



Count Julian

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Exiled in Tangiers, cut off from home and country, the narrator of Count Julian rants against the homeland he was forced to leave: Spain. The second novel in Juan Goytisolo's trilogy (including Marks of Identity and Juan the Landless), this story of an exiled Spaniard confronts all of Goytisolo's own worst fears about fascist Spain.

Count Julian Details

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Author : Juan Goytisolo

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From Reader Review Count Julian for online ebook

Annie Primera says

Serían cinco estrellas si le hubiera entendido algo =)

Iñaki Tofiño says

Curiosa lectura para los tiempos que corren; ¿reivindicar la figura del conde don Julián, la traición y la invasión musulmana de España?

Evidentemente no hay que leerlo en clave "Charlie Hebdo", seguramente nada más lejos de la intención del autor que defender el terrorismo fundamentalista. Su idea es claramente otra: luchar contra los esencialismos, defender la hibridez, la mezcla, el Otro musulmán enraizado, mal que a algunos les pese, en la historia de España.

Un buen punto de partida para reflexionar sobre las categorías de "nosotros" y "ellos", lo propio y lo ajeno.

David says

After enjoying "Señas de identidad" I followed up with this book "Reivindicación del conde don Julián" (this is the original title).

First published in 1970, Goytisolo wants to vindicate Count Julian, who allowed the Moors to invade Spain in the eighth century after the last Visigoth king, Rodrigo raped one of his daughters. Why vindication? Goytisolo was exiled to Morocco fearing the harsh politics of General Franco, and his book would not be published in Spain till after Franco's death in 1975.

Let's say Goytisolo does not mince words. This is a harsh, dire book full of revenge and disgust for Spain. He singles out Spanish born Seneca, the philosopher and Queen Isabela, the most Catholic of queens (favouring an illustrative description of her private parts). His point of view is that Spain had become too rigid and "Catholic" and allowing the muslims in would break this monolithic doctrine.

Reading this book now some 50 years later, having visited the country twice and seeing the refugee crisis now, things have certainly changed. Obviously with the end of Franco, Spain has embraced multi-culturalism even though for centuries the Jews, Muslims and Christians seem to co-exist, despite the issues today. Yes things have changed and I would like to hear Goytisolo's views now. Maybe this book helped the change.

Having said this, I enjoyed the book. Written as part poem; part treatise, it can be amusing, sad and powerful all at once. His language is wonderful, I often found myself reading it aloud. It almost needs to be spoken. At times I just read and didn't even know where he was going. It reminded me of James Joyce's "Finnegan's Wake" - you read it for the sheer enjoyment, but at least Don Julián makes sense.

Now to track down "Juan sin tierra" to round out the trilogy.

Justin Evans says

I wasn't all that keen on *Marks of Identity*, the first of Goytisolo's trilogy. It had a couple of memorable scenes, but otherwise seemed to be difficult for the sake of difficulty. Luckily, CJ is substantially shorter, so I was willing to give it a chance; and I just read Gibbon's paragraph on the original Count Julian, which reminded me of this book.

And I'm glad it did. I only wish I knew i) Spanish and ii) much more about Spanish literary history, because I suspect there's a lot going on here that I only get in a very vague way. Count Julian is a semi-mythical character who sold 'Spain' out to the invading Islamic armies in the middle ages; Goytisolo imagines himself as a Count Julian figure, who, in the words of de Sade, would perpetrate a crime so horrific that his very existence "would become the cause of some sort of disorder," and so mammoth in scale that "the effect of it would be prolonged far beyond my own lifetime." Like, you know, selling out Spain to the Muslims.

CJ the book is a description of a few such hypothetical crimes, mixed in with some extraordinary invective against Spain and the Spanish, particularly the myths of Spain (at one point they're collapsed into the dung of a famous species of Iberian goat), and most importantly, the fascist government of the late twentieth century. It's hard to tell, but it seems that most of these crimes are kind of day-dream hallucinations, though the first crime--crushing bugs in the books of great Spanish authors--is really the frame for the rest of the book. I won't repeat the content of the crimes, because, frankly, they're genuinely horrifying.

As much as I enjoy expressions of sheer disgust about speleologists, this book is even better than that. First--though my ignorance of Spanish holds me back--Goytisolo is clearly out to deform the Spanish language as much as possible, since it was taken as a symbol of Spanishness during the period. He tries, in effect, to write beautifully in an intentionally bad way, which sounds unpleasant, and occasionally is. Second, what could be a simple rant is structured around a number of recurring images and incidents, clearly inspired by musical composition. It works very well, better here than in, e.g., Javier Marias, though it works fairly well for him too. Finally, Goytisolo gets a surprising amount of content from the idea of looking: Julian stands in North Africa, looking across the straits at Spain every morning, just as a spectator stares at a snake.

So, in short, this book is linguistically challenging, symbolically rich, astonishingly well-structured, intellectually sound, and more than a little grotesque. Count Julian is an incredible character, and the ending of the book left me shaken. Not for everyone. Contemporary Anglophone readers will certainly freak out about its treatment of women (forgetting, in the process, that an assault on a woman who is symbolizing a country is at the same time an assault on the mythology of Motherlands and the use of the patria's 'femininity' in the interests of militarism and oppression). But a masterpiece nonetheless.

Hermochi says

Qué libro tan difícil. Jamás he leído algo con tantas referencias con un estilo tan oscuro. Es una novela que funciona como amalgama onírica de situaciones que le ocurren al personaje, con pensamientos, conversaciones, de forma que está todo entremezclado y no se diferencia bien qué está pasando. Menos mal que la edición es una maravilla y te permite seguir bien la lectura.

Por lo demás, me ha gustado mucho la crítica a la España oxidada y los valores patrios que puede ser revisionados, aunque se haga en esta explosión que es el texto.

dimwig says

he's at his excoriating best when he's writing about metaphorical vaginas

Emanuela says

One of the worst things I have ever read. Boring, dull and disgusting.

David Harrison says

This is the first novel I have read using 'stream of consciousness' as its mode of narration. Although somewhat jarring and confusing at first, the stream of consciousness continues on at a rapid pace and you become totally immersed in the world (both internal and external) of the character. For a while, I found the often random, interrupting, unconnected thoughts to be difficult to follow and caused me to lose sight of the main point of certain sections in the narrative, however they added to the overall chaotic feeling of thought processes and linked images.

As someone who has a keen and passionate interest in the Middle East and Spain, I found the premise of this novel to be wonderfully exciting - a modern day Count Julian, traitor of Spain. The treason appears to be mostly hallucinatory or imaginary in nature, caused by daydreams and smoking of too much kef, but the effect upon the reader (especially those who may have felt alienation from a place, rejection of one's identity or disassociation with traditional society) is great.

The meandering, chaotic streets of Tangier full of beggars, market traders, and shisha cafés provide the setting as the narrator goes about his day encountering tourists (especially Spanish tourists) and imagining plots to betray Spain to the Moors. Gazing across the Straits to the Iberian peninsula is a constant theme of the book.

The reason for the narrator's exile from his homeland is not clear, and it is debatable whether the narrator truly sympathises with the 'Moors', or whether this is a simple act of siding with the 'Other' out of spite and vengeance. The narrator does show some orientalist tendencies when describing groups of Arab warrios, but the intense dislike for the 'Us' (the Spanish - now become another 'Other' to the narrator) culture and tradition is the main force of the novel and therefore leaves me feeling uncertain about the narrators place within the Arab society he has adopted as his home.

No aspect of society remains untouched - literature, Spanish traditions such as bullfighting, the Catholic Church, food, landscape, politics, consumerism, industrialisation. Some passages are entirely ridiculous, and others are grotesque but the narrative is exciting, dizzying and a superb iconoclastic attack with a distinct Arab flavour.

