

An Anzaldúan Triptych: with Homage to Federico García Lorca

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INTRODUCTION

1 In perhaps her most well-known poem, “To live in the borderlands means you,” Gloria Anzaldúa insists that “hondening the Anglo inside you/is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black.” That Gloria foregrounded her Chicana—or ChicanX—identity in her writings is indisputable, as even her title *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* indicates. I must admit, however, that sometimes it concerns me that, even if she played a role, perhaps unwittingly, in the construction of such, her identity has been largely reduced to that of “Chicana,” with “queer” occasionally thrown in for good measure, while other aspects of her complex identity—her Leftist politics, her Pagan spirituality, etc.—have been obscured.

As someone who knew her as a beloved friend, and fellow scholar and writer—she called me “comadre”—and activist for thirty years, I know that she was very proud of the “Anglo inside [her],” that is, of her European heritage—primarily Basque, Spanish, and German—as she was of her Indigenous Yaqui identity, of which she learned late in life—I’m not even sure she told her family about this—and of her African heritage. Carolina Núñez-Puente, who teaches in the English Department at the University of La Coruña, Spain, appears to be one of the few scholars who has addressed, in “From Genealogies to Gynealogies,” Gloria’s affiliations with the Basque country and Spain. Those who loved Gloria often called her by her nickname, “Gorri,” which means “red” in the Basque tongue.

I have titled this essay “An Anzaldúan Triptych” because I intend to focus on three poems that I think should be read together. “Triptych,” from the Greek adjective *triptukhon* (“three-fold”), describes three paintings or relief carvings on three panels, typically hinged together side by side and used as an altarpiece. “Triptych” may also refer to a set of three associated artistic, literary, or musical works intended to be appreciated together.

I might have used the term “quadriptych,” but Gloria’s poem “Holy Relics” is known far and wide by many, so I’ve decided to focus on three other interlinked poems. Together with “Holy Relics,” they were to have been published in a book of poems Gloria was working on in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to be titled *Tres lenguas de fuego / Three Tongues of Fire*, which, remains unpublished. These poems were meant to track Gloria’s various ancestries—by way of well-known figures—from antiquity, in the person of Mary the alchemist—I’m reminded of Mary’s maxim “Out of the One comes Two, out of Two comes Three, and from the Third comes the One as the Fourth”—to medieval Spain and the Basque country, to Mexico. The culminating poems of the volume were to include ones focusing on Malintzin Tenepal and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

In regard to “triptych” and the number 3, it is significant that Gloria possessed a keen and abiding interest in numerology. In “now let us shift,” she advises, “To further the self, you choose to accept the guidance and information provided by symbology systems such as the Tarot, I Ching, astrology, and numerology.” Although Gloria was well aware of the significance of the number 3 in the Major Arcana of the Tarot, with the card therein representing the Empress, or the Mother—a role that Gloria, although not becoming a biological mother, often enacted for those she cared for deeply—for her, the number 3 was perhaps most frequently linked to the concept of liminality, which she and my partner David Hatfield Sparks and I often jokingly referred to as “door number 3,” as in the TV game show “Let’s Make a Deal.” This notion is celebrated in her poem “To live in the Borderlands,” where the “forerunner of a new race” is neither male nor female, but rather a “new gender,” a third gender—which could be seen to have suffered a binarization

in the acceptance of the otherwise powerful term “two-spirited.” As a very early exponent of Queer Theory, Gloria insisted that “queer” did not equal “gay.” Rejecting a “gay”/“straight” binary, she argued that “Queer” inferred a third identification, one much more fluid than either term of the binary permitted. One might say that she suggested an identification of “bisexual,” but her use of “Queer” signified a third possibility even more fluid than that. As she wrote, “To survive the Borderlands/ you must live sin fronteras.”

I have subtitled my essay “with Homage to Federico García Lorca.” The reason being, I seemed to hear, as I re-read many times the three poems I will focus on, Gloria reminding me, as she’d shared with me just after we’d met in the autumn of 1974, how very much she loved the works of García Lorca and how much he had and continued to inspire her own writing. In this regard, I was impressed once more by Carolina Núñez-Puente’s “Genealogies” due to her realization of Gloria’s “love for Federico García Lorca,” which she asserts shines through in her “admiration for Lorca’s nocturnal imagery” and which is “evident in her poem ‘La vulva es una herida abierta,’” which Núñez-Puente associates with García Lorca’s “Llanto [Lament] por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías.” Gloria hints at her admiration of García Lorca in a chapter from her unfinished novel *Prieta*, in which she writes that, regrettably, LP – *La Prieta* – had “never had good recall – not even the ballads of García Lorca which her former lover Llosi adored so much.”²

Gloria loved García Lorca not only for his poetic eloquence, his spiritual beliefs, and his Spanish heritage, but for other things as well, not least of which was his homosexuality, expressed in his “Sonetos del Amor Oscuro” (“Sonnets of Dark Love”).³ When I met Gloria, she had already read numerous gay writers, including Robert Duncan, James Purdy, and others, and she insisted I read John Rechy’s *City of Night*, since it was one of the few works then published by an openly gay Mexican American writer.

The three poems on which I have chosen to focus on herein are “La Española y el Moro,” “A Small Growing Fire,” and “The Basque Brujas.” While the third poem has been published, in the journal *Sinister Wisdom* in 1994, the first two have not. “La Española y el Moro” depicts a young Spanish woman who is abducted by a dark-skinned Moor with whom she ultimately falls in love. The poem metaphorically addresses the transition from the eight-hundred-year period when Spain was ruled by the Muslim Moors, when Spain was called *Al-Andalus*, to Spain’s return to Catholicism, when Moors and Jews were exiled from Spain, with many fleeing to Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. “A Small Growing Fire” portrays an icy Catholic nun who falls in love with a young woman branded as a witch and whose repression of her desires leads to the death—the burning at the stake—of the woman for whom she yearns. The third poem narrates the life of two rural women who love each other and who, as “witches,” practice the ancient Basque religion. Both become victims of the Catholic Inquisition, one being burned at the stake, the other left to grieve for her lover.

“La Española y el Moro”

“La Española y el Moro,” like the other poems, is a narrative poem, a poetic cuento, a product of many hours spent in researching histories, travelogues, and other works at the San Francisco Public Library, particularly its downtown and Mission branches. In “La Española y el Moro,” the world Gloria recreates for us is that of *al-Andalus*. “*Al-Andalus*,” she writes, “he called this land,” when Muslims, primarily Arabs and North Africans, collectively called Moors, ruled Spain. Their capital cities were Granada and Córdoba. During their reign, they constructed hospitals, bathhouses, and universities and built paved roads. They installed sophisticated irrigation systems. City streets were lit in the evening. They “transformed the Iberian landscape. They brought new crops, such as sugar and rice, oranges, lemons, . . . and coffee.” They built libraries said to contain more than 400,000 books and manuscripts on astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and many other subjects. Muslim calligraphers produced thousands of books every year. They also brought games, including chess and playing cards, to Spain. They wielded a powerful impact on the Spanish language. For example, Spanish contains between 2,500 and 4,000 words of Arabic origin. These include: *aceituna*—olives, from *zaytūnah*; *albahaca*—basil, from *habaqah*; *albaricoques*—apricots, from *al-barqug*; *alcachofa*—artichoke, from *al-kharshufa*; *alcoba*—alcove, from *al-quba*; *arroz*—rice, from *arruz*; *azafrán*—

saffron, from za'faran; café—coffee, from qahwah; fideo—noodles, from fidáwš; jabón—soap, from sabun; limón—lemon, from laymün; naranja—orange, from naranğ; and sandia—watermelon, from sindiyyah.⁴

Anzaldúa's imagery, including oranges, palm trees, and basil suggest that she not only schooled herself in the history of al-Andalus before she sat down to write "La Española y el Moro," but also that she most likely read and was inspired by the Spanish Muslim Arabic poems of Ibn Sara, who wrote an ode to an orange tree—"There stands the orange tree/ Showing off its fruits to me,/ Like gleaming teardrops lovers shed—;" Abd al-Rahmān I, who wrote an ode to a palm tree; and Ibn Zaydún, who wrote of longing for "The beautiful days we spent together/ Our two spirits like sweet basil."

In "La Española y el Moro," which commences with the abduction of a Catholic woman by an African Muslim warrior, Gloria surprises us by having the woman fall in love with the handsome warrior, with his muscular arms, "long fingers," "stalwart neck," "thick lashes," and "satin black skin." He releases the women of his harem to be with the Catholic woman alone. The poem transforms into one of Gloria's most sensuous as they join in lovemaking. "A Moorish tapestry gazed down at us," she writes, with the "beaks of twin red peacocks touching," with the peacocks here referring to male beauty. "He drew the curtains around us," the young woman relates, "His necklace of heavy silver / rose and sank on my breast." For a time, life for "La Española y el Moro" goes well. They are embraced by sumptuousness, drinking in the pleasure that beauty bestows, signified by the perfume of the woman's hair—"oil of civet"—and of "jasmine and sweet basil" growing in the garden, the "luscious taste of the pomegranate."

The love of "La Española" for "el Moro" becomes tragic as Muslim rule ceded to Catholicism. Although the Muslim-centered culture of al-Andalus generally tolerated both Jews and Christians for centuries, with the exception of a poll tax, the Catholics among them desired to reconquer Spain, believing themselves superior to practitioners of Judaism and Islam. On January 2, 1492, the city of Granada, the heart of Muslim Spain, fell to Catholic forces, ruled by Queen Isabela of Castile and King Ferdinand of Aragon, the rulers famous for sending Columbus on the journey that would lead him to the New World. At this time, Muslims were officially exiled from Spain. Those remaining were forcibly Christianized. Qur'ans and roughly 500,000 Islamic texts were burned. The estates of wealthy Muslims were burned by Christian militias or appropriated by Catholics. Mosques were transformed into churches. Women were forbidden to veil themselves. Many Muslims fled to Mexico and other places in Latin America clandestinely and illegally.

In this light, Gloria may well have read the laments of Ibn Ghazal who penned, "O people of al-Andalus.../ Our place here is no more...," and of Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi, who wrote of Córdoba,

*"For what do you lament so plaintively," I asked,
And [a bird] answered, "For an age that is gone forever."
And in a similar mode, the ruler
Of Córdoba spoke of halls now empty.
I asked the houses of those who had vanished,
"Where are your inhabitants to us so dear?"
The houses replied, "They lived here for awhile,
Then they went away, but we know not where."⁵*

"Mata moros, mata moros! Kill the Moors! Kill the Moors!" Gloria has the anti-Muslim Christians exclaim—a famous phrase referring to St. James Matamoros—James the Moor-Slayer—and eventually becoming the name of a city in northern Mexico, bordering South Texas. "When it was over," Max Harris relates, "tens of thousands were dead...and the Arabic civilization of Andalusia was a thing of the past." Gloria describes the capture of the Moorish lover: "The muscles under his skin/ rippled like imprisoned birds," she relates, as she watches "them drag his unruly head / through the cobbled streets of Córdoba." Here, Gloria is most likely referring to the beheading of Moors by the Christian leader Geraldo the Fearless (died 1173), who beheaded 14 Moors in 1165, an event that is commemorated—although not condoned—each year in Zacatecas, Mexico.

In 2004, the year Gloria passed away, controversy arose in Spain when some governmental authorities in the region of Aragon suggested that the severed heads of four Moors should be removed from its heraldic shield.

“La Española y el Moro” commences with a quotation from García Lorca’s poem “Cançion de jinete” (“Rider’s Song”):

*“Córdoba,
Lejana y sola.”*
—**García Lorca**

*“Córdoba,
Far away and alone.”*
—**García Lorca**

García Lorca, we know, was inspired by Islamic Arabic, Moorish poetry and music, in which, he felt, “love and death come inextricably together.” In “Deep Song,” he remarks, “The truth is that in the air of Córdoba...one still finds gestures and lines of remote Arab...The same themes of sacrifice, undying love, and wine...” In García Lorca’s “Cançion de jinete,” the rider rides on a “jaca negra” (a “black pony”); in Gloria’s poem, the Muslim warrior rides on a “black stallion.” Both are linked to the city of Córdoba.⁷

“A Small Growing Fire”

To write “A Small Growing Fire,” Gloria relied upon her experiences growing up in the Catholic Church. She told me that when her father died, she wore black for an entire year. She told me that of her parents, it was her father who had most inspired her to become the writer she is. Her familiarity herein with the life of a nun is expressed in regard to the cycle of prayers to which she must daily adhere, reminiscent of that daily undertaken by practicing Muslims. For the Mother Superior, this includes Matins, prayers made during the night; Lauds, prayers voiced around 3 a.m.; Prime, prayers made around 6 a.m.; Tierce, prayers made around 9 a.m.; Sext: prayers at noon; None, prayers around 3 p.m.; Vespers, evening prayers; and Compline, prayers made around 9 p.m. In this context, Gloria told me in the mid- ‘70s that she had tried many times to slay the “nun” that dwelt within her, but that, despite her efforts to do so, she failed. Those who knew Gloria well were profoundly aware of her struggle to free herself from an ascetic’s life and yet have enough time, as she put it, to devote to her work. Primarily, she remained a hermit, fearing, as she grew older and dealt increasingly with diabetes and other illnesses, that an intimate relationship might take too much time away from her writing.

“A Small Growing Fire,” like “La Española y el Moro,” is a tragic love poem. Herein, however, a nun falls in love with an alleged witch. This poem resonates with the first in echoing the theme of desire destroyed by institutional religion. Moreover, it confronts the pain of self-denial. Because it concerns two women, it also speaks to self-hatred and internalized misogyny among women nurtured by patriarchal structures, and to the terrible damage it may inflict on others, as in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which Gloria deeply appreciated.

The nun is shocked when the young woman she has seen in passing and felt intense desire toward is brought before her, when she must judge whether or not the latter is in fact a witch. Her eyes reflect the “sunny olive groves of Andalusia,” from her long black hair flows the perfume of oleanders, and her “lithe body” is as “supple as a poplar[’s].” Wherever she “let[s] her glance rest,” she lights a “small growing fire.” The sight of the young woman reminds the nun of an episode that seems to be from her own life when she, the nun, was young. She recalls a “beautiful mosque in Córdoba,” a young woman “tossing her hair” as she sees a “tall Moorish youth running to catch her,” and then “yielding [her] red mouth to [his] black one.” With echoes in this poem of images from “La Española y el Moro”—a vision of, Córdoba and al-Andalus, a mosque, palm trees, and a Moorish man—we are led to wonder at this point if the Mother Superior of this poem may in fact be the elder, embittered version of the woman who once loved a Moor. We are told that

the nun thought she had “smothered/ to death” the fire that had burned within her when she was young.

This Mother Superior, for those familiar with *The Handmaid’s Tale*, has become an Aunt Lydia. “Like our Christian fathers,” Gloria imparts, she considered women/ the repositories and instigators of evil,” and, as patriarchal theology insists, “the wickedness of women to be greater/ than all the other wickedness of the world.”

In the poem, the Mother Superior has been described in terms of ice—“she chilled whatever warmth crossed her path”—whereas the young woman is described in terms of fire. The nun is dressed in black and white, while the young woman dances in a feast of color. Fueled by self-hatred and internalized misogyny, however, the nun must twist the red poppies and yellow marigolds she associates with the woman she desires into the hideous red, yellow, and black of the Sanbenito, the garment worn by heretics during the Spanish Inquisition. The young woman is ultimately led to the Quemadero, the place of execution. For a few moments, the beautiful color embodied by the young woman, fuchsia or vermilion, is restored, as “her dress flare[s] into bougainvillea blossoms.” Yet finally, in terms of color, all that is left of the young woman after she has burned is the greyness of her ashes and the whiteness of her bones.

Without imitating it, Gloria’s “Small Growing Fire” bears, in certain ways, an uncanny resemblance to García Lorca’s poem “La monja gitana” (“The Gypsy Nun”). In García Lorca’s poem, a “nun embroiders gillyflowers/ on a flaxen cloth”: “How finely she embroiders! And with such grace!” As she embroiders, she has a vision resonating somewhat with that of Gloria’s Mother Superior. She envisions “two gypsy bandits” galloping on horseback. It seems as if she is suddenly riding with them, across great distances, across rivers and mountains. Her vision embraces desire, and perhaps love gained and lost, as the “shirtwaist from her back” lifts up, and “her heart of lemon verbena / and sugar breaks into.” She “long[s] to embroider / [the] flowers of her fantasies” – “sunflower[s]...magnolias...crocuses” – “on the flaxen...altar cloth.” Likewise, Gloria’s nun’s vision is so intense that the fire of her passion for the young woman “burn[s] a hole in her fine needlepoint,” causing her fingers to “break the threads she sp[ins],” and making “carding unbearable.”

“The Basque Brujas”

“The Basque Brujas,” alternatively titled “The Basque Witches,”— *sorginak* in the Basque tongue—is by far the most beautiful love poem Gloria ever wrote.

Gloria chose the term “Brujas” in the title of her poem for several reasons, the first being that if she had chosen to use the term “curandera,” a traditional healer, she felt that this might have been interpreted as a Catholic term, and she wanted to make sure that readers understood her characters to be pagans. Rather than using the term “witches,” although some versions do make use of that term, she meant to make readers aware that the “brujas” of her poem were from Spain or the Basque country rather than England or elsewhere. She also desired to contest the stereotypical notion that brujas only perform works of destructive magic. Although I don’t recall the exact reason why she chose to use “brujas” rather than the Basque “*sorginak*,” with which she was familiar, I assume with confidence that she felt many more readers would know the term “brujas.” With “The Basque Brujas,” I will interweave García Lorca’s influence on Gloria’s poem with others’ and my own research.

The Basques (in Spanish, *vascos*, also, *Euskalunak*) have inhabited the region of the Pyrenees, nestled between Spain and France, since remote antiquity. It is a land of lakes, meadows, forests, hills, mountains, cliffs, and caves. Ancient sacred sites include “caves, like those at Azcondo...and Zugarramundi..., dolmens... springs...[and] steep places.”⁸ Julio Caro Baroja, in *The World of the Witches*, relates, “The Basque country is a land of seafaring people; it rains a great deal and there are violent storms in the autumn.”⁹ Sea and sun are often linked in Basque folklore. The sun is envisioned as the goddess *Eguski Amandrea*, Grandmother Sun.¹⁰

In “The Basque Brujas,” Gloria has her narrator, Angeles, relate, “the shadows of the Pyrenees fall on our faces.” Throughout the poem, Gloria depicts the landscape—*la tierra*—of the Basque country, with its lakes, meadows, forests, green hills, mountains, “crag and promontories,” cliffs, and caves. “I come to the circle of clearing beside the great cave...”; “Up the narrow, slippery path to the grotto to the mouth of the cave;” “Like night I want to sink into earth to dwell in the damp cave of sleep...” Gloria not only describes the sun as “tug[ging] itself out of the sea” and as “drown[ing] in the sea” but also of the

women attending the rites by flying “over the hills” in spirit if not in flesh, “then...dip[ping] into the sea.”

In Basque folklore, Caro Baroja explains, “witches...have nothing to do with...Evil.” He continues, “There were special meetings...on the four major festivals of the year, and more than two thousand people were said to have attended one of these.”¹¹ “On the other hand,” he continues, Basque witches “can be linked up with the goddesses of classical antiquity, who presided over sorceresses.”¹² The predominant goddess of ancient Basque religion is Mari, who shares the same name as one of the lovers in “The Basque Brujas.”

The other is Angeles, named after Angeles “Angie” Arrien, one of Gloria’s mentors (and my own) in Tarot and Basque traditions, who explained that Gloria’s surname was Basque, one resonating with her concept of “this bridge called my back.”¹³ Mari is also known as La Dama de Anboto (the Lady of Anboto). As a mountain-dwelling divinity, she is “believed to inhabit the highest peaks of mountains like Amboto, Aizkorri, and Muru.”¹⁴ She is also thought to inhabit caves and grottoes.¹⁵ She is depicted as a beautiful woman, finely dressed and surrounded by wealth.¹⁶ She sometimes travels through the air surrounded by flames.¹⁷ A shapeshifter, she occasionally manifests as a fiery tree, a ball of fire, a cloud, or a raven.¹⁸ Mari is sometimes depicted as a goddess of the moon.¹⁹ In “The Basque Brujas,” Gloria writes: “The full moon watches ...fly... swoop over the moonlit cliffs; “The full moon watches from the beech tree branches”; “Dipping our fingers we paint moons on our brows.”

Mari is a special patron of goatherds and shepherds.²⁰ In “The Basque Brujas,” the women are shepherds and are also goatherds, as their “eating goat cheese and brown bread” implies. Mari or the Lady is also a patron of wisewomen or witches; as such, she is known as “la Señora de las brujas” (“the Lady of the Witches”).²¹

Aker, or Akerbeltz is the primary Basque male divinity with whom Mari is paired. He is not her husband, but rather her male consort. A phallic god, he is frequently depicted as having black skin, and he is thought to resemble Dionysus. He frequently appears as a black goat. Due to this manifestation, the place where Basque witches met came to be known as the akelarre, the “field of the goat.” These gatherings appear to have been heavily erotic; in *Los Mitos vascos*, André Ortiz-Osés writes, “[I]n paganism, sexuality obtains a sacred character ...[It] signifies the fountain of life... the fertility of vegetable and animal life [and] the fertility of woman...denoting abundance and riches.”²²

The gatherings often included the sacrifice of a goat, representing the sacrifice of Aker. The blood of the goat was believed to fructify the earth; its flesh was cooked and shared by participants, imbuing them with its life-force, in this case, male life-force, known as indar (female life-force is adur).²³ Gloria refers in her poem to “the rock where the Ancients sacrificed the goat,” and to a “goatskin” and presumably a goat’s “horn” worn by a priestess of the rites “on her forehead.”

Gloria may well have been inspired by two of García Lorca’s poems that focus specifically on goats.²⁴ In the first, “Dream,” he begins, “I was riding upon a billygoat.”²⁵ His grandfather remarks, “That is your path.” In the second, “The Billy Goat,” the poet “stare[s]/ at [a] huge billy goat,” hailing him as a “devil,” an “eternal mystic,” and “the most / intense of animal[s].” He associates him with “satyrs,” “Mephistopheles,” and “Pan,” and elsewhere to “Bacchus” and “Lucifer,” linking him to pagan worship, as described in Gloria’s “Basque Brujas.” What is more, García Lorca subtly links this goat deity to same-sex intimacy, writing, “your passions are insatiable. / Ancient Greece / will understand you.”²⁶ Although, in Gloria’s poem, it is lesbian love we encounter, I think this suggestion of male homosexuality might nevertheless have influenced Gloria’s linking of the worship of the goat deity to lesbian love. Ángel Sahuquillo, in *Federico García Lorca and the Culture of Male Homosexuality*, further explains that García Lorca also links these correspondences to the sea and to the Akelarre, the “meadow” or “field of the billy goat” where the meetings of the witches were held.²⁷

The veneration of Aker the goat deity was linked to the herb belladonna. It was said that the scent of belladonna permeated the houses of witches. In “The Basque Brujas,” the rite in honor of Mari and Aker includes “rub[bing] belladonna on each other’s breasts and buttocks.”

For the Basques, a gathering of those called witches represented a coming together of the priestesses of Mari and the priests of Aker.²⁸ Near “The Basque Brujas” end, Angeles remarks, “Coiling serpents twine around my waist.” In *The World of the Witches*, Caro Baroja notes that the Basque “queen of the coven” “sits on a throne; in her hand she holds some snakes.”²⁹ These snakes most probably evoke the image of Sugaar, a deity of storms and thunder, depicted as two coiling, intertwined serpents.

In “The Basque Brujas,” Gloria relied upon her own personal desires and upon relationships shared by friends of hers. “She raises her hands to her hair, lets the pins drop,” she writes, once more speaking of luscious, long black hair. Angeles “burrow[s] in the warm crevasse between her breasts” and breathes “in the smell from her armpits.” She strokes the “embedded cones of her spine” and smooths the “taut skin over [her] hipbone,” she seeks the “mouth of the philtre.” “The well opens,” she whispers, “My love, put your hands on my hips and your lips on my mouth and never leave me.”

“With left hands we draw the circle, claim the crack between the worlds,” Angeles says of the ritual they share with other pagan women, other witches; “We rub belladonna on each other’s breasts and buttocks. Chanting, we dance to the center, dance back, dance to the right faster and faster. We aim our thoughts, send longing, mourning, celebration and joy like arrows.” As they chant, dance, and project their thoughts, their “spirits...congeal into shapes, glide through the hollow, over the hills, then back to dip into the sea.” They then “fall on the sand in each other’s arms” and “paint moons on [their] brows” with menstrual blood.

Gloria’s inspiration in depicting the central rite of the poem blended her research into Basque paganism and witchcraft with her admiration of Monique Wittig’s *The Lesbian Body* and her experience in an early “Pentacle” group led by Starhawk, a San Francisco Bay Area witch, priestess, and activist, best known as the author of *The Spiral Dance*, which links Witchcraft and Wicca to Goddess Reverence. Gloria also braided her experience in this group with her knowledge of lesbian-centered rites and her own practices of divination, healing, and magic. Gloria was, in this regard, a master healer of her friends, especially assisting with stress and insomnia. She told me that one of her grandmothers had practiced *curanderismo*. I recall that during winters when we lived in Texas, her grandmother would send packages of orange leaves from the Valley, with which Gloria would make a thick syrup that would keep us from getting colds when others were falling ill. Near the end of her life, I asked her one afternoon as we walked along the sea wall in Santa Cruz why she had never “come out” as a *curandera*, to which she replied, “I am a *curandera* of words.”

The worship of Mari, Aker, and other Basque divinities appears to have climaxed at the time of the Basque witch trials in the seventeenth century,³⁰ when Catholic Inquisitors misinterpreted the gatherings as demonic.³¹ Not surprisingly, Christians condemned Mari as *La Maligna* (the “Malicious” or “Wicked One”).³² Her devotees, together with those of other Basque deities, were subject to the Inquisition. Angeles tells us, “A neighbor points his finger at Mari and me. Men come and take us away. The Inquisition, their whips and racks, torture never-ending.” She continues, “[F]ire tongues lick our faces. The hissing, the smell of flesh, burning pain.” Then she awakens to realize that only Mari has been taken: “When I come to myself, I am lying on the floor by our hearth. I sit up, stare at the flames. On my left side a wound where she was torn from me. Never did I dream she would go before me.” She then intones a praise-hymn to Mari not unlike that chanted by the Lesbian poet Sappho to Aphrodite millennia ago: “Lady of Anboto, Dama...gust of wind, a white cloud...burning torch, ...woman with the feet of a bird. Oh, Lady, bring my lover to my bed again.”

Although Christianization of the Basques commenced quite early, in the fourth century, and climaxed in the eleventh century, many Basques continued to practice earth-centered traditions in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries.³³ Indeed, many elderly people continued to pay homage to Mari into the mid-twentieth century.³⁴ Devotees of Mari have been said to drink *Patxaran*, made from the sloe berries of blackthorn and flavored with anise, vanilla, and coffee beans, to attain altered states of consciousness in which to communicate with her.³⁵ This reminds me of a belief Gloria and I shared, and which I continue to believe—that just because the worship of a deity has been prohibited, this does not mean that the divinity has died.

Duende and “Deep Song”

Finally, and *mea culpa*, my “trptych” here devolves into a coupling, although not a binary, but rather two interrelated, sometimes indistinguishable, fluid concepts in which García Lorca believed, and two that Gloria found very inspiring when writing poems: *duende* and *canción profunda*, or “deep song.”

Both are concepts expressed by way of complex chains of correspondences. For example, *duende*

is described as a “mysterious power,” somewhat resonant with the Yòrubá concept of ashé. But it is also depicted in terms of figures, such as the trickster and the “master of the house,” as well as “waves of emotion” such as the “inexplicable power of attraction” and a “heightened awareness of death.” As with ashé and Indigenous and Anzaldúan notions of sacred immanence or embodiment rather than Platonic transcendence, duende also manifests as “earthiness” or the “spirit of the earth.” As Gloria speaks of the sacredness of la tierra, so García Lorca notes that “Spanish art is tied to the land.”³⁶ Perhaps linked to the occult, García Lorca sees in duende a “dash of the diabolical.”³⁷ Exemplary of duende are “the Greek mysteries;” the Romani poetic-musical form of the siguiriya;³⁸ the works of Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz;³⁹ Arabic music, as when “duende’s arrival is greeted with energetic cries of Allah! Allah!;”⁴⁰ and the rites of Santería / Regla de Ocha / the Yorùbá religion wherein, in García Lorca’s words, “the blacks of the Antilles...huddle...before the statue of Santa Barbara [ie, the orishá Shango].”⁴¹

García Lorca writes, “All arts are capable of duende, but where it finds greatest range, naturally, is in music, dance, and spoken poetry, for these arts require a living body to interpret them...Spain [, however,] is [especially] moved by the duende, for it is a country of ancient music and dance where the duende squeezes the lemons of death—a country of death.”⁴² “The magical property of a poem,” he insists, “is to remain possessed by duende.”⁴³

“Deep song” is, as noted, resonant with, and at times indistinguishable from, duende.

As with the former, in García Lorca’s belief system, Romani and Islamic Arabic- Moorish poetry/chant/music are exemplary of “deep song.” “Deep song” embraces “the air of Córdoba;” the traditions of the Basque country; the night; pantheism; and suffering and tears.⁴⁴ Perhaps more pronounced in “deep song,” although an aspect of duende as well, is its emphasis on “love and death inextricably [bound] together” and the belief that love is stronger than death.⁴⁵

As Gloria speaks of the sacredness of la tierra, so García Lorca notes that “Spanish art is tied to the land.” In all of the poems we have considered here, la tierra, “earthiness,” the “spirit of the earth,” perhaps even as pantheism, plays a central role. From the light with the clarity of crystal, the “blue sky burnish[ing] the tile[s],” “the slopes of the Sierra,” and the “wild Berber mountains” of “La Española y el Moro;” to the “sunny olive groves” and “fields of flowers...red poppies and yellow marigolds” and oleanders of “A Small Growing Fire;” to the meadow, “yellow roses,” “green hills,” “moonlit cliffs,” the “shadows of the Pyrenees,” the cave, and the waves of the sea of “The Basque Brujas,” nature takes on a powerful role in the triptych of Gloria’s poems.

As with both duende and “deep song,” “La Española y el Moro” demonstrates the influence of Islamic Arabic- Moorish music and, as with “deep song,” the haunting presence of Córdoba. In regard to duende, as the works of Santa Teresa inspired García Lorca, so they inspired Gloria when she created the persona of the Mother Superior, as they did when she sat down to write “Holy Relics,” her poem about Teresa of Avila. As the duende manifesting in the Greek Mysteries and Yorùbá rites inspired García Lorca, so pagan Basque beliefs and rites, together with Starhawk’s Spiral Dance, inspired Gloria’s “Basque Brujas.” As “deep song” is for García Lorca the song of night, so night plays a role in the Anzaldúan triptych: “night with its shadows approaching. / night with its mouth without edges. / Night with its waiting.” And as the themes of both duende and “deep song”—especially the latter—pertaining to “love and death inextricably [bound] together” and the belief that “love is stronger than death” inspired the poetry of García Lorca, so the triptych of Gloria’s poems speak to the tragic loves of a Catholic woman for a Moor, a nun for a witch, and that of two witches for one another—all destroyed by institutional religion.

Gloria and I were extremely close friends for thirty years, our friendship commencing in graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin in 1974 and lasting until her passing in northern California in 2004. Since we’d first met, Gloria shared with me her love for la Virgen de Guadalupe and for ‘folk Catholicism,’ which she in turn later came to hold in common with Cherríe Moraga, Ariban Chagoya, and other Chicax/Latinx writers dear to her, and with her beloved friends, the artists Liliana Wilson and Santa Barraza. Early on in our friendship, Gloria’s and my love for Spanish literature, particularly the works of Lorca, as well as for the Symbolist movement, were nurtured by the brilliant UT professor Lily Litvak. Gloria was especially inspired by spiritual concepts in which García Lorca believed, especially “deep song” and duende, together with the knowledge he acquired of the Yòrubá religion (known popularly as Santería or

Lucumí) while he sojourned in the Americas – a religion the doors of which were opened for Gloria, my partner David, and myself by our friend and mentor Luisah Teish, a priestess of the religion. Teish discovered, during a divinatory reading for Gloria, that Gloria was a spiritual daughter of two female orishás, Oshun, a goddess of love and the arts, and Yemayá, goddess of the sea, whom Gloria praises in *Borderlands* and elsewhere. Also in the context of her relationship to the works of García Lorca, Gloria was mentored by Angeles Arrien, as mentioned above (more recently, Zainab Salbi, the author of *Freedom is an Inside Job*, has acknowledged Arrien’s influence), who shared her knowledge of the ancient Basque religion with her, and explained to Gloria the meaning of her Basque surname, which led to the title *This Bridge Called My Back*—the surname meaning either a corral or, in folkloric terms, “over, under, and that which connects them.” This is to say, simply, that Gloria’s work was deeply spiritual, as was García Lorca’s work, and that their spiritual mestizaje—their mixing of sacred traditions, in Gloria’s terminology—, together with their gift for poetry, their Spanish heritage, and—as Gloria would put it—their Queerness, brought them together.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s poems give expression to a “mysterious power” expressed by duende and in “deep song,” a mysterious power that was in no small part García Lorca’s gift to her and that may have also emerged from Anzaldúa’s certainty that she had lived before, in medieval Spain, the Basque country, ancient Mexico, and elsewhere.

Chicago, April 2019

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Notes

1. This essay is dedicated to Professor Emmy Pérez, who invited me to speak at the conference on April 27, 2019 focusing on Gloria Anzaldúa, "El Retorno: El Valle Celebra Nuestra Gloria," held at University of Texas Rio Grande, and to CMAS.
2. Anzaldúa, "Reading LP," 262.
3. See: Sahuquillo, *Federico García Lorca and the Culture of Male Homosexuality*; and see: *Binding, Lorca: The Gay Imagination*.
4. For information on a l-Andalusian culture, see: Aidi, Hisham. 2003. "Let us Be Moors": Islam, Race, and 'Connected Histories.' MER (Middle East Research and Information Project) (MER 229: winter 2003). http://www.merip.org/mer/mer229/let-us-be-moors#_14/(accessed January 29, 2018); *Anything But Language*, eds. "44 Spanish words with Arabic origin." *Anything But Language*, May 13, 2016. <https://anythingbutlanguage.com/en/44-spanish-words-arabic-origin/>(accessed April 28, 2017); De Castro, Teresa. 2002. *The Role of Food in the Conflict of Two Identities: Moriscos and Castilians in early modern times (L'émergence d'une identité alimentaire: Musulmans et Chrétiens dans le Royaume de Grenade*, [trans. Lynn Martin at ezania.net.] in *Histoire et identités alimentaires en Europe*, ed. M. Bruegel and B. Lauriou, 169-185. Paris: Hachette; Eigeland, Tor. 1989; Salloum, Habeeb. 2015. "Arabic Contributions to Spanish Music, Song and Dance." *Arab America*. <http://www.arabamerica.com/arabic-contributions-spanish-music-song-dance/>; Zucker, Sam. 2017. "How the Moors influenced Spanish cuisine." *CataVino*. <https://catavino.net/how-the-moors-influenced-spanish-cuisine/>(accessed April 28, 2017).
5. Ruggles, "Arabic Poetry," 174.
6. García Lorca, *Collected Poems*. 469.
7. García Lorca, *Collected*, 474-475.
8. Caro Baroja, *World of the Witches*, 237-238.
9. Caro Baroja, *World of the Witches*, 163.
10. McCrickard, *Eclipse of the Sun*, 105.
11. Caro Baroja, *World of the Witches*, 160-161.
12. Caro Baroja, *World of the Witches*, 237.
13. At the time we met Angeles Arrien, she was teaching at CIIS (the California Institute of Integral Studies) in San Francisco.
14. Caro Baroja, *World of the Witches*, 237-238.
15. Caro Baroja, *Los Vascos*, 194; Caro Baroja, *World of the Witches*, 237.
16. Ortiz-Osés, *Mitos vascos*, 31.
17. Caro Baroja, *Los Vascos*, 194.
18. Caro Baroja, *Los Vascos*, 194; Caro Baroja, *World of the Witches*, 238.

19. Gimbutas, *Living Goddesses*, 174.
20. Caro Baroja, *Los Vascos*, 194.
21. Caro Baroja, *World of the Witches*, 237-238; Caro Baroja, *Los Vascos*, 409.
22. Ortiz-Osés, *Mitos vascos*, 39-40.
23. Ortiz-Osés, *Mitos vascos*, 37-40.
24. Sahuquillo, Federico, chap. 4, pp. 128-161
25. García Lorca, *Collected Poems*, 39.
26. Sahuquillo, Federico, 130.
27. Sahuquillo, Federico, 128-130, 134-135, 143, 149)
28. Ortiz-Osés, *Mitos vascos*, 39.
29. Caro Baroja, *World of the Witches*, 160-161.
30. Ortiz-Osés, *Mitos vascos*, 39.
31. Ortiz-Osés, *Mitos vascos*, 41.
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33. Ortiz-Osés, *Mitos vascos*, 27.
34. Caro Baroja, *Los Vascos*, 194.
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37. García Lorca, *In Search*, pp. ix- x, Maurer, intro.; "Play and Theory," 57.
38. García Lorca, *In Search*, "Play and Theory," 58.
39. García Lorca, *In Search*, "Play and Theory," 60, 68.
40. García Lorca, *In Search*, "Play and Theory," 62-63.
41. García Lorca, *In Search*, "Play and Theory," 61-62.
42. García Lorca, *In Search*, "Play and Theory," 63-64.
43. García Lorca, *In Search*, "Play and Theory," 67.
44. García Lorca, *In Search*, intro., p. xii; pp.4, 5, 7, 14, 16-17, 21-23, 37, 47.
45. García Lorca, *In Search*, p. xii, 12, 13, 24.