

Giuseppe Cafiero (translated by Simon Knight)

Tainted Blood

Aselli y escalera cum misericordia. The Aragonese canon lawyer, Francisco Peña, and that angular Sicilian, Ludovicus a Paramo, gave prominence and respectability to truths that were never doubted, never opposed, never condemned. Such was the canonical authority of their writings,¹ they were pointed to as shining examples of orthodoxy, without the slightest hesitation on the part of the Church. They contained many ideas which lent support to the humors of a king and queen and eventually bore fruit in canon laws and papal bulls.

Seville had abjured its Moorish past, the age when Yousouf Abou Yakpub had adorned Alcazar and Cathedral with magnificent patios in the Berber style. Seville had abjured its past, welcoming demands for a renewed faith that would not brook comfortable apostasies of the kind tolerated in earlier, more innocent times. *Aselli y escalera cum misericordia.*

In the Chamber of Truth, rack and thumbscrews figured as divine instruments, permitted by Roman pontiffs and impeccably Catholic monarchs to ensure that nothing escaped their vigilance. Rack and thumbscrews extracted confessions, albeit supplemented with imagined wickedness, sometimes catching the investigator off his guard in his mania to wrench all he could from tortured body and spirit, worm his way into sins and perversions of every possible kind.

Those were the days of Isabella and Ferdinand, but also of Tomás de Torquemada, of the Consulta da Fé, the Auto-da-Fé, of men and women of other faiths caught up in the judgment of the Sancta Fide. And the writings of Alfonso de Espinar and Andres Bernàlder are steeped in love

for the reason of state, which never deceives or defrauds but exalts the very principles of truth—in the name, of course, of true religion, of their most serene and devoted majesties, of Catholics everywhere.

Some people were saying, and they made no secret of it, that it was time to teach the Jews a lesson—the Jews were rich, the Jews were usurers, the Jews were influential merchants, the Jews were bankers—because they did not hold the true faith. This was the main reason, but not the only one. Some still remembered the proven bad faith of the misbelievers, the Christ-less ones, who, one day some years before, had united to institute a great festival, to be held on the very Friday of the *Heddomada Paschalis, Major et Sancta*, when the Holy Week celebrations required that the confraternities carry the *Pasos* through the old parts of town, and on Good Friday take part in a funereal procession, in an oppressive semi-darkness lit only by flickering tapers.

A manifest insult to the feelings of their Catholic Majesties, the priests, and the people as a whole. It was no way to come out of the ghettos: claiming the right to live by religious rites different from those practised by the royal household, the Spanish people, and the priests appointed to crush the Antichrist *cum Catholicis Institutionibus*.

There was no pity, there could be no pity, when those of different faith were immensely wealthy, when those who in the Passover celebrated the flight of their ancestors from abominable, idolatrous Egypt, were obliged to break unleavened bread and, to keep their courage up, quoted the words of Flavius Josephus on the cowardice of the burning of the temple.

Then came the time of Marranos and Conversos, a time of ambiguities as denunciation became the common practice in proceeding against the ancient sons of Israel, now set free—and without any spirit of religious revenge—from the rules of the acronym Sifrei Emet, which showed how David had overcome Goliath with reckless boldness.

So it came about that Nathal Salomon, obedient to the dictates of the Santo Oficio and duly rebaptised Juan Fernandez Morales el Converso in the Hispanic manner, left Utrera for Seville, for the monastery of San Pedro, not far from the notorious fortress of Triana. Utrera was soon lost amid the gentle hills at his back, sulkily ruminating on its ancient reputation as a city friendly to assassins and mockers of the sacred mission of the most catholic kings,² when, after the councils of Narbonne

and Béziers,³ it was difficult to choose non-canonical options—even though it has subsequently become loyal for the sake of St. John the Baptist.

The black robes of Tomás de Torquemada conjured up terrifying images of the fires of hell, of hideous demons, of bodies racked for their betrayal of the faith. Those black robes offered no salvation to soldiers not enlisted in the Militia Christi—no longer reckless, and certainly not feared.

Anxiety gnawed at Juan Morales as he walked the road between Utrera and Seville: it was by now obvious that his liberty depended on a new set of rules. Not on religious orthodoxy, but on a political decision to grant the assets, wealth and livelihoods of infidel conversos and marranos to the most faithful of the faithful and to their catholic majesties.

So, as Juan Morales, a practising converso, walked the road from Utrera to Seville, he kept a tight grip on the purse containing his worldly substance. Money talks. He was ready, if necessary, to disburse large quantities of gold coin to obtain the good offices of a certain father Julio, prior of the monastery of San Pedro, who, in his role of *alguazil*, could mediate with the Holy Inquisition and pull strings on his behalf. No other course was open to him. Reluctantly and with much inner pain, he had relinquished the name of Nathal Salon to ensure his survival. He had sacrificed his dignity by engaging in ecclesiastical intrigues to ensure that the catholic species was united in its struggle against the infidels: proven enemies of catholic philosophy, belief and virtue, of a healthy economy, of financial dealings unsullied by semitic practice.

Juan Morales had offered conspicuous sums of money to the church of Nuestra Señora de la Mesa, in Utrera, to pay the wages of a squad of heretic hunters. Juan Morales was, after all, a converso, and proud of the fact, as he was proud of the businesses he had set up to buy and sell, deal in foreign exchange and lend money in Utrera and other places. They afforded him prestige, respect and authority and permitted him to vaunt his status, even with legitimate children of Holy Mother Church, and so it had been all his life.

By the time Juan Morales made his journey to Seville, rumors of mass exoduses of marranos and conversos were commonplace. In street and tavern, it was murmured that their majesties, the Pope in person and the

Santo Oficio had concerted their efforts to restore to the indigenous Spanish the wealth of which, by deception and usury, they had been defrauded by Jew and Moor.

The streets of Seville were a hotbed of rumor, fear, suspicion. People were keeping a sharp watch for clues which would enable the Inquisition's familiars to exercise their discretion and summary powers of arrest. It was rumored—though Juan Morales very much doubted the fact—that many conversos had become influential pastors, and even bishops. The investigations of the Santo Oficio were being aided and abetted by delays; arrests by calculated abuses of power; defamatory accusations by personal grievances. Diffidence, mistrust of friends, wariness of associates, fear of acquaintances spread like a dark shadow. There was little peace even in attending mass, only a subtle pressure to demonstrate familiarity with the functions and rites, to show unaccustomed enthusiasm in going to confession, to move with confidence in the sacred precincts, so as not to engender suspicion.

Juan Morales therefore hastened to reach the monastery of San Pedro and bare his soul to father Julio, harken to his advice and, if appropriate, offer him a substantial sum of money to safeguard his future in a web of skilful intrigue, and preserve him in his dignity of converso and flourishing merchant. The monastery of San Pedro stood on a rocky spur on the opposite bank of the Guadalquivir, between the Cartja and the sacred wood of Nuestra Señora de las Cuevas.

Near the cathedral, Juan Morales had the good fortune to bump into a carter by the name of Rodrigo, who happened to be loading priedies, benches, strong wooden boards and strange iron frames. Juan Morales was fortunate enough to ask Rodrigo for directions to the monastery of San Pedro, only to be told that Rodrigo himself was going there to deliver furniture, accoutrements and tables required by the Inquisitor General and his entourage for the trial of two conversos and a priest of known heretical views.⁴

To Juan Morales, it seemed for an instant that every road offering safety and a way of escape was now patrolled by treacherous familiars, beset with dangers, watched over by sworn enemies. He doubted the wisdom of his mission, his trip to Seville, his determination to seek out Don Pedro. But despite his fear and hesitation, he at length convinced himself that the meeting was an absolute necessity. There was no

alternative, nor could he see any other way of avoiding the snares that the court might well set for him should it decide to re-examine, in an obstinate, acrimonious spirit, his condition as a converso.

True, he was an assiduous, loyal and sincere participant in the Catholic liturgy, he had quickly forgotten the Torah and, with it, the Jewish religious tradition and the flickering lights of the Feast of Dedication. It was his desire to forget all but his baptism according to the Roman Catholic rite, his sworn submission to his new God, Christ the Messiah, the Pope and their Catholic Majesties. It was by their gracious benevolence, after all, that he was permitted to employ his talents and abilities, and the accumulated riches of his ancestors, in carrying on his various businesses. Juan Morales therefore accepted the carter's Rodrigo offer of a lift as far as the monastery of San Pedro.

The customary silence of the cloister was broken by the sound of voices, sharp, penetrating, on edge. Monks came and went with unwonted haste. The monastery seemed alive with a palpable excitement, all astir with unfamiliar accents and whispers, the rustle of hurrying robes. The rule of the order had been thrown into confusion now that poverty and chastity were no longer upheld by silence. Don Julio, the prior, had freed his fellow monks from their first obligation so that the courtroom and torture chamber could be got ready without delay for the solemn celebration of a trial conducted by the most holy Inquisition.

In his celebrated works,⁵ Ildefonso de Valladolid had commented on the main aspects of the life and work of San Pedro Soler—*vir sanctus et sanctus homo*. Disciples had been trained to adhere to his precepts with iron determination, with a single-mindedness tempered by a spirit of sacrifice. Dressed in their loose-fitting black tunics marked with a red cross and gathered in at the waist with a heavy chain, they prayed as they labored in the high service of the Church and their Catholic Majesties Isabella and Ferdinand.

The converso Juan Morales therefore committed himself to the tender mercies of San Pedro Soler and, in his name, requested an audience of Don Julio in the hope of finding succor, protection, asylum. But contact with a converso was a very risky business: Tomás de Torquemada had eyes in the back of his head, and prior Julio could not but hold the Santo Oficio in the highest regard now that the papal dispensation safeguarding his interests and those of his community had been set aside.

Justice was partial, factious, interested. The agents of the Inquisition labored, with laudable efficiency, to extract confessions and, if it so happened that the suspected heretic lived an exemplary life unsullied by Jewish or Moorish connections, a false confession was quite good enough. *Carceles secretas*, was the thought uppermost in Don Julio's mind, and he had a justified fear of ending up there himself if he decided to protect this man of tainted blood who was appealing to him for help.

Insecurity and fear for one's own skin often lead to hasty decisions, decisions in conflict with one's deepest sense of right and wrong. But what else could Don Julio have done in the face of imminent danger? It was the task of the brothers of San Pedro to serve on behalf of the supreme authorities. Their role at this moment was to prepare the audience hall and torture chamber, the means whereby a man not born to militate under the Catholic banner, a man of the race guilty of the blood of the Messiah, and by definition immensely rich, might be tried and condemned to death.

Don Julio had no way of proving that Juan Morales was a *limpio*, a man of untainted blood. He could have handed him over to the Court with an appeal for clemency on the grounds that once (as a precaution, it was the custom to stress in certain circumstances the word "once")⁶ Juan Morales had been a converso and was therefore worthy of compassion and a sentence tempered *cum misericordia*. The *carceleros* would nevertheless have forced Juan Morales to wear the yellow *sanbenito* with the vivid red St. Andrew's cross before and behind as a reminder of the flames of hell.⁷ And Juan Morales would have been stripped in perpetuity of all his worldly goods, all the wealth built up by hard work or bequeathed to him by his ancestors, who had come to Spain to escape earlier persecutions in Africa.

Condemnation and penitence, penitence and condemnation were the best that could be expected for Juan Morales. It suddenly occurred to Don Julio that the fate, fortune and very survival of this converso were in his hand. It was in his power to hide him and help him disappear with his family and riches—at present carefully locked away in some strongbox in Utrera. Don Julio turned these things over in his mind and finally ordered Juan Morales to return to his native town, sell up his goods and chattels and return to the monastery bringing all his wealth with him: money and gold, wife and child. Don Julio turned these things over in his

mind and—well before the Court of the Santo Oficio began its work—ordered two novices to dig three deep graves in the garden, behind the fourteenth-century chapel, in an out-of-the-way spot where few people ever ventured.

* * *

Ten months ago, I received a suspicious letter:

Dear Sir,

During these long, dreary winter months, my mind has often returned to your advertisement in the Indo-Cyprian Gazette. That was in August, when we of the Puerto do Despeñaperros circus were fulfilling a three-month engagement with the Cyprus Tourist Board. We were performing as jugglers, acrobats and lion-tamers—or rather our womenfolk were. We had also agreed to throw open our caravans to visitors curious to learn about our way of life. The tour operators thought this would prove a big attraction for holiday makers in these Mediterranean lands, especially the Greeks, Italians and Maronite Lebanese. They were wrong.

It was an experience we would not want to repeat. Misunderstandings of an artistic and religious nature, and over money, forced us into distasteful compromises, to such an extent that, in order to return home, we had to seek help from our embassy in Kiev, which advanced the large sum needed to transport our equipment, particularly the menagerie. We now have a debt to repay to our government, and it occurs to me that the reward you mentioned in your August advertisement would go a long way to meeting this heavy financial burden. I am therefore responding to your request for information about the persecution of Jews by the Spanish Inquisition with first-hand details of the wrongs suffered by our forbears. I will spare no one's feelings in matters of modesty, race, religion or social class.

Since the early sixteenth century our circus community—the Puerto de Despeñaperros—has lived a few miles from Surnia, between Lamirra and Okano, a land of lakes. Here, for most of the year, silence reigns, and in any case prayer is the stuff of our daily life. "He who judges is seriously remiss if he gives credence to the folly of certain people." Such is the first

rule of our community, intended to put an end to the mockery of our ancient—Jewish—faith. An end, too, to the scorn which takes hold of certain minds when others are not as pure as Rome prescribes. *Melior est virtus quam sapientia, et vir prudens quam intelligens.*

When not working nor wandering the highways of the world, we dress according to the old traditions: black coats gathered in at the waist over long flared skirts. Virtue then seems to take us by the hand and, without fear or shame at being different, we give ourselves wholly to teaching and celebrating the ancient rites, the Midrash, the Pentateuch, the Talmud, the sibylline words of one Leon de Mosè, who wrote learned commentaries on the art of praying with bowed head, or composing psalms to be sung in seven or nine-part harmony. We honor and perpetuate the timeless customs, faithfully observing the teachings of our semitic forefathers, who came to these Protestant lands to escape the cultural fervor of Mediterranean countries chosen and watched over by the God of Zion.

Our forefathers handed down what they knew. Their sons rediscover the quarry from which they were dug in this oral tradition, often accompanying their recitals on stringed instruments, two or three playing together in the way taught by that great master Bavli Sefer.

We are well disposed to learn what people would have us learn, yet we cannot forget what our forefathers suffered, the ferocious, premeditated determination to exterminate them, and all for the sake of their money. I therefore enjoin you to throw light on this period, on sombre circumstances which may explain why the history of that time is itself so obscure, incomprehensible, distorted.

Let me share with you from the collective memory of my people, what we know of the persecutions in Spain. Our forefathers were Jews, merchants who had taken refuge in Iberia years earlier to escape from persecutions elsewhere.

Devoted to the outward forms of worship, religious bowing and scraping, amoral behavior, sobriety in affairs of the heart, the mortification of the flesh, sexual abstinence, Isabella and Ferdinand, the Catholic Kings, infamous instigators of the Spanish Inquisition, yielded themselves to the pleasures of money and the lust for others' riches.

Faithful to the Church of Rome, these joint sovereigns subjected every liberty to their gracious wills, taking it upon themselves to condemn faiths

it suited them to call heresies, send to the stake believers it suited them to call heretics, strip the Jews—whether conversos or no—of all their wealth, every asset, every possession. Conscience should have prevented the fulfilling of their criminal instructions, their murdering lust. But conscience was seared, so the lot of our semite ancestors was to languish in dank dungeons, learn the secrets of the torture chamber, fuel the blaze of purifying bonfires, because, by the very nature and character of our religion, we were apt to corrupt and contaminate all faithful believers in Christ and the Church of the Bishop of Rome. It therefore became a holy crusade for Isabella and Ferdinand to have their familiars and devoted court prelates flush out rich Jews, confiscate their worldly goods and hand them over to the Holy Office to die in the blackest and most gruesome torment.

Abui Abuz—whose studies and copious writings will be more than familiar to you—has dealt with these matters at some length, but has considerably toned down the true facts. I am thinking particularly of his Voyage critique à la cour de Isabelle et de Ferdinand, which expresses no censure of the Catholic atrocities, but tends rather to justify both royal and papal conduct, however morally ambiguous and reprehensible. Truth has many faces, as the saying goes, and often we choose the face we would most like to see in the mirror.

In Isabella and Ferdinand's day, our forebears in Spain lived the life of conversos. But even this did not exempt them from the persecutions and animosity of their Catholic Majesties, who exercised determination and treachery in stripping the Jews of all their worldly goods, on the pretext that this people was inveterately hostile to the image of Christ the Messiah.

Some of our forefathers' co-religionists quickly fled abroad, without waiting to see which way things would turn out. Others, having delayed their escape, were forced to seek asylum with supportive Catholic friends and acquaintances. Such was the case of one Nathal Salomon of Utrera, an extremely wealthy man, who took refuge with wife, son and riches at the Convent of San Pedro, in Seville, under the protection of the saintly prior of the community, Don Julio. News of Nathal, his family and riches soon dried up. They were thought dead, maybe treacherously murdered for the sake of their money.

Then, 30 years later, a man named Nathal Salomon arrived in this country. With him came a few men and 50 or so women. They brought a number of beautifully copied scrolls of the Torah. We still have an old notebook, a kind of diary, which sets out the way of life, laws and government of this community. We know for certain that they practised polygamy, that the women were held in subjection, obliged to work without respite while the menfolk—officially for reasons of religious observance—enjoyed their ease, that they bore on their bodies the horrible signs of the work of the Inquisition.

The community, which took the name Puerto de Despeñaperros in honor of Eliad de Despeñaperros, an heroic converso who, though a polygamist, became a bishop, in due course devoted itself to the noble art of the circus—an occupation offering highly profitable employment to the womenfolk. And an oral tradition was born, though it never alluded to the origins of the community: whether it had sprung from the loins of Nathal Salomon, who had escaped from prison and surrounded himself, for reasons of faith and in fulfilment of a vow, with women of divers races but a single religion; or whether its originator was that Don Julio, formerly a most devoted servant of the Catholic god, who had left his convent of San Pedro in Seville for reasons of spiritual zeal, laudable self-respect, or possibly to dispense with his vow of chastity. It is valid to ask whether the man who came to this land in the guise of Nathal Salomon was in fact a Jew or a Catholic.

I hope you will be able to get to the bottom of the matter. Meanwhile, for the information I have just provided, please be so kind as to send me the ten thousand dollars promised in your advertisement in the Indo-Cyprian Gazette of last August. The sum should be paid into my account—code-name "shalom"—at the Libre Banque de Sion.

Yours faithfully,

Uko Salomon, Surnia.

NOTES

1. Francisco Peña, *Inquirendorum Haereticorum Lucerna*; Ludovicus a Paramo, *De Origine et Progressu Sanctae Inquisitionis*.
2. Anonymous, *Mata el Rey y Vete a Utera*, Santa Maria de l'Ascunciòn, undated.
3. P. Anton Royas, *Narbo Martius et Colonia Iulia Septimanorum Baeterrae*, Catholica Fides.
4. Altarà of Caindo, *Historia de Sevilla y la Inquisicion*, Universidad de Toledo, undated.
5. *Exercita S. S. Petri et Opuscula Omnia cum Vulgata Interpretatione. Dissertatio Epistolarum S. S. Petri cum Annotationibus*, Tipographia Collegia Alemanda, Libri IV.
6. Amodar de Medina, *Instrucciones*, Nueva Tierra, 1814.
7. Leon Navas, *Regulae Inquisitorum*, Avila, undated.