

Elena Deanda-Camacho. *Ofensiva a los oídos piadosos. Obscenidad y censura en la poesía española y novohispana del siglo XVIII*. Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2022.

David T. Gies
University of Virginia

While musing on the topic of obscenity and pornography in 1964, US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously wrote, "I know it when I see it."

Likewise, scores of ecclesiastical and civil censors "knew" what pornography was when they banned hundreds of publications in the Spanish and Latin American eighteenth century (and, of course, centuries earlier). In the book under review, Elena Deanda-Camacho grapples with the question, "Qué es lo obsceno?" in "el siglo de la pornografía" (as Lynn Hunt called it). Spain, of course, differed from other European countries, such as England and France, where publications like *Fanny Hill* or *Thérèse philosophe* enjoyed publication, circulation, and even best-sellerdom. Ecclesiastical authorities in Spain sought to prosecute anyone intent on publishing a work of comic or serious sexual content, but in a delicious and unintended irony, it was precisely these censors who ended up preserving

"obscene" works in their archive, archives which are now the source of much of Deanda's meticulous research.

Deanda studies a variety of literary texts in tandem with archival documents because "[e]ste tipo de análisis desvela relaciones de complicidad y desencuentro que se ciernen entre estos términos, a menudo considerados antagónicos. Estas relaciones son de complicidad porque el texto inquisitorial es co-dependiente de la obscenidad, pues la censura cita, analiza y conserva la obscenidad" (16). In Chapter 1 she takes a look at "foundational texts," indices of banned books (Valdés, 1559; Quiroga, 1853; Sandoval, 1612; Zapata, 1632; Sotomayor, 1640; Marín-Valladares, 1707; Pérez de Prado, 1747, and Rubín, 1790), and Antonio Arbiol's *Estragos sobre la lujuria* (1726), which theorized sexuality in the first third of the eighteenth century. It was a book that was "la piedra de toque de los tratados eclesiásticos en materia sexual" (55). In addition, it is not hard to agree with Deanda's observation that many of these tracts were powerfully misogynistic, since women were often portrayed as dangerous, diseased, corrupt, disgusting, or putrid (that is, "obscene").

Chapter 2 grapples with the sixteenth-century *Carajicomedia* (1519) and Nicolás Fernández de Moratín's now notorious *Arte de putear* (1775-1777). Both works are deemed "pornológicas" because they deal with prostitution, prostitutes, their clients and the social, economic and sexual dynamics that define the profession. Art or obscenity? Can style win out over content? Can aesthetics and ethics be reconciled in a work that channels classical models and displays clear literary knowledge and appreciation? Chapter 3 shifts attention to the New World and then back to the Peninsula, first in the form of the *Guía de foráneros de México de 1785* and *Décimas a las prostitutas de México* (also called *Manuscrito de Juan Fernández*, 1782), and then to Leandro Fernández de Moratín's *Fábulas futrosóficas* (1821-1825) (now thought to be the work of Gallardo, as demonstrated by Philip Deacon in the current issue of this journal). Deanda helps the reader negotiate contemporary language in the New World (Mexicanisms) that provoked laughter through double entendres and coded references. Chapter 4 moves on to study Félix María de Samaniego's *Jardín de Venus* (1782) and what are called "sones novohispanos" —"Chuchumbé" and "Jarabe gatuno" (1766 and 1802). The new element here is how New Spain incorporated race, castas, and afro-culture into these "obscene" works, something mostly absent from Spanish poems, treatises, and narratives of this ilk.

Tanto en España como en la Nueva España, durante el periodo premoderno, lo obsceno se relacionó con lo popular (el vulgo, la plebe) y en la realidad americana, con los distintos subgrupos racializados que se llamaron 'castas'. Dentro de ese sistema de castas, que era tanto un régimen político como estético, las combinaciones genético-'raciales' de predominio afro se encontraban en lo más bajo de la escala social. En otras palabras, la visibilidad pública de castas como la de los mulatos, los

pardos o morenos en la esfera pública novohispana fue considerada obscena desde la perspectiva del inquisidor [...] Mientras que Samaniego se escapó de la sanción inquisitorial, los 'pardos' y la gente de 'color quebrado' en la Nueva España se vieron constantemente acosados por los censores, solo por cantar cancioncillas chuscas en fiestas seculares. Incluso comparando la censura de las canciones populares en la metrópoli y la colonia, se evidencia que el control de la Inquisición en la Nueva España fue más férreo. La raza, la clase y la localización periférica y colonial de los productores culturales determinó el vigor de la persecución inquisitorial. (151, 154)

Deanda defends Samaniego against the oft-repeated claim of anticlericalism, suggesting that "el *Jardín* también sa alía con los mismos clérigos al representar sus deseos sexuales como algo normal y cotidiano. El *Jardín* es y no anticlerical...." (167). Likewise, if one can distinguish between literature that is erotic —euphemistic, indirect, and metaphorical— and literature that is obscene —direct, literal, and excessive— then works like Samaniego's *Jardín* might be considered simultaneously erotic and obscene. On the other hand, the "Chuchumbé" material (for this reader, refreshingly new), fell mostly into the latter category for censors bent on squelching popular expressions of unfettered and joyous sexuality.

Similar divisions come into play in Chapter 5, which analyzes Tomás de Iriarte's *Perico y Juana* (1804) and Juan Meléndez Valdés's *Besos de amor* (ca. 1780). Concerning the latter, Deanda sees a bifurcation of Meléndez's achievement, viewing his poetry as both sensual (rococó) and capitalist ("En los *Besos de amor*, Meléndez despliega, por un lado, una estética sensualista de herencia locktiana que decanta en su poesía rococó y, por el otro, una ideología mercantil y burguesa que se sintoniza con el capitalismo temprano y sus sistema de valoración," 223), while marching him, rightly, in the same misogynistic parade as the other male authors of the century she focuses on in this study: "Aunque lo intentan, los *Besos* fallan en incluir los deseos o el placer femeninos. Si bien no estamos ante el sexo mercenario del *Arte*, en los *Besos* la mujer y su cuerpo siguen siendo objetos de consumo" (228).

This engaging book, written in a clear and mostly jargon free prose, poses fundamental questions for literary scholars. Deanda looks at each text from an historical and gendered point of view, and she fearlessly attacks criteria which attempt to divide the erotic ("artistic") from the pornographic (mechanical and low-class). Other scholars might disagree with such a distinction (and have done so), but it is difficult to argue with her statement that "[u]no de los mitos desbancados aquí es aquel que considera que la España inquisitorial fue irascible y perseguidora de sus mejores talentos" (240), since it was often the work that got punished, rather than the (male) author.

Pornography and the erotic are, as Deanda repeatedly asserts, artificial constructs based on culture, history, geography, and society (211). Is it true, as Ruen Ogien has claimed, that today's pornography is tomorrow's erotica?

Are the works studied so creatively here —works written by obviously literate, cultured, and educated authors— crudely obscene and pornographic, or sublimely titillating and subtly erotic? Although Deanda opts to equate the categories —"La representación pornográfica es otra modalidad de la imaginación sexual, ni mejor ni peor que la erótica [...] La

ción clasista que perhaps, in the end, only

Diccionario razonado manual para inteligencia de ciertos escritores que por equivocación han nacido en España. Aumentado con más de cincuenta voces y una receta eficacísima para matar insectos filosóficos. Obra útil y necesaria en nuestros días [Cádiz, 1811]. Marieta Cantos Casenave, ed. Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2021.

Bartolomé José Gallardo. *Diccionario crítico-burlesco del que se titula Diccionario razonado manual para inteligencia de ciertos escritores que por equivocación han nacido en España.*