

reflexión sobre el papel de la mediación y sobre cómo esa mediación puede ejercerse con éxito desde los roles menos inesperados, incluso ensombreciendo los agentes mediados” (22). El capítulo siguiente estudia la obra *Don Diego de noche* de Salas Barbadillo desde el punto de vista de la lactancia como tema y metáfora de mediación. El libro concluye con un análisis de una obra del poco estudiado escritor Francisco Santos, que es interpretada como un reflejo de un momento en que el parto pasa a reflejar toda clase de tensiones sociales en una sociedad en plena decadencia.

La conclusión del libro es negativa en el sentido de que el autor reconoce que la complejidad del uso de los momentos y personas asociadas al parto como tema y metáfora creativa es demasiado rica y cambiante a los largos de estos siglos para poder plantear una línea evolutiva. Esto no quita que su productividad proteica descarte la utilidad de tenerla en cuenta como tema de estudio. En realidad, esta conclusión apunta a un problema del libro: el cubrir tantos materiales que hace de él una obra casi enciclopédica de la narrativa áurea que refleja el vasto conocimiento de su autor y sus interesantes y bien documentadas ideas sobre su desarrollo como un todo. Esta riqueza no le quita valor al libro, pero lo hace difícil de manejar. El índice de nombres citados ayuda, pero no es lo suficientemente detallado pues no incluye temas, lo que permitiría consultar los muchos pasajes que son de interés para aquellos que quieran usarlo para información específica sobre algunos de los muchos asuntos tratados. Igualmente, la riqueza y exhaustividad de las notas de pie de página y la riquísima bibliografía contribuyen a hacer de este libro más un manual *sui generis* de literatura áurea que un estudio monográfico con una tesis central. El libro es por tanto una rica mina de materiales y de lecturas novedosas de algunas obras por el que a veces resulta complejo navegar. Por ejemplo, aquellos interesados en una lectura feminista de las obras y del periodo encontrarán abundantes materiales para argumentar sus trabajos por más que esta monografía no esté concebida desde ese punto de vista a pesar del tema que trata. Igualmente, los interesados en los aspectos de la historia de la medicina tocantes a la ginecología y el parto encontrarán cantidad de materiales de interés en el libro.

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Gernert, Folke. *Lecturas del cuerpo. Fisiognomía y literatura en la España áurea*. Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2018. 571 pp.

As readers, we learn early that a character’s physical description is shorthand for her disposition. Eyes set wide or close, nose aquiline or bulbous, forehead low or high; by these signs, authors encode temperament and often adumbrate destiny. Literary characterization is, as such, applied physiognomy.

Physiognomy is the system by which we organize beliefs about the legibility of the body: it presupposes that physical variations are signs. Both literary characterization and physiognomy entail a system of naturalized signs and conventions; both cause uneasiness because they historically suggest that physical features, often racialized—“swarthy” or “fair”—might be an index of fitness and virtue. However, there had always been, in my own mind, a difference between characterization

and physiognomy: conventionalized physical description in literature could encode abhorrent values but was fundamentally redeemable; physiognomy, on the other hand, was a destructive pseudoscience whose last gasp was eugenics. As comforting as I found that distinction, literature and physiognomy are not quite so easily parsed, as Folke Gernert demonstrates in her invaluable new study of physiognomy and literature.

At the heart of the book is the history of a paradox: that physiognomy has been both nearly ubiquitous and partly esoteric for millennia, enduring if always slightly dubious. Physiognomy endures, Gernert shows, to the current century; scientists continue to hypothesize—and perhaps, as a consequence, to find—that physical features, such as the ratio of the height to the width of a face, might predict anti-social behavior. These sorts of studies are objectionable while simultaneously adorned in trappings of science. That uncomfortable simultaneity is a feature of physiognomy's history: sifting apart licit from illicit interpretations of physical signs has always been part of the thorny debates that surround physiognomy.

It is precisely the permeable boundary between the social acceptability and rejection of physiognomy that Gernert traces over five centuries. The book is learned, exhaustively documented, and marvelously useful. *Lecturas del cuerpo* will be the standard point of departure for literary scholars who seek to understand the histories of physiognomy, chiromancy (palm reading), and metoposcopy (interpretation of the lines on the forehead), as well as the literary representation of these practices.

The first two sections, roughly half of the book, are dedicated to the history of physiognomy and an analysis of its diffusion and social acceptance. Chiromancy and metoposcopy were generally divinatory; physiognomy (called variously *fisiognomía*, *fisonomía*, *fisionomía*, *filosomía*) helped to discern temperament. As a tool of what came to be known as differential psychology, physiognomy (unlike chiromancy) enjoyed wide acceptance from the thirteenth century to the eighteenth. Gernert skillfully distills the history of physiognomy from antiquity, including works spuriously attributed to Aristotle, through the 1660s. These sections will be immensely useful to anyone who wants to understand the status of knowledge practices and disciplines during the medieval and early modern periods.

The history of physiognomy is, like physiognomy itself, full of signs at once familiar and difficult to interpret. The case of the Neapolitan physiognomer and natural historian, Giambattista Della Porta, indicates why. Seen from one angle, Della Porta is the picture of orthodoxy: he dedicates a book to his king, Philip II; he is admitted to a prestigious academy, the Lincei; in 1608 the Vatican's Apostolic Camera publishes his *De destillatione*, a book that features not only laudatory poems in languages from Armenian to Old Church Slavonic but also a portrait of Della Porta that alludes to his renown as a physiognomer. In Gernert's telling, on the other hand, Della Porta struggles to find social acceptance and is hounded by Rome until 1610. Readers will find Gernert open to these various perspectives, even as her history attempts to establish a clear narrative. The plural of Gernert's title—*Lecturas*—should be taken very seriously; physiognomy and its proponents

are never fully vindicated nor entirely denounced. It is a field of knowledge, Gernert shows, being constantly repositioned.

The second half of the book is dedicated to literature and physiognomy, from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, with particular attention paid to chivalric novels, the picaresque, the *comedia*, and Cervantes. Gernert is interested primarily in the ways in which physiognomy is represented (“textualización de la fisiognomía”), which puts literature in the position of being reactive to a phenomenon that antecedes it, rather than acting on or shaping the development of a contemporaneous semiotic system. Readers will find a marvelous treasury of literary references to physiognomy and even more broadly to esoteric subjects. The secondary bibliography seems to me to cover the last century of literary criticism and historiography comprehensively. Gernert writes the kinds of engrossing footnotes that will launch dissertations. What influenced Quevedo’s skepticism toward esotericism? What was the extent of Calderón’s knowledge of the occult? How were women’s ways of knowing coded as heterodox? I found social circles and shared passions taking shape before my eyes: Pérez de Montalbán citing Juan Quiñones de Benavente whose dear friend was Jerónimo Gómez de la Huerta, who was praised by Lope de Vega, who was, in turn, Pérez de Montalbán’s mentor, and so on. The author gives us a sense of social milieu, in addition to a history of textual representation.

Gernert takes paradigmatic instances of misreading and resignification as an invitation to analyze similar phenomena in other works. For example, in *La Celestina*, belief in legibility of the body is a weakness to exploit; Celestina knows that men often train their gaze on only one sign—the intactness of the hymen—and that patriarchy can be subverted by rewriting the body as virginal. The major contribution of the second half of Gernert’s book is to treat Celestina’s wily rewritings and men’s patriarchal illiteracy as an invitation to closer reading. Reading canonical and unfamiliar works through Gernert’s eyes, we are trained to identify the textual tradition of physiognomy alluded to in literary representations, in addition to the broader literary treatment of esoteric and occult forms of knowing. Many of the chapters contain compelling conclusions, such as the observation that chiromancy and other divinatory practices are more common in picaresque novels that feature female protagonists (and nearly absent in books about *pícaros*). The gendering of esoteric forms of knowledge indicates a broader strategy to characterize women as superstitious or gullible. The book’s erudition justifies even more extensive conclusions about the effect of literature on physiognomy.

Panoramic in its vision of the Spanish-language literatures of the medieval and early modern Iberian Peninsula, exhaustive in its bibliographic sweep, and written straightforwardly, *Lecturas del cuerpo* reorganizes physiognomy and Spanish literature as a field of scholarly attention. Gernert has set a high bar for future studies of the literary representation of esoteric knowledge practices.