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## LUIS GOYTISOLO'S *TEORÍA DEL CONOCIMIENTO* AS POSTMODERN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

### RESUMEN:

*Teoría del conocimiento* es la última novela de la famosa tetralogía de Goytisolo, *Antagonía*. En este estudio trato la obra como autobiografía postmoderna. Repleto de referencias autobiográficas a la vida de Goytisolo y estructurada como *bildungsroman*, queda como exploración de autoría, subjetividad, y la posibilidad de agencia en una realidad post-totalitaria y postmoderna. Goytisolo cuidadosamente crea la ilusión de una autobiografía convencional solo para luego socavar la premisa de un sujeto plenario y la transparencia del lenguaje, dejando a los lectores con una versión alternativa del ser y autor, encarnado en el personaje peculiar de El Viejo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Autobiografía, posmodernismo, Luis Goytisolo, subjetividad, agencia

### ABSTRACT:

*Teoría del conocimiento* is the culminating novel in Goytisolo's famous tetralogy *Antagonía*. In this study I read the novel as a postmodern autobiography. Replete with autobiographical references to Goytisolo's life and structured as a *bildungsroman*, it is clearly an exploration of authorship, subjectivity, and the possibility of agency in a post-totalitarian, postmodern reality. Goytisolo carefully creates the illusion of conventional autobiography only to undermine the premise of a plenary subject and the transparency of language, leaving readers with an alternative version of self and authorship, embodied in the quirky character of the Old Man.

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KEY WORDS: Autobiography, postmodernism, Luis Goytisolo, subjectivity, agency

When Luis Goytisolo spent four months of solitary confinement in a Madrid prison for having participated in activities with the communist party and anti-Franco groups, he sketched the preliminary notes for perhaps his greatest and best-known work, *Antagonía*.<sup>2</sup> *Antagonía* is a tetralogy comprised of *Recuento* (1973), *Los verdes de mayo hasta el mar* (1976), *La cólera de Aquiles* (1979), and *Teoría del conocimiento* (1981). Goytisolo assures us that he found his voice in *Antagonía*, establishing early on the autobiographical tenor of the project: «Pero en *Antagonía*, sí me di cuenta desde un principio que había encontrado mi propia voz, de que había dado con la confluencia de macrocosmos y microcosmos dentro de una misma obra que a la vez fuese una especie de imago mundi» (1988, 84). That Goytisolo's tetralogy emerges from within the depths of a totalitarian state becomes pertinent to its overarching theme of the power and freedom found through literary creation. The four novels revolve around the life and experiences of Raúl/Ricardo, Goytisolo's alter-ego. The author reflects on his experiences growing up in postwar Spain and transforms them into a fictional work.

The last novel of the tetralogy, *Teoría del conocimiento*, appeared in 1981 as the novel written by Raúl Ferrer Gaminde, the fictional protagonist whose name appears on the title page. The system of interior duplication maintained in the first three novels of the tetralogy continues in *Teoría*, and readers encounter the same names and relationships floating freely throughout the meticulous tripartite structure. The three sections of the text are narrated by consecutive protagonists who struggle for authority and implicitly compete with the names of Raúl Ferrer Gaminde and Luis Goytisolo appearing on the two title pages. Each protagonist works on a personal project: the first narrator, Carlos, writes a diary, the second narrator, Ricardo, takes notes for a future novel, and the third narrator, the Old Man, creates a personal legacy for his progeny.

By focusing his work on the problematic of human identity, Goytisolo engages with the plenary subject and the autobiographical project it underwrites, producing a postmodern autobiography.<sup>3</sup> He calls attention to the metafictional elements in the text while diminishing the importance of more conventional concerns, like plot and characterization, both of which promote a view of subjectivity as fixed

<sup>2</sup> In «Gestación de *Antagonía*» Luis Goytisolo gives an in-depth account of both his stay in Carabanchel and its fruitful outcome.

<sup>3</sup> See *Autobiography & Postmodernism* by Kathleen M. Ashley and Leigh Gilmore. Both terms have a «shared interest in theorizing the subject» (3). In one section of book, the group of essays «demonstrate that autobiography gives postmodernism a text and a discourse through which to theorize human agency». (8)

and integral. The metafictional aspects of the novel serve to dramatize the complexity of subjectivity, with its layers of constructed positions.

Throughout Goytisolo's thirty-year novelistic trajectory, there are two marked tendencies that permeate his work. The first is the incorporation of autobiographical elements, which maintains an intimate relationship between fiction and reality. In the earlier phase of his novelistic project, these elements take the form of references to Goytisolo's personal experience in Francoist Spain. In his post-*Antagonía* novels, the autobiographical elements manifest themselves as central ideas or issues in the work that reflect Goytisolo's «real-life» concerns.<sup>4</sup> The second constant in his work is a dedication to the continual renovation of the novelistic genre, manifested in the experimental and hybrid textual structures of even his earliest novels.

*Teoría* erodes the power structure that supports the notion of an all-powerful author-figure and creates a fictional world of relativity that denies the existence of absolute truths and selves. The traditional paradigm collapses, and reality and the knowing subject no longer sit comfortably on either side of a transparent language that would reflect and support the wholeness of both. In his novel, Goytisolo urges readers to unleash the power of narration as a tool for creating alternative realities and for embracing the paradoxes of our postmodern context. Divided into three main sections, the novel boasts three character-narrators. The first narrator is Carlos, a young man who writes in what he defines as an intimate diary. Dates, like those in a diary, serve to mark the divisions within this section. Carlos leads a decadent life and lives with his parents. He has not yet established himself in society and is drawn to writing. In his diary, Carlos documents his voyeuristic endeavors at his apartment window with a mysterious woman across the street named Aurea. He describes his observations of her with obsessive detail in an effort to counteract her elusiveness. Carlos also writes with detached humor about his dysfunctional family relationship, and he explores philosophical issues, including the nature of the human soul.

The second narrator is Ricardo Echave, a middle-aged architect who has renounced his profession and is writing notes for a future novel. Unlike Carlos, Ricardo is well established in society and has decided he wants something more than his successful career. The section that he narrates begins abruptly about one quarter of the way into the novel, and the only structural manifestation of

<sup>4</sup> See Alicia Molero de la Iglesia's *La autoficción en España* for her treatment of Goytisolo's novel *Estatua con palomas*, which is part of a larger investigation of the autobiographical genre in late 20th century given the impossibility of representing the subject and the power of narration to create the self and reality. Juan Pascual Gay calls *Antagonía* «una ficción autobiográfica» in his 2007 study of the tetralogy.

this change is the switch from the dated entries of Carlos's section to titled passages, such as «Desvanes» and «El efecto sireno,» in Ricardo's. Substantially longer than Carlos's diary, Ricardo's notes mention his ambitious but unrealized projects (both literary and architectural).

Ricardo's narration is about the past. He reflects on his life and constructs the story of his relationships and experiences. The majority of his narrative revolves around the memory of an ex-lover and cousin, Margarita, who has recently died in a car accident. She had left him a mysterious photograph, and he recounts episodes with her in an effort to decipher its message and come to terms with her untimely death.

The Old Man narrates the third section of *Teoría*. His text does not have the subtitled sections characteristic of Ricardo's narration, or the dates of Carlos's diary. But, like the first two narrators, he also speaks in the first person and is concerned with establishing his authority over a situation, in this case his own impending death, which threatens his sense of self. The dying Old Man dreams of leaving behind what he calls his legacy—bits of wisdom, observations, and practical advice—for posterity. He has tape-recorded his legacy and oversees its transcription by a son-in-law, who happens to be the father of the first narrator, Carlos. The Old Man's section of the novel has a frenzied tone resulting from his vacillation between lucidity and senility. He expounds on a variety of subjects, including farming, economics, and philosophy. The culminating event of his narration is a party on Christmas Eve that includes unlikely guests, such as Dante and Milton. The novel ends with the Old Man narrating his own death.

*Teoría* presents readers with a deceptive sense of linear progression in its sequence of narrators: the young amateur writer, Carlos, is followed by the middle-aged professional, Ricardo, who, in turn, is followed by the prophetic and sometimes lucid, dying Old Man, who claims authorial supremacy over the previous two narrators. This structure mimics a traditional model of authority (as hierarchical and absolute) by aligning the three narrators according to age and experience, culminating with the wise old man on his deathbed.

Yet Goytisolo constructs his novel using three author-narrators who struggle for authority over the text. To further complicate matters, the name Raúl Ferrer Gaminde, fictional author/character of the first three novels of *Antagonía*, appears on one inside title page of *Teoría*, while Goytisolo's name appears on a second title page and on the cover. Clearly, the central issue is: who controls the text we read? In order to answer this question, readers must think about what an author is, and how s/he gains textual authority over his or her life story.

Despite the apparent progression of the novel, from youth to old age, from amateur to seasoned narrator, *Teoría* functions duplicitously by inscribing conventional notions of textual authority and authorship only to question their validity. In her book, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon contends that such critical complicity is the hallmark of postmodern fiction:

the postmodern involves a paradoxical installing as well as subverting of conventions—including conventions of the representation of the subject. The complicitous inscribing is as evident as the subverting challenge. (13-14)

*Teoría* challenges conventional ideas about language and subjectivity that posit the author as a whole consciousness and language as an objective tool at the author's disposal. Language is no longer seen as a transparent medium that authors manipulate to convey information about the world. Such notions are the target of postmodern art in general:

History, the individual self, the relation of language to its referents and of texts to other texts—these are some of the notions which, at various moments, have appeared as 'natural' or unproblematically common-sensical. And these are what get interrogated. (Hutcheon, xiii)

Goytisolo's novel threatens the concept of the autonomous self and the autobiographical project by revealing the discursive and therefore vulnerable nature of textual authority, and by suggesting that fiction is an arena for exploring the process of creation of the postmodern self in progress.

Traditional ideas of authorship, rooted in nineteenth-century realism, imagine the author as sovereign subject and guarantor of textual meaning. At the other end of the spectrum, post-structuralist thought has argued against the idea of a writing subject situated outside the play of space and time, language, history, culture, and difference. Thinkers like Foucault and Barthes have contributed to the idea of the decentered and displaced subject, subjected to ideological forces that shape, and even determine it.<sup>5</sup> In an effort to carve out a space for resistance between these two poles of subjectivity, Paul Smith, in his book *Discerning the Subject*, explores the predicament of the subject caught between determining forces («subject») and delusions of self-determination («individual»). Smith's account of agency recognizes the impossibility of accepting either of the two extreme definitions of subjectivity as «subjected subject» or «whole individual». He argues that, although subjects are called into positions by discourses, the human agent emerges as the site of resistance among contradictory subject-positions

<sup>5</sup> See «The Death of the Author» (Barthes) and «What is an Author?» (Foucault).

(xxxv). In other words, the human agent can find room for maneuver from within the ideological pressures that seek to position the subject.

What does Smith's account of agency suggest about the author? Sean Burke argues in his book *The Death and Return of the Author* that the fate of the author in the field of literary studies is inextricably entwined with the fate of the human subject (107). An outgrowth of the post-structuralist crisis of the subject was the declaration, best represented by Barthes and Foucault, of the «death of the author». If the subject was a fluid and dynamic entity enmeshed with language, the author could no longer be the omnipotent prototype of the realist project. In order to reflect the new model of subjectivity expressed by post-structuralist thinkers, theorists like Barthes and Foucault diminished the power of the author in favor of the interpretive role of individual readers. However, the author-figure did not die quietly. Indeed, *Teoría* represents a tendency in postmodern fiction to problematize the author-figure in order to explore issues of power and authority in our contemporary context of constructed truths.<sup>6</sup> Instead of staging the simple death of the author, Goytisolo emerges from his novel as an agent, aware of the doubleness of the self and the paradoxes of writing, both of which deny the possibility of absolutely powerful author-figures and their very real historical counterparts.

Resistant to see language as a vexed medium, the first two narrators, Carlos and Ricardo, turn to narration as a way to impose order on somewhat mysterious events that invade their realities and threaten their stability. Their efforts are inevitably frustrated, since they ingenuously invest in language the power to contain reality and guarantee them a whole subjectivity.

Carlos's efforts to concretize his visual attraction to the enigmatic Aurea through language emerges as the dominant theme of the section. Attempting to break free from their unilateral relationship, Carlos decides to communicate with Aurea. By counting the number of times she flashes the lights in her apartment window, Carlos is able to make out her phone number, and he calls her. After talking with her on the phone, he runs across the street to meet her, only to learn from the doorman that she has not been there for quite some time. The irritated doorman gives him a tour of her empty apartment and a dispirited Carlos returns home. He replays the tape he made of his telephone conversation with Aurea moments before, but it has been inexplicably erased. He cannot seem to capture her, to find proof of her existence.

<sup>6</sup> Luicille Kerr's *Reclaiming the Author* studies how contemporary Spanish American fiction problematizes the figure of the author in order to protest concepts of authorship that would simplify or constrain the author-figure as a discernible and knowable entity. Brian McHale discusses the author problematic as a hallmark of postmodern fiction in his book, *Postmodernist Fiction* (197-215).

In his obsessive yet distanced courtship of Aurea, Carlos even dabbles in exhibitionism, offering himself as object to her, thus breaking the code of domination inherent in voyeurism. Indeed, all of his actions thus far would indicate a desire for a more reciprocal relationship. In her study on the erotic in *Antagonía*, Kathleen Vernon claims that Carlos's actions reveal an «insistence on the mutual awareness of both partners as the voyeur's gaze is returned, reciprocated by the original object of his look» (94). Vernon does not mention that Carlos's relationship with Aurea is imaginary. He never convinces himself or the reader of her existence; therefore, any prospect of interaction with her is illusory. His dreams of sexual intimacy with the other may have been, ironically, manifestations of masturbation—both mental and physical. When faced with a new experience, represented here by his encounter with Aurea, Carlos tries to document and objectify.

The relentless objectification involved in rationalist discourse can be read as an act of violence. Carlos displays an aggressive desire to dominate and possess Aurea, metaphorically revealing his desire to objectify and thereby control his reality:

A mi modo de ver, así como sería superficial pensar que lo que importa al cazador es la pieza cobrada cuando, aunque tal vez ni se le haya ocurrido pensarlo, lo que realmente le importa es la prueba de sí mismo que supone cobrarla, [ . . . ] Y, si bien está fuera de duda que hay piezas y piezas, que el cazador se siente más satisfecho de unas que de otras, que ante unas se prueba mejor a sí mismo que ante otras, también lo está el que lo propio sucede en lo que a la aventura amorosa se refiere, y es en este sentido en el que cabe afirmar que, si yo soy el cazador, Aurea es la gran pieza. (28)

Carlos's narration reveals him to be young and idealistic, living in imaginary worlds, and wanting to realize his fantasies of the ideal. His will to control is bound up with his plan to become an author, to gain textual authority by apprehending the truth of Aurea's existence.

Ricardo similarly struggles with the limits of a rationalist discourse when faced with an experience that defies his signifying efforts. Like Aurea, Margarita symbolizes unattainable desire in the form of the consummate woman. However, if Carlos desperately wants to transfer Aurea to reality where he can interact with her, Ricardo longs for the opposite. He elevates Margarita to almost mythical status by glorifying the stories of their relationship. This idealization proves ironic when juxtaposed with the events surrounding their breakup: Ricardo apparently treated her badly and was caught in bed with her younger sister, Magda. Ricardo is unable to comprehend Margarita's anger towards him:

El hecho es que, como si en mi intento con Magda hubiese algo de irreparable, bien porque para Margarita no tuviese perdón, bien por el enfado que en mí había provocado su venenosa y desabrida susceptibilidad, a partir de ahí el signo de nuestras relaciones cambió para siempre, desplazándose, tras un período de distanciamiento. (116)

There is a discrepancy between Ricardo's attitude towards Margarita before her death and his exaltation of her after. Ricardo reveals himself as incapable of a successful relationship with Margarita; he is unwilling or powerless to understand her reaction to his treatment of her and her sister as interchangeable objects for his manipulation. Like Carlos, Ricardo writes in order to gain a position of authority in a somewhat obscure situation.

Both Carlos and Ricardo subscribe to a notion of authorship and self as a means to obtain control over their worlds and as a way to achieve a clear-cut definition of the self through their autobiographical projects.<sup>7</sup> Their will to represent the other manifests the violence inherent in absolutism. However, both narrators are ingenuous in their pretensions because they are unable to account for a multifaceted and multi-perspectival reality that eludes mimetic representation.

In his study on colloidal discourse in *Teoría*, Spires notes a viscosity that creates a «sense of fusion» between the author, text, and characters. This «contaminación estilística» results in an erasure of textual boundaries, such as beginning and end, creator and creation (97-98). In his analysis of the novel, Pope discusses the interpenetration of the three narrators, whose words echo each other, and whose concerns and styles are hauntingly parallel. He also points out how the interior duplication of names and situations reveals the precariousness of the speaking *yo* that equates itself with a name and a story (1987, 134-35). Indeed, the interchangeability of people and places reveals the arbitrary nature of the linguistic system that matches subjectivity with a proper name. In this novel, characters are not securely rooted in a name or a history that marks them as individuals. There are mutations, migrations, and even reincarnations, and all work to undermine the proper name as a symbol for the whole and plenary *I*, metaphorically suggesting that the normalizing effect of discourse reduces even the human being to an objectifiable entity, but does not account for the complexities of a postmodern subjectivity.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See article by Pope (1987) and study by Lisa Arbúes for parallel analyses of the narrators' projects.

<sup>8</sup> In Pope's 1988 study «Luis Goytisolo's *Antagonía* and Radical Change,» he calls Goytisolo a «true post-modern». Pope reads the four volumes of *Antagonía* as a sort of postmodern revolution, where self and knowledge are in constant change and the creative impulse is celebrated.

On the fringes of the systematization produced by rationalist discourse, and perhaps even the motor of such discourse, lies the unknown. Pope argues that, in *Teoría*, each speaker turns to narration as a way of ordering and making sense of mysteries. When confronted with the unknown, each must face the limits of knowledge and language. He states that,

Dado el misterio impenetrable de la vida, ninguno de los personajes consigue la estabilidad que anhela por mucho que se empeñen en 'la tarea de señalar con precisión los límites de la realidad que viven y de la que han vivido.' (1987, 135)

Although I agree with Pope's statement in the cases of the first two narrators, I believe that the Old Man's project is distinct from those of Carlos and Ricardo. The Old Man not only embraces the limits of rational thought and the absurdities that escape them, but he gains a certain degree of stability by inscribing the limits of his authorial situation and thereby overcoming them. He emerges as a model of authorship and agent for our contemporary society, which is grounded in relativity and interconnectedness.

As mentioned earlier, the structure of the novel invites readers to accept the Old Man as the final authority, and therefore as the guarantor of the narration. He claims to be in possession of both Carlos's and Ricardo's writings and includes them in the final text, thereby establishing himself as the controlling source/editor of the text we read. His superior attitude further entices readers to accept his word as final. In the following passage, he assumes God-like proportions:

Yo soy yo y lo que está contra mi [. . .] Gran pájaro que remonta el vuelo en flecha gracias al impulso de sus poderosas alas, rozando casi las escabrosas rocas de un despenader, así me elevo yo sobre los límites de la naturaleza en apariencia insalvable, para luego planear con júbilo por encima, muy por encima, de las cotidianas miserias en que se afana el ser humano. (319)

By comparing himself to a great bird that soars above the natural world, the Old Man seems to transcend his decrepit condition as a dying mortal. He repeatedly finds recourse in such metaphors that permit him to escape the uncomfortable reality of the last days of his life and underline his powerful position as final narrator. He creates images that metaphorically allude to his personal experience, and he thereby works around the rigid laws that guide rational discourse. His linguistic creativity becomes the Old Man's means to power, albeit a contextual and not an unqualified power.

The commanding position of the Old Man as the final speaker in the series is reinforced by his narration of the deaths of both Carlos and Ricardo. According to him, Carlos dies in a pharmacy and Ricardo in a car crash—both deaths reportedly accidental. By declaring the two previous narrators dead, he secures himself a comfortable vantage point over the entire text. As the last existing speaker, the Old Man narratively stages his own death: «mientras la enfermera se volvía hacia los familiares, amigos y convecinos que rodeaban mi lecho, para anunciarles, señores, este hombre ha fallecido» (345). Not only does the Old Man somehow manage to recount his own death, he casts it in the past tense, thereby accentuating his comfortable distance from the mortal event. He seems to step outside himself, referring to himself in the third person. However, in spite of the Old Man's specious control, a closer look reveals that the circumstances surrounding the taping of his legacy threaten his illusory position as final narrator and ultimate authority of the text.

Although the Old Man controls the taping, he must rely on the intervention of a transcriber: «por la noche, cada noche, Carlos irá pasando a máquina lo que yo haya grabado durante el día» (263). The creative partnership between the Old Man and his transcriber recalls the collaboration of God and Moses:

Los textos que recogen mi pensamiento, por el contrario, cuando dentro de milenios sean hallados junto a un mar muerto, están destinados a revelarse como el eslabón perdido del pensamiento que para entonces prevalezca, relegadas por completo al olvido las creencias hoy imperantes. (262)

When the Old Man speaks into a tape recorder, and Carlos Sr. transcribes his words, a similar dynamic of intertwined authorship arises. The dictation paradigm seeks to exclude the interference of mediation and thereby assure utter control over the message. However, as Ross Chambers points out, even the seemingly one-way power relation of dictation is reversible because of the necessity of mediation (173-74). The Old Man's conspicuously secure position of «dictator» is undermined by the textual foregrounding of the transcriber's active role in the process.

The Old Man's post as final speaker of the novel is further threatened when he reveals the pages we read to be a hodgepodge of different documents and tapes he leaves in the transcriber's hands:

Tenemos el diario del joven Carlos, una copia mecanografiada que, a falta de datos más explícitos acerca de su desdichado autor, cualquier futuro estudioso puede llegar a pensar que se trata de una obra de ficción escrita por Ricardo Echeave, dada la seguridad con que éste se refiere a determinados aspectos de su contenido. Tenemos también lo que yo llamo el libro de Ricardo, esto es, la grabación

del contenido de sus notas realizada por él mismo. Y están, finalmente, mis Cintas, estas Cintas que Carlos convierte cada noche en transcripción mecanografiada, justo el procedimiento inverso al seguido por Ricardo Echave. Una situación, sobra decirlo, que convierte a Carlos en depositario único de todos esos materiales. Y Carlos tiene mi confianza. (310-11)

Who is responsible for the novel we read? The Old Man's account of the hybrid nature of the work and the subsequent diffusion of authority invalidates conventional notions of the author as originary source of textual meaning and problematizes representation and subjectivity. Despite the apparent differences between the three narrators, these layers of textuality collapse boundaries and uproot the speaking voice from any definitive position. This results in a work without an authoritative subject as its guarantor and referent, and therefore leaves the autobiographical project without its anchor.

Each narrator struggles to express himself from within a linguistic system based on the logic of binary opposites. As Pope points out, each narration revolves around a central mystery or paradox that eludes resolution. Paradox disrupts the authoritarian discourse of logic and creates noise, which allows for change within the system.<sup>9</sup> The three narrators of *Teoría* form a progression toward a postmodern poetics of expressing what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls the «unpresentable» (1984). The attraction for the paradoxical or unexplainable is noted as an important part of postmodern discourse. Staging becomes the only recourse of the effort to supplement the inadequacy of mimetic representation.<sup>10</sup> While all three narrators are faced with the limits of cognitive discourse, only the Old Man moves beyond the brick wall of mimetic representational strategies to the staging of the unpresentable, parallel to Goytisoló's staging of the postmodern autobiographical dynamic in *Teoría*.

Despite the erosion of the Old Man's power and the subsequent fusion of voices, the Old Man's project is distinct from that of the previous two narrators in that he displays an ironic self-awareness. Whereas Carlos and Ricardo center their narrations on mysterious absent women, who serve as the motor for self-expression, the Old Man revolves his story around his impending death and the great unknown that it represents. Each author, then, must contend with the limitations of representation that threaten the subject's wholeness. But only the Old Man manages to transcend these discursive restrictions by inscribing his cognizance

<sup>9</sup> See William Paulson's *The Noise of Culture* for a similar account of the function of noise in a world of information.

<sup>10</sup> In *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, Wolfgang Iser contends that literature stages the duality of human existence that escapes cognitive discourse.

of them. Unlike the naïve Carlos and Ricardo, who write for the present, the Old Man writes for posterity by turning to an imagined audience of future readers who will actively participate in the meaning of his work. In so doing, the Old Man acknowledges the otherness of the self that invalidates perceptions of the author as autonomous. Carlos and Ricardo are intent on capturing and explaining the other, but the Old Man moves beyond the world of his narration and reaches out to an imagined future audience. He releases the creative potential of language by freeing it from the shackles of mimeticism.<sup>11</sup>

Despite his declarations of superiority and self-sufficiency, in the last few pages of the novel the Old Man becomes more and more interested in his relationship with those he is leaving behind, the inheritors of his legacy. He begins to address readers in the second-person plural (*vosotros*), asking a series of questions that suggests both a concern for and an awareness of community, a topic with which he seemed unconcerned previously. His comments on the relationship between author and reader are of particular interest, as they emphasize the importance of the reader in the process of artistic creation. According to him, the reader is an integral part of this dynamic model of textual meaning:<sup>12</sup>

Y así como en una obra de ficción su sentido último no hay que buscarlo en el texto, ni en su autor, ni en el lector, sino en la relación que vincula la obra con uno y otro, relación a través de la cual aquella cobra vida, se vivifica, a la vez que ilumina la figura del autor lo mismo que la del lector, así, de modo semejante, nuestra relación de conocimiento respecto al ser humano y al mundo en que vive. (307)

The Old Man proposes an understanding of textual meaning that avoids the violence of signification by suggesting a dynamic relationship among the writer, reader, and text. Such a model denies an absolute figure of authority that would guarantee a fixed and stable meaning, therefore allowing for a wealth of readings. The meaning of *Teoría* is not captured; it is suggested. It is the theoretical point where the author, the text, and the reader converge. The Old Man's perspective on the nature of textual meaning and authority has radical implications, for it

<sup>11</sup> See Gay's study on Mimesis and autobiographical fiction in *Antagonía* for a similar reading of the Old Man's position in *Teoría*: «Si los volúmenes anteriores se configuraban a partir de una sucesión de narradores, con la reiterada presencia del lector, *Teoría del conocimiento* se cierra con el reconocimiento del demiurgo, del dios creador, que mueve los hilos de la función definitiva. El cierre del ciclo supone no sólo la muerte del Viejo, ese Esopo velazqueño escéptico y decadente, sino la autonomía de una obra que definitivamente se les escapa, tanto a este último narrador como a su autor, irremediamente de las manos (157).

<sup>12</sup> DeWeese contends that the subject of *Antagonía* is transcendence itself, and she refers to the tetralogy as «un estímulo a la creatividad y el conocimiento. Es un espacio mágico, como la mandala, en que el autor y el lector pueden encontrarse» (55).

suggests that even the most oppressive absolute discourse is open to subversion. Even the most sturdy of selves is defined alongside and in mutual exchange with its community and context.

The Old Man lingers between the desire to be the final author of his life story and the acknowledgment that this is impossible. By choosing to embrace the loss of control accompanying the last work of his legacy and its deposit into the hands of a transcriber, and then the latter's progeny, the Old Man oddly gains power. He unexpectedly secures his immortality by embracing his own death and inviting future readers to participate in the interpretation of his life story. He abandons the traditional model of authorship that would posit him as the absolute authority over the legacy and recognizes the importance of the audience/readers as participants in the process, much like Goytisolo does in the construction of *Teoría*.

The Old Man stands as a possible model for authorship in our postmodern context of relative truth and fluid subjectivities. This context denies the possibility of a dictator, whose power necessitates the last word. Instead, like Luis Goytisolo does with *Antagonía*, the Old Man gains power by inscribing his own limitations as author-figure in a postmodern context.

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