

Spanish novelist Miguel Delibes dies at 89

AP foreign, Friday March 12 2010

DANIEL WOOLLS

Associated Press Writer= MADRID, Spain (AP) — Miguel Delibes, an acclaimed and prolific novelist whose work featured gritty depictions of rural life in post-civil war Spain and psychological analyses of characters facing turning points, died Friday. He was 89.

Delibes, who had been fighting cancer of the colon for several years, died at his home in the north central city of Valladolid shortly around 7 a.m. (0800GMT), Spanish National Radio said, citing his family.

Speaking on the radio, Education Minister Angel Gabilondo said "We must remember him as a good person and a great writer."

Delibes started off as a cartoonist for a provincial newspaper before becoming a reporter, editor and finally a novelist in a career spanning more than 50 years, culminating in his winning the Spanish-speaking world's top literary award, the Cervantes Prize, in 1993, among other accolades. He was also a member of the Spanish Royal Academy, the official watchdog of the Spanish language.

"I feel sorry that there was not enough time for him to win the Nobel, because he was one of those authors who deserved it, said Culture Minister Angeles Gonzalez-Sinde.

"He was a much-read writer, incredibly prolific and also a great inspiration for other artists," she said.

Delibes hailed from the city of Valladolid in the Castilian heartland of central Spain, and his deep roots there and love of rural life — he was an avid hunter and wrote often about it — surfaced repeatedly in his books.

One of his most popular ones, "Los Santos Inocentes" (The Innocent Saints), published in 1981, illustrates the impoverished existence of peasants living under a selfish and wealthy landowner. In a dramatic scene near the end, a simple-minded peasant rigs a trap that hangs the rich man after he shoots the peasant's pet bird with a hunting rifle. The book was made into a movie in 1984 by Spanish director Mario Camus.

Another of Delibes' most popular works was "Cinco Horas with Mario" (Five Hours with Mario), published in 1966, in which a widow sitting by her husband's coffin muses over their time together and critiques the beliefs and social mores of provincial life.

Delibe was somewhat of a hermit, shunning limelight and crowds.

"I like open spaces. I like nature, and I also like to converse with my colleagues, face to face, or with two of them, or three, but no more," Delibes said in an interview published in 1986.

In his acceptance speech when he won the Cervantes prize, Delibes looked back on his career and said life goes by quicker for writers because they spend so much time inside the heads of their characters, neglecting their own existence.

He noted that the protagonist of one his books once commented to an older co-worker, aged 70, that "if I were that age I would die of fright."

"Now I must admit I have that same age," Delibes said in the speech. "How is this possible?"

The Cervantes Institute said Delibes' passion for the countryside — and hunting — had given him a true feel for the decline of rural life and the fragility of the environment.

"It is not going too far to say that this hunter who writes measures his passions with a shotgun resting on his shoulder, and in this he finds joy, anxieties and even fineness of spirit," the institute said in a biography of Delibes.

Details of funeral arrangements were not immediately available.