

García Santo-Tomás, Enrique. *Signos vitales. Procreación e imagen en la narrativa áurea*. Iberoamericana–Vervuert, 2020. 364 pp. ISBN: 978-3-96869-077-3.

This monograph explores representations of childbirth and medical practices such as delivery, midwifery, and breastfeeding through the lens of social and literary codes in Spanish early modernity. Enrique García Santo-Tomás engages with scientific discourses framed by medieval and Renaissance expectations of comportment,

the honor code, as well as life and death. The book is structured around three sections that connect the figure of the midwife and changing gendered practices in the medical field throughout Spain's history. Specifically, regarding obstetrics, this volume explores the staging of birth in theatrical plays, as well as representations of midwives, nascency, breast milk, and gender dynamics in literary works by Miguel de Cervantes, Alonso Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo, and Francisco Santos.

The first section, "Contextos (1500–1586)", follows a historical thread about how the traditionally female dominated field of obstetrics gradually shifted towards men's control. Fueled by commonplace suspicions regarding women's sexual weaknesses and potential corruption by witchery, increasingly complex medical jargon arose to limit communication to male medical professionals. This slowly displaced women, who commonly lacked academic education, from the obstetric practices they had hitherto been performing. García Santo-Tomás connects this shift with discourses about the powers imbued in mothers' milk, the Council of Trent's prohibitions on nudity that affected artistic representations of lactating mothers, and considerations of societal status and the ideas of honor (and dishonor) they entailed. This gendered division pushed the Spanish crown to require midwives to obtain licenses, which were issued by male doctors, thus further aggravating misogynistic interactions between these men and women. This contextual opening leads to García Santo-Tomás's interpretation of a reciprocal infusion between medicine and theology where "la teología se 'medicalizó' al tiempo que la medicina se teologizó" (81); as well as of the inquisitorial repression faced by the increasing number of medical manuals. The nation, as argued in this volume, progressed towards definitive regulations that were royally decreed in 1750 by Ferdinand VI and embodied a flourishing intersection between political ideals and biological discourses.

The second section, "Intervenciones (1580–1670)", is centered around connections between eroticism and medical care, especially as they pertain to theatrical representations. García Santo-Tomás explores the potential erotic approaches to Renaissance treatises on anatomy, which by necessity often covered the bodily needs of a woman in labor. Paired with the mystery surrounding fertility and women's connections to witchery, the fascination with reproductive acts gave way to a conception of midwives as a feminine counter ideal within a complex relationship involving theatricality, sexuality and medicine. Men's curiosity regarding childbirth, viewed at times as a form of invasive contemplation, also lead to the rise of a "metáfora del embarazo masculino" (160), which served authors to present their works as a form of literary parturition made possible by intellectual conception. This section also explores incest as a crime and sin, returning to the Council of Trent to contextualize the norms that specified, among other details, degrees of tolerance in marriages between cousins. García Santo-Tomás examines representations of incest through their coeval early modern perception as a lower rank offense, similar to adultery and *estupro* in gravity but not as damnable as sodomy or bestiality. After engaging in this discussion through the lens of endogamy, the author closes this segment by evaluating the usefulness of transgression and taboos as vehicles to both reflect on social forms and ignite narrative drives.

The third section, "Imágenes (1613–1698)", analyzes three specific works in detail: Cervantes's *La señora Cornelia*, Salas Barbadillo's *Don Diego de noche*, and San-

tos's *La tarasca de parto en el mesón del infierno*. García Santo-Tomás approaches Cervantes's *novela ejemplar* through the transformative potential of maternity as a novelization of medical care as a transnational phenomenon (227). Regarding Salas Barbadillo's work, García Santo-Tomás's study focuses on the effects of Madrid's geography on courtiers' conduct. He pays special attention to nocturnal activities and the economy of consumption in Madrid, made possible by an urban scene that Salas Barbadillo had defined in his other works as a "madre de monstruos y prodigios" (249). Love, sex, and a culture of courtly deviance in which "hasta los pechos se alquilan" (263) serve García Santo-Tomás to highlight numerous religious influences as he moves on to Santos's work, establishing connections between midwives and prostitutes surrounded by and connected to "los más viles pecados de la república" (299). Terror and pleasure are framed as intertwined in Santos's piece, one that García Santo-Tomás presents as an elastic product that allegorizes a Spain in the midst of a progressively worsening decadence.

Readers interested in representations of maternity and a historical-literary approach to the field of obstetrics will find in García Santo-Tomás's volume a compelling analysis of complex early modern Spanish representations of childbirth as a mixture of gender dynamics, anatomy, medical mysteries, and sources of suspicion and wonder. Seen under this light, the author's mission to execute on his objective to "estimular nuevas conversaciones en un campo que en ocasiones se resiste al cambio" (27) is a resounding success. With this monograph, García Santo-Tomás refines our understanding of the roles and conceptions of early modern obstetricians, while simultaneously generating neoteric connections between medicine and literature, conception and representation, that will stimulate conversations among both academics and avid readers of early modern Spanish works.

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