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# Juana I of Castile and Maria Pacheco: Leadership and Power in Early Modern Spain

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# Juana I of Castile and María Pacheco

## Leadership and Power in Early Modern Spain

Abigail Connell

### Investigation:

Juana of Castile and María Pacheco were powerful women in Early Modern Spain who were both surrounded by myth in their own time and fictionalized in Spain through plays, novels, and movies. In Victor Hamel's 1842 novel *Los Comuneros de Castilla*, his characters Juana, the "mad queen of Spain", and María Pacheco, the co-leader of the *Comunero* rebellion, become friends, Juana taking María under her wing.

This research addresses the following questions:

*How does the novel's portrayal of María Pacheco and Juana of Castile hold up against the historical record?*

*What is the feasibility of the claim that Juana and María Pacheco were friends?*



### Historical Context: Comuneros' Rebellion

When Fernando of Aragon died in 1516, his grandson Carlos V assumed the Spanish monarchy

Raised in Flanders, Carlos brought the Flemish Court with him, undermining Spanish customs

Spanish nobles were unhappy with his rule and set out to conquer Spain for themselves in the name of the "true" Spanish monarchy, which belonged to Juana of Castile

The insurrection lasted about a year, starting in May 1520 and effectively ending when Carlos V and the foreign royal forces defeated the rebels at Villalar in April of 1521

The failure of the *Comuneros* is partially attributed to their lack of ability to obtain Queen Juana's formal support



### Juana of Castile

Became Queen of Castile in 1504, and Queen of Spain in 1516, heir of Isabel of Castile and Fernando of Aragon

Wife of Felipe the Handsome of Austria, mother of Carlos V/I

Considered "mad" by the Court, leading her father, husband, and son to rule on her behalf until her death in 1555

Symbol of the *Comunero* Rebellion

Imprisoned in Tordesillas for most of her life, except during the Rebellion, during which she acted as queen



### María Pacheco

Led the city of Toledo in the *Comunero* Rebellion in 1520-1521 with her husband, Juan de Padilla

Born to a noble family, kept her mother's last name because it held more prestige

Led Toledo in her husband's absence while he was traveling, and even in his death until the *Comuneros* were overtaken in Toledo in February of 1522

Left without money or power when Toledo was captured, and forced to flee to Portugal

### Logistics of their meeting: Tordesillas

In reality, Juan de Padilla and the *Comuneros* did travel to Tordesillas in August of 1520 to convince Juana to take their side in the rebellion.

However, there is "no information regarding [María's] life between the marriage in 1515 and her appearance at the head of the *Comunero* Rebellion in 1521"—Stephanie Fink De Backer

The first mention of María Pacheco in the context of the *Comunero* Rebellion comes with her influence in Toledo in January of 1521



### Character Traits and Life Events

Both women grew up in Toledo and were highly educated along with their brothers and sisters

Both women entered into marriages of alliance and fell in love with their husbands

While Juana's life was long, secluded, and relatively uneventful, María Pacheco's adult life was brief, intense, and carried out in the public eye

Both women's lives were most active during the *Comunero* Rebellion

### Goals and Objectives

Both women wanted to remove the foreign influence from Spain and ensure Spanish rule

María took this to mean that Carlos should not rule, with Juana and the *Comuneros* in charge in his place

Juana, however, was reluctant to undermine her son's power

### Public Perception

Juana was portrayed by her husband, her father, and her caretakers in Tordesillas as "mad," mentally unstable, and depressed

Primary evidence of Juana's madness came in the form of an emotional breakdown following her husband's death

Writers during María Pacheco's time considered her a radical, blaming her influence for her husband's involvement with the *Comuneros*

Rumors and stories spread of María's hunger for power and determination that her husband should be king

### Conclusion

The Queen Juana of Castile and María Pacheco may never have met, but their lives and personalities intersected in a way which makes it seem likely that they would have been friends had they known each other

- Their upbringing, education, and the state of their marriage align closely
- Their adult lives bear striking similarities, such as being considered "mad" and falling from their families' grace
- Where their personalities differ, such as María's strength and Juana's weakness, may have prompted admiration of María from Juana during her period of rule

What seems less likely is that Juana took María under her wing as another daughter, given their differences in responsibility and psychological health

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