

GARCÍA SANTO-TOMÁS, ENRIQUE. *Signos vitales. Procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea*. Madrid: Iberoamericana-Vervuert (Tiempo emulado. Historia de América y España, 76), 2020. 364 pp. €29.80. ISBN 978-8-4919-2169-1 [paperback]. This monograph is the second instalment in a planned trilogy by Enrique García Santo-Tomás, following on from the author's *La musa refractada. Literatura y óptica en la España del Baroco* of 2014. Like this previous book, *Signos vitales* examines the relationship between Spanish fiction – principally prose, with excursions into drama, as well as Biblical and pictorial representations and neo-Latin and vernacular humanism on the Peninsula – in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the rapid advances seen in the age in the fields of science, medicine and technology. This new study concentrates on the influence of obstetrics in fiction of the Golden Age, highlighting the presence of various manifestations of pregnancy, birth, maternity, paternity and child-rearing in the literary output of the period. The monograph consists of eight chapters, grouped into three thematic sections: 'Contextos (1500–1586)' (subdivided into 'Prácticas', 'Mediaciones' and 'Nacimientos'), 'Intervenciones (1580–1670)' (comprised of 'Dramatizaciones'

and 'Impresiones') and 'Imágenes (1613–1698)' (discussing 'Maternidades', 'Paternidades' and 'Celebraciones').

The first section of García Santo-Tomás's study contextualizes the dynamics of childbirth in Renaissance Europe, conferring a particular emphasis on the role of midwives and wet nurses in Spanish society, art and writing; these female practitioners frequently entered into conflict with the male medical establishment, a tension which characterizes their frequent – and hitherto undervalued and under-studied – appearances in the literature of the Golden Age. García Santo-Tomás is insistent in asserting the function of midwives as agents of creation in their own right, with the ability – analogous to that of a literary creator – to manipulate to either a positive or negative end the bodies and destiny of both the mother and the newborn. García Santo-Tomás notes that the predominantly male authors of Spanish fiction are among the most sympathetic listeners to midwives and wet nurses, especially in the seventeenth century, but that their sex ensures that certain lacunae still persist, not least the general absence of depictions of labour pains in literary prose, with isolated exceptions, such as Antonio Enríquez Gómez's *Vida de don Gregorio Guadaña* (1644).

In his treatment of Joan Timoneda and Lope de Rueda at the beginning of the second section of the monograph, García Santo-Tomás highlights not only the importance of midwives and wet nurses to the plots of short stories and plays, but also the function that these authors perform by laying the foundation of the portrayal of these figures in the work of later writers, where they will assume a vital metaphorical role in shaping literary creation. Representative of this tendency in the seventeenth century are Juan Pérez de Montalbán and Luis de Guevara, in whose works the theme of unknowing or inadvertent incest spawns expansive considerations on the questions of authorship and plagiarism; two of the *novelas cortas* in the former's *Sucesos y prodigios de amor* (1624) exploit this device, as do a pair of tales in the latter's *Intercadencias de la calentura de amor* (1683), with midwives once more playing a key role.

The final section of García Santo-Tomás's work presents three more extensive case studies: Miguel de Cervantes's *La señora Cornelia*, the least-explored in modern criticism of the *Novelas ejemplares* (1613), where breast milk mediates questions of both identity and artistic creation; Alonso de Salas Barbadillo's *Don Diego de noche* (1623), in which a clandestine birth in a graveyard by night shows male malpractice being set straight by female agency; and Francisco Santos's *Día y noche de Madrid* (1663), in the second *discurso* of which this urban chronicler presents the most detailed depictions of obstetrics, fertility, birth and childhood found in the literature of the second half of the century in Spain. It is in this final part of the monograph too that García Santo-Tomás draws out most explicitly the varying literary representations of Madrid and its growth and increasing squalor once the court returned to the capital after its hiatus in Valladolid in the first years of the seventeenth century; this is a further merit of this author's study, which will no doubt be of great use to scholars of short prose fiction of the Spanish Baroque. [<https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqad056>]

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