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# KIRKUS REVIEWS

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**Delibes, Miguel**  
**THE HEDGE**  
Trans. by Frances M.  
Lopez-Morillas  
Columbia Univ. Press \$16.95  
11/? SBN: 231-05460-2

There is a bag of tricks and japes and methods and set-pieces in this Spanish novel that may please devotees of postmodernist "metafiction"; others will find it merely burdensome. In the little sliver of actual story here, Jacinto San José, a counting-house clerk, suffers a phobia about zeros. Meanwhile, Jacinto's co-worker seems to have turned into a dog. And the counting-house overseer and all-around generalissimo is the lordly, female-breasted, ritualistic Don Abdón. There are sections of incomplete speech; in other sections all punctuation is spelled out ("... as if he were trying to catch something comma nervously comma and from between his fingers comma near his nose comma a partridge flew out with a short whistle whic, whic period); in still other spots all personal pronouns are reassuringly double-identified. Moreover, at the end, Jacinto turns into the hedge he has been cultivating all through the book. The point of these thick but unaccountable elements? A message, it seems, about individuality and its annihilation:

"The only chance we humans had, the Tower of Babel, we threw it away like fools. But can you imagine, my boy, a free man without a coin in his pocket? Don Abdon, you are the most motherly father of all fathers. Then, are you insinuating, Jacinto San José, that order is not freedom? Jack, jack, under every bed a whack! Is it true that there are times when you have to write more zeroes than others before you get dizzy? The hedge is the defense of the timid." Linguistic, political, and theological/metaphysical musings: an unappealing metafictional stew.



FUNDACIÓN MIGUEL DELIBES

cream and thin cream. The color photography is outstanding. [November]

## Interior Design

**MAKING SPACE: How to Get the Space You Need Out of the Space You Have** Sally Clark and Lois Perschetz. Clarkson N. Potter, \$24.95 ISBN 0-517-54716-3

The authors, both veteran design reporters and editors, cover essentially the same material as the recent *Double Duty Decorating* (PW Forecasts, Sept. 16), i.e., creating practical and attractive living, dining and sleeping spaces, bathrooms, kitchens, storage, and spaces for work, media and children. While the ideas and information included in both books are of equal soundness and quality, *Making Space* has the more impressive layout and is visually more exciting. For the most part the text consists of explanatory captions for nearly 500 extremely handsome photographs. Among the most attractive projects included here are a family/kitchen/dining room created by adding part of an old barn to the existing kitchen of a country house, and an office/dining/sewing room ingeniously fitted into a three-room apartment. Also included is an illustrated guide to unusual space-saving furniture and accessories along with directories of manufacturers, designers and architects. *First serial to Home, Redbook and Ladies' Home Journal; Literary Guild selection.* [November]

## Needlecraft

**SOFT TOYS TO STITCH AND STUFF** Jean Mandrell Benson. Doubleday, \$14.95 ISBN 0-385-18202-3

Crafters will face only one problem as they explore Benson's treasury: which beguiling stuffed toy to make first. There are over 40 items, representing original designs that the author creates for stores and private clients. Excellent color photos show off the charms of a brown woolly sheep, a pink pig, dolls, a worm-and-apple pillow, etc. The book's introduction offers advice on materials, with Benson's recommendation for choosing fake furs as easy to work with and giving the toys a cuddly, lifelike feel. Incisive instructions assure readers of success whether they tackle small projects (a wee mouse) or the larger ones, all the way up to a 20"-high horse, the right size for a child's seat. With the exception of the horse and a few other biggies, the patterns are all full-size, ready for tracing. Diagrams, drawings and black-and-white photos illustrate the steps in cutting and construction. *Better Homes and Gardens Crafts Club selection; BOMC alternate.* [November 4]

P.W.

**NEEDLEWORK DRAGONS AND OTHER MYTHICAL CREATURES** Carol Gault. Van Nostrand Reinhold, \$19.50 ISBN 0-442-22894-5

Engagingly illustrated with photographs (four pages in full color), diagrams, graphs, patterns, charts, this enchanting book comprises 25 projects of varying degrees of sophistication and complexity. In her resolve to "inspire the beginner and challenge the expert," Gault has selected a range of designs from a cross-stitch alphabet piece to a quilt appliquéd with mythical beasts, from a Chinatown dragon needlework pillow to a phoenix blackwork mounted picture. Serpents, unicorns, centaurs, fairies, elves, flying horses and other winged creatures slither, prance, float and gambol over such objects as book covers, portfolios, coasters, handbags and boxes, though the preponderance of designs are meant for pillows or wall hangings. Every project is presented with closely detailed, exemplary directions and accompanied by thorough material specifications; and the general text is liberally instructive on the basic needlework techniques, the transfer and enlargement of designs, blocking, framing, hemming and other finishing processes. Both practical and decorative, this collection will delight the needleworker longing to create images out of those shimmering realms of fantasy and imagination. [November]

## Photography

**EXAMPLES: The Making of Forty Photographs**

Ansel Adams. N.Y. Graphic Society/Little, Brown, \$35 ISBN 0-8212-1551-5 Seldom is photography written about in Churchillian accents, simple and resonant, but that's what Adams does in this delightful auto-exposure of the best of his life work. ("... a grand view of the Golden Gate commanded me to set up the heavy tripod... and focus on the wonderful evolving landscape of clouds.") The author recalls technical, logistical and esthetic adventures that led to his own favorite pictures, many of which, of course, are now classics of the art. Excitement leaps from the page as Adams sights "an inevitable photograph" from a highway, then scrambles to align his equipment before the image perceived could vanish with the sun. The outcome was the most popular of all Adams images: "Moonrise. Hernandez, New Mexico." Camera enthusiasts will relish the author's account of developing and printing this and other pictures as the famous Adams "zone system" of exposure and preplanned development evolves. Each of the 40 photographs discussed is reproduced in duotone. *First serial to Popular Photography.* [November 11]

## FICTION

**THE HEDGE**

Miguel Delibes, translated by Frances M. López-Morillas. Columbia University Press, \$16.95 ISBN 0-231-05460-2 One of two initial titles in Columbia's new European translation series, this imaginative, macabre parable by a noted Spanish journalist and novelist was published in 1969, six years before the death of Franco, to whom it obviously refers. The blackly comic story, written in the style of a French *nouveau roman*, deals with life under a stifling dictatorship ruled by "the most motherly father of all fathers," Don Abdon, a Buddha-like figure with a crew cut and black-nippled maternal breasts that he covers with a red polka-dotted bra for swimming. (Actually, Don Abdon can't swim, but no one dares say so.) Jacinto, a kind but cautious clerk, works for Don Abdon Ltd., the country's main employer, in a pool of calligraphers and "number adders." He seems as unquestioning and sheeplike as the system could possibly require, though he does stick by his friend Genaro who was demoted to the life of a dog (and is taken for walks on a leash) after suggesting a wage increase. But then Jacinto develops acute dizziness when writing zeros and is sent to plant a hedge around a rural rest hut as therapy. Not until the tendrils snake their way over and around him does he admit to himself that he is in danger, and by then it is too late. Delibes's evocation of totalitarianism is brilliantly convincing, and the translation never misses a beat. [November]

**FALLS THE SHADOW**

Emanuel Litvinoff. Stein and Day, \$15.95 ISBN 0-8128-2944-1 Neither a true mystery nor a true thriller but an interesting amalgam of both genres integrated into a serious study of character, Litvinoff's new book (he is the author of the trilogy *Faces of Terror*) is a crime novel with metaphysical overtones. The solution to the mystery is provided early on; most of the story is taken up with an investigation proving the hypothesis. When middle-aged Israeli businessman Avrom Benamir is gunned down by an assassin in Tel Aviv, police inspector Amos Shomron becomes involved in a case that will change his life. The killer, identified as Frank Sinclair, turns out to be a Dachau survivor named Franz Slonimsky; moreover, he claims the victim was really a former Nazi commandant at Dachau named Oberleutnant Ulrich Walther Kampmann. As Amos becomes obsessed in finding the reasons why a Nazi would take up a new life as a model citizen of Israel, he opens old wounds dating back to the Holocaust

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DELIBES

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# Two Spanish Fantasies

## THE HEDGE

By Miguel Delibes.  
Translated by Frances M. López-Morillas.  
206 pp. New York:  
Columbia University Press. \$17.95.

## THE BACK ROOM

By Carmen Martín Gaité.  
Translated by Helen R. Lane.  
210 pp. New York:  
Columbia University Press. \$17.95.

By TOBY TALBOT

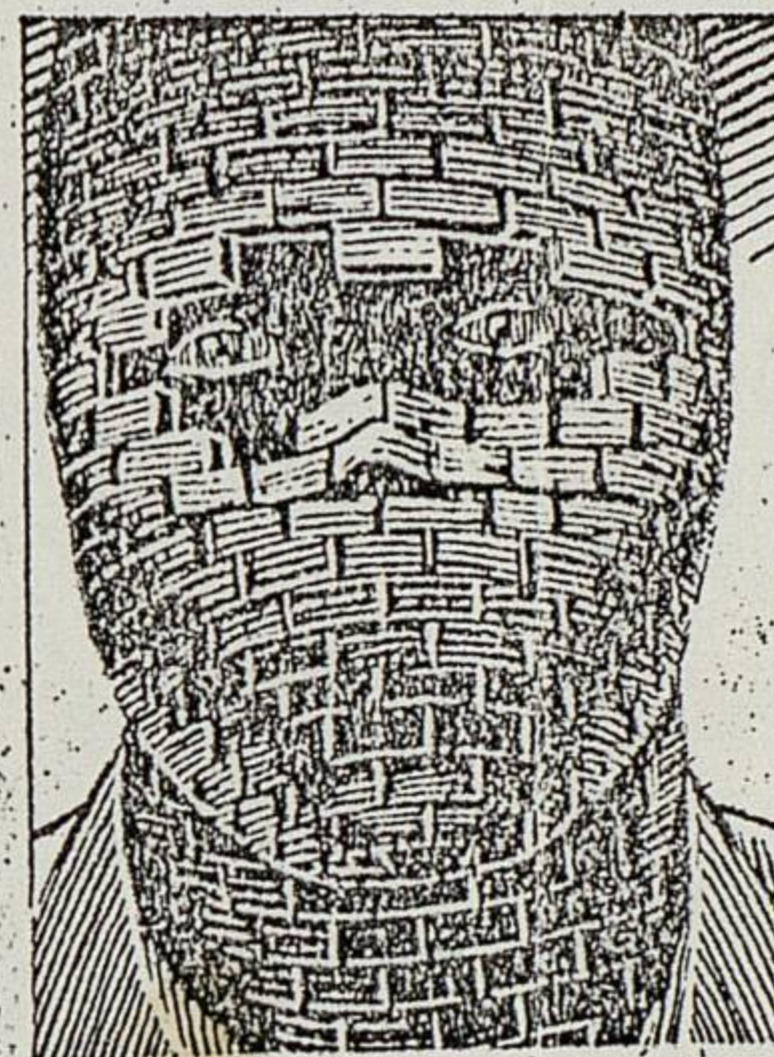
A DEMANDING work by one of Spain's foremost novelists, "The Hedge" covers a territory similar to Kafka's in presenting a grotesque vision of the individual crushed by a mechanized, totalitarian society. Set in a minimal, dreamlike landscape, it follows the "progress" of Jacinto San José Nino, 44 years old, celibate, so timid people keep wondering "what kind of nest he has fallen from." He is employed as a calligrapher in a vast company ruled by Don Abdón, a Buddha-like despot with huge breasts, "the most motherly of all fathers."

One day, Jacinto, dizzy from writing zeroes, questions the difference between zero and the letter O. He is sent off by Don Abdón to Rest and Recuperation Hut No. 13 with some American hybrid seeds and the

Toby Talbot is the author of a memoir, "A Book About My Mother," and the translator of "Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number" by Jacobo Timerman.

injunction to plant them around his hut. A hedge proliferates in a wink and turns into an exuberant, entwined wall that shuts Jacinto off from the world. Drowning in a sea of vegetation and becoming increasingly frantic, the prisoner attempts to scale the mammoth tendrils, to hack at them, burn them, explode them, to send out messenger birds. In the end, he yells at his image in the mirror, "They've suicided you, Jacinto!" (his name now in lower case), and with this final abdication of the self, he succumbs to a nonhuman transformation, content to survive at any price.

A quotation from the philosopher Max Horkheimer at the beginning of this parable (its original title when published in 1969 translates as "Parable of the Shipwrecked Man") establishes the motif of the book — "My principal emotion is fear." Jacinto is scared of losing his job, of having children and having to raise them to be either victims or executioners in a pitiless society, scared of the fate of his friend, Genaro, who's been converted into a dog. Jacinto's primitive fear of engulfment invites the Freudian interpretation of the devouring mother. The monstrous hedge evokes not so much Jack's challenging beanstalk as the cancerous, unsurmountable encroachment of an Orwellian state, of either the Franco or Eastern European variety. The barbarization of the protagonist fulfills Ortega y Gasset's prophecy of the dehumanization of man, victimized by his very



Drawings by Mark Taffel

motif principal  
el temor

progress, specialization and conformity. And along with it comes the disintegration of thought and language. "Cogito ergo sum" is displaced by assigning the responsibility for thought to the oppressive state.

The experimental technique of "The Hedge" conveys this oppressiveness. Its discontinuous narrative line is without section breaks. Jacinto's extensive interior monologues are in everyday language and italics; the rest is in repetitive, at times onomatopoeic, bureaucratic language. Genaro's canine plight is oddly punctuated, the symbols cumbrously written out (i.e., "period," "comma," "semicolon"). There is a lack of the novelist's narrative voice and almost a total

absence of dialogue (reflecting the lack of communication and solidarity between men in that alienated world). Jacinto himself has invented a new sublanguage, Contracto, whose objective, "THROUGH SILENCE TO PEACE," entails using fewer and shorter words. An example runs as follows: "Belov associas; a few syllabs to give you welco and tell you that we are making progre. It is a necessari for Humani to save syllabs. It is very dange to talk more than we think. . . . Let us be laco and try to cause humas to talk as little as possi with other humas, for if one huma speaks less with ano huma, disagre is impossil and therefo we will reach a defini perio of harmo."

Continued on Page 20

# ycemia

## HYPOGLYCEMIA

### Factor or Fad

What You Should Know about  
Low Blood Sugar

DYNN I BENNION, M.D.

ted for hypoglycemia  
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DGLYCEMIA: FACT OR  
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written for the lay-  
that deals with the  
truthfully."

Professor of Clinical  
ity of Surrey, England

ion presents a clear  
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—Scott M. Grundy,  
M.D., Ph.D. Chief,  
Center for Human Nu-  
trition, and Professor,  
Internal Medicine and  
Biochemistry, Univer-  
sity of Texas Health  
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7. I enclose my check or money order for  
wish, I may return the book postpaid within

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Parry is kidnapped by Co-  
manches after a bloody raid on  
her settlement. During the next  
16 years, she resists the Indians,  
then relents, then assimilates —  
all with a plodding dispassion  
that defies credibility. Douglas  
C. Jones's caricatures of brutal  
Comanche men and subservient  
Comanche women are rivaled  
by his clichés about Mexicans.

za's fat wife hummed as she  
worked. It was a good life."  
Soon both Mexicans are dead by  
Comanche bullets. The novel be-  
comes relentless gore, portray-  
ing a Comanche culture dedi-  
cated to murder, rape and tor-  
ture.

"Season of Yellow Leaf" is  
worth considering if only to  
make us question the popularity

The Paris Review.

Mel Watkins is an editor of  
The New York Times Book Re-  
view.

Diane Cole is a critic and  
writer in New York.

Valerie Miner's novels in-  
clude "Blood Sisters" and  
"Murder In The English De-  
partment."

## Spanish Fantasies

Continued from Page 11

Mr. Delibes and his readers  
are extremely fortunate in his  
translator, Frances M. López-  
Morrillas, whose English ver-  
sion captures the satirical, the  
absurd and the grotesque and  
guides the reader through the  
complexities of a very wily and  
serious work.

**A** WRITER is suffering  
through a bout of insom-  
nia, a copy of Tzvetan  
Todorov's structuralist study  
"The Fantastic" in her hand, a  
print of Luther and the Devil on  
her wall, when she receives a  
cryptic phone call from a  
stranger, who materializes  
shortly. Thus does Carmen  
Martín Gaité, an award-win-  
ning Spanish novelist, launch  
herself and the reader into a  
fantasy world.

The black-garbed stranger, a  
sort of interviewer-cum-ana-  
lyst, unlocks the back room of  
the writer's memory with his  
questions. The two of them  
share cigarettes, tea and pur-  
plish pills taken from a little  
golden box to release the  
writer's imagination. Shifting  
back and forth between frag-  
ments of the past and the  
present, the woman constructs  
a collage of growing up before  
the Spanish Civil War and dur-  
ing the Franco era.

Gradually the autobiographi-  
cal fragments coalesce, and we  
find ourselves in the presence of  
a writer of 50, a bit hard of hear-  
ing, once married, tending to  
seek refuge in literature, strain-  
ing to find a narrative thread for  
a jumble of notes and ideas

she's been keeping in a mislaid  
notebook. Encouraged by her  
interlocutor, she loses herself in  
flashbacks, dreams and fanta-  
sy, fragments of poems and  
songs, childhood games and in-  
cantations, bygone friends and  
romances, telling all, heedless  
of whether it happened or not. It  
occurs to her to pull together  
this rush of memories into a fan-  
tastic novel. (Referring to Todo-  
rov's work, she extracts the no-  
tions of breaking through the  
boundaries between time and  
space and of the blurring of am-  
biguity and certainty.)

She recaptures her youth, the  
dressmakers, dances, Deanna  
Durbin movies, summers at a  
spa, flights to an imaginary is-  
land, her struggle to escape a  
rigid code of feminine behavior,  
as well as the bombing of her  
native city of Salamanca, the  
air shelters, the Falangists in  
the street, the omnipresent Gen.  
Francisco Franco with his re-  
pressive regime, the black mar-  
ket, the momentous conversion  
of her back playroom (analo-  
gous to the back room of memo-  
ry) into a storeroom for hoarded  
foodstuffs, and finally Franco's  
funeral.

**T**HE pages write them-  
selves. At the story's end,  
writer and reader share a  
kind of uncertainty — was the  
experience, the text, reality or  
dream, truth or illusion? In this  
topsy-turvy world à la Lewis  
Carroll (to whom the book is  
dedicated), did the interlocutor  
really exist, or was he an appa-  
rition, a genie, a representation

of the writer's muse, what Todo-  
rov calls the "ambiguous vi-  
sion"? Yet as Poe claimed,  
"The mind of man can imagine  
nothing which has not really ex-  
isted."

"The Back Room," is autobio-  
graphical, fantastic metafiction  
that seamlessly examines a  
woman's life, the division of  
personality, the creative pro-  
cess and the theory of fantasy as  
a literary genre. It explores the  
mysteries of the mind, the de-  
lights of the imagination,  
writer's block. "Control your  
curiosity. Curiosity has always  
gotten you into terrible messes  
where you lose your footing,"  
the inner voice of the self-cen-  
soring writer says. Her interloc-  
utor advises her to write the  
way she talks, yield to digres-  
sions, dare to face up to uncer-  
tainty rather than submit to the  
obsessive compulsion to follow  
the white pebbles of order. Here  
is how Carmen Martín Gaité  
pictures the back room: "I also  
imagine it as the attic of one's  
brain, a sort of secret place full  
of a vague jumble of all sorts of  
miscellaneous junk, separated  
from the cleaner and more or-  
derly anterooms of the mind by  
a curtain that is only occasion-  
ally pulled back. The memories  
that may come to us as some-  
thing of a surprise live in hiding  
in the back room. They always  
emerge from there, and only  
when they want to. It's no use  
trying to flush them out."

Columbia University Press is  
to be thanked for embarking on  
this series of translations of  
"Twentieth-Century Continen-  
tal Fiction" and particularly for  
filling a longstanding gap in the  
presentation of recent Spanish  
works. And Helen R. Lane also  
deserves congratulations for  
her graceful translation. ■

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