

THEORY AND FUNCTION OF THE *DUENDE*

The following is the text of a lecture which Lorca gave in Havana and Buenos Aires, and which gives us some clue to understanding his poetry. However, it is so idiosyncratic, and so full of allusions to the culture he grew up in, that many readers may be baffled.

'*Duende*' means literally imp, goblin, demon. But what he is really talking about is the quality which distinguishes great art, in any medium, from that which is merely competent, 'a mysterious power which everyone feels and which no philosopher can explain'. It is this quality which makes us passionately admire one particular poem, piece of music or picture after we have heard or seen thousands which are good in themselves. We may be able to give reasons for our choice, but, ultimately, it is a mystery.

For Lorca, this power is intimately connected with the 'hidden spirit of suffering Spain'. He finds the *duende* in flamenco, the bullfight, and the ancient ballads he quotes which, like his own poetry, are about love and death. 'All that has dark sounds has *duende*,' he proclaims. It has nothing to do with intellect, it is in the blood, and it exists only where there is a possibility of death. We do not need to know all the works of art to which Lorca refers to understand that he is telling us something about the 'demon' which drove him.

On page 222 he makes a mistake in his reference to Luther at Nuremberg. I could have corrected this to Wartberg in my translation.

DEATH.

Juega y teoría del duende

Ladies and Gentlemen:

From the year 1918, when I entered the Students' Residence in Madrid, until 1928, when I left it, completing my studies in philosophy and literature, I heard in that distinguished place, where the old Spanish aristocracy came to counteract the frivolity of French seaside resorts, more than a thousand conferences.

Longing for air and sun, I grew very bored, and when I left I felt covered with a thin layer of ash almost to the point of my becoming a pepper-pot of irritation.

No. I didn't want to bring into this room the terrible blowfly of boredom which strings together all heads with a thin thread of dreams and which puts in an audience's eyes little bundles of pins.

To speak plainly, in that range of my poetic voice which does not possess wooden lights, or hemlock loops, or sheep which change to blades of irony, I'm going to see if I can give a simple lecture on the hidden spirit of suffering Spain.

Anyone who goes to that stretched-out bullskin between the Júcar, Guadalete, Sil or Pisuerga (I don't want to name the waters, coloured like a lion's mane, which shake the Plata) will fairly often hear the words, 'This has much *duende*.' Manuel Torres, a great Andalusian artist, said to someone who was singing: 'You have a voice, you know the style, but you will never be a great success, because you have no *duende*.'

All over Andalucía, from the rock of Jaén to the shell of Cádiz, people speak constantly of the *duende* and recognise it with a sure instinct when it appears.

The marvellous singer *El Lebrijano*, creator of the *Debla*, said: 'No one is as good as me on the days when I sing with *duende*.' The old gypsy dancer *La Malena* once exclaimed, on hearing Brailowsky play a piece of Bach: 'Olé! That's got *duende*!', and she was bored with Gluck and with Brahms and with Darius Milhaud. And Manuel Torres, a man with more culture in his blood than anyone I have known, on listening to Falla playing his own *Nocturno del Generalife* coined this splendid phrase: 'All that has dark sounds has *duende*.' And there is no greater truth.

These dark sounds are the mystery, the roots pushing into the soil which we all know, which we all ignore, but from which comes what is real in art. Dark sounds, said the popular artist of Spain, and he agrees with Goethe, who defined the *duende* when he spoke

of Paganini: 'A mysterious power which everyone feels and which no philosopher can explain.'

So, then, the *duende* is a power and not a form of behaviour, a struggle, not a mode of thought. I have heard an old master-guitarist say: 'The *duende* isn't in your throat, the *duende* wells up from inside the soles of your feet.' That means it is not a question of ability, but of true living style, of blood, of ancient culture, of the act of creation.

This 'mysterious power which everyone feels and which no philosopher can explain' is, in short, the spirit of the earth, the same *duende* which seized the heart of Nietzsche, who had been seeking it in its external forms on the Rialto bridge or in the music of Bizet, without finding it and without knowing that the *duende* he sought had jumped from the mysterious Greeks to the dancers of Cádiz or the mangled Dionysiac cry of Silverio's *siguiriya*.

So I don't want anyone to confuse the *duende* with the theological demon of doubt, at which Luther in a Bacchic mood threw an inkpot in Nüremberg, nor with the Catholic devil, destructive and unintelligent, who disguises himself as a female dog to get into convents.

No. The *duende* that I speak of, dark and quivering, is a descendant of Socrates' happy demon, marble and salt, who indignantly scratched him the day he took hemlock, and of the other melancholy demon of Descartes, small as a green almond, who got tired of lines and circles and went down by the canals to hear drunken sailors sing.

Every man - Nietzsche would say, every artist - climbs each stair in the tower of his own perfection at the cost of his struggle with a *duende* - not with an angel, as some say, or with a muse. We must make this fundamental distinction to get to the root of the work.

The angel guides and gives gifts like St Raphael, defends and saves like St Michael, forewarns like St Gabriel. The angel is radiant, but he flies over men's heads, above us, he pours out his grace while man effortlessly achieves his work, his sympathy or his dance. The angel of the road to Damascus and the one who came through the opening of the little balcony at Assisi, or the angel who followed the steps of Enrique Susón, *commands* us and we cannot resist his light, because he waves his steely wings in the ambit of those who are predestined.

The muse dictates and, sometimes, inspires. She can do relatively little, because she is now so distant and exhausted (I have seen her twice) that I had to put half a marble heart inside her. The

poets of the muse hear voices and do not know their origin, but they are from the muse who inspires them and sometimes makes a meal of them. So it was with Apollinaire, a great poet destroyed by the horrible muse with whom he was painted by the divine, angelic Rousseau. The muse awakes the intellect, brings pillared landscapes and a false flavour of laurel. Intellect is often the enemy of poetry because it imitates too much, because it raises the poet to a sharp-edged throne and makes him forget he might soon be eaten by ants, or a great arsenic lobster might fall on his head. Against this the muses in monocles or in a small salon's cool lacquered rose are helpless.

Angel and muse come from outside; the angel gives light and the muse gives shape (Hesiod learned from them). Gold leaf or pleat of tunics, the poet receives norms in his laurel grove. The *duende*, though, must be awakened in the deepest dwellings of blood.

We must push away the angel and kick out the muse, and cease to fear the violet fragrance which is breathed from eighteenth-century poetry and from the great telescope with the sickly muse of limits asleep in its glass.

The real struggle is with the *duende*.

The ways to seek God are known, the rough way of the hermit or the mystic's subtle way. With a tower like St Teresa, or by three paths like St John of the Cross. And even though we must cry with Isaiah's voice, 'Truly you are the hidden God', in the end God sends his first thorns of fire to those who seek him.

But there is no map, no formula to seek the *duende*. We only know that it burns the blood-like glass, that it drains you, that it rejects all the sweet geometry you have learned, that it breaks with style, that it makes Goya - the master of grey, silver and pink like the best English artists - paint horrible bitumen black with his knees and his fists. Or it strips Jacint Verdager in the cold Pyrenees, or takes Jorge Manrique to await death in Ocaña's wasteland, or clothes Rimbaud's delicate body in an acrobat's green suit, or puts the eyes of a dead fish on Count Lautréamont in the boulevard, at dawn.

The great artists of southern Spain, gypsy or flamenco, know as they sing, dance or play that no emotion is possible without the *duende*. They may deceive you by giving the impression of *duende* when it isn't there, as you are deceived every day by authors, painters or literary fashions without *duende*, but if you pay attention, and are not indifferent, you will discover the clumsy fraud and put it to flight.

Once, the Andalucian singer Pastora Pavón, *La Niña de los Peines*

['The Girl with the Combs'], a sombre Spanish genius with an imagination like that of Goya or Rafael 'the Cock', was singing in a tavern at Cádiz. She played with her voice of shadow and of melted tin, her voice covered with moss, and she tangled it in her hair or drenched it in *manzanilla* or lost it in dark, distant woods. But it was no good, useless. The audience remained unmoved.

Ignacio Espeleta was there, handsome as a Roman tortoise, who once, on being asked, 'Why don't you work?' replied, with a smile worthy of Argantonio, 'Why should I work, if I come from Cádiz?'

Eloisa was there too, the fiery aristocratic whore of Sevilla, a direct descendant of Soledad Vargas, who in 1930 declined to marry a Rothschild because he was not her equal in blood. The Floridas were there, who are believed to be butchers, but are really ancient priests who still sacrifice bulls to Geryon, and in a corner was the stately rancher Don Pablo Murube, looking like a Cretan mask. Pastora Pavón ended her song amid silence. Only a very small man, one of those little dancers who suddenly come out from the bottles of brandy, sarcastically said in a very low voice, 'Viva Paris!', as if to say: 'Here we don't care about talent, or technique, or mastery. We care for something else'.

Then *La Niña de los Peines* jumped up like a madwoman, crippld like a medieval mourner, drank in one gulp a large glass of fiery *cazalla*, and sat down to sing without a voice, without breath, without subtlety, with a burning throat, but...with *duende*. To do it she needed to destroy all the scaffolding of the song to make way for a furious and blazing *duende*, friend of the desert winds, that made the listeners tear their clothes with almost the same rhythm as West Indians at their rites, crowded before St Barbara's statue.

La Niña de los Peines had to wrench her voice, because she knew that the fastidious listeners wanted not forms but the essence of form, pure music with hardly a body to hold itself up in the air. She had to weaken her own skills and safeguards, to get away from her muse and remain defenceless, so that her *duende* would come and deign to fight her hand-to-hand. And how she sang! She didn't play with her voice now, her voice was a jet of blood dignified by grief and sincerity, and it opened like a hand with ten fingers through the pierced but stormy feet of a Christ by Juan de Juni.

The coming of the *duende* always presupposes a deep change in all the old forms. It gives a sense of freshness, totally unknown before, with a quality of the newly created rose, of miracle. It succeeds in producing an almost religious fervour.

In all Arabic music, dance, song or elegy, the coming of the *duende* is greeted with energetic cries of 'Allah! Allah!', 'God! God!',

very similar to the bullfighters' 'Olé!' In all the songs of southern Spain the *duende's* appearance is followed by sincere cries of 'Long live God!' - a profound, human, tender cry of communication with God through the five senses, thanks to the *duende* which moves the voice and body of the dancer, a real and poetic flight from this world, as pure as that obtained by the rare seventeenth-century poet Pedro Soto de Rojas across seven gardens, or that of St John Climacus on his trembling ladder of grief.

Naturally, when this flight from the world is achieved, everyone feels its effects - the initiated, seeing how style can conquer mere matter, and the uneducated, with an indefinable but real emotion. Years ago, in a dancing contest at Jerez de la Frontera, an old woman of eighty carried off the prize against beautiful women and girls with waists like water, simply by raising her arms, lifting her head and beating her foot on the stage. But in that reunion of muses and angels, beauties of form and beauties of smile, that moribund *duende* which dragged its wings of rusty knives along the ground was bound to win, and did.

All the arts are capable of *duende*, but it finds most scope, naturally, in music, dance and spoken poetry. They need a living body to interpret them, since they are forms that are born and die endlessly and raise their contours in the exact present. The *duende* of the musician often passes to the *duende* of the interpreter, and at other times, when the musician or poet are not up to it, the interpreter's *duende* - and this is interesting - creates a new marvel which has little in common with the original work. Such is the case of Eleonora Duse, full of *duende*, who sought out unsuccessful works and made them triumph, thanks to what she put into them. Or Paganini, who according to Goethe could make profound music out of very ordinary stuff. Or a charming girl in Puerto de Santa Maria, whom I saw sing and dance the dreadful Italian song 'O Mari!' with such rhythm, pauses and meaning that she made of the Italian trash a hard snake of raised gold.

What was really happening was that they were discovering a new thing which had never been seen before, infusing living blood and skill in vessels empty of expression.

All arts, and all countries, can produce the *duende*, the angel and the muse. So Germany has, with exceptions, a muse, and Italy a permanent angel, but Spain is perpetually moved by the *duende*, for it is an ancient land of music and dance, where the *duende* squeezes lemons of dawn, and a land of death, a land open to death.

In every country death is an end. Death comes and the blinds are drawn. In Spain, no. In Spain they are lifted. Many people

there live between walls until the day they die and are brought out into the sun. A dead man in Spain is more alive than a dead man anywhere else on earth: his profile has a cutting edge like a barber's razor. The joke about death and its silent contemplation are familiar to Spaniards. From Quevedo's *Dream of the Skulls* to the *Rotting Bishop* of Valdés Leal, and from the seventeenth-century Marbella, dead in childbirth on the road, who said:

*La sangre de mis entrañas
cubriendo el caballo está;
las patas de tu caballo
echan fuego de alquitrán*

The blood of my entrails
covers the horse;
the hooves of your horse
create sparks of tar

to the young man of Salamanca, recently killed by a bull, who cried:

*Amigos, que yo me muero;
amigos, yo estoy muy malo.
Tres pañuelos tengo dentro
y este que meto son cuatro.*

Friends, I am dying;
friends, I'm very bad.
Three handkerchieves I have inside
and this is the fourth.

...there is a barrier made of flowers of saltpetre, where there rises a people contemplating death, with Jeremiah's verses on their roughest side, and fragrant cypress on the side that is most lyrical. But it is a land where the most important thing of all has a final metallic value of death. The knife and the cartwheel, the razor and the pointed beards of herdsmen, the bald moon, the fly, damp larders, rubble, lace-enshrouded saints, lime, and the cutting outline of eaves and balconies possess, in Spain, little grasses of death, allusions and voices which the alert mind can pick up, which summon our memory with the rigid wind of our own passing. It is no accident that all Spanish art is bound to our soil, full of thistles and definitive stones. The lament of Pleberio or the dances of the great Josef María de Valdivielso are not isolated instances; it is no accident that this Spanish love song stands out from all the ballads of Europe:

*Si tú eres mi linda amiga,
¿cómo no me miras, di?
Ojos con que te miraba
a la sombra se los di.
Si tú eres mi linda amiga,
¿cómo no me besas, di?
labios con que te besaba
a la tierra se los di.
Si tú eres mi linda amiga,
¿cómo no me abrazas, di?
Brazos con que te abrazaba
de gusanos los cubrí.*

'If you are my sweetheart,
why don't you look at me?'
'The eyes with which I looked at you
I gave to the shadow.'
'If you are my sweetheart,
then why don't you kiss me?'
'The lips with which I kissed you
I gave to the earth.'
'If you are my sweetheart,
why don't you embrace me?'
'The arms I embraced you with
I covered with worms.'

Nor is it strange to find among our earliest lyrics, this song:

*Dentro del vergel
moriré.
Dentro del rosál
matar me han.
Yo me iba, mi madre,
las rosas coger,
hallara la muerte
dentro del vergel.
Yo me iba, mi madre,
las rosas cortar,
hallara la muerte
dentro del rosál.
Dentro del vergel
moriré,
dentro del rosál,
matar me han.*

In the garden
I shall die.
In the rose bush
they will kill me.
I was going, mother,
to pick some roses,
I met death
in the garden.
I was going, mother,
to cut some roses,
I met death
in the rose bush.
In the garden
I shall die,
in the rose bush
they will kill me.

The painter Zurbarán's moon-frozen heads, El Greco's yellow of butter and of lightning, the prose of Father Sigüenza, Goya's entire work, the apse of the church in Escorial, all polychrome sculpture, the crypt of Osuna's ducal house, 'Death with the Guitar' in the Benaventes' chapel at Medina de Rioseco – all these are the cultural equivalent to the pilgrimages of San Andrés de Teixido, where the dead have a place in the procession, to the dead-songs sung by Asturian women with flaming lanterns on a November night, to the sibyl's song and dance in the cathedrals of Mallorca and Toledo, to the dark Tortosan 'In Recort' and the innumerable rites of Good Friday, which, together with the highly civilised spectacle of bull-fighting, form the popular triumph of death in Spain. In the whole world, only Mexico can compare with my country.

When the muse sees death, she shuts the door or raises a plinth or displays an urn and writes, with her waxen hand, an epitaph, but next she tears her laurel wreath in a silence wavering between two breezes. Beneath the broken arch of the ode, she mournfully binds the exact flowers which the Italians painted in the fifteenth century, and calls Lucretius' trusted cockerel to put unexpected shadows to flight.

When the angel sees death, he flies in slow circles and weaves with tears of frost and narcissus the elegy we have seen trembling in Keats' hands, and those of Villasantino, Herrera, Bécquer and Juan Ramón Jiménez. But how horrified the angel will be if he feels a spider, even a little one, on his tender rosy foot!

But the *duende* doesn't come if it sees no possibility of death, if it doesn't know it will haunt the house of death, if it doesn't mean

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to shake those branches which we all carry and which neither are, nor will be, comforted.

In idea, sound or gesture the *duende* likes a straight fight with the creator on the rim of the well. Angel and muse escape with violin or compass; the *duende* wounds, and in healing this wound, which never closes, is the exceptional, the creative part of man's work.

The magical quality of a poem consists in being always full of *duende*, to baptise all those who admire it with dark water. Because with *duende* it is easier to love, to understand, and one is *certain* to be loved and understood, and this struggle for expression and communication in poetry becomes a mortal struggle at times.

Remember the case of St Teresa, possessed with flamenco and *duende*. Flamenco not because she stopped an angry bull with three magnificent passes, which she did; not because she showed off her good looks before the friar Juan de la Misericordia and not because she slapped the Papal Nuncio, but for being one of the few creatures whose *duende* (not angel, for an angel attacks no one) transfixed her with a dart, wanting to kill her for discovering its last secret, the delicate bridge which joins the five senses to that centre of living flesh, living cloud, living sea, of timeless love.

This valiant conqueror of the *duende* was quite unlike Philip of Austria, who, longingly seeking the angel and muse of theology, found himself imprisoned by the *duende's* cold ardours in that building El Escorial, whose geometry borders on dream and where the *duende* dons the muse's mask for the eternal punishment of the great king.

We have said that the *duende* likes the edge, the wound, and approaches places where the forms unite in a yearning greater than their visible expressions.

In Spain (as among Eastern peoples, where the dance is a religious expression), the *duende* has a boundless scope in the bodies of the dancers of Cádiz, praised by Martial, in the breasts of singers, praised by Juvenal, and in the whole liturgy of bullfighting, an authentic religious drama where, as in the mass, a god is worshipped and is sacrificed.

It seems as if all the *duende* in the ancient world has come together in this perfect ritual, exhibiting the culture and the great sensibility of a people who discover man's highest anger, spleen and grief. Nobody is amused by Spanish dance nor by the bullfight; the *duende* ensures we suffer through the drama, in living forms, and prepares the stairs for a flight from surrounding reality.

The *duende* operates on a dancer's body like wind on the sand.

With magic power, it changes a girl into a paralytic of the moon, or fills with adolescent blushes an old broken man who is begging round the wine shops for alms. It gives a head of hair the smell of a night-time harbour, and at each moment it moves the arms with gestures which have always been the mothers of dance.

But it is impossible to repeat oneself, better to emphasise it. The *duende* does not repeat itself, any more than the shapes of the sea in a storm. *e.g. constantly moving*

In bullfighting it acquires its most impressive tones, because on the one side it has to fight with death, which might destroy it, and on the other with geometry, the fundamental base and measure of the ritual.

The bull has its orbit; the bullfighter his, and between the two orbits is a point of danger which is the vertex of the terrible game.

You can have the muse with the *muleta* and the angel with the *banderillas* and pretend to be a good bullfighter, but in the work with the cape, when the bull is still unwounded, and in the moment of killing, you need the help of the *duende* to thrust home the artistic truth. *— like Hemingway's Fiesta*

The bullfighter who alarms the public by taking risks is not bullfighting, he is absurdly *playing with his life*, which any man can do. But the bullfighter bitten by the *duende* gives a lesson of Pythagorean music, and makes us forget that he is constantly throwing his heart at the horns.

Lagartijo with his Roman *duende*, Joselito with his Jewish *duende*, Belmonte with his baroque *duende* and Cagancho with his gypsy *duende*, from the twilight of the bull-ring they show poets, painters and musicians four great paths of the Spanish tradition.

Spain is the only country where death is a national spectacle, where death sounds great bugles on the arrival of spring. Its art is always governed by an artful *duende* which gives it its uniqueness and its quality of invention.

The *duende* that fills with blood, for the first time in sculpture, the cheeks of the saints of the great Mateo de Compostela, is the *duende* which makes St John of the Cross groan or which scalds naked nymphs in Lope de Vega's religious sonnets.

The *duende* which raised the tower of Sahagún or worked hot bricks in Calatayud or Teruel is the same which breaks El Greco's clouds, kicks Quevedo's bailiffs till they roll, and inspires Goya's weird dreams.

When it rains, it brings out a *duende*-haunted Velázquez, in secret, behind his monarchical greys; when it snows it brings out a naked

Bullfighting

DEATH

Herrera to prove that cold doesn't kill; when it burns, it puts Ber-
rugete in the midst of flames and makes him invent a new space
for sculpture.

The muse of Góngora and Garcilaso's angel must drop the laurel
wreath when the *duende* of St John of the Cross goes by, when 'the
wounded stag appears above the hill'.

Gonzalo de Berceo's muse and the angel of the archpriest of Hita
must withdraw to let Jorge Manrique pass when he comes fatally
wounded to the gates of Belmonte castle. The muse of Gregorio
Hernández and the angel of José de Mora must give way to the
duende, weeping tears of Mena's blood, and Martínez Montañés'
duende with the head of an Assyrian bull. And the melancholy muse
of Cataluña and the damp angel of Galicia have to look with loving
wonder at Castilla's *duende*, so far from the warm bread and the
sweet cow that grazes in the normality of sweeping sky and dry earth.

The *duende* of Quevedo and the *duende* of Cervantes, one with
green phosphorus anemones, the other with plaster anemones of
Ruidera, crown the altarpiece of the *duende* of Spain.

Each art has, as is natural, a *duende* of a distinct kind, but all
their roots join at a point where the dark sounds of Manuel Torres
well up. It is ultimate matter, the common base, uncontrollable and
trembling, of wood, sound, fabric and words.

Dark sounds behind which, in tender intimacy, are volcanoes,
ants, zephyrs and the great night that clasps her waist with the
Milky Way.

Ladies and gentlemen: I have raised three arches and with a clumsy
hand have placed in them the muse, the angel and the *duende*.

The muse remains quiet; she can have a tunic in small pleats or
the cow's eyes that regard Pompeii or the big nose with four faces
painted by Picasso, her great friend. The angel can shake Antonello
de Messina's hair, Lippi's tunic and Massolino or Rousseau's violin.

The *duende*...Where is the *duende*? Through the empty arch enters
a wind of the mind, which blows over the heads of the dead insis-
tently, searching for new landscapes, accents we never knew. A wind
with a smell of children's spittle, crushed grass and a jellyfish veil
which announces the constant baptism of newly created things.

— must surpass it in
modernism?

e. o. god of the
new?

the
duende
above
muse
+ angel

structure of
bedtime?

of
Picasso
friend
of muse?