

**LUIS GOYTISOLO'S
NARRATIVE AND THE
QUEST FOR
LITERARY AUTONOMY**

Andrew M. Sobiesuo

**Spanish Literature Publications Company
York, South Carolina
1997**

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INTRODUCTION

There exists today a large number of studies on Luis Goytisolo's narrative. Very few of them though are dedicated to the metafictional aspect of his novels, even though it constitutes the main focus of his most important novels, the works that comprise the tetralogy *Antagonía*. This study purports to discuss the importance of metafictional narrative in Spanish literature, and Luis Goytisolo's invaluable contribution to the development of that phenomenon. Before the 1970s, Spanish narrative usually tended to reproduce the social milieu. Camilo José Cela's *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (1942) and Carmen Laforet's *Nada* (1945), among others, have been cited as expositions of the hard social reality of the postwar years. These novels, Sobejano notes, are "un primer paso hacia un realismo existencial que pronto habría de generar otro modo de realismo social."¹ The main concern of the social novel, which Sobejano defines as "un tipo de novela que tiende a hacer artísticamente inteligible el vivir de la colectividad en estados y conflictos a través de los cuales se revela la presencia de una crisis y la urgencia de una solución" (299), was contemporary society. Narrative discourse was perceived as an instrument for communicating an accurate perception of external reality to the reader. Mimetic representation of reality was foregrounded and representational accuracy was rarely questioned. Language was conceived as a system of signs whose signifiers pointed non-problematically to their referents.

However, the situation began to change in the 1960s. In reference to the social novel, Salvador Clotas had written in 1969 that "a partir de 1962 aproximadamente, esta novela entra en crisis, y los años siguientes hasta el presente constituyen uno de los períodos más grises y desolados que ha conocido la novela española."² Even though this assertion is grossly exaggerated because the death of the social novel did not hinder the develop-

ment of the novel, it nonetheless indicates the presence in Spain of a new narrative form. María Elena Bravo is more accurate when she concludes that the publication in the 1960s of certain works "afirmaba la necesidad de un movimiento hacia lo formal y lo experimental."³ What this suggests, contrary to Clotas' opinion, is that the sixties witnessed a new vitality and a search for new directions. This is what we find in works by writers such as Luis Martín Santos, Juan Benet, Miguel Delibes, Juan Goytisolo and even Cela who had previously espoused the realist mode. If in the realist novel the reader identified the word with the object represented, in the 'New Novel,' the reader is confronted with the reality of language.⁴ In other words, the reader is confronted with what Carlos Fuentes has referred to as "el lenguaje . . . de la pluralidad de significados, de la constelación de alusiones: de la apertura."⁵ Mimetic discourse was abandoned in favor of discourse that confronted language as a system in itself. The author's *weltanschauung* prevailed and stylistic and technical innovations usually reflected the awareness of contemporary critical orientations.

It was not until the 1970s, however, that novels began to consciously investigate their own mode of existence. This period ushered in a new tendency that focused on the problematics of creating literature as part of the narrative. This new tendency, its proliferation, features and significance, is what we have traced in Luis Goytisolo's *Antagonía*.

Chapter One traces the rise of metafiction and some of the early exponents of self-conscious narrative in Spanish letters. From the divergent critical orientations, it can be stated with some degree of accuracy that at bottom self-conscious narrative or metafiction, explores fiction through fiction. It focuses on its own unfolding and the purpose is to create a text in which narrator, characters and fiction consciously reflect on the text.

There is an explicit authorial presence in metafictional texts and Cervantes' *Don Quijote*, as we shall see, initiated this narrative technique. The real author intervenes to comment on the nature of the narrative. In other words, the author becomes just another character in his novel. *Don Quijote* calls into question the status of fiction and of itself as a fictional work. In addition it not only contemplates on itself as a text but also comments on all the processes involved in text production. In this vein therefore, Cervantes' novel is rightly construed as the first

exponent of self-conscious narrative, and subsequent writers have explored this narrative form from different angles.

Even though the nineteenth century is widely recognized mostly for its contribution to realist narrative, Galdós *Fortunata y Jacinta* and *Misericordia* manifest several tenets of self-consciousness. Whether or not it was Galdós' intention to write self-conscious novels remains unresolved and would constitute a separate area of investigation.

Our focus in Chapter One also converges on Unamuno's *Niebla*. This is not to suggest that Unamuno was the only exponent of self-conscious narrative in Spain at the beginning of this century or that *Niebla* is his only metanovel. Simply put, he seems to be the most representative of this kind of fiction and *Niebla* appears to have expressed it better than any of his other novels, or at least, has become more widely recognized. In *Niebla*, literary criticism is established as an indispensable component of literary creation. Unamuno advocates the invention of fictional characters as an experiment of freedom.

In Chapter Two, we examine how Luis Goytisolo subverts the realist tradition in the creation of *Recuento*. *Recuento* describes the creation of a novel and the birth of a writer. The realist narrative methods are exposed and contradicted at the same time, resulting thus in a new kind of narrative that investigates its own unfolding. It is a complex novel that has attracted several diverse interpretations. Limiting it to the socio-historical interpretation as some critics have done would deprive the novel of its richness. Even the presentation of Barcelona is presented through a mystified narrative that revolves around the reflexion on literary creation. What we see is the multiple dimensions of language. From the lengthy, repeated description of places, objects and events, we come to the conclusion that the author is not trying to create a historical reality but a literary one. Upon examining the repeated presentations and contradictions in the descriptions of the church of the Sacred Family, the very careful reader would come to the conclusion that the author is only playing with language patterns. As early as chapter four in *Recuento*, the narrator displaces the referential aspect of language by questioning the nature of existence. Raúl himself dispels this when he states in *Recuento* that "no se puede hacer una novela sobre nosotros . . . sin darle al menos una significación . . . que la haga literariamente válida" (348).