THE SIMPLISTIC NATURE OF SPANISH RURAL SOCIETY
AS REFLECTED IN SOME CHILD CHARACTERS
OF MIGUEL DELIBES

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas
August, 1975

The major proposition is that the childhood point of view in two Delibes novels—*El camino* (1950) and *Las ratas* (1962)—aids the reader's comprehension of the basic values held by rural Spaniards. These values are stressed in both novels, giving the reader an insight into the nature of these simplistic people.

Honest, accepting attitudes of the child protagonists aid the reader's understanding of the plight of the villagers. The superiority of the natural way of life is revealed in both novels. Nature became even more important to Delibes as his stature as novelist increased. The later work, therefore, is a social protest against effects of industrial progress on rural Castilians.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the literary works of Miguel Delibes, who, according to numerous critics, ranks alongside Camilo José Cela as one of the best known representatives of the Spanish Critical Realism. One of Delibes' most popular novels, *El camino*, has been translated into numerous languages for use in classrooms where students have at least elementary training in the Spanish language. Perhaps there is no more significant benchmark for a writer than to be thus chosen as a worthy example of literary skill to be taught to young people throughout the world.

It is not by accident, however, that Delibes has received such widespread recognition. *El camino* and several other Delibes novels are written from the viewpoint of a child. While equally interesting to and rewarding for adult readers, the novels bring an especial richness to the young reader, who quickly grasps the universality of the childhood experience. Miguel Delibes has made a return to childhood, a voyage backward in time, which he has executed with all the purity and simplicity of the master craftsman.

The primary purpose in the ensuing pages is to examine and analyze two of Delibes' novels, *El camino* and *Las ratas*, with the idea of gaining an overall view of a large and
impressive segment of Spanish society—the rural population. Both these Delibes novels have as their principal characters young boys whose lives and futures are molded in the simplistic pattern to be found in the outlying village. The traditions and mores of an older Spain, as pictured in El camino, are but little changed through the years which separate that novel from the more recent Las ratas. Although industrialization has had its effect on the Spanish landscape in the later novel (and, of course, in real life), the villagers retain an abiding faith in the value of man and his involvement with other men. This basic outlook on life is transmitted to the young, and surely in no other place but Spanish rural society may be found a more intense mentally constructive attitude toward the present life, along with a conviction that man can find reason for and satisfaction in life when he successfully copes with his individual responsibilities.

Such an attitude is implicit even in the young Daniel, protagonist of El camino, who is also known as el Mochuelo ("the Owl") because of his inquisitive and curious nature. In a somewhat different vein, the same basic values are exemplified in Nini, eleven-year-old "prophet" of Las ratas. Although there is great contrast in the settings of El camino and Las ratas, the basic nature of the characters is little affected. Progress may wreak havoc with man's physical life, as in the later novel, but the centuries-old beliefs and traditions thrive and spread even in the most barren of geographical areas.
It has been said of El camino that the author "looks at the microcosm of a village through the eyes of a boy who lies awake the night before his departure for school in the world outside his valley." (2, p. ix) The rich valley land in which Daniel's young life is based, however, is very different from the exhausted soil surrounding the village of Nini. Years have passed between the writing of the two novels, and man's greed has made terrific inroads on the Spanish soil. The exodus to the cities is well under way in the later novel, and the characters coexist in a hostile environment. Las ratas, as a result, is an attempt to deal not only with man's moral problems but also with the impact on the villagers of a neglectful government and a forgetting larger society. The villagers are isolated, in effect, and their solitude "is not merely a mental attitude; it is also an objective fact." (4, p. 132)

The two Delibes novels to receive primary attention in these pages have much in common; at the same time, Las ratas shows evidence of a distinct maturation process as regards the novelist's philosophy of life. Perhaps as Delibes himself grew older, he saw more clearly the necessity for saving both the Spanish land and the Spanish children, both of which, of course, are vital to the future of the country. There are many harsh realities of life to be faced even in childhood, and Delibes makes this point very clear in both novels. At the same time, he is able to bring out various truths regarding
The present work thus can be intrinsically valuable in several respects. First, insight into Delibes' "living" philosophy will be gained through an analysis of his characters who, both child and adult, are representative of a huge number of the national population. In addition, the novelist's own growth in literary stature is revealed. As his country "progressed," so also did Miguel Delibes, even though, regrettably, some of the alterations in Spain within the twelve years which separated El camino and Las ratas have a decidedly negative aspect. The industrial revolution which spread throughout the nation in the 1960s, as well as the impact of massive tourism and the electronic media, may be said to have altered the very face of Spain. According to more than one individual who actually experienced this societal phenomenon, the world described in El camino is real—it bears the truth of the era directly succeeding the Civil War. Today it would not be possible to write this novel. Las ratas, then, is necessarily different from El camino, and this difference will also receive emphasis in these pages.

Finally, although many critical literary works have stressed Delibes' themes, his style, his growth as an artist, and varied other aspects, as far as the present writer is able to discover, no concerted effort has yet been made to show a direct linkage between Delibes' use of child characters and his picturization of rural Castilians. Through the novelist's psycho-sociological technique, whether it was
conscious or subconscious, may possibly be gained a more perceptive insight into the real character of Spain's rural population.

A short review of critical literature may help to establish the need for more emphasis on the child protagonist and his view of the society in which he lives and grows. Among the many critical approaches to Delibes' work may be found an article by Ernest A. Johnson, Jr., who is currently teaching in the Department of Romance Languages at Amherst College. Johnson's emphasis is on El camino as a way of life, and concentration is focused upon "the struggle between the instincts and the demands of civilized conformity." (7, p. 749) Also, the author compares El camino with various efforts of international authors but fails to include any comparison with other Spanish novelists.

In another short critical analysis, José Luis Cano notes the values implicit in El camino. A complete volume by J. S. Alborg treats in detail only Delibes' first three novels.

Leo Hickey, in "Miguel Delibes and the Cult of the Infra-Red Man," most nearly approaches the thesis of the present attempt as he notes in his short article Delibes' use of elemental characters, their simplicity, patience, ignorance, and acceptance of their lot. Also, Hickey's much longer work, Cinco horas con Miguel Delibes, provides some valuable insights into the novelist's philosophy, his attitudes, and his work.
Philip Pollack attempts to relate Delibes' novels to contemporary British fiction, with emphasis on thematic comparisons and the father-son relationship. Francisco Umbral's article, "Miguel Delibes en la novela tradicional," surveys novels up to La hoja roja, and notes a resemblance between Delibes and Sánchez-Ferlosio. José Luis Martín Descalzo includes Las ratas in his five-page study of the world and style of Delibes, but concentrates primarily on the author's plots and his use of language.

Among some few adverse criticisms of Delibes is found a chapter in Novela española actual, by M. García-Viño, who launches a rather scornful attack on Las ratas in particular, accusing the novelist of excessive pessimism and "grayness." In the present writer's opinion, this critic fails to perceive Delibes' real and constant fear that industrial progress is undermining the national values when he makes such remarks as, "Tanto en El camino como Las ratas nos da Delibes su visión pesimista de la civilización actual de la técnica, de la ciudad." (5, p. 35) He also seems to misunderstand the totality of Delibes' thesis, as evidenced by the following comment: "La tesis que late en toda su obra es la de que el mal está en la ciudad, en tanto que producto más caracterizado de la civilización de masa y máquinas." (5, p. 36) Furthermore, his suggestion that Delibes' work is characterized by "mental provincialism" does not fit in at all with the present writer's assessment of the novelist's aim.
Various Master's theses and doctoral dissertations have also been written at Spanish universities with Delibes as the subject. Maximino Alvarez Rodríguez, on the life and work of Delibes, offers perhaps the most comprehensive study, which includes aspects of materialism, determinism, and existentialism in the novels along with considerations such as family unity and the novelist's concern with political and social issues.

Francine Gual emphasizes rustic aspects and natural elements in the first three of Delibes' novels, whereas María Marín Hernández concentrates her attention on the novelist's treatment of children and feminine characters. This latter critic also provides limited, rather general analyses of Delibes' view of provincial life. Faustino Plaza Camamero devotes his study to the child's world in such areas as education, innocence, and maturity. Various other theses originating in Spanish universities concentrate on elements of realism, sentimentalism, and naturalism in Miguel Delibes. In later chapters of the present effort, more extensive treatments from various Spanish professional critics will be considered.

At least two American students have used Delibes as the subject of advanced-degree papers. Judith Ann Link used as her M. A. Thesis topic "Major Themes in the Novels of Miguel Delibes." Covering the wide spectrum of his novels, hers was purportedly the first Master's thesis on Delibes to be written.
the rural masses and, to an extent, tie in a theme of ignorance and oppression with a more hopeful, trusting acceptance of life's misfortunes. In a personal letter to the present writer from Miguel Delibes, the following explanation of el Mochuelo and Nini is offered:

Quiza en Daniel haya mas de lo que llamemos infancia normal, mientras el Nini podria ser, en su calidad de niño sabio el contrapunto de la miseria y la ignorancia de los medios rurales castellanos, que trato de fustigar en mi novela "Las ratas." Lo que es evidente es que las realidades campesinas que transcribo no las estorba el hecho de que los protagonistas sean niños. (3)

It is quite possible that, rather than simply failing to hinder an awareness of the "rural realities" of Spain, Delibes' use of the childhood point of view actually facilitates and stimulates the reader's understanding of Spanish rural society and, in effect, reveals its innate human qualities more clearly than would have been possible with adult protagonists. As one critic has pointed out, "Como Steinbeck, Mark Twain o Dostoievski, nuestro novelista ha prestado una especial atencion a la psicologia infantil, y en sus novelas hay siempre niños que muestran su candor y su sinceridad en contraste con la vida de los hombres." (6, p. 203) Certainly, in these times when neither distance nor language can interfere too greatly with a hopefully growing rapport, "una relacion de confianza mutua," among the world's nations, the reader can gain from Delibes a truer appreciation of Spain, her unique situation, her problems, and the individual attempts to cope with a fast-changing world.
in English. Anthony Allegro, now teaching at Smith College, wrote his doctoral dissertation on Delibes in 1973, at the University of Massachusetts. Allegro devotes an entire, lengthy chapter to a comparison of El camino and Las ratas, and concludes that the two novels are "based upon the same thematic formula, the contrast between the natural and the social orders." (1, p. 120) He sees a sharp difference in the portrayals of rural life, however, and terms El camino "realistic" or concrete, while Las ratas is described as a "stylization" of the abstract. Allegro also notes that children play important roles in both novels in regard to their interaction with the adults of their respective worlds.

There are possibly other Master's theses on the subject, as well as doctoral dissertations, either completed or in progress. However, a specific view of Spanish rural society as an isolated proposition, and as seen from the childhood perspective, has thus far been neglected. Therefore, the objectives of this present study are to analyze the two young protagonists of El camino and Las ratas and the characters with whom they deal and to present an overall view of Spanish rural society. Naturally, conclusions of the present writer will be included in order to prove the suggested connection between the child characters and the simplistic nature of Spanish rural society.


CHAPTER II

AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF EL CAMINO

As briefly noted in the introduction, substantial differences exist in the physical settings of the novels El camino and Las ratas. Before going into detail regarding the specific literary and philosophical elements of El camino, Delibes' third novel, it is pertinent from the critical standpoint to examine chronologically the author's earlier publications. Since setting is of such vast importance in the formulation of the present thesis, particular note is made of the contrast of settings in these first three novels. La sombra del ciprés es alargada (1948) and Aún es de día (1949), first and second efforts of the novelist, are also significant to the present purpose because both stories focus on the early formative years of the protagonists and because each book brings its own message regarding the conflicts of man with his environment. As critic Ernest A. Johnson, Jr., so aptly phrases it, Delibes is always concerned with "Man's struggle to understand his own nature in relation to the lives and events around him." (9, p. 748)

In La sombra del ciprés es alargada, the story is divided into two parts, the first being the more valuable within the present context. Part I begins when Pedro, the protagonist,
is only ten years old. Left in the charge of an uncle at his parents' deaths, young Pedro is carried to live in the home of a tutor, don Mateo Lesmes. With don Mateo's other student, a boy named Alfredo, Pedro is brought to manhood under the influence of their professor's philosophy of non-involvement in life. The boys are taught that to become involved brings the chance of being hurt. Don Mateo maintains that if one remains detached from life and such emotional ties as love, friendship, and family, he is more apt to live a serene and painless life. In the initial sentence of Chapter I, Avila is described as "the old city of walls," and the first-person narrator attributes much of his later development to the city itself:

... creo que el silencio y el recogimiento casi místico de esta ciudad se me metieron en el alma nada más nacer. No dudo de que, aparte otras varias circunstancias, fue el clima pausado y quedo de esta ciudad el que determinó, en gran parte, la formación de mi carácter. (4, p. 29)

The very season of the year, at the reader's introduction to young Pedro, tends to stress the theme of death-in-life:

Se iniciaba ya el otoño. Los árboles de la ciudad comenzaban a acusar la ofensiva de la estación. Por las calles había hojas amarillas que el viento, a ratos, levantaba del suelo haciéndolas girar en confusos remolinos. (4, p. 29)

The details of his journey through the streets of Avila are impressed upon the boy's mind, and, significantly, he has little recollection of his early childhood while his parents were living. "Casi puede decirse que comenzó a vivir,
a los diez años, en casa de don Mateo Lesmes, mi profesor."

(4, p. 29) Although teachers carry out impressive roles in other Delibes novels as well, in _La sombra del ciprés es alargada_ the young Pedro is actually prevented from having a normal childhood and is steered toward an excessively introspective and weak-willed adult character by his close association with the scholarly don Mateo. In direct contrast to the strengthening effects of the adult/child relationship in later novels, don Mateo has a distinct negative impact on the maturation process of his youthful charge. Pedro thus comes to typify those of the Spanish religionists who have the capacity to believe "in a passive sense, but whose belief is not translated into action." (6, p. 43) The youth is taught to believe that avoidance of strong human ties can bring a closer relationship with God. Circumstances prove, however, that it is impossible to achieve self-fulfillment when one cuts himself off from contact with other human beings.

_Aún es de día_ follows the development of Sebastián, a young man of the city. With his mother and sister, the youth lives in a slums section of Valladolid. This setting, however, while physically debilitating, is not allowed to bring sordidness to the spiritual growth of the hunch-backed Sebastián. He is able in the midst of personal tragedy to build a virtual armor between himself and the ugliness of the environment that holds him prisoner. In great contrast to the clean, purifying
country atmosphere of Spanish rural sections, later to receive stress in Delibes' novels, the metropolitan setting of Aún es de día brings with it the implication that in such an environment man cannot hope for Nature, or the contentment to be gained from emotional and physical stabilization as men co-exist on this earth. Furthermore, a point most critics have missed in this early novel is Delibes' indictment of the Spanish socio-economic structure which makes possible the mean existence of such Spaniards as Sebastián. Janet Díaz, a most perceptive "student" of Delibes, remarks that the action of Aún es de día, beginning in the year 1946, "portrays aspects of the Spanish economy and social structure in the year or two preceding its composition, and by implication indicts their injustice . . ." (6, p. 45) Díaz further explains that such social commentary is proven by the author's inclusion of the novel in the third volume of his Complete Works, which also contains La hoja roja and Las ratas, both of which novels carry strong social criticism.

Yet another point which sets the young Sebastián apart from other youthful characters in Delibes' later novels is the absence of a father-figure. Whereas adult males play vital roles in La sombra del ciprés es alargada and in the two novels which will receive major emphasis in these pages, Sebastian's life is lacking in this respect. Even considering that the effect of the older man may be negative, as in La sombra del ciprés es alargada, one feels that Sebastián
has missed a great many of life's moral lessons by being denied the father-son relationship.

*El camino*, on the other hand, goes deeply into the influence of a father's yearnings upon the future of his son. As the first of Delibes' anecdotal novels, *El camino* portrays simple domestic life in a natural setting, the small mountain village of Molledo-Portolín. An entirely different attitude is clearly discernable when one examines the totality of this novel in comparison with Delibes' earlier writings. The family unit, for example, receives a great deal of emphasis. In *La sombra del ciprés es alargada*, Pedro has no family; the boy turns to his tutor for the love and guidance he might normally have expected from his parents. Love, of course, is entirely beyond the human capacities of don Mateo; as for guidance, his teachings influence the lad in a way designed to bring him serenity in life but none of the warmth and compassion that come only when the affairs of other people are an integral part of one's own experience. In *Aún es de día*, Sebastián's family situation, perhaps, is even more deplorable. His alcoholic mother is cruel to her deformed son, and the fatherless household is an exceedingly bleak and amoral background in which Sebastián, even if other circumstances had been favorable, cannot hope to approach any semblance of normal manhood. The different settings of Delibes' first three novels, however, are possibly just as important an element. As de Hoyos hypothesizes:
Si Miguel Delibes hubiese de nuevo encerrado su novela en una ciudad como Ávila, o como la ciudad de Aún es de día, El camino no sería un libro tan perfecto; pero el autor ha abandonado la ciudad y se ha instalado en un pequeño pueblo para ponerse en contacto directo con los niños, con la naturaleza, con los pájaros, con los ríos y con los árboles. (8, pp. 202-3)

El Mochuelo, principal character of El camino, is faced with a completely different problem than those of Sebastián and Pedro. Daniel's father is very much alive and is almost fanatically dedicated to planning for his son's social and material progress. As a first step toward such desired progress, young Daniel is to be sent to the city to study and improve himself. The boy is not at all sure that the kind of progress his father wants for him is the best way of life. Still, he knows that "Si esto era progreso, el marchase a la ciudad a iniciar el Bachillerato, constituía, sin duda, la base de ese progreso..." (3, p. 1) Regardless of the fact that Daniel's father, the cheesemaker of the village, is pushing him toward a future undesired by the boy, the home situation is in direct contrast to those of the first two novels. El Mochuelo thrives in a close-knit familial environment which, in effect, spreads out to permeate the entire village. Daniel, as a part of village life, enjoys personal associations and privileges that neither Pedro nor Sebastián could ever imagine.

Thus, it is plain to see that the setting--the environment--of El camino is to take on supreme dimensions in its contribution to the overall tone and message of the novel.
The intimate nature of small-town existence, in short, becomes a primary facet of the novel, and, together with the loving concern constantly displayed within Daniel's small family circle, tends to dominate both plot and action. Furthermore, as Delibes himself remarked, "En los pueblos, en cambio, la vida de relación es mínima, y, en consecuencia, las manías y los rasgos individualizadores son más estables." (2, p. 45)

Thus, neither the cold ascetic environ of the Lesmes home nor the sordid filth of Sebastián's slum abode is conducive to the normalcy of maturation one might expect from a boy who receives the benefits accruing from both the family and the civic situation in which the reader comes to know el Mochuelo. Even the nickname "the Owl" (so given because of his curious, inquisitive nature) bears significance; certainly, no one cared enough for the two boy characters to bestow upon them the intimacy of a nickname. The fast difference in city life and country life, then, may be encompassed in this small literary detail: virtually every character in El camino bears such a sobriquet.

Daniel himself makes an implied comparison of urban and rural life when he thinks to himself, "Seguramente, en la ciudad se pierde mucho el tiempo . . ." (3, p. 2). Furthermore, after reading Delibes' first three novels, one is able clearly to comprehend the novelist's preference for the rural as opposed to the urban existence. Delibes has explained, "Daniel el Mochuelo no quiere marcharse del pueblo por los
mismos motivos que yo no quiero marcharme del mío" (2, p. 42),

and Judith Ann Link explains the preference in her Master's thesis in these words:

Delibes' attitude toward the city and its society, contrasted with the life of a small village or the country, becomes a strong thread woven consistently throughout his works. For him the city seems to represent a material, sensual, egotistic and superficial existence; he depicts it as a dark, bustling, dirty entity which produces a negative effect on man. The countryside or a small town engenders a natural way of life which leads to a fundamentally happier, saner, freer, and more spiritually satisfied human being. (10, p. 7)

Delibes himself adds even more of an explanation when he says:

Entiendo que la buena novela puede ser, indistintamente, rural o urbana, y, por otra parte, preocupación siempre viva en mí ha sido el hallazgo de valores estables, de valores materiales permanentes y, hasta el día, no encontré otros menos engañosos que la naturaleza. En lo que atañe a mi preferencia por las gentes primitivas, por los seres elementales, no obedece a capricho. Para mí la novela es el hombre y el hombre en sus reacciones auténticas, espontáneas, sin mixtificar, no se da ya, a estas alturas de civilización (?), sino en el pueblo. Lo que llamamos civilización recata no poco de hipocrisia. (5, p. 9)

The last sentence of the above quotation surely expresses the novelist's philosophy of Nature and, furthermore, ties it directly to rural or small town life. He does not mean, of course, that there are no good men in the city and no evil men in the countryside. As Anthony Allegro, in his doctoral dissertation, has pointed out, human defects are to be seen in city dwellers and villagers alike. "Any intelligent reading of Delibes clearly reveals that the struggle has nothing to do with where anyone lives, but rather with how
people live, what their values are, how they deal with others, and whether or not they respect the dignity of the human being." (1, p. 73)

At the same time, one cannot so lightly dismiss Delibes' expressed affection for primitive people or his belief that the height of civilization (to him, la naturaleza) is to be found in its most spontaneous expression only in the village. As critic Janet Díaz further explains the contrast, "It is not so much that 'the city is evil' as that there is a cultural gap of centuries between life there and in the countryside." (6, p. 52)

The primary purpose here, then, is to come to an understanding of the nature of Spanish rural society and to determine the specific characteristics, social mores, and perhaps traditions which enable primitive persons to reach a height that cannot be attained elsewhere. It will then be possible also to examine the villagers as they go about their daily routines, striving to uphold the precepts upon which their simple, natural, basic way of life is based. For this purpose, details of family life, personal relationships and attitudes among the villagers, and a strong affinity with Nature as seen through el Mochuelo's eyes will bear enormous significance. The purity of concept, the inclination toward openness as found only in the child, are of inestimable value in an undertaking of the present kind. And, while acknowledging that Delibes the adult penned the words and thoughts
of el Mochuelo the child, he achieved also a realistic and honest picture of the village where undoubtedly during his boyhood summers he himself had lived adventures and experiences similar to those of Daniel, Roque, and Germán. Delibes does not idealize the countryside, as the unperceptive reader might mistakenly believe. He feels tenderness for his characters, yet he has a clear vision of their weaknesses and seems frequently to be moved by pity for them rather than by any attempt at exalting them. "Nor is life in the countryside idealized, for even if it is a refuge from mechanization and the negative side of civilization, it is also remote from the positive content of progress, which the novelist clearly realizes." (6, p. 58)

A brief summary of El camino appears to be needed before any further personal analysis is undertaken. As far as summarizing the plot per se of the novel is concerned, however, there is great difficulty in doing so. The story consists of flashbacks which come to Daniel as he lies in bed, unable to sleep, the night before he is to be sent to the city. Plot is subordinated to characterization; as Leo Hickey has commented, "El autor pone todos sus esfuerzos en los personajes, y las palabras llegan arrastradas por el impulso vital y dinámico de ellos." (7, p. 349)

Through various incidents which come to el Mochuelo's mind as he remembers the past, the reader comes to know Roque and Germán, the protagonist's closest friends, Uca-Uca,
Daniel's small girl friend, and Mica, an older girl with whom el Mochuelo is badly infatuated. The protagonist, with intense longing to have things remain as they are, remembers countless escapades and adventures shared with his friends; among them: the time the three boys lost their trousers to a passing train; the day they burned the cat of "la Guindilla mayor" (which translates as "the eldest 'Hot Pepper'"—one of three unnamed sisters in the story) with a magnifying glass; the stealing of apples from Gerardo's orchard and being apprehended (and reprimanded) by his daughter Mica. Uca-Uca, motherless daughter of Quino, wants to participate more actively in Daniel's venturesome life, but el Mochuelo regards her as a nuisance until, heartbroken over Mica's engagement to a man from the city, he realizes the loyalty and worth of the much younger girl.

There are many and diverse adult male characters, too, who figure prominently in Daniel's young life: Paco the Blacksmith, who is Roque's father and the strongest man of the village; don Moises, the tall, nervous teacher of the three boys; don José, the priest, who is constantly referred to as "a great saint"; Quino, who lost one of his hands and thus earned the nickname of el Manco; el Cuco, the station agent, much admired by Daniel because he is able to keep straight all the comings and goings of the trains. These are only some of the men who are indelibly imprinted in Daniel's consciousness and who, along with many others, make up the tightly unified village population.
Women play important roles as well, and each one, in her own way, contributes to Daniel's knowledge of human nature and his growing comprehension of a warm and real way of life. The reader becomes intimately acquainted with various adult female characters, including: Sara, Roques's older sister, who makes his life miserable with her bossy ways and her insistence on a strict religious training; Josefa, who committed suicide because of unrequited love for Quino; the five Leporidas, so named because of their strong resemblance to rabbits; the three Guindillas, called "Hot peppers" because of their fiery temperaments. A large part of the novel is taken up with the love lives of these women. Roque and Daniel devise a plot to get Sara involved with don Moisés so that she will lose some of her unwanted interest in Roque's "welfare." The entire village agrees that don Moisés needs a wife, and the Guindillas, the Leporidas, and don José worry a great deal because "llevaba diez años en el pueblo diciéndole y aun seguía sin la mujer que necesitaba." (3, p. 140)

The history of the Guindillas is also an integral part of the village life. The oldest of the three sisters is a religious fanatic who consistently runs to don Jose to confess her sins (as well as to decry the sexual misbehavior of many of the younger population). The second Guindilla dies and is not at all mourned by la Guindilla mayor. As the eldest "Hot Pepper" sees it, "Dios es sabio y justo en sus decisiones; se ha llevado a lo más inútil de la familia. Démosle gracias." (3, p. 37)
The youngest of the Guindillas incurs the wrath of the domineering eldest Guindilla by running away to the city with don Dimas, a bank clerk, who remains with her only as long as her money lasts. La Guindilla mayor never lets her erring sibling forget the sin she has committed and the shame she has brought on the family name. By the end of the novel, however, la Guindilla mayor is romantically involved with Quino, and it is implied that she will make a good mother-surrogate for young Uca-Uca.

The reader thus learns the long, interesting history of most of the village inhabitants. The adult world, as is always true, is seen in an entirely different perspective from the view gained of Daniel's childhood world. Yet, the children are never isolated from what is going on in the lives of their elders. The critic de Hoyos says:

Las impresiones fuertes de la niñez, el asombro ante la gente mayor, el respeto a la naturaleza y el temor a los actos censurables, aparecen comentados por estos chicos en un pueblo pequeño donde se conoce todo el mundo, y en un valle que es un sueño para el juego y las aventuras de los muchachos. (8, p. 205)

Children tend to see things in a magnified, distorted way. As a child's viewpoint is used, the characters in the work come across virtually as caricatures—which, as a literary device, results in a much easier, clearer understanding of Delibes' message for the reader. It is through adults, as a vital part of Daniel's small world, that he learns the values as well as the mistakes of other people. He sees their virtues and their faults in much the same way that Delibes
sees them. A quotation from the novel serves to emphasize both the solidarity of the villagers and their isolation from the larger Spain:

La gente del valle era obstinadamente individualista. Don Ramón, el alcalde, no mentía cuando afirmaba que cada individuo del pueblo preferiría morirse antes que mover un dedo en beneficio de los demás. La gente vivía aislada y sólo se preocupaba de sí misma. Y a decir verdad, el individualismo feroz del valle sólo se quebraba las tardes de los domingos, al caer el sol. Entonces los jóvenes se emparejaban y escapaban a los prados o a los bosques y los viejos se metían en las tascas a fumar y a beber. Esto era lo malo. Que la gente sólo perdiere su individualismo para satisfacer sus instintos más bajos. (3, p. 152)

Of course, the mayor's criticism is also exaggerated; none of the villagers are possessed of base instincts to the extent that don Ramon complains. Similarly to people everywhere, regardless of nationality or social class, all Delibes' characters have good as well as bad traits.

Delibes does not make the mistake, either, of letting all the events of his novel come to a happy conclusion. Daniel is somewhat distantly acquainted with death and its ramifications until he is made to face up to the loss by drowning of the beloved German, who has enjoyed such close communication with God's small creatures—the birds. The suicide of Josefa, too, has shown el Mochuelo that, for some people, death is preferable to an unhappy, unsatisfying existence. Additional points of summary will be made as an assessment is undertaken of the most important life values as el Mochuelo sees and learns them from adults and other children alike.
Love of family, perhaps, is one of the strongest of the villagers' values. A primary aspect of the family unit which strikes the reader is the dominance of the father in Daniel's home. The boy's mother is a submissive woman who bows to her husband's will. The cheesemaker is a determined, obstinate man who, despite his wife's frequent tearful reactions to "giving up" their son in the name of progress, remains unswayed. His mind is made up! He has always been the master in his home, he thinks, or as he rather crudely puts it, "Desde el día de mi boda, siempre me ha gustado quedar por encima de mi mujer." (3, p. 117) When Daniel's father decides that his son is to go to the city, nothing the mother can say will change his mind. He states, "Es cosa decidida. No me hagas hablar más de esto." (3, p. 7) The mother sighs, defeated and overcome, and says nothing more. At least, she remains quiet for a time. Actually, Spanish women, along with other nationalities, are often the "power" in the home, but they are wise enough to let their husbands believe that they are the ones who make all the decisions.

Although he is ostensibly master of his household, the cheesemaker regards himself as a slave to society. His primary reason for wanting Daniel to receive a higher education is his pressing desire for his son to become something the father never had the opportunity of being. He says to his wife, "No, el chico será otra cosa. No lo dudes ... No pasará la vida amarrado a este banco como un esclavo. Bueno,
como un esclavo y como yo." (3, p. 6) It is a common desire for fathers to want more for their children than they themselves have had, but Daniel's father takes a rather exaggerated view of his so-called enslavement. The family lives well, the man owns his business, and the total atmosphere is one of plenitude, particularly when one compares this family's living standards with the villagers' plight in Las ratas or, indeed, with the slum life surrounding the characters in Aun es de día. One might easily deduce that the cheesemaker does not know when he is well off. Regardless, however, he is willing to sacrifice a great deal so that Daniel may go on a "higher path." The myth of instruction, education, and the prestige of a university/academic title are very important to Daniel's father. Indeed, the educational process as a whole may be seen to hold more significance in Spain than in the United States, for example. Thus, Daniel's father wants him to become a man in the city, to progress, and not to be like him, a poor cheesemaker. If father, mother and son have to suffer to attain this end, so will it have to be. "Daniel progresaría aunque fuese a costa del sacrificio de toda la familia, empezando por él mismo." (3, p. 30)

Daniel's mother, as befits the wife of a respected businessman of the village, is a hard-working woman, respectful of her husband and anxious for her only child to be happy. Unlike her husband, she does not have any desire to send the boy to the city. She protests first that he is the only
child they will ever have, since she was made sterile after Daniel's birth. When this approach fails to alter her husband's decision, she points out that Daniel is not much of a student. Furthermore, as a third reason for his not going, it is very expensive to send a child to the university. People such as Ramón, the druggist-mayor, can afford such extravagancies, but they—the cheesemaker and his wife—cannot do it. They do not have the money. It is noteworthy that the despairing mother gives as her first reason for protest her love for her son. Money is the final argument, and, like all the others, has no effect on her stubborn mate.

Daniel has a good relationship with his parents. They compose a happy little family within the embrace of which el Mochuelo is able to enjoy an idyllic existence. Delibes presents several touching scenes between the boy and his parents, and the three characters seem to be representative of a normal village family wherein the father makes the decisions (?), the mother is the helpmate in all respects, and the child, while learning from his mother and father and being an integral part of the family unit, is expected to respect the parents' decisions and obey their dictates.

One thing, however, mars the serenity of Daniel's days. He will soon be leaving behind all the warmth and love that have filled his life thus far. His father cannot understand why the boy should prefer stagnating in the village to "progressing" toward a better social position in the city. The generation gap between father and son, of course, is nothing
new. Delibes, in his effort to re-create the happy days of childhood, succeeds realistically in measuring the distance between the adult and the child in Spanish society. It is remembered that, in La sombra del ciprés es alargada, the young hero was taken arbitrarily to live in the home of don Mateo. The uncle, obviously, did not think to ask the boy about his reaction to the plans for the future. In Aún es de día, Sebastián’s mother spent her time raving and ranting about her son’s shortcomings. Never once did she consult with him about his hopes and expectations for the future. Now again in El camino is found a similar situation, though a much more affectionate one, to be sure. While Daniel’s home circumstances are infinitely preferable to those of the other two young Delibes characters, he is being shipped off to pursue a life for which he has no inclination, a life that will require fourteen years of study before a degree is even earned. Yet it never occurs to Daniel to discuss the matter openly with his father. The boy hears about the plan, indeed, while eavesdropping on his parents’ conversation after everyone is in bed. The boy’s objections in his own thoughts are many, but never does he give voice to them. Similarly to his mother, he feels that the father’s word, in this case, is law, and he does not dare reveal his forebodings even though he sees a great deal more value to his present existence than the one that has been planned for him. This disparity between his own wishes and those of his father
makes Daniel wonder about life in general. "La vida era así de rara, absurda y caprichosa. El caso era trabajar y afanarse en las cosas inútiles o poco prácticas." (3, p. 2)

For Daniel, whose every ambition could easily be realized right there in the village, useful knowledge consists of such things as being able to tell a goldfinch from a jay or a clod of cow dung from horse dung. Although one cannot categorically state that this earthy sort of knowledge is more valuable than academic training, Delibes seems to imply that it is. Indeed, in writing about his early novels, Delibes takes the view that education and civilization alike contain a great deal of the hypocritical. "La educación empieza por disfrazar y termina por uniformar a los hombres. El hombre que reboza sus instintos y se viste en el sastre de moda, es un ser desfibrado, sin contrastes, sin humanidad y, carente de todo interés novelesco." (5, p. 9) The reader wonders if Daniel will lose, in the process of his education and "civilization," the eager, curious, questing quality that sets him so far apart from the ordinary. Everyone must grow up, of course, but would not Daniel possibly have become a more complete and integrated adult if he had been allowed to mature in his natural setting?

El Mochuelo's views on life and on the actions of the villagers are shared by his friends Roque and Germán. Together the three boys observe with interest all that transpires in their limited little world, and in doing so gain for themselves a rather liberal practical education in the
ways of that world. From Roque, Daniel learns the facts of life, or perhaps to put it more expressly, the facts of birth. Before Daniel's very eyes, then, "se abriría una nueva perspectiva que, al fin y al cabo, no era otra cosa que la justificación de la vida y la humanidad." (3, p. 60) His knowledge of sex makes Daniel more of a person; one might say, more of a man. He sees his mother in a different light, "desde un ángulo más humano y simple, pero más sincero y estremeciéndolo también." (3, p. 60) In the way of youngsters from time immemorial, the trio exchange bits of wisdom, lore, and information from their personal observations, and thus gain an experience of life (really an education in life) that can be made possible in no other way.

As previously mentioned, the boys learn from older people as well. Mica succeeds in impressing upon them the doubtful rewards of thievery. After she catches them in the act of stealing apples, Mica makes them promise that, in the future, they will simply ask for the fruit rather than take it furtively, like thieves. At the conclusion of Mica's "lecture," the boys leave silently and walk along homeward without saying a word.

Su silencio era pesado y macizo, impuesto por la secreta conciencia de que si aún andaban sueltos por el mundo se debía, más que a su propia habilidad y maña, al favor y la compasión del prójimo. Esto, y más en la infancia, siempre resulta un poco depri-mente. (3, p. 80)
Because they have been "caught in the act," so to speak, the boys learn the importance of the human conscience and gain as well a moral perspective of immense value.

Mica, several years older than Daniel, becomes his ideal of womanhood. His own lack of finesse, in contrast to the young lady's sophistication, becomes apparent to Daniel, and he begins to think that going to the city may not be so bad after all. If he studies hard and becomes very rich, perhaps he will have more of a chance with Mica. "Entonces la Mica y él estarían ya en un mismo plano social y podrían casarse y, a lo mejor, la Uca-Uca, al saberlo, se tiraría desnuda al río desde el puente, como la Josefa el día de la boda de Quino." (3, p. 126) The last part of Daniel's thought is malicious, in the way that children are often cruel to one another. Uca-Uca's unwelcome attentions have often caused him trouble, and he imagines that, on the day he marries Mica, the bothersome little girl will dispose of herself in the same way one of her father's disillusioned lovers had done. Uca-Uca accords Daniel the same devotion he lavishes on Mica. It is Uca-Uca, however, who cries over the boy's wounds, and it is not long before Daniel is able to see the difference between real affection and a "story-book" romance.

Daniel's relationships with adults within the village confines can be translated into terms which illuminate the simple uncomplicated nature (and values) of the peasant. Roque's father, Paco, represents male strength and virility.
While such female critics as the Lepóridas and la Guindilla mayor call Paco shameless and drunken, Daniel sees the wisdom in the blacksmith's explanation of his drinking: "Tampoco las autos andan sin gasolina." (3, p. 15) Ironically, and despite the protests of narrow-minded females, the priest of the village, don José, selects Paco to carry the exceedingly heavy image of the Virgin in the procession celebrating the Day of the Virgin. On Paco's broad shoulders for a time rests the symbol of religious purity, and Daniel, much admiring, is convinced that Paco is "el hombre más vigoroso del valle, de todo el valle. (3, p. 18)

Daniel puts a great deal of faith in what Paco says, however, as well as in what he does. Disturbed one day because Uca-Uca had pointed out the number of years separating his age from that of Mica, Daniel worries so that he is unable to go to sleep. He suddenly remembers hearing Paco comment one day on the fact that Dimas, who had experienced a love affair with the youngest "Hot Pepper", was fifteen years younger than his lady. "Sonrió Daniel, el Mochuelo, en la oscuridad. Pensó que la historia podría repetirse y se durmió arrullado por la sensación de que le envolvían los efluvios de una plácida y extraña dicha." (3, p. 105)

The eldest Guindilla, unlike Paco, does not represent for the boys the quintessence of all that is admirable in her sex. Dried-up, garrulous, and extremely critical of any woman who dares to be happy, this eldest of the "Hot Peppers" makes
herself very unpopular with the young lovers of the village by seeking them out in their hiding places with a flashlight. Unlovely and unloved, she is very cruel in her treatment of her sister when that unhappy one returns from the city after having been abandoned by Dimas. The eldest "Hot Pepper" obviously resents having missed out in life as regards the sexual experience. She almost drives the priest crazy with her frequent "confessions" and requests for advice. When Quino rescues her from some angry youths whose love-making she had interrupted, the frustrated female is so grateful that she bends and kisses the stump of Quino's amputated limb. She confesses to the priest the next day that she has kissed a man in the dark. Almost overnight, it seems, the dried-up old maid changes into a woman. Thus Delibes is able to depict one of the most basic of all human values. Without sexual love, la Guindilla is domineering, hateful, and totally lacking in the womanly virtues as seen, for example, in Daniel's mother. Having gained the love of a man, however, she sets about the simple task of becoming a housewife, even to the extent of planning for big changes in the appearance of Uca-Uca, now to become her stepdaughter. In the depiction of la Guindilla mayor's alteration from an acrid busybody to a contented, fulfilled woman may be seen the novelist's idea of the true female function. What better fate can a woman hope for than to be loved by a man and to assume her rightful place in society as a housewife and mother?
This change in la Guindilla mayor, of course, is presented from the viewpoint of Daniel. In the same way that he and Roque decide that something must be done about the dictatorial Sara, the boys are interested in the love affair of Quino and Irene. Although the whole village, with the exception of don José, are unaware of the flowers Quino is bringing and laying on Irene’s balcony, when the truth does come out Daniel is not in the least surprised.

Pero a Daniel, el Mochuelo, nada de esto le causó sorpresa. Empezaba a darse cuenta de que la vida es prodigia en hechos que antes de acontecer parecen inverosímiles y luego, cuando sobrevienen, se percatá uno de que no tienen nada de inextricables ni de sorprendentes. Son tan naturales como que el sol asome cada mañana, o como la lluvia, o como la noche, o como el viento.

(3, p. 180)

The priest is surprised, the eldest Guindilla is so shocked she almost suffers a nervous rigor, and all the other adults of the village react in much the same manner. Daniel, however, is not surprised. He is a child who has come to accept the love between man and woman as a natural and beautiful part of human living.

Thus it is seen that in the lovely green village of Daniel’s birth the simple basic values are the way of life. Man, woman, and child take their proper places in the scheme of things, and Daniel, for one, regards the most trivial events as vital steps on the pathway of life. To an outsider, his village would look like any other village.
Pero para Daniel, el Mochuelo, todo lo de su pueblo era muy distinto a lo de los demás. Los problemas no eran vulgares, su régimen de vida revelaba talento y de casi todos sus actos emanaba una positiva transcendencia. Otra cosa es que los demás no quisieran reconocerlo. (3, p. 25)

Each and every villager is an important "cog" in the workings of the simplistic life cycle. The importance, the value placed on each person and his contribution to the functioning of the village as a social entity is made perfectly clear to the reader, and an implicit contrast may be seen in this placid rural existence and in the hustle and bustle, the nameless, faceless relationships within the city. Can a man achieve his due importance in a metropolitan setting? The answer in El camino is an emphatic "No." Perhaps Daniel will progress to the Bachillerata grade and, as a result, become wealthy and influential. He will never be able to return to the golden days of childhood, however, and it is sure that, with time and space intervening, he will never again experience that closeness to people and to Nature which composes the "good life."

A un pueblo lo hacían sus hombres y su historia. Y Daniel, el Mochuelo, sabía que por aquellas calles cubiertas de pastosas bonigas y por las casas que las flanqueaban, pasaron hombres honorables, que hoy eran sombras, pero que dieron al pueblo y al valle un sentido, una armonía, unas costumbres, un ritmo, un modo propio y peculiar de vivir. (3, p. 25)

Items of Nature are a prerequisite of Nature, and in El camino Nature assumes a dominant place in the life of man. The majesty of Nature is actually frightening to some people,
as it is to Roque, who feels small in comparison. "Las inge-
tes montañas, con sus recias creatas recortadas sobre el
horizonte, imbuían al Moñigo una irritante impresión de in-
significancia." (3, p.22) But for Daniel the simplicities
of the countryside, the small ordinary smells and sounds of
the living terrain, are reassuring.

The sounds and smells bring to the boy the assurance of a
continuity of life and the all-pervading presence of a super-
natural Being who presides over the affairs of man and beast,
assigning to each his respective and proper role. In this
three-way relationship (God/man/Nature), nothing is without
value; every being and every object assumes an importance.
Daniel's youthful affinity with man and Nature brings him clo-
ser to an understanding of the divine pattern. As his depar-
ture from the beloved scene draws more and more imminent, el
Mochuelo relives the experiences of his earlier days.

No era Daniel, el Mochuelo, quien llamaba a las
cosas y al valle, sino las cosas y el valle quienes
se le imponían, envolviéndole en sus rumores vi-
tales, en sus afanes improbros, en los nimios y
múltiples detalles de cada día. (3, p. 71)

The fall of the sparrow, so it is noted in The Holy Bible,
does not escape the attention of God. Regrettably, human am-
bition tends to dull the keen edge and the penetrating qual-
ity of Nature, and man is predisposed to accept a system of
non-values. The following quotation from don Jose's sermon on the Day of the Virgin helps to illuminate Delibes' philosophy of Nature:

Algunos—dijo—por ambición, pierden la parte de felicidad que Dios les tenía asignada en un camino más sencillo. La felicidad—concluyó—no está, en realidad, en lo más alto, en lo más grande, en lo más apetitoso, en lo más excelso; está en acomodar nuestros pasos al camino que el Señor nos ha señalado en la Tierra. Aunque sea humilde. (3, pp. 168-9)

The priest might have been speaking directly to Daniel's father, who had chosen for his son a path away from the simple life, the real values which had become so dear to Daniel.

The reader is not permitted to follow el Mochuelo to the city. It is known only that he grieves for all that is being left behind. "Y lloró, al fin." (3, p. 210) So closes the story of the young Daniel, who against his will is being sent on a useless detour unhappily leading him away from the knowledge of the individual's worth, the vital life-giving forces of Nature, and the presence over all of a Spirit who directs every hesitant step along the way. Even death is made acceptable and understandable as little Daniel places a dead bird in Germán's casket, to keep his friend company on his last journey. The little things one compassionate person can do to ease the load of a fellow being signify the true "miracle."
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER III

A DETAILED STUDY OF LAS RATAS

Nini, eleven-year-old protagonist of Las ratas, is placed in a very different setting from the one Daniel enjoys in El camino. Indeed, the two child characters, while illustrating some common traits and circumstances of life, are of two distinct types. Whereas Daniel is a follower, Nini is a leader of men. Yet the men and women who make up the village society of the two novels remain essentially the same. Despite the effect of "progress" on Daniel's very future and the plainly visible upheaval in Nini's life because of man's insistence upon technological advance, there is a similarity in the innate nature of the two groups of townspeople. A brief summary of Las ratas, perhaps, will aid in a later understanding of both similarities and differences.

The village of Las ratas is located in a huge semidesert about fifteen miles north of Valladolid. The land is arid, and conditions of poverty prevail, with the result that there is little possibility for the inhabitants to experience more than a bare-survival standard of living. The land is exhausted, and the climate is cruel. The child protagonist, Nini, lives with his father, el tío Ratero, in a cave on the outskirts of the village. Three of the boy's grandparents live in another cave close by.
The story does not unfold in the stream-of-consciousness technique employed in *El camino*. Rather, although a structured plot is again lacking, the novel is composed of a series of anecdotes which tie in together as the reader follows Nini through several months of the boy's childhood existence.

The primary (continuing) incident is made up of the village mayor's attempts to drive el Ratero ("rat hunter") out of his cave and into a house in the village. The government, apparently, does not want tourists to know that some Spaniards still live in caves. But the cave is home for el Ratero and his family, and he vehemently resists all efforts at dislodging him.

El tío Ratero subsists by hunting rats, which he sells to Malvino, the tavernkeeper and sometimes to Rabino, a shepherd. Malvino serves the rats, fried and sprinkled with vinegar, to his customers. Nini contributes to the family income by earning small amounts of money at odd jobs such as slaughtering, pruning vines, setting up scarecrows, and giving the villagers advice on such matters as preparing hotbeds. Nini's most important function, however, is that of weather prophet for the villagers. They rely on his predictions to tell them when to sow and reap their crops.

Nini is very close to Nature. His fondness for his dog Fa is evident throughout, and he also adopts a fox cub whose mother has been slain by Matías Celemín, the Weasel. The baby fox also falls victim to the human Weasel after Nini has
carefully tended it for some time. The protagonist knows a great deal about growing things and the signs of the seasons. When it comes to mechanical objects such as tractors, however, Nini professes no knowledge, commenting only that such things are "invented" rather than natural.

Another continuing episode which finally leads to murder is el Ratero's feud with Luis, a young man from another village. Luis is encroaching on el tío Ratero's hunting grounds, and, since rats are not plentiful in this particular hunting season, the "crime" is of a serious nature. El Ratero's hatred of the "poacher" grows until he feels himself forced to kill Luis. Nini realizes that his father has committed a heinous crime and that life is going to change significantly because of el Ratero's act of violence.

It is undeniable that Delibes takes a fervent and dedicated interest in people such as those represented by the characters of Las ratas. Commenting on the work of Francisco Umbral and other Castilian writers, Delibes has said, "Estos señores encontraron en la pobreza de Castilla la manifestación del problema español." (2, p. 180) The other authors' treatment of the problem, however, was esthetic rather than socio-economic, and their neglect of this latter area has been of great concern to Delibes. As he puts it, "Esto es lo que me movió a mí a escribir Las ratas." (2, p. 180)

Sebastián Juán Arbó is another Spanish novelist who may be compared with Delibes. In his novel Martín de Caretas, for
example, the small hero "puede compararse con los héroes infantiles de Miguel Delibes . . . El encanto de Martín reside en su inocencia, que le libra de tomar a pecho contratiempos y fracasos." (8, p. 106)

In a further comparison of Delibes and other Spanish novelists, Martínez Cachero makes this remark:

Ninguna denuncia explícita he visto y creo que la intención del autor va por otro camino--por los dos caminos Ciudad o Campo, ofrecidas al protagonista, con la victoria final del Campo. (Nada, pues, que permita el emparejamiento, la precursión respecto de un Delibes o de un Fernández Santos). (10, p. 143)

In a specific reference to characterization, Leo Hickey says:

Otros dos personajes de Delibes que no alcanzan el nivel humano, infrahombres en un sentido aún más bajo que el Viejo de Hemingway o el Lennie de Steinbeck, son el tío Ratero y su hijo-sobrino el Nini. (7, p. 218)

And, while making comparisons, one can hardly fail to include the well-known Crónica del alba of novelist Ramón Sender. Although the characters are not los elementales for whom Delibes shows such marked preference, the childhood viewpoint is beautifully employed. The novel is a record of Pepe Garcés' tenth year of life, which the adult Pepe recalls as he lies dying in a French refugee camp in the last months of Spain's Civil War. Critic Ralph Bates, quoted in an introduction to the work, describes the novel as being "presented with such force, such virtuosity of imaginative recall that one has a sense of hurrying over a strange and enormous landscape, in the company of haunted and prophetic children." (11, p. vii)
To complete this brief section of comparative criticism, it is fitting that a word from Delibes should take a prominent place. In speaking of the impact of The Confessions of Nat Turner on the literary world, Delibes remarked that the Negro problem is of interest to the entire world. "Este es el caso extremo; la novela de un país líder en el mundo. En el otro extremo está España." (2, p. 157) Delibes was eager to bring Spain's problem to the attention of the world in the same way that "Nat Turner" made all nationalities aware of the Negro problem. Delibes concentrated on the plight of the poor villagers primarily because they were important to him in a more personal way than, say, the inhabitants of slums sections in Spanish cities. Since Las ratas won the distinction of the Critics' Prize as Spain's best novel of 1962, the novel was indeed read by many people of the world. Furthermore, critic Vázquez Zamora almost immediately commented on the appropriateness of the narrative as it concerned the village economy. (6, p. 136) Therefore, it might be said that Delibes' intention of stressing socioeconomic rather than esthetic factors was successfully accomplished as well as universally applauded.

A critical (personal) examination of the settings of El camino and Las ratas allows for a better understanding of the transition in Delibes' own point of view. The broader setting of Las ratas is seen as "pardo como una excrecencia de la propia tierra y de no ser por los huecos de luz y las sombras
que tendía el sol naciente, casi las únicas en la desolada perspectiva, hubiera pasado inadvertido." (4, p. 3) This scene is a far cry indeed from the lush greenery of el Mochuelo's fertile valley. Of course, the time of year is significant also. Perhaps Delibes deliberately chose to show rural Castile in this later novel as it suffers the natural onslaughts of approaching winter. He says: "El otoño avanzado estrangulaba toda manifestación vegetal; apenas el prado y la junquera, junto al cauce, infundía al agónico un rastro de vida." (4, pp. 13-14) The expiring panorama may be symbolic of the diminishing hopes of the villagers that the government will assist them in the midst of their adversities. Indeed, rather than giving aid, the government adds to the people's burden. Looking almost resentfully at his flint lighter, Rabino dolefully comments, "¿Pues no salen ahora con que hay que pagar por esto?" (4, p. 37) Scientific progress has brought little in the way of improved advantages to these rural Castilians. Rosalino, foreman for don Antero, the town's richest man, tells Pruden that only beggars and fools sow by hand nowadays. Pruden can hardly appreciate such a comment, for he is one of the poor, although hardly a "beggar," as Rosalino would have it. The vast gulf between the rich and the poor is emphasized as Delibes shows the extent of tragedy for the poor when Nature refuses to give the needed rain for the crops. Rosalino remarks rather casually that if it does not rain by Santa Leocadía's day it will be necessary to resow the fields.
Y el Pruden, a quien las adversidades afinaban la suspicacia, le contestó que el mal era para los pobres, puesto que utilizando la máquina, como hacían ellos bien poco costaba hacerlo. (4, p. 36)

It is implied here that "progress" has served merely to accentuate the circumstances of the poor, not to alleviate them. Obviously one of the poorest of the poor, however, Nini retains his faith in the beneficence of Nature if not in the machinations of government. When Pruden asks the boy what can be done to make it rain, Nini, with a serene look about him, merely replies, "Esperar." ("Wait.") (4, p. 36)

The townspeople have a very different conception of Nature than the one held by Nini, and it is within this context, perhaps, that the greatest change in the authorial point of view may be discerned. The villagers hate the barren countryside because it seems forever to be fighting against their attempts to wrest from it a meager living. Nini, on the other hand, has such a close relationship with earth and its creatures that even the surface barrenness does not dismay him. Moreover, Nini realizes the dependency of man upon Nature. He assumes a much more mature attitude, for example, than does Daniel in El camino, who loves the land and the natural beauties of his valley primarily because they bring him pleasure. Nini earns and deserves a unique place in village society, while Daniel is merely an average youth. The people of Nini's village regard the boy with awe and a modicum of reverence. Delibes does not set Nini up as a saint, but the trusting attitude of the villagers is quite apparent. In the first
chapter of the novel, Pruden remarks to his wife Sabina, "Digo que el Nini èse todo lo sabe. Parece Dios." (4, p. 16)

Since Daniel is presented as an average boy while Nini takes a position as guide and mentor for his fellow (adult) beings, it seems likely that Delibes is bringing a much more vital message in Las ratas. The difference in the viewpoint of the two novels adds to the credibility of such an assumption. El camino is seen directly through the eyes of Daniel. He relives the past, and virtually all that occurs is viewed from the perspective of an eleven-year-old boy who is soon to leave his beloved homeplace. At the same time, Delibes, as narrator, makes clear his position regarding the determination of Daniel's father that his son shall "make progress." There is no doubt at all in the reader's mind that the author sympathizes with the boy's fervent wish to remain at home and to follow in his father's footsteps. This desire to preserve tradition is not particularly emphasized in El camino, but it is evident to the perceptive reader.

In Las ratas, on the other hand, Nini devotes himself to carrying on with the ancient way of life. He learns from both his grandfathers, his grandmother, Rufo the centenarian, and his uncle/father. Furthermore, Delibes himself assumes a different stance as author. He expresses no opinion as to the rightness or wrongness of events that transpire in this later novel. Indeed, his reluctance to reveal his disapprobation serves to accent the seriousness of the situation. Spain has changed greatly over the period of years since the writing of
El camino. What was just beginning to happen during young Daniel's childhood is well on the way to becoming established procedure in Las ratas. Delibes does not like the changes, but he views them more or less as an impartial observer. In comparing this aspect of the two novels, Anthony Allegro has made the following perceptive analysis:

...the change in technique is perhaps the more important element in terms of what makes the two works seem so different. What makes them distinct is the more objective, dramatic technique of the narrative which in turn necessitated changes in authorial distance and point of view. The narrator (thus the implied author) of El camino takes sides; the narrator of Las ratas remains detached. He neither condemns nor approves. He simply observes and narrates. This major shift in the narrative distance changes the entire fabric and texture of the work. A degree of abstraction (still within a realistic style) is now possible. (1, p. 70)

Within the framework of the more abstract (detached) authorial distance of Las ratas, family life takes on quite a different character than in El camino. Daniel's childhood is relatively carefree and boyish. He suffers some sadness, of course, as all humans do, regardless of age; the major portion of his early years, however, is quite normal and happy as el Mochuelo shares in many adventures with his peers. Nini, however, has no playmates other than his animal friends. Furthermore, his home life is most unusual. He has two grandfathers and one grandmother, the three of whom live together in a cave next to the one occupied by Nini and his father. From these old folks the boy acquires his wisdom. Grandfather Abundio is a pruner who makes annual trips to work in a vineyard at
Torrecillórigó. He is virtually obsessed with cleanliness, a trait Nini attributes to Abundio's desire to get rid of all that is dirty, useless, and superfluous. The boy enjoys his grandfather's work and learns from him a great deal about growing things.

Román is a hunter. He will not go near the water except in January when, as old Rufo puts it, "La liebre, en enero, cerca del agua." (4, p. 28) In the act of hunting it seems that Grandfather Román changes into some sort of hunting animal. Despite being Abundio's brother, Román is very different from the pruner; from Román also, however, Nini learns much that is valuable:

... aprendió el niño, junto al abuelo Román, a intuir la vida en torno. En el pueblo, las gentes maldecían de la soledad y ante los nublados, la sequía o la helada negra, blasfemaban y decían: "No se puede vivir en este desierto." El Nini, el chiquillo, sabía ahora que el pueblo no era un desierto y que en cada obrada de sembrado o de baldío alentaban un centenar de seres vivos. Le bastaba agacharse y observar para descubrirlos. (4, p. 31)

In the same way, el Nini learns a great deal about many things from Rufo. Whereas the other children gather around the old man just for the sport of laughing at the sight of his aged, trembling hands, Nini sits at his feet in much the same way that Jesus, as a boy, had absorbed the teachings of the wise men in the temple. From Rufo:
Nini has an inquiring, observant nature which he puts to work for the purpose of learning all that it is possible for him to know. Daniel, too, is alert and curious, thus earning his nickname "el Mochuelo." There is a vast difference, however, between the two kinds of knowledge the two boys are interested in acquiring. Daniel's active part in the "tormenting" of the cat which belonged to the Guindillas, for example, shows the dissimilarity of the two kinds of learning as the boys apply their knowledge to the life experience. Daniel himself did not know where the idea of burning the cat came from.

It is impossible to imagine Nini's taking part in such a childish prank, particularly when an animal is made to experience pain as a result. It sickens Nini to see Grandfather Román hurling his club at a rabbit. The boy hates pain and death in all its forms, and he can conceive as dead only the rats that provide him a living.

Nini is practical enough to realize, at the same time, that some animals must die for the sustenance of man.
Grandmother Iluminada he learns the expert method of slaughtering hogs so that the animals experience the least possible pain. No hog, the old woman bragged, ever grunted more than three times after she stuck him, and the boy, after his grandmother's death, carries on the slaughtering tradition in the same merciful way.

All this does not mean, of course, that el Mochuelo is a cruel and unfeeling boy. He and his comrades act in much the same way that any average boy acts in the process of growing up. Nini, as the contrast has shown, is not an average boy. Adulthood has been forced upon him, perhaps because of the strange and unusual texture of his family life. Under the tutelage of three grandparents and a father, all living in caves outside the village proper, the boy learns while very young that life is a precious commodity which oftentimes is also difficult to preserve. Nini is precocious in all respects. He has wisdom and judgment far beyond his tender years, while el Mochuelo is fortunate enough to enjoy a sheltered, plentiful life, his only worry being the knowledge that his father is going to force him into a formal education which he neither appreciates nor desires. It is pertinent at this point to repeat part of Delibes' explanation of the two boys as given to the present writer and as presented in the Introduction to these pages.
Quizá en Daniel haya más de lo que llamemos infancia normal, mientras el Nini podría ser, en su calidad de niño sabio el contrapunto de la miseria y la ignorancia de los medios rurales castellanos, que trato de fustigar en mi novela "Las ratas." (5)

Furthermore, in a conversation with César Alonso de los Ríos, Delibes was asked why a novel as crude as Las ratas was dominated by a superior child such as Nini. Delibes replied, "Con el Nini intenté, por un lado, un contrapunto de la vida tremenda del medio rural castellano. Le di una elevación espiritual por encima del resto de los convecinos." (2, p. 204)

Also, Leo Hickey, referring back to Aún es de día and El camino and making a point about characters in Las ratas as well, has said that Sebastián, Daniel el Mochuelo, and Nini, to name a few, constitute "una caravana miserable de seres haraposos y hambrientos, primitivos y elementales, lamentables y desgraciados." (7, p. 215) Although Daniel does not experience the extreme poverty of Nini, his life is made miserable and lamentable because his father wanted to set him on the wrong road.

Perhaps fortunately for Nini, the best his father can give him in the way of "education" is the most valuable way to go about killing rats. Malvino pays el Ratero two pesetas per rat, and this is the primary income on which the family subsists. The timeless aspect of rejuvenation and rebirth is seen not only in the reproduction of the rats (every six weeks) but also in the change of seasons. With the coming of autumn, el Ratero and Nini go down to the riverbed every morning to pursue their hunting. Their work continues through the winter
months, but with the coming of spring el Ratero, who respects the mating season of the animals, stops his hunting and withdraws to his cave to await another autumn. It is rather odd that the death of Nature’s green covering should signify the most fruitful time of the year as regards el Ratero’s profession.

El tío Ratero believes only in this kind of natural life. Unlike Daniel’s father, el tío Ratero does not want his son to go to school. He firmly resists any efforts people may make toward seeing that Nini shall get a formal education.

Doña Resu, the second richest person in the village, approaches el Ratero several times on the matter of educating the boy. She has a very low opinion of men who live in caves and, selfishly, she wants Nini to improve his natural intelligence so that it will cast added glory on herself. Doña Resu takes
young girls (like Simeona) into her own home to help them prepare for a life of service with the Church. Eufrasia, for example, has just spent three years with doña Resu, doing hard and humiliating tasks, in preparation for entering a convent. Malvino wisely comments, "Es la manera de tener criada gratis." (4, p. 146) Simeona, now that Rufo, her father, is dead, will also spend three years with the lady and, during that time, will provide further "free maid service."

Whatever her designs on Nini may be, however, doña Resu continues to be frustrated where his schooling is concerned. She complains to el Ratero that the boy is spending too much time with the "sinful" Extremadurans, drinking wine and hearing obscene stories. She suggests that he would be better off in school, but el Ratero replies that Nini already knows more than anyone else. The lady argues that "everybody" might think the boy is very wise, but, she asks, since the people themselves are ignorant, how can they know how much Nini really knows? She says to the boy's father, "El Nini tiene luces naturales, ya lo creo que las tiene, pero necesita una guía. Si el Nini se lo propusiera podría saber más que nadie en el pueblo." (4, p. 81)

Getting no favorable response from el tío Ratero, doña Resu carries her attack to the boy himself. She asks Nini why he does not go to school. The boy asks, then, why he should want to go, and the lady replies, "En la escuela se educa a los pequeños para que el día de mañana sean hombres
de provecho." (4, p. 84) Similarly to Daniel's father doña Resu believes material possessions are the mark of progress. She asks Nini, "¿Y no te gustaría a ti cuando seas grande tener un auto como el de don Antero?" (4, p. 85) The boy replies that he would not like to have such an automobile, and doña Resu changes her tactics. She comments that Nini surely would like to be able to plant pines better than Guadalupe the Extremaduran, to which statement the boys agrees. She adds, however, that Nini might even grow up to be "somebody" like don Domingo, the engineer of the Extremadurans, and Nini completely frustrates the lady when he asks her, "¿Quién le dijo que yo quiera ser un señor, doña Resu?" (4, p. 86)

But doña Resu is not finished with her anticipated "improvement" project for the boy. Again she approaches el Ratero, whose sullen answer this time is that the boy is his. Dona Resu tells him,

Yo no trato de quitarle al Nini sino de hacerle un hombre. Doña Resu sólo pretende que el chico se labre un pervenir. Así, el día de mañana, vendrá el "don" y ganará mucho dinero y se comprará un automóvil y podrá pasearte a ti por todo el pueblo. (4, p. 120)

She asks el tio Ratero, "Wouldn't you like to be driven through the village in an automobile?" The old man answers drily, "No." Then she asks if he would not like to leave the cave and live in a fine home on Donalcio Hill. The rat hunter replies that he would not. The cave is his. The old man might not have a great deal of life's more substantial rewards, but the boy and the cave belong to him. Woe be to anyone who
attempts to take them away from him. Completely unlike el Mochuelo's father, el tío Ratero wants things to remain as they are. He is not ashamed of his station in life, and he would like for Nini to follow the same pattern. He sees nothing but unhappiness for himself and the other impoverished villagers when the government attempts to make their circumstances better. His cave is the only one left of the five formerly lived in. The mayor has persuaded Sagrario the Gypsy and Mames the Mute to leave their caves and move into the village. Román and Iluminada are dead, and Abundio, as soon as they were buried, took his few belongings and disappeared. El tío Ratero and Nini thus are the only cave-dwellers left. Justo the mayor, hoping for added benefits for himself, tries every possible way to drive el Ratero from the cave. El tío Ratero is determined to preserve his simple, uncomplicated way of life. Moreover, had he not killed the rat hunter from another village, it is quite possible that he would have postponed indefinitely the encroaching "progress" that threatened his traditional, established, and simplistic mode of living. His determination to defend his belongings is carried to an extreme, and the future for father and son at the conclusion of the novel appears exceedingly bleak. El Ratero is not intelligent enough to understand that he has committed a serious crime. In his eyes, he simply protected what belonged to him. He says to Nini, "Las ratas son mías." (4, p. 164) When Nini replies that now they will have to leave the cave, again
the father maintains obstinately, "La cueva es mía." (p. 164) People will not understand el Ratero's position of self-defense, the boy realizes, and, similarly to Daniel, Nini takes a final look at the spot which, to him, has been the dearest place in the world.

So it is seen that the home and family, despite the great differences for Daniel and Nini, are equally important in the two novels. Other simplistic values may also be compared in the stories. Although Nini's mother, having been confined in a mental hospital when the boy was six, has little part in the contemporary action of Las ratas; other female characters show both the motherliness and the "bossiness" which appear to be characteristic of "Delibes women." The counterpart of the eldest Guindilla may be seen in doña Resu, who has not enjoyed the companionship of a man since the death of her husband don Alcio, and who takes the same delight in meddling in other people's affairs as was exemplified in the eldest "Hot Pepper". Señora Clo, on the other hand, the third richest person in the town, displays the womanly virtues seen earlier in Daniel's mother. Unlike doña Resu, Clo has a great fondness for Nini, claiming that the boy's knowledge is inspired. Whereas doña Resu, nicknamed the Eleventh Commandment, says that, since Nini's parents are brother and sister, he must be simple-minded, Clo points out that, as well as being simple, the human product of a union between blood kin may be unusually brilliant (as in Nini's case). Clo does not have doña Resu's
avaricious nature. Whereas doña Resu collects her rents punctually no matter what the weather may be like, señora Clo takes her rent in wheat, oats, barley, or even in promises if nothing else is available. A further sharp contrast of the two female types may be seen in the following description:

Y en tanto el Undécimo Mandamiento no se apeaba del "Doña", la estanquera era la señora Clo a secas; y mientras el Undécimo Mandamiento era enjuta, regañona y acre, la señora Clo ... era gruesa, campechana y efusiva; y mientras doña Resu, el Undécimo Mandamiento, evitaba los contactos populares y su única actividad conocida era la corresponsalía de todas las obras pías y la maledicencia, la señora Clo, la del estanco, era buena conversadora, atendía personalmente la tienda y el almacén y se desenvivía antaño por el Virgilio, un muchacho rubio, fino e instruido, que se trajo de la ciudad y del que el Malvino, el Tabernero, decía que había colgado el sombrero. (4, p. 42)

Don Antero, the most powerful of all the villagers, is similar to doña Resu in that he is interested in Nini for selfish reasons. When the boy, disturbed by the malicious mistreatment of a cow provided by don Antero for the town holiday, lets the animal loose in the middle of the night, the rich man does not allow Nini to be punished. Antero asks his foreman if Nini is the boy who knows about everything and fixes everything. When Rosalino answers in the affirmative, don Antero decides: "Pues déjale trastear y el día que cumpla las catorce le arrimas por casa." (4, p. 41) Don Antero, also recognizing the boy's unusual talents, aspires to make of him an exemplary farmhand.

These three rich persons, of course, have considerable influence on the lives of the less fortunate villagers, and
it is interesting to note that at least one of them, señora Clo, is understanding, sympathetic, and lenient in business dealings. Even in the matter of el Ratero's cave señora Clo has a different attitude from other people of importance. Justito, whose attempts to throw the rat-hunter out of the cave are common knowledge, is approached by señora Clo, who wants to know what harm el Ratero is doing. The mayor explains to her that he wants the rat-hunter out for the man's own protection. Some day, he maintains, the cave will fall in and smother el Ratero. Señora Clo's answer to the problem is typically simplistic. She advises the mayor, "Arréglasela; eso es bien fácil." (4, p. 107)

But such a solution is not at all appealing to Justito, who wants to prevent any further "disgrace" to his town. The government has requested that he do away with the caves in the name of "progress", and such is Justito's dedicated intention--regardless of the effect on any individual's life.

Another female who conflicts with the simplistic values of the average villager is Columba, the wife of Justito. Being herself city-born, she places great value on the artificialities of metropolitan society. She feels uncomfortable in the presence of the villagers, and avoids them whenever possible. "En puridad, la Columba echaba en falta su infancia en un arrabal de la ciudad y no transigía con el silencio del pueblo, ni con el polvo del pueblo, ni con la suciedad del pueblo, ni con el primitivismo del pueblo." (4, p. 105) She
regards the town as a barren waste, and not one of its natural charms appeals to her. Columba appears to judge Nini as the utmost representative of the "simple" life, and she observes the boy with scorn and suspicion. She has absolutely nothing in common with him, and, unlike the native villagers, calls on him for help only when there is no other alternative. Columba, for her own advancement, wants Justito to be successful in driving Nini and his father from their cave. She asks the boy why they are determined to remain there, cautioning that one day Nini will suffer from rheumatism because he lives underground. Nini points out that rabbits do not have rheumatism, and Columba, losing control, slaps the boy twice, then raises her hands to her own cheeks and bursts out crying. People can experience extreme frustration for more than one reason, of course, and it is Columba's heartfelt desire to be rid of the village and its inhabitants forever.

Male strength and virility, best illustrated by Paco el Herrero in El camino, also receive emphasis in Las ratas. El tío Ratero, while he may be weak in intelligence, is strong and brawny. Antoliano, another sympathetic character, is exceedingly masculine. In his trade as a sawyer, his hands and arms have developed amazingly. He admires and respects Nini and, similarly to most of the villagers, frequently asks the boy for help and advice.

Perhaps the greatest stress on masculine strength is illustrated by the contrast between the two priests of the
village. In Las ratas, don Zósimo, nicknamed the Big Priest, is much loved by the villagers. He is seven and one-half feet tall and weighs 275 pounds. Don Zósimo just never seemed to stop growing, and, when Nini was very young, his mother used to threaten the child by saying, "Si no callas, te llevo donde el Curón, a que le veas roncar." (4, p. 99) The sheer size and strength of the Big Priest was enough to frighten the boy into obedience.

Don Ciro, the parish priest who takes on the priestly duties of the village after don Zósimo's transfer, is quite a different type of man. Don Ciro is excessively young, timid, and humble. The villagers regard him as quite an ineffective representative of the Lord. Whereas don Zósimo spoke in a thundering voice that made the very hills appear to tremble, don Ciro gets down on his knees in the dust, raises his weak arms, and appeals humbly to God to send an abundant rain. Delibes, using this contrast perhaps to stress the importance of male strength as a simplistic value, gives the following rather humorous and ironic background for the young, "weak" priest:

De don Ciro contaban que el día que el Yayo, el herrerador de Torrecillórigo, mató a palos a su madre y tras enterrarla bajo un montón de estiércol, se presentó a él para descargar sus culpas, don Ciro le absolvó y le dijo suavemente: "Reza tres Aumarias, hijo, con mucho fervor, y no lo vuelvas a hacer." (4, p. 99)

Overall, and in the midst of the conflicting personalities of the villagers, however, the simplistic nature of Nini pervades. In supreme contrast to the ordinariness of el
Mochuelo, a lovable and charming boy who is in no way remarkable, stands the impressive small figure of Nini, who loves people and animals for their own sake, who ministers to the aged and dying, who attends to every possible need of his fellow villagers, and who regards pain and death as reprehensible and (sometimes) quite avoidable. Nini tries to reason with his stubborn father where the "foreign" rat hunter is concerned, but to no avail. In the way of all Delibes' young, Nini must give over to the whims and the dictates of his parent. At the same time, it is implied that Nini, from the moment el tío Ratero commits murder, will be the one to lead and his obstinate father, in the same vein, to follow.

Nini, similarly to el Mochuelo, loves his village. He recognizes and accepts its faults as well as its virtues as essentially human. As Luis López Martínez interprets the villagers of Las ratas, "Los personajes que presenta Delibes en esta novela son como todos los que pertenecen a esa galería de personajes grises y sin relieve que tanto abundan en la vida real y que generalmente pasan desapercibidos." (9, p. 147)

The land, its creatures, and its men and women are all valuable components of the Master Scheme, and, if God made a mistake by allowing the traditional values to become disarranged by certain marks of progress, this, too, is understandable to the young protagonist of Las ratas who, above all else, values human needs and living things in all their various forms. "Y el Nini atendía a unos y a otros con su habitual solicitud." (4, p. 98)


CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION: AN OVERALL VIEW OF SPANISH RURAL SOCIETY AND
THE VALUE OF THE CHILD'S POINT OF VIEW

Spanish rural society, as seen in both El camino and Las ratas, is composed primarily of persons who hold to simple
values and live out their rather uneventful lives in the be-
lief that every man is an individual of considerable worth.
The climate may be favorable and the land green and productive,
as in El camino; the weather may be inclement at times and the
terrain barren, as in Las ratas; indeed, the people may have
differing attitudes toward their own small space in the larger
entity, Spain, depending on whether they live a life of rela-
tive plenty or one of extreme poverty.

However, the life pattern of most rural Castilians does
not change. The values which were important in El camino are
also predominant factors in Las ratas. Simplicity is evident
in its most clearly defined form. El Mochuelo grows up in an
atmosphere of warmth and solicitude, bringing forcibly to the
reader's attention the importance of the family unit. Every
individual in Daniel's village, in fact, takes extreme inter-
est in the day-to-day circumstances of every other person.
The history of a people is etched in realistic terms, and by
means of characterization Delibes reveals a solid belief in
tradition, an innate distrust of the new and mechanical, and a stoic acceptance of the harsh realities of life.

The characters in Delibes' novels who do not possess these traits are not true representatives of Spain's rural society. In *El camino*, for example, Ramón, the druggist's son, was sent away to the city to study and "improve" himself. When he returned to his native village during vacations, Daniel saw him "venía empingorotado como un pavo real y les miraba a todos por encima del hombro . . ." (2, p. 1) The youngest Guindilla ran away to the city with Dimas, and her life was irrevocably changed. Gerardo became wealthy in America, and the imprint of his characterization is only a faint shadow on the overall texture of the novel.

The characters who are most vividly impressed upon the reader's memory are individualists such as Paco, the strongest man in the valley, *don José*, "a great saint", and Quino, the amputee, all of whom belong to and in the village. Even Sara, Roque's domineering sister, and the eldest Guindilla, who pokes her nose into everyone's affairs, become more human and lovable when romantic love comes into their lives. Love between man and woman, of course, is another simplistic value. Daniel's father, of course, is a native villager, but his aspirations for Daniel's future have distorted his sense of values. Delibes makes it obvious that Daniel's desire to remain in the valley is both natural and right. One cannot imagine Daniel as becoming, like Ramón, as proud as a peacock, yet the possibility is there.
In *Las ratas*, the same expert use of characterization is evident. *Doña* Resu is not representative of village life. She spends her winters in the city, and she tries in every possible way to change the life style of the rat hunter and his son. Justo the mayor is greatly influenced by his city-bred wife Columba, and both man and wife become a threat to Nini and his father. Justo’s vigorous efforts to evict el Ratero from his cave appear ridiculous to most of the villagers. Columba despises the villagers as well as the village. She sees only the dirt and the poverty which, undeniably, are there. Her values were acquired in the city, and it is obvious that they are false values.

Which characters are most warmly and sympathetically portrayed in *Las ratas*? The answer has to be, once again, those individualists who cling to the established way of life. The rat hunter, with all his idiosyncracies, is a true traditionalist. He is unalterably opposed to "progress" which, for him, would have constituted moving out of his cave and into the village. This would not be a long journey, it is true, but it would have been conducive to destroying el Ratero’s sense of individual worth.

El Nini, too, is unforgettable. Nature is the most valuable of all possessions to him. He is near to the earth, his native soil, and he has the utmost respect for all of God’s diverse creations. Similarly to el Mochuelo, he objects to an education which might take from him the true and
real, the spontaneous and durable values gained from the simple life.

Then there is Pruden who, unlike don Antero, the village's richest man, is dependent on the weather, good fortune, and, to a large extent, Nini for his meager living; and there is Big Wagger, the shepherd, who resents the government's interference with the old way of life. Señora Clo is the only one of the "wealthy" villagers, moreover, who takes real interest in the average villager's problems. She is sympathetic in all respects, and she is much more closely tied to the village and aligned on the side of its inhabitants than, for example, the more "progressive" doña Resu.

The oldest generation, too, composed of persons such as Grandfathers Abundio and Román, Grandmother Iluminada, and Rufo, contribute greatly to the simple, elemental values. From them Nini learns important lessons such as planting, hunting, slaughtering, and predicting the weather. What could be more basic to rural life than such an education? In all cases where artificial values have supplanted the traditional and the accepted or present life, Delibes' characters are clearly out of tune with the rhythm of village life.

Delibes began to use the child protagonist early in his writing career. His first two novels, La sombra del ciprés es alargada and Aún es de día were based on the early experiences of Spanish boy characters. Pedro and Sebastián, however, did not live in rural areas. They did not possess the
same values, either, that are apparent in El Mochuelo and Nini. In moving his setting from the city to the village, Delibes accomplished a great deal. Rather than portraying the negative aspects of "civilization," "education," and the metropolitan way of life, he was able to picture the positive elements of Nature in all their power and glory.

Delibes continued with the child protagonist, however, after this transition of setting. El camino gave Daniel el Mochuelo to the world of literature, and the novelist received critical acclaim. As critic de Hoyos has said, "Delibes es el novelista de nuestro tiempo que ha concedido mayor atención a los niños." (4, p. 203)

The objective here, however, is to go beyond merely pointing out that various Delibes novels contain child protagonists. From much of what has been established in preceding sections, a distinct contribution is observable from the fact that Delibes did use child rather than adult "heroes." His childlike psychology is aptly employed in such a way that the reader receives a strong impression of candor and sincerity which, regrettably, appears to lose a great deal of its force as adulthood is reached. Perhaps no more vivid example of this childhood faith and innocence can be given than El Mochuelo's placid acceptance of the sex role. Adults were surprised and shocked to discover that Quino and the eldest Guindilla were seriously "courting." Daniel saw the love affair as quite natural. The relations between man and woman, to Daniel, "Son
Sexual love, of course, is a vital element of "la naturaleza." The adults of Daniel's society had come to accept the eldest Guindilla as a cantankerous old maid and Quino as a lonely widower. Whereas it was not even necessary for Daniel to make a shift in perspective, the adults had to rearrange their previous thinking in regard to the two persons involved. Thus, using Daniel's consciousness, Delibes made the village panorama more lucid, more acceptable, and indeed more "natural" than it might otherwise have been. El Mochuelo had not yet reached an age where his basic instincts had to be guarded and qualified. Despite the fact that his view, his observations of others in his small world, were at times strongly exaggerated, the overall presentation is real and believable. Indeed, it seems to the present writer that such exaggeration enabled Delibes to make his points more impressive. El Mochuelo and his peers learned a great deal from what the adults told them (or which they heard from eavesdropping); but they learned even more by watching and observing adults in action. "Otros detalles completan la bella historia de estos muchachos y sus observaciones sobre lo que oyen a los mayores." (4, p. 205) The world of Daniel, then, is accurate and unadulterated by reservations which are normally contained in an adult chronicle of events.
The village scene is much changed in *Las ratas* as concerns physical aspects. The villagers have reached a depth of poverty that did not apply in *El camino*. While the earlier novel merely implied that "progress" does not offer a good way of life, *Las ratas* depicts in clearly-stated terms the lowly and miserable conditions resulting from government intervention and/or neglect. In areas where the government might have helped, in other words, it was neglectful. There obviously was no such thing as agricultural aid, since the people went hungry when their crops failed. In trying to put up a front for the tourists, however, the administration threatened the very livelihood of persons such as el Ratero and other *primitivos*. A prime example, of course, is Justo's attempts to get the rat hunter out of his cave. A consumerism society is dominated by the time *Las ratas* was written, and Delibes felt it was necessary to set out on a counteracting mission. "Lo que tenemos que hacer, la misión que nos toca, es preparar a la gente para resistir a esta sociedad de consumo." (1, p. 202)

Nini sees life's simple values with remarkable clarity. While *Las ratas* is not presented through the boy's consciousness as was true with Daniel in *El camino*, virtually the same type of revelation is possible. Nini's reactions to opposing forces, for example, supply the needed momentum for the unfolding of the rather tenuous plot. Again it is possible to give a concrete example of the advantage of the childhood point of
view. Doña Resu was the second richest person in Nini's village. As such, she carried a great deal of authority, which she was fond of using. She brought pressure on el Ratero time after time to send Nini for further education. She finally went to the boy himself, and tried to tempt him with all sorts of tangible "assets." She finally asked if he did not want to become a "somebody." With utmost frankness and supreme simplicity, the child asked her who in the world could have told her that he had aspirations of becoming a "somebody."

Within the context of this contrast of personalities and values may be seen the core of Delibes' philosophy of life. Nini is clearly more of a person than doña Resu could ever hope to be—at least, from Delibes' standpoint this is true. "And a little child shall lead them" is not an idle prediction. Jesus led his elders to a better way of life, and in Nini a like dedication to human welfare is observable. Although high above the ordinary villager, Nini is yet on the same plane of existence. His spiritual elevation does not separate him from others; instead, his clear insight provides even closer contact with his neighbors. As Delibes has explained the use of Nini, "... trato de simbolizar con él las dificultades que encuentra en un pueblo un ser inteligente para realizarse." (1, pp. 204-5) In the last analysis, "Nini es una especie de conciencia social." (1, pp. 204-5)

By means of events which happen in Nini's young life, the novelist reveals "la profunda relación que, como nostalgia de
lo eterno, tiene con la angustia existencial ante la finitud de lo humano." (5, p. 226)

The living conditions of the villagers in Las ratas are enough to make them bitter and resentful. Nini, however, is hopeful, trusting, and accepting of life's harsh realities. He does the best he can do with the little with which he has to work. He is always present in time of need, and his ultimate philosophy is to wait. The narrator's philosophy, of course, is the Delibes philosophy. When accused of excessive pessimism, Delibes responded:

Yo creo que el pesimismo es connatural en mí, aunque, como ya te dije, no lo estoy ni todos los días ni a todas las horas. Ahora bien, tiene razón: el problema del campo es algo que me preocupa. (1, p. 177)

The key words are el campo (countryside). Always, Miguel Delibes is concerned with "primitive or elemental beings" who represent for him the essence of Nature.

From critical research, personal analysis, and helpful information from Delibes himself, the following conclusions may be reached:

1. The simplistic values of rural Castilians are explicitly revealed, stressed, and commended in both El camino and Las ratas. Love of family, male virility, the womanly virtues, the sexual function, and the individual's worth are basic and almost instinctual. These values are real and stable. They do not change in spite of the most devastating alterations in living conditions.
2. The childhood point of view is helpful in giving a clearer vision of the real, the important, the permanent values inherent in the simplistic mode of life. Although more explicitly shown in *El camino*, the childhood view is also employed to a lesser extent in *Las ratas*. The frank honesty of Nini approaches the same depth as the sincere candor of *el Mochuelo*. In both cases the novelist avoided the qualifying and perhaps even prejudicial nature of modern adult "reporting". In their own childlike simplicity, Daniel and Nini are capable of innocent accuracy which is often lacking in the adult narrator.

3. Delibes' own philosophy of Nature deepened and became more forceful as the years passed between the writing of the two novels. What was merely hinted at in *El camino* becomes strongly evident in *Las ratas*. The authorial preference for the simple life and those who practice it is more emphatically stressed in the later novel, primarily because it is a social protest against mechanization and the artificialities, the dehumanizing effects of modern living. The technical world is an enemy of Nature. At the same time, Delibes does not ignore the advantages progress could bring to the people he so much respects and admires. The unfortunate circumstance is that, all too frequently, men suffer the disadvantages but are not able to realize the actual fruits of "progress".

In a letter to Antonio de Hoyos dated March 15, 1974, Delibes wrote: "Su ensayo de mi obra [*El Camino*] ha causado
una grata sorpresa. ¿Qué quiere V. que le diga? Sabe V. de mis libros mucho más que yo que los he escrito." (4, p. 221) Similarly, in his letter to the present writer, Delibes wrote: "Muchas gracias por su interés por mis cosas. En realidad yo no se explicar mis novelas ni los personajes que las pueblan. Ellos están ahí y se explican solos." (3)

* * * * *

No doubt it is difficult for a writer to explain precisely everything he composed during a flow of inspiration. Certainly, it is up to the individual critic to interpret a literary work as it contains some special meaning for him. It is also true, however, that there are some generalities which can be substantiated with adequate study. While the present thesis is in disagreement with some opinions, and is fairly original as regards others, an in-depth analysis of the various sources appears to validate the conclusions reached.
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3. Delibes, Miguel, an unpublished letter to George M. Gentry, Valladolid, Spain, March 9, 1974. A copy of the letter is appended.


APPENDIX

(Letter from Miguel Delibes to George M. Gentry, sent from Valladolid, Spain)

9 Marzo 1974

Querido Amigo:

Muchas gracias por su interés por mis cosas. En realidad yo no se explicar mis novelas ni los personajes que las pueblan. Ellos están ahí y se explican solos.

Quizá en Daniel haya más de lo que llamemos infancia normal, mientras el Nini podría ser, en su calidad de niño sabio, el contrapunto de la miseria y la ignorancia de los medios rurales castellanos, que trato de fustigar en mi novela "Las ratas". Lo que es evidente es que las realidades campesinas que transcribo no las estorba el hecho de que los protagonistas sean niños.

Espero que cuando termine su trabajo tenga la gentileza de enviarme un ejemplar dedicado.

Le renuevo mi gratitud y le envío un saludo amistoso.

(signed)

Miguel Delibes
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