

Shem Tov Arduťiel's Moral Proverbs
and Other Old Castilian Poems Written by Jews

A bilingual selection of poems from the Old Spanish
translated and annotated by Adam Mahler

***FROM** Los proverbios morales/The Moral Proverbs*

Señor rey, noble, alto,
oí este sermón,
que viene dezir Santob,
judío de Carrión,

comunalment trobado,
de glosas moralmente
de filosofía sacado,
segunt aquí va siguiente.

Cuando el rey don Alfonso
finó, fincó la gente
como cuando el pulso
fallece al doliente,

que luego non cuidavan
que tan grant mejoría
a ellos fincava,
nin omne lo entendía.

Cuando la rosa seca
e en su tiempo sale,
el agua d'ella finca
rosada, que más vale,

así vós fincastes d'él
para muncho turar
e fazer lo que él
cobdiciava librar,

como la debda mía
que a vós muy poco monta,
con la cual yo podría
bevir sin toda onta.



High lord, noble king,
 hear this sermon
 Shem Tov, the Jew
 of Carrión, is giving,

these verses that follow
 he combed from the margins
 of moral philosophy,
 and rhymed in Castilian.³

When Alfonso perished
 the kingdom languished,
 like a person with
 a failing pulse.

At first they thought
 no cure existed,
 nor could they even
 imagine one.

Though the rose withers
 in its season,
 its rosewater lingers,⁴
 which is more precious.

Thus were you issued,
 to live a long life
 and settle the issues
 he wished to resolve,

say, the sum I'm owed,
 that's nothing to you,
 but for me enough
 to live without shame.⁵

³ An interpretative translation of *comunalment*, which Paloma Díaz-Mas and Carlos Mota take to mean "in the vernacular." Perry reads this passage, however, as signifying "for the benefit of all."

⁴ The comparison to rosewater was particularly resonant in Medieval Iberia, where the flowery essence had important cosmetic and ceremonial applications.

⁵ Scholars have cited these verses towards the end of Shem Tov's plea for royal patronage as evidence of his prior service in the court of Alfonso XI, who preceded Peter the Cruel (r. 1350-1369), the poem's ostensible addressee.



Señor, a mercé vosa
gradecer non me trebo
que por muito que [...]
rosa non diría o que debo

mercé sin fin, con rimas
Já moro esto [...]

Segunt cuál raíz tien,
el árbol así crece;
cuál es el omre o quién,
en sus obras parece.

Cual ventura oviere,
tal señor servirá,
que, cual señor sirviere,
tal gualardón avrá,

por que toda la villa
que faze algo de nada
vean la maravilla
de Dios cuánto es granda.

El cuerdo non consiente
tomar de sus bondades
plazer quanto en miente
le vienen sus maldades,

que, quanto es del punto
a la rueda, justicia
non monta del más justo
ante la su malicia.



I dare not praise,⁶
 My Lord, Your Grace,
 for the rosy words
 I muster fall short.

In rhyme I set
 your endless mercy,
 living in a state of
 [...]

As a tree's growth
 depends on its root,
 so a person's nature
 shows through one's works.

Man serves the master
 his lot accords,
 his reward will match
 the master served,

so all who make wealth
 as if from thin air
 will see the marvel
 of God—His greatness.

The wise man won't revel
 in the good he's done
 while he remembers
 the wrongs he's committed.

The just man's good deeds,
 like the spoke of a wheel,⁷
 can't exceed the sphere
 of his evil acts.

⁶ This epigram and the one immediately following it are conjectural translations based on fragmentary witnesses written in Galician-Portuguese.

⁷ In his 1987 translation of the *PM*, T.A. Perry establishes connection between Shem Tov's wheel and the heavenly sphere mapped by Maimonides in the *Book of Knowledge* (105).



El loco es su soçobra
 Que anda muy pagado,
 [...] buena obra
 Se fizo no [...]

cuántas malas ha fecho
 [...] oviese seso,
 andaría con derecho
 triste, malapreso.

Yo estando con cueita
 por miedo de pecados
 muchos que fiz, sin cuenta,
 menudos e granados,

teníame por muerto,
 mas vínóm al talante
 un conorte muy cierto
 que·m fizo bienandante:

omre torpe, sin seso,
 sería a Dios baldón
 la tu maldat en peso
 poner con su perdón.

Él te fizo nacer,
 vives en merced suya:
 ¿cómo podrá vencer
 a su obra la tuya?

Pecar es la tu maña
 e la suya, perdonar
 e alongar la saña,
 los yerros olvidar.



The fool's undoing⁸
 is his pride.
 He boasts of good works,
 and yet he neglects

his former crimes.
 If he had any sense,
 he would go in shame,
 a sorry wreck.

Racked with fear
 of my countless sins,
 small and large,
 I thought: I'm dead.

Then into my mind
 threaded these words
 of reassurance,
 making me glad:

Idiot man,
 you insult God,
 weighing your faults
 against His largesse.

He's why you were born.
 You live at his mercy.
 How could your work
 ever trump His?

Your way is to err —
 His to forgive,
 delay wrath,
 and forget your sins.

⁸ This and the following quatrain, composed in Old Castilian, are fragmentary in the original.



Bien como es más alto
el cielo que la tierra
el su perdón es tanto
mayor que la tu yerra.

Segunt el poder suyo,
tanto es la obra suya;
segunt el poder tuyo,
tal es la obra tuya.

Obrar de omne, que nada
es todo el su fecho,
e su vida penada
es a muy poco trecho,

¿cómo sería tan granda
como la del Criador
que todo est mundo manda
e faz en derredor

andar aquella rueda
del sol e las estrellas
que jamás nunca queda
e sabe cuenta d'ellas?

Cuanto el tu estado
es ante la su gloria
monta el tu pecado
a su misericordia.

Sería cosa estraña,
muy fuera de natura,
la tu yerra tamaña
ser como su mesura.



Just as the heavens
tower over earth,
so His forgiveness
dwarfs your error.

As is His power,
so is His work.
As for you—
as your power permits.

All man's efforts
amount to nothing;
his bitter life
on earth is fleeting.

How could your labor
outstrip the work
of the Creator,
who governs the world

and turns without cease
that heavenly wheel—
the sun and the stars
whose number He fixed?⁹

As your earthly lot
compares to His glory,
weigh your error
against His mercy.

It'd be a strange feat
that defied nature
if your sins exhausted
Divine mercy.

⁹ A clear allusion, in the Old Castilian, to Ps. 147:4–5 ("[The Lord] telleth the number of the stars").



De aquesto non temas,
que seer non podría,
e non tornes jamás
en la tu rebeldía;

mas te arrepentir
e fazer oración
e merced le pedir
con magnifestación

de todo lo pasado,
e partir d'ello mano.
Con tanto, perdonado
serás bien de liviano.

En sueño una fermosa
besava una vegada,
estando muy medrosa
de los de su posada;

fallé boca sabrosa,
saliva muy temprada.
Non vi tan dulce cosa
más agra a la dexada.

Non sabe la persona
torpe que se baldona
por las priesas del mundo
qué nos da a menudo;¹⁰

non sab que la manera
del mundo ésta era:
tener siempre viciosos
a los ombres astrosos,

¹⁰ The first of a sextet of verses that trade the poem's alternate rhyme scheme (*abab*) for an *aabb* quatrain.



Don't worry about it.
That won't happen.
Avoid returning
to your rebellion,

rather repent
and offer prayer,
ask of God mercy,
admit in detail

to your past and run—
fast from your error.
Do that, no doubt
you'll be forgiven.

One night I dreamt
I kissed a maid:
lovely, though afraid
of those of her house.

Her lips were fresh,
her spit was warm.
A sweet girl never
parted more bitterly.

The fool doesn't know
he insults himself
when he caves to pressures
of the moment.

He knows nothing
of the world or its ways:
uplifting the wicked
time and again,



e ser d'él guerreados
 los omnes onrados.
 Alça los ojos, cata.
 Verás en la mar alta

e sobre las sus cuestras
 andan cosas muertas,
 e yacen çafondadas
 en él piedras preciadas;

e el peso así
 avaxa otrosí
 la más llena balança
 e la más vazia alça

En el cielo estrellas
 e sabe cuenta d'ellas
 non escurecen una
 sinon el sol e la luna.

Un astroso cuidava,
 y, por mostrar que era
 sutil, yo le enbiava
 escripto de tiserá.

El necio non sabía
 que lo fiz por infinta,
 porque yo non quería
 perder en él la tinta;

ca, por non le deñar,
 fize vazia la llena
 y no-l quise donar
 la carta sana, buena,



while it wages war
on honorable men.
Look, cast your eyes
towards the high seas:

Dead remnants float
on cresting waves,
precious stones,
meanwhile, lay buried,

just as the balance
lets sink the heavy
plate, raising high
the plate that's empty.

Of the stars in the sky
whose number He tells,¹¹
the eclipse only dims
the sun and moon.

To a sorry soul
I sent a letter
cleverly composed
with scissors—the fool,¹²

baffled, missed the joke:
I just didn't think
he was worth my ink.
Out of disdain,

I emptied my letter
to the last word,
—I deprived him of
a good, clean page.

¹¹ Another allusion to Ps. 147:4.

¹² This quintet of epigrams has been the subject of much scholarly debate; it reproduces the Hispano-Semitic trope of scissor-writing, which seized on the identical trilateral roots, in both Arabic and Hebrew, of the words *scissor* and *tale*. It is hard to say with complete confidence what this sequence is “about”; the grammatical person of the first epigram, in particular, makes for difficult reading. The scissor-writing motif was, at any rate, a Shemtovian favorite, and the subject of the Jewish author's celebrated *maqama* (rhymed prose). The sequence affirms at once the centrality of the letter to Shem Tov's intellectual project and his reliance on a distinctly Hispano-Semitic tropological inheritance.



como el que tomava
meollos d'avellanas
para sí y donava
al otro caxcas vanas,

yo del papel saqué
la razón que dezía;
con ella me finqué
dile carta vazía.

Las mis canas teñílas,
non por las aborrecer,
nin por desdezirlas,
nin mancebo parecer:

mas con miedo sobejo
que hombres buscarían
en mí seso de viejo
e non lo fallarían.

Pues trabajo me mengua
donde puede aver
pro, diré de mi lengua
algo de mi saber.

Si non es lo que quiero,
quiero yo lo que es;
si pesar he primero,
plazer avré después.

Mas, pues aquella rueda
del cielo una ora
jamás non está queda,
peora e mejora,



Like someone who keeps
the hazelnut kernels
for himself, tossing
others spent shells,

from that paper
I removed my prose,
which I'd keep. He'd get
an empty sheet.

I dyed my white hair,¹³
not that it bothered me,
not to deceive
or look any younger,

but out of deep fear
that men might seek
an elder's wisdom
and find none in me.

For lack of work
that earns me income,
I'll render in verse
a share of my wisdom.

If it's not what I want,
let me want what it is.
If it peeves me at first,
in time it will please me.

The wheel of heaven
never keeps still:
now earthly lots rise,
now they decline.

¹³ These verses form the basis of Antonio Machado's short tribute to Shem Tov in his *Nuevas canciones*: "Como Don San Tob, / se tiñe las canas, / y con más razón" (You would do well / to dye your white hair / like Don Shem Tov).



aun aqueste laso
renovará esprito;
este pandero manso
aún el su retinto

sonará; verná dia
avrá su libra tal
precio como solía
valer el su quintal.

Yo prové lo pesado,
provaré lo liviano;
quicá mudaré fado
cuand mudare la mano,

que el que non se muda
non falla lo que plaz;
dizen que ave muda
agüero nunca faz.

Porque pisan poquiella
sazón tierra, perlando,
omes que pisa ella
para siempre callando,

recelé, si fablase,
que enojo faría;
pero si me callase
por torpe fincaría.

Entendí que en callar
avría grant mejoría;
aborrecí hablar
e fuéme peoría;



This weary soul
will renew his strength,
this slackened drum
again will beat

his rhythm. The day
will come when his pound
will command a hundred
times its old rate.

I have borne burdens.
I will feel lightness.
My luck might change
when I change my mind.

A man who fears change
draws muted pleasure.
A mute bird, they say,
makes a poor augur.

For a short while,
chattering men tread
the earth, which treads
their bones in silence.

I feared if I spoke
I'd cause a bother,
—yet, keeping quiet,
I'd seem a boor.

I judged silence
the wiser course.
I renounced speech;
it made matters worse.



que non só para menos
que otros de mi ley
que ovieron muy buenos
donadíós del rey.

Mas vergüença afuera
me tiró y a pro;
si no, tanto no fuera
sin honra y sin pro.

Si mi razón es buena,
non sea despreciada
porque la diz presona
rafez, que mucha espada

de fin azero sano
sab de rota vaína
salir, e del gusano
se faz la sede fina,

e astroso garrote
faze muy ciertos trechos,
e algún roto pellote
encubre blancos pechos,

e muy sutil trotero
aduze buenas nuevas,
e muy vil vocero
presenta ciertas pruebas.



I possess no less art
 than my fellow Jews
 who have received
 great gifts from the king.

Outright shame
 has knocked me down.
 I rightly live
 down and out, disgraced.¹⁴

May truthful words¹⁵
 not be loathed
 because a base man
 spoke them — fine swords

of well-forged steel
 are drawn from broken
 sheaths. Rich silks
 are spun by worms.

A rickety catapult
 strikes on target.
 A tattered coat
 covers white breasts.

A scrawny messenger
 brings good news.
 A sleazy lawyer
 argues a good case.

¹⁴ This epigram poses significant challenges for the translator, turning as it does on the polysemy of *pro* as a noun meaning "profit" and as a preposition meaning "out" or "about" (in the latter's spatial sense). Shame tosses the poet *about*, and it makes him *go without*. My interpretation attempts to recapture some of the original's paronomastic verve, albeit in roundabout fashion.

¹⁵ Thus begins Shem Tov's iconic defense of his Judaism. The subject of much scholarly inquiry, including a chapter in T.A. Perry's *Moral Proverbs*, these verses forecast with devastating accuracy the criticism that Shem Tov's work would later face. In 1496, the likely convert Fernán Verde was forced to defend his admiration for the *PM* and other Jewish works before an inquisitorial tribunal. Verde justified his literary predilections largely by reproducing Shem Tov's argument here: a good work is worthy of study, regardless of its authors' origins.



Por nacer en espino
non val la rosa, cierto,
menos, nin el buen vino
por salir del sarmiento;

non val el açor menos
por nacer de mal nido,
nin los enxemplos buenos
por los dezir judío.

No·m desdeñen por corto,
que mucho judió largo¹⁶
non entraría a coto
fazer lo que yo fago.

Bien sé que nunca tanto
cuatro trechos de lança
alcançaría cuanto
la saeta alcança,

e razón muy granada
e diz en pocos versos,
e cinta muy delgada
sufre costados gruesos,

e mucho omne entendido,
por seer vergonçoso,
es por torpe tenido
e llamado astroso,

e si viese sazón,
mejor e más apuesta
diría su razón
qu'el que lo denuesta.

¹⁶ The word-final stress on *judió*, though striking to modern readers, is encountered not infrequently in Hispano-Jewish writings. Elsewhere in the *PM*, Shem Tov pronounces this term differently, as *judío* (e.g., the dedicatory poem on pp. 19–20).



The rose is no less,
of course, for its thorns,
nor are good wines
from low vines refused.

For its modest nest,
the hawk is no less—,
nor sayings less wise
on the lips of a Jew.

Don't judge me uncouth,
for many a refined
Jew would fail
to match what I do.

I know full well
four throws of the spear
can't outshoot a single
shot of the arrow.

Great wisdom is said
in short verses.
By narrow belts
wide flanks are girded.

For his reserve,
many a subtle
thinker is scorned,
or called a dolt.

When the time is right,
he'll speak his mind
with clarity and poise
his haters can't muster.



Quiero dezir del mundo
e de las sus maneras
e cómo de él dubdo
palabras muy ciertas,

que non sé tomar tiento
nin fazer pleitesía
de acuerdos más de ciento
me torno cada día.

Lo que uno denuesta,
veo a otro loallo;
lo que este apuesta,
veo a otro afeallo;

la vara que menguada
la diz comprador,
esta mesma, sobrada
la diz el vendedor;

el que lança la lança
seméjal vagarosa,
pero al que alcança,
seméjal presurosa;

farían dos amigos
cinta de un anillo
en que dos enemigos
non meterían un dedillo;

con lo que Lope gana,
Rodrigo empobrece;
con lo que Sancho sana,
Domingo adolece.



About the world
and its ways—and how much
I doubt it—I wish
to speak truthful words.

Lacking in tact
and courtesy, each day
I take back a hundred
decisions or more.

I see one man praise
what another disdains,
one man disparage
what another cherishes.

The seller says
his rod is too long.¹⁷
The buyer, meanwhile,
claims he was shorted.

The person who throws
the spear judges it
sluggish—not so
the one it approaches.

True friends could wear
as a girdle the ring
in which two foes
can't place a finger.

What makes Lope rich
ruins Rodrigo,
what saves Sancho
plagues Domingo.

¹⁷ As Díaz-Mas and Mota note, Shem Tov here refers to the *vara*, or rod, that medieval surveyors used for the purposes of demarcating land or meting out quantities of goods.



FROM Las coplas de Yosef/The Song of Joseph

Según que lo departe de quien avía talante de un ombre sin arte apuesto era, gigante,	la nuestra escritura, de ver la su fegura, otrosí de medida, por nombre avía Yosef.
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Yosef sienpre temiera con sus ermanos foera allí luego fiziera cuando los ribolbiera,	al Dio de los fonsados, pastor en los ganados, uno de los pecados con su padre, Yosef.
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Su padre lo quería y luego le fazía Ermanos que avía mas gran envidia avían	querencia muy granada una aljuba onrada. non le tenían en nada, como andaba Yosef.
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A sus ermanos llamaba «Gavillas soñaba todas se levantavan, mas muy queda estaba	e ansí les dizía: que fazíamos un día, obedecían a la mía, gavilla de Yosef.»
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Íbanselo soltar «¿Si tú as de podestar si tú as de seer ¡Nós te abremos de matar	apresuradamente: sobre toda esta gente, a nós por rigente? por tus sueños, Yosef!»
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Otro soeño soñaba, que en uno andaban a él se le encorbavan Este sueño contaba,	e non en noche una, el sol e la luna, con estrellas diez y una. a su padre, Yosef.
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Su padre lo soltaba, a sus ermanos pezaba, y luego le enbiaba vianda les mandaba	sabíalo de cierto, avían mal talento, a ellos al disierto, a ellos con Yosef.
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Our scriptures tell us of a man,
honest, measured, a towering figure,
all who cared to glance his way
thought him handsome. His name was Joseph.

Always he'd feared the God of heavens'
hosts. He fed flocks with his brothers. One day
he brought his father evil report of
what they had done — the sin of Joseph.

From his father, who loved him deeply,
he received a robe, richly adorned,
only his brothers hated him, and envied
how the going was easy for Joseph.

He called to his brothers, saying, "Hear
my dream: we were binding sheaves one day,
yours arose and, circling round, bowed to mine.
Standing proud was the sheaf of Joseph."

Quickly they teased apart its meaning:
"So you think you'll rule over us all,
that you'll be our king? Then surely
we'll kill you for your dreams, Joseph!"

Another night, another dream.
This time—he told his father—the sun
and moon were one, eleven stars
joined in, all bowing before Joseph.

His father, knowing what it all meant,¹⁸
ordered that Joseph journey into
the desert, to ply with food his bitter
brothers, who had it in for Joseph.

¹⁸ As Girón and Minervini note, Jacob's foreknowledge that the dream would come true is likely sourced from Midrashic commentary; it does not appear in the corresponding Biblical passage, in Genesis 37:10–11. Jacob's plan to send Joseph to his brothers carrying provisions is also likely of Midrashic origin.



Enco[n]tró en la carrera e luego él se foera si á visto pasar a e luego respondiera	al ángel Gabri'el, a preguntar a él fijos de Yisra'el, el ángel a Yosef.
«Si veniste presto, que yo lo sé por cierto Dixo: «Non faría toerto mas de muy mal talento	tú tórnesto priado, que te an amenazado.» a mi padre onrado,» los buscaba Yosef.
Fallólos en los yermos Loego dixeron: «Ya vimos ¡Andad e matemos ¡En pozo lo echemos,	a todo ese dor. do viene el soñador. nuestro rebulbedor! al malo de Yosef!»
Re'uben les dixera: Fazelde con que muera Re'uben esa ora que dezir bien podiera:	«¡Non lo queraes matar! en el pozo estar.» mucho era de rebtar, «¡Dexemos a Yosef!»
Loego le tomaron presto le despujaron en pozo lo echaron en él lo dexaron	aquellos sos ermanos, el aljuba a manos, de sierpes [y] guzanos, solo a Yosef.
Del mal que fazían sentábanse e comían gran recua veían Entonces fazía bien	non se demoraban, y sos ojos alçaban: de moros que pasaban. Yehudah a Yosef.
Yehudah el fuerte del moso ubo miente, Dixo: «Non le demos muerte, Apresuradamente	como osos e toros questo como oros. vendámoslo a los moros.» alçaron a Yosef.



Along the way, he met the angel
Gabriel. He asked if in his travels
he had encountered Israel's sons—
Thus the angel replied to Joseph:

"If you came here in haste, you best hasten home.
I know the danger your brothers pose."
"I won't fail my father," he said. Now leery
of his brothers, along went Joseph.

He found his kin among the wastelands.¹⁹
They said: "Look! Here comes the dreamer!
Let's kill our slanderer, cast to the bottom
of a well that wicked Joseph."

Reuben spoke: "We need not kill him.
Just let him waste inside the well."
Thus Reuben earned his share of blame,
who failed to say, "Just free Joseph!"

His brothers seized him at once, stripping
him of his robe with their bare hands.
Deep into a well of snakes and worms²⁰
they cast their brother, abandoned Joseph.

They sat, not dwelling on their crime,
but rather savoring their meal. They glanced
at a Moorish caravan passing by—
Judah was about to do right by Joseph.

Judah was strong like a bear or a bull.
His thoughts turned to the boy prized like gold:
"Don't kill him—let's sell him to the Moors!"
Up from the well they hoisted Joseph.

¹⁹ The author here employs a Hebrew term, *dor*, meaning "generation," to refer to Joseph's brothers. The Hebraism perhaps underscores Joseph's, his brothers', and, more broadly, a Jewish audience's common issuance from the patriarch Jacob.

²⁰ The "snakes and worms" are, as Girón and Minervini note, a Talmudic variation on the "waterless" well in Genesis 37:23–24.



Cuando del pozo salía,	vendiéronle a mercadores,
valía poca cuantía,	que perdió sus colores,
allá donde yazía	tomáronle temores.
A Agibto decendía	con los moros Yosef.

Los nueve ermanos foeron en aquesta traición,	
la šekhinah pusieron	en so culación,
e así se avinieron	echar so maldición
a ninguno que dixere	que vendieron a Yosef.

Re'uben no estaba	cuando Yosef foé vendido,
al pozo se tornaba	despoés que obo comido,
al moço non fallaba,	fizo grande apellido
e loego se rasgaba	sos paños por Yosef.

Re'uben lloraba	e gran llanto fazía,
a los nueve tornaba	e así les dezía:
«En el pozo buscaba	por ver se yazía,
mas non le fallaba	a mi ermano Yosef.»

Cabrito de cabrón	loego lo degollaron,
su aljoba tomaron,	menuda la pararon,
bien la ensangrentaron,	bermeja la turnaron,
e así la lebaron	al padre de Yosef.

Ya'aqob coando la vido	en aquellas çazones,
fizo grande apellido	e dixo estas razones:
«Fijo eres comido	de osos u de leones,
mas nonca abré en olbido	a mi fijo Yosef.»

Ya'aqob enpeçaba	de rasgar los sus paños
e luego ulbidaba	los sus vicios tamaños
e non se conortaba	con soyos ni con estraños,
que ya no esperaba	de más ver a Yosef.



They sold him to merchants for a pittance.
 For while Joseph was lying in the well,
 fear drained the color from his face.
 Down to Egypt, the Moors took Joseph.

The nine traitors counted God's Presence²¹
 in their quorum. They cast a curse
 on anybody who dared reveal
 that they had sold their brother Joseph.

Reuben, sated, returned to the well.
 Having missed the sale — and with
 the boy nowhere to be found — he tore
 his garments, and he cried out, "Joseph!"

Reuben began to keen and wail,
 he turned to the nine and said: "I went
 to see if he still lay in the well—
 I couldn't find my brother Joseph!"

They slit the throat of a fatling goat,
 they tore to shreds their brother's robe
 and dyed it dark red with the blood—thus they
 returned to Jacob his gift to Joseph.

When Jacob saw the robe in tatters,
 he spoke in sobs and shouted out:
 "My son—the snack of lions or bears!
 I'll never forget you, son, my Joseph."

Jacob, numb to all pleasure, started
 to rend his clothes. He took no comfort
 in strangers or in kin—he thought
 he'd never again lay eyes on Joseph.

²¹ Here the Old Castilian text employs a Rabbinic term, *šekhina* (referring to God's abode or a perceptible Divine Presence), perhaps to heighten the sense of moral outrage: nine of the brothers establish their *minyan*, or quorum, based on the arrogant assumption that God is backing their scheme to dispose of Joseph. The account of the false quorum is of Midrashic, not Biblical, origin.



Yosef ya lo leban do estaba soterrada e ansí le dezía «¡Ay madre, al Dio ruegues	por carreras de Efratah, la so madre unrada, y ansí le hablaba: por tu fijo Yosef!»
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Dixo: «Fijo non temas que allá donde te lleban los sueños se afirmarán Loego se le bolbían	ni tomes coidado, tú serás bien onrado: que tú as soñado.» sos colores a Yosef.
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Los moros decendieron a Yosef vendieron a buen señor lo dieron, que de cierto supieron	a tierra de Agibto, segón es por escrito, donde era muy bien quisto, quién era Yosef.
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El Dio fue en su guía su señor lo tenía por mejor se tenía todo su aver ponía	e d'él fue manparado, mucho bien onrado, de que lo uvo cobrado, en manos de Yosef.
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Muy apuesto andaba su señora le amaba, tan mal que le aquexaban Luego le llamaba	como rosas e flores, prendiéronle temores, aquellos sus amores. su señora a Yosef.
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«¡Ven acá, mis amores, que aquesas tus colores comigo a tus sabores de mí abrás onores	quiérasme conortar! me abrían de matar, te quieras deleitar, si lo fazes Yosef.»
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Yosef respundía «Del señor la valía pues ¿cómo le faría Gran jura fazía	razón muy afeitada: yo la obe cobrada, tal traición granada?» de no ferlo Yosef.
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By now Joseph was headed to Efrat,
where his beloved mother lay buried.
He muttered, and he murmured: "Oh mother!
Pray to God for your son Joseph!"

She said, "Do not be afraid, my child,
don't fret, for where you're going, you'll be
honored—and the dreams you dreamt, confirmed."
This uttered, the color returned to Joseph.

The Moors arrived in the land of Egypt.
They had sold Joseph, scripture tells us,
to a kindly master who adored him—
all who knew him admired Joseph.

In all God was his guide and his guardian.
His master, better off for his purchase,
held him in such high regard, he placed
all that he owned in the hands of Joseph.

Joseph was handsomer than a garden
rose. His master's wife, Potiphar,
gripped by fear, yearned for him achingly—
and so, one day, she beckoned to Joseph:

"Come here, my love, try to console me.
Your skin's rich hue will surely kill me,
do with me as you please, and I'll see
that you are richly rewarded, Joseph."

Joseph's response was careful, measured:
"I owe my honor to my master—
how could I betray him so brazenly?
He wouldn't do it, he swore, not Joseph.



Respundió so señora «Tu fas me enamora ¡Yaze comigo agora, Luego respondía	como desvergonçada: e soy tu desdeñada. non sea misturada!» otra razón Yosef.
«Aunque fuese cierto sabe lo encobierto vee el que faze tuerto, Gra[n]de sería el riebito	de non aver mestura, el Señor del altura, dale mala majadura. que echarían a Yosef.»
«Con sortija apuesta con tal cosa como ésta «De toda esta cuenta por eso só suelta,	e bendición granada es la mujer ligada. » nós non tenemos nada» para ti, Yosef.»
«La mujer casada si non es güerdada otro, si non es vañada Razón muy apuestada	a nós es contrallosa, el tienpo que es escosa, cuando le viene su rosa.» respondía Yosef.
«¡Yosef, faz mi mandado, Abrás linage onrado que así lo é fallado Non lo avía escosado	non estés en porfía! en la tu judería, en la mi estrellería.» de fazerlo Yosef.
Yosef ya callaba y sus ojos alçaba y una fegura estaba que toda semejava	y fazer lo quería, allá donde se iba allá donde jazía al padre de Yosef.
«¡Fazer non lo quieras! que de doze piedras tu piedra, si yerras, fijo, ¡e antes mueras	—le dixo la fegura— que son de apostura será la más escura, que lo fagas, Yosef!»



His Lady responded, lacking all shame,
 "Your gaze stirs my heart, and you spurn me —
 Lay with me, and let nobody know of it!"
 Another thought occurred to Joseph:

"Even if we were never found out,
 the Lord on High uncovers everything,
 and punishes severely those caught sinning —
 How they would heap blame on Joseph!"

"By two things is a woman bound:
 a ring and a solemn vow." "About
 such things," she said, "I couldn't care less.
 For your sake, I'm unattached, Joseph."

"A married woman is forbidden us,
 so too a virgin who can't keep chaste,
 or one whose rose has bloomed yet goes²²
 unbathed," said, and wisely, Joseph.

"Quit being stubborn," she said, "And do
 as I say. Your line will be the noblest
 among Jews—I've read it in the stars.
 Little, now, was stopping Joseph.

He said nothing, desire stirring,
 and raised his eyes in her direction,
 yet a figure had arisen in her place:
 the likeness of the father of Joseph.

"Do not do it," this likeness said,
 "For if you sin, your stone will turn
 the darkest of twelve perfect gems.
 Sooner die than give in, my son, Joseph!"

²² As Girón and Minervini note, the "rose" is the author's spin on the widely attested Romance term for menstruation, *flor*. As recently as the 19th-century English-language writers referred to a woman's period as a "monthly flower." A *tria sunt* of forbidden women, the catalogue cites prohibitions against adultery, deflowering outside of marriage, and sexual relations with a woman who has not undergone *mikveh*, or ritual bathing, after her period. Another detail of Midrashic origin, per Girón and Minervini.



Yosef coando vido
alçó los sus ojos
pensó de ser ferido
temió de ser caído

tal cosa como ésta,
y sale por la puerta,
peor que de saeta,
en el infierno Yosef.

Gran dolor tenía
y luego corría
Dixo cuando le azía:
Y luego le ronpía

por él la su señora
tras d'él en esa ora.
«¡A mí vernás agora!»
sus paños a Yosef.

Ella dio apellido
cuando vino su marido,
«El tu sierbo querido
luego sea prendido

y fué alburuçada,
luego la voz alçaba:
me obiera forçada,
tu sierbo Yosef.»

Coando su señor vido
Yosef foé prendido
y luego fue metido
doze años estobo

la tal ocasión,
a grande traición
dentro de la prisión,
en la cárcel Yosef.

Aquél que guardaba
a Yosef conortaba
y mocho lo amaba
y sienpre andaba

aguesas prisiones
con buenas razones
en aquesas sazones,
el Dio con Yosef.

El rey esas sazones
con dos sus barones
mandó a los asayones
echarlos en prisiones

obo malos talentos
que lo eran sirbientes,
que se fallan presentes
donde estaba Yosef.

En la cárcel estaban,
una noche suñaban
loego se lebantaban,
ellos non pensaban

non avían fiadores,
y avían temores,
non avían soltadores,
que los soltase Yosef.



When Joseph saw where things were going,
his gaze broke, he bolted out the door.
He feared a wound worse than an arrow's
strike: he'd burn in hell, thought Joseph.

His master's wife was feeling love's pangs.
She chased after Joseph, clutched his sleeve,
and said, "You will come to me at once!"
She nearly tore the robe off Joseph.

She started shrieking and yelping—when her
husband arrived, she screamed louder still:
"Your beloved servant tried to rape me—
off to prison with your Joseph!"

For the scene his master stumbled on,
Joseph was seized, falsely accused,
and sent, without delay, to prison—
they would be twelve long years for Joseph.

The jailer who kept watch would soothe
Joseph with his kind conversation.
The guard's heart kept growing fonder—
always and everywhere, God was with Joseph.

The king, meanwhile, had started to sour
on two lords in his service. He ordered
all officers present jail both men
in the same prison where he held Joseph.

One night in prison, the guards away,
troubling dreams jolted both lords
awake. They thought no dream-tellers
were in their midst, oblivious to Joseph.



Yosef con bondades	d'él fuerun pregontados:
«Amigos, ¿cómo estades	atán desmayados?
¿Por qué non favlades	y estáis callados?»
Loego sus puridades	dezían a Yosef.

«Esta noche suñaba	— le dixo el eçcacciano —
que yo ubas tomaba,	fazía vino tenprano
e al rey espremía	de ellas en la su mano.»
Muy alegre soltava	este sueño Yosef.

Dixo: «¡Faz alegría!	¡Non estés desmayado!
que á de venir un día	del rey serás onrado,
e a tu escancianía	loego serás tornado
— que gran sabeduría	sabía Yosef — .

De que de esta prisión	tú fueres soltado,
dirás de mi ocasión	a ese rey onrado,
de buena razón	serás mi abogado,
que a grande traición	fue preso Yosef.



Gently Joseph posed these questions:
“Why the pallor on your faces?
Why, my friends, do you keep silent?”
The lords held nothing back from Joseph.

“Tonight I dreamed,” said the cupbearer,
“I was plucking grapes to make young wine —
I crushed them into the hand of the king.”
Word of this dream gladdened Joseph.

“Take heart!” he replied, “Do not dismay.
The day will come when the king will restore
you to honor, his cupbearer once again” —
how they were wise, these words of Joseph!

“And when at last you are freed from prison,
then you will appear before the king,
my well-spoken advocate, saying, “A great
injustice has been done to Joseph.”

