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Nietzsche, Plato and the Power of the *Duende*: the shamanic roots of poetry

Nietzsche, Platão e o poder do Duende*: as raízes xamânicas da poesia*

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Abstract: This article deals with the shamanic roots of poetic achievement by way of analyzing the ancient Greek art-deities, namely Apollo and Dionysus, in their sharp opposition of artistic tendencies as they are presented by Friedrich Nietzsche in his reappraisal of Platonic considerations on artistic creation. This first analysis is soon followed by an interesting parallel to the Nietzschean force of the Dionysian that can be found in the equally mysterious power of the "Duende," present in Federico García Lorca's fusion of Surrealist concerns with his sense of native Andalusian culture, as a means to show the shamanic roots of poetic representation.

Keywords: poetry; shamanism; Nietzsche; Plato; Duende.

Resumo: Este artigo lida com as raízes xamânicas da poesia através da análise das antigas deidades artísticas gregas, a saber, Apolo e Dionísio, em suas marcadas dicotomias de tendências artísticas tal como são apresentadas por Friedrich Nietzsche em sua reavaliação das considerações platônicas sobre a criação artística. Esta primeira análise é então seguida por um interessante paralelo à força nietzscheana do dionisíaco que pode ser encontrada no igualmente misterioso poder do "Duende," presente em Federico García Lorca quando da fusão de seus conceitos surrealistas com o senso de sua cultura nativa da Andaluzia, a fim de se mostrar as raízes xamânicas da representação poética.

Palavras-chave: poesia; xamanismo; Nietzsche; Platão; Duende.

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> *That for which we find words is something already dead in our hearts. There is always a kind of contempt in the act of speaking.*[1]

As part of a general revaluation and re-thinking of the Classical heritage, which took place in the 19th century, some philosophers developed critiques of the supposed rationalism of the Greeks: "Let us anticipate a century; let us assume the success of my onslaught on two thousand years of opposition to Nature, of the degradation of humanity."[2] These words belong to Nietzsche's ontological work, *Ecce Homo*, and refer to his belief in the strength of his onslaught, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, on "the whole of idealism in its typical form."[3] Nietzsche attacks the opposition to nature in favor of the affirmation of "all that is questionable and strange in existence" by means of the understanding of the wonderful phenomenon of the Dionysian in contrast to the Apollonian. One of his attacks is against Platonic philosophy's negligent treatment of art in favor of science. The two art-deities of the Greeks, Apollo and Dionysus, represented a sharp opposition of artistic tendencies (Apollo being the God of sculpture and Dionysus of music) before they "appear coupled with each other, and through this coupling eventually generate the art-product, equally Dionysian and Apollonian, of Attic tragedy."[4] Nietzsche describes their worlds as the separate domains of Apollonian dream and Dionysian drunkenness. By opposing Socrates's voice of reason and logic, to the Dionysian voice of forgetfulness and collapse, Plato created a new anti-thesis. Dionysus, however, was not to be overcome easily, being already used to contention. Before becoming Socrates's nemesis the God of wine, the satyr, had already faced the son of Zeus, Apollo.

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[1] NIETZSCHE. *The twilight of the idols*, p. 530. [Hereafter, quotes that are not followed by a reference number belong to the one previously numbered].
[2] Friedrich Nietzsche's words in HUNTINGTON (Ed.). *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 869.
[3] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 867.
[4] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 951.

The world of Apollo embraces the human necessity of the dream-experience, a world in which the beautiful appearance of forms and shapes is of utmost importance. As Nietzsche recalls: "It was in dreams, says Lucretius, that the glorious divine figures first appeared to the souls of men; in dreams the great shaper beheld the splendid corporeal structure of superhuman beings."[5] Thus one might assert that human beings have a strong connection to the Apollonian world, stage of subconscious experiences, wherein not only pleasant images are portrayed but the dismal encounter of forgetfulness as well. Yet one is never to be found prisoner of the dangers of dream-life as one is under the protection of Apollo, the deity of light, constantly reminding the dreamer that it is only a world of fancy. Apollo's beauty is never shaken; even under the influence of anger "the sacredness of his beautiful appearance must still be there." The reason for Apollo's undisturbed nature lies in his solid faith in what Schopenhauer calls his *principium individuationis*, that is, the belief in human ability to account for the cognitive forms of any phenomenon under the light of reason. This belief brings the joy and wisdom of the beautiful appearance of the *principium individuationis*.

Yet, there are occasions when man seems to lose such absolute control of the faculty of reason, generating the collapse of the *principium*. At the very moment of such collapse one is invaded by a "blissful ecstasy which rises from the innermost depths of man, aye, of nature."[6] Only then can one be granted an insight into the world of Dionysus. The analogy of drunkenness helps to understand the effect of Dionysus's emotions because they are awakened in order to lead the reasonable believer into the torpor of self-forgetfulness. Dionysus breaks man's individual cell and, as "the potent coming of spring penetrating all nature with joy," celebrates festively the reunion between man and nature, with the corollary of a better understanding among men as well. Dionysus is therefore the constant reminder of the primitive force which is present in all things, although often estranged, underlying the veil of reason. The satyr thus represents a force much stronger than that of the beautiful appearance, since the latter is shattered by the action of oblivion so that the musical voice of the mysterious Primordial Unity can be heard in the heart of man.

[5] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 952.
[6] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 955.

Similarly, the shaman-poet conveys the Dionysian awe since he is a man in touch with the world beyond reason. Shamanism is evidently one of the most ancient forms of religious vocation, to be found in the prehistoric cultures of Siberian hunters, wherein the shaman, who is also a magician, medicine man, and poet, takes a magical flight toward wisdom, healing, and clairvoyance. The manifestation of this vocation occurs by way of a crisis. As Mircea Eliade has influentially put it, through a rupture of the shaman's psychic balance, shamanism operates as the archaic technique of ecstasy.[7] He is not only the link between the natural and the spiritual realm, but also healer, artist, dancer, and poet. As a poet, the shaman tells traditional out-of-time-and-space stories, mythical narratives. As Nicolau Sevcenko shows, the poetic vocabulary of a Tartar shaman, for instance, contains 12,000 words, in contrast to the 4,000-word range of an ordinary man of his community.[8] Thus, the shamanic roots of poetry celebrate, as it were, the coming of Dionysus and his feast of friends: "In song and in dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and to speak; he is about to take a dancing flight into the air."[9]

As Nietzsche suggests, everything is now broken up under the charm of music and "the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the Primordial Unity." The soft dream of Apollo has been heated and the images seem to disintegrate in the deep forest of the unconscious. Time has come again for the Dionysian under-current and the manifestation of the unexpected, through latent, artistic ecstasy. Nietzsche sees the coming of the Dionysian, in contrast to the vanishing of the Apollonian, as an artistic celebration: "It is with them [Dionysian artistic expressions] that nature for the first time attains her artistic jubilee; it is with them that the destruction of the *principium individuationis* for the first time becomes an artistic phenomenon."[10]

If the Dionysian phenomenon brings forth such exuberance, why then was it to be suppressed in favor of the Apollonian culture by the Greeks, namely Plato and his utopian Republic? The answer to such a

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[7] ELIADE. *Shamanism*: archaic techniques of ecstasy, p. 9.

[8] SEVCENKO. No princípio era o ritmo: as raízes xamânicas da narrativa, p. 134. [My own translation].

[9] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 956.

[10] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 959.

question may lie in the episode of King Midas and Silenus, when Midas, after chasing the companion of Dionysus in the forest, asked him about the best and most desirable thing for man. Nietzsche retells the story:

> Fixed and immovable, the demigod said not a word; till at last, urged by the king, he gave a shrill laugh and broke out into these words: 'Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why de ye compel me to tell what it were most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is beyond your reach forever: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you – is quickly to die.'[11]

The Greeks understood the painful horror of existence and thought the pathos should be overcome, or at least veiled from sight, by the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians, Apollo included. The titanic powers of nature revealed by Silenus gave them room to "the Apollonian impulse towards beauty." The wisdom of Silenus was reversed and the Greeks sought shelter from the ultimate suffering of existence "under the bright sunshine of Olympian gods." The complete absorption in the beauty of appearance would find its most sublime epitome in Homer's naïve art.[12] The wisdom of suffering is thereafter defeated by the Apollonian illusion of will.

Yet, Apollo's beauty and moderation are necessarily dependent on the underlying Dionysian layer of suffering and knowledge. The essence of music pervades the surface of appearance and "Apollo could not live without Dionysus. (...) The individual, with all his restraint and proportion, succumbed to the self-oblivion of the Dionysian state, forgetting the precepts of Apollo."[13] When Plato banned the poets from his Republic he aimed at the Apollonian artist because he knew of such a mysterious union, that is, the interdependence between the naïve art of Homer and the wise sufferer's primitive voice of music: "The poems of the lyrist can express nothing which did not already lie hidden in the vast universality and absoluteness of the music which compelled him to figurative speech."[14] Plato was aware of the presence of the primordial

[11] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 962.

[12] That is to say, legendary, in Plato's terms, philosophically naïve. Poetically, of course, Homer is highly sophisticated.

[13] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 967.

[14] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 978.

pain inside the redeemable appearance of the symbolical dream-picture and such a presence was not welcome in the Platonic civilized society. Nevertheless, the pervasive flux of Dionysus neutralized the illusory will of civilized man to overcome his primordial unity, that is, his ever latent union with the heart of nature: "the satyr chorus, the chorus of the natural beings, who as it were live ineradicably behind every civilization, despite the ceaseless change of generations and the history of nations, remain the same to all eternity."[15]

The Dionysian reality assumes therefore the hidden form of substratum; it is separated from the world of everyday reality by "a gulf of oblivion in which all past personal experiences are submerged." After having penetrated into the true nature of things and returned to the world of everyday reality, the Dionysian artist feels it "as nauseating and repulsive." This is so because he senses it would be ridiculous to be asked to set it right once he knows he cannot change "the eternal nature of things." The poet then tries to express his feelings through his art. In spite of the resident mockery of the illusive action, the ecstatic poet seeks in art salvation from the nauseating and repulsive existence of everyday reality.

The poet's awareness of the mockery pervading the sublime illusion of cultured man gives his art the vision to portray what Nietzsche calls the "contrast between the intrinsic truth of nature and the falsehood of culture."[16] Only if able to penetrate the depths of natural phenomena does one become a poet. The Dionysian shaman-poet reaches his moment of magic in the velvet hour of the atemporal reality and embraces both sun dome and the night in his universal communion with the primal forces of Nature. As Nietzsche puts it: "the poet is a poet only in so far as he sees himself surrounded by forms which live and act before him, and into whose innermost beings he penetrates."[17] The eye of the shaman-poet is therefore constantly fixed on the Dionysian abysses, whereto he goes in search of wisdom beyond ordinary perception, only to return and express his derision at the ineffability of everyday reality. Inflamed by the song of Dionysus the shaman-poet's words dance to reveal their divine mockery at the swarming "wisdom" of the falsehood of culture. The eye

[15] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 983.
[16] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 986.
[17] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 988.

of the Dionysian poet stares at the heart of the abyss and becomes the very antithesis of the Socratic eye, "an eye in which the fine frenzy of artistic enthusiasm had never glowed."[18]

In classical Greece, collective religious ceremonies such as the Bacchantes were repressed as subversive.[19] Instead of the wild and luxuriant Dionysian festivals of the past, the State began to control religion through pythonesses that used to perform at official temples. The Greek poet, a true heir of the essential Dionysian shamanism (in terms of inspiration), was regarded as a possessed man who spoke only according to a god's will. If one ever wanted to know truth and justice, one should never listen to such bards; on the contrary, the answer lay in the teaching of the philosopher. The poets were, like the shaman, possessed by something out of this world, something Plato called *furor poeticus*.

Poetic inspiration was not to be regarded as art as long as it derived from the divine rather than from man. In the dialogue between Socrates, the philosopher, and Ion, the rhapsode, Plato states the new truth as Socrates explains to Ion the possessed nature of poetic inspiration: "For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed."[20] Socrates wants Ion to realize that the poets do not profess the voice of learning since their compositions are the fruit of an altered state of mind:

> The lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind.[21]

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[18] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 1021.

[19] Dionysus's devotees used to worship their god by means of a wild and frantic cult. Every two years, in winter, a group of scarcely dressed barefooted women would climb the snowed mountains, and then they would run and dance under the sound of the tamboura. After that, in the climax of delirium, they would slaughter a wild beast and eat it raw. Thus, they would acquire the god's vitality and achieve the Dionysian ecstasy, in which their personalities were, for a while, substituted by the god's.

[20] PLATO. *Ion*, p. 144.

[21] PLATO. *Ion*, p. 144.

Although he is considered a noble person the poet cannot be called an artist since art, for the Socratic mind, belongs to the grasp of men and poetry to that of the Muse, that is, the divine power of God: “Many are the noble words in which poets speak concerning the actions of men; (...) but they do not speak of them by any rules of art: they are simply inspired to utter that to which the Muse impels them, and that only.” Whenever Socrates refers to the poet’s words, he means mostly those by Homer, “who is the best and most divine of them.”[22] Yet Homer is not that much of a Dionysian poet. As suggested earlier, his verse embraces much more of the Apollonian features bringing forth what was called naïve poetry. All the same, the author of *The Odyssey* is taken as the paragon of a possessed poet because of the mysterious union between Apollo and Dionysus, that is, their necessary interdependence in all artistic expressions, and thus the Dionysian under-current makes itself present even in the foremost “naïve” poet.

Socrates then tells Ion of the chain of voices which the non-human songs of poets are to follow: “The rhapsode like yourself and the actor are intermediate links, and the poet himself is the first of them. Through all these the God sways the souls of men in any direction which he pleases, and makes one man hang down from another.”[23] Each and every one of such links is used by the Gods and therefore none of them profess words of truth and knowledge nor express their feelings by art, as Socrates reminds the rhapsode: “for not by art or knowledge about Homer do you say what you say, but by divine inspiration and possession.” Through the words of his master, Plato, who had to burn his own poems to flee from unphilosophical temptations and become a disciple,[24] set about his utopian dream of a civilized society where men of reason only were to achieve the virtue of knowledge and truth, a society that had no place for those deprived of their right minds by the influence of the Muse. The time had come for Plato’s unpoetic Republic.

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[22] PLATO. *Ion*, p. 144.

[23] PLATO. *Ion*, p. 144.

[24] As stated by Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, concerning the strong influence of the Socratic mind upon his most eminent disciple and the banning of poetry from the Greek ideal State: “the youthful tragic poet Plato first of all burned his poems that he might become a student of Socrates. (...) the Socratic maxims, together with the momentum of his mighty character, was still enough to force poetry itself into new and hitherto unknown channels”. HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 1022.

Plato wanted his Republic to be a place of virtue and wisdom, which were to be achieved by the action of reason, and therefore by the true source of knowledge, that of philosophy: "is not the love of learning the love of wisdom, which is philosophy?" asserts Socrates in Plato's *The Republic*, BK II.[25] Poetry was relegated to a secondary position as it praised the deeds of Gods, and the Greek Republic required man to face his own destiny from then on. The legendary feats were then seen as mythical dream-like stories. Learning was out of the bounds of poetry for the Greeks. It was the time of the *polis*, where a political elite ruled society in terms of its culture, religion, and education; men no longer lived in the wilderness, and the musical wisdom of the Dionysian primordial pain was veiled by the artificial light of reason and civilization.

Poetry, being a true reminder of the wild, could not be of any value for the one who wanted to be a keeper of the Platonic State; the noble spirit should care for the truth of philosophy instead: "he who is to be a really good and noble guardian of the State will require to unite in himself philosophy and spirit and swiftness and strength?" asks Socrates before being promptly answered by Adeimantus: "Undoubtedly."[26]

In his establishing the foundations of his Republic, Plato allows his master to suppress the quarrels, in effect, to lie (in this case maybe a "good lie") to the very ones he wishes to keep from lying. Battles and quarrels tell of loss and pain and these do not belong in the Platonic State. The poet, possessed by the primordial cry, was too primitive a creature to be welcome: "all the battles of the gods in Homer -- these tales must not be admitted into our State, whether they are supposed to have an allegorical meaning or not."[27] Socrates reserved for the literal a special place, in contrast to the allegorical, lest the latter might exert too deep an influence on the inexperienced mind: "therefore it is most important that the tales which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thoughts."

True representation was very highly regarded by Plato, so that God "is always to be represented as he truly is, whatever be the sort of poetry, epic, lyric, or tragic."[28] Having God as the representative of good

[25] PLATO. *The Republic*, p. 320.
[26] PLATO. *The Republic*, p. 320.
[27] PLATO. *The Republic*, 321.
[28] PLATO. *The Republic*, 322.

only, any evil deed ever portrayed by poets can never be credited to the divine power. Whatever is not good cannot be born of God and must be forsaken so as not to cause unwanted disorder:

> That God being good is the author of evil to any one is to be strenuously denied, and not to be said or sung or heard in verse or prose by any one whether old or young in any well-ordered commonwealth. Such a fiction is suicidal, ruinous, impious. (...) God is not the author of all things, but of good only.

That God could ever change into something evil was out of question since "being, as is supposed, the fairest and best that is conceivable, every God remains absolutely and for ever in his own form." Therefore, evil deeds belong solely to the poet's verses which contain mostly lies. What began as mere lies in words becomes the true lie in the "highest part of men," which is the soul, because lies bring nothing but ignorance to the soul, since they veil the truth from the mind of those deceived: "this ignorance in the soul of him who is deceived may be called the true lie, for the lie in words is only a kind of imitation and shadowy image of a previous affection of the soul." By no means could the conveyers of such sentiments be allowed freedom of speech in the Platonic State and Socrates makes it very clear as he addresses Adeimantus at the close of Book II:

> These are the kind of sentiments about the gods which will arouse our anger; and he who utters them shall be refused a chorus; neither shall we allow teachers to make use of them in the instruction of the young, meaning, as we do, that our guardians, as far as men can be, should be true worshippers of the gods and like them.[29]

Despite his wish to place man in the center of the stage where the gods used to be, Plato cannot help comparing his guardians to divine creatures. But he would rather have his guardian face only half his image and, he therefore denies him the very truth he defends so carefully: the truth that lies in the heart of nature and that speaks to man about not only the outward beauty of Apollo but the suffering essence of Dionysus;

[29] PLATO. *The Republic*, 324.

the truth whose concealment will always keep man from approaching whatever is beyond the binary dichotomies of good and evil, preserved in one of the last and only sacred shelters still to echo it: the art of poetry.

"Perhaps what is not intelligible to me is not therefore unintelligible? Perhaps there is a realm of wisdom from which the logician is shut out? Perhaps art is even a necessary correlative of, and supplement to, science?"[30] These are the thoughts Nietzsche imagines Socrates might have had after being visited by a dream-apparition during his last days in prison. The philosopher who did not write often heard whispered the words "Socrates, practice music" in his dreams: probably a visit paid by a deity who brought some good advice to the dialectician at the end of his days, for, as Nietzsche asserts, "that despotic logician had now and then with respect to art the feeling of a gap, a void, a feeling of misgiving, of a possibly neglected duty." Indeed, Socrates did heed that dream-vision voice and composed a poem on Apollo as well as verses from a few Æsopian fables.

Even through the most "despotic logician," the musical words of poetry found their way to reveal "the only sign of doubt as to the limits of logic." Like a shadow that never fades but only dims before the vanishing light, no matter how much one tries to keep the voice of Dionysus from expressing its primal rhythm, it will still get through even if under the whisperings of a deity in dream.

Another relevant concept to be revived by the Romantic spirit is that of the sublime, which was to be rescued from the writings of Longinus. According to the Greek author sublimity is on the one hand an idea related to the older rhetorical concept of "high style."[31] Like Romantic writing, whose aim would be the unfolding of extraordinary realities, "whatever *knocks the reader out* is 'sublime.' It may be a flood of elaborate diction, as in Plato, or a few simple words, as in the biblical passage, 'And God said *Let there be light.*'[32] Longinus stated that it would be much more a matter of content than form in that any subject, which can genuinely excite, is capable of being handled in a sublime way. On the other hand the concept is also related to ethical ideals: "the wise man knows his place as a citizen of the *kosmos*, his greatness and

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[30] HUNTINGTON. *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, 1026.

[31] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. xii.

[32] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. xiii.

his limitations, he rises superior to meanness and materialism."[33] The ideas evoked by the ancient Greek concept are similar to those present in shamanic activities in general, wherein ecstatic behavior is likewise to be expected:

> Sublimity is a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse. (…) For grandeur produces ecstasy rather than persuasion in the hearer; and the combination of wonder and astonishment always proves superior to the merely persuasive and pleasant.[34]

Similar to the Nietzschean concept of the Primordial Unity, itself deriving in part from Longinus's ideas, sublimity exerts an invincible power and force that unlike persuasion we cannot control. As in the Romantic ideal, the forces of nature should also be present in the literary text: "In literature, nature occupies the place of good fortune, and art that of good counsel. Most important of all, the very fact that some things in literature depend on nature alone can itself be learned only from art."[35] In order to avoid the faults that are so much tied up with sublimity, that is, to achieve a genuine understanding and appreciation of true sublimity, teaches Longinus, one should be aware that literary judgment comes only as the final product of long experience: "real sublimity makes a strong and ineffaceable impression on the memory."[36]

The Romantic vision of the English poets finds undoubtedly some source in the writings of Longinus, whose words sound as prophetic as a poem by Blake on the divine spirit: "I should myself have no hesitation in saying that there is nothing so productive of grandeur as noble emotion in the right place. It inspires and possesses our words with a kind of madness and divine spirit."[37]

Perhaps the most significant parts, as far as this work is concerned, within the writings of Longinus, are those related to the shamanic performance as in visualization, or Phantasia, "the situation in which enthusiasm and emotion make the speaker *see* what he is saying and

[33] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. xiv.
[34] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. 1.
[35] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. 3.
[36] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. 8.
[37] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. 9.

bring it *visually* before his audience" and in the Dionysian epiphany, of which we have two different descriptions in Longinus.[38] They both depict the palace of Lycurgus in its divine seizure.[39]

Above all men Longinus praises the poet, to whom the powers of God were given as a divine gift and in whose words the sublime is heard:

> So when we come to great geniuses in literature – where, by contrast, grandeur is not divorced from service and utility – we have to conclude that such men, for all their faults, tower far above mortal stature. Other literary qualities prove their users to be human; sublimity raises us towards the spiritual greatness of god."[40]

Longinus did a service to the men of letters when he wrote in favor of those possessed by the voice of god at a time the poet was under suspicion: "greatness of mind wanes, fades, and loses its attraction when men spend their admiration on their mortal parts and neglect to develop the immortal."[41]

> *Ladies and gentlemen: I have raised three arches, and with clumsy hand I have placed in them the Muse, the Angel, and the "Duende."*[42]

An interesting parallel to the Nietzschean force of the Dionysian can be found in the equally mysterious power of the "Duende," present in Federico García Lorca's fusion of Surrealist concerns with his sense of native Andalusian culture.[43] Lorca published his essay on this daemonic figure based on a lecture given in New York City, during his most deliberate surrealistic phase in the late 1920's. As we learn from Arturo Barea, "Lorca took his Spanish term for daemonic inspiration

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[38] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. 20.

[39] The first one refers to Aeschylus: "the palace was possessed, the house went bacchanal." And the other one to Euripedes: "the whole mountain went bacchanal with them" (LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. 22).

[40] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. 42.

[41] LONGINUS. *On the sublime*, p. 52.

[42] LORCA. The Duende (1983). In: ROTHENBERG. *Symposium of the whole*, p. 51.

[43] LORCA. The Duende (1955), p. 154-166. I will be using here the page references from Rothenberg's anthology *Symposium of the Whole* (ROTHENBERG), in which Lorca's essay appears, significantly, as part of the range of discourse toward an ethnopoetics.

from the Andalusian idiom. While to the rest of Spain the *duende* is but a hobgoblin, to Andalusia it is an obscure power which can speak through every form of human art."[44] Accordingly, as Lorca writes, "in all Andalusia, from the rock of Jaen to the shell of Cádiz, people constantly speak of the *duende* and find it in everything that springs out of energetic instinct."[45] The Duende is the spiritual power of those possessed by a rage to live and express it in any given artistic terms, the spirit of Dionysus, as it were, that takes over the artist in the sublime moments of inspiration, creativity, and performance. It is indeed a mysterious power that Lorca, in his comments on the presence of Duende in music, links to the dark (black) side pervading all art, the strangeness that moves us beyond understanding: "these 'black sounds' are the mystery, the roots that probe through the mire that we all know, and do not understand, but which furnishes us with whatever is sustaining in art."[46] In his own words, Lorca defines the Duende thus:

> The *duende*, then, is a power and not a construct, is a struggle and not a concept. I have heard an old guitarist, a true virtuoso, remark, "The *duende* is not in the throat, the *duende* comes up from inside, up from the very soles of the feet." That is to say, it is not a question of aptitude, but of a true and viable style – of blood, in other words; of what is oldest in culture: of creation made act.

As if echoing the words of Nietzsche on the primordial power of Dionysus, Lorca refers to "a mysterious power that all may feel and no philosophy can explain." Lorca indeed acknowledges the Nietzschean presence concerning matters dealing with such mysterious power, which "is, in sum, the earth-force, the same *duende* that fired the heart of Nietzsche." Lorca makes clear that his Duende, albeit dark, is not devilish and hence should not be "confused with the theological demon of doubt at whom Luther, on a Bacchic impulse, hurled an inkwell in Nuremberg, or with the Catholic devil, destructive, but short of intelligence." On the contrary, Lorca's struggling power of darkness "is a descendant of that benignest daemon of Socrates, he of marble and salt, who scratched the

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[44] BAREA. *Lorca*: the poet and his people, p. 3.
[45] LORCA. The Duende (1983). In: ROTHENBERG. *Symposium of the whole*, p. 43.
[46] LORCA. The Duende (1983). In: ROTHENBERG. *Symposium of the whole*, p. 44.

master angrily the day he drank the hemlock." Lorca believes that all truly creative artists have to face their own inner demons, rather than their angel or muse, and scuffle them before producing any given artistic representation of such fight:

> Any man – any artist, as Nietzsche would say – climbs the stairway in the tower of his perfection at the cost of a struggle with a *duende* – not with an angel, as some have maintained, or with his muse. This fundamental distinction must be kept in mind if the root of a work of art is to be grasped.

As Lorca points out, the angel "guides and endows … or prohibits and avoids … or foretells …the angel dazzles; but he flies over men's heads and remains in mid-air, shedding his grace" upon an awe-stricken man who can never resist such radiance. As to the muse, in keeping with Lorca, she "dictates and, in certain cases, prompts" the poets who "hear voices and do not know where they come from." Surely the "Muse arouses the intellect … but intellect is oftentimes the foe of poetry because it imitates too much; it elevates the poet to a throne of acute angles and makes him forget that in time the ants can devour him." All in all, Lorca continues, "Angel and Muse approach from without; the Angel sheds light and the Muse gives form."[47] That is to say, angels and muses alike soar from above, but the Duende roar from within and "must come to life in the nethermost recesses of the blood."

Like the Dionysian forces that should overcome Apollo's illusion, the Duende also faces the challenge of warding off the angel and the muse in the poet's heart. As Lorca asserts, the poet's "true struggle is with the *Duende*," who must "repel the Angel, too – kick out the Muse and conquer his awe of the fragrance of the violets that breathe from the poetry of the eighteenth century, or of the great telescope in whose lenses the Muse dozes off, sick of limits." True poetic, or artistic, expression should hence be the result of seeking out the daemon rather than following the acknowledged paths of God, which, as Lorca reminds us might range "from the barbaric way of the hermit, to the subtler modes of the mystic." In order to face the challenge of struggling with the Duende, however, "neither map nor discipline is required. Enough to know that

[47] LORCA. The Duende (1983). In: ROTHENBERG. *Symposium of the whole*, p. 45.

he kindles the blood like an irritant, that he exhausts, that he repulses, all the bland, geometrical assurances, that he smashes all styles." In other words, unless one endeavors, like the shaman in his magical flight, to access the innermost recesses of the human, that is, to struggle with the dark mysterious power of the Duende, art will not surface. As Lorca puts it, "the great artists … know that no emotion is possible without the mediation of the *Duende*."[48]

The similarities between the shamanic figure and the Duende are of a spiritual nature that deals with religious awe. The Duende can also be seen as spiritual possession, which, like the shaman in healing magical flight, represents a rupture of both the psychic structure of the shaman/poet and of the physical structure of the world at large. The descriptions given by Lorca corroborate such a connection:

> The arrival of the *Duende* always presupposes a radical change in all the forms as they existed on the old plane. It gives a sense of refreshment unknown until then, together with that quality of the just-opening rose, of the miraculous, which comes and instills an almost religious transport.[49]

Lorca uses the power of Duende to describe artistic performances that possess such transporting qualitites. Both the performer and his audience, which, as in a shamanic séance, reveal a communal bond that becomes indispensable for the manifestation of spiritual power, in fact feel the presence of Duende. As Lorca points out, "naturally, when flight is achieved, all feel its effects: the initiate coming to see at last how style triumphs over inferior matter, and the unenlightened, through the I-don't-know-what of an authentic emotion." Another similarity that brings together the possibility of Duende and shamanic practice is that both rely on the living presence of a performer. Even though, as Lorca claims, "all arts are capable of *Duende*," one will find "its widest play in the fields of music, dance, and the spoken poem," which are indeed all features of shamanic performance. As I have shown before, the shaman dances, plays music, and recites songs as part of his preparation for attaining magical flight in the re-enactment of old time rituals.

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[48] LORCA. The Duende (1983). In: ROTHENBERG. *Symposium of the whole*, p. 45.
[49] LORCA. The Duende (1983). In: ROTHENBERG. *Symposium of the whole*, p. 46.

The concept of death also brings together shamanism and Duende. According to Lorca, in Spain (homeland of Duende), unlike any other part of the world, death is seen as a beginning and not an end: “in every country, death comes as a finality. It comes, and the curtain comes down. But not in Spain! In Spain the curtain goes up.”[50] In Spain death is a reason to reflect rather than mourn, and the dead “are more alive than the dead of any other country of the world: their profile wounds like the edge of a barber’s razor. The quip about death and the silent contemplation of it are familiar to the Spanish.” On the word of Lorca, unlike the Muse, who, as “she sees death on the way, closes the door … or promenades an urn and inscribes an epitaph with a waxen hand,” or the Angel, who “flies in circles and weaves with tears of narcissus and ice the elegy we see trembling in the hands of Keats,” the “Duende, on the other hand, will not approach at all if he does not see the possibility of death.”[51] Thus death as the final curtain does not function in Spain, or in shamanism, where the initiate has to die and be reborn to become the wounded healer. Wounded by death itself, the shaman will from then on heal all that affects life, just as the “*Duende* draws blood, and in the healing of the wound that never quite closes, all that is unprecedented and invented in a man’s work has its origin.” It is my contention that the spiritual power of Duende in artistic representation is the same as that pervading shamanic practices and its representations. As Lorca puts it, “the Duende who raises the tower of Sahagún … is the same spirit that breaks open the clouds of El Greco and sends the constables of Quevedo and the chimaeras of Goya.”[52] Like the spirit of the shamanic figure that descends to the nethermost regions of the human psyche and takes a magical flight to deal with the supernatural beyond the grasp of reason, the Duende rises from the innermost recesses of man and fights off the Apollonian rational spirit to yield the sublime jubilation of artistic creation as a means of unfolding the shamanic roots that lie at the core of poetic achievement.

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[50] LORCA. The Duende (1983). In: ROTHENBERG. *Symposium of the whole*, p. 47.
[51] LORCA. The Duende (1983). In: ROTHENBERG. *Symposium of the whole*, p. 49.
[52] LORCA. The Duende (1983). In: ROTHENBERG. *Symposium of the whole*, p. 50.

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