

I. A. A. Thompson

A BUDDENBROOKS EFFECT IN 17th- CENTURY SPAIN

THE SECRETARY JUAN DELGADO AND HIS SUCCESSORS:
AN INTER-GENERATIONAL BIOGRAPHY, c.1515-1658



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*To the memory of Erzsébet Csehi (1898-1985)
and to her son, Irving Csehi (1938-50).
They will always be with me.*

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Introduction

It is as well to begin by saying what this book is not. It is not an institutional study of Philip II's Secretary of War nor of his Secretariat.¹ It is what can best be described as an "inter-generational biography", the biography of three consecutive generations of the Delgado family. It is, of course, not irrelevant that the first of those generations was a senior official at the Court of Philip II, not least because it was my close acquaintance with Juan Delgado as Secretary of War in my earliest days at Simancas which nearly sixty years ago led me to begin looking into the more personal aspects of his life and family in his home city of Palencia. It is, therefore, not a study of the Secretary but of Juan Delgado, and his son and grandson. It is an attempt, insofar as it has been possible, to uncover their personalities and personal relations, their getting and spending, their attitudes and beliefs. At that level, therefore, it is simply a contribution to the study of group identities in 16th- and 17th-century Spain, specifically those of Service, Military, and Oligarchy. But it has also something to contribute to the historiography of the Family. The family of a royal official of the likes of Delgado is a rather special type of family, the distinctive characteristics of which have received little consideration in the "History of the Family" genre. Finally, it is a study in the broader issue of social mobility, and, more specifically, in the under-explored processes of downward social mobility, the decline of one family in wealth, in importance and in name.

In the last 30 or 40 years the History of the Family in Spain has moved from the sociology and anthropology of the 19th and earlier 20th centuries to a progressively refined and sophisticated conceptualization of the problematic and the methodology of the study of the family in early-modern Spanish history, its purpose often overtly programmatic, looking to prosopographical studies and collective biographies of specific groups or localities for exemplification and verification.² However, the key issues for the understanding of the processes and causes of change in family structures, functions and ideologies have been much easier to postulate in the somewhat disembodied analytics of the conceptual than they have been to demonstrate in actuality. Prosopographical research has

¹ That has been more than satisfactorily done by Santiago Fernández Conti in his *Los Consejos de Estado y Guerra de la Monarquía Hispánica en tiempos de Felipe II 1548-1598*.

² Outstanding examples of this approach can be found in Francisco Chacón Jiménez's collection, *El viaje de las familias*. For a concise but thorough survey of the recent historiography of the family in Spain see García González, "La historia de la familia o la vitalidad de la historiografía española. Nuevas perspectivas de la investigación."

necessarily produced a static, horizontal historiography of averages, norms, ranges, generalities and generalizations, descriptive of the situation at a specific point in time. Verticality, change across time, has been achieved largely by a simple layering of horizontals, comparing one static snapshot with another taken at some later date, that date usually selected for external cultural, social or economic reasons presumed to have affected the nature and structure of the family, and therefore to have provided the explanation for that change.

James Casey, in his innovative study first published in 2007, *Family and Community in Early-Modern Spain. The Citizens of Granada (1570-1739)*, has gone beyond this methodology and sought an alternative strategy both to provide those temporal transmitters and to test the current hypotheses of historians of the family in Spain against selected inputs from a limited number of families in different situations and contexts from the late 16th to the early 18th Century. This has enabled him to integrate the different aspects of political, social and family history within one particular civic community across time. However, by the very nature of the project, the continuities and the discontinuities that are to be found are found diffused across a number of different families within the large amorphous pool of the perpetual community of Granadan family clans, rather than within any single family. The result, therefore, remains an ontological account, sophisticated and nuanced, of the “what”, rather than of the “how” and the “why”. The end of such studies is to reveal the differences resulting from change rather than to examine the processes of change. The “how” and the “why” are not to be accessed simply by a description of these changes, but by a recognition of the essential, organic component of change in human institutions. Organic change cannot adequately be either described or explained by a series of snapshots of different examples at different moments, often generations apart. Organic change is by definition generational, internal, and ultimately individual. It is the outcome of the successive changes within the same family that are transmitted through its consecutive generations by the individuals who are the integral and essential vectors of those changes. In the historical study of the family and family structures these internal, inter-personal factors that transmit attitudes, behaviours and cultures immediately, successively and progressively upwards from generation to generation have received far too little attention.

It is not that there are not studies of individual families but, in great part because of the enormous difference in the nature, the completeness and the continuity of the evidence, they are very much more common for the later 17th and 18th centuries than for the previous period. Furthermore, the emphasis of those studies is essentially different from this present one. They are all (as far as I am aware) studies of successful, socially integrated and upwardly mobile families, and their central thread, therefore, is not the individual, not the personality, but the profession, the business, the office, the dynasty over the long-term, and thus the directness and immediacy of the transfers between successive generations is much

less pertinent.³ Such histories are, therefore, entirely different from that of any one of the myriad of families that rose and effectively disappeared within the space of a few brief generations.

Neither is it the case that there has been a failure to recognise the role of the individual in generational change at a conceptual level, "como sujeto social",⁴ but it is precisely the gap between the concept and the actuality, the lack of exemplification, the conceptualization of "the individual" and the absence of "individuals" that deprives the theoretical of substantiation. It is this limitation, the absence of the specific in the organic process of change that the interiorized, inter-generational biography of a single family may be able to help overcome.

What the single, intra-familial study can do that broader inter-familial studies cannot, is not only to go deeper and in greater detail, but thereby also to deploy techniques that are impractical on a larger scale, the establishment of individual relationships by witness analysis, for example, the access to personality characteristics by the analysis of behaviour, language usage, handwriting, or indeed by individual clothing, colour and style preferences, which may, or may not, conform with social norms. From there, crucially, it can look to see how those personality characteristics and the attitudes and behaviours they generate are transmitted from one generation to the next, or, just as important, how and why they are not, and how the psychology of the individual relates not only to external cultural, political and economic circumstances but also to the shadow of the individual's own life-history. Successive generations are connected not just by lineage, but by genetics, by intrafamilial relationships, by the role of parents (whether positive or negative) on the formation of identity and personality, by sibling status, family cohesion, envy, or competition. It is the specificity of that form of verticality which is the distinctive feature of the single, intra-familial study.

Clearly restricting the field of study to a single family also has its limitations. It is subject to several of the criticisms that are habitually levelled against any form of micro-history.⁵ It cannot by itself be shown not to be unique, and so cannot by itself be the basis for or an exemplar of a new generalization. It has other obvious limitations in that the relevant source material for such a study is also restricted. If a particular type of source is not available, it cannot effectively be replaced by what we know about another family or families. With respect to the Delgados, for example, I have not been able to find any material detailing the pre-nuptial negotiations between the families involved, nor in more than one case the full

³ The most striking and by far the best known example is that of the Goyeneche, but I am also thinking here particularly of such studies as Lohmann Villena's, *Les Espinosas: une famille d'hommes d'affaires en Espagne et aux Indes à l'époque de la colonisation*; Priotti's, *Los Echávarri: mercaderes bilbaínos del siglo de oro*; Salado Santos's, *Al Servicio del Rey. La familia Ronquillo Briceño 1550-1699*.

⁴ See, for example, Chacón Jiménez, "Familias, sociedad y sistema social", *El viaje de las familias*, ch. 14, pp.301 *et seqq.*

⁵ Amelang, "Microhistory", p.308.

details of the dowry itself, nor, indeed, about marriages outside the direct line, often even including the names of the spouses. The delineation of the succession to Juan Delgado's *mayorazgo* has the inheritance passing to his brother and his brother's direct heirs, but there is no mention of his sister-in-law's name, the mother who also gave her name to his nephew, the potential heir to the *mayorazgo*. No mention is made of pregnancies, stillbirths, infant or child deaths, and the only baptismal record I have is that of a 34 year-old cathecumen from Algiers, slave of Delgado's son.⁶ The general lack of personal diaries, letter-books and private correspondence inevitably gives excessive weight to the largely impersonal language of the legal documentation upon which so much of the reconstruction of a family's history has to rely. And that is without questioning the trustworthiness of the evidence that we have.⁷ In one case, for example, Juan Delgado's daughter-in-law misstates her age by 10 years, and the arithmetic of the valuers of household goods is very far from reliable, though fortunately correctible.

The single family study, even in isolation, can, of course, reinforce or support existing positions, but perhaps its greater value is rather more negative. It can show that certain broader propositions or generalisations are not universal. It can uncover the absence of connections, connections the non-existence of which it is not the purpose of composite studies with their positivist, pattern-seeking methodologies to uncover.⁸ It can, most importantly, present orthodoxy with the challenge of alternative possibilities by drawing attention to the existence of families which do not conform to the standard models, families whose wealth and honour did not derive from their personal involvement in the public life of the community.⁹ One such family was the Delgado.

The detailed study of the Family in early-modern Spain has been almost entirely uni-locational, locked into a "place", usually a city which has the archival records to support its investigation. That investigation by its very nature enforces the connection between the family and the locality and the family's continuity within that locality, and hence with the "clan", the "linaje" or the "parentela" as the institution that gives the "family" its longevity and its substance within that locality.¹⁰ The Delgados are different. They are outsiders, newcomers, *déracinés*. They stand alone. They come without history, their civic "patriotism" the response to the psychological need to belong. Their roots in Palencia were shallow. Francisco Fernández, Juan Delgado's father, was an immigrant, and his children do not seem to have maintained any persevering links with their maternal family in Palencia. Indeed, none of them was even able to identify more than one of Juan Delgado's

⁶ Archivo Parroquial de San Antolín, Palencia, 22.3.1579.

⁷ See Casey, whom I cite throughout from the 2009 Spanish version, *Familia, poder y comunidad en la España Moderna. Los ciudadanos de Granada (1570-1739)*, pp.285-9.

⁸ See Amelang, "Microhistory", pp.310-11.

⁹ Casey, *Familia, poder y comunidad*, p.24.

¹⁰ Casey, *op.cit.*, p.155.

grandparents. Furthermore, by virtue of their occupations (in Court, in the Church, and in military service) they were also “transients” who not only did not have deep roots in their local society, but, serving in Valladolid, Madrid and Lisbon, or in Granada, on the galleys and in Naples, or Rome, were unable to develop them. None of Francisco Fernández’s three sons was in adulthood a permanent resident in Palencia and only Juan retained any sort of long-term connection with the city. Their occupations and their marriages took them outside the city and, indeed, also separated them from each other. As one of a number of different Palencian Delgados, even their names are not always properly known. When Juan Delgado’s grandson took his place as *alférez mayor* in the city’s *ayuntamiento* on 21.2.1608, the clerks repeatedly entered his name incorrectly (Don Agustín Delgado Ferrer y Córdoba instead of Delgado Ferrer y Cardona) and even several years later he appears in the *Libro de Actas* (24.7.1615) as Delgado Ferrer y Cardenas. Within the city’s elite they had colleagues, associates, personal friends no doubt, but no blood ties, no “family”. They had no “family” in Palencia to which they belonged and thus no “clan” to sustain them. They succeeded or failed alone.¹¹

The emphasis placed in recent studies on the crucial importance of the “clan” and the “parentela” rather than the nuclear family is not to be found in the Delgados. The Delgados had no pre-existing paths to power to follow, and their search for honour could not realistically look back to the past, but forward to the future. The fabrication of a patently unconvincing genealogy was no more than a necessary tool for the moment. Consequently, when it proved to be ineffective, the “appropriated” nominal association with that past was promptly abandoned, and Don Agustín sr. changed his name back from the assumed “Delgado Córdoba y Herrera” to the original “Delgado y Salinas”. This does not deny the key role of the “clan” in the preservation of the line and the support it could provide for its members. On the contrary, it is precisely and crucially that support the Delgados lacked, but it does draw our attention to the many free-floating families of the Delgado type that existed outside the clan system and, therefore, to the incompleteness of what is often projected as the predominant structure of Castile’s early-modern elite civic society.

The existence and the perpetuation of the “linaje” is in itself evidence of success, and it is success that has created and left so much of the historical record of upward social mobility. Indeed, that has been the principal motive for the preservation and publication of such records, as the archiepiscopal *examinador* of that remarkable compilation, the mid-18th century *Historia de la Casa de Herrasti*, insisted, “la Genealogica, cuya objeto mira a el esplendor de las Familias Ilustres, descubrir sus Origenes, y delinear el prolongado curso de sus descendencias, y successiones.”¹² The

¹¹ On the crucial role of the “vinculación por relaciones de parentesco, de amistad y de paisanaje” for the maintenance of a family’s fortunes see Imízcoz Beunza, “La Hora Navarra del XVIII: Relaciones familiares entre la Monarquía y la aldea”, p.46.

¹² Pérez de Herrasti, *Historia de la casa de Herrasti*.

converse process of downward social mobility has been very much more difficult to identify, to document and to explain, except in the most general and opinionated terms. Once gone, the disappeared leave few traces. In most ways we are not very much further forward in understanding how and why that multitude of middling and lesser-gentry families failed than were the *arbitristas*, such as González de Cellorigo, or Argote de Molina, in their day.¹³ The Delgados are an example of a family that both rose and declined. The rise is well documented. The decline has not been. The progressive paucity of the evidence available to the historian is itself symptomatic. The inter-generational approach enables us to follow in some detail, and to understand, the progressive failure of Juan Delgado's line into the third generation. It offers us the possibility of considering some of the factors that might lie hidden beneath the common application of generalised economic, social and political factors to group mobility, groups that are in reality composed of individuals, individual families, not just the "individual" of the programmatic conceptual schema, but specific and detailed individual cases.

The explanatory model of downward mobility that a three-generational study such as this immediately brings to mind, and one that I have found most suggestive in this context, is that which has come to be known, taking its name from Thomas Mann's portrayal of the fortunes of a mid-nineteenth century German family-business, as the Buddenbrooks Syndrome, or the "third-generation effect", the commonly observed phenomenon of the progressive loss of momentum for growth through successive generations. Though originally conceived as a tool for the analysis of family-businesses in the conditions of a capitalist economy, it has been applied suggestively to Italian business in the 17th century,¹⁴ and there is no reason to believe that *mutatis mutandis* it could not equally have some applicability to early-modern Spain and to the history of the rise and fall of family fortunes. Indeed, what is really remarkable is its total absence from the literature. It has the virtue of bringing into the negative side of the mobility equation the factor of the individual personality, and the even more interesting question of the generational dimensions of personality. How applicable to the rise and decline of the Delgados the Buddenbrooks Syndrome might be I shall return to when the relevant evidence has been presented, but without pretending to extend their case into a general model of the rise and decline of families *tout court*, it is perhaps not going too far to suggest that, in this respect, the history of the Delgados may not be unique in 16th and 17th Century Castile.

¹³ See the valiant attempt of Alberto Marcos to address this problem in "Movilidad social ascendente y descendente en la Castilla Moderna". Chacón's "Reflexiones sobre historia y movilidad social", *El viaje de las familias*, ch. 15, is typical in having practically nothing to say about the processes of downward mobility.

¹⁴ Lorandini, Cinzia, "Looking beyond the Buddenbrooks Syndrome: the Salvadori Firm of Trento, 1660s-1880s".