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IMAGES OF WOMEN AND IDEAS OF NATIONHOOD IN NINETEENTH CENTURY SPANISH HISTORICAL PAINTING

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Abstract

History painting was the dominant form of academic painting in the nineteenth century. It emanated from the need to reinterpret the national past in order to consolidate the process of nation formation that took place throughout this period in Europe. In Spain, this genre privileged portrayals of historical women in an attempt to provoke a stronger emotional response from the viewer. My aim in this paper is to show the dynamics of representation in these paintings where the body of a woman, which in iconographic traditions have nearly always represented as subjugated, is also the body of a political figure, and the role these works may have played in constructing notions of national identity and womanhood. For this purpose, I have chosen the following paintings for examination: *Death of Lucretia* painted by Eduardo Rosales in 1871; two works that bear the same name and subject *The Cid's daughters*, produced by Dióscolo de la Puebla in 1871 and Ignacio Pinazo in 1879; *Mariana Pineda being taken to the scaffold* (1862) by Isidoro Lozano and *Mariana Pineda bidding her farewell* by Isidoro Lozano (1862); and Pradilla's *Juana the madwoman* of 1878.

Key Words: History painting, Ignacio Pinazo, Dióscolo de la Puebla, Eduardo Rosales, nineteenth century, nationhood, Spain, women,

Introduction

In Spain, History painting grew out of the annual, compulsory, academic contests for students organised by the Academy of Arts in Madrid.¹ The juries of the competition invariably imposed a historical theme, as did many other academies of the time. The regulations of the National Exhibitions, which were created in 1856 by the then Spanish monarch, Isabel II, also favoured works that represented a historical event. While historic occasions have long been an attractive subject for artists, during the nineteenth century the interest in earlier times was not a casual one but originated from the need to reinterpret the national past in order to consolidate the process of nation formation that took place throughout this period. Tomás Pérez Viejo explains that at the end of the eighteenth century, the obsolete system of identification exerted by Christianity was replaced by the nation. This transformation was directly linked to the appearance of modern societies and is explained as a consequence of the need to legitimise an emergent capitalist society. Thus, while the sovereigns of absolutist monarchies did not need to justify their political position, since they claimed that as a matter of tradition it was given to them by God, the new governments found its validation in the concept of the nation (1999: 14). The belief that the nation was the natural, inevitable, and morally valid form of a political organization expanded and even in some cases came close to some type of fanaticism (Anderson 1985: 204). However, as Delannoi notes, the nation is a cultural construction, 'the myths, the costumes, the languages, are evidently initial data, but they acquire power only by the repetition, the diffusion and in short the construction' (1993: 11). Thus, the reinvention of history became an essential part within this process everywhere in European nineteenth century history painting.

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Despite the important role history writing played within the process of nation formation, it was largely the domain of the cultured elite and therefore did not have wider popular diffusion, although there were other forms of communication, such as the press, popular literature, music, etc through which historical imagery was disseminated. Of course, painting was one way of conveying images to the people, playing a crucial role in the diffusion of ideas amongst the public, thanks to the spectacular character that the National Exhibitions had acquired. Pérez Viejo compares them with the current big film festivals (Pérez Viejo 2002: online), like those of Cannes or Venice. Furthermore, these painted images acquired even greater public dissemination as a result of being reproduced in engravings, as illustrations in history books and magazines, and by appearing on bank notes, text books, and commercial wrappings (Pérez Viejo 2002: online). It is also important to note that paintings of historical scenes were characteristically pro-government. Most of these works were either bought or commissioned by the government and the crown, and were hung on the walls of the Congress, the Senate, palaces, provincial deputations (Álvarez Junco 2001: 352), and national museums. Thus, the function of these works became both pedagogical and political, and acquired a special meaning since they expressed the government's image of Spanishness. The most popular historical periods represented within this genre, therefore, were those which served better to justify the current situation (Pérez Viejo 2002: online). Episodes from the reign of the Catholic Kings, for instance, became a widely represented subject, since they symbolised the unification of the country. The war of independence against France was also a popular period, as it emphasised the common struggle against the exterior enemy, France.

However, having shown how the historical painting has played its part in shaping the history of modern western society, the issue here is to explore how the need to reinterpret history affected notions of *womanhood*, since women became one of the most important subjects within this genre confirming nineteenth-century's culture obsession with the differentiation between the feminine and the masculine. But what were the main discourses of womanhood in Spain at the time?

During the nineteenth century, the emancipation of women, having enjoyed a measure of advancement during the enlightenment, suffered a regression as new bourgeois paradigms of womanhood were created. In Spain, the eighteenth century can be considered as a historical period during which women began to acquire certain independence (Saint-Saens 1996: 137). I am, of course, referring to those women who belonged to the upper class, who took pleasure from the freedom to attend theatre, *fiestas* and gatherings in salons, and which allowed them to become protagonists of important parts of social life. However, just as the political organisation of the state, institutions and society started to adopt the formulas of liberalism at the end of the eighteenth century, this process of liberalisation for women came to an end in Spain.

Liberal theory contested the divine right of monarchs and aristocrats to political rule, and legitimised political participation for members of the land-owning classes. Essentially, liberalism defended the rights of the citizen; participation in public life, including most crucially the right to vote, and to hold political office. These rights contained the basis of that participation, namely, the right to hold property in one's own name. Nevertheless, political liberalism, despite its theoretical struggle for universal freedom and democracy, in practice was a patriarchal and authoritarian project (Munch Comini), and according to Susan Kirkpatrick, 'with the exception of scattered groups of utopians, there was no serious proposal to extend the political and economic benefits of the liberal programme to women' (1989: 51). This was in part because 'women were legally defined as dependants and enjoyed limited property rights', and therefore 'only men had the right to make contracts that allowed entry into the public sphere' (Labanyi 1995: 9-10). Additionally, with the emergence of modern capitalist society, the home and the work place became two divided spheres. With capitalist expansion, the workplace became separated from the household which had previously been the focus of production. Middle-class families began to settle in new residential areas set apart from the places of business where the father of the household worked. This separation of economic production from the home created a division between a 'new public world constituted by the universal bonds of contract between formally free and equal individuals' and 'a private familial world constituted by natural ties and a natural order of subordination' (Pateman 1988: 90). In this way a clear demarcation of roles and functions based on gender was developed. Men, then, came to occupy the world of reason, situated in the public space, while women were relegated to the domestic world of private emotions and feelings. That is to say, the reality for most women revolved around the rest of the family, working at home without receiving economic remuneration (Capel & Ortega 1994: 323). What is more, the female body was presented as essentially

beautiful and designed for procreation. In practice, the subjugation of women was legitimised with discourses that tried to demonstrate their physical and intellectual inferiority for work (Lafite 1964: 25).

Analysis of Paintings

After looking at the discourses of womanhood and nationhood in nineteenth century Spain, a pertinent and interesting question emerges in relation to their representation within the historical genre: what dynamics of representation transpire when the body of a woman, which in iconographic traditions is nearly always represented as subjugated, is also the body of a political figure? The works I have chosen to illustrate my response to this question achieved great public and critical acclaim at the time and recreated historical passages in which the protagonists were women from different eras. Those are the Roman matron Lucretia, the daughters of the medieval Spanish warrior 'The Cid', the nineteenth century liberal heroine Mariana Pineda, and the Renaissance Castilian queen Juana I. The stories of all these women were imbued with nationalist connotations, but also contributed to legitimise, undermine, and in some cases both, the nineteenth-century discourses of womanhood.

The analysis begins with *Death of Lucretia* painted by Eduardo Rosales in 1871.



Death of Lucretia by Eduardo Rosales (1871)

http://cvc.cervantes.es/img/citas_claroscuro/esp_xix16.jpg

Lucretia is the legendary heroine of ancient Rome, who was married to the nobleman Collatinus, and represented the quintessential virtuous wife. Tarquin, the son of the tyrant Etruscan king of Rome, raped her, and she committed suicide by plunging a knife into her breast because of her perceived shame. Before dying she demanded an oath of vengeance against the Tarquin family from her father, husband, and loyal friends. The enraged populace rebelled against the Tarquins and drove them out. This event marks the beginning of the Roman Republic.

From the point of view of nation formation, this painting would validate Spain's Greco-roman roots, which, as Perez Viejo suggests, was one of the aims within the historical genre, abounding with paintings recreating episodes and mythologies of these classic periods (Pérez Viejo 2002 online). Besides, the representation of Lucretia's story could be seen as a metaphor for the state of the Spanish nation which was embroiled in huge political turmoil and urgently in need of a Lucretia-like figure. In 1868, Isabel II was expelled from the country for interfering in politics in a wayward, unscrupulous way, thereby creating a vacant throne. After the Spanish Parliament had decided to reinstate the monarchy under a new dynasty, an

Italian king, Amadeo de Saboya, was selected. However, after three years in power and exasperated by the hostile situation in Spain, Amadeo abdicated and left the country in the midst of major political instability. It was during this time when Rosales painted his 'Lucretia'. Considering this context, the theme of the painting seems to suggest a change in Spanish politics and presents the proclamation of the republic as a solution. In fact, according to Xavier Salas, although Rosales lived in Rome, the Spanish political scene was always a constant preoccupation for him, and when Amadeo left the country, he commented on many occasions on the need for a radical change in Spanish politics (1982: 13).

In relation to gender, it is interesting to note Rosales' choice of portraying the moment when Lucretia is already dead, in stark contrast to earlier artists like Titian and Luca Giordano who focused in representing the more provocative scene of the rape, or Gentileschi, Rafael, and Durer who depicted Lucretia in the moments before committing suicide. However, his decision appears to have considered the pictorial taste of the time. Like Bronfen notes in her book *Over her Dead body*, 'the pictorial representations of dead women became so prevalent in eighteenth and nineteenth century European culture that by the end of the latter this *topos* was already slightly clichéd' (Bronfen 1992: 3).

Lucretia in death remains a beautiful and desirable woman, and since she is dead does not represent a threat to male viewers. Furthermore, in relation to the representation of Lucretia's dead body in this painting, there is clearly no hard evidence of physical violence to her body or traces of blood on her clothes, despite having bled to death. Thus, we see the manipulation of Rosales to eliminate any disturbing elements that could distract from a pleasurable view of the female body. Let's not forget that in nineteenth-century salon pictures women were presented as objects to a male viewer/possessor outside the painting, a meaning sometimes explicitly enforced by the gaze of a subordinate male onlooker in the painting itself. And in Rosales's painting the two masculine characters shown holding Lucretia appear frozen in the act of gazing at her while the elder (most likely representing her father) even seems to be about to kiss her. Besides, we must bear in mind that, in the nineteenth-century, man was not only the subject of all erotic predicates but also the customer or consumer for all erotic products as well. At the same time, the myth of Pygmalion, revived in the nineteenth century, admirably embodied the notion of the artist as sexually dominant creator: man-the artist fashioning from lifeless matter an ideal erotic image for himself, a woman cut to the very pattern of his desires.

This leads us to the next two works I have chosen to support my thesis, which share the same name and subject matter; *The Cid's daughters*, painted by Dióscolo de la Puebla in 1871, and by Ignacio Pinazo in 1879. (See: http://cvc.cervantes.es/img/citas_claroscuro/esp_xix06.jpg and <http://img221.imageshack.us/img221/1041/desnudo0214po3.jpg>)

These works illustrate part of an epic poem about the Spanish hero El Cid. In this part of the poem, the protagonists' daughters are physically abused and abandoned in the forest by their husbands, the Counts of Carrion, who were looking for revenge after they had been accused of acting cowardly in battle by the hero. Later in the poem, El Cid has to regain his honour, and so asks the court of Toledo for justice, which culminates in the Counts being defeated by El Cid's men. Through this episode the importance of El Cid as a symbol of the fight against the abuses of nobility is connoted, and served to imply the long-standing democratic and liberal character of the Spanish nation. In this sense, these painting responded to the main purpose of nineteenth-century history, which was, as aforementioned, to form the notion of Spanishness. If we analyze these paintings from the perspective of gender, however, it is interesting to see how these works appealed to the prudish and moralist spectator of the nineteenth century. According to Bram Dijkstra, the vast production of nineteenth century works of art that recreated episodes where women were abused physically, responded to the need to cater for 'an audience of men who, [...] constrained in their own sexual development by images created by their fathers, were now seeking relief in daydreams of "invited" violence, for which they could not be held personally responsible' (1986: 100).

Furthermore, during the last half of the nineteenth century some scientific literature considered that women obtained a certain amount of pleasure when being beaten and subjected to violence. The psychologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing considered that masochism was a true perversion only in men, since in woman voluntary subjection to the opposite sex is a physiological phenomenon. He thought that owing to her passive role in procreation and long-existent social conditions, ideas of subjection are, in woman, normally connected

with the idea of sexual relations' (Dijkstra 1986: 101). Bernard Tamley, a recognised scientist at the time, considered that women loved a degree of moderate submission to their husbands and their desires, being part of women's nature, and that a bit of sexual bondage was not pathological if with it she would be able to keep the love of her man (Dijkstra 1986: 116).

Thus, these paintings of El Cid's daughters could be interpreted as a characteristic visualization of the male preoccupation with the notion that women were born masochists and loved nothing better than to be raped and beaten. The fact that they are tied up and naked made them doubly vulnerable, ready to be taken with impunity by any man who happened to be passing by. These two women are also integrated in a natural landscape, especially in Pinazo's painting, which stresses the association of women and nature and the world of the senses.

Moving on, I now turn to examining, as proposed, the historical paintings of Mariana Pineda, a woman whose name lives on as one of the few recorded political heroines in Spanish history. During the despotic rule of King Fernando VII (1784 -1833), Mariana was sentenced to death for having ordered the embroidery of a constitutional flag. Although she had been offered her freedom in exchange for the names of her suspected, liberal, anti-government co-conspirators, Mariana refused and she was executed at 27 years; a widow with two young children.

The paintings I have chosen to analyse here are *Mariana Pineda being taken to the scaffold* (1862) by Juan Antonio Vera, and *Mariana Pineda bidding her farewell* (1862) by Isidoro Lozano.



Mariana Pineda being taken to the scaffold by Juan Antonio Vera (1862)

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ad/Mariana_Pineda_en_capilla_1862_Juan_Antonio_Vera_Calvo.jpg



Mariana Pineda bidding her farewell by Isidoro Lozano (1862)

Photograph of illustration in Antonina Rodrigo's book *Mariana de Pineda* (2004)

We first observe that while the title of each of these works is evocative of the unfolding drama which led to Mariana's death, it is striking that the scenes depicted by the artists do little to emphasise her political act of heroism. For instance, in the two paintings there is no sign of the liberal flag, the symbol of Mariana's political liberalism. Instead, certain iconographic elements of these paintings suggest an association of the figure of Mariana to the religious world.

If we contemplate the figure of Mariana in these works, it becomes possible to establish an argument for links within the paintings to Christian iconography. In this respect, Mariana's head is fore-grounded by a near circle of background light in Vera's painting, and thus gives the impression of a halo. In both paintings, the artists make use of chiaroscuro, a ploy which, as Edelman suggests, has long been used by artists as a strategy to create a mystical atmosphere (1995:51). Focussing on Mariana's facial features, we can also see that in the two pictures they have been idealised. Although there were many lithographs and portraits of the 'real' Mariana, the painters have chosen to create a new face for her which has much in common with religious images and the face of Mariana is reminiscent of a holy figure. Thus, in Lozano's painting the heroine reaches her eyes to heaven, a gesture seen in many religious images.

Perhaps most evident, in these paintings, is that the figure of Mariana, through her stance, evokes a Christ-like figure. According to Gombrich, painting is 'a memory of pictures seen' (1969: 314), and Mariana's pose clearly reminds us of images from Christian iconography in which Christ is touching his heart and extending out his right arm. To be more specific, it is very reminiscent of the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus which, not coincidentally, was one of the most popular devotions of the nineteenth century, promoted by Pope Pius IX, and symbolised the infinite love of Jesus.



Sculpture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

[http://www.adurcal.com/enlaces/molina/monumentos/BIENES_IGLESIA_MELEGIS\(I\)/15.Sagrado_corazon.JPG](http://www.adurcal.com/enlaces/molina/monumentos/BIENES_IGLESIA_MELEGIS(I)/15.Sagrado_corazon.JPG)

In Spain the devotion had a special significance, and from 1918 to 1924 almost every house in Spain enthroned the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Christian 1996: 442). Through this visual association, Mariana's mortal sacrifice for the liberal cause is linked to Christ's sacrifice to redeem humanity, and therefore creates an image of reconciliation between the Catholic Church and liberalism, which were in crisis at the time. By conferring on Mariana, a liberal figure, an aura of religious holiness, these paintings legitimise liberalism as able to co-exist alongside Catholicism, especially if we consider that these paintings were produced after 1860, when the liberal state diminished their attacks on the Church and was willing to begin a process of reconciliation. Nevertheless, the replacement of the image of Christ with that of a woman, which occurs in these paintings, could lead the viewer to see the features of sacrifice, abnegation, and absolute love for others related to Christ as stock characteristics of women according to patriarchal discourses of the day. In such a reading, the representation of Mariana as a political heroine is diminished and her depoliticised figure is returned to the 'feminine realm', mitigating male anxieties and legitimising gender discourses of the time.

Finally, the next important female historical figure I have elected to discuss is Queen Juana I (1479 - 1555). Daughter of the Catholic Monarchs, her story was recreated by various artists. The legend of this queen tells of the sudden death of her beloved but unfaithful husband Philip, whose sobriquet was 'The Handsome', which led to Juana's descent into insanity. Since she was considered incapable of ruling, Juana was locked up in a castle for the rest of her long life while her son took the throne to become Charles I. The most popular and widely reproduced painting dealing with the Castilian queen is Francisco Pradilla's *Juana the madwoman* (1878).



Juana the madwoman by Francisco Pradilla (1878)

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/b1/Juana_la_Loca_de_Pradilla.jpg/800px-Juana_la_Loca_de_Pradilla.jpg

In this picture, Pradilla represents Juana and her entourage during her legendary journey to take her husband's dead body from Burgos to Granada where she wished him to be buried. The group had stopped to rest near a convent after Juana had refused to enter the building out of her jealousy that the nuns would try to get close to her husband's casket.

At first sight, Juana's story seems an unlikely subject to include as having contributed to the proposed ideal of nationhood. However, as the art critic Carlos Reyero notes, despite the fact that a superficial reading of this painting may lead us to think that it is of scant relevance, in terms of helping to create an image of Spanishness, everything shows it belongs to the group of historical themes that contribute most to create a sense of national identity. Reyero argues that for the nineteenth century Spaniards, Juana is above all the daughter of the Catholic Monarchs, therefore the last truly Spanish sovereign, to whom power is irrelevant and remains loyal to her husband while he was alive and after dead. She also becomes an austere, strong, discreet widow (Reyero 1998: 122), very much in tune with the legendary sobriety associated to Castilian people. In fact, Pradilla's painting was perceived as a representative of Spanishness and was considered a national treasure. To prevent the possibility of a foreign country purchasing the work (the French government was particularly interested) the Spanish parliament bought it for 40.000 pesetas, an enormous amount at the time. This decision was celebrated by most national papers like *El Eco* which wrote that Pradilla's painting was a very patriotic work of art.

Then again, Pradilla's work also reinforced the image of Spanishness that British and French writers, artists and travellers, like Hugo, Chateaubriand, Roberts, or Dore, had created throughout the nineteenth century. In these works Spaniards were portrayed as passionate, primitive, impetuous, and unsophisticated. A good example of this constructed image is the famous novel *Carmen* (1846) by Prospero Mérimée, whose protagonist is a beautiful and impulsive Gypsy woman. In that sense, and as Reyero suggests, Pradilla's picture could have been seen abroad as proof of the Spanish temperament, the picturesque representation of a woman that marches through the fields of Castille making an spectacle of her mad pain (1898: 122). In fact, when the painting was exhibited in Paris the art critics and the public were as interested in the painting as in the subject, and Juana's madness was considered very "espagnole" (Gallego 1964:305). Through Pradilla's work, then, Queen Joan's story became a paradigm of the Spanish national character, as much in Spain as abroad.

With regard to the discourse of womanhood, this painting clearly hinted at the notion that women, due to their emotional nature, were incapable of ruling competently. In nineteenth century Spain, the debate about the aptitude of women to exercise political power became a hot issue. In 1830 King Fernando VII set aside the Salic law, which was a rule of succession forbidding females and those descendants in the female line to succeed to the titles or offices in the family. This decision was influenced by the fact that his only child was a girl, Isabel, and he expected her to succeed him to the throne. With this resolution, Fernando prevented

his brother, Carlos, from becoming king, leading to the so-called Carlist wars (1833-1876), a contention between those who defended the right of Isabel to govern and those who defended Carlos. Thus, Isabel's supporters fiercely defended the aptitude of women to govern while the Carlists questioned it violently. In other words, what was supposedly a political debate became a gender issue, which should be borne in mind whilst examining this painting. It is true that in the painting Juana appears to be exercising her power as a queen. There she is, surrounded by her court, being obeyed by the women and men that follow her on the macabre journey. Then again, she is also associated with the public sphere. Juana also stands at the centre of the painting, dominating it, and the verticality of her body within the composition gives the queen prominence and authority. What is more, she is the focus of everyone's gaze.

However, although she may be the centre of attention, the women who are seated symbolically lower down than her, stare at the scene with an expression of compassion, while the male figures standing up in the background observe her with aloof curiosity. From this representational difference, the artist demarcates a symbolic line between the inferior female world of feelings and the more rational and scientific one of men. For these male characters, who are clearly owners of an active gaze, the woman is the 'other', to whom they observe attentively, hinting at how the mad woman became a spectacle in the nineteenth century. Another painting from the same period *Charcot lecturing on Hysteria at the Salpêtrière* (1887), by Pierre Andre Brouillet, reinforces this point.



Charcot lecturing on Hysteria at the Salpêtrière (1887), by Pierre Andre Brouillet

<http://www.theslideprojector.com/images/1850sto1890s/charcot/charcotdemonstratinghistechnique.jpg>

Andrè Brouillet's work shows the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot lecturing on female's hysteria. He is holding a fainting young beautiful woman by the waist while a group of scientists observe and listen to the recognised doctor. The female figure wears a low-cut white blouse in contrast to the well-covered dark dressed male scientist, which accentuates the woman's alienation from the world of reason represented by the doctors. Her madness has become an object of observation inside and outside the painting while the scene allows the spectator to enjoy placidly the sight of her passive, vulnerable, sensual beauty. It is patent that in this work like in Pradilla's the mad woman appears like a spectacle and returns woman to the realm of emotions.

Conclusion

In this article I have explored the figures of Lucretia, the daughters of 'The Cid', Mariana Pineda, and the queen Juana I, as they were represented in nineteenth century History painting. I have argued that in these works of art these women were, on the face of it, glorified as public figures, even elevated to a heroic status. But, however emancipative the representation of these narratives would appear to be at first glance, they are frequently undercut by the patriarchal discourses of the time. They portray women as passive sexual objects, as in Lucretia's painting; frame them in the realm of nature, as it occurs with the Cid's daughters;

exclude them from the political sphere, as in the portrayals of Mariana, and finally associate them with the world of the irrational, which occurs in Juana's case.

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