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## psychiatry in pictures

### Juana la Loca

Rafael Euba

‘Her words are so moving, it is very hard for the Marquise and me to resist them. Her supplications stir in me the deepest compassion’. She is Queen Joanna of Castile, begging to be released. The person so moved by the unfortunate queen is the Marquis of Denia, her guardian, or perhaps her jailer, depending on the point of view.

‘Juana la Loca’ (1479–1555) was confined in Tordesillas because of her mental illness. It is believed that she may have had either schizophrenia or a psychotic melancholia, popularly attributed to the loss of her husband, Philip ‘The Handsome’. The image of the heart-broken queen – who, incidentally, appears in her portraits to be better looking than her ‘handsome’ husband – wandering the Castilian steppe with her entourage and Philip’s coffin, and later imprisoned, has inspired countless paintings, films and novels, most of them containing the words ‘love’ and ‘madness’ in their titles. These stories, always sympathetic to Joanna, also assume that she was a *de facto* political prisoner of the males in her family, her father King Ferdinand and her son Charles I, who allegedly usurped her throne by locking her away. The contemporary descriptions of her behaviour however, are certainly consistent with a severe and chronic psychotic illness.

She was kept in Tordesillas against her will until her death after nearly 50 years, while her father Ferdinand ‘the Catholic’ and her son Emperor Charles ruled her kingdoms on her behalf. Joanna was allowed to keep Catalina of Austria, her youngest daughter, with her until the girl eventually left Tordesillas to become Queen of Portugal.

Joanna’s psychosis, and more importantly her incarceration, had a profound impact on Spain’s history.

One of the most famous representations of Juana on canvas is by Francisco Pradilla, currently held by Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid.