

JUAN GOYTISOLO'S NOVEL TRILOGY: A READER'S PERSONAL MEMORY

For those of us Spaniards who came of age in the early sixties, Juan Goytisolo is a special person. He helped us come to terms with ourselves, exposing the emptiness behind Spain's past and present masks--her personalities and historical characters, her institutions and watchwords, her causes and ideals. Masks, in short, that are the reflection of a Name and that make us slaves to our own illusions, even as they conceal us. Juan Goytisolo put within our grasp the miracle of the Name become Human,

that is, the possibility for each person to recreate an original world

Before the publication of his trilogy of novels--Marks of Identity (1966), Count Julian (1970), and Juan the Landless (1975)--Juan Goytisolo was just another writer, another name in the chorus of committed intellectuals opposed to Franco. Nothing more. And we who were born shortly after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) had grown up among just such names, rather than among men. From the pro-Francoists came "Glorious Crusade," "Universal Destiny," and "Empire"; and from the anti-Francoists, "Social Commitment," "Class War," and "Marxism." For us, though, these were nothing but catchwords, empty slogans.

Such perceptions were our unconscious defense, a way to counter the human shallowness of these alternatives. More importantly, this was the only form that our weak insubordination could take--that of a solipsism which refused to categorize either Franco's Regime or the Opposition as human and which refused to take either seriously. There was something in us akin to the silent uprootedness and inner alienation of the then contemporary James Dean.

My generation's apathy was due more to the futile circumstances of that period than to a personal or exaggerated sense of criticism. Since participation was not an option, no energizing opposition was possible. We could not be roused either to support or to reject that Spain in which it was our lot to live. It hardly seems necessary to explain why we were not attracted by the culture or the life-style of the ruling classes--yesterday's or today's. But it is perhaps necessary to briefly point out some of the reasons for our indifference towards the Opposition.

In the first place, we resented their stance as paragons of virtue. They seemed better suited for a book of saints' lives or a patriotic almanac than for human beings of flesh and blood. To us, they all seemed like martyrs and redeemers, raised up on lay altars, high above our own weaknesses and inadequacies: as models, impossible to imitate, and yet equally impossible to ignore. We neither cared for the furtive airs of the Opposition's conspiratorial brotherhoods--no matter how strategically necessary--nor for their ideological clannishness--mirror image, no doubt, of the Regime's narrow catechism of "Triumphalism."

On balance, the Opposition's record, in terms of accomplishments, was just as discouraging: their lack of effectiveness--or was it rather the countereffectiveness of the Establishment--made it plain that their insistence on a militant stance had more to do with personal fulfillment than with actual achievement. Their sermons about social commitment seemed no less tenuous than ink marks on a piece of paper, and they were seldom so firm as to be proof against offers of university chairs, prizes, and, by then, innocuous public platforms.

Last, and most importantly, the Opposition did not take the individual into account. One was just as likely to be pigeonholed, limited, and expected to conform to slogans on one side as on the other. Fed up, we adopted an attitude of passive and unthinking resistance which, unfortunately, became all the more alienating as it became fashionable.

It was then, in 1966, that Marks of Identity was first published. This book showed us the miracle of the Name become Human and restored to us the person, Goytisolo, transformed and able to fight--against his own generation as well as against himself. His eyes were opened and he pointed accusingly at the masks which made us all strangers to ourselves.

While my generation's problem was not exactly the same as Alvaro/Goytisolo's in Marks of Identity, they were intimately related. The roots of our disaffection could be traced to Alvaro's immediate past--to its impotence, its narrowmindedness, the emptiness of its commitment, and its superhuman conscience. Needless to say, the next generation will have to, and, indeed, must already fight different enemies--and it will have its own Goytisolos. But for us, both the pro- and the anti-Francoists' options

offered equally untenable realities. This perception was crucial to our common rejection of both. Whereas Alvaro had militated, we had defected; but in Marks of Identity, Alvaro's subsequent defection met our own--he, full of disappointments, and we, full of apathy and reluctant to get involved.

We found our needed remedy in Alvaro's willingness to confront his problem. He dared to see himself as a problem, and so stepped down from his lofty pedestal to join us in our doubt--to acknowledge his identification with our indirection, with our sense of contingency, of smallness, and of uselessness. Alvaro did not belong to a world of eternal values and worn-out passwords. He had shed the sternness and remoteness of a redeemer to battle anonymously with his thwarted desires and ideas. Like us, he lived in a Spain already full of tourists and a nascent consumerism, already Europeanized to a certain degree, but he also refused to surrender to it.

It was the meagerness of the alternatives which had caused us to "drop out." Then, Alvaro's confession opened up another perspective: that of our individual and concrete lives. While these could hardly be regarded apart from the Spain of the day, neither were they part of the general profiteering, sloganeering, and betrayals.

I did not then, nor do I now, view this solution as one of individual escapism, or of mystical evasion, which seeks only private regeneration. The need for this personalism was, and continues to be, genuine; for the problem--it became clear then--was within ourselves and not, as was conveniently held, outside of ourselves.

Alvaro's painful journey to the center of his failure became for us the journey to the center of our apathy. The strength to accomplish this could be drawn, his example told us, from our own dissatisfaction: that inner destruction driving us to affirm our secret but already irrepressible desires, until then frustrated at every point. This second leg of the journey began four years later, in 1970, with Count Julian.

Count Julian was not an old and virtuous hero of the Opposition. Rather, he was a radical misfit, the pariah that many of us carried within, who, unconsciously and in a typically Spanish fashion, was dissatisfied with the myths of Spanish culture. He embodied our anti-Spanish feelings, condemned with equal vehemence by Left and Right, for Count Julian belonged to neither Spain. He was one of us, sharing our same desires and fantasies of personal freedom. He was Spain's "worst": the heretic, the Jew, the Moor--in a word, the traitor. And yet, he remained as much a Spaniard as the most Senecan of Christian gentlemen.

We saw in him, or rather, we saw in the torrents of words that poured from Alvaro's lips, and in his manic nightmares, a conduct which would tear us free of the morass. We were moved more by the personal quality of his shout than by the object of his insults. What mattered to us was the exorcism itself rather than the nature of the things spat upon, trampled, and despised. Count Julian vindicated his own private gallery of values and heroes, but what moved us was his acceptance of his nightmare and his identification with his demon.

We were drawn, not by the degree to which he turned Spain's hateful institutional traits inside out, but by how alien he ultimately remained to them. We did not admire the goodness of the traitor's cause, no matter how glad we were to see established values opposed, but rather the loneliness of his treason. We admired him because he was forced to draw strength from the very weakness to which he had been condemned, forced to depend on the very rejection to which he was subjected. His unrealized desires, endless but always thwarted, became his very point of departure.

We learned then that individuality consists of acceptance and of rejection--and of the acceptance of rejection. And so, we arrived at a no-man's-land, inhabited by pariahs and misfits, by the dispossessed and

the landless.

Meanwhile, Spain progressed. That is to say, she had allowed herself to be beguiled by Madison Avenue, by its industrialized, technocratic happiness. She even thought that she had overcome, or was about to overcome, her centuries-old atavisms, thanks to mass production, high consumption levels, and an abundance of marketing courses. It turned out that the wishes of the young members of the famous Generation of '98--Unamuno, Baroja, etc.--had come true: Spain was de-Hispanizing herself, was finally becoming European. But this change came too late for us. Goytisolo had already made us see the radical individuality inherent in an alternative progress. We realized how absurd it was to reject the Golden Age only to accept the Age of Plastic and Steel. Goytisolo confirmed this with the last part of his trilogy.

If the vindication of individuality had escaped the reader of Count Julian, then Juan the Landless must have come as a severe shock. It was published in 1975, the same year that Franco died. For Goytisolo, as well as for us, although for other reasons, this death came too late as well. By this point, Juan Goytisolo had lost interest in his country, after the long ordeal of a love/hate relationship which burned itself into ashes and then went out. We had never been either passionately for or against Francoism. For both him and us, the death of the dictator was nothing more than a news item in foreign newspapers; it had no personal meaning. It was irrelevant to the road we had already been traveling for some time. We all agreed on one thing, though--Franco, Goytisolo, and us--namely, that the road had dead-ended in that year. That road had taken us all away from Spain, away forever from our land.

Once Spain had been abandoned, we had only our own presence, our own body, and our own longings to live on: these were the only positive well-springs of a future life as desert nomads--free and unencumbered, vagabond and joyful. We did not feel the need to adopt the Arab world, as Goytisolo ended up doing. That was not the important thing. The crux of the matter was to have achieved a kind of insouciance--the definitive, although indifferent, separation from the mother country we no longer needed.

We had not wanted to be the builders of either of the two Spains that presented themselves--Franco's or the Opposition's. We had wanted, dimly and unknowingly, just to be ourselves, either beyond or before, or at any rate, in spite of the alternatives offered by a system which, although Franco was dead, would continue to be as authoritarian and paternalistic as ever. Goytisolo was an example to us from the standpoint of a previous generation. He made us see that freedom is either individual, concrete, and lonely, or it is nothing. That freedom, therefore, is won by abandoning the field to the ghostly adversaries who encircle us--ours as well as theirs.

--Gonzalo Díaz-Migoyo
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