

MADNESS AND MAJESTY: THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF JUANA I OF CASTILE

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INTRODUCTION

Juana I of Castile, more famously known as Juana la Loca (Joanna the Mad), is a historical figure whose mental health has intrigued historians, psychiatrists, and political scientists alike.

Ascending to the throne during one of Spain's most politically charged periods, Juana's mental state—characterized by extreme emotional instability and irrationality—was often used by those around her to advance political agendas.

OBJECTIVE

To explore Juana I's behavior to hypothesize psychiatric diagnoses like bipolar disorder or schizophrenia, while also showing how her mental health was exploited for political gain.

METHODS

Historical Review

Review of primary and secondary sources on Juana's life analyzed through a psychiatric lens, focusing on her **affective dysregulation, psychotic features, and catatonic episodes**.

Diagnostic Framework

Historical accounts of Juana's behavior were compared to DSM-5 criteria, highlighting prolonged depression, manic outbursts, and catatonic behavior, suggesting a **severe mood or psychotic spectrum disorder**.

Political Context Analysis

The political tactics of Ferdinand II and Charles I were examined to show how Juana's mental health was used to justify her confinement and secure control of the Castilian throne.

RESULTS

Psychopathology Hypothesis

Juana's behaviors—manic episodes, catatonic depressions, and irrational outbursts—consistent with bipolar disorder and/or schizophrenia.

Political Exploitation

Her mental state was leveraged by Ferdinand II and Charles I to consolidate their control, sidelining her from the throne.

Historical Context

Mental illness perceptions in the early modern period were intertwined with power dynamics and gendered interpretations of "madness" in female monarchs.

Clinical Relevance

The case urges modern psychiatry to reflect on how mental illness can be manipulated for social or political control, stressing the need for ethical care.



Figure 1: Portrait of Juana of Castile, adapted from "Juana of Castile: The Corpse Bride" (Lucylizziesbooknfilmreview, 2018)

DISCUSSION

Juana's grief, instability, and delusions highlight the difficulty of diagnosing historical psychiatric conditions. Applying modern labels must be done cautiously, as her behavior was shaped by sociopolitical factors.

CONCLUSION

Juana I of Castile's life illustrates the intersection of mental illness and political power, showing how psychiatric disorders can be both genuine conditions and tools of manipulation. Her struggles with severe affective and psychotic symptoms highlight the ethical challenges in understanding and treating mental illness, both historically and today.

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