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Review of: Ángel Gómez Moreno, *Claves hagiográficas de la literatura española: (del Cantar de mio Cid a Cervantes)*

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Gómez Moreno, Ángel. *Claves hagiográficas de la literatura española: (del Cantar de mio Cid a Cervantes)*. Medievalia Hispanica, 11. Madrid-Frankfurt: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2008. 285 pp.

Professor Ángel Gómez Moreno, who can undoubtedly be counted among the best medievalists of his generation, has taken up the monumental challenge of writing a book that explores the crossroads of hagiography with genres such as epic, ballad, folktales, and sentimental fiction in Spain. Tackling a subject as wide as it is elusive, the conciseness of this monograph is surprising, as well as the looseness of its structure, which consists of nineteen short chapters ranging from eight to twenty one pages. The design of the book, as well as its content, clearly points to a series of little-known references and notes simmering over a long period of time, a practice that only few scholars have the patience to carry forward. This format is not detrimental to the subject but, much to the contrary, allows for a fluid reading of a piece of high scholarship.

Chapter 1 (“Hagiography: A tool for literary analysis”) offers a concise but useful bibliographical scope of essential primary and secondary sources within the Spanish sphere, from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. These references will be referred to consistently throughout the book, especially the compilations of saint’s lives that form the base of several key connections. Hagiography, as Gómez Moreno explains in his introduction, is a genre that can be embedded in a myriad of other literary forms, either as part of a longer narrative or skimmed off as selected information (i.e., the teachings of a saint, his passion, or even “compiled miracles”). The author points to the common identifications of saint/hero, saint/knight, saint/warrior, and love/pain, known topics which he further explores in later chapters, to which he adds “fame” as a concept of utmost importance, not considered up until now. As Gómez Moreno takes a broader diachronic perspective, he points out the many pagan sources of the lives of saints, diving into folktales and even fables in search of connections. He also stresses the many correspondences between the lives of saints and medieval narrative prose, where exoticism is overly present in the form of pilgrimages or explorations, and virtue and miracles are recurrent in both genres. Ángel Gómez Moreno manages to ensemble such close identifications that, at a certain point, it is hard to tell what makes hagiography a distinctive, standalone genre: a definition could have helped the reader find a way through hybridization, as would a tentative date for the decline of standalone *flores* (compilations of the lives of the saints), which is only attempted in the second-to-last chapter.

Claves hagiográficas de la literatura española traces paths back and forth, fulfilling the title's promise of isolating key issues common to hagiography and genres such as *novelas*, seventeenth century travel narrative, ballads, and folktales. Among many other topics developed in this monograph are love/pain as a form of pre-masochism; what constitutes "virtue" in saints and heroes; sacred places and objects of cult; female and child sanctity; obstacles in travel; proofs of sainthood; and "on the limits of truculence" (and organic abjection). Noteworthy is Prof. Gómez Moreno's incursion into the "aesthetics of tremendism" on chapter 17, which seems to suggest that hagiography is a source for pre-vampirism and hosts early forms of gore in written, oral, and graphic manifestations. This chapter places the lives of saints as the perfect venue for the display of vivisections and delayed sufferings of all kinds, not to mention self-inflicted pains and abject behavior of a compulsive nature. However, the author sees a clear bridge between this "poetic principle" of early modernity and the latter part of the twentieth century when, especially in film, when the display of pain became an aesthetic pursuit, if not a contest.

Also of special interest is chapter 6, which adds historiography to the pool of primary sources researched, and develops a groundbreaking idea: that the source of many historical data, such as prominent families' surnames or many events recorded as chronicles, is to be found none other than in the lives of saints. Chapter 9 also "cracks" another code by explaining that, while the Byzantine novel has been pointed out as the source of anagnorisis in Miguel de Cervantes' and sixteenth century narratives, hagiography has a larger impact that makes encounters and miss-encounters not only verisimilitude, but almost inevitable. Chapter 16 is also somewhat different, as it analyzes how the literary craft and style of medieval authors was shaped by the way the lives of saints were told. Narrative techniques and forms, as well as rhetorical devices such as prosopography, amplification, and glosses are scrutinized with a keen philological eye, while *exempla* give a clue as to why the genre subject of study was so easily transmitted. Chapter 18 takes into account the popularity of saints in a ranking format, as well as the widespread symbolic iconography, distinctive objects and task division in the case of auxiliary patrons.

Gómez Moreno makes suggestions to himself along the way for future research, which proves that this monograph is a milestone along a wider path. Among the most interesting ones is the faking, or the reverse imitation of the lives of saints, an intriguing topic pointed to in chapters 8 and 14, as well as the

exploring of connections between hagiography and history (the case of *Juana “la loca”* and other erratic behaviors), further pointing to the osmotic nature of reality and fiction. Ángel Gómez Moreno has the breath of knowledge, and the philological and cultural tools with which he has achieved yet another important landmark.

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