

## STRUCTURAL AND THEMATIC REITERATION IN DELIBES'S RECENT FICTION

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WITH the publication of *El príncipe destronado* (1973) and *Las guerras de nuestros antepasados* (1975), Miguel Delibes has returned to a more traditional vein of writing<sup>1</sup> after having composed the fragmented, labyrinthine *Parábola del naufrago* (1969), whose Neo-Baroque verbosity, fantastic nature and temporal and linguistic experimentation disconcerted much of his public. While relatively more conventional in their straightforward chronology, linear narrative and recognizable structural disposition, Delibes's two recent novels exhibit a sophistication of technique consonant with the author's continuing maturation.

*El príncipe destronado* could well be labeled a novelette; its one-hundred-odd pages of large print, interspersed with cartoons by the author's son, permit a reading at one sitting. The plot is loose; only a time-set beginning and end provide a framing structure. *El príncipe* recounts a day in the life of a four-year-old boy, from the morning hour when the child awakens until he falls asleep that same night. The title, as a familiar epithet describing the displacement of one child by the birth of a younger sibling, suggests the unsettling nature of events in the life of young Quico as things and people around him—his world—seldom lend themselves to his wishes or needs. The remaining list of characters, a model of narrative economy, includes the mother and father, who see their six children as the charges of the two maids, Vítora and Domi; the boys, Quico, Juan, Marco and Pablo, elder sister Merche and baby Cristina. With Quico as the narrative's principal center of consciousness, Delibes relates the boy's precarious victories and defeats in toilet training, his resistance to eating the food placed before him, his efforts at winning attention, the mischievous games with his year-old sister which bring quick retribution, and many other amusing as well as significant incidents that constitute Quico's less than se-

cure, comfortable or desirable world.

*Las guerras de nuestros antepasados*, a more ambitious undertaking, is some three times the length of *El príncipe*, with a larger cast and more complex orchestration. The story, told in dialogue form by a hospital prisoner, Pacífico Pérez, to a psychiatrist, purports to be a tape-recording of seven sessions, largely one-sided conversations comprising as many chapters. Pacífico, imprisoned for having killed a man and subsequently sentenced to death for admitting—falsely—the murder of another, recounts his life from childhood to the day he turned himself in as a murderer, and thereafter his time in prison up to the novel's present, when the tape-recorded conversations take place. The longer chronological span allows for greater development of themes, subplots and characterization than in *El príncipe*.

It might appear after superficial examination that these two novels are more dissimilar than otherwise. No critic yet has studied relationships between the two,<sup>2</sup> and their apparent differences may well have discouraged such comparative analysis. There are several immediately evident points of divergence. The setting is rural in *Las guerras* and urban in *El príncipe*. The village atmosphere of Pacífico's early life is essentially unchanged in prison; most fellow inmates are of similarly rural backgrounds. In *El príncipe*, the action unfolds primarily inside a large, modern apartment building, with only brief glimpses of the street—concrete and stoplights—an environment from which nature has been eradicated, save for an occasional climatological reference. Concerning the socio-economic level represented, the ignorance, backwardness and poverty of Pacífico's village contrast with the opulence of Quico's family, the ostentatious display of affluence in their chauffeur-driven car and abundant domestic appliances still rare in Spain in the early sixties. The two novels differ in length and the time-span of

events. *Las guerras* covers Pacífico's entire life—some twenty-six years—as opposed to one day in the life of Quico. Regarding chronological disposition, *Las guerras* is essentially retrospective and *El príncipe* uninterrupted present; except for the previous summer's vacation, Quico betrays few memories. The tone, while ironic in both novels, involves more frequent exaggeration, more blatant caricature and parody in *Las guerras*. Pacífico's imaginative and hallucinatory account contrasts with the pedestrian verosimilitude of daily domestic trivia in *El príncipe*.

When these works are compared with their immediate predecessors, it can be perceived that *El príncipe* is more similar to *Cinco horas con Mario* (1966) while *Las guerras* is closer to *Parábola del naufrago* (1969). The first pair share the limited time span, the indoor, urban setting, the domestic nature of events narrated, and the symbolic representation of the forces of civil war via their incarnation in marital conflict and familial misunderstanding. Although perhaps not immediately obvious to all readers, the latent presence of the civil conflict in *El príncipe* proved strong enough to influence the title of the movie version (*La guerra de Papá*, 1977).

*Las guerras* and *Parábola* have in common the more fantastic nature of events, the use of more stylized language, greater irony—frequently verging upon sarcasm—and more abundant use of “sick” humor, obvious caricature, exaggeration and distortion. *El príncipe* can be included unhesitatingly among Delibes's novels of social realism, to which he assigned *Cinco horas*. *Las guerras*, despite employing fewer and less daring experimental elements than *Parábola*, would be difficult to class in any group except the fourth of Delibes's production,<sup>3</sup> which by the novelist's previous judgment included only *Parábola*. The allegorical nature of both, their “atentados deliberados contra la gramática,”<sup>4</sup> and nightmarish visions of society as a devourer of individuals relate these novels closely on the level of artistic inspiration.

Apparent divergences notwithstanding, the same similarity to earlier works which serves on one level to distinguish *El príncipe* and *Las guerras* suggests that mutual thematic concerns may be related to further points of convergence. Obviously, several

differences noted—urban vs. rural setting, socio-economic status of characters, even length and narrative chronology—are superficial, with no inherent or necessary relationship to enduring thematic preoccupations of the novelist. Nor do such differences preclude the presence of similar techniques, of identical or comparable formal elements whose combination could reveal a confluence of basic, underlying structures. We therefore hypothesize the existence of varied forms of stylistic, thematic and structural reiteration common to both novels. Our method will be the alternate and comparative examination of the two works under these successive headings. The intent of this article is to pursue the hypothesis of internal similarity, establishing such points as emerge from our analysis.

On a structural plane, the two works reveal points of contact not visible at first glance. Both novels are precisely dated with respect to action in the novelistic present, 3 December 1963 (*El príncipe*) and 21-27 May 1961 (*Las guerras*); their temporal situations are of close historical proximity. *El príncipe* has a narrative and historical span of eleven hours, structured in twelve chapters; *Las guerras*, longer in historical time, is closer to the shorter work in narrative time. Each of the seven sessions lasts some two hours, approximating the fourteen waking hours of Quico. The seven chapters, together with the doctor's prologue and epilogue, result in a comparable number of chapters or divisions (nine in *Las guerras*, twelve in *El príncipe*), with such sub-structures based upon time sequence. The chronological principle governing the sub-structuring of *El príncipe* is hours, days in *Las guerras*, each following a linear succession, with the caveat that the doctor's additions—prologue and epilogue—although corresponding to an overall chronology, do not follow the day-by-day sequence of the body of Pacífico's narrative.

*Las guerras*, with its more sophisticated internal structuring dictated by the more complex plot, possesses two parallel parts, mirror-like in correspondence of length (an equal number of pages, the unsignalled division occurring during the fourth night of Pacífico's recital), place (Humán del Otero/prison), characters (family/cell-

mates) and narrative time. The first half, more briskly paced, tautly recounts Pacífico's life in the outside world; the second offers a relatively detailed reconstruction of his years behind bars and in the prison hospital. The present novelistic time of *Las guerras* unfolds inside prison walls: all narration is retrospective with events in the first part taking place outside, those in the second—save for the abortive escape—within the microcosmic prison.

As has frequently been his wont, Delibes utilizes in these two novels the perspective of a specifically limited narrative consciousness, reproducing rather consistently a child's view of surrounding reality in *El príncipe*. (Quico's distorted perceptions are upon occasions offset by an opportune and subtle omniscience granted some characters, leading us to believe that Delibes did not consider himself totally bound by the infantile perspective.)<sup>5</sup> *Las guerras*, an autobiographical account, is told to an impartial man of science whose obvious function is to reassure the reader of the narrator's veracity and at times, his sanity. The mentally and emotionally abnormal narrator-protagonist possesses a restricted self-awareness which strikes the reader as the limiting factor imposed by the author from the outset to confer upon the narrative its peculiar, even unique character.<sup>6</sup> The resultant perspective distorts reality by reason of a deficient narrative consciousness. It is limited in its perceptive reach and lacks sophisticated interpretive ability capable of distinguishing instinctive from intellectual phenomena.

Characterization of the protagonists is largely indirect and occasionally behavioristic. Quico and Pacífico reveal themselves via thoughts and especially their words and actions. Given their dual roles of narrator-protagonist, no other character describes their physical appearance or psychological make-up. The author himself seems uninterested in their appearance; the few characteristics mentioned include Quico's blond hair and Pacífico's slender frame and thick glasses. In *Las guerras*, however, Delibes employs a fuller mode of characterization by appellatives, whether ironically or appropriately bestowed. Ironic names include those of Candi(da), Pacífico's lustful and confusedly enigmatic playmate, and Don Santiago, organizer of

the prison break, who echoes the leadership of the homonymous apostle. Appellatives which fittingly accentuate the character include those of tío Paco (nickname for Francisco) whose gentle awareness of nature embodies a Franciscan attitude, and Pacífico's own name which aptly captures his characterization as a passive, retiring individual induced to violence against his will.

At times character portrayal in both novels takes on a semblance of caricature. Quico, for example, sees his mother as a flurry of flowered cloth at one point and at another as a metonymical cigarette held by long slender fingers, his aunt Cuqui as a soft, warm nest in which to doze. Simplification and distortion ensue logically and necessarily as the result of the use of primitive mentalities as narrative perspective. In *Las guerras*, el Bisa, el Abuelo and Padre (all warmongers) are left-handed, whereas tío Paco and Pacífico, sensitive and quiet, lack this sinister trait. A tree called "el Hibernizo" flowers in autumn and produces apples in winter, a motif underscoring the proximity of these two men to nature (it grows in Paco's yard where Pacífico watches and identifies with it). "El Hibernizo" later attracts Candi who feels that she, too, resembles this tree given her nonconformist behavior. As an Edenic symbol, "el Hibernizo" is related both to self-knowledge and to bringing the lovers together with predictable ill results for Pacífico. The latter is further characterized-caricatured in a reverse mode of pathetic fallacy by sympathetic and hyperesthetic reactions when a hook is pulled from a fish's mouth (aching of the mouth, swollen lips), a tree is pruned in his presence (pain in his fingers), or upon hearing of el Bisa's war heroics with the bayonet (blood in the urine).

As with most of Delibes's mature novelistic production, neither novel possesses a coherent, easily summarized plot. Narrative unity derives from the omnipresence of the respective protagonists, witnesses to a series of sequential events which comprise, respectively, a day and a lifetime. The narration proceeds not in a hierarchical but in a chronological order, commensurate with the protagonists' mentalities. Considering their biographical structures and loosely-organized character revelation,

neither *El príncipe* nor *Las guerras* falls into the character novel category except in an approximate sense.

The two novels are comparable stylistically in utilizing what amounts to individualized sub-languages, nothing new in Delibes—the most notable linguistic precedents are *Diario de un cazador* and *Diario de un emigrante*, with more recent antecedents including the personal dialects of Carmen and Jacinto in *Cinco horas con Mario* and *Parábola del naufrago*, respectively. The lexicon of *El príncipe* is predominantly simplistic, although not entirely circumscribed by the average four-year-old's vocabulary. Quico's stereotyped forms of self-expression are modeled upon radio commercials, the maids and delivery boy, his older brothers and parents. The child repeats his incessant questions ("¿verdad, Mamá?", "¿es pecado?"), his favorite expletives ("mierda," "cagao," "culo"), and the triumphant "toca, ni gota" with a frequency exceeded only by his pleas for attention ("mira") and references to "la guerra de Papá." Pacífico speaks the rural dialect of the Tierra de Campos, punctuating it with a string of obsessively frequent expressions—"más claro, agua," "o sea," "oiga," "a ver," "por mayor," "ya ve," "mire," "talmente," "¿se da cuenta?", "bueno, vamos, pues eso," "tal cual," "eso, sí," "¿comprende?"—and inserts "que" at every possible juncture. However, Delibes does not adhere strictly to a vocabulary representative of Pacífico's brief and abortive education, nor are all the deviations to be found in the speech of Pacífico's interlocutor (who employs equally stereotyped expressions from his scientific sub-discipline).

Parallelistic devices abound in both novels, not merely on the linguistic level (repetition of words, phrases, snatches of commercials) but on the level of anecdote and scene. In Quico's case, the succession of similar or identical scenes is dictated by limitations inherent in the four-year-old mentality, childhood's natural mimetic tendencies and the narrow boundaries of his world. Repetition, verging upon monotony (as in *La hoja roja*), subliminally emphasizes the closed horizons, and the restriction of alternatives. It suggests the validity of inductive generalization, allowing the "typical" to embrace time beyond that

portrayed. Due to Quico's particular moment of development, the largest frequency of reiterated scenes occurs in situations of continency or incontinency, with attendant reward or punishment, and his retelling of the same to almost every other character encountered. A specific instance involving a single repetition or parallel scene is one wherein Quico pinches his finger as had the delivery boy earlier. His identical reaction, "Leche, me pillé" (pp. 35, 38) finds a counterpart in paired but contrasting scenes wherein the child learns an equally vulgar expression from his father (directed to the mother) only to be told by her when he repeats it that "Papá no dice esas cosas" (p. 88).

The use of parallel scenes in *Las guerras* is more subtle and complex; the repetitions are not identical but substantially modified to permit their functioning parodically. One example (others are adduced in our discussion of parodic treatment of the theme of war) is the pair of scenes in which Pacífico feels himself the nude object of scornful contemplation and ridicule by an entire village. The first—probably a drug-induced hallucination—belongs to his life before imprisonment, when the long-deserted village of Prádanos, scene of daily libidinous romps in the raw with Candi, seems suddenly to fill with spectators in festive garb crowding balconies and windows. The paired scene appears near the end of Pacífico's account, following the prison break in which he is a reluctant participant. Stripped to his underwear so the dark prison uniform will not show against the snow, and pulled from his temporary refuge in a manure heap, he is marched through another village by the Guardia Civil before the hostile residents crowding balconies in curiosity.

The principle joining the above scenes also functions to pair the two parts of the novel which correspond to Pacífico's life on the outside and his stay in prison. The latter is a mirror image of the former, reflected by a distorting glass with a resultant *esperpento* effect, particularly in motifs relating to the titular theme. In the first part, Pacífico describes the wars of his forebears, individual and collective; the second part—"his" war (the prison break)—constitutes a systematic degradation of family expectations.

Thematic similarities between *El príncipe* and *Las guerras* effectively complement the foregoing structural parallels. Of the four principal themes (war, religion, progress as a negative force, society against the individual), none are new in Delibes. In these two novels, however, he seems to have sharpened his pen, departing from his earlier, more temperate criticism. Delibes' art has repeatedly narrowed its focus in terms of time, space and characters, since the narrative concentration of *Cinco horas con Mario*, where one character, one room and one night comprise the raw material of the work. The novelist's aim at his target preoccupations is thus proportionately more accurate and revealing.

War, Delibes's *bête noir*, plays a prominent role in both works. The title, *El príncipe destronado*, alludes in bellic terms to a fratricidal contest which, though only emblematic in its hyperbole, recalls the novelist's representation of the Spanish Civil War—itsself a fratricidal Armageddon—as the Cain and Abel drama.<sup>7</sup> The title, *Las guerras de nuestros antepasados*, indicates man's endemic disposition toward war as an unbroken legacy, a standard to be carried by the next generation. In *El príncipe*, the burden falls to Paco, the recalcitrant eldest son, and in *Las guerras*, the expected standard bearer is Pacífico, no less reluctant. Quico's father, now a "captain of industry"—at one point it was said that he spoke with the harsh voice of a general—fought on the Nationalist side in the Civil War. His position of power and wealth, together with overt contempt for his father-in-law's and wife's socio-political views, are quite in harmony with his intransigent expectation that all of his sons follow in his footsteps, espousing the ultrarightist regime's ideals. Pacífico's father also fought in the Civil War on the victorious side, and while he expects his son to be ready for his own war when it comes, his interests have become primarily materialistic like those of Quico's father. Not so in the case of el Bisa and el Abue, Pacífico's great-grandfather and grandfather, who fought in the Carlist and North African conflicts respectively. So obsessed are these two old men with their combat exploits and their prowess with bayonet (el Bisa) and machine gun (el Abue) that they prefer to discuss nothing lest it be

unrelated to war. Pacífico thus is only too glad to escape their relentless prodding, even if it means going to jail—"Ahí os quedáis" (p. 177) replaces any sentimental farewell to his family as the prison doors close behind him.

Matrimonial conflict in *El príncipe*—symbolically similar to that in *Cinco horas con Mario*—and family conflict in *Las guerras* serve Delibes as allegories of forces underlying civil war. In the shorter work, mother and father wage their battle from opposite ideological stances, mirroring the larger conflict. The couple's children are drawn innocently into this family acrimony: Pablo for the reasons mentioned, and Quico who, incapable of apprehending the full meaning of his parents' verbal fusillade, functions as a pathetic pawn. Ironically, Quico's only interest in remaining in the same room with them during the noontime broadside is to exact a paternal promise that he will receive a tank for his upcoming fourth birthday. The battle lines of Pacífico's family are drawn with el Bisa, el Abue and his father on one side, and tío Paco, Pacífico, his grandmother, mother and sister as the opposition. Though the father becomes absorbed eventually by the profit motive, the older two never renounce their military fixations. The conflict drives tío Paco to reside away from his kin on a small farm. Pacífico and his mother escape by going to prison and dying, while the grandmother's suicide—"porque sois malos"—is no less an indictment than the protagonist's relief at finding himself safely behind bars. The sister, stronger than Pacífico, opts to remain, asserting herself over the remaining males by threats of physical violence. The results of the family conflict parodically coincide with those of a real civil war: death (mother, grandmother), prison (Pacífico), exile (Paco), victor (sister), and vanquished (ironically, the military fanatics) and the prosperous profiteer (father).

Delibes parodies war and bellicose attitudes time and again in the two novels. Differences in tone and style make the emphasis subtler in *El príncipe*. Rather than exaggerated caricature, one finds the war games favored by the children, echoed by mayhem and death in Juan's comic books. The family's conflictive dinnertable

conversation includes frequent references to "la guerra de Papá" and the allegation—presumably hyperbolic but never contradicted—that the respectable paterfamilias has killed "Más de cien." A primary bone of contention between the parents is the impending induction of Pablo into a paramilitary organization.

Rehearsals conducted by el Bisa constitute a more obvious and exaggerated parody of war and military maneuvers, distorted to the point of the *esperpento*. Immediately after the funeral of Pacífico's mother, the patriarch initiates the military training of the boy, just turned eighteen. Dressed in a tattered Carlist cap and jacket, blowing reveille at dawn on his rusty bugle, el Bisa arrays the three younger generations in remnants of the uniforms of "his" war. From his wheelchair, the centenarian directs rifle practice and drill, the ferocity of the burlesque recalling Valle-Inclán at his best. On a collective level, an equally amusing, if less extreme, parody is found in the various rock-throwing battles between the male villagers of Humán and Otero.

A larger and more complex parody emerges upon comparative examination of the two parts of *Las guerras*; the first presents the war tales of Pacífico's forebears, their hope and expectations for "his" war, and the second his life in prison, dominated by the abortive escape replete with military motifs which offer a distorted reflection of family stories and norms. More numerous are the parallels between the grandfather's escape from the fort at Igueriben, besieged by Moors, and the prison break, but links with other generations exist. Don Santiago, essentially immobile "commander" and strategist of the escape, is a counterpart of el Bisa: both are intransigent, obsessed with a single goal, and Don Santiago's function as director of training maneuvers—would-be escapees practice crawling on their stomachs—specifically echoes the basic training of Pacífico by el Bisa. El Bisa's slaughter of a terrified adolescent concealed in a haystack inversely anticipates Pacífico's seeking refuge in the dung-heap. The father, wounded by an exploding shell, spends some five years following "his" war in a succession of military hospitals, while Pacífico, whose incipient tuberculosis is aggravated by cold and exposure, is com-

mitted after "his" war to a series of prison hospitals. The prison at Góyar is an ancient castle-fortress, situated similarly to the fort at Igueriben. Both el Abue and Pacífico escape from the elevated rear of the respective strongholds by sliding down ropes; Pacífico (explaining the mechanics of his grandfather's exploit to the psychiatrist) draws the specific analogy, "tal cual nosotros en Góyar" (p. 49). Both subsequently crawl on their bellies, moving at night to avoid detection, concealing themselves up to their noses (el Abue in sand dunes vs. the dung-heap for Pacífico). Further irony inheres in the fact that both strongholds are defended by machine guns, with el Abue firing and Pacífico as a target. The desert's scorching heat and sand is inversely paralleled by the searing cold and snow. Both escapees are barefoot; in both cases, dummy figures are constructed to be left behind, simulating soldiers and sleeping prisoners, respectively, to deceive the "enemy." Further points of contact exist, but those cited illustrate Delibes's parodic principles. The basic irony consists in the radically opposed character, motivation and attitudes of Pacífico vis-à-vis his forebears which contrasts with the similarities of setting and anecdote. The greatest irony, not exempt of pathos, is that Pacífico, morally far better, is cast as anti-hero and villain, while the blood-thirsty Abue emerges to a hero's welcome.

Religion, another reiterated theme in Delibes, surfaces again in both *El príncipe* and *Las guerras*. An offshoot of religiosity is the pervading presence of repressive, puritanic morality, emphasizing the sexual to the exclusion of other transgressions. In *El príncipe* this can be appreciated in the attitude toward the human body. Quico learns that he will be thrown into hell for wetting his bed or his pants, a threat of retribution which alternates with that of having his "pito" severed. This mutilation so convinces the child of its potential efficacy that he himself suggests its implementation. Unable to distinguish the semantic difference between two similar phonetic groups, he humorously identifies the "Espíritu santo" as "pito santo" much to the horror of his mother and nursemaid, who would have him believe that to mention or touch his "pito" is a mortal sin. Delibes, a novelist of Catholic thesis in

*Mi idolatrado hijo, Sisi* (1953), here draws an implicit contrast between truly Christian behavior and the external trappings of religiosity, in an attenuated echo of his mirthful burlesque of superstition and credulity in *Viejas historias de Castilla la Vieja* (1963). As he did with Carmen in *Cinco horas con Mario*, the novelist exposes the use of religious language—Biblical quotations or deformations thereof—for personal or non-religious ends. In *El príncipe*, patently equivocal notions are instilled in the infantile psyche in the name of religion, contrasting with the hypocrisy of adult behavior at every turn, which produces an ironic gulf between what is practiced and what is preached. So insatiable is Domi's curiosity for things erotic that when Vítora and her soldier boyfriend are left alone to say their goodbyes, the older maid uses Quico to spy for her and report what goes on between them.

Another instance, one of many throughout *El príncipe*, involves a conversation between the mother and her sister-in-law. Tía Cuqui, concerned with the emotional consequences of Quico's loss of his privileged position as darling of the family, warns the mother of possible damage. The mother's incredulity calls forth the example of a neighborhood youth whose mother would undress in his presence until he was fifteen, which so disturbed him that his recent marriage had to be annulled. The contrast between the prohibitions attached to Quico's mentions of his body and the adults' interest in everyone else's erotic behavior constitutes an implicit indictment of a hypocritical moral code, self-serving and un-Christian.

The role of religion in *Las guerras* runs a parallel course. Pacífico feels guilt over his daily sexual excesses with Candi, confessing repeatedly to the village priest, although unable to maintain his resolve never to see her again. No comparable contrition is felt, however, when he stabs Candi's brother, Teotista, to death. Pacífico neither helps the victim as he lies on the grass, nor does he feel remorse. This attitude is consistent with the same ethical standard which does not allow Pacífico to save himself by lying; he could have claimed self-defense. Similarly, his refusal to extricate himself from the second murder charge by truthfully blaming Don Santiago for the

death of the prison guard springs from a sense of collective guilt from which the psychiatrist cannot shake Pacífico. He is convinced that, while perhaps not guilty of that particular crime, he might have been under other circumstances. Therefore, the fact that criminal intent may not be punishable according to law means little to him; spiritually he believes all men guilty of the crimes of their fellows. This notion, a faint reflection of the Biblical "brother's keeper" concept, nets Pacífico the death penalty for a crime he did not commit.

Religious superstition is a theme in both novels, as it was in *Las ratas* (1962) and *Viejas historias de Castilla la Vieja*. The area of metaphysical conjecture in *El príncipe* is occupied almost totally by the Devil, to the exclusion of God, the Virgin Mary and other benign figures, excepting the less than orthodox "Ángel de la Guarda". The children argue heatedly about the devil's physical attributes, perceive hell in the flames of the kitchen stove, and worry that "el Moro" (a deceased neighborhood cat) has been dragged off by the devil because he was black. The only mention of Christ occurs in a ritualistic bedtime prayer directed to the baby Jesus. In *Las guerras*, superstition is more pervasive. It is seen in the family's belief in the "mysticism" of the grandmother—Pacífico naively asserted that she had a halo at times, when the setting sun cast a nimbus behind her—and in the villagers' belief that, on the second of November, spirits of the dead emerged from the mouth of an abyss and surrounding crevices in the form of clouds of dust and specks of light, simulating figures which varied with the years.

Religion does not function as a truly positive force in either *El príncipe* or *Las guerras*. It appears inoperative in most areas where Christian morality should function, producing little in the way of charity, tolerance, forgiveness or kindness in either novel, while the absence of brotherly love, the presence of vindictiveness and long-standing rancors are much in evidence. It has been so distorted in *El príncipe* that it functions almost exclusively as an instrument of coercion. The priest in *Las guerras*, unable to convey the concept of brotherhood to the feuding rival villages, eventually renounces his anti-war stance for purely pragmatic reasons.

Another equally important theme in the two works is the negative force of progress, an idea appearing in Delibes's work as early as *El camino* (1950), and which has resurfaced since publication of these two novels in the book of essays *S.O.S.: El sentido del progreso desde mi obra* (1976), wherein the technological absurdities of short-sighted "progress" come under close scrutiny. In his effort to suggest the myriad undesirable forms of progress, the novelist uses several anecdotal motifs in the two novels. In *El príncipe* we see the effects of communications media as shapers of mass mentality and purveyors of violence. The maids' radio plays nothing but lachrymose farewell songs or sentimental ballads requested by departing sweethearts or doting parents. A soap opera inevitably follows the parade of songs, so predictable that even the young maid, Vítora, accurately foresees the melodramatic outcome. The children are vulnerable on other fronts, namely television and comic books, in which violence reigns, whether in the form of spectacular explosions as cartoon characters blow each other to smithereens or in wholesale and random knifings in Juan's comic book, *El cosaco verde*. Television not only establishes violence as natural and entertaining, but while viewing the programs, the children are bombarded with repeated commercial messages which visibly take over normally independent young minds. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear Juan shouting "¡Deliciooso! ¡Refrescaante!" to Quico's accompaniment of "Están bonitas por fuera, están riquitas por dentro" (p. 150). The latter is taken in as well by the throw-aways of a disposable society. Objects such as brightly colored bottle-caps or a discarded tube of toothpaste find their way into his pockets, becoming imaginary cannons, trucks or T.V. control buttons.

For the parents, progress has meant material comfort and a life of relative ease, together with the unacknowledged distancing of themselves from their children, each other and their language. Words such as "visqui" or "glace" bastardize their vocabulary much as the children's speech is contaminated by commercials. For the father, progress also implies a tacit, gradual abandonment of ideals for the sake of wealth. His preoccupations are "la Bolsa,

los líos laborales . . . , la responsabilidad del mando" (p. 69), fixations relegating him to the stature of the ill-fated Cecilio Rubes, the bathroom fixtures dealer of *Mi idolatrado hijo Sisí* (1953), who regarded money as the satisfier of all needs, only to lose everything except his wealth. For Delibes, the lesson derived from these situations is that progress carries with it a fatal disregard for the natural development of life, be it in the realm of nature (cf. the plea against contamination in *S.O.S.*) or human relations: alienation, cruelty, indifference.

Pacífico's father, Felicísimo, incarnates one stage of advancement in war technology: his specialty is an anti-tank tactic combining the throwing of hand grenades and something resembling a Molotov cocktail. His personal ideology, although simplistic, is equally modern: "sangra o te sangrarán" (pp. 120, 292). When Pacífico is rejected by the military service for reasons of ill health—"Padre, en jamás de los jamases me preguntó cuáles eran" (p. 124)—no one suggests treatment. Felicísimo is also willing to overlook his daughter's liaison with Emigdio, inasmuch as the latter "por un lado buscaba la economía y, por otro, aumentaba el rendimiento" (p. 125). Felicísimo "recogía las liquidaciones a fin de mes y ni chistaba" (p. 126). Delibes satirizes various agricultural innovations in Emigdio's experiments which include fitting the hens with glasses, playing music and adding wine to the chicken feed because "el que está contento, trabaja más a gusto" (p. 125); the hens' inability to walk straight is offset by an initial rise in egg production. Emigdio next suggests that "poniendo salvados en lugar de pienso y añadiendo enzimas para la digestión, ahorraríamos dinero" (p. 125), and wants to add a sheep pen and feed these animals chicken manure, "como la gallinaza era rica en nitrógeno" (p. 126). Emigdio's *razón de ser* in the novel seems to be almost exclusively as the vehicle of an amusing but telling satire of the notion that all that is new is good. The reader is thus not surprised to learn upon Candi's visit to Pacífico in prison that all the chickens have died, nor is the conjecture that it was the plague too convincing.

Other examples might be added to this burlesque of the long-term failures of a



technology which sacrifices nature and even common sense, but no more straightforward statement can be found than Delibes's outspoken position paper, *S.O.S.*,<sup>8</sup> published a year after *Las guerras*. The abandoned villages described in *Vivir al día* (1968) are real; the deserted town of Prádanos in *Las guerras* is fictitious in name only. Like the village in *Las ratas*, already half-abandoned, these sites and many others are victims of a short-sighted concept of progress which sees urban living as unqualified advancement, despite the loss of privacy, tranquility and individual sense of identity, in exchange for existence in something resembling a cement jungle (cf. *El príncipe*).<sup>9</sup>

In recapitulation, we observe that just as family conflict serves Delibes as an allegory of civil strife, the family in both novels becomes a microcosmic society to demonstrate various means whereby the collectivity warps, represses and even destroys the individual. Both protagonists' original state of innocence is visibly subjected to a process of deterioration or corruption, each forced to suppress his better instincts (such as desire to blurt out the truth) in the interests of self-preservation. Thus Pacífico, despite his innate aversion to violence and the conviction that he is different, acquiesces passively to el Bisa's incitements to prepare himself for war—simply in order to have a little peace. Quico, continually admonished that he is bad, begins to accept this self-image; faced with the lies and hypocrisy of the babysitter, Domi, and still worse, his mother's lie which contradicts Quico's over-faithful version of events, the boy imitates adult models in attempting to gainsay or conceal the truth. Such mechanisms of defense notwithstanding, remnants of pristine innocence remain in both protagonists and serve to augment in each the sense of alienation, of being different and alone.

The essential role of the two protagonists, both weak and naive by comparison with those around them, is that of victims, cornered by a hostile world.<sup>10</sup> Quico and his siblings Juan and Cristina are happiest when shut up in the playroom by themselves, away from the ill-humored Domi and short-tempered mother. Pacífico, much like Quico seeking refuge in the closed-in space of his crib—"con los cos-

tados de barrotes, como una cárcel" (p. 48)—looks upon jail as freedom from a predatory world in which he cannot survive. His conviction that he enjoys greater liberty than those on the outside leads him to welcome being in a prison within the prison, the solitary confinement cell. There, in total solitude, removed from the possible hostilities of other men, Pacífico does not withdraw from the world at large but imagines the spectacle of hills and fields; in his fantasy he explores them, running up and down the steps in the cell. Pacífico, through refusal to compromise his self-esteem, pays the price of maximum and forced, but not altogether unwelcome, alienation. Dependent upon others for his every need, Quico must learn to accept the rule of the strongest. The ultimate allegory of the solitude of the individual, menaced by a hostile and alien society, is the prison break. The naked, unarmed escapees, each separated from the others and totally alone, are stalked by the assembled technological might of the state, represented by the prison guards with searchlights and machine guns and the Guardia Civil with bloodhounds and carbines. The survivors are objects of the collective hostility of the villagers, resentful of the prison's proximity. Delibes adds to the absurdity of the entire Kafkaesque episode with Pacífico's enforced participation as his life is threatened by Don Santiago when he wishes to remain behind after having witnessed the murder of the guard. His one desire in life to get safely back into prison, Pacífico suppresses his lifelong repugnance and buries himself in manure until he deems it safe to be recaptured.

THE TWO NOVELS exhibit comparable chronological structures and historical situations, as well as similar narrative duration in the present. Their formal divisions or sub-structures are approximately the same in number, and are based in both cases upon chronological principles, as in many of Delibes's works. The essential organizational principle in each is biographical or autobiographical, dependent upon the omnipresent protagonist or narrator-protagonist in the absence of a more conventional plot. Modes of characterization in the two novels include irony, symbolic

appellation, caricature, simplification and self-definition. Each novel employs an individualized sub-language, simplified and repetitive but not strictly limited to the verosimilar probabilities of self-expression of each narrative consciousness.

In both novels, Delibes employs numerous parallelistic devices, including the repetition of words, phrases, anecdotes and scenes, literally or with variations. The two halves of the novel function as mirroring devices in *Las guerras*. On the thematic level, each novel reiterates four enduring preoccupations of the author: civil conflict or war; defective, insufficient or misconstrued religion; progress as a negative force; and the individual vs. society. Other points of similarity include: the use of humor, which involves irony, understatement, and often comic appellation; the reiteration of Delibes's long-standing interest in childhood and adolescence; and the implicit or explicit theme of death. The themes of war, materialism, the negative aspects of progress and society's menace to the individual are closely interrelated, forming the nucleus of Delibes's concern for man in the bewildering, frightening, normless jungle that is twentieth-century civilization. The novelist portrays a decadent society embarked upon a course of self-destruction. The numerous points of contact between the two novels analyzed result from their near-identical artistic inspiration, demonstrating that underlying structural similarities are more significant than superficial differences.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*El príncipe destronado* (Barcelona: Destino, 1973); *Las guerras de nuestros antepasados* (Barcelona: Destino, 1975). Subsequent references are to abbreviated titles, with pagination given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup>The initial criticism, largely book reviews, includes: reviews of *El príncipe destronado* by Pere Gimferrer, "Miguel Delibes y la infancia," *Destino*, 1901 (4 de marzo de 1974), 37; José Domingo in *Insula* 332-33 (julio-agosto, 1974), 26; J. W. Díaz, *Hispania*, 58, 2 (May 1975), 401-02; and an interview-article, "Miguel Delibes: En torno a un príncipe destronado," by Manuel M. Meseguer in *Los Domingos del ABC* (1 de diciembre de 1974), 19-21. *Las guerras de nuestros antepasados* is reviewed by Francisco Umbral in *La Vanguardia* (3 de enero de 1975) and references are found in the same author's article, "Miguel Delibes," *Destino* 1965 (4 de junio de 1975), 38; Pere Gimferrer, *Destino* 1948 (1° de febrero de 1975), 22; S. G. Parra, *Reseña*, XII, 84

(abril 1975), 4-5; Rafael Conte, *Insula*, 342 (mayo 1975), 5; Carlos Murciano, *La Estafeta Literaria*, 564 (15 de mayo de 1975), 2097; and Kessel Schwartz, *Hispania*, 59, 2 (May 1976), 380-81. Brief references to both occur in "Cinco horas con Miguel Delibes" by Gladys Crescioni Neggers in *La Estafeta Literaria*, 565 (1° de junio de 1975), 7-9.

Edgar Pauk, in *Miguel Delibes: Desarrollo de un escritor, 1947-1974* (Madrid: Gredos, 1975), includes *El príncipe* among Delibes's novels of "preocupación social," but does not mention *Las guerras*, unpublished when Pauk's study was done. Alfonso Rey, *La originalidad novelística de Delibes* (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad, 1975) discusses *El príncipe* primarily as an interesting exercise in novelistic perspective. Rey omits *Las guerras*, for the same reason as Pauk. Comments on *Las guerras* are found in Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, *Nuevos cuadernos de la Romana* (Barcelona: Destino, 1976), pp. 126-29, in the context of Torrente's reactions to his reading of this novel of Delibes and Caballero Bonald's *Agata, ojo de gato*.

<sup>3</sup>Lecture by Miguel Delibes, sponsored by Fundación March and published in *Hoja informativa de Literatura y Filología*, 32 (Madrid: Fundación March, 1975), n. p.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Subsequent to our original drafting of this article, this viewpoint was reaffirmed by Luis González-del-Valle in his paper read at the April 1977 Kentucky Foreign Language Conference.

<sup>6</sup>Torrente, loc. cit., gives some attention to the use of dialogue and its effect upon the narrative viewpoint:

Pero esta novela de Delibes, puro y desnudo diálogo desde la primera a la última página, ¿puede propiamente llamarse relato? ¿No es, por diálogo, todo lo contrario? Aclaremos. Es un diálogo, sí, pero que no responde al modelo teatral del diálogo-acción. El suyo, aunque quizá no deliberado, es otro, antiquísimo, como lo que inauguró en el Paraíso el Señor al preguntar a Adán. Es el diálogo del que pregunta de tal manera que la respuesta tiene que contener, breve o larga, una narración. El del fiscal con el acusado, del médico con el enfermo. Delibes no busca tan lejos sus modelos sino que los halla en la relación verbal del psicoanalista con el paciente. . . . Pero en esta técnica de preguntas y respuestas —lo saben todos los profesionales del interrogatorio— el que pregunta va a tiro fijo. . . . En la novela de Delibes, narra Pacífico Pérez, pero el médico conduce la narración. (128)

Torrente's perceptive observations reflect his concerns as critic and novelist with narrative theory and the technique of the point of view.

<sup>7</sup>César Alonso de los Ríos, *Conversaciones con Miguel Delibes* (Madrid: Magisterio, Español, 1971), p. 49.

<sup>8</sup>In large part a reiteration of his address of acceptance in the Real Academia Española de la Lengua, Delibes's essay states:

El verdadero progresismo no estriba en un desarrollo ilimitado y competitivo, ni en fabricar cada día más cosas, ni en inventar necesidades al hombre, ni en destruir la Naturaleza, ni en sostener a un tercio de la Humanidad en el delirio del despilfarro mientras los otros dos tercios se mueren de hambre, sino en

racionalizar la utilización de la técnica, facilitar el acceso de toda la comunidad a lo necesario, revitalizar los valores humanos, hoy en crisis, y establecer las relaciones hombre-naturaleza en un plano de concordia. (20-21)

Delibes specifies that his criticism is not directed at all progress: "no es al progreso estabilizador y humano—y, en consecuencia, deseable—al que me refiero sino al sentido que se obstinan en imprimir

al progreso las sociedades llamadas civilizadas" (p. 23).

<sup>9</sup>*El disputado voto del señor Cayo* (Barcelona: Destino, 1978) published some two years after the writing of this article, continues and amplifies the interest Delibes has shown over decades in progressive abandonment of the Castilian countryside.

<sup>10</sup>Lecture cited in Note 3.

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