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Arts and Poetry

(Jaquero-Esparcia, Alejandro: *Poesía con fines didácticos sobre las artes. Génesis y recepción en la España de la Modernidad* [*Didactic Poetry about the Arts. Genesis and Reception in Early Modern Spain*]. Murcia: Editum Artes, 2019, 301 p.)

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Since ancient times, the interrelation between arts and poetry has become one of the most fruitful topics in Western culture, and it had a particularly relevant implication during the Early Modern Period. Horace's motif of *ut pictura poesis* has served as a source of influence for both painters and authors for centuries, being the decades of the 17th and 18th centuries some of the key moments in its reception.

The recent publication achieved by the young Spanish scholar Alejandro Jaquero-Esparcia *Poesía con fines didácticos sobre las artes. Génesis y recepción en la España de la Modernidad* needs to be considered a milestone within the discussion of this influential and significant topic. It has come as the result of a research developed through years of archive analysis and artistic and literary pieces evaluation. The fact that it has been edited by Editum Artes (belonging to the Universidad de Murcia) acknowledges the value of the book, for this academic publisher has become one of the most prominent in the Spanish speaking world. As the title suggests, the monograph deals the evolution of the concept of didactic poetry during the Early Modern Era, having its climax during the 18th century with the production of Diego Antonio Rejón de Silva (1754-1796). In order to reach this point, Jaquero-Esparcia offers an extensive overview of the evolution of the genre in Europe since the late Middle Ages, where the first poems of this kind were originated, and through the moments of the Renaissance and the Baroque.

Along these chapters, Alejandro Jaquero-Esparcia analyzes aspects such as the transition from the Medieval handbook to the modern, professional didactic poem, how painters selected some of these ideas to be represented in their *oeuvres*, or how they fought to be considered as artists (liberal professionals) and not as artisans. These debates, along with some others, populate the pages of the book here reviewed, and they are presented as the core of the Modern artistic ideology, which culminated with the assistance

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of the Enlightenment and the introduction of European intellectualism in the production of Spanish artists and theorists.

This is the long process that leads to what can be considered the central part of *Poesía con fines didácticos sobre las artes. Génesis y recepción en la España de la Modernidad*: the chapter in which the author explores the works of both the mentioned Diego Antonio Rejón de Silva and of Juan Moreno de Tejada (1739-1805), a prominent Spanish poet and engraver during the last decades of the 18th century. As the author states at the beginning of this section: “Se buscará la superación de las ideas barrocas por medio de un restablecimiento de los ideales generados durante el Renacimiento, pero auspiciados en un nuevo espíritu de progreso científico y una fe inalterable en el legado grecorromano” (187).¹

As it had happened with the previous sections, Jaquero-Esparcia starts this central one dealing with the 18th century by offering the general contexts into which he is going to disclose his ideas. This ambitious task is achieved by the representation of other European authors and artists who were also dealing with the interrelations of “the sister arts,” and who, sometimes, had a strong influence in the later development of enlightened ideas in Spain. For instance, names like Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670-1742), Charles Batteux (1713-1780), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), or Edmund Burke (1729-1797), are included and their works on Aesthetics discussed. These inclusions prove how Alejandro Jaquero-Esparcia has conducted a thorough research, exploring many different sources which sometimes are not easily accessed due to their antiquity, location, or lack of modern editions. This introduction is closed with the inclusion of other names that worked halfway between the Enlightenment and the Romanticism (i.e. Count Leopoldo Cicognara -1767-1834-).

The second part of the section finally focuses on Spain the the concept of Aesthetics and didactic poetry produced there during the 18th century. To do that, the author begins by discussion one of the most influential changes that the spirit of the Enlightenment meant for Spain: the creation of the Royal Academies, specially the creation of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando [Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando] (1752), where the artists received academic and professional education, and where some of the most interesting and heated debates on Aesthetics were held. Interestingly enough, this particular fact has not received as much attention as it could be expected, so a deeper research is still needed, something that the author aims to pursue in the future.

The role played by this Academy is crucial, because both Rejón de Silva and Moreno de Tejada were, to some extent, disciples of what was taught and discussed there, and they were also the inheritors of the aesthetic ideas that were postulated as “valid” and of how they evolved during the century.

These ideas would later have a reflection in the didactic poems these painters and poets wrote during the second half of the century. The final pages of this section are devoted to the evaluation of these poems, on painting Rejón de Silva's and on engraving Moreno de Tejada's. These pages, in consequence, mean an outstanding exercise of multidisciplinary, for Jaquero-Esparcia has to control both artistic and philological ideas and concepts.

In summary, the importance of *Poesía con fines didácticos sobre las artes. Génesis y recepción en la España de la Modernidad* lies on different issues, but one of the central ones is the exploration of how the Spanish 18th century supposed the culmination of a centuries-long process in the understanding and valuing of Arts, didactic poetry, and the interrelation of both. Jaquero-Esparcia's analysis constitutes a landmark in a non-easy process that, often, scares Art Historians to different issues, but which is absolutely crucial for a complete comprehension of what Arts are in general and of what History of Art should be as an academic discipline.

Notes

¹ Artists will search for a surpass of the Baroque ideas by reestablishing the ideals that had been generated during the Renaissance. However, this would be supported by the new atmosphere of scientific progress and an unswerving faith in the Classical past.