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Black women in early modern Spanish literature

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We must proceed with caution when examining and retelling the lives of Black women in early modern Iberia (Castile, Catalonia, and Portugal). Sub-Saharan African women and their descendants abound in the cultural history, literary production, and visual culture of early modern Iberia. Omnipresent, Black women lived in Renaissance urban centers across Portugal and Spain, such as the cosmopolitan cities Lisbon and Seville. And in these metropolises, Iberian society often celebrated and exalted Black women’s beauty, strength, and value. In Lisbon, for instance, it was not uncommon for the locals across all rungs of society to identify the city with Black femininity and Black womanhood via the phrase “Black women are the mothers of Lisbon.” Like Lisbon, the city of Seville and the kingdom at large had a voluminous Black population that reached a height of 11 percent. Seville’s Black population was ethnically diverse, originating from Angola and the Congo Basin, the Cape Verde Islands, the Kingdom of Dahomey, the Senegambia and the Rivers of Guinea, as well as Mozambique and neighboring Portuguese outposts in East Africa and Goa. The overwhelming presence of Blacks and their descendants in Seville gave way to the city’s alias as the tablero de ajedrez, or chessboard table. In these cities, the real lives and vitality of Iberian Black women cannot be disassociated from this rich heritage and legacy.

What is more, the lived experience and cultural representation of Black women in Iberian early modernity – spanning roughly the late fifteenth to early eighteenth centuries – shared little to no resemblance to early modern Anglophone and Francophone depictions of and reactions to Black women. During the Renaissance, clergymen and travelers from northern Europe openly expressed their visceral shock and disapproval of Portugal and Spain’s large Black populations, most notably the presence of free Blacks who visually displayed their power and wealth, as well as the common sight of interracial unions between Black women and white men. In this chapter, I would like to nuance and underscore for my readers that the lives of early modern Iberian Black women cannot and must not be flattened to the sole example of Black Venus in France or other so-called “Negress” figures typically imagined in Anglophone and other northern European contexts. To be clear, I do not wish to claim that early modern Iberian society operated as an idyllic, utopic paradise where misogyny did not affect Black women. Many historical records, literary texts, and pictorial images can illustrate this fact. However, my main contention here is that the early modern Iberian archive – in its complexity and vastness of...
sources – and the literary works that mirror it empower me to tell the stories of Black women who disrupt the scholarly narrative we have thus inherited from Anglophone and Francophone sources – North American and European alike – that assumes and positions Iberia as having lacked and not offered any significant contribution to Black women’s lives in the African diaspora. Perhaps we owe this sentiment to the legacy of the propagandistic anti-Spanish Black Legend catapulted by the English, Dutch, and French.

Black women in early modern Iberia

To that effect, what was the status of real Black women in early modern Iberia? Between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, sub-Saharan Africans living in the Iberian Peninsula were both enslaved and free. They contributed to early modern Iberian society and global imperial expansion by serving as cartographers and mariners on long-distance transatlantic voyages, laborers who built urban infrastructure, and free migrants who produced crops and material goods. Some worked as apprentices in art studios and ceramic workshops, while others were butchers, cobblers, fisherman, public executioners, scribes, stable workers, and wine makers. Regarding our interests, the lives of Iberian Black women – enslaved and free – also varied. The most common means by which the enslaved could have acquired her freedom was first, by buying it; second, by being voluntarily freed by the owner; or third, by the owner dying. Because a large-scale agrarian plantation society, like those operative in Brazil, the Caribbean, and the United States, did not exist in Spain or Portugal, historical records document enslaved Black women working in a variety of spaces, including bakeries, brothels, convents, churches, orphanages, and royal palaces. Enslaved or not, Iberian Black women were skilled and talented, for they brought with them a repository of knowledge from sub-Saharan Africa. Most notable are the street vendors known as *regateiras*. Brandão in his census reports that on the Lisbon waterfront, early in the morning, “black women sold rice pudding, couscous, and chickpeas from pots which they carried on their heads.”

The fascinating lives of free Black women in early modern Iberia dispel common misconceptions for present-day readers. In rural areas, for example, Black women cultivated and tilled the land of their own farms in the countryside, whereas others performed as actresses in theater troupes. Early modern Iberian society created and maintained institutional networks whereby free Black women owned taverns and inns. On both sides of the Atlantic, in Lisbon and port cities across Spain and the Spanish Caribbean, these African and African-descended women were known as either *negras horras* or *morenas horras* (in Portugal, *negras forras*). These women used their assets and monies earned to free other enslaved Black women and men, pay local taxes, and build community spaces – both religious and secular – for Blacks living in their immediate communities.

To further demonstrate the complexity and richness of free Black women’s lives in Spain, let us consider the embroideress Catalina de Soto, known as the “Queen of Black Women,” or “Reina de negras” in Spanish. The jurist and historian Francisco Bermúdez de Pedraza describes Catalina as follows: “I met her as a young man and used to tag along behind her because I was so amazed by the great novelty of seeing a clean and well-dressed black woman with two white women servants walking behind her.” She was famous for her embroidery and needlework; Bermúdez de Pedraza records that de Soto also appraised trousseaux for wealthy white women during their engagements.

The meticulous record keeping of the Spanish Inquisition serves as another site that has preserved the agency, power, and savvy of Iberian Black women. The life story of Catalina Muñoz from sixteenth-century Valencia offers us another glimpse into the ways in which real Black
women channeled the Divine through healing, conjure work, and divination. Catalina obtained her power and position by capitalizing on the fame – often referred to in her trial record as “escándolo” [“scandal”] – she acquired as a spiritual advisor and healer to the Valencian religious community of Sanct Martín Church. 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 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 their prayers. Muñoz’s trial record states that she “amassed a large clientele who ran after her, begging her to reveal occult and secret things that they desired to know.” While inquisitorial authorities and historians alike have attempted to reduce Catalina to misogynist clichés, she, as a free Black woman living in sixteenth-century Valencia, sustained her social standing and power through capitalizing on the fame of her visions to become the spiritual counselor of not only her clients and acquaintances but also the city’s religious elite.

I reject the notion that Muñoz’s and de Soto’s lives are, were, and therefore must be treated as “exceptional.” To do so only empowers and reinforces a reductively pejorative stance on Black women’s agency, personhood, and worth, as if they could never escape, resist, or supersede the clutches of European colonialism and anti-Black racism.

Black women abound in the literary production of early modern Iberia. Omnipresent, these women bear the names Antonia, Boruga, Catalina, Dominga, Eva, Francisca, Guiomar, Ines, Margarita, Maria, Lucrecia, and Sofía, to name only a handful, which also mirror real Black women documented in numerous archival documents ranging from baptismal records, bills of sale, marriage licenses, Inquisition dossiers and testimonies, royal inventories, and wills. In the pages that follow, this chapter analyzes a short-skit scene from the playwright Lope de Rueda’s play Los engañados. In doing so, I argue for highlighting Iberian Black women’s agency, authority, and power – each codified in forms of Africanized Spanish (habla de negros) and material culture – in order to destabilize and revise present-day critics’ and readers’ misguided and misunderstood perceptions of early modern Iberian Black women as obscenely hypersexual and brutishly weak.

**A literary case study: Lope de Rueda’s Guiomar in Comedia de los Engañados**

In the third act of Los engañados (1538/1558), Lope de Rueda showcases the domestic house servant Guiomar, who argues with the aggressive white house servant Julieta and reasons with the “open-minded” dama Clavela. In this paso, or short skit, Rueda plots a two-pronged ideological viewpoint about race relations in Renaissance Spain: (1) anti-Black sentiments against Black Africans (as demonstrated by Julieta) and (2) an awareness of Black humanity and personhood (as demonstrated by Clavela). Throughout the skit, Julieta violently attacks Guiomar because she talks back and refuses to renounce her noble sub-Saharan African lineage. In particular, this scene showcases Guiomar speaking in habla de negros. Scholarly readings of habla de negros provided by Hispanists and linguists since the 1960s have traditionally emphasized the burlesque, comical, and picturesque aspects of the speech form. Spanish philologist Frida Weber de Kurlat, for example, describes the habla de negros according to its “posibilidades estéticas y dramáticas puramente cómico-burlescas” [aesthetic and dramatic possibilities that are purely comical and burlesque] [1962, Weber de Kurlat, 139]. Even recent scholarship has repeatedly insisted that “black Spanish must be understood as a linguistic fabrication used as a comic device [that] is a purely literary language” (Lipski, “Perspectivas,” 301–5).
I propose an alternative reading of *habla de negros* that, while acknowledging that this comical and burlesque speech employs racist appropriations of Africanized Spanish, also highlights its inherent subversive power within a particular historical context. As I maintain throughout *Staging Habla de Negros: Radical Performances of the African Diaspora in Early Modern Spain*,

...just as much as the critique and deconstruction of “white” literary constructions of *habla de negros* are undoubtedly valid, my scholarly endeavor is not centered around nor fixated on repeating a scholarly narrative that has tendentiously emphasized the way in which white Spanish poets and playwrights have excoriated Blackness through their putative anti-Black stereotyping via *habla de negros* speech forms.

Via the literary case study of Guiomar, and other Black women who spoke in *habla de negros*, real or otherwise, I channel Black speech through the Bakhtinian paradigms of the carnivalesque and heteroglossia. I turn to these concepts in order to demonstrate how *habla de negros* texts empower the unwritten speech of their Black African speakers. While this is not always evident in every single *habla de negros* work, I aim to highlight the way in which practitioners of Africanized Spanish utilize their Black characters to simultaneously reify and contest prevailing stereotypes while also speaking with an inherent expressive power, or heteroglossia, that situates them as subversive, thinking Black subjects.10

To demonstrate Julieta’s and Guiomar’s point of contention in the text, I cite the crux of the three women’s conflicted exchange as follows:

**GUIOMAR:** Jesus, Jesus! Doesn’t your Grace think to ask who I am? God knows, and the entire world knows, that I’m the niece of Queen Berbasina; in-laws of the Marquis of Cucurucú, across the seas and lands.

**CLAVELA:** Your aunt was a Queen, Guiomar?

**GUIOMAR:** Oh, my Lady! Your Grace thinks that I’m a daughter of some black wretch in these parts? It has been a century since Madam Bialaga has been dead.

**CLAVELA:** What a respectable name she had to last her for a century!

**GUIOMAR:** Yes, my Lady. Madam Bialaga was my mother’s name, and my father’s name was Eliomor. But he prefers the name Don Diego.

**JULIETA:** Look how you just run your mouth. What respectable names for a dog!

**GUIOMAR:** That’s why my first son, who was born in Portugal, is called Dieguito; like his grandfather.

**CLAVELA:** His grandfather you mean to say.

**GUIOMAR:** Yes, my Lady, his grandfather.

**CLAVELA:** Do you have any children, Guiomar?

**GUIOMAR:** Oh my Lady! Don’t bring that up, for it makes me cry. I have a son who’s in the Indies of San Juan, Puerto Rico. This August he wrote me a letter. He’s as fresh as a countryside flower over there! Oh, how I miss my son so much!

**JULIETA:** How foolish and drunk!

**GUIOMAR:** That’s why my first son, who was born in Portugal, is called Dieguito; like his grandfather.

**CLAVELA:** How foolish and drunk!

**GUIOMAR:** Who’s drunk, you fresh bitch? Oh get me a hammer! I swear to God I hope bad whoring falls on you, such that you never see the sight of meat or get laid!

**CLAVELA:** Oh how bitter. You mean to say, “carnestoliendas”; you’re a horrible speaker!

**JULIETA:** I hope you get syphilis! How about that!

**GUIOMAR:** Go on, you cowardly crud; I’m not salvaging my honor on you.

**JULIETA:** Oh what a fantasy! Hush then, Queen Black Bitch, since your Highness has now sent all of her blacks to make gunpowder.
GUIOMAR: Diarrhea mouth! You and your shit-filled mouth! Take this stick here and go fuck yourself.

CLAVELA: Enough, let her be Guiomar. If not, then tell me: what is it that your son wrote in the letter?

GUIOMAR: I’ve memorized what my son said:

“My most Illustrious mother, Guiomar:
The letter I’m writing to you isn’t a farewell, but rather a polite gesture of saying that I’m fine and all is well. Blessed be God. Praise be to God. Amen.”

Oh! May God give him life. My son is my heart; he came from this belly here!

CLAVELA: Don’t cry, Guiomar, don’t cry.

GUIOMAR: I have no other choice, because we’ve gone through it all; as deep as pockets run.11

This passage rehearses a critical moment where Guiomar articulates her authority, which is inextricably linked to her sub-Saharan African agency in the following two ways: (1) her noble lineage and familial bonds traceable to West Africa and (2) the larger history of Luso-African diplomacy and letter writing. For skeptics of Guiomar’s humanity, intelligence, and power in this scene, I underscore her embodiment as a savvy Black woman who puts on notice the racist ideology and logic that deems enslaved Black women as illiterate and inept.

The names of women Guiomar shares in the above cited quote – her aunt Reina Berbasina [Queen Berbasina] and her mother Doña Bialaga [Lady Bialaga] – signal her affiliation with and genealogical connection to real West African aristocracy. What I observe here in Rueda’s portrayal of historically rooted references to Spanish sociocultural exchanges with West-Central Africa is not far-fetched. In fifteenth-century Iberia, for instance, the first Black Africans arriving in major urban centers such as Lisbon and Seville were free emissaries and royal sovereigns. Although a traditional reading may dismiss words such as “Berbasina,” “Bialaga,” and “Cucurucú” [cock-a-doodle-doo] as the immediate comic-induced effects of habla de negros language, I historicize the etymology of “Berbasina” – as it relates to Guiomar’s reference to her aunt as Queen Berbasina – in late-sixteenth-century Iberian terms as “an ethnonym derived from the Wolof political title Bur ba Siin, meaning the ‘ruler of Siin.’ Like its neighbor Saloum, Siin was a Serer homeland that had been incorporated into the former Jolof empire. Serers from both Siin and Saloum were known to Iberians as ‘Berbersí,’ ‘Berbecín,’ or ‘Berbacins.’”12 Borrowing from David Wheat’s brilliant Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640, I frame Guiomar’s connection to Berbasina historically in order to center these proper nouns as real sites that once existed and facilitated sub-Saharan African and Iberian trade. Even more, the word “Bialaga” gestures a relationship to the Bight of Biafra. While Guiomar’s aunt (Queen Berbasina) and mother (Lady Bialaga) could have been hypothetical royal sovereigns, the fact that she positions them as “cuñados de la marqués de Cucurucú, por an mar y por a tierras”13 [the sisters-in-law (or coinage; money), bound by sea and land, of the Marquis of Cucurucú] is highly erudite and suggestive on Rueda’s part.

The playwright’s cuñados wordplay aligns Guiomar’s maternal elders with African nobility, the minting of coins and other metal objects, and the monetization of Black bodies (especially the offspring of royal African sovereigns sent to the Iberian Peninsula, and in this case, Guiomar). In the context of cuñados, Rueda foregrounds – as mediated by Guiomar’s habla de negros language – a familial bond and genealogical logic that are then overlaid with the economic subtext of slave trading. Guiomar’s agentic voice, as Rueda designs it in the text, highlights the (re)production of people like that of a cuño [stamp; seal] that also (re)produces the proto-capitalist modernity of an effigy minted by the stamp itself. Guiomar’s insightful commentary positions her as a thinking subject who in one sense, inverts racial relations and in another sense, subverts the power...
invested in Julieta’s anti-Black racism. The rhetorical value of Guiomar’s autobiographical mode in the skit, as she relates it back to her royal African lineage and the sinister legacy of African slave trading, both animates and captivates Clavela’s protection and sympathy. Once Guiomar finishes recounting her story, Clavela abruptly silences Julieta with the quip: “Calla rapaza. ¿Y reina era tu tía, Guiomar?” [Hush, you thievish raptor! And so, Guiomar, your aunt was a queen?]

If Guiomar’s assertive habla-de-negros speech acts underscore her royal sub-Saharan African lineage, which many Iberian African women (re)claimed, then let us acquire another ideation of how Rueda’s Los engañados anchors her authority, savvy, and intellect via the letter she reads from her son Dieguito: “Lutrisima madre mía Guiomar, la carta que yo te cibo no e para besamano, sino que sa bono. Bendito sea Rios, loado sea Rios, amén.”14 [Most Illustrious mother of mine, Guiomar! The letter I write to you here is not intended as a farewell, but rather a polite gesture of saying I’m fine and all is well. Blessed be God. Praised be God. Amen.] Via the correspondence, Guiomar reveals the letter’s origins when she shares Dieguito’s post in “la India le San Joan de Punto Rico” [the Spanish Indies in San Juan, Puerto Rico].15 While the letter does not reveal any (auto)biographical information about Dieguito – although we are told he was born in Portugal and named after Guiomar’s father Eliomar, or Don Diego(z) – it does inform us, however, that enslaved and free Black Africans were literate, thinking subjects who received authorization to travel from Seville to the Spanish Americas.16 Further, I also treat Rueda’s repetitive instantiation of global Spanish imperialism as a concerted technique for cohering the geographic circulation of commodities, knowledge, and merchandise in imperial Spain. Through the performative act and textual insertion of Dieguito’s letter, again read aloud by his mother Guiomar, Rueda then imbues Los engañados with an intertextual quality. To advocate for Black women’s agency, I reiterate Guiomar’s personhood as a literate subject, for she enacts the ceremonious gesture of reading her son’s letter. As a performance, the letter she reads aloud to Clavela, Julieta, and the audience at large has an affective appeal: the audience can identify with the nostalgia Guiomar expresses for her son sent off to the Americas.

Rueda’s theatrical representation of the remittance of letters, letter writing, and the event of African mariners and migrants settling in the Spanish Caribbean does much more than parody the historical imagination of imperial Spain’s participation in the trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific colonial enterprises. Instead, it inculcates in the most profound way the verisimilitude of Black Africans’ roles as de facto and de jure agents in early-colonial Spanish territories across the globe. What I am signaling here is that Rueda’s geographical reference to San Juan, Puerto Rico dialogues with a larger sixteenth-century transatlantic imperial Spanish discourse. And for Rueda’s audience, I would insist that Black Africans of Dieguito’s ilk are not a foreign concept. “The Spanish empire’s reliance on Africans to populate and sustain its Caribbean colonies,” explains Wheat, “stands in stark contrast to other European powers’ use of voluntary or indentured European migrants for these purposes.”17 He further states,

Although western European expansion in the Americas might be imagined as a series of interactions between native Americans, white settlers, and Black slaves, these ostensibly primordial categories cannot adequately explain the development of Spanish Caribbean sites in which racial descriptors often failed to correspond to fixed legal, social, or economic status.18

David Wheat’s population estimates confirm and render plausible Rueda’s literary account of Dieguito’s life overseas in early-colonial Puerto Rico:

[n]early forty thousand African and Africa-descended workers inhabited Spanish Caribbean seaports and rural areas by the first decade of the seventeenth century, revealing that in the
early modern Iberian worlds, settlers—or more accurately, pobladores, those who peopled Iberian colonies overseas—were often anything but white or European.19

My reading of Dieguito’s role as de facto “colonist” or migrant— as gleaned from how I historicize the perceived literary fiction of his letter to Guiomar—is predicated on his mother’s agency and subjectivity as an African woman who (re)traces her royal African lineage. Just as Dieguito’s narrative undercuts the primacy of white settlers as the dominant figures presented in historical narratives and complicates the very notion of European colonization of the Americas,20 Guiomar’s role in Los engañados is anything but marginal or passive. As a mother, Guiomar’s habla de negros language corroborates her “Berbasina” and “Biafra” genealogies— ethnonyms we can thread historically to the Rivers of Guinea and the Bight of Biafra.

The categories of mothers and motherhood also cannot go overlooked in my reading of Guiomar. She heralds her self-definition and subject position by recounting her sub-Saharan African matriarchs: Queen Berbasina (her aunt) and Lady Bialaga (her mother). Guiomar’s memory of them, as created by Rueda, weaves a narrative of matrilineal authority and power captured by those textual moments when she talks back to Julieta and self-defines her role as a non-passive subject in the play. As the skit closes, Rueda leaves us with the following exemplary message: unlike Guiomar’s co-star Julieta, whom Rueda, I suggest, constructs as a divisive force in the Los engañados, Guiomar unites women. Clavela shows sympathy for Guiomar by telling her not to cry about Dieguito’s transatlantic absence (“No llores, Guiomar, no llores”) and reassures her of his well-being overseas (“Bien está,” she says).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined Lope de Rueda’s Black woman character Guiomar’s agentive voice via her contestatory speech acts. I have proposed that her subversive habla-de-negros speech events serve not only to redirect critical attention on Black women literary characters but also to elevate the theoretical apparatus employed in Hispanic Studies. Black women characters—or the “negra,” as they are commonly called in early modern Spanish theater studies—also fight to protect their womanhood and social standing in early modern Spanish society. Just as their white female counterparts represented in theatrical works written by men—let us consider, for example, Gil Vicente’s Auto de la sibila Casandra, Calderón’s La vida es sueño, or Lope de Vega’s numerous plays—or plays written by women about women—I am thinking of Ana Caro de Mallén, María de Zayas y Sotomayor, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz—Black women, too, offer us complex and multivalent roles to examine. Rueda’s Guiomar is indeed a force with which to be reckoned and to be taken seriously in our scholarly criticism.

To that end, Guiomar is not the only Black woman character who speaks assertively and subverts power dynamics in her scenes with white actors. In Diego Sánchez de Badajoz’s Farsa teologal, for example, the work closes with a Black woman who defends herself from a shepherd’s countless vicious attacks. The Aragonese dramaturge Jaime de Güete, in Tesorina, showcases the slave Margarita, who fights against male chauvinism and misogyny. Margarita’s role in Tesorina ought to capture more widespread critical attention, for she safeguards not just her Black womanhood but the womanhood of all women. When Margarita refuses to tell her master Timbreo and his shepherd Giliracho the whereabouts of the women who have disappeared on set, she angrily replies: “Tú Xaber y digir no” [You know where they are; I’m not saying a word!] [v. 2369], which, as a result, provokes Timbreo’s wrathful retort: “¡Valgaos el diablo, morruda!” [Go to Hell, you smashed-in-faced bitch!] (v. 2370). The heated exchange then escalates with back-and-forth expletives, in which Margarita exclaims to Giliracho: “patanax, viyaca, borde” [Boor!
Nicholas R. Jones

Scoundrel! Scumbag! [v. 2414], “viyaco” [Villain!] [v. 2532], and “don boraxo” [Mr. Drunkard!] [v. 2547].

What angers her is Giliracho’s devious neglecting to reveal where he has seen the missing women. To him, she shouts: “Dale, xux, / te yuro esta crux / qui yo te quibraré el dente” [Come here, you! I swear on this cross that I’ll break your teeth] [vv. 2542–4]. Recycling lines from the heated exchange between Jorge and Comba in Reinosa’s “Gelofe, Mandinga,” Güete also positions Margarita in a non-passive role. The work ends with Sircelo, Giliracho’s lackey, intervening with an attempt to make peace between Giliracho and Margarita.

The variety of textual examples showcasing the presence of Black women in the theater of Lope de Rueda allows us to affirm that early modern Spanish theatrical representations of these women did not solely position them as inferior to whites. If anything, these depictions in drama treat them as subjects knowledgeable and proud of their presence and skills; their royal origins and wealth of lands; their previously acquired education and decorum. Guiomar, or otherwise, these Black women know they are gifted with wisdom and the resolve to subvert a variety of circumstances that others could not, however white they might be.

Notes


3 Quoted from A.C. de C.M. Saunders, A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441–1555, 77. The sixteenth-century Portuguese writer António Ribeiro Chiado reprises these themes in his Auto das Regateiras.

4 For more on these women, see chapter 4 in David Wheat’s Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640 (Chapel Hill, NC, 2016), 142–80. On Black women and solidarity in late-medieval and Renaissance Valencia, see Debra Blumenthal, “‘La Casa dels Negres’: Black African solidarity in late medieval Valencia,” in Black Africans in Renaissance Europe, 225–46.

5 The original Spanish reads: “Yo la conocía en mi puecia y me iba tras ella pareciéndome gran novedad ver una negra muy aseada y compuesta, con dos criadas blancas detrás de ella,” 260, in Historia eclesiástica de Granada. The modern edition, from which I cite, was published in 1989. Also, unless otherwise noted, all English translations are mine.


7 See Baltasar Fra-Molinero’s La imagen de los negros el teatro del Siglo de Oro and Antonio Santos Morillo’s “Caracterización del negro en la literatura española del siglo XVI.” For an alternative perspective, refer to chapter 3 in Nicholas R. Jones’s Staging Habla de Negros: Radical Performances of the African Diaspora in Early Modern Spain (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2019), 119–58.

8 While this chapter only focuses on Lope de Rueda’s Los engañados, it is important to note that the playwright features Black women in his Comedia Eufemia, Coloquio de Tymbria, and Coloquio de Gila.

9 Lipski expounds this idea more fully in A History of Afro-Hispanic Language. Refer specifically to chapters 2 and 3.

10 Jones, Staging Habla de Negros, 6.

11 Original Spanish in Lope de Rueda, Las cuatro comedias, 182–3.
12 Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean*, 34. For additional archival records on this subject, see footnote 15.

13 Rueda, 182.

14 Ibid., 183.

15 Ibid., 182.


18 Ibid., 7.


20 Ibid., 8.

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