

Many Trails, One Path

Paco Mitchell

The Way of the Golden Thread

Your description of choosing one path among many, Russ, and the *questions* you plucked like colorful flowers along the way, bring many things to mind. The first thing that came to mind, as a flamenco *aficionado* for 60 years, was how *flamenco letras* (verses) often touch on dark-yet-colorful images that may resonate with your specific questions and, finally, with our larger discussion.

First, however, I should mention that flamenco letras, in their many thousands, constitute one of the richest and most vibrant *oral traditions* still being practiced today, in my opinion. Those verses that enter and reside in the *flamenco canon*—accessible to all—do so because they have been passed from parents to children, among siblings, from grandmothers and grandfathers to uncles and cousins, from singers in the next village, in crowded local bars, on empty streets at midnight, at baptisms and weddings. Sometimes they are composed by poets, but more often they are improvised and altered in the moment. I still have a personal collection of letras in the hundreds, gathered over six decades—and I still recognize many of them being sung on Youtube videos today, by singers both modern and past, professional and amateur, while I “surf the web.” It is always a thrill to recognize a letra from long ago, still being sung! I listen closely, to hear how the current singer modulates the poetry and its music—already old when I first learned it in my twenties—still being sung today, as if given a new life. It is like witnessing a re-birth.

As I read your eloquent ONTSO #8 reply, then, the first letra that leaped into my mind was one that is usually sung in the *palo* (= genealogical branch) of “*alegrías*.” (Alegrías is Spanish for happiness or joy.) The *leaping letra* goes like this:

*¿Cuál de las dos cogeré?
Tengo dos veredas iguales
Y ¿cuál de las dos cogeré?
Si cojo la de mi gusto
Mi perdición ha de ser (bis).*

Which one shall I choose?
There are two equal paths before me.
Which one shall I choose?
If I choose the one of my longing,
It will be my perdition (repeat).

Longing leading to perdition? This may seem unnecessarily “dour,” Russ, a word you used in your #8 reply, suitable for Scots. I know as well that *flamenco letras*, in general, may seem

to our readers a bit “off the track” of our discussion (although I don’t remember any industrial “railroad tracks” on this meandering path we are following). And yet, if we can make allowances for the dark and bittersweet character of flamenco poetry, even in an upbeat *palo* like the *alegrías de Cádiz*, then we will find a deep, ever-present, underlying consonance between the *chiaroscuro* ambivalence of flamenco music, and the dour “Otherness” that you and I have evoked and explored so many times. I am not saying that a flamenco aesthetic or passion will “save” humanity from the consequences of its collective folly. But there might be a “lesson” in my experience of flamenco that could be of help to a few readers with ears to hear.

So—I admit that flamenco is often preoccupied with soul or *duende*,¹ with suffering and death, but there is a purpose to it: *to transform* that same suffering into the soulful beauty of art—where we find a consonance between the *sonidos negros* (dark sounds) of Spanish gypsy flamenco—with its *cante jondo* or deep song—and the lively joy of the *alegrías*. As a gypsy flamenco singer from Sevilla once told me: “Paco, cantar es llorar.” To sing is to cry. He was locating the unusual sounds of flamenco within a larger mystery—i.e., *how the artistic expression of suffering can lead to healing joy*.

At any rate, as a dyed-in-the-wool Scot, Russ, you have made it abundantly clear that dourness is often no stranger to the “order of the day.” Yet *nothing* either you or I have said about the dourness attendant upon “the Other,” calls for despair. Anyone may share the depths of suffering of the persecuted gypsies, the *gitanos andaluces*—suffering which is found in many “elsewheres” over centuries and millennia. Throughout the history of humans on the planet, this process must have occurred billions of times, in some form. So, the paradox still holds true on some level: Suffering and soul. Death and birth. Pain and beauty.

Here is another flamenco letra that raises the paradox of suffering and beauty to what, to me, is a subtle yet high level of flamenco art, though the letra in itself is quite terse:

¿Qué es eso que suena?

Los presidiarios

Con sus cadenas

Y van arando

Y rosas y lirios van derramando!
blooming.

What is that sound?

The prisoners

With their chains

As they go plowing

While the roses and lilies are busy

The first four lines repeat an identical melody line, in near monotony, because “the prisoners” “with their (familiar) chains” “go plowing.” (Imagine humans in chains dragging a plow through the hard, dry, stony earth, like harnessed mules.) Yet all the time, roses and

¹ See Federico García Lorca’s essay, “Theory and Play of the Duende.”
<https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Spanish/LorcaDuende.php>

lilies are busily blooming, and in that last line, the monotonous melody suddenly takes off and becomes joyous and lyrical—like the free flight of a bird!

This paradoxical quality of suffering and beauty is precisely one of the ways that flamenco music—the guitar itself, the scales, rhythms, and chord progressions; the soulful depths of the singing; the trenchant poetry; and the entire tradition of Spanish flamenco culture—“saved my life.” I swam to and clambered onto the *life-raft of flamenco*, like a shipwrecked sailor, close to death after losing my right eye in Mexico at age 20. That music and culture still have a *salvational* quality for me, if only because I was able to enter it so passionately, penetrating it to considerable depths in my long-lasting *afición*.

But I do not think of flamenco dourness as “pathetic,” as if I were dealing with nothing but *pathos*, or *pathology*. There was always *something more* and, to tell the truth, something Other involved. The Other was always mysterious, and still is. It was a transcendent joy, something transformative, or transmutative, as if through the churning emotions invested in the music I was becoming something that was at once different and Other than what I had been, and yet I was also becoming more deeply the same as I had always been. In other words, I was beginning to experience the truth of Jung’s dictum: *Become the person you have always been*. And that is precisely what you were saying, Russ, speaking from your own experience. And insofar as art is often involved in such life-processes, *before* academic theorizing, there must be thousands of creative practices that potentially offer the same benefits. In fact, you and I both have had the privilege of pursuing our share of different art forms to varying degrees, and experiencing various *shades of joy* along the way.

What I am saying about the living tradition of flamenco is also true of the similarly chiaroscuro value of *dreams*, and the essential Jungian perspective of *facing and integrating the Shadow*—something we all carry, know it or not. And dreams, in their staggering profusion, reveal and bring forth those dark images of the Unknown, into the “light” of consciousness.

But in most cases, there is a caveat. If we do nothing more than “follow the crowd,” serving the dominant attitudes of the day, we will most likely not participate in the coming to birth of *the new thing*, especially if that “thing” should involve the risk of our collective demise by way of *extinction*. It is a sad truth that our persistence in clinging to what has brought us to this dead-end-crisis-point, reinforces a rigid regression to the sclerotic habits of a cruel past which we once overcame at such tremendous cost. This is one way to assess the explosive divisions that are ripping societies and cultures apart today.

Consider the list of current tendencies on display: Regression, repression, retribution, destruction, devastation, denial, greed, hatred, power-lust. And that’s just for starters. The list goes on and on. Humanity is manifestly *in trouble*. Any future born from these dark, resurgent impulses will be no future at all. And who shall administer these blessings? Steve Bannon? Donald Trump? Vladimir Putin? Or are the spirits of Stalin, Hitler, and Vlad the Impaler rising from their coffins to haunt us today?

Have I gone too far, Russ? Perhaps, but perhaps not. It depends on who is reading. To me, I am simply reflecting back to the world a few of the things that I *see* taking place. I still see profound beauty, but much of what I see is ghastly. Simply put, the collective human shadow is currently crawling out from its multiple hiding places, growing bolder by the day.

I would love to see renewed depths of Eros-relatedness beginning to prevail, such as you have written about for decades. I like what you said in your reply to ONTSO #8, what you are calling for—a groundswell of resurgent kindness, generosity, and compassion, rising to greet the Coming Guest—the extremity of Otherness—like a welcome guest, however strange or unfamiliar. That is the exemplary message of the Baucis and Philemon story that you’ve often told, giving the Other an opportunity to *effloresce* into the light.

A curious thought occurs to me at this point: The more violently we resist the Coming Strangeness, the more terrifying it will probably be. Which amounts to saying that, lacking clear mirrors in which to see ourselves, the faces we present to ourselves and to the world will probably be *monstrous*. In some strange way the “monster” *belongs* to us, just as we *belong* to it! But the “monstrous” is not all that we are, it’s only a part—and perhaps a result—of our fragmentariness. That’s one big reason why dreams are so important—because they can mirror us clearly, thus helping us overcome our fragmentation—if, that is, we can *assimilate* and *integrate* enough of our dreams’ essences, and become relatively whole persons. But—if not enough of us succeed in doing that, I would expect the forces of fragmentation to dominate whatever future we stand to undergo, having created those very conditions by our actions and inactions, by our stubborn, violent, and fearful attitudes.

I speak as if with certainty that this increasing fragmentation will be a process of global proportions, which also suggests that I speak as if I *know* what will happen. Yet, I do not know. I do, however, find a bell-like resonance in the saying from the old Chinese sage Lao Tzu, which I have cited elsewhere:

“If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.”

The “oddness” of certain dream elements

Your perceptive reference to the “oddness” of certain dream elements reminds me of Freud’s notion of the “navel of the dream,” i.e., the point where the “interpretability” of the dream’s content and imagery dissolves, so to speak, into something like an umbilicus or umbilical cord, which disappears into the psychic depths. I’m not positive that Freud meant what I see, but I take his idea as an interesting metaphor. That in turn reminds me of something you and I discussed in our DBF trilogy, that is, the “Mother Pool” at the Pagosa Hot Springs in Colorado. The Mother Pool “feeds” all the other adjacent hot springs. When they decided to find out how deep the Mother Pool was, they got into a boat and dropped a plumb-bob tied to a 600 ft. long length of string, but they ran out of string before finding the bottom. A year or so later, another attempt was made, but with a line that was just over 1000 ft. long. Once again, the string played itself out, but the plumb-bob still had not hit

bottom. So, they gave it a Guinness World Record Depth of 1002 ft. But the truth is that, still nobody knows how deep it actually is.

I like the fact that the effort to “measure the depth of the Mother Pool” failed, and they were forced to live with the metaphorical, but also the physical, *mystery of the depths*. Can’t we say that the Mother Pool of Pagosa resonates with Freud’s “dream navel”—or umbilicus—and accept the mystery of the hot water welling up from the earth’s depths?

I see no good reason why not. Numbers are certainly important, numerically, and we can do amazing things with them. But they are also important symbolically and poetically. That reminds me of the poem: *one’s not half two. It’s two are halves of one*:
one's not half two. It's two are halves of one:

which halves reintegrating, shall occur
no death and any quantity; but than
all numerable mosts the actual more

minds ignorant of stern miraculous
this every truth-beware of heartless them
(given the scalpel, they dissect a kiss;
or, sold the reason, they undream a dream)

one is the song which fiends and angels sing:
all murdering lies by mortals told make two.
Let liars wilt, repaying life they're loaned;
we(by a gift called dying born)must grow

deep in dark least ourselves remembering
love only rides his year.
All lose, whole find

— e. e. cummings

**“Why would the source of dreams (the “Other,” as I call it) go to such efforts to “hide”
or “obscure” important dream elements? (RL)**

Another intriguing question! Of course, I don’t know the “answer,” but that does not stop *intuition* from laying out its wares like a vendor in a Middle Eastern *souk*! In fact, God forbid that humans should ever claim to finally understand, and thus to have “dominion” over, *dreams and dreaming*. I daresay that would probably announce the end of our “special species status” on the planet.

As I ponder your question, Russ, I admit that those elements that “escape us” are perhaps *being hidden*, as if by purposeful design. At the same time, another possibility occurs to me: Maybe the images you refer to are just “not yet ripe for consciousness”—like fruit that’s not yet digestible. I’m using “ripe” as an obsolete alchemical notion, of course—the idea that metals “ripen” in the darkness of the earth’s womb, and that the alchemical task was to bring that ripening to *full fruition*, in a kind of “new birth,” also known as “gold.”

If we were only dealing here with physical or “vulgar” gold, my hypothesis could be dismissed as silly. But if we consider the alchemical dictum, “*Tam ethice quam psychice*”—As much psychic as physical—then we are free to consider all manner of odd, eccentric, obscure possibilities. This fact opens the way for Jung’s statement that, because as psychologists we cannot limit our investigations to the thoughtful stringencies of pure physics, or strict thought, “we are driven to take into account the standpoint of feeling, and therefore *everything that the psyche actually contains*. [Emphasis added.]

So, I use the term “ripe” in its alchemical sense, yes, but also in the more contemporary sense of an image or intuition that is ready for a “birth” and elaboration in consciousness—like a fetus at full-term. We could even borrow from old religious traditions, and imagine that some dream images, dream motifs, or dream “messages,” are not yet ready for *incarnation*, not yet ready to take on substance and form, via the light of visibility granted to consciousness. After all, it seems to me that *anything with eyes must be adapted to the nature and creative power of light*.²

² Speaking of light and eyes, I also wonder about subterranean creatures, like “sightless worms”, for example, or “blind moles,” both of which still somehow navigate—if we can call it that—through the sub-surface darkness of dirt. Who knows what worms and moles know? Scientists could perform experiments and tests, of course, and find that blind moles still have eye slits, backed by retinal organs, and are not totally blind, but are capable of sensing a certain amount of light—as manifested in times of day for their *daily naps*, and in *seasons* as well (e.g., spring) a season reserved for their *mating* in the dark! Somehow the moles know all this, and the worms as well, after their own fashion. But does that mean that science can *comprehend* the “psychic consciousness” of sightless worms or blind moles? I don’t think we can say those creatures are *not aware*, just because they don’t speak English. Another thing to ponder.

“Is the Other something of a trickster?”

What an interesting question, Russ!

For centuries, the alchemists' work was apparently part-dream/part-thought process—which in itself is a “tricky” configuration or balancing act. And their “guiding spirit” was often known as Mercurius, the trickster god *par excellence*, also referred to as the *serpens mercurii*, or *Mercurial Serpent*. Mercurius was experienced as ambivalent (= values on both sides), slippery, and hard to grasp, “the highest and the lowest.” And, like the actual metal, “mercury” slips through your fingers.

So, is this Other you and I refer to, something of a mercurial trickster? Does the Other work in mysterious ways, as if “aiming” to pull the ego into something deeper than itself, into something as-yet unknown? That certainly resonates with what we know of Jung's teachings about the Self, which you associate with the Individuation Process and the Golden Thread. It also conforms to my experience of dreams. Paradoxically, perhaps, the Self in all its mystery is also simultaneously *knowable*, or rather experienceable, to some extent, by “moderns” such as ourselves—hospitable to all manner of oddities and strangeness.

Jung devoted his immense erudition to laboriously backing up his *experiences* of the objective reality of Individuation and the Self, with wide-ranging historical and cultural references. Despite multiple descriptions throughout the alchemical centuries, the essence of that experience found many cognates, such as the *hieros gamos*, or the “sacred marriage of the sun and the moon”—contraries, yet inherently related—hence, the Latin term “*coniunctio oppositorum*.” Their conjunction or “marriage” is still a major event in psychological development today. In my experience, this cannot happen consciously, without a humbling acknowledgement of the Shadow, which can assume both “positive” and “negative” forms. The human shadow is often condemned as being only negative, something to be shunned: “Get thee behind me, Satan!” But our highest unrealized potentials for good are likewise entangled with our shadowy confusions. Hence, the tradition of Lucifer, the “light bringer.”

Does this point to a “Trickster quality in the Self”?

There is no use pretending that an encounter with the Self is like a party or picnic. As Jung repeated firmly: “Any encounter with the Self is a defeat for the ego.” Individuation, then, can be imagined as a kind of humble, slow, almost processional movement into the psychophysico-spiritual precincts of the Self, and is full of difficulties and dangers. Interestingly, the Self is also like an instinct or endowment, present from birth, but not usually known as such, mostly remaining unconscious to the ego-personality. A conscious recognition of it is usually reserved for late in life, although clues and hints of its potentials can appear early in life, and throughout, often in epiphanies.

From these and other ruminations, I think we might as well answer your question in the affirmative, so long as we all keep in mind how much profound Mystery remains.

Regarding your observation that in dreams like my “Gold, Silver, Zephyr, Harmonium” dream, one is pulled into “depths that the ego experiences as a *different reality* from the usual categories ego-consciousness concerns itself with.” Quite true, Russ. I believe such experiences constitute much of the *richness of dreams*, theoretically accessible to anyone who (1) opens themselves unreservedly to dreams, (2) manages to free themselves from the conventional prejudices against dreams, (3) is able to receive dream images “hospitably,” as you often point out, (4) with an assumption that a dream’s value does not depend on our understanding it, much less our “approving” of it, (5) a willingness to engage with our dreams whole-heartedly, and with a kind of moral or ethical response of *embodiment in our lives*.

I should point out that, in that particular Harmonium dream, even though I was walking (not driving!) through a *city*, nevertheless ***I was alone***. I think that’s a clue to the state of mind that furthers one’s ability to enter into the profundities of one’s dream-depths. In other words, had I been rollicking around with companions, in a state of *self-absorbed, egoic distraction*, I might not have had the visionary “remove” needed to witness something catastrophic and tragic (the crash), but yet to come, and in addition, to witness the release of *powerful potentials* (the globes) from that tragedy.

What the dream portended was not exactly pleasant, but I still count it as a dream-gift to be treasured, one of many. I do not assume, by the way, that my aloneness spares me from undergoing the travails of the ensuing chaos “during and after the crash.” It does, however, enable me to serve as a *witness* to what is coming; to see the *potentials* the chaos releases; to learn the *names* of those symbolic potentials; and to adjust my *life-course* in accord with the iridescent, *peacock-colored light* of the translucent globes. That dream, among many others, has given me a deep sense of humility, of responsibility, of a task amounting to destiny, and a feeling of living my life, not only on surfaces, but also on deep levels. That is why I can say that the image of the immeasurable Mother Pool of Pagosa, rings like a huge bronze bell, that echoes in my own unfathomable depths. I know you are aware of virtually everything I am saying here, Russ. And your own observations of how you are experiencing “The Final Interlude” are inspiring for me—and many others, I’m sure.

A Final Flamenco Letra

To finish, I would like to offer this brief Youtube clip of a *letra* with which the singer, José Cala, accompanied on guitar by Carlos Llave, demonstrates the relationship between the Arabic “call to prayer,” and the flamenco *palo* of the *soleá* (= solitude, loneliness), one of the deepest of the flamenco musical forms, regarded as “the mother of the *cante jondo*.” In other words, within the *cante jondo* (deep song), the *soleá* began as an “oration.” To me, Russ, music with this degree of emotional depth, sacrality, and beauty, “belongs” to our ONTSO project:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btqY5cxrLHw>

The video shows the antecedent Arabic element merging with the later flamenco. Other elements in flamenco derive from Jewish liturgical chant, old Christian church “modes” (mainly the Phrygian mode), Indian *ragas* (the gypsies migrated from India), and Andalusian folk music from centuries past. First, José sings the Arabic, then the Andalusian Spanish. Here is the *letra* with an English translation:

Por Soleá

<i>¿Cómo quieres tú comparar</i>	Why do you want to compare
<i>Un charco, prima, con una fuente?</i>	A mere puddle, my cousin, with a fountain?
<i>Un charco con una fuente?</i>	A mere puddle with a fountain?
<i>Un charco, prima, con una fuente?</i>	A mere puddle, my cousin, with a fountain?
<i>Sale el sol, se cale el charco</i>	The sun comes out, the puddle dries up
<i>Y la fuente prevalece.</i>	But the fountain keeps flowing.
<i>Sale el sol, se cale el charco</i>	The sun comes out, the puddle dries up
<i>Y la fuente prevalece.</i>	But the fountain keeps flowing.

[Note: The phrase “Por soleá” means “in the style of soleá.”]

MUSIC, MEMORY, AND PSYCHE

Russell Lockhart

I appreciate the role that flamenco has played in your life for such a long period. Your recounting of its importance to you is gripping in so many ways. It excites in me a kind of envy, particularly in the ways you find “home” in the long history of flamenco’s myriad forms. Because of the capacity of music and song to impact the deeper psyche in ways that ego consciousness does not and cannot, this envy I experience leads me to examine what role music and song have played in my life.

Do I find any sense of “home” in music and song?

I’m going to describe in detail an experience that illustrates some of the feelings I’m having about music, memory, and psyche. Many years ago, somewhere in the early 80s, I was flying home after giving some lectures in New York. It was an evening flight. I ordered a scotch and sat back to watch the movie that was offered. It was *Honeysuckle Rose*, starring Willie Nelson and Dyan Cannon. I expected to fall asleep. Instead, I began hearing voices, voices singing. I started to cry and could not control what was happening to me. Passengers were concerned and called the stewardess, and she tried to soothe me, but it took a long

while. I recognized the voices I heard. They were country music voices from the past: Ernest Tubb, Bob Wills, and Gene Autry among others I couldn't remember the names of but recognized their songs. None of these voices were among those I normally listened to. I wondered if in some way, listening to Willie Nelson (my favorite country singer) somehow triggered long forgotten memories. But why such emotion? Why tears?

Shortly after this experience, I visited my parents and told them what had happened. My dad responded right away. He told me that after I was born (November 1938), he would hold me and rock me while he played country music on the radio and *sang along out loud to me*. He did this, he said, in an effort to cure his stuttering. He said, "It worked!" I was shocked. I had never known he stuttered. As far as I can remember, this was never mentioned as I grew up.

Even now, as I write these words, I start shaking with the same emotion I had on the plane. Science tells us we have childhood amnesia until language begins to form and then memories can be coded. My experience suggests that while this is true of *conscious* memory, it may not be true of *psychic* memory. My father rocking me and singing to me in my first months of life must have been an incredibly strong *bonding* experience, with the psyche taking all this in and *remembering* it.

The emotion I experienced on the plane was not just from hearing the country songs, but what those songs meant to me when I had very little consciousness, but what the psyche remembered. So, I feel convinced that conscious memory and psychic memory are distinct. Of course, psychic memory is now referred to as "the unconscious." But clearly, even the unconscious is not limited to forgotten or repressed wishes, desires, or memories. This experience tells me that there is something "other" at work in relation to my memory. Something "other" that was fully operating when I was only months old. This "other" seems not only to have agency but intention as well. It is something *other* than consciousness.

Years later, when recalling this memory, I was inspired to write a poem that tried to express what these words are not quite doing. Perhaps I managed to be moved to do so by the goddess Calliope, the goddess of poetry. In any event, there is something different that happens when we "hear" a poem rather than just read it. It relates to the oral tradition you described so well, Paco, in relation to flamenco. We know that song and music and spoken poetry are mediated by an older and deeper part of the brain than is ego consciousness. Here is the link to the poem I wrote. It is entitled *The Deeper Keep*.

<https://youtu.be/FOQwAAinSiQ>

I can also say, many decades later, that it is by developing a relationship with the Other over this time that I find a sense of *home*.

At the center of what you wrote and what I described above is *music*. This word comes from the Greek 'mousike,' which meant "the art of the Muses." Just being aware of the word

music and its Greek source, brings us to encounter the Muses, the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (the goddess of memory). The Muses presided over the arts, sciences and learning. It is Euterpe who is the goddess of music. Please note that I say *is* and not *was*. Of course, in our rational day and age, the very idea of a goddess of music is an anachronism, an idea that has no place, no home, in the current time. But while gods and goddesses and other anachronisms can be tossed away as no longer relevant to our conscious aims and intentions, I do not believe this is true of the deep psyche, that is, the province of the Other.

The closest I can come to your deep immersion and love for flamenco, is my fascination with fado. I only discovered this genre about 15 years ago. I do not understand the language but the music, particularly the voice of Mariza, captivates me. I know the two styles of music are quite different in their history, their form, and their styles. Even though I do not understand why, it is fado that affects me more than flamenco. I think these such differences are important and are worth more discussion.

I'm also sure that music that one does *not* like has an importance as well. For example, I do not like jazz at all. Again, I do not know why. It is inexplicable. Oddly, though, I love reading jazz history. As I write this, just after writing about the Muses, I can see that Euterpe does not inspire me to like jazz, but Clio inspires me to be drawn into jazz history. I feel this oddness is important, but I can't quite get why. What is clear is that the experiences are beyond strong.

This brings up a final point I will make. What do our reflections on music have to do with "our need to speak out"? What has any of this to do with our concerns about climate change, about extinction, about the disasters brewing all around? I believe that music has the power to impact the province of the Other, to stimulate the Other, and to make consciousness more open to being receptive to the offerings of the Other. I believe there is some important *reciprocity* that can be facilitated by engaging in music that impacts us in the depths. For how to be in the coming time, there can be no better resource than this.