

Cursilería

The word 'cursilería' is derived from 'cursi', a word with a meaning close to 'corny' that appears for the first time in the article "Un cursi",¹ a *costumbrista* 'physiology' (un étude de mœurs de personnages typiques) about a guy from Cádiz without good manners who is noted for his annoying behavior. On the female side, cursi may be older, perhaps derived from a couplet, or murga from Cádiz relative to the daughters of a French tailor called Sicour, or Tessi-Court, dressed like their father's clients above their class. The couplet repeats the refrain "the girls of Sicur, Sicur, Sicur..."

The term is defined in *La filocalia, o arte de supiera a los cursis de los que no lo son* (Madrid, 1868) by Santiago Liniers and Francisco Silvela, a work in which is already considered a plague. 'Cursi' and 'cursilería' entered the academic dictionary in 1869, with the following definitions:

1. Said of a person who presumes to be fine and elegant without being so.
2. Applied to that which, with an appearance of elegance or wealth, is ridiculous and in bad taste.
3. Said of artists and writers, or of their works, when they vainly try to show expressive refinement or elevated feelings.

'Cursilería' is a recurring theme in the contemporary novels of Benito Pérez Galdós, especially in *La desheredada* (1881) and in *El amigo Manso* (1882).

Relevant essays on the subject were written by Ramón Gómez de la Serna,² who relates it to the Baroque, and Enrique Tierno Galván,³ who characterizes it as a 'feminization of the bourgeois'. Ortega y Gasset dedicates a note to it in the essay "Intimidades"⁴ and considers it an endemic morbidity of Spain, due to the peculiar development of the middle class. However, 'cursi' is closely related to 'kitsch', a word from Munich used first between 1860 and 1870, now used worldwide.

In America, 'cursi' acquires diverse shades, such as the Caribbean *picúo* or the Peruvian *huachafería*.⁵ In Argentina it often appears in the novels of Manuel Puig and in Portugal it is called *piroso* and *piroseira*,⁶ while in Brazil the term *brega* is used. Mexico has been proclaimed "the country of 'cursis'" by its own analysts and journalists, according to the Mexican Carlos Monsiváis.⁷

¹ «Un cursi». La Estrella (Cádiz). December 25, 1842.

² Ramón Gómez de la Serna, "Ensayo sobre lo cursi", *Cruz y Raya*, 1933.

³ Enrique Tierno Galván, «Lo cursi». *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 1952.

⁴ José Ortega y Gasset, «Intimidades», *El espectador*, 1929.

⁵ Mario Vargas Llosa, «La huachafería», *El Comercio*, Lima (August 28, 1983)

⁶ Antonio Lobo Antunes, *A morte de Carlos Gardel* (1994)

⁷ Carlos Monsiváis, «La cursilería». *Escenas de pudor y liviandad* (México, 1988)

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