could marry and consequently the theme of the lecherous priest is, to my knowledge, unknown among the Sephardim of Greece, Turkey, and the Balkans. Not so in Morocco. I cannot resist citing one particularly delightful example. In the ballad of Virgilius, the author of the Aeneid, according to medieval tradition, is represented as a confirmed womanizer. In the ballad, Virgil is punished for having seduced a maiden in the king’s palace. In the Sixteenth-century Spanish versions, she is described as “hija de un arçobispo / y sobrina del buen rey.” The North African tradition perpetuated this reading. Whether for purely orthographic reasons or otherwise, I take particular delight in the reading of a MS from Tangier, where the girl is described as follows: “hija era del lobispo, / sobrina del señor rey,” suggesting a wolfish bishop, perhaps even endowed with formidable fangs. Subject to the subsequent appearance of more Peninsular Spanish versions of Fray

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9 On the attenuation of violence in the Eastern Sephardic tradition, see Armistead and Silverman (Tres calas 134n26; FLSJ I, 111-112; III, 33n4). Quite different from the unwarranted intervention of “learned” editors in expurgating ballad texts are the preferences of the singers themselves, who, for whatever reason, may choose to attenuate some aspect of the narratives they sing. Such preferences are, I believe, an authentic part of the tradition and, as such, deserve serious study and must be taken into account. Braulio do Nascimento has incisively investigated the important role of euphemism in relation to oral creativity.

10 For anticlericalism in modern Hispanic traditional ballads and the motif of the lecherous priest (or friar), see Armistead, “Neo-Individualism” 179-181.

11 For the lobispo (= lobo + obispo), see Armistead, “Tri-Religious Spain” 277. For other Sephardic instances of the lecherous priest, see CMP III, 319. The topic obviously pertains to the process of de-Christianization observable in many Sephardic romances (Armistead and Silverman, “En torno” 127-48).
Pedro, I tend to see in the extensive elaboration of the Judeo-
Moroccan versions, not merely a repetition of some recent Spanish 
importation, but rather, perhaps, a distinctively North African 
Sephardic development of the Spanish song. Only future discoveries 
of additional documentation may perhaps tell us more.

I would like to close by stressing the scholarly importance of the 
theme we have barely been able to touch upon in this paper. Years 
ago, Rudolf Schenda, a distinguished Swiss folklorist, in his review of 
the first volume of our Folk Literature of the Sephardic Jews, incisively 
observed: “There’s no doubt about it: Here, in thematic profusion, 
again and again, the central topics [of the ballads] are beloved, 
abducted, pleasing, and procreative women, as well as adultery, 
incest, seduction, and temptation….”12 Over the years, in editing the 
volumes of our Sephardic collection—and in ancillary publications as 
well—we have carefully annotated the individual traditional motifs 
that inform and support such a characterization of Judeo-Spanish, 
Pan-Hispanic, and Pan-European balladry: This involves, for example, 
not only fruit symbolism and the hunt of love—medieval symbols 
still echoed in the two modern texts we have seen today—but many 
other crucial motifs as well, such as bird, flower, water, fountain, rain, 
garden, door, and agricultural symbolism. Again, we are concerned 
with the meaning of the girls’ combing her hair, of her picking 
flowers as a prelude to abduction, of her being carried away on 
horseback—all motifs shared in common with most European folk 
songs and other forms of traditional literature as well.13 Such topoi are 
part of an elaborate folk song code known to all the various linguistic 
domains of Pan-European balladry. An accurate identification of these 
motifs and their narrative functions is absolutely essential to our 
understanding of how such poetry works. If the bowdlerizers—Albert

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12 “Kein Zweifel: bei allem thematischen Durcheinander geht es hier 
immerwieder um gliebte, geraubte..., gefällige und gebärende Frauen, um 
Ehebruch, Inzest, Verführung und Versuchung” (Schenda 283-84).

13 See, for example, CMP III, 298-329 (Motif-Index) and the motif and 
topoi indices in FLSJ I-III (and subsequent volumes). Harriet Goldberg’s 
splendid Motif-Index … in the Pan-Hispanic Romancero is a major step forward. 
Note also the important contribution of Rogers, The Perilous Hunt.
Lloyd’s “dear souls,” determined that “all folk song [should be] as sweet as lavender”—had had their way, we would still be deprived of such essential insights. The honor of having systemized these crucial codes must go to our friends and colleagues, Manuel da Costa Fontes, John Cummins, Alan DeYermond, Margit Frenk, Harriet Goldberg, Adrienne Martín, Braulio do Nascimento, Paula Olinger, Stephen Reckert, Edith Rogers, Louise Vaszári, Juan Victorio, Keith Whinnom, and other enlightened scholars, who have, over the years, incalculably enriched and illuminated our perspectives. Thankfully, now, Dr. Bowdler has been surpassed and definitively left behind in the dust, ... and we can now say, emphatically and joyously, with the great Walt Whitman: “Damn the expurgated books! I say damn ‘em! The dirtiest book in all the world is the expurgated book.”

Texts:

1a. El vendedor de nabos (á-o)  
The Turnip Vendor  
Me llaman Juan de la Huerta;  
My name is John of the Garden.  
¡Tírale claveles!  
Throw him carnations!  
mi oficio es sembrar nardos.  
My job is to plant lilies.  
¡Claveles, claveles y lirios morados!  
Carnations, carnations, and purple lilies!  
Las mozas que van por coles  
The girls who go to pick cabbages  
todas me piden mis nardos.  
all ask me for my lilies.  
Y como soy complaciente,  
And, since I am eager to please,  
a todas regalo nardos.  
I give all of them my lilies.  
(Arroyo de la Luz, Cáceres: Capdevielle 90)

1b. El vendedor de nabos (á-o)  
The Turnip Vendor  
Me llaman Juan de la Huerta;  
My name is John of the Garden.  
¡Tírale claveles!  
Throw him carnations!  
mi oficio es arrancar nabos.  
My job is pulling up turnips.  
¡Claveles, claveles y lirios morados!  
Carnations, carnations, and purple lilies!

14 Traubel I: 124. I owe having been able to consult Traubel’s book, incompletely referenced by Perrin (vi, 297), to the authoritative knowledge and expert technical help of my friend and colleague Raleigh Elliott.
Las mozas que van por coles
todas me piden el nabo.
A las que son de mi gusto,
se los doy de los más largos.
A las que son pequeñitas,
se las doy de los medianos.
Aparejo mi burrito
y me voy para el mercado.
En medio del camino,
me robaron los gitanos.
Me robaron el burrico;
tan sólo el nabo ha quedado.

(Arroyo de la Luz, Cáceres: Armistead and Silverman, 
*Tres calas* 109, n. 44)

1c. El *vendedor de nabos* (á-o) 
Yo salí de Berbería
con una carga de nabos.
En meatad de aquel camino,
me robaron los gitanos.
Me quitaron el borrico;
sólo que me dejan nabos.
Me fui en casa de las monjas,
a ver si me compran nabos.
Salí la madre abadesa:
—¿A cómo vendes los nabos?

—A peseta medio kilo.
—No los quiero, que son caros.—

Salieron todas las monjas,
cada una con un nabo.
En la playa de Sevilla,
hay un letrero bordado,
con un letrero que dice:
«Aquí murió el de los nabos.

(The Turnip Vendor)
I came out of Berber country
with a load of turnips.
Along the road,
the Gypsies robbed me.
They took away my little donkey,
leaving me with only turnips.
I went where the nuns lived,
to see if they’d buy turnips.
The mother superior came out:
“How much do you want for the
turnips?”
“One peseta for half a kilo.”
“That’s too much; I don’t want
them.”

All the nuns came out,
each one with a turnip.
On the beach at Seville,
there’s an embroidered sign,
with letters that read:
“Here lies the turnip man.
No murió de calentura, 
ni menos de acostado.  
Muriera de una paliza,  
que las monjas se la han dado». 
Ya se acabó la historia 
de Juanito el de los nabos.  
(Tetuán, Morocco: CMP III, 56)

2a. Fray Pedro (ó)  
Estaba Fray Diego,  
sentadito al sol.  
A la dongolondera  
al dongolondón.  
Pasaban las monjas  
por el corredor.  
—¿Qué es eso, Fray Diego?  
¿Qué es eso, señor?  
—Contemplando los prados,  
el almendro en flor.  
—Diga el frailecico  
si otra cosa vio.  
—Y las (veo) tortolicas  
que arrullan su amor.  
—Diga si otra cosa  
quiza contempló.  
—Parejas de novios  
en conversación.  
—Diga si hay en ello  
pecado mayor.  
El amor no peca  
porque es ley de Dios.  
(Arroyo de la Luz, Cáceres: Capdevielle 86)

2b. Fray Pedro (ó)  
Estaba Fray Diego,  
There was Fray Diego

He didn’t die of fever, 
nor yet of pneumonia;  
he died of a terrible beating  
administered by the nuns.” 
And that’s how the story ends  
about little John of the turnips.

Fray Pedro
There was Fray Diego

There was Fray Diego
sentadito al sol, sitting in the sun, 2
los hábitos rotos, with his robe torn
colgando el cordón. and his rope hanging out.
Ya salen las monjas The nuns came out
por el corredor: onto the gallery.
—¿Qué es eso, Fray Diego, “What’s that, Fray Diego? 4
qué es eso, Señor? What’s that, good sir?”
—Estas son las bolsas “These are the bags
de la munición, for the ammunition
y ésta, la escopeta and this is the shotgun
con que cazo yo. I use for hunting.”
(Entre Ríos, Argentina: Moya II, 276)

2c. Fray Pedro (ó) Fray Pedro
Estaba Paipero There was Paipero
sentadito al sol, sitting in the sun,
con los calzones blancos in his white breeches 2
y afuera el cordón. and his rope hanging out.
Ya, la, lan, y afuera el cordón. Ya, la, lan, with his rope hanging out.
Mirónle las damas The ladies are watching him
[desde el corredor]: from the gallery:
—¿Y qué es esto, Paipero? “And what’s that, Paipero? 4
¡Ay! ¿Qué es esto, señor? ¡Ay! What’s that, good sir?
Ya, la, lan, ¿Y qué es esto, señor? Yá, la, lan, what’s that, good sir?
¿Qué es esto que asoma What’s that that’s peeking
por el mirador? out from the belvedere?”
—Estas son las [bolsas “These are the [bags
de la munición] for the ammunition
y ésta es la escopeta and this is the shotgun
con que cazo yo. I use for hunting.”
—¡Ay, suba Vd., Paipero, “¡Ay! Come up, Paipero,
suba Vd., señor!” come up, good sir!”
—¡Ay! No puedo, señora, “¡Ay! I can’t, good lady,
no puedo, por Dios. I can’t, for God’s sake.
Para tantas damas, For so many ladies, 10
no hay abundación.— there isn’t enough.”
Quiso que no quiso, arriba subió.
Con agua de rosa, laváronselo.
Con toallas de holanda, limpiáronselo
y en pesitos de oro, pesáronselo.
Ciento y veinte libras y más de un cuarterón.
Y en arquitas de oro guardáronselo.
Y a la media noche, la arquita reventó.
Y ciento veinte damas a todas empreñó.
Menos la cocinera, que se le olvidó.
—Gracias, señor, gracias, que para mí [x]altó.
—No [x]altó, señora, que aquí la traigo yo.—
Y entre los anafes, ahí se la endonó.
De la fortaleza la pared cayó.
Con plumas de gallina, la pared formó.
Todas paren niña, la cocinera varón.
Ciento veinte cunas todas en un corredor.
Menos la cocinera, en el techo la colgó.
Y el cordón del fraile, ¡Qué bonito cordón!

Y a la, lan, ¡Qué bonito cordón!

Like it or not, he had to go up.
They washed it with rose-water; they dried it with Holland cloth; and they weighed it with little golden weights: a hundred and twenty pounds, plus another quarter.
And they packed it away in a little gold box.
At midnight, the little box burst.
One hundred and twenty ladies all became pregnant, except for the cook whom he didn’t notice. “Thank you sir, thanks; there was none left for me.” “Not at all, good lady, I have it right here.”
Among the anafes,* he gave it to her.
It was so strenuous that the wall fell down.
He repaired it with chicken feathers.
All the ladies had girls, but the cook had a boy: A hundred and twenty cradles along the gallery, except for the cook’s that was hung from the roof.
As for the friar’s rope: a beautiful rope indeed!

Ya, la, lan, ¡Qué bonito cordón!

Ya, la, lan, a beautiful rope indeed!
In his *Cantos de boda judeo-españoles*, Manuel Alvar includes a photograph of a pot of *adafina*, the traditional Moroccan Jewish sabbath meal (analogous to Yiddish *cholent*), being cooked on an *adafinero*, which is a type of *anafe* (p. 40, plate 3). Compare Bendayán de Bendelac: *adafinero*: ‘anafe grande (hornillo de carbón), hecho de barro, redondo y con tres patas, donde se dispone del carbón según un método especial para que dure a fuego lento veinticuatro horas’ (*Diccionario 9b*; also s.vv. *acubierto, acubrer, annafe*). For the etymology of *adafina* (Ar. *dafana* ‘to bury, hide, conceal’; *dafin* ‘buried, hidden, secret’; *dafina* ‘hidden [treasure]’), see Alvar (*Cantos* 38 & n. 42).
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Vasvári, Louise O. *The Heterosexual Body of the «Mora Morilla»*. London: Department of Hispanic Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1999 (= Papers of the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar, no. 12).


¡Qué me siegue esta cebada!
and Other Euphemistic Metaphors
in the Spanish Ballad Tradition

DARING YOUNG LADIES WHO invite lower-class servants into their bedrooms, evil seductresses who use men as sexual objects, insomniac princesses who visit their lovers in the dead of night ... These are but a few of the erotic motifs of the *Romancero*, an oral Hispanic poetic tradition that has survived for centuries passed on and sung primarily by women. Like certain French *fabliaux* and Italian *novelle* of the *Decameron*, a remarkable number of *romances* tell erotic tales of female transgression. Despite the defiant nature of the female protagonists of the ballads, the women ballad singers themselves lived, and in a small number of cases still continue to live, within the boundaries of a patriarchal society. Thus, while the lives of the singers do not outwardly appear to challenge gender roles, many of the ballads they sing tell of female protagonists who do not allow themselves to be subjected to male control and balk at normative models of femininity. These seductresses invert social roles by performing actions typically reserved for men. In *romances* such as *La bastarda y el segador* and *Gerineldo*, aggressive, upper-class women actively pursue lower-class men in order to satisfy their sexual desires. These female protagonists, however, do not use taboo language to describe their sexual conquests, but instead express the forbidden idea indirectly through euphemistic metaphors. The use of such tropes to disguise unacceptable behavior leads one to ask what function these ballads serve for the women who sing them and the people who
listen. In “Four Functions of Folklore,” William Bascom explains that one of the single most important functions of folklore is permitting actions that are usually not approved. “Every culture has certain words that should not be spoken and deeds that should not be done” (277). Bascom’s explanation leads to the question this article attempts to answer: What is the function of euphemistic metaphors in the Romancero?

This article discusses the language the ballad singer uses to suggest erotic activity. The Romancero never describes the sexual act or organs directly; rather, it uses euphemistic metaphors to veil the ballad’s obscene content. The euphemisms serve to conceal the text’s meaning from those members of an audience who would be scandalized by the obscenity if it were presented more directly. Rather than diminish the erotic nature of these ballads, however, the euphemism only increases the text’s sexual tension by involving the audience in the process of discovering the forbidden meaning of the symbolic language. In La bastarda y el segador, a modern romance rooted in the ancient connection between the fertility of the female body and the fruitfulness of land, the ballad singer avoids openly discussing embarrassing subjects by replacing offensive words with agricultural terminology. This unveiling of double entendre makes the ballad more titillating for its audience while at the same time, it increases the singer’s freedom to discuss subjects otherwise considered taboo for women.

The female protagonist in La bastarda y el segador uses euphemistic metaphors to order a young reaper with an impressive sickle to come into her bedroom and cut her barley and rye. The ballad typically begins with the arrival to town of three reapers, itinerant workers who only came to town during harvest time. Their identity as out-of-towners is established in the first line of the ballad: “Salieron tres segadores a segar fuera de casa” (Unedited version collected by Sarah Portnoy in Morales, Spain, June 1998). Since the reaper is not a permanent figure in the town and does not belong to her social class, the bastarda has greater freedom to take advantage of him sexually without concern for the consequences. The bastard woman sends a servant to bring this lower-class itinerant worker to her, demonstrating the class disparity between them, then she boldly
tells him what he must do in order to satisfy her sexual appetite. Given that he has little choice, the reaper performs his function, the woman pays him a few coins, and he leaves. The next day the church bells ring to let the townspeople know that the segador has died.

While women would have sung this ballad to entertain themselves and each other during household chores, men also would have sung La bastarda y el segador while working in the fields, thus their labor would have echoed the repetitive, mechanical sexual activity that takes place between the bastarda and the segador. The agricultural metaphor functions as an obvious parallel for this sexual tryst in which the reaper must continually service the bastard woman. In some versions, the segador keeps track of his work and the woman asks him how much he has reaped so far. This test of his “reaping” endurance is a clear measure of the man’s virility. A version from Extremadura uses a sequential metaphor to illustrate this sexual marathon:

A la una de la noche ha echado mano a segarla.
-Diga usté, buen segador, ¿qué tal vamos de senara?
-Ya yevo siete gaviyas y ahora voy con la manada. (Gil García 47)

The class difference between the two characters allows the woman to treat the segador as though he were a beast of burden who must continue to plow the land despite his probable fatigue. The bastarda shows her superiority to the segador from the beginning by having one of her servants fetch him while she watches from her balcony above, remaining in a position of authority. The motif of the upper-class woman seducing a lower-class man is frequent in the Romancero and occurs in such well known ballads as Gerineldo and La dama y el pastor. This separation on a spatial as well as a social level is emphasized in a Portuguese version of the ballad entitled A filha do Imperador de Roma in which the concupiscent woman spies the object of her desire from the highest window in the palace:

Um dia de grande calore, um dia de grande calma,
Subiu-se a uma ventana mais alta donde ela estava,
viu andar três segadores segando trigo e cevada. (Fontes 206)
The English ballad *The Mower* shows a similar power structure in which the young woman is the landholder and the plowman a landless itinerant worker. As in the case of *La bastarda y el segador*, the woman in the English ballad is also in a position of power over the vulnerable, lower-class male. Since she is not interested in him for his wealth or status, she judges him solely on his ability as a sexually potent male. According to Darby Lewes, “[T]heir mutual dependence (she has land that needs plowing; he is a plowman) is offset by the fact that her possession of the land is a given, while he must demonstrate that he is a ‘true’ (sexually potent) male” (21). Since the woman is not interested in the male for his wealth or because of his social class, she judges him solely on his masculine prowess. Like the *segador* who must prove himself by repeatedly “plowing” the lady, the following lines of another English ballad *The Ploughman* show the male in a similar position of needing to demonstrate his virility.

As walkin’ forth upon a day,  
I met a jolly ploughman;  
I tald him I had lands to plough,  
If he wad but prove true, man. (quoted in Lewes 21)

Like the English maiden in *The Ploughman*, the *bastarda*, a member of the aristocracy, would also have been in possession of the land being reaped by the *segador*, thus clearly placing her in a position of economic power. Therefore, when the *bastarda* tells the agricultural worker how to plough her fields, he is clearly aware that he does not belong in the world of the nobility and danger that her female power represents for him. In one version, the intimidated *segador* replies with the same euphemistic language to show his discomfort in this unfamiliar setting: “Esta cebada, señora, no está para mi sembrada,/ son pa’ Reyes y marqueses y tendrá delito, gracias” (López Sánchez 84).

Despite his reservations, the *segador* complies with the woman’s request to sow her seed. Part of the *bastarda’s* attraction to the worker is that he symbolizes the “Other.” Unlike the aristocratic gentlemen of her social circle who do not perform physical labor, this harvester of the earth’s seed is capable of satisfying woman’s primitive impulse
to be “harvested” herself. Hence, the bastarda has her servant call the reaper into her bedroom and tells him to “segarme una poca de cebada,” a euphemistic metaphor for sexual intercourse (Unedited version collected by Sarah Portnoy in Morales, Spain, June 1998). The segador functions as an instrument of the woman’s sexual pleasure, a tool used to cultivate the land. This agricultural metaphor opposes the female force of nature to the masculine power of technology. Male agricultural workers, represented in this ballad by the segador, “must use their technology—plows, mowing machines, and the like—to coax and or force subsistence from the land; they must turn virgin land into productive farmland that will enable mankind to survive” (Lewes 16).

The brute strength of the segador that enables him to successfully work the land is what entices the bastarda to choose him as her lover. Initially, the bastarda delights in the voyeuristic thrill of watching the segador from above, before calling on the one with the sweaty clothing to come up to her bedroom. Her attraction to the segador is obviously not to his ropa sudada, rather, she uses the clothing as a way to avoid the taboo subject of the eroticized male body. The fact that he has been doing physical labor causes his shirt to stick to him, revealing the contours of his rippling muscles. The laborer’s sweat is a symbol of virility because of its link to labor and because it suggests the physical activity of sexual intercourse. As this euphemism demonstrates, the bastarda desires the segador because he is a working man.

In other versions of La bastarda the protagonist says he wore la

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1 The segador's sweaty clothing may also symbolize the physical activity of sexual intercourse. The spectacle of a segador causing the sexual excitement of a woman appears in a Spanish lyric poem, however, in this case it is the woman who is sweating. The female narrator remarks that she is even sweating in the shade because of her extreme state of arousal: “Estoi a la sonbra i estoi sudando:/¡qué harán mis amores, que andan segando!” (Frenk 524). Similarly, in La bastarda, when the female protagonist saw the segador's sweaty body, she may have fantasized about the sweat produced by the exertion of sexual activity.
ropa triunfada, an ambiguous description that could either refer to his skill as a reaper or his talent as a lover. In one Andalusian version the bastard woman talks about the opulence of the dress of these men as the element that attracts her attention: “los mangotes de oro fino y los fajones de Holanda” (Piñero, Romanero andaluz 133). This metonymic nature of clothing as a way to discuss the male body appears in other romances of female seduction, such as Gerineldo, in which the narrator describes the page as being “muy calzado y muy vestido” (Cossio and Maza I:131). Like the euphemistic “ropa sudada” in La bastarda, the anonymous princess in Gerineldo refers to the page’s dress as a way of “circumventing the taboo of direct mention of physical attraction,” but her words inevitably reveal her desire (Rogers 67). “¡Qué lindo vas, Gerineldo, qué galante y qué pulido;/ quien te tuviera de noche dos horas a mi servicio” (Cossio and Maza I:131). Gerineldo’s elegant clothing is merely the wrapper concealing the package underneath that the princess finds so exciting. The protagonist in Gerineldo, like the protagonist in La bastarda, takes the initiative in a sexual relationship by seducing a lower-class man, once again underlining the class difference between the sexes in the ballad. While the opening lines of Gerineldo are surprising because the protagonist speaks openly about her lust for her father’s handsome page, the euphemism of clothing to refer to his body may have satisfied the listener’s internal censor and made her behaviour seem more acceptable.

The aggressive behavior of both the bastarda and the princess in Gerineldo can also be seen as a reaction to the constraints of a male dominated society. While the female protagonist of Gerineldo is the king’s legitimate heir, the seductress in La bastarda does not have a legal status. Therefore, she would not have been entitled to the same rights of inheritance or to the same dowry as a legitimate offspring and may have felt resentful of her inferior standing. The bastarda’s marginal status is reinforced by her anonymity in the text. She is not recognized by a proper name, but is simply known as “la bastarda.” This sense of inferiority may have contributed to her desire to break free of social limitations, since her very existence represents a transgression on the part of her father. Another explanation for the protagonist’s scandalous behaviour appears in versions in which her
The young girl complaining because she is forced to become a nun is a frequent poetic motif as late as the Renaissance. If a family only had enough money for the eldest daughter’s dowry, or if a father wanted to conceal his illegitimate offspring, a young woman could be forced to enter a nunnery. This theme appears in Spanish lyric poetry in verses such as “No quiero ser monja, no,/ que niña namoradica so” (Frenk 98). In lyric poetry the maiden merely voices her unhappiness with her situation, while the narrative context of the ballad gives the woman the chance to take the situation forcefully into her own hands and do something about it.

El conde de Inglaterra tiene una hija bastardada.
La quiere meter a monja y ella quiere ser casada.
L’ha metido en un convento por tenerla más guardada.

(Armistead, Tres calas 110)

The bastard’s non-legitimized status may also play a role in her attraction to men outside her social circle. As one version from Portugal demonstrates, men of her own social class do not excite la bastardada. They are either too old, some are beardless, while others are not even strong enough to handle their own swords (Fontes 206). All of these criticisms are euphemisms for being unable to perform sexually. While a beard and mustache are common symbols of masculinity, the beardless man is often represented as lacking virility. The bastard’s third accusation, the man unable to handle his own sword, is an obvious metaphor for the aristocrat’s inability to satisfy the woman, thus, linking the sword with the penis. The bastard’s accusation suggests that whereas the upper-class sword fails to please her, the laborer’s tool of reaping and sowing capably performs.

While the Peninsular versions of La bastardada discussed above are

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3 This motif occurs in the Old Testament story of Samson and Delilah. When Delilah seduces Samson and cuts off his long hair, he loses his incredible strength (Judges 16:17).
very descriptive and include a lot of dialogue, the Sephardic versions of this romance greatly abbreviate the interaction between the two characters and usually eliminate most of their dialogue. The Sephardic versions are typically much shorter than the Peninsular ones. For example, one very brief version omits la bastarda’s direct request for service and all conversation (Hemsi 13). Why does the Sephardic culture greatly abbreviate this popular Peninsular ballad? Samuel Armistead suggests that it is because the Sephardim were very cautious because of the extreme conditions under which they lived. While this is one plausible explanation, I believe the brevity of these versions could also be attributed to the markedly different function of this particular ballad in society. Whereas agricultural workers and women, respectively, sung the Peninsular versions while at work in the fields or during household chores, this particular Sephardic ballad was primarily used as a wedding song. Moshe Attias explains that it was to be sung during the nights preceding the ceremony as a prelude to marriage (28-35). Therefore, the erotic nature of this ballad would have served to increase the sexual tension leading up to the wedding night.

While the need for symbolic language in these ballads to conceal unacceptable terminology has been made clear, why is this particular euphemism of physical force used to describe the sexual act and sexual organs in La bastarda y el segador? First of all, the sexual act described here is not one of equals or of mutual pleasure. The bastarda does not ask the reaper if he would like to go to bed with her, rather, she commands him to do so: “Siégala tú, segador, que te será bien...

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4 The Sephardic versions of La bastarda often begin with lines from the well-known romance of Delgadina. In the popular romance of Delgadina, when the king’s attractive young daughter refuses to submit to her father’s incestuous desire, he has her locked up in a tall tower with only a small amount of salty food and water. This “contamination” of Delgadina and La bastarda suggests that the bastard woman may have been forced to act in this lascivious manner because she had no other choice. She could either die of starvation or find a man to come to her aid. For examples of these unique Sephardic versions, see Armistead and Silverman, Judeo-Spanish Ballads from Bosnia, p. 45; Hemsi, Cancionero sefardí, p. 159; and Attias, p. 33.
The Dictionary of Symbols defines the plough as a “symbol of fertilization” and says that “because the earth is female in nature, ploughing is a symbol of the union of the male and the female principle” (Cirlot 260). According to Eric Partridge’s glossary of Shakespeare’s bawdy terms, plough means “to coit with; to impregnate a woman” (163). In Folk Song in England, A.L. Lloyd describes how in Africa, in a particular tribe, the smith has sexual intercourse with his wife as soon as he gets a new hammer, so that it will work more effectively (209).

Another explanation for this particular euphemism in the ballad is the ancient connection of female fertility and male technology. In Folk Song in England, A.L. Lloyd explains that the sexualization of the world is not limited to nature and agriculture, but extends to tools and the trade associated with them (208). Agricultural activities such as plowing, sowing, are reaping are vivid sexual symbols in various cultures. Sexual play on words with agricultural tools exists in both lyric and narrative poetry. In the following example from Margit Frenk’s Corpus de la antigua lírica popular hispánica, holgar can either mean to rest or to engage in sexual activity. “A segar son idos,/ tres con una hoz; mientras uno siega,/ holgavan los dos” (525). The segador’s hoz refers to the penis, while the other two at rest designate the testicles. Similar euphemisms for tools exist in the ballad tradition. The euphemistic metaphor of the penis as sickle and the

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5 The Dictionary of Symbols defines the plough as a “symbol of fertilization” and says that “because the earth is female in nature, ploughing is a symbol of the union of the male and the female principle” (Cirlot 260). According to Eric Partridge’s glossary of Shakespeare’s bawdy terms, plough means “to coit with; to impregnate a woman” (163). In Folk Song in England, A.L. Lloyd describes how in Africa, in a particular tribe, the smith has sexual intercourse with his wife as soon as he gets a new hammer, so that it will work more effectively (209).

6 Corominas’ Breve diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana says that the verb holgar comes from folgar, a verb which designates sexual intercourse, as in the modern day follar.
testicles as a quiver, a container for arrows, appears in versions of *La bastarda y el segador* in which the male refers to his *hoz* and his *aljaba* (Armistead, *Tres calas* 109). In addition, in *The Mower* the English maiden’s offer to sharpen the man’s scythe represents the fantasy in folklore in “which working techniques are sexualized and the tools and gestures of trade are turned into erotic metaphors” (Lloyd 319).

While the *segador*’s tools represent his penis and testicles, the female body is represented geographically. The euphemistic metaphors of *La bastarda y el segador* transform the woman’s body into a sexual landscape. For example, in one Andalusian version, when the reaper asks the bastard woman, “-Oigame usted, mi señora, ¿dónde la tiene sembrada?”-she responds with a geographical description, “No la tengo en ningún prado, ni tampoco entre cañadas,/ la tengo entre dos columnas que le atraviesan mi alma” (Piñero, *Romancero de la tradición* 177). This metaphor connects “nature as a void needing to be filled” to the woman in the ballad anxious to be penetrated by the phallus (Lewes 6).

These topographic euphemisms grab the listener’s attention and heighten the sexual excitement by allowing the listener to decode the euphemistic metaphors. The metaphors clearly refer to the act of penetration without using the recognized vocabulary for sexual intercourse. This capacity of the euphemistic metaphor to suggest without being explicit is what allows women to narrate a situation of an erotic nature. According to Freud’s *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* such comic situations provide release from sexual restraint. Freud argues that wit, and I would add the euphemistic metaphors in these ballads, serves as a “sugar coating round the pill” of smut and obscenity and that this pill “satisfies one of our deepest cravings” (Monro 89). The wit in these ballads lies in the woman’s capacity to successfully perform the shocking and unexpected, while the euphemistic metaphor manages to satisfy the censor within. In polite company smut and obscenity are considered taboo. What these ballads demonstrate is that the difference between the acceptable and the taboo is a matter of form rather than content. The ideas remain the same: it is only the words that must be made more acceptable. The ballads effectively convey these taboo ideas in an economic, acceptable wrapping.
Lloyd's English version of "The Mower" ends on a more positive note. The maiden is much more agreeable and helps the young man regain his strength when she says, "I'll strive to sharp your scythe, so set it in my hand,/ And then perhaps you will return again to mow my meadowland" (201). Since this English maid clearly hopes for further liaisons with her lover, she tries to make their encounter a pleasant experience.

The same concise, euphemistic language found in *La bastarda* also appears in the English ballad *The Mower*. In both the Spanish and the English ballads the woman is the powerful agent of seduction with no patience or sympathy for the male's inadequacy. The *bastarda*, as well as her English counterpart, requires numerous performances to meet her sexual needs. The insatiable female appetite is a frequent motif in medieval literature and is often used in misogynistic texts to warn men of the dangers of women. In these examples, however, the female appetite does not have a negative connotation, but instead suggests the male's sexual inadequacy. For example, in one version the English mower expresses his frustration when he says, "I mowed from nine to dinner-time, it was far beyond my skill, I was 'bliged to yield and quit the field, and her grass was growing still," (Lloyd 201). Meanwhile, in the Spanish ballad the *segador* admits his fatigue when he tells the inexhaustible lady, "Yo suspiro, gran señora, por mi hoz y por mi aljaba" (Armistead, *Tres calas* 109), or in this Andalusian version in which the man just cannot seem to keep a rapid pace: "Le ha segado siete veces, y el segador se cansaba" (Piñero, *Romancero de la tradición* 178). The aggressive sexual demands of the lascivious seductress eventually so exhaust the *segador* that the ballad ends with his death, while the woman escapes unharmed and unpunished from the sexual tryst. Could this outcome in which the lascivious vixen succeeds while the male fails be indicative of a ballad tradition preserved primarily by women? In a society in which men dictated where women could go and whom they would marry, it seems likely that the female singers and audience would have experienced vicarious pleasure by seeing the female protagonist triumph in her transgression.

The euphemistic metaphors discussed in this article allow the
female singers freedom of expression. Since women are both the receptors and often the protagonists of the ballads, I believe the genre represents a female-empowering tradition and an opportunity for women to release repressed desire through song. At the end of La bastardá order is restored with the death of the segador. Therefore, the ballads not only function as a socially approved outlet for repression but also serve as a mechanism for maintaining the stability of the patriarchal power structure.

Since these ballads are not isolated texts, but part of a larger society, one must question if their language represents a female expression or a male viewpoint projected onto women’s song. Like pornography, a genre directed more at men than at women, these ballads are loveless and centered on the act itself, so they could be interpreted as a portrayal of the uncontrollable desire of nymphomaniacs, a motif that would be more likely to interest men than women. Despite this seeming male viewpoint, however, isn’t there something to be said for the representation of sexually unsatisfied women whose male lovers cannot meet their needs? Perhaps this portrayal of the independent, aggressive female who breaks the limitations of society’s moral code—while still staying within acceptable boundaries linguistically—appealed to women. Bascom explains that folklore allows people to do what they might want to do, but are forbidden from by the normal standards of cultural behavior. Ballad singing is an acceptable vehicle for women to enjoy a taboo fantasy. If a woman is able to temporarily identify with the protagonist, then she must not totally reject what the character represents, making it unlikely that the ballad represents a projection of male values. Nonetheless, it is interesting to speculate the extent to which the typically lower-class female singer identifies with the aristocratic protagonist. The bastardá’s superior position in society would have been alien to the average ballad singer, yet, a peasant woman singing this ballad may have identified with the wealthy protagonist simply because she likes sweaty, working men as much as anyone else. While this is one possible explanation, the language of the romance provides yet another. The ballad’s euphemisms could contribute to this connection by making the bastardá’s language seem less threatening and more playful. Through
the use of the veiled language of these euphemistic metaphors, the romances do not stray beyond the boundaries of what is socially acceptable, yet they still effectively communicate a sense of female sexual empowerment.

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Between Secular and Sacred: The Song of Songs in the Work of Abraham Ibn Ezra

David A. Wacks

One of the most intriguing features of Andalusī Jewish culture is, according to Ross Brann, “a startling fusion of the sacred and profane […] particularly in the manner the poets devoted themselves to the idea of beauty” (11). Hebrew poets of al-Andalus had two primary vehicles for expressing the idea of beauty: the Classical love poetry of the Arabic tradition, and the Biblical Hebrew love poetry of the Song of Songs. 1 This places the Song at the center of the most compelling cultural problem of Jewish Al-Andalus. Like Hebrew Andalusī culture, the Song itself is similarly torn between secular and sacred fields of meaning. It is a secular love poem of breathtaking beauty that has been historically interpreted as a religious allegory.

The work of the Judeo-Spanish poet and exegete Abraham Ibn Ezra (d. 1167 CE) featuring the language of the Song is perhaps the best showcase of the interplay between sacred and secular in Hebrew Andalusī literature. When it comes to the Song, Ibn Ezra literally wrote the book on it, a commentary that gives equal treatment to its literal and allegorical meanings. 2 He also made use of the language of

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1 Hereafter referred to as the Song. All translations of Hebrew texts are mine unless otherwise indicated.

2 The commentary appears in the various editions of the traditional Mikra’ot Gedolot, a rescension of biblical text and commentaries. English translation is by Richard Block.
the Song in many literary works of various genres. Through his work we are privileged with a unique glimpse into the beating heart of Hebrew Andalusi culture.

Abraham Ibn Ezra lived from 1092-1167 CE. This places him at the end of the Golden Age of Andalusi Hebrew cultural production, and he is the last of the great Andalusi courtier-rabbis. He was born in Tudela, in Northern Spain and he lived in al-Andalus until 1140 CE, when the invasion of the less than tolerant Berber Almohads inspired him to take a trip to North Africa in search of better working conditions. The trip never ended, and led him to Italy, France, England, and back to France where he lived until his death (Weinberger 1-8).

He was an incredibly active intellect and writer. While most recognized for his biblical commentaries, he also penned over one hundred books on medicine, astrology, mathematics, philosophy and linguistics. Finally, he was a prolific poet, and left behind a staggering collection of piyyutim, or religious poems, as well as secular poetry and the rhymed allegorical philosophical narrative Hayy ben Meqîs (‘Alive, Son of Awake’) adapted from the Arabic Ḥayy ibn Yaqḍân of Ibn Sinâ (b. 980 CE).3

Abraham Ibn Ezra was a rationalist par excellence. In fact, he was so well known as such that he was condemned by his contemporary Nahmanides for favoring rationalist interpretations of the Bible over midrashic aggadot, traditional stories about biblical characters (Weinberger 10). This tendency of his is evident in his commentary on the Song, which breaks sharply with the previous traditional interpretations.

The Song is perhaps the most commented book of the Bible, and certainly one of the most popular (Block 1). The greatest intellectual figures of the Middle Ages, Christian and Jew alike, have tried their

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3 This work should not be confused with the Hayy ibn Yaqḍân of Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185), which expands and novelizes Ibn Sinâ’s work, but also differs from it philosophically (Goichon). Weinberger notes that Ibn Ezra’s Hebrew Hayy ben Meqîs is couched in a more poetic idiom than Ibn Sinâ’s Arabic original, and is laced with metaphorical figures (116).
hand at interpreting the Song. The twelfth-century Christian theologian Bernard of Clairvaux wrote over 80 sermons interpreting the Song. Fray Luis de León, an Augustinian priest, Professor of Hebrew Bible and poet living in sixteenth-century Spain, was jailed for four years by the Inquisition for translating the Song from Hebrew into Spanish, and for insisting on the primacy of the Hebrew text over that of the Latin Vulgate (Blecua 11-15). Interpretation of the Song has long been fraught with conflict and overshadowed by prevailing religious doctrines.

Jewish exegetes have traditionally interpreted the Song as an allegory of the relationship between God and Israel. Interpretations favoring the literal meaning of the Song have been regarded as unacceptable. In the Targum, or Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, the allegorical relationship is explained historically, beginning with Abraham, the first “beloved” of God. The highly influential tenth-century rabbi, Saadia Gaon (b. 992 CE) continues the historical allegorical interpretation, and Ibn Ezra follows suit (Block 4-5).

Ibn Ezra, undaunted by the sometimes dire consequences befalling those who dared take on the Song, produces a commentary that, apart from being a philological tour de force, may well have been viewed by his contemporaries as controversial. It is divided into three parts. The first deals with philological questions. The second treats the literal meaning of the Song as a poem about two lovers. The third explains the song according to the traditional historical allegory found in the Targum and commentary of Saadia Gaon. Although this tripartite exegetical method is Ibn Ezra’s regular approach to any biblical text, it is noteworthy that he does not change it to accommodate the traditional ban on literal interpretation of the Song. In defiance of rabbinical tradition, he gives equal time to the literal and allegorical interpretations of the Song. This fact is significant, and is exemplary of the juxtaposition of sacred and secular so characteristic of the literature of the Andalusi courtier-rabbis. Just as the use of Biblical poetic language introduces the sacred into the realm of secular poetry, here the development of the secular meaning of the Song in Ibn Ezra’s commentary puts the secular and the sacred on the same page for the first time in the Jewish exegetical tradition.
This juxtaposition of secular and sacred echoed what Judeo-Andalusī authors were doing in their poetry. In fact, the use of Biblical language by Judeo-Andalusī poets is quite common—the Bible was, after all, their only source of poetic language, and it was not considered improper to use Biblical language per se in secular poetry (Brann 11-14; Drory, Models 173-77). However, using the language of the Song in a way that does not take into account its traditional allegorical meaning could be viewed as objectionable from a religious point of view. It is ironic, then, that a rabbi as highly respected as Abraham Ibn Ezra should be guilty of abusing the language of the Hebrew Bible.

Ibn Ezra’s intellectual talents enabled him to make use of the language of the Song in several ways. In each context, the language of the Song interacts differently with Ibn Ezra’s own language. This interaction depends on the secular or sacred nature of the work, the extent to which the context reinforces or challenges traditional interpretations of the Song, and the extent to which the author weaves the language of the Song into the fabric of his own. The originality and variety of Ibn Ezra’s use of the Song becomes clear after the most precursory investigation of his work, and the examples I put forth here are but a small sample of the intellectual romance between Ibn Ezra and the Song.

The first example is drawn from a panegyric, a poem in praise of an unnamed patron (Levin, Anthology 113-14). It is titled “To his Beloved.” Samuel M. Stern maintains that it was written in imitation of a muwaṣṣalīḥ by Hispano-Arabic poet Ibn Quzmān (Harvey 186-87). The poem displays several tropes and figures characteristic of Arabic love poetry. The patron is compared to the sun, the favor of whose face shines upon the poet (line 3). The poet begs for mercy from the “arrows” shooting forth from the patron’s eyes (line 5). The poet’s eye is compared to a snare that traps him in the patron’s beauty (line 17). Finally, the poet’s very life hangs on a kind or cruel word from the patron (line 22). At the poem’s close, Ibn Ezra skillfully

4 By secular, we mean poetry that does not directly treat religious themes or that is not written for liturgical purposes.
intertwines language from the Song into that of the Andalusī Arabic kharja, or closing couplet:5

The choice honey from your lips is sweet;  
It is God’s work, unblemished.  
*Your breath radiates the fragrance of apples.*6  
My beloved, where have you eaten the apple?  
Come and say to me: ah! (trans. Weinberger 90)7

Here Ibn Ezra has taken the biblical image of the sweet breath of the beloved and used it in a purely physical description. While it is one thing to put Biblical language at the service of secular poetry, it is another to do so in a way which clearly favors a literal interpretation of the Song. It is yet another to poetically subordinate it to a colloquial Arabic love song. A contemporary analogy would be setting a highly literary poem to the tune of a Madonna song, and closing the poem with a couplet drawn directly from the song.

Therefore, in the space of two lines the Andalusī reader would find this text to resonate with the poetry of Ibn Quzmān and the commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra. It is also possible that the reader or listener would have been personally familiar with the song from which the kharja was taken—yet another intertextual enhancement. Members of Ibn Ezra’s audience familiar with his commentary on the Song would have also recognized the allegorical meaning. In his commentary, Ibn Ezra writes that “the scent of your breath” “refers

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5 A kharja is a couplet in vernacular (Mozarabic Romance or Andalusī Arabic) placed at the end of a muwaššaḥah, a strophic poem written in a literary language (Classical Arabic or Hebrew). The muwaššaḥah often resonates thematically with the kharja, but at the very least is linked to it mimetically by placing the couplet in the mouth of a character described in the poem. For a complete discussion of the genre, see Rosen.

6 Song 7:9 - “the scent of your breath is like apples.” Literally, “the scent in your mouth is like that of apples.”

7 That is, “so I may smell the scent of apple on your breath.” In this and subsequent quotations I have rendered the language of the Song in italicized text.
to the high priest who offers the burnt offerings and burns the incense (when Israel is reunited with God in Israel)” (trans. Block 191).

Another example of Ibn Ezra’s use of the Song that maintains one foot in the secular and one in the sacred is found in Ibn Ezra’s poem “In a Lifetime.” The poem is a meditation on the stages of the life of man that was used in the Yom Kippur liturgy. It is somewhat pessimistic when compared to other poems of similar theme written by contemporaries. Nevertheless, one of the more positive images, that of the man of twenty, is taken directly from the Song:

To the youth of twenty life is pleasant;
*He’s fleet as a roe deer and romps the hills;*\(^9\)
He scorns reproof, he mocks his teacher’s voice;
The net of a beautiful girl keeps him in bonds.

(trans. Weinberger 107-09; Levin, *Religious Poems* z:542-45)

From here on in, the subject of the poem goes downhill, as he is “entrapped” by a woman at thirty (lines 15-16), “shaken and humbled” at forty (line 19), and finally “he is thought of as dead” (line 39). Here the language of the Song is employed to describe a lost golden youth. It seems at first glance a *carpe diem*: that you (the reader) should enjoy the vigor of youth described in the Song while you can, before things start to go against you. However, when taken in the context of the Yom Kippur liturgy, it starts to sound more like a chastisement to *not* get carried away with the evanescent pleasures of youth. In any event, Ibn Ezra is not talking about the allegorical interpretation of the sound of the beloved leaping in the mountains. In his commentary he explains that this is the sound of God speaking to Moses on Mt. Sinai (trans. Block 108). Here Ibn Ezra uses the literal meaning of the Song in a secular poem that is used in a religious

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\(^8\) The title is Weinberger’s translation.

\(^9\) Song 2:8 “Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.”
The poem is a secular poem in that it is not categorically devotional in that it does not address the relationship between man and God. The poem, in its exploration of a man’s life cycle, muses on the vanity of worldly existence.

The maqāma is a narrative genre written in rhymed prose interspersed with poetry. It was invented in Arabic by Badr al-Zamaan al-Hamadhanī (d. 1008), and cultivated in Spain in both Arabic and Hebrew through the thirteenth century. For a detailed definition and introduction to the maqāma, see Drory, “The maqāma.”

See Henry Corbin’s introductory study and translation (138-179), and Levin’s edition of Ibn Ezra’s text (Ḥayy 89-99).
doves, his temples like halves of a pomegranate. His back was not stooped, his strength undiminished. His sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. As if anointed with oil, he had the fragrance of a nard. His speech was most sweet and he was altogether desirable. (trans. Weinberger 112; Levin, Ḥayy 50)

The sage is depicted using language that describes the Shulamite in the Song. He is compared to the dove, the pomegranate and nard, and his speech is seductively sweet. The play on the established figures of the maqāma genre and the erotic nature of the language calls into question the intended tone of the text: is Ibn Ezra mocking the maqāma, the Song, or both? Or is he simply entertaining the reader by shuffling the deck of literary contexts and dealing us a new hand? To the educated Andalusī reader, this text might call to mind a number of sources: the language of the Song and its allegorical interpretation, the figure of the false sage in the classical maqāma, or the seemingly sincere sage of Ibn Sīnā’s Ḥayy ibn Yaqūb.

All of the language here is used in the literal sense, as the allegorical meanings are either absent in the commentary or completely irrelevant to the context. However, one could assert that here Ibn Ezra is suggesting a new allegory for the meaning of the Song: that of the relationship between himself and his own intellect, embodied by the sage. He is proposing, in effect, a love affair with his own mind.

There are, however, instances when Ibn Ezra makes use of the Song in accordance with the traditional allegorical meaning. Even in such cases, he finds a way to put his creative stamp on the allusion and make it his own. In the poem “I Am Perfect, Beautiful, but Still in the Hands of Shamma,” Ibn Ezra extends the historical metaphor

13 “Your eyes are doves,” (Song 1:15); “your eyes are doves behind your veil,” (Song 4:1).
14 “Your cheeks are like a piece of a pomegranate behind your veil,” (Song 4:3, 6:7).
15 “Your anointing oils are fragrant, “ (Song 1:3); “While the king was reclining at his table, my nard sent forth its fragrance,” (Song 1:12).
16 “His mouth is most sweet; and he is altogether lovely,” (Song 5:16).
to contemporary al-Andalus:

I am perfect, with beautiful hair, but still in the hands of Shamma.
But your wrath has scorched me, crushed me, burnt me.
Remember, beloved, your covenant!
Your love is wondrous to me [...] (Levin, Religious Poems 1: 81)

Here the Shulamite, representing the Congregation of Israel, symbolizes the European Jewish Diaspora. “Shamma” refers to Christianity, and is a reference to the descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:13). So, “in the hands of Shamma” means living within Christianity. Following the allegory, this fate would have befallen Israel as a punishment for serving foreign gods. The next line “and the wrath that has scorched me …” is glossed in the commentary, where Ibn Ezra likens the “wrath” or “heat of the sun” that scorches the Shulamite to the Israelites' captivity in Egypt (trans. Block 163). This is a fairly straightforward commentary: in the Song, the Shulamite was made to work in her brothers' vineyard, and as a result is sunburnt; in the allegory, the Israelites are made to work by the Egyptians, and are similarly sunburnt. In his commentary, Ibn Ezra explains that the sunburn is the effect of God's wrath against Israel for continuing to worship Egyptian gods after being set free from slavery. In the poem, however, Ibn Ezra is referring to European Jewry paying the spiritual price for living in Christian lands. None of the language in the poem is explicitly devotional; the only thing that keeps this poem from being purely secular is its reliance on the allegorical interpretation of the Song. The fact that only a sprinkling of words from the Song would suffice to recall the allegory and

17 “Open to me, me sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one,” (Song 5:2).
18 “Your eyes are doves behind your veil,” (Song 4:1); “your temples are like a split pomegranate behind your veil,” (Song 4:4, 6:7). His use here of the Hebrew tsammah for hair instead of veil (as it is used in the Song) also occurs in his commentary on the literal sense of the Song (trans. Block 117).
19 “Gaze not upon me, for I am dark, because the sun has scorched me,” (Song 1:6).
Ibn Ezra also wrote *piyyutim*—religious poems—that explicitly treat the allegorical interpretation of the Song (the relationship between God and Israel). When the language of the Song is used in this way, the effect is much less subtle. The result is more of a straightforward gloss on the Biblical text than an artfully rendered allusion. “O Silver Throated One, How Beautiful Are Your Words” is such a poem:

O silver throated mountain goat, how beautiful are your words!  
You are above all in the wisdom of your books!  
I am black, the sun has scorched me,  
For I have transgressed statute and law.  

Here Ibn Ezra explains the allegory in the poem itself. Again, according to his commentary, the sunburn symbolizes God's anger at Israel for assimilating and not keeping his law.

Theologically speaking, this poem is probably the least controversial use of the Song—one that is in keeping with the traditional allegorical interpretation and also written for liturgical use. A crowd of worshippers present in a synagogue for a major holiday would be on the average far less educated than a gathering of elite *literati*, and therefore the use of the explicit allegory. At the same time, one could reasonably expect the general audience to be familiar with the text of the Song as it was read publicly in the Passover liturgy every year. While the effect is less elegant than keeping the allegory implicit (as in the last example), it is more openly didactic and appropriate to its context in the liturgy.

These remarks begin to scratch the surface of Ibn Ezra's love affair with the Song, and with these few examples one can see that the language of the Song is particularly suited to intertextual play linking biblical, exegetical, and poetic texts both sacred and secular. Abraham Ibn Ezra is a highly proficient agent of its language. In his work, this combination of Biblical text and Andalusí author yielded some of the most sophisticated intertextuality in Iberian literature. Such work is
exemplary of the tension between sacred and secular that defined the poetic sensibility of the Andalusí Hebrew poets.

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Poetry and Desire: 
Sexual and Cultural Temptation in the Hebrew Maqāma Tradition 
MICHELLE M. HAMILTON

Arabized Hebrew poetry in medieval Iberia, in part the focus of this conference, was identified amongst the Jewish communities of al-Andalus and Christian Spain with secular Arabic love poetry and learning, from which it originated. The Jewish intellectuals of the Golden Age who composed such poems often did so with reservations, aware that in so doing they were co-opting the medium and values of the dominant culture. As Ross Brann has pointed out, the Arabized Jews of al-Andalus felt a “sense of intellectual and religious embattlement,” and that their composition of Arabized erotic poetry was only one of many areas that caused their “unease over their linguistic, cultural, and social assimilation whose dangers were all too apparent” (“Arabized Jews” 439). In fact one of the topoi of the genre was a renunciation of having participated in such a lifestyle, and many of the greatest of the Golden Age poets periodically renounced the erotic poetry of their youth and the way of life they felt it represented.

Two authors of the twelfth century, al-Ḥarīzī and Ibn Shabbetay, condemn the rabbi-courtiers’ affinity toward Arabic love poetry in another literary form originating from and very popular amongst the Arabs, the maqāmāt. The genre is inherently ambiguous, and while in this paper I present one reading, I recognize that other, often contradictory readings, are possible. The maqāmāt of al-Ḥarīzī and the maqāma-like compositions of Ibn Shabbetay are both remarkable in
that they are written in Hebrew, and both treat themes of Jewish nationalism (i.e., themes dealing with the nation of Israel living in captivity among non-Jews, which, of course, characterizes the situation of the Arabized Jewish elite of medieval Iberia).¹

Al-Ḥarīẓī and Ibn Shabbetay were almost exact contemporaries living in the second half of the twelfth-century, both natives of Northern Iberia.² Both authors were trained in the Arabic literary tradition, as was the norm for Jews in medieval Iberia, yet both were for a time inhabitants of the newly Christianized territories of Iberia—thus in a liminal space culturally, temporally and linguistically. Al-Ḥarīẓī did eventually leave Iberia and travel in the East, and his fifty maqāmāt, the Taḥkemonī, are modeled on the Arabic genre popularized by the Arab authors, al-Ḥarīẓī and al-Hamadhānī. Ibn Shabbetay was author of four known treatises, one of which is Minhāt Yehuda (The Offering of Yehuda), a composition that shares many genetic traits with the maqāmāt genre—with its mixture of rhymed prose and poetry, its imagery, allegory, ambiguity and its critical/satirical tone. It is however, a single tale narrated in the third person, which is not typical of al-Ḥarīẓī’s or the Arabic maqāmāt. I will focus in this paper on the manner in which both al-Ḥarīẓī and Ibn Shabbetay depict poetry and manipulate images of the Arabic and secular Hebrew poetic traditions in order to effect a social critique of the Jewish intellectuals of medieval Iberia, the so-called coutier-rabbis.

First I want to look at how al-Ḥarīẓī “reads” poetry in his introductory and first maqāmāt, i.e., how the issue of the Arabic language and the Arabic literary tradition are combined and presented in the

¹ As discussed by Raymond Scheindlin (Gazelle 43).
² Millás Vallverdú asserts al-Ḥarīẓī was from Catalonia (77), David Simha Segal suggests he was from Toledo and also puts the author’s death on December 3, 1225 according to a contemporary eyewitness account (xiii, note 1). Al-Ḥarīẓī did live some time in Provence, and traveled extensively in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Iraq (Navarro Peiro 322). Talya Fishman maintains that Ibn Shabbetay lived in either Toledo or Burgos, based on the fact that his patrons Abraham Alfakhar and Todros Halevi Abulafia were located in these cities (103, note 2).
Hebrew maqāmāt. Such an analysis allows us to see what new perspectives he hoped to gain by addressing the poetic genre, through the lens of another genre, the rhymed prose maqāmāt.

In the allegory of the introductory maqāma, al-Ḥarīzī has a prophetic dream vision in which Intellect arouses him from Folly, entrusting him with a divine mission—charging him to renew the Holy Tongue—comparing the Hebrew language to a “bride adorned with jewels.”

Behold, I have put my words in your mouth and for the vision of poetry I have set you as a prophet unto the nations. See, I have appointed you to pull down and to destroy the houses of folly, and to build and to plant the palaces of poetry. God has stirred up my spirit to light lamps out of the divine splendor for the Holy Tongue to open the blind eyes so that they become lights that all the people of the earth may know that the Holy Tongue is incomparable in the clarity of its diction and in the pleasantness of its metaphors—that it is as a bride adorned with her jewels. Poetry is her garment and the spice of myrrh is on her skirts. When she takes off her veil, every eye hangs upon her and every heart is bound by her cords. Giants are held captive by her fetters and the heroes of war are by her slain. (Trans. Reichert 31)³

³ All Hebrew texts from al-Ḥarīzī are from Toporovsky’s edition.
Here Hebrew is personified as a beautiful maiden abused by her own kin and tribesmen, who stab her with swords and “the flints of their tongues.” Because of this treatment, everyday Hebrew “weeps bitterly” (Trans. Reichert 31). The Jews’ neglect of the Hebrew language is equated with abandoning a helpless young bride to murderers and rapists. The poor victim cries out—asking what she has done to cause the children of Israel to spurn her and embrace the tongue of strangers:

“What wrong have you found in my deeds that you have gone far from me? On the day that the Lord spoke with your fathers, did I not stand between the Lord and you? And were not the tablets of the covenant written with the breath of my mouth and hewn from the rock of my tongue? All the while that the glory of God dwelt in His sanctuary, I was as a queen sitting beside Him in order to tell you His secrets and to shed his Glory over you. And yet your children have spurned me and embraced the tongue of strangers, in that they have burned incense unto other gods.” They have enslaved the tongue of the Israelites to the tongue of Kedar and they said: “Come and let us sell her to the Ishmaelites.” (trans. Reichert 32)

The Jews’ abandonment of their language is here painted as sexual and religious transgression. Not only have they abandoned Hebrew to embrace foreign tongues, they have enslaved her to the Arabs, to non-Jews.

Al-Ḥarīzī continues this sexual metaphor, describing in detail the horrible treatment of Hebrew, who is cast into a pit, where “the tongue of Kedar blackened her, and like a lion, tore her. An evil beast devoured her” (Trans. Reichert 32). In contrast, the Jews embrace and make love to Arabic: “Their hearts were seduced when they saw how excellent was the poetry that Hagar, Sarai’s Egyptian handmaiden had
bourne. And Sarai was barren!” (Trans. Reichert 32). The situation of the Jews in the diaspora is here compared to a pit full of ravenous beasts. Hebrew is tortured and ultimately devoured by the beast-like Arabic language, the tongue of Kedar. The Jews’ use and appreciation of Arabic is sexualized—equated with embracing the bosom of a foreign woman and coveting a non-Jew’s wife.

Poetry enters here as the means of seduction. It is the poetry produced by the sons of Hagar (i.e. the Arabs) that draws the Jews to Hagar/Arabic—thus effecting cultural assimilation. This leads to al-Harizi’s justification for his work: he takes it upon himself to make Hebrew, the barren woman, a happy mother of children. He prays to God to let him meet a maiden of understanding and mysteries (33), such that she may be the vehicle of his good will and mission to redeem Hebrew literature and to make it rival Arabic. Such a maiden—in fact the Hebrew language incarnate—appears, instantly offering herself to al-Harizi:

“Drink, my lord, from the running waters of my thought, for honey and milk are under my tongue [...]. I was the crown of royalty but behold, today I am trodden under by every foot. I am the Holy Tongue, your mistress. And if I be pleasing in your eyes, I will be your companion. But only that you will be zealous for the name of God [...].”

He thanks the Lord and weds this beautiful bride and gives her his literary compositions—both praise and poetry as offerings, “And I placed earrings of my praises in her ears and a necklace of my poetry about her neck. And I betrothed her unto me in righteousness and in reverence without contact or intercourse” (Trans. Reichert 34). Al-Harizi has chosen his bride well—he has found a nice Jewish girl.

The maqâma of another medieval Iberian author, Ibn Shabbetay, however, offers another version of this parable—one in which the protagonist does not marry a nice Jewish girl and does not have a
fruitful union, but ends up being seduced by the likes of Hagar and her barren spawn. Naturally, the end results are not as pretty as in al-Ḥarīzī’s tale.

Ibn Shabbetay’s use of allegory, imagery and forms similar to those of al-Ḥarīzī’s maqāmāt makes it clear that both are in the same poetic universe. Ibn Shabbetay provides us with one story: that of Zeraḥ, who, after a dream vision in which he falls into a deep pit and is there devoured by a wild beast, finds himself tricked by Cozbi, the go-between, who seduces him with the beautiful maiden, ‘Ayyala. What happens to Zeraḥ is not new—the man seduced by the songs and poetic ability of the beautiful, young virgin, disregards his father’s advice, neglects his religious study, agrees to pay outrageous amounts of money, and gives up his bachelorhood—only to find that instead of having married the demure beauty he expected, the go-between has exchanged the girl for a decrepit, old hag, who does not cease from abusing him.

Following the advice of his father Taḥkemonī, Zeraḥ decides to have nothing further to do with women. He finds some male companions and sets off for an idyllic land to study and pass the time, free of women’s company. Soon, though, Zeraḥ has two terrible dreams. In the first a wind wisks him away, eventually dropping him into a valley of lions and wild beasts that devour him. In the second he falls into a pit deeper than the earth itself.

This dream recalls Hebrew’s fate in al-Ḥarīzī’s introductory maqāmā—she is thrown into a pit and devoured by lions while the Jewish youth consort with foreign women. The pit and devouring seem to be a metaphor for the diaspora and the fate of Jewish culture—and tell us as readers of Ibn Shabbetay’s text that this dream does not bode well for Zeraḥ. In fact, in the morning when his friends find him depressed they ask what is troubling him, and he tells them of his dreams. His companions interpret the dreams, claiming God has given him a glimpse of the future, that the pit is marriage—into which he will soon fall and there be joined by a woman—the beast of the dream.

We are soon introduced to the woman foretold in this prophetic dream, ‘Ayyala, Hind of the Dawn, who is the personification of Arabized erotic poetry. Her introduction into the text is anticipated
by the description the old go-between gives to the women of the land who have banned together to fight Zerah’s misogynist preaching. They decide to search for the perfect woman to seduce Zerah: “[A] maiden complete in her beauty, entirely perfect and without blemish [...] Shining like the sun, fashioned from myrrh and cassia. Formed (as a mosaic) from grace and beauty. She receives all who gaze upon her with delight” (lines 310-12). Chief among her traits should be her linguistic skills: “She should speak with a mastery of rhetoric and bewitch with her song, and her speech should be pleasant like a sprinkling of dew and like a mirror of strong metal/mineral [...] and she should know how to play the lute and the lyre” (313-16).

The description of the desired woman recalls that of the Hebrew language in al-Ḥarīzī’s maqāmā. Both are bright as the sun, and redolent of myrrh. Here the woman’s linguistic and musical skills are underscored, and she must be an expert not only in song (or poetry), but also in rhetoric—having a command of both wisdom literature—proverbs, morals, and advice—as well as satirical poetry, song, and music.

The old go-between is described in the text as conjuring ‘Ayyala, the incarnation of secular poetry, into being, “She is the gazelle taken from Eden, the garden of God. And her name is ‘Ayyala Shluha, Hind of the Dawn” (367-8). The use of ‘ofra (young hart, roe) and ‘ayyala

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4 Because I am calling attention to specific motifs in this passage, I have here chosen to use my own close and very literal translation of the passage. While the lyrical quality is not as refined as in Raymond Scheindlin’s translation, the Arabized discourse will be more readily recognizable to those familiar with Arabic poetics. Elsewhere in this paper I use Raymond Scheindlin’s translation (“The Misogynist.” In Rabbincic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature. Eds. David Stern and Mark J. Mirsky 1990) when possible, as indicated. Translations of select passages of the work are also available in Tova Rosen’s study, “Sexual Politics in a Medieval Hebrew Marriage Debate.” (Exemplaria 12.1: 2000), and in Ángeles Navarro Peiró’s Narrativa Hispanohebrea (Siglos XII-XV) (1988). All Hebrew texts are from Matti Huss’ edition: “Critical Editions of Minhāt Yehuda, Ezrat Ha-nashim, and Ein Mishpat with Prefaces, Variants, Sources and Annotations” [Hebrew]. I and II, Diss. Hebrew U, 1991.
Raymond Scheindlin in *The Gazelle* explains that the Song of Songs appealed to Hebrew poets because of the similarity in imagery and motifs. He also gives a list of the Hebrew terms used to denote the beloved (25).

(Ahind) to denote this woman leaves no room for doubt—she is the embodiment of erotic poetry. Both these terms are central in the Arabized Hebrew poetry of Iberia, that, in its attempt to replicate Arabic poetic motifs and themes in the Hebrew language, drew chiefly from the Song of Songs as its source for erotic imagery.5

‘Ayyala’s encounter with Zeraḥ in the text further underscores her nature as poetic and sexual threat—she engages him in a poetic debate—forcing him to participate and adopt the meters and motifs of her erotic discourse, which is, of course, the discourse of Iberian Arabized erotic poetry. Her first words to him are a poem, which she accompanies with her lute:

‘Ayyala Sheluha came and stood like the dawn rising, like the sun shining forth. Then she advanced. [...] She took up her lute, tightens its strings, and intoned clear verses. In a beseeching voice, she stood before Zeraḥ as she took up her rhyme:

My lover’s face is like the sun all covered by a cloud of hair

Beauty belongs to him alone and he is now my lot and share.[...]

Come, my love, feed on faithfulness; let us go down to the gardens and pluck roses and anemones. For the buds have now appeared, the vine blossoms have opened, the pomegranates are in bloom—two breasts, not yet caressed by any hand[...]

(trans. Scheindlin 282)
The image of the beautiful ‘Ayyala, who is an expert musician, adept at composing and reciting poetry corresponds to that of the singing slave girls of al-Andalus, who later also figured in the cultural life of Christian Reconquest Spain (see, for example, the Arcipreste de Hita’s reference to *moras* and *judías* “entenderas”). These slave girls were an expensive commodity, and part of an entire entertainment industry with defined rules and mores. Al-Tīlāšī, in his *Muta‘at al-‘asma‘ fi ‘ilm al-sama‘* (Pleasure to the Ears, on the Art of Music), gives us a glimpse of the singing slave girl’s world in a discussion of the slower singing style popular in al-Andalus:

Today, this form of singing is especially prevalent, among Andalusian cities, in Seville, where there are expert old women who teach singing to slave girls they own, as well as to salaried half-Arab female servants of theirs. The [slave girls] are sold from Seville to all the kings of the Maghrib and Ifriqiya, and each of those slave girls is sold for one thousand Maghribi dinars; either more or less, according to her singing, not [for the beauty of] her face. She is never sold without an accompanying register containing all [of the songs] she has memorized, most of which consist, essentially, of those poems we have mentioned. Among them are rapid poems suitable for a beginning, and slow poems which experts in the art of music sing only at the end ... For this reason, those [slave girls] are, among [Andalusians], sold with a warranty, the absence of which necessarily lowers the price of the sale. Among them, a singing girl is required to have an elegant handwriting, and to display what she has memorized to one who
can certify to her mastery of the Arabic language. Her buyer reads what is in the register and shows her whatever part of it he wishes, whereupon she will sing it to the instrument specified in her sale. Sometimes she is an expert in all instruments, and in all kinds of dance and shadow play, and comes with her instrument, along with [an entourage of] slave girls to beat the drum and play the reed for her. (Trans. Liu and Monroe 37-38)

‘Ayyala fits al-Tifâšî’s description well: she has an old woman as a teacher, she is skilled in rhetoric and singing, and, indeed, has an entourage of hand maidens and her own lute, which she plays quite well. In fact, as found in Rabbinic and Christian historical sources, the Jews of medieval Iberia adopted and maintained the sexual laxity and permissiveness of al-Andalus, even after the Reconquest and as citizens of the new Christian territories of Northern Spain, and seem to have actually played an important part in its existence, being central in the sexual slave trade. As Yom Tov Assis has discussed, this was still true in the Christian-ruled Iberia in which Ibn Shabbetay lived.

‘Ayyala’s portrait, in fact, paints her not only as Arabized secular poetry, but also, appropriately, as a singing slave girl. Imbuing ‘Ayyala with this additional aspect is particularly appropriate and adds to the multivalence of her figure: she is, on one level, the incarnation of the erotic motifs of a foreign poetic tradition that had, for generations, been tempting the best intellectual minds of the Iberian Jewish community from their own traditions and language; and on another, more physical level she is the representation of the Muslim/foreign slave girl who seduced Jewish young men from the women of their community.

Zeraḥ, confronted with this beauty and her charming words forgets all his father’s advice, and rejoins with a poem of his own, addressing it directly to ‘Ayyala and using much of the same imagery:

Your hair is like the dark of night, your face as morning fair;
Let not your brilliance startle you or your raven-colored hair.
(Scheindlin, “Misogynist” 282)
He has responded to ‘Ayyala’s description of his countenance with one of hers, both descriptions reminiscent of the Arabic tradition, with the contrast of the dark hair against the face shining like a star.

The next several poems exchanged continue with the erotic imagery of the Arabic tradition, mixing in allusions to the Bible—Numbers and the Song of Songs:

‘Ayyala: Fear no fawn’s eyes although they threaten Death to every man alive;
Their eyes may sting, but when victims see them they at once revive.
(Scheindlin, “Misogynist” 283)

Zerah: Turn your eyes away from me for they excite me, for their brows are pulling back their bows and casting me in the midst of death!6

‘Ayyala: A star shined on the face of the fawn, in the garden of his cheek a lily/rose bloomed
Night and day the brightness of his face shines, therefore he is called Zerah.

Zerah: What is wrong with you, graceful gazelle? You are chasing after a soul that has not been the least bit unfaithful to you. For it merely wanted/meant to graze amongst the roses of your cheeks as the seraphim observed from above.

‘Ayyala: By the blood of your reddened lips, Zerah, question/implore, please, your forefathers, that if, when you were born,

6 The remaining translations of the poems exchanged between ‘Ayyala and Zerah are my own.
they put scarlet on your hands or on your lips.

Z ERAH: You took heed when love's men were shooting arrows into your archers.
My heart trembled at the sound of the voice crying from between your lips
You dwelt in the precious part of the heart—you took its gold as your property, for you destroyed your own habitations.

‘ AYYALA: By the noble aspect of your neck, my beloved, you are advantaged over other creatures.
Move along with pride for it is proper to you to walk with your neck outstretched

Z ERA: The neck of the gazelle of grace is like an ivory column on
a stone floor of porphyry and red marble.
Do not adorn me with a gold adornment lest the bauble will be a blemish on the skin.

Z ERAH (again): Gazelle, adorn yourself and bedeck with beauty your breasts, taken with delights that are like tents set up in far away places with brightly colored tops.
Is it good that you render my heart asunder with them, just as they have torn your clothes and caused them to fall, for the hand fondles them, for in them are planted aromatic pegs/nails?
The poems exchanged by ‘Ayyala and Zerah are descriptive love poems that focus on both the lovers’ bodies. The imagery is typical and follows the typical order, descending from the hair to the breasts, conforming to the typical description as summarized by Raymond Scheindlin, “the eyebrows are shaped like bows; the eyes shoot arrows that wound or kill the lover; the cheeks are rouged with the lover’s blood; etc.” (Wine 81). Such stock descriptions are designed, not to distinguish the beloved as unique, but on the contrary to establish her/him as the archetypal beautiful beloved.

This exchange of detailed, but typical physical descriptions serves to locate us as readers in the poetic universe of Arabized erotic verse—Zerah is overcome by love, and he bows his knee acknowledging her superior poetic talent—his desires having overcome his resistance. But still he has not seen ‘Ayyala, and he is burning with desire to see her face and have his way with her (535-38).

Zerah calls the go-between and her husband to arrange a dowry,
for he must wed ‘Ayyala—and is willing to pay any price. We know, though, that Zerah is lost, for the narrator tells us, “He is without wisdom/reason/volition” and just a few lines later, Cozbi claims the Lord has led Zerah into her trap like a lamb to slaughter. Here we have the rhymed prose subverting the poetry—the prose allows commentary by both the narrator and the go-between.

Cozbi then prepares to exchange an ugly blemished old woman for ‘Ayyala. Zerah thus finds himself married to a woman who is the antithesis of the beautiful ‘Ayyala. This woman is not only physically horrid, but also speaks in a very demanding, and very prosaic manner, chiding him with her first words to him, screeching: “Don’t talk back to me! Go and fetch me vessels of silver and vessels of gold” (608-10 Trans. Scheindlin, “Misogynist” 285).

In the The Offering of Yehuda, in the figure of ‘Ayyala and in the poems exchanged by Zerah and ‘Ayyala we have an exemplar of erotic Hebrew poetry of the Golden Age, complete with its standard imagery, topoi and allusions. Here Ibn Shabbetay is invoking the Arabized Hebrew poetic tradition of al-Andalus, but in a Hebrew maqāma-like text, a hybrid text of rhymed prose and poetry. Ibn Shabbetay, like his contemporary al-Ḥarīzī, uses this form to comment on the poetic tradition itself. Arabic poetry proves seductive and deceptive, just as the dominant cultures of medieval Iberia were to their Jewish inhabitants. Inherent to both al-Ḥarīzī’s and Ibn Shabbetay’s portrayal of Arabic erotic poetry as a seductive woman who leads the good Jewish boy astray is a critique of the rabbi-courtiers, the Jewish poets of the Golden Age, who adopted this poetic discourse. Both al-Ḥarīzī and Ibn Shabbetay condemn the composition of erotic poetry and the participation in its world as a form of assimilation. Al-Ḥarīzī chides Jewish intellectuals for preferring Arabic over their own tongue. Ibn Shabbetay takes al-Ḥarīzī’s critique one step further, though, criticizing them for adopting the style and values of the Arabic literary tradition. Zerah’s awful fate is that which awaits any good Jewish boy who lets himself be seduced by the false words of the corrupt discourse of Arabic poetry.

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Works Cited


“Ke adame filiolo alieno”: Three Muwaššahāt with the same Kharja

ADRIANA VALENCIA AND SHAMMA BOYARIN

THE MUWAŠŠAH IS A LITERARY genre that stands at the meeting place of three languages—Arabic, Hebrew, and Romance—and their respective literary traditions. It is a strophic form that has meter and rhyme, and was set to music. In the muwaššah, each strophe, called a gušn, forms a unit, its lines rhyming with each other but not necessarily with the other strophes. The muwaššah usually starts with two lines called the matla' that introduce the rhyme of the refrain, the asmāt (singular: šimt). This rhyme is repeated in the muwaššah’s two final lines, called the kharja (plural: kharjāt). Kharjāt are frequently in either colloquial Arabic or Romance, as opposed to the Hebrew or the fushā, that is, formal Arabic, of which the rest of the muwaššah is composed.

One commonly-accepted theory is that the kharja is a quote from a popular song that provided the performers with the tune to which they should perform the muwaššah (Monroe). Since the asmāt rhyme with the kharja internally as well as externally, it is clear that the poet had the kharja in mind as he was composing the muwaššah.

In this paper we will present a reading of three muwaššahāt from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, two of which are in Arabic and

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1 For a detailed description and an up-to-date summary of the scholarship on the muwaššah, see Rosen.
one of which is in Hebrew. The two Arabic muwaššahāt are by Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Bāqī, and Abū Bakr Yahyā al-Jazzār of Saragossa. The Hebrew muwaššahā is by the Jewish poet Moshe ibn Ezra. All three muwaššahāt share the same Romance-language kharja, and by comparing the three, we will show how different thematic elements of the kharja were utilized by different authors in different contexts to create different and original compositions.

The existence of Romance-language kharja in Arabic muwaššahāt was recognized by others. Waššāḥūn, that is, the composers of these works, drew from the same cultural well, despite differing religious backgrounds. The repetition of kharja across languages is testament to this cultural unity. In the discussion of the languages involved in the muwaššahāt and their relationships in the culture of al-Andalus, scant attention has been paid to what the muwaššahāt actually say. In this paper, we will focus on close readings of these muwaššahāt paying attention to their poetic value. When we read the muwaššahāt as poems, their cross-linguistic elements become even more significant. The fusion of languages is a moment neither of tension nor of disjuncture, but, rather, a testament to an internalized multiculturalism.

Since all three muwaššahāt share the same kharja, the kharja must be a quotation from another source. The waššāḥūn obviously had the kharja in mind as they composed, so we shall discuss the kharja first: “ke adame filiolo alieno edel amibe/ keredlo de mi betare šu ar-rakibe.” In it, the speaker says that he loves a foreign youth who returns his love, but the raqīb, a chaperone of sorts, stands in the way of their love. The raqīb is a stock figure in Andalusian literature. He spies on the loving couple and impedes their love.

In all three muwaššahāt, this kharja is introduced as a direct quotation said or sung either by the lover or the beloved. These phrases may allude to the fact that the kharja is a quotation from a pre-existing source. In other words, when the speaker says, for
example, “[my lover] sings to me,”\(^2\) the composer is signaling a change in textual strata. While on one level it is a character within the *muwaššah* that is saying, or singing the *kharja*, on an other level, these speech acts introduce another poet’s verse. In some cases, as here, the phrase “he sang” (Ar. *Anšada*, Heb. *šorera*) introducing quoted speech specifically refers to the fact that the *kharja* is being sung. This supports the idea that the *kharja* is taken from a popular song. We shall now turn to our translation of the *muwaššah* by al-Jazzār of Saragossa:\(^3\)

O my eyes, Are these the conditions that the fire of the obligated Kindle, or is my gushing caused by heat?
My blamer, How much you blame me for the appearance of emaciation!
My killer, after whom I pine, even though I Have nothing of what I desire but pain.
What thing like me is other than a lovelorn Who’s collapsed, and what are my badges but pallor?
I would be a sacrifice for a gazelle, O how violent, and how fragrant!
My intestine conceals its love for him, and harbors it.
Were it to be disclosed, how much it would fold, lest it be disclosed.
O what concealment, there being no helper save estrangement.
You neglect me, and I have no aid but for weeping
The objects of desire are the warrior’s steel, lest it be used
[...]
These worries are my burden, O repentance-seeker Who knows the shackles of the war-cry upon the smitten.
The goal of my eye becomes embittered from stinginess.
Perhaps one day it will be cooled and sleepy.
Grant it an eyelid that is given joy, and that is not hated.

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\(^2\) See Ibn Ezra, verse 25 (below)
\(^3\) The dates of al-Jazzār’s birth and death are unknown.
O little fawn, these eyelids, because of these hearts do that which swords do during battle!
How bad is that which the chaperone (raqib) covets, and how is his striving!
Whenever the ḥabīb appears, he appears with him
And when I sing, I answer to whosoever calls (to him):
For I did love a foreign boy, and he, he loved me;
his raqib desires to prohibit him from me (Jones 189-90).

In the matlaʾ of this muwaṣṣah, the elements of affliction and heat, in connection with the suffering of the lovelorn, are introduced. In this matlaʾ, there are no addressees save the speaker’s own eyes. It is through his eyes that both the speaker’s suffering and cure arrive. In line 4, the beloved, for whom the speaker yearns, is portrayed as the speaker’s killer. The use of the word qātil here (literally: murderer), used to portray an object of desire, effectively locates tension within the literary figure of the beloved. This notion is further elaborated when, in line 5, the lover explains that he has nothing in the way of what he desires except for pain. In accordance with the literary conventions of love, pain is embedded in the qualities sought by the lover: pain is part of what the speaker desires.

The idea of clandestine love is manifested here through the speaker’s body. The physical manifestations and locations of love are further elaborated. Love is located within the speaker’s gut; it is concealed within its folds (lines 9 and 10). The enamored speaker is involved in a physical struggle with his own body in order to maintain the secret status of his infatuation.

Lines 11-12 incorporate notions of the absence of help or aid to the lover save desperation. The lover is figuratively bathed in tears; he has no recourse other than weeping. In line 13, the only surviving line of this strophe, the speaker further affirms the dual role of the beloved: at the same time that the beloved is the ultimate object of his desires, the beloved is also a potential instrument of harm. It appears that the poet incorporates the idea of a raqib into this

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⁴ All translations are ours.
muwaššah from this point: in lines 16 and 17 the speaker addresses one who asks repentance from others. This figure seems to be the raqib, whose role it is to cause the lover to renounce his love.

In lines 18-20, the idea of the beloved as the goal of the speaker’s eye is introduced. The interplay of the beloved as object, viewed by the eye and yet unobtainable by it, with the idea of sickness and cure, fully plays out the literary ideas of love as both emotional and physical. In contrast with the “qurrat ul-ayn” (coolness of eye) that is hoped-for in line 19, the eyes in line 18 become embittered; this actively contrasts discomfort with cure and comfort. The final line of this strophe, line 20, consists of supplication to an unnamed benefactor, requesting an “eyelid that is given joy or that is not hated.” This introduction of the element of the eyelid to the image of the eye is elaborated upon in lines 21-22. In this last ši̇mt before the kharja, the speaker addresses the object of his affection directly; he continues with the elaboration of the image of the eyelids. Moreover, the image of the eyelids is fused with the image of war instruments.

The speaker jumps from talking about his beloved in lines 21-22, to a complaint about the raqib in lines 23-25. The raqib appears as an impediment to the speaker’s communication with the object of his affections; these three verses establish the raqib’s constant presence with the beloved and the subsequent inability of the speaker to be alone with his beloved. The speaker then sings the kharja. In this instance, the kharja is not sung directly to the beloved. Rather, it is an expression of love couched in indirectness. The beloved is spoken about, not to. The poetic speaker throughout the poem is also the kharja’s speaker. Moreover, the kharja is seamlessly incorporated into the work as a whole. The language shift, from Arabic to Romance, impedes neither our understanding of nor the internal logic of the work.

Let us make a language shift of our own, from Arabic to Hebrew, and turn to the muwaššah by Ibn Ezra (1055-1138):

My questioners have asked: How have the sorrows of my heart not been concealed?
A cruel fawn devours a lion cub.
The crash of my desire I would have concealed between my ribs,
For his wrath have I feared, but for my crying
On the day of my crashing woe, I dripped, revealing
my afflictions. 5
My saboteurs are my eyes: once they figured out the secret of my heart,
They spied in secret on my fawn, who became angry at me.
My heart is set upon the enjoyment of his beauty.
My eye picks the roses from the gardens of his cheeks.
He is upset because he made his beauty
a weapon in his hands. 10
My haters will pity me, seeing how my fight
Gladdens his face, while my body has been consumed by my spark.
Ursa Major retracts her light when faced with his light.
The core of his eye, whose sharpness devours a lion, is angered
And puts my heart to thresh beneath its axle. 15
My friends: Do not complain, for my torment
Was wrought by his eyes; my cure is in them, and my well-being.
The locks of his hair, like my heart, are dark, and his eyes
Draw a sword at my back, until it becomes like his waist.
Because of its woes, my eye rains tears, like his teeth. 20
My well-wishers: would that the paths of my lover lead to me.
His eyes will pity my anguish and the fierceness of my pain.
The deer who broke my heart will redeem the matter;
She remembers that one by deceit can separate those entwined.
She sings to me when she cries, the song of fawns:
For I did love a foreign boy, and he, he loved me;
his raqib desires to prohibit him from me. 25
(Brody and Pagis 269-70)

In this muwaṣṣaḥah we will observe two patterns that serve as organizing elements. One of these is created by frequent references to vision: seeing, concealment, and eyes are prominent. A second pattern that unifies this muwaṣṣaḥah revolves around the relationship between the heart and the eye. Both of these patterns are related to
the Hebrew section of the muwaššahah, that is, to the theme of the speaker’s suffering at the hands of his cruel lover. One of them, the references to eyes and vision, also serves as a thematic bridge to the otherwise seemingly-unrelated kharja.

The first two lines introduce a key theme of the poem: the speaker is expected to conceal his love, but cannot do so because of the beloved’s cruelty. The first line also introduces one of the structuring elements of the poem: the suffering heart. In the next three lines (3-5) the speaker explains that he tried to hide his love “between his ribs,” in his heart as it were, but unfortunately his tears reveal his secret. Although the primary meaning of the word šīr in Andalusian poetry is grief, in this poem it may also be alluding to a secondary meaning. One finds in the Hebrew prose of this period that the word šīr is used to mean “brine,” or even, as a medical term, to describe the fluid produced by infected eyes. This idea is supported by the fact that the speaker refers to the pains of love as nega’ay (my afflictions), a term which is also taken from the world of medicine. In either case, these lines introduce the idea of the speaker’s eyes, through the tears they produce, as acting in opposition to his heart. The speaker states this explicitly in the next strophe (line 6), calling his eyes “saboteurs.” It is not just through tears that the eyes cause the undoing of the heart, but also through the act of looking. Once they become wise to the heart’s secret, they spy on the beloved, who finds out, and treats his lover coldly.

The heart and the eye are also the subjects of the next strophe (lines 8-9), but now instead of being opponents, they are collaborators. The speaker’s heart has set its desire upon enjoying the beloved’s beauty, and his eye picks roses from the beloved’s cheek.

Lines 14-15 introduce a new topic: the beloved’s eyes. The beloved’s eyes devour a lion, and put the speaker’s heart to “thresh beneath its axle” (line 15). There is an obvious imbalance of power

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5 For example, Moses Maimonides in his book of Jewish Law says: “He who is afflicted in his eyes, that is that in both or one of them there is either šīr, or that tears flow from them because of the pain, or blood flows from them ...” (Maimonides Hilkhot Šabat, Chapter 2 Halakha 4)
between the speaker’s eyes and gaze, and the eyes of the beloved. The speaker’s eyes betray his heart and put him at the mercy of the beloved. The beloved’s eyes, on the other hand, are part of his power. The poet stresses this comparison through the repetition of a homonym. Šīr, which in line 5 meant grief, here means axle. This further re-enforces the imbalance between the two sets of eyes: the speaker’s eyes produce the šīr of grief, while the beloved’s eye’s make use of a šīr to grind his lover’s heart.

Line 17 returns to the idea of love as an illness: the beloved’s eyes are both the cause of the speaker’s torment and bear the potential for his cure.

Lines 18-20 set forth a series of comparisons between the beloved’s physical attributes and those of the speaker. Each comparison gives both a positive description of the beloved and a negative description of the lover. The beloved’s locks are black and beautiful, while the speaker’s heart is black from grief. The speaker’s back is thin from suffering, while the beloved’s waist is thin and beautiful. The speaker’s eyes rain tears which glisten, in turn, like the beloved’s teeth.

Lines 21-22 introduce a surprising change to the poem. Until this point, the beloved was cruel, enjoying the torment he caused the speaker. Now, however, he will come to his tormentee and, seeing his pain, his eyes will take pity on him. The following strophe explains the reason for this: the beloved will realize that there has been a misunderstanding. Some man, by treachery, has managed to separate them. This man, who has not yet been mentioned in the poem, must be the raqīb mentioned in the kharja. In his commentary on this muwaššahah, Jayyım Brody, writing without the benefit of the reconstructed kharja, interprets this strophe as a reference to the raqīb (Brody and Pagis 3: 13). The kharja speaks of a raqīb who stands between the lover and his beloved. Unlike the other two muwaššahah that we treat, which mention the raqīb in the Arabic part of the muwaššahah as well as the in the kharja, we only get an implied reference to the raqīb in the Hebrew muwaššahah. In retrospect, however, we can see that the frequent references to sight and spying that have appeared in this muwaššahah are allusions to the raqīb. Because the kharja has as a theme one whose role is to look and spy,
the poem as a whole deals with spying and looking; in lines 6 and 7, the speaker’s eyes can be read as carrying out the function of the Raqib; they separate between the lovers by spying on the beloved. The poet has already accounted for the subject of the Kharja by the use of a leitmotif that can function both independently of, and in relation to, the quotation he wishes to use. Once again, the linguistic shift does not represent a complete break in the poem’s larger organization. That this is also true about the third Muwaṣṣaḥah should come as no surprise. The last of the three Muwaṣṣaḥāt sharing this Kharja is by Ibn Baqī (d. 1145):

I have no patience to help me save weeping.
Ask about my patience for the collar-rising full moon.
How does the robe of leanness not become my daily clothing?
While the secret of infatuation conceals the covert-gazelle?
It is not wrongdoing for the likes of me to be infatuated! 5
The love that decorates the robe of emaciation is other than error;
It beautifies freeborns without offense.
Blame a full moon for my emptiness! For is the light not known to the moon when it is full?
So be just regarding her, or unjust, unlike me (who is just). 10
If I had power over it, that which is in me
Would be transported to he who argues with my beloved.
O avaricious one, how much do I go about in circles, following your course?
You are faithful to the separation of the abode, rather than to our mutual encounter.
Let an embrace from you be the cure for thirst 15
Or a sip that softens the heat of the obligated one,
A fresh water-source, who for its drinker is sweeter than wine.
My survival is through my having her as an object of my desire,
(she who is) the moon of the edge of the dune.
She doesn’t approach but, contrariwise, brands my love with mutual suspicion;
In that love, I am the lord of the banner. 20
I’ve a young fawn that folds softly like a twig.
Her waist-wrapper’s fold folds over a sand dune. 
By the sand dune and the pliable branch, tell me O bored one, 
Would it harm my good reputation, were I to say, 
While the raqīb is jealous of me, and his (zealousness) does not 
abate: 
For I have loved a foreign boy, and he, he loved me; 
his raqīb desires to prohibit him from me (Jones 8-9).

In this muwaššāḥah, the poetic speaker presents his love as one 
that is both licit and concealed. The two determining elements of this 
muwaššāḥah are the beloved’s actions and the presence of the raqīb. 
The lover’s intentions are impeded not only by the beloved herself, 
but by the disapproval of the raqīb who plays a silent yet governing 
role.

From the beginning of this muwaššāḥah, the speaker indicates 
that he is long-suffering—that his unrequited love has affected him 
physically. He not only weeps continually (line 1), but also has 
stopped eating. The idea of emaciation, first indicated by the 
speaker’s “robe of leanness” (line 3), is repeated in line 6 when the 
speaker refers explicitly to his own “robe of emaciation” created for 
him by love. The lover shows the typical symptoms of love-sickness, 
an infirmity that, according to medieval medical beliefs, could 
ultimately lead to death. Medieval Arabic and Hebrew love poetry is 
full of similar images.

The lover blames the full moon, mentioned first in line 2 for his 
emptiness, i.e. his pain (line 8-9). Here he claims that the full moon 
has plenty of light (love) to share, yet his full moon has refused to 
share with him and instead leaves him empty. Thus the poet uses the 
metaphor of moon light to represent the love and happiness the 
beloved selfishly refuses to give the speaker. Just as the full moon 
always simply attracts light, the beloved (i.e. the moon) attracts 
lovers. The image of the beloved as the full moon (line 8) echoes 
accepted contemporary poetic conventions.

While the beloved is endowed with a surplus of radiant love that 
all can see, the lover himself chooses to keep his love hidden. In line 
4, the lover reveals that he has been concealing his “secret of 
infatuation.” Yet, while he may have been hiding his feelings, they
are nonetheless legitimate and licit. In this muwaššah, in fact, the poetic voice goes to some pains to make the distinction between his licit, yet concealed love, and illicit love. In line 6 the speaker classifies himself with those who are “freeborn,” therefore one capable of loving and choosing his own beloved. On the other, it indicates a change of state (from freedom into captivity) as a result of love.

The speaker seems to be referring to this again in line 10 when he addresses directly the audience: “So be just regarding her, or unjust, unlike me (who is just). / If I had power over it, that which is in me /would be transported to he who argues with my beloved.”

The speaker asks his audience to be fair-minded when judging his beloved. Whether this is a plea to a fictional or real audience, it clearly is playing upon the contemporary literary conventions of love. The idea of justness raised by this line is a major theme in Arabic poetry, especially in relation to a wronged lover. Yet it also relates to the idea of a licit love, and alludes to the unjust raqīb, a character whose function is to block just this sort of licit love.

The beloved is addressed directly in the central portion of the muwaššah (lines 13-17), and, while discussed in other portions, does not constitute the central topic. This muwaššah seems to be more about the raqīb’s disapproval and the beloved’s distance than about the beloved’s qualities.

A final affirmation of the licit nature of the speaker’s love is made in the framing of the presentation of the kharja in lines 24-25: “would it harm my good reputation, were I to say/ while the raqīb is continuously ravingly-jealous of me.” Having established the licitness of his love, the speaker now turns to the audience. The raqīb’s role is to block that which is illicit; in this muwaššah of licit love, then, the raqīb’s jealousy causes him to transgress his assigned role; rather than being an objective chaparon, he has become an interested party. This muwaššah is set up as a two-part rhetorical argument, the first in the Arabic text, the second in the Romance kharja: the licitness of the love counterbalances the illicit desire of the raqīb.

Obviously, many of the similarities between these three muwaššah stem from shared literary tropes that, in turn, stemmed from a shared cultural context. Among these tropes are, for example, the
cruel capriciousness of the beloved and the idea of concealing one’s love. Yet the use of the same *kharja* brings these *muwaššahāt* even closer. However, each *waššāh* (*muwaššah* poet) chose a different way of incorporating the thematic content of the *kharja* into his *muwaššahah*. The poet may have been playing a riddle-game with his audience. If indeed the *kharja* is a quote from a well-known popular song, the audience would recognize the tune and know how the *muwaššahah* ends. Listeners would be on the lookout for the composer’s cleverness, trying to see how he would incorporate the “foreign” *kharja* into his composition. The synthesis between the *muwaššahah*’s two parts, which reach across linguistic boundaries, can be seen as a symbolic representation of the cultural milieu of al-Andalus. The love for the foreign youth is as licit as the *kharja* is not foreign.

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**Works Cited**


Wine and Genre: *Khamriyya* in the Andalusī *Maqāma*

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The Arabic *maqāma* has a long and interesting relationship with Spanish literature. In an address before the Spanish Royal Academy in 1894, Francisco Fernández y González noted the existence of a collection of fifty *maqāmāt* by the 12th century Andalusī commonly known as al-Saraqustī.\(^1\) Without specific reference to al-Saraqustī, María Rosa Lida de Malkiel’s work between 1940 and 1959 went so far as to posit a genetic relationship between the Arabic and Hebrew *maqāma* and Juan Ruiz’s Spanish masterpiece, the *Libro de buen amor*.\(^2\) Lida de Malkiel’s untimely death and the abandonment of her theory in later scholarship meant that the argument for a direct or indirect (through the Hebrew *maqāma*) influence of the Arabic *maqāma* on the *Libro de buen amor* was left unproved. In spite of the intriguing possibilities offered by the similarities between Arabic and Spanish picaresque genres, this paper will focus instead on the *maqāma* of al-Andalus, specifically the Bacchic elements in the collection of *maqāmāt* of Abū l-Ṭāhir al-Saraqustī, who was brought to modern

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attention in Fernández y González’s speech.3

Only sketchy biographical information remains concerning al-Saraqușṭî, who was the major practitioner of the maqāma genre in al-Andalus. Although al-Saraqușṭî’s date of birth is unknown, his death in 1143 CE, in Cordova, is documented. One variant of his name designating lineage or nisba (al-Aštarkūwwî) is derived from Estercuel de Ribaforada, Navarre, while the other, “Zaragocí,” connects him with the city of Saragossa, where it is assumed he spent his formative years. Al-Saraqușṭî studied or corresponded with the notables of Andalusî society of his day, including the poet, Ibn al-‘Arabi. Al-Saraqușṭî, in turn, was the teacher of the grammarian Ibn Maḍâ’ (1119-1195 CE) to whom he transmitted the Kāmil of al-Mubarrad. In addition to the poetry included in his maqāmāt, al-Saraqușṭî wrote panegyrics and love poems, of which only a limited number survives. Al-Saraqușṭî was also the author of a rhetorical treatise of considerable significance to the composition and interpretation of the maqāma genre, entitled The Book of Concatenation, on Rare Words in the Language of the Arabs (Monroe, “Al-Saraquṣṭî” 1-14). The importance of this treatise for both compositional and interpretative functions becomes apparent in light of the huge number of recondite expressions, many with multiple layers of meaning, cultivated by practitioners of the maqāma.

Al-Saraquṣṭî is the Andalusî successor to the better-known Eastern practitioners of the maqāma, al-Hamadhānî and al-Ḥārîrî. In many ways, al-Saraquṣṭî’s cultivation of the maqāma genre in al-Andalus shows both his belatedness with regard to his Eastern predecessors and his geographic remoteness from the Eastern (Ar. mašriq) centers of culture. Al-Saraquṣṭî’s appropriation of the term luzūmīya, to refer to his embellishments on the rhyme scheme of the maqāma’s rhymed prose, evokes and confronts both the originator of this term, al-Maʿarrî, and al-Saraquṣṭî’s immediate predecessor in the maqāma genre, al-Ḥārîrî. Of lesser significance is the influence of al-

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3 For this article I have drawn on material from my review article in the Journal of Arabic Literature of Ignacio Ferrando’s Spanish translation of the maqāmāt of al-Saraquṣṭî.
Hamadhānī, the purported “inventor” of the maqāma genre. Even though he is the great originator of the genre, al-Hamadhānī warrants a sole mention in the entire corpus of al-Saraquṣṭī’s maqāmāt. In contrast, al-Saraquṣṭī’s fixation on upstaging his immediate predecessor, al-Ḥarīrī, is obvious in the former’s greater elaboration of rhetorical strategies. In spite of al-Saraquṣṭī’s position of inheritor of the maqāma tradition from al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī, he is far from being his Eastern counterpart’s epigone. He equals or exceeds al-Ḥarīrī’s formal innovations, while perpetuating al-Hamadhānī’s practice of exploiting the maqāma’s irony and doctrinal subversion.

Anyone expecting a wealth of themes and locales specific to Iberia will be surprised by al-Saraquṣṭī’s deference to the model of themes and non-Iberian locations established earlier by al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī. Except for the Andalusī settings of “Maqāma 41,” entitled “The Berbers,” “Maqāma 43,” “Ṭarīfa,” and “Maqāma 20,” “Wine” (the latter being the focus of this article), nearly all the maqāmāt take place in the East, North Africa, or the even more remote, exotic locales of India and China. With a limited number of exceptions, al-Saraquṣṭī’s maqāmāt follow the general paradigm outlined below. Although one might expect such a structured schema to yield a mere slavish imitation of al-Saraquṣṭī’s forerunners in the maqāma genre, quite the opposite is true. Notwithstanding the suspicion with which originality and innovation were viewed in al-Saraquṣṭī’s cultural and literary milieu, both attributes are apparent within the fixity of the maqāma’s conventions. This innovation within fixed parameters is analogous to the manner in which originality and virtuosity are demonstrated within the conventions of the major poetic genre, the classical ode (Ar. qaṣīda).

The maqāma as composed by most practitioners is a doubly-hybrid genre: not only is the composition a combination of prose and poetry, the prose segments themselves are rhymed (Ar. saf). Beyond these formal characteristics, the protagonist of the vignettes is generally a picaresque or rogue type. I would speculate that it was this picaresque element that led Lida de Malkiel to postulate a relationship between the maqāma and picaresque elements of the Libro de buen amor. However, the protagonist of the maqāma, in contrast to the
Libro de buen amor’s Archpriest, makes a practice of defrauding the gullible through displays of rhetorical brilliance or other chicanery. More often than not, the rhetorical brilliance comes in the form of a jeremiad delivered by the sanctimonious rogue to a group of onlookers. For this oration, he is showered with gifts from the unsuspecting congregation. The fire-and-brimstone pontificating of the jeremiad is often replaced by discussions of rhetorical issues, specifically the superiority of poetry over prose, and the merits of certain literati over others. In addition to the exploitation of rhetorical brilliance for gain, the wrong-doing takes the form of theft, embezzlement, or drunkenness, with only rare allusions to the sexual misconduct explicit or implicit in the maqāma’s Western counterpart, the picaresque novel.

In a typical maqāma plot, the protagonist makes his appearance as an unidentified character, perpetrates his scam, has his identity revealed, and finally departs. The compositions are thus seemingly fragmentary, episodic narrations, with little or no ordering or connection between themselves, other than the repeated appearance of the protagonist and his associate. Because the maqāma is a short narration, it does not engage in the extensive character development typical of the modern novel. The convention of the rogue/sidekick combination was initiated by the maqāma’s tenth-century originator in the East, al-Hamadhānī, and was maintained in the genre’s relocation to al-Andalus by al-Saraquṣṭī. Apart from the sidekick’s task as the primary narrator, this character performs the function of anagnoresis by unmasking the rogue’s previously unknown identity. The associate occasionally participates, willingly or unwillingly, in the scam. In a great number of maqāmāt, however, the companion expresses a fully-expected humiliation and indignation over the rogue’s trickery.

A variation on the standard paradigm of the maqāma articulates a set of themes known collectively as khamriyya. This group of themes and rhetorical devices had its origin in poetry. It is impossible for the first-time reader of khamriyya poetry not to be struck by the transparently un-Islamic nature of glorification of the two major sins—wine-drinking and at least the suggestion of sexual
transgression. This poetic tradition, with its appearance or irreverence based on exaltation of the proscribed conduct of wine-drinking and eroticism, predated the advent of the maqāma: poetry exploiting khamriyya themes, tropes, and imagery had its origins in the pre-Islamic (Ar. jāhiliyya) period. In spite of this long tradition, the entire array of rhetorical strategies associated with wine did not have the term khamriyya applied to it until the category was articulated by modern literary critics beginning in the 1920s. By far the most significant of these modern critical appraisals were the two chapters devoted to khamriyya poetry in Tāhā Ḥusayn’s history of Arabic literature (Ḥusayn 2: 71-202). One would expect the maqāma to appropriate and exploit khamriyya topoi taken from poetry for two reasons. First, both the maqāma and khamriyya poetry share a similar subversive thematic character. Since the first maqāmat of al-Hamadhānī, the genre has had a frequent and often transparent connection to social and doctrinal subversion. This is apparent in the marginal, lower class characters whose questionable ethics and dubious logic pose issues of primary significance to any doctrinal stance, orthodox or heterodox. The marginalized social milieu of the maqāma gives rise to frequent mention, without resolution, of the doctrinally loaded free-will/predestinarian dichotomy. The maqāma’s doctrinal ambivalence is inextricably connected with the vagaries of doctrine and sectarian affiliation surrounding the genre’s supposed “inventor,” al-Hamadhānī. Ambiguities underscored by al-Hamadhānī’s maqāma corpus have included the author’s purported adherence to the then subversive Mu’tazilite and Kharajite doctrines, in addition to his supposed covert affiliation with Shi‘ism, within a predominantly Sunni context.

4 The heterodoxies in contradistinction to the dominant Sunni doctrine of al-Hamadhānī’s late tenth, early eleventh-century period centered on controversy concerning predestinarianism, the createdness of the Qur‘ān, allegorical interpretation of the Qur‘ān, and of course, the disputed succession to the Prophet Muḥammad, the basis for the Sunni/Shi‘ī schism. For comprehensive studies of Islamic doctrine from this period onward, see Watt (1948, 1985, and 1961).
The *maqāma*’s rhetorical qualities also play a role in its subversive nature. In a secular context, an unstated goal of the *maqāma* genre is to legitimize and elevate the status of adorned prose at the expense of poetry. The *maqāma*’s very existence as a genre, therefore, questions the received wisdom of poetry’s inherent superiority over prose. This undermining of the commonly held trope of poetry’s superiority to prose is accomplished in part through a reworking of the themes and rhetorical strategies of poetry into rhymed prose. Moreover, because of the patently inferior caliber of the poetic fragments that alternate with the *maqāma*’s rhymed prose, the marked contrast between the two genres destabilizes the commonplace of poetry’s superiority. Another indirect and paradoxical relationship between the *maqāma* and poetry is based on rhymed prose, the hallmark of the *maqāma* genre. Rhymed prose compounds on a rhetorical basis the already subversive nature of *khamriyya* themes borrowed from poetry. This owes to the widely acknowledged fact that the rhymed prose of the *maqāma* bears a very close resemblance to quranic discourse. The wine-drinking and eroticism proscribed by the Qur’ān therefore ironically receive a positive representation in the *maqāma*, a genre whose discursive and rhetorical characteristics resemble, if not mimic, quranic discourse. The similarities between the rhymed prose of the *maqāma* also call into question other doctrinal orthodoxies. Because the *maqāma*’s rhymed prose is obviously a human creation, the similarities between the *maqāma* and the Qur’ān implicitly challenge the doctrine of quranic imitability. In a parallel to the Qur’ān and its exegesis, the *maqāma*’s frequently opaque meaning and rhetorical complexities often make the *maqāma* the object of explications (Ar. *šurūṭ*). This need for explication and exegesis also underscores the importance of works such as al-Saraqušī’s book of concatenated meanings described above. The practice of explicating the *maqāma* was initiated by the originator of the genre itself, al-Hamadhānī, who provided the commentary for his own *maqāmāt*. In addition to these rhetorical similarities between *maqāma* and Qur’ān, similarities between the *maqāma*’s rhymed prose and quranic discourse also confound the often-invoked orthodoxy in Islam of disassociating the prophet
Muḥammad from poets and poetry. Like poetry, sajj has both rhyme and, in a limited sense, meter. Since many passages in the Qurʾān are rhymed prose, sajj’s similarities to poetry detract from the argument that Muḥammad lacked rhetorical and poetic skills. Still another method by which the maqāma implicitly subverts Sunni Islamic practice is through the implicit questioning of the complementary processes of ḥadīth formation and isnād. Ḥadīth, exemplary traditions and anecdotes attributed to the prophet Muḥammad and his followers, are validated in Sunni practice on the authority of a chain of reliable witnesses and transmitters (isnād). The maqāma calls into question this authenticating practice through the use of a purely fictional chain of transmitters who are also unreliable narrators in the modern rhetorical sense. Each of these transmitters, in turn, conveys the fictionalized, and frequently ironized, narration.

The combined subversive force of the maqāma’s rhetorical form and the illicitness of khamriyya themes is most apparent in al-Saraquṣṭī’s twentieth maqāma, entitled not surprisingly, “Wine.” Al-Saraquṣṭī’s maqāma is a variation on the plots of corresponding maqāmat with the same title and theme by his two predecessors, al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī. In al-Saraquṣṭī’s maqāma, al-Sāʿib ibn Tammām, the narrator, “falls off the wagon,” and resumes wine-drinking after a long abstinence. Al-Sāʿib goes to a monastery, the customary place for wine consumption without stigma, because of the location’s function as an isolated center of Christian culture within the larger prohibitionist Muslim context. He is greeted, incongruously for a monastery, by a woman. The figure of the Christian hostess is a direct reminiscence of the corresponding character in a maqāma of al-Hamadhānī, the originator of the genre. This hostess makes the uncustomary request of advance payment for the wine to be consumed. She justifies this distrustful attitude toward her newly-arrived customer by explaining that an earlier customer had defrauded the establishment by running up a large bill that he was unable to pay. The deadbeat customer, who is none other than the rogue himself, is still present, drinking in the monastery. The rogue has continued his drinking by encouraging and accepting the generosity of fellow drinkers. In a recognition scene so typical of the
maqāma, the narrator recognizes the rogue, al-Sadūsī, who in turn recites a series of second-rate poems based on khamriyya themes and in which he expresses his unrequited love for the cup-bearer (Ar. sāqī).

These pedestrian poetic compositions both engage and subvert the highly idealized khamriyya tradition of poetry: the rarefied experience of altered consciousness from wine consumption depicted in khamriyya poetry is displaced by the base drunkenness of the protagonist. The khamriyya tradition is further subverted by an undermining of its topos of homoerotic attraction form the cup-bearer. In contrast to the idealized, pining desire typical of khamriyya poetry, this maqāma subverts the topos through a trivialized recitation of stock tropes from the poetic tradition. Even though the cup-bearer is more frequently than not a Christian in serious khamriyya poetry, the anachronism of attributing his upbringing to caesars and the introduction of a novel element, the competing attentions of the Christian grandee, ironize this borrowing from the poetic tradition. The distinctively Andalusī reference to the cup-bearer’s descent from Luqāriq localizes and embellishes the sāqī’s stereotypical Christianity. The two poetic passages following the rogue’s recognition scene compound the ironic treatment of earlier poetic tradition by repeated commingling of Christian alterity and homoerotic desire. The rogue’s ineffectual invocation of the Christian messiah to further his seduction attempts on the cup-bearer are countered by the equally ironic response of the boy. In a repartee more appropriate to a master Arabic rhetorician, rather than an illiterate Romance-speaking Christian servant, the cup-bearer rejects the rogue’s advances by alluding to a rhetorical and grammatical impossibility in written Classical Arabic. This ironic admixture of religion, rhetoric, and sexual desire culminates with the rogue’s self-justification for his illicit desire: the paronomasia and the unattributed permission beginning with the phrase, “they say,” allows for an equally ambiguous, specious, yet self-serving, deduction on the part of the rogue.

Apart from these intentionally hackneyed, ironic borrowings from the poetic khamriyya tradition, al-Saraqušṭī condenses a wide range
of *khamriyya* metaphors, tropes, and allusions in the virtuosic rhymed prose sections. His sources are the *maqāmāt* of his eastern predecessors, specifically al-Ḥamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī, as well as poetry belonging to the *khamriyya* tradition. In the *maqāma*'s introduction, al-Saraquṣṭī evokes the poetic origins of this tradition through the topos of wine’s association with immortality and suspension of time. Since the rogue’s age makes him acutely aware of his mortality, he reverts to wine consumption to suspend time and thereby hold in abeyance his mortality. The protagonist therefore co-opts a primary feature of Islam, its promise of immortality, by substituting the piety of his earlier abstinence for the drunkenness and debauchery expressed in *khamriyya* themes. The equating of abstinence with repentance also harks back to the foremost practitioner of *khamriyya* poetic themes, Abū Nuwās. Al-Saraquṣṭī’s constant evocation of the poetry of Abū Nuwās and other *khamriyya* poets is subversive in two respects. First, the conjuring up reiterates the doctrinal subversion inherent in *khamriyya* poetry’s defiance of Islamic proscriptions on wine consumption and illicit sex. On still another level, the recapitulation in rhymed prose of *khamriyya* tropes from poetry subverts the commonplace, mentioned above, of the generic superiority of poetry to the rhymed poetry of the *maqāma*. A recurrent theme shared by both the *maqāma* and wine poetry is blind fate or destiny (Ar. *dahr*). Ubiquitous references to blind fate in the *maqāmāt* of al-Saraquṣṭī and his predecessors in the genre frequently assume the form of the rogues’ attributing their willful actions to blind fate. Philip Kennedy’s study of *khamriyya* poetry notes the ambivalent attitude toward blind fate in the poetic canon of Abū Nuwās: “Composing largely iconoclastic poems within a still somewhat conservative poetic tradition allowed him to hedge his bets; he, like others of his temperament, both challenged Islam and reconciled himself to it” (102). This paradox can best be grasped historically, since the conception of blind fate pre-dated the advent of Islam and came to be a polar opposite of the religion’s doctrinally sanctioned notions of free-will and purposefulness. Rather than supplanting pagan belief, concepts such as blind fate and determinism continued to coexist in uneasy tension with Islamic
doctrinal orthodoxy. The unreconciled ambivalence thus became a frequently-articulated topos of both wine poetry and the maqāma.

Sexual desire, licit but more frequently, illicit, is inexorably linked to the violation of the proscription on wine consumption in khamriyya poetic tradition; both transgressions are reiterated in the maqāma. The linkage of the two topoi is not surprising, since both proscriptions are closely related to the mitigation of the effects of the passage of time and blind fate. Whereas wine consumption holds these forces in suspension through sensory transformation, sexual gratification, whether homo- or heteroerotic, accomplishes the same purposes through intimations of immortality. The two major sins in Islam, wine consumption and fornication, thereby paradoxically supplant the religion’s primary function—the promise of immortality. From a sexual standpoint, immortality is based not exclusively on the reproductive capability concomitant with heteroerotic gratification, but also on the idealizing of homoerotic desire. This conflation of contemporary Freudian categories of sexuality into an entire spectrum of pansexuality is typical of discourse in the khamriyya poetic tradition and, later, the maqāma itself. In what would be categorized in contemporary epistemology as heterosexual desire, al-Saraqust’s maqāma exploits past poetic tradition and his predecessor, al-Ḥarīrī, for such metaphors as equating wine consumption with marriage to a beautiful woman. Conversely, while abstinence is tantamount to divorce, wine’s luminosity and the dichotomy of veiling (a practice to conceal the object of sexual desire) versus unveiling, parallel to the abstinence from consumption of wine, are reminiscences from the poetic khamriyya tradition. Further heteroerotic allusions are found in the extended metaphor of wine as a coquettish, beautiful girl in the maqāma’s introductory section. The failed seduction of the cup-bearer already described constitutes the homoerotic pole of allusions to sexual transgression. The rhetorical circularity of the rogue’s justifications for the seduction are typical of the specious logic of protagonists in numerous maqāmāt by the canonical practitioners, al-Ḥarīrī and al-Hamadhānī: the proscribed homosexual seduction of the cup-bearer is rationalized by faulty analogy to the licit heterosexual relationship of the marriage of a Muslim and non-
Muslim. However, to add further to the rhetorical and logical instability, the doctrinally sanctioned marriage is used as a specious support for lust and fornication.

This brief overview of the khamriyya tradition in the Andalusī maqāma genre reflects what the contemporary literary critic, Harold Bloom, has called the “anxiety of influence.” At the risk of oversimplification, the essence of this phrase is that any given poet or writer is so constrained and overpowered by the influence of his immediate predecessor, that he will go to great lengths to avoid directly imitating this predecessor. Such is the case which the treatment of khamriyya themes in the Andalusī maqāma. Al-Saraquṣṭi accomplishes this goal not through radical transformation of the maqāma genre, but rather through a greater elaboration of the maqāma’s existing rhetorical features. Al-Saraquṣṭi also attempts to avoid the overpowering influence of his immediate predecessor, al-Ḥārīrī, by circling back to themes and tropes from the origins of the maqāma in al-Hamadhānī, and even further back to the origins of the khamriyya tradition in poetry. Such a harking back to earlier tradition is fully understandable in view of the relative newness of the maqāma as a genre. Only a century and a half earlier, al-Hamadhānī, because of his supposed “invention” of the maqāma genre, acquired the epithet “wonder,” or “innovator” or the age for the novelty of originating the genre. Al-Saraquṣṭi’s reluctance to make radical innovations on this relatively new maqāma genre therefore is not surprising. Within the context of the maqāma genre, al-Saraquṣṭi’s work thus offers a conservative contrast to the more striking formal innovations in Andalusī poetry, namely the zajal and muwaṣṣaḥah, themselves also vehicles for the expression of the Bacchic themes of khamriyya tradition.
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Romancing the Past: Two Narrative Examples of Interfaith Relations

Cristina Guardiola

The presence of Jews, Muslims, and Christians in the Iberian Peninsula brought about various cultural and ethnic experiences. As Américo Castro noted, this convivencia typified the Iberian Middle Ages. Glick (165) and others have further explored Castro’s ideas by emphasizing their importance within social contexts, since Castro’s convivencia cannot be understood solely in terms of a (false) sense of collective harmony, but in terms of its plurality, wherein ethnic conflict and cultural diffusion were concurrent. At the same time that the three “castes” shared living spaces, and interacted in business, intellectual, and other social communities, they were also victims of persecution, intolerance, and mistrust. The unease of convivencia and the hostilities arising from it may be seen in literary examples portraying relations between the different faiths of the Iberian peninsula. The approximate eight centuries of coexistence fostered certain social perceptions, which are conveyed in the works of medieval Jewish, Muslim, and Christian authors. These authors “bequeathed to later generations a rich legacy of reciprocal literary portrayal” (Carpenter 62). For the purpose of this conference, I have taken two examples, from chronicles, that portray inter-faith relations. These examples deal with two women: Raquel, the Jewish lover of Alfonso VIII, and Daifa Halema, a Muslim woman and eventual wife of Pedro Montalvo. The representation of these women reveals strict attitudes

1 See also Mann, et. al. and Meyerson and English.
regarding sex and religion that undoubtedly privileged the Christian man.

Castilian *fueros*, or law codes, are particularly useful measures of interfaith contact and conflict, since they determine the social boundaries existing among Christians, Muslims, and Jews in a particular space and time. In primarily Christian Castile, escalating restrictions during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries limited the scope of Jewish and Muslim business dealings and personal freedoms. These laws were promulgated to separate each religious group both visually and geographically, and undoubtedly fueled the hostilities and suspicions already harbored by all (Gampel 11). Some *fueros* imposed religious segregation by establishing restrictions on sexual relations among Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Not surprisingly, these relations tended to privilege Christian men over all others. Dillard’s study of the Cuenca and Sepulveda *fueros* shows that both women and their Muslim or Jewish lovers were executed if discovered in the act; however, the Cuenca *fuero* posed no problem when relations occurred between Christian men and Muslim or Jewish women (85-6). Also, the *Siete Partidas* set strict penalties for sexual relations between Christian women and Jewish or Muslim men, but it did not impose any penalty for relations between Christian men and Jewish or Muslim women (Glick 171; *Siete Partidas*, 7.24.9; 7.25.10). Furthermore, Nirenberg has argued that Christian women’s body served as “religious line,” as a boundary which only members of their same faith might trespass (148). This points to the all too familiar identification of the woman’s body as a location of honor. While a sex act between Christian woman and Jewish or Muslim man was dishonorable for that woman’s family and religious community, the same act between a Christian man and a Muslim or Jewish woman was acceptable. Indeed, it would be justified as a form of insulting inferiors and demonstrating prowess (Dillard 86).

An example from Christian moral and didactic literature also shows similar strict attitudes regarding sex and religion. Sancho IV’s royal advice book, the *Castigos e documentos* (1293), states,
Otrosi [...] guardate non quieras pecar nin auer grand afazimiento con judia nin con mora, ca la judia es muger de otra ley contraria de la tuya; e la mora es muger de otra creencia de porfia a desfazimiento e a desonrra dela tuya (126-27).

Also [...] take care not to sin, nor to become too involved with Jewish or Muslim women, because the Jewish woman belongs to a different law which is contrary to yours, and the Muslim woman has another contrary faith that is the undoing and dishonor of your own.

Throughout Sancho’s royal advice book, a series of precepts links religious thought to moral and political thought, and God to the king. The *castigos* are lessons, created by God and taught by the king, for the salvation of one’s soul. This particular *castigo* warns against personal involvement with Jewish or Muslim women. In it, Sancho describes both Judaism and Islam as religions adverse to Christianity. Involvement with Muslim or Jewish women would displease God, and corrupt the Christian man.

The harsh tenor of these laws and counsels reflects the growing tensions felt among the faiths in the later Middle Ages. This tension is similarly reflected in historiographic narratives, which provide novelized accounts of relations between faiths. Sexual relations between Christians and Muslims were novelized more often in historiographic narratives than relations between Christians and Jews. For the former group, marriages and other sexual relations have been noted, although the results of these relations were scarcely positive. The association between Muslim men and Christian women frequently emphasized a perception of Muslim sensuality and aggression. These relations often were the result of what was perceived as “violent and aggressive” behavior. It was described as rape or forced marriage, which had to be avenged. As Barkai notes, Castilian chronicles often used territorial expansion as a literary means to avenge Christian women and restore the honor of Christian men (38, 118-19, 123, 208, 224). For the latter group, marriages and
other sexual relations scarcely have been noted. Aizenberg studies three medieval accounts that narrates the relations of Jewish women with Christian men; all the accounts that she analyzes result in failure.

The previous descriptions of interfaith relations in medieval Spain respond generally to the presumed idea of Christian and male superiority. They are summarized by Aizenberg:

Marriage between members of different religions is strictly prohibited and cohabitation between Christian woman and Moors or Jews is subject to harsh penalties. Stern warnings are also issued to Christian men against the perils of carnal knowledge of women heretics, but these warnings are tempered by the ethos of masculine superiority, which includes a recognition that the outgroup woman, though forbidden as legitimate partner, is attractive as an object of desire—a sex object—and an awareness that when Christian men seduce minority women, they help weaken and dominate the outgroup.

For Aizenberg, religious difference and gender are means to address the issue of power. The narratives she studies do not just happen to fail. Rather, the outcome proves a point, which also is apparent in the examples we address. In these examples, Christianity is privileged, and Muslim and Jewish women become objects of a masculine and controlling desire.

Our first example deals with Raquel and the Castilian king,
Alfonso VIII (1158-1214). Raquel and Alfonso VIII are legendary and historical figures. They appear in medieval narratives written between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, although they are better known from dramas of the Golden age and Romantic period. All accounts describe Raquel in terms of her religion and physical beauty. As Aizenberg has noted, she functions as a sexualized “other” that ensnares Alfonso VIII and renders him submissive to her. The Almela version reads as follows:

[Alfonso] vio vna judia mucho fermosa. & pagose tanto della que dexo la reyna su muger. & encerrose conella vn grand tiempo, de guisa que lo non podian della partir, nin se pagaua tanto de otra cosa commo della. E según cuenta el arçobispo don Rodrigo, dice que estuvo encerrado con ella siete meses, que non se membrava de sí nin de su reino. [36r]

[Alfonso] saw a very beautiful Jewish woman, and was so pleased with her that he left the queen, his wife. He locked himself up with her for a long time, in such a manner that they couldn’t make him leave her, nor did he care for anything as much as he cared for her. And according to Archbishop Rodrigo, he was shut up with her for seven months, [and] he didn’t even remember his kingdom.

Raquel is Jewish and beautiful. In this account, she functions as an object of desire. That the words “pagose tanto della” should be understood in terms of sexual gratification hardly seems necessary to

3 Raquel appears in numerous medieval historiographic texts. Among them are Alfonso X’s (1221-1284) Estoria de España, Sancho IV’s (1257-1295) Castigos y documentos, and Rodriguez de Almela’s (1426-1489) Valerio de historias escolásticas. The Almela version is by far the most novelistic in nature. Because of this, all quotes shall come from this version. Also, Raquel protagonistizes Lope de Vega’s La judía de Toledo (1630), and García de la Huerta’s play (1788), which shares her name.

4 The Almela treatise is found in ADMYTE: Archivo digital de manuscritos y textos españoles.
Alfonso’s behavior is judged by moral standards. Medieval texts include the Raquel episode to explain Alfonso’s future construction of the Burgos convent. In the *Estoria de España* and in the *Castigos e documentos*, Alfonso builds the convent as penance for having sinned with Raquel. Thus, from the onset, her story contains religious overtones that favor Christianity. Also, Alfonso’s behavior is judged by political standards. He is so taken by Raquel that he forgets all about his kingdom. He does not deal with matters of government, nor does he actively attempt to produce a legitimate heir. Because of this, it is not surprising to see Raquel pay for Alfonso’s irresponsibility.

Mas como los condes & ricos hombres & cavalleros viesen commo el Rey estaba en tal peligro & deshonor por tal hecho como este, [ …] acordaron que la matasen. [36r]

Since the counts and grandees and knights saw how the king was in such danger and dishonor on account of this affair, [ …] they agreed to kill her.

Alfonso’s political and moral peccadilloes are partially displaced onto Raquel, because she has dishonored the king and put him in danger. The king’s men find Raquel “en muy nobles estrados,” which may refer to the finery of her receiving room or may indicate an acquired legal power. In any case, the “estrados” represent for the king’s men a threat against Alfonso’s royal power. For them, Raquel has seduced their king, and weakened and dominated his Christian kingdom. The counselors’ reaction is logical, if not commensurate, to her crime. Acting for the good of the kingdom, they slit her throat as well as those in her company: “degollaronla & a quantos conella estavan” [36v]. Her portrayal, as Mirrer discusses in relation to a similar Jewish character, “condenses anti-Semitic with antifeminist attitudes, for she is portrayed as the object of a fury that is sexually, as well as
religiously charged” (40).

Our second example deals with of Daifa Halema, or the *morica garrida*. References to her are found in many sixteenth and seventeenth-century prose and poetic narratives. The legend takes place during the conquest of the town of Antequera in 1410, and might amplify any one of the many skirmishes narrated in the *Crónica de Juan II*. However, this episode does not focus on the military details of that conquest; rather, it concentrates on Daifa, her relation to Montalvo, and the events surrounding her conversion.

Daifa, like Raquel, is an object of desire, made exotic because she is forbidden. The narrative gives her the epithet, *morica garrida*, a term which implies her religion as much as it describes it. It is, in fact, the latter that sets the episode in motion:

*[...]*

The Christian tried to get as close to her as possible in order to better note her beauty, which was great [ ...]. The Christian was in awe of [Daifa’s] presence, and in admiration of so much beauty, and [he was] very much in love with her. [ ...] The Muslim woman showed such love and will to receive saintly baptism, that the Christian gained great hopes of getting her out of the town.

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5 Francisco Mendoza Díaz-Maroto published a version of this poem in 1993, and Samuel Armistead and James Monroe published an article studying a then newly-found 106 octosyllabic poetic version of the *Morica de Antequera* in 1984. Also, Francisco López Estrada has collected both prose and poetic texts of this legend. All *morica garrida* quotes are from this López Estrada collection.
The encounter between Daifa and Pedro speaks more to Christian imagination than to its plausibility. It depicts Daifa as a desired object, and an object that wishes to be possessed. Moreover, Daifa promotes the idea of Christian dominance by rejecting her Muslim religion and seeking a means to convert. Aware of what her exotic beauty promotes, Daifa walks on the town walls so that she may capture the attention of a Christian paramour, and see through her desire for conversion. Indeed, Pedro falls in love with her because she is beautiful, but he carries her away because of her wish for baptism. Later, he fights bravely at Antequera because he wants to marry her. The escape and marriage are prompted by her Christian goals, which become central to the narrative.

Daifa’s conversion parallels the subplot in this narrative: the military victory at Antequera. While Daifa seeks to convert, Pedro seeks to expand Christian territory. He goes to great lengths to assert his military prowess. When he first approaches Daifa, he speaks to her “in aráviga lengua […] por tomar lengua de lo que en la villa se hazía” (8). (He speaks to her in Arabic […] to find out what was happening in the town.) Louise Mirrer has noted elsewhere how this artful appropriation of language justifies the Christian’s initially deceptive actions, which are motivated by the idea of Reconquest. Both his language skills, and his strength and valor show superior military power (Mirrer 4-5). Montalvo easily overcomes the enemy at Antequera, who represents little or no threat to Christianity. Montalvo’s ease in overcoming his Muslim enemy is demonstrated time after time: by his ability to speak Arabic, by Daifa’s abduction and her faithfulness, and finally by his victory in the ensuing battle. One may see Daifa’s conversion as an allegory for the Antequera victory. Daifa and Pedro overcome a Muslim threat to achieve their goals. Her conversion and his military victory are easily achieved. Both are rewarded. She becomes a Christian and he conquers in battle. Moreover, through Daifa’s conversion, Pedro has conquered twice: on the battlefield and metonymically on the body of his new wife.

Daifa’s conversion and marriage end this episode. At her baptism, she is renamed Leonor de Montalbán by Fernando de Antequera, who
gives her the same name as his wife. While the baptism shows that Daifa has been bestowed an honor by Fernando, the name reinforces her integration into Christian society. Her new first name, Leonor, rejects her Muslim origins, and it associates her with Fernando’s wife and the virtues characteristic of noble Castilian ladies. Her new last name, Montalbán, suggests her marital status, since she is now Pedro’s wife. Daifa Halema now becomes Leonor Montalbán, la bella. She is Leonor Montalbán, the beautiful, now stripped of Islamic faith.

These two brief depictions of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim interfaith relations, narrated from a decidedly Christian perspective, underscore feelings of Christian and male superiority. Non-Christian minorities are subsumed under a Christian and masculine ethos. The women who become involved with Christian men face two options: conversion or death. Both options leave no possibility for maintaining aspects of the women’s original religious identity, and perhaps indicate the harsher realities that characterized convivencia. They also perhaps indicate the fears that these relations caused. But this, while a topic of considerable interest, must be left for a future occasion.

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Romanticizing the Moor in the Sixteenth-Century Spanish Ballad
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Seven vihuela books, containing more than two-hundred secular songs in five different languages, are the only surviving examples of what was a widespread practice of writing down and playing vihuela music in the sixteenth century. Of the 140 songs in Spanish, there are numerous villancicos, a few ensaladas, and, my focus today, just over two dozen romances. It would be logical to expect these romances to consist of a typical mix of elements from Carolingian and Arthurian epics, romances fronterizos, chronicles, and courtly love poems. And indeed, such traditional ballads are represented as well as ones with innovative themes taken from the Bible and from Classical antiquity. But it is interesting to note that of any grouping that can be made, the largest, 11 of the 25, consists of Moorish themes and that the rate of frequency increases between 1547 and 1576. Thus a question arises: why this new thematic propensity? In
order to answer, one needs to address problems technical (publications), musical (instrumentation), and generic (novelization). The following paper shall demonstrate that a study of the vihuela ballad exposes an exceptionally sympathetic treatment of the Moor, indeed a romanticization, which is supported by its accompanying music. I shall show that the use of the ballad as a tool of idealization is a characteristic inherited from the previous generation of Spanish composers of secular music whose work is found in the *Cancionero musical de palacio*. And, after a study of the vihuela songbooks, I shall propose that their fantastic rendering of the Moor may provide an important link to the *novela morisca* of the second half of the sixteenth century.

Before proceeding with a study of the vihuelists, I would like to foreground this paper with a few words about the most important source of secular music prior to them: the *Cancionero musical de palacio*. Compiled between 1502-1520—thus completed just 16 years before the first vihuela book—the *Cancionero* is a record of the songs performed in the court of Isabel and Fernando and provides an appropriate point of comparison for this study. Of all the possible themes in balladry, it is the theme of courtly love that predominates the 44 musical ballads in the *Cancionero*. See, for instance, the poem in Example 1 by Juan del Encina. It is the typical lament of one who has fallen in love at first sight, only to have his love unrequited. Addressing his beloved, the lyric voice moans: “vuestra vista me causo, / un dolor qual no pensais / que si no me remediais/ moriré cuitado yo.” Such laments are legion in courtly love, where the hallmark is a love of impossibility and of suffering.

The poem of Encina is not only typical of its poetic genre, but also of Spain itself. Courtly love was such a pervasive theme in all *cancioneros* of the fifteenth century that, according to some scholars, “it was the type of poetry for which Spain became most famous abroad” (Boase 3). The amount of civil unrest and civil war that took place in fifteenth-century Iberia might lead one to expect more

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3 As I am not discussing any other *cancionero* in this paper, I shall simply refer to the *Cancionero musical de palacio* as “the *cancionero*.”
wartime reflections in art. But, to the contrary, those turbulent times recast poetry as an escape from the surrounding reality. As Boase so aptly states: “courtly and chivalric ideals, including the fiction of courtly love, informed manners and modes of conduct, transmuting disease, ugliness and the often despicable motives of war into a dream of heroism and love” (Boase 4-5).

But there are other reasons that added to the popularity of courtly love poetry. It became a vehicle of expression for the old and the new nobility alike. In all of Europe, nobles were losing power in the fifteenth century because of “the popular appeal for strong monarchical governments; the growth of centralised bureaucracy; the king’s reluctance to offer administrative posts to aristocrats; the absence of chivalry in the methods and motives of mechanized warfare; and the substitution of a monetary for a seigniorial economy” (Boase 5). So, the old nobility responded by writing in the archaic poetic style, by retreating into a world that they contend once existed, that of chivalry and courtly love. On the other hand, during the period of civil war 1464-1484, lands and wealth were widely distributed in Spain to muster allegiance to the crown. This created a new class of nobles, anxious to prove their worth. So they, too, wrote verses of courtly love to confirm their presence in the aristocracy and to buy into an imagined reality of the past. Since the Cancionero musical de palacio is a compilation of the poetry performed at court (i.e. for nobles), and since many of its authors were nobles themselves, it is little wonder that it would subscribe to courtly love, to “a general nostalgia for the stability and idealism of a past which was of course largely imaginary” (Boase 81).

It remains to be explained why the vihuelists would, just a few decades later, turn from courtly love ballads to predominantly Moorish ones. Yet perhaps the two genres are less discrete than they appear. Chronologically, the fervor of courtly love did coincide with the fervor of the reconquest of the peninsula from the Muslim population. In fact, Otis Green makes the bold statement that courtly

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4Again, see the Introduction to Roger Boase’s book, The Troubadour Revival.
love was so prevalent during the reconquest that it contributed to the final triumph of the Spaniards over the Moors (93). Romanticized in every way during the sixteenth century, the fall of Granada symbolized the passing of an era because “it was the last war of its kind based on courtly and chivalric principles” (Boase 114). Roger Boase points out that after 1492 “it was later recognized [by the Spaniards], with some regret, that chivalric idealism would never be the same without Moorish Granada to serve as a stimulus to noble exploits” (113). A predictable void opened up and, as if echoing Garcilaso’s famous verse “ora la espada, ora la pluma,” the Moor himself was enlisted in the cause for Castilian poetry (121). Spaniards gained land and a new poetic subject — the Moor was idealized and encapsulated in time (and in poetry) just as the courtly knight had been before him.

But there were other reasons to romanticize the Moor in the sixteenth century besides nostalgia for the reconquest. The abolition of Islam in 1526 marked the beginning of a very tumultuous period. María Soledad Carrasco-Urgoiti states that throughout the sixteenth century the Crown futilely tried to prohibit all differentiating customs of the Moriscos, and such prohibitions were met with unrest and revolts that resulted in still stiffer repression (34). Terrorism became commonplace, and in the third quarter of the sixteenth-century, “bands of Moriscos, called Monfíes, descended upon the cities, robbing and killing, and then returned to almost impregnable hiding places in the mountains” (Carrasco-Urgoiti 35). The decree of 1567, reinstating earlier prohibitions of Moorish traditions, lead to the famous rebellion of the Alpujarras that lasted more than a year. As retaliation, the rebellious villages were looted by the king’s army and the Moriscos were executed or banished from Spain. Thus, as the cancionero composers had done before them, the vihuelists used the ballad as a means of idealizing Moors, in this case holding up the example of the honorable infidel of yore that could draw sharp contrast to the contemporary, rebellious Morisco.

Many of the ballads could be characterized as particularly sympathetic romances fronterizos. Take for example, “A las armas moriscote,” set by two different vihuelists, which narrates the
Spaniards’ request for help of their Moorish allies against the French. Or, the ballad “Los brazos traygo cansados,” in which a Moor helps the father of Don Beltrán find the dead body of his son. It is interesting that the father in this ballad speaks to the Moorish enemy in Arabic: “hablóle en algaravia, como aquel que bien la sabe” providing a memorable scene of linguistic and emotional understanding. Or, there are the ballads that explore the tragedy of the loss of certain Moorish cities to the Christians. “De antequera sale el moro” describes the anxiety of the Moor who must inform the king of the loss of Antequera. Or, the famous ballad, “Passeavase el rey moro” set by three different vihuelists, which dramatizes the anguish of the Moorish king upon the loss of Alhama. All of the above poems focus not only on the fatalities of war, but also on the emotional suffering of noble Moors and Christians alike.

This is not to say that the ballads of the vihuelists did not treat themes of love. But it is a particular forbidden love between Moor and Christian that is favored. The “Romance de Moriana” is the tale of a Christian woman held captive by a Moor. (See Example 2.) Although he has her killed when she mourns the absence of her Christian husband, his behavior is entirely chivalrous until that point, and one might even argue that her death is a point of honor in that era. As the ballad begins, they are playing chess, when she wins, he magnanimously gives her a city, when he wins, she fastidiously allows him to kiss her hand. When he sees her cry, he asks the following questions:

¿Qu’es esto, la mi señora?, ¿quién hos ha hecho pessare?
Si os enojaron mis moros, luego los haré matare,
o si las vuestras doncellas, haré las bine castigare,
y si pesar los cristianos cumple de los conquistare;
mi arreos son las armas, mi descanso el peleare,
mi cama las duras penas, mi dormir siempre velare.
(Binkley 110)

Read one way, this text could support a vision of the Moor as bellicose, but read another, he is like any great knight—steadfast,
brave, honorable.

Milán’s Musical accompaniment to “Romance de Moriana” shows further sympathy to the Moorish subject (See excerpt in Example 3). In the excerpt, one can see the homophonic, controlled measures that accompany the text, and then the moment the singer ends his phrase, the vihuela flourish begins. These bursts of music require virtuosic playing on the part of the vihuelist, but do not obscure the text in any way since they only occur between vocal phrases. These flourishes, or redobles, can be played “dedillo” (index finger) or “dos dedos” (thumb and index finger). On the one hand, the redobles seem to document improvisational traditions. But some scholars say “the dedillo technique could easily be the substitute for the eagle’s feather, used as a plectrum by the Arab ud players” (Mason 55). So, on the one hand, perhaps Milán is simply recording an improvisational performance practice. But on the other, though impossible to prove, he could be documenting a particular Moorish performance practice and thus mirroring in music the sympathetic theme he chose to set.5

Beyond the poetic themes and the music that accompanied them lies another interesting characteristic of the vihuela ballad. A study of their narration is perhaps the most important factor linking them to

5 This brings up another tenuous issue—the very instruments for which these ballads were set. Evolving in the fifteenth century, the vihuela is an instrument particular to Spain and the countries under Spanish control, in particular Southern Italy and the New World. It has a flat back and usually incurved sides, but its tuning is identical to that of the lute. And while the lute itself was flourishing in almost every other European country in the Sixteenth century—Italy, Germany, France, England—the same cannot be said about its fate in Spain. Although it was played in the Iberian Peninsula, and was even listed amongst the possessions of Philip II, there are no Spanish lute publications. This is particularly curious if one knows that the lute is derived from the Arabic ud, both etymologically (al-úd) and physically (both instruments have round backs, flat tops and wide necks). It has been hypothesized that the Spaniards’ rejection of the lute, especially on a popular level, and consequent development of the vihuela, had to do with a rejection of its origin. And perhaps, in the time of the Inquisition, it is safer to play sympathetic songs about Moors on the vihuela—an instrument whose very form suggests a rejection of Moorish culture.
a contemporary body of purely textual literature, the *novela morisca*. As seen in the “Romance de Moriana,” as well as the other ballads in the *vihuela* books, these are not lyric poems but narrative ones with descriptive, third person accounts, and dialogue. Whereas most of the *romances* in the *Cancionero musical de palacio* are static, introspective, courtly love laments, the ballads adopted by the vihuelists can be defined as novelistic. Although their subject matter is carefully chosen, they are much more similar to the traditional *romances* in which “la primera y más importante función del romance es narrar una historia interesante” (Roig 37). In fact, if one were to use M. M. Bakhtin’s contrasting definitions of the epic and the novel, the ballads of the vihuelists would fall almost in the middle, sharing some of his definitions of both. For the most part, of course, they are epic: set in an absolute past, based in a national tradition, and portraying an epic distance (Bakhtin 13). But on the other hand, most have dialogue with imitative speech and some have verisimilitude and a portrayal of the lower classes. Think, for example, of how the soldiers of Beltrán, showing little Christian honor, cheated his elderly father seven different times when they drew lots to see who would have to retrieve his body; or of the love-sick prince of Syria in the ballad “Enfermo estava Antico” who has fallen prey to the base love of his step-mother. Although they are still more epic than novelistic, they lie closer to the novel than the lyric *Cancionero* ballads do.

This preference for novelistic elements in the ballads of the *vihuela* books may be explained if one takes into account their audience. It has been hypothesized that the *vihuela* books were presented to a wide market, for “the affordable retail prices[…] and large print runs suggest that the printed literature circulated far beyond the closed circle of the noble elite” (Griffiths, *At Home* 8). Unlike the *Cancionero* which, of course, only existed in manuscript, the *vihuela* books were printed, and sold 1,000 to 1,500 hundred copies each— three to four times as many copies as other specialty books of the period (Griffiths, *At Home* 8). These facts demonstrate that the *vihuela* was not only a court instrument, but also an instrument of a rising urban population recently fostered by the
riches of the New World. As John Griffiths notes, “All the evidence points to a much broader social context, to an instrument equally integrated into the households of the middle-class bourgeoisie as well as those of the nobility” (At Home 9). Therefore, it is not surprising that the ballads that the vihuelists adopted were much closer to the chivalric novels that were in fashion than to the ethereal ballads of the Cancionero.

It is also important to note that the trends highlighted thus far are not the result of a school of provincial composers. Milán was a courtier in Valencia, Narvaez a chamber musician to Felipe II, and Mudarra a canon at the cathedral in Sevilla. Little is known of the life of Valderrábano, but it is suspected that he was not a professional musician (Griffiths, La música 70). Pisador also lacked professional musical training and was for a time mayordomo of Salamanca. Fuenllana was the musician to the Marquesa de Tarifa and later to Isabel de Valois, the third wife of Felipe II. And Daza was from a prominent family of Valladolid, having no need to work for a living. In short they represent a diverse group from Castile, Aragon and Andalusia, both professional musicians and amateurs, of the upper and middle classes. Thus, any conclusion we draw from their work is all the more compelling since it was surely not the result of a homogeneous group. What they did have in common, however, was the Spanish public for whom they were publishing.

The power of the buying public points to the genre that is most often associated with it: the novel. This preference for ballads that treat Moorish themes, and do so in a narrative and novelistic way, provides an important link to the development of the novela morisca, the point with which I shall conclude, yet one that is still open for further investigation. Carrasco-Urgoiti states in her book The Moorish Novel, that the first half of the sixteenth century makes little contribution to the evolution of the ballad, but that the genre

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6 In the sixteenth century, riches from the New World were streaming into Spain and the beneficiaries included a variety of individuals: merchants, clergy, government officials, and relatives of settlers in the New World. See J. H. Elliott, Spain and Its World 1500-1700, especially Chapter 1.
remains alive, mainly as poetry for singing. She credits two factors for changing the ballad in the sixteenth century. First she cites the four ballad collections published by the book dealer Juan de Timoneda in 1573, in which the ballads were progressively more “descriptive and dramatic” (46). And second, she highlights the appearance in 1560 of the novela *El Abencerraje*, stating that “the evocation of frontier life and sympathetic portrayal of a Moorish couple, was a factor contributing to the proliferation of similar subject matter in the genre of the ballad” (46-47, emphasis mine). She goes on to say that the characterization of Abindarraez and the elaborate image drawn at his first appearance, “anticipate the psychological traits as well as the descriptive technique that will shape the new ballad type of the enamored Moor” (47, emphasis mine). Turning to this passage, we have the gallant Moorish knight, in the light of the full moon, dressed in red, gold, and silver looking splendid atop his horse (See Example 4). But let us compare this scene to the poem set by Fuenllana: “De antequera sale el moro” (See Example 5). Again, the ballad describes the anxiety of a messenger going to deliver the news of the loss of Antequera, using a long description to build suspense. This emphasis on his clothing, his physical appearance, the horse he was riding, and the woman of whom he is thinking, certainly calls to mind the opening scene of *El Abencerraje*—but so, too, do the other ballads that I’ve looked at briefly in this paper. They too show the greater descriptive and dramatic interest that Carrasco-Urgoiti speaks of. They too are sympathetic portrayals of Moorish subjects. And, most importantly, they too appear in print in the sixteenth century. In fact, all but one of the *vihuela* books predate both *El Abencerraje* and the books of Juan de Timoneda.

Thus, I propose that this anticipation of psychological traits and descriptive techniques mentioned by Carrasco-Urgoiti began earlier than the publication of *El Abencerraje* in 1560. I do not argue that the vihuelists had a particular agenda in mind, but that they were simply responding to the taste of the public for whom they were publishing. Jack Sage states the following in his article on the vihuelists:

They [the vihuelists] kept in step with, and even ahead of, literary
trends of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries. In pragmatically angling their teach-yourself-to-play tutors [the vihuela books] not only towards the affluent courtier but more especially towards the new market of ordinary folk that the printing press was beginning to foster, they again kept up with, or indeed overtook, their literary fellows. (639)

And by choosing ballads in which the Moor is consistently idealized, the vihuela ballads provide an important link to the subject of the Moor in Renaissance literature.

**Table 1**

*The vihuela Books*

Listed are the ballads contained in each book. Those ballads with a Moorish subject are marked by an asterisk.

   *Con pavor recuerda el moro* (Romance de Moriana)
   *Sospirastes, Baldovinos*
   Durandarte, Durandarte
   Triste estaba y muy penosa

2. Luis de Narváez, *Los seys libros del Delphín* (Valladolid, 1538)
   *Passeávase el rey moro*
   Ya sienta el rey Ramiro

3. Alonso Mudarra, *Tres libros de Música* (Sevilla, 1546)
   Durmiendo y va el Señor
   Isreal, mira tus montes
   Triste estava el rey David

4. Enriquez de Valderrábano, *Silva de Sirenas* (Valladolid, 1547)
   *Los brazos traygo cansados*
   *Ya cavala Calaynos*
   Adormido se á el buen viejo
Ay de mí! díse el buen padre (Romance de Matatías)
En la ciudad de Betulia
¿Dónde son estas serranas?

5. Diego Pisador, *Libro de Música de Vihuela* (Salamanca, 1552)
   *A las armas moriscote
   *La mañana de Sant Joan
   *Passeávase el rey moro
Quién uviesse tal ventura
Guarte, guarte, Rey don Sancho

6. Miguel de Fuenllana, *Orphénica Lyra* (Sevilla, 1554)
   *A las armas, Moriscote
   *Passeávase el rey moro
   *De Antequera sale un moro

   *Enfermo estava Antico

**EXAMPLES**

1.

Señora de hermosura
por quien yo espero perderme
que haré para valerme
deste mal que tanto dura
vuestra vista me causo
un dolor qual no pensais
que si no me remediais
moriré cuitado yo

2. ¿Qu’es esto, la mi señora?
quién hos ha hecho pessare?
Si hos enojaron mis moros,
luego los haré matare,
o si las vuestras doncellas,
haré las bien castigare,
y si pesar los cristianos
cumple de los conquistare;
mi arreos son las armas,
mi descanso el peleare,
mi cama las duras penas,
mi dormir siempre velare.

(“Romance de Moriana” Spanish Romances of the Sixteenth Century,
Ed. Thomas Binkley and Margit Frenk, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana U P, 1995.)

3. 7. Romance de Moriana
Y mirando con más atención, vieron venir por donde ellos iban un gentil moro en un caballo ruano; él era grande de cuerpo y hermoso de rostro y parecía muy bien a caballo. Traía vestida una marlota de carmesí y un albornoz de damasco del mismo color, todo bordado de oro y plata. Traía el brazo derecho regazado y labrada en él una hermosa dama y en la mano una gruesa y hermosa lanza de dos hierros. Traía una darga y cimitarra, y en la cabeza una toca tunecí que, dándole muchas vueltas por ella, le servía de hermosura y defensa de su persona. En este hábito venía el moro mostrando gentil continente y cantando un cantar que él compuso en la dulce membranza de sus amores[...]


5.
De Antequera sale un moro,
de Antequera aquessa villa,
cartas llevava en su mano,
cartas de mensajería,
escriptas yvan con sangre,
y no por falta de tinta;
el moro que las llevava
ciento y veynte años avía,
ciento y viente años el moro,
de dozientos parecía:
la barva llevava blanca,
muy larga, hasta la cinta,
con la cabeza pelada,
la calva le reluzía;
toca llevava tocada
muy grande precio valía,
la mora que la labrara
por su amiga la tenía.
Cavallero en una yegua
que grande precio valía,
no por falta de cavallos,
que hartos él se tenía;
alhareme en su cabeza
con borlas de seda fina.
Siete celadas le echaron,
de todas se escabullía.


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What is at stake when we consider the legacy of a text like The Thousand and One Nights—one generally accepted as widely influential, not only on individual writers but on entire traditions—on contemporary literatures? The very mention of a legacy forces us to rethink what we mean by influence, originality, authorship, and literary lineages and genealogies. Where do stories originate? What is the best way to approach the inheritance of narrative? The answer, I believe, lies in the study of translation. As Jorge Luis Borges has said: “Ningún problema tan consustancial con las letras y con su modesto misterio como el que propone una traducción” (Obras completas 1: 239).

There are perhaps few texts which bring the issues of influence and of the power of narrative to the forefront as clearly as the collection Alf Layla wa-Layla, The Thousand and One Nights. Or perhaps we should say no text and its translations, for any story of The Thousand and One Nights and its legacy is ultimately a story about the translation of the Nights. In this article, I explore the legacy of The Thousand and One Nights in three Argentine writers: Jorge Luis Borges, Manuel Puig, and Ricardo Piglia. In the process, I suggest some ways
to rethink the legacy of medieval literature and concepts of the Orient in today’s world, specifically in Latin America.

Borges refers to *The Thousand and One Nights* frequently in his writings, claiming it as one of the first books he read as a child in his father’s library. The version he found there, and the one he always preferred, is the one by Richard F. Burton. But Borges was also very familiar with the other major European translations. This can be seen in his essay “Los traductores de *Las 1001 Noches*” (1935), one of his two most important essays on the topic of translation. In this text, Borges compares only the translations of the *Nights*; he makes no attempt to refer back to the original, except through what the translators themselves have to say about it. By deviating from the traditional approach of comparing the original with the translation, Borges avoids the unproductive practice of simply listing what is lost in translation. Borges’ approach, in fact, suggests a complete disregard for the concept of a “definitive text.” As he says in his other key essay on translation, “Las versiones homéricas” (1932):

Presuponer que toda recombinación de elementos es obligatoriamente inferior a su original, es presuponer que el borrador 9 es obligatoriamente inferior al borrador H—ya que no puede haber sino borradores. El concepto de texto definitivo no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio. (*Obras completas* 1: 239; emphasis in the original)

In “Los traductores de *Las 1001 Noches,*” Borges points out that when we think of the *Arabian Nights,* we invariably turn to the first translation of the text into a European language; that is, Jean Antoine Galland’s version of 1704-1717. Borges is drawn to the fact that the original *Nights* is a translation, and he refers to Galland as the “fundador.” Galland’s version establishes the stories that everyone in

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1 For a complete list of references to the *Arabian Nights* in Borges’ work, see Balderston (219); for a list of references to Burton, see Balderston (25-26). For a discussion of Borges’ references to the *Nights* in interviews and in his “Autobiography,” see Rodríguez Monegal (71-72).
the Occident thinks of when they think of the Nights: “El hombre de Europa o de las Américas que piensa en Las 1001 Noches, piensa invariablemente en esa primera traducción” (Obras completas 1: 397). The same might be said about readers in the Orient in modern times as well, as the text has “reentered” the Arab world through fairly recent translations of the European versions.2

But Galland’s version contains several stories that have never been found in any original version of the Nights, including some of the more famous tales, such as “Aladdin” and “Ali Baba” (Irwin 17). Galland’s new stories then become such an integral part of the Nights, Borges reminds us, that none of the translators who have followed dare to omit them. An original—Galland’s version was then translated into numerous languages, including Arabic—but one that is a translation of a previous text, which is itself a compilation of anonymous stories of unknown origin. The idea of any solid original, in the traditional sense of the term, is thoroughly destabilized.

As he discusses Galland’s and the subsequent translations of the Nights, Borges argues that a translator’s changes, omissions, substitutions, and interpolations can actually be for the best. The falsifications that the translator commits represent an irreverent rewriting that can improve on the original. Paradoxically, the merit of the translation, as Borges sees it, lies in its infidelities. In contrast with accepted scholarship, for example, Borges always valorizes Burton, including the alterations and the peculiar and disparate vocabulary and neologisms that abound in his version of the Nights (Obras completas 1: 405).3 And discussing the 1889 French version by J.C. Mardrus, Borges states: “Celebrar la fidelidad de Mardrus es omitir el alma de Mardrus, es no aludir siquiera a Mardrus. Su infidelidad, su infidelidad creadora y feliz, es lo que nos debe importar” (Obras

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2 See, for example, Knipp (47-48); or Armistead and Monroe (7).
3 Borges’ position is in stark contrast with accepted scholarship, which has tended to criticize Richard F. Burton’s version of the Nights, focusing on his alleged plagiarism, his inconsistent style, and his nearly pornographic rendering of some of the stories. See, for example, Knipp (49-51).
Borges also discusses Enno Littmann’s German translation (1923-1928). According to major sources, Borges reports, it is the best one available. But once again Borges disagrees:

[Littmann] es siempre lúcido, legible, mediocre. Sigue (nos dicen) la respiración misma del árabe. Si no hay error en la Enciclopedia Británica, su traducción es la mejor de cuantas circulan. Oigo que los arabistas están de acuerdo; nada importa que un mero literato—y ése, de la República meramente Argentina—prefiera disentir. (*Obras completas* 1: 411)

Especially notable here is that the false modesty with which Borges expresses his objection is so closely linked with him being from Argentina. Being Argentine—and not from the Metropolis, where the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is written and where Orientalists reside—leads to a dissenting evaluation of what constitutes a good translation. At stake for translators and writers from the periphery, Borges suggests, is how they incorporate previous traditions—that is, the legacy of the past—through irreverent rereadings and rewritings of previous texts.

If in “Los traductores de *Las 1001 Noches*” Borges jumps over the role of Spain in the transmission of the *Nights*, there are other places where he acknowledges the importance of the *Nights* in Medieval and Golden Age Spanish literature, and many places where he discusses the importance of the latter on contemporary Latin American writers. In “Magias parciales del *Quijote*” (1949), for example, he...
points out some of the parallels between the narrative frames in the 
*Nights* and in Cervantes’ novel, focusing on the vertiginous *mise-en-
aphymes* found in both. There is also Borges’ version of “El brujo 
postergado,” taken from “Exemplo XII” of Don Juan Manuel’s *Conde 
Lucanor* (itself derived from an Arabic pre-text, *Las cuarenta mañanas 
y las cuarenta noches*) (*Obras completas* 1: 342). Borges’ version is a 
linguistic and cultural transposition from fourteenth-century 
medieval Spanish to twentieth-century Río de la Plata *castellano*, in 
which the temporal and geographic displacements are foregrounded 
by the *acriollamiento* of the text. “El brujo postergado” is found at the 
end of Borges’ *Historia universal de la infamia* (1935), in a museum of 
translated fragments entitled “Etcétera.” Also included in this section 
are “La cámara de las estatuas” and “Historia de los dos que soñaron,” 
both drawn from the *Arabian Nights*, but not from the original (Borges 
did not know Arabic), but from Burton’s version of the *Nights*.

Borges’ references to *The Thousand and One Nights* allow us to 
trace a spatial and temporal map of narratives, as seen from South 
America in the twentieth century, dating back to the ninth or tenth 
century in the Near East, at times circulating through medieval and 
Baroque Spain, at others skipping several centuries to France and 
Germany and across the Channel to England. A story of literary 
traditions, of the legacy of a medieval Arabic collection of framed 
tales, defined by its translations and transmutations through cultures, 
synchronically and diachronically.

This play with pre-established geographies, and the cultural and 
political assumptions that accompany them, resurfaces in a late essay 
that Borges dedicates to the *Nights*, in the collection *Siete noches* 
(1980). Challenging the stability of a Western center from his South 
American margin, Borges states: “La cultura occidental es impura en 
el sentido de que sólo es a medias occidental. Hay dos naciones 
esenciales para nuestra cultura. Esas dos naciones son Grecia (ya que 
Roma es una extensión helenística) e Israel, un país oriental” (*Obras 
completas* 4: 235). And Borges adds:

¿Qué es el Oriente? Si lo definimos de un modo geográfico 
os encontramos con algo bastante curioso, y es que parte del
Oriente sería el Occidente o lo que para los griegos y romanos fue el Occidente, ya que se entiende que el Norte de África es el Oriente[…]. Al decir Oriente creo que todos pensamos, en principio, en el Oriente islámico[...].

Tal es el primer sentido que tiene para nosotros y ello es obra de Las mil y una noches. Hay algo que sentimos como el Oriente[…] que [yo] he sentido en Granada y en Córdoba. (Obras completas 4: 235-236)

Borges shows that our definitions of Occident and Orient depend on each other, and on each other’s texts and translations. The exact geographies of Occident and Orient are undeterminable, much like originals and translations are unstable and open for rewriting in Borges’ conception of literature.

Significantly, Borges repeatedly connects this idea with issues of identity:

¿Y cómo definir al Oriente[…]? Yo diría que las nociones de Oriente y Occidente son generalizaciones pero que ningún individuo se siente oriental. Supongo que un hombre se siente persa, se siente hindú, se siente malayo, pero no oriental. Del mismo modo, nadie se siente latinoamericano: nos sentimos argentinos, chilenos, orientales (uruguayos). (Obras completas 4: 236)

The uncertainty surrounding the definitions of Occident and Orient is increased by the humorous reference to the fact that in the Río de la Plata region an “Oriental” is someone from Uruguay. Such comments underscore the subjective nature of the borders between East and West, North and South. The tension between Occident and Orient, between center and periphery, is displaced toward and reconsidered from the shores of the Río de la Plata. By redrawing geographical maps from South America, Borges redraws political and cultural maps, and opens new territories for Latin American writers.

Manuel Puig and Ricardo Piglia, in very different ways, have occupied the space that Borges establishes in Latin America through
his irreverent re-articulation of the legacy of past literary traditions. Puig and Piglia are also significant in the context of this discussion because they both have texts in which a Scheherazade-like storyteller appears as part of a crucial debate over the importance of narrative and translation in the contentious socio-political climate of late twentieth-century Argentina.

An unexpected manifestation of Scheherazade appears in Manuel Puig’s *El beso de la mujer araña*, a novel consisting primarily of the dialogue between two characters jailed in Argentina at the beginning of the “Dirty War” period (1976). The cellmates are Molina, a cross-dressing homosexual, and Valentín, a Marxist revolutionary. Molina recounts the Hollywood movies that he adores to Valentín, stories that serve to seduce and postpone the inevitable end associated with the fact that Molina is an informant. In this sense, Molina can be seen as a Scheherazade figure, as his narratives fill the metaphoric night that has befallen Argentina. The following exchange from their dialogue illustrates the extent to which Valentín is drawn in by Molina’s stories:

MOLINA: [..]quisiera, no despertarme más una vez que me duermo[..]. De veras lo único que pido es morirme.

VALENTÍN: Antes me tenés que terminar la película. (239)

Valentín’s responses reveal that storytelling has become a way to defy death and authoritarian rule in the midst of the characters’ stark reality. The specific movies that Molina narrates are significant in and of themselves, as they point to a confusion of identity and a plurality of signification that drive the novel. Molina, like Scheherazade, tells and retells as s(he) sees fit, translating stories that both entertain and do much more than entertain. The double meanings suggested by the act of retelling multiply-mediated stories create a productive ambiguity and serve to open personal and political space.

But Molina is not the only seducer/storyteller in the novel. The

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6 See Masiello (86).
other, we quickly realize, is Valentín, who constantly tries to seduce Molina politically through his Marxist discourses. While a key point of the novel is that the distinction between Molina’s sexual seduction and Valentín’s political one becomes thoroughly blurred, it is also important to note the decisive role of storytelling and translation in this process. Molina’s and Valentín’s widely different frames of reference, as well as the various repressive discourses represented in the novel (i.e., the pseudo-scientific explanations of homosexuality that appear in a series of footnotes; the official reports of the security forces), are different world views, different systems of interpreting and creating meaning. In other words, they are different language systems, containing layers of mediation in a battle over representation and identity. Thus, many of the tensions of the novel can be seen as attempts at translating conflicting modes of communication.7 In this manner, desire and ideology—which are both inverted and subversive in Puig’s novel—are displaced toward storytelling, as narrative itself becomes a way to resist repressive discourses.

Molina’s storytelling, the narratives of a gay male Scheherazade in drag, culminates with the sexual union between the two protagonists, and finally the violence at the end of the novel. The magic of the storytelling and the interweaving narratives, ironically set against the reality of life in jail, postpones violence and death, at least for a time. It also creates the potential for reconstructing memory and community, through narrative and translation, at times of extreme repression and authoritarian regimes that seek to homogenize the discourse of society and silence any dissenting voice. In the process, Puig demonstrates the potential of narrative to imagine and recreate the nation, even from behind prison bars.

Perhaps an even more unusual version of Scheherazade is at the center of Ricardo Piglia’s 1992 novel La ciudad ausente. At stake in Piglia’s text, as in Puig’s El beso de la mujer araña, are questions of language and representation, of memory and community, and of the role of narrative and translation in drawing the stage where such

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7 See Masiello (87).
issues can be played out. Piglia’s text deals with these issues in more recent times, as we now find ourselves in the aftermath of dictatorship and in the transition to democracy, in a society facing the forces of neoliberalism. The novel is composed of disparate but interrelated stories; these narratives constitute the textual space of the novel and the geographic, historical, and literal space of the nation itself.

Everyone in La ciudad ausente, including Junior, an investigative journalist seeking to decipher the stories as he travels through them, is obsessed with tracking the narratives, seeking their origin and center. But originality and centrality are as elusive as meaning in this text, as the stories continually circulate, often illicitly and in clandestine fashion, in copied mechanical fragments, as if to create counter-plots to the larger, authoritative discourses of the State or the Market.8

Increasingly, Junior and the reader realize that the stories come from Elena—the Scheherazade figure in the novel—who used to be a woman but is now a machine.9 The stories Elena produces, however, are themselves not original, as she channels an irreverent combination of past literary and historical references, both Argentine and foreign. It is precisely this irreverence and appropriation, enacted through processes of mistranslation, that turn the narratives into “Argentine stories.” The productivity of mistranslation begins with the machine herself, even before others get a hold of her stories, as the first story—where one might expect to find an origin—is itself a mistranslation. Elena, the “machine that transforms stories” (The Absent City 37), takes fragments that appear lost and transforms them into something else. This mistranslation, this transformation, is the process through which the past—whether it be past literary traditions,

8 See what Piglia says about paranoia, politics, and memory in literature in “El último cuento de Borges.”

9 Elena is the (dead) wife of Macedonio Fernández, who is a major presence in La ciudad ausente, primarily in the conception of the novel as a museum. For a discussion of the role of Macedonio Fernández in La ciudad ausente, see Romano Thuesen (213-226).
past historical experiences, or both—can be reconsidered and rearticulated. In this sense, translation—as a reconstruction of a lost utopia—is an ideal metaphor for the process of rebuilding a collective, lost memory.

Transformation in La ciudad ausente, as Masiello argues, reveals how Latin America can be "an active site for the reinvention of literary forms and discourse" (168). This is largely achieved through variations on the practice of mistranslation, which multiply and confuse meaning, and open the way for a number of muted characters to find a voice. Through a series of reproductions, images, and simulacra, narrative becomes the site of political and aesthetic resistance. The optimism found in Piglia's novel is thus specifically related to the potential of mistranslation to transform the past, including what was believed to have been lost, into something different—a possible future for a nation reconstructed through narrative.

In her monologue at the end of the novel, Elena, a postmodern, mechanical Scheherazade, reaffirms the perseverance of storytelling, even as she awaits a confirming ear that can only come from the future:

Estoy llena de historias, no puedo parar, las patrullas controlan la ciudad y los locales de la Nueva de Julio están abandonados[...], estoy en la arena, cerca de la bahía, en el filo del agua puedo aún recordar las viejas voces perdidas, estoy sola al sol, nadie se acerca, nadie viene, pero voy a seguir, enfrente está el desierto, el sol calcina las piedras, me arrastro a veces, pero voy a seguir, hasta el borde del agua, sí. (La ciudad ausente 178)

The conclusion to Piglia's novel recalls the final affirmation of Molly Bloom in Joyce's Ulysses.10 The machine in La ciudad ausente is also
reminiscent of the final chapter of *Ulysses* in that she, like Penelope, is constantly weaving and unweaving stories, stories that come from the memory of others, from other texts, and are transformed into something different. In this sense, the machine is also like Molina in *El beso de la mujer araña*, the spider woman weaving and unweaving her web of seduction, which turns out to be a web in which identity and representation must be reconsidered. In both Puig and Piglia we see the storyteller again as Scheherazade, created by circumstance and recreating herself and those around her through narrative. Scheherazade, an entire tradition and its legacy, appropriated through mistranslation and resituated on a new map to create unexpected meanings as needed in the socio-political context of contemporary Argentina.

A generation before Puig and Piglia, Borges developed an aesthetics based on practices of mistranslation that legitimize the margin by, among other things, rearticulating the legacy of past traditions and challenging our notions of North and South, East and West. Taking advantage of the space created by Borges' redrawing of geographic and literary maps, Puig and Piglia rework the tradition of Scheherazade, creating irreverent versions of the classic storyteller: in one case a gay male Scheherazade who narrates to seduce but also participates, unwittingly, in a foundational dialogue from behind prison bars; and in the other, a female machine that mis-translates the material fed to her to create new stories that help define the nation in the transition from dictatorship to democracy, while defying the discourses of the State and the Market.

Through various processes of translation, in the broadest sense of the term, Borges, Puig, and Piglia show that Latin American writers can transform the original, including the values of the center where it was produced. This move destabilizes concepts of originality, authorship, and influence, creating major cultural political implications for the periphery and its literatures. Stories within

*One Nights*, an important precursor to both *La ciudad ausente* and the *Wake*. See Masiello (163-168) and Waisman’s “Ethics and Aesthetics North and South.”
stories, laden with desire, interrupted and postponed to extend life and question meaning: such is the role of narrative and translation in Argentina today.

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