

BOOK REVIEW

García Santo-Tomás, Enrique. *Signos vitales: Procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea.* Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2020. 364 pp., cloth.

Enrique García Santo-Tomás's monograph, *Signos vitales: Procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea*, is an interdisciplinary study of the discourse of childbirth in medical treatises and fiction from 1500 to 1698. The book analyzes the people (midwives, wetnurses, and male authorities), issues (infancy, parentage, and sexual taboos), and metaphors surrounding this topic. García Santo-Tomás positions this study as the second installment in a trilogy that investigates literature in relation to the scientific and technological context of early modern Spain.

The book's three parts span the Renaissance and Baroque: "Contextos (1500–1586)," "Intervenciones (1580–1670)," and "Imágenes (1613–1698)." The bibliography covers primary sources, the historical context, and literary studies. The author provides detailed footnotes and an index of names. Twenty-one full-color reproductions of artworks accompany the chapters. Some of the fiction writers studied include Fernando de Rojas, Francisco Delicado, Juan de Timoneda, Lope de Vega, Juan Pérez de Montalbán, Luis de Guevara, Miguel de Cervantes, Alonso Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo, and Francisco Santos.

The three chapters of part one, "Prácticas," "Mediaciones," and "Nacimientos," lay the groundwork for the study. "Prácticas" reviews the historical and pictorial background to the roles and representation of midwives within the European and Spanish contexts and the tensions between the sexes revealed therein. "Mediaciones" assesses the representation of the midwife and nursemaid in Classical and Biblical texts, as well as medieval and Renaissance Spanish fiction, including *La Celestina* and *La Lozana andaluza*. It also delves into the legal status of midwives in Spain and Spanish manuals on childbirth. Studying the midwife allows us to grasp how writers relied on the figure as a multifaceted agent, capable of representing the act of creative engendering and the tensions surrounding the family and state. "Nacimientos" covers the discussions of childbirth and women in Christian Humanists. It also turns to the fictional representation of anxieties surrounding the family in Juan de Timoneda's *Patrañuelo*. In Spain, official discourse voiced a tension surrounding women's agency as mothers and midwives, and male writers used scenes of childbirth to raise similar concerns.



Part two, "Intervenciones," explores the metaphorical role of the midwife as mediator in chapters titled "Dramatizaciones" and "Impresiones." The first of these chapters examines the midwife as intermediary within the *comedia* and how the genre discloses the preoccupations surrounding infancy and parenthood. The midwife also symbolizes how the *comedias* enter the public sphere in performance and print. "Impresiones" studies the novella collection's use of the incest taboo and the anxieties it reveals regarding legitimacy and endogamy and its metaphorical meaning that concerns language and desire in texts by Pérez de Montalbán and Luis de Guevara.

The three chapters of part three investigate specific texts: Cervantes's "La señora Cornelia," Salas Barbadillo's *Don Diego de noche*, and Santos's *Día y noche de Madrid* and *La tarasca de parto en el mesón del infierno*. In "Maternidades," the figure of the child in "La señora Cornelia" weaves together the lines of inquiry from previous chapters, such as legible bodies and the engendering of literary texts (232). In "Paternidades," Salas's *Don Diego de noche* centers on the father to address concerns surrounding men's roles in a quickly changing society (263–264). "Celebraciones" focuses on the censure of festivities in lesser-known writer Santos's novels, wherein childhood takes on a metaphorical role (289). In *La tarasca del infierno*, an allegorical multiple birth symbolizes social and political problems plaguing baroque Spain.

García Santo-Tomás concludes by offering a new critical strategy for reading early modern Spanish fiction: adopting the perspective of a midwife, “pensando en la lectura y transmisión textual como un acto mediador de índole biológica” (319), similar to reading like a telescope and like a clock, from his previous installment in the series. The novel dynamic that reading like a midwife brings to these strategies is the perspective of a woman. Throughout the monograph, García Santo-Tomás briefly acknowledges the key women writing in the field of fiction and nonfiction (Zayas, Carvajal, Oliva Sabuco de Nantes, and women’s voices in the margins of treatises). He also notes that women were the primary audience of the novella genre and that further research into how the topic of his study manifests in women-authored texts could be carried out (320), given the limitations that men faced in expressing women’s experiences (105, 315). It seems that this is a necessary next step to realize the full potential of this intriguing line of inquiry.

ORCID

AliciaR. Zuese  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8192-3832>

Alicia R. Zuese 
Department of World Languages, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, USA
 zuese@smu.edu

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