El diseño maduro de personajes y espacios, definidos mediante el adjetivo justo, con economía, sin que falten connotaciones emotivas, permiten sospechar que Tuset de Córdoba está llamado a mayores empeños. Detalles precisos indican que el autor de «La Garbo» se ha documentado escrupulosamente, pero lo que importa es su capacidad para expresar, sin romper el equilibrio del brevisimo relato, la incomunicación social, y la miseria de las fantasías generadas por los medios llamados a superarla. Persiste la fábrica de sueños...

U.N.E.D., Valencia

Cecilio Alonso


This novel, first published in Madrid in 1805, is welcome to our libraries. It has been rescued from oblivion to take its place in the increasingly impressive configuration of late eighteenth-century Spanish novels. Moreover, its several components create a surprisingly engrossing novel, one that makes itself agreeable for enlightened points of view, individualized characters, and attractively exotic locations.

At the beginning of the hundred pages of his substantial and valuable introduction, Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos leads the reader to every archive and library he visited in a vigorous, but ultimately futile, pursuit of any information about the author. The mysterious Martín de Bernardo wrote three other works, the earliest of which, a translation of a French biography of Marie Antoinette, was denied permission to be printed by the censors. Two later books, of exceeding rarity, were finally located mostly in libraries abroad. The novelist’s memoirs, published in London, of what transpired in Madrid just before 1810 is valuable for its close account of the collapse of the government of Carlos IV and Godoy. It is further useful for revealing a more reactionary point of view than that displayed in the earlier El emprendedor.

The novel itself offers an excellent example of the perspectivism that came to the fore in Spanish Enlightened thought—superior worshippers of Islam and noble Negroes, for example, expose European pretensions to a superiority of culture that is often conspicuous by its absence. The work begins with the recounting of the services of an admirable physician, Mahamut, to the sick in the port city of Basra. Summoned by an arrogant Ottoman official to cure one of his wives, Mahamut stands up against the insults of the man, and for his pains is imprisoned. With this incident begins the tale of his escape from perils and the quest of his lady love. We learn half way through the novel that Mahamut is really Antonio Ramírez, a Spaniard in disguise, and thus Bernardo draws on
the device of assumed identities, dear to the Oriental tale. New charac-
ters make their entrance as the main protagonist embarks on his trav-
els. The stories of their lives add, to the amaligam of Byzantine novel
Oriental tale, such disparate elements as the plot of scheming French
society figures that follows the model of Les liaisons dangereuses; the ex-
posure of the sham that caused great fear of a supposedly haunted
house; an episode reminiscent of the incident in Torres Villarroel’s Vida;
the political intrigues of pashas; the taming of a wild horse; and the ar-
rested spread of a deadly plague. The novelist is able to keep in play
broad lines of suspense (when will two characters learn that their love
is not incestuous as brother and sister but may be consummated in
marriage between first cousins; when will Mahamut return to his right-
ful status and the love of Doña Elisa) with the anxiety created by seem-
ingly insoluble adversities (how can Mahamut rescue his beloved held
captive in a harem, surrounded and watched by eunuchs and Janizary
guards). Longer than so many other Spanish novels of the period, Martín
Bernardo’s narrative is still fun to read.

While we come to see eventually how this «español» came to his
«aventuras en el Asia», the reader is constantly aware that Mahamut/
Ramírez is not the prudente, the valeroso, or even the ingenioso hero of
the novel. The «emprendedor» of the title may recall the «empresas» of
the traditional heroes of past fiction. Bernardo, however, cats him on no
larger a scale than that of the hombre de bien. The eighteenth-century
setting also makes itself felt in the constant presence of commerce: mer-
chants continually cross the path of the characters, they buy and sell
beautiful women for harems, they negotiate letters of credit, they spon-
sor ships, they have connections to bankers and merchants in other cit-
ties and countries. Good sense, practical judgment, and firm resolve ad-
just to any exigencies because, free of prejudice, they see reality clearly,
and can find solutions to their problems. At the end, Providence smiles
with favor on the virtuous protagonists. The author writes intelligently
about the balance between self-interest and the concern for others, about
the need for «política» and «secreto» in the conduct of our affairs (122),
about the danger of poorly governed amour propre (300), and other ques-
tions.

Despite the tone of moderation, there are hints of contradiction in
the novel. Bernardo’s women characters comport themselves bravely and
effectively, and they steadfastly maintain their integrity (although I am
at a loss to understand how they could remain virginal captives in a
harem, for such long periods of time, without ever having been forced
to yield to a captor’s lust). But then one reads an occasional aside like
these: «no había día que no oyese quejas de nueva dolencia a alguna de
sus mujeres o esclavas (pensión general del sexo femenil el padecer
continuamente)» (308); «Lo más cierto, el deseo de vengarse de quien no
la había ofendido (propiedad de mujeres celosas» (325).
The novelist offers many descriptions of sea and desert, luxurious apartments and clamorous markets that argue for his direct and personal observation. But then he writes many clichés («un padre que os dio el ser» —317, «gemidos, capaces de ablandar el más duro mármol» —326). He does so almost as if acquiescing in a more popular tone: «Vieron el cielo abierto (como suele decirse)...» (331); «esta carta les pusiera, como dicen, alas en los pies» (339). Portraiture is often individual, but the author reverts to types as well, such as the stoic Spaniard (292).

Álvarez Barrientos elucidates virtually all of this in his detailed introduction and the many notes that accompany the text. The analysis of Martín de Bernardo's work is penetrating and cogent, and the result of his labor is another of his excellent contributions to our knowledge of the Spanish novel between the decline of the picaresque and the rise of the Romantic novel.

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Este nuevo poemario de Juan Carlos Marset, continuador a juicio de sus críticos de su ópera prima Puer profeta (Premio Adonais 1989) en cuanto a su potencia expresiva y al despliegue imaginativo de sus imágenes, inaugura sorpresivamente un ritmo poético versátil e inquietante. Se ha dicho que vuelve a recuperar la experiencia poética de la ciudad (ya no la Nueva York de su primera obra), sin embargo esta ciudad que funda con su voz, «la Nea-polis de la Italia meridional», adquiere ribetes casi míticos, intangibles en su difusa materialidad. No en vano la colección que lo acoge dentro de la editorial Tusquets, se denomina «Nuevos textos sagrados», dirigida por Antonio Mari, provocando en el lector desprevenido una inevitable predisposición a una lectura centrada en claves, metáforas y arcanos, que el poemario legitima desde instancias literarias y filosóficas.

El virtuosismo formal se despliega en un juego de ritmos y moldes, entre el lirismo quebrado del verso y la prosa acentual, profundamente poética. La voz del poeta va diseñando tonos, pasajes, fases enhebradas en las cuatro grandes partes en que se divide el libro:

I PARTE: LEYENDA NAPOLITANA

II PARTE: MANUAL DE FUNDICIÓN, compuesto por cuatro poemas numerados y titulados respectivamente.

III PARTE: DELIRIOS DE SIBILA, compuesto por dos partes «Prenunciones» y «Desastres», integrados por una serie de prosas unitarias con títulos individuales.