

Báez Rivera, Emilio Ricardo. *De manos femeninas: Voces místicas criollo-mulatas en la Hispanoamérica colonial (siglos XVI-XIX). Antología y estudio*. Biblioteca Indiana 58. Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2026. ISBN 978-84-9192-546-0. 711 pgs.

Lorente Queralt, Núria. *Manchadas de tinta las manos: Imaginarios femeninos y redes de sociabilidad en torno al libro hispánico en la primera Modernidad*. Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2026. ISBN: 978-39-6869-974-5. 177 pgs.

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Two areas in which the female presence in Hispanic American literature are being studied extensively in recent decades are the convent and the printing workshop. In the first case, research has focused on a variety of issues concerning transatlantic female networks and spirituality in general, examining everything from the role of female support circles through correspondence between women to visionary and mystic writings within the conventual space. In the second case, studies have focused on the role of women in the world of the printing press, as printers' wives and widow svery frequently with an active role in the dissemination of culture among popular and elite circles. Two recent excellent monographs in Iberoamericana / Vervuert by Báez Rivera have been recently added that insist on analyzing these research trends.



In *De manos femeninas. Voces místicas criollo-mulatas en la Hispanoamérica colonial (siglos XVI-XIX). Antología y estudio*, Emilio Ricardo Báez Rivera offers an ambitious and long-overdue anthology that systematically maps the visionary and mystical landscape of colonial Spanish America. While the names of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Madre Castillo have long anchored

the feminine canon of the period, Báez Rivera argues that they represent only the peaks of a vast, submerged mountain range of spiritual expression.

His work, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, serves as both a critical study and a primary source repository. It expands the traditional "bi-continental" view of mysticism (Spain and Mexico/Peru) to include a more nuanced "criollo-mulata" perspective, notably integrating voices from the Viceroyalty of New Granada and the Río de la Plata.

One of the volume's most compelling theoretical contributions is its exploration of the "escritura por mandato" (writing by command). Báez Rivera meticulously details how the colonial confessor functioned as both a gatekeeper and a co-creator. The transition from the *ars audiendi* (the art of hearing confession) to the *ars dictandi* (the art of dictating or writing the soul's progress) was a fraught process.

The author identifies several key rhetorical strategies used by these women to navigate the patriarchal oversight of the Holy Office:

- **Affective Modesty:** The recurring *topoi* of being a "worthless worm" or "ignorant woman" served as a protective mask, allowing the writer to claim divine authority while appearing submissive.
- **The Divine Mandate:** By asserting that God *ordered* them to write, these women effectively bypassed the censorship of their immediate superiors, placing the responsibility of the text on the Creator himself.

The anthology is organized by Viceroyalty, providing a comparative look at how mysticism adapted to different colonial climates.

1. **New Spain (Mexico):** The text revisits established figures like María de Jesús de Tomelín ("The Lily of Puebla") but shines in its recovery of less-studied figures like Sor Micaela Josefa de la Purificación.
2. **Peru:** A significant portion of the study is dedicated to Santa Rosa de Lima, yet the inclusion of the "donada" Úrsula de Jesús—a mulata visionary—is perhaps the most vital inclusion. Her dialogues with St. Francis, where she questions the spiritual hierarchy based on skin color, provide a rare glimpse into the intersection of race and mysticism.
3. **New Kingdom of Granada and Río de la Plata:** By including Mama Antula (Santa María Antonia de San José), recently canonized in 2024, Báez Rivera brings the collection into the contemporary theological conversation, showing the enduring legacy of these "itinerant" spiritual lives.

A standout feature of this volume is its commitment to primary archival recovery. The author recounts his journeys to the Convento de Santa Teresa y San José de Puebla and his collaboration with paleographers like Josué Caamaño Dones. This has resulted in the publication of previously unpublished fragments, such as the writings of Sor Isabel de la Encarnación. As for the presentation, the author offers a selection of brief excerpts from each of the *místicas* and *beatas* followed by his own commentary on them (some of them extensive) highlighting their features, relevance, and key concepts, interspersed with numerous explanatory footnotes.

The book succeeds in moving beyond the "pathologization" of mysticism. Rather than viewing these women through a lens of "hysteria" or "melancholy"—as their contemporary critics often did—Báez Rivera treats their visions as a legitimate form of intellectual and creative labor within the only space truly open to them: the interior world.

De manos femeninas is more than an anthology; it is a restorative act of memory. As Asunción Lavrin notes in her prologue, the work is a *tour de force* that situates feminine visionary writing

not as an isolated curiosity, but as a "collective expression" rooted in European precedents yet transformed by the unique racial and social tensions of the Americas.

For scholars of the Baroque, gender studies, and colonial history, this 2026 edition stands as the definitive starting point for understanding the "feminine pen" that, despite being cloistered, helped write the spiritual history of a continent.

The list visionary women included in the anthology includes the following:

Virreinato de la Nueva España

Venerable Madre María Magdalena de Lorravaquio Muñoz (Ca. 1575-1636)

Madre María de Jesús [de Tomelín] (1579-1637), El Lirio de Puebla

Sor Isabel de la Encarnación [Bonilla de Piña] (1596-1633)

Doña María Inés de los Dolores [Mora y Cuéllar] (1651-1728)

Doña Francisca de San José (1655-1725)

Sor María de San José (1656-1719)

Sor Sebastiana de las Vírgenes (1671-1737)

Francisca de los Ángeles (1674-1744)

Sor Micaela Josefa de la Purificación (1681-1752)

María Casilda del Pozo Calderón (1682-?)

Madre María Anna Águeda de San Ignacio (1695-1756)

Sor Sebastiana Josefa de la Santísima Trinidad (1709-1757)

Madre María Marcela Soria (1729-?)

Sor María de Jesús Felipa (S/F, Texto de 1758)

Sor María Ignacia del Niño Jesús (S/F, Epistolario 1801-1802)

Virreinato del Perú

Santa Rosa de Santa María (1586-1617)

Donada Úrsula de Jesucristo (1604-1666)

Santa Mariana de Jesús (Azucena De Quito, 1618-1645)

Madre Antonia Lucía del Espíritu Santo (1646-1709)

Sor Gertrudis de San Ildefonso (La Perla Mística, 1652-1709)

Sor Úrsula Suárez y Escobar (1666-1749)

Sor Paula de Jesús Nazareno (1687-1754)

Sor María Manuela de Santa Ana (1695-1793)

Sor Josefa de los Dolores Peña y Lillo (1739-1822)

Madre María Manuela de la Ascensión Ripa (1766-1824)

Virreinato del Nuevo Reino de Granada

Sor Jerónima del Espíritu Santo (1669-1727)

Madre Francisca Josefa de la Concepción de Castillo (1671-1742)

Sor María de Jesús (Ca. 1696-1776)¹

In the landscape of Early Modern Hispanic studies, the role of women has long been relegated to the periphery—viewed either as passive consumers of devotional literature or as "exceptional" figures whose presence in the mechanical world of printing was merely accidental. Núria Lorente Queralt's monograph, *Manchadas de tinta las manos. Imaginarios femeninos y redes de*

¹ Afea este excelente estudio las veces que aparece un agramatical *iter spiritualis* en lugar del debido *iter spirituale*, por lo demás *peccatum minutissimum*.

sociabilidad en torno al libro hispánico en la primera Modernidad (Hands Stained with Ink), provides a necessary and sophisticated intervention into this narrative. By shifting the focus from individual "great women" to a structural analysis of gender, labor, and sociability, Queralt argues that female participation was not a marginal curiosity but a constitutive element of the print culture and economic system of the 16th century.

The work is deeply indebted to the historiographical shifts initiated by Joan Kelly's seminal question, "*Did Women have a Renaissance?*" Queralt adopts a critical lens that balances material history with the history of emotions and gender theory. Her methodology is robustly interdisciplinary, weaving together an analysis of primary archival sources—notarial protocols, workshop registers, and wills—with a literary analysis of the "imaginaries" constructed within the pages of the books themselves.

The metaphor of "ink-stained hands" serves as the book's guiding principle. It functions as both a material reality—referring to the physical labor of women in workshops—and an epistemological tool to uncover the traces of female agency that traditional historiography, often focused on the patriarchal "heads" of printing houses, has systematically obscured.

The monograph is organized into four thematic chapters that trace the trajectory of women from learners to active agents in the production of meaning.

1. Literacy and Practical Learning Queralt begins by challenging the notion of widespread female illiteracy. She identifies a "functional literacy" that emerged in urban centers, where women in artisan and merchant families learned to read and write not for intellectual vanity, but for pragmatic necessity. This chapter highlights how the expansion of print culture actually catalyzed female education, as women needed to navigate accounts, legal documents, and workshop administration.

2. The Sentimental Education and the Family Unit The author explores the tension between the "normative" model of femininity—promoted by best-sellers like Vives's *Instruction of a Christian Woman*—and the actual lived experience of women. Queralt argues that the family was the primary site of both discipline and opportunity. While marriage was a tool for patriarchal control and patrimonial continuity, the "domestic" space of the printing house allowed women to acquire specialized technical knowledge that bypassed formal guild restrictions.

3. Rituals of the Printing Press This section is perhaps the most innovative in its treatment of sociability. Queralt reconstructs the printing shop as a "nucleus of gendered intervention." She documents the roles of widows, daughters, and wives who did not merely "assist" but managed complex business networks, negotiated with authors, and sustained the economic viability of the Hispanic book trade across both sides of the Atlantic.

4. Agency and the Production of Meaning The final chapter bridges the gap between material production and symbolic representation. Queralt analyzes how women were figured in texts—often in moralizing or allegorical terms—and contrasts these tropes with the "dissonant" voices of early female writers like Olivia Sabuco or Teresa de Jesús. She successfully demonstrates how women used the very tools of their "disciplining" (the book) to carve out spaces for self-expression and intellectual authority.

Queralt's work stands out for its refusal to romanticize the female experience. She acknowledges the "truncated emotions" and the "systematic devaluing" of female labor that occurred as capitalism and the State began to masculinize the guilds. By situating the "ink-stained hands" of women within the broader transition from feudalism to early modernity, she provides a nuanced account of how women navigated a system that simultaneously needed their labor and denied their recognition.

One of the monograph's greatest strengths is its transatlantic scope. By including the "Hispanic book" in its global sense, Queralt reminds the reader that the networks of sociability and the movement of paper and ideas were not confined to the Peninsula but were essential to the colonial project and its social transformations.

Manchadas de tinta las manos is a concise, elegantly written, and theoretically rigorous study. It succeeds in restoring the "materiality of the hands" to the history of the book. Núria Lorente Queralt does not just add women to the history of the Hispanic press; she demands a rewriting of that history to account for the silent, ink-stained labor that made the "Golden Age" of Spanish letters possible. This volume is essential reading for scholars of Early Modern history, gender studies, and the history of material culture.

Scholars are now actively seeking out the "silent" women of the era, whose voices and experiences have historically been erased, overlooked, or considered secondary. Recent monographic issues of *eHumanista* highlight this trajectory: Nieves Baranda's work on women's letters and communities in [vol. 67](#), Tania Padilla's exploration of female sociability in [vol. 61](#), and the volume on Iberian spirituality ([vol. 56](#)) edited by Molina Huete and Aboal López. These investigations achieve their full resonance when the female experience is analyzed through a transatlantic lens, bridging the gap between Iberian origins and colonial realities. For a practical example of how these themes—specifically literacy, censorship, and the movement of ideas—manifested in the New Spain context during this era, Antonio Cortijo Ocaña's *Memorias de libros. Censura y comercio de libros en Nueva España. Siglo XVII, 2023* provides a detailed map of the book trade and inquisitorial oversight in 17th-century Mexico City and Puebla. In addition to the towering role of sor Juana as an intellectual figure (see also his *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o la búsqueda de identidad*, 2015), it is important to point out that several contemporary women (chief among them Paula de Benavides, viuda de Bernardo Calderón) played very relevant roles as cultural sponsors in their role as printers and booksellers in México City and Puebla during the 17th c.". Women may have been pushed to the margins, but they were never silent. Their vast cultural output is waiting for scholars ready to dig into the overlooked gaps of history.