

Max Kramer

## TRIANGULAR DESIRE: THE GAY GAZE IN LORCA'S "LA CASADA INFIEL"

Max Kramer  
City University of New York

Federico García Lorca's "La casada infiel" ("The Unfaithful Wife") is a poem like no other. The translator Albert Rowe recounts this telling anecdote: "I have heard villagers, unable to read, recite the first few lines; and one unschooled young man the whole poem, his voice shaking with passion, he vowing at the end that he would kill his wife were she unfaithful" (63). The poem, which distinguishes itself by its great descriptive power, ranks among Lorca's most famous and celebrated compositions and enjoys canonical status in twentieth-century Spanish literature. Based on the form of the ballad, it relates the tale of a Romani<sup>1</sup> male who engages in a sexual encounter with a woman whom he thinks a young virgin. It is told entirely from his perspective and has a narrative arc that is immediately intelligible and seemingly straightforward. On St. James' eve, a man takes a woman to the river, where they undress and have intercourse in a hollow in the bank. The lovemaking, which is suggested through infectious lyrical prosody and highly charged imagery, takes place despite the strict moral codes governing marriage and family in Andalusia, especially for a Romani. And yet, according to the narrator, who is also the tale's protagonist, the male Rom does not want to fall in love because—and this is the scandal at the center of the poem—the young *virgin* lied: she already had a husband. In the end, the two lovers return to town, and the man treats the woman almost as a prostitute, presenting her a sewing box as a gift.

The poem has mostly been read from a feminist point of view, with the assumption of a heterosexual narrative, and construed as a mockery of the macho protagonist's performance. In such readings, the straight, feminist readers, far from being enthralled by the speaker's hegemonic male performance, are meant to be repulsed by this deeply misogynistic man. Of course, "La casada infiel" invites a multiplicity of interpretations. The queer elements of the poem, however, have not escaped all critics. Robert G. Havard dwells on the similarities between this poem and the others in the collection, many of which are decidedly queer: "Her marital status makes him an adulterer [...] and relates this poem to the gamut of illicit themes—abduction, onanism, homosexuality, incest etc.—found in the other ballads" (245). Candelas Newton reaffirms Havard's observation: "'La casada infiel' [...] does indeed depict sexual fulfillment, but under false pretenses, as the woman hides her married status from the Gypsy with whom she makes love" (32). Scott Charles McClure adds that "by giving the woman a large sewing basket at the end of the poem, the Gypsy turns her into a prostitute because we are dealing with a form of payment" (14). Manuel Antonio Arango L. confirms this conclusion: "He justifies his exploit, his behavior by offering her a gift, as if she were a prostitute" (166). The subject of adultery and potential prostitution ("costurero" / "sewing box") makes it possible to read the poem as queer even though these elements are not all that shocking for the era, relatively speaking. Besides, the fact that the male Romani has engaged in either extramarital or premarital sex is never addressed, which implies that this was an even less serious violation—again, relatively speaking. Furthermore, in the face of Lorca's known homosexuality, Robert G. Havard is right to wonder what we are to make of the poem's hearty heterosexuality—its depiction

of unmitigated eroticism between a Romani male and a would-be virgin (243). The critic starts off by citing two of the poem's emblematic stanzas:

Yo me quité la corbata.  
Ella se quitó el vestido.  
Yo el cinturón con revólver.  
Ella sus cuatro corpiños. [...]  
    Aquella noche corrí  
el mejor de los caminos,  
montado en potra de nácar  
sin bridas y sin estribos. (*OC* vol. 1, 407)  
    I took off my necktie.  
She took off her dress.  
I, my belt and pistol.  
She, four bodices. [...]  
    That night the road I ran  
was the finest of them all,  
without a bridle or stirrup  
on a filly made of pearl. (*CP* 563)

In his subsequent analysis, Havard demonstrates that “posturing is fundamental to male-female relations” (243) in Lorca’s work. He argues that posturing is not only the main theme of the poem, but also a psychologically relevant subject for Lorca “at a personal level,” since “sexual pretence was a way of life and telling a tale a daily ordeal” for the poet (247).

While this article takes its cue from Havard’s analysis, my own focus will be slightly different. Although I agree that the uncomplicated heterosexuality of a “legitimate” (and deeply reactionary) “Gypsy” may well exemplify Lorca’s need to posture in his work and life, I also believe, more importantly, that this overtly heterosexual (and misogynistic) poem, which reads like a “locker room scene” and invokes the specter of alternative *male ownership* in the form of a husband, in fact masks a homosexual perspective that is carefully attuned to the cultural expectations of the time. In so doing, the poem actually serves as code for homosexual desire. I contend that an intricate connection exists between speaking in metaphors, as the poem’s autodiegetic narrator does, and the perspective Lorca was choosing to convey. My working hypothesis is that the Andalusian poet took advantage of the ambiguity that was inherent in a certain cultural setting and literary form—that is, the milieu of Romani males and the Spanish ballad (*romance*). This strategy of conflation was effective, even though the poem, with its “untypically clear narrative progression” (Ramsden 37), constitutes an oddity within *Romancero gitano* (*The Gypsy Ballads*), the famous collection that contains it. Among other factors, this linear narrative form may explain why the poem became “popular to the point of desperation”<sup>2</sup> (García Lorca, *OC* vol. 3, 343), and this conflation allowed the poet to detach himself publicly from the queer content of the poem while still representing it. His contemporaneous readers could misinterpret the queer angle in the poem because they had been invited to read the poem with a focus on the male-female encounter and the prosaic reality of adultery. The more a poem’s setting and narrative were orthosexual—and thus, almost by definition, homophobic—the more the poet benefited from a heterosexual alibi, which could render

him unassailable. Since the set-up in certain Lorca poems, including “La casada infiel,” was heterosexual, readers could deem the content to be heterosexual and conformist, too. Choreographing queer desire in a hyper-virile, heterosexist milieu had a defusing effect and was thus a powerful strategy. When sexual non-normativity was expressed in such a way, it became less likely to trigger heteronormative sensitivities, and was therefore difficult to perceive and, hence, difficult to censor. Both the heterosexual narrative and the male bonding characterizing the homosocial speech situation function as distancing devices in “La casada infiel.” They disguise the queer elements in the poem and allow it to masquerade as frivolous entertainment. In a 1934 interview with *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), Lorca himself alluded to the importance of artifice in his poetry, despite its popular themes: “My art is not popular. I have never considered it as such. [...] The Gypsy Ballads is not a popular book, although some of its themes are popular” (García Lorca, *OC*, Vol.3, 445).

Martin von Koppenfels reminds us that the Spanish romance is the epitome of historical longevity. It remained “stable and useful as a form over seven centuries, from the anonymous collections of the late Middle Ages, the romanceros, to the artistic romances of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” Its enormous prestige in European Romanticism further amplified this. “Without this effect, says Koppenfels, the late romance revivals in Spain would be unthinkable,” and so would the fact “that a contemporary of the Dada movement and Surrealism could create a furore with a book called ‘Gypsy Ballads’ on the eve of the Great Depression.” As a matter of fact, “the generation of Lorca was the last generation of Spanish poets who could handle this arch-Romantic form without committing any conscious or shrill anachronism” (108). “La casada infiel” thus follows a deep cultural and literary tradition. This tradition, however, undergoes an ironic transformation in Lorca’s hands.

In this transformation, same-sex social interactions—which are perfectly in line with the heterosexualizing doxa—take place, but they also carry a queer interpretation. It is a gregarious homosexuality, but a homosexuality without the anus. A number of theoreticians have commented on this phenomenon. In his discussion of erotic *Sondersprache*—i.e., a subvariety of a language only understood by a certain social group, similar to jargon, argot, or slang—Walter Porzig shows how homosociality and secrecy are in fact thematically close to each other in certain cultural circumstances: “in it the young men of a tribe form an alliance, the all-male society (*Männerbund*) as designated by ethnology, which keeps matters of sexual life as its collective secret and protects them through special language” (249). Lorca’s Gypsies are a perfect example of such a society. The boundaries between the social and the sexual are always closely intertwined and in flux. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes the “unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual,” even though “‘obligatory heterosexuality’ is built into male-dominated kinship systems” (*Between* 3). Klaus Theweleit summarizes this double-bind as follows: “thou shalt love men, but thou shalt not be homosexual” (339). Homophobia (men’s fear of other men) thus formed part of male bonding, but also served as a convenient backdrop for the indirect expression of homosexual desire in literary representations. To this end, queer authors chose milieus known for male camaraderie and machismo, such as the military, religious orders, and sports teams, where male fantasies could flourish. A common figure was the smooth talker (as is the one in “La casada infiel”) who brags about his escapades with members of the “weaker sex,” essentially portraying them as objects of conquest. A welcome side effect of these narratives was that they warded off potential

doubts about the author's own sexual tastes.

Sedgwick, inspired by René Girard's notion of *triangular desire*, states that "in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent" (*Between* 21). In fact, Girard explicitly includes homosexuality in this relation between the subject and his rival, whom he calls *mediator* and *romantic* (2, 17): "An attempt should be made to *understand* at least some forms of homosexuality from the standpoint of triangular desire" (47). Sedgwick summarizes this problem as it pertains to Modern literature in particular: "male-male desire became widely intelligible primarily by being routed through triangular relations involving a woman" (*Epistemology* 15).

Girard—and later Sedgwick—suggests that erotic literary representations that involve three parties, and thus at least two of the same gender, are potentially ambiguous configurations that offered Modernist authors a chance to forestall homophobic responses. Bringing in a female lover as a fixation for one of two male characters' libidinal energies ostensibly displaced the queer insinuations between the subject and his mediator. In "La casada infiel," the outcome of this could be a female character qua token lover—a convenient alibi for a queer crime.

Indeed, the no-nonsense account of the sexual exploit that the Romani narrator delivers is, in fact, predicated on a homosocial speech situation. In all probability, this man's man addresses his story to a fellow man's man, as suggested by the expression "por hombre" ("as a man") toward the end of the poem, which creates the impression of male collusion or solidarity. This solidarity is at the root of the poem's macho and misogynist representation, which "celebrates heterosexual love in an ecstatic scene of unbounded sexual energy" (Maio 102). At the same time, considerable doubts about both the Rom's manliness and his *Romanipen* (being a Rom, the totality of the Romani spirit, culture, law) may be raised, as can questions about the relationship between the male poet and the narrator. Given that the poem is quite long, the subsequent excerpts will serve as précis:

1) The romani male<sup>3</sup> takes the woman to the river but learns she is already married (this part of the poem is narrated in clear and non-figurative language):

Y que yo me la llevé al río  
creyendo que era mozueta,  
pero tenía marido.

So I took her to the river.  
I thought she wasn't married,  
but she had a husband.

2) A plant metaphor intimates that she offers herself freely:

En las últimas esquinas  
toqué sus pechos dormidos,  
y se me abrieron de pronto  
como ramos de jacintos.

At the far edge of town  
I touched her sleeping breasts.

They opened to me suddenly  
like fronds of hyacinth.

3) An equestrian metaphor intimates that the two have sex:

Aquella noche corrí  
el mejor de los caminos,  
montado en potra de nácar  
sin bridas y sin estribos.

That night the road I ran  
was the finest of them all,  
without a bridle or stirrup  
on a filly made of pearl.

4) They return from the river:

Sucia de besos y arena,  
yo me la llevé del río.

I took her from the river  
soiled with kisses and sand.

5) The male Rom presents the woman with a gift, perhaps as a payment:

La regalé un costurero  
grande de raso pajizo,  
I gave her a sewing basket  
made of straw-gold satin,

6) Finally, he does not want to fall in love because she lied:

y no quise enamorarme  
porque teniendo marido  
me dijo que era mozueta  
cuando la llevaba al río. (*OC* vol. 1, 406, 407)  
and refused to fall in love  
because she had a husband,  
though she said she wasn't married  
when I took her to the river. (*CP* 561-565)

After finding out that the woman is married, the Rom feels personally affronted because he took her to the river, believing she was unmarried and a virgin. He justifies himself by saying that he did what any other man would have done in similar circumstances. It is the woman's fault, and the man decides not to pursue the relationship because he is an honorable man and Rom, while she—from a male hegemonic viewpoint—is a wicked, unfaithful wife.

Joseph Velasco argues that “the beings in whom [Lorca] places the most powerful erotic appeal are women” (446, n. 5), and lists “La casada infiel” among the poems that

serve as unequivocal examples of male-female desire in Lorca's body of work. After a first heuristic reading—that is to say, a sequential decoding of the poem—this seems to make sense, for there is no question that a man and a woman are having sex in the ballad. Still, the sexist projection of the woman's improbity stands in stark contrast to the male Gypsy's smug self-perception:

Me porté como quien soy.  
Como un gitano legítimo. (*OC* vol. 1, 407)  
I behaved as what I am.  
As a true-born gypsy. (*CP* 565)

These two lines are essential, for they interrupt the heuristic reading and point to the poem's *hypogram*—that is, the poem's hidden agenda, the absent master-word or key intertext. In Michael Riffaterre's terminology, a hypogram is a "preexistent word group," an "ensemble of stereotyped commonplaces," "a single sentence or string of sentences" made out of clichés, or a "quotation from another text, or a descriptive system" (23, 31, 63). Put differently, it refers to a set of conventional associations. A second, retroactive or hermeneutic reading—a comparative re-reading—therefore reveals a new significance<sup>4</sup>: a hypogram that has something to do with legitimacy, but nothing whatsoever to do with the illegitimacy spelled out in the title of the poem: the blindingly obvious scandal of female infidelity.

What, then, could constitute the poem's hypogram, or one of its hypograms? The simile "[c]omo un gitano legítimo" ("like a proper Gypsy") surprises us with "legítimo" ("legitimate") as its vehicle, because the term is morphologically unusual: "it is the only proparoxytone word in the poem's assonantal rhyming pattern, all other rhyming words being stressed either on the last or penultimate syllable" (Selig 3). In addition to its morphological atypicality, this choice of words also surprises and confuses translators. The RAE dictionary defines "legítimo" as "conforme a las leyes" ("in compliance with the laws"), "lícito" ("fair") or "cierto, genuino y verdadero en cualquier línea" ("authentic, genuine, and true in any way"). Langston Hughes translated the term as "thoroughbred" (17), John Frederick Nims as "hundred-percent," Steven Spender and J.L. Gili as "proper" (de Angulo 73), A. S. Kline as "true," and Will Kirkland, as we have seen, as "true-born" (*CP* 565)—and the list could go on. In line with this formal emphasis on "legítimo," the narrator portrays himself to be "reactionary to the bone" (Reichenberger 132). Finally, the reader learns that this Rom wears a "necktie" and a "belt and pistol," which convey that both "in his appearance and at heart, he places greatest importance on being taken seriously in his male role" (Reichenberger 132).

A similar emphasis on masculinity emerges in the paralipsis of lines 40 and 41: "No quiero decir, por hombre, / las cosas que ella me dijo" (*OC* vol. 1, 406, 407) / "As a man, I won't repeat / the things she said to me" (*CP* 563). Again, the special and somewhat disproportionate stress on the Gypsy's legitimacy and hegemonic masculinity encourages the reader to reread the text in search of a possible hypogram. Such strategies, along with specific symbols (phallic, masculine, sexual), recur not only in Lorca's poetry but also in his theatre. In his rural trilogy—which consists of *Bodas de sangre* (Blood Wedding), a tragedy of impossible love and deception; *Yerma*, a drama about a woman left childless and more generally without love; and *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (The House of Bernarda Alba), which depicts female characters suffering under the yoke of social conventions—

the themes of frustration, oppression, conformity and sterility can be linked to a homosexual perspective, because they may serve as code for unspeakable, unlivable desire.

The hypogram in question may relate less to the adulteress whom the Gypsy is trashing than to his imagined audience, which cannot but consist of other, sympathetic men: “This has to do with the speech situation. His addressee is simply not his beloved but instead it is his buddies, in front of whom he boasts of his exploits” (Reichenberger 129). In addition, the phrasing of the poem’s opening line could not be more macho: “Y que yo me la llevé al río” (*OC* vol. 1, 406, 407). Most English translations of the poem forgo the problem of the initial “Y que” (“And that”), which indicates that the Rom is still scandalized about finding out the woman lied to him. Indeed, this copulative “Y” (“And”) has great semantic scope, because it suggests that the narrator had already begun to speak to his audience before the beginning of the poem as we read it. It signals the entrance of a witness—or several witnesses—into a situation that is already in progress, calling up “the figure of a man who flaunts his affair in front of a crowd which does not consist—or not only—of us the readers” (Fernández de los Ríos 72, 73).

The English translation — “So I took her to the river” (*CP* 561)—falls short of conveying the poem’s familiar, chauvinistic, and violent tone, because it considerably tones down the objectification of the woman in the expression “me la llevé” (“I took her along with me”), which indicates that the Rom considers the woman a possession.

It is also important to note that the speaker does nothing but *compare* himself—“como” (“like”)—to a legitimate Gypsy, which relegates the Gypsy legitimacy to the realm of imagination. There is room to think that perhaps he is not a legitimate Gypsy at all, nor, for that matter, a man, the other term that is highlighted by an unusual construction in Castilian: “por hombre” (“as a man”).

So what if we tried a queer reading of the poem, according to which the Gypsy in question is an unlikely exemplar and his masculinity is merely performative? What if we tried a reading in which the link between the poem’s author and the narrator/protagonist may be of greater consequence than that between the narrator/protagonist and the unfaithful wife? For instance, the simile that makes the narrator’s Gypsy antics possible may be understood as a form of *citation*, given that *citationality* is inherent to all comparison. Jacques Derrida shows how fundamental citationality is to signification. “Every sign,” he writes, “can be *cited*, put between quotation marks.” Thereby the sign “can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion.” For Derrida, “this citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or an anomaly, but is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called ‘normal’ functioning” (320–321). In “La casada infiel,” the unchangeable nature of regulatory norms for *Gypsy* and/or *masculine* behavior is put into question by this dissemination of the sign, which involves the “[c]omo un gitano legítimo” statement. Later, Judith Butler would embed the notions of *citationality* and *iterability* into her theory of gender, which she defines as “the repeated stylization of the body” (*Gender Trouble* 43). She makes these notions part of her conception of performativity: “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (*Bodies That Matter* 2). To say that one acted “[c]omo un gitano legítimo” may thus emanate from a rich discursive history of how a “legitimate Gypsy” is supposed to behave and what hegemonic masculinity entails. The citation “[c]omo un gitano legítimo” could then function as “a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and

through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo” (*Bodies That Matter* 95), for the narrator might be living under the ethnic ostracism of not being enough of a Gypsy and/or under the heteronormative censorship of not being sufficiently male. Under such conditions, an exaggeration of both elements is to be expected.

Following Homi Bhabha, the narrator’s self-portrayal can also be theorized as a form of *mimicry*, which, like a fetish, “mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them” (91). In this strategy of resistance—which Bhabha condenses in the formula “*almost the same but not quite*” (89)—imitation actually questions authority. With the proparoxytone term as a trigger, the metaphoric expression (*como*)—metaphor as understood by Aristotle—could signal to a queer-sensitive reader that the instances of Gypsiness and manliness represented in the poem might be nothing but extreme stylizations: the narrator is only quoting a standard of hegemonic male behavior; his excessive Romanipen and virility betray, in reality, not his own perspective but the author’s gay gaze. This, then, is not a triangle between three characters (as in Girard’s theory); rather, the narrator’s internal focalization, along with his choice of lexicon (“legítimo”), refers to an extratextual reality that leads back to the poem’s author, about whose sexuality we do know something real. In short, the (perhaps unintentional) attempt at legitimacy backfires because it resignifies the narrative and turns it into a subversive statement that destabilizes the heterosexual *mimesis*.

With this queer projection in mind, let us now move on to a proper inspection of the poem’s casting. To be sure, the woman is described in detail, and she gets center stage. This is to be expected, even if the overall portrait is misogynistic. What is less typical is that, in the poem’s depiction of foreplay, the narrator describes himself in as much detail as the woman, and even mentions himself first. Let us return to one of those emblematic stanzas:

Yo me quité la corbata.  
Ella se quitó el vestido.  
Yo el cinturón con revólver.  
Ella sus cuatro corpiños. (*OC* vol. 1, 407)  
I took off my necktie.  
She took off her dress.  
I, my belt and pistol.  
She, four bodices. (*CP* 563)

Both the “corbata” and the “revólver” are conventional phallic symbols, and the narrator’s self-portrait turns out to be highly erotic, all butch and tough-guy. The man and the woman undress rapidly, in a magnificent parallel montage of extraordinary rhythmic effects formed by four sequences that make us refocus our attention at every turn on each lover’s multiplying paraphernalia: he takes off his necktie, she her dress, he his belt and pistol, she her four bodices, and so they make love. Even then, her thighs slip from him like frightened fish while he runs down the “best of roads.” It is this very parallelism, and the male narrator’s equally eroticized gaze at both a *woman* and a *man*, that converts the poem into a performance of queer desire, for although the poem seems to focus on the woman in this “simultaneous undressing of lovers” (Gauthier 102), it also betrays a certain erotic admiration for the man: “indeed, desiring the masculine, describing male desire or painting that masculinity in its violence or in its grace is always the mode the exaltation of sexuality adopts in the *Gypsy Ballads*” (Villena 14). We also notice that the adulterous wife

“takes off all her clothes and underwear by herself” (Gauthier 309), without the help of the man. For sure, the poem then continues by describing only the woman’s physical attractions—her skin and her thighs (ll. 28-35):

Ni nardos ni caracolas  
tienen el cutis tan fino,  
ni los cristales con luna  
relumbran con ese brillo.  
Sus muslos se me escapaban  
como peces sorprendidos,  
la mitad llenos de lumbre,  
la mitad llenos de frío. (*OC* vol. 1, 407)  
No silken shell or spikenard  
is finer than her skin,  
nor did moons or mirrors  
ever glow like this.  
Her thighs eluded me  
like startled fish,  
one half filled with fire,  
the other half with cold. (*CP* 563)

Nevertheless, at the crucial moment—that is, at the beginning of the sexual encounter—the male narrator’s attractiveness is highlighted just as much as the woman’s. This turn has been carefully set up by earlier allusions to the narrator’s phallic prowess: the poem speaks about “una pieza de seda / rasgada por diez cuchillos” (“a piece of silk / being ripped by ten knives”) and conjures an image of erection: “los árboles han crecido” (*OC* vol. 1, 406) / “the trees have grown bigger” (*CP* 563). This pattern is only augmented by the equestrian metaphor cited above, “[a]quella noche corrí / el mejor de los caminos,” which depicts the Rom in his proudest glory: as a sexualized rider of horses.

The “como” in “[c]omo un gitano legítimo” and the metrically irregular choice of the word “legítimo” also give the reader second thoughts about the narrator’s self-portrayal, because the very comparison and the stress placed on Gypsy legitimacy triggers a doubt about the text’s original *matrix*.<sup>5</sup> The obvious matrix of illegitimacy that seems to be at the heart of the poem—adultery—would thus serve to decoy the reader away from an even more outrageous illegitimacy: the author’s homosexual’s desire. Havard states that the “illicit theme—adultery and/or probable prostitution—is no doubt important,” but “the conspicuous absence of a sense of menacing fate which is so prevalent in other ballads suggests that part of Lorca’s intention was to show that such forms of sexual misconduct are tacitly accepted by society, while others, notably homosexuality, are not” (246).

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Havard concludes that the “poem’s main theme” is that “posturing is fundamental to male-female relations” (247), which brings us to the problem of the poem’s performative and citational character. The simulacrum of chauvinist eroticism—“tie,” “knives,” “revolver,” etc.—in “La casada infiel” must be interpreted as broadly personifying male traits that evoke an archetype, replete with mustache, bushy eyebrows, cigarette, “wife-beater,” leather belt, rolling gait, and other hallmarks of the textbook macho man. The evidence of the simulacrum prompts readers to see the female character, the male narrator, and the male author in a new light, and to

associate them in a triangle of desire by actualizing a potential hypogram that is overpowered by the more obvious one (adultery). Still, the “triangle is no Gestalt,” for the “real structures are inter-subjective.” As Girard reminds us, “[t]hey cannot be localized anywhere” (2).

Joseph Velasco’s conclusion about *Romancero gitano*—namely that “the beings in whom the poet places the most powerful erotic appeal are women” (446, n. 5)—is a naive fallacy, because it ignores the *mediated* (Girard) homosocial speech act that is the telling of the poem. Even this act itself participates in metaphor: “the triangle has no reality whatever; it is a systematic metaphor, systematically pursued” (2). Velasco’s conclusion also ignores the role-play in the poem, as well as the juggling of gender perspectives in the poem’s Gypsy drag show, which relies on a wishful “como,” on a would-be “like.”

The gay gaze in “La casada infiel” should not come as a surprise in a “romancero” that contains so many ballads marked by an *overdetermination* of queer subjectivity, such as “Thamar y Amnón” (“Thamar and Amnon”), which details an act of incest; “Prendimiento de Antoñito el Camborio en el camino de Sevilla” (“The Taking of Little Tony Camborio on the Seville Highway”), which depicts Antoñito’s performative queer identity; or the archangel poem “San Miguel” (“St. Michael”), which toys with gender inversion. As Eugene A. Maio states, “[n]o work of Lorca, least of all the *Romancero gitano*, presents us with characters who enjoy normal heterosexual experience” (105). “La casada infiel” is the only first-person poem in the book, but Herbert Ramsden reminds us that it is “the one in which the poet himself is most clearly not the narrator” (38). Perhaps Ramsden is unwittingly pointing out the queer *mediation* in the poem, just as Lorca may have staged—who knows?—this mediation unwittingly. Even so, it is undeniable “that the author of this ballad was well acquainted with the psyche of the Spanish male of his time and with the values that his environment had conditioned him to defend” (Fernández de los Ríos 84). This poem is not (primarily) about an unfaithful wife with a husband and a Romani male competing for her *ownership*; instead, it is the *author/poet* who relates to the *narrator* because *he* is *his* admirer in this triangle of desire. The commonplace underlying this queer *semiosis* is one that has to do with hegemonic masculinity or the lack thereof. Despite its title, the poem does not actualize a single hypogrammatic constant—the “cheating wife,” as it were. The more important hypogram that underlies the poem is the unvarying standard of the “hombre real”—the “hombre verdadero,” the “real man”—and this matrix does not speak of Romanipen, of legitimate Gypsiness (another red herring), but rather of legitimate masculinity, which so-called “inverts” such as Lorca, according to the stereotype, did not possess and sought in others. The poem fragmentarily actualizes various other hypograms only to deflect from the citation, from the mimicry at work in the Gypsy impersonation. We are made to gaze in fascination at manhood.

In his pastoral spectacle of feigned virginity, illicit sex, and ethnic pride, Lorca would have us believe that we are dealing with a homodiegetic narrator filling in as a supporting actor while someone else gets the starring role—i.e., the unfaithful wife of the poem’s title. In fact, the opposite is true, we are confronted with an autodiegetic narrator who steals the scene from the unfaithful wife and turns out to be the protagonist. Under the guise of a celebration of different-sex intercourse depicted from a male-supremacist point of view, and with the female-oriented title as a distraction, the ballad secretly pays homage to the proud clan member, the wide-legged storyteller, the iconic Gypsy archetype, and to his self-confidence and erotic pull. In this “bottom gay’s” dream come true, in this androcentric myth of a world, the obligatory heterosexuality that characterizes homosocial settings was

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a perfect cover for the expression of otherwise forbidden content: desiring men.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The terms *Romani* or *Roma* refer to the mainstream terminology that came into being in 1970 when the International Romani Union (IRU) was created. Romani or Roma are all-inclusive political terms which refer to a collective Roma identity. They tend to be used to downplay factions and group distinctions that exist under the broader category, which is why the term is not entirely welcomed by some groups. I use the Spanish term “gitano” and its English equivalent “Gypsy” only when I quote Lorca’s poem directly or its translation, but also when I quote from scholarly literature that uses this terminology. The latter are considered offensive and discriminatory by many Romani people, connoting in an oblivious way a vagabond, free-spirited lifestyle which fetishizes Roma people, or else defamatory stereotypes of thieves, criminal scroungers, etc., as in “Gypsy cab” for example. Regarding Lorca’s use of the term, see Gauthier: “The word ‘gitano’ in Lorca’s work does not particularly refer to the descendants of the nomadic peoples who, from the depths of Asia, traveled to the west, some through Central Europe, Provence and Spain; others along the southern shores of the Mediterranean: Syria, Egypt, Libya, North Africa and Andalusia. The tanned complexion is a clue, it is true; but it does not designate exclusively these settled nomads in Catalonia around 1425, and in Andalusia in 1460. The capture of Granada by the Catholic Kings in 1429 saw only the richest Moorish families leave Spain. The majority of the Arabs who remained in the country have been assimilated, more or less Christianized, and occupy the lands or peripheries of the big cities” (18, n. 9).
- <sup>2</sup> “popular hasta la desesperación.” All unattributed translations are mine.
- <sup>3</sup> Gauthier maintains the hypothesis of a civil guard by virtue of “the mention of the belt with its revolver which suggests, moreover, that he has a rank of a noncommissioned officer or an officer.” Similarly, the woman could be not a “Gypsy” but rather the “‘chatelaine’ of the estate near the village.” Gauthier 100.
- <sup>4</sup> *Significance* (in French *signifiante*) is the meaning produced by the semiotic in conjunction with the symbolic. Michael Riffaterre states that from the standpoint of meaning “the text is a string of successive information units” and that from the standpoint of significance “the text is one semantic unit” (3). See also Roland Barthes: “All that is barely tolerated or bluntly rejected by linguistics (as canonical, positive science), significance, bliss—that is precisely what withdraws the text from the image-systems of language” (33). In *Desire in Language*, Julia Kristeva defines “meaning” as “the position of a subject of enunciation” and significance as “possible, plausible, or actual denotation” (167); in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she adds: “What we call *signifiante*, then, is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives toward, in, and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists—the subject and his institutions” (17).
- <sup>5</sup> By extension, the poem resembles Arthur Rimbaud’s poem “Sensation,” which also establishes a comparison to a Rom, “comme un bohémien” (like a Gypsy) and to a heterosexual relationship, “comme avec une femme” (as with a woman). What such comparisons reveal is that Gypsy men are quintessentially defined as masculine and straight. See Rimbaud 35.

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