

CECILIA GONZÁLEZ-ANDRIEU

How Does Beauty Save? Evocations From Federico García Lorca's *Teoría Y Juego Del Duende**

Does Beauty Save?

The enigmatic phrase “beauty will save the world,” from Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* (383).¹ has been so influential that Pope John Paul II titles the last section of his Pastoral Letter *To the Artists* (1999) “The ‘Beauty’ That Saves.” In this concluding section the late pope stresses his conviction of beauty’s redemptive role as he speaks to artists, expressing hope that they will have “an especially intense experience of creative inspiration” (*To Artists* no. 16). Through their participation in this experience, the Pope trusts artists will “pass on to generations to come” a beauty that “will stir them to wonder!” (no. 16).² As John Paul understands it, this will awaken “enthusiasm” which is necessary to “meet and master the crucial challenges which stand before us” (no. 16). The role of beauty is to activate this enthusiasm for life which will both lift spirits and set humanity back on the right path. “Beauty,” he asserts enigmatically, “is a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence. It is an invitation to savor life and to dream of the future” (no. 16). Yet, John Paul cautiously adds that “the beauty of created things can never fully satisfy,” while he quotes Augustine’s well-known passage in the *Confessions* that in finding beauty we indeed find God (no. 16).³ In this pastoral letter the pope assigns a complex and one could even say priestly task to artists who as mediators of beauty can be instruments in the ministry of “opening the human soul to the sense of the eternal” (no. 16).

How does this opening happen? How does beauty save? In answering this question in this paper I interlace a number of strands to arrive at a theological aesthetics of beauty’s participation in redemption. I begin by looking at beauty’s role in relation to humanity by weaving John Paul II with the work of the pioneering Protestant liturgist Von Ogden Vogt. Next, I consider Federico García Lorca’s intriguingly theological lecture *Teoría y Juego del Duende* using a pragmatist aesthetics which understands art as both practice and experience.⁴ Cognizant of the theoretical paradox of attempting to define beauty, I look instead at Lorca’s theory to discern beauty’s effects on the artists who evoke it and on the communities who recognize it. It is then that the traces or glimmers of the “saving” effect of the work of beauty becomes apparent. I conclude by offering a constructive soteriology of beauty.

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The Loss of Beauty

Rewinding almost a century, in his now-classic work *Art and Religion* Von Ogden Vogt argues for the centrality of truth, goodness and beauty to a full human life. Vogt understands these as permanent human values that “we cannot live without” (*Art & Religion* 1, 34). Vogt first wrote his appeal to renew the unity between art and religion as a response to the horrors of the First World War, revising his volume as World War II came to an end. It was a time he describes as “wrecked by shell fire” when our “intellectual houses are falling about our ears” (1). Yet, in the midst of such suffering Vogt expressed hope. “The atomic forces,” he tells us, “may lead to vast disasters but they hold also the promise of a brilliant and beautiful era of peace and progress” (vii). Vogt’s proposal was to argue for practices in the arts, worship and architecture which would “foster the religious experience,” (5) an experience which would break down the blindness of sectarianism and bring a world of unity. Perhaps the terror of two world wars had been unleashed precisely because humanity had stopped seeking beauty, truth and goodness, or worse yet, had accepted counterfeit versions.

If John Paul II is right and “beauty is *the visible form of the good*, just as the good is *the metaphysical condition of beauty*” (*To Artists* no. 3).⁵ then failing to see the beautiful we also fail to seek the good. “The true and the good are beautiful,” Vogt insists, “The beautiful, most highly speaking, is both true and good. That which is false is not beautiful; it is an ugly lie” (*Art & Religion* 23). The only way to discern the lie is to learn to notice its ugliness; for Vogt this could only happen by being trained in the experience and practice of beauty. “To perceive beauty,” Vogt wrote hopefully, “is to be moved by something of the same emotional course as attends on the perception of Divinity. And to create beauty is in some sense to participate in the character of Divinity” (23). Beauty, is not passive enjoyment, but leads to vital transformation. For Vogt, “The evil cannot be avoided nor the good effected without a stir of imagination in religion to match the need and the opportunity” (vii). For such a stirring of the imagination Vogt turned to the arts.

Similarly, John Paul II stresses that in being “obedient to their inspiration in creating works both worthwhile and beautiful, [artists] not only enrich the cultural heritage of each nation and of all humanity, but they also render an exceptional social service in favor of the common good” (*To Artists* no. 4).

The Common Good and Beauty

What is this service in favor of the common good and what does it have to do with art? In an age of dispassionate aestheticism and of “art for art’s sake,” Vogt rebelled, saying “Art is not something detached from life: it makes life and is made by it” (*Art & Religion* 10).⁶ In our own time, noting the “diminished interest in religious themes,” John Paul II expands what might be understood as beautiful theologically when he stresses that “Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption” (*To Artists* no. 10). Vogt

and John Paul II converge: the beauty they speak of is not the kind advocated by secular aesthetes, or indeed by religious purveyors of innocuous art, which in refusing to deal with the reality of suffering and of evil also "disseminates lies" (Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste* 141). If art can indeed be vitally involved in life while giving voice to the deepest theological questions "without emptying the message itself of its transcendent value," (*To Artists* no. 12) then an accomplished and honest artist contributes uniquely to the common good. As Vogt explains "Artistry is expression, release, liberation, outgoing effort, authorship, origination. Its results are not called thoughts of art or feelings of art but works of art" (*Art & Religion* 28).

How Does Beauty Save?

For all their eloquence Vogt and John Paul II are giving us thoughts *about* art, appreciative but once-removed. Clearly an artist's guiding hand would be helpful; thus I turn to the poet and dramatist Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) to help fill in the "how?" that follows the assertion that "Beauty will save the world." Lorca achieved notoriety at a young age, and because of this we have access to his thought even though he was tragically martyred in the early days of the Spanish Civil War before reaching the age of 40.⁷ In a few extant lectures of the young artist we have a theological aesthetics worked out by an artist who lived most intimately the creative processes he examines. Federico García Lorca is a virtuoso practitioner of the *mysterium tremendum* that is art, as well as an awed and inquisitive examiner of art's power and origin.

An Artist's Insights

My principal guide to answering the question of beauty's saving qualities is Lorca's *Teoría y Juego del Duende* (Theory and Game of the Duende).⁸ The lecture was presented in 1933 and according to Christopher Maurer "became a cornerstone of [Lorca's] poetics" (García Lorca, *In Search of Duende* viii). How does Lorca understand the source of beauty?

Vogt and John Paul II clearly see artists as mediators, yet modernity has for the most part stressed the idea of artists as lone geniuses, individual, autonomous and often having little (if any) concern for "the common good."⁹ If art is purely a subjective form of self-expression it cannot point beyond itself. To consider beauty as redemptive the idea of "inspiration" must be addressed. Yet, haven't previous generations called divine inspiration what we now understand to be creativity? Don't we in the 21st century know better than to believe that what an artist experiences as creativity has anything to do with God?¹⁰

This argument assumes our present age knows more about aesthetics because we like to analyze, as if artistic inspiration could be understood through dissection.¹¹ A non-reductive approach turns the question around – what if what *we* have been calling creativity or artistic inspiration is actually *closer* to Hildegard of Bingen's assertion of divine inspiration?¹² As Barbara Newman contends in her study of Hildegard, "we must avoid the reductionist error of assuming that a physiological cause (or better, correlative) of the visions

excludes the possibility of any higher inspiration" ("Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation" 167). What if it is precisely our modern predilection for analyzing that stands in the way of understanding the source of artistic inspiration? And what if by setting boundaries between secular and sacred we in effect reduce the redemptive power of art that Vogt and John Paul II hope to see revived "for the common good"?

The Theory and Game of the Duende

Lorca's *Teoría del Duende* breaks most boundaries. The lecture is a profoundly intimate piece of literary theory, theology, and philosophy expressed succinctly and poetically. Lorca offers it modestly "as a very simple lesson about the hidden spirit of disconsolate Spain" (*Obras Completas* 109). The "Duende,"¹³ as Lorca explains, is defined by elusiveness; it is what one folk singer in his native Andalucía told another he lacked: "...you have a great voice, you know the styles, but you will never have any success, because you don't have duende" (109).¹⁴ As presented by Lorca, duende shifts shapes from entity, to process, to attribute. Yet the genesis of the term which sets his first aesthetic principle can be traced principally to a mysterious quality perceived and proclaimed by the poor of Lorca's southern Spain: a people whose guitars sound like the weeping of a "heart badly wounded by five swords" ("La Guitarra," *Obras Completas* 297-298). Who were these people?

Lorca (who was also a classically trained pianist) made it part of his work to recover the music, poetry and dance of his fellow descendants of the ancient Moorish kingdom of Al-Andalus.¹⁵ Because the polemics surrounding Spain's Muslim legacy are beyond the scope of this study,¹⁶ I will accept Lorca's point of view: "with Lorca, there is always more than meets the eye, especially when it comes to his fascination with Spain's Muslim past."¹⁷ Andalucía is where Lorca was born and lived; for him the place and the people created an atmosphere of uncommon stark beauty and primeval wisdom. A similar view is famously expressed by Washington Irving in 1832:

The ancient kingdom of Granada, into which we are about to penetrate, is one of the most mountainous regions of Spain. Vast *sierras* of chains of mountains, destitute of shrub or tree and mottled with variegated marbles and granites, elevate their sunburnt summits against a deep-blue sky, yet in their rugged bosoms lie engulfed the most verdant and fertile valleys, where the desert and the garden strain for mastery, and the very rock is, as it were, compelled to yield the fig, the orange and the citron, and to blossom with the myrtle and the rose. (*Tales of the Alhambra* 11)

The people of this ancient kingdom, Lorca tells us, "speak constantly of the duende, discovering it instinctually the moment it appears" (*Obras Completas* 109). Duende is not synonymous with beauty but appears as the effective pointer toward beauty through its effects. In Lorca's articulation the first aesthetic principle of duende is that it is recognized by the common people. Duende is not known through analysis and abstraction; the recognition and

proclamation of duende belongs to experience and to community, a community living close to the earth. In this way, Lorca moved beyond a "modern" aesthetic introducing a second principle of duende. Lorca illustrates this with a stunning quote from the *cantaor* (singer) Manuel Torres, "everything that has dark sounds has *duende*," and to underline this quality Lorca adds "there is nothing more true" (110). What are these "dark sounds" that must be present for duende to be recognized by the community? For this we look to Lorca's creative work.

La voz lorquiana

Impressions and Landscapes (García Lorca, *Obras Completas* 1535–1592) is the poet's first published work, written when he was only nineteen years old. To his contemporaries the youth appeared to be writing travel prose, yet the book reveals an unexpected aesthetic as he transcends conventional *costumbrista* literature toward the theological.¹⁸ In one of the essays, Lorca begins his description predictably,

The road that leads to *La Cartuja* flows softly between the willows and the broom plants, loosing itself in the gray heart of the fall afternoon.... ("Impresiones y Paisajes," *Obras Completas* 1541-1542)¹⁹

He continues in this fashion and then turns,

This ascetic and quiet landscape has the enchantment of painful religiosity. The eternal hand gave it nothing but melancholy. Everything expresses in its form a formidable bitterness and desolation. The vision of God in this landscape is one of great fear.... (1542)

As he continues making his way across the village he enters the church "whose form rises above the rest, crowned by simple pinnacles and a cross" (*Obras Completas* 1543). Here Lorca unveils the meaning of *dark sounds* as the travelogue disappears, smashed to pieces by his penetrating and decidedly dark prose,

Toward the rear [of the church] the magnificent altar scene reproduces figures of saints dressed in the finest clothes. In their midst stands out the terrifying vision of Christ carved by Siloe,²⁰ with a sunken abdomen, the vertebrae breaking the skin, the hands torn to pieces, the hair made up in strange curls, the eyes sunk in death and the brow disintegrating into a gelatinous redness...Next to him stand the evangelists and apostles, strong and impassible, with scenes from the Passion in a deathlike rigidity, and holding up the cross, an Eternal Father with a look of pride and forcefulness, and a brawny young man with the face of an imbecile....

...The figure of the Redeemer appears full of the tragic mysticism of the moment, but it finds no echo in the sculptures that surround him. Everything is very far from passion and from love; only He overflows

in fervent lushness, in charity and grief, in the midst of indifference and general pride. (1543)

The dark sounds that are normative of *duende* reveal Christ's "tragic mysticism" as it is first recognized and then amplified by the poet. Jesus in his suffering is the ultimate measure of *duende*, an overflow of "fervent lushness, charity and grief." As Lorca contrasts the other figures we note their indifference is the obstacle to love, dark sounds effectively move us out of indifference. How is this movement effected in artist and in audience?

García Lorca points to Nietzsche to demonstrate the limitations of modern Western philosophy in answering this question,

... *duende* embraced Nietzsche's heart as he looked for it in its exterior form on the Rialto bridge²¹ or in Bizet's music, without finding it, and without realizing that the *duende* that he pursued had leapt from the Greek mysteries to the dancers in Cádiz or to the anguished Dionysian scream of the *siguiriya* of Silverio. (*Obras Completas* 110)

In highlighting the Parisian Bizet, whose Opera "Carmen"²² tells the story of the poor *gitanas* yet does not originate with the *gitanas* themselves, Lorca sets another marker for *duende*. We can discern a third principle as he notes the difference between "fine Art" and the community's "art" whose only measure of "success" is indeed its honesty and its power to move.²³ As Lorca comments on Nietzsche's failure to notice this difference he quotes Goethe, agreeing that *duende* is "the mysterious power that all feel but that no philosopher explains" (110).²⁴ We may note here a fourth aesthetic principle: philosophy cannot properly explain the mystery at the heart of the recognition of *duende*. Reason has definite limits.

Continuing, Lorca recounts how a legendary *cantaor* was fond of saying "The days I sing with *duende* I am unbeatable," and how the elder dancer *La Malena* memorably exclaimed, "Olé! That has *duende*!" upon hearing a fragment of Bach (*Obras Completas* 109). Here we have a fifth principle: the beauty revealed by *duende* can be discerned both in one's work and in another's artfulness, and it is unrelated to fame or technical virtuosity. *La Malena*, Lorca adds with some irony, was "pitifully bored" by Brahms and Gluck (109).

A Wounded Wrist

From here Lorca ventures a theory of how an artist mediates beauty: "duende is a power, not a doing, it is a striving, not a thinking...." As an old singer told him, "it is not in the throat; the *duende* rises from inside, from the soles of the feet'...it is not a matter of talent, but of living craft,...of blood,...of ancient culture, of the act of creating" (*Obras Completas* 110).

Writing in the fifth century Synesius of Cyrene confided to his teacher Hypatia a similar experience,

This work [I am sending you] was completed, the whole of it in a single night, or rather, at the end of a night, one which also brought the vision enjoining me to write it. There are two or three passages in the book in which it seemed to me that I was some other person, and that I was one listening to myself amongst others who were present. Even now this work, as often as I go over it, produces a marvelous effect upon me, and a certain divine voice envelops me as in poetry. (Letter 154, to the Philosopher [Hypatia])

Five hundred years later, Hildegard of Bingen "maintained that her musical gift, like her visions and her understanding of Scripture, came to her 'without any human instruction': she recorded the songs and taught them to her nuns just as she had heard them sung by celestial voices" (Newman, *Voice of the Living Light* 15). Finally, Lorca himself addresses the question of his experience as mediator of beauty,

I want to cry just because I want to
The same way the children in the last bench cry,
Because I am neither a man, nor a poet, nor a leaf,
But a wounded wrist probing the things of the other side. ("Poema
doble del lago Edem," *Obras Completas* 499)²⁵

A "wounded wrist" is in danger of bleeding to death; it is a violent depiction of the artist's complete surrender. As Lorca notes, the bleeding happens because of the search for what is "on the other side." Does Lorca, like Synesius and Hildegard mean the Divine?

Remember the case of the very Andalusian and "duende-filled" Saint Teresa, Andalusian ... for being one of the few creatures whose duende (not whose angel, because angels never attack) had shot her through with a dart, wanting to kill her for having stolen his very last secret — the subtle bridge which unites the five senses with that center of raw flesh, raw cloud, raw sea, Love liberated from Time. (García Lorca, *Obras Completas* 117–18)

The passage leaves little doubt that Lorca means the Divine. The secret the duende holds is that there is a "bridge" that "unites" the human person to the center of creation which he calls el "*Amor libertado del Tiempo*." In Lorca's poetic universe there is only one personified Love who appears as a constant—Jesus, the Christ. Duende is evidence of that "subtle bridge" which through a process involving our senses communicates a beauty that takes us to Christ, and Christ in Lorca is the most sublime artist of all.

Poet of the world, rain of the most high,
saint of saints, balm of life,
perfume of hearts, martyr of brotherhood,
king of the sun, father of the stars,
soul of the flowers.... ("Oración a Jesús de Nazaret," *Prosa Inédita De Juventud* 71)²⁶

Duende emerges as we experience a beauty that wounds us and through this wounding we are united to the "poet of the world" who is "Christ."²⁷

Searching for the Duende

Shifting from recognition to process, Lorca then proposes duende as a personification, defining the duende as neither the angel nor the muse. The "angel" flies above us and pours out his grace, which is then taken by the artist and inserted without much effort into the art. Further, as he sees it, the "angel who entered through the bars in the small balcony in Assisi...orders;" there is no resistance because the angel "moves his steel wings in the world of what is predestined" (García Lorca, *Obras Completas* 111). By contrast, the "muse" is "far away and tired" addressing the intelligence "which is very often the enemy of poetry, because it imitates too much" (111). The key distinction Lorca makes between the angel, the muse and the duende, is that "the angel and muse come from without; the angel gives ideas and the muse gives forms...but the duende has to be awakened in the last dwellings of our blood" (111). Lorca clearly wants to expand beyond classical theories of aesthetics dealing with ideas and forms, however, he does not equate mysticism with duende. There is no reaching the duende through a contemplative and anagogical movement toward God; the encounter with the duende, he announces as one who knows, "is a fight," (111):

The roads to find God are known, from the extreme method of the eremite to the subtle and mystical; with a tower as Saint Teresa, or with three roads like Saint John of the Cross. And even if we have to call out with a voice like Isaiah: 'You are truly the hidden God,' in the end God sends to the one who searches for him the first thorns of fire. (112)

Unlike mysticism facilitated through spiritual practice, the complex embodiment of beauty evidenced by duende has no road map and provides no sustenance along the way. It is precisely in surrender that duende as an attribute becomes possible. To illustrate this Lorca recounts a story. The setting is a small bar in Cadíz. A gifted singer performs; she sings with amazing virtuosity, but her audience remains unmoved. Finally, defeated, she downs a strong drink, and although she has been singing all night sits down to "sing without voice, without breath, without nuances, with her throat burning, but...with duende. She had succeeded in killing all the scaffolding of the song" (García Lorca, *Obras Completas* 113). She knew that her audience didn't want "forms, but the marrow of the forms, pure music with a concise body so it could hold itself up in the air" (113). As the poet describes the singing it was "a flow of blood which had dignity because of its pain and its honesty, and it opened like a hand, the ten fingered-hand of the nailed feet, full of storm, of a Christ by Juan de Juni" (113).²⁸ The duende appeared in the singer's voice because she emptied herself,²⁹ thus mediating the pain and honesty of the Passion for her hearers. Her voice evokes the "marrow" of Christ through the communication of this surrender. Duende is recognized as beauty that saves, by making present the surrender of the Crucified One through the dancer's voice.

It is not difficult to imagine how Lorca must have moved his audience. Having thus brought them to this recounting of an actual moment when duende "appears," he now makes explicit the connection to the divine,

The arrival of the duende presupposes a radical change of all the forms of the old plans, it gives the feeling of unpublished freshness, with the quality of a newly created rose, of miracle, which brings about an enthusiasm³⁰ that is almost religious. In all the Arab music, dance, song or elegy, the arrival of the duende is greeted with the energetic cry of "¡Alá, Alá!", "God, God!"...and in all the songs in southern Spain the apparition of the duende is followed by the sincerest exclamation of "¡Viva Dios!", "profound, human, tender cry of a communication with God through the five senses, thanks to the duende who moves the body and voice of the dancer. (*Obras Completas* 113-14)

It is in this articulation that Lorca departs even further from Nietzsche's theory, which posits a duality in aesthetic experience made up of the fragmentation of Dionysian chaos and the Apollonian which orders it.³¹ (Ehrenzweig, *The Psycho-Analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing* 57-58). Lorca arrives at a different conclusion. The experience of beauty is a wounding which has power precisely because it is experienced as wounding, and because it also wounds the "public." Rather than seeking some Apollonian order, in surrendering to the duende the artist makes evident her suffering, accepts it, and emptying herself allows God's beauty to fill her. This is her gift. Duende is the complete surrender of both the artist and the public to their human finitude.³²

Saving Beauty: Christ

In an intriguing passage, Martin Buber speaks about "myth" in a way quite similar to Lorca's duende, synthesizing Jewish and Christian ideas,

Myth does not mean that one brings the stars down to earth and allows them to tread it in human shape; rather in it the bliss-bestowing human shape is elevated to heaven, and moon and sun, Orion and the Pleiades, serve only to adorn it. Myth is not an affair of yonder and of old, but a function of today and of all times, of this city where I write and of all places of man [sic]. This is an eternal function of the soul: the insertion of what is experienced... into the magic of existence. The stronger the tension and intensity of the experience, the greater the formative power that is experienced. Where the highest shape, the hero and savior, the sublimest event, the life that he has lived, and the mightiest tension, the profound emotion of the simple, meet, the myth arises which compels all the future. (Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work* 88-9)

Beauty is an experience understood by the soul as revealing the "magic of existence" in the here and the now. It is the encounter that reveals tension and

intensity and is exemplified in “the highest shape, the hero and savior.” In theological terms we might say myth/duende is the truth revealed as the soul becomes attuned to the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. Lorca knows that the “battle” with the duende involves the eventual unconditional acceptance and surrender exemplified by Christ. To be wounded by the love of Christ is the ultimate gift of beauty.

Years earlier, Lorca had composed the impossibly short poem, “Cruz” (“Poema del cante jondo,” *Obras Completas* 328).³³

CROSS
The Cross.
(Final period to the road.)

Observes itself in the irrigation channel.
(Ellipsis.)

The poem is a luminous piece of subtlety. Lorca the writer looks at salvation history as punctuation marks on human life. The redemptive cross of Christ is that point toward which everything inexorably moves. Sacrificial love, that beauty with the darkest of sounds is the end which completes – the final period. Yet, as it “observes itself in the irrigation channel” it is transformed and opens into a new and open road...the ellipsis. Fundamental for this insight is that the Cross’ reflection in the water is in an “irrigation channel.” The *acequia*, a staple of Granada, although human-made, is modeled on a stream. The channel is an image of the work of God that comes into being through our creativity.

Through his ‘artistic creativity’ man [sic] appears more than ever ‘in the image of God,’ and he accomplishes this task above all in shaping the wondrous ‘material’ of his own humanity and then exercising creative dominion over the universe which surrounds him. With loving regard, the divine Artist passes on to the human artist a spark of his own surpassing wisdom calling him to share in his creative power. (John Paul II, *To Artists* no. 1)

The channel’s purpose is to bring sustenance and life so there may be fruit. It is when the Redeemer sees his salvific purpose of bringing life³⁴ reflected back by the human effort to do the same that the road opens up into an eternal ellipsis. “The encounter with God does not come to man [sic] in order that he may henceforth attend to God,” Buber tells us, “but in order that he may prove its meaning in action in the world. All revelation is a calling and a mission” (Buber, *I and Thou* 164).

Art, the work of human persons to reveal beauty, is patterned on the work of God. In mediating beauty, art is a channel which carries forward the purpose of the Cross. The channel of art reflects selfless love back by multiplying it in image, and by having it guide the water that will bring life. Art makes visible the beauty of the Cross through our work. For Lorca, the duende will only descend on those willing to fearlessly reflect the complete surrender to love of the Cross.

As we conclude Lorca's *Teoría*, we note by interlacing Vogt and John Paul II that Lorca's lecture is a treatise on how to recognize beauty as redemptive as the community proclaims "¡Viva Dios!" (*Obras Completas* 113). Lorca presents art as an act of being present to the Paschal mystery. It is the surrender to this mystery of our redemption that becomes visible in the fight waged by the artist, and it is the recognition of the sacramental nature of what has been disclosed that brings cries of "¡Viva Dios!"

...the duende wounds, and in the care of this wound, which never closes, is the unexpected, the imagined, in the work of a man. The magical virtue of all that is poetry is in always having duende in order to baptize with deep and dark water all those that see it, because with duende it is easier to love, to understand, and it is certain that one will be loved and understood.... (García Lorca, *Obras Completas* 117)

Art "baptizes" us through the gift of beauty that allows us to love and know ourselves loved. When duende is at work we enter this mystery. Looking at duende, then, as the process that brings to life the beauty of the Paschal mystery, Lorca discloses its work in the artist and in the one who receives the gift of the art.

Conclusion: A Soteriology of Beauty

To conclude, I want to propose some markers to help us answer the question of how it is that beauty saves. John Paul II and Von Ogden Vogt alerted us to look for evidence of beauty's work for the common good, the activation of enthusiasm for life, and unity. Through Lorca's insights we see that: 1) Beauty saves by making us part of a community; we overcome our isolation as we recognize and proclaim our recognition of beauty together. 2) Beauty saves by making us honestly deal with suffering, because the dark sounds that wound us do not mask what is painful but reveal it as beautiful by moving us past indifference and toward better versions of ourselves. 3) Beauty saves by destroying our concepts of "ability" and "technique," helping us value what is spontaneous and honest in the community's art. 4) Beauty saves by disclosing the limits of reason, humbling us through its radical ineffability. 5) Beauty saves by making us aware of the giftedness of others and of our own giftedness. 6) Beauty saves by requiring our surrender, so that we transcend the idea of the power of human faculties and instead recognize beauty in self-sacrifice and humility. 7) Beauty saves by overwhelming us with its quality as gift and in its unmerited bestowal giving evidence of God's intimate involvement and love of our world. Beauty appears as "miracle" and "mystery." 8) Beauty saves by requiring that we do battle with it, breaking us of our hubris, and calling for our unconditional surrender to something greater than our limited individual vision. 9) Beauty saves by embodying the Crucified One in wounding our hearts to feel compassion. 10) Beauty saves by making us live in the here and now, pointing to a communication with God that involves our senses and helps us discover the gift of our embodiment. 11) Beauty saves by disclosing the artist's unique participation in the created order as "image of God" through the gift of creativity. 12) Beauty saves by calling us to good works, and by producing

abundant and good fruits. 13) Finally, beauty saves by baptizing us with “deep and dark water” which makes it possible for us to know ourselves loved and thus to love.

If we can imagine ourselves at one of the tables in the small seaside bar of Lorca’s story, we first come to know ourselves as separate from the beauty before us. As we listen, watch, taste, smell and touch the beauty of what art discloses, we suffer, entering the Passion. We recognize ourselves as “other” from that which exquisitely draws us to it, which attracts us so much we want to be one with it. Beauty beckons us to know it in its deepest self. We suffer this otherness, and yet we walk forward. As in the Passion, there is a purpose to the walking, and the sheer beauty of that purpose sustains us. Unwilling to look away and not love, we sacrifice our self-preservation. All the scaffolding is pulled out, we hang there unaided; then with the door of the tomb closing in upon us we are broken by the beauty, by its power, by our desire to be one with it. It is in this wounding that the mingling of the divine and the human pours out in the “blood” that Lorca describes as constituting a genuine work of art.

Finally, in the experience of creating something beautiful, and in the aesthetic experience of receiving that creation, we are resurrected. We have new life, we see with new eyes, we are transformed, and we know things we never knew before. Through the duende’s wounding we have seen, and we can see again, the face of God in the generosity of the exquisite Paschal mystery of loving and being loved through the redemptive power of beauty.

Loyola Marymount University

NOTES

- 1.) John Paul II refers to what he terms Dostoyevsky's "profound insight." See John Paul II, Pope, "Letter to Artists" (Rome: 1999) no. 16.
- 2.) The emphasis is the pope's.
- 3.) The original text reads "*Sero te amavi! Pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi!* (Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you!)" See Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002) Book 10, 27.
- 4.) For a full discussion of theories of practice and experience see Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) 34-61.
- 5.) The emphasis is the pope's.
- 6.) Vogt was particularly perplexed by the comments of Merton Stark Yewdale who asserted that "life is the great delusion and Art the supreme counter-agent to existence." Vogt adds "How could anyone write that...?" The article cited by Vogt is "The Aesthetic World," *International Studio* (November, 1918).
- 7.) There are two superbly researched biographies of the poet that investigate the mysterious circumstances of his death apparently at the hands of Fascist sympathizers, see Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca: A Life* (London ; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989). Also see Leslie Stainton, *Lorca, a Dream of Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1999).
- 8.) Translations of the lecture are mine from Lorca's original text in Federico García Lorca, *Obras Completas*, 13th ed. (Madrid: Aguilar, 1967) 109-121. A complete English translation is available in Federico García Lorca, *In Search of Duende*, trans. Christopher Maurer and Norman Thomas Di Giovanni (New York: New Directions, 1998) 48-62. For other critical explorations of the idea of the duende in Lorca's work see Edward M. Pavlic, "'Something Patterned, Wild, and Free': Robert Hayden's Angles of Descent and the Democratic Unconscious," *African American Review* 36, no. 4 (2002) 533-555. Also, Karen Bennett, "The 'Duende' in England: Lorca's 'Blood Wedding' In Translation," *Translation and Literature* 11, no. 1 (2002) 24-44.
- 9.) Kandinsky's influential work originally published in 1914 contends that art is the expression of an inner need of the artist which he names 1) personality, 2) style, and 3) service to art or pure artistry. Kandinsky is also convinced that "an artist is not only justified in using, but it is his duty to use only those forms which fulfill his own need." (Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1977) 53). The emphasis is his.
- 10.) The overabundance of self-help books on "creativity" points to the current belief that, like losing weight, being creative geniuses is something we can "learn" to be. A search for the keyword "creativity" in Amazon's book database returned over 9,000 entries, and a search of the terms "being creative" returned almost 200.
- 11.) For a very helpful discussion of the difference between textbook and living aesthetics see Alejandro García-Rivera, *A Wounded Innocence: Sketches for a Theology of Art* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003) viiii-x.
- 12.) "It happened in the year 1141 of the Incarnation of God's Son Jesus Christ,...that the heavens were opened and a fiery light of great brilliance came

and suffused my whole brain and set my whole heart and breast afire like a flame—yet not burning but warming, as the sun warms an object on which it sheds its rays.” Hildegard of Bingen, “Scivias”, *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis*, ed. Adelgundis Fückrötter, vol.43-43a (Turhout, Belgium, 1966) 3-4. Cited in Barbara Newman, “Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation,” *Church History* 54, no. 2 (1985) 166.

13.) Henceforth simply duende.

14.) Christopher Maurer adds this comment to his translation of the lecture, “The notion of duende (from duen de casa, ‘master of the house’) came to [Lorca] from popular Spanish culture, where the duende is a playful hobgoblin....But Lorca was aware of another popular usage of the term. In Andalusia people say of certain toreros and flamenco artists that they have duende—an inexplicable power of attraction, the ability on rare occasions, to send waves of emotion through those watching and listening to them.” (García Lorca, *In Search of Duende* ix.)

15.) Lorca researched with care the folk music of southern Spain, helping to organize a festival of *cante jondo* (the traditional music) with renowned composer and friend Manuel de Falla, See Gibson, 108–116.

16.) “The historian María Jesús Viguera Molins has noted the ‘conflictual’ nature of the ‘historiography of al-Andalus,’ with Spanish historians at different periods of their nation’s history either romanticizing or denigrating the Moorish era; the influence of contemporary politics on their writing was such that, as she put it, myth risks replacing history and the present risks displacing the past.” Hishaam D. Aidi, “The Interference of Al-Andalus: Spain, Islam and the West,” *Social Text* 24, Summer (2006) 68.

17.) Miguel Ángel Vázquez and Robert G. Havard, “Poetic Pilgrimages: From Baghdad to Andalucía, Abk Tammm’s L Anta Anta Wa-L Al-Diyru Diyru,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 34, no. 1/2 (2003) 125.

18.) Costumbrismo is the literary style that pays close attention to the unique cultural characteristics and customs of a particular place and time. “The costumbrista writer and the novelist sought to establish a concrete picture of contemporary Spain by portraying people and scenes that typified that which was genuinely Spanish.” (Mary E. Giles, “Descriptive Conventions in Pereda, Pardo Bazán, and Palacio Valdés,” *Hispania* 50 no. 2 (1967) 285.)

19.) The translation is mine.

20.) Gil de Siloe, d. c. 1501, Spanish Sculptor, Burgos.

21.) “For Nietzsche Venice was also the projection of human melancholy.” (Margaret Plant, *Venice : Fragile City, 1797-1997* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 197).

22.) *Carmen*, Bizet’s last opera, was written in 1875.

23.) For my exploration of a valuing of “art” beyond the “Art world” see Cecilia González-Andrieu, “Theological Aesthetics and the Recovery of Silenced Voices,” *The Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* Winter (2008). Available at: <http://www.visualarttoday.com/Exhibitions/AlfredQuiroz/index.html>.

24.) In the quote Goethe is referring to Paganini.

25.) My translation.

26.) García Lorca’s “*Oración a Jesús de Nazaret*” was previously unpublished, circa 1917.

27.) For an exploration of the concept of woundedness in theological aesthetics

see García-Rivera, *A Wounded Innocence* xi, xii, 14, 19, 38, 52, 58, 69, 75, 80, 82, 85–86, 91–93, 100, 115, 119–122.

28.) Juan de Juni, Spanish (1507-1577).

29.) Ron Austin also notices self-emptying as an important aesthetic/spiritual principle in both artist and audience, "Attention as 'self-emptying' inescapably involves negation. It requires loss and suffering. We must therefore, expect inner resistance, and remain aware of it. In fact, the observation of our various forms of resistance can lead to a greater self-understanding." (Ron Austin, *In a New Light : Spirituality and the Media Arts* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007) 5).

30.) I notice here Lorca's use of the very same word that John Paul II uses to define what artists activate in the receiving community: "People of today and tomorrow need this enthusiasm if they are to meet and master the crucial challenges which stand before us." (*To Artists* no. 16).

31.) See Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Psycho-Analysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing: An Introduction to a Theory of Unconscious Perception*. (New York: G. Braziller, 1965) 57-58.

32.) "Psycho-analysis knows well enough how poignant our narcissistic mortification can become if our unconscious wish for omnipotence and immortality is thwarted by the limitations of reality. All wisdom we can muster is needed to accept the fact of our own personal death." Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967) 175.

33.) *La cruz. /(Punto final/ del camino.)/ Se mira en la acequia./(Puntos suspensivos.)* My English language rendering of final period for *punto final* fails to capture the complexity of Lorca's phrase. *Punto final* in its visual representation is the one dot that ends a sentence (.), which he juxtaposes with the three dots (...) that make up the open ended ellipsis. The focus on these as typographical characters is a modernist construction popular with Lorca's contemporaries commonly identified as *La generación del 27*, see Guillermo de Torre, *Hélices: Poemas, 1918-1922* (Málaga: Centro Cultural de la Generación del 27, 2000) 54-56. Beyond the visual characters and the allusion to the process of writing, other meanings of *punto final* include the final destination of a journey, and also the very last and definitive point made in an argument, and which might be apprehended as irrefutable.

34.) "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

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