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# Ramón Menéndez Pidal: The Practice and Politics of Philology in Twentieth Century Spain by Steven Hess (review)

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## Linguistics, Language, and Media

**Hess, Steven.** *Ramón Menéndez Pidal: The Practice and Politics of Philology in Twentieth Century Spain*. Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2014. Pp. 385. ISBN 978-1-58871-252-3.

Few people's scholarship can be said to have influenced the development of historical, literary and cultural discourses in and about the Hispanic world as much as Spanish philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal's (1869–1968). Unsurprisingly enough, his life and work have already merited a large number of studies, including several biographies. One may therefore feel justified in thinking that one more such biography would be one too many. Steven Hess's monograph on Menéndez Pidal's life, however, is far from a redundant book. Based on the philologist's personal papers, as well as on original archival material from his close professional and familial circle, newspaper sources and Hess's extensive knowledge of Menéndez Pidal's work, this study places the philologist's life and research within the larger political, cultural and intellectual background of Spain between the late 1800s and the 1960s.

*Ramón Menéndez Pidal: The Practice and Politics of Philology in Twentieth Century Spain* is structured as follows: chapter 1 offers a general biography of Menéndez Pidal and a chronological overview of the progression of his scholarship. Chapter 2 treats Menéndez Pidal's contributions to the field of Romance Linguistics, where he successfully applied the philological methods developed in nineteenth-century France and Germany to the analysis of the history of the Peninsular Romance dialects. Chapter 3 presents an overview of Menéndez Pidal's activity in the field of medieval Castilian literature, which included a plethora of editions and studies on Castilian epic poetry, lyrical poetry and traditional ballads (*romances*). Chapter 4 focuses on Menéndez Pidal's multifaceted work as a historiographer of medieval and early modern Spain, whose studies were to influence both academic and popular constructions of the Iberian Middle Ages for decades. Chapter 5 analyzes Menéndez Pidal's contribution to the study of early modern Spanish literature and his place within the literary establishment in twentieth-century Spain, and chapter 6 studies his role as the founder of linguistics in Spain as an academic discipline and as the mentor of several successive generations of philologists and dialectologists whose activities eventually encompassed Spain, Latin America and the United States.

As mentioned above, Hess's study is more than just another biography on Menéndez Pidal. It is, first and foremost, an examination of the construction of official discourses on history, language and culture during the medievalist's time. Hess eloquently presents the role of Menéndez Pidal as that of a cultural catalyst, whose position at the head of several prestigious academic institutions and his prolific production in multiple areas allowed him to exert key influence on the shaping of academic discourses on the history of Castile and Spain. Menéndez Pidal's political allegiances and his communication with official power are also discussed at large, and the author paints a well-balanced portrait of him as a moderate in a politically and socially turbulent environment—a non-militant Catholic and a political conservative with liberal tendencies, whose moderation, ironically, was often derided publicly in the form of accusations of partisanism coming from both sides of the political spectrum. His place within the larger currents of thought and intellectual groups in Spain is also assessed, especially in connection to the authors and thinkers of the Generation of 98, whose vision of Castile as the cultural and spiritual center of the Spanish nation he wholeheartedly shared. Another praiseworthy aspect of this study is the carefulness and meticulousness with which Hess frames every study by Menéndez Pidal within its respective discipline, as well as within the medievalist's own body of work. All references are adequately introduced and efficiently deployed in order to shed light on the particular details of Menéndez Pidal's life and work, and the historical events surrounding them. The style is clear and concise. All of these features result in a volume that is both extraordinarily informative and easy to read. The reader will find this study to be a phenomenal refresher not

only on Menéndez Pidal's scholarship, but also on the political and intellectual history of Spain over almost a whole century.

Although the author has succeeded in producing an information-rich and superbly documented study, the editorial quality of this volume is unfortunately not on a par with the quality of its content. This reviewer was quite surprised by the large number of misspellings and other editorial lapses contained in this book. There are multiple cases of missing letters: for instance, "it as then that" (14) instead of 'it was then that'; "Catáogo" (94) for 'Catálogo'; and "neotradiconalismo" (134) for 'neotradicionalismo.' Some words and names are misspelled: for example, "Améncó" for Américo (139); "Bodlian" for Bodleian (179); "cantilères" (189) for cantilènes; and "Candar" (204) for Cantar. Errors sometimes result in incongruous readings. For instance, "Menéndez Pidal's early of a view of the role of Castilian" (85) for 'Menéndez Pidal's early view of the role of Castilian' and "to the degree that is became" (141) for 'to the degree that it became.' One can also see blended cognates between Spanish and English: for example, "subjugante" (206) for 'subyugante/subjugating'; and "tradición" and "innovación" (233) for 'tradición/tradition' and 'innovación/innovation.' Occasionally, punctuation and capitalization are overlooked. For instance, "sharply defined philological parameters Yet behind all this" (191) and "de este sueño anestético. prefiere, en cambio" (196). Spanish and English spellings for place names are sometimes used alternatively, as in both "Aragón" and "Aragon" (212). Some style-sheet choices are also perplexing. For instance, quotes from sources in Spanish are presented either in both English and Spanish or only in their English translation throughout the book, without any apparent steady criterion behind this choice. Although it is understandable that a monograph of this length may include a few editorial lapses, the number of such inconsistencies in this volume is far beyond what one would expect from an academic edition. It seems fair to attribute most of these issues to a lack of adequate editorial overseeing rather than to carelessness on the part of the author, and it is unfortunate that such issues were not corrected by the publisher before the volume went to the press.

These editorial oversights notwithstanding, this volume is a remarkable contribution to the understanding of Menéndez Pidal's work and his place in the development of historical and academic discourses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spain. Methodologically, it serves as an example of solid documentation and exhaustive use of archival materials. Content-wise, there is much in this book that will appeal to a wide audience within Hispanic studies, especially to students and researchers of Spanish history, peninsular dialectology and medieval and early modern literature. The author deserves to be congratulated.

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**Navarro, Federico, coord.** *Manual de escritura para carreras de humanidades*. Buenos Aires: U de Buenos Aires, 2014. Pp. 354. ISBN 978-987-3617-25-6.

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¿Cuáles son las secciones de una monografía? ¿Es distinto leer en historia y en filosofía?  
¿Cómo se prepara un examen final oral? ¿En qué se parece una reseña estudiantil a una  
experta? ¿Cuál es la diferencia entre describir, comparar y justificar? ¿Cómo se discute con  
las fuentes? ¿Qué enseñan, solicitan y corrigen los docentes? ¿Cómo se planifica la respuesta  
a un parcial?

The above sampling of questions taken from the back cover of the *Manual de escritura para carreras de humanidades* addresses only a handful of the important topics in this recent