

Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos

JESÚS PÉREZ MAGALLÓN. Soñando caminos: Moratín y la nación imaginada. Valencia: Calambur, 2019. 379 pp.

Thomas C. Neal



Volume 44, Number 3, Spring 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1089830ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18192/rceh.v44i3.6391>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Asociación Canadiense de Hispanistas

ISSN

0384-8167 (print)

2564-1662 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Neal, T. (2020). Review of [JESÚS PÉREZ MAGALLÓN. Soñando caminos: Moratín y la nación imaginada. Valencia: Calambur, 2019. 379 pp.] *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 44(3), 803–805.
<https://doi.org/10.18192/rceh.v44i3.6391>

© Thomas C. Neal, 2022



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Schmidhuber. Estos empeños deben extenderse a archivos peninsulares. También es necesaria una recopilación en un volumen de los documentos (y sus correspondientes estudios) hallados hasta ahora. Recordamos los de Ramírez, Spell, Cervantes. Hay varios otros a los que se deben sumar los hallados por Rodríguez Garrido, Soriano Vallés y Schmidhuber en fechas muy recientes. La mayoría de ellos son de difícil localización. Su recopilación permitiría un estudio comparativo que arroje luces importantes.

El volumen si bien no es para el gran público, es una obra de gran importancia. Sin temor a errar, puedo asegurar que la obra ya tiene un lugar relevante dentro de los estudios sorjuaninos y resulta indispensable para todos los que quieran profundizar en el estudio de la monja.

ALBERTO PÉREZ-AMADOR ADAM

Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Iztapalapa

JESÚS PÉREZ MAGALLÓN. *Soñando caminos: Moratín y la nación imaginada*. Valencia: Calambur, 2019. 379 pp.

Jesús Pérez Magallón's newest monograph seeks to shed light on playwright Leandro Fernández de Moratín's contribution to imagining the nation in Spain, a subject that, he claims, has been underappreciated, due to the now-familiar scholarly biases that often result in Spanish intellectuals being left out of conversations about the emergence of modern political ideas. Where the Spanish Enlightenment is concerned, it is certainly true that some would consider it anachronistic to discuss the concept of "nation." Echoing recent trends in scholarship, however, Pérez Magallón is eager to remind us that in eighteenth-century Spain, geopolitical rivalries and the Bourbon push for centralization made national identity a relevant topic in conversations between intellectuals and administrators alike. In the case of Moratín, Pérez Magallón sees the playwright as type of Gramscian organic intellectual who projected a vision for a modern Spanish collective identity through his cultural projects. Pérez Magallón's book aims to reorient the reader towards some of Moratín's more celebrated aesthetic ideas in such a way as to see their political undertones more overtly.

In chapter 1, Pérez Magallón revisits the premise that Leandro Fernández de Moratín's aesthetic ideas were an extension of those of his father, Nicolás, in order to connect the younger Moratín to the discursive enterprise of nation-envisioning that began in the previous century. Both father and son, Pérez Magallón maintains, were men committed to an underlying plan of reform that manifested itself within their cultural creations. The author discusses, amongst other things, each Moratín's role

in contributing to the development of certain symbols of national history and tradition. Chapter 2 looks at the relationship between Moratinian neoclassical philosophy and the playwright's vision for governance and bourgeois morality. The main work considered is *El viejo y la niña* (1807); also touched upon is Moratín's relationship to Santo Díez Gonzalez's failed theater reform proposal in 1797. Chapter 3 looks at how lyric poetry may have also figured into Moratín's social and political ideas. While Moratín didn't compose many lyrical poems himself, Pérez Magallón contends that the playwright viewed the lyric as "otra encarnación de una nueva imaginación del ser nacional" (107). The chapter concludes with an interesting discussion of Moratín's views on the Spanish poetry canon, where Pérez Magallón sees "una funcionalidad política evidente" (129) in Moratín's attitude towards certain Golden Age poets.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the oft-studied subject of gender roles in Moratín's plays, and what they may have revealed about the playwright's imagined national social order. Not all of Moratín's plays, argues Pérez Magallón, were concerned with projecting "expectativas utópicas" (172) onto female characters; his plays could often portray females as victims of misguided paternal authority. A laic education for women, the author suggests, was paramount in Moratín's musings on Spanish nationhood. Chapter 5 conversely analyzes figures of male authority in Moratín's plays, especially how they related to enlightenment theories of governance and predominant models of male conduct that were popular in eighteenth-century literary discourse. As with Moratín's feminine characters, Pérez Magallón notes that the male authority figures portrayed in Moratín's works were hardly monolithic. While undoubtedly patriarchal, his male characters could also be seen to convey a progressive type of masculinity characterized by a preparedness to "asumir la responsabilidad de una nación reformada" (206).

Chapter 6 situates Moratín within the intellectual context of the Morvilliers Affair and the subsequent debates that took place about Spain's cultural contributions to enlightenment Europe. Following an insightful discussion of Black Legend discourse, one that includes lesser-known French sources of anti-Spanish attitudes, Pérez Magallón argues that Moratín himself was not immune to the "transformaciones de la conciencia nacional" (261) provoked by foreign critiques of Spain. Gleaning Moratín's feelings on the matter, the author insists, requires a consideration of some of his lesser-known writings such as his travel diaries, which Pérez Magallón analyzes thoughtfully. For him, Moratín's commentary on quotidian life in the places he visited, such as his musings on the quality of food and inns in Italy, lend insight into his *anti-apologista* sentiments, and express the

playwright's view that Spain had fallen behind its neighbors on a most basic cultural level.

Chapter 7 explores Moratín's political leanings in light of the pejorative label of *afrancesado* that was often attached to him during his time (and in posteriority) due to his willingness to accept a post in the Bonaparte regime during its occupation of Spain. Such a label is problematic, contends Pérez Magallón, since many of the so-called *afrancesados* such as Moratín were willing to tolerate the rule of Joseph II not because they saw him as a foreign savior, but rather as a necessary evil that might best assure the country's path to reform. In his examination of Moratín's travel writings, Pérez Magallón insists that it was in fact the playwright's admiration for England, not for France, that stands out amongst his political and economic ruminations. Pérez Magallón explores these writings further in chapter 8, echoing other critics who have praised Moratín's "dominio y crecimiento moderno de la prosa" (338). Once again, Moratín's keen interest in England is highlighted in the chapter, both as a model and countermodel to Spain: "[e]s Inglaterra que le sirve a Leandro para pensar su propio país e imaginar un futuro diferente" (326).

Impressive in its scope and elegantly produced, *Soñando la nación*, and the variety of primary sources it considers, will surely be a helpful resource for scholars wishing to explore the political nuances of Moratín's writings in more depth. As an aside, while the book leaves the present reader convinced of Moratín's involvement in contributing to an early national imaginary in Spain, it is less conclusive in terms of synthesizing the specific *type* of nation that Moratín may have had in mind. Indeed, if there is a weakness to the book, it is its tendency to often wander away from Moratín himself into digressive discussions of the playwright's contemporaries, or into lengthy summaries of secondary scholarship. Nonetheless, Pérez Magallón's contribution here is commendable. Like many Spanish authors of the enlightenment period, the younger Moratín is often treated too one-dimensionally, and Pérez Magallón's efforts to rightfully place him within recent interdisciplinary theoretical conversations in Enlightenment Studies will certainly be well-received.

THOMAS C. NEAL
University of Akron