

Professor Maria Degado on **The Delights (Las Delicias)**

It's the beginning of a new day for the 120 students boarding at Las Delicias, an agrotechnical school in rural Argentina that accommodates both boys who are looking at agricultural employment and boys who have been expelled from other schools.

A missing phone sees a boy interrogated by a teacher off screen – the camera focusing mercilessly on the boy being questioned. It emerges that another boy hasn't heard from his mother in a good while. A third sucks a lollipop while contemplating his body mass index. Boys come and go – in the gardens, in the corridors and classrooms, in and out of the first aid booth, called in to see teachers about misdemeanours. This is a film about activity, activity that is too often ignored or seen as insignificant.

The Delights captures the camaraderie of the boys among teachers whose small acts of kindness help to foment a culture of care and respect across the school – the need for the boys to look out for each other and to think beyond the self. Eduardo Crespo's camera captures the hustle and bustle of the school: the chatter of the boys as they climb trees to pick fruit, the concentration displayed during a game of draughts in the sun, the affection shown to a small frail bird, two boys making the case as to why a teacher has no patience with them, a session with a teacher who tries to instil in the boys a need to recognise the importance of friendship, values and the kind of people they are or want to be – 'Because if you're better, the world would be better.'

The viewer is never given long enough to get to know the boys as individuals. The focus, instead, is on the dynamics of communality and how the boys interact: on the small pleasures gained from a wheelbarrow race in the mud, throwing a javelin in a field, making a sandwich at the dinner table, quietly sorting out the bedding in the dormitory. And it is through these small acts that the boys' personalities emerge – small acts that often have big implications.

Las Delicias is ultimately a film about cohabitation, about structures of kinship and support. It begins at the start of a day, it closes at the end of a day – a term, possibly a year – as the elder boys go off to pastures new. And then it begins again as the school welcomes a new cohort, building new homes in a place that encourages them, just as Crespo's film encourages the viewer, to think about their place in the world and their responsibility to that world.

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