

Enrique García Santo-Tomás. *Signos vitales: procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea*. Tiempo Emulado: Historia de América y España 76. Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2020. 364 pp. ISBN: 978-84-9192-169-1

Enrique García Santo-Tomás in this new volume brings us a compact, informed, and challenging view of the role of midwives and the scientific, moralistic, and literary discourses on nurturing in early modern Spanish literature. Getting away from the beaten path of misogynist depictions of women and formulaic feminist defenses, García Santo-Tomás instead enters the very complex arena of female medical practices and its representations in the written word and painting (p. 40); to that purpose, he bases his analysis on social and medical historians in other languages and traditions. The author is not new to this type of analysis, as his followers well know; in that regard, this book comes to us from a very solid record of previous publications where the material world of consumption (milk, tobacco, chocolate, etc.), childbirth, nurturing, and private life are very present. But here, García Santo-Tomás inserts childbirth and nurturing not only in a complex and meaningful history of representations of women and their communities, but also in a series of three books dedicated to dialogues between science and literature in the Spain of the 16th and 17th centuries. *Signos vitales: procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea* (2020) is the second of the tryptic, the first being *La musa refractada: Literatura y óptica en la España del Barroco*, published in 2014 (p. 13).

Signos vitales: procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea, after the introduction, is divided into three main parts, entitled “Contextos (1500-1586),” “Intervenciones (1580-1670),” and “Imágenes” (1613/1698). It culminates with a concluding section “Ficciones médicas,” the bibliography, and an onomastic index. The bibliography is divided into three subsections. The first is concerned with historical, social, and cultural works related to childbirth, nurturing, midwifing, paternity, and writing (pp. 321-32). This bibliographical selection will serve as a steppingstone from which to build future academic debates on the topic.

In the first part of the book, “Contextos (1500-1586),” the reader enjoys a historical overview of essays on childbirth, both moralistic and scientific. Special emphasis is given to medical, social, and practical issues surrounding childbirth and caregiving of both the mother and the neonate (pp. 31-139).

The second part of the book, “Intervenciones (1580-1670),” is composed of two chapters that guide the reader through a multiplicity of literary texts, where giving birth, breastfeeding, and nurturing become the axes of a new scientific paradigm and literary aesthetic (pp. 141-206), with the addition of the topic of incest. Chapter four, with the title of “Dramatizaciones,” introduces us to a vast array of plays where giving birth, milk, and nurturing are present. Once the examples are established, García Santo-Tomás elevates the trope of parthenogenesis

to a symbolic level, to that of the process of writing and dissemination of literary works (162). In doing so, the author follows, among others, the works of Richard Khuns, who proposes a vision of writers as midwives and pimps. He also follows John Brett Mischo, who maintains that there is gender change in the central players of ideology of reproduction in the early modern period, and Herry Newman, who emphasizes how the texts became manipulated and potentially damaged by the printers, like a midwife touches, manipulates, and may damage a baby (pp. 163-65). Chapter five, "Impresiones," focuses on representations of incest and their symbolic meaning in the literary field, language, memory, and history, following previous works by Elizabeth Barnes, Zenón Luis-Martínez, and Maureen Quilligan, among others (p. 175). García Santo-Tomás, first presents a historical sketch of the topic of incest from the classics, later inserting analysis of the writing of incest in Juan Pérez de Montalván's *Sucesos y prodigios de amor en ocho novelas ejemplares* (1624), and its connections with sequels by the pen of other authors. With all of this, the author builds multiple connections between the practice of endogamic relations and systems of cultural production, between the culture of proximity and authorship, between taboo and family.

The third part, "Imágenes (1613-1672)," is composed of three chapters and deals with representations of maternity and paternity both literally and symbolically. The symbolic aspect is set in a very poetic way by evoking in the titles the topic of the three ages of humankind: infancy, youth, and old age. Chapter six, "La infancia de Cervantes" opens the triptic, followed by chapter seven "La juventud de Salas Barbadillo," and closes with the eighth chapter "La senectud de Francisco Santos." These three chapters compose a fundamental sequence of the birth, development, and decay of the *novella* in Spain. In the sixth chapter, García Santo-Tomás offers the reader a magistral reading of *La señora Cornelia*, one of the less commented pieces in the *Novelas ejemplares* by Miguel de Cervantes. The author not only provides a solid critical apparatus from pages 210 to 214, but also develops a remarkably insightful reading of the narrative interruptions and mediation in the Cornelia story that is nothing less than a story of loss and recovery of a son and heir, modeled by strangers. The baby, being "body shaped, manipulated and shared" by outsiders, can be read, according to the printing practices of the times, much as the novel itself, which was modeled, edited, mutilated, and corrupted by brokers who ended up dispossessing the author of the control of his work and the mother of her child (p. 165, 176, 232, 309, 318-19).

To conclude, I will indicate that in the last two chapters, García Santo-Tomás brings us back to very well-studied authors: the *costumbristas* Salas Barbadillo y Francisco Santos. With them, he culminates a monograph where the liaisons between medical treatises, medical practices, and different forms of producing and distributing literature in the Golden Age are numerous and in need much more attention, as this book demonstrates by focusing on midwives, incest, nurturing, fatherhood, motherhood, and childbirth. As García Santo-Tomás

reminds us, all of it is in “*mantillas*,” or “wearing a shawl.” With all certainty, his *Signos vitales: procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea* will be a steady guide for future critics thanks to his detailed bibliography (divided in three sections for the convenience of the reader and future scholar entering the terrain), his masterful footnotes, and his analysis of the multiplicity of topics and numerous authors.

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