

MIGRANT SEPHARAD AND FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA*

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In memoriam Iorgu Iordan

The Spanish Jews ('Sepharadim' or 'Sephardim', from the Hebrew *Sepharad* 'Spain') who were expelled in 1492 sought refuge in the Islamic countries, from northern Africa to the then Ottoman-dominated Balkan Peninsula.

The members of this Jewish Diaspora arrived in their new homes with lasting memories of their Iberian origins, memories that persisted for centuries and became one of the active factors in Sephardic culture. First and foremost was their language, *jidío* or *judió*, which they still speak today, wherever they are, at least in informal conversation. It is none other than the Spanish of the second half of the fifteenth century, enriched on the one

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Confession and warning: A French synopsis of this study was presented at the Conference on *The Jewish Communities of South-Eastern Europe from the Fifteenth Century to the End of the Second World War*, Thessaloniki, 30 October - 3 November 1992. I have to confess after the event to having deceived my audience, because I erroneously attributed the parentage of one of the subjects of my comparative analysis to the Thessalonician Jews. That my offence was committed in good faith, however, and with no intention to deceive is proven by my source (cf. the Appendix), which does indeed give Thessaloniki as the text's place of origin; though it does also give another (musical) version of it from Morocco. However, since the themes' wide circulation (which is never a one-way process) and their concurrent birth are common phenomena in folklore, I have not considered it unethical tacitly to lay claim to the *romance* in question on behalf of Greek Jewry.

I have my distinguished colleague, the musicologist Professor Susana Weich-Shanak of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, to thank for confirming and crosschecking my error: the text and the tune that are described in Milner and Storm's anthology as originating from Thessaloniki in reality come from Morocco and have been published by the Spanish scholar Arcadio de Larrea Palacín in *Romances de Tetuán*, Madrid, Instituto de Estudios Africanos, 1952, vol. I.

hand with elements of scholarly Hebrew^{*}, and on the other with lexical and syntactical forms that bear witness to their inevitable contacts with and mutual influence on their linguistic environment^{**}. The Spanish Jews also brought with them the poetic traditions of their language, which included the splendid tradition of mediaeval epic poetry in the form of the *romance*. Initially, the term was used of any poetic composition in the Latin-derived vernacular, as also of the dialect itself (whether Castilian, Catalan, or Galician —Proto-Portuguese— on the Iberian Peninsula, or, outside the Peninsula, Provençal or the *langage françois* in France, the 'language' of Tuscany, Sicily, or Venice, amongst others, in Italy, etc.), as opposed to the scholarly linguistic organ, which was always Latin. Later on, and specifically in Spain, *romance* was the name given to a specific epico-lyrical genre with a strong dramatic element that had grown out of the erosion and dwindling of the mediaeval heroic epic, the *cantar de gesta*.

Two texts

The Sephardim naturally continued to cultivate the traditional thematic stock of the Iberian *romance* after they were exiled, though they enriched it with elements of their own, amongst which, as might be expected, a prominent place was occupied by Old Testament themes.

This is the case with a short masterpiece titled *Un hijo tiene el rey David* (A son has King David), which deals with the biblical story of the incest between the poet-king's son Amnon and his half-sister Thamar (cf. II Samuel 13).

The same theme also attracted Federico García Lorca; and since the *romance* is still a very popular poetic genre today throughout the Spanish-speaking world, not surprisingly he turned to this traditional form for his own version of the story, his poem 'Thamar y Amnón', from the splendid *Romancero gitano* (1928).

* The specific gravity of this component is, of course, a function of the level of the language being used in any particular context, its 'functional style'. Thus, the literal translation into *judio* (for educational purposes) of the original Hebrew scriptures led to the evolution of the level known as *ladino*, which the eminent linguist and Sephardist Haï m Vidal Séphiha does not hesitate to describe as a *langue-calque*.

** Which, naturally, differ from region to region: Arabisms in the Maghreb countries and the Middle East; Turkish, Greek, and Slavonic influences in the Balkans; Italianisms in the Dodecanese and in Corfu, etc.

It was this fortunate coincidence of both theme and poetic form which sparked my interest in attempting a critical approach to the two texts. But before proceeding to the analysis, I suggest the reader turns first to the Appendix and lets the texts speak for themselves.

The romance

I have said that both poems belong to the genre of the *romance*. It seems a good idea at this point to give a brief outline of the *romance's* general characteristics.

The first and most obvious of the genre's features is its outward appearance: both the texts are written in seven- and eight-syllable trochaics, the metre *par excellence* of Spanish folklore (and rather similar to the Greek *politikon* or fifteen-syllable verse). The form developed out of the bisection of the longer line of the heroic epic, which was originally asymmetrical, and later developed into the sixteen-syllable line. Another of the *romance's* characteristics is the, mostly, uniform assonance (*rima asonante*, 'imperfect' rhyme, which is based only on the vowel sounds). In the original versions of both our texts, the even-numbered lines all rhyme *a-a*.

Another of the genre's external features, from the point of view of the narrative, is the start *in medias res* (a condition which Lorca's poem fulfils to a certain extent), as also the equally abrupt ending (both texts meet this condition, the Sephardic *romance* rather more so than the Lorca). This particular feature has to do with the development of epic folk poetry. At a certain point —which the eminent Spanish philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal dates to around the middle of the fourteenth century— public interest in the old, longwinded *cantares de gesta* began to wane, and the mediaeval bards (*juglares*) who recited them were soon presenting their audience with selected excerpts that reflected the listeners' preferences and held their attention more easily. The attempt at selectivity is largely responsible for these poems' fragmentary aspect.

As time went by —and we now come to the inner form of the *romance*— the semiconscious act of 'anthologising' developed into an independent manner of oral creation and execution. The singers drew their themes from various sources (heroic epics, certainly, but also chronicles, various other traditions, or simply the imagination of certain gifted individuals), and, as they spread by word of mouth, the themes underwent a further processing

in accordance with the laws of the *romance*: 'the narrative was simplified, certain objective details of minimal interest in a short passage were omitted, while in contrast subjective or emotional details were developed and, to a different degree each time, gave this new style the air of a living epic-lyrical intuition of that fragmentary scene'¹.

If one were to express all this in the language of modern literary criticism, one would say that the internal form of the *romance* consists in the *intertextual reference* to its source, through a process in which the *dramatic* factor intervenes by isolating a specific 'scene' (or fragment), the *epic* is abridged, while the *lyric* is added by the poet by way of direct subjective intuition. All this leads to a 'stylisation' of the *romance*, in which the genetic directing mechanisms are upgraded to structural features of the genre. For instance, as the German theorist Leo Spitzer has pointed out, often the fragmentary nature of the *romance* does not necessarily signify that it has been broken off from an earlier and broader whole, but is a deliberate ploy, and the result is reminiscent of the 'artificial ruins' that 'seek to present themselves as venerable relics'². Of course, the 'stylisation' is even more pronounced in the 'literary' *romance* (such as Lorca's).

To return to the subject of this study, let us first take a look at the two texts' intertextual reference to their common biblical source (II Samuel 13).

The frame of reference

If we compare the biblical information about Tamar and Amnon with the information contained in the two poems, we note first of all that there are a number of differences; and it is these, which reflect what I have termed the process of 'stylisation'.

1. The kinship between the two protagonists: half siblings

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar: and Amnon the son of David loved her. (v. 1).

¹ Ramón Menéndez Pidal. *Romancero Hispánico*, vol. I, Madrid 1953, p. 60.

² Leo Spitzer, 'On the Artistic Form of a Spanish *Romance*', (Rom. tr.) in the anthology *Poetică și stilistică: Orientări moderne*, Bucharest 1972, p. 51.

Both poems retain the first degree of kinship (Seph. 'though she was his own sister'; Lorca, 'he saw ... the breasts / so hard of his sister'), though not the 'extenuating circumstance' of its half-blood aspect, which reflects the theme's emphasis on incest.

2. A third party devises a stratagem whereby Thamar can be rapped

But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimea, David's brother: and Jonadab was a very subtle man. ... And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thyself sick: and when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Thamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand. (vv. 3-5).

Both *romances* omit this new mitigating factor that might be taken into account in Amnon's favour. The Sephardic *romance* ascribes the ruse to Amnon himself, blackening him still further (‘shall eat it, my father, / if Thamar cook it for me’); while Lorca elects to omit it altogether.

3. King David plays the role of the unwitting go-between

Then David sent home to Thamar, saying, Go now to thy brother Amnon's house, and dress him meat. v. 7).

The same happens in the Sephardic text ("I shall tell Thamar / to cook it for you and to bring it to you"). Lorca omits it.

4. Mention is made of the possibility of overcoming the prohibition on incest

And when she had brought them unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me my sister. And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly. And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee.

Speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee. (vv. 11-13).

The passage does not provide enough evidence about incest under Judaic law, and the references that are sometimes made (to Lev. 18:9-11, Gen. 34:7, and Judges 19:23 and 20:6) do nothing to dispel one's doubts on the matter. Only Lev. 18:9-11, which concerns one of the ten commandments, seems to allude to the act in question — 'The nakedness of thy sister, the daughter of thy father, ... thou shalt not uncover' — because it may be taken as a partial implementation of the general prohibition: 'None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness' (Lev. 18:6). The rest are probably condemning rape. I imagine that the biblical text is supplemented, in this particular instance, by Talmudic tradition, though I cannot provide any documentary support for this hypothesis. Besides, Amnon's initial scruples about satisfying his sexual desire for Tamar concern not the kinship between them so much as the fact that 'she was a virgin: and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her' (v. 2).

All this strongly suggests that the ancient Jews did indeed have a somewhat flexible attitude to the subject. All the same, the explicit reference to the possibility of a lawful union between the two siblings ('he will not withhold me from thee') is an innovation that calls to mind, for instance, the sacred incest between the Pharaoh and his sister, which symbolised the marriage of the Sun and the Moon.

Both poems focus, as I have said, on the subject of incest, and omit this particular point in the biblical text, which could have been a further mitigating factor in Amnon's favour. However, something of this ideological nexus seems to have influenced Lorca. I shall return to the subject later on.

5. Amnon rejects Tamar

Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone. And she said unto him, There is no cause: this evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me. But he would not hearken unto her. Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her. ... Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her. (vv. 15-18).

This passage is a particularly interesting one, from both a psychological and, above all, an ideological point of view. On the one hand, it describes an extreme instance of *post coitum tristitia*: the satisfaction of desire is followed by a revulsion towards its object ('the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her'). On the other hand, Thamar's reaction ('this evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me') reflects a mentality and a system of values which Ruth Benedict and the American anthropological school refer to as the 'shame culture'³. This aristocratic and phallocratic ideology is reflected in the particular emphasis the biblical text gives to the dual rape-rejection as also to the 'shame' which is borne chiefly by the victim. (In contrast, the sanction on incest probably reflects another fundamental ideology, the 'guilt culture', based on the concept of sin.)

The specific act of rejection is absent from both *romances*. However, the Sephardic poem makes some allusion to this particular psychological and ideological climate: 'Sorrowing, Thamar went forth / sorrowing and shamed' (in the original the adjectives are *triste* and *mal airada*.), and four lines further on the reason is given: "Your brother Amnon / has taken my honour and my good name", using two terms (*honra* and *fama*) that express the paramount values of the Spanish shame culture. The fact that all this is presented as a consequence of incest — since no other 'shame' is mentioned in the text — is typical of the ideological nexus of the Middle Ages, within which the poem was created and in which the two cultural forms co-exist, borrow themes from one another, and 'translate' them each according to its own code.

6. Thamar's lament

And Thamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying, (v. 19).

This point is omitted from the first text, but developed at length by Lorca (in sixteen lines, from 'Oh, what shrieks' to 'in the sealed rooms'). Indeed, the way he elaborates the passage in question is indicative of his

³ For the shame culture (in the Homeric period), cf. E. D. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, 1951, chapters I and II.

own 'inter-textual reference' to the sources: in contrast to the show pace of the biblical text, here events unwind with the speed of a play, if not of a film: Oh, what shrieks are heard / over the houses ¡/What a thicket of daggers / and torn tunics!/On the gloomy stairs / slaves go up and down'. Allied with this dramatised lament is a collective presence which accompanies the heroine, reflecting and occasionally expressing her feelings —'All around Thamar / virgin gypsies shriek / and others gather up the droplets / of her martyred flower'— and whose function is reminiscent of that of the chorus in ancient Greek drama.

7. Absalom consoles Thamar

And Absalom her brother said unto her, Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? But hold thou thy peace, my sister: he is thy brother; regard not this thing. So Thamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house. (v. 20).

Again the Bible text seems to play down the significance of incest *per se*: 'he is thy brother; regard not this thing'.

In connection with the initial thematic choice (the focus on incest) and the ideological basis of the Sephardic *romance* (the Spanish version of the shame culture: *honra* and *fama*), Absalom produces another argument to comfort his sister: "Do not worry, Thamar, /for, before the sun does rise, / you shall be well avenged". In accordance with this feudal moral code, bloody vengeance, if it does not restore, at least cleanses one's 'honour and good name'.

This point is omitted from the Lorca poem, in which Absalom in fact makes no appearance at all.

8. King David's reaction

But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth, (v. 21).

In the Greek edition of the Bible, which I consulted (*The Septuaginta: Ç ÐáääéŪ ÁéääÐç éääŪ ôï òò Áääï ïÐëï íóá*, Athens, 1977), the verse stops here. But in another translation (*Biblia sau Sfinta Scripturã*, Bucharest, Institutul Biblic 'i de Misiune Ortodoxã al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1968), it continues: 'yet he did not rebuke his son Amnon, for he loved him because

he was his firstborn'.

Insofar as it too denotes, in a way, the biblical text's 'flexible' attitude to incest, reference to the King's biased attitude is omitted from both poems. Besides, since the Sephardic *romance* ends with the dialogue between Tamar and Absalom, David's wrath naturally does not come into it.

In contrast, in the Lorca text the King's reaction is transferred to the end and is represented by an apparently strange deed: 'David with the scissors / severed the strings of the harp'. Both these innovations are significant; I shall therefore return to them later.

9. Absalom's revenge

And Absalom spoke unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon ... And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers ... and Absalom invited all the king's sons ... Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have I not commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant. And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded, (vv. 21-9).

This episode is entirely absent from the Lorca poem, owing, as I have said, to the fact that Absalom plays no part as a 'hero of the drama'. The *romance*, however, as we have seen, does end with an allusion to vengeance (Absalom offers it as a consolation to his sister), which is one of the most characteristic features of this traditional genre's intertextual reference to its source. Firstly, because, as at an earlier point ("o shall tell Tamar / to cook it for you and to bring it to you"), the event is transferred from the sphere of the action to the that of the word. As a result, the narrative voice is replaced by dialogue, the event itself is conveyed concisely (in contrast to the biblical text, in which the same event it mentioned twice, as word and as action), and above all the pace accelerates. Secondly, because all this also entails a compression of the temporal dimension: whereas in the Bible the deed is premeditated (and for a long time, moreover — 'after two full years'), here the revenge directly follows the offence. (There is a similar precedent in the lines: 'The king went out, / Tamar came in through the door.')

Thirdly, because this is the advance notice of an act we do not 'see', a forewarning that forms the end of the poem. Thus, through the

unappeased expectations of the reader — or rather the hearer, for the *romance* is an oral genre — suspense and tension are created but not released.

10. Absalom's flight

But Absalom fled. (v. 34) ... and went to Talmai, the son of Ammi-hud, king of Geshur ... and was there three years, (vv. 37-8).

The episode is omitted from both poems. There is a flight scene in the Lorca poem, but it is Amnon who flees: 'raging violator, /Amnon flees on his mare'. So the hitherto absent Absalom makes a phantasmagoric appearance in the translucence of the text. Indeed, the following lines — 'Negroes direct arrows at him / from walls and watch-towers' — create the impression that the avenging persecutor is masquerading as his victim, for they can be taken as an allusion to Absalom's death, which followed his rebellion against his father:

Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through! the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak. (II Sam. 18:14).

An initial report

This comparative examination of the two texts from the point of view of their intertextual reference, i.e. the way in which each treats the common biblical source, leads to some initial conclusions.

1. The Sephardic poem maintains the same stance towards its source as all the traditional *romances* towards the heroic epics from which they derive: it selects and condenses certain thematic elements and omits others. We have seen, for instance, that the poetic text abridges some narrative passages, omits repetitions, and compresses the time between two actions that are causatively linked in order to achieve a different pace from the Bible's. So the 'stylisation' of the epic material, together with specific stylistic interventions, such as the poem's abrupt ending at the height of its tension, is intended to create the impression of the fragmentary structural nature of the genre and to underscore the *romance's* origin in a broader canon and /or

its inclusion within a 'cycle' — even when, to quote Spitzer, this consists of 'artificial ruins', i.e. when such canons and cycles do not exist. (Thus, in our case, in displaying certain traces of its 'secession', the text is probably trying to refer us to a complete narrative group — an epic or a cycle of *romances* — based on the figure of King David, whose existence, outside the biblical text, is extremely doubtful.)

Viewed from another angle, the same features — the isolation of a single scene, its condensing and abridgement through development of the dialogue to the point where it absorbs the narrative, the accelerated pace and the suspense — denote the contraction of the sphere of the epic and the expansion of the dramatic element, which is another generic feature of the *romance*.

Connected with this is the text's constant focus, from a thematic point of view, on the incest between the two siblings, as also its systematic suppression of the information in the biblical source that might possibly be regarded as 'extenuating circumstances' in Amnon's favour. This decision shows that the dramatisation of epic material in the *romance* is aimed in a specific direction, the direction of *tragedy*. I think the process needs to be examined in greater detail.

As we have seen, I Samuel 13 manifests a somewhat 'flexible' attitude to incest, and attaches much more importance to the rape and subsequent rejection as the major factors in Tamar's 'shame' and the reasons for Absalom's hatred of his brother Amnon. The incident is consequently a *matter of honour*, because, as our analysis has shown, it takes place in a 'shame culture'. It is also, even more so, a *family matter*. One imagines that its historical basis consists in a conflict between various interests, the price of which is power: between Amnon and Absalom over the rights of the firstborn, i.e. of succession, and subsequently between Absalom and David over the throne. However, it is presented in the form of a family dispute. In the context of this 'scenario', the theme of incest could be interpreted as a link between its public ('political') and private aspects. Just as the Greek *Oneirocriticon* interpreted sexual union with one's mother (cf. e.g. Artemidorus Daldianus) as seizure of power in the city, so endogamy between brother and sister signified royal rank, because it was one of the distinguishing characteristics of royal couples in the Levant. This leads us to the realisation that the biblical incident's structural model is — in André Jolies' phrase — the 'simple form' (*einfache Forme*) of the saga, in which 'the universe is constructed like a family and interpreted as a whole in terms of

the tribe, the family tree, and blood ties'⁴.

The Sephardic *romance* partakes of the same ideology, to which — as we have seen — its adds a specific Spanish, chivalrous flavour: the concepts of one's 'good name' (*fama*) and one's 'honour' (*honra*), which, when they are besmirched, can be restored only by bloodshed. We established here, however, that the prime motivating factor behind the 'matter of honour' is the incest itself. Certainly, the act is equally one of the fundamental 'verbal gestures' (as Jolies calls them) of the saga. But the explicit emphasis on its forbidden nature in the *romance*, even though it is interpreted immediately afterwards from the perspective of the 'shame culture', nonetheless alludes to the opposite ideological form, the 'guilt culture'. In its turn, this emphasises precisely that the 'stylisation' of the epic material that takes place in the *romance* aspires to the structural model of the tragedy. To be precise, it is a potential tragedy, which typologically precedes tragic poetry proper and maintains genealogical connections with the 'simple form' of the saga: alluding to a writer of the Hellenistic period, the distinguished Hungarian religious historian Karl Kerényi calls it a *tragodoumenon*⁵.

2. Since it partakes simultaneously of both a traditional thematic stock and a modern aesthetic, the Lorca poem refers intertextually to the common source in much the same way as the other text, but is much bolder in its 'stylisation'. Thus we have seen that, although it omits Absalom as a 'living' presence, it nonetheless introduces his existential experience into the text indirectly, thus making it more concise than the specific incident in the Bible (II Sam. 13). Other aspects of the elaboration of the source, such as the appearance of a kind of chorus (the 'virgin gypsies' who accompany Tamar and share her suffering), are indicative of the fact that, in his dramatisation of the material, the poet goes beyond the *tragodoumenon*, and approaches the structural model of tragedy proper.

The modern *romance* also omits anything that might be regarded as an 'extenuating circumstance' in Amnon's favour and focuses on the incest, though without specifically mentioning that it is prohibited. This does not mean that Lorca is returning to the shame culture of the saga, as expressed in the biblical text. Yet there are suggestions of Tamar's lunar aspect ('Amnon was watching / the moon, low and round, / and he saw in the

⁴ André Jolies, *Einfache Formen* (Fr. tr. : *Formes simples*, Paris 1972, p. 64).

⁵ Karl Kerényi, *Die Mythologie der Griechen* (Ital. tr. : *Gli dei e gli eroi della Grecia*, Milan 1972, vol. II), p. 27.

moon the breasts / so hard of his sister'), balanced symmetrically by Amnon's solar aspect, which features may connote a mythical archetype of incest (the ritual marriage of the celestial bodies).

As for the plot, Lorca simplifies it even more than the traditional *romance* does, restricting it to the fundamental formula of the couple possessed by an illicit but inevitable passion.

Lastly, the poet diverges from the traditional model with respect to the construction of his work, in that the outcome is not so abrupt as in the Sephardic *romance*. The king's action which ends the poem ('David with the scissors / severed the strings of the harp'), and which maintains a faint connection with the biblical source, has the effect of releasing the accumulated dramatic tension. (I shall return later to the significance of the action.)

Having got this far, there is nothing more to say, nor, on the basis of the data gleaned so far, can we explain precisely how the last mentioned features are connected with tragedy. To form an opinion on this particular subject, we must read the texts again, still guided, as always, by their context.

Second reading

The subject of the first analytical approach to the poems was their thematic material relation to that of the biblical text, or, in the terminology of semiotics, the *semantic* aspect of the intertextual reference to their source, as also certain *pragmatic* (ideological) aspects of this process.

I now propose to repeat the same procedure from a purely narrative viewpoint in order to assess how far our texts' divergence from a simple, universal narrative model — the folktale — contributes to the development of the typologically new form of the *romance* (traditional and modern). In this context I shall refer to V. I. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928)⁶, a work which laid the foundations of the modern scientific methodology of research into the central category of folk prose. At this point I can well imagine the reader's objections: that neither of these two texts, nor yet their source, is a folktale; that this is poetry, not prose; and that, at least in Lorca's case, the work's folkloric character is, at the very least, debatable. All the same, given that what concerns us at the moment is the narrative structure in its simplest expression, then the antithesis between prose and

⁶ I refer to the Romanian translation: V. I. Propp, *Morfologia basmului*, Bucharest 1970.

verse, literary and folk creation, is of no essential significance. From the same point of view, the functional format of the folktale is as good an analytical tool as any other, with the further advantage that its morphological basis is of mythic origin⁷, and consequently is universally valid.

Propp's *functions*, then, are elementary narrative structures, which comprise 'constant dimensions' of the folktale (and by extension of any plot), irrespective of their agents and their manner of execution. The number of functions is limited, and their sequence unvarying⁸. Let us now see how they apply in the second reading of our material. I shall refer only to those functions which exist in at least one of the two poems, and only in relation to these shall I examine the biblical text, even if the latter also contains others or, since it is not a folktale, presents them in a different order.

— *Initial situation* (symbol i). Although it is not essentially a function, this is nonetheless an important morphological element. It consists in the presentation — or at least the enumeration — of the members of the hero's family and their happy existence prior to the unexpected calamity that is about to occur.

In the biblical text, the initial situation is given in the very first verse (II Sam. 13:1), which comprises the *dramatis personae* (Absalom, David, Tamar, and Amnon), the degree of kinship between them, as also an allusion ('loved') to the violation of the prohibition (function c), although neither the existence nor the actual content of the prohibition is specified.

This particular element is absent from most *romances*, owing — as I have said — to the genre's fragmentary aesthetic. Exceptionally, function i is present in the Sephardic poem, whose first four lines give more or less the same information as the source, omitting only Absalom and — for reasons already mentioned — the precise degree of kinship between Amnon and Tamar. The opening part of the poem also includes the *violation* (c) — 'he loved' — and the actual *prohibition* (b) on incest (which is indirectly, but clearly, expressed in the conjunction 'though'). So the initial situation is presented in a composite form, assimilating and incoipoiating two other functions, and doing so indeed in the opposite order to the 'regular' folktale: *ibc*⁹. So with respect to the narrative structure too, the *romance*

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. HI.

⁹ For assimilation of functions, cf. *ibid.*, chap. I.

displays the same tendency towards 'economy', i.e. reduction of the specific gravity of the epic factor. Furthermore, the fact that the prohibition on incest and its violation are mentioned right at the start creates an effect of dramatic anticipation, whose object and aim are the consequences of the act in question. This fact, naturally, is interrelated with the structural model of the *tragödomenon* in which the poem's roots lie: the acting out of the *hubris* turns our attention in the direction of the *catastrophe*.

Lorca develops the initial situation at length (in 36 lines), including in it the violation, but without specifying the prohibition. We have here, then, the mixed function *ic*, just as in the biblical text. However, of paramount importance here is the 'strategy' the poet employs in the construction of *i*, which allows him to develop his meaning differently:

I. *landscape*, which is presented from the psychological viewpoint of the aroused state of all the senses on that 'haunted' summer night (11. 1-12);

II. *presentation of Thamar* dancing, as a magnetic pole of irresistible erotic attraction (11. 13-24);

III. *presentation of Amnon*, obsessed by passion, and the powerful relationship between the two protagonists via their gaze (11. 25-32);

IV. *the protagonists' kinship*, which is revealed in a complex context that also involves further specification of the sexual magnetism as a violation and an allusion to Thamar's lunar aspect (11. 33-6).

The 'undermining' of the epic is undertaken here by the lyrical factor, which is manifested through the intense emphasis on the natural environment, charged with psychological connotations, with intimations of the unique personal perspective from which the poet conceives the whole drama right from the start. It is a perspective that in the first place includes the intuitive notion of passion being diffused throughout the universe, that is as one of the elements, or rather the 'spirits', that animate it. This 'animist' concept fits well with the implied identification of Thamar with the moon, an identification which in turn explains the irresistible magnetism she exerts, particularly upon the eye. All this reduces the significance of the prohibition—which is not even stated specifically—and develops the entire dramatic suspense as a tragic 'necessity' (*ananke*). Furthermore, everything in the opening part of the poem that suggests that the two siblings are the mythical couple of Sun and Moon constitutes faint, yet unmistakable indications of the 'dramatised' epic material's descent from an older model, which is the *ritual* archetype of tragedy.

The preliminary functions (a-g) in Popp's schema are succeeded by a

morphological element which is of great importance, in that it is the point of departure for the folktale's whole plot. Depending on the nature of the relevant function, the Russian theorist distinguishes two types of folktale: those which start with *damage* (symbol A) and are characterised by the presence of the 'malefactor'; and those which start with the expression of a *lack* (symbol A'). Our texts, like their common source, are a mixed type, which

—as we shall see— embodies both variants of this function, and which presents an appreciable functional 'polysemy' and also an instability in the 'roles' played by the various protagonists (though this does not affect the execution of the relevant functions).

— *Lack* (A'). All three texts coincide as far as the specific form of this function is concerned — the hero has no partner (symbol A') — as also with respect to its manifestation as 'love sickness', as the troubadours would say. However, both the extent of the theme and the manner in which it is presented are appreciably different.

The biblical text (II Sam. 13:2) incorporates an indirect expression of the prohibition (b), which, as we have seen, is probably based more on Thamar's virginity than on the question of incest.

The Sephardic *romance* (11. 5-6) makes do with a brief expression of the function in the form we have already mentioned.

Lorca (11. 37-52) transposes the narrative function into a lyrical key again and develops it in three tempi, 4-8-4, with remarkable symmetry, since the thematic reference of the first and the last is Amnon and of the middle one commiserating nature. Such parallel images as 'In the moss on the trunks / the cobra lies singing' and 'Ivy of goose-skin / covers his burning flesh' contain the implication that love is a kind of magical malady or bewitchment, a *defixio* or *katadesis*, as the occultists would call it in their 'technical' language. The parallelism also reinforces the notion of inevitability implanted in the previous phase. Finally, the dazzling, raw light as, one might say, an 'attribute' of Amnon (11. 41-4) is an intimation of his solar nature and makes him, again, the inevitable partner of the lunar Thamar.

— *Mediation* (B). In this phase the damage or the lack is made known to the hero, who thus makes his appearance (in the folktale). Henceforth, this role in our texts obviously belongs to Thamar, who may thus be placed in

the category of 'hero-victim'¹⁰. Consequently, Amnon finds himself in the position of 'malefactor' in relation to his sister (which, as we have seen, corresponds to the first type of folktale); though at the same time he retains certain typological characteristics of the '(re)searcher'¹¹ seeking to compensate for the lack.

In the biblical text and in the Sephardic *romance* it is the father who sends Thamar to Amnon. From the heroine's point of view, this could be interpreted as the 'exposure' of the protagonist (type B⁵). In both texts the exposure is preceded by an intrigue that leads to a 'stratagem' (t), the purpose of which is to trap Thamar. In the Bible (vv. 5 and 7) this factor is redoubled, taking the form of both the willing and the involuntary accomplice, Jonadab and King David respectively. As usual, the *romance* (11. 17-18) condenses the content of the source and presents only David in the role of (involuntary) accomplice. This shows that, from a functional point of view, neither the specific vehicle of the role nor his 'moral' characterisation has any significance whatsoever. The essential point is that someone helps the prince to achieve his purpose. Consequently, if we regard Amnon as a 'hero-(re)searcher' (which, as we have seen, is an alternative perspective in this case), the accomplices may also be perceived as 'donors', while the stratagem thus acquires the typical features of the 'first function of the donor' (D). In view of all this, this phase, as presented in the Sephardic *romance*, may be symbolised as (f/D)B⁵.

Lorca omits the incident in both its first and its second aspect. Since the lyrical 'stylisation' is much bolder in his text than in the traditional poem, the narrative element's field of action is much more drastically limited. In this specific case, by not giving any justification for his protagonists' actions other than the fatal passion that obsesses them in the form of a tragic 'necessity', the poet reinforces his dramatic elaboration of the biblical source.

— *Departure* (|). A consequence of the previous function, in all three texts this takes the form of Thamar's arrival in Amnon's bedchamber (which means that the 'hero-victim' falls into the trap).

In contrast to the biblical source (vv. 8-9), which develops it in narrative form, both *romances* condense this function; but they do so in different ways. In the Sephardic poem, time is characteristically telescoped ("The king

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

went out, / Thamar came in through the door', 11. 19-20); while Lorca replaces it with an exceptionally lyrical description of the heroine ('Thamar came noiselessly in / to the silent room, / colour of vein or Danube, / turbid with distant traces', 11. 53-6).

— *First function of the donor* (D). This re-appears here, in its proper place, after being foreshadowed in B. In the folktale, this function entails two factors: the hero and the donor. The latter, in order to assist the former, or to provide him with a 'miraculous tool', subjects to a test. This phase may be considered alternately in the two types of plot that we have seen ('damage' and 'lack'), which means that a third perspective is opened up that explicitly deploys these versions.

With Thamar in the role of 'hero-victim', in all three texts the test is of the D¹ type: the protagonist is faced with demands for various services, including sexual intercourse¹². From this point of view, it is the biblical text that most closely approaches the model of the folktale. Amnon first demands (through a third person) that Thamar make him 'cakes'; then (vv. 21-4) he asks that she herself bring them to his room so that he may eat 'at her hand'; and finally he asks her to have intercourse with him. As the *tragodoumenon*, the Sephardic *romance* focuses on the 'lexical gesture' of incest: hence Thamar's test is indirectly expressed, through Amnon's confession of his illicit passion for his sister (11. 21-4). Lorca's poem, finally, presents the test as a seduction, as a game based on the fatal and irresistible desire of which both protagonists are the victims, suddenly enmeshed in the toils of the magical *defixio* (11. 57-68).

If, though, we regard Amnon as the '(re)searcher', then Thamar joins the donor-victims, who in folktales tend to be animals that are threatened by the protagonist and beg him to take pity on them¹³ — type D⁵.

In the biblical text (vv. 12-13), which again is reminiscent of the folktale, the plea for Amnon to take pity on Thamar is accompanied by the promise that he may have her lawfully (with the king as donor: 'he will not withhold me from thee'), as though her virginity were the 'miraculous tool' the protagonist has been seeking. To understand this we must remember that the structural archetype in this case is the saga, i.e. a 'simple form' which focuses on the theme of the family and the transference of the paternal legacy. Since the patrimony in this case is David's throne, and since ritual

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 45.

incest was identified with royal anointment in the hieratic monarchies of the East, we may conclude that by capturing Thamar, Amnon is symbolically anticipating his seizing of power. (This is why, moreover, once he has acquired the 'tool', the hero rejects the 'donor' immediately: vv. 15-16).

In the same way, in Lorca's text (11. 61-4) Thamar's plea for mercy is merely a stage in the 'scenario' of mutual passion and seduction, i.e. the fatal 'necessity' to which the two protagonists succumb. (It is therefore an additional functional nuance of the previous type, and I shall symbolise it as D[^].)

Finally, Amnon's perspective is not subjected to the 'biased' thematic treatment attempted by the Sephardic *romance*. Instead we find ourselves dealing with the next function of the folktale:

— *Reaction of the hero* (E). The revulsion with which Thamar regards her brother's incestuous passion (11. 25-6: 'If you are sick for love of me, / do not rise from the bed') is an allusion to the 'negative reaction' (type E¹). At the same time, her vigorous, indignant reaction not only dispels the faintest inkling of any 'extenuation' of Amnon's actions, but makes the rape which follows (and which, as we have seen, is indefensible both in the Jewish tradition and in the mediaeval ideology of 'honour') all the more heinous.

The next phase (Bible, 13:14; Sef., 11. 27-8; Lorca, 11. 69-76) brings us once again to a crossroad. From Amnon's point of view, this phase, which includes the rape of Thamar, is equivalent to the:

— *Acquisition of the miraculous tool* (F), for reasons which I have already expounded, and is identified specifically with the functional type of direct transference (F¹)¹⁴.

Alternatively, from Thamar's point of view, all the functions, from \hat{A} to E, could be interpreted as a development of the 'stratagem' (f) devised to trap her. But this means that we must leave the category of folktales that begin at A' ('lack') and move to the other plot format, in which the present phase develops functionally as:

— *Damage* (A). In all three texts we are presented with a rape, which in Propp's morphology may be recorded as 'physical harm' (A⁶)¹⁵, and at the

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 47.

same time with brother-sister incest, which corresponds to 'forced marriage' between kin (A^{xvi})¹⁵. By combining the two types, let us express this particular function symbolically as A_{xiv}¹⁶. As always, apart from this common functional basis, it is the specific way it is treated that is of primary importance.

The Bible reports not only Tamar's rape, but also her rejection (vv. 15-18): 'this evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me'. Evidently, this amplifies the theme of shame, which in turn refers us back to the saga and its ideological basis of the shame culture.

The Sephardic *romance* merely sketches in the fact of the rape, which, in the subsequent phase, is interpreted as a humiliation in terms of the shame culture, and thus leads to revenge, i.e. the outcome of the *tragodoumenon* as a drama of honour.

In Lorca's poem the incident is developed in a lyrical key, again with parallels between the human act and the elements of nature (11. 69-72 and 73-6). As we have seen elsewhere, here too the protagonists are presented on a symbolic level, and an allusion is made to Amnon's solar undertones: 'The cubed sun resisted / the slenderness of the vine'. A parallel is also drawn between the erotic scene and the animal kingdom ('The hundred horses of the king / whinnied in the courtyard'), and the sexual urge thus acquires manifestly universal dimensions, while the world of instinct is presented as a kind of tragic 'necessity'. Consequently, Lorca approaches even closer to the structural archetype of the tragedy, because, in this context, the rape scene is identified with the element of *hybris* or rather of *hamartia*¹⁷.

— *Mediation*. This appears again, but in the morphological schema that begins with A. In all three texts it is developed this time as the 'announcement' of the damage (B⁴)¹⁸.

In the biblical text (vv. 19-20) and in the Sephardic *romance* (11. 29-36) Tamar confesses her shaming to her brother Absalom — who henceforth assumes the 'role' of the hero — though she does not ask him for help.

Though Lorca remains within the same schema, he presents a significant variation, which signals a new step in the tragic dramatisation of the epic material. There is no longer a potential dispenser of justice (because the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.45.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁷ For this element in relation to the tragic hero, cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453 a. For the *hamartia*, i.e. the tragic flaw, see also *Nicomachian Ethics* V 8.

¹⁸ Cf. Propp, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

tragic plot leads inevitably to disaster, and not to a happy ending, like the folktale), and the setting for the 'announcement' is again expanded to a universal scale (11. 77-84). Lorca also introduces the 'chorus' as a factor — the 'virgin gypsies' who commiserate with the heroine — as a kind of group commentator on the dramatic events. Finally, the lyric tone reappears in the form of a brief reference to the natural environment (11. 91-2).

— *Reparation* (R). In folktales, this function is the counterpart to the 'damage' (A) and is the climax of the plot¹⁹. Here all three texts move away from the folkloric schema, because, naturally, there can be no question here of 'reparation' as such.

Since the 'damage' is the rape of Tamar, which both the saga (biblical text) and the *tragodoumenon* (Seph.) interpret as shame, according to the shame culture system, R necessarily takes the form of *revenge*, which, although it brings about a partial restoration of lost honour, does not, of course, restore the victim's virginity (so I shall devise for it the symbol R^{rev.}). The source text gives the episode in question a narrative development in (at least) three stages: i) premeditation (vv. 23-8), ii) execution of the revenge (vv. 29-32), and iii) Absalom's flight (vv. 34-9).

In contrast, in the traditional *romance* (11. 37-9), the event is chronologically abridged ('before the sun does rise') and dramatised in the dialogue (it is announced, but we do not see it happen), in accordance with the structural specifications of the genre, which demand a drastic reduction of the epic and an abrupt ending to the affair with an escalation of the suspense.

In Lorca's poem, the incident (11. 99-100) occupies an exceptionally complex position from a functional point of view. On the one hand, it is not, of course, a 'reparation', but rather the opposite, since the tragedy necessarily ends with the *destruction* of the hubristic one. This entails the poet's making Amnon the focus of our interest again; but only briefly, just long enough to show him on his way to his ultimate annihilation: † raging violator, / Amnon flees on his mare. / Negroes direct arrows at him / from walls and watchtowers'. As though the tragedy were rediscovering its archaic ritual core, i.e. the expulsion of the 'scapegoat', the king's firstborn son, having brought about with his fatal passion the destruction of Tamar, himself, and Absalom (whose fate, as we have seen, Lorca also puts in Amnon's hands), flees, carrying with him all the sins of the house of David,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.55.

in the hope perhaps of expiating a curse equal to that which burdened the Atreids... On the other hand, this phase, which is also the final phase of the poem, ought somehow to resolve the inconsistency which arises here between the structural format of the folktale, in which the function R is the climax of the plot, and the new structural archetype and product of dramatisation which is the tragedy, whose outcome demands a release of the tension, with the actual expiation and *catharsis* taking place in the minds of the audience. This is why the poet attempts one final inversion of perspective — the *peripeteia*, as the Stagirite would call it²⁰ — and shifts the drama from the sphere of events to that of writing, in order to bring us the image of a poetic form destroying itself as though in a show of solidarity with the fate of its heroes: 'And when the four horseshoes / were four echoes, / David with the scissors / severed the strings of the harp'. (For this situation too I have devised its own special symbol: - $\mathbf{R}^{\text{des. cath.}}$.)

Final report

First of all, let us compare the structural schemas of the two poems:
 SEPH. ROM: icb A¹ (f/D)B⁵ f D¹ E¹ F/A^{6xvi} B⁴ R^{rev-}
 LORCA: ic A¹ f D[^] F/A^{6xvj} B⁴ - R^{des.cath.}

From a purely narrative point of view, in comparison with the traditional *romance*, Lorca's poem presents a clearly simplified structure, which means that the 'stylisation' in the second text is much more advanced than in the first, to the advantage of the 'dramatisation' of the epic material. Moreover, this is what usually happens in the transition from the *tragodoumenon* to the tragedy. The role of the lyric factor, i.e. of the poet's subjective intuition, in the whole process is not apparent, of course, in our schema, but I think it has been sufficiently emphasised in the course of the analysis. It consists in the parallels drawn between the various stages of the plot and the natural environment, by a latent 'animist' world-view that transposes and extends the two protagonists' drama onto a universal scale, and thus intensifies the sense of the inevitable, of the tragic 'necessity' that the poem conveys.

Let us now take a look at the functional elements Lorca leaves out and see what their absence means.

— He does not explicitly express the prohibition (b) on incest, which the

²⁰ *Poetics*, 1452 a.

Sephardic *romance* uses to 'blacken' Amnon further (*though* she was his own sister') and to focus the *tragodoumTenon* on precisely this theme. In this respect, Lorca is closer to the biblical source, not, of course, because he shares its 'flexible' attitude towards incest, but because a violation (c), when we do not know the specific system of reference from which it is diverging, is more indefinite, i.e. more 'lyrical', and more inevitable, i.e. more potently dramatic.

— The function of 'mediation' (B), which follows A' ('lack'), is also missing. In the traditional *romance* this function also assimilates the 'stratagem' (f) and the actions of the individual 'donor', and thus fully accounts for the trapping of the hero-victim. The absence of this phase, as we have seen, intensifies the tragic dramatisation.

— In the first poem, the 'reaction' (E) of Thamar logically follows the 'test' (D), which consists in her brother's declaration of love. The heroine's reaction (indignant refusal) determines the subsequent narrative development, which is to say it colours the 'damage' (A) with shame and the 'reparation' (R) with revenge; in other words, it seals the *tragodoumenon* as an 'affair of honour'. In contrast, the second text assimilates this phase within the previous one, making it part of a dialectic of seduction and temptation, which in the logic of the tragedy is another fatal device, to which both protagonists fall victim. Consequently, Lorca's poem, henceforth follows the new structural model, in which A becomes *hubris* and R 'anti-reparation', i.e. destruction and catharsis.

As we know, both poems have a common source in the biblical text of II Samuel 13, and their individual similarities are due to the creative method typical of the *romance* that they employ in their treatment of the narrative material (selection of the 'scene', fragmentation, abridgement of the epic element, etc.). The first poem does this on a primary level, as a traditional text: the other does it in the context of a secondary process that includes 'imitation' and 'stylisation' of the folkloric models. The differences between them spring precisely from the historically secondary position occupied by the later text, the work of a modern artist whose consciousness is anything but folkloric even when he seems to be captivated by the charms of the 'naive'. All the same, a simple comparison between them from a narrative point of view shows the Sephardic *romance* to be virtually the model, one

might say, for the bard of Granada's poem.

We know that Lorca was a tireless student of folk literature. We know too that in the early years of this century, the distinguished philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal was simultaneously researching the genesis and evolution of mediaeval epic poetry and preparing an edition of the Iberian *romancero*, which included, for the first time, not only the purely Spanish and Portuguese, but the American and Sephardic *romances* too. I do not know whether this particular piece is amongst the texts published by Pidal, nor (and I fear we never shall know for sure) whether or how this fine piece of poetry created by the exiled children of the Sepharad ever came to Lorca's notice.

But since the realm of poetry is above all the land of *als ob* ('as if), let us make believe that Lorca's gypsies undertook to repatriate the epic offshoot that was uprooted, with the Spanish Jews, five centuries ago.

APPENDIX

A SON HAS KING DAVID — (1) A son has King David: / (2) Amnon is his name. / (3) He loved Thamar, / (4) though she was his own sister. / (5) His love was strong / (6) and he fell ill in his bed. / (7) One fine morn / (8) the King came in to see him. / (9) 'What's the matter, my son, Amnon, / (10) son of my soul?'/ (11) ° am sick, my king and father, / (12) I am sick and cannot eat.' / (13) 'Amnon, would you eat/ (14) the breast of a turkey?'/ (15) ° shall eat it, my father, / (16) if Thamar cook it for me.' / (17) ° shall tell Thamar / (18) to cook it for you and to bring it to you.' / (19) The king went out, / (20) Thamar came in through the door. / (21) 'What's the matter, Amnon, / (22) brother of my soul?' / (23) 'It's for love of you, Thamar, / (24) that I lie sick on my bed.' / (25) 'If you are sick for love of me, / (26) do not rise from the bed.' / (27) He puts forth his hand to her breast / (28) and flings her upon the bed. / (29) Sorrowing, Thamar went forth, / (30) sorrowing and shamed. / (31) On the threshold of the room / (32) she encountered Absalom. / (33) 'What's the matter, Thamar, / (34) that I see you thus ashamed?' / (35) 'Your brother Amnon / (36) has taken my honour and my good name.' / (37) 'Do not worry, Thamar, / (38)

for, before the sun does rise, / (39) you shall be well avenged'. (This translation is based on my own Greek version.)

UN HIJO TIENE EL REY DAVID — Un hijo tiene el rey David / y por nombre Amnón se llama; / namoróse de Tamar/aunque era su propia hermana. / Fuertes fueron los amores, / malo cayó echado en cama. / Un día por la mañana / su padre a verlo entrare. / — ¿Qué tienes tú, Amnón, / hijo mío de mi alma? / — Malo está, el rey mi padre, / malo está y no como nada. / — Si comerás tu, Amnón, / pichuguita de una pava? / — Yo la comeré, mi padre, / si Tamar me la guizara. / — Yo se lo diré a Tamar, / que te la guize y te la trayga. / El rey salió por ahí, / Thamar por la puerta entrara. / — ¿Qué tienes tú, Amnón, / hermano mío de mi alma? / — De tus amores, Tamar, / me trujeron a estas camas. / — Si de mi amor estás malo, / no te levantes de esta cama. / Tendióla la mano al pecho / y a la cama le arrolara. / Triste saliera Tamar, / triste saliera y mal airada. / La salida de la puerta / con Axalor se encontrara. / — ¿Qué tienes tú, Tamar, / que te veo tan airada? / — Tu hermano Amnón / me qxiitó honra y fama. / — No se te de nada, Tamar, / que antes que arrale el sol, / tu seras la bien vengada. (From Chanah Milner and Paul Storm's anthology, *Sefardische liederen en balladen-romanzas*. The Hague, Albersen & Co. B.V., 1974, pp. 52-3)

THAMAR AND AMNÓN — (1) The moon turns in the sky / (2) above the parched earth, / (3) while the summer sows / (4) roarings of tigers and of flames. / (5) Over the roofs / (6) nerves of metal resounded. / (7) A shriveled breeze came / (8) with the bleating of wool. / (9) The earth offered itself, full/(10) of healed wounds, / (11) or trembling with sharp / (12) searings of white light. // (13) Thamar was dreaming/ (14) of bireds in her throat, / (15) to the sound of gold tambourines / (16) and lunar guitars. / (17) Her nakedness in the eaves, / (18) sharp north wind of the palm-tree, / (19) seeks snow from her belly / (20) and hail nom her shoulders. / (21) Thamar was singing / (22) naked on the terrace. // (23) Around her feet, / (24) five frozen doves. / (25) Amnon, slender and hard, / (26) from the tower saw her, / (27) his loins full of spray / (28) and his beard waves. / (29) Her bright nakedness / (30) lay on the terrace, / (31) with the sound of an arrow /' (32) newly driven between teeth. / (33) Amnon was watching / (34) the moon, low and round, / (35) and he saw in the moon the breasts / (36) so hard of his sister. // (37) Half past three, and Amnon

/ (38) lay down on the bed. / (39) The whole room was suffering / (40) with his winged eyes. / (41) The heavy light / (42) buries villages in the brown sand, / (43) or uncovers in passing / (44) coral of rose or dahlia. / (45) Pressed lymph from the well / (46) sprouts silence in the pitcher. / (47) In the moss on the trunks / (48) the cobra lies singing. / (49) Amnon sighs on the bed's / (50) cool sheet. / (51) Ivy of goose-skin / (52) covers his burning flesh. / (53) Thamar came noiselessly in / (54) to the silent room, / (55) colour of vein or Danube, / (56) turbid with distant traces. / (57) Thamar, close my eyes / (58) with your constant daybreak. / (59) My threads weave in blood / (60) flounces on your skirt. / (61) Leave me alone, brother. / (62) Your kisses on my shoulder / (63) are wasps and zephyrs / (64) in a double swarm, of flutes. / (65) Thamar, in your high breasts / (66) are two fishes calling me, / (67) and in the bud of your fingers / (68) murmurs a sealed rose. // (69) The hundred horses of the king / (70) whinnied in the courtyard. / (71) The cubed sun resisted / (72) the slenderness of the vine. / (73) Now he seizes her by the hair, / (74) now her blouse he rends. / (75) Tepid corals sketch / (76) rivulets on blond paper. // (77) Oh, what shrieks are heard / (78) over the houses! / (79) What a thicket of daggers/(80) and torn tunics!/(81) On the gloomy stairs / (82) slaves go up and down. / (83) Pistons and thighs are at play / (84) beneath the idle clouds. / (85) All around Thamar / (86) virgin gypsies shriek / (87) and others gather up the droplets / (88) of her martyred flower. / (89) White cloths redden / (90) in the sealed rooms. / (91) Sounds of tepid dawn / (92) change vine-tendrils and fishes. // (93) A raging violator, / (94) Amnon flees on his mare. / (95) Negroes direct arrows at him / (96) from walls and watch-towers. / (97) And when the four horseshoes / (98) were four echoes, / (99) David with the scissors / (100) severed the strings of the harp.

THAMAR Y AMNÓN — La luna gira en el cielo / sobre las tierras sin agua / mientras el verano siembra / rumores de tigre y llama. / Por encima de los techos / nervios de metal sonaban, / Aire rizado venía / con los balidos de lana. / La tierra se ofrece llena / de heridas cicatrizadas, / o estremecida de agudos / cauterios de luces blancas. // Thamar estaba soñando / pájaros en su garganta, / al son de panderos fríos / y cítaras enlunadas. / Su desnudo en el alero, / agudo norte de palma, / pide copos a su vientre / y granizo a sus espaldas. / Thamar estaba cantando / desnuda por la terraza. // Alrededor de sus pies, / cinco palomas heladas. / Amnón,

delgado y concreto, / en la torre la miraba, / llenas las ingles de espuma / y oscilaciones la barba. / Su desnudo iluminado / se tendía en la terraza, / con un rumor entre dientes / de flecha recién clavada. / Amnón estaba mirando / la luna redonda y baja, / y vio en la luna los pechos / durísimos de su hermana. // Amnón a las tres y media / se tendió sobre la cama. / Toda la alcoba sufría / con sus ojos llenos de alas. / La luz, maciza, sepulta / pueblos en la arena parda, / o descubre transitorio / coral de rosas y dalias. / Linfa de pozo oprimada / brota silencio en las jarras. / En el musgo de los troncos / la cobra tendida canta. / Amnón gime por la tela / fresquísima de la cama. / Yedra del escalofrío / cubre su carne quemada. / Thamar entró silenciosa / en la alcoba silenciada, / color de vena y Danubio, / turbia de huellas lejanas. / Thamar, bórrame los ojos / con tu fija madrugada. / Mis hilos de sangre tejen / volantes sobre tu falda. / Déjame tranquila, hermano. / Son tu besos en mi espalda / avispas y vientecillos / en doble enjambre de flautas. / Thamar, en tus pechos altos / hay dos peces que me llaman, / y en la yema de tus dedos / rumor de rosa encerrada. // Los cien caballos del rey / en el patio relinchaban. / Sol en cubos resistía / la delgadez de la parra. / Ya la coge del cabello, / ya la camisa le rasga. / Corales tibios dibujan / arroyos de rubio mapa. // ¡ Oh, qué gritos se sentían / por encima de las casas! / ¡Qué espesura de puñales / y túnicas desgarradas! / Por las escaleras tristes / esclavos suben y bajan. / Émbolos y muslos juegan / bajo las nubes paradas. / Alrededor de Thamar / gritan vírgenes gitanas / y otras recogen las gotas / de su flor martirizada. / Paños blancos enrojecen / en las alcobas cerradas. / Rumores de tibia aurora / pámpanos y peces cambian. // Violador enfurecido, / Amnón huye con su jaca. / Negros le dirigen flechas / en muros y atalayas. / Y cuando los cuarto cascos / fueron cuatro resonancias, / David con unas tijeras / cortó las cuerdas del arpa.

(From Federico García Lorca, *Romancero Gitano*, 1928)

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