

**Ambiguity and Destruction Through the Naming Process in  
*Reivindicación del Conde don Julián and Recuento***

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The main objective of **Reivindicación del Conde don Julián** by Juan Goytisolo and **Recuento** by Luis Goytisolo is the harsh criticism and demolition of the entire Spanish society. The narrator–protagonist of **Reivindicación**, through an imaginary odyssey that lasts one day, attacks and destroys the literature, religion, cultural beliefs, myths, and language of Spain, both past and present. In **Recuento**, on the other hand, Luis Goytisolo exposes and parodies the post–civil war social classes and traditional institutions, such as the army and the Catholic Church. The purpose of this analysis is to prove how the ambiguity that permeates these two novels has its counterpart in the naming process, which undermines the tradition of one–dimensional main characters.

There is no doubt in the reader’s mind that there is a connection between the arbitrariness of the sign<sup>1</sup> and the naming process in literature. A proper name, functioning as a signifier, would have as referent the psychological characterization and the specific role played by the character in the novel, the signified. The use of a proper name characterizes, defines and categorizes, linking the signifier to our conception of the character. According to Derrida,

The proper name in the colloquial sense, in the sense of consciousness, is only a designation of appurtenance and a linguístico–social classification... The great game of denunciation and the great exhibition of the “proper” does not consist in revealing proper names, but in tearing the veil hiding a classification and an appurtenance.<sup>2</sup>

**Reivindicación** and **Recuento** are works of metafiction in which proper names can be, as Patricia Waugh points out,

placed in an overtly metaphorical or adjectival relationship with the thing they name... In metafiction such names remind us that, in all fiction, names can describe as they refer, that what is referred to has been created anyway through a “naming process.”<sup>3</sup>

In these two novels, by using different names for the same character, the intrinsic relationship between the name and its referent is temporarily erased. The implied reader runs the risk of losing himself in the already interwoven complexity of the structure and the literary discourse, and in this way he becomes more involved in the creative process of the novel.

In **Reivindicación**, Juan Goytisolo substitutes a proper name or a noun with different literary, mythological, fictitious or historical names that capture the essence of the character or the common noun. However, he is still classifying and the referent not only remains intact but also is enriched with connotations and meanings of the new name. Count Julián, the main character, is a legendary figure blamed for the loss of Spain to

the Moors in the eighth century and is considered a traitor in Spanish history. There are several hypotheses as to his real identity and origin. According to some historians he was the vassal of an Arab general in the city of Ceuta, to others he was either a Visigoth dignitary or a Berber chief of Christian faith.<sup>4</sup> The first epigraph of the novel mentions the confusion concerning his real name: Ulyan, Urbano, Ulbán, or Bulian. This ambiguity is reflected in the structure, the language, the narrative planes and the anecdote of the novel.

The narrator–protagonist, a literary transposition of the author himself, is in exile in Tangier, Morocco, and in his imagination revives Count Julián to take revenge and invade Spain. This mythical process requires the creation of an alter–ego – himself as a child – who represents his past and needs to be destroyed in order to gain personal and psychological liberation. The division of the narrator–protagonist and the subsequent confrontation between Julián, the executioner, the present, and Alvarito, the victim, the past, make possible the internal dynamics of the novel. A conflict ensues when two bodies or entities are set against each other, acting, in this case, within the narrator’s mind. The emergence of human conflicts, according to Kurt Singer,

implies a conscious awareness of alternatives not only in man’s dealings with the outer world and with his fellow men but also within his own self. He is not only capable of playing off one force against another but of turning himself against himself, and thus exhibiting a new polarity.<sup>5</sup>

In *Reivindicación* the narrator–protagonist lacks a name, for he is an abstraction who is trying to reject his past – Spain – and find identification in his present – the Arab world. At one level, this dichotomy takes form in the names of the streets of Tangier, where he combines Spanish and Arab names: Hach Maohamed Torres, Cristianos, Ben Raisul, Fuente Nueva, M’Rini, Calle del Arco, Riad–el–Sultán, and so forth. On the other level it is shown in the fantastic creation of two antagonistic characters who stand for the conflicting forces that operate in the narrator’s subconscious.

The novel splits into four clearly defined chapters. In the first the reader is a witness of the narrator’s birth: “Unido tú a la otra orilla como el feto al útero sangriento de la madre, el cordón umbilical entre los dos como una larga y ondulante serpentina.”<sup>6</sup> [“(The sea) links you to the other shore, as the fetus is tied to the mother’s blood–engorged womb, the umbilical cord between them coiling like a long sinuous strip of serpent.” (p.4)] Then the narrator wanders through the streets of Tangier with an Arab boy who serves as a guide. His company reminds him of his past childhood in Spain. However, from the beginning this child, Alvarito, is doomed, bound to be victimized by Julián, who embodies the spirit of revenge of the narrator. The child metamorphoses into Capercucito, “Little Red Riding Hood,” a bird or an insect to be devoured by Julián, who becomes the big bad wolf, a snake, a flesh–eating plant or a contemporary James Bond who passively witnesses the fall of Alvarito. The first chapter is like an embryo that presents the *Leitmotifs* that will be echoed throughout the novel by using a mirror technique that reflects the previous *Leitmotifs* within a system of modifications to open a new dimension. At the end of this chapter the implied reader is

aware of the narrator's duality, expressed in mythological terms: "el laberinto está en ti: que tú eres el laberinto: minotauro voraz, mártir comestible: juntamente verdugo y víctima" (p. 52) ["the labyrinth lies within [you]: that you are the labyrinth: the famished minotaur, the edible martyr: at one the executioner and the victim" (p.40)]. And the geographical description of Tangier as an "urbano laberinto" (p. 89), "urban labyrinth," takes the name of Julián in one of his acceptations, Urbano, to point at the same confusion and intricacy that characterizes both of them, one being a reflection of the other. The narrator designates the vagina as Hercules' cave and describes it also in mythological terms. By foregrounding Greek mythology to metaphorically compare parts of the body or actions of the characters, the narrator is raising his narrative world to a mythical level, as well as being a "symbolic reenactment of the particular event with some idiosyncratic attributes added by the narrator-protagonist."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most prolific display of Greek mythology takes place in the excursion of American tourists to Hercules' cave, where the anatomic description of the vagina merges with several classical myths: the myth of Orpheus, whose trip to Hades or the underworld places the narrative world on an imaginary level; the same is true with the lagoon of the Styx, Tisiphone, Phlegethon, and Rhadamanthus. The myth of Theseus, whose killing of the bull – a symbol of Spain – corresponds with the Arab invasion of the peninsula favored by Julián, also appears. On other occasions the narrator will turn to the myth of Sisyphus or Charon to refer to the repetitious and frustrated beginning of the fantastic invasion of Spain, or to the myth of Prometheus, which alludes to the creation of man and perpetual suffering. This myth also relates to the division of the narrator into Julián and Alvarito. The excursion to Hercules' cave links the myth of the cave to the tourist and capitalist invasion of Spain, and above all to the annihilation of the chastity myth, whose defense and praise is portrayed in the novel by Corín Tellado, a famous contemporary writer of love magazines, and *Celestina*, the well-known character of the fifteenth-century tragicomedy, both of them concerned with women's virginity. The myth of the cave is very relevant to the unveiling of the inner motivations of the narrator's creativity since it encompasses some of the most important *Leitmotifs* of the novel.

In chapters two and three, Julián visits a coffee house where Tariq, an acquaintance, invites him to smoke kiff. Due to its effect, Julián recreates in his imagination the destructive odyssey of Spain. The experience takes the form of a journey through the literary and historical myths that have shaped the idiosyncrasy of Spain: The Cid, Trajano, Teodosio, Guzmán el Bueno, Isabel the Catholic, Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Lorca, the Generation of '98, and especially Seneca, who represents the natural and human stoicism that originated the moral and religious spirit of Spain.<sup>8</sup> Seneca, as Mrs. Putifar, the American tourist who dies bitten by a snake and revives, metamorphoses into Figurón, Ubicuo, Alvaro Peranzules – famous count of Leon –, Manolete – famous Spanish bullfighter –, or as first philosopher of Spain and fifth of Germany, parodying the power of Charles I, and Alvarito, whose mother is Isabel the Catholic, the latter and Saint Teresa fusing together with a stripper. The Cid, the Spanish hero who overcame the Arabs in several battles, becomes the traitor Julián. In their metamorphic transformation these figures lose their mythical value and the representative nature of the Spanish spirit. The symbolic destruction of the Spanish cultural past occurs when the narrator goes to the library of Tangier and crushes some insects among the pages of well-known Spanish writers, "alcanzando el primer volumen

de la pila y depositando entre sus páginas una hormiga y seis moscas...cerrando de golpe, zas!, y aplastándolas” (p. 37) [“reaching for the first volume in the pile and depositing an ant and six flies inside it...suddenly closing the volume and crushing these seven insects” (p. 26)]. The opening lines of the novel already reveal the narrator’s wrath and rejection towards an unnamed country: “tierra ingrata, entre todas espuria y mezquina, jamás volveré a ti” (p. 11) [“harsh homeland, the falsest, most miserable imaginable, I shall never return to you” (p. 3)]. His hatred and repulsion are evident in the use of negative epithets referring to Spain: “Atlántida” [“Atlantis”], “Madrasta inmundada” [“foul stepmother”], “funesta Península” [“dreary Peninsula”].

The fourth chapter deals with the invasion of Spain and the consummation of the narrator’s revenge. The context of the death of Alvarito occurs as a literary transposition of the Little Red Riding Hood story, in which Alvarito becomes the victim of Julián. But Alvarito’s death cannot come without suffering and, after being subdued and tortured by Julián, he commits suicide. The sadist motif occupies a great part of the narrative space in the novel and is precluded in the beginning of the novel in the quotation from the Marquis de Sade: “I should like to discover a crime the effect of which would be actively felt forever.” The same motif is suggested in mentioning *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Lautreamont, where Mervyn, the adolescent, is killed by Maldoror, his merciless persecutor. Alvarito’s death is a redeeming self-destruction without which the protagonist would not gain his personal liberation. However, the narrator and the reader realize that this fictitious liberation is a product of the imagination of the former who will undertake the same odyssey the next day.

The final attack is against the Catholic Church, the most sacred Spanish bastion. The Arab hordes invade the temple and desecrate the images of the Virgin Mary and her Son. The very naming process – the wooden mannequin or the Doll for the Virgin and the Boy Doll for her Son – serves the purpose of mocking them and reducing them to mere entities deprived of any religious implications. When the Virgin and Son are pulled down by the Arabs, the narrator describes their screams as howls, equating them with dogs.

Santiago, Saint James, is the patron saint of Spain to whom legend attributes apparitions which helped the Christian army in the Reconquest of Spain over the Arabs. He is a significant figure in the naming process in *Reivindicación* as well as in *Recuento*. Santiago’s role is not exactly the same in both novels. In *Recuento* he is not the defender of Spain against the Arab aggression, as occurs in *Reivindicación*, but the punisher of the civil war Republicans who fought against their Catholic and traditional brothers. Raúl, the narrator-antagonist and dissident of *Recuento*, in his struggle against the traditional values of the nationalists, falls victim to Santiago and his “white horse.” His criticism is not directed at Catholic dogmas, as in the previous novel, but instead is substantiated against the ecclesiastic institution for its political power and privileged position during the Franco regime. Palazón, the priest in the religious high school, watches over all the children’s conduct, and his domineering and repressive attitude is shown in the name itself: Palazón means “bunch of sticks.” Raúl, who is also a victim of Palazón, is the son of Jorge and Eulalia, whose names have strong religious implications. Saint Jorge is the patron saint of Catalonia and Saint Eulalia is a well-known martyr. Their names indicate Raúl’s upbringing in a conservative and

Catholic environment that can be traced back to his ancestry. His great-grandfather Jaime fought with general Prim in the African campaign. There is a possibility that Ferrer, one of Cabrera's lieutenants who fought in the Carlist faction, might be one of his ancestors. His other great-grandfather married María Ignacia Gaminde, of Basque origin and noble lineage. His grandfather Raúl returned to Barcelona soon before the loss of Cuba and invested large sums of money in a farm and stocks. Raúl rebels at an early age against those conservative values and chooses political militancy in the outcast communist party. Raúl's rebellion, however, is not only political but also literary and tries to consolidate a narrative theory already envisaged by Juan Goytisolo, Juan Benet, and Luis Martín Santos, among others. Adolfo Cuadras is the writer, within the fictitious world, of a novel that follows the principles of the behavioristic novel of the '50s. Raúl's rejection of a narrative whose main objective is the mere transcription of the external reality is shown through direct statements, and by means of the naming process — Cuadras meaning “stables.”

Before starting to write his novel, Luis Goytisolo already knew the names of his characters and explained that the use of several names for one single character was due to their depersonalization. On one occasion he stated that:

Every character had its name (several in many cases), as this is an essential working element in a work, such as “Antagonía,” which puts so little emphasis on the characterization of those characters. <sup>9</sup>

The characters that revolve around Raúl are types, sometimes described in archetypal terms, and lack any psychological characterization. Those with names belong to the Catalan bourgeoisie that sympathizes with Castile and has betrayed the interests of Catalonia to benefit itself. Their names point to some remarkable achievement or their role in the novel. Florencio Rivas' name, who is the representation of the successful industrial contractors, comes from *floreecer*, “to flourish.” His wife, whose name is Dulce, “Sweet,” has a lover called Amadeo, whose origin is from *amar*, “to love.” Due to the sudden death of Florencio his economic empire is in trouble, but Amadeo asks his lawyer Primera Espada — “First Sword” — for help. He shows his ability when he restores the trust of Florencio's creditors and prevents the economic collapse of the company.

The proletariat hardly appears in *Recuento*. Its disappearance from the narrative context demonstrates its limited influence in the political scheme of the Francoist period. Those who represent the urban proletariat on many occasions do not have a name that classifies them. Instead they are named with epithets that depersonalize them, reducing their identity to an abstraction: “the non-Catalan employee,” “the Navarrese,” “the willful worker,” “the Mary,” Florencio's prostitute lover. Their names have negative connotations given by the definite article. Another way to depersonalize these characters is through the use of alias or nicknames for the same character: Aurora is Nefertiti, Manolo Moragas is MM, Mariconcha is Maricoña, Federico is Esteva, Adolfo is Lucas, Fortuny is Ferrán, Escala is Salvador Puig, alias Z or Mister H, Raúl is Lalo as a child, Pipó when he is intimate with his girlfriend Nuria, Daniel or Luis in his political militancy, and Pipa to the police. The names and alias that Luis Goytisolo so frequently uses correspond to the protean nature of his characters. At the same time,

they are separated from their real identity, which is safeguarded from society and from the reader.

In **Reivindicación**, the use of names such as Julián, Little Red Riding Hood, James Bond, etc. erases any pursuit of individual characterization and identifies the characters' actions with those already mythical, legendary or fictitious. In **Recuento**, those with given names belong to the upper classes, whereas those of the lower classes are deprived of a proper name, and consequently their identity blurs through the naming process. There is no doubt that the use of different names creates certain textual ambiguities that distort the implied reader's gestalt-forming, stimulating him to form expectations within a coherent interpretation. This, of course, is a deliberate technique undertaken by the author with the intention of involving the reader in the construction of the text, as Iser points out:

The vital process of consistency-building is used to make the reader himself produce discrepancies, and as he becomes aware of both the discrepancies and the processes that have produced them, so he becomes more and more entangled in the text.<sup>10</sup>

In the novels that I have analyzed, there is a clear attempt to undermine the traditional unidimensionality and individualization of the characters through the naming process, so the reader is led astray in his consistency-building of the characters' characterization. In **Reivindicación**, the use of names negates individual characterization, whereas in **Recuento**, name-giving blurs the identity of the characters.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton states that “each sign in the system has meaning only by virtue of its difference from the others,” **Literary Theory: An Introduction** (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984), p. 97.
- <sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, “The Battle of Proper Names,” **Of Grammatology** (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), p. 111.
- <sup>3</sup> Patricia Waugh, **Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction** (NY: Methuen, 1984), pp. 93–94.
- <sup>4</sup> Ramón Menéndez Pidal, **Historia de España, Vol. IV** (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, S. A., 1957), p. 12.
- <sup>5</sup> Kurt Singer, **The Idea of Conflict** (Australia: Melbourne UP, 1949), p. 16.
- <sup>6</sup> Juan Goytisolo, **Reivindicación del Conde don Julián** (Mexico D. F.: Ed. Joaquín Mortiz, S. A., 1970); translations are from Helen R. Lane, **Count Julian** (NY: Viking, 1974).
- <sup>7</sup> Genaro J. Pérez, **Formalist Elements in the Novels of Juan Goytisolo** (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, S. A., 1979), p. 161.
- <sup>8</sup> Angel Ganivet, **Idearium Español: Obras Completas, Vol. I** (Madrid: Ed. Aguilar, S. A., 1951), pp. 153–154.
- <sup>9</sup> Luis Goytisolo, “Gestación de Antagonía,” **El Cosmos de Antagonía** (Barcelona: Ed. Anagrama, 1984), p. 14.
- <sup>10</sup> Wolfgang Iser, **The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response** (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), p. 130.

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