

ansias de independencia, sus sueños de marcharse a Francia para ayudar a los refugiados españoles, su frustración frente a la mediocridad humana que muchas veces dice rodearle. El libro será de gran utilidad para quienes quieren forjarse una imagen de personajes, ideas, lecturas y avatares de esos tres años fundamentales en el devenir internacional desde el punto de vista de una mujer que vive los acontecimientos europeos desde las lejanas tierras de Cuba. La ejemplar introducción de Palau de Nemes se hace instrumento necesario al lector en la elaboración de una complejidad biográfica que la brevedad de las entradas impide.

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Miguel Delibes, *Señora de rojo sobre fondo gris*. Barcelona: Destino, 1991, 152 pp.

Although his works since Franco's death clearly reflect Spain's changing moral, sociopolitical and cultural climate (e.g., *El disputado voto del señor Cayo*, *Cartas de amor de un sexagenario voluptuoso*, and *El tesoro*), they fall both stylistically and thematically within Delibes's long-term developmental trajectory. Nothing in them suggests radical innovation or a break with the writer's evolutionary direction; there are few, if any, reflections of the (probably parodic) experimental mode of *Parábola del naufrago*. Indeed, Delibes has maintained his position as a master of continuity as opposed to the ruptures characterizing the trajectories of writers such as Torrente.

Nonetheless, modifications appear in Delibes's vital pattern, suggesting pauses for meditation, recapitulation, or reflection, which may be viewed in the context of evolving values, authorial maturation, and human aging. If *El disputado voto*, *Los santos inocentes*, *El tesoro* and earlier novels such as *Las guerras de nuestros antepasados* all manifest Delibes's lifelong concern with the clash between tradition and "progress," continuity and change in Spain's remote villages and backward rural areas, they are also, simultaneously, expressions of another constant preoccupation in this writer's work, i.e., the liberal/conservative dichotomy, pacifism versus violence, and the inevitable conflict between material or technological advancement and the conservation of spiritual values. *Señora de rojo* is thematically very different. Insofar as both involve the recreation of a dead protagonist via the prolonged

introspective monologue of the surviving spouse, the closest precedent among Delibes's novels would be *Cinco horas con Mario*.

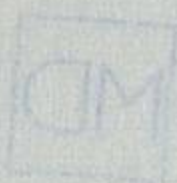
With the recent publication of *Mi vida al aire libre* and *Pegar la hebra*, Delibes initiated a series of memoirs—unpretentious, impressionistic and lyric autobiographical fragments narrated in the first person singular, whose common denominator is the reconstruction/preservation of undifferentiated quotidian moments, alike in their repetitive or generic yet intimate nature, collectively representing an epoch, a set of values, a way of life. Unlike other first-person, autobiographical, but generally laconic essays by Delibes which focus upon travels (*USA y yo*), daily life (*Un año de mi vida*), hunting (*Con la escopeta al hombro*, *Las perdices del domingo*, *Aventuras de un cazador a rabo*) and fishing (*Mis amigas las truchas*), the prevailing common denominator of the memoirs is sentiment, family life in all its intimacy.

Señora de rojo sobre fondo gris belongs to the same group of texts of frankly autobiographical and sentimental inspiration, although there is no question that it is a novel rather than a memoir. Like *377A, madera de héroe*, it is fiction, unmistakably rooted in a deeply traumatic personal experience (encounters with death, grief and loss). *377A*, Delibes's most extensive recreation of his Civil War experience in the Spanish Navy, is an ontological inquiry into the nature of heroism, camaraderie, and the relativity of historiography. *Señora de rojo* returns to another still more painful trauma, the death of his wife, Angeles de Castro, the inseparable companion upon whom the writer depended immeasurably. An exorcism of loss as well as a meditation upon the nature of *convivencia* and limits of human communication (both verbal and non-verbal), *Señora de rojo* is both elegy and metaphysical evocation, a heartfelt tribute to the remarkable woman whose terminal illness some two decades ago left an unfillable void.

A relatively little-known aspect of Delibes's early postwar years involves his erstwhile employment as an editorial cartoonist (he drew the illustrations for the British translation of *El camino*). Although Delibes's painterly potential was eclipsed by his novelistic talent, art has continued sporadically to interest and involve him, from early journalistic criticism or reportage of graphic, cinematic and other artistic events to collaborating in the adaptations of several of his novels for film and theater. Logically, within this context, the authorial alter ego or mask in *Señora de rojo* is a famous painter, whose wife's early death (at age forty-eight) has plunged him into a crisis of compulsive drinking and artistic sterility. The action is set in 1975, paralleling the final illness and death of Franco (Delibes's wife died slightly earlier,

but at a comparable age). Other coincidences between the mask and author include the large family with seven or eight children; the closeness and interdependence of the extended family; the fact that both Delibes and the artist acquire a refuge in the country where they can work and relax away from the city; the fact that both serve as visiting professors at an American university in the Washington, D.C. area, where they live with an American family; and similarities between the helpmate/critic roles of Ana, the painter's wife, and Angeles. Both women radiated vitality and possessed a rare capacity for appreciating aspects of daily life overlooked or taken for granted by others. Both artist-husbands unconsciously derived much inspiration from the wife's visionary perspective.

More than anything else Delibes has written, *Señora de rojo* is a love story, and much like the portrait of a lady which gives the novel its title, its focus is almost exclusively upon her, upon the (re)creation of her likeness in tones strong enough to resist the grayness of death and oblivion. The painter's retrospective monologue—nearly monochromatic in its obsessive insistence upon the figure of the beloved—is governed by the same principles of selectivity and exclusiveness as portraiture. However, it is motivated as much by guilt and remorse as by love, for he suffers from the realization that while Ana was alive, he did not appreciate her, that others “saw” her much more clearly than he. The confessional monologue is directed to his daughter Ana, just released from jail, where she and her husband had been confined on suspicion of political activism during the mother's illness and death, and it is these two events (the politically-motivated arrests and the eventual operation for a brain tumor which caused Ana's death) that loom largest in the narrative. The political detentions and interrogations are arguably the most fictitious portion of the novel, although Delibes himself was threatened with jail for criticizing the governments' agricultural policies in the 1960s, and a collaborator was incarcerated. Ana's “coping” with the two events functions to externalize her strength of spirit, altruism, tenacity, generosity and *don de gentes* as she admits no obstacles in her campaign to secure their children's freedom. Contrasting with her tireless, optimistic activity, the painter-narrator recalls his own role as strangely passive (analogous to the gray background or the attitude of the spectator viewing the portrait). As befits the nature of the passion which inspires and permeates it, the text is open-ended: no response from the silent interlocutor serves to convey absolution; nothing in the events narrated suggests a way





out of the emotional quicksand. The entire novel is a portrait, and the artist—like the reader—is left sunk in contemplation.

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José Jiménez Lozano, *Los grandes relatos*. Barcelona: Anthropos, 1991, 143 pp.

José Jiménez Lozano's overwhelming need to remember, to tell, to report—in short, to narrate—is as discernible in his most recent collection of thirty-three (very) short stories, *Los grandes relatos*, as it was in his previous book of gripping tales, *El grano de maíz rojo* (1988), which in 1989 garnered the *Premio Nacional de la Crítica de Narrativa*. The use of the word "gripping" requires immediate explanation. Jiménez Lozano's stories often delight and hold the reader's attention, less for what they describe and may communicate than for the sheer mastery and effortless ease with which they are written. For Jiménez Lozano, as well as for many of his characters, the activity of recounting what they remember may be their last refuge, their most cathartic act, a notion well dramatized in the final story, "El espejo."

Critical recognition of Jiménez Lozano's fiction has been slow in coming, and it is only recently—with such studies as *La imaginación agónica de Jiménez Lozano* (Anthropos, 1991) by Francisco Javier Higuero—that he is beginning to emerge as an "important" fiction writer. Perhaps Jiménez Lozano's difficulties in establishing a more solid reputation or canonical position have been the result of the very nature of his writing project. For over a quarter of a century now, he has been known as a "Catholic" writer in a country that is, for all intents and purposes, uniformly (and "officially") Catholic. At first consideration, this would augur well for him. Yet paradoxically, this situation makes our author a *rara avis*; it seems that Catholic writers do not fare well in Catholic Spain, and that as a result, Jiménez Lozano's brand of religious writing has been marginalized by critics in these sophisticated, postmodernist times. Jiménez Lozano's stance as a pertinacious writer in search of both stylistic eloquence and the deepest roots of Spanish spirituality, as well as his desire to locate and scrutinize evil while honoring compassion and goodness, further marginalizes his work. As a result, it appears to be "traditional." It is precisely tradition, however, that Jiménez Lozano endeavors to foreground, the thematize, and even to celebrate in these *grandes relatos*.