



Hipertexto 17
Invierno 2013
pp. 3-15

The Seductive Narrative Appeal of a Madwoman Juana 'la Loca' and Excessive Femininity

Alexandra Fitts
University of Alaska Fairbanks

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Juana of Castilla (1479-1555), known as Juana la Loca, is one of the most intriguing and ambiguous figures of Spanish history. Though she was the first Spanish monarch to unite Castilla and Aragón under one crown and held the title of queen from 1516 until her death, she never truly ruled and was confined in the castle of Tordesillas for the last forty-six years of her life.¹ Juana has always captured the Spanish imagination, and over time her image has gone through many revisions. For centuries the accepted view of Juana was that she was driven mad by the early death of her beloved husband, Felipe “el Hermoso.” A popular story and artistic subject has her traveling through Spain with his coffin, refusing to part with his decomposing body, which she would periodically uncover and kiss. Later renditions allow for a more political interpretation, presenting her as a pawn in the machinations of her father, husband, and son. In the twentieth century, Juana emerges as a proto-feminist, persecuted for failing to fit into the predetermined mold of a woman of her time and position. Still more recently, she has become an increasingly sexualized figure whose appetites (healthy, but excessively female, and ultimately unacceptable) were labeled insanity.

It is not surprising that interpretations of Juana’s plight and her madness alter as the historians, biographers, artists and writers who are fascinated by her reflect the understandings and preoccupations of their own times. However, there is more to Juana’s shifts in image than changing cultural norms and perceptions of women and power. Juana has become an amalgam of all of the previous stories about her. Rather than ceasing to be something of a necrophiliac in order to become an astute politician, or morphing from a pawn into a political player, the attributes have been piled one on top of the other until Juana, at least as a fictionalized character, can no longer bear their weight. In some recent works, she is everything we have ever heard about her- pious, impious, naïve, headstrong, high-strung, intelligent, jealous, sexualized, political, victimized.... The result is a character that is so thoroughly overdetermined, and in

¹ She became queen of Castilla upon the death of her mother, Isabel I (“la Católica”) in 1504, and with her father Fernando’s death in 1516 she also became queen of Aragón.

particular overdetermined in her femininity, that her motivations and behaviors make no narrative sense and cause the work centered on her to fail. I will first discuss Juana's problematic history, including some of the theories of her sanity or insanity, and look at the changing artistic and literary portrayals of her. Then I will examine two fairly recent works about Juana, Spanish director Vicente Aranda's 2001 film *Juana la Loca* (rendered as *Mad Love* in English) and Nicaraguan writer Gioconda Belli's 2005 novel, *El pergamino de la seducción* (*The Scroll of Seduction*), to illustrate the unmanageable confusion that characterizes today's Juana.

Juana was the third child of Fernando and Isabel, and as such was never expected to rule. She was married at sixteen to Archduke Felipe of Austria, who was eighteen at the time and known as "El Hermoso" for his virile good looks. While it may have been a political marriage, apparently Juana and Felipe were quite taken with each other and were married the very day they met rather than waiting several weeks until the planned ceremony. They quickly began producing children, ultimately six in all. In 1497, Juana's brother Juan (Isabel's heir) died, then Juana's older sister and her young son, and with Queen Isabel's death in 1504, twenty-five-year-old Juana became the unexpected queen of Castilla.

The much-told story is that Juana, already with a "nervous" disposition and a tendency toward melancholy, was so in love with Felipe that his serial infidelities drove her mad. She went on hunger strikes, refused to bathe or change her clothes, and flew into unexplained rages. Together, Juana's father Fernando and her husband Felipe had her declared incompetent to rule and ultimately signed a treaty naming Felipe king of Castilla. His reign was to be short-lived, as he died 6 months later at the age of 28. Upon Felipe's death, the throne passed to Juana, though she ruled first under the regency of her father and later that of her oldest son Carlos, who would become Carlos I of Spain and Carlos V, Holy Roman Emperor.² After Felipe's death, Juana refused to be parted with the decaying corpse of her beloved, and kept it with her as she traveled the country, ultimately settling in a palace in the town of Tordesillas, which she did not leave until her death 46 years later.

Clearly, Felipe, Fernando, and later Carlos had a great deal to gain by Juana's continued incapacity to rule, and some contemporaries and several later historians have shed doubt on her insanity, casting it as a ploy of the men around her to wrest control from the rightful queen. Even her refusal to allow the burial of her husband can be seen as a political strategy to ward off potential suitors, or a struggle to bury him in Granada in order to establish a clearer connection to Spain for her son Carlos.

As with any highly studied historical figure, it is impossible to get to the "true story" of Juana's life. A number of historians, among them Bethany Aram, have looked at the changing face of Juana scholarship. Aram writes that Juana has been seen as a lunatic, a heretic, crazy in love, schizophrenic, and most recently, "a victim of political

² This is a terribly abbreviated overview of Juana's life. For a more in-depth analysis, see Bethany Aram, *Juana the Mad: Sovereignty and Dynasty in Renaissance Europe*.

machinations” (2). She points out the difficulty of discussing insanity in a historical figure given the socially constructed nature of “madness.”³ Aram is of the opinion that Juana’s purported insanity was actually a perceived excess of femininity: whereas successful female monarchs like Elizabeth I of England, or Juana’s own mother Isabel I, “managed to transcend their gender, others, including Juana, may have embodied female stereotypes. Their political destiny might become associated with a “natural” physical condition” (7).⁴ The idea of Juana as over endowed with traits that are either threateningly or stereotypically feminine also fits with literary depictions of her. Her political position takes second place as her gender, physical being, and emotional condition entwine, rendering her the ultimate embodiment of the “hysterical woman.”

Some modern historians, particularly those publishing popular histories and biographies in Spain, continue to cast Juana in the role of the tragic romantic heroine, subject to the uncontrollable fluctuations of her feminine body and nature. Two of the more popular works about her are José Luis Olaizola’s *Juana la Loca* (1996) and Manuel Fernández Álvarez’s *Juana la Loca: La cautiva de Tordesillas* (2000). Olaizola, for example, reminds us that Juana’s odd behavior could be due to her pregnancy, given that “doña Juana se encontraba en el sexto mes del embarazo de su primogénito, y con el carácter alterado como les suele suceder a las primerizas” (46), and that it was a mistake to give her bad news under a full moon, “cuando más indefensa se encontraba la princesa frente al mal que llevaba dentro” (118). For his part, Fernández Álvarez (a member of the Real Academia de Historia) seems besotted with the “deliciosa criatura que salió de España” (12). He describes a painting of her, pointing out “el busto con generoso escote... Todo un cuerpo hecho para el amor, con el fuego que cambiaría la historia” (97).

Likewise, it is difficult for literary critics not to fall into the trap of certainty, usually erring on the side of romanticism. In “Doña Juana de Castilla: Entre la historia y el mito,” which deals with the inescapable overlap of fiction and history and of the impossibility of writing unbiased history (or historical fiction), Juan Fernández Jiménez writes that “Juana de Trastámara y Felipe de Habsburgo se atrajeron mutuamente desde el instante en que se conocieron, y se exhibieron su pasión sin ambigüedad alguna” (16). It is ironic that an article that focuses on the intrinsically subjective nature of the historical endeavor cannot resist a reference to Juana and Felipe’s *undeniable* passion for each other. While there may be no ambiguity as to what biographers and historians have *written* about Juana, her actual feelings and passions remain nothing if not

³ See Michel Foucault *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. While the concept of madness as a social construct is widely accepted today, modern scholars owe a debt to Foucault’s groundbreaking work.

⁴ Comparing Juana with Catherine of Aragón, Theodore Sackett writes “Although their political identity was fixed, first as a political body theoretically based in absolute power, it was also determined by their physical female body, as procreators of male heirs. Therefore their first identity, legitimate inheritors of their mother’s power, was annulled by the second” (50).

ambiguous and unknowable.⁵

Much of the impulse to pin Juana down revolves around the question of her madness: was she insane or not? Susan Suleiman has written about the dangers inherent in the desire to analyze and “cure” the female subject. In discussing Freud and Breton she writes:

... the desire to “master the material”- whether it be dreams, the unconscious, the woman’s body, sexual difference or narrative itself- was both the generating impulse and the Achilles’ heel of the psychoanalytic project... It has also, for a long time and in very specific ways, been the additional sign, in our culture, of being a woman. (146)

Indeed, the project of analyzing Juana has gone on for centuries, as generation after generation of historians and writers has attempted to manage her through labels. As Foucault points out, the sixteenth century did not have a concept of insanity analogous to the modern version.⁶ Instead, Juana’s instability was most often attributed to religious disruptions, either a lack or an excess of piety. Then, in the nineteenth century, there was a sort of epistemological shift in Juana’s image. Director Vicente Aranda has said that:

Para los historiadores... Juana estuvo loca durante más de trescientos cincuenta años. Concretamente estuvo loca hasta mediados del siglo diecinueve, momento en que un dramaturgo español considerado mediocre por la crítica de su época y también por la crítica actual, da luz a una obra –también mediocre- titulada *La locura de amor*. (24)

The mediocre play that Aranda refers to was written by Manuel Tamayo y Baus and published in 1855. Tamayo y Baus presents us with Juana as victim- victim of her husband’s faithlessness and cruelty, of the plots of powerful men, and of her own ungovernable passion. She is no longer impious or simply “mad”; she is now mad with love. In a scene that continues to be recreated (even in Aranda’s film), Juana recognizes her own insane jealousy, proclaiming “¡Qué infame, qué horrible pensamiento! Loca estoy. Ahora sí ya no es posible dudarle. ¡Espantosa locura, que me deja conocer quién soy, qué me sucede, cómo y cuánto padezco!” (Act IV, last

⁵ Similarly, Salvatore Poeta points out the impossibility of knowing Juana’s mind or motivations, but states that “one reality remains documented irrevocably in history and art: Juana’s absolute resilience of spirit and steadfastness of moral character. It was precisely Juana’s resoluteness which keeps her memory alive to the present day” (166). I would argue that there are a number of things other than moral resoluteness that account for the persistence of Juana’s appeal, but more importantly, I must insist again on the difference between the irrevocable nature of what has been *written* about Juana or the art produced about her and the impossibility of knowing her actual feelings or spirit.

⁶ “In the Middle Ages and until the Renaissance, man’s dispute with madness was a dramatic debate in which he confronted the secret powers of the world; the experience of madness was clouded with images of the Fall and the Will of God, of the Beast and the Metamorphosis, and of all the secrets of Knowledge” (xii).

scene). Tamayo y Baus is also responsible for another scene that refuses to go away: Juana's hysterical attachment to Felipe's dead body.⁷

The highly charged trek about Spain with Felipe's corpse is perhaps the version of Juana that is in the forefront of the public imagination, due to both Tamayo y Baus's play and the most iconic painting of Juana, by Francisco Pradilla (1878). The painting portrays Juana pregnant and disconsolate, standing in a grey landscape while gazing dejectedly at Felipe's coffin. Discussing the painting, María Elena Soliño points out the helplessness and passivity of Juana's stance, which she says filled a need in a Spanish public that was anxious about the relation between women and power to turn to a more "traditional" time and a safe version of femininity (193).⁸

As Juana scholarship proceeded into the twentieth century, her diagnosis progressed from mad with love to schizophrenia and depression, before finally emerging with the conclusion that she was not insane at all. The changes in perceptions of Juana's mental state, and indeed the compulsion to diagnose her at all, reveal more about changes in social concepts than about Juana herself. Elaine Showalter famously wrote of Ophelia, that she "does have a story of her own that feminist criticism can tell; it is neither her life story, nor her love story, nor Lacan's story, but rather the *history* of her representation" (283). And like the stories told about Ophelia, the stories told about Juana equate her madness with her femaleness. Just as Showalter describes Ophelia as "a girl who *feels* too much, who drowns in feelings" (286), Juana is defined by stereotypical notions of feminine weakness and emotionalism. More than that, she is reduced to a female body, subject to the unbalancing impulses of sexual desire and pregnancy.

Perhaps because they are precisely what have made Juana luridly fascinating to generation after generation, it has been hard to abandon the overly feminized aspects of her image. There is something both enormously intriguing and repellent about the figure of a woman driven mad by her own "excessive" femininity -her passivity, weakness, love, physical passion, hormonal surges, and desperate need for affection. And while concepts of madness may have evolved, the public is loath to move on from the very aspects of Juana that have made her legend captivating.

Both Aranda's *Juana la Loca* and Belli's *El pergamino de la seducción* fall prey to the desire to present us with more contemporary views of Juana while refusing to let go

⁷ In "Necrophilia, Madness, and Degeneration in Manuel Tamayo y Baus's *La locura de amor* (1855)," David R. George, Jr. describes the social conditions in nineteenth-century Spain as well as the emerging concept of necrophilia that informed the play and its public reception. He writes that in the nineteenth century audiences were most interested in the necrophiliac aspects of the legend: "with few exceptions, both foreign and Spanish authors tended to focus attention on the episodes in the queen's life story that led up to or that directly represent the well-known tales of her legendary obsession with Philip's corpse" (65).

⁸ Spain was coming to terms with the disastrous monarchy of Isabel II, who had been exiled in 1868 after years of misrule and numerous purported affairs.

of the older ones. Each incorporates modern notions of insanity by giving us analyses of and justifications for actions that in the past would have been seen as evidence of possession or madness. In the film one royal advisor states that the people believe Juana to be mad, and another replies, “they don’t give the same meaning to ‘mad’ as you do.” The more knowledgeable advisors understand that there is more to Juana’s purported madness than meets the eye. Both the novel and the film present Juana’s behavior not as insanity but as a comprehensible result of the unbearable circumstances in which she was forced to live.

In addition to questioning the vague designation of “insane” or merely “mad” that has been applied to Juana, both works also demonstrate an understanding of her plight that has clearly been influenced by feminism. Juana is presented in both as a woman out of time. She is a feisty, independent spirit who had the great misfortune to be born into circumstances where independence in a woman was punished. Both Aranda and Belli view Juana as a woman who dared to expect more from life than she would ever receive, be it a marriage made for love, a faithful husband, the ability to raise her offspring as she saw fit, or the respect of her parents and children. Juana’s dogged refusal to abandon her expectations led to the loss of her freedom by providing her husband and father with an excuse to remove her from power.

One problem with this interpretation of Juana’s story is that it doesn’t fit with the very elements of her story that have made so many people want to hear about Juana, read about her, and study her. The sad story of a woman who is a political pawn, manipulated by all of the men who surround her, is tragic but not nearly as intriguing as nymphomania and necrophilia. And so both the film and the novel fall into the trap of wanting to have it all and do it all. Juana is tempestuous, wildly jealous, sexually obsessive, destructive and violent, but she is also self-aware and politically astute. Perhaps the real Juana was all of these things, but in a narrative sense, the compulsion to cover all of the possible versions at once leads to confusing and contradictory results. Both the film and the novel are sex-filled bodice rippers (the cover of the DVD of *Mad Love* issued in the USA says “lusty... steamy... sex so hot the ladies in waiting line up to eavesdrop on their passion” and the paperback cover of the novel actually portrays a bodice, presumably waiting to be ripped) while also trying to provide a nuanced political understanding of Juana’s plight. They seem to want to make the case that Juana was not actually insane, but can’t resist the iconic images of her uncontrollable passion.

In Aranda’s film, Juana’s story is told from the moment of setting off on her journey to meet her future husband for the first time until his death ten years later, framed by opening and closing sequences of Juana as an old woman in Tordesillas looking back on her tumultuous life. If these framing scenes are meant to give us a sense of an older and wiser Juana, they fail. In the opening scene, the voice-over narration describes Juana as being betrayed by everyone close to her, but Juana herself only obsesses about her physical desire for Felipe, saying “cuando cierro los ojos, se acerca él, siento su piel en la yema de mis dedos, vierte su voz en mis oídos. Percibo el olor de sus axilas. Levanta mi deseo.” (*Juana la Loca*). The closing scene is even less ambiguous -there is no mention of political betrayal, only of her abiding

passion. The final words of the film uttered by the elderly Juana say it all: “gemir de placer.”

And Juana’s love for Felipe is clearly and primarily physical. Her sexual desire approaches self-destruction as she allows herself to be degraded by Felipe over and over so that she can achieve a moment of passion. The film’s mixed message extends to Juana’s physicality- on the one hand, she is in touch with her sexual desires and comfortable in her body’s natural functions in a way that was little accepted at the time. For example, she insists on nursing her own children rather than using a wet-nurse, over Felipe’s objections. Felipe himself throws her perceived “unnatural naturalness” in her face when he wants to humiliate her, telling her with increasing frequency that she is “crazy” when she expresses physical longing. Feminist sensibilities want to applaud Juana’s ownership of her desire and vilify Felipe’s inability to accept feminine sexual power. But on the other hand, the film itself paints her connection to the physical in a way that is excessive. She *always* is ready for sex, whether she is pregnant, post-partum, in mourning, or has just discovered her husband’s infidelities. It is hard not to agree with Felipe when he looks at her in disbelief as she pleads for sex yet again.⁹

María Donapetry addresses Aranda’s overly sexualized version of Juana: “esta película debería haberse titulado *Juana la Insaciable*, y no simplemente ‘la Loca’, ya que todo lo que parece ocupar la mente de la reina es el próximo encuentro erótico con su marido” (152). She correctly points out Juana’s reduction to nothing more than a feminized body, and a feminized body that corresponds to a patriarchal view of women’s physical being -one that revolves around sexual pleasure and reproduction. With the exception of Juana’s mother, Isabel (who has abandoned all femininity to assume the mantle of power), the sexual objectification of the film extends to the other women characters, most notably Felipe’s lover Aixa. The “Moorish princess” is Juana’s foil in several clear ways. Aixa is calculating where Juana allows herself to be manipulated and sexually shrewd where Juana is naively honest. But they are both ultimately nothing more than desiring/ desired female bodies. Aixa’s sexuality is just as excessive as Juana’s, particularly given her representation as a Satan-worshiping exotic Other. She is shown casting spells and running an amulet down Felipe’s naked back while making love. According to Donapetry, “El ‘exceso’ de esta mujer ya no es su independencia del patriarcado dentro de la película... sino el designio de la mujer como continente oscuro en el que la oscuridad y la feminidad se *confunden* en el más estricto sentido de la palabra” (152). Aixa attempts to drive Felipe mad with desire in precisely the same way that he has driven Juana mad. Like Juana, her character is defined primarily in terms of her physical being and destructive sexual impulses.

⁹ The film was not helped by the casting of Daniele Liotti as a Felipe who looked much like romance cover model Fabio with his mane of hair. Critics of the film had great fun lampooning the excess lustiness between the couple. *The New York Times* review says, “with his long dark locks gleaming with ardent viscosity and his impressive stride, everything about the young archduke suggests urgency... But it is not his ardent, lusty gait that hooks the demure Joan; it’s his ardent, lusty... oh, you get it.” *The San Francisco Chronicle* review states that rather than insane, Aranda’s Juana “was merely high strung, maybe a little sex-crazed- maybe a lot sex-crazed. Joan was definitely someone who needed to stay away from caffeine.”

Juana's excess of female physicality is not limited to her sexual appetite. In one of the film's more sensational scenes, she is shown tearing the future Emperor Carlos V's umbilical cord with her teeth after giving birth in a latrine. Claiming an "indisposition," Juana makes a hurried departure from a dance and produces the baby moments later. One of her awed ladies-in-waiting whispers that she could give birth anywhere: "Su alteza es como una vaca." Again, the message is confusing. On the one hand, the public is seemingly meant to privilege Juana's honest and natural connection to her body; on the other hand we hear her compared with breeding stock as we see her with her mouth bloodied from biting the cord. If we need further reminder of Juana's natural connection to a somewhat sensationalized melding of sex and motherhood, she is later shown having an orgasm while breastfeeding.

We gain some sympathy for Juana, as Felipe's behavior grows more callous. When she discovers that her mother has died, she goes to give her husband the news that she is now queen and finds him in bed with another woman. Juana breaks down in the pouring rain of the courtyard, lamenting, "my mother is dead and my husband is unfaithful." She is shown in this scene consciously opting for "madness," because it is preferable to the alternative of her reality. While this scene and others like it help to explain Juana's erratic behavior (and echo Tamayo y Baus' creation of a Juana who is aware of her own madness), they do not prove that she is fit to rule. In fact, in perhaps the most telling scene of the film, an advisor who is close to Juana has convinced members of the *cortes* to meet with her so they can see that Fernando's and Felipe's claims of her madness are politically driven. But what they find is a Juana more interested in uncovering who wrote a love note to Felipe than in discussing governance. The advisors are trying to tell her that her people are starving and Flanders is plundering Castilla, but she cannot be distracted from comparing the handwriting of her ladies-in-waiting with the letter that she has uncovered. As a viewer, I am left as confused as the advisors- am I really supposed to believe that she is not mentally unstable after that? Or that she is unstable, but it's understandable given the way she's been treated?

Aranda himself does not think that Juana was insane, stating in an interview: "¿estaba loca Juana? La respuesta sobrepasa cualquier posibilidad de interpretación al incidir la luz de la modernidad sobre los fragmentarios datos histórico-documentales... Desde la perspectiva actual Juana no está loca" (24-5). Gioconda Belli, author of *El pergamino de la seducción*, has also stated in an NPR interview that she does not believe Juana to have been insane:

Belli: Her love for Felipe, it was definitely a very passionate love on both sides, was used against her, and was the reason they called her mad.

NPR: Do you think Juana la Loca was mentally ill at all?

Belli: No, I don't think so. I think maybe she was a person that was very carried away by her emotions. (Belli, "Interview")

Again we have a Juana who is misguided or misjudged, but most importantly, one who

has been carried away by her “passionate love.” In many ways, we have not come very far from Tamayo y Baus’ *Locura de amor*. However, Belli, like Aranda, tries to present her Juana as not only mad with love (and sex) but also simultaneously self-aware and independent.

El pergamino de la seducción is even clearer than *Juana la Loca* in its desire to show Juana as a political victim. Many of the iconic scenes from the film are repeated here- the love-at-first-sight kiss and quickie marriage, handmaidens giggling to Juana’s moans of passion, her evident erotic pleasure at breastfeeding. But Belli is very conscientious about providing explanations and modern interpretations for Juana’s seemingly desperate acts- perhaps too conscientious. Juana possesses a self-awareness that can only be envied. Her analyses of her own motivations and psyche are jarring in their insight, as her apparently irrational outbursts are actually calculated. She says, “Me negué a comer, a bañarme. Otra vez apelé a la única resistencia a mi alcance: la de mi cuerpo” (270). She reflects on her purported insanity: “Quizás esté loca. No dudo que algún día me convencerán de estarlo, que terminaré viendo gatos y alucinaciones... Locura fue, sin duda, mi pasión por Felipe” (313). Most anachronistic are her musings on her station in life:

Me rebelo contra la obediencia y la idea que sean otros quienes decidan mi vida. En este estado de ánimo, hago cosas impulsivas de las que después me arrepiento. Y no puedo, sin embargo, jugar el papel dócil que se me asigna sin que se me remuevan las entrañas. Soy una princesa del Renacimiento. He leído a los clásicos y he discutido filosofía. (115)

The idea that Juana would identify herself as a “Renaissance princess” is fairly unlikely, and even more difficult to believe is that she would be able to rationalize her behavior as a result of her privileged Renaissance education. Juana’s own justifications for her actions are not enough though, and Belli provides a framing device to give us even more interpretations and make it clearer just what we should believe. In the novel, Juana’s story is being told to the seventeen-year-old narrator of the novel, Lucía, by Manuel, a thirty-something historian who enacts his own obsession with Juana by seducing Lucía. Belli cannot resist the well-known scenes of Juana’s madness, but she presents them to us through Juana’s voice (or Manuel’s imagination of Juana’s voice) so that we can be given explanatory justifications for her actions. In one scene (which also appears in Aranda’s film), Juana suspects a redheaded lady-in-waiting of being Felipe’s lover and shears the woman’s head in a fit of jealousy. Juana describes her “victim’s” fear and pleading and her own “possession” as she screams at the top of her lungs and holds the redhead down, but she also justifies her actions as those of a bold, powerful woman: “¿Quién se atreverá? Yo me atreveré” (202). The reasonableness with which Juana recounts her actions may be intended to show the reader that she is actually quite sane, but it fails to convince. The “decision” to be mad, which we have also seen in Tamayo y Baus and Aranda, is not necessarily one that proves her soundness of mind. At one point, Juana is separated from Felipe at her mother’s insistence. Thrown into depression, she refuses to eat or to bathe, though she does have the energy to masturbate while imagining Felipe with other women. Once again, she justifies herself: “Qué me importaba andar sucia, desgreñada, si no era más que

una vil prisionera en esos corredores adustos?” (180).

Through relating his version of Juana to Lucía, Manuel, the historian, is able to wax pedantic and cite at length from various historical constructions of Juana. For example, “Y sobre los métodos de Juana, en la época nadie los comprendía. Era muy moderna en ese sentido, creía en su poder individual. Al final, eso que algunos piensan que fue su ruina también le permitió sobrevivir tanto tiempo en Tordesillas” (272). Again, it seems clear how the reader is to construe Juana’s supposed madness, but one problem with being told what to believe is that we have to trust the source, and Manuel turns out to be insane himself. His obsession with Juana and her teen-aged substitute Lucía renders him biased and unreliable. Both Juana and her intermediary, Manuel, are untrustworthy as narrators of her story.

Lucía lends the perspective of a hormonal and infatuated teenager as she feels a mysterious link with the equally adolescent and hormonal Juana, helping the reader understand Juana’s impulsivity and rebelliousness. Like Juana, Lucía is an independent spirit trapped in oppressive circumstances, in her case a Catholic boarding school in Franco-era Spain. As Julie Marchio points out, “Juana y Lucía experimentan un mismo sentido de aislamiento en las sociedades respectivas en las que viven. Ambas evolucionan en espacios cerrados, la primera en la fortaleza de Tordesillas, la segunda en su colegio de monjas y luego en la casa de Manuel” (Marchio). Another thing that Lucía shares with Juana is her hypersexuality. Belli’s Juana, like Aranda’s, just can’t get enough sex, reflecting that “descubrir la alegría de mi cuerpo me hizo cuestionar todo cuanto en la vida se me presentara como cierto” (96). In this case, her discovery of sexual pleasure seems to be the first step toward losing herself, which reinforces the notion of Juana’s insanity stemming from her uncontrolled female body. Lucía proves to be just as enraptured with her discovery of sex as is Juana. Lucía is presented in an overtly sexualized way from the beginning of the novel; in a passage that speaks more of a male gaze than a woman’s own perception of her body, she describes her 36C breasts, thick pubic hair, narrow waist, long legs, and pert buttocks. She is unbound by the confines of Franco-era repression, feeling more comfortable naked than clothed, reflecting that, “no me había sentido vulnerable desnuda nunca. Más bien experimenté mi piel como un campo magnético cargado de fluida energía” (38). She enjoys masturbation so much that some nights she indulges over and over, wondering if it would be possible to commit suicide by giving up food and water to masturbate until perishing. We are led to believe that Lucía’s unselfconscious awareness of her body is one of the factors that allow her to establish a supernatural link with Juana. However, Lucía’s excessively uninhibited sexuality leads her astray as well, as she cannot help but fall into a destructive relationship with the clearly unstable Manuel.

Belli’s novel highlights the fictional nature of Juana’s story; the title itself makes reference to the parchment or scroll on which Juana’s story is told, and which is used to seduce Lucía, thereby determining her own part in the story. Importantly, Manuel is descended from the Denia family, who were charged with guarding Juana during her days at Tordesillas. Just as the sixteenth-century Denias manipulated Juana by controlling the information that came in and out of the castle, Manuel manipulates Lucía

through his selective telling of Juana's tale. While the truth may be difficult to establish with so many competing versions in the novel, it is still clear that the reader is to sympathize with Juana and to believe her final document, hidden for centuries by the Denia family. In it she states that her problems began because "vine al mundo con demasiado ímpetus, con el pecho demasiado ancho" (312). In other words, she was a girl who *felt* too much. She seemingly knows that the world will call her the queen who went mad for love (and thus predates Tamayo y Baus' interpretation of her self-awareness by two centuries), but she consciously chooses love over her kingdom or her reputation.¹⁰

In *El pergamino*, even more than in *Juana la Loca*, Belli makes it explicit that we are to believe that Juana's "madness" was truly male punishment for her strength, rebellion, and independence. Belli provides any number of justifications and explanations for Juana's behavior, but the fact remains that the behavior itself is perplexing. As a fictional character Juana and her twentieth-century counterpart Lucía represent a muddle of motivations. They behave in inexplicable ways that are nonetheless painstakingly explained. They are victims of men, but would not have been so easily victimized if they were not subject to their own raging sexual desires. In the real world, women may in fact be subject to raging sexual desires, and often are victimized by men, but the sexualization of Juana and Lucía feels forced. Their sexuality is simultaneously celebrated for its naturalness and "liberation" in a way that appeals to contemporary attitudes while it is exploited for its link to Juana's hormonally induced madness.

The fact that she has inspired so many books, plays, paintings, and films is evidence that Juana is clearly a fascinating character. It seems that none of the many stories that have been told about her have satisfied the public's interest or imagination. Nor have they managed to explain the contradictions in her image. But perhaps the impulse to explain Juana is precisely the problem. The surfeit of information and interpretations has served only to render Juana's image more unmanageable. Bounded by our own epistemological constraints, artists, historians, and critics have continued to add our versions of Juana to the already muddled pile. While both Aranda and Belli are clearly sympathetic to Juana as a character, neither can ignore the evidence of her instability nor resist the lure of representing and retelling her romantic and sexual obsessions. In both cases, the result is a Juana whose motivations the reader/ viewer cannot adequately comprehend. The point is not that history, literature, or film should be one-sided or simple. The evidence on Juana is contradictory and tantalizing. However both the film and the novel fail in their desire to present a political interpretation of Juana's madness while simultaneously exploiting the long-held stories and images of her insanity, and, in particular, her association with the instability of female "nature." In

¹⁰ Nicasio Urbina has written about the importance of narrating in *El pergamino*. He says that "como hemos visto la novela más reciente de Gioconda Belli es una refinada estructura narrativa que juega con las perspectivas, con las voces, con las focalizaciones de la narración," though he does also point out the elements of the novel that would easily fit in a telenovela (Urbina).

spite of their efforts to justify her actions, she remains Juana “la Loca,” driven mad by lust.

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