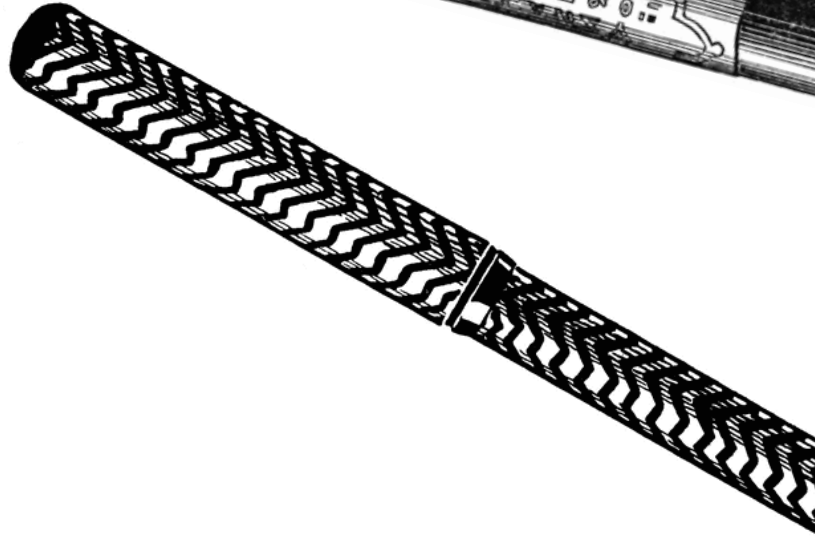


Inhale

Reflection Statement



*“As if you were on fire from within.
The moon lives in the lining of your skin.”*

- Pablo Neruda

Inhale: Reflection Statement

Inhale is a collection of poems which conceptually examine the integral premise of Federico García Lorca’s *duende*, through facilitating an exploration into the destructive dichotomy of irrational passion and transcendental catharsis essential to the construction of artistic integrity. Whilst my primary intent was to depict the forging of a tangibly divine bond between artist and audience, many of my poems also emulate traditional Andalusian folk songs through their linguistic binds to themes of earth, desire and mortality. In this way I hope to engender an appreciation within my audience of the melancholic depth that resides beneath the supposed simplicity of the folk song’s modest façade. Integral to the interest I took in Lorca’s work was his ability to ‘remove all traces of abstraction’¹ through restating emotional description in terms of physiological sensations: “white-threaded sadness” and “the ivy of a shiver”. With Lorca’s theoretical and poetic influence moulding the conceptual foundations of my work, I felt it only appropriate to dedicate my suite (in light of his tragically short life) to his enduring artistic legacy.

Duende possesses a name, an identity in the Spanish culture, yet this does not confine it to the banks of the Guadalquivir². In defining a transitory consciousness of *duende* as an underlying facet of the human experience, I endeavour to nurture within my

¹ Miguel García-Posada (ed.), *Primer romancero gitano*. Madrid: Castalia, 1988.

² The Guadalquivir, Spain’s second longest river, flows directly through the heart of Andalusia.

audience a formal recognition and understanding of this potent sensation they themselves have most likely hitherto encountered. Pursuing the realisation of a concept that eclipses the bounds of the English language, I attempted to curb the potential for audience alienation through my inclusion of a prosaic foreword that elucidates the intrinsic characteristics of Lorca's spirit of artistic evocation. Exemplification of the grammatical tendency of the Spanish language to unify pronouns and verbs through conjugation into a singular entity, allowed me to metaphorically illustrate the inextricable bond between the *duende*, artist and art form. Natural imagery also acts as a commonality through which my audience is awarded deeper insight into the *duende's* organic aesthetic.

My decision to write *Inhale* as a suite of poems was imperative in satisfying the creative demands of my concept, linear-narrative forms inhibiting my ability to effectively transcend the margins of each distinct artistic domain with fluidity. Due to the conceptually nebulous nature of my work, I chose to utilise voice over characterisation so as to sanction a more intimate interaction between my reader and the more concrete aspects of my imagery, as demonstrated in:

“Viscous shuddering of pantherous slinks before sanctified altars”

My use of second person acts to engage the reader through recognition of *their* potential to both possess and express *duende*, simultaneously allowing an ambiguity to permeate my work that allows meaning to be made and interpreted on multiple levels. In conjunction with metaphorical language, this allows me to portray the complex depth of the relationship shared between an artist and their craft through a more relatable evocation of emotions, suggestive of the obsessive intensity present both within physical and metaphysical human relationships.

*“Between spindle arms my brassy soul still unfurls, barley twists on your carousel.
Will you be the one to untangle my mauled heartstrings when the song is over?”*

I feel my voice; depiction of mortality and oxymoronic dissolution of the boundaries between an appreciation of classical beauty and indulgence in squalor, have been enthused by the modernist baritone of T.S. Eliot’s *Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* and Charles Baudelaire’s *Paris Spleen* and *Les Fleurs du Mal*. This becomes particularly apparent in *Abuelo*, the pervading inertia and unfulfillment expressed within the poem reminiscent of Prufrock’s forlorn lament, further intensified through inclusion of a thorn-line:

*“Sipping youth's ruddy credulity,
in drained kaleidoscope opiate.”*

The importance I place upon imagery in *Inhale* to enhance the sensory experience of my reader through authentically conveying textural elements of expression to a point of palpability, can be largely attributed to inspiration taken from my study of Romantic poets John Keats and Samuel Taylor Coleridge within the ‘Texts and Ways of Thinking’ module of the Extension 1 course. Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is directly referenced within *Feathered Lines*, where I employ his ‘albatross’ as a metaphorical allusion to possession of *duende* and the artistic burden of perfectionism. This is further enhanced through my extensive use of alliteration, which combines with anaphora to aptly express the frustration and defeat felt by artists whilst attempting to realise their own quixotic ideals.

*“Paint, because all I know is the torrid–tinted rush of wristbone whorls.
Paint, because I crave control through a crunched snatch of wooden slick-stroke.”*

My exploration of *duende* bears semblance to the grotesquely beautiful dichotomy established within Immanuel Kant's aesthetic philosophy of the sublime³:

*“Stirring, unfolding sticky treacle limbs
into an armada of double bass boats.”*

Through independent research, I uncovered the work of Bjørn K. Myskja, who argues the potential of Kant's sublime to transcend natural bounds and manifest within works of art and literature⁴ (thus bearing ties to Lorca's *duende*) - specifically Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*, Beckett's absurdist inclinations further espoused in *Abuelo*:

*“You steal Eucharistic silk,
before throwing it at bricks.”*

Myskja's study and interpretation of the sublime subsequently shaped my own understanding of the latent commonalities shared by Lorca's *duende* and the Romantic notion of the sublime ingrained within Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a text I have studied within the 'Comparative Study of Texts and Context' module of the Advanced course. I feel Shelley's exploration of the role of the natural world in shaping the unrestrained emotional and spiritual experiences of an individual, parallels my personal investigation into the transcendental qualities inherent in flamenco's earth-founded ecstasy, as noted in *Por Siguiriya*:

³ Ginsborg, Hannah, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), (2013).

⁴ Myskja, Bjørn K., *The Sublime in Kant and Beckett: Aesthetic Judgement, Ethics and Literature*, Munich: De Gruyter (2012).

*“Suckled honey glass thread twirled around lead castanets,
shattering to the steps of peach legs and tangled bee fuzz.”*

Several of my poems incorporate elements of the *blank verse* and *ballad* style ubiquitous within Romantic poetry, whilst irregular internal rhyme throughout *Inhale* creates an underlying rhythmic beat that echoes the erratic *compás* (time signature in the form of percussive hand clapping or *palmas*) of flamenco. This is rendered apparent in the portrait I paint of *Pablo Ruiz Picasso*, alliterative verse and assonance combining with synecdoche of the human body to further emphasise an awareness of mortality and physical limitations in the absence of *duende*:

*“to pink lungs and red lips.
You inhale women’s hips,
rolling liquid waists between
your fingertips like cigarettes.”*

The scholarship I have read relating to poetic form has been extremely insightful, Sara Thorne’s *Mastering Poetry*⁵ and Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge’s *Poemcrazy*⁶ informing my initial experimentation into various poetic forms with the intention of understanding and subsequently exploiting those forms most conceptually and stylistically befitting the idiosyncrasies of my writing. Nevertheless, the predominant free-verse style of my poetry creates a climate of spontaneity that allows a glimpse of the increasingly ephemeral *duende*, without form constricting its impulsiveness and aching rhapsody to an anticipated cadence. Structurally, Stephen Fry’s *The Ode Less*

⁵ Thorne, Sara, *Mastering Poetry*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, (2006).

⁶ Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge, *Poemcrazy*. New York: Three Rivers Press, (1996).

*Travelled*⁷ inspired me to dabble in the realm of metaphysical poetry, utilisation of the long line in *Pained Euphoria* robbing the reader of breath concurrent with the protagonist's own struggle for air:

*“Eyelids dance, stretch as you search
for the rhythm on which your voice
latches and swells, surging with tense
tides of unmistakable intensity and
your lungs starve for air, you refuse;
satisfying them with love-laced words.”*

Friedrich Nietzsche's affirmation “the people sing the folk-song, for themselves, out of inmost impulse”⁸ inspired within me a deeply personal appreciation of the distinct humility that characterises flamenco's uniquely poetic lyrical forms. Through Nietzsche, I was introduced to Camille Paglia - her investigation into the intrinsic symbiosis between artistic form and the Dionysian *chthonic* construct⁹ bearing unmistakable ties to and confirming the silent universality of Lorca's *duende*.

The focus of my initial concept was to document the development of a traveller's connection to place (Spain), through utilisation of a central persona and narrative poem entwined with more concise poetic interludes, detailing culture-specific customs. In commencing the writing phase however, I struggled to connect with the persona I initially intended to create and found it extremely constricting to follow a cohesive linear narrative structure whilst simultaneously attempting to capture Spain's

⁷ Stephen Fry, *The Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking the Poet Within*. London: Random House, (2010).

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Music and Words*, (1871).

⁹ Paglia, Camille, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. London & New Haven: Yale University Press, (1990).

erratically zealous soul. My premise consequently evolved from a simple exploration of the effects of travel and exposure to Spanish culture upon the individual, into an investigation into passionate artistic expression as a form of catharsis and the possibility of *duende* resonating as an underlying facet of the human experience.

The intended audience of my work extends to include active readers of poetry and music aficionados with a particularly avid interest in Spanish history and flamenco culture, as my work is suffused with allusions both to the life experiences and literary works of Spanish personalities and to various *palos* or flamenco styles. Accordingly, an ideal publication for my poetry would be *Aesthetica* magazine; a bi-monthly periodical showcasing literary works related to European music, art and culture.

Over the duration of the course and through my development of a personal understanding of artistic integrity, I feel I have come to recognise *duende*. Through remaining receptive to new ideas and expanding my own musical palate, particular works and performances occasionally sparked a restless energy within me that compelled me to write. Upon reflection, it was in these moments that my most successful writing emerged. My journal has proved an invaluable companion, allowing me to record and observe the development not only of my Major Work, but also of my personal growth as a writer throughout the creative process. I am delighted to have accomplished what seemed a monumental task a little under a year ago, and feel *Inhale* is an achievement I can be proud of.