

## Ekphrasis and Memory: Delibes's

## Portrait of a Lady

Delibes's works since Franco's death clearly reflect Spain's changing moral, sociopolitical and cultural climate (visible in El disputado voto del señor Cayo, 1978; Los santos inocentes, 1981; Cartas de amor de un sexagenario voluptuoso, 1983; and El tesoro, 1985), yet they fall both stylistically and thematically within Delibes's long-term developmental trajectory. Nothing in them suggests radical innovation or departure from the writer's evolutionary direction; few, if any traces remain of the (probably parodic) experimental mode essayed in Parábola del naufrago (1969). Indeed, saving this lone exception, Delibes has maintained his position as a master of continuity in contrast with the ruptures characterizing the trajectories of writers such as Torrente.

Nonetheless, occasional modifications appear in Delibes's vital pattern, suggesting pauses for meditation, recapitulation, or modification, small changes or corrections that result from evolving values, authorial maturation, and human aging. If El disputado voto, Los santos inocentes, El tesoro and such mid-career novels as Las guerras de nuestros antepasados (1975) manifest Delibes's lifelong concern with the clash between tradition and "progress," continuity and change in Spain's remote villages and backward rural areas, these same novels simultaneously express other constant or long-term



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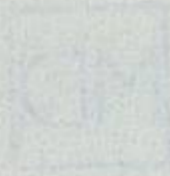
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Hispanic Review and Delibes

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Delibes's work since 1930 is a best clearly defined  
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preoccupations in the writer's work, i.e., the liberal/conservative dichotomy, pacificism versus violence, and the inevitable conflict between material or technological advancement and the preservation of spiritual values.

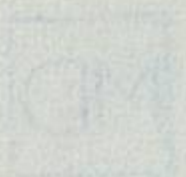
While not radically innovative, Señora de rojo sobre fondo gris (1991) differs thematically from the more "typical" novels of rural Castilla, belonging instead to the "domestic" novels of Delibes, novels such as La hoja roja (1959), Cinco horas con Mario (1966), and El príncipe destronado (1973), among his mature fiction, which essentially recreate the quotidian tenor of life within four walls, with all its minutiae and grayness, as well as occasional brighter moments. Communication and the barriers to communicating which arise and persist even in the most intimate circumstances are common preoccupations found in Delibes's works as early as Aún es de día (1949), but are better developed in the more recent titles. The illusions and delusions besetting communication appear as a major concern in at least one other post-Franco novel, Cartas de amor de un sexagenario voluptuoso.<sup>1</sup> Because of the epistolary format, Cartas involves a silent interlocutor, as do Cinco horas con Mario and Señora de rojo. Insofar as the latter two recreate a dead protagonist via the prolonged introspective monologue of the surviving spouse, the closest precedent for Señora de rojo among Delibes's novels would be Cinco horas con Mario. Carmen's monologue addressed to





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Mario's cadaver is formally analogous to the confessional monodiálogo of Nicolás, the narrator of Señora de rojo, as he recreates his impressions of his late wife's life and death for Ana, the homonymic daughter. A significant difference, however, is the absence of the contrapuntal irony provided by Carmen's egocentric misreading of the biblical passages underlined by Mario; Nicolas is aware that his own egocentrism during Ana's life kept him from "seeing" her as clearly as did many others, but any irony in his reconstruction is attenuated by grief and contrition as he remorsefully contemplates his failure to appreciate fully the miracle of Ana's love until he lost her. Especially noteworthy for Delibes's novelistic development is the artistic theme, the visibility and impact of the painterly (ekphrastic) dimension of the text, unprecedented in this writer's fiction. Exploration of the ekphrastic dimension in Señora de rojo, its place in Delibes's life and art, and analysis of the techniques whereby Delibes creates his "verbal icon" constitute the focus of this essay.

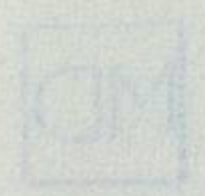
With the recent publication of Mi vida al aire libre (1989) and Pegar la hebra (1990), Delibes initiated a series of memoirs--unpretentious, impressionistic and lyric autobiographical fragments narrated in the first person singular--whose common denominator is the reconstruction/preservation of undifferentiated quotidian moments, alike in their repetitive or generic yet intimate nature, collectively representing an epoch, a set of values,





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a way of life. The sentiment imbuing them--a desire to rescue and fix forever the memories of a past once taken for granted--is very much like that which inspired Señora de rojo. Indeed, there are episodes of Mi vida al aire libre (74-80, 105-108) recalling scenes of the novelist's noviazgo and first year of marriage which constitute an indispensable (factual) counterpart to the idealized fictional portrait drawn in the novel. Unlike other first-person, autobiographical, but generally laconic essays by Delibes which focus upon travels (USA y yo, 1965), daily life (Un año de mi vida, 1971), contemporary history (La primavera de Praga, 1968; El otro fútbol, 1982), literary history and criticism (La censura de prensa en los años 40, 1985) hunting (El libro de la caza menor, 1964; Con la escopeta al hombro, 1971; Las perdices del domingo, 1981; Aventuras, venturas y desventuras de un cazador a rabo, 1977) and fishing (Mis amigas las truchas, 1977), the prevailing common denominator of the memoirs is sentiment, family life in all its intimacy.

Señora de rojo sobre fondo gris belongs unmistakably to the same group of texts of frankly autobiographical, nostalgic, memorialistic and sentimental inspiration, although there is no question that it is a novel rather than a memoir. Like 377A, madera de héroe (1987), it is fiction, ~~unmistakably~~ rooted in a deeply traumatic personal experience. 377A, Delibes's most extensive recreation of his Civil War experience in the Spanish Navy (1938-39), is



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1885) la vida de la casa, 1884; la  
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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 November 22, 1974 of his wife and inseparable companion, Angeles de Castro. So important was Angeles in the writer's life that Ramón García Domínguez (a journalist from Valladolid, well acquainted with Delibes and his family) divides his essay, Miguel Delibes: un hombre, un paisaje, una pasión, "Antes de la ausencia de Angeles" and "Después de Angeles." 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 (1942-45) as an editorial cartoonist (a talent upon which he drew to provide 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



an ontological inquiry into the nature of narrative, comparative, and the relativity of historiography. *Barra* is a return to another still more painful trauma, the death November 23, 1974 of his wife and inseparable companion, Angeles de Castro. So important was Angeles to the writer's life that *Barra* (1978) is a journalistic work from Valladolid, well acquainted with Belice and his family) divides his essay, *Miguel Delibes: un hombre, un paisaje, un mundo*, "Angeles de la ausencia de Angeles" and "Después de Angeles". An exploration of loss as well as a reflection upon the nature of narrative and limits of human communication (both verbal and non-verbal). *Barra* is both elegy and metaphysical speculation, a heartfelt tribute to the remarkable woman whose terminal illness some two decades ago left an indelible void.

A relatively little-known aspect of Belice's early postwar years involves his artistic employment (1943-47) as an editorial correspondent (a talent upon which he drew to provide the illustrations for the British translation of *El castaño*). Although Delibes's painterly potential was eclipsed by his journalistic talent, art has continued sporadically to interest and involve him, from early journalistic sketches or reports 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 side of work in *Barra* de *Barra* is a famous painter, whose wife's



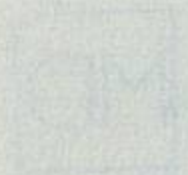


early death (at age forty-eight) has plunged him into a crisis of compulsive drinking and artistic sterility. The world of painting--other painters, exhibitions, medals, fine arts academies, lectures on art, art history, and the painter's trade--looms large in the novel, both as ekphrastic dimension and as intertext or metaliterary plane.

Ekphrasis, i.e., the verbal depiction of an actual or imaginary work of art, is well known in poetry (cf. Unamuno's Cristo de Velázquez, the royal portraits described by Manuel Machado, the fact that Juan Ramón Jiménez was himself a painter, as was Lorca), but is by no means rare in fiction: Azorín's depiction of the statue in Doña Inés, Valle-Inclán's use of numerous art objects in the Sonatas, the visual art in several of Galdós's novels, Baroja's emphasis upon artists and their works in El árbol de la ciencia, and upon painting in Camino de perfección, Miro's references to sacred images and other art works, Torrente's depiction of art and artistic forgeries in Off-Side, Laforet's descriptions of artists and their works in Nada and La isla y los demonios, Matute's verbal depiction of lewd murals in La trampa, or Carlos Rojas in numerous novels wherein his alter ego is a painter. Estelle Irizarry considers additional author-artists in a more extensive study, Writer-Painters of Contemporary Spain (1983). Buero Vallejo, who also studied painting, gives a prominent role to painting and painters in such theatrical works as Las Meninas and El sueño de la razón, and Casona treats problems



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of painterly creativity in La sirena varada and Prohibido suicidarse en primavera. Thus, although without precedent in his own fiction, Delibes is well within an active tradition of amalgamating verbal and visual artistry.

In Señora de rojo, Delibes makes the painting not only a focal point for the reader's attention, the protagonist's recollections, and the narrative structure--which, portrait-like, lacks internal divisions--but also a primary poetic metaphor in which the red (remembered passion, as well as Ana's vitality) stands out sharply against the gray of absence, death and passivity. The cover illustration, a fragment of "Melancholy" by French Impressionist Edgar Degas, also presents a lady in red against a blurred and neutral background. It may have inspired the title and choice of the red dress, but is unlikely to be the model for other specifics of the novel<sup>2</sup> (whose autobiographical substrata will be further examined below). However, the illustration and text are admirably suited to each other in subject, mood, color, and use of impressionist techniques.

Studies on the relationship of literature and the visual arts have tended to focus on the way a given picture resembles or "influences" a text to which it is juxtaposed, or else to examine how a series of pictures and texts in combination embody or define the spirit of an artistic movement or period. Certain fundamental assumptions--that the visual arts are spatial, while narrative is temporal, that words are conventional (signifying by arbitrary



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conventions) while pictures are natural ("naturally" resembling what they represent) have been challenged by semioticians and other recent critics. Umberto Eco contends that all pictured images serve "sign-functions" and thus are equally within the semiotic domain (191-216). Thomas Sebeok, however, seeks to preserve the mystique of the image or icon as "natural sign," grounding the character of imagery in animal behavior, i.e., its ability to mislead birds to mistake painted grapes for real ones ("Iconicity"). Roland Barthes has referred to certain pictures as "metaphors," without considering it necessary to define the nature of iconic metaphor or to investigate the gap between verbal and pictorial images (38). Maria Mayenova, who does ponder this gap, concludes that it cannot be bridged: "an elementary verbal metaphor cannot be realized visually" (135). The question of whether spatial form is as much a part of literature as it is of the visual arts is likewise a matter of debate--many critics do not concede that, as W.J.T. Mitchell argues, "spatial form is a crucial aspect of the experience and interpretation of literature in all ages and cultures" ("Spatial Form" 273). The counterpart to "spatial form" in literature is narrativity in the visual arts, analyzed by Steiner:

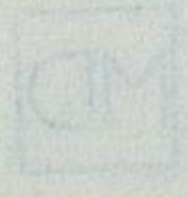
Narrativity is a function of a number of factors: temporal sequence, the continuity of an acting subject, specificity of time and place, and so forth. Though this model was developed with verbal narrative in mind,



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it can be applied to painting as well. Its ability to entertain "degrees of narrativity," dependent on which of these factors are in play in a given work, is particularly valuable for explaining the heterogeneous phenomenon of narrativity in the visual arts. ("Narrativity" 93)

Still more radically, Mitchell argues that there is "no essential difference between poetry and painting, no difference, that is, given for all time by the inherent natures of the media, the objects they represent, or the laws of the human mind" ("Going Too Far" 2). The present essay does not pretend to resolve the question as to whether methods of studying narrative form are applicable to analysis of the visual arts, or conversely, whether "spatial form" exists in literature. Somewhat in the vein of Jeffrey Meyers, who agrees with Baudelaire's assertion that the arts supplement and reinforce each other, and who argues that "aesthetic analogues...add a new dimension of richness and complexity to the novel by extending the potentialities of fiction to include the representational characteristics of the visual arts" (1), I investigate the ways in which the ekphrastic dimension and full range of metaliterary and artistic intertexts are employed by Delibes and how he attempts to transcend the difference between space and time.

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speaker's immobility and passivity, as depicted by Delibes) symbolically translates the temporal medium--language--into spatial form--painting--and vice versa. Narrative and painting combine to produce "formal and linguistic self-sufficiency" (Krieger 110). The function of art in this novel has no precedent in Delibes's works: the entire novel is a portrait of Ana--her figure, gestures, words, beliefs, actions, movements, laughter, talents, intuition, kindness--and the portrait is at the same time the novel's all but exclusive subject. So understood, Señora de rojo would be a direct descendent of antiquity's "iconic poem," an "artistic variant of the rhetorical ekphrasis, 'description'...a verbovisual mini-Gesamtkunstwerk aimed at depicting concurrently the physical and the moral and the spiritual beauty of the 'sitter'" (Weisstein 252). (Later, under the heading "Literary works that describe or interpret works of art," this critic includes the iconic poem, deemed the "poetic strain of ekphrasis," 259).

Ekphrasis "implies an attitude toward the story it tells" (Carrier 24), either retelling the pictorial story or constituting a "poetic misreading" (Bloom 14) of the (intertextual) canvas. Delibes's text illustrates both principles, as Ana's portrait exemplifies an attitude as well as "poetic misreading": ironically, it is not the work of her husband, but the masterpiece of another--considered mediocre by the widower--who saw her more clearly than the narrator, blinded by his own egotism:



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//

Fue en esa etapa cuando le pintó el famoso retrato con el vestido rojo, un collar de perlas de dos vueltas y guantes hasta el codo. El vestido, de cuello redondo y sin mangas, lo diseñó él para la ocasión. Mi gran curiosidad por ver como resolvía el fondo del cuadro no se vio defraudada: lo eludió, eludió el fondo; únicamente una mancha gris azulada, muy oscura, en contraste con el rojo del vestido, más atenuada en los bordes. (61-62)

Nicolás "misreads" not only the painting as art, but the motives of artist and model, the critical reaction, and his own position within the total context. The remainder of the foregoing passage describes the husband's jealousy of the painting's success, as well as his suspicious accusations of Ana during the time she served as model: "entonces sentí celos del cuadro, de no haberlo sabido pintar yo, de que fuese otro quien la hubiese captado en todo su esplendor....El hecho de que un forastero hubiese entrado en mi casa para conseguir lo que yo no pude, con el modelo a mano, me empequeñecía"(63).

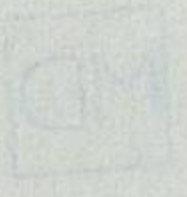
The way in which Delibes integrates the theme of painting (as activity within the temporal dimension) with the image of the painting (as portrait or icon within the spatial dimension) contributes to transcending the chasm of spatiotemporal difference. Ana herself--who possesses exceptional, intuitive talents both as (potential) narrator



...en este punto se plantea el famoso retrato  
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fuese algo más que un simple capricho de moda en  
aquella época... El hecho de que un pintor hubiese entrado en  
mi casa para conseguir lo que yo no pude, con el modelo a  
mano, me espantaba" (53).

The way in which Delibes integrates the theme of  
painting (as activity within the temporal dimension) with  
the theme of the painting (as portrait or icon within the  
spatial dimension) contributes to transcending the theme of  
epistemological difference. As Barthes—who possesses  
exceptional, intuitive talents both as (potential) narrator





and critic--expresses interest in the interface between novel and painting:

...descubría conexiones que a cualquier otro lector, menos avisado, le hubieran pasado inadvertidas. Tu madre me llevó a Proust, a Musil, pero también a Robbe Grillet y un día me hizo ver que mi pintura describía pero no narraba, lo mismo que las obras del nouveau roman....Su intuición de los espacios, las formas y los colores, también hubiera hecho de ella una sagaz crítica de arte. (23)

Some years ago, in "La revolución narrativa" (published in La censura de prensa en los años 40 y otros ensayos, 1985), Delibes noted that the novel demands more of the reader than forms of entertainment which are predominantly visual: "cine, televisión, revistas gráficas. La novela, por simple que sea, exige un pequeño esfuerzo mental...de crear las imágenes que la letra impresa sugiere. El cine y la televisión no precisan palabras, aunque, a veces, las utilicen como complemento" (102). His remarkably clear formulation of the visual/verbal dichotomy dividing art from narrative, applied to the generalized reader in the context of an essay on novelistic renovation and experiment, suggests that Delibes was not unaware of the theoretical underpinnings and implications of his exercise in ekphrasis.

Several instances of verbovisual description attest to the probability of conscious effort by the novelist to create "spatial form" or "verbal icons." Frequently,





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 mismo me llevó a Proter, a Maffi, pero también a Ruben  
 Griller y en día me hizo ver que mi pintura descubre  
 poco no notada, lo mismo que las obras del gran  
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Nicolás's memories (memory=temporal) seem also to attempt to bridge the gap, acquiring the visual, spatial aspects of a portrait:

Todavía parece que la estoy viendo, a la mañana siguiente, sentada en la estera del refugio, el vaso de zumo de naranja con que se desayunaba sobre un tajuelo, divertida de mi desorientación, su pequeña cabeza morena coronando su delgado cuello, firme y fragilísimo. (10-11)

Like a picture, which usually represents what can be seen in a single moment from a single perspective, Nicolás's evocations of Ana focus upon an instant where time has been immobilized. Wendy Steiner, especially concerned with the relationships between depiction and narration, has studied the interaction of text and image in several works.<sup>3</sup> Attempting to apply principles of narratology to what she terms "narrative painting," Steiner observes that "narrativity is strongest in paintings depicting specific (though not necessarily existent) personages engaged in some singular (in both senses) act" (1988, 12). Essentially all of Nicolás's "narrative paintings" of Ana fulfill these conditions. Conversely, for paintings to achieve temporal effect, they must evoke some kind of narrative (which is necessarily verbal), or they must exist in sequence (as in comics or movies).<sup>4</sup> Mitchell affirms that "Painting sees itself as uniquely fitted for the representation of the visible world, whereas poetry is primarily concerned with



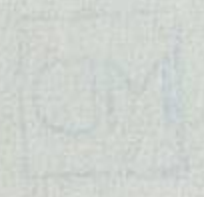


Nicolás's assertion (memory-temporal) seen also to attempt to  
bridge the gap, adapting the visual, spatial aspects of a  
portrait:

Todavía recuerdo que la estoy viendo, a la manera  
algunos, cuando en la escena del refugio, el vaso  
de agua se resaca con que se desmenuza sobre un  
tatuaje, dividiendo de mi descripción, su pedregal  
sabes ahora pensando en delgado coque, firme y

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the invisible realm of ideas and feelings. Poetry is an art of time, motion, and actions; painting an art of space, stasis, and arrested action" ("Going Too Far" 1). In his development of the portrait as symbol and metaphor, translating the visual/spatial to the realm of the verbal and temporal, Delibes has moved decisively in the direction of amalgamation.

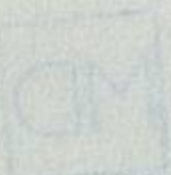
The novelist's seemingly omnipresent emphasis on seeing and the quality or angle of light enhances the visual quality of memory: "Algunas noches la veía derrumbarse sobre la cama, dejar caer el libro que había empezado a leer sin llegar a pasar página y quedarse dormida con la luz proyectada sobre su cabeza" (65). Not only is a painting the focal point of the narrative, and the narrator a painter, but artistic discourse abounds: fondo (62 and passim); lienzo and pincel (7, 8, 89); primer término (62); references to spaces, forms, colors proliferate, as does the artistic ambient, the number of other artists; descriptions of painterly activity (88, 90, etc.) and of the artist's study (48-52). Weisstein's typology of the possible linkages between literature and the visual arts includes the category, "Literary works concerned with art and artists, whether real or imagined" (260), with Balzac's Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu, Somerset Maugham's The Moon and Sixpence, Joyce Cary's The Horse's Mouth, and Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse among examples adduced. This category obviously overlaps parts of Señora de rojo, but is less appropriate as





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a classification, simply because Delibes's concern with art and artists is secondary; what is of primary interest is the portrait of Ana.

The category of "Literary works in whose creation certain arts or techniques borrowed from the visual arts have been employed" (Weisstein 260) overlaps another aspect of Señora de rojo, with impressionist, surrealist and expressionist vignettes being identifiable (as noted below). Delibes's (or his narrator's) impressionistic emphasis on light is not limited to recollections of Ana, but appears insistently in the description of the study (claraboya, gran chorro de luz, tragaluz, luminosidad excesiva) and insistent mentions of the impressionist play of lights on objects. Above all, however, light bathes the remembered form of Ana: 64, 65, 86, 91, 122, 136, etc. Several evocations of Ana are, in effect, mini-portraits:

Yo sé que si bebo la dosis justa, la veré ahí, tumbada en ese diván, con el vestido rojo del cuadro, con tal nitidez que podría describir la expresión de su rostro y los detalles de su atuendo. Y si no está ahí, la veré por el tragaluz atravesar el camino de grava y, poco después, recostada en el marco de la puerta, observándome atentamente; un poco desmañada pero muy atractiva. (79)

Here, as elsewhere, Ana is evoked within a frame (a mirror, 87; the doorway, 90; "en el diván, bajo la pálida luz del piloto," 131).



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87: the doorway, 89: en el diván, bajo la estufa luz del  
píloro, 131).



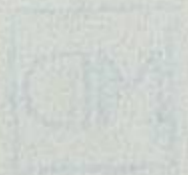


The discourse of art functions on the literal level, but also is used figuratively, as a simile for life, as when Nicolás is unable to make small talk during the days before Ana's operation: "Yo buscaba en mi cabeza temas de conversación que pudieran interesarla, pero me sucedía lo mismo que ante el lienzo en blanco: no se me ocurría nada" (123-24). Light treated figuratively becomes a metaphor for the narrator's emotional state: "A veces mi cabeza se esclarecía en un relámpago, pero en los últimos tiempos todo era oscuro, me movía a tientas" (91). The artistic intertext functions to clarify, through refraction, certain aspects of the psyches of the couple, e.g., Nicolás's predilection for "Las Meninas" (a work wherein the painter and his activity is the real focus of attention), and their visit to the Prado Museum while Ana is undergoing tests in the Madrid clinic, "yo con el Goya negro, ella con el Greco" (139), thereby further illuminating his depression and her spirituality. So thoroughly is the intertext of art woven into the fabric of the novel that it appears even in the physician's prognosis: "Señora, dijo, mucho me temo que el empaste de una muela nada tenga que ver con este cuadro" (96). And the aesthetic sense or (in)ability to discriminate between good and bad art becomes a means of foreshadowing the surgeon's inability to restore Ana to health: "su casa--con muebles demasiado grandes, libros encuadernados, mala pintura--me produjo una impresión desapacible" (98); "ella se detuvo y comentó con acento





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irónico: Como médico sera uná notabilidad pero la casa parece que se la han puesto sus enemigos" (101).

The present of the novel, set in 1975, parallels the final illness and death of Franco (Delibes's wife died almost exactly one year earlier, at an age comparable to Ana's in the novel). It is during the winter of that year that the painter directs his retrospective, confessional monologue to his daughter Ana, just released from jail, where she and her husband were confined on suspicion of political activism during the mother's illness and death. These two events (the politically-motivated arrests and the eventual operation for a brain tumor leading to Ana's death) loom largest in the narrative which constitutes a collage of moments from a lifetime together, glimpses like snapshots of Ana, jumbled in time that has been fragmented by memory. The political detentions and interrogations are arguably the most fictitious portion of the novel, although Delibes himself was threatened with jail for criticizing the government's agricultural policy during 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 thir children's freedom.

Other coincidences between the mask and author include the large family with seven or eight children; the closeness and inter-dependence of the extended family; the fact that



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both Delibes and the artist-narrator 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 in the 1960s, living with an American family; and close 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, as well as depending upon them for day-to-day support:

Nada de esto impedía a tu madre atender sus obligaciones como secretaria. Conocía mis compromisos, mis deseos y caprichos; seguía mi vida tan puntualmente que rara vez me consultaba antes de responder a una carta. Procuraba desbrozarme el camino para que yo trabajase despreocupado... (39)

Ahora pienso que no tendré a nadie a mano cuando me asalte el miedo. ¿Qué va a ser de mí cuando no encuentre su mirada cómplice entre los ojos hostiles del auditorio? ¿Cómo arrancarme a hablar? (78)

Totally demoralized, disoriented, and disconsolate, Nicolás attempts to assuage his anguish with alcohol and Valium, but merely sinks into an almost catatonic state:

pensaba que mi incapacidad se debía a que ella era mi motor y el motor se había averiado....Una voz

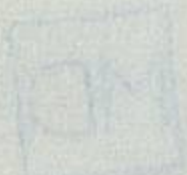


both Delibes and the artist-garçon acquire a refuge in the country where they can work and relax away from the city. The fact that both serve as visiting professors at an American university in the Washington, D.C. area in the 1960s, living with an American family and close familiarity between the humanistic roles of both, the painter's wife, and Angeles. Both women related vitality and possessed a rare capacity for appreciating aspects of daily life overlooked or taken for granted by others. Both artist-technicians unconsciously derived much inspiration from the wife's visionary perspective, as well as expecting from her for day-to-day support.

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ahora pienso que no recordé a nadie a mano cuando me salió el ruido. ¿Por qué a eso de mi cuando no encuentro en ningún momento entre los ojos hostiles del auditorio? ¿Cómo responder a Rafael? (58)

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misteriosa me soplaba la lección entonces y yo lo atribuía a los ángeles, pero ahora advertía que no eran los ángeles sino ella; su fe me fecundaba...(129)

As the progress of the brain tumor begins to affect the optical nerves, the portraits of Ana take on expressionistic tints:

A la mañana siguiente, mientras desayunábamos, la descubrí con el rostro asimétrico....Su ojo derecho parpadeaba, en tanto el izquierdo se mantenía inmóvil, hueco, insondable. El mismo desequilibrio se advertía en la boca: mientras la comisura derecha sonreía, la izquierda se desmayaba en un gesto de gravedad. (118-119)

Before she enters the hospital, Ana's head is shaved, and she acquires a wig which, like the affected nerve, alters her appearance. The last domestic scene with Ana recalls the "Goya negro" paintings viewed by Nicolas during her final days:

Me hallaba frente a ella, en la sobremesa, el sol de membrillo en las ranuras de la persiana y, quizá por un efecto de luz o porque aquel casquete la desfiguraba, el caso es que la expresión de su mirada cambió subitamente por segunda vez en pocos días, y mientras su ojo derecho refulgía luminoso y dulce, el izquierdo quedó hueco, desorbitado, como la boca de un pozo. Eché la cabeza hacia atrás hasta topar con el respaldo del sillón, pero la horrible visión







no desapareció. (136-137)

Following scenes in the operating room and later while Ana is in the intensive care unit, brain dead but still breathing, Nicolás has nightmares in which scenes of her illness are grotesquely deformed, "extrañas pesadillas de muñecas articuladas con relojes-despertadores en el hueco del corazón" (149). Unmistakably surrealistic is the conception of the painting-like scene when Nicolás is informed of Ana's death:

vi venir el piquete de batas verdes, encabezado por la maciza figura del cirujano jefe, por el fondo del corredor en penumbra....tan vívida era la sensación de escena repetida que sabía que al médico pelirrojo que avanzaba por la parte interna del pasillo, y cuyo cabello refulgía al pasar bajo los pilotos de las puertas, le chillaba un zapato...fue aumentando el crujido del zapato abotinado del médico pelirrojo, un crujido que acompañaba el paso, que era algo así como la música del desfile. Y al llegar...se detuvieron, el doctor Calvo giró media vuelta a la derecha, mientras los demás...se situaban detrás... guardándole las espaldas. (150-151)

Just as the bright-colored, light-filled, impressionistic memory-paintings of Ana reflect her lifetime of vitality, the somber, expressionistic and surrealistic scenes of her final illness and death reinforce the narrator's sense of horror and pain.



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final illness and death reinforce the narrator's sense of  
horror and pain.





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. Much as in traditional notions of art since the Renaissance, the painting symbolizes the transcendent object--beautiful, outside of time, and beyond time's depredations. 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. In vivid contrast with Ana's life of tireless, optimistic activity, the painter-narrator recalls his own role as strangely passive (analogous to the gray background or the attitude of the implied 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. No other closure is possible when the novel's prime concern, the portrait, is complete. The pictorial medium<sup>is</sup> temporally static, and the artist--like the reader--is left sunk in contemplation. Ars longa, vita brevis.

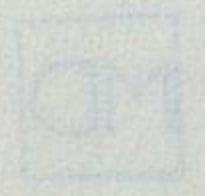
Janet Pérez  
Texas Tech University





More than anything else Delibes has written, *El amor es como el viento* is a love story, and much like the portrait of a lady which gives the novel its title, the focus is almost exclusively upon her, upon the (re)creation of her likeness in form strong enough to resist the progress of death and oblivion. Much as in traditional notions of art since the Renaissance, the painting symbolizes the transcendent object-beautiful, outside of time, and beyond time's depredations. The painter's retrospective monochrome nearly monochromatic in its obsessive insistence upon the figure of the beloved--is governed by the same principles of selectivity and exclusiveness as portraiture. In vivid contrast with his life of timeless, optimistic activity, the painter-narrator recalls his own role as essentially passive (analogous to the gray background or the attitude of the implied spectator viewing the portrait). As with the nature of the session which defines and connects it, the text is open-ended: no response from the silent interlocutor serves to convey resolution; nothing in the events related suggests a way out of the emotional entanglement. In other words, it is possible when the novel's prime concern, the portrait, is complete. The pictorial medium, especially static, and the artist-like the reader--is left with a contemplation, *El amor es como el viento*.

James Price  
Texas Tech University





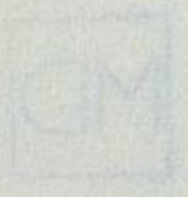
## Notes and References

1. Delibes's treatment of the problem of the interlocutor and communication is studied in Janet Pérez, "Delibes y el interlocutor ausente," Selected Proceedings of the Mid-America Conference on Hispanic Literature (1984) (Lincoln, Nebraska: Society for Spanish and Spanish American Studies, 1986), pp. 81-92.
2. I recall having seen, during visits to the Delibes home in Valladolid in the 1960s, a large portrait of Angeles de Castro--a somewhat younger Angeles, not dressed in red. It may have been the source for other details (pose, expression, accessories).
3. See especially Image and Code (1981); The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation Between Modern Literature and Painting (1984); and Pictures of Romance (1988).
4. For more on the interface between painting and literature in Spanish writers, see Chaffee and Persin. Additional treatments of the role of the visual arts in the novel from a comparatist perspective appear in Meltzer and Smitten.



Notes and References

1. Delibes' treatment of the problem of the inter-relationship and communication is studied in Janet Lopez, "Delibes y el interrelacionador esencial," Estudios de Literatura de la Edad Moderna (1984), Lincoln, Nebraska: Society for Spanish and Spanish American Studies, 1984, pp. 61-92.
2. I recall having seen, during visits to the Delibes home in Valladolid in the 1950s, a large portrait of Antonio de Guevara - a somewhat younger Angéles, not dressed in red. It may have been the source for other details (poorly remembered, necessarily).
3. See especially Spain and Gods (1987); The Order of the Knights: History in the Spanish Roman Modern Literature and Painting (1987); and History of the World (1987).
4. For more on the inter-relationship between painting and literature in Spanish writers, see Chalico and Fernán. Additional treatment of the role of the visual arts in the novel from a comparative perspective appear in Delibes and Chalico.





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