Poetry and Creative Resistance

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Abstract

In his 1933 paper entitled *Juego y teoría del duende*, García Lorca identified *duende* with ecstatic or euphoric states that are reached via the artistic embrace of suffering. Many of the illustrations that he provides of this process relate to the *flamenco juergas* of that era. Nevertheless, he also commented that the role of poetry was to be infused with *duende* in order to baptize the reader with its dark water. This suggests that the nature of poesía enduendada may be inferred through the lens of *flamenco*.

The communities that formed around the *flamenco juergas* that García Lorca described resemble the ritual communities that the anthropologist Victor Turner observed, which he called *communitas*. The *flamenco juergas* of that era were not yet the performance spectacles familiar to contemporary audiences, but were participatory, retaining the intimacy of a storytelling circle. During the course of the *juerga*, the musical and dance account of what had been suffering is transformed into an ecstatic or euphoric experience. However, the venues in which the *juergas* took place caused them to be associated with a criminal or at least decadent element, and denigrated by many sectors of the prevailing social order; usually on moral grounds. While the mutual storytelling validated the pain and outrage, it was not intended as education or propaganda. Therefore, although these groups were regarded as threatening, the lyrics rarely represent subversive content. Subversion or resistance in these venues was implicit and nonverbal; indicated by a variety of conflicting cultural codes.

With the advent of recorded music, the *flamenco communitas* expanded to include those who would not otherwise have participated in *juergas* or frequented those venues. It also united performers of different eras, whether or not they were alive. This provoked fierce criticism from those in the prevailing social order, usually on moral grounds.

Where poetry is concerned, this process is not readily obvious, nor does poetry carry the stigma of decadence or potential criminality. Moreover, the necessary literacy was usually available only to those in the wealthier socio-economic sectors. This was one of the dynamics that imbued poetry with an elitist aura of obscure subjectivity.

García Lorca’s *duende* paper suggests otherwise. Two of the features that emerge from viewing *poesía enduendada* through the lens of flamenco are that it is highly physical and social. The talk will conclude with several examples of the physical and social dynamic of poetry.