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PART III
DIASPORA
In folk literature the novella functions as an intermediate genre between the fantasy world of the fairy tale and the realistic world of the legend. The plot of the novella takes place in reality: time, place, and names of heroes can be indicated. There are no supernatural characters and no wondrous transformations as in fairy tales. Everything described could have happened in reality, but unlike the legend, the novella is full of strange events, adventures, accidental events, and exact timing. Everything is strange, amazing, but still possible. The primary emphases in the novella are two human traits: wisdom and love. The main force that controls the plot is fate. No one—not even a king—can fight this force.

The fairy tale takes place in a world of fiction and fantasy and is considered a genre appropriate to children and women. The legend requires emotional involvement or religious faith and is told and heard as a true story about exemplary behavior. The novella, on the other hand, is usually a long story, very stylized, and based on literary sources, making use of proverbs and quotations. It fulfills the social necessity for wonderful, amazing worlds without crossing the borderline between reality and the supernatural. Its story is told as if it could have happened even though we know that it probably did not. Thus, the listener feels more comfortable with the novella than with the fairy tale or with the legend.

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In this article, I will consider one Sephardic novella told in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) in Jerusalem in the 1930s to Yosef Meyuhas, who wrote it in Hebrew, elaborated on and styled it, and published it in his collection *Ma'asiyyot am livnei qedem* (Folk Tales for Ancient People).

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Meyuhas's collection, published in Jerusalem in 1938, was the first Sephardic collection to be published in Israel. It includes twenty-eight stories divided according to ethnic group: fifteen Sephardic, seven Persian, four Yemenite, one Georgian, and one Moroccan. In his introduction, Meyuhas describes his goals and method of work:

I go and write down the stories from original sources, from the narrators themselves in their own language. Then I write them in Hebrew and I stylize and elaborate on them. Then I read them to my pupils in the high school of which I am the head, and only then do I publish them. (12)

Thus, after using the stories he collected as didactic material in his school, Meyuhas presumably has made changes according to the reactions of his students before publishing the polished tales.

This method is very different from the academic scientific method of documentation in which stories are recorded on tape and written as they are told without changing a word. Meyuhas chose a very high Hebrew heavily influenced by the biblical style, which required biblical grammatical forms, and deliberately interwove verses and expressions taken from the Bible. He was very conscious of what he was doing; it was part of his ethnic ideology. In his introduction, he wrote:

I call from the bottom of my heart to all my Sephardic brothers and I say: Come back to the Sephardic culture. But only to the past of this culture. A past that has already written a brilliant golden page in our history. But this page needs to be supplemented. Each of us—the Sephardic people—have to collect something of this important tradition [i.e., folklore]: romances, songs, customs, descriptions of everyday life, festivals.... It is important that those materials will stay forever in our memories and be written in the history book of the Jews. (16–17)

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Yosef Meyuhas is credited with calling for the preservation of ethnic cultures long before it became the official cultural policy of the State of Israel in the 1970s. Meyuhas called for the preservation of the Sephardic group culture through collection and documentation. But he did not think that it was necessary to document it in its own language, even though the language of an ethnic culture is considered to be its most prominent trait. He himself transformed this Judeo-Spanish oral tradition into a high literary Hebrew. He feared that the Ladino tradition would not continue to survive, and he wanted to commemorate it for posterity. In 1938 he was already very aware of the importance of Hebrew as the common language that would unify the Jewish people. This approach later became the official ideology of David Ben-Gurion and became institutionalized when the State of Israel was established. Meyuhas believed that he was solving the conflict between ethnic group language and the unified Hebrew language by documenting the ethnic group traditions in Hebrew.

Another important point about Meyuhas's work is that he did not fall into the trap of an in-group author describing his own heritage. He did not need to censor texts in order to show only the "beauty of the legacy." He did not turn to nostalgia: for example, he did not censor the first episode in the Sephardic version of Cinderella, in which the daughter kills her own mother.3

The turning point in Meyuhas's life came when he heard a lecture given by the poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik, and he made the decision to document the background of his own ethnic group. Meyuhas wrote:

And here is the place to tell the audience with joy that my main motivation to start collecting Sephardic folklore was my meeting with our greatest poet, Bialik. ... I had the honor to be present at his lecture, and I heard him calling: "Go back to the Sephardic culture." ... He [Bialik] talked about "tribes," about the ancient division of Israel into different tribes. He thought that this structure has great advantages, since each tribe has its own color and its own traits.... From this point of view, I understood this call from our poet to us, the Sephardic people... and because of that I chose for myself, since I am Sephardic, too, to take care of Sephardic folklore, especially folktales. (13–14)

Bialik’s call in 1927 for cultural pluralism motivated Meyuhas to go back to his own heritage, but it took him eleven more years before he was able to publish his collection.

All fifteen of the Sephardic stories chosen by Meyuhas are defined as folktales (fairy tales and novellas), although it can be assumed that during his extensive fieldwork among the Sephardic people of Jerusalem he heard other genres as well, such as historical and religious legends, or humorous stories about Djuha—a literary character who is the “trickster” and simpleton of Sephardic folk literature—both of which are very common among this group.

According to his professed ideology, his stories are very much anchored in Spain, the long-ago homeland of the Sephardic Jews. This is emphasized in Meyuhas’s collection much more than in Sephardic collections by other authors, who collected tales in which other countries appeared—the countries where the Sephardic Jews fled when they were expelled from Spain in 1492, such as Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and Morocco. Of the fifteen stories Meyuhas published, six take place in Spain. All the heroes living in Spain before the expulsion are very wealthy and have high positions in the king’s court. The stories are full of references to Sephardic ethnic culture: names of the heroes, idioms and expressions that he left in Ladino, descriptions of food, and everyday life and customs.

Since I have not been able to see his original notes in Ladino, I do not know how much Meyuhas changed or elaborated the stories to fit them to his declared ideology to express the rich culture of the Sephardic Jews. I can only analyze the text as he eventually published it.

I purposely chose the story that most typically exemplified Meyuhas’s concepts: “The Wealthy Señor Miguel.” As the story is very long (fifteen pages, which is not typical of oral tales told today), I will summarize the plot according to the nine subchapters of the story as Meyuhas published it. The original oral narrator, of course, would never have divided the tale in this manner.

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1. **Without title.** Once there lived in Toledo a very wealthy man, called by the people of the town “the wealthy Señor Miguel,” but his real name was Miguel de la Roza. Señor Miguel had inherited a legendary fortune from his ancestors. On the gate of his palace he hung a big sign, also inherited from his fathers, that said: “No one withstands wealth—not even kings.”

Señor Miguel had an only son, Alberto, who was extraordinarily handsome and wise, as well as possessed of a noble character. As wealthy as Señor Miguel was, so was he also generous, and his donations to charity were always very large. His palace was always full of guests. It was said that “whoever entered crying, left laughing” (ken entra yorando sale riyendo). The fame of Señor Miguel became known even to the king, who one day decided to come himself with his vizier (minister) to see this man with his own eyes.

2. **The visit and its results.** One night the king and his vizier came to the Jew’s palace disguised as simple people. They were amazed by the beauty, the richness, the generosity, and the artistic taste of everything—the rooms, the furniture, the crystal lamps, the food, the musicians, and the dancers. The atmosphere was as if everything was enchanted and full of magic. When they left, the king noticed the sign at the gate. He immediately became furious that this arrogant Jew dared to challenge kings.

3. **The trial.** The day after his visit, the king called all his counselors, told them about the Jew, and demanded that they bring him to trial immediately. Señor Miguel arrived, trembling and full of fear, without knowing that the king himself had been his guest the night before. He explained that he had inherited this sign and that its meaning was very innocent. The sign was intended to encourage people to work and accumulate money. Money is like air to the state, to the king. With no money, people would not respect the king. The saying, he said, was meant to praise the king.

The judges did not accept the explanation. “Even if you are right,” they said, “it is an insult for the king that a Jew should make propaganda for him.” “But,” said the king, “I will give you three months to prove that the saying on the sign is true. If you fail, you and your family will be hanged on the gate of your palace where you hanged your sign.” Señor Miguel returned home crying, sure that this was his end and without understanding why it happened.

4. **The advice of a mother.** Señor Miguel had an old mother who was extremely rich and very noble. Like Miguel, her palace was also
always open to guests. She made her house a center for noblewomen from all religions and races. They would meet and discuss how to help people with money or ways to raise their spirits. Among her women visitors was a wonderful young woman called Elizabet, who was of the Jewish family Rozanes, and who was also the art teacher of the king’s only daughter.

The king’s daughter was the most beautiful girl in the whole kingdom. Her beauty was like the sun and the moon. Her father the king loved her so much that he built a special palace for her and locked her in it so that no man could see her or try to win her love. The king was determined that only he would choose her bridegroom when the time came. Meanwhile, he sent her the best teachers of the kingdom to teach her art and science, but the teachers were all women. The teacher most beloved by the princess was Elizabet, who became her confidante.

When Miguel’s mother heard the terrible decree, she comforted her son and told him to trust God. “You always helped people. You gave so much to charity. The Almighty will not leave you. Go to sleep and tomorrow we will find a solution.”

5. The night is the angel of advice. The mother could not sleep during the entire night. Suddenly before her eyes appeared the image of Elizabet. The mother prayed to God and thanked Him for this sign. In spite of how late in the night it was, she immediately ordered her carriage prepared and rushed to Elizabet’s house.

When Elizabet heard the situation, she immediately had a very original idea. She told the mother to prepare a big lion made all of gold and precious stones. In the lion’s belly there would be a small room, and through his pearl eyes things could be seen. Air would enter through the lion’s ears and nose. Into this lion they would put Alberto, the only son of Miguel. In this way, Alberto would be delivered to the guarded princess and ask for her help.

The next day, Miguel’s mother told her son the plan and added that she would pay for the precious lion with her own money. She ended by thanking God.

6. The visit to the king’s court. The old woman invited the best jewel maker in the kingdom to come to her and asked him to do the work. For this work, she gave him an enormous amount of money, promising that she would add much more, since money was not important in this case. When the lion was ready and Alberto was inside, the old woman put on her best clothes and went to the king. She told the king that she had to go to visit her son overseas, and she could find no better place to leave
her precious treasure than the king's palace. If she did not come back, she would willingly donate the lion and all her money to the king. The king was so amazed by the extraordinary lion that he immediately accepted. More than that, he gave the lion to his own dearest treasure—his daughter.

7. The strange meeting. Very late at night when the princess had finished playing her piano, she approached the lion to look at it. When she gazed into his eyes made of pearls, she saw the picture of a young man. Then she heard the faint sound of a key opening a door. Before she had time to scream, a very handsome young man, as noble as a prince, stepped out of the lion. He knelt before the princess and begged her to listen to his story. In response to the story and the handsome appearance of this young man, she promised to help. She hid him in a room next to hers, suggesting that meanwhile they would spend time talking and learning together.

8. The main thing forgotten. The princess spent wonderful days with Alberto. She felt drunk, but not from wine. She forgot her promise to help him at first, but after a few days, she did remember. When she tried to think how to help him, there appeared in front of her eyes the image of her beloved teacher, Elizabet.

The princess summoned Elizabet and told her everything. Elizabet pretended that she knew nothing about Alberto and the lion. And yes, she had a very good solution. "The king, your father," she told the princess, "is in a very dangerous situation right now. There is a rebellion in the kingdom, but the king has not enough money to hire soldiers and suppress the rebels. Go to your father," she advised, "and ask his permission to bring him money. I can get it easily for you." The princess did as she was told, and the king agreed.

The princess then sent Alberto home secretly. Miguel's mother gave Elizabet the enormous amount of money necessary to build an army and even promised more. The princess gave this money to her father, saying it was a secret, anonymous donation. Because of the money, the king was able to save his country.

9. The happy ending. The time of the trial came. This time Señor Miguel arrived proud and self-assured. He repeated his speech on the importance of money, stating that no kingdom could exist without it, that money was like air to kings. Without money, he said, the people would not respect their king. "And if you are still not convinced, you can hang me. Only remember that I and my family have been serving the kingdom with sincere loyalty for many generations."
Then the princess rose. She had come especially to this trial to testify that Señor Miguel had saved the kingdom with his generous donation. Elizabet, the beloved teacher, added details (without telling the secret of Alberto and the princess) and ended by saying: "No one withstands wealth, not even kings."

The king and the judges and all the court were amazed. Not only did the king thank Señor Miguel and his son Alberto, but he appointed Miguel as Minister of the Treasury and Alberto as his Chief Minister and private counselor.

Not many days passed before the king recognized the wisdom and nobility of Alberto and chose him as the bridegroom for his only beloved and precious daughter. The wedding lasted seven days, and all the kingdom rejoiced. Many presents were distributed to the poor. And there was no end to the happiness of the king and all the people.

Unlike the legend, the novella does not specify details of time and place. But the story is related as if it might possibly have happened. Our story is set in Toledo, Spain, and although the time is not specified, it is clear that the kingdom spoken of is Muslim. The Chief Minister is called vizier, and God is called Allah. Toledo was conquered by the Moors in 712 C.E. and became part of the Caliphate Kingdom of Cordoba. In 1035, Toledo became an independent Muslim state and remained so until 1085, when it was conquered by the Christian King Alfonso VI, who declared Toledo the capital of Castile and Leon.

During the Muslim period, the Jews integrated very well into society and gained central positions in the kingdom. The Jewish community developed especially in the eleventh century and were both socially and economically successful. Some Jews bought land near the town and became very rich. They also played important roles in the Muslim kingdom.5

The Muslim rulers of Toledo were of Berber origin. They needed the educated Jews as administrators in their court, and they found they could rely more on the loyalty of Jews than they could on the loyalty of their own people, who came from fanatical Muslim tribes. Nor could they trust the rulers of the surrounding Christian kingdoms, which were increasingly posing a threat to the Muslims in Spain. In order to bind the Jews

to them, the Muslim rulers granted them estates and whole villages. This became known as the Jewish “Golden Age” in Spain, so eloquently described in the poetry of the court culture of that period. An example of extraordinary success during this period is the career of Shmuel Ha-Nagid of Granada.⁶

There are only two family names mentioned in the story, both of them Jewish—de la Roza and Rozanes—but these are very well known names among Sephardic Jews. The descendants of these families—among whom were counted many rabbis, writers, and prominent people—were active among Sephardic communities in Turkey and Jerusalem at the approximate time in which this story is set. No wonder the original storyteller chose these names. The atmosphere and background of the story, even without recognizable names and time, suggests that everything could have actually happened as it was told.

Since the narrator focuses on the Jewish viewpoint, the Jewish characters do have names: Miguel, Alberto, and Elizabet. The gentiles, however, have no names. Typical of that period, in addition to their Hebrew names, all Jews had foreign names that they used daily. The plot of the story moves between two worlds: Jewish and Muslim (gentile). Each world is concentrated into a small space, namely, the palaces of the different characters. In each world there are two palaces, one of which belongs to a woman. The king and his daughter live in their own palaces, and likewise, Miguel and his mother live in separate palaces.

Unlike the typical novella, in which the hero travels to faraway countries encountering adventure after adventure, here the plot moves within a narrow space—four specific palaces in the same town. The king penetrates into the Jewish world only once. Otherwise, movement is from the Jewish palace to the king’s palace. Some of these penetrations are effected secretly. The only character who moves freely between the two worlds is the Jewish teacher, Elizabet, who acts not only as mediator between Jew and Muslim but also between the king and his daughter and the princess and Alberto. The following figure is presented to help clarify the spatial movements that govern the structure of the plot.

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The plot consists of eight movements back and forth between the two worlds. Between the trial and the retrial there are five secret movements involving two important acts. The first brings Alberto to the princess and results in their marriage at the end of the story. The second brings money to the king and results in three things: the salvation of the kingdom, the salvation of the Jewish family, and the marriage between the two families. In keeping with this genre, the movements concern love and wisdom. The first two movements function as exposition and plot motivation, while the last movement is the closure and the happy ending. The secret movements concern only two characters: the two men. Miguel does not know that the king visited him secretly. The king does not know about Alberto and will never know. But he does know at the end who saved him. The level of secrecy is different according to the different characters. The king, who has the highest status or position, knows the least.

Although the two main characters belong to different religions and are of a different status—one is the ruler, the other a subordinated Jew—they are almost equal. The Jew is richer than the king; the king is more
powerful (although without the Jew he would have lost everything). The Jew ends up as second to the king (his Minister of the Treasury). While the Jews in Spain were rich and powerful, none of them could become a king, even though they practically ran the kingdom by serving as advisors and administrators to the king.

In each world, the story presents two parallel families, both small and apparently lacking a wife. Miguel has only one son and the king only one daughter. Wives are not mentioned. Both children are beautiful, educated, wise, and of excellent character. The grandmother functions as mother and "wife" to her son. She advises him, it is to her that he runs with his problem, and she saves him through her wisdom. Elizabet functions as mother to the princess—in fact, even more than a mother—a woman in whom the princess can confide her secrets.

The women in this story play very important roles. They are rich, powerful, independent. They save their men, and they find solutions to the problems that confront their families. Elizabet, the mediator, works behind the scenes, suggesting the trick with the lion. She brings Alberto to the princess. She gains the trust of both sides: the king and the princess, the Jewish mother and Alberto. She covers the princess’s secret of hiding Alberto in her quarters. She is the one who recognizes and understands the dangerous political situation confronting the king, and she knows how to use this knowledge in favor of the Jew, even as she saves the king. The king respects her and listens to her. She herself has no male partner—she acts on her own.

The mother, besides being rich, is also independent and powerful. She insists on paying for the lion, and she sends money to the king on Elizabet’s advice. She lives in her own palace and not, as expected in traditional families, with her son. She conducts meetings of women in her house where philosophy and ways to help people are discussed. She comforts her son, and she knows whom to approach for help. She is not afraid to stand in front of the king, nor to deceive him by convincing him of the lie that she is going away and needs him to keep the lion safe for her. She has the courage to risk her only beloved grandson and send him in the golden lion to the “mouth of the real lion”—the king.

The princess, though guarded heavily in her own palace and surrounded only by women, reacts quickly and intelligently when she meets Alberto. It is she who plans what they will do together. She hides him and takes care of him. She falls in love with him. At the same time, his emotions are not mentioned in the story at all. It is she who convinces her father to accept the “anonymous” money; thus, she, like the grandmother, deceives the king, since she knows perfectly well where the money has come from. She is not afraid to appear at the second trial and gives a logical and enthusiastic speech, convincing her father that Miguel
is right. But she also knows what not to tell her father—how she met and hid Alberto, for example. At the trial, she knows how to control herself so that the king never suspects that she and Alberto know each other.

On the other hand, the men are passive in this story. Although he is the ostensible hero because he is named in the title, we do not learn much about Miguel except that he inherited his money and spends most of his time entertaining his guests and donating to charities. He does not convince the king at either of the trials. It is, in fact, the women—Elizabet and the princess—who carry the burden of conviction in their appearance at the second trial. When the crisis with the king first arises, the only thing Miguel can think of doing is to seek his mother’s advice and comfort. He then goes to sleep while she is the one who acts.

Alberto is brought into the plot by his grandmother, accepts passively being locked in the lion’s belly, and is taken first to the king’s palace and then to that of the princess. The first thing the princess likes about him is his beauty—his physical appearance. In folktales, this is usually a response that is confined to men relating to women. Though Alberto does earn her trust by the conviction with which he tells his story, this is his only active role. From that moment, it is she who decides what will happen to him. She puts him into the next room, brings him food, teaches him every night what she has learned from her teachers during the day, and then decides when to send him back home.

The king does not know how to save his country or where to find the money he needs. He is deceived twice—once by the grandmother and once by his own daughter—but suspects nothing. Strangely enough, he has absolute trust in Elizabet, his daughter’s teacher, and accepts all her advice. He thinks that he is guarding his daughter and preventing her from the company of men, but he knows nothing about what really happens in her palace. Ironically, at the end, he thinks that he has chosen the right bridegroom for her, not suspecting that she already chose him long before.

Although the women are those who direct the plot and save the family and the kingdom, the end of the story maintains the traditional social roles of men. Miguel is appointed to be the Minister of the Treasury and Alberto becomes second to the king. The women are not mentioned thereafter. Presumably the grandmother retreats to her palace, and the princess is happy to be Alberto’s wife.

The main ideological axis of the story is the power of wealth. Religious values and faith in God appear only perfunctorily in the background, and even less noticeable is the power of love—the romantic axis.

The protagonist, Señor Miguel, is characterized mainly through his property. The townspeople do not call him by his family name but give
him a nickname that describes his wealth: “the wealthy Señor Miguel.” Money is his raison d'être; because of his money, he can give to charity and entertain his many guests. This belief in money is expressed clearly in his two speeches before the king. While it was his money that almost brought him to disaster when the king threatened to kill him, it was also money that not only saved him from execution but also raised him to one of the highest positions in the kingdom.

Money, therefore, motivates the entire plot. Because she has money, the mother can save the family. Her independence as a woman who lives alone is possible because she is so rich. “I will pay all the expenses for preparing the lion,” she says. The main literary means of expressing this idea is by using a proverb: “No one withstands wealth—not even kings.”

This proverb is appropriately engraved on a golden sign and hung on the front gate of Miguel’s palace. The proverb has the power of expressing the authority of the experience of the collective, and thus summarizes tradition. It indicates for the users/listeners “the wisdom of many.” Using proverbs presents the driving force behind a group’s norms; because proverbs are short, structured, and use poetic forms like rhyme or rhythm, they are easy to remember. Proverbs are thus used in recurring situations by members of the group to interpret a behavioral or interactional situation. Using proverbs in a literary context can serve several functions: as a key to the plot, to portray a character, or to express the ideology of a story.

The main proverb in “The Wealthy Señor Miguel” appears three times in the story and is said by three different people at three turning points in the plot. The first time it is mentioned is by the narrator during the exposition of the story. It emphasizes a static situation. In identifying the proverb, the narrator says, “A wonderful sign, written in big prominent golden letters.” The narrator also indicates that this sign passed through many generations: “inherited from his fathers, and his fathers from the fathers of the fathers from the very early generations.” By using this sentence, the narrator gives the proverb the heavy weight of tradition, as well as the idea that there is nothing wrong with its emphasis on desiring money—that it has never caused any trouble before. This is supposed to create surprise in the listeners

when the king notices and takes such violent exception to the sign and its inscription.

The reaction of the king is described by the narrator in indirect terms: the king tells his vizier “his deepest bitterness against the Jew who has a palace, who is so proud and arrogant as to hang this sign declaring in big letters: ‘No one withstands wealth—not even kings’.” The next day, the king repeats the content of the proverb to his counselors, but the proverb itself is not repeated: “The king told them about the insulting, shameful sign.” The interpretation of the proverb thus becomes the main issue of the trial. The judges interpret it as an insult to king and crown. Señor Miguel has an opposite interpretation, that the proverb “praises the king and the kingdom.” The life of Señor Miguel depends on his ability to justify his interpretation of the proverb.

One of the traits of a proverb is that it can be interpreted differently, sometimes in directly opposing interpretations according to the situation and the perceptions of the users of the proverb. But here we have only one situation (the trial) and one audience (the king and the judges). Miguel’s interpretation, though a minority opinion, does not completely fail, since he gets the chance to prove the validity of his exposition in three months before final sentence is passed. The plot might be described as a competition between two interpretations of a proverb—that of the Jew who is in an inferior position, and that of the king who holds ultimate power and status. It is thus Miguel who must find the proof to uphold his interpretation, and he must be convincing, because his very life depends on it.

During the retrial, the proverb is quoted again, but now it is by Elizabet, who ends her defense of Miguel by repeating the proverb. Now the reaction of the king and the judges is completely different. “And they all said: now we see that Miguel spoke the truth and the content of his sign is true and he deserves glory.”

The narrator justifies the wealthy Jew with pride, without even hinting at stereotypical views of Jews often held by non-Jews (Jews as greedy, wanting only money, or obtaining their money by “sucking the blood” of the non-Jews). This story might, however, be interpreted as an apology for the wealth of Jews, since its conclusion is that this wealth is ultimately helpful for non-Jews (it might actually save their kingdoms). The only

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time the word “Jew” is used is when the king sees the sign with its proverb and calls Miguel “an arrogant Jew.”

An expression of Judaism and faith in God is almost absent, appearing only through the character of Miguel’s mother. It is interesting to note that, during the time of the Marranos, the secret practice of Judaism was mainly kept by women.12

From the generic literary point of view, Judaism is treated like the idea of wealth—it is also expressed in proverbs and quotations. The mother uses biblical phrases, which function as proverbs. When Miguel tells his mother about the terrible situation facing him, she says, “Do not fear. God is with us and he will save us…. let us trust God.” She ends her words with a biblical quotation: “For gracious and merciful is He” (Joel 2:13), which is combined with an expression that has the structure of a proverb: “God has many ways.” That night, when the mother sees the image of Elizabet and realizes that the young woman is the one who can help her son, she sees this as a solution that came from God. She thanks God, concluding with a quotation from Psalms, a book that is usually used for private prayers for help: “My strength and song is the Lord, and He has become my salvation” (Psalms 118:14).

The third time Judaism is mentioned is when the mother is given the solution of the golden lion and tells her son about the plan. Again she tells him to trust God and repeats the same phrase, but now more fully: “for gracious and merciful is He, long-suffering and of great kindness” (Joel 2:13), and she adds: “When God favors man’s ways, even his enemy will help.” This is the only time the narrator defines a sentence with the term “proverb.” All the biblical phrases used by the mother are common, and they appear in the regular prayer book, which is repeated every day. One does not, therefore, need any deep knowledge of Judaism to quote them.

Using biblical quotations has not only the authority of collective tradition but also the absolute authority of a holy text. There is, however, no substantive difference in the basic interpretative process whether the text is a proverb or a quotation. Biblical verses may easily become proverbs if they express a function. When such a verse is used in a narrative text, the empirical proof of its context is usually provided by the tale.13 Miguel’s family, indeed, was saved. On the level of the plot, this was due to Elizabet’s intelligence and cleverness. On the mother’s interpretive level, God saved Miguel’s family through Elizabet, because the mother

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12 Oral tradition; personal fieldwork.

believed that God first gave her the idea to turn to Elizabet for help and then gave Elizabet the plan of the golden lion.

In the genre of the novella, love and romance are usually strongly emphasized. Some novellas actually contain explicit erotic descriptive material. "The Wealthy Señor Miguel" provides a very romantic situation: a man is secretly transported directly to the princess's room, although she is heavily guarded and surrounded only by women. This motif of the precious princess locked away by her father (for her own good, according to him) is well known in folk literature. It is enough to mention King Solomon's daughter, who was locked in a tower. In that story, one of the most famous in Jewish culture, the young man manages to get into the tower carried by an eagle. In "The Wealthy Señor Miguel," our hero arrives in the belly of a lion. Both of these "conveyances" are kings of the animal kingdom: the eagle is the king of the birds, and the lion is considered the king of animals. Although Alberto enters the forbidden precincts of the princess by way of a lion—an image that is considered in many cultures as the symbol of manhood—there are no erotic descriptions in our story. Although the lion is a symbol of masculinity, the lion of our story is only a statue, even though Alberto does emerge from the lion's belly. Love between the couple is only alluded to.

In contrast to Solomon's daughter's tale—where the couple kiss and make love, and she bears him three children by the time her father finds out the truth—in our story nothing of the sort occurs. The princess puts Alberto into another room next to hers, and they converse about philosophy.

14 AT 930 The Prophecy, Jewish Oicotype 930*C, King Solomon's daughter in the tower; cf. AT 310 The Maiden in the Tower, Rapunzel. Motifs: M 372 Confinement in tower to avoid fulfillment of prophecy; T 381 Imprisoned virgin to prevent knowledge of men (marriage, impregnation), usually kept in a tower; and R40 places of captivity (tower, castle, palace). For Sephardic versions of tale type 930, see Reginetta Haboucha, Types and Motifs of the Judeo-Spanish Folktales (New York and London: Garland, 1992), 436–50.

15 The story was told by H. N. Bialik in "The Legend of Three and Four," in Writings of Bialik [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1960), 345–77 (two versions). For stories on King Solomon in the Sephardic oral tradition, see Matilda Koen-Sarano, Lejendas (Jerusalem: Nur, 1999), 21–106.

16 J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), 180–82 (for the lion) and 87–89 (for the eagle). In Jewish culture, see, for example, "King of the Beasts—the Lion," Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 13b. The lion is a symbol of the tribe of Judah and of all Israel (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 11b).

17 E. Neuman, Amor and Psyche [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1982); Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, 181: "[the lion] the possessor of strength and of the masculine principle."
and science. She is said to teach him every night what she has learned during the day. The father never finds out the secret and imagines that it is his own idea that his daughter and Alberto be married. Even when the princess defends Alberto in public at the trial, she is so controlled that no one suspects that they have had a secret relationship. The only hint we have about love is when the narrator describes the princess as “drunk, but not from wine.” The narrator of the story uses the verse from Isaiah 51:21, “drunken, but not with wine,” but the context in which it is used here is a love story, so the narrator may in fact have been alluding to the Song of Songs 1:2, “for thy caresses are more pleasant than wine.” Even today, Hebrew speakers often use the expression “drunk, but not with wine” to describe someone in love.

Though both stories belong to the same genre, the novella, the differences are in the aims and ideology of the stories. Solomon’s story is about fate and a confrontation with social status. Solomon locks his daughter up to prevent her predicted marriage to a poor man. Our story is about the importance of wealth and involves interreligious confrontation. But, as noted above, this confrontation is presented in a rather perfunctory manner. The boy and the girl are almost equal: she saves his father, and his father saves her father (with his money). The result is marriage. It does not bother the narrator that this is an interreligious marriage. Usually in Jewish folktales, when such a couple meet, the boy is Jewish and the girl is non-Jewish, but before getting married, she converts to Judaism. Or, if the man is non-Jewish and the girl Jewish, the girl prefers to die rather than marry a non-Jew, however noble or powerful. Stories of the latter type include the one from Morocco about Saint Solika, the Yemenite story about the daughter of Rabbi Shabazi, or the Ashkenazi story about the Rabbi’s daughter.

In another Sephardic tale, the Jewish girl, Sara, was able to use her marriage to the king in order to save the Jewish community. This, of course, is in imitation of Queen Esther, who, after the expulsion from Spain, became a symbol of admiration for the crypto-Jews in Spain, since she, like them, kept her Judaism in secret. However, typical of Jewish life

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20 The story is written as a ballad, “The Rabbi’s Daughter,” by the poet Shaul Tschernikhovski, Collected Poems [Hebrew] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1956), 438.

21 Koen-Sarano, Konsejas i Konsejikas, 267–68.
in medieval Spain, many storytellers preferred to end their tales with interreligious marriage, power, and money rather than with death or martyrdom. In our story, no one changes religions or dies; on the contrary, the marriage is considered a great achievement and victory.

“The Wealthy Señor Miguel” was told to Yosef Meyuhas by Efraim Tager in Jerusalem around 1930. Most of the Sephardim living in Jerusalem at that time were very poor, but proudly refused to use the support of *haluqah*\(^\text{22}\) money, unlike the Ashkenazim who did take these donations of money from abroad. This story, which describes the legendary richness and status of the Sephardic ancestors in Spain, expresses their longing for the glorious golden past. The Sephardim in Jerusalem considered themselves to be an elite. They were very proud of their Spanish origin. But their view of Spain was not unambiguous. They never forgot that the same glorious Spain vomited the Jews out, expelling them with great cruelty. Nor did they forget the suffering they experienced in their flight, nor the Inquisition, which burned many who remained in Spain as crypto-Jews.\(^\text{23}\) As one reaction to their experiences, many of the expelled Jews from Toledo adopted the family name of Toledano, which combines “Toledo” with “no,” thereby expressing their oath never to return.

One of the folk explanations for the expulsion from Spain was the arrogance of the wealthy. This idea is expressed very clearly in the book *Shevet Yehudah*, by Shlomo Ibn-Virga. In one of his stories, Ibn-Virga describes an argument between King Alfonso and Don Yosef Nasi. The king says: “You came to our country naked and hungry; the Christians accepted you with love, but you returned evil for good. You took interest [on loans], you took the houses and grounds [of your debtors]…. why are you dressed like nobles? Why do you teach your sons music? And why do you teach your sons the art of sword fighting? Why do you


The same concept is found in other Sephardic oral tales that are still told today. In one, the queen of Spain sees a very rich Jewish couple at her ball. She looks at the woman and tells her husband: “Look at this dirty Jew; look how his wife is dressed, and look at the diamond ring she is wearing! Give an order and expel all the Jews from Spain.” And so he does.25

Yosef Meyuhas declared in the introduction to his collection that he wrote down these stories to remember the glorious past of the Sephardic Jews in Spain. The text of “The Wealthy Señor Miguel” conforms very well to this intention, but the subtext reveals the dangers of the situation. The inner narrator in the text praises the richness and pride and ends the plot with victory and justification for Señor Miguel. The oral narrator—the out-of-text narrator Efraim Tager in Jerusalem, 1930—knows already the consequences and the suffering caused by this wealth. Aware of the huge gap between the present and the past, all that is left for him is to yearn for the past and hope for the future.

25 Told to me orally by Matilda Koen-Sarano as she heard it from her father.