
Original Article

Valencia's miraculous prophet: The Inquisition dossier of Catalina Muñoz (1588)

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Abstract Preserved in the archives of the National Historic Archive in Madrid, the life story of Catalina Muñoz uncovers the ways in which she, as a triply marginalized subject – black, woman, and slave – obtained power and social clout by capitalizing on the fame she acquired because of her role as spiritual advisor and healer to the Valencian religious community of Sanct Martín Church. This essay positions Catalina as an astute agent and spiritual advisor who navigated with savvy the intricacies of Valencia's sixteenth-century religious elite. In doing so, the article aims to re-assign and parse Catalina's agency as a prophet. It is through the caveat of prophecy where Catalina obtains her power and position by capitalizing on the fame – often referred to as 'escándolo' ['scandal'] – she acquired as a spiritual advisor and healer to the Valencian religious communities.

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Catalina Muñoz was not an important personage in the reign of Felipe II. Nevertheless, she did achieve some notoriety in her lifetime, as a healer and prophet. The Holy Office's court secretary identified Catalina as '[la] sclava que fue de Ger^{mo} Muñoz, ymaginario, de color negra vezina de Valencia' ['the slave who belonged to Jerónimo Muñoz, astrologer and sculptor of images; a black woman and resident of Valencia'] (Archivo Histórico Nacional [AHN], 1588c, fol. 100v).¹ The court notary, Josephe Bellet, confirmed Catalina to be 45 years old

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.



at the time of her arraignment and to have already acquired her manumission. The most likely means by which a black African slave could have acquired her freedom was by: first, buying it; second, being voluntarily freed by the slave master; or, third, the master dying. Since Catalina's master died in 1592, I surmise she obtained her freedom either by purchasing it or by Jerónimo's freeing her before his death, each of which I link to her fame in Valencia as a healer, seer, and prophet figure.

This 'Prophetic Futures' special issue is so necessary and timely because it allows for the categories of race and gender to be taken seriously as critical approaches in the analysis of Catalina's subversion of empowering and healing others via Catholic rites of healing traditionally designated for men. This essay aims to re-assign and parse Catalina's agency as a prophet. I both understand and situate Catalina's skill as a prophet to function as an extension of her Inquisition dossier's language framing her as a healer and seer. It is through the caveat of prophecy (as I frame it by Catalina's visionary acts as a healer and seer) where Catalina obtains her power and position by capitalizing on the fame – often referred to as 'escándolo' ['scandal'] – she acquired as a spiritual advisor and healer to the Valencian religious community of Sanct Martín Church. Evoking a black feministic theoretical perspective, I contend that Catalina and her practices are *not* exceptions to the way in which her blackness undergirds the ideological implications of indecency and scandal. Across space and time, black women have always fashioned their complex identities, subject positions, and voices to contest patriarchal authority, and their gender *cannot* be disconnected from their blackness. Catalina shines as one of many examples of African-descended women, across the early modern Ibero-Atlantic world, who utilized her intellect and wit to improve her lot in society as a former slave.

To build upon my conceptualization of Catalina Muñoz as a prophet figure in this study, I situate her perceived 'scandalous' presence within the literary representation and tradition of Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina* (Burgos, 1499). Catalina's embodiment of the *alcabueta* figure manifests in her dossier when she heals the sick, ends men's adulterous relationships with their concubines, and defies the Catholic Church's patriarchal dominion by reciting masses for her clients. Ultimately, in my reading of Catalina's performance as a prophet, via her spiritual work and activity as an *alcabueta*, I underscore the words 'service' and 'client' throughout her trial record because these terms highlight the prophet-like as well as transactional nature of her in late sixteenth-century Valencia.

Catalina's dossier frames her biographical information around her slave master, Jerónimo Muñoz, and he had a long-lasting influence on her profile as a prophet, or so-called sorceress, in the eyes of the Inquisition of Valencia. I argue that Catalina's spiritual activities as a healer and seer are not mutually exclusive from her close proximity to and interactions with her slave owner's life and career, most notably his role as judiciary astrologer to Felipe II and his prediction of the Tycho Brahe Supernova in 1572.² Historians Benjamin Ehlers

2 Benjamin Ehlers urges against taking at face value the Jerónimo's influence on Catalina via his prediction of a supernova in 1572. See Ehlers (1997), 101–16.

and Ricardo García Cárcel inform us that Jerónimo ‘carried out his teaching duties in Valencia until his late sixties, receiving a salary of 150 *libras* a year, more than necessary to buy a slave’ (Ehlers, 1997, 102). In 1578, Jerónimo moved to the University of Salamanca where he held the endowed chair, or *cátedra*, of mathematics, astrology, and astronomy. Víctor Navarro Brotóns explains that, in 1582, Jerónimo received a salary of 100 *libras* per class taught, plus an additional 50 *libras* for moving expenses from Valencia to Salamanca.³

³ See Ehlers (1997, 102); Muñoz (1981 [1573], 21–3); García Cárcel (1979, 255).

The word *imaginario* is one of the first words used in the title of Catalina’s deposition and serves a central role in helping us define the fluidly inspirational relationship between Jerónimo and Catalina. The lexicographer Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco, in his dictionary *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611), associates *imaginario* with images and imaginary figures formed in heaven by constellations. Covarrubias’s thinking behind the term allows us to see a nexus between the astrological/spiritual activities of Catalina and her master. Especially taking pieced-together descriptive clues from the trial record, it is plausible to imagine the house where Catalina lived and worked. It transforms into a site that would possibly encourage and inspire her ability to imagine things and have visions. So, in relation to Catalina’s visions, I view them as influenced by her master’s scholastic profession as an astrologer and mathematician who sculpted and created images. In many ways, Catalina’s position in the Muñoz household reflects the historical terrain of early modern Iberia where black Africans –both enslaved and free– worked as apprentices in workshops and under their masters or patrons. And further, since black women were excluded from most officially recognized paid jobs, it is even more necessary for us to read Catalina’s relationship with Jerónimo as a kind of apprenticeship before *and* after her manumission. Given the rich variety of semantic registers that the word *imaginario* captures, I further liken it to the various iterations of Catalina’s ‘in-betweenness’ as an *alcabueta*.

On Sunday 19 June 1588, a date that both encapsulates and recounts Catalina’s spiritual activity, the Inquisitors of Valencia, Spain, Don Pedro Girón, Don Pedro Pacheco, and Doctor Frexal, found Catalina guilty of heresy and having a *pacto diabólico* [pact with the Devil]. On this date, the public sentence transformed the cathedral at *La plaza de Seu* and the streets of Valencia into a theatrical locale, in which a state institution of formidable influence in society could display its notorious ‘pedagogy of fear’ (Bennassar, 1981, 94–125, esp. 94–95). Catalina’s crime was publicly decried as an intolerable assault on the Catholic faith: ‘[Catalina] con poco temor de Dios, Nuestro Señor, y en grande escándolo de ser herege y sentir mal [disentir] de las cosas de nuestra santa fee y tener pacto con el demonio’ [‘Catalina feared little God and Our Lord (Jesus). As a heretic, she stirred up a huge scandal and dissented against the things that represent our holy faith’]. She has a pact with the Devil (AHN, 1588c, fol. 100v). In retaliation, Catalina’s body served to stage a violent and abject spectacle: the inquisitors sent her to the scaffold, a high and magnificent



wooden structure strategically positioned for all to see. Upon delivery of her trial's verdict, she was gagged by the mouth, holding a candle in each hand, and received 100 lashes. Although not of primary focus in this present study, I find it worth relating that the Inquisition of Valencia sentenced Catalina for a second time on 30 June 1602 for 'diversas hechizerías' ['many kinds of sorcerous acts'], where she was involved in the jewel robbery of the Marchioness of Denia during the royal wedding festivities of Felipe III (AHN, 1600–02). With the recruited assistance of 14-year-old Ángela Piedrola, Catalina was called in to locate the missing jewels. Catalina passed away on 16 March 1603 in her sixties.

Muñoz established a personal and public relationship with God and the saints. Before her trial in 1588, Saints Francis, Domingus, Sebastian, Vicente Ferrer, Michael the Archangel, and Lady Magdalene appeared to Catalina in holy visions. Walking through the streets of Valencia, she displayed the wounds and crown of thorns of the Passion of Our Lord. As a healer, she healed the infirm and returned straying lovers to their partners from concubines by breaking illicit relationships with her prayers. Muñoz's trial record states that she 'atrajo un público de muchas gente [que] ocurrían a ella pidiendo les anunciase cosas ocultas y secretas que se deseavan saber' ['amassed a large clientele who ran after her, begging her to reveal occult and secret things that they desired to know'] (AHN, 1588c, fol. 100v–101r). According to those who confessed against Catalina, she also had 'diabolic,' or malevolent, visions in which she spoke to enchanted Moors and a demon named Lucifer. While in the house, Catalina 'havía visto una visión con cuernos y cola larga en figura de hombre y pelo como de gato. Y le dixo que por qué no le dava crédito' ['had a vision of a man with horns, a long tail, and cat fur. He told her why he didn't believe her'] (AHN, 1588c, fol. 100v). As established by the Holy Office of the Inquisition of Valencia, Catalina's fame and fascinating life are credited to her ability to attract a crowd of followers, who confided in Muñoz to announce secret aspects about their lives. But unfortunately, the very same people for whom Catalina provided her spiritual services, from her parish at Sanct Martín Church, condemned and reported her to the Inquisition's tribunal.

What I find compelling about Catalina's dossier and its discussion of her spiritual activity as a prophet in sixteenth-century Valencia is that it reveals an image of her as a black woman who worked to improve her social standing through the powers of divination – whether we believe them to be true or not. Between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, most blacks living in the Iberian Peninsula were slaves. They contributed to early modern Hispanic imperial expansion by serving as cartographers on long-distance transatlantic voyages, building urban infrastructure, and producing crops and material goods. Writing on sub-Saharan African slavery in Valencia, historian Debra Blumenthal remarks that 'it is fair to say that black Africans were a conspicuous minority of the city of Valencia's overall population – according to varied estimates, numbering some 70,000 inhabitants. However, it would seem that they comprised a considerably

more significant portion of the city's slave population' (Blumenthal, 2005, 229). In her notarial research, Blumenthal adds, 'by the latter half of the fifteenth century, black Africans constituted at least 40% of the slaves purchased and sold both in public auctions and private sales between households' (Blumenthal, 2005, 229).⁴ Around the time in which Catalina Muñoz lived, Vicente Graullera Sanz in *La esclavitud en Valencia* explains that a slave would cost some 20 *libras* between 1570 and 1580.⁵ And among slave owners in sixteenth-century Valencia, all professions were represented, ranging from bakers, to farmers, to shepherds.

In early modern Spain, women of African descent earned their living working as sorceresses – making love filters, finding lost objects, and curing illnesses with herbal remedies.⁶ Like Catalina Muñoz, a good portion of them were tried and condemned by the Spanish Inquisition, although witch hunts, torture, and terrorizing were not as extreme in Spain (except for isolated cases in Asturias, Basque Country, and Galicia) as in Northern Europe.⁷ Racially gendered as a black African, female slave – who later acquired her freedom – Catalina's labor was primarily relegated to the domestic space of her master's home. And it is within the confines of Jerónimo's home where I situate Catalina's labor as codified in her spiritual work as a prophet. To that effect, this essay departs from Benjamin Ehlers's study on Catalina's trial, 'La esclava y el patriarca' ['the slave and the patriarch'], that privileges a binarized reading of Catalina's relationship to her master, his home, and his scholarly profession as an astrologer and a mathematician at the Universities of Salamanca and Valencia.

Catalina's story must be retold. I emphasize her racially gendered position as a black woman, for accounts like hers, on the one hand, give evidence to the strong presence of African-descended women in early modern Spain, and, on the other hand, reveal Iberian black women's non-passive role in Counter-Reformation Spain. As a meticulous record keeper, the Spanish Inquisition catalogued the cultural practices and spiritual activities of women belonging to all ethnic backgrounds, ranging from *conversas* and *moriscas* to Amerindians and East and South East Asians.⁸ More specifically, Catalina's case can be compared to the Inquisition trials of other female prophets and seers such as Francisca Hernández and Magdalena de la Cruz.⁹ While scholars have overlooked Catalina's racial status as a black African, I (re)claim it as a key variable in analyzing the subversive nature of the prophetic acts located in her dossier.

Catalina Muñoz and Valencia's period plagued by scandals

The Inquisitors who presided over Catalina's case framed her as a victim of her scandalous delusions. In her testimony, Catalina reaffirms her identity and her position as a good and devout Catholic: 'Sobre razón que el dicho por su acusación que ante nós presentó [Catalina] dixo que, siendo la susodicha

4 Blumenthal (2005, 225–46).

5 Graullera Sanz (1978, 136–69).

6 Casares (2005, 247–60); see also Casares (2014).

7 Casares (2005, 257); see also Levack (1995).

8 *Conversos* and *moriscos* were the baptized converts to Catholicism from Judaism and Islam.

9 For more information on these two women's trials, see Homza (2006).



cristiana bautizada y gozando de las gracias y privilegios que los demás fieles y católicos cristianos suelen y acostumbran gozar' ['On grounds of the accused person presented before us, [Catalina] said that she was a baptized Christian and enjoying the graces and privileges that other faithful and Catholics usually enjoy'] (AHN, 1588a). Of course, Catalina's visionary experiences modified her reception and treatment in the eyes of the inquisitors. And before an inquisitorial gaze, visions were women's way to subvert and deny gender stereotypes that always limited their voices in a male-dominated society. In *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, Elizabeth Petroff notes the importance of visions in the lives of visionaries.

Visions led women to the acquisition of power in the world while affirming their knowledge of themselves as women. Visions were socially sanctioned activities that freed a woman from conventional female roles by identifying her as a genuine religious figure. They brought her to the attentions of others, giving her a public language that she could use to teach and learn. Her visions gave her the strength to grow internally and to change the world, to build convents, found hospitals, preach, attack injustice and greed, even within the church. She could be an exemplar for other women, and out of her own experience she could lead them to fuller self-development. Finally, visions allowed the medieval woman to be an artist, composing and refining her most profound experiences into a form that she could create and recreate for herself throughout her entire life. (Petroff, 1986, 6)

Catalina exemplifies the visionary woman described by Petroff, a figure who has negotiated with savvy her role as a prophet figure to amass a following in both her religious and secular communities. Without this skill, Catalina would not have prospered and elevated her marginal standing; I would even venture to argue that she purchased her freedom with the monies earned from her services. To that end, there is no doubt that the question of Catalina's racially gendered position in Counter-Reformation Valencia functioned as a source of power for her, even though, paradoxically, her racially gendered position as a black woman places her under the watchful scrutiny of the Inquisition.

In a letter written by doctor of theology Marco Antonio Anselmo Palao at the turn of the seventeenth century, he recalls having met Catalina in Valencia:

I met a black woman slave taken to be so saintly that she performed miracles and administered the Sacrament to angels. She acquired and rose to such esteem and veneration that the Patriarch Don Juan de Ribera liked to chat and spend time with her, with which he accredited her holiness. The fraudulent acts were discovered, and the Holy Office sentenced her to



10 Palacio o Palao
(1644, fol. 167v).

200 lashes and to wear the habit of the guilty and a few years later I saw her once again, the famed *alcahueta*, pay and suffer the same fate.¹⁰

For many years, Marco Antonio Anselmo Palao served as dean of the Cathedral of Orihuela. In the above-cited correspondence, Palacio's memory fails him by confusing the dates of Catalina's two sentences. As noted earlier, she did appear before the Inquisition in 1600, and this time she received a punishment of 200 lashes. It is very unlikely that Palao would refer to any other woman but Catalina. Further, no other black woman slave with the profile of Catalina interacted so closely with Archbishop and Patriarch Juan de Ribera. And as demonstrated by Ehlers's research, the connection and the episode between Catalina and Ribera suggest that within post-Tridentine Catholicism there existed a precarious balance between the fear of uncontrolled revelation and the attempt to affirm again the traditional manifestations of the faith. Catalina's spiritual activities as a prophet demonstrate very clearly the possibilities offered in this balance, and her fame proved problematic for Archbishop Ribera, who remained in his philosophy open to recollection in a time rife with scandals.

Catalina's racial difference as a woman of African descent who heals, sees, and takes Catholic religious practices into her own hands magnifies her heavily felt presence and role in Valencia, which then escalates how 'scandal' operates in her dossier. In other words, her blackness undergirds the ideological implications of scandal and indecency. The identity imposed by the inquisitors and the secretary of the tribunal upon Catalina – a black woman who causes a ruckus and deceives – is repeated throughout its process. From the outset of her deposition, the court clerk explicitly refers to the 'gran escándolo del pueblo cristiano' ['great scandal of the Christian people'], which clearly racially genders Catalina's religious activities and experiences as a healer and seer. For the Inquisition, Catalina's religious actions fit within the definition of the *iludente* [Spanish: *engañadora*, *burladora*; English: deceitful, mocking cheat]. As Claire Guilhem has shown, the work of the *iludente* belongs to 'demonic illusion, temptation, lies, vanity, and let's say, spiritual weakness' (Guilhem, 1984, 193). From the perspective of the inquisitors, Guilhem adds that 'the accusation of illusion is an accusation forged by women. Illusion is not a male crime. Man [as a category] is free to choose; woman [as a category] is "trapped" in a nature of which she is not sovereign; necessarily deceived' (Guilhem, 1984, 193). Catalina's case reveals how her visions and religious services illustrate a controversial, yet dissident, position in the eyes of the city of Valencia's patriarchal religious order, which I weave into her dossier's recurring narrative of 'gran escándolo,' or 'huge scandal'.



Catalina's hagiographic presence as *Alcahueta*

In medieval and early modern Iberia, hagiography was a kind of mediating text that fomented women's participation in medicine and encouraged the sick to rely on their capabilities. Saints in the medieval and early modern periods were honored for their ability *to do* things. Catalina's Inquisition case is filled with numerous hagiographic references that characterize her as a prophet via her ability to heal with saints. She healed her clients through praying to the Divine by calling and summoning Saints Domingus, Francis, Vincent Ferrer, and Michael the Archangel. From the Marian cult, and the healing context of Marian miracles, Catalina was widely sought for her healing mediations through the Virgin Mary and Lady Magdalene. In this regard, Catalina performed the duty of a priest or a nun, and I link her healing practices – as they are linked to her characterization as a prophet – to the more expansive medieval Iberian literary corpus of the 'Learned King' Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa María* (1252–1284) and Gonzalo de Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* (c. 1260), which also employed Marian miracles and cures through the Divine.

In adjudicating their case against Catalina, the inquisitors of the Valencia tribunal indicted her for working as an *alcahueta*, the intermediary go-between, healer. A figure who can mend and break illicit relationships and marriages. For example, her dossier states that '[u]na persona le dixo rogase por su marido que se apartase de la manceba. Y cierto mozo se le havia aparecido, amenazándola que le daría de palos si descubría en qué casa tenía la amiga, si no, sólo rogase por la salvación del dicho hombre' ['someone asked Catalina to pray that her husband left his concubine. Later, a young man showed up threatening Catalina by saying he'd beat her if he'd discover where her friend was hiding, and to only pray for his salvation'] (AHN, 1588a). This passage also positions Catalina as an *ensalmadora*, a popular woman healer who invoked the incantation known as the *ensalmo*, a logotherapeutic, secular prayer to influence preternatural powers and persuade them to relieve a patient's affliction.¹¹ Although not entirely an 'illness,' I do read the above-cited 'affliction' of marital infidelity as illustrative of Catalina's healing intervention. Catalina makes possible for her female clients to reclaim their control over legal privileges and the rights men held over women.

The female body is an enabling ground for launching a spiritual career as a healer. It is an irony of history – and one traceable in Catalina's dossier – that the contrary of this very notion will become a major objective of the Inquisition in the seventeenth century. Although the inquisitors presiding on Catalina's trial never refer to her as an *alcahueta*, she in fact exhibited similar qualities to that of the renowned literary character Celestina of Fernando de Rojas's bestseller *La Celestina* (Burgos, 1499), particularly in Acts 1 and 10. *Celestina* was translated into all the major European languages and reprinted in some 84 separate

11 See Dangler (2001).

Castilian editions before 1650 (Gerli, 2011, 13). Rojas's *Celestina* was by all accounts one of the most popular and influential books of early modernity (Gerli, 2011, 13). The Catalina-Celestina union that I forge in this study considers various constitutions of what it means to be an *alcabueta*, ranging from the concept of the *maestro* (a woman of knowledge) to the *buhonera* (the one who belongs to the artisan and practical world, involved in ill-perceived forms of 'sorcery'). The *buhonera* also makes shawls and potions and engages in capitalist and spiritual transactions. Like the literary *Celestina*, women like Catalina Muñoz were trapped by authorities who sought to malign them for traditional practices that they had been taught to follow and in other situations where their knowledge and prowess as healers obscured male-dominated knowledge and institutionalized religious authority. Given the historical context and literary history of *Celestina*, I situate Catalina as a Celestinesque figure, a mirrored iteration of Rojas's *Celestina*, who employs her rhetorical arts and knowledge of medicine, herbs, astrology, weaving, sewing, and cosmetics to practice the art of making the suppressed desire of all with whom she comes in contact speak (Gerli, 2011, 48). Ultimately, I urge my audience to read Catalina – as well as other historical representations of women of color who lived their lives as go-betweens, healers, and witches in early modern Iberia – as representative of the cultural study and literary history of *Celestina*.

Medical healing links Catalina to *Celestina*. Catalina's deposition, for instance, discusses an episode where she cures an individual suffering bleeding to death:

E que otra cierta persona que padecía quatro años había fluxo de sangre [pérdida de sangre] se le había encomendado rogase a Dios por ella y había curado. Y otro día oyó una voz que le dixo tres veces: 'Sierva de Dios, estas demandas me agradan.' Y que fuese, que ya estava sana.

[And some other person, who suffered from blood hemorrhages for four years, had entrusted [Catalina] to petition God to cure her. The next day, Catalina heard a voice that said three times: 'Serve God! These demands please me.' And be it as it were, the lady was cured.] (AHN, 1588a)

The word 'encomendado,' from the Spanish verb *encomendar* ['to enlist; to entrust'] explicates and nuances the economic, or proto-capitalist, metanarrative of Catalina's spiritual services. This excerpt also demonstrates the professionalization of medicine, where women healers take into their own hands the care, safety, well-being, and ultimately curing of their patients. Covarrubias constitutes *encomendado* as a financial exchange and relationship, where services are placed as an order. In other words, as implied by the dossier, Catalina received payment for the spiritual/religious work she rendered to cure the hemorrhaging client.



To that effect, it is plausible to treat Catalina as a businesswoman. In Valencia, she provided her spiritual services (communicating with the saints, performing miracles, and healing) that subverted and usurped the knowledge and power of male priests. For example, she connected with the Divine by telling her clients the number of masses they needed to deliver their relatives from Purgatory. Archbishop Juan de Ribera, who continued to support spiritualists despite his staunchest critics, confided in Catalina and sought her spiritual foresight and wisdom. Catalina utilized her visions to successfully intervene in a variety of spiritual and religious problems for her clientele. This fragment from her deposition exemplifies how Muñoz communicated with the ‘muchas ánimas de personas señaladas’ [‘the many souls of specified people’]:

Item, le acusava que havia dicho y afirmado que se le habían aparecido muchas ánimas de personas señaladas d'esta ciudad que nombró, rogándole tratase con ciertas personas que cumpliesen ciertos descargos [obligaciones] porque estaban detenidas en purgatorio y dixesen ciertas missas. E que habiendo cumplido lo susodicho, se le habían aparecido alegres, dándole las gracias e diciendo que ivan a gozar de Dios.

[*Item*, the witness claimed Catalina had said and affirmed that the souls of many individuals from Valencia had appeared before her. She pleaded with certain persons that they fulfill their spiritual duties [obligations] to pray for and to say masses for their loved ones' souls that were detained in Purgatory. So, having fulfilled the said charge, the clients had appeared to [be] happy, thanking and telling her that they were going to enjoy God.] (AHN, 1588a)

This above-cited passage captures a moment of despair in which Catalina's clients wanted to know how many masses needed to be recited so that their relatives could leave Purgatory and enter the gates of Heaven. This testimony justifies why people of her parish at Sanct Martín Church relied on Catalina's spiritual interventions. As a prophet figure, her visions and the masses she gave offered direct, expeditious results to her clients that male priests simply could not deliver. In an economic sense, Catalina had a desirable product. As a prophet figure who heals and has visions, Catalina offers services that provide solutions for those in need of spiritual agency and help.

Conclusions, or a Derridian closure: The *Pharmakon*

Catalina Muñoz's significance to a revitalized field of Iberian cultural studies consists precisely in the multiplicity of discourses she devised in the face of attempts to normalize and discipline her as a subaltern. Rather than submissiveness, the Inquisition and other disciplinary mechanisms produced a counter-



effect that proved enormously appealing to sixteenth-century Valencia. While the inquisitorial authorities attempted to reduce Catalina to misogynist clichés, the aura of her personality was greater and more variously inflected than the rigors imposed by the Inquisition's judicial-religious spectacle of binary gender restored. By underscoring the necessity of Catalina's dossier and presenting it alongside the canonical *Celestina*, I have sought to challenge the notion of the uniqueness of the literary artifact that so many of us still harbor as an unexamined assumption in scholarship. As a free black woman living in sixteenth-century Valencia who also rubbed shoulders with the city's elite, Catalina further sustained her social standing and power through capitalizing on the fame of her visions to become the spiritual counselor of her clients and acquaintances. By evoking the literary tradition of *Celestina*, Catalina's spiritual activities become enriched, particularly when considering the image of Celestina's *pharmacopoeia*—one closely aligned with Derrida's *pharmakon*, or 'Plato's Pharmacy'—and its triply bound references to poison, remedy, and scapegoat. The Derridian *pharmakon* serves as a heuristic to excavate the circulation of products and movement of services Catalina's clients commissioned her to perform and vice versa. Tracing this back to Catalina, I conclude by further theorizing her prophetic *technê* and notoriety via the concept of scandal we have previously encountered. Following the Derridean thread, scandal in early-modern Castilian had the same contradictory meaning that fame conveyed in early modern English: implying either a good or bad reputation. We can innovate our understanding of Catalina's double-ness or in-betweenness through Derrida's definition of the *pharmakon* as 'ambivalence.' And to that effect, this Derridian thinking thus characterizes the broader implications of Catalina's 'prophetic future' along the lines of her Blackness that operates simultaneously as a source of agency, but also as the identity through which her oppression is registered.

I have attempted to reclaim Catalina from the safely marginal and reductive readings of criminology or tabloid history. Catalina was astute, and we must not dismiss the fact that she navigated elite circles of the Spanish nobility. Her canny moves across the Spanish religious elite, albeit amidst the ideological boundaries of sixteenth-century Spain, highlight the fact that black women – Catalina is not the only one, or the 'exception' – occupied a paradoxical position within the upper echelons of early modern Spanish society. As a triply marginalized subject – black, women, and slave – Catalina obtained power and position by capitalizing on the fame brought by her role as spiritual advisor and healer to the Valencian religious community of Sanct Martín Church.



About the Author

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