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## *El Duende's Struggle with Words:*

### **Embodied and Intellectual Investigation of Spiritual Experience within Flamenco Dance**

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Summer 2014

*I am held by the music, as though any separation between myself and the rhythm has disappeared. A chill, like a rippling sensation, moves up to my eyes. Tears begin to well up, while the cry from her lungs finds an echo within me and makes me want to shout along with her. The hairs on my skin stand on end, blood drains to my feet. I am rooted to the spot, suspended between the emotion being drawn out of me, as though bypassing my mind... The song continues and I become aware that others in the audience are experiencing the same. I can tell by the expressions on their faces, a certain look in their eyes, and simply feeling it sweep around us all in a second, like a trance.*

Jason Webster, *Duende: A Journey into the Heart of Flamenco*

Jason Webster hooks readers with this tantalizing recollection of his first ecstatic experience with flamenco, an encounter with *el duende*. While the hypnotizing effect of the music and dance, which conjured a physical, emotional, and perhaps spiritual response within him and the rest of the audience, is a captivating vignette, the rest of the novel fails to deliver any explanation of this phenomenon. Instead, it drags along disappointingly, indulging in an unconvincing “passionate love affair.” This frustrating tease is one example of the tense dynamic between the mysterious element of *el duende* and the literature it has inspired.

The phenomenon which Webster describes is culturally recognized in southern Spain, and now by many throughout the world, as *el duende*. *El duende* is popularly understood as a dark, captivating spirit present in authentic performance art, but is most closely associated with flamenco and bullfighting. Spanish poet Federico García Lorca dedicated much of his career to imploring the public to recognize, seek, and cherish *el duende*. He saw authentic flamenco as a portal for this dark spirit of music and art, and felt it was being lost and degraded by tourist's

tastes for lighter styles of flamenco. He codified the term and impressed it into the public conscience of southern Spain through his speeches, poetry, and public work in support of flamenco so the spirit of authentic art would not be lost on modern culture.

Exemplified by Webster's memoir, guided by Lorca's extensive work, and inspired by a personal experience with duende, this research has been dedicated to understanding the relationship between el duende as a lived experience and the possibility, or lack thereof, of reproducing it through text. Not only did García Lorca identify and expound on the experience, he tried to capture the powerful and mysterious sensation into his own work. In order to explore the limits and potential of language in relation to the spiritual experience of duende and art, a quandary elicited by Lorca's work, I put into conversation the physical, embodied study of flamenco dance, my own textual reflection on this experience, and literary analysis of other writers' attempts to translate el duende into words. Because of the inherent dissonance of the subject with purely analytical analysis, I engaged the subject through a multidisciplinary approach to investigate the fundamental dynamics of duende and its relationship to literature.

### García Lorca's Duende

Duende, as an abstract term embedded in a cultural understanding of spirituality, life, death, and art, cannot be contained or defined within the limits of this work, or perhaps at all by the nature of the subject. However, for this work I used Federico García Lorca's speech, *La juega y teoría del duende* (Play and Theory of Duende), as an access point to understanding the term and its relationship to literature. Given in Buenos Aires in 1933, the speech is the essential, canonized text of duende literature and scholarship. I will outline the several key distinctions and explanations Lorca draws through this speech to set the foundation for my analysis.

The complicated nature of analyzing such a subject is highlighted by the speech, where

Lorca does not give a simple explanation of the term, but instead glorifies its power and ineffable nature by underlining the human inability to intellectualize it. To emphasize the mysterious essence of duende, García Lorca quotes Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and gives a partial definition: duende is a “mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained.”<sup>1</sup> García Lorca points to the apparent paradox of writing on something which inherently cannot be explained, and the perhaps near impossibility of understanding its relationship to words. The observation highlights the essential limitations and intrigue of this research.

Although it may truly be impossible to tease out a definition or understanding of duende, the speech approaches the periphery of duende to describe how it feels, suggest where it appears, and what García Lorca believes it to be. The poet outlines a few common ingredients in an appearance of el duende. I have summarized the ingredients and characteristics of duende which García Lorca identifies, and will discuss them in depth to give the reader a better idea of the phenomenon of duende. Briefly, duende:

- is accessible to all arts and people
- requires a performer’s understanding or awareness of death
- has a spiritual or religious likeness
- has a quality of extreme emotionality
- is a shared experience between performer(s) and audience

### *Accessibility*

While García Lorca states that every art is capable of producing duende, one aspect the poet emphasizes is the particular accessibility to duende of performance art. He proclaims that it

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<sup>1</sup> Federico García Lorca, “Juego y teoría del duende” in *Obras completas*, ed. Miguel García-Posada (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, 1997), vol. 3, 329, trans. Christopher Maurer, *In Search of Duende* (New York: New Directions, 2010), 49.

is music, dance, and spoken poetry in which duende most readily arises. García Lorca explains this with a poetic proclamation, describing that “the living flesh is needed to interpret them, since they have forms that are born and die, perpetually, and raise their contours above the precise present.”<sup>2</sup> According to Lorca, the human body is the necessary vessel for duende to appear because of the tension between the body’s life and the simultaneous reality of impending death. It is of primary importance that the mode of expression be perishable and ephemeral. This points to the irony of García Lorca’s interest in duende as a writer, an artist who produces work that can be easily, if only partially, separated from its creator and context. Furthermore, it brings up the connection to death which García Lorca stresses throughout his discourse.

### *Awareness of Death*

While the human body is essential as a vessel of authentic artistic expression, it is not merely the fact of impermanent flesh that allows for duende, but an artists’ realization, attention, and openness to their own mortality which allows it to appear. Lorca repeatedly confirms this, and explains that the “duende does not come at all unless he sees that death is possible. The duende must know beforehand that he can serenade death’s house and rock those branches we all wear, branches that do not have, will never have, any consolation.”<sup>3</sup> The duende is not the spirit of death itself, however its appearance is predicated upon the performer’s readiness or emotional maturity to face the reality of death. For García Lorca, the artist’s awareness of their own magnificent yet tragic mortality is always present in, and essential to, a moment with el duende.

García Lorca describes the experience as accessible to all, however, he claims that Spanish performance art lends itself especially well to duende because of its cultural connection

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 58.

and openness to death. Furthermore, the practices and performances of flamenco and bullfighting create this essential channel to duende through their themes of death. He tries to contextualize the term for his Argentinian audience and explains that while “every art and every country is capable of duende,” Spain is especially animated by duende because it is “a country of death, open to death.”<sup>4</sup> While the observation of Spain as a country especially aware of death is a subjective argument open to debate, the presence of death is essential to Lorca’s understanding of duende and flamenco and therefore adds to our understanding of duende.

### *Extreme Emotionality*

The insistence that each artist must be open to death also gives reasoning to the heightened emotionality of the experience, especially for the vulnerable performer. García Lorca recalls the work of revered singer La Niña de los Peines, and shares his memory of her ecstatic performance, recounting that she “had to tear her voice...had to rob herself of skill and security, send away her muse and become helpless, that her duende might come and deign to fight her hand-to-hand.” Instead of a refined and controlled style commonly sought after in fine art, García Lorca here describes the performer in a position of raw, spontaneous vulnerability. If flamenco truly has an indelible connection to death, the artist must be emotionally uninhibited and open to the overwhelming anguish and despair of death. He also describes this experience as combat. Thus, this is not an ecstatic, pleasurable, peak aesthetic experience, but instead a gravely emotional opening of vulnerability and exposure to an audience. While el duende may be the workings of a spirit or force which cannot be cognitively understood, it is a deeply embodied experience of catharsis and grief rooted in human sensibility and emotion.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 55.

### *Spiritual Connection*

The association with death and the overwhelming emotional sensation also create links to the spiritual and religious connections García Lorca draws throughout his speech. Keeping in mind the great influence and presence of catholicism in Spain, the poet likens this overwhelming experience and realization of death to a religious experience. He describes that “in all the songs of the south of Spain the duende is greeted with sincere cries of ¡*Viva Dios!*—deep and tender human cries of communication with God by means of the five senses.”<sup>5</sup> He likens the dramatic entrance of duende in an experience of performance art to one of religious communion with God. He further codifies this connection with the use of religious concepts such as miracles, baptism, and the sacrifice and suffering of Christ, to impress upon his audience the greatness of the experience and its spiritual nature. This relation to religion puts duende on a higher plane, and aids in understanding it as an incomprehensible entity, spirit, or power.

Although García Lorca uses religious terms, the experience is not dependent upon a belief in God or christianity. He likens the overwhelming emotional experience to a religious context by saying el duende “brings to old planes unknown feelings of freshness, with the quality of something newly created, like a miracle, and it produces an almost religious enthusiasm.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, while the emotional quality may be familiar to those who have been through extraordinary religious experiences, el duende is not folded into a particular religious dogma. Furthermore, while there is a connection to religious experience, he emphatically concludes that there is no pious discipline to seek el duende like a religious edict. Instead, one finds it through the soulful experience and expression of flamenco dance.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

### *Shared Experience*

An encounter with *duende*, as noted by Webster in the opening excerpt, is unique in that it is shared amongst the artists and their audience. García Lorca again notes the power of La Niña de Los Peines who invoked this collective experience and “made the listeners rip at their clothes” by singing with *duende*.<sup>7</sup> The experience of *duende* enters through the performer, but also captivates the witnesses in a collective experience. Thus, *duende* is a symbiotic relationship because the performer must open themselves to vulnerability in order to move the audience. Further, he says that when *duende* arrives, “everyone feels its effects, both the initiate, who sees that style has conquered a poor material, and the unenlightened, who feel some sort of authentic emotion.”<sup>8</sup> By highlighting the dramatic emotional connection between the performer and audience, the determination of a *flamenco*’s quality is shifted from purely aesthetic observation of technical expertise to an intuitive judgement gauged by a corporal experience within the audience. García Lorca and Jason Webster were clearly motivated by such a shared experience of *duende*, and it is this aspect that allows for the possibility of a novice such as myself to also experience the phenomenon.

### García Lorca’s Conflict with Words

Moving away from the dynamics of *duende* in a flamenco performance, García Lorca’s thesis becomes confused as he attempts to reconcile his own work as a writer with the awe inspiring experience of art in the living forms of music and dance. After emphasizing spoken poetry over written poetry as a vehicle for *duende*, he states that “the magical property of a poem is to remain possessed always by *duende* that can baptize in dark water all who look at it.”<sup>9</sup> Here, García Lorca briefly references his own work as a poet, but quickly glosses over the subject. As

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 58.

previously noted, Lorca groups spoken poetry with music and dance as particularly open to *duende* because of the living body's expression of such an art. However, with this statement he provokes a new quandary--the existence of *duende* in the written word.

Not considering avant-garde poetry, which also communicates through a visual arrangement, a reader gazing at a poem is essentially an audience member removed from the performer. Lorca's mention of written as opposed to spoken poetry raises several questions on the relationship of *duende* to literature. Can a reader be overtaken by *duende*? Does the writer endow the work with *duende*? Can it be passed on to a reader, even when the artistic vehicle is removed from its author in a non-performance experience of the art? This dynamic between a lived, spiritual experience and the capacity, or lack thereof, to express it through language elicits the questions of flamenco literature's relationship to *duende*. It is this dilemma that prompted the textual aspect of my investigation.

García Lorca does not provide an answer to these questions, but seems instead to grapple with them himself, struggling to understand his own work in relation to *duende* throughout his career. Acknowledging the limitations of his art form, García Lorca concludes in his speech that "in poetry this struggle for expression and communication is sometimes fatal."<sup>10</sup> This morbid admission of the limitations of literature illuminates the fact that García Lorca himself did not resolve these questions. Furthermore, his own struggle serves as evidence to support his first assertions: that *duende* can not be intellectualized nor understood.

#### García Lorca's Conflict Addressed in Academic Discourse

Opposition amongst critics and scholars in the academic dialogue surrounding García Lorca's biography and works highlights this same question of the presence of *duende* in written word, and the relationship between the author, text and reader. The scholarly discourse on the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

poet reflects and addresses this unresolved dilemma to underline it as an ever present theme in his career and the popular understanding of duende. Critics evaluate the relationship between the author and his work through their unique perspectives, ranging on a spectrum from reading his work with a psychoanalytical perspective, using his biography as clues and evidence to understand his poems, to completely dissociating the artist from the work, arguing that the texts must not be confused by drawing psychological conclusions. Some hold the presence of the man as absolutely essential to understanding the work, or receiving el duende, while others argue that the words stand alone.

While scholars may disagree on their philosophies, the complicated nature of understanding duende's presence and the reader's relationship to García Lorca's poetic works is sustained as principal theme in the discourse. *A Companion to Federico García Lorca*, edited by Federico Bonaddio, is concerned primarily with synthesizing this divided discourse on approaches to García Lorca's work. Bonaddio confronts these fundamental questions of the artist's relation to his product, which permeate the literature surrounding García Lorca, in the introduction. He draws an ambiguous conclusion to this dilemma and says: "we are faced, at every level - biography, criticism and, indeed, the author's own texts - with the uncertainties of textual practice and interpretation."<sup>11</sup> The collaborative work advances the scholarship by analyzing both sides, and ultimately argues for a balanced approach to García Lorca's work in the middle of the spectrum. This approach would find an understanding of the texts that takes into account his personal and biographical context with a discerning and scrutinizing lens.

Christopher Maurer, the scholar whose translations of poetry and García Lorca's speeches most aided my research, notes a biographical influence which made the poet himself

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<sup>11</sup> Federico Bonaddio, "Introduction: Biography and Interpretation," in *A Companion to Federico García Lorca*, ed. Federico Bonaddio (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2007), 15.

particularly sensitive to this conflict. In his introduction to *The Poetical Works of Federico García Lorca*, he notes the great influence of Lorca's teacher, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, "whose aesthetics rest on the conviction that no language will ever capture poetic emotion," in confronting this question of authentic *duende* in literature.<sup>12</sup> This reveals the internal conflict on the dilemma between the spiritual experience of live art and the purpose, function, and efficacy of text, which is revealed in the inconsistencies of the speech.

Limited in my capacity to review the breadth of García Lorca's literary portfolio and biography to draw such conclusions myself, my understanding was aided by the observations made by experts, which evidently support the conclusion that the quandary of this research is indelibly linked to García Lorca's work and *duende*. In a description of this conundrum against which the poet struggled, Maurer summarizes that to Lorca, "literature is the melancholy record of one's failure to...conquer the flesh, to understand the meaning of human life, and to capture the spiritual absolute."<sup>13</sup> This observation reflects Lorca's description in his speech of the ephemeral experience of *duende*, the human's inability to comprehend it, and the poet's incapacity to translate it. Thus, the scholarly discourse and García Lorca's own biography and writings echo the confusion I identified in his speech, and further warns of the likely unresolvable nature of this research inquiry.

#### Lived Experience of *Duende* and Text

In addition to investigating the creative struggle of *duende* through dance and writing, I also explored the relationship of *duende* to the written word by experiencing pertinent literary works of art through readership. I chose two books of Lorca's poetry, which are particularly concerned with the subject of flamenco music and culture, *Romancero gitano* and *Poema del*

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Maurer, introduction to *The Poetical Works of Federico García Lorca*, ed. Christopher Maurer (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1991), xxiii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xxv.

*cante jondo*, along with the aforementioned memoir by Jason Webster, and a novel by Sarah Bird, *The Flamenco Academy*, as my primary sources. I read these seeking an understanding of whether this literature inspired by duende merely describes the experience, or if it actually allows the reader to engage with it also. I wanted to know if I these works could actually transmit duende to me through reading.

A few methodological roadblocks I did not foresee greatly affected this portion of my research. In designing this project, I failed to take note of the subtle and unresolved conflict García Lorca had within his own philosophy of duende concerning the written word. I did not pick up on his careful focus on *spoken* poetry over written poetry. From the analysis and summary given previously, I draw the conclusion that his understanding of duende was not meant to be applied to written texts. Thus, in light of García Lorca's focus on a living performance necessary to create the space for el duende, my literary studies seemed destined to fail. Nonetheless, I ventured forward in the investigation process.

Another obstacle which impeded the possible transmission of duende through García Lorca's work was the inherent challenge of reading poetry in a language in which I am not fluent. Merely proficient in Spanish, much of the subtlety, meaning, and beauty of the poet's original spanish verse was lost on me. For this reason, my understanding was aided by translations of the work. The problems with experiencing poetry as mediated by a translator are numerous. However, this issue of translation was yet another clue that I would not be able to experience duende through text.

Ultimately, as a receiver of García Lorca's written flamenco poems, I did not have any experience in the magnitude or likeness of duende. My experience with reading Lorca's poems, in both Spanish and English, brought nothing like the emotion that he describes and that I felt as

a witness to a live flamenco performance. An excerpt from my field notes describe my lackluster experience:

*I feel no connection to this poetry. I even tried reading them out loud. Still nothing. Maybe I am just affected by Lorca's conviction of the power of performance and spoken word, but it feels like the poems are dry and deflated without the author to give them life. It seems unlikely that there is any room for duende when I am so far removed from the circumstances and subjects of this poetry. Reading Lorca in Tacoma, piecing together my understanding with translations and slow readings of the originals, it doesn't feel like I'm getting warmer... But, maybe I'm just not a poetry person.*

This static reading experience was only amplified by reading both Jason Webster and Sarah Bird's novels. While entertaining, the reading experience seemed to only confirm my distance as a reader from the actual experience and support the conclusion of the inability of translating duende simply through text. Reading both Webster and Bird's descriptions of duende merely highlighted the lack of flamenco ambiance and culture in the library, cafe, or wherever I chose to read. Although I was unable to be overtaken by the mysterious power of duende through reading, my experience is not universal and cannot be applied to anyone but myself. It is simply that: my own experience.

### Creative Embodied Investigation

With the study of duende and its relationship to text, I was confronted by the inherent paradox of investigating something which resists academic inquiry. By its very nature, el duende eludes methodical approaches of research and experimentation. As alluded to by García Lorca's internal conflict, one cannot approach the subject with a rigid formula and expect to extract a predicted or reproducible result, or a simple conclusion. Because of the apparent limitations of studying and accessing duende through literary sources alone, as evidenced by my experience reading flamenco literature, I attempted to add to my research framework by pursuing a understanding of duende through a lived experience. I approached this through the physical study

of flamenco dance, and by attempting to translate my experience into words through journaling and field notes.

Although I was a complete beginner in the study of flamenco dance, it was not altogether unreasonable to attempt an experience with *duende* because of the accessibility to audience members and limited physical expression of the dance that García Lorca claims, as discussed previously. In his speech, the poet explains that flamenco's *duende* is not produced through skill. Rather, it arrives because of a performer and audience's maturity and emotional preparedness for the experience. He illustrates this through an anecdote: "years ago, an eighty-year-old woman won first prize at a dance contest...competing against beautiful women and young girls with waists supple as water, but all she did was raise her arms, throw back her head, and stamp her foot on the floor."<sup>14</sup> Despite her limited physical expression of the dance, the old woman was able to receive and transmit *duende*. This example emphasizes *duende* as an intuitive experience of the soul of the dancer, rather than a qualitative judgement of technical expertise. For this, it is possible that a novice dancer, without the technical mastery of a skilled *flamenca*, could experience an ecstatic moment such as this, providing he or she is properly open to the spirit of *duende*. While the subjectivity of my own emotional openness and maturity raises another research dilemma, this does reveal the possibility of experiencing *duende*.

I was encouraged in my pursuit of *duende* by a previous experience in which I felt what García Lorca and others describe as the presence or power of *duende*. In the summer of 2013, I traveled solo throughout Spain with a backpack and a rail pass. Guided by spirit of adventure (and a *Rick Steves' Spain* travel book) I roamed throughout the country. On a hot June evening, I found myself seated before a low stage in La Casa de la Memoria in Seville. I had never before seen a flamenco show, but I felt peculiarly drawn to it. About forty of us sat lined in two rows

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<sup>14</sup> García Lorca, *In Search of Duende*, 54.

around the slightly raised stage in a surprisingly intimate setting. We were instructed that no photos were to be allowed, and the lights were dimmed. The ambiance of the space hushed us into a quiet reverence and curiosity before the performers even came out. Two guitarists and a vocalist walked out, dressed nicely in all black, and took their seats on plain wooden chairs. Without introduction, a female dancer dressed in a striking, but not flashy black dress strode onto the stage, eyes raised above the audience, and assumed a stance of power in the center. The dancer's demeanor sobered the audience as she took ownership of the space merely through the strength and gravity of her body language. My attention was magnetized to her. She signaled the musicians with a few rhythmic claps and a *llamada*, a call, and the musicians began.

I was hypnotized for the next hour by the simultaneous tension, vulnerability, and strength apparent in the dancers and the weeping, tumultuous music. The guttural cries of the *cantaor*, the singer, pulled at my heart with the stories of grief long past carried through the lyrics and pained tone of voice. The beating rhythm of the dancers stomping against the floor, the musicians clapping out a complicated twelve beat pulse, and the dark melodies of the guitar locked me into another world.

I walked away from the extraordinary show deeply impressed and disturbed. Affected by the woman's strong posture and loud, aggressive stomping, I was suddenly aware of how I carry myself through the world. I reflected on the power this dancer exuded from within, one that emerged in a tightly controlled yet spontaneous tension visible through her body. In comparison, my posture looked as if I was trying to assume invisibility: rounded shoulders, eyes down, quiet steps. The dancer's display of a competing emotional vulnerability and power made me question how I face the world physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. The passion and skill of the artist's expression also made me question to what creation I devote myself. Although I did

not identify a presence of death with my experience as García Lorca describes, perhaps this almost distressing impression of struggle and questioning left by the performance was the residue of such an encounter. This, I believe, was my first experience of *duende*.

I was forced to revisit that uncomfortable self-reflection once again when I was challenged to change my posture in a technique workshop. Marisela, my fantastic teacher and a lifelong *flamenca*, demonstrated the strong flamenco posture to the students: a consistently engaged core, shoulders back, chest and throat open, and knees slightly bent with the butt pushed back. Although I would not usually think of myself as having poor posture, I always carried myself with shoulders rounded forward and closed and a relaxed belly. I attempted to take on the posture Marisela demonstrated, and I was suddenly aware of my physical weakness. My stomach muscles grew tired and I had to constantly struggle to remember to keep them engaged. Consciously adjusting my posture to take on this strong yet open form paradoxically made me feel completely exposed and emotionally vulnerable. I recorded the intense experience of vulnerability in my writings:

*I'm not used to strengthening my core. Marisela says hers never rests. It makes me feel vulnerable to open my chest and my gut. It feels exposed. Maybe that is a biological thing, if my gut gets injured it is all over because there is so much bacteria in there or something. I don't like speaking to people or walking into rooms with my body so open. But I also don't like to be so hunched. What if I try something different today and greet everyone with an open body position, no matter how vulnerable it feels. Ugh I don't like to be looked at.*

*Ouch.*

This writing shows that I felt like a walking target. I was suddenly overly sensitive and highly conscious of how nervous it made me to hold my body so erect, strong, yet open. I recognized that my old posture felt protective and safe, but weak in comparison. I wanted to feel

strong. So, I put attention to my core, practiced the posture and some strengthening exercises, and after just two weeks I felt a new power from my center. If only slightly, I had physically changed my perception of the world, which in turn altered the way I greet and converse with the day. Perhaps this constant struggle against gravity and confronting the world is a part of what García Lorca identifies at the dancer's *lucha*, his fight, against el duende.

Although I felt uncertain of ever reproducing this magnificent event through my own study of the dance, I may have caught a moment of it. I was again in a technique workshop, focusing on a simple exercise. Four other students and I were lined against a ballet bar, holding on as we stood on our toes, lifted one foot and deliberately slammed our heeled shoes against the wood floor. We created a beating rhythm, hitting the floor in an incessant and ever quickening pace. The *clavos*, the nails on the toes and heels of our shoes, made a loud clap against the floor that sounded throughout the entire studio. We went faster and faster with our combination sequence--heel-*planta-talón-tacón*, heel-*planta-talón-tacón*--and all of a sudden, I felt the power, tension, and struggle those dancers exuded back on the dark stage in Seville. It felt like something overtook me, like I was a part of something bigger. But just like that, as soon as I caught notice of it, my rhythm faltered and it disappeared. Perhaps that was it: el duende. I just didn't have the openness or experience to sustain it.

### Conclusion

Through participation in flamenco dance classes, chronicling my experience through creative writing, and analysis and experience of pertinent texts, I attempted to gain an understanding of duende's meaning and its relationship to the written word. Literary analysis of primary sources, read in conjunction with the lived experience of dance and my own struggle to put that into words, informed an understanding of language's power, or lack thereof, to describe

and transmit the spiritual experience of art. The research was challenged by the nature of approaching a spiritual, ephemeral subject through an academic lens. This investigation amounted to far more than could be distilled into an academic report from a summer of research, and perhaps does not lend itself at all to the restraints of the scholastic realm.

García Lorca points to the motivating quandary of this research, the ineffability of the experience, as he says “seeking the *duende*, there is neither map nor discipline.” Because there is no map or discipline under which to study this, perhaps it is the struggle to continue to search for it that will give rise to it. The ambiguous conclusions of my efforts are related by the prologue of the least successful piece of literature in my study. Jason Webster speaks to the inherent paradox of researching *duende* from an academic point of view:

University life was easy and sheltering. At university you could live all the adventures you wanted in your head just by going to the library and reading about exotic places, while still enjoying cycling around town with a flowing scarf and snuggling by a fire with a pint in a warm pub in wintertime.<sup>15</sup>

This passage reflects my experience of approaching *duende* with an academic lens. Ultimately, I found that *el duende* did not live where I pursued it. I did not find it reading novels comfortably in the rocking chair lounge of the Collins Memorial Library. It is an ecstatic, intoxicating release of authentic emotion experienced in a communal space of ambiance, intensity, and intimacy.

However, *duende*, as García Lorca philosophizes, seems to be a struggle inherent in authentic creation and expression. It is something each creator, artist, poet, dancer, along with the audience, constantly fight against. Both the performer and the receiver must fight against their own impulses and selves in this experience. If the dark, cathartic and spiritual experience of *duende* is truly about the internal struggle that García Lorca describes, as an actor on all sides, through reading, writing and dancing, perhaps I engaged the creative struggle through the mere

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<sup>15</sup> Webster, *Duende*, 4.

attempt of research. While the struggle to communicate through the means of language does not have the obvious tones of a struggle with death, it is similarly a fight against the limitations of our humanity.

The inquiry turned out to be the tip of the iceberg, as the further I prodded more questions arose, which I was, and am, unprepared to answer. Instead of conclusive answers, what the research revealed are unexplored avenues for further research. Mostly, it revealed my own strengths and weaknesses, my interests and curiosities, and my capabilities as an investigator and a critical thinker. My findings on duende's ability to be transmitted through text are inconclusive as applicable to anyone beyond myself. While my personal understanding of language and text in relation to a lived experience was deepened, the findings of this particular research ultimately may not benefit others except to encourage them to pursue their own understandings.

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