

*El 'cazador-cazador'<sup>1</sup> as Green Hunter and Renovator of Poetics in the Work of Miguel Delibes*

Although a staunch ecologist, Miguel Delibes harboured a lifelong, unapologetic passion for small-game hunting, his preferred quarry being the *dos plumas y dos pieles* of red-legged partridge, quail, hare and rabbit. His regular weekend forays, from 1949 to 1995, as part of a *cuadrilla*, typically composed of his brother, friends, and—later on—sons, although just as often alone or accompanied by a dog, entailed gruelling treks and stalks over wide areas, frequently for paltry rewards.<sup>2</sup> While a fine shot and tenacious strategist, Delibes might expect to encounter little more than a few grumpy magpies and, dejectedly, over the years—on regulated but unmanaged public hunting grounds, which he favoured—an ever dwindling number of feral red-legged partridge, a cunning and elusive bird which he valued above all other prey. Even physical injury did not dent his enthusiasm: in 1971, the author broke his fibula

---

<sup>1</sup> *El cazador-cazador* is a formula of words often used by Delibes when he discusses hunting. See, for instance, Miguel Delibes, *El libro de la caza menor* [1964], in García Domínguez's excellent edition of the complete works: *Obras completas*, prologue by Germán Delibes de Castro, 7 vols (Barcelona: Destino, 2009), vol. 5, 25-206 (36); César Alonso de los Ríos, *Conversaciones con Miguel Delibes* (Barcelona: Destino, 1993), 152. His most succinct (perhaps because slightly nettled) declarations of hunting principles are: 'Cuestiones de bulto', from *De pegar la hebra* [1990], in *Obras completas*, vol. 5, 1089-91; 'El verdadero cazador', in *El último coto* [1992], *ibid.*, 881-1053 (962-64). See also Carlos Blanco Álvaro, *Entrevistas* (Valladolid: Ámbito, 2003), 31-33.

<sup>2</sup> See the testimony of his son Germán, *Obras completas*, ed. by García Domínguez, ix-xxi (x). In *Mi vida al aire libre: memorias deportivas de un hombre sedentario* (Barcelona: Destino, 1992 [1989]), Miguel Delibes says that he began to hunt more regularly when in 1954 he acquired a Volkswagen (212).

during one sub-zero hunting expedition and was immobilized for three months.<sup>3</sup> He branched into fishing for trout—which he terms the red-legged partridge of the river—to slake his thirst for hunting during the closed season. At the same time, Delibes mounted an ardent defence of the environment, displaying all the pessimism of a deep-green radical: ecosystems were failing, species were being lost; there was an urgent need for governments to defer to biologists; the Rio Treaty was a ‘una broma’.<sup>4</sup>

In mitigation of his stance, Delibes emphasized that as an inveterate practitioner of authentic hunting—or *la caza-caza*—he hunted strictly for food, confining his quarry to what he regarded as the lower animal species: ‘el hombre es un animal carnívoro y [...] para mí no es lícita la caza de un animal gastronómicamente inútil.’<sup>5</sup> The all-too-human eyes of deer and larger prey deterred him from practising any form of *caza mayor*.<sup>6</sup> He also professed an aversion to bull-

---

<sup>3</sup> The accident is recounted in the entry for 3 January, Miguel Delibes, *Un año de mi vida* (Barcelona: Destino, 1972); and again in Miguel Delibes, ‘Un cazador que escribe’, in *Mi vida al aire libre*, 201-22 (218-19).

<sup>4</sup> Alonso de los Ríos, 166. When Delibes made his inaugural address to the Real Academia Española in 1975, he drew upon views expressed in the Club of Rome’s *The Limits of Growth* and Edward Goldsmith’s *Blueprint for Survival*. See Miguel Delibes, *El camino*, ed. by Jeremy Squires (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 2010 [1950]), 1-29. See also Miguel Delibes and Miguel Delibes de Castro, *La tierra herida: ¿Qué mundo heredarán nuestros hijos?* (Barcelona: Destino, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Miguel Delibes, ‘La caza: mi punto de vista’, in Miguel Delibes, *Obras completas*, vol. 5, 1108-10 (1109). In *El libro de la caza menor*, Delibes describes how he ended up having to bury a fox he had killed realizing, with some disgruntlement, that its carcass served no useful purpose (35-36).

<sup>6</sup> Delibes usually includes wild boar (*jabalí*) among the big game he avoided hunting. However, he was not always averse to taking a potshot at this less than doe-eyed creature. See, for instance, Javier Goñi, *Cinco horas con Miguel Delibes* (Madrid: Anjana, 1985), 54.

fighting, which he termed ‘un suplicio organizado’ and a ‘tortura progresiva’.<sup>7</sup>

Delibes even declared that, aware of the agonizingly slow death inflicted by household insecticides, he preferred to reach for the fly swatter.<sup>8</sup> Some of Delibes’s fictional characters are highly sensitized to the risk of causing of pain. Although in the end he is acculturated to violence, Pacífico Pérez, for instance, the protagonist of *Las guerras de nuestros antepasados*, empathetically bandages the stumps of a recently pruned fig tree; and when a trout is hooked from a stream, his own lip begins to smart.<sup>9</sup> Nini, in *Las ratas*, is revolted by death in all its forms.<sup>10</sup> Delibes is also keen to distance himself, as a *proper* hunter, from what he regards as the mentality governing modern consumer culture: one of insatiably and mathematically exploiting natural resources in a spirit of nonchalant indifference to the long-term consequences—or ‘después de mí el diluvio’.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Delibes, entry for 27 September, *Un año de mi vida*.

<sup>8</sup> See Miguel Delibes, ‘Cuestión de bulto’, in *Obras completas*, vol. 5, 1089-91 (1091). See also, Delibes, *La caza de la perdiz roja* [1963]: ‘[el cazador] menos amigo de las escenas cruentas se siente muy capaz, en plena, ardorosa faena, de cortar el último resuello del animal herido con las propias manos. Hora después, enrolado nuevamente en la vida doméstica, es muy posible que el Cazador vacile en el momento de propinar un palmetazo a una mosca’, in *Obras completas*, vol. 5, 1-23 (9).

<sup>9</sup> Miguel Delibes, *Las guerras de nuestros antepasados* [1975], in *Obras completas*, prologue by Víctor García de la Concha, vol. 3, 481-730 (530; 507).

<sup>10</sup> Miguel Delibes, *Las ratas* (Barcelona: Destino, 2000 [1962]): ‘le repugnaba la muerte en todas sus formas’ (34).

<sup>11</sup> Miguel Delibes, ‘El matador de conejos número uno’, in *Obras completas*, vol. 5, 1083-84 (1084). See also ‘La caza de perdiz en ojeo’, in *El libro de la caza menor*, 103-10: ‘Estos pirotécnicos, aficionados a la cohetería, adolecen del mal de la época: descubierto un placer, quieren sorberle de una vez’ (108).

Despite his low-impact hunting style, the trafficking between predation and biocentrism in Delibes's work might in some sense seem duplicitous.<sup>12</sup> His position was personally unfraught, underwent little evolution and was restated many times over many years.<sup>13</sup> While it is certainly human, ethical inconsistency of this kind is disconcerting in such a committed writer. Undoubtedly, Delibes had a moral capaciousness which, combined with his professional training as a journalist, enabled him to hold points of view which were, to a considerable degree, mutually antagonistic. The author of *USA y yo*, for example, is by turns awed and censorious. He can admire the scale and mechanization of North American agribusiness, yet pine too for the plain lifestyle of the Mennonites.<sup>14</sup> In conversation with Alonso de los Ríos, Delibes affirmed, 'Yo tengo una manera de ser receptiva. Ante cualquier polémica me convencen hoy los argumentos del uno y mañana los del otro'.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the concept of a *green hunter* poses a particular challenge to his readers' understanding. The most perceptive and informed study of this seeming *non sequitur* is by a professor of ecology, Fernando Parra, who enlists the work of his eminent colleague, Ramon Margalef, to exonerate Delibes, arguing that the novelist is

---

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), defines biocentrism as 'the view that all organisms, including humans, are part of a larger biotic web or network or community whose interests must constrain or direct or govern the human interest' (134).

<sup>13</sup> Fernando Parra, 'Delibes al aire libre: un ecologista de primera hora', in *Miguel Delibes: Premio Letras Españolas, 1991*, ed. by Dirección General del Libro y Bibliotecas (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1994), 74-93, rightly notes one development, however: Delibes moved away from regarding *alimañas* as vermin fit only for extermination (92).

<sup>14</sup> Miguel Delibes, *USA y yo* (Barcelona: Destino, 1966).

<sup>15</sup> Alonso de los Ríos, 55.

subscribing to a long and intelligent tradition of sustainable hunting. The conclusions reached by the current article are not dissimilar. Nevertheless, its purpose is to probe Delibes's paradoxical self-positioning in further detail, as well as to explore the reciprocity between tracking and writing in his work, with especial reference to *Diario de un cazador*.<sup>16</sup>

Urban Northern European readers, perhaps, will find it hardest to square Delibes's ecological concerns with his relish (according to the notorious *Who's Who* phrase) for, hunting, shooting and fishing. In the United Kingdom, committed ecologists have a history of strong opposition to the hunt. While organizations such as the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation (which is now affiliated to the International Union for Conservation of Nature), and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (which added the word *conservation* to its title in 1981) strive to reconcile shooting and stewardship of the land, their chief priority is one of maintaining the countryside in order to harvest from it a steady crop of animals. Their view of nature could be described as predominantly human-centric. Delibes

---

<sup>16</sup> Miguel Delibes, *Diario de un cazador* (Barcelona: Destino, 2003 [1955]). All subsequent textual references are to this edition. The present article is also indebted to the work of F. Bermudez Cañete, 'Miguel Delibes y la ecología', *Camp de l'Arpa*: LXXII (1980), 35-41, and Josefina González, 'Miguel Delibes y la autobiografía ecológica de "Un cazador que escribe": *Mi vida al aire libre*', *Monographic Review/Revista Monográfica*: IX (1993), 83-92. Both critics absolve Delibes of inconsistency. Bermudez Cañete writes that 'La caza, siempre que mantenga el equilibrio de la población animal, es un elemento más de regulación y estímulo de la vida salvaje, que se desarrolla en tensión frente a los depredadores y al hombre' (37). González argues that Delibes assumes the latter day mantle of hunter-king, both preying upon and protecting the environment (88).

commended the Federación de Caza (de Castilla y León) for its rapprochement with ecologists, yet the priorities of all these bodies are broadly equivalent.<sup>17</sup>

Attitudes towards hunting often reflect social hostility towards the nobility, for whom hunting was traditionally a unique privilege. However, this is marginally less true of continental Europe, where historically hunting has been practised by more members of the middle and working class than elsewhere. Delibes himself, keenly aware of the sociology of his favourite sport, is ill-disposed towards the aristocratic hunt (that is, using beaters), and deplores the practice among some *nouveaux-riches* of adopting shooting for its snob value.<sup>18</sup> Even so, in Spain the association between hunting and the landed elite is weaker than elsewhere. There, the common man in his *patria chica* customarily enjoyed some entitlement to catch game. Thus, John Cummins notes the presence in Spain, during the latter Middle Ages, especially in the re-conquered territories, and even after the curtailment of hunting rights in other European kingdoms, of ‘considerably more democratic hunting practices’ than in other countries.<sup>19</sup> ‘Pragmatic conservationism’, rather than noble privilege, he says, underlay many of the local prohibitions. Today, there are in excess of a million holders of hunting licences in Spain, more than in any other European country, save France. In this way, Delibes’s well-known championing of the *infrahombre* is in harmony with his portrayal of the Spanish Everyman’s fondness for hunting, as any reader acquainted with the streetwise narrator of *Diario de un cazador*, or with El Barbas, in *La caza de la perdiz roja*, can recognize. Revealingly, in *Diario de un*

---

<sup>17</sup> Delibes, *El último coto*, 1016.

<sup>18</sup> In *El libro de la caza menor*, Delibes is conscious that historically hunting was pursued by an elite capable of brutally repressing poachers (38).

<sup>19</sup> John Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 237-38.

*jubilado*, Lorenzo, newly equipped with social pretensions and tarnished by consumerism, spurns hunting as a mere plebeian pursuit.<sup>20</sup> According to one of Delibes's favourite maxims, 'el verdadero sentido de la caza está en el hombre libre, sobre naturaleza libre, contra pieza libre'.<sup>21</sup> This dictum is as much an expression of egalitarian sentiment as it is of any wish to become a Rousseau-like solitary walker, communing with nature. Delibes favoured what he termed democratic or popular hunting: that is to say, hunting which was regulated but available to all, and conducted on public hunting grounds with genuinely wild animals. He accordingly opposed the rise during the 1970s of fee-paying reserves, stocked to an increasing degree with comparatively tame battery-reared birds which were duly annihilated, with the help of beaters, by static, fee-paying customers in an ostentatious frenzy of shooting (or 'festejos pirotécnicos').<sup>22</sup> This, he argued, was a consumerist distortion of hunting since it involved competitiveness, questing after social status, and a typically modern drive towards rapacious exploitation, while requiring little by way of skill or stamina. Hunting red-legged partridge from a Mercedes Benz is an activity he singles out for especial scorn as a grotesque example of the urge to ape the gentry.<sup>23</sup>

In resolute opposition to *la caza al ojeo* (that is, with beaters, a method which the author consistently refused to dignify with the name of hunting), or trapping (using decoys or lures), *la caza-caza* or *caza silvestre*, of which he approved, implies

---

<sup>20</sup> Miguel Delibes, *Diario de un jubilado* (Barcelona: Destino, 1995). Lorenzo scorns hunting as a '[Deporte] del tercer mundo', 13. This point is made by Janet Pérez, 'Miguel Delibes presenta la tercera salida de don Lorenzo, cazador andante', *Confluencia*: XIII (1997), 52-62.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Alonso de los Ríos, 151. The phrase recurs in Delibes's hunting books.

<sup>22</sup> Alonso de los Ríos, 152.

<sup>23</sup> Alonso de los Ríos, 153.

isolation, physical endurance, a schooling in close observation and an alertness to the perpetual variations within nature over time. In Biblical vein,<sup>24</sup> Delibes asserts that animals exist to serve us and, provocatively, that hunting for food is no more cruel than practising animal husbandry. With a lack of squeamishness often shown by those living close to the land, he argues that the quarry dies swiftly and relatively painlessly. Hunting may be ‘cruento’ (bloody), he asserts, but not ‘cruel’.<sup>25</sup> He warns, too, that anti-hunting meat-eaters are at risk of hypocrisy: in a rebuke worthy of J. M. Coetzee’s apologist for animal rights, Elizabeth Costello,<sup>26</sup> he relates, on several occasions, the story of the guard at the Dachau concentration camp who wept over the death of a canary.<sup>27</sup> Logically, vegetarianism would indeed be more widespread if, as often transpires in Delibes’s rural novels, the diet consisted of what is killed personally or communally. *In extremis*, even the God’s Gardeners, a deep-green vegetarian cult in Margaret Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*, act on the principle that ‘if you killed a thing you had to eat it’.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, Delibes characterizes the hunt as a therapeutic encounter with animality. The thrill of the chase may lie chiefly in the stalking, yet he admits to experiencing feelings of aggression, even bloodlust, in the heat of the moment. At the same time, the writer describes this encounter as battle between well-matched rivals. For the hunter, therefore, enjoyment comes from testing oneself against the bravura of

---

<sup>24</sup> God tells Man to ‘have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth’: Genesis 1. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Miguel Delibes, ‘Con la escopeta al hombro’, in *Obras completas*, vol. 5, 207-326 (324).

<sup>26</sup> J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* (London: Vintage, 2004 [1999]).

<sup>27</sup> Alonso de los Ríos, 150; Delibes, *Con la escopeta al hombro*, 326; Delibes, ‘La caza: mi punto de vista [1996], in *Obras completas*, vol. 5, 1108-110 (1109).

<sup>28</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 287.

a wild animal, an activity which fosters an imaginatively intimate involvement with its creatureliness. Nowadays, our attitude towards the animals we consume for their meat is one of indifference or, perhaps, disdain. Traditionally, however, human beings lived in closer proximity to the beasts they fed upon, and over the course of millennia hunters showed respect, even veneration, for their prey. Thus, as Robert Pogue Harrison observes, the gods of hunting were ambivalently conceived, expressing not only admiration for the considerable prowess needed to track and kill wild beasts, but also human wonderment at the animal kingdom itself: ‘Just as Artemis both hunts and protects the wild animals, so Dionysus’s relation to various animals is not simply one of predation but also one of guardianship and even identification.’<sup>29</sup> In comparable vein, the writer and farmer Wendell Berry finds no contradiction between a high regard for animals and consuming those slain or reared by one’s own hand. In ‘The Pleasures of Eating’ he states (perhaps a little disconcertingly): ‘Some, I know, will think it bloodthirsty or worse to eat a fellow creature you have known all its life. On the contrary, I think it means that you eat with understanding and with gratitude.’<sup>30</sup> If one considers that the earliest known examples of art are sacralized depictions of animal prey, it becomes apparent that psychological projecting on to animals runs unfathomably deep in human culture. Delibes richly partakes of this tradition. To take but one example, in *Las ratas* the ecologically light-footed Tío Ratero likes to insist that the water-voles, upon which his livelihood depends, ‘son buenas’;<sup>31</sup> while the modernizers are disgusted, he esteems them. This archaic attitude can take many

---

<sup>29</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: Chicago U.P., 1992), 32.

<sup>30</sup> Wendell Berry, ‘The Pleasures of Eating’, in *What are People For?: Essays by Wendell Berry* (New York: North Point, 1990), 145-52 (p.151).

<sup>31</sup> Delibes, *Las ratas*, 26.

forms. In Delibes, as discussed further on, rather than being mythic or totemic, it is one of fascinated estrangement from animality.

With sincere cajolery, Delibes insists on the alluring atavism of the hunt, on the powerful antidote it provides to the stresses of modern living: ‘el tratamiento ideal para un cerebro tan castigado como el del hombre moderno.’<sup>32</sup> However, for many a green writer, nostalgia does not preclude radicalism. So too, it may be argued, Delibes’s advocacy of atavism in this context has progressive trappings since an immersion in nature fosters a sense of co-dependency, of human limitedness: ‘Quítese [a la caza] este retorno a la rusticidad, a la selvaticidad,’ he says, ‘y se quedará en nada.’<sup>33</sup> Duelling with small game out in the Spanish wilds, often returning empty-handed, Delibes regarded his form of hunting not as an example of human rapacity, but a sign of environmental embeddedness:

Hay muchos tipos de cazador y para mí el cazador que ejerce la caza como yo la ejercito, animales pequeños que evidentemente sirven para el alimento del hombre: la perdiz, la codorniz... y que el cazador ejecuta con el esfuerzo de sus propias piernas y con el aire de sus propios pulmones, con el perro a la mano, me parece que es un hombre que se ha integrado en la naturaleza [...].<sup>34</sup>

Hunting is Delibes’s means of transcending his human sense of apartness from nature, a severance which he places in a broad historical-*cum*-anthropological context.

---

<sup>32</sup> In Goñi, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Delibes, *Con la escopeta al hombro*, 317.

<sup>34</sup> In Blanco Álvaro, 31.

The views of 'El gran Ortega', who wrote a study of hunting, are frequently, and almost uniquely, enlisted by Delibes in his essays over the years.<sup>35</sup> Thus, he speculates that the philosopher would have shared his distaste for shoots in the grand aristocratic style using beaters. For Ortega y Gasset, the atavistic impulse ('el gusto de «ser paleolítico»',<sup>36</sup> which is so highly prized by Delibes) and the higher human faculties are mutually enriching. Ortega extols the honing of the hunter's senses, his alertness to his surroundings, and even goes so far as to envisage the hunter as a model philosopher, waiting patiently, with heightened powers of observation, for truth to break cover. Delibes concurs with the philosopher's claim that, even in prehistory, prey was never abundant and that mere detection comprises a major part of the hunter's skill. What Delibes finds attractive about reverting to primitivism is less the thrill of unleashing brutal instincts within himself (those normally held in check by civilizing impulses) than the transcendent release from selfhood occasioned by a rapt attentiveness to a living natural environment. The flight from rationality is here regarded as a fulfilling outcome in itself, almost as if rationality were responsible for insulating the mind from the senses, making an abstraction of our physical circumstances. As Ortega implies, when humanity was enveloped by wilderness, hunting and living were synonymous, and acute awareness of what lay beyond the self was the norm. This more biocentric model of apprehension, paradoxically prompted by death-dealing intent, is conveyed by Ortega's observation that hunting is

---

<sup>35</sup> See especially: Miguel Delibes, *La caza de la perdiz roja*; the prologue to *El libro de la caza menor*; 'Ortega y la caza' [1993], in *Obras completas*, vol. 5, 1114-15; 'La profecía de Ortega' [1995], *ibid.*, 1070-72.

<sup>36</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *A «Veinte años de caza mayor», del conde de Yebes*, in *Obras completas* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1947), 420-90 (480).

a mimetic activity: ‘la caza es una imitación del animal.’<sup>37</sup> In order the better to predict its behaviour, a proficient hunter will identify with the prey. Such identification, which goes beyond simply trying to understand the mind of the victim, is a hyperbolic form of animal possession. In Delibes, who is rather more detached than Ortega and others in this regard, it is associated most often with comedy, such as in *Las ratas* when Nini’s grandfather Román partially transmogrifies into a hare.<sup>38</sup>

For the most part, Delibes adopts Ortega’s thesis as his own, with few quibbles. However, one of these is significant. Just as Tío Ratero, a grunting troglodyte who thoroughly embodies Ortega’s assertion that the hunter aspires to *ser paleolítico*, is a poor advert for the noble savage, so Delibes emphasizes that the hunt amounts to a temporary excursion from modernity, not a permanent utopia or any enduringly higher state of mind. The hunter is not a cultural escapist but a mediator who brings his experience of the wild to bear upon the everyday civilized world: ‘El hombre-cazador, en su efímera fuga, se ha percatado del valor de los detalles que veinticuatro horas antes despreciaba [...]’.<sup>39</sup> In its simplest sense, Delibes’s remark alludes to the renewed appreciation of the basic necessities of life occasioned by any form of physical hardship; drinking from a muddy pool after an exacting day in the field can, for example, feel like the height of luxury.<sup>40</sup> More importantly, however, Delibes presents hunting as a dialectic between country and city; or, more abstractly, between living and thinking. His philosophical perspective on hunting (as on most things) tends to be city-centric; for him it is a cathartic activity

---

<sup>37</sup> Ortega, 486.

<sup>38</sup> Delibes, *Las ratas*, 32-33.

<sup>39</sup> Delibes, *El libro de la caza menor*, 36.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 36.

whereby the tortured modern ‘se irracionaliza’<sup>41</sup> before returning to modernity, whence he came. In this regard, Delibes’s attitude towards hunting, as indeed towards rural life in general, is not one of simply taking to the hills. One could draw a comparison here with the traditional function of pastoral literature. Unlike, say, the escapist tendency of the picturesque in painting or (potentially, at least) regionalism in the novel, classic pastoral initiated a dialogue between the values of city and country. As Terry Gifford puts it: ‘[pastoral] involved some form of retreat and return, the fundamental pastoral movement, either within the text, or in the sense that the pastoral “returned” insights relevant to the urban audience.’<sup>42</sup> Similarly, hunting, for Delibes, is a Janus-faced activity. It affords an opportunity to break out of culture’s closed circuit by making the hunter nature-sensitive. But it also sharpens the hunter’s perception of the modern city: its necessary comforts as well as its enervating insulation from the totality of the living world.

In the course of Delibes’s work a major source of consternation is his perception that the line separating culture from nature was becoming blurred. Thus, in the absence of any identifiably pristine non-human realm, the possibility of a return from the wilderness capable of bringing insight or catharsis was becoming ever more remote. Having qualified Ortega in the manner outlined above, Delibes enlists another of the philosopher’s arguments to help define his own biocentric ethic. The ethos of hunting is an immersion in the non-human realm of nature, so that authentic hunting, which Delibes characterizes as a kind of subsistence foraging amid natural wastes, is destroyed in a world where nature is everywhere trammelled by human stewardship: ‘Ortega, *grosso modo*, intuía estas causas hace diez lustros: la caza desaparecería al

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 31.

<sup>42</sup> Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 1-2.

*humanizar* el planeta, o, más concretamente, al desnaturalizarlo.<sup>43</sup> In *The End of Nature*, the all-pervasiveness of human artifice, its encroachment upon the traditional otherness of nature, is similarly lamented by Bill McKibben as a dead weight upon the human spirit: ‘We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature’s independence *is* its meaning; without it there is nothing but us.’<sup>44</sup> From varying standpoints, these writers are making essentially similar points: the current age is one where the traditional notion of nature as a realm distinct from human affairs is beginning to fade. In this sense, Delibes’s end of hunting in *El último coto* is the precise equivalent of McKibben’s *end of nature*.

Delibes regarded his many hunting books as non-didactic primers written for the general public, not the cognoscenti. They convey a good deal of hunting lore and practical information, often repetitively so. For example, his first hunting book, *La caza de la perdiz roja* (1963), expresses a set of views which peppers later works. However, these books do chronicle, in urgent tones, the recent history of hunting in Spain, as well as charting the steady reduction in wild game and its replacement by artificially reared animals. The story arc is one of the inexorable domestication of nature, and of the consequent decline in authentic hunting in favour of shooting as a consumerist leisure activity. As if railing against a latter-day version of enclosure, Delibes attacks the increasing ‘concentración parcelaria’,<sup>45</sup> or privatization, of hunting grounds—a process which almost left him, he claims, having to shoot from his own rooftop. As early as *El libro de la caza menor* (1964), a jocularly pessimistic work, Delibes paints an extremely bleak future for the truly wild red-legged partridge, the

---

<sup>43</sup> Delibes, ‘Ortega y la caza’, 1115.

<sup>44</sup> Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003 [1989]), 61.

<sup>45</sup> Delibes, *El último coto*, 885.

‘Sofia Loren’ of the hunting world.<sup>46</sup> Pursued not only by vastly expanded numbers of Spanish holders of hunting licences but also by brigades of North American and European hunter-tourists, this game bird, which formerly could be captured simply by chasing after it, now ‘sabe latín’<sup>47</sup> and, like the quail, has become rare and intensely farouche. Delibes reiterates his solutions: severe sanctions against poachers; a well-paid, expanded corps of gamekeepers; rotating closed seasons allowing animal numbers a chance to recover; stricter controls on beating; the issuing of licences, possibly by means of a formal examination; a ban on hunting aids and automatic weaponry; and limits imposed on the number of international hunters.<sup>48</sup>

The new hunting law of 1971 did little, in Delibes’s view, to address the shortcomings of the toothless and antiquated act of 1902. While he praised its determination to prosecute wrongdoers, and conceded subsequently that its implementation had relieved some of the pressure on the red-legged partridge, his dominant complaint was that it reinforced a trend towards the establishment of private hunting grounds available only to those who could afford a high fee while, in the open countryside, it did nothing to alleviate the plight of authentically wild birds.<sup>49</sup> In *La caza en España*, Delibes concluded that the new law had produced a scenario in which ‘en España las perdices cada vez son más, mientras que son cada día menos los que tienen acceso a ellas’.<sup>50</sup> In the 1980s it became possible to rear red-legged

---

<sup>46</sup> Delibes, *El libro de la caza menor*, 78.

<sup>47</sup> Delibes, *ibid.*, 85.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 125-27.

<sup>49</sup> On 22 March, *Un año de mi vida*, Delibes lists his reactions to the 1971 Ley de Caza. He welcomed its tightening of penalties and regulations, but objected to its allowance of beating, lures and modern technologies, as well as its failure to give sufficient protection to game on private estates.

<sup>50</sup> Delibes, ‘La caza en España’, 353, note 4.

partridges from incubators and thereby to replenish private reserves artificially for the entertainment of fee-paying customers whose *arribista* preference was for the aristocratic *ojeo* (beating). For Delibes such developments were anathema. Although many in number, reared red-legged partridges are tamer than their wild brethren, and can be slaughtered in droves by shooters who are not alert in the Ortegán sense, are ignorant of the traditional hunting aptitudes of tracking and stalking, and unwilling to exert themselves physically. This is why, in spite of rising stocks of red-legged partridge, Delibes increasingly came to regard hunting as a thing, not merely of his own past as a younger, fitter man, but of his country's past. This grimly elegiac stance pervades his last full-length hunting book, *El último coto* (1992). The countryside had lost its lingering remnants of wilderness, hunting grounds had been parcelled up for the delectation of wealthier shooters, and the fauna was either severely depleted or semi-domesticated. In such an impoverished environment, the keynote had become one of maximally ravaging managed reserves rather than of retreating, for the sake of it, to a non-human world, and still less of seeking from it what one requires merely in order to sustain oneself.

A comparison between Delibes, the author of hunting essays spanning more than forty years, and his roguish alter ego, Lorenzo, the hunter-hero of three novels covering approximately the same period, in the main reinforces what has been said above, although it also raises important issues concerning the author's aesthetics. The relevant works celebrate a shared ethos of camaraderie and freedom from daily cares. Lorenzo relishes his hunting trips for the respite they bring from continual money worries and a myriad of petty professional and personal irritations. Delibes dedicates *Diario de un cazador* (1955) to other (decidedly non-aristocratic) hunters 'de buen corazón y mala lengua', and then renders himself unavailable for further comment by

making Lorenzo sole narrator. Lorenzo's engagingly scampish patter typifies the *objetivista* dogma of many a Spanish novel written in the 1950s, and its welter of racy colloquialisms differs from the more formal register of Delibes's hunting essays. For all that, their tones are comparable in certain regards. Delibes, the essayist, deploys a relaxed conversational style, sometimes introducing an interlocutor, real or imagined, into his debate. His hunting books often consist of calendar entries of events or arguments, reminiscent of the diary format used by Lorenzo. Delibes once stated that Lorenzo is a slightly distorted autobiographical character, one who had the courage to articulate the writer's more continent impulses.<sup>51</sup> A little like Delibes, Lorenzo is walking in his father's footsteps; Lorenzo's father was a man whose obsession ran so deep that he lost the will to live after severing his hand, and therefore trigger finger, in a printing accident, dying three days later. Lorenzo's addiction to hunting is so encompassing that it puts him in constant danger of ruining his financial and amatory prospects. When he grumbles about Pepe's rampant targeting of magpies and mothering hares, or clenches his teeth when Zacarías refuses to release birds caught with a lure, a Delibeian sense of honour and integrity peers through. In spite of his sceptical outlook, Lorenzo clearly delights in the guild spirit of the *cuadrilla*, and collects his companions' tall stories and exploits as assiduously as his own—Zacarías's tale of one blind fox being led by another, or the autopsy performed on a partridge to settle the matter of who shot it (81) being memorable examples.

---

<sup>51</sup> Delibes affirmed: '[. . .] he de reconocer que [Lorenzo] ha sido el personaje que he perfilado más parecido a mí, sobre todo en ese amor por la caza y la naturaleza. Quizá menos en su achulamiento y su lenguaje desinhibido, pero incluso en esto tal vez había un deseo reprimido que echaba fuera a través de un personaje.' Ramón García Domínguez, *El quiosco de los helados: Miguel Delibes de cerca* (Barcelona: Destino, 2005), 575.

Delibes may be severe in the letter of the law in his hunting books, but Lorenzo is altogether softer in its execution.<sup>52</sup> While a natty dresser, Lorenzo chafes against uniforms—a running motif in the *Diario* novels—as well as against figures of authority in general, including gamekeepers and civil guards. On several occasions he has to wriggle free of incriminating encounters with figures of authority: on August 28<sup>th</sup> he kills a hare on reflex, out of season, and promptly bumps into a pair of civil guards who caution him about La Ley de Caza but fail to notice his bulging knapsack; having knowingly strayed into a private reserve on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, he bribes the gamekeeper—a tactic used again, this time unsuccessfully, by Pepe on December 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Although it is an all-male preserve, Delibes decouples hunting and machismo. Lorenzo is a crack-shot. Yet, capable of growing only the most lopsidedly droopy of moustaches ('El Pepe dice que es un quiero y no puedo' (49)), beset by hunting nightmares in which the barrels of his shotgun are like chocolate (119), hopelessly outbid when attempting to acquire a La Jabalí shotgun (for which he has 'suspirado [...] más que por una mujer (86)), and frequently outmatched by his feisty and dignified girlfriend, Anita, he is a poor advert for male sexual potency. The novel contains a running conflict between the rival demands of hunting and courtship and, in consequence, there is a near permanent rift between Lorenzo and Anita, in spite of the strength of their mutual attraction. Over the course of the hunting season, Lorenzo wavers between his pursuit of Anita ('Ni en el monte estoy tan a gusto como al lado de esta chavala' (92)), and absconding on weekend hunting trips. He obstinately rejects her ultimatum: 'que escogiera entre ella y la escopeta' (187) yet, for all that, he

---

<sup>52</sup> An exception to this general rule is Delibes's first hunting book, *La caza de la perdiz roja*. Here he lionizes a poacher, albeit one who was conservation-minded.

is not a dominant partner. Rather it is Anita who, with a largeness of spirit which transcends the underlying predicament, takes pity upon Lorenzo when his mother falls ill. Realizing that he is unable to cope, she accepts Lorenzo as a flawed, although still lovable, human being. Her offer to prepare the incapacitated Lorenzo's hunting gear is a moving reconciliation, not a surrender. In Delibes, the hunting impulse, which equates to a love of nature, is the closest thing in his work to anything resembling an essence. As such, neither he nor Lorenzo appears able to defy it, and Anita ends by acceding to it as an aspect of the natural inevitability of their affection.

It is notable that those hunting companions who display exploitative attitudes towards the countryside behave also in a comparable fashion towards each other, and eventually meet with censure or the retributions of authorial emplotment: to Lorenzo's chagrin, Tochano, a feckless individual who habitually flouts hunting laws and who marries his girlfriend only after a fox-bite makes him fear for his life (67), accidentally shoots his own dog, first through incompetence and then on purpose to put it out of its misery (Don Florián remarks that a man capable of such cold-blooded brutality would just as easily shoot his own father (176)); the ruthless Pepe, whom Lorenzo rejects as a worthy hunting companion, continually takes advantage of others' generosity, and accidentally kills himself with a shotgun.

Beneath the surface bluster, Lorenzo's essential decency is never in doubt, just as his lowbrow style belies a considerable gift for self-expression. However, while he is a sensitive individual in many ways, Lorenzo's hunting obsession precludes all but the most fleeting moments of aesthetic responsiveness to the natural world. On the rare occasions when they occur, these are powerfully articulated. For instance, having spent the night outdoors in the company of his best friend, Melecio, he remarks: 'Así, como nosotros, debió de sentirse Dios al terminar de crear el mundo' (128).

Nevertheless, many readers will be struck by the unromantic, prosaic quality of the writing. His prevailing non-lyricism is at one with the self-sufficient, working-class culture to which he adheres, and is quite different to the notorious anti-intellectualism of *franquista* culture. For Lorenzo, the culture of hunting principally involves freedom from day-to-day cares and, just as importantly, a sense of camaraderie and avid rivalry within a gregarious band of fellow enthusiasts who like to swop inflated tales about their exploits. In this sense, the diary, which details trips and quarry taken, is not simply a bald record of events at one remove from reality, but enacts, rather, one of hunting's primary pleasures: the storification of experience and of the environment. This is, indeed, an alternate aesthetic, though one which is at variance with the familiar archetype of the Romantic lone walker enraptured by beautiful landscapes. Hence, although Lorenzo's stance towards nature is strikingly utilitarian, it resonates with a more traditional, pre-modern attitude towards the non-human world. As Jonathan Bate points out, weaving communal stories around a shared environment makes the landscape a living presence, consubstantial with humanity, rather than an object of artistic contemplation: 'The presence of memory means that the countryside is inhabited rather than viewed aesthetically.'<sup>53</sup> What is true of Lorenzo is also true of Delibes, the author of hunting books. The reader of these will be struck by their predominantly factual style, based on decades of experience and observation: like Lorenzo, Delibes seldom waxes lyrical when talking about the hunt.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2001), 18.

<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, García Domínguez, *El quiosco de los helados*, regards Delibes as 'consumado paisajista' (454).

Echoing the customary opposition between art and life, Delibes often owned to a strong sense of personal self-division: on the one hand, he was a novelist who found the task of writing fiction increasingly testing and time-consuming with the passing of the years, and, on the other, a hunter who relished his weekly reprieve from thinking. Yet he wrote hunting books effortlessly, as holidays from artistic work: in *Con la escopeta al hombro*, he observes that ‘Para mí, escribir sobre asuntos de caza constituye, en cierto modo, una liberación de los condicionamientos que rigen el resto de mi actividad literaria’.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, as his son notes, the grief-stricken author produced no literature between the death of his wife in November 1974 and 1977, yet did manage to compose *Las perdices del domingo* as well as his inaugural speech to the Real Academia Española.<sup>56</sup> However, while Delibes habitually describes himself as a *cazador que escribe*, the subtle relationship between these two modes deserves to be teased out. In one sense, they are as if antithetical: El Barbas, who is revered by El Cazador (that is to say, Delibes), repeatedly spurns Ortega’s opinions on hunting since he is a ‘buena pluma’ rather than a ‘buena escopeta’.<sup>57</sup> In another, however, they are symbiotic. In a revealing statement, Delibes describes himself as one who ‘apenas podría cazar si no escribiera y que no podría escribir si no cazara’.<sup>58</sup> What is being touched on here is the delicate balance between writing and life, and how that balance was struck in his case. For Delibes, each sustains and informs the other; beyond the financial and recreational factors being alluded to, there is an insinuation that writing in some way resembles hunting and, conversely, that there is a creative side to

---

<sup>55</sup> Delibes, *Con la escopeta al hombro*, 209.

<sup>56</sup> Germán Delibes, xxx.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Era una buena pluma. / ¡Bah!’: Delibes, *La caza de la perdiz roja*, 83.

<sup>58</sup> Delibes, *El libro de la caza menor*, 38.

hunting. Indeed, the writer once wrote an article comparing his shotgun to his favourite fountain pen.<sup>59</sup> Although the hunting books, in traditional terms, are conspicuously unliterary in that they shuffle off symbol, myth and moments of poetic reverie, they do have an ethos of their own based on questing, attentiveness to the environment, lore and experience—both personal and communal. Through the above observation, then, Delibes is locating his literary muse in the natural, more-than-human, world. I should like to argue, therefore that there is a biocentric awareness at work in Delibes and Lorenzo's de-aestheticization of nature.

By and large, familiar cultural attributes of game animals seldom appear in Delibes's creative writing, despite an occasional hint of superstition and personification. In *Viejas historias de Castilla la Vieja*, for example, the hare, archetypally a shape-changing trickster of a creature associated with witchcraft, comes to represent a demonic figure for the villagers, who join forces in order to confront it.<sup>60</sup> As we have seen, also, Delibes is fond of the comedy inherent in portraying hunters who undergo a form of animal possession. But these are exceptions to a more usual rule. Whereas Hemingway, in *The Old Man and the Sea* (the only work of his which Delibes liked),<sup>61</sup> weaves a web of association between the fisherman and the marlin so that the plights of these solitary 'true brothers'<sup>62</sup> grow to resemble each other, Delibes tends not to invest hunting with such identifications. The

---

<sup>59</sup> Miguel Delibes, 'La escopeta extraviada', *Aventuras, venturas y desventuras de un cazador a rabo* [1977], in *Obras completas*, vol. 5, 411-579 (497-500).

<sup>60</sup> Cummins, 116.

<sup>61</sup> See Alonso de los Ríos, 95. As a young man, Delibes had read a lot of adventure stories by Lajos Zilahy, Maxence Van der Meersch, Zane Grey, Emilio Salgari and James Oliver Curwood, and little besides. The last three were his favourite boyhood authors (see note 69).

<sup>62</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and The Sea* (London: Arrow, 2004 [1952]), 57.

critic, García-Viñó, once complained that Delibes was no Hemingway.<sup>63</sup> This is certainly true, but perhaps especially in the less pejorative, more intriguing, sense of there being a different outlook on nature in Delibes's work. For, though it may seem a paradoxical claim to make of a hunter, Delibes's post-pastoral frame of reference, engaged with observation rather than imagination, is possibly more willing to allow the non-human realm to subsist on its own terms. Thus, in his writing, characters do not approach nature as an object of subjective poetic fancy; rather, nature is experienced pragmatically, rationally and, above all, communally. In this sense, Delibes's alter egos, El Cazador and Lorenzo, are set apart from the solitary Romantic aesthete or the primitivist hero.

The allied, rather than adversarial, relationship between hunting and writing in Delibes can be pressed further, for there are significant parallels between his hunting and his fictional works in terms of their narrative discourse. Some of Delibes's most successful novels redeploy aspects of his hunting journals, which he began to keep in the 1940s. The use, common to the *diario* novels (even after Lorenzo has largely renounced hunting) as well as to several of Delibes's hunting books, of an episodic format rather than of a more traditionally linear plot, appears also, for example, in *El camino*, *Las ratas*, and *Cinco horas con Mario*.<sup>64</sup> The similarities between *Diario de un cazador* and the last text are noteworthy, given the decidedly unliterary register of their narrators' speech and their absentee implied author. Indeed, stylistically, Lorenzo is a prototype for Carmen. The favourite Delibean technique of using a diary-like chronology tends to subordinate human activity to the temporal rhythms of

---

<sup>63</sup> Manuel García-Viñó, 'Miguel Delibes: entre la primera y la segunda naturaleza', *Punta Europa*: IX (1964), 26-41 (37).

<sup>64</sup> Miguel Delibes, *Cinco horas con Mario* (Barcelona: Destino, 1966).

a larger environmental frame. It carries with it a sense of well-defined characters living in the moment, but in a spirit of improvisation, without assumptions of destiny or personal essence. One might even hazard that its ethos is comparable to that of the chase, in which the hunter must remain alert and adaptable to shifting circumstances, resisting any perceptual fixity which prevents him from confronting the world as it is. Although Delibes is principally a novelist, his narratives are often created out of short-story-like sequences. This, too, recalls the structure of some of his hunting books, with observations, episodes and yarns collecting around moments of calendar time. Finally, to hunt successfully requires an attunement to something exterior, a process which resembles the *modus operandi* of Delibes's muse; in describing the subordination of his will to those of the fictional characters he creates, he asserts that 'Yo solo obedezco'.<sup>65</sup>

In these ways, the real tension in Delibes's life turns out to be less between hunting and literature than between reality and conventional kinds of literary representation. In works such as *El camino* and *Las ratas* Delibes is capable of writing movingly about the beauty of the countryside. Nevertheless, there is a gathering tendency in the fiction he wrote during the 1950s to avoid standard literary constructions of nature: hence, the reader will not detect anything resembling the myth-making of the 1998 Generation, Romantic rapture or the entropic competitiveness of Naturalism.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, his frequent portrayal of rural violence negates the potential for pastoral. Delibes does not invest nature with a sense of the

---

<sup>65</sup> Alonso de los Ríos, 155.

<sup>66</sup> In 'Zoophilia and Zoophobia in Miguel Delibes's *Las ratas*', *MLR*: CIII (2008), 1021-35, I try to show that Naturalism is attendant upon the encroachment of modernity and that the narrator's painterly eye for beauty tends not to be lyricism for its own sake, but a meticulously elegant expression of local knowledge.

sublime, and seldom with any sense of private ecstasy; it is never gendered, and passages of lyrical nature writing in his writing are less common than one might assume. Edgar Pauk aptly conveys this uncanonical mode of poesis: Delibes ‘halla una fuerza vital que trasciende los valores de los críticos literarios.’<sup>67</sup> This relative lack of standard literary mediation is perhaps responsible for the peculiar ring of authenticity which Randolph Pope attributes to his work.<sup>68</sup> Thus, Delibean nature is no more a mother than hunting is a metaphor for the practices of human culture. And wild animals are not anthropomorphized: they remain simply animals. In this regard, it is enlightening to compare Delibes with James Oliver Curwood, a writer, famous in his day, for penning tales of heroic trappers and wilderness adventurers, and one of Delibes’s three favourite boyhood authors.<sup>69</sup> Curwood became a rather naive and unsuccessful green crusader, renouncing hunting and embracing conservationism in the 1920s. Unlike Lorenzo and El Cazador, Curwood’s heroes are valiant loners who experience private epiphanies in the great outdoors. James Kates takes the American author to task for this: ‘As opposed to his wanderers in the wilderness, who are faintly plausible, Curwood’s village-dwellers have a sense of unreality about them.’<sup>70</sup> What

---

<sup>67</sup> Edgar Pauk, *Miguel Delibes: desarrollo de un escritor (1947-1974)* (Madrid: Gredos, 1975), 59.

<sup>68</sup> Randolph D. Pope, ‘Miguel Delibes y el genio de una realidad imaginada’, *Siglo XXI. Literatura y Cultura Españolas*: I (2003), 203-14.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Grey y Curwood me cautivaban’. Jules Verne, however, he found wearying. Miguel Delibes, prologue, *Obra completa*, 5 vols (Barcelona: Destino, 1966), vol 2: reprinted in *Obras completas*, ed. by García Domínguez, vol. 5, 1138-40 (1139). See also, Delibes, *Con la escopeta al hombro*, 207-326: ‘A mí siempre me han fascinado los tramperos —reminiscencias, quizá, de mis lecturas de Zane Grey y Oliver Curwood’ (293).

<sup>70</sup> James Kates, ‘James Oliver Curwood: Antimodernist in the Conservation Crusade’, *Michigan Historical Review*: XXIV (1998), 73-102 (91).

Kates deconstructs as a Curwoodian invention of wilderness in his own image is markedly different to Delibes's patient eye for natural detail and skilful evocation of community life.

It may seem counter-intuitive to regard hunting, even as a form of self-provisioning amid semi-wastes, as congruent with biocentrism. However, even though he might justifiably be accused of understating the effects of overkill in Spain in an age of motorization and relative affluence, Delibes's ascetic *cazador-cazador* is green in certain ways, and the charge of Franciscan hypocrisy he levels against carnivorous urbanites, squeamish about country ways, carries weight. Of course, his arguments will leave vegetarians unmoved. Although his attitude towards hunting is unconventional in that it sidesteps mystic union, quasi-erotic subtexts and other literary paraphernalia, it is broadly in line with a traditionally Christian, instrumental view of animals. And one cannot ignore the fact that the prehistoric hunters so beloved of Ortega and Delibes probably caused the extinctions of megafauna in North America, Europe, Madagascar, New Zealand, and possibly Australia.<sup>71</sup> Yet much of what the writer says in his hunting books is by way of an effort to discriminate between low impact and rapacious forms of hunting, and to perpetuate the existence of 'un medio incontaminado'.<sup>72</sup> Delibes applies a very narrow definition to hunting and vehemently opposes certain practices and circumstances as malign. In green terms, these infractions amount to an enframing of nature for human ends, and anyone who commits them is unworthy of the title *cazador*. His idea of hunting as low-grade foraging does necessitate a hands-off approach to nature. In effect, he is championing the need for genuine wilderness. On a biographical level, hunting served to reconnect

---

<sup>71</sup> See Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994 [1992]), 231-42.

<sup>72</sup> Delibes, 'El último coto', 962.

Delibes with his childhood and a loving but otherwise somewhat remote father, since it was he who introduced Delibes to the sport during his boyhood. Ultimately, if the writer had never taken up hunting, he might never have become environmentally-minded.

Just as environmentalists object less to hunting (or to the concept of hunter-gathering) than to the industrial farming of animals, so Delibes's *cazador-cazador* also challenges the modern commodification of meat. J. M. Coetzee's militant vegetarian, Elizabeth Costello, in spite of her anger about humanity's cruelty towards animals, recognizes that hunters have a high zoo-centric awareness. Thus, she is able to claim that hunting is ethically superior to the methods of the stockyard:

I suspect [Ted Huges] believes he is recovering an attentiveness that our faraway ancestors possessed and we have lost. [...] I would guess that he believes he looks at animals much as palaeolithic hunters used to. [...] We can call this primitivism. [...] But when all is said and done, there remains something attractive about it at an ethical level.<sup>73</sup>

Though he lacks the totemic propensity of a Ted Hughes or Ernest Hemingway, Delibes's stance is one that Costello might conceivably condone. Indeed, Henry Thoreau, whose *Walden* is a canonical green text, similarly commends hunting, albeit with some reservation. Rather like Delibes's Juan Gualberto (El Barbas), Thoreau senses that literary representations of nature may be subtly falsifying. Hunters, on the other hand, know better:

---

<sup>73</sup> Coetzee, 97.

Fishermen, hunters, woodchoppers, and others, spending their lives in the fields and woods, in a peculiar sense a part of Nature themselves, are often in a more favorable mood for observing her, in the intervals of their pursuits, than philosophers or poets even, who approach her with expectation.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed, he goes on to say that ‘perhaps the hunter is the greatest friend of the animals hunted’.<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, however, while Thoreau argues that the boy or young man who hunts is consolidating ‘the most original part of himself’,<sup>76</sup> he ultimately rejects it as a phase through which one should pass on the path to a more vegetarian lifestyle. As we have seen, Miguel Delibes does not develop in a Thoreau-like direction. Yet, from a carnivorous perspective, it is hard to refute Delibes’s claim that shooting wild birds for meat is morally no more objectionable than killing domestic fowl. Or, as Pacífico Pérez has it, there is nothing sadder or more bored than a farmyard chicken.<sup>77</sup>

Finally, not only is there continuity (rather than puzzling inconsistency) between Delibes’s *cazador-cazador* and green issues, but there are strong stylistic affinities between the hunting books and the novels which Delibes began writing in the 1950s. Hence, contrary to assertions made by the novelist himself, these do not belong to different spheres. Delibes, who was self-professedly poorly-read at the time, renovated the quite orthodox literary style of his first two novels less through the influence of other writers than, so to speak, parthenogenetically, by recycling aspects of his hunting journals and books—his very own aesthetic primers. This self-

---

<sup>74</sup> Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. by J. Lyndon Shanley, introduction by John Updike (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2004 [1854]), 210.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>77</sup> Delibes, *Las guerras de nuestros antepasados*, 581.

refreshing entailed looser, more schematic or contrapuntal narrative structures, with reiterations and compressed chronologies. It also led in the direction of a post-pastoral aesthetic; that is to say, the better he came to know rural Castile and its inhabitants, the less conventionally lyrical he became. Rather than decorative, reflective of human feelings or a Romantic portal to a transcendent realm of contemplation, nature came to be portrayed with an ever keener eye to its material presence as a place of human dwelling.

*Jeremy Squires*

*University College, Dublin*