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URRACA: FEMALE SOVEREIGNTY FORGOTTEN AND IMAGINED

ABSTRACT:

Queen Urraca has been ignored in recent works of historical fiction because her story does not respond to the political and social climates that begin to appreciate women in power. This relative absence is mirrored in the historiography of historical fiction. This essay provides a summary of history and historical fiction about Queen Urraca that elaborates the changes in the way readers have thought, think, and continue to think about women.

KEY WORDS: Urraca, metafiction, historical fiction, women.

RESUMEN:

El abandono de la reina Urraca I en la historia ficción se podría atribuir al hecho que su historia no conforma a los ideales socio-políticos que informan la mujer hoy día. La ausencia relativa de la mujer se refleja en los estudios históricos que se han hecho sobre este género. Este ensayo provee un resumen de la historia e historia ficción de la reina Urraca en la que se apunta la evaluación de nuestro pensamiento sobre la reina y de cómo sus lectores han pensado, piensan, y siguen pensando sobre la mujer.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Urraca, metaficción, ficción histórica, mujeres.

Tengo por importante [...] el concepto de que la novela ha dejado de ser obra de mero entretenimiento, modo de engañar gratamente unas cuantas horas, ascendiendo a estudio social, psicológico, histórico, pero al cabo estudio.

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I hold as important [...] the idea that the novel has stopped being a work made for leisure, a way of whiling away the time for some hours, entertainment, and has risen to the level of social, psychological, and historical analysis, but in the end an analysis.

Emilia Pardo Bazán, *Preface to Un viaje de novios*

Urraca I was queen of León and Castile from 1109 until 1126, yet the biases imposed upon the vicissitudes of Urraca's life have wholly overshadowed the accomplishments of her sovereignty. In history and literature, Urraca has been condemned for behaviors scandalous only because of her sex. In fact, her sexual behavior has been the underlying reason behind most of the negative assessments of her rule. In 1982, she was partially rehabilitated in the eponymous novel by Lourdes Ortiz, whose interest in this queen prefigured today's current inclination for history and fiction.² Historical novels, those written by and about women in particular, have been read as recuperations of a presumptive past. In the creative recuperation of time gone by, these novels address past and current ways of thinking about women. Lourdes Ortiz, a Spanish novelist, dramatist, and professor, recreates the twelfth century monarch by introducing a complex understanding of Urraca's politics within a contemporary understanding of her psyche. Historical events determine most of the narrative of the novel. Ortiz integrates reality and imagination to present a character grounded in the understanding of Urraca's lifetime. Ortiz inscribes into the twelfth century plot concerns about women in twentieth century Spain. The recognized importance of Ortiz's novel is, however, at odds with Urraca's relative absence within contemporary historical fiction. As current associations between the genre and female readership suggest that these novels provide a way for contemporary women to reinterpret patriarchal practices (Cooper, Short 2-4, 10), this review of the queen's history and literature suggests the difficulties and possibilities of effecting a shift in understanding within patriarchal master narratives.

1. THE SHADOWS OF HISTORY AND FICTION

Reading historical fictions emphasizes the inventive nature of the written medium: a representation of the past is always a fictive creation mediated through a person's

² In 2001, Espasa (Grupo Planeta) set up a 30.000 € prize for the best novel in Historical Fiction. It is a date, the publishing house claims, that coincides with the peak of Spanish historical fiction writing. Henseler reports data from a survey from 1998, which states that the historical novel accounted then for 35.1% of preferred reading material in the category of contemporary narrative (adventure novels claimed first place with 37.3%) (42).

understanding of both past and present (Wallace 2012 211). Characters read within this construct are evaluated according to the actions found within the historical narrative, as seen through the author's and our own intents and inherent biases. In Ortiz's *Urraca*, the author provides partial glimpses into Urraca's time, seen through the eyes of the author composing it, and read through the time of reader's reading it. Historical narratives depend upon authors who may reduce but can never escape the influence of ideologies of their time. Historical fiction responds to our need for truth despite our understanding of its impossibility.³ In a sense, it is a genre reflective of Plato's cave allegory. Readers of historical fiction, as prisoners in Plato's cave, understand the shadows they see as reflections on one among many walls of representation. Readers of today's fictions understand that the representations of narrative past and of author's present reflect imperfectly the forms of what is and was and may have been real.

This multiple and imperfect representation of reality inevitably leads one to questions of authenticity. To what degree can *Urraca*, or for that matter, any work of historical literature, be judged wholly or in part as an authentic and aesthetic recuperation of history? It is a question that resonates still today. Before history was taught professionally, the historical narrative provided for the reading public the primary means of understanding past events (Hamnett 5). The recent appeal of historical fiction in literature, cinema, and television series has done much to reestablish the importance of historical fictions. However, historians, and literary and cultural critics have tended to neglect the genre as a model of scholarly inquiry, believing it a matter unworthy of comment because of institutional pressures or value-laden biases. Historically, the rise in popularity of the historical novel coincided both with the rise of the nation state and the advent of history as an academic discipline (Rehberger 61-62). History came to be understood as man formed bonds not with a region or village of origin, but with "a national sensibility," growing out of a sense of imperial goals or a fear of conquest (Wallace 2005 10-11). The Hegelian concept of history believed human life as part of a historical process, and any progress experienced by human life achieved by a dialectic between social forces (Wallace 2005 11).⁴ For modern historians like Hamnett, the nineteenth century historical novel often voiced unresolved historical issues through their character's experiences. Or, alternately, it illuminated national or social identities through their thoughts and deeds (2). Academic institution, national ideology, and literary imagination pushed against each other with conflicting ideas. In America,

³ This is the essential framework that allows for the later expression of postmodern historiographic metafiction, as described by Linda Hutcheon, and will be addressed in a subsequent section of this article.

⁴ Much the same thing is discussed later by Lukács, who notes that, "[h]istory itself... is the bearer and realiser of human progress" (27; qtd. in Wallace 2005 11).

the justification of American history as a worthwhile academic discipline conflicted with the identification of American historical fictions as fanciful, fictive or imprecise representations of that same past. The insecurities of history as a worthwhile object of study possibly were due to America's brief existence as a country. These insecurities may not have been felt as strongly by people who could claim a longer, unified existence. In England, Oxford's development as a modern university grew out of the idea that new subjects such as History furnished "a discipline, in both the widest and narrowest sense, for transforming immature young men into responsible and capable leaders, at home and within the empire" (Soffer 933). Implicit in this idea was the belief that a study of one's past exposed one's personal patriotism. History in Oxford thus became a rigorous academic discipline providing the student with the knowledge of political institutions that had led to England's rise, and the means to make informed decisions for one's fellow man and for the future of one's country (Soffer 933-936). Yet, the friction between history and historical fiction ironically underlies their mutual interdependence. History could teach the British student to be a better citizen, but the stories gleaned from primary sources – be they a charter, a treatise, or a castle – were necessary inspirations to get the student to university. Herbert Butterfield noted this universal response to the primary sources of history, and the desire for story engendered by these primary sources: "All of us have this feeling when the glimpse of some historic town, or the impressive sternness of an old castle, or the sight of a Roman wall, awakens a world in our minds, and sets us thinking on all the tales that stone could tell if only it could speak the history it stores" (9). The sight of these historical artifacts fosters the storyteller in us. This sight projects a linear transfer between the object beheld and the subject beholder. The stories contained in objects like the Roman wall are projected onto the consciousness of the subject to foment a type of *translatio imperii*, or rather a *translatio sapientiae*, whereby the knowledge of the past promotes the wisdom necessary for continued conquest and empire. History and historical fiction develop, not coincidentally, at a time when the self-identified community grows to the national level. Historical fiction appeals to the more popular demand for literature in which the community's origins may be understood or questioned, their essence examined and expressed. At the same time, history as an emerging academic institution legitimated its discipline by offering the means to nurture and promote citizens with the country's best national interests at heart.

This model for the birth of historical fiction fit well for countries with expanding borders, but needed slight modification to admit the Spanish nation.⁵ After all,

⁵ The topic has been studied very little for Spain. The primary institutions for encouraging historical study in the nineteenth century were not universities, but royal academies. According to Cuesta

the majority of Spanish imperial holdings had all but disappeared by 1826. The 1810 Cortes in Cadiz had proclaimed sovereignty for the people it represented, yet decades of war, internal conflict, and imperial decline prolonged the self-definition of Spain and the Spanish people as a nation (Hamnett 218-19). Spain's identity gained a certain literary cohesiveness in Benito Pérez Galdós's *Episodios nacionales*, an impressive series of forty-six novels that paints Spanish history from the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) through the Bourbon Restoration (1874). Written between 1872 and 1912, the five series that comprise the *Episodios* were written in the belief that an understanding of Spain's past would enable the nation to move past its difficult present (Coffey, Troncoso, García Castañeda, Luna).

Given the rise in female authorship in the nineteenth century, one of the main problems with this summary of the growth of history and historical fiction is the lack of female authorities. The absence of these figures, one might presume, does not stem from their lack of existence, but rather from a narrowed and masculinist approach to the concept of historical fiction. Critics like Diana Wallace have restored many of the women who wrote at the same time as their groundbreaking male counterparts by reevaluating the genre's definition.⁶ While most early twentieth century critics (Lukács, Butterfield, Alonso) scarcely if ever mention women, Wallace has recognized that works by Maria Edgeworth (*Castle Rackrent*, 1800), Charlotte Brontë (*Shirley*, 1849), George Elliot (*Romola*, 1863; *Felix Holt*, 1866), Elizabeth Gaskell (*Sylvia's Lovers*, 1863) and Virginia Woolf (*Orlando*, 1928; *Between the Acts*, 1941) clearly evidence a tradition of women historical writings (2005 8-9).

Within the Iberian peninsula, the existence of women's historical fiction might also be presumed. A 2011 exhibition at Madrid's Biblioteca Nacional displayed the writings of Carolina Coronado. Although she is known primarily for her poetry, the Sala de las Musas exhibited three of Coronado's fifteen novels; the museum's pamphlet confirmed these novels' historical nature (*Paquita. Adoración* [1850], *Jarilla* [1850], *La Sigea* [1954]).⁷ Emilia Pardo Bazán's *La tribuna* (1883) refers to concrete historical

Fernández, some initial reforms were made for the study of history in the 1830s. In 1845, the *Plan Pidal* provided the means to establish basic requirements for students earning university degrees. By 1857, the *Ley Moyano* finally ratified the inclusion of history into the Spanish university curriculum (22).

⁶ Simply speaking, the genre of historical fiction has been defined as one which is set in a historical past. It is thought to begin with the early nineteenth century writings of Sir Walter Scott. *Waverly* (1814) is credited as the first historical novel, and its appended title "[t]is sixty years since" marks a time period sufficiently "past" to be considered of historical value. Wallace has noted, as may be seen above, at least one female author of historical fiction who wrote before the advent of *Waverly*.

⁷ A fourth historical novel, *Harnina*, was unfinished at the time of her death in 1911 (Torres Nebrera 405).

events that affect the lives of the author's urban working class characters (González Arias 135). Pardo Bazán's ability to faithfully portray this class in *La tribuna* is one of the reasons it has been classified as part of the Naturalism movement. Other authors such as Fernán Caballero wrote various works classified as *costumbrista*. In the prologue to Caballero's *La familia de Alvarado* (1856), for example, the Duque de Rivas praises her exact reproduction of Spanish locales and characters, claiming that they are portrayed with the precision of a Velázquez painting. Much of the work written by these nineteenth century novelists has been categorized by other genres subsumed by the umbrella of historical fiction. Many of these women's stories interpret local life; they do so by suggesting that particular social and biological forces shape human events or by grasping the essence of a people through a narrative that reproduces their mannerisms and customs. It is clear that these movements may be understood as variations on the historical novel, and that these movements represent to different degrees subnational communities within an emerging nation state (Iarocci 387-88; Channon-Deutsch 122-37). It is clear that authors like Pardo Bazán and Fernán Caballero address political and social groups that shape part of the Spanish nation; it is abundantly clear that both these authors desired a voice in the construction of the Spanish nation. Their works may not express, strictly speaking, a means of completely synthesizing the essence of a time, yet the lives of its characters represent the ways a region, group, or sex would want to inform national interests. In this, these female authors extended beyond the purview of male authors, and like their English counterparts, these female authors have been largely and until recently ignored.

The historical novel, imagined by a male author and written primarily for a male audience, presupposed for the genre its own *raison d'être*. Because these reasons did not coincide with the presumed rationale of female writers of historical novels, their works were misunderstood, discounted and discredited by future readers, scholars, and critics. The tensions already in existence between history (as an academic institution) and fiction (set in a historical past) fueled greater conflicts invalidating the genre as a worthwhile object of study. Moreover, the aphoristic description of historical fiction as "vulgar fiction, impure history" is one that subtly undermined female authorship. The gender specific negative qualifiers "vulgar" and "impure" were particularly damaging to women authors of historical fictions, as many of these authors inscribed amorous plots, which were understood by male authors as plots of lesser literary quality, into their fictions. While male, nineteenth century novelists drew upon readers' yearning for patriotic plots woven into the texture of history, women novelists were criticized for writing escapist, frivolous novels. This is not the place to argue, as Wallace convincingly does, that the escapist nature of a romantic tale can be set against a historical and political backdrop; nor is it the place to argue that escapist literature and politics may be more closely connected than at first

they seem to be (Wallace 2005 2-3). Women's historical fiction – especially in the twentieth century – elaborated a form of sexual politics to bring women out of the shadows of history (Ciplijauskaitė 29). Over the past fifty years, the re-inscribing of women into histories (both academic and literary) has empowered the female author to explore previously taboo issues. In particular, the study of historical fictions has allowed one to explore the changing nature of gender, and the social and cultural construction of the roles that genders play (Wallace 2005 8). The importance of sex and gender within the historical fiction genre became abundantly clear after the sexual liberation movement in the 1960s. Yet, for works such as *Urraca*, the more explicit sexual freedoms of the Castilian and Leonese queen could be told more plainly after the death in 1975 of the Spanish dictator, Francisco Franco. The *destape* that followed Franco's demise “unclothed” persons suffering from sexual, social, and political repression, and in *Urraca* one senses a similar uncovering. Queen Urraca I has been dispossessed in the narrative of her sovereignty, isolated from others in what amounts to a monastic prison, and denied the trappings of wealth typically afforded medieval queens. Yet despite the paucity of material goods, and her social and political disenfranchisement, Urraca wields a power to seduce the chronicle's interlocutor and her reader. Ortiz has suggested that her work be read interpretatively, and draws parallels between reading and living under the Francoist dictatorship. This interpretation presents reading as an investigative act, one in which an official story may be seen to cover up a crime. The story officially told will tell one thing; questioning the narrative for its motivations, for the presentation of its events, for its omissions, reveals something other than what officially has been told (Flesler 317). In *Urraca*, Ortiz writes the queen's story, but Ortiz's narrative subverts the accepted truth of the queen's life. Ortiz does not reject the sexual encounters that have been used to demean the queen. Instead, she writes them in ways that empower the queen. The reader reads that the queen is a prisoner and is seemingly powerless. Yet, the queen's narrative reshapes our understanding of the events that have taken place, and through Ortiz's narrative Urraca voices an authority heretofore denied. Ortiz's novel has been carefully and painstakingly researched so that the reader should focus on the historical detail. Nevertheless, the expression of the psychological and erotic elements of Urraca's story privileges these elements rather than the eleventh and twelfth century historical content (Spires 205). Urraca grounds her narrative in the authority of the written word, but her topics are scarcely imaginable for a medieval chronicle. Urraca's unusual sexual proclivities, her unrepentant lack of maternal feeling, and her relentless quest for power are retold in a way that marks a new shape for the independent woman. Her autonomous identity is very different from the idealized, subservient feminine behaviors found in medieval narrative, or recommended by the Falangist Sección Femenina. There are differences between

the expected, official image of queen and woman, and the image revealed through Ortiz's narrative. These differences offer the plausibility of a queen very different from that found in historical record.

Ortiz also exposes in *Urraca* differences in the social roles that men and women have and imagine of one another (Ciplijauskaitė 33). Urraca, as written by Ortiz, never conforms to an idealized female role. She transforms repeatedly in the work, strategically assuming any number of transgressive, gender-specific roles to maintain the sovereign power she desires. The transformative nature of Urraca's gender resonates in the structural circularity of the novel. In the first section of the novel, the collapse of Alfonso VI's kingdom is transformed into her own collapsed reign. The first section starts with a king and queen united, and ends with the death of her father, and the failure of her own marriage. The collapse of Urraca's marriage is told and retold throughout the three parts of her tale, as she grapples for a sovereign power afforded only to men. Each of the three sections recounts parts of Urraca's life, which chronicle events from her childhood to those of her aspirations as queen, from becoming a queen to achieving sovereignty, and from achieving sovereignty to becoming a prisoner. Urraca chronicles her story by focusing on salient historical events, and by mediating her part in the story through the desires of both mind and body. These desires are explained partly through the metaphor of the chess game, and played out on Urraca's physical and political body.⁸ Gutierrez's ability to anticipate an attack and set forth in battle makes him a knight championing her cause. He is sacrificed later, like a pawn, to her greater objectives. As the second knight, Lara demonstrates his maneuverability and craft in the ever-changing patterns of creative lovemaking; a backward motion reserved for his cravenly retreat in Candespina. Gelmírez's grasp for power (through her son Alfonso VII) is indicative in the sidelong moves of the bishop, yet the monotony of the lateral moves represents his lackluster bedroom manner. Alfonso I is ably represented with his own set of enemy players that collectively attack Urraca. As the opposing king, he demands her sexual and political defeat. Each of these players, Gonçalvez intuitively interacts with Urraca as pieces on a chessboard. With an appropriate quote from Alfonso VI's cabalistic doctor, Cidellus, Gonçalvez notes the similarities between the chessboard and parchment, and identifies Urraca's various roles as queen, wife, and mother (25-26). But, it is important to remember that Urraca manipulates each of her pieces to foment her sovereign, masculine power. Because of this, one sees how

⁸ The movements of the characters in *Urraca* reflect modern movements of pieces on the chessboard. Urraca's desired freedom of movement was not possible until the latter half of the fifteenth century, when the game of chess began to be played differently. A greater freedom of movement is attributed to the bishop and the queen; the latter's increase in power has been attributed to Isabel I of Castile.

the same sexual politics of the chessboard that allow Urraca to maneuver her pieces across the chessboard also destabilize that chessboard. The instability of the political chessboard, representative of Urraca and Ortiz's social and political realities, arises from the other players, for whom the rules of chess cannot accommodate one player as both king and queen. Cidellus's comparison between chess and writing extends this metaphor onto the chronicle she writes (and presumably the chronicle that the reader reads). Urraca has appropriated for herself another male-coded behavior: the documentation of her rule. Urraca is a queen with a kingly prerogative. She becomes her own chronicler, and the monk Roberto the narratee to whom she tells her story. The seduction of her story, her convincing self-expression, is impressed upon skin as well as paper, as may be symbolically interpreted by her intimacies with the monk (Ciplijauskaitė 37; Henseler 42-57). Urraca's story imposes itself upon the reader, bending the reader's reading of her to her will. As sovereign, she wants to be listened to as she would tell her tale, just as she wants to play by her own rules. Urraca's story is one of resistance to a social order bent on challenging her independent sovereignty. It is a story still of valid import for the twenty-first century. This is why the open ended conclusion to the story both appeals to and is rejected by the reader. The primacy of Urraca's written word, and the very medieval sentiment found with the composed chronicle (that her reign – as she has narrated it – will allow her to live well past her natural life) tragically diminishes with the implied moment of her suicide.

2. THE SHADOWS OF URRACA'S HISTORY

The negative portrayal of Queen Urraca I of León and Castile in chronicles contemporary to her life has marked her for centuries as a subject of inquiry and ignominy. Urraca I is a controversial figure in history and literature, in part because her queenly image in no way represents the Virgin's *mediatrix* role, upon which queenship was later informed.⁹ Urraca does not emulate Mary, having fought with her second husband and her only legitimate son for the power to rule over her lands. Historical records note that the Castilian-Leonese queen took at least one lover, gave birth to at least two illegitimate children, and possibly died in childbirth

⁹ The symbolic merit of *Maria regina* has been studied by Mary Stroll, who identifies the Virgin mother as a symbol first used by popes and later appropriated by queens. Stroll identifies within this image complementary characteristics, such as that of advocate for her people. She mentions specifically the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, whose dual interpretation of Mary as queen of the heavens and advocate of the world provided the idealized behaviors informing not only the state of the Church, but also of medieval queenship (173-78). Despite the negative portraits depicted in chronicles contemporary to her life, Urraca effectively used religious propaganda to associate her with the Church (Martin 1132-71).

with a third. This hurried description informs the content of most early accounts of her life; it is a summary that focuses on the queen's sex and her illicit sexual relationships, and presumes a gender-specific bias that predisposes the reader to dismiss her. The *Historia Compostelana* criticizes Urraca specifically as regards to her relationship with Diego Gelmírez, bishop of Santiago de Compostela (d. ca. 1149). She is described in this chronicle as having a weak, female, perverse character, which makes her a ruler incapable of governing justly or peaceably. Neither Lucas of Tuy (d. 1249) in the *Chronicon Mundi* nor Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada (d. 1247) in *De rebus Hispaniae* gives Urraca much credit. The former denies her sovereignty by stating that her son, Alfonso VII, succeeded his grandfather, Alfonso VI. The latter chronicler suggests that Alfonso VI, prior to his death and against his noblemen's wishes, married Urraca to Alfonso I of Aragón. After this, the Aragonese monarch whisked his new wife away to foreign lands. Alfonso VI, in the meantime, died leaving his land in a golden age of peace in which men and women, no matter how weak, could walk alone in safety. Afterwards, Urraca ruled for four years (262-63).

Urraca's illicit love affairs with the counts Gómez Gutierrez (commonly known as the count of Candespina) and Pedro de Lara (count of Lara) come out in the *Historia Compostelana*: "Comes iste P., ut rumor ajebat, firmissima amoris catena U. Reginæ obsequi solitus erat (...) ob hoc ejus captio mærorem atque tristitiam Réginæ generaverat" (*España Sagrada* 270). Jiménez de Rada's *De rebus Hispaniae* expanded upon Urraca's misdeeds by adding:

Pero la reina Urraca se entregó en secreto al conde Gómez, sin mediar las bodas, por lo que el conde, dando por seguro el matrimonio, comenzó a dirigir las guerras del reino y a presionar a los aragoneses en la medida de sus fuerzas; y tuvo de la reina un hijo en secreto, que fue llamado Fernando Hurtado. Entretanto, otro conde, Pedro de Lara, intentaba ganarse discretamente el favor de la reina, y consiguió lo que quería... Por su parte el conde Pedro de Lara, que había dado pábulo de manera impropcedente a sus relaciones íntimas con la reina en el convencimiento de que concluirían en matrimonio, hacía valer su hegemonía sobre los demás, y comenzó a actuar como rey... (267-69)

Later, the *Estoria de España* takes up the account, repeating how

...la reyna consintiosse al Conde en poridad, mas non por casamiento. Et ouo en la reyna donna Vrraca un fijo a furto, a que pusieron nombre por ende Fernan Furtado. Et el Conde don Pedro de Lara otrossi gano estonces en poridad el amor de la Reyna, e fizo en ella lo que quiso. (647)

According to Menéndez Pelayo, Father Mariana (1536-1624) embellished the account noting how "andaban el nombre del Conde y el de la Reina puestos afrentosamente en cantares y coplas," songs whose existence Menéndez Pelayo denied (398).

This is not to say that all accounts from the past unanimously vilified the first female Leonese and Castilian sovereign. Religious chroniclers and historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tried to rehabilitate the queen, yet to what extent their works may be considered faithful or judicious interpretation of archival records is a matter of much doubt. In the nineteenth century, the presumed counselor to Fernando VII and archivist of the Seville's General Archive of the Indies, José Clemente Carnicero (b. 1770), wrote *El liberalismo convencido por sus mismos escritos*. In it, he noted the many apologists who had denied the queen's exploits as narrated in past accounts. In particular, Clemente Carnicero refuted claims made by Francisco Marina (1754–1833) that condemned Urraca's moral and political acts. Clemente Carnicero equally denied that the Spanish nation had defied Urraca's sovereign right to rule, and instead proclaimed her son Alfonso king (119). Clemente Carnicero's anachronistic description of a twelfth century Spanish nation and its courts would have certainly appealed to a nineteenth century public. Clemente Carnicero avowed the defamation by other authors to be spurious, since neither the "nación de consuno" nor the "cortes generales y legítimas" deposed Urraca. Clemente Carnicero cited historians of previous centuries to vindicate Urraca. He claimed, but did not name, that documents used by these historians proved her to be honest, pious, a lover of the people, and a benefactress of churches and monasteries. He concluded that Urraca died "egemplarmente, y que hasta el día de su muerte fue reconocida siempre por Reina" (126).

Even in the twentieth century, Urraca has continued to be snubbed. The most surprising of these omissions is found in the series *Historia de España de Menéndez Pidal*, published throughout the twentieth century by Espasa Calpe. While entire chapters are given over to the reigns of Alfonso VI and Alfonso VII, Urraca I's years as sovereign are subsumed within the chapter rubric "from Alfonso VI to Alfonso VII". Urraca's historical rehabilitation came late in a monographic study by Bernard Reilly, *The Kingdom of León-Castile under Queen Urraca*. Coincidentally, it was published the same year as Ortiz's *Urraca*. Reilly offers the following opinion of Urraca, which directly rejects any fanciful descriptions of the queen: "Urraca was a widow about twenty-seven years old and a mother of two children. She was no impressionable or romantic girl but a mature woman, approaching middle age by modern reckoning but more likely having achieved it on any twelfth-century scale" (45). Reilly introduces his object of historical study by offering a relatively objective evaluation of the sources written in the centuries immediately following her death. His descriptions take into account the politics in the various chronicles that discuss Urraca, noting her possible resistance to what would become a disastrous marriage to Alfonso I of Aragon (46-47, 57), and pointing out discrepancies in the Archbishop Gelmírez's descriptions of the queen's character (47). Reilly's historical account measures the queen's documentary records against the chronicles contemporary to her reign. From these sources, he

intuits that her liaisons must be understood as part of a “political stratagem,” which perhaps was a cause in the failure of her marriage. Alfonso the Battler “could not be other than master” (48). The prejudices against Urraca based on her sex, which inform almost all of the previous historical accounts, are much less apparent in Reilly. His representation of Urraca is more impartial; his description of her as monarch is based on the effectiveness of her goals. Reilly’s history concludes with the lament that “the study of the reign of Urraca, for all her prominence, remains a study of her public acts and public institutions of the realm itself” (353). Yet, it is because the twentieth century historian must focus on her public acts that he appraises her reign positively. It may even be claimed that his impartiality has led recent scholars to further study the queen’s historical record. Cristina Monterde Albiac’s *Diplomatario de la reina Urraca de Castilla y León* (1109-1127) has been touted as the means to refocus the study of her reign (Martínez Sopena 266). A recent reevaluation of archival documentation found within Pallares Méndez and Portela’s *La reina Urraca* has begun to do just that. Their reading of certain official documents suggests that Urraca, from a very young age, was conscious of the masculine biases that opposed her sovereignty.¹⁰ These historians also question a legend perpetuated in Jiménez de Rada’s *De rebus Historiae* and repeated in the *Primera Crónica General*, which maligned the queen’s character, and thus questioned her ability to effectively rule.¹¹ Turning to archival documents, Pallares Méndez and Portela debunked the claims made in the thirteenth century legend, and thus refuted the ascribed negative traits that defame Urraca’s sovereign reign. Pallares Méndez and Portela’s review of royal documents leads inexorably to a reassessment of Urraca’s reign. Their biography leads as well to a questioning of the values upon which sexist presumptions were initially made, and a frank assessment of the progress made to disabuse Urraca’s historical record from gender-laden biases.

¹⁰ Pallares Méndez and Portela put forward that the unnecessary mention of both sexes in official records signed early on by the queen may be read as her awareness of the difficulties imposed by her sex on her rule (24, 33).

¹¹ The legend condemns Urraca for ingratitude expressed toward Pedro Ansúrez, by claiming she wrongly confiscated his lands after her father’s death in 1109. The legend raises questions for these historians, since Urraca’s ingratitude is presumed because of the paternal relationship presumed between them. He was thought to be her *ayo*. Ansúrez’s position as *ayo* is never mentioned; it appears neither in Alfonso nor Urraca’s royal diplomas. This is decidedly strange, since other noblemen such as Pedro Fróilaz were recognized in this capacity and rewarded for it. In fact, Ansúrez signs the very same diploma that compensates Fróilaz for the care he has provided Urraca’s son. In this document, he is named by his title and territorial possessions, but his role as *ayo* is not mentioned. On 15 December 1110, Urraca confirmed a donation that Ansúrez and his wife made to the church of Santa María in Valladolid. It was a church with strong ties to the family, and Urraca herself adds a donation to the church in the same document. It is unlikely that in either of these documents the queen would have failed to mention his role as *ayo*, were he to have acted in this capacity. Ansúrez also appears in royal documents dating from the start of Urraca’s reign in 1109 until 1117, when he is thought to have died (Pallares Méndez, Portela 25-26).

3. THE SHADOWS OF URRACA'S FICTION

Given Urraca's slow rehabilitation within history, it is no surprise that her portrayal in Spanish literature also has been underrepresented and unflattering. The sovereign was sidelined in *La varona castellana* (1604), a scarcely read and even more scarcely staged Lope de Vega play whose eponymous title refers not to the queen but to Sorian legend María Pérez de Villañane. While Menéndez Pelayo points out that the first act of this play reflects favorably upon the "princess," her lack of agency is less than praiseworthy (397). The play revolves around the positively coded masculine acts of María Pérez, who manages to fight and best a nefarious King of Aragon. This female act of bravery is never transposed upon the queen, despite the fact that Urraca fought her husband for years over control for her lands. Urraca is somewhat improved as the protagonist of the historical dramas by Eusebio Asquerino (*Doña Urraca*, 1838) and Antonio García Gutierrez (*Doña Urraca de Castilla*, 1872). She appears within the nineteenth century novel, *El conde de Candespina* (1832), by Patricio de la Escosura, and again in the eponymous *Doña Urraca de Castilla* (1849) by Francisco Navarro Villoslada. This last novel bears a more detailed mention, if only for the encomiastic comparisons made by others. For example, Gabino Tejado, editor for the Badajoz liberal paper, *El Extremeño*, wrote "[d]e la fábula tejida por el Sr. Navarro Villoslada, cabe repetir lo que se ha dicho de las novelas de Walter Scott, que son más verdaderas que la historia" (Mata Induráin 63). The historical novels by this author display a certain amount of psychological depth (Sebold 39). This depth provides the reader with a fleshed out literary persona. But, it is at the expense of her morals, since Urraca is conflicted by her desire for a married man, Bermudo del Moscoso. His rejection of her becomes a plot point used to dovetail with the chronicles upon which the author relies. To summarize: Urraca is unable to marry the man she loves, and so her "pure" passion turns to licentious behavior. Navarro Villoslada notes in his prologue his historical dependence on the *Historia Compostelana*, and observes the queen's continued, negative historical portrayal.

Duramente ha sido tratada esta Princesa por los escritores contemporáneos, y no se diga si a ellos han seguido los aragoneses y navarros, bizarramente defendida por autores del pasado siglo, paladines que esgrimían armas a favor de una mala causa sólo porque en ella se interesaba una señora. Nosotros, a fuer de imparciales, no podemos cerrar los ojos a la luz de la verdad, por más que nos ofenda; pero creemos que ni por unos ni por otros se ha tenido en cuenta el negro cuadro de las costumbres y carácter del siglo XII para apreciar esa gran figura, por aquéllos tan ultrajada, por éstos tan acaloradamente defendida, sólo por Reina y Reina castellana. Si preguntamos a la historia, si buscamos sepulcros, si registramos escrituras de donaciones o privilegios, en los cuales la gratitud aspira a perpetuar con la

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donación la imagen del donador, todas las investigaciones nos darán unánime testimonio de la sin par hermosura de Doña Urraca. (25)

The defense made here is confusing at best. If *Gelmírez's* attacks on Urraca are remembered (she is weak, volatile, perverse in an essentially female way), one cannot understand easily the logic behind *Villoslada's* defense. Urraca has been maligned by some; she has been defended by others, whose defense was borne out of a misguided attempt at chivalry. But in the end, all that matters is Urraca's beauty. Her beauty is relevant not merely because it is unsurpassed, but because of what it represents. Her attributes are painted by the author to imply a connection with both the divine and the damned, and so suggest a soul in turmoil. That is to say, her external beauty reflects her original virtuous state, from which she has departed because of her misfortunes in love.

The unrequited love story between Queen Urraca and Bermudo del Moscoso is told as a result of Urraca's encounter with Bermudo's son, Ramiro. This encounter prompts a positive change in Urraca's psyche, for upon encountering the youth, she begins to show remorse for her dissolute behavior. Urraca's personality changes as the remembrance of her true love prompts a moral rebirth. Urraca's change comes from the slow recognition that Ramiro is Bermudo's son. The impossibility of love with the father or the son is manifested through a thought process that ends in the subordination of Urraca's desires to those of Bermudo's family. To effectively portray Urraca's character as one capable of moving from virtue to dissolution and back, Navarro Villoslada gives his female a domineering, contrary nature.

Tenía Doña Urraca un genio dominante y tiránico, que en un hombre sería el origen de grandes empresas, y en una mujer el manantial de intrigas y disturbios. Alfonso el Batallador, muy más tiránico y dominante todavía, lleno de cualidades eminentes, tan propias de un Monarca que aspira a brillar por la conquista, carecía de algunas otras que sobran a su mujer. La primera sabía ser rastrera como la serpiente, para elevarse como el águila; el segundo hubiera creído que descender a tomar aliento era abdicar su título de rey de las aves. La una apelaba tan presto a la fuerza como a las lágrimas; el otro no conocía más armas que su razón y su espada. (25)

Urraca has been morally redeemed, but in doing so, Navarro Villoslada condemns her politically. Her thoughts and actions, as Encinar describes, become exceedingly volatile and lack all political vision (22). Urraca's description, which Navarro Villoslada suggests is indicative of ideal royal temperament, codes idealized qualities in a sovereign according to gendered, animal behaviors. This allows the ideal monarchic temperament to be interpreted positively in men but negatively in women. Simply put, both Urraca and Alfonso are tyrannical and domineering, but only Urraca knows how to slither like a snake. For Navarro Villoslada, the

manifestation of behaviors ideal in a male sovereign produce an ineffective queen. In Ortiz's *Urraca* the case is different. It is Urraca's androgynous power that allows her to wield power (McGovern 201).¹²

The construction of Urraca's character has been discussed by McGovern and others through the critical framework provided by Linda Hutcheon.¹³ Historiographic metafiction provides a superb means to discuss the evolution of the nineteenth century historical novel into its twentieth century incarnation, and McGovern applies with care the characteristics that inform Hutcheon's twentieth century subgenre. Hutcheon conforms to Lukács's idea that the protagonist in the historical novel should synthesize the general and the particular of the time. McGovern recognizes that this is a thing a sovereign queen cannot accomplish, as she is underrepresented within the time frame of the Middle Ages. My concern for this critical framework, however, is informed by the concerns already expressed by Diana Wallace. Forgoing, for the moment, that the many centuries comprising the Middle Ages will produce only most banal of general/particular syntheses, the idea that women were not agents of action during that time brings to bear the political, "nation-building" character implicit in the masculinist study of historical fiction. Only matters of great import, and therefore only those produced with the cultural tools necessary for their recording into history, may be included. Equating Urraca simply as woman, as opposed to sovereign queen, deprives her of the voice being found in the re-examination of an eighteen-year historical record. Likewise, it denies her the sovereignty of a voice produced within Ortiz's fictive chronicle. Urraca was a sovereign ruler in León and Castile; she was intent on maintaining the power afforded her as ruler of these lands. These goals for controlling and maintaining empire are repeatedly made throughout the narratives of historical record and fictive chronicle.

Urraca's claims over her own history are gender coded in the chronicle she writes; medieval accounts of sovereign kings, after all, are rather more prevalent than those of their queens. As McGovern notes, Urraca's story aligns with those of three male leaders; in Urraca's story, she places their tales on the periphery of her own (198). Through Urraca's careful manipulation of details, she exposes the subjectivity of narrative. The example McGovern gives is that of the Cid, whose life as a mercenary also subverts the Francoist dictatorship's official, idealized portrait of Rodrigo

¹² Between Navarro Villoslada's novel from 1849 and Ortiz's 1982 *Urraca*, Ramón Gómez de la Serna published *Doña Urraca de Castilla* (1944). Unfortunately, I have not had access to this novel.

¹³ Encinar, Gurski, Janzon, Mazquiarán de Rodríguez are a few of the critics whose discussions of Urraca's character have been subsumed within discussions of historiographic metafiction.

Díaz de Vivar (198).¹⁴ The subjectivity implicit in the Cid's narrative exposes the relativity of Urraca's writing. If Urraca's account cannot guarantee the reader of the truth of an event – because no account can do so – it can at least hint toward the motivations informing that event. Urraca, writing while imprisoned in the phallic monastic tower, is defying the official story. McGovern states that

[a]s Urraca's consciousness and chronicle evolve, it becomes apparent that it is not truth that she seeks nor is it revenge for her imprisonment, but rather a power achieved only through writing. To this end she wants to be heard on her own terms, desiring to be remembered by future generations. (199)

Urraca's writing is a process, one that has allowed her the reflection of self-discovery (Gurksi 177; Rivera Villegas 307). Urraca writes her history to mark her presence in the world. In doing so, she inserts herself into a written form of history that writes against a master narrative prejudiced against women. Yet as Urraca writes, her story does not directly contradict other narratives, but dialogues with them (Higginbotham 177-78). The fictive Urraca doesn't deny events within the master narrative. Instead, she shifts their interpretation so as to cast herself, Ortiz's fictive Urraca, as she would like to be remembered. Higginbotham's idea of a text in communication with others is suggestive, especially in light of the importance the protagonist places on empire. The fictive Urraca has persuaded the reader of the plausibility of her narrative, so that the reader can accept the plausibility of her motives. Urraca claims that she has done all that she has done for her empire. Her desire for empire has been desire for a territory. Control for this space has played out on a chessboard, on a body, and in a chronicle. Urraca has played, acted, and written as a measure of self-expression. Through Urraca, Ortiz reaffirms that a woman's control over her representation was possible.

4. THE SHADOWS OF LITERATURE AND HISTORY

The shadows of literature and history have been intertwined and critically studied in the twentieth century. An identification of both as human constructions of past and possible realities, mediated through different orders of narrative, has been the starting point from which many feminist critics have interpreted and reformulated the actions, representations, and thoughts of and about women. Queen Urraca I gained visibility early in the discussion on women, in part because it fit nicely into an emerging trend

¹⁴ The importance of the Cid Campeador for Franco cannot be overstated. The understanding of the ways in which Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar was manipulated ideologically and propagandistically in the Francoist regime has been thoroughly researched by María Eugenia Lacarra and Francisco López Estrada.

of historical fiction that catered to a feminist crowd. It was a crowd that arguably saw a way to recuperate women's history through hypothetical and inventive stories of the past. But despite Ortiz's vindication of the Leonese and Castilian queen, Urraca has achieved far less acclaim than Spain's last medieval queen, Isabel I of Castile. Since the start of the twenty-first century, only one new novel has been written and distributed about Queen Urraca.¹⁵ Summarily reviewed in *El País* on 17 February 2000, *La reina Urraca* by Ángeles Irisarri attempts to rewrite a history that rejects "the brutal nonsense" that has been written about her. The judgment that Irisarri makes of the queen's historical record resists the historical reimagining of women marked by a "general shift toward cultural and epistemological relativism" (qtd. in Cooper, Short 4-5). That is to say, Irisarri aims to write a novel that presents itself as history, as opposed to an obvious fiction that requires the reader to consciously suspend disbelief. The author's note at the end of the novel references the irritation felt by Irisarri and historian María Luisa Ledesma Rubio. Both lament that no chronicle with better PR for Urraca has survived. The lament presupposes the existence of such a chronicle. It also affords Irisarri the opportunity to present her own work as a legitimate, historical defense of the queen. By setting her chronicle against a list of historical quotes (found in the last pages of the novel), Irisarri gives the novel the semblance of verisimilitude. Bolstered by the implied authority a historian confers upon the novel, Irisarri's work asserts the credibility of her fiction.

La reina Urraca offers an intimate portrait of the queen, and discusses a lifetime of problems confronted by a queen who sacrificed herself for the good of her children, her people, and her kingdom. Irisarri denies the transgressive nature of Urraca's known history, because she cannot rely on masculinist narratives that have betrayed the queen. The author tells the Urraca's tale through her daughter, Sancha Raimúndez. Through Sancha, Irisarri challenges the negative historical record of Urraca's reign. As Sancha chronicles her mother's life, she includes letters written to the Archbishop Gelmírez. These letters condemn the lies being written in a book [the *Historia Compostelana*] about the cathedral and its archbishop. As might be found in the evidently partial biography that a loving daughter would write about her mother, the novel fails to approach the complexity of Urraca's character when it is compared to Ortiz's queen. Irisarri's novel resorts to a stereotypical image of womanhood that is idealized through maternal instinct and moral behavior. Irisarri potentially rejects the sexual freedoms achieved by women in the twentieth century by denying the birth of Urraca's illegitimate children. Nevertheless, Irisarri's work attempts to reconfigure the

¹⁵ Another work, *Sota de copas, reina de espadas*, was written by Carolina Dafne Alonso Cortés and originally printed in 1986. It has been distributed electronically by the Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes in 2006.

traditional, masculinist interpretation of this medieval sovereign queen, and, in this, reflects the steps made of late to reevaluate the queen's reign.

While Urraca's years in power remain in the shadows of literature and history, each new work contributes – however imperfectly – to an evolving understanding of her rule. By rejecting the possibility that Urraca lived an imperfect life, Irisarri reverts to a queenly image that conforms to a pious, maternal, and feminine ideal. This reasoning complicates our understanding of Urraca, but allows us to conclude with a final comparison between Urraca and her late medieval counterpart, Isabel I of Castile. This fifteenth century monarch has been the subject of many twenty-first century works in history, literature, art, film and television.¹⁶ One may imagine that attention to the latter queen and neglect of the former is due to current political and social climates that begin to appreciate women in power. Given the success Isabel shared with Fernando in uniting the realms of Castile and Aragon, in the territorial expansion and dominion over Granada and the New World, it is to be expected that Isabel's story would be preferred over Urraca's. Many of the works of historical fiction written about Isabel have been produced within ten years of the 500 year anniversary of her death. Yet, Isabel is not without faults, many of which are abhorrent to twenty-first century sensibilities, some of which are elided or ignored in contemporary narratives. The present, careful constructions of each queen suggest a desire to favorably represent the past and a drive to question prior, unfavorable narratives. A demand for novel narratives may be seen in the works of contemporary authors writing about the sovereign queen, Urraca I of León and Castile. The works by these authors reflect the very long shadows from biases of a medieval and masculinist past, but they also reveal new attitudes towards women and power. The narratives written about these women represent the past in order to confront it; in doing so, these narratives speak about the past as well as to the future.

¹⁶ Neither works on Isabel la Católica nor Urraca have won nor received honorable mention in the fifteen years of this prize's lifetime. 2004 prizewinner, Almudena de Arteaga, however, went on to write two novels set in and around Isabel's lifetime (*La Beltraneja: El pecado oculto de Isabel la Católica*, 2004; *Catalina de Aragón, reina de Inglaterra*, 2005). 2005 prizewinner, Ángeles de Irisarri, has written about both queens, but expanded her work on the Catholic queen into a trilogy (*Las hijas de la luna roja. Isabel, la Reina*. Vol. I (2001); *El tiempo de la siembra. Isabel, la Reina*. Vol. II (2001); *El sabor de las cerezas. Isabel, la Reina*. Vol. III (2001). Other authors include César Vidal, *Yo, Isabel la Católica* (2008) and Cristina Hernando Polo, *Isabel la Católica. Grandeza, carácter, y poder* (2011). A compendium of novels in English about Isabel I must include Jean Plaidy's *Isabella and Ferdinand* trilogy (1960-1961). More contemporary authors include Lawrence Schoonover [*Queen's Cross* (2008)], C. W. Gortner [*The Queen's Vow. A novel of Isabella of Castile* (2013); *The Last Queen* (2015, about Joan the Mad)]. Directed by Jordi Frades and produced for RTVE, *Isabel* enjoyed three seasons (2012-2014). This series spun off a new production, now in its first season. *Carlos, Rey Emperador*, is based on Isabel's grandson. Lastly, Michelle Jenner and Eusebio Ponce, characters from the *Isabel* television series, reprise their roles in *El ministerio del tiempo* (a science fiction series that uses literature and history as the backdrop for its episodes).

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