

MANUEL RUBÍN DE CELIS, *El Corresponsal del Censor*. Edición de Klaus-Dieter Ertler, Renate Hodab e Inmaculada Urzainqui. La Cuestión Palpitante. Los Siglos XVIII y XIX en España 12. Madrid: Iberoamericana/Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert. 2009. 378 pp.

*El Censor* (Madrid, 1781–87) was one of several periodicals published in Madrid in the late eighteenth century which took the form of moral essays modelled on Addison's *Spectator*. In their introduction to this volume the editors trace the history of a genre which spread throughout northern Europe before its belated arrival in Spain. *El Corresponsal del Censor* (27 April 1786–June 1788) was a quite separate periodical which played an original variation on the theme. Its anonymous author, Manuel Rubín de Celis, an Asturian by origin, was an economist and *contador de rentas* of reformist and Jansenist views who enjoyed the patronage of Campomanes. In his journal Rubín assumed the fictitious identity of 'Don Ramon Harnero', a typical rentier and *petimetre* who engages in one-sided correspondence with the editor of *El Censor*. Some of the letters are signed by Don Ramón himself, the voice of the common man, while others are letters received by him from a variety of correspondents, male and female. In this way Rubín exposes his readers to different points of view without having to make his own views clear. This ingenious device allows him to voice moral and social criticism without risk to himself. The disguise is all the more effective in that Don Ramon is no *ilustrado*, like his inventor, but an idle, ignorant, egocentric and shallow representative of the very type that Rubín wishes to satirize. His fictitious correspondents represent a wide range of opinion, conservative and progressive, from every walk of life. His targets include superstition and fanaticism, pedantry, xenophobia, chauvinism, the decadent state of the Spanish drama and of university education, the worldliness of nuns and clerics, and the injustice of the penal system. Some of the fictitious correspondents whose letters Don Ramón passes on to *El Censor* are intended to amuse, such as the moral watchdog who writes from Granada to warn of the danger of entrusting young women to the hands of male barbers (instead, he proposes the establishment of 'una escuela de peluqueras'). Generally, Rubín is an eloquent advocate of social change. In one letter an elderly nun tells how she fell in love with a young cousin but was forced into a convent so that he could marry her elder sister (marriage to a younger sister being deemed injurious to family honour). Elsewhere Rubín invokes José de Acosta in questioning the view of native Americans as 'barbarians'. All in all, *El Corresponsal del Censor* is a *tour de force* of imagination, wit, and controlled indignation.

The editors have performed a useful service in making available an original chapter in the history of Spanish journalism. It is a pity, however, that the tightly packed text has not been made more digestible. It would have been helpful to preface each letter with a brief commentary, and to identify the sources quoted in the text.

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