

***Signos vitales: Procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea.* Enrique García Santo-Tomás. Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2020. 364 pp. €29.80. ISBN 978-84-9192-169-1.**

In *Signos vitales: Procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea* (Vital signs: Procreation and image in golden age narrative), Enrique García Santo-Tomás examines the cultural history of midwives and wet nurses through medical and literary texts from Spain's golden age (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), uncovering meta-phors, discourses, and displacements that demonstrate the interconnectedness of medical discourse and fiction. This work follows García Santo-Tomás's *La musa refractada: Literatura y óptica en la España del Barroco* (2014; 2nd ed. 2015, trans-lated as *The Refracted Muse: Literature and Optics in Early Modern Spain* in 2017), which examines the relationship between fiction and science. In *Signos vitales*, García Santo-Tomás builds on his earlier intervention, combining the history of what we would now call obstetrics with fictional representations of midwives and wet nurses and close reading of reproductive and biological metaphors. The central argument

of *Signos vitales* is that the increased control male practitioners exerted over child-birth throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gradually displaced birth mediators—the midwife and wet nurse—to the metaphorical realm. García Santo-Tomás's study is divided into eight chapters in three sections, plus an introduction and conclusion. The subsections (“Contexts: 1500–1586”; “Interventions: 1580–1670”; and “Images: 1613–1698”) are accompanied by full-color illustrations that allow García Santo-Tomás to pair his literary and scientific readings with art history. Throughout, García Santo-Tomás's analysis of the dual maternal processes of birth and nursing reveals a broad spectrum of concerns regarding maternity, such as the father's role during birth, the privileges afforded the midwife, and the use of wet-nursing. García Santo-Tomás demonstrates that even as humanists exerted discursive authority over birth and wet-nursing, birth mediators play a crucial role to remediate family structure in many texts and are thus humanized even while voiceless.

Chapter 1, “Practices,” examines the changing role of midwives and wet nurses throughout the early modern period, synthesizing recent historical research and setting the analysis within Monica H. Green's work on the imposition of masculine authority over women's health. Furthermore, the chapter adds detail to recent critical interest in the blood purity discourse within humoral constructs that considered breast milk a purified product of blood that could impart pure old Christian blood or the tainted blood of the converso, therefore justifying humanist arguments against wet-nursing. It also covers attempts to regulate midwifery and investigates male-authored sixteenth-century Spanish midwifery manuals. García Santo-Tomás argues that the relationship between surgeons and midwives was less antagonistic than has been thought previously since midwives operated in a separate but not necessarily incompatible sphere. The second chapter, “Mediations,” examines literary antecedents such as apocryphal accounts of the Virgin Mary's midwives, images of the lactating Virgin, and negative portrayals of the witch-midwife like *La Lozana andaluza* (1528) and *La Celestina* (1499). García Santo-Tomás reveals multivalent representations of midwifery not limited to negative stereotypes of the witch-midwife and demonstrates the crucial role midwives played in the early modern social fabric as healers who also provided religious and legal services. He then gives an overview of the seventeenth-century cultural shift in which male practitioners began to assert their right to intervene in birth on the basis of a theoretical understanding of the body's functions, as opposed to midwives' practical knowledge, setting the stage for the following chapters that detail

baroque representations of birth as a metaphor for the creative process. As García Santo-Tomás reveals, literary representations silence maternal pain in childbirth, displacing the female voice from birth. The third chapter, "Births," examines the opposition of many sixteenth-century Spanish humanists to wet-nursing that takes on moral overtones within the discourse of blood purity by asserting that maternal breastfeeding prevents blood contamination. The chapter then turns to literary analysis of stories from Juan de Timoneda's *El patrañuelo* (1567) that examine infants removed from their birth family, fictionalizing the destabilizing displacement of parental figures by the wet nurse and thus highlighting the dangers of commercializing child-rearing.

The second section examines midwifery and wet-nursing first in the theater and then in the narrative wealth of the short novel's tales of babies lost, found, swapped, misidentified, or misplaced. As García Santo-Tomás asserts, the wet nurse and midwife are increasingly displaced into the metaphorical realm even as they remain central yet silent figures in the birth process. The fourth chapter, "Dramatizations," brings light to the midwife's understudied role on the *comedia* stage, where she is ubiquitous yet invisible, a voiceless figure who plays a pivotal role in many plots. The chapter then examines metaphorical renderings of midwifery, divorced from materiality, to comment on the creative process that allows the author to claim "birth rights" or literary paternity. In dedications, the printing press functions symbolically as a mediating agent, analogous to the midwife, who displaces the "father"/author from the birth process. The fifth chapter, "Impressions," assesses the short novel's unprecedented seventeenth-century popularity, examining procreation's darker side through fictional portrayals of incestuous relationships that suppress mediation of childbirth. García Santo-Tomás argues that these representations are not merely baroque excess but also examine prohibited relationships to explore the limits of expression and the relationship of the subject to the institutional control of the state. He asserts that apprehension that children raised outside their birth family may unknowingly commit incest reveals unease with the mediation of midwives and wet nurses. García Santo-Tomás examines incestuous relationships in Juan de Montalbán, drawing parallels between literary incest and the metaphorical descriptions of kinship relationships in introductory materials that describe Montalbán's work as a literary descendant. Finally, he examines incest themes in a pair of novellas by Luis de Guevara. García Santo-Tomás asserts that these novels portray destabilization of familial relationships produced by incest but also expand the catalog of prohibited relationships, going

beyond the oedipal conflict, using suspense, the catharsis of revelation, and dialogue with medical epistemologies, concluding that the baroque period and the new era of printing led to a reinvention of the family (both printing families and literary).

Chapter 6, "Maternities," examines Cervantes's little-studied novella *La señora Cornelia* (The Lady Cornelia, 1613) wherein Cornelia's "interrupted maternity"—when her child is accidentally given to a stranger, therefore foreclosing the possibility of maternal breastfeeding—displaces the mother from a central narrative role and underscores the need to preserve paternal authority. García Santo-Tomás asserts that this representation parallels other disenchanted Cervantine visions of family and lineage. Chapter 7, "Paternities," examines challenges to traditional notions of honor and decorum that emerge from the demographic explosion and culture of consumption in a rapidly changing Madrid in Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo's *Don Diego de noche* (Don Diego at night, 1623). Here, the city plays a maternal role, although a dark and disturbing one. In a clandestine cemetery birth scene, the novel relegates the mother to a secondary plane, ultimately affirming patriarchal control, a process that mirrors the imposition of written word over oral culture and the male physician over the midwife. The eighth chapter, "Celebrations," analyzes the body as metaphor for social disorder in Francisco Santos's *La tarasca de parto en el meson del infierno* (The hag gives birth in hell's inn, 1672), whose monstrous birth scene critiques the decadence and corruption of Madrid, again a "mother" but in this instance abjected. Over the last few chapters, García Santo-Tomás demonstrates that, within a shift toward increased patriarchal control over the family, complex depictions of the midwife and wet nurse recognize their vital role in ensuring infant survival.

Throughout, García Santo-Tomás shows the interconnectedness of medical and fictional discourses as birth becomes a versatile metaphor for the creative process. Furthermore, he reveals the fear that mediation perverts childbirth, leading to paternal displacement that disturbs the social order of the family and even the state. Although midwifery and wet-nursing have received increased and much-merited critical attention in the past few years, García Santo-Tomás's study fills several lacunae. Within Spanish literary studies, attention has tended to focus on canonical texts such as *La Celestina*. This study brings to light an impressive array of representations across genres from canonical and noncanonical authors—examining in depth Juan de Timoneda, Miguel de Cervantes, Alonso de Salas Barbadillo, Lope de Vega, Juan Pérez de Montalbán, Luis Vélez de Guevara, and Francisco

Santos, but also a wide variety of other texts too numerous to mention here—focusing especially on understudied works and opening new avenues of research. He traces the gradual imposition of patriarchal control over the female body in the transitory state of birth, yet one that could not be imposed without the agents of mediation. By examining apparently secondary characters, García Santo-Tomás brings out new interpretations. If the study has a limitation, it is that more attention is paid to midwives than to wet nurses, and the analysis of wet-nursing becomes lost at times. However, this wide-ranging, interdisciplinary, and painstakingly researched study opens up new critical avenues on understudied topics such as incest in the short novel and noncanonical authors and works that will be of interest to researchers of golden age Spain, the history of medicine, history of childbirth, gender studies, and cultural studies. Moreover, the wealth of sources cited will be invaluable to those studying maternity, birth, and midwifery. More broadly, studies of early modern maternity and childbirth tend to foreground England to the exclusion of other countries; García Santo-Tomás builds on recent historical and cultural work on midwifery by academics such as Montserrat Cabré, Teresa Ortiz, and Wolfram Aichinger. García Santo-Tomás's study adds breadth to the critical conversation, citing an extensive bibliography from Spanish cultural studies and history. Hopefully this study will be translated for the benefit of English speakers.

EMILY KUFFNER

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON