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*Models in Medieval Iberian Literature and Their Modern
Reflections: Convivencia as Structural, Cultural, and Sexual
Ideal (review)*

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McInnis, Judy B., Ed. *Models in Medieval Iberian Literature and Their Modern Reflections: Convivencia as Structural, Cultural, and Sexual Ideal*. Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2002. lvii + 377 pp. ISBN 1-58871-009-2

Models in Medieval Iberian Literature and Their Modern Reflections is a compilation of articles selected from papers originally presented at two conferences in 1998, and published as an homage volume for the late Juan Espadas. The editor presents this seemingly disparate collection as unified by the concept of *convivencia*, a notion that has usually been applied to the phenomenon of cultural tolerance in medieval Iberia, where communities of Muslims, Jews and Christians co-existed. While *convivencia* is said to have come to an end after the historical events at the end of the fifteenth century to favor the construction of a national identity based on religious unity in Christianity, in this book the traditional use of the term is enriched and its scope amplified. As Judy McInnis explains: "one might say that while it [*convivencia*] ceased in relation to cultural minorities, it has existed universally in the necessary co-existence of men and women. ... [The latter formed] a subjugated population within a dominant phallogocentric structure" (xi).

In this sense, the term *convivencia* articulated in this volume equates notions of ethnic or religious difference with that of gender difference in the study of the economies of power in Iberian societies. Explained this way, *convivencia* ceases to be a concept exclusive for the study of the Hispanic ethnic diversity of the Middle Ages and is stretched to reach forward not only to describe gender interaction, but also to illustrate the political and cultural complexity of present day Spain. This last treatment, the one that links past and present, finds its way into the collection by offering the study of several cases of modern and contemporary Spanish writers who delve into Spain's medieval past to explain their current anxieties.

The book is divided in three sections. The first, "Models in Iberian Medieval Literature", contains articles that focus primarily on medieval female centered literature.

John E. Keller's "The Blessed Virgin as a Patron of the Arts and Letters" briefly describes the plot of five of the *Cantigas de Santa María* where Mary is presented as a protector of poets who celebrated her. José L. Freire's "The *Cantigas de Santa María*: Social Perception and Literary Portrayal of Jews and Muslims and Historical Reality" reviews the extant scholarship on the topic followed by a brief historical analysis of the social roles of Muslims and Jews

in medieval Spain. Freire also includes an Appendix with an annotated bibliography of works on the Jewish and Muslim presence in the *Cantigas*.

Anthony J. Cárdenas's "The Theophilus Legend in Prose, Poetry, and Miniatures of the *Códice Rico* of Alfonso X: Compacting with Hell and Closing the Devil's Gate" examines the differences between the visual and textual versions of the Theophilus legend that are presented in the Cantiga 3. These are its poetic and pictorial forms, plus the variant reading in the marginal prosification in Castilian, which include the novel and original character of Theophilus's wife as an active agent for the sinner's repentance.

Another instance of a woman as a religious model, apart from those that appear in the *Cantigas*, is presented in Roxana Recio's "Mary Magdalene in Medieval Catalan Literature", which examines the depiction of an assertive Mary Magdalene through whose story the spiritual practice of the *devotio moderna* was introduced to Catalan readers.

Models of feminine behavior are explained in Antonio Torres Alcalá's "The Maiden and the Sea: Old Galician Lyrics" in which the author classifies Galician *cantigas de amigo* according to their structure. Then he examines the female voice of the maiden in these poems which, he argues, explore a female psyche which relates better to nature and emotions than the male psyche. Another model of feminine behavior is underlined in "What Women Heard in Medieval Spanish Tales", where Nydia Rivera Gloeckner offers a commentary on *El Conde Lucanor's* pedagogical depiction of married women.

Models of creative women are represented in Clara Estow's "Leonor López de Córdoba, A Case for Writing Women", and Sarah E. Owens "Medieval Women and Their Letters". Estow advocates for the study of Leonor López de Córdoba's memoirs in the light of her notorious historical character. She argues that the purely formal study of the isolated text limits its value, which focuses mainly in the author's will to find her way in a male dominated society. For her part, Owens presents examples of medieval European and Castilian women connected by their choice of the epistolary genre which allowed them a voice, if private, that could bypass the restrictions imposed by their patriarchal society.

Finally, David Quinn's "Models in Berceo and Beyond" presents Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* as a narratological model for writers traditionally associated with the *Generación de 1998*.

Part II, "From Medieval to Modern: Chivalric Models", contains two articles. "*Cárcel de amor (Prison of Love)* in 1492 and 1996: A Comparison of the Novels of Diego de San Pedro and Luis Racionero", by Judy McInnis, is relevant for the collection in that it compares two powerful female characters as models of conduct among nobility in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: *Cárcel's* Laureola, compared to queen Isabel la Católica, and Lucrecia Borgia. The other article in this section, "From the 'pexe rey' to the Rich Fisher King: Arthurian Matter and Chivalric Ideal in the *Victorial*", by Cristina Guardiola, does not fit as comfortably with the cohesive principle of the collection as suggested McInnis's introduction.

Part III, "Some Reflections of Medieval Models in Late 18th Through Late 20th Century Hispanic Literature", contains studies on modern and

contemporary re-workings of medieval characters and events. With the struggles between Christians and Moors in the background, the authors study examples of historical drama and novel in order to explain or shape the perception of modern events and identities. The eighteenth-century treatment of the figure of Asturian king Pelayo, credited with starting the Christian Reconquest of Muslim occupied Spain, is presented in "Pelayo and his Sister: The Making of a Hero in the Neoclassic Tragedy", by Alexander Roselló Selimov. Juan Espadas' paper "The Spanish Civil War and the Middle Ages in Angelina Muñiz Huberman's *La Guerra del unicornio*", prepared for publication by McInnis, discusses Huberman's medieval novel as a *roman à clef* that comments on the events of the twentieth century. "The Truths Hidden behind the Historical Truth in Two Novels by Fulgencio Argüelles and Luis Racionero", by Juan Cruz Mendizábal, explores the treatment of ninth-century Asturian king Ramiro I. In "*En el último azul (In the Ultimate Blue)*" by Carme Riera: Memory's Future and the History of the Spanish Jews", Reyes Coll-Tellechea flies through the history of the Spanish Jews to arrive at the account of the Chuetas' experience, the last of the Majorcan Jews. This historical summary compares it to the plot of Riera's novel, which narrates the Chuetas' persecution in the late seventeenth-century Balearic island of Majorca.

This third part ends with a working bibliography of twentieth-century Spanish, Latin American and US Latino Literature dealing with medieval themes and settings whose latest entries were published in the year 2000.

The three parts described above are preceded by the Editor's lengthy Introduction, which offers a very useful and thorough review of the last scholarly approaches to the issue of gender and ethnic co-existence in the early Iberian culture plus a preview of the articles that follow. This introductory essay explains the articles' relevance for the collection, something for which this reader is grateful, since it is at times difficult to understand the rationale for the inclusion of some of these studies within the same volume. The stretch to which the notion of *convivencia* is subjected so that all these works can be grouped together is already apparent in the book's long title. Without any doubt, it is the first part of the book that is of more interest to medievalists, although some of the articles rely too much on a merely descriptive approach that will offer little to the expert in the topics treated.

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