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A Novella

The Spanish House

by

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**To Aziz Balouch and Shusha Guppy
and all the singers whose voices never die**

The Spanish House
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The Spanish House
Text, Notes and Glossary
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Introduction

The Spanish House is set partly during the autumn and winter of 1974–75, and partly in the year 2020, between London and rural Spain. The protagonist is a woman from London, Marjery Morris, who meets a certain Joe Leon at a Marxist meeting. She comes unexpectedly into a moderate inheritance from a hitherto estranged uncle, and they decide to take some time out. She spots an advert to rent a barraca (a small, stone house, a bit like a Scottish bothy) in southern Spain. She telephones the number given and finds herself being interrogated by a certain irascible Doctor Levi, who owns the property. The story is contemporaneous with the dictator Franco's last illness, and it is told entirely from Morris's perspective and in her voice.

Joe Leon is of Jewish origin, though he has eschewed religion for dialectical materialism. The couple share a set of values, a view of the world. From the moment they arrive at the deserted barraca, however, they begin to react very differently to their new environment (a fictional setting, close to the village of Darra on the northern slopes of the Sierra Morena at the point where the three provinces of Castilla La Mancha, Extremadura and Andalusia meet).

I see the Iberian peninsula (together with Sicily) as pivotal to the onset of the Modern era, as well as being a constant reminder of the interconnectedness of Judeo-Islamic-Christian culture and thought. In *The Spanish House*, this matrix manifests against the semiotic backdrop of an almost rabbinical dialectical materialism. The node in *The Spanish House* is the relationship between sex, politics and religion and the manner in which these three play out through the character of a woman at a particular time in history. The fugue lies in the link between love – Eros – and the aim of transforming the human condition. The poeticism of the piece becomes so intense that the fiction begins to bend; a process analogous to the effect on time-space of being funnelled into a cosmic black hole. The deliberate use of the folk-song idiom is a turning-on-its-head of the flawed and dangerous Romantic and post-Romantic concept of "a people", a self-contained tribe, a hermetically-sealed "folk", linked, bound and defined by the land on which they dwell. In a distorted mirror-image of the eschatologies of some traditional societies where the people are seen as being an integrated seam in the landscape, in the patriotic-nationalist rapture the land becomes defined by dominant groupings, their dominance being expressed through those ultimate

farcical reductions of folk songs which we call national anthems. *The Spanish House* plays out using folk songs, but here the agenda is the opposite, namely to elicit the lie, the inherent impossibility, of such a concept.

Marjery becomes fascinated by the local church and its priest, but the attraction, at least at first, is essentially a surface one. Joe, on the other hand, starts out the straight materialist, but by degrees falls into a state of intoxicated self-neglect. Their relationship steadily falls apart. The story is permeated by the *cante jondo* (deep song), one of the folk-song forms of southern Spain. Church and priest, it turns out, are far more than they seem, as is the elusive Dr Levi. Philosophically, the story is an exposition of the dialectic of the spirit in the pre-Marxist sense. Ideas of Sephardic and Arabic culture rise uncontrollably from the white, burned earth of the Inquisition-Conquistador trail, along with the unresolved axis of the Spanish Civil War (the second being partly an ultimate consequence of the first), until the narrative is driven to a screaming climax that is wordless in its intensity.

Towards the end of the story, forty-five years on, the protagonist herself begins to question the veracity of the narrative, to poke faults in its fabric, to question its rules of engagement and even the existence of the other characters in the novella, and to point out obviously hackneyed literary devices such as the moderate inheritance, the newspaper advertisement, the peculiar phone conversation, until ultimately, she is led to confront the tenuousness of her own existence, not simply as a mortal human being but also as a functional character in a fiction. This calls into question the range of possibilities of the novel and novella forms in the long stream of storytelling and music that comprises the human imagination and also evinces the polyvalent and sometimes contradictory relationships between song-forms like flamenco, reggae or rock and politics. Not so much angels on the head of a pin, as a balancing-act along the invisible strings connecting diametric Kabbalistical poles stretched almost to breaking point. *Crack the vessels!*

The Spanish House

And I fell to grieving over the generations of men...
(Levi, from *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. II)

*We socialists are freer because we are complete;
we are more complete because we are freer.
The skeleton of our complete freedom is already
formed.
The flesh and the clothing are lacking.*
(Dr Ernesto Guevara, Havana, Cuba)

I returned to the Spanish house because there was nowhere else to go. My head pounded and my swollen feet ached in my boots as I half-walked, half-climbed up the hill. The roof of my mouth was like a *canción* manuscript and my tongue, an inkless quill. I didn't care. What I had to do was too important.

Once again, it was spring and it was early morning, perhaps five, perhaps six. I wore no watch. The stars had faded and the air was fresh and cool before the onset of the heat of the day. My breath gave off a fine, yellow mist and my lungs seemed to have expanded within my chest so that in spite of my exhaustion, I felt as though I could've walked on. As I climbed the hill, the land about me began to feel intensely familiar, like the bones of an old lover: the dusty hillsides with flashes of green, the smell of roses coming from somewhere, the sound of my boots on the hard earth of the track. I kept my eyes focused on the regularly-spaced ruts which some jeep had made, the previous winter and on the small, blue flowers which grew by the side of the track and which gave off no odour. I knew that if I looked up too often, I would lose consciousness, and that like the stars I would fade into the enormity of the blue sky. A few times, I did try to catch a glimpse of the barraca, but to no avail. Then I remembered that Garcilaso was not a carmen and was set some way back from the edge of a plateau so that while one was actually climbing the hill, the whitewashed stone shack remained hidden from view. I should've known that, from the time before. So much of my life had been a symphony of forgetfulness. A nuba, pummelled and

distorted and confused until I could no longer tell that which was true from the morass of persiflage and falseness with which gladly I had adorned myself.

The hill, the house at the top of the hill, the sky above that and the village below. Suddenly, in the midst of familiarity, I felt a sense of alienation. I had returned for reasons of my own ... but that was a lie. I didn't really know why I had returned. They ran through my mind, the reasons, the men: Joe Leon, Dr. Levy and the man who had called himself Father. Padre Úbeda de Valor. I half-spoke the names of which I had hardly dared think during the fifty years since I had been here last, and I felt a trembling seize hold of my gut. I stopped. I had to sit down. Then I walked over to a large, flat-topped rock, sat down and closed my eyes and felt the morning breeze brush against the lids. I held my breath. I could hear the sound of the birds, and I felt that I might be able to catch each one by its name. And beneath the birdsong, something inaudible, something felt rather than heard ... the pulsing of the river which snaked its way far below the pueblo. The silver river issued from the recesses of the mountain whose name I had never discovered and flowed through the harsh gullies of La Mancha, southwards to the Andalusian border. For a moment, I held all the noises of the early morning within my head, my chest. But it was only for a moment. Then I exhaled. There was a time when I could've run up this same hill...

Back then, with Joe, I had wanted to capture eternity in my hand, to stroke it as one might, the cold, dampened spine of a sleeping lover, but now, I ran my hands through my thinning hair and tried to slow my breathing, tried to focus on what I would have to do that morning. And yet, the more I tried to distance myself from the past, the more it seeped into my thoughts, until I found myself wondering whether I would ever possess the physical or mental strength to climb the remainder of the hill. A part of me was quite content to lose myself in the cold stone morning, to sit and ruminate on the events of fifty years earlier. A London autumn, in Nineteen Hundred-and-Seventy-Three. I thought again of Joe Leon, of how we'd met, and I thought of myself and the woman that I had been.

Once, the Spanish house had been owned by an ex-rock star, but when Joe and I rented it out for the winter, the place was already in a dilapidated state. The rock star had rocked on (as they say) awhile back, and it had been sold to a consortium who had tried and failed to make a profit, and who finally had sold it on to a certain Dr. Eli

Levy who, I think, must have been a psychiatrist of some sort. At least, that was what Joe and I had figured when we had looked at the advert in the newspaper. It was one of those small, boxed adverts, and it was in a no-frills section of the paper which normally did not deal with holiday cottages. But then, *Garcilaso* had never been a holiday cottage. Looking back, perhaps it was this which drew me to the place, though at the time, I was more concerned with the price and the location. In spite of the fact that Joe had a Spanish surname, renting the house was my idea, not his. The thing was, Joe had never regarded himself as anything other than English. Or, Middle English, as they used to say. As someone who has spent more time around academics than I care to remember, I must say that I had always thought of *Middle English* as referring to an ancient form of the language, rather than to a particular mindset. But after I met Joe – or, to be more correct, Joseph Leon – I slowly developed a conception of just what it might be like to exist within that ethos. Or rather, to not exist within it, but to be obsessed with the desire to merge with it, to become, as it were, that which is the essence of England. Joe was that desire. It hadn't always seemed like that. But then, as I have learned during this long life of mine, appearances very often are deceptive. We had met through politics (we were both of the left-wing tendency, though we were never Trotskyites) and a common love of free-form jazz and soon we discovered that we also shared the unfortunate legacy that our parents had died young. I had grown up in a Home, while Joe had been brought up by an elderly great-aunt. I still remember the rainy afternoon we met in the early autumn of 1973.¹

We had just left a particularly stormy Party Meeting (I find it hard to recall the exact name of the Party; the Workers' Party, perhaps; they all had such similar names and in any case, it is irrelevant). I was certain that there would be a split and that the various factions would march off into the awful suburbs of west London to establish ever more esoteric cells. I found it hard to imagine how it might be possible to remain a Communist, living somewhere like Slough. You'd have to be a theologian. You'd have to have faith. In any case, I remember being intensely gloomy and sitting on my own at a table which had not yet been wiped clean of grease-stains. Eventually, my coffee arrived and with it, Joe.

He had been at several meetings – I had noticed him on a few occasions previously – but he was obviously a relatively new member and had hardly spoken. I remembered him, because of his long, black

hair and his small but penetrating eyes. There seemed a mutability about him, and his complexion somehow seemed to alter, depending on the nature of the light, so that in bright sunlight he would be cream-coloured, while at other moments, say, in the evenings, Joe's skin would acquire an almost olive hue. That day, he smiled at me through the gloom and joked that maybe now he would have to find a new café as well as a new Party. At that time, I thought his humour dry, but later, once I got to know him, I realised that it stemmed from a terrible fear. He was of average height, and wore a bulky overcoat that seemed to swallow him up. He sat down, and we began to talk. He described himself as *an unsuccessful Jew* and added, *they do exist, you know, Margery.*

I liked the way he said my name, it made me seem special.

Margery Morris was a stupid name, if ever there was one. It seemed redolent of my very boring upbringing in the counties which they called *Home*. Sort of lower middle class. A cog, within a cog, within a cog. None of my ancestors had ever done anything remotely notable. Not that I had really known much about them, but there had never been any question of secreted exoticisms in the substance of my bones. I was the stuff of bitterness and ennui. Perhaps, really, that was why I became a Communist. My only way out of mundanity was by becoming extreme. Or at least, by thinking extreme. In those days, the two were very much the same. Thought and action. The will and the way. In becoming a Communist, ironically, I acquired a veritable ancestry: Castro, Luxemburg, Engels, Marx, Shelley, Desmoulins, the Levellers, Tyler, Loxley, Spartacus ... I had a whole panoply of heroes at my back (and heroines, too, though in those days, the Movement preferred not to draw the distinction). They gave my life a validity which previously it had lacked. Lines of dialectic, stretching towards infinity, spanned my emptiness.

I had long, brown hair at the time, though contrary to the fashion, it was straight, not wavy. In those days, we were very much against the formalities of our forebears (in our cases, the Children's Home and the great-aunt) and within hours of first drinking together in the steamed-up café, and helped a little by a gleaming, wet street and the swooping sound of Albert Ayler's saxophone, we were sharing a bed. *Spiritual Unity*. Margery and Joe. It wasn't that I needed a man. It wasn't that I needed anyone, except perhaps *Das Kapital*. But let's face it: you can't shag a book. Not unless your tastes are ... exotic, shall we say? Anyway, looking back, I feel uncertain of exactly what it was that drew me to him. I used to imagine it might have

been his flickering intensity, his vulnerability, his uncertainty – the crisis of faith which I sometimes think is deeply-buried in the soul of every Marxist – and then sometimes I thought that perhaps it had been his Gothic features. His hazel eyes. Or maybe it had been our café conversations. Perhaps it was a combination of all these things. Sometimes, I have felt like a sleepwalker, hurtling through life, guided only by fragile storm-lanterns.

It was what they might have called a whirlwind romance (though Joe and I never would have used that term), and within a week, I had moved in with him (in those days, it always happened that way around; liberation had unspoken limits). I still remember his Hounslow flat. It was not that of a typical bachelor. I'd been in plenty of those, where it would be cold coffee in cracked, white mugs and fossilised cigarette stubs all over the window-panes. The smell of poorly-washed socks and the hoach of grease and dust in the corners. No. Joe Leon's place was clean to the point of godliness (though, of course, that would have been a contradiction in terms) and smelled, not of perfume or aftershave, nor even of maleness, but rather, of a musty dryness not unlike that which one would've imagined would have resided in the deeper recesses of a pyramid. A controlled mortality. A slowing down. A sense of repressed fear.

I lived with him in that place, and bit by bit, I allowed my healthy slovenliness to creep into his order. Still no fag stubs, though. Outwardly, we lived as a Communist couple. Inwardly ... who knows?

Some five months after I'd moved in with Joe, I went to a clinic in the East End and got rid of his child.

I didn't tell him. I wasn't sure how he would've reacted; when all was said and done, Communist or no Communist, he was a man and he was Jewish. I remembered him telling me that his great-aunt had been deeply Orthodox and that being a widow, she had shaved every last blade of hair from her scalp. I had pictured the newly-bald pate, smooth and clean and white like porcelain and so reflective that the child Joe had been able to see his face in the structure of her skull. He had told me that he had rebelled against all of that. But I knew that within every rebel, there runs the seam of tradition. Within every conquest, lie the seeds of defeat. I felt stupid. It was my responsibility, and I had let both of us down. I was twenty-five and liberated, and I wasn't ready for motherhood. I wasn't even sure whether or not I would ever want to be a mother. Anyway, I handled it. I dealt with it. And it was over.

Perhaps it was my guilt at having done this without telling him. I don't know. It's odd how life works out. The vicissitudes. Things which Marx never considered. Like individual fate, and chance. I often think of Marx as the inventor of a musical notation; the stave lines and the key give one the basic parameters, but within those limits there may be infinite variation. And no amount of ink can ever really tell one what the actual music would sound like. For a few days after the procedure had been carried out, I still felt rather weak and was off work. I had told Joe some story about an illness which had required an operation. I was a good liar in those days, I lectured in a Further Education College, teaching what they used to call, *Modern Studies*. Anyway, I was still off work when, one morning, a parcel arrived through the letterbox of his – our – flat. The mid-morning mail. I heard it drop onto the mat. Dressed only in a long shirt, I went through to the hall and picked it up. The parcel was addressed to me. I fiddled with the brown paper, but it had been stapled together and so I went and got a knife. I ripped it open. Inside was a letter from a lawyer whose name I did not recognise. I read the long epistle, and then read it again, this time out loud. I placed it on the mantelpiece, washed, dressed, went out to the newsagent and came back again. It was still there. It was only then I realised that it hadn't been some kind of a dream. I gazed at my face in the mirror above the mantelpiece. My sea-blue eyes. I pulled at the skin of my cheeks. I was young, and was full of love and ideas. In a few years' time, I thought, I will be old and will have nothing except my ideas. It felt unreal. The letter, time's passage. My life. Once, I had seen pictures of my parents. Old black-and-white photographs from the War.² Long heads, slicked-back hair, bouffants like bread-loaves ... grey eyes. Frozen smiles. They had died when I was not yet two. I remembered nothing. All I had were stories. Dreams, fictions. Grey on grey. I sighed, and folded the letter.

When, late that night, Joe returned home (he worked as a security guard), I threw my arms around him, and dragged him off to bed. With him still in his uniform, we made love. Gold braid on black. The smoothed-down roughness of the black wool. I had a thing about that; it was my only concession to authority. And then I announced it to him. I had inherited money. Not a fortune, not enough to change one's life, but a not inconsiderable sum. Enough to do something with. Not enough to change one's life. I thought I saw a shadow cross his face, but later I reasoned that the light had been dim and that he had been tired and unshaven because the

next moment, he grabbed the letter from my hand and was hungrily devouring its contents. It was a moderate inheritance, from a great-uncle of whom I had heard but whom I had never known (in the orphanage, I'd had no visitors). The money hadn't exactly been left to me; it was simply that I happened to be the only traceable relative, and he had left no will. The State had taken so much; and the rest was mine by default. We live and die by default. Whether through guilt, or duty, or sheer madness (I still haven't figured out which it was; perhaps, like most things, my motivations will remain perpetually elusive to me), I suggested to Joe that we go away for a while. *To get our heads sorted out*, I said. The truth was, things hadn't been working. Maybe, things had never really worked for Joe and I. For a while, we had danced like porpoises, we had breathed a private fuel, but once the politics and the physical attraction had worn off, what had been left? I had killed his child, and hadn't even told him. Hadn't even asked. My job was pretty much on the rocks, in any case, and his wasn't worth keeping.

Weeks passed, and I had done nothing, when one Sunday morning, I came across the advert for the cottage. I noticed it while I was reading a rather exciting article about the fierce onslaught of digital computer technology (something, which like the concept of inter-planetary travel, was intensely fashionable in those days, especially in what some used to call *the quality press*), and at first, I skipped over it and read through the rest of the paper. I don't know why I was drawn back to it. It was really quite mundane. Perhaps it was the fact that outside, it had begun, slowly, to rain. Joe was still asleep, and I was seated by the kitchen window, clad in my dressing-gown and drinking strong, dark Co-operative coffee. The pitter-patter of the raindrops as they struck the glass began to irritate me, and I felt a great, empty balloon begin to swell inside my belly. *I could sit here, by this window, sipping goodwill coffee, till the day I die*, I thought. I brought the mug to my lips. I could have this man's children, or perhaps not. Perhaps I would be the kind of working woman people tended to look down upon. *Only widows, whores and the working class work*. It was as though Queen Victoria had never died. The drink had gone flat. I set the mug down, turned my face from the grey daylight and went over to the cupboard where I pulled out a bottle of *Sanluca Manzanilla*. I twisted off the cork, tipped the bottle, end-up and poured a liberal amount into the coffee-mug. Then I slumped into the chair, and drank. I picked up the newspaper and filched through the pages until I found the advert again.

La Barraca Garcilaso

AVAILABLE FOR RENT

Small stone-built barraca in the northern foothills of the Sierra Morena, Spain. Isolated, few amenities. Minimum one month's rent (£20) plus deposit (£10) payable in advance.

For further details contact: Dr. Eli Levy

P.O. Box 3324/7

London W2

Tel. 01 - 584 9643

Something stirred in my breast. Perhaps it was just the sherry, racing up to my cerebral cortex. The boxed advert seemed to grow larger and larger, until it had filled almost the entire newspaper. I realised that I had not blinked. I read the advert, over and over again. I turned the words around in my mind like a musical mode and found that somehow I was fascinated by the name of the cottage. *Garcilaso*. A Spanish love poet who'd been dead for over four hundred years. Once not bad, my Spanish had grown rusty through disuse, but then, I wouldn't be going there to teach a class, thank God. I'd had enough of that! Joe and I could go there, and could start a new life of some sort, a life which would be free of schedules and rain. And guilt. Joe Leon and Margery Morris in la barraca *Garcilaso*. Or we might just make it a break, a time-out. The rent was tiny (even with the deposit, payable in advance) and there would be no tourists. Afterwards, I did my research. It was in an area where tourists had not yet penetrated, an indeterminate place which lay somewhere between the mountainous northern fringes of Andalucia, the region known as Estremadura and the featureless, dusty province which they called, Castilla La Mancha. Land of castles, land of light, the land far beyond. It was a barraca, a stone cabin, and it would be just what I needed. But that morning, I silently thanked the great-uncle whom I had never known. It didn't make up for the loneliness, but long ago I had succeeded in turning loneliness into solitude. Outside the window, in the rain, some children were tossing around a small blue and yellow ball. The ball made a dull, wet sound as it hit the pavement. Like the sound of a skull. I turned away, and downed the rest of my coffee. The manzanilla had completely merged with the roasted beans and though the liquid had grown cold, it tasted of hazelnut.

At first, when I put the idea to Joe, he was reluctant. He raised every objection, every potential pitfall. Unlike me, who had never known my parents, he had lost his in a car crash when he was a child. He had been brought up by the old aunt who had died when he was still in his teens, and he seemed desperately insecure about taking any risks. He had wanted to put my money into a solid bank account, or into Post Office premium bonds, so that it would build up interest. But I told him that it was my money, and that I could do with it whatever I pleased. Then he raised the obvious political objection: Spain was ruled at that time by a baby-faced Falangist dictator;³ to have gone there for anything other than some clandestine political purpose to do with ultimate Revolution would have been a betrayal of everything for which we had worked. It would have been a denial of that which we had in common. He gazed intently into my eyes as he made his points, one by one. He could be very eloquent when he wanted something. *But Franco has nothing to do with it*, I said. We'll be investing in the local economy of a part of Spain which has been deliberately neglected by the regime. But Joe replied: *We'll be putting money into the pockets of this Dr. Levy – whoever he is*. I shrugged. *Yeah, well, he's Jewish, presumably. And you're Jewish. So*, I said, proud of the crude elegance of my argument, *so, we'll be doing two oppressed groups of people a favour. And we'll be enjoying ourselves at the same time! Nothing in the works of Marx, Engels, Luckács or Gramsci says you have to miserable*. I neglected to tell him that I had been, once, to Barcelona. I knew that I had lied to him enough already. I had gone for the architecture and to try and get a feel for the old Civil War up there, but I didn't mention it, because I didn't think he would understand. Joe snorted at my argument. His cynicism had always saved him in the past. He was a non-practising Jew, and I was an ex-Roman Catholic. We were beyond all that infantilism. We were not Zionists, either. Joe was a follower of Noam Chomsky, and believed that Israel was essentially an imperialist colony which had had the effect of dividing Jews from Muslims, two peoples who, historically, had been on good terms with each other. *What they didn't get through the Crusades, they've got through Israel*, he would say. These views were highly unusual in those days, even for people on the Left. In common with most other activists, I was privileged. I did not have to have a position on the matter. I took Joe's opinion as a symptom of Jewish self-hatred, as yet one more attempt on his part to immerse himself in a mixture of temperate internationalism and middle English arrogance. I didn't see my own role in any of it.

But again, I digress. Back to the Spanish idea. I argued that Franco was ailing, and that Spain was on the brink of change. Salazar, the demented Portuguese dictator, had died earlier that year, and the air had begun to vibrate with a certain excitement in which we, on the International Left, revelled.⁴ I could've gone on my own, though I was wary of imitating those intrepid aristocratic women travelers of the Nineteenth Century who would have thought nothing of saddling a mule and trekking across the Marches of any land from the rugged Atlantic coasts of the Alem-tejo to the unchartable steppes of southern Siberia. Romantics, or adventurous imperialists. Nor did I desire to be a package tourist, one of those who flocked to the Fascist regime's bloody beaches. No. My desire was for the Marches, the lands which no-one called home, the lost stretches which were neither desert, nor yet farmland. Perhaps it was my idea of attaining a state of extremes where ideas and action might merge.

Arena y sangre. Perhaps I was a Romantic, after all.

I was weary of the unending grey of the north. Of the exhausted atheism of the London suburbs, where in spite of the fact that the populace is drawn from all over the world (or perhaps, because of it), the moment they slip into the dangerously cold cocoons of Dollis Hill or Hounslow or Beckton, they relinquish everything that was energising about their cultures, and embrace, instead, the dead hand of hubris. Where there is nothing but fall, even pride must slip away. I was tired of struggling always against the odds, of constantly having to fight the undertow. I didn't need Joe, I told myself, at least not in the same way I needed Marxism, but I wanted him to be there, to offset any pretensions I might have developed in the direction of Freya Stark (I smiled to myself as I thought that I was not, and never would be, a redoubtable Dame). Also, I had loved him. I had loved his body, his eyes, the cut of him, and I had loved our conversations and the beliefs which we had shared. Recently, I had felt it begin to recede, and I wanted it all back, or else, I wanted nothing. I was going, and I wanted him to be with me and if he wished to come along, fine. If not ...

He said that he would have to think about it, and he went off to work as usual. I felt sometimes that at crucial moments, Joe was terribly non-committal. He was good at arguing the case, but he would ruminate for too long, would try to make everything perfect before doing anything. I wondered how he could ever have embraced Marxism with its dialectical philosophy. For everything, there was an opposite and you had to decide. Thought into action. The whirling

entity of consciousness encased in the dark mud of physicality. Kant, in the slums, would have been a revolutionary. Not that we had ever lived in anything which might remotely have been described as a slum.

I phoned the number in the advert. The tone rang out for so long, I was about to put the receiver down again. On the tenth ring, the receiver at the other end was lifted, there was an unsettling pause and then a man's voice answered.

—... Yes?

The tone was irritable. I was thrown off-balance.

—Is that ...? I'm enquiring about the house. In Spain. It was in the paper.

My voice trailed off into an awkward silence.

—It's not a house. It's a barraca. It is not a holiday house. Why are you interested?

—I ... I mean, we, quite liked the idea of getting away from it all.

—Getting away from what?

—From London. From England.

—From yourselves, you mean.

I inhaled, sharply. I was beginning to regret this.

—Look - I understand that the property is up for rent. We would like to rent it over the winter. From, say, October until April. Or thereabouts.

—I need to know your reasons for wanting to live in a peasants' shack for six months during the winter. It's not for just anyone. It's warm during the day but can be very cold at night.

—We'll wrap up ... I began, but he cut me off.

—I have to be very discerning about whom I allow to stay there. He paused. —You're not a hippy, are you?

The man's voice was high-pitched, and even when he spoke quickly, he enunciated his words very clearly. He wasn't listening, he was interrogating. I felt as though I was lying on a couch, being grilled by a brown-suited representative of the petit-bourgeoisie. I pictured a small, unpleasant, middle-aged man with beady eyes and a mouth that curled down at the ends.

—I understand. I'm not a hippie.

—You said, we? Who is we?

—Joe and I. Joe Leon, my ... husband.

A silence. I shifted my mouth away from the receiver, and swallowed, quickly.

—And who are you?
—I'm Margery. Margery ... Leon.
—What do you do?
—I'm a teacher. A lecturer.
—In a university?
—In a college.
—What kind of college?
—A Further Education college.
—Remedial?
—What?
—Whom do you teach?
—People. Adults.
—Yes ... adults ... yet there are many kinds of adults, you know.
He paused.
—Tell me, Margery. Exactly what kind of people do you teach?
His tone had grown soft, insistent, hypnotic. Still holding the receiver in my left hand, I massaged my temple with my right. Just the finger-tips.
—All kinds, I sighed. Mostly, they're looking for something.
—All kinds, he repeated, softly. What do you think they are looking for?
—Knowledge, I suppose.
I felt myself shrug, then felt self-conscious, as though he might've seen me. As though he might've been watching me.
—Do you like what you do, Margery Leon?
—Most of the time.
—Not all of the time.
—No. Not all of the time.
—Is that why you're leaving?
I felt a tightness around my ribs. I tried to push it outwards, to measure my words.
—Look. What is this? I just want to rent the house. The shack, whatever it is. We won't damage your house in any way – if that's what you're worried about. We're perfectly reliable.
—What about Joe?
—What about Joe? He's fine.
I didn't want to say that he worked as a security guard. It would have been too odd a juxtaposition.
—Leon.
—What? I asked.
—Leon. That's a Spanish name.

—Yes, I'm aware of that. So?
—It's the wrong end of Spain.
—Look – Mr ...
—Doctor. Doctor Levy.
—Look, Dr. Levy. I understand you have to be careful to whom you let your property. I assure you that we are respectable people who will take the utmost care of it. Now, would it be possible to take this further?
There was silence at the other end. I was proud of myself. I couldn't hear his breathing.
—The place is free from the tenth of October, onwards. I require two months' deposit at the start. Send it to the P.O. Box address. Cash. I need your home address and telephone number. I also need details of your life histories.
I felt as though I'd drunk too much black coffee.
—Why do you need our 'life histories'? What does it matter, where one is from, and what one does?
He paused before replying.
—It has been a question of life and death. And of life after death.
—What?
I was being patronised. I could have put the phone down, there and then, and that would have been the end of it, but somehow, I felt powerless. A slippage.
—It's a pre-requisite to letting the property. Take it or leave it.
I wondered what Joe would think of all this. I heard myself saying,
—Fine. I'll send you the details and the deposit. Where do we get the keys – and where exactly is the place?
A dead tone.
I shook the receiver about, thinking that perhaps there was a fault on the line. Then my cheeks began to burn. I felt a vague sense of having been insulted. He had put the phone down on me. I hated that. I was having regrets about the whole thing, and yet I was intrigued by it. By his manner, by his strange voice, his odd questions. And what was that about Joe? People have all kinds of names. What was it to Levy? I felt angry, and yet at the same time, honoured that someone should have felt the need to ask me all of those questions. Did I like what I did? Not really. And what about Joe? Where did he fit in? Levy's questions had fallen like London rain. Unpleasant, yet hard to avoid and possibly invigorating. I

realised that I hadn't asked him any questions about himself. I was glad I hadn't told him about the money. I felt relieved about that. It didn't strike me as odd that it had never occurred to either Joe or myself that we might have placed the money, not in an account, nor in Dr. Levy's (presumably voluminous) wallet but towards some or other worthy cause. Another lie. But this time, we had shared the lie, silently. I went and made myself a cup of weak tea and set about typing, on my almost new Olivetti, the 'life histories' which Levy had demanded.

I should have picked up the warning signs. The man who called himself Dr. Levy had had a voice which sounded as though it had been siphoned through a tea-strainer. His tone had been high-pitched and slightly artificial, and the silences, which at the time I thought had merely denoted an attempt to throw me off-balance, later assumed mythic significance. The odd questions about our personal lives. But in those days, I just wanted to get away. To get out of a London winter and onto an Iberian hillside. I didn't care if the landlord was hopelessly eccentric and rude to boot. That Dr. Levy was an absentee landlord, an *absentista*, was certain, yet already my image of him was changing; I had a picture of a bespectacled, elderly man, living somewhere in the vastness of London suburbia, definitely not friendly and slightly hunched-over, with a typewriter mouth and eyes that bespoke an age of crushed dreams. But I was inured to such obstacles. Being on the Left in the mid-1970s meant that one had endured both failure and fragmentation, but also that one possessed what seemed like a rational optimism for the future. As though on an eagle's wing, I was carried on a sense of manifold possibilities all the way to Darra on the border between the provincias. And somehow, I carried Joe with me. Joe Leon, who once must have been of that same country, but who had no memories left.

We arrived at the village of Darra in the early afternoon when, even in winter, the heat was at its most rampant. The pueblo was so small, it hadn't even been on the map. But that wasn't surprising, since the one I had (Levy had sent next to no information) was rather out-of-date and anyway, most general maps tended to omit the more diminutive villages, particularly if they lay any distance from the main roads. And Darra, most definitely, was off the beaten track. It lay halfway up a mountain, and I estimated that it was some four-and-a-half kilometres from the nearest bus stop. I joked with Joe that we would have needed a military map to have found it, and that I wasn't exactly going to have asked La Guardia Civil for one. He laughed,

but he was not at his ease. Later, I learned that in the distant past, Darra had been almost magnificent with an alcazaba, and a busy market but since that time, it had descended almost to the status of an aldea, a hamlet. The market was long gone, and now all that was left was a run-down, whitewashed church whose bell apparently was cracked somewhere across the middle, and a couple of rows of houses, all of which seemed to be collapsing into one another and into the cemetery. Some dirty, cobbled streets. A plaza of sorts. The place stank of poverty and old pork, of five centuries of caciquismo and bonded, subsistence farming. Of jornaleros. The tourist boom had not yet filtered through from the African coasts and even the relatively fertile areas of this part of Spain were either reconquista barren or else lay uncultivated. Goats cost less to feed and keep than campesinos, and no cabra montés had ever joined a union. But behind the pueblo, the old pentagonal torre rose into the sky, elegant even in its dereliction. Birds swirled like pennants around its broken turrets. And behind the ruin, an unnamed mountain heaved in an almost sheer, black wall up to a peak which spiked into the emptiness. It was covered with neither snow nor grass but was completely bare as though time and the sun had burned all life from its slopes, and it loomed over the village like some monstrous Inquisitor. It was as though at some point in its past, the pueblo of Darra had shunned the outside world and now was sinking beatifically into dust. There was dust, everywhere. It blew from the roads which were little more than tracks, from the stepped fields, which by that time of year had been burned to an earthenware brown, and it seemed even to seep from the ruined walls of the old Berber castle. It blew into my lungs and made me cough with an almost religious ferocity, until I felt as though I would fold, inside-out, in that place.

Darra had a priest, a postman and a woman who served as both nurse and mourner. Most of the young had left and moved to cities like Merida or Badajoz, and so Darra was populated almost entirely by aged men and women all of whom seemed perpetually to dress in black. *They must each have ten identical outfits*, Joe had nervously joked, shortly after our arrival. His humour was an attempt to normalise a situation which for him, was barely tolerable. We went to the post office for the keys, but found it closed for the siesta, and so we sat on the step in the sunshine and waited, clutching a bag with some sausages and a bottle of wine which we had bought earlier. Two hours on, a man with a face like a pata negra arrived. As he rummaged around in a green metal box, searching for the keys, he gave

us scarcely a glance and avoided any spurious conversation. I tried to ask him, in broken Spanish, whether many people came to stay at *Garcilaso*, but I felt ridiculous and gave up after the third attempt. I expected Joe to be glaring at me in his very Anglo-Saxon way; among the Middle English, the fear of exposing oneself, of seeming ridiculous and out-of-control of the internal situation of oneself, was the greatest fear of all. But he seemed distracted, disoriented, almost. He wasn't used to the dust, could neither speak nor understand Spanish, and in any case, he'd always been an English city man.

As we passed by the last houses on our way out of the pueblo, I saw an old woman, standing in a doorway, her arms folded. She was wearing a white apron over her black dress, and I guessed that she might have been some kind of a nurse. A wet-nurse, perhaps. I tried not to look at her. Tried even harder not to glance up at Joe.

It was almost dark by the time we began to trudge up the hill to the house. *Garcilaso* was separated from the pueblo by the forest which I had made out earlier and which later I learned was known as Montesinos. I saw that the track ran through the forest and that the moon was already rising. Beyond the village were scattered a few cork oaks and some heaps of donkey-trodden wheat. Just before we entered the woods, I noticed some minute plots which had been hacked out of the hillside. I heard the sound of water. I knelt down and dipped my hands into one of the tiny runnels which coursed through the plots. I bowed my head and splashed some water onto my face. It was freezing. Still crouching, I gazed up at the darkening mountain. The stream must come from inside the rock, I thought. Apart from the sound of water rushing over pebbles, everything was silent. Joe stood, motionless. He seemed preoccupied.

The forest was mixture of pine, oak and chestnut, and as we climbed through it, from between the branches, I could see the stars emerge, one by one. As I gazed upwards, my jacket caught on a bramble bush. Carefully, I eased it free. The smells here were stronger than in England, but it wasn't just that. The vegetation, the soil, even the air, possessed a quality quite unlike anything I had ever experienced. In Barcelona, that which I had sensed had been tempered by the sound of car horns and the flicker of television sets and by the ubiquitous, plum-cheeked profile of El Caudillo. But this place lay between lines, in the unspecified region which was beyond three frontiers, in the old borderlands which had never really belonged to anyone except maybe vultures and dying bulls and where the labour was still bonded to the land and to their overlords

whose lineage stretched all the way back to the Reconquista. Here, the electricity was quite different. The vegetation was poor and grew even sparser, the higher we climbed. We almost tripped over the tufts of wild, esparto grass. We were too tired to talk.

As we approached it, the house seemed to possess no shadow, or if it did, then it had drawn the darkness into itself. It was a single-storied, white-washed stone shack and possessed one wooden door, painted a dark blue and a storm lantern which hung from a corner bracket and which lacked a wick. Nailed to the wall, next to the door, was a ceramic sign, decorated with Arabesques:

Garcilaso

I turned the key hard in the lock and pushed open the door. The room smelled musty, as though it had remained unoccupied for years. In a corner alcove were a couple of tall, cream-coloured candles in black metal holders and on the mantelpiece there lay a box of matches. An oil heater stood in the centre of what once had been the fire-place and in the tiny kitchen, there was a stove, also fired by oil. There was no hot water. Just a kettle, a pail, a few kitchen utensils and a voluminous metal sink that looked more like a cattle trough. In another corner of the room was a large, rough single bed and a few chairs which lay scattered about at random. There were no curtains, but only glass and shutters. The toilet consisted of a hole. Joe sniffed, and looked around as though he was trying to figure out just where it might be safe to sit down. I felt in my element. This was exactly what I had wanted. A roof and four walls. Maristan. Asylum. I pulled in the windows and threw open the shutters and sticking my head out, I inhaled the night smells of the forest. Then I cooked up the sausages we had bought in the last town, and we ate these along with some enormous tomatoes, and we drank the wine, warm, and as darkness fell, we peeled off each other's clothes and made love on the planks of the bed. A tired, grateful, blind love. I had forgotten how dark it got in the countryside when there was no moon.

Afterwards, as I lay there, I felt the rough wood against the skin of my back and I listened into the darkness for unfamiliar sounds. Gradually, as my eyes adjusted to the black, I was able to make out two bookshelves which had been nailed to the wall opposite the bed. The books were small and had ochre red covers with gold lettering on the spines. Eventually, I fell asleep. The next day, Joe said that he had slept, hardly at all; the bed had been too rough, he complained,

or perhaps the house had been too stuffy; it was mid-October, and the day's heat still took a long time to dissipate. Or perhaps, the dreams had already begun.

In the morning, while Joe moped around the hut, trying to set things in order, I went out exploring. *Garcilaso* had been built on a small plateau in the shadow of a much larger mountain. And from the plateau, I could make out the sparse pastures in the valley below where the campesinos were attempting to graze their goats, and the row of olive trees which skirted the forest of pine and oak through which we had passed, the previous night. In spite of the lateness of the season, the heat from the morning sun remained intense, while the air was fresh and cool and smelled of slowly-burning wood. On the lower slopes of the forest I came across some large boulders which looked as though they had rolled down from the mountain. *The rock here was very ancient, of the metamorphic type ... something I'd read, somewhere.* I was startled by a herd of black hogs wandering among the boulders. The beasts snorted obscenely as they passed me. I wondered whether Spanish pigs honked more loudly than British ones; it was a new dialectic, something else over which to agonise. I thought that maybe I should submit the question to the next Party Plenum. I saw myself, sitting before a walnut desk – the sort that had been leaned on so much, it tasted of rancid sweat – addressing the comrades. Rain on the windows. Serious faces. *The motion before the Committee is as follows: Do red hogs snort more loudly than black hogs? The ayes raise their hands ... the red, or the black ... the nays ...*

I found myself heading down to the pueblo, drawn by the sounds of slightly off-tone church bells and enormous brass horns. Old army drums. I ended up in the middle of a procession. People must have come from all over, from isolated carmens or barracas and from settlements even smaller than Darra. Los aldeanos. The smells of wax and incense filled the air and some of the nazarenos were bare-footed. I followed the procession, looking and feeling intensely out-of-place. The dressed-up children (so, after all, I thought, there were some younger people in this place), the doleful, bleeding Jesus held aloft and surrounded by weeping virgins, and the drums sounding to military time; I was swept up by it all and after a while, I realised that I was marching in step with everyone else. When I looked up from the main street of the pueblo (really the only street), I could no longer make out the barraca. My view was obscured, not by the low houses which were, at most, one-storied, but by the trees of Montesinos Forest.

The procession halted when it reached the church steps. I almost fell into the people standing in front of me. An old woman and a small boy turned and glared angrily at me. I blushed, and looked away. The trumpets fell silent, and there was a final cacophony of drums, a bang and clatter which sounded more like the clash of sword shafts on shields. Standing at the top of the steps was the old nurse-woman, dressed, like everyone else, completely in black. She wore a plain head-scarf and boots which were laced tightly across the bones of her ankles. She stood, stock-still, and her mouth was open. She was singing what could only have been a lament and her voice was a bird which swooped high and low. I closed my eyes, and I felt that I was inside the saeta and could see, as though from above, the entire village, the forest where some wild boar were hunting down a gazelle, the house called *Garcilaso* where Joe was unhappily attempting to scrub the kitchen clean.

*Como pueden los dolores
herir to rostro siguiera
siendo tu la mas hermosa
reina de la primavera.⁵*

It went on for many minutes and seemed to fill the entire pueblo, the volcanic rock of the huddled houses, the faces of the nazarenos, the very air which we all inhaled, and I felt my chest expand with her voice until I could bear it no longer. I felt as though I would explode. At last, mercifully, the singing stopped with the refrain, *deblica bare*, and the drumming began again, and this time the drums were accompanied by simple, monotoned trumpets. By the door, engraved into the white-washed stone, was a clumsy inscription: *San Isidro*. Isidore of Seville. Philosopher of the Goths. The first Ecstatic. Stuff I'd read somewhere, a long time ago. I thought that perhaps that had been another Isidore. I followed the bleeding Virgins into the church and sat right at the back. I slipped the scarf which I had worn as protection against the sun, further forwards so that it covered my forehead. It was red silk, and it was covered in sunflowers, and in the dark iglesia, it seemed rather incongruous and almost disrespectful.

The priest was clad in the usual florid Catholic ecclesiastical vestments, while the congregation were all in black. I could barely make out his face, but he seemed quite young. I was surprised. I had imagined an older man, perhaps nearing retirement. I wondered,

then, whether priests ever retire. It had been such a long time since I had been near a church. The light coming through the stained glass windows was a deep red, and when I glanced down at my hands, I saw that the skin had turned the colour of old blood. The faces of the worshippers, soon to be penitents, were all of the same hue. All except the priest, who was standing in the altar mayor, bathed in natural light. He held the monstrance at eye-level and blessed the congregation. The metal gleamed like a sunburst, and I shaded my eyes. *Chrysos*. I thought that perhaps, somewhere in the vault above the priest there would be a window of unstained glass. At the end of the misa (I had forgotten how long Catholic services could be), everyone lined up for Confession and then took the Communion. Everyone, except me. The smell of incense made me want to cough, to clear my throat, my lungs. To expel the air, grown heavy with sacredness. I sat on the rearmost pew, feeling unable either to get up and leave or else to join with the nazarenos and confess my sins. I was supposed to be a communist, I reminded myself. All of this was just so much pomp and delusion. Lakes of laudanum. The need to fill a silent, mechanistic universe with the sound of nails being hammered through bone was simply a product of conditioning. We expect God, and so God arrives. We might see him in the broken windmills of La Mancha where the air is dust and opium. And perhaps we might see him in the stones of San Isidro of Darra, in the eyes of melancholy statues. Fine. But it is infantile. The search for solace, for forgiveness. Rubbish, beautiful rubbish.

After it was over, I sidled up, past the crucero and the side-chapels with their eternal sanctuary lamps, to the high altar which was draped in a cloth decorated with sinuous, polygonal motifs. The monstrance was still on the altar, but it had been covered with a white veil. To the left of the altar was a casket on a stand. The casket was the size of a hat-box and was made from a dark wood of a type which I hadn't seen in the area. A pane of glass lay across the top. I went over, and peered down through the window. On a green velvet cushion, was a tiny book which lay open at what seemed to be the middle. Its pages were covered in hand-written verses and the initial letter on the first line of every page was embossed in gold leaf. I leaned closer, until my face and the palm of my right hand were pressed up against the glass. Like so much here, it had a musty smell like that of old wood, but there was something mixed in which I couldn't place. It was colder in the church than it had been outside and my breath made patterns across the book. The outline of a hand, the fingers,

longer than mine. I drew back, and waited for the mist to clear. When next I peered at the book, I made sure I held my breath. The writing was in Latin script, but it wasn't Latin, and nor was it Spanish, or if it was the latter, then it must have been a very archaic form of the language, since I could recognise only a few of the words.

But as I followed the poem, or prayer, or incantation, down the cracked, yellowed page, I began to recognise, at first, phrases, and then, entire lines. It was as though the language in which it had been written had changed as it had been written. It occurred to me that perhaps the tract had been penned by many different priests, over several centuries. But then I wondered whether it might just have been one of those forgotten, pious forgeries of which Mother Church had always been so proud.

*Quieres pobrecillo, que sean prosperas tus bodas,
y eres un siervo dirigido que no dispones de tu persona.*

*Contentate, no te confundas, hasta tener buen aliento:
pues solo prueba nuestro vino quien es bien alentado:
rey de nuestra sesion es un copero que pasa
en ronda su vaso.*

*Rey de esta sesion es un copero, ¡Que bien copero!
Escancia a los hombres con la mirada
vino del Eterno Antiguo:*

*¡Que suerte la nuestra y dicha ha haya este copero!
Conseguimos nuestra lluvia a la sombra de sus bodas:
Rey de nuestra sesion es
un copero que pasa en ronda su vaso.⁶*

*Tres morillas me enamoran
en Jaen,*

Axa y Fatima y Marien.⁷

I translate, more or less literally, those parts which I am able. Since I am an academic and not a poet, I will not attempt to poeticise that which is untranslatable. This fragment, consisting of the last three lines, seems (now, with hindsight) to belong to some other poem, yet my mind, festered as it is, can no longer separate one jewel from another.

I peered at the words until I could hold my breath no longer. Then I leaned back, and exhaled. I reasoned that the book must have been an ancient bible and that churchgoers would have placed their palms on the casket, to obtain blessing. To save their souls. The casket was

bathed in a soft, natural light. I peered up at the vault. The window was not glass as I had imagined, but was made of a translucent alabaster and for an instant, I thought I saw a flock of birds glide past on the other side. I became aware of a presence behind me.

I spun round. I thought I recognised the man's face.

—You were here, at the misa, but you didn't confess, you didn't take comunión.

It was the priest, but he was out of robes. I smiled. I was unused to such directness, such naïveté.

I stammered:

—I ... I'm not Catholic. We've just moved into the barraca.

He looked blank. His long face was half-hidden in shadow. Except for his narrow dog-collar, he was dressed, all in black.

When I spoke again, my voice sounded small. Trapped.

—*Garcilaso*. The house up on the hill.

He nodded, slowly, and came towards me. His trousers had been ironed perfectly, so that the creases were like blades. He looked at the casket. His dark brown hair was cropped, almost military, while his face was long and angular and his skin was the colour of lamp oil. He glanced down at the casket, at the book.

—El libro del cofre. It is very old. No-one knows its real age. Some say it was here, before even this church. Before even, the media naranja.

He waved his arm in an arc, towards the vault and walls.

I followed the movement. The ceiling was decorated with tiny cupolas, like inverted half-oranges. Media naranja. Amidst the ornamentation were elegantly calligraphed Latin phrases. Spiritual permutations. It was not what I had expected, in a simple village church.

I glanced back at the casket. The surface of the glass was covered in a fine, white film. My breath had merged with the dust of this place.

—How old is the church?

The priest now was standing right next to me. I could smell his aftershave. *El Crisantemo*. He must've been around thirty and was slightly taller than Joe which meant that he would've been approaching six feet. Or perhaps, I thought, it is merely that he is wearing high-heeled boots. His eyes were a greeny-brown. Winter hazelnut. He gazed up towards the eaves.

—San Isidro was built before la reunión de coronas. Before La Reconquista. The exact date is uncertain – so many documents

have been lost – but it must've been en siglo trece. It is in the mudéjar style.

—... That's old.

—Everything here is old. Even the cork trees live for a century-and-a-half. That's two entire lifetimes, end-to-end, or six generations. The foundations are even older. The rocks are ageless...

Suddenly, he seemed far away as though he were on the summit of the unnamed mountain in whose shadow countless generations of village-folk had lived and died and been forgotten, their bodies turned to mountain dust.

Then he nodded, and smiled. Looked straight at me. I felt disconcerted, and glanced away at a pillar. He nodded, slowly and introduced himself.

—El Padre Úbeda de Valor.

I went to shake hands, but his remained folded across his jacket. Long hands with thin, white fingers. Manicured nails.

—Oh ... Marge. I mean, Margery. Margery Morris. I'm from England. London. I'm here for the winter.

I felt awkward, and took a step back. Banged into the casket. Through my jeans, I felt the hardness of the cofre press against the muscle of my thigh. I wondered what kind of wood it was made of and from which tree it had come. I adjusted my head-scarf and fought the urge to glance at my watch. I had never called myself 'Marge' before.

—Well, Señora Morris. I hope your stay in Darra will be a fruitful one. Watch out for the thunderstorms. The rain comes down like a river of stones.

His voice was smooth, almost too smooth, as though he had trained it, as though he had learned to exhale at just the right moment. But then, I reasoned, he was a priest. He sweated sermons, bled prayers. He carried the body of Christ in his palm, in a thin, white leaf. *The Good Red Wine*. Something I'd read somewhere. Or maybe, had heard, a long time ago. My reference-points were all at sea.

—Yes. Thank you.

I shivered, and drew my arms around my breasts. The church was colder than I had thought. Cold, red light.

—Well, I'd best be heading off. Need to buy some food.

I felt hopelessly Anglo-Saxon.

He did not reply. His face was in shadow again.

I eased myself away from the casket and walked as slowly as I could down the aisle. Just before I emerged into the sunlight which bathed the rear of the church, he called out to me. I stopped, and

turned around. From that distance, his face seemed almost like porcelain.

—When you said you were not Catholic, you meant that you once were Catholic, didn't you?

I felt the blood rush to my cheeks. I thought of Joe, and of the Party. It all seemed so far away. Like someone else's life.

I half-nodded. Later, I wasn't sure whether I had.

The days passed, slowly. Christmas came and went to the sound of the cracked bell and the endless cacophony of howling trumpets. Pointy hats. Religion here was not so much opium, as malevolent green absinthe. The unrefined type. Woodworm in the choir-stalls; wormwood in the soul. The place stank of crucifixion. And the villagers followed it, blindly. It was a dust psychosis which had been fostered by the rulers over countless centuries. I kept well away during this time. I would do the shopping and the cooking, though we found that we really were not as hungry as we would've been in England. Perhaps it was the warmer climate.⁸ Or the clean air. Our diet was far better, though we did drink a lot more wine and coffee. And sherry. And wine that tasted like sherry. There was only one small café in the pueblo which opened only on certain days and for fixed times. It never opened on a Sunday, and never on feast days, or saints' days. This meant that the place was closed, more than it was open. It was run by an elderly patrón who smoked short Castilian cigarettes which gave off a pungent, sulphurous odour. I hadn't seen the postman in ages; he seemed to have vanished into the land. It occurred to me that if I stayed here long enough, then I, too, might become stone. The idea seemed attractive – but like London Marxism, it was just an idea. In *Garcilaso*, reality was never far away. Hot water could be obtained only by boiling a pan on the stove, and I would wash the clothes in the sink. In fact, by now, I was doing almost everything, while Joe simply sat outside, wrapped in a blanket in the chilly sun, drinking wine. He was drinking far too much. I began to get irritated by his attitude which was so unlike that of our first few days in Spain. *If you wanted to just laze around and do nothing*, I told him, *then why didn't you go to the coast and book into a hotel?* But he just shrugged and smiled, and said nothing. That would normally have inflamed me even more, but somehow, this time I didn't push it. I'm not sure why. It was just a sense I had, that something massive and ineluctable was going wrong. It was around that time that the dreams began or at least, that was when I first became aware of them. They were really variants, rondos, of the same dream. There

seemed a certain sense of familiarity, a kind of vague déjà vu which was very far from the irrational but perfect certainties one usually gets in dreams, so it is possible that I had been dreaming for a while before that night, but I have no way of knowing.

That night, I too had had too much to drink; I had felt the winter chill which flies across the Spanish Marches hover over the plateau. It's not like London, where the cold is gauche and ubiquitous and therefore easier to deal with. In the Marches, the air caresses and penetrates like the point of an épée. It creeps up on one while the sun is still shining and warm, and then it kills. The house was poorly-heated, and I wrapped myself up in the few woollens I had brought along, and sat on a low stool by the stove. I drank sweet, brown sherry from a large wine glass while Joe sat at the table in the corner, immersed in a battered paperback. Some of the books in the house had been written in a high, almost supra-literary castellano and were inaccessible to me. I had tried to penetrate their covers, to evince meaning from the arcane. But my Spanish was not, and would never be, good enough. My frustration at not being able to stretch across the fabric of words led me, as usual, into abstractions; I pondered on all the books that had been destroyed, down the ages, or which had never been written ...

Joe, of course, could not read or speak any kind of Spanish, and these days, his face seemed paler than ever, as though he was getting no sun at all ...

We hardly talked. As the months had gone by and the leaves had fallen and then begun to rise again, we had conversed, less and less. Marxist theory seemed to have evanesced, somewhere along the line. It was strange, how, in so short a space of time, we had moved so far apart. I felt guilty about this, and yet the guilt was not a large one. I had enjoyed our commonalities – the politics we had shared, the rainy days in art galleries, the films, the coffee, the Cuban cigars which Joe liked to attempt to smoke ... yet it all seemed to belong to a former life. I wondered whether, when we returned to London – as return, we would have to, since the money would not last forever and I, at least, would need to get another job – we would simply resume our former habits. Somewhere along the line, I had abandoned the idea of remaining in this land of fissures and crags and zarzas. The cartography of my dream had not matched the contours of this place, and in my failure to span the abyss, Joe and I had fallen apart from each other. I knew that it wasn't just the drink, and that even after we returned to England, things could never be the same. Our bodies

would never be able to dance the same steps. I sighed. I thought of the village and of the mountain. The church of San Isidro. The broken bell. Pig-iron. Padre Úbeda.

I had my back to Joe so that all I could hear, through the breathing of the oil flame, was the slow turning of the pages in his book. He seemed out-of sorts. He'd not shaved for a few days, and earlier, as he had sat slumped over the table, there had seemed a certain laxity which had crept up on him, gradually. His complexion had grown quite sallow since he'd come here. Cautiously, I had asked him if he was feeling alright. He'd said that the water didn't suit him. I had told him he shouldn't have drunk the water but he hadn't met my gaze, and had slumped even further into the corner of the room. I sat cross-legged on the floor, with my back to him, and I poured myself more sherry, and as I drank, I let the warmth flow through my body until the tips of my fingers tingled, painfully. I rested my elbows on my thighs. The stove flame licked and sputtered, and I became fascinated by its dance. After a while, I grew unaware of everything, save the yellow flame. The sherry eased like oil through my brain until I felt as though I was floating and burning at the same time. A humming sound came from outside of me and I thought it odd that there were bees about at this time of night and in this season. My eyes began to water and the tears streamed down my cheeks, yet still, I stared at the fire. And the more I tried to concentrate, the more I became aware of other things. The humming came, not from bees, but from crickets, hidden deep in the winter grass. From somewhere in the woods, there issued the sound of water running over flat stones. And through the cement roof, the stars shone more brightly than I had ever known, and I could feel the moon pull bones from the soil. At that moment, I realised that Joe had gone. I blinked.

He was no longer in the room. His book lay, open, on the table. The door was ajar and the night poured in through the opening. A light breeze blew the pages of his book, back and forth. The noise was irregular, disturbing. My knees felt stiff and my shins ached. I must've been sitting there for longer than I had thought. I set my glass down on the stone floor and got up. I pushed the door, and went out into the darkness.

My eyes had grown accustomed to the brightness of the flame and so at first, I was almost blind. I stood on the threshold of the house, and as I waited, things began to emerge from my blindness. Over to my left, I made out the dark shadows of the trees of Montesinos

Forest, while to my right, the battered peak of the mountain formed a triangular, starless space in the sky. The air smelled of pine and winter jasmine, and its chill warmed my skin. From the forest, I heard the cry of an animal. A thin, high-pitched yell, more full-bodied than that of a bird. It was repeated, three times, and then, nothing. I had heard that there were wild-cats in the area. I drew my sweater around my breasts and walked away from the barraca. After a while, I left the path and waded through an enormous sea of leaves. My legs made swishing sounds, and I got into a kind of loping rhythm, so that when I emerged onto solid ground again, I felt suddenly clumsy. As I drew towards the forest, the trees loomed larger, darker, and I felt a shiver run through my body. The warmth of the day had dissipated, and my breath was a white mist. By now, I had grown accustomed to the moonlight and I was able to make out individual trees. I felt that I knew their names and the names which they had possessed, before. I sensed that I did not need to speak these names. I reached the edge of the wood, and stopped.

The sound of my breathing was the loudest thing on earth. The moon had risen, and was a curved, white blade.

Then the noise came again. This time, it was closer, and it seemed more like an animal wail. A wounded gazelle, perhaps. I passed between the trunks of two beech trees and entered the forest.

The wailing continued, and I followed it like a dog on a trail. As I moved deeper into the wood, the noise became louder, until it seemed as though the singing was all around me. I felt a terrible sense of melancholy. A heaviness came to rest upon my chest, and my steps grew ponderous. I had lost the moon and with it, my sense of direction. I felt myself moving in imperfect circles. Sharp twigs brushed against my skin and caught in the wool of my jumper, which I had to abandon. The trees seemed closer together. I no longer felt cold. Or perhaps, I could no longer distinguish between ice and fire. The voice was deafening and the earth seemed to vibrate with its force. I squeezed myself between two trees, badly grazing my arm. And then I fell into a clearing. I hit the ground and my head swam. I got onto my knees, and looked up. Sitting on a large rock in the centre of the clearing was a man with a long, thin face. He didn't seem to have noticed my presence and his mouth was open. He was singing, or wailing ...

His voice was high-pitched, and it grated as though a blade had sliced through his throat. He was wearing a white shirt, open to the breastbone, and every muscle in his upper body was pulled taut.

One moment, his face would be intensely pale, while the next, the veins would bulge and the skin would become violently flushed. The song had no words, it was a song of his body, of his sinews, his bones. Cante quejío. His voice soared, quivered, died and then somehow erupted once again. He was singing through steel. I could feel the notes bleed from his nerve-endings, and yet his eyes, which were inclined upwards, remained completely dry. I sat, hunched like some fugitive animal, and I felt the ground burn cold beneath my skin. My head felt light ... lighter than it had ever been and I felt that I might float up through the leaves and into the open sky. I recognised the face of the priest, yet behind the skin, there danced the bones of others. *Conocimiento*. The bones of Mukharrik, the butcher's son who had had the most powerful and beautiful voice ever known and who had died a thousand years earlier. And there was Blind Mocadem of Cabra who had composed verses in the Romance tongue. And there was Gharbib the Goth. The cantaor's voice made the leaves flutter and tremble, and I felt the ground vibrate beneath my thighs. My eyes were closed, yet it made no difference; there, in Montesinos clearing, I saw the old poets dance through the flesh of Úbeda de Valor. I do not remember how long his song continued, it seemed as though time, like the moon, had been suspended; at one point, I thought I saw, at the opposite end of the clearing, a movement of branches, a footfall on dry leaves. But when I looked straight at them, the branches were still. Nothing existed except the man and the song which he had become. In some places, his voice was soft like the stream-washed silk of a fish-necked lute while in others, it grew sonorous and melancholy as though he were a dying lion. And then at times, it became harsh and guttural, the scratch of an eagle quill across parchment, and I felt the shudders run through the fluids of my spine. The song was darkness, but occasionally, it burst through the leaves in flashes of white light. It were as though I were locked behind bars of black iron in a prison. And yet, paradoxically, my body had no weight, no substance. I was fire and ice. *Fuego y hielo*. Everything was three words, and then the three words burned down to three letters, in the old language. In Hebrew. Levy. But then he stopped singing, and in the silence, as the zejel perished in the darkness and the echoes of his voice wandered, blind, like the sounds of a stringless lute, I felt that I was falling.

He looked at me, and his eyes were black.

I panicked.

I leapt up, and dived into the forest. I tore through the trees and the zarzas, ripping my thin clothes and the skin beneath, though I felt nothing. Somehow, I found my way back to the house.

Just before I had left the clearing, I thought I had seen Joe, perched on an upturned tree-trunk. His whole being had seemed rapt, his face, his eyes, as though he had been following the cantaor with his breath, with his skin.

The next thing I remember, I was back where I had begun, seated on the low stool, facing the fireplace. The stove had almost burned down, and my wine-glass lay exactly where I had left it. I stared at the tiny flame, and then at the wine. The fluid was the colour of maize, and it rose, just a little, where its surface met the glass. I reached out my hand and twirled the wine-glass by its stem. The liquid jiggled up and down, but did not spill over the edge. I watched, as slowly, it came to rest. I shivered. The flame had just gone out. I wondered whether the whole thing might have been a dream. The forest, the clearing, Father Úbeda. Then I remembered Joe. I glanced over at the corner. His book still lay open on the table. I heard the sound of breathing, and looked towards the bed. Joe lay in the shadows. He was facing the wall, and I could make out the fall and rise of his back. He was fast asleep. His feet were bare. The soles were hard, clean. He couldn't have been in the wood. I went and lay beside him, but did not touch his body. Just before I lost consciousness, I noticed that my sweater was missing, but I was in that state where even the most incongruous of opposites can make the utmost sense and where all dialectics resolve to a single, infinitesimal point, and sleep came at last.

When I awoke, Joe was gone. Sunlight streamed through the half-open shutters, and I got up and stood, naked, in the window. I stretched, closed my eyes, and breathed deeply. My body felt stiff, as though I had been fighting spirits in my dreams. I leaned forwards until the tips of my nipples touched the cold glass. The wood of the shutters was coarse against my loins. I wanted the sun's warmth to ease the fibres of my muscles, to liquefy them so that I might assume the shape which I desired.

I washed, and ate voraciously of the few sausages and bread which remained to us, and I made the coffee, strong. And then I went down to the pueblo. As I walked over the rough stones and earth, I felt my limbs grow supple, as though I had danced for hours. I needed to go back to the church of San Isidro. I had no idea what I would do once I got there, but somehow, I felt drawn to the place with its

broken bell and its arcane casket. And I wanted to see the priest. I had stopped thinking about Joe.

Mass had ended a little while before, and a few stray worshippers still hovered around the steps. I pushed open the door of the church. The air inside was cool and the filtered light seeped into the stone and made the statues seem lambent. My boots made hard, tapping sounds on the flags as I walked up the nave. At the crucero, I turned left and headed towards the sacristía. I paused at the door. Suddenly, I felt stupid. I could simply have walked away. Pretend that nothing had happened. Go on living my fantasy in the sun. My holiday from Marx. But that wouldn't have been me. I had always faced my demons. Sometimes, I had ridden them.

The door opened. I stepped back. The priest seemed taller even than before, or perhaps it was simply that he was standing closer to me.

—... Yes?

I was mute.

—Can I help you?

He was unshaven. I shook my head, slowly.

—I'm rather busy at the moment. Come back later.

I took a deep breath. Moved forwards.

—I want to talk about last night.

I could smell him. Booze and iron. I couldn't take my eyes off his face. He seemed puzzled.

—... Last night?

—In the woods.

I had heard of priests who, forever deprived of women, would drink the Communion Wine, the golden blood of Christ. Chrysos. My neck was sweating. It felt like a deerskin, hanging from the back of my skull. I wished, at that moment, that I could simply vanish, or be swallowed up by the stone of the church. Then I remembered that beneath the flags, there were vaults and tombs where the dead lay, face-up, watching the living.

—I'm sorry. I don't understand, he said.

I stammered.

—Were you ... were you there, Father Úbeda?

Why was I asking? Of course he'd been there. I had seen him, I had heard him singing, or wailing. Cante quejío. The deep, deep song. I could still hear it, echoing back at me from the weeping Virgin alabasters and the polygonal crosses which decorated the vault. Media naranja. Blood oranges.

—What do you mean? I was here, performing the Mass of the Night of the Black Cloth.

He reached out his hand. The lines, scored across the palms. Sand lines.

—Are you alright? he asked.

I was shivering, but I stepped towards him. He seemed enormous.

—... I heard no bells, Father. I was there. In the Forest of Montesinos. I heard singing ... moaning. I followed the sound, and I came upon a clearing, and in the clearing ...

He placed his hand on my shoulder. I flinched, but did not move away. His palm was fleshy, muscular but the fingers were all bone. Momentarily, the bones trembled. Then he smiled. His hand was safely back with his body.

—... Why are you smiling? I asked.

He shook his head.

—I think that maybe you had too much manzanilla.

—It was local sherry, actually.

He shrugged.

—The home-made is the most potent.

—I don't think I imagined it, I ventured.

—The sound of the streams, flowing from the mountains. can sometimes be mistaken for singing. Did you know the water-supply in this area is more abundant than anywhere else on the Northern slopes of the Sierra Morena?

He was dissembling like a tourist guide.

I shook my head, slowly.

—That's why flowers and the trees of Darra are quite different from those in the rest of this part of Castilla. The climate here is not the same.

He leaned closer. I could feel his breath dance like a butterfly on the skin of my neck.

—No-one knows from where exactly the channels arise. The sites of their emergence have become buried beneath soil and trees. But never mind, Margery. The night is over. The black cloth has lifted from the crystal. Your dream has brought you to the church. That is good. Perhaps you will stay.

I shook my head.

—I doubt it.

I was about to tell him that I was a Marxist. That religion had belonged to an earlier stage of social evolutionary development, an

age when men shuddered and prayed every time the sun set over the western Marches. That long ago, I had risen above God. That my salvation would come only when capitalism had collapsed and a workers' utopia had been established by dint of the sweat of the masses. But I stopped myself. This was Franco's Spain. Spies were everywhere. Priests, especially. The mystical body of the Church lay entwined with the not-so-mystical body of La Guardia Civil. I had no idea who Padre Úbeda de Valor was. He might have been a Falangist agent. A black-shirt.

—I'm ... not religious anymore.

My words were falling apart. I felt the weight of his palm on my shoulder. His skin was soft but unlike that of so many priests, it was not clammy. He had shaved imperfectly that morning, and there was some black stubble around his chin. Around his lips. He must've been twenty-five, or maybe thirty at most.

—I'm not asking you to become Santa Teresa, he joked.

I smiled, and looked at the floor. He removed his hand.

—Where is your friend?

—My friend ...?

Joe. Of course. I had hardly thought of him, all morning.

—I don't know, I replied. He's probably gone for a walk.

It never occurred to me that Padre Úbeda had not condemned Joe and I, out-of-hand.⁹ We were not married, we were not even engaged, and I was certain that Padre Úbeda must have known this, and yet this son of the Roman Church had not passed judgement on us.

I remembered the clearing. At the last moment, I thought I had made out Joe's lean face. I remembered now. His skin had glistened like the spine of a snake. He had been weeping. I stepped back.

—I'd better go.

—You're always leaving, aren't you, Margery?

—What d'you mean?

—Do churches frighten you?

I felt the blood rush to my face.

—No. But if you think about what they've done, over the centuries, then they are frightening places. The Inquisition, Torquemada ...

—That's the Church, the organisation. Torquemada was a madman, driven by self-hate. Did you know that he was a converso? That his family had been Jewish?

I shrugged. My heart was pounding.

—I don't really see the difference. Paranoia and lunacy are not excuses. It wasn't then, it isn't now ...

I stopped myself.

He spoke, softly.

—Why don't we sit down? I've been standing, all morning.

He motioned me to one of the pews closest to the altar.

—When you walk into this church, you are walking into several churches.

—I don't understand.

—I'm surprised, Margery. You, who were in the woods last night.

I shuddered, and looked away. Tried to focus on the blood-red images stained into the glass. I'd always wondered just how that was done. It had not been something they'd taught. The Oxford Movement priests of England with their empty pieties. Small men, with callow hypocrisies. I stammered.

—... That was a dream.

He seemed not to have heard.

—There is the church of which you spoke. The official Church of State, Inquisition, Vatican. Then there is the building of stone and mortar and bone. The hands of those who fashioned the pillars, the vault, the statues. That which we do, does not die with us, Margery. It goes on, forever. Their blood is in the rock.

I looked up. The ceiling of the church was arched like a bow, so that it was halfway between a vault and a dome. The cupolas had been covered with representations of las Estaciones del vía Crucis. I remembered all the Stations, from childhood. *The Olive Grove ... the Scourging ... the Place of the Skull*. Burning rocks, everlasting sin, time, stretched on a wheel ... the statues, the velvet, the stench of incense ... Forgetting had never been an option. This pueblo – and the pueblos all over the world – had been immersed in that stuff for far too long.

I wondered which side Darra had found itself on during La Guerra Civil. Definitely nacionalista. Out here in the west, in the land beyond, it was conquistador country. During my stay in *Garcilaso*, I had read between the lines of history. I had traced along the words which had been wiped or omitted from the canciones of El Escorial and from the diaries of Cervantes, the latter by the hand of the author himself. The forces which had expunged the Jews and Muslims and blown a holocaust through South and Central America simultaneously had turned in on the holy land of Spain itself and scourged the place of anything fertile or progressive or even mildly aperturista. And when everything had been done, all that had been left was one vast, empty

March, a great dust plateau from whence it was possible to move, neither up nor down but only to desiccate slowly in a kind of Catholic puritanical wasteland which subsumed the intellect, the emotions, everything. No wonder, I thought, the old Don had found nothing in the cave. Before the Don, the books of the mystic Al-Ghazzali had been burned in Cordoba on the orders of the qadi of that city, Ibn Hamdin, on the grounds that al-Ghazzali was an infidel, ripe for damnation. Standing there, in that iglesia far from any place, I could feel the heat as the pages of *The Revival of Religious Sciences* went up in flames. Even at that time, the rot must have been seeping down from the damp north. I could smell it.

As I craned my neck and gazed upwards, the thorn'd stems of Christ's crown twisted around one another and the blood which seeped from his forehead seemed to resemble roses. I blinked, cleared my eyes, looked away. So much death, everywhere.

—This church is built on several levels. There is the one you see ...

He tapped his shoe on the floor, startling me.

—... and then there are the tombs which lie beneath these flags. Darra was once an important town. Before this church was built, there used to be a jail on the same site. The tombs date back to the time of the jail, and are in what used to be the dungeon.

I felt uneasy at the thought of the rack-stretched dead crawling around beneath my feet. I was glad I had worn boots that morning. I would not have liked to have wandered through the church like a bare-soled penitent, wearing the skins of the dying.

—And then, there is the Church which you cannot see. The Mystical Church.

—Yes. The Church of El Caudillo.

He put his finger to his lips. Shook his head slowly. Whispered.

He gestured towards the altar mayor.

—The other day, you were trying to read the Encyclopaedia of the Purity Brotherhood.

—The what?

—The book in the casket.

—Oh yes. I couldn't make out the language.

—No-one can.

—How's that?

—It is in code.

From the shadows to my right, I sensed the weight of the casket on its stand.

—Has anyone broken the code? I asked, without really knowing why.

He paused, and seemed to gaze through me. His pupils were rapiers.

—Like the swords of Úbeda, like the hermandad of the parish, they are not breakable, he said.

The air in the church smelled sweet. I felt naked. Night flowers.

For a moment, I thought of Dr. Eli Levy. Though of course, we had never met, in my mind, Dr. Levy's face had changed once again and now seemed long and drawn and the sadness in his eyes had acquired almost the look of tragedy.

The next night, I did not dream. Joe returned to the house, very late. He said he'd been for a night swim in the forest river. When I asked him whether the water might not have been too cold, he did not reply, and when I asked him if I, too, might share in his balneal delights, he ignored me and mumbled something unintelligible. But his body stank of the reeds which rose from the river-bed and of the night jasmine which grew, rank, in the depths of the forest. His unshaven face glistened with river sweat. A storm had begun. There was no lightning but there was thunder and the drops of rain fell like hard stones on the cement roof. *Ouad el Hajara*. I began to wonder whether he might be on drugs. He often seemed pre-occupied, and would go to bed alone and would sleep deeply, almost unrousably. It was a complete transformation. In England, Joe had seemed so workaday, as though he had been born for the dialectic. I wondered if that had been what had drawn me to him, all those months ago. The mixture of ordered, European argument and simple, English things. His paradox. But then, I thought, perhaps the same might have been said of myself. We really know nothing. That night, as on so many others, I crept into bed beside his curved form, but it took me a long time to fall asleep. The shadows played like children on the walls.

The weather was growing warmer as *Garcilaso* moved into February. I would frequently sit outside and read, or else, would simply be, as I listened to, and then became unconscious of, the birdsong, or to the tune which the breeze played as it swung the linterna di tormenta from side-to-side. Although, by this time, I had given up trying to penetrate the tomes written in bizarre castellano, I did manage to read many of the other books in the house. Most were in a kind of archaic, almost vernacular Spanish which I found difficult but interesting, while the few that were in

English seemed to have been written by travellers from Victorian Britain or (like Chateaubriand) from Louis Napoleon's France who had been drawn by the whiff of the exotic sensuality which they seemed to equate with this land of burning dust and dark peaks. Incarcerated within the covers of a book by the aforesaid Chateaubriand called, *Les Aventures du Dernier Abencerage*, was another, by Mikhail Bakunin, entitled *Dios y el Estado*. God and the State. I smiled, as I shut the book again; whoever had bound the volume had assumed that La Guardia Civil would never have glanced between the covers. In Franco's Spain, Anarchy was definitely judezmo. There were books with titles like *Libros de Acedrex*, *The Tales of the Masked Prophet*, *The Game of The Four Seasons*, *The Living Son Of The Wakeful*, *Collares de Oro*, *The Book of Light Flashes*, and there were treatises on chess, backgammon and other board games, tales of knife fighters, vagabond poets, and speaking trees ... I learned of a character named, *Black Desmoulins*, a Gascon bandit who had roamed these parts, two hundred years earlier and who had been notorious for stealing, both pigs and señoritas from the villages hereabouts. And then there was the clock-maker, who, when his lover, *l' Andonda*, had died of dysentery, had had her heart embalmed and set amongst the brass and copper of the cogs in the largest of all his time-pieces. *El loco Mateo*.

*Ay! El martillo dondo ha caido?
Le pido al Santo Cielo
No me hayo maldicion.
Ay! Darba! Darba!*

*Que se me esta parando el cuerpo
Y no siento que mi corazon;
Parece cano siel cielo se rompio
Me, ha mandado maldicon.*

*Ya estan sonando temblores
Hacia el alba del dia.
Se me acabo las penas mias.
Derba, derba...¹⁰*

And then there was the tale of the donkey breeder who became a hero when he killed a wild boar who was attempting to trample the meagre Darran fields ...

With the smell of the paper and the texture of the leather, and the gold scratched across the hide, *Garcilaso's* corpus of words constituted a folk history which both fascinated and repulsed me. Apart from the hidden Bakunin book, there was nothing overtly political on the shelves and yet the physicality of the tales seemed to me to imbue the place with a sense of resistance which must lie somewhere within all dialectics. The crack in the iron. These people had been crushed, so many times. The fate of La Mano Negra in the late Nineteenth Century had been replicated, backwards and forwards, for centuries. It had been musical chairs, with la Iglesia and los reyes taking the only seats there were, right from the time of Los Reyes Catolicos, on ... and now that the last caudillo was dying, would he not simply be replaced by another? Most people, I thought, do not rise up and dance revolution; whether in the suburbs of London or the village of Darra, most people are so desiccated by either poverty or monotony (or both), they have no duende left. There are only opposing monologies. And sometimes, they aren't even opposing.

Feudalism and the rule of capital can exist in tandem, can attain a homeostasis, which, no matter how ultimately destructive, can be unassailable. Life then becomes just one long scream, *quejío*, at the onset of a darkness which is perpetual. I chuckled as I thought of the London fog and of the tight-arsed commuters who pretended to have no feelings and who lived behind so many veils that they could no longer distinguish the real from the ironic, or indeed, from the comic. Their's was an alboreá of the mind. Capitalism and caciquismo were malevolent jugglers, dancing along the same path.

Then I remembered the Church of San Isidro and Padre Úbeda. The numerous, long-dead masons who had fashioned her from the dust. The blood with which she had been consecrated. The Brotherhood of Purity. The marriages of farmhands. The deaths of singers. The canciones recited in the plaza by nomadic poets. In the old days, the ahdabs would be the only link a place like this would have had with the outside world. But then, I thought, as I watched a solitary, white cloud float across the sky, the world of poets does not exist. I chuckled, as I thought that perhaps they ought to have poets in the carriages of the London Underground. *Mind the Gap*. In England, words had become dissociated from the music of people's lives so that like vampires, people no longer possessed shadows. I checked my own shadow, and then found myself wanting to laugh.

Sometimes, I would go down to the pueblo and sit on one of the flat-topped rocks which had been positioned at the opposite end of

the plaza, and would gaze at the church and in particular, at its plain Castilian belfry. That the church bell was cracked, was certain; the sound which it produced was dull and resonated, hardly at all; yet no matter how hard I peered at the bell, I could not make out the fissure, since it lay, invisibly, within the substance of the metal. No-one in the pueblo seemed to know when and how the campanario had been broken; some, like the patrón of the café, thought that it was just age, or the extremes of the seasons, while others attributed it to overuse ... but no-one really knew. No doubt, a metallurgist with sophisticated equipment could have determined exactly the nature and position of the deficiency, just as a geologist could have proven that the dark stone of the cliffs did have a finite age, and a geographer that the mountain did possess a name – but no scientist had ever been up that church tower, no man of figures had stood on the cliff edge. Our rationality, our scientific method, cannot begin to analyse the essences of things without destroying or changing that which it observes. Perhaps, a quantum approach, with its shimmering appoggiatura, its eternally-unresolved dialectic, its paradox of darkness and light, might yield more. And anyway, I thought, as I gazed beyond the belfry at the moving sky, a man with a large iron hammer and a good ear would be able trace the break just as well as any scientist.

Joe and I had not made love for weeks. We had hardly spoken. He would rise much earlier than I, and usually would be gone by the time I got up. Sometimes, I would catch a glimpse of his form as he moved across the room, and then I would hear the water splashing as he bathed beneath the iron bucket. I thought of how he had been when we had first arrived. How awkward and English, how Stalinist. Now, he would spend the whole day, doing whatever it was he was doing. Sometimes, he would return with a glazed look in his eyes and the stink of river reeds on his skin, but really, most of the time, I had no idea where he went, and I didn't feel inclined to ask him. Apart from the physical aspect – we were in our mid-twenties, and the sex deprivation must have had its effects, at least, on me – I should have been quite happy that we had left each other to our own devices. Our relationship had never been one of mutual dependency. But this degree of dissociation was unplanned. We might as well not have been living beneath the same roof. The days were punctuated by the sun's position in the sky and by the sounding of the church bells. Shadows and silence. As for the nights ... I dreamed, constantly.

Usually, I would be in the forest, in the clearing, and the priest who was no longer a priest, but a prophet, would moan and sway,

and apart from his voice, which every night would bleed onto the stones and leaves, the only sound would be that of running water. Joe would be there, yet we would never acknowledge each other, we would never speak. And Joe's face, like that of the singer, would be thin and pale, the colour of milk. I remembered reading somewhere, in some arcane book, that the prophet David had sung his revelation to his people. I would be aware of Joe rising as though in a trance and of him beginning to move with the song. This happened on several successive nights, and then, one night, he began to dance. At first, his steps were slow, elliptical, hypnotic, but gradually, his movements became faster and more frenzied so that beads of sweat poured down his face, his neck, his shoulders. He was naked from the waist up and his hair swirled about him, silken, long and black like the wings of a bat. At times, it covered his face and during those times, he would be invisible, like the candle beneath a flame. As he danced, his Englishness melted away from his pale body. He was quite magnificent. Again and again, I was drawn to the clearing, and every night, I would sit and watch as Joe danced to the voice of the cantoor.

Once, in the middle of the night, I was awoken by movement. It was Joe, writhing, next to me on the bed. His eyelids were shut tightly, and his entire body seemed gripped by a paroxysm. He was sweating. I got up, and brought over a small metal bowl filled with cold water. I sat down beside him, and sponged his brow. After a while, he began to relax, and at length, he fell into a restless slumber. His black hair had grown long and wild. This was a different Joe entirely from the one I had met in London. I knew that all along he had been drinking the local water. It was out of my control. Yet somehow, I never once considered leaving.

In the mornings, we would never speak about the dreams, though I knew that they were not mine alone, and I felt that somehow we both were being transformed. I had never really known Joe. I had never known myself. I thought it might go on forever, this *comuni3n*, this *saeta*, this call of the one to all. But even in the dreams, even at the moment of highest ecstasy when the *adhab* had reached the very *siah* of his scale and his voice might have torn through the trunks of the trees, even then, I had the sense that the sound of running water, which had been ever-present even through the day, was growing steadily louder. I knew that one night, it would engulf the singer and the moon, and that Joe and I would be drowned in its dark waters. And I longed for the darkness.

My money was running out. Joe had been missing all day, and that night would be the *Night of Piety*. I immersed myself in a bottle of home-made Darra wine. The wine was deep brown and sweet. The green Sherrish grapes which went into making this fino could only be grown in a certain type of soil. Once, in my wanderings, I had come across a vineyard which was quite different from the others. The earth was a light yellow, the colour of fine, building sand. In one of the books in the house, I had read that indeed this sand had come from the once magnificent, long-demolished summer-houses of the law-givers and merchants who had preferred to escape, during the burning months, from the heat of Merida or Toledo and breathe, instead, the clear air of the mountain slopes. The wine was really more like a strong sherry and was very sticky. The sun had set, dramatically, as always, behind the wall of the unnamed mountain, and the violent red of its death had been cast across the village, the forest, the house. The nights had become warm enough for the oil fire to be abandoned, and I sat outside on an old wooden chair which I had hauled from the room, and I drank straight from the bottle. The birds of the daytime were speeding across the fast-darkening sky as though they were being pursued by some invisible hand. Beneath the warmth, however, there remained a hint of chill. Then, as twilight descended, there was a gap. A silence. I had listened to this quiet, many times. It was not merely the absence of sound. As I listened, my senses became stilled. The scent of black poppies, of gentians, of jasmine, seemed to fade, while my eyes had not yet grown accustomed to the lack of brightness. I felt that during that time, if I had eaten anything, I would not have tasted it. A few days earlier, in a moment of playful insanity, I had knelt down and scooped up a palmful of the reddish-brown soil, and gingerly, I had darted out my tongue-tip and had tasted it. I had imagined that it might taste of dead bulls, or of the moon, but it had tasted of nothing.

I closed my eyes, stretched out my legs and let my arms go limp at my sides. I wondered if it might be possible to lose everything, and yet still to live. I wondered whether all those philosophers whom we revered ... Hume, Kant, Hegel, Marx, the great line of Western inheritance ... whether, at the fall of day, they had stood, naked, on the shoulder of a mountain and contemplated falling into the emptiness. Into the void of the old philosopher-physicians, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Maymun. Rationality, taken to the point of infinity. The music of the stars. Al Isfahani. *Kitabo-l-Agani*. The Book of Songs. He had not been from Andalucia, yet he had been of this soil, of this stone. *The*

answers will come only when the stones talk. Hume. I remembered so little, and yet, here, as my relationship with Joe slowly came apart and my money flowed away into nothingness, here, at the end of winter with my senses dulled by the wine and the dancing cold, I remembered everything. The first touch of his hand upon mine, the feel of his long fingers. The bones of a lutenist. The orchestra of a thousand. I had felt his quill strike across the tendons of my body. The time we had made love, not the first, but the best, here, on this mountainside, out of doors in the depths of winter cold. The moon, hanging, not quite full, over our bodies. My face, sinking into its light. Even through his disappearances, the drifting away from a physical love, the lack of words that which was between us that which both joined and divided us, seemed now to intensify and to burst and flow as though our love could no longer be trammelled or articulated and had enveloped the entire land; the dark mountain, the village with its ancient secrets, its blood sins, hidden beneath velvet and glass, the invisible stream whose sound I could just make out beneath the chatter of the night birds. The dark cloth which covered the crystal.

I opened my eyes.

Things were coming back. I could feel, once again. The air was chilly against my skin. But it was not the bludgeon cold of Saxon Kent; this last seam of winter danced enticingly along the architecture of my body, tracing out the creases, the circles, the lines, searching for a weak place. From out of the stillness, something which lay beneath my senses seemed to have become sharpened. I could just make out a few, flickering lights from further down the slope – the huts of cabreros – and the almost vertical cliff-face which towered above everything seemed less dark than usual. The moon had not yet risen. I wondered whether perhaps the lamps of Darra might be casting a faint glow like moonlight across the stone. I walked slowly towards the forest. I had on a thin cotton blouse with puff sleeves and a skirt, the cut of which in those days was what they used to call *midi*. Both blouse and skirt were white.

Once again, I heard the wailing sound of the man's voice, so like that of an animal. A gazelle, wounded by a spear. I entered the clearing, and sat, cross-legged, on the ground. The cleric's face was contorted with the effort of singing, but it was no longer the face of the priest. Padre Ubeda had been subsumed into some thing far greater than the Catholic Church. He wore priest black, but without the collar, and there was no Crucifix around his neck. He seemed oblivious. His eyes were almost closed, his skin was a dark red,

and the sweat streamed from his forehead. I, too, closed my eyes, and instantly became aware of the noises of the forest. I heard the scraping sound of a wild dog as it searched for rodents, and from above, I felt a nightingale stretch and then ease its wings into the shape of a *vaw*.

A few yards to my left, I felt the slithering of a long body, yet I felt no fear. I knew that when the moon rose, the snake would gleam, silver, like a flute. *Teli*, I mouthed though I wasn't certain whether or not I had spoken. The singer's voice was sweeping from high to low and back again ... but there was something else in the clearing. I felt the hairs on my back rise and tingle. I opened my eyes and saw Joe. He was standing, or rather, was swaying in tune with the song. Like the singer, like those who danced for the dead, he seemed oblivious of my presence. It was as though he was possessed by a writhing spirit. He had torn off his shirt and shoes and wore only the thin, white trousers which he had bought in the local market, some weeks earlier. The trousers were flared slightly at the ankles, and through the thin cotton, I could make out the muscles of his legs as they twisted and stretched to the ends of their fibres. His feet, his ankles, moved like snakes' necks. Úbeda's voice seemed to rise from deep in his gut. It was a *voz afillá*, a primal sound and at a certain point it crossed over into something which should have been falsetto, but wasn't, and Joe's arms rose slowly from his sides. As the cante rose higher and higher into the night, so Joe's arms floated upwards, and all the while, the tips of his fingers were coiling and uncoiling. With every moaned *ayeo*, *ayeo*, his frame contorted like that of a dying man beneath the singer's portamento. It was as though he needed to stretch beyond his own, failed body, as though he desired nothing more than to become a snake. When the singer's voice dropped into silence, Joe continued to dance, but more slowly than before, so that his every movement was accentuated, agonising, beautiful. *Amor loco*. His sweat smelled of blood. His skin poured into shadow. With his nakedness, he filled the clearing and the silence with the bitter scent. I smelled the bitter scent of willow leaves and I realised that the entire grove was bounded by a giant weeping willow with leaves shaped like lances. It must've been ancient, to have grown so huge, so all-encompassing. Its roots must stretch like arms, I thought, far beneath the earth and perhaps all the way to the pueblo, to the church of San Isidro. The limbs of the willow would live within the *nemoroso* of the church where once there had been a dungeon and within the dungeon where once there had been a mosque. And they

would breathe at the heart of the mesquita, where the mihrab wept for the dolorido sentir of human life. The only sound was that made by his feet like that of bastones as they struck the hard floor of the clearing. His steps were measured and ritualistic, and there were dark streaks across the skin of his ankles which, at first, I thought had been made by soil, but then realised were actually of blood. In the darkness of the clearing, the blood was almost black. He was moving so fast that the voice of the singer no longer seemed to lead him. At times, it seemed as though the dancer – the man who once had been Joe, but who, long before that, had been Yusuf of Leon – was creating the voice through the movements of his fingers, by the rhythm beaten out by his soles, by the swaying of that torso which so often had possessed mine. Yet as he danced, he did not breathe.

As I watched him, I began to feel giddy. I wondered whether perhaps it was the singer who was not breathing. But such a thing would be impossible, I reasoned. I felt tiny snakes rage through my body. I got up, to try and shake them off. But the more I tried, the further I was swept into the dance. I felt my long hair swing, to and fro, about my shoulders, my neck. I found myself moving, up close to Joe. His eyes were open, but he seemed not to see me or at least, he did not see that it was I, Margery Morris from London, from the Home Counties which had never been my home. I don't know whether it was the perspiration which was running into my eyes, or the over-sweet wine I'd had earlier, or whether it was the lack of oxygen, due, perhaps, to the breathing of the enormous willow, but I, too, began to lose track of Joe's face, and felt only the swirling movements of his muscles and the cry of the song which merged with his twisting, stamping form. I could no longer tell the difference between Úbeda and Joseph. In the moonlight, they had become, one. The cantaor, the bailaor. The darkness. Levy. The bitter, yellow aroma of the willow's spring catkins, the deep, animal sweat. Joe's smell, growing stronger, the hardened earth, the stones, sharp as knives beneath my feet, the sweep of tiny branches against my back ... That which I smelled and that which I felt opened up and flowed into the song which I knew had become a *saeta* without fanfare, without idols. I felt my body move, wordlessly, towards a climax where the highest and lowest notes, the *siah* and the *sajah*, would come together at last and where all dialectics would be resolved. It was a single note, sustained in a shivering intensity beyond breath, beyond possibility, and it erased everything. I stood, motionless, my mouth opened and something gushing from me. I was no longer

conscious of the singer, or of Joe. I was no longer conscious of my own body, but only of the one, perfect note. *A minor*, dominant cadence. Geometric freedom. I sensed, beyond sense, that Joseph, the forest and I were one, and that, many centuries earlier, in the town square of Aloya, I had danced the hezej and the ramel to the lute of Oraib the Elegant, the Tall, the Beautiful who had lived to the age of ninety-six and who had loved the poet, Ibn Al-Modaber, and that I had learned my art at the singing school of Jamila, the Queen of Song. And I had danced in the Triana to the verses of Muhammad bin Carloman. And once, in the dead of night, *Shubb leila-tull qadar*, in the Moorish castle behind the village, I had danced for the blackbird, himself. For Ziryab. He, who had added the fifth string to the lute, the red, the soul string. And he had played with his fists moving like metal, like silver, over the body of the lute and I had danced to the spirit string and the spirit had taken me and the darkness had been filled with light. *Ya hajam!* And from the gates of the alcazaba, I had even crossed the Marches with the warrior poets who had fought with both weapons and verses. *Guerra a fuego y a sangre*. And later, I performed before el rey Alfonso X el Sabio at his Murcian College of Music. And later still, in the time of the moriscos, I had spun the tale of Las Tres Morillas and I had been Axa, Zohra and Marien. I had been the Jew, the Christian and the Muslim. Number, Harmony, Truth.

*Tres morillas me enamoran
en Jaen,
Axa y Zohra y Marien.
Tres morillas tan garridas
iban a coger olivas
y hallabanlas cogidas
en Jaen,
Axa, Zohra y Marien.
Y hallabanlas cogidas
Y tornaban desmaidas
y las colores perdidas
en Jaen,
Axa, Zohra y Marien.
Dijeles, ¿quien sois, senoras,
de mi vida robadoras?
Christianas qu'éramos moras
de Jaen,*

*Axa, y Zohra y Marien.
Con su gran hermosura,
crianza, seso y cordura
cautivaron mi ventura
y mi bien,
Axa y Zohra y Marien.¹¹*

And my body wept into the cante quejío as I was tortured and burned and driven from my own land. Number, Harmony, Truth. But a part of me stayed and hid itself, deep within the deepest songs, the peteneras, the fandangos, the solearas, the siguiiyas. And the saeta, the saeda, the deepest disguise of all. I secreted myself, the lion-string of my spirit, into the bellies of their idols, their saints, their holy weeks. And I made their saints weep blood. I flowed through the wastelands of the Marches, bringing forth from stone, the flowers of spring. The sound of drums and trumpets. Swords on shields. Fire. Dance.

All my senses had rolled into one. This must be what it feels like when one dies, or is born, I thought, and the very fact that I had thought it, made me realise that the song had ended. I had stopped dancing, and my body felt limp and exhausted. And then Joe looked at me. His mouth opened. *You killed my child*, he shrieked, and his high-pitched voice grated like that of Doctor Levy. Levy of Leon ...

And then it came to me. A fake advert. A fake child. Abortion. Ugliness. Dirty blood. I began to shiver, and I drew my blouse around my chest. The cotton was thin and damp, and through it, I could feel my ribs. His eyes were burning hazel. I smelled the fire. *Playera*. He was crying, and his face was that of Levy as I had pictured him so many months earlier. Just above his head, a golden crown seemed to hover, fleetingly. I looked away. Closed my eyes. I hadn't seen the singer leave. The cantaor. The priest. Levy. From far off, I made out the sound of running water. I was no longer certain of my own name. I was no longer certain of anything. I felt utterly alone. I heard the movement of a branch. I wheeled around. I saw the branch come to rest. Joe was nowhere to be seen. I wiped the hair out of my eyes and dived towards the branch.

I pushed my way, barefoot, through the thick foliage. My feet were bleeding and as I followed the sound of the stream, now also were my hands and arms. Water, rushing over stones, smoothing them down until they were like whitened bones. Water, in my head. My skirt caught on a zarza and spun me around. I stood there for a moment, stuck to the bramble bush. Then I pulled myself free,

causing the white material to tear. But it didn't matter. My bra-less blouse was already ripped and bloody and my breast was partially exposed. The skin seemed inordinately white, as though the moonlight had dripped, molten, onto my body, transforming it. Or maybe it was the loss of blood ...

The sound of the river grew steadily louder until its pulse filled the night. I made one, last heave and was out of the bushes. A cool breeze blew across my neck. I threw my head back and let the breeze caress my hair, the backs of my thighs. I could feel the water flowing close by my feet. The moon had set and the starlight hardly penetrated through the tops of the trees. The darkness was almost total. I blinked, slowly, but there was no difference. I called out his name, *Joseph Leon! Comrade Joe!* but there was no reply. My voice was swept into the din of the river. I stepped forwards, but the ground fell away beneath me and I tumbled onto my back. I felt the frozen mountain water flow over my feet, washing away the blood, the dirt. I propped myself up on my knees and scooped some river water into my palms. Washed my face. I felt wide awake, and my wakefulness possessed a different quality than before. I looked up. Dubhe, Merach, Alioth, Mizar, Alkaid ... the stars danced fractals across the sky. Constellations. The Plough, the Ship, the Boar. The boar had killed Joe. And the stars whirled around in the blackness until they were a band of light, a *teji*, a great snake in the sky. I had been bitten by the pole serpent, by the river-worm, La Serpiente. I lay back again. The ground was not cold. I exhaled. I knew that Joe had leapt into the river and that I would never see him again. But at that moment, I felt as though I could have reached out and touched the underbelly of the *teji* and looped it around the darkened moon and brought the moon down into the river where Joe would lie always, journeying forever into the night. Levy. Saeta. Saeba. The arrow.

After what seemed like hours, I rose and made my way out of the forest and down to the village. I had no watch, but I knew from the stars that dawn still lay several hours away. The air was at its coolest. It was early morning, on the 9th of Ab. It was the time when people die. The time of final exile. *El último exilio*. I felt the aguardiente, rough in my gut. Even the blue cock had not yet crowed. I knew that like the willow, the events of the night and the transformation over that winter of Joe were linked with the church of San Isidro. The pueblo was silent, the windows of the houses, dark. Everything hovered on the brink of Semana Santa. Tragic week. The church walls had been cleaned and they glowed with an incandescence akin to that of

antique crystal or alabaster. But it's just the whitewash, I thought. The skin. Beneath the watery paint, beneath the lying patina, the stone was black and the window in the vault, red. I walked straight up to the puerta principal and pushed it open. The faint starlight filtered through the stained windows, casting loping, arched shadows across the rows of empty pews. My body recoiled, even after all that had happened. The whiff of incense, like that of sulphur, is pungent to the nostrils. It had been the night of the *misa de difuntos*. I was alone, yet the place seemed occupied. I wondered about the rumour that some villagers who had been betrayed to the Nacionalistas by the Ecclesiastical authorities during the Civil War had been buried beneath the flagstones of La Iglesia de San Isidro. And before that, the garroted bodies of the leaders of the Mano Negra had been brought to this place and secretly buried beneath the stone. As I walked up the nave, I glanced to left and right. The windows told stories, and I knew their stories. *Embrujo*. A town, filled with images of prosperity and plenty. Ears of corn. *Soleo*. The gathering of the olives. Toledan silver, Cordovan crystal, silk from al-Gharanata. Saidi. Africans, lords. The fondak of traveling marabouts. The kaisariya of jewellers and of those artists who made perfumed oils. *Asolear*. The drying in the sun of the harvest. Then came swords and fire. *Guerra a fuego y a sangre*. Severed heads. A town, burned alive. Mass conversions. Expulsions. Moriscos and conversos. The hand of Fatima, of Hazrat Saeda, bleeding, nailed to a cross. And *Taqqiyya*, the great concealment. In the wine-cup, in the ciborium. Gold into lead. Alchemical reverse. Beneath the velvet, I gazed into the casket, at the miniature book with its strange lettering, its scribbled code, its hidden liturgy. Its calligraphies of the soul. The book pullulated with blue light.

Suddenly, the church felt oppressive, and the stone seemed to weigh down on my back, on my chest, so that I couldn't breathe.

I became dizzy. The letters swam before me. I heard the rhythmic clashing of swords on shields. And at last, I understood.

*Now we are far apart
one from the other
my heart has dried up
but my years keep falling
We were two secrets
held by the heart of darkness
until the tongue of dawn threatened to denounce us.
Not even sleeping can I have*

*peace in my thoughts.
For I have a continuous ailment
which my body is suffering
to fulfill your love.*

I raised my fist. The sound grew louder and louder, until it filled the entire church. Metal on stone, metal on metal. Beneath the words, the dance. The Verse of Light.

*Aleph Lam Mim
Yud Heh Vav*

Beginning, middle and end. God, angel and human. I breathed in as deeply as I could, then let the air run out over the dry parchment of my tongue, my lips.

In one movement, I brought down my clenched fist and smashed the glass. A dull sound, and then there was the tinkling of shards on stone. I felt no pain.

The light which shone through the window-stains grew brighter and the light was of many different colours. *Peteneras.*

*They are going to depart
Towards the Sierra Morena
There goes an army
And they call its captain
The Jew Elias.
The viceroy has declared
That Moors
And Jews
Will no longer be allowed into Cadiz.*

I reached down, into the brittle, green velvet and I lifted the kitaab. It felt cold beneath my fingers. Around the edges of the book, tiny stones had been embedded into the leather. Sapphires. A river of sapphires. There were streaks of red across its pages. It took a moment for me to realise that my hands were covered in blood. I peered at the words, trying to decipher their code through the blood.

*Who named you Solea?
You are the queen of song,
Of this incomparable song.*

*Serrana, I hold you by the hand,
Little Serrana, by the hand.
I sing to you in the style of Cordoba
And I treat you like a brother.*

Holding the book in the palm of one hand, I reached down again and lifted the velvet from its corners. It came away in a cloud of dust which stank of bullskins. Beneath it, in a secret compartment, lay what looked like a large wallet. I realised that it was this which, before, had given off the stink of bullskin. Of sepharad. I balanced the book on the edge of the casket and picked up the wallet. It was an old-style wallet which was more like a purse, with large flaps on either side. Gently, my hands trembling, I opened the flaps. Reached inside. Touched something cold.

I recoiled. It felt like a finger.

Gingerly, I tried again. This time, I pulled out the object.

It was a hand. A withered, blackened hand. The fingers were long and tapered at the tips like those of a lutenist. Or a dancer. The nails were intact and were well-manicured. It smelled of roses. The integument was stretched tightly across the bones so that it seemed more like snake skin than human. The organ had been severed at the wrist and yet somehow, there seemed a completeness about the hand, as though the entire history of the body to which it once had belonged remained clenched within its palm. It had been burned, charred. For a moment, I felt the searing pain of the pyre. The desperate, unknowable agony of being roasted alive. The screams. The stench of opened guts, of flesh turning to liquid, and bones to smoke. Scorpions over roses. *Aleph Lam Mim.* Beginning, middle, end. The long winter. I shivered. Diablerie. I heard footsteps.

I spun round, knocking against the side of the casket as I did so.

A loud thud. The book had fallen to the floor. Some paper had come loose from the binding. It looked familiar. These pages were of a different size, and were newer, than those of the book. Then I realised that it was our life histories. The sheets I had typed out, all those months ago, for Dr. Levy. Now they seemed hideous to me.

A figure approached from the direction of the sacristía. He was limping.

I froze.

I thought it was Úbeda, but as the figure emerged from the shadows, I saw that it was the pata negra. The cartero who had given us the keys, that first evening in Darra. It seemed like a lifetime ago.

He stood, some six feet from the casket. Two steps from me. In the filtered, red light, the lines around his eyes and mouth were even more deeply etched into the flesh than they had been in the daylight. Before, I had thought that his face had been like a pata negra, a leg of dark ham, but now, in the red ochre glow of the iglesia and with beads of sweat tasselling his brow, the integument stretched across the bones was more like the skin of a toro.

He said nothing, but his eyes moved slowly from my face to my hand to the cofre and back again. His eyes were black.

—Where is Úbeda? I asked. I was looking for him ...

My voice grated in my throat. I wanted to cough. He did not reply. I went on, ridiculously.

—Padre Úbeda de Valor. He knows all about this.

I gesticulated towards the mess of paper which lay on the floor. Blood flew from my hand in a red arc and splattered across the altar cloth.

The postman watched.

I felt my body implode.

—It's his fault, I shouted, raucously, he knew all about us! Dr. Levy, Eli Levy, the bastard, he planned it all!

My voice broke into pieces against the media naranja of the vault and the alabaster of the dome window.

The cartero was unmoved. It occurred to me that he, too, might have been in on it. What if I was to be shackled in the mosque-dungeon, to the garroted ghosts of the Manu Negra and the even older judezmo spirits of the conversos?

I clutched my bleeding hand to my chest, and backed away from the cartero and the broken cofre. When I reached the crucero, I felt my body drown in white light.

I turned and almost ran from the church. I felt the glare of angry, glass saints burn into my back. As I left Darra, I saw a thin young woman standing silently in a doorway. Her arms were folded and she was staring at me. I tried to seem unhurried.

It was only when I reached the edge of the pueblo, as dawn's bloody tongue licked across the sky, that I realised that I was still clutching the hand. The blackened fingers were covered in blood. My blood.

By the time I reached *Garcilaso*, I knew what I had to do. I pushed aside the bed and hastily, using the kitchen skewer, I prised up one of the floorboards. The earth beneath the house was soft and dry and yellow like Sherrish sand, and digging a hole was easier than I

had expected. I dug deep. I wrapped the hand in thick polythene, and buried it there, beneath the Spanish house. I knew that I had to leave. I reasoned that I was not in danger. Father Úbeda would never be able to inform the authorities. La Guardia Civil, secular representatives of the mystical body of Spain, inheritors of the blood mantle of the Great Inquisition, would surely not have taken kindly to the thought of a priest hiding away secret Mudéjar and Sephardic texts, let alone to a statue-less subversion of the night-time saetas. The leilas. The dark dances. But what of the cartero? Might he not be a falangist agent? Un cacique. After all, I had just desecrated his church and insulted his padre. But then, I thought, who would believe an ancient aldeano with a face like a black ham. That was how the pueblo, el pueblo elegido, had survived. By remaining beneath notice. By hiding behind the haunch of a boar, beneath the skin of a bull. No, I was safe on that account. Politically, the danger was measured, relative, its possibilities, finite. I washed the blood from my hands, feet and face, and changed into my sober, London clothes. I packed what little I had, took the keys and left. Following a circuitous loop which avoided Darra, I walked the four miles to the bus-stop in the shadow of the unnamed mountain. The air felt fresh on my cheeks, and every so often, I would let my lids close and then open again, as though to confirm that I was still alive. My hand was swathed in a large, white, cotton handkerchief, and I kept checking that the blood had not seeped through the material. I did not think of Joe. I did not look back.

Later, as the bus trundled away from the valley, I pressed my hand against my side, to try and stanch the bleeding. I was relieved that the bus was almost empty. As it drew around a tight corner, from halfway up the mountain, the glare from the front window of the house almost blinded me, and I shielded my eyes. It burned against the skin of my cheek. Up there on the hill, it was like another sun. I looked away, down at the valley floor and towards the river which I knew would be flowing fast over dark stone, but which, from the height of the road, seemed frozen like a silver reed. When I looked again at the house, the light in the glass had faded and I could no longer make out the windows. Down in the village, the first of the Easter processions was beginning to gather in the plaza. I was too far away to hear the drums.

Back in London, I did try to contact Doctor Levy, but the phone number had been disconnected and my letters to the P.O. Box were returned, unanswered. I got another job (in those days, it was not

difficult to pick up where one had left off, to scoop up the broken pieces of one's life) and tried to forget about Joe, *Garcilaso*, Darra, the priest, the Workers' Party, the whole thing. I put it behind me, as an Englishwoman ought. No-one missed orphan Joe. No-one, that is, except me. He was like a wound in my side, a note, ripped from a symphony. Unscored. I never married, never had children. Those desires had all been burned away. Like so many, I have simply grown old.

Now, as throughout the world, capitalism slowly collapses beneath its own weight and as the bourgeois democracies implement increasingly repressive measures on certain, scapegoated sections of the populace, it seems that old Karl was right, after all. Back in the late Twentieth Century, we had terrible doubts; we imagined that socialism and communism might be sophistries, mere products of wishful thinking, a utopian mixture of Talmudic justice and Swabian economics; now, it seems so obvious: the nation-state could no more have been the boundary condition for capitalism's demise, than it could have been for socialism's construction. And Marx is all that lies between us and a new Dark Age. But this time, it will not be a steel socialism, a mindless, cannibalistic monster that crushes the human spirit, a fiction, which in pursuit of absolute realism, destroys reality and eventually spawns only rabid right-wingers. It will be a politics rooted in physicality. In dance. Marx wrote the code; it is for us to unlock it. Even as my own life ebbs away, I am still a communist. Perhaps, now, I am more deeply a communist than I was, fifty years ago. Perhaps, now, I am a Marxist of the soul.

Last month, I saw Joe, sitting in a café. You might say that I imagined it, that fifty years of wishful thinking, combined with an excess of coffee, had led me to fantasise that my lover had returned to the haunts of our youth. He seemed no different – it was as though he had not aged at all. My heart beat faster and I had the urge to run up and greet him. Hey, Comrade, where have you been all these years? *Joe Leon!* But half a century of programming had left their mark. The English Way runs through the seam of my muscles, the sap of my bones. And I looked away, avoided the familiar, ran from my own blood. I looked away and concentrated on the trivial, the neutral. And when, with fearful hope, I glanced back, he had gone. I began to wonder whether perhaps I might have imagined the entire thing; Darra, Montesinos, *Garcilaso*, Father *Úbeda* ... even Joe. When I thought about it (and during those long, strange

weeks after my first sighting of the man whom I had loved so many years earlier, I did little else, but think of it), I began to realise that it was possible that the events and the people might merely have been products of a kind of desperate insanity, brought on, perhaps, by an excess of unrequited sexual energy combined with a collapse of idealism. It struck me now as odd that I had never seen Joe talk to anyone else, nor could I remember having actually heard anyone address him directly. But then there was the matter of the inheritance. The money had long gone, frittered away on this and that. To have deluded myself, out of loneliness (or solitude – call it what you will) that I really did have relatives who would do the honourable thing and die without leaving a will ... to have produced such an elaborate confabulation would have been beyond the powers of even my desperation. Perhaps, this same *amor loco* would creep up on me again, would hover before my eyes like an old, dark shadow. And yet, soon, I would be blind, deaf, unfeeling, unmoving. I became very afraid when I thought in this way. And then I would marvel, in a dissociated, intellectual manner, at how it was still possible to feel such fear in the face of death's immanence. But then, I never really believed my own, flawed logic – not really – I mean, Joe had been such a physical presence to me and anyway, I reasoned, to hallucinate imperfection would have been not only impossible, but monstrous.

Perhaps it was my own doing, but after that, I kept seeing him in all sorts of places. His presence grew with the headaches. I saw him in shops, in the library, walking down the street. At the hospital, where they are attempting to treat the cancer that is in my brain and which, I know, sooner or later, will kill me. I feel it puncture my thoughts. I have lost the ability to discern whether my emotions and ideas arise from my own mind or from that of the tumour. But perhaps, it was always, thus. Perhaps the tumour was there, back then, as a seedling, a replacement for the life I had taken. Fifty years in darkness, a veiled crystal. Joe's child, grown malevolent. I have changed, and I have remained the same. But always, Joe Leon was as I had known him, back then in the deserted Marches, in the Forest of Montesinos, in the Spanish house. The long, fallow face, the lines of the mouth pulled down slightly at the ends. I never got close enough, in the clearing, to be able to make out his eyes. I began to wonder now whether I was going insane, even if I had not been so in the past ...

One way or another, I had to know. In spite of the fact that in a few months' time, it would cease to matter, either way. And yet, it is those things which are the most finite, that in the end, come to

assume the greatest importance. The one thing more dreadful than assuming an inheritance is its denial.

And that was why, my strength failing fast, I returned to the village of Darra, to the Church of San Isidro, to the shadow of the unnamed mountain. And thence, to *Garcilaso*. I had gone into the church, searching for a grave. That of Joseph Leon, perhaps, or else that of Padre Úbeda de Valor. I had found none. I wondered whether they had been buried beneath the church floor in unmarked tombs, in the old dungeon. The casket, too, was gone. There was no trace of the book. I wondered whether it had been taken to a museum. Moved safely into the past. The church had smelt of secularism and disinfectant. The church had smelt of nothing. As I sat there, on the rock by the beech trees in the pink, early morning light, it did not seem as though I had made a decision to return, but rather, that I had been impelled to do so. I had been drawn back to *Garcilaso* as, all those years ago, I had been drawn to the forest clearing and into the dance. I had escaped then, and had lived my life on the run but Joe had not escaped. Perhaps, like the *zejel*, like the *villancico*, or the *canción*, it had been the fate of Yusuf Leon to be trapped forever between states. We carry our tragedies within us, and perhaps this had been his. And yet, I thought, as I rose from my stone seat, what a glorious tragedy, so unlike my own! My past would never be safe. The breeze was light and clean with the scent of winter jasmine and suddenly I felt almost deliriously refreshed so that I made the remainder of the distance to *Garcilaso* in less than fifteen minutes. I reached the small plateau, just as the sun was rising from the south-east. To the north, the mountain whose name I had never learned, seemed to have caught fire and its sheer rock-face rose before me like a giant, red curtain. I thought I made out a tiny figure on the summit. I rubbed my eyes, and looked again ...

It had been a trick of the light, merely. A small flock of birds, perhaps, or a tower of dust.

As I had expected, the barraca was still there. Somehow, I had never considered the possibility of its absence, any more than I had considered the possibility that one morning, the sun might not rise or that there might be no birds in the sky. *One morning, the sun will rise as it always has, yet I will not be here to watch it.* I sighed. My breath no longer made mist. The morning was gathering heat. I walked towards the house. As I drew closer, I became aware of cracks in the white-wash, and of the small white flowers of the *zarzas* which had been left to trail, without hindrance, over the closed shutters

and even across the door with its peeling blue paint. I swept aside the stems and stood before the door. Until then, I had not thought it possible that someone might be living in the house. Dr. Levy must have been long-buried. Or perhaps, he had never lived, or else had lived, only through others. *It has been a question of life after death*, I thought. I wondered through whose hands *Garcilaso* had moved, over all those decades. Its owners were either gone, or lost, or else, like me, they waited, perpetually outside. I knew that during the intervening fifty years, much had changed – in Spain as elsewhere – yet I also knew, or rather felt, that *Garcilaso* was an exception. I had never discovered the real age of the house. None of the books which I had read had mentioned the house itself, or the mountain, or the river. I felt the sun on my back, and my skin began to grow damp with sweat. Above the forest, a flock of birds rose into the light. I grabbed the doorknob and pushed, hard.

Dust swirled into my nostrils, and I sneezed and coughed and my eyes ran. I pulled out a hankie from my sleeve and wiped my face. Then I realised that I had left my bag by the rock. I cursed myself. It had all my money, my cards, everything. There was no furniture, but only an empty wine-bottle. For a moment, I had the crazy thought that it was my wine-bottle, the one I had left by the fire, all those years ago. I went over and picked it up. It was empty, and was coated in the fine, red-brown dust which covered everything in this country, the land which lay beyond the Marches.

I ran the tip of my index finger along the seam of the glass. Gazed at the accumulation of dust on the skin. Rubbed it between finger and thumb. Smelled it. Then tasted it. The dust was bitter, like winter oranges. A low, grumbling sound seemed to come from beneath me, from beneath the floorboards. It had been nearly fifty years ... the house, the fire, the night chill, the clearing. *Cante quejío*. My body, young, healthy and supple like the branches of a willow. And Joe, my lover. My leones dancer. So much had happened, and yet it was as nothing. The span of life vanishes in a flash like the arch of the jota. Over by the wall, opposite the fireplace, was a pile of blackened wood. Carefully, I put down the bottle. The glass made a dull, dead sound on the floor. Yellow stains were spattered across the ceiling, while in places, the plaster had collapsed so that beams of sunlight shone through onto the floor. The house had become the haunt of tramps who, long ago, had set the furniture alight, and who, it seemed, had burned fires everywhere, except in the fireplace. The empty bottle had been theirs. The hinges, which once had held the kitchen door, now stuck

out from the wood, so that I could see right through to where the sink had been. That, too, had vanished and the pipes protruded from the floor like jagged metal arteries. I wasn't sure whether it was safe and so I tested each floorboard before stepping onto it. My boots creaked as I walked around the room.

Halfway across, I stopped and closed my eyes.

The house was silent. I remembered the silence, the darkness, the stars, of the first night. I knew that outside, the birds would be singing, and that every so often, the light breeze would rustle the leaves of the forest, yet here, within *Garcilaso*, in spite of the cracks in the ceiling, in spite of the splintered wood, the unsafe floorboards, I would hear none of that. Once again, there was just the house and I. And Joe. Joseph. I could still feel the touch of his hands on my body. Yusuf. I had been the lute beneath his fingers. He had strung me with the fifth, the soul string, and I had danced through the Spanish house as Kasmuna the Jewess had danced to the fingers of Ziryab. I opened my eyes and was dazzled by the daylight which seemed suddenly to have become bluer and more intense. The noise had grown louder and sharper and was like metal. Swords. Shields. I ran my hands through the silvery wisps of my hair. The scalp beneath was stretched like parchment across the bone. I was dying. Soon, my body would lie rotting beneath a fathom of soil, and other dancers, their feet bleeding, would tap out the notes of the *zejel* over my bones. And the earth would harden over my corpse and would become stone. *Sangre y arena*. Glass. My head began to feel light. There was no air in the hut. My legs felt weak. The last stretch up the mountain had drained my body of its remaining strength. I needed to sit down, but there was nowhere to sit. I fell onto my hands and knees. The wood of the floor was rough, and splinters stabbed into my skin. The light fell in streaks across my eyes. I felt a deep nausea, a sense of intense desolation. Pain. I felt the cancer, like a demon, pull at my insides. Its fingers were long, tapering. I bowed my head, and my hair fell across my eyes. I moaned, but the sound was outside of me. It was someone else's voice. It was the song of Padre Úbeda, in the clearing, half a century gone. The song of the moon. I could feel the fine twigs, I could smell the bitter stench of willow leaves. *Salix*. My lungs ballooned with their bitterness. And Joe filled my eyes. Joe's body, limp and wet from the caress of the dark river water. A Pietà. El yacente. Joe, as he was, the day we had met. His long, black hair, his smile so like the cut of dawn across the sky. The movement of his shoulders, in and out of the candlelight, as we made love that first night in *Garcilaso*. The smell of him. Sand, glass,

blood. Silver. The distance which had stretched between us – a darkness which was more than just time's expanse – and the utopia for which once we both had worked. The mystical body of the land across which our bodies would be scattered, the soil which had devoured us, long before. And the rich, blood hazel of his eyes as he had gazed into mine, that last moment before he had run off into the river. Joe had known then, what I was learning only now. Joe, weeping. The martyrdom of Darra, of the Moriscos, the Conversos. *La Ghalib illa'llah*. The hand had written of the burning bullskin and of the death of the moon. I had murdered his child. His homunculus. It had been, just one more. *Non deus nisi deus solis*. I was damned. Even in the midst of the dance, I had remained apart.

My fingers were clenched around the waist of the bottle, the nails pressed hard against the skin of the glass. I lifted it up above my head, felt it balance on the tips of my fingers. Then, with all the force I could muster, I wheeled my arm around in a long arc and smashed the bottle on the floor. Shards of glass flew everywhere. My flesh ripped apart like velvet. I felt nothing. Then I raised my fists above my head, and brought them down on the wood, again and again. I wanted to feel pain, I wanted the thudding, the beat, to push out the memories, the smells, the taste of the soil which was still in my mouth, which stank in my throat so that I could no longer breathe. It had never left me. The cancer. It was in my parents' faces, in the ancient photographs from the time before; it was in their dead smiles, their emptied, grey eyes. I was of its substance, and soon, I would lie beneath it. Within it, as now it lay within me. The old, dry wood was splintering, cracking apart. I felt it give beneath my fists. The same hands which once I had clenched in salute to a better world. I had wanted to punch holes in the sky, that I might bring down the stars and the moon and the sun and make them dance around the people. Around Joe and myself. Around Las Tres Morillas. *I'm in love with three Moorish maidens in Jaen, Axa and Zohra and Marien ...*

The wood was velvet and glass. White fire. My arms were bleeding, yet still I felt no pain. I was dancing. My feet were bone and metal.

I reached down through the dry, yellow sand, through the blood and the burning light, and I clasped the withered hand.

From somewhere, far off, I heard the sound of church bells. The broken note. *A minor, dominant cadence*. And from the dark iron of the unnamed mountain, one last time, the river of the saeta flowed across the desolate marches.

Notes

¹ The 24th of October, 1973, to be precise. The early 'Seventies. The Twentieth Century. It all comes back to me now as though it had happened, just yesterday. And in some ways, it feels closer to me than any other part of my past, closer (sometimes I think) than that which masquerades as my present reality. Nearly three decades in, I find it hard to acclimatise myself to this most obdurate of centuries – the age is, I believe, a wholly transitional, one, and perhaps only two hundred years from now, shall there exist a true sense of perspective. But I digress.

² The Second World War, that is. The passage of time blunts everything except memory. It's like a stone at the bottom of the sea. The movements of the water smooth the surface of the stone so that it becomes a mirror. The more you gaze into the water, the sharper the image grows. There have been countless conflicts since the end of World War Two and yet still today, I refer to it as *the* War. Though I was born several years after its conclusion, and though by the time I'd met Joe, the war had been over for almost three decades, yet in those days, we lived still in its shadow. Our politics, our loves, our dreams ... the more we tried to run away, the more we found ourselves entrapped. Hitler, Mussolini, Franco ... Stalin. Names which now seem as distant and unimportant as those of the generals of Waterloo. History flattens everything out, lives become ink on a page, everything is relative, all crimes palatable. Only now, some eighty years on, does escape seem feasible. Not from history – that would be impossible; Marx was right about that – but from myself and that which I have done, or failed to do, in my life. Forgetting is merciful and yet to forget is to commit a crime on oneself.

³ Why is it that the more demagogic world leaders have tended to resemble infants? Think of the British Prime Minister during the Second World War, Winston Churchill or of Mao Tse-Tung, the mid-Twentieth Century Chinese caudillo, or even of cuddly old Adolf Hitler ... Perhaps the deeper the blood lake, the more innocent the skin shell. By that reckoning, a malevolent cherub must be born every second. But not Georgian Joseph. No. Steel Joe was always different. It was a matter of theology.

⁴ But it was a matter of opinion; many saw no reason why things would change in Spain. So, Franco was dying. So what? The system, or a diluted variant of it, would remain in place.

⁵ How could the pains
Wound your face, even
You, who are the most beautiful
Queen of springtime.

⁶ So, poor being, are you ready for a fine old wedding party?
Though you're only a servant, with no power over your own self.
Relax, be happy, breathe easy.
Just taste our wine, with its breath of life.
The king of our company is he who pours the wine,
passes it from glass to glass.
King of our company is the wine-man. And what a wine-man he is!
He pours it out with the glint of eternal antiquity in his eye.
We're lucky to have this wine-man.
In his shade at wedding parties we're sure of rain.
King of our company is the wine-man who passes the glass from hand to hand.

⁷ I'm in love with three Moorish maidens
In Jaen,
Axa and Zohra and Marien

⁸ Though I remember that occasionally, in the depths of a winter's night, the temperature did fall below zero.

⁹ In those far-off days, in Spain, even holding hands in public was frowned upon. Not infrequently, couples would be stopped by the Police and would have to produce documentary proof of their state of wedlock.

¹⁰ Oh! Where has the hammer fallen?
I ask holy Heaven
Not to send me malediction.
Oh! It strikes, it strikes!
My body is growing stiff,
I can hardly feel my heart;
It is as if the sky were being torn to pieces.
It has sent me a malediction.
Already the tremblings, the rumblings,
As daybreak comes.
I am leaving this world,
My pains are over,
It has struck, it has struck.

Since my translations are from memory, any mistakes must be my own. Today, some of the words seem unfamiliar to me ... yet perhaps that is the way of it.

¹¹ I'm in love with three Moorish maidens
In Jaen,
Axa and Zohra and Marien

These three lovely little maidens
Started forth to gather olives
And they sought until they found them
In Jaen,
Asha and Zohra and Marien.

Then they sought until they found them
But returned in grave dismay
And with pallid cheeks
To Jaen,
Asha and Zohra and Marien.

Who are you? I asked, Senoras,
Robbers are you of my life.
Christians are we who were Moors
Of Jaen,
Asha, Zohra, and Marien.

Breeding, talents, and prudence
They have captured my hopes
And my being –
Asha and Zohra and Marien.

Glossary

Ab	a Hebrew month; the Egyptian concept of the heart and soul
adab	in Sufism, a state of mind and of body and being, an attitude which involves having a raised awareness of everything, including comportment, manners, e.g. only saying that which is absolutely necessary; also refers to the literature advising on/relating to this state of awareness. Sufi brotherhoods would work through and towards this state, constantly
ahdab	wandering minstrels
aguardiente	alcoholic spirit associated with jondo singers
alboreá	Gypsy wedding song, originally not revealed to non-Gypsies and generally not sung outside of Gypsy weddings
alcazaba.....	Moorish castle
aldea	village, hamlet
los aldeanos	villagers
aleph...lam...mim	Arabic letters, symbolising (among other things) the beginning, middle and end of time, the alphabet and of the Quranic revelation.
Al Isfahani.....	10th-century Syrian mathematician who wrote the 24-volume 'Book of Songs'
altar mayor.....	high altar
amor loco	crazy love
aperturista	liberal
arena y sangre.....	sand and blood
asolear.....	the drying of the harvest in the sun
el avellano de invierno	winter hazelnut
bailaor	flamenco dancer
barraca	cabin, shanty, hovel
bastones	sticks, originally used in cante jondo, to provide or accentuate the beat
cabra montés.....	(female) goats
cabreros.....	goatherds
caciquismo	having feudal chieftains (caciques)
campanario	church bell
campesinos	peasants
canción/canciones	song/songs, especially if written down
cantaor	flamenco singer
cante jondo	deep song. Flamenco which draws on the most profound of human emotions.
cante quejío.....	wordless, primal cry of cante jondo
un/el carmen	a/the house built on the side of a hill
cartero.....	postman
castellano.....	Castilian Spanish
El Caudillo	the Leader (Franco)
chrysos	gold (Greek)
cofre.....	box
el color del avellano de invierno..	the colour of winter hazelnut
comunión	Communion

conocimiento.....	knowledge, gnosis
conversos.....	Jews who had converted to Christianity
un cortijo	an Andalusian country house
el crisantemo	chrysanthemums
crucero	chancel containing the high altar
debla	basic form of cante jondo, sung unaccompanied.
deblica bare.....	great goddess (in Cali, the language of the Gypsies; the verses of the debla traditionally ended with these words)
diablerie.....	shivering intensity
dolorido sentir.....	painful feeling (of life)
Dubhe, etc.	The Great Bear and some of the stars that comprise this constellation (Arabic)
embrujo	enchantment, magic, bewitching
en siglo trece.....	13th-century
El Escorial	royal palace in Madrid
las Estaciones del vía Crucis.....	Stations of the Cross
falangist.....	a member of the Spanish Falangist (Fascist) Party
fandango	form of cante jondo deriving from Moorish/Gypsy forms and related to the Aragonese jota. The fandango has no compas, no fixed units of accentuated beats
fino	a dry sherry
fondak	outer, unlocked part of a covered bazaar
fuego y hielo.....	fire and ice
La Ghalib illa'llah	There is no god but God
al-Gharanata	Granada
La Guardia Civil.....	the Civil Guard, responsible in Spain for internal security
guerra a fuego y a sangre.....	war by fire and blood
La Guerra Civil	the (Spanish) Civil War (1936-39)
Hazrat.....	Prophet (Muslim)
hermandad.....	secret religious brotherhoods
hezej	type of rhythm in Arabic music, where there is one beat, followed by a rest (2/8)
Ibn Maymun	Moses Maimonides
Ibn Rushd	Averroes
jornaleros.....	landless labourers
jota	fast, almost aggressive Aragonese dance; 'jota' is the Arabic word for 'dance'
Judezmo	Judeo-Spanish language
kaisariya	inner, locked part of a covered bazaar
kitaab	book
leilas.....	(type of) night dances
leones.....	Leonese
el libro del cofre	the (religious) book of the casket
linterna di tormenta	storm lantern
La Mancha	the Marches
La Mano Negra.....	The Black Hand; a late 19th century political liberation movement which was crushed
el loco Mateo	Mad Matthew
manzanilla.....	Manzanilla sherry
marabouts.....	North African Muslim holy men

maristan asylum
 media naranja..... half-oranges (architectural term, referring to stucco design favoured by mudéjar art)
 mesquita mosque
 mihrab..... prayer niche in a mosque, set in the direction of Makkah, i.e. in the direction worshippers are to face
 misa mass
 misa de difuntos..... Mass of the Defunct
 moriscos Muslims who had converted to Christianity
 Mudéjar Muslim under Christian rule and the artistic style which the Mudéjars developed
 nacionalista nationalist (fascist)
 nazarenos penitents
 nemoroso.....melancholy darkness
 non deus nisi deus solis..... There is no god but God
 nuba..... a turn or a time; the actual music/song
 the 9th of Ab..... the day in 1492 when the Jews were ordered to leave Spain
 Quad el Hajara River of Stones
 pata negra..... black leg of ham
 patrón patron (of a café)
 petenera old jondo form, possibly derived from Sephardic song. Said to bring bad luck.
 piedad recumbent effigy of Mary cradling the dead Jesus (Pietà)
 playera primal form of jondo, which developed into the siguirya
 plaza square
 portamento..... in cante jondo, a certain pressure on the vocal cords
 provincias provinces
 pueblo small town; people, nation
 el pueblo elegido..... the chosen village
 puerta principal front door
 qadi..... commander
 ramel..... rhythm in Arabic music, with two even beats and a rest (3/8)
 Reconquista..... the reconquest of Spain by Christian forces
 la reunión de coronas..... the Union of the crowns of Aragon and Castille, in 1479
 los reyes the kings
 el rey Alfonso X El Sabio..... King Alphonso the Wise
 sacristía vestry
 saeba arrow; going straight to the aim; aiming true; right, correct
 saeda my lady, female leader, Princess, fortunate, auspicious, beatific; one of the ten 'faithful' disciples who were assured of attaining paradise (refers to Fatima, daughter of Muhammad; can also refer to Maryam, mother of Jesus)
 saeta doleful religious song, usually addressed to the Virgin Mary or to Jesus
 saidi lordly, Africans

salix willow (Latin)
 sangre y arena..... blood and sand
 Sepharad bullskin; the Jewish name for the Iberian peninsula
 Semana Santa Easter Week
 La Serpiente the Hydra (constellation)
 Sherrish Moorish town which became Jerez (and the grapes thereof – hence, 'sherry')
 Shubb leila-tull qadar..... Night of Piety, when it as though there is light in the darkness (night in the middle of Ramadhan, when dreams and prayers are thought to be especially auspicious)
 siah and sajah..... highest and lowest notes of an octave
 siguirya..... form of cante jondo deriving from the Arabic word, *segur*, 'to lament'. Originates from a primal form, the 'playera'. Expresses a terrible internal desolation
 solea (pl. solearas) form of cante jondo which is an expression of religious feeling, descended, through the zajal, from the chants of Cordoban muezzins. Shares the gravitas of siguirya but without its internal desolation. Solea is more to do with resignation or acceptance
 soleo the gathering of the olives
 Taqquiya The Great Concealment – refers to the Islamic allowance for hiding one's faith and not practising it if one is being persecuted for it
 teli Kabbalistic snake (constellation)
 toro bull
 torre..... tower
 las Tres Morillas..... The Three Moorish Maidens
 el último exilio the final exile (of the Jewish conversos from Spain)
 vaw Arabic letter, symbolic of the universal aspect of the whole, and of reunion
 villancico Spanish song-type, identical with the Arabic song-type, the zajal
 voz afillá primal, grating voice of jondo song
 el yacente a Pietà
 Ya Hajam! Phrase which Ziryab made his pupils shout repeatedly to test the timbre of their voices
 yud ...heh ...vav Hebrew letters, symbolising many things, including the primal letters of one of God's 'names' (YAH-WEH)
 Yusuf Joseph ('the beautiful')
 zarza(s) blackberry bush(es), bramble(s)
 zejel form of Arabic Spanish song which evolved into solea; specific metrical rhythm of *aaab*
 Ziryab..... 'Blackbird': C8th Syrian master musician and singer who came to Spain and had a major influence on music; also a cultural icon of his day

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