

The Delacampagne's Sense of "Duende"

By Francis Marmande

A husband-and-wife collaboration, the book *Duende (Visages et voix du flamenco)* (*Duende: Faces and Voices of Flamenco*) blends photographs by Ariane Delacampagne with text by Christian Delacampagne (L'Archange Minotaure; €45). It's a book in which each page is filled with *duende*. "*Duende? The word is strictly speaking, untranslatable, except in a linguistic register that I would prefer to reserve for rare occasions: that of religion.*" *Duende*—part spirit, part daemon—is the unseen angel that moves, as wind on the sand, through a dancer's body, the *cantaor*'s throat or the bullfighter's billowing cape. The angel of *duende*, which appears and disappears, without warning, is inseparable from the figure of the poet who most nearly divined its inner workings: Federico Garcia Lorca, who derived his image of *duende* from the *cantaor* Manuel Torre.

Duende, an inspiration, a sacred breath that wafts you into the air and drops you back down to earth, that spins you back to front and back again, often bears the hallmark of a trance, a possession; "*Whatever emits a dark sound*", Manuel Torre used to say (*in other words, whatever is tinged with the premonition of night or the shadow of death*) "*has duende*". You can't dictate whether or when *duende* will descend on you, whether or when its sudden violence will burst onto the scene. But it can choose you.

To explore a demanding form of popular art, one needs—as one would for blues or jazz—a guide who will be a Virgil to our inner Dante. Christian Delacampagne, whose work in the field of political philosophy will continue to grow in stature, was the gentlest, wisest, most mischievous guide one could wish for. Even when dealing with the bitterest conflicts, he maintains the tone of a man who never seeks to have his own way but only to pass on what he knows, to share his experience moment by moment. There is not a hint of preachiness or self-importance in his writing, so unlike some thinkers whose main ambition seems to be to impress themselves with the depth of their own thought. Even his description of Ariane Delacampagne's photographs is understated in its elegance: *Ariane Delacampagne's photographs illustrate particularly well the truth I mentioned at the outset, which must, I think, always be borne in mind: before flamenco became a form of entertainment or an object of consumption—albeit an object of consumption redeemed by intellectual, political or academic significance—it was first and foremost a way of being.*

This way of being was also at times a hardship, or a destiny unwittingly shared by people who had never heard the term "flamenco", but who, like the Gypsies of Jerez, knew all about the pain of life—the grief and, "*equally, the sweetness of existence.*"

The end of his text, before he turns the presentation over to the black and white photographs of his companion Ariane, has all the class of a "*remate*" (conclusion, final note, personal touch, signing off), worthy of the sublimest *remates* of Rafael de Paula or José Tomas. In an often hostile world, some creatures are blessed with grace. They delve laughingly into serious matters and dance on the sidewalks of big cities. They never put on airs (why would they?), nor feign the distress of mourners in their own funeral march. Christian Delacampagne was of this breed.

Is it because they haven't experienced the hardships, the untimely deaths, the unfairness of finger-pointing gods? Not in the least, but they never lay the blame at your doorstep. By turns

they work, love, play and suffer, all without fuss. Such a person was Christian Delacampagne, who died on May 20th in Paris, at the page of 57. Where can one hear “good” flamenco, you ask? You might as well ask a poet for a list of the ten “best” temples in Kyoto. If you were a good person (but the question does make one wonder a bit), Christian would have given you an answer. It doesn’t matter. Where? Wherever you happen to be: in a small theatre, perhaps, on Place Blanche, where in the 1960s geniuses used to perform before a handful of winos and nobodies. And what about tonight? Same thing. Here, there, wherever the Delacampagne’s duende may lead you. In Mont-de-Marsan too—at the Arte Flamenco Festival, July 2-7.

Francis Marmande

Article published in the May 28, 2007 edition of Le Monde.