

THE DIFFERENT ARCHITECTURES OF METAFICTION IN JUAN AND LUIS GOYTISOLO

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I. THE ARCHITECTS

The metafictional mode is sounded with great frequency by contemporary Spanish writers, to the point that it can be affirmed that it is characteristic of what is understood as contemporary writing. While the lucid book of Patricia Waugh—even as it ignores the Spanish contribution and gives a wrong date for the publication of *Don Quixote*—shows the international ramifications of this movement and its relation with a post-modern attitude, and while Robert Spires has studied with insight and rigor the mechanism of metafiction in several important Spanish novels, much remains to be done. Specifically, I am concerned with the way in which metafictional declarations by the narrator interlock with the central symbols of the novel, since the symbol has been a traditional way of making covert metafictional statements. I will study in this brief article two cases, Juan Goytisolo's *Juan sin Tierra* (1975), and Luis Goytisolo's *Los verdes de mayo hasta el mar* (1976). My thesis is that even if the metafictional posturing of their narrators is similar, their place in the economy of the novel generates a different value with deep consequences for the interpolation of these novels.

Both narrators identify with an architect, indication that both authors are aware of the relative independence of language. Just.

as architects must work with materials that have a specific texture and are available, in the same way the novelists deal with words polarized by their use in ordinary language and literary tradition. Just as architects must design their buildings for a place that is surrounded by other elements that affect their significance, streets, neighborhoods, parks, novelists write situated in the maze of culture. And finally, just as architects must resign themselves to having other people inhabit their creations and impose on them their personal imprint, in the same way novelists know that the reader will be the occupant of the novel and read it according to the fashion of the time. From this basic agreement on the identification of the novelist with the architect, the paths of Juan and Luis Goytisolo diverge, as we shall see looking into the matter with greater detail.

In *Juan sin Tierra*, a segment entitled «Variaciones sobre un tema fesi» explores the similarity of the writer and the architect:

seguirás el ejemplo del alarife anónimo y extraviarás al futuro lector en los meandros y trampas de tu escritura: alzarás bloques de piedras sonoras, las substraerás a la tiranía del razonable uso y les permitirás crecer y agruparse, atraerse, excluirse, dóciles a los campos magnéticos y afinidades secretas que imantan la búsqueda aleatoria del zahorí: su cúpula feliz será la mejor brújula: su choque hará brotar el flujo de chispas que alumbraba bruscamente el arco voltaico: investido de los poderes sutiles del mago, pondrás tu imaginación al servicio de nuevas e insidiosas arquitecturas cuyo sentido último será el del aleve callejón fesi: capturar al intruso ingenuo, seducirlo, embaucarlo, envolverle en las mallas de una elusiva construcción verbal, aturdirle del todo, forzarle a volver sobre sus pasos y, menos seguro ya de su discurso y la certeza de sus orientaciones, soltarle otra vez al mundo, enseñarle a dudar (135-36).

This passage describes the architect as a trickster, but with a moral intent. («Moral» is used here in a specific way, as it could be applied to Rousseau or Freud, as I have written elsewhere, since Goytisolo does not offer codes of conduct, but a set of corrosive questions that undermines conventions and characterizes the search of innocence and truth as an urgent search with uncertain and unstable results.) The choice of the world of Arabic origin, *alarife*, instead of *arquitecto*, with its classical Greek resonances,

is noticeable. The author reverses a historical preference in modern Spain when he chooses the Arab over the Greek and Roman tradition. The architect in Fez is anonymous, his work disconcerting and elusive, not aiming for the serenity of the Parthenon or the soothing proportions of a design by Leonardo or Raphael.

In *Los verdes de mayo hasta el mar* the narrator modifies his universe openly and frequently, telling the reader, for example, that he is searching for the most suitable name for a country house, experimenting with «¿La Noguera?» (18), still flimsily braced by question marks, to settle later with «Santa Cecilia (mejor que la Noguera)» (21). The work of the writer is brought into the open, much as the imprints left on the walls by the architects of the Bauhaus. One of these changes is specially important, when the narrator alters his own profession: «Sobre Ricardo: arquitecto mejor que escritor» (204). Much of *Recuento* (1973), the first volume of the tetralogy *Antagonía* in which *Los verdes de mayo hasta el mar* is the second volume, is given over to the description of Barcelona, while in *Teoría del conocimiento* (1981), the fourth volume, one of the main narrators is an architect. Yet, in Luis Goytisolo we do not find an *alarife*, but an architect steeped in the Homeric tradition whose forte is the heroic simile and whose mind is occupied with the mission of bringing order into chaos, into the great *Antagonía* of life. The third novel in the tetralogy is called *La cólera de Aquiles* (1979), reflecting the same insistence on its classic grounding. I propose, in this context, to read the word «teoría» in *Teoría del conocimiento* in the sense of a sequence of images. If we interpret «teoría» as simply theory, then the meaning is necessarily a paradox: we do not know how we get to know and we can only propose theories about it. But, if we recuperate the Greek meaning of procession and exhibition, we can read *Antagonía* as a sequence of insights, not final epiphanies, yet successive revelations that confer new meaning to the life of the characters.

II. FEZ AND THE IDEAL CITY

Juan Goytisolo's architect is the anonymous and plural designer of Fez. Planning seems to be joyfully overridden by the vitality of the people, structures burst open by the flow of time. The

words to describe Fez are «arabescos», «en zigzag», «túneles», «oscurísimo callejón», «uterinas sinuosidades», «recovecos, escondrijos, curvas de un camino versátil que culebrea de modo arbitrario sin conducir finalmente a salida alguna» (135). The book itself, according to Goytisolo, was written in an unstructured fashion, and obvious pains were taken in order not to duplicate the structure of any of the seven parts. Just as readers begin to get used to the private grammar of one part, they are pushed into another section with a different organization.

In *Los verdes de mayo hasta el mar*, the narrator mentions several times an engraving of an Ideal City:

El dibujo titulado La Ciudad Ideal... original anónimo, obra probablemente de un loco, realizada, se diría a juzgar por alguno de los elementos representados, hacia fines de siglo; dibujo en tinta china, iluminado en algunos puntos con distintos colores, composición con todas las marcas características del arte naif, mezcla de plano y vista panorámica de una ciudad, al modo de los grabados de ciudades tan en boga con anterioridad a la invención de la fotografía, y como ellos salpicado de llamadas y de números que, a pie de página ofrecen las adecuadas explicaciones de cada detalle. Una sola diferencia: ninguna figura humana, nadie que, aunque sólo fuese a modo de contraste, animara el conjunto, como es usual en tales grabados... La Ciudadela, denominada Ciudadela Solar, se desarrolla en torno a un edificio de cúpulas doradas llamado Templo de la Ley... (51-52).

The reference is to the Ideal City that has a long tradition, from the Bible and Plato in the past to Soleri today, with a hint to the dreams of the rebel dominican priest Tommaso Campanella, the author of *La Città del Sole*. It represents the desire of the mind to impose its order over the sprawling nature of the city, but also more: the subordination of the irrational to the rational, of the masses to the ruler, of time to eternity. In *Teoría del conocimiento* the narrator explains that «el plano de la Ciudad Ideal es, en primer término, el plano de la mente de su autor, como la organización de una catedral pretende ser, en su estructura, representación visible del Creador por antonomasia» (219). It is not surprising to read that Luis Goytisolo claims to have conceived the whole of the structure of his massive tetralogy during a few days, while a prisoner in Carabanchel, and not have changed it

during the seventeen years in took him to finish his work. In an interview with Julio Ortega, Luis Goytisolo underscored the deliberate and rigorous planning of his tetralogy: «Cada libro es una parte de un todo. Es como comparar el ábside de una catedral con el claustro, dos partes distintas pero imprescindibles de una misma cosa» (143). In an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Antonio Sobejano-Morán establishes convincingly that the numbers used in the description of the Ideal City, 4, 9, 12, 36, correspond to important structural elements of *Antagonía*, underlining the premeditated and calculated nature of Luis Goytisolo's writing .

III. LAWRENCE AND NEMO

One architect designs Fez, the other the Ideal City, and they define further their differences by the company they keep. In their narrations, the writers express their elective affinities by choosing alter egos. In *Juan sin Tierra*, the narrator sees himself as Lawrence of Arabia, who sets out to fulfill a carefully planned imperial project only to find himself unleashing the repressed forces of a new nation, while he undergoes a profound conversion, from scholar to activist, from colonizer to a critic of British policies, simultaneously confronting his previously repressed homosexuality. Lawrence is a hero to Goytisolo precisely because he allowed his old self to be lost in the turmoil that wrecked the universe he had expected from his books.

Los verdes de mayo hasta el mar ends with a cruise reminiscent of the end of Fellini's «8 1/2». All the characters, dead and alive, plus heroes from Greece, Rome, and Hollywood are on board of the Nautilus, in charge of Verne's Captain Nemo. The fact that Nemo is a reincarnation of Ulysses is less important here than his accomplishments as an engineer that allowed him to create the perfect womb, impervious to any incipient or accident, until at the end of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* he is swallowed by a maelstrom from where he will emerge with a purified spirit. His reason emerges triumphant, the Nautilus having confirmed its value as the Ideal City.

IV. THE RAW AND THE COOKED

Luis Goytisolo has established a connection between his Ideal City and Homer's Iliad: «La metáfora de la Ciudad Ideal... que aparece tanto en *Los verdes* como en *Teoría del conocimiento*, juega un papel similar al del escudo de Aquiles en la Iliada o el de Eneas en la Eneida: nos da una imagen emblemática de lo que la propia obra es» (Ortega 145). Achilles' shield showed city and country life, the harmonic life that could be reached by virtuous and rational life. The forger of the shield was Hephaestus, the god of fire, the emblem of civilization. In contrast, Juan Goytisolo will choose as his deities the African gods, the serpent of the underground, and the savage fury of King-Kong.

One of these architects offers a house full of traps, guarantees nothing, except he will labor to irritate and unsettle you. His foreman is Lawrence, his hired hands are Arabs, heretic priests, and homosexuals. The other promises to build a luminous and reasonable house, where every activity will find its proper place, a house built to last. His foreman is Nemo, and while one of his men is a blind Greek, all the rest look as adds for the Corte Inglés. Both claim to be architects. One has his office in Fez, the other in Ideal City. One eats his meat raw, the other cooked. Make your choice.

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