“Wonder Nuns:” Sor Patrocinio, the Politics of the Supernatural, and Republican Caricature*

This paper examines the relationship between politics and the supernatural in nineteenth-century Spain through the figure of Sor Patrocinio: a stigmatized nun and advisor to Queen Isabel II of Spain. I introduce Sor Patrocinio as an example of a “wonder nun”: a type of ultra-charismatic, supposedly supernaturally gifted religious woman who influenced her country’s political agenda. During Sor Patrocinio’s rise to fame, she lost control of her public image. In their efforts to dethrone Isabel II, Spanish republicans transformed Sor Patrocinio into a politico-religious symbol, a living reminder of the anti-liberal and neo-Catholic tendencies attributed to Isabel II and her clique. On the one hand, her case exemplifies the struggle of liberalism to form modern nations in Europe. On the other, it shows how some religious women obtained power through their experience of the supernatural during the “culture wars” of the period, reflecting how such experience was shaped by political affairs.

After the Glorious Revolution of 1868, which dethroned and sent the queen of Spain, Isabel II de Borbón, into exile, one of the photographs retrieved from the Royal Palace was a portrait of the Franciscan nun, Sor Patrocinio, next to Isabel II (Fig. 1). The photograph dates from around 1865; it was part of the personal collection of the Bourbon family and was never meant for publication.¹ In the picture, Isabel II looks extremely tired. Social

¹. A drawing of the picture appeared for the first time in the republican newspaper El Liberal in 1907. For photographic portraits of Isabel II, see: L. Ruiz Gómez, “Isabel II frente al espejo:

Andrea Graus is at University of Antwerp, Ruusbroec Institute, Prinsstraat 13, S.G.K. 34-101, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium. Andrea Graus holds a PhD in History of Science from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (2015). Her thesis explored psychical research and spiritism in Spain at the turn of the twentieth century. Her research interests include the history of mysticism and popular devotion, and the history of child prodigies. She is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the Ruusbroec Institute (Universiteit Antwerpen), working in the ERC-funded project: “Between saints and celebrities. The devotion and promotion of stigmatismes in Europe, c. 1800-1950” (PI: Tine Van Osselaer).

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tensions were rising in Spain and she might have been aware that her reign was coming to an end. Her body is angled toward Sor Patrocinio; the nun has her hand on Isabel’s knee in a comforting fashion. Sor Patrocinio is wearing white gloves to hide her stigmata and is looking at the camera with a gentle smile on her face. She appears to be in charge, which certainly seems to be how the population perceived the situation. To many, Sor Patrocinio was more than just a spiritual confidant to the Queen, she was the person behind the political agenda of the Spanish monarchy. In the eyes of republicans, anticlerical activists, freethinkers, liberals, and of others too, the relationship between Sor Patrocinio and Isabel II was closer to that depicted in figure 2. This shocking illustration comes from a set of republican and anticlerical watercolours entitled Los Borbones en pelota (c. 1868) (“The Bourbons in the buff”). I will return to this collection of sexually explicit caricatures at the end of the paper. For the moment, it is worth noticing the seduction of the Queen by Sor Patrocinio portrayed in this image. The implication is that, by lying on top of Isabel, the nun is taking control over Spain. Of course, we should not lend too much weight to this parody; in contrast to what critics of her affirmed at the time, it is highly improbable that Sor Patrocinio was effectively ruling the country. My interest here is not what actually happened, but rather how people perceived Sor Patrocinio and eventually how she was transformed into a politico-religious symbol.

In this paper, I address what I have tentatively called “wonder nuns” through the figure of Sor Patrocinio. As I will argue, wonder nuns are characterised as ultra-charismatic, celebrity-like, “supernaturally gifted” religious figures.

Figure 1 Sor Patrocinio and Isabel II of Spain, c. 1865.

retratos fotográficos,” in Isabel II: los espejos de la reina, ed. J. -S. Pérez Garzón (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2004), 249–62; R. Utrera Gómez, “Isabel II y la fotografía: imágenes de una vida,” Estudios de Historia de España XV (2013): 217–54.
2. See, for example, Dos Amigos Filósofos (pseudonym), Biografía de Sor Patrocinio, o sea la célebre monja de las llagas (Madrid: Imp. de los Sres. Rojas, 1868).
women who had or were attributed political influence in their respective countries. The supernatural played a crucial role in assigning power to such women. Different uses and interpretations of alleged miraculous phenomena, such as Sor Patrocinio’s stigmata and prophecies, reveal contrasting political agendas. By focusing on the case of Sor Patrocinio, I aim to reflect on the ways in which religious women became mixed up with the social, political, and religious concerns of their nations during the so-called “culture wars” of the era in Europe. On the one hand, this paper offers a colourful example of how religious women acquired power through their experience of the supernatural. On the other hand, it shows how different social agents turned such women into positive or negative symbols to support their political ideologies. Sor Patrocinio’s case is related to key aspects of the formation of the modern nation in Europe, such as secular-Catholic conflicts, the establishment of constitutional monarchies, and the rise of liberalism. Furthermore, it exemplifies the role played by female political mystics and prophetesses during an era of new religious and political identities. In a secularised and post-revolutionary France, such women became advocates of ultramontanism and

Figure 2 ¿Quién quiere sebo? (“Who wants some lard?”), Sign. DIB 18/1/4867. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional de España. See also: SEM (pseudo.), I. Burdiel, ed., Los Borbones en pelota (Zaragoza: Institución “Fernando Católico,” 2012), 223.

3. C. Clark and W. Kaiser, eds., Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-century Europe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

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presented an apocalyptic image of the Republic. In Italy, they prophesised the horrors of liberalism and predicted the triumph of the Roman Catholic Church. In Belgium and Germany, Catholics used mystic figures such as Louise Lateau (1850–1883) to oppose the Kulturkampf.

Because Sor Patrocinio was such a fascinating character, much has been published about her, although not necessarily along academic lines. Most publications are descriptive and offer a biographical portrait of this unconventional nun. I do not wish to add another chapter to her extended biography; I will, however, introduce her life in relation to crucial political events in Spain, particularly because almost nothing has been written on her in English. Because her life was so intrinsically linked to the reign of Isabel II (1833–1868), scholars have speculated as to the role played by Sor Patrocinio in the Spanish court. Most continue to reflect the reputation she had at that time; that is, as a political mystic who manipulated decisions of state during the reign of Isabel II. Recent scholarship has tried to redress Sor Patrocinio’s bad name, reassessing her mystical experiences in a positive light and presenting her as a victim of liberal, republican, and anticlerical campaigns. These seemingly opposing views are not mutually exclusive because, as I hope will become clear, Sor Patrocinio’s actions contributed to her shoddy reputation just as she was also used by different movements, from the Carlists to the Republicans, to advance their political agendas.

Just as with medieval “holy women,” networking was part of the religious life of “wonder nuns.” They were in contact with aristocratic personalities, political and military leaders, clerics, and laypeople with particular political aims who sought spiritual advice and intercession to achieve their aims. For instance, anxious French aristocrats asked female mystics about the return of the monarchy — and of their privileges — during the Third Republic. While mysticism is sometimes considered to be an inward experience, scholars and
theological writers have shown that it calls for public engagement. Mystics stand on the margins of religion and society, and for this reason they are inherently subversive and capable of challenging the establishment. This paper reflects on these matters. Focusing on Sor Patrocinio’s case, I will start by sketching important events in this nun’s life, linked to the political history of Spain. I will then clarify the concept of “wonder nun,” giving several examples. Finally, I will briefly introduce the tradition of anticlerical and republican caricature, before analysing some cartoons of Sor Patrocinio. I argue that, despite Sor Patrocinio’s intentions, these graphical caricatures constituted her public image, transforming her into a symbol of neo-Catholicism and the struggles of the liberal regime, and contributing to the creation of a denigrating image of religious women with power.

The Royal Nun

Sor Patrocinio was born on 27 April 1811, as María Josefa de los Dolores Quiroga y Cacopardo. “On that day,” wrote the authors of an anticlerical booklet entitled Los Neos en calzoncillos (1868) (“Neo-Catholics in their underwear”), “the woman was born who perhaps, and by no accident, has for over thirty years been the staunchest enemy of the Spanish people, the true queen of Spain, who with her feigned saintliness managed to dominate the granddaughter of a hundred kings [Isabel II].” Sor Patrocinio’s father was an accountant who remained loyal to King Fernando VII (1784–1833) during the French occupation of Spain under Napoleon (1808–1814). Although Sor Patrocinio received a marriage proposal from Salustiano Olózaga (1805–1873), a man with a promising political career, she chose to follow her religious vocation. In 1829, she took the veil and joined a Franciscan convent in Madrid. That same year, a first holy wound allegedly appeared in her side. Together with stigmata, Sor Patrocinio experienced other extraordinary phenomena, from diabolical attacks, through levitation, to miraculous healing, Marian apparitions, or the gift of prophecy. She soon gained a public reputation as a stigmatic and became popularly known as “la monja de las llagas” (the nun with the wounds). At the same time, political turmoil was shaking Spain. In 1833, Fernando VII died and left the regency of the country to his wife, María Cristina de Borbón-Dos Sicilias (1806–1878), until their daughter, Isabel, aged just three when her father died, could reign. This infuriated those in favour of crowning Fernando VII’s brother, Carlos María Isidro de Borbón (1788–1855), or Don Carlos as he was known, who was an

13. P. Sheldrake, “Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and the Prophetic,” Spiritus 3, no. 1 (2003): 19–37.
14. M. de Certeau, La Fable Mystique: XVI–XVII Siècle (Paris: Gallimard, 1982); S. T. Katz, “The Conservative Character of Mysticism,” in Mysticism and Religious Traditions, ed. S. T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983): 3–60.
15. A. Funes and E. Lustonó, Los Neos en Calzoncillos (Madrid: Imp. de los Sres. Rojas, 1868), 16–17.
16. Most biographies of Sor Patrocinio include “la monja de las llagas” in their titles because she was very well known by this nickname.
absolutist and supporter of the ancien régime. This led to a series of civil wars called the Carlist Wars. To resist the Carlists and obtain endorsement for Isabel, María Cristina made liberal concessions.¹⁷

In their struggle against liberalism, most of the clergy supported the Carlist cause. They used Sor Patrocinio’s fame as a stigmatic to favour the spread of Carlism. According to rumours, her convent was the site of Carlist reunions.¹⁸ One day, Sor Patrocinio was supposedly abducted by the Devil and brought to the Royal Palace, where she realised that Maria Cristina was a vile woman and that her daughter Isabel should not be crowned. The Carlists interpreted this vision as a prophecy concerning the rise of Don Carlos.¹⁹ On 7 November 1835, the National Guard arrested Sor Patrocinio. The nun was called into court, accused of trying to subvert the state and of faking supernatural phenomena. By then, Sor Patrocinio’s old suitor, Salustiano Olózaga, had become an important liberal leader and governor of the province of Madrid. According to Sor Patrocinio’s brother, a spiteful Olózaga was unable to find testimony of the alleged Carlist prophecy and consequently focused the judicial inquiry on the nun’s stigmata.²⁰ The liberal press covering the investigation labelled those who still believed in Sor Patrocinio as “credulous.”²¹ Several physicians examined and treated the sacred wounds, judging them to be of natural origin.²² During her trial, Sor Patrocinio confessed that the Capuchin friar Fermín Alcaraz, loyal to the Carlists, gave her a miraculous relic that opened a wound wherever she applied it. Father Alcaraz told her to press it against her hands, feet, side, and forehead, and not to tell anyone about it. The defence attorney subsequently argued that Sor Patrocinio had been the innocent victim of a fraud. Nevertheless, on 25 November 1836 it was concluded that the nun willingly participated in the deception. Sor Patrocinio was condemned to forced removal to another convent, far from the Royal Court.²³

This was the first of many exiles, always for political reasons. Although Sor Patrocinio was supposed to be a cloistered nun, she lived in more than fifteen different locations in Spain and France. Despite accusations of having favoured Don Carlos, she became a close friend and ally of Fernando VII’s daughter, Isabel II (1830–1904), who was proclaimed queen in 1843, at the age of just thirteen. The two women met in 1844, when Sor Patrocinio was allowed to return to Madrid after her first exile from the city. By then, the nun was offering spiritual guidance to the Queen’s future husband: Isabel’s

¹⁷. Jarnés, 64–65.
¹⁸. Dos Amigos Filósofos, 63–64 and 80.
¹⁹. Anonymous, Extracto de la Causa Seguida a Sor Patrocinio (Madrid: Imp. D.-B. González, 1849), 22–23.
²⁰. J.-A. Quiroga, Manifestación al público derivada de las palabras pronunciadas por el Excelentísimo Señor Don Salustiano Olózaga en el Congreso de señores Diputados, referentes a Sor María Rafaela del Patrocinio (Madrid: Imp. de Manuel Anoz, 1861), 28–29.
²¹. Anonymous, “Causa célebre de Sor Patrocinio,” El Nacional 144 (1836): 574.
²². Anonymous, “Medicina legal,” Boletín de medicina, cirugía y farmacia 3 (1836): 43.
²³. Anonymous, For a transcription of the lawsuit, see Extracto de la causa, 19–100.
cousin, Francisco de Asís de Borbón (1822–1902). Isabel had been fascinated by the “nun with the wounds” since childhood and had always supported her. Just like everyone else in the capital, she was aware of Sor Patrocinio’s alleged miracles and with “great eagerness” attempted to learn everything about her. In 1846, Isabel was forced to marry Francisco de Asís, who according to rumours was a sympathiser of Carlism and a homosexual. In the words of the Duke of Ríañases (1808–1873), after the marriage, Sor Patrocinio “advised Queen Isabel to abdicate because she would not be happy otherwise, given that the throne belonged to Carlos V [Don Carlos].”

A year later, scandal shocked the nation when the Queen declared her love for General Serrano and asked for a divorce, which she did not obtain. It was the beginning of the unfortunate reign of the queen who would be known as “reina de los tristes destinos” (the queen of unhappy fate).

The reign of Isabel II was a constitutional monarchy during which conservative, progressive, and moderate parties took turns in government. In Western Europe, constitutional monarchies aided the political normalisation of liberalism and seemed to offer an alternative to the polarisation between revolutionary republicanism and monarchic absolutism. In this new scenario, monarchs had to adapt their public and private behaviour to the moral values and concerns of the nation; a duty that Isabel II failed. The Queen’s many lovers, and the fact that she was “very much a woman” in a misogynist country, contributed to her unpopularity. Her support of ultramontanism and the Spanish clergy turned her into a target of liberal and anticlerical campaigns. During Maria Cristina’s regency (1833–1840), the political triumph of liberalism had limited the financial rights of the clergy, forcing it to sell many of its properties. However, the liberals were not successful in establishing a secularised national identity in this traditional Catholic country. In 1840, a revolution brought the Moderate Party to power, contributing to the reassessment of the relationship between the Church and State in a positive manner. The Church had come to realise that the possibility of restoring absolutism was remote, and that the only way to recover its privileges was to negotiate with the liberal system. The concordat of 1851 between the Spanish State and the Holy See consolidated Roman Catholicism as the only religion of the nation. As a result, the clergy regained some rights in areas such as education, censorship, and the Church’s properties. In return, the Vatican recognised Isabel II as the queen of Spain — it had remained neutral during

24. Jarnés, 83.
25. Isabel II cited in: Jarnés, 83.
26. “Minuta de una importante carta política (al parecer sin acabar) que el duque de Ríañases se proponía escribir a un amigo suyo – (Sin fecha). 1854?,” Diversos, Títulos y familias, 3430, leg. 196, exp. 1, doc. 167, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid. Emphasis in the original.
27. The nickname was invented by politician Antonio Aparisi Guijarro (1815–72) after his dismissal in 1858, but it was popularised by the novelist Benito Pérez Galdós (1843–1920). See B. Pérez Galdós, La de los Tristes Destinos (Madrid: Alianza, 2011).
28. SEM (pseudo.), I. Burdiel, ed., Los Borbones en Pelota (Zaragoza: Institución “Fernando Católico,” 2012), 16–30.
29. W. A. Smith, “The Background of the Spanish Revolution of 1868,” The American Historical Review 55 (1950): 787–810, 802.
the early conflicts between Carlists and Isabelinos. Throughout this period, and until the 1868 revolution, the clergy recovered the majority of its privileges, to the chagrin of anticlerical groups such as the republicans and the freethinkers.30

Meanwhile, Sor Patrocinio’s influence on the royals grew. She was especially helpful during the numerous matrimonial crises and acted as the “court oracle.” She obtained funding from the monarchy and founded at least six convents strategically located at royal sites. The first was next to the Royal Palace in Aranjuez. Isabel II visited Sor Patrocinio asking for advice, or sent a carriage to bring her to the palace.31 This nurtured Sor Patrocinio’s reputation as a charismatic mystic using her supernatural gifts to interfere in political affairs, working toward her ends even from within the walls of a cloistered convent. Sor Patrocinio became a symbol of absolutism and of the Church’s intervention in matters of state. Political parties and public opinion attributed every unfavourable outcome to Sor Patrocinio’s influence over the Queen. The press painted an image of the nun as manipulative. As had occurred during the First Carlist war, journalists highlighted Sor Patrocinio’s ability to foster political change through mystical experiences. For example, during a government scandal in 1849, the newspaper La Época wrote that the “apparitions” witnessed by the nun had prompted the parliamentary crisis.32 As we will see, during the 1860s, Sor Patrocinio became the target of republican and anticlerical caricature. She survived two murder attempts inspired by this public campaign against her.33 At the same time, the image and reputation of Isabel II continued to deteriorate. According to the historian and journalist Modesto Lafuente (1806–1866), Sor Patrocinio was able to dominate the monarchs with her alleged miracles.34 In the words of the hispanist John Brande Trend: “Her power over the Queen was incalculable.”35 A letter addressed to one of Isabel II’s ministers reveals: “The poor Q.... [Queen] is under the dominance of a cruel fascination. She says that ‘not even by kissing the dust of her sandals, will she pay S.P. [Sor Patrocinio] the benefits that she owes her.’”36 Isabel II always defended Sor Patrocinio and denied her participation in political matters. In a statement written in 1904, to support the nun’s Cause for Beatification, she wrote:

30. J. Alvarez Junco and A. Shubert, eds., Spanish History Since 1808 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. chap. 3; V. M. Arbeloa, Clericalismo y anticlericalismo en España (1767–1930) (Madrid: Encuentro, 2009); W. J. Callahan, Church, Society and Politics in Spain (1750–1874) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); A. Shubert, Historia social de España (1800–1990) (Madrid: Nerea, 1990), 211–43.
31. “Apuntes sobre sor Patrocinio,” Reinados, Alfonso XIII, caja 25017, exp. 17, Archivo General de Palacio, Madrid.
32. Anonymous, “El pais entero estará ansioso....,” La Época 180 (1836): 2.
33. A. Rodrigo, “Sor Patrocinio: la monja de las llagas,” Tiempo de historia VI (1980): 48–57.
34. M. Lafuente, Historia General de España. Tomo XXIII (Barcelona: Montaner y Simón, 1890), 130.
35. Trend, 9.
36. Pedro Egaña’s correspondence, Diversos, Títulos y familias, 3557, leg. 21, exp. 21, doc.
38. Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid. Emphasis in the original.
...if civil war started in Spain, if a ministry fell, if someone attacked my royal person, if a position was awarded to some famous person, the impious press promptly yelled: “That’s the nun Sor Patrocinio all over!”; and I protest before God and mankind that she never took part in these matters, nor did she meddle in governmental and political affairs.37

In 1866, the Progressive and Democrat parties signed the Pact of Ostende to dethrone Isabel II and along with her the hegemony of the Moderate party and the clergy. The Liberal Union joined the pact two years later. This fact, in addition to growing disaffection within the army and the navy, as a well as rising prices and the growth of unemployment, prompted a revolt in Spain in September 1868.38 Sor Patrocinio followed the royal family in their exile to France. French newspapers took good note of their arrival. On the front page of the republican and Bonapartist journal Le Gaulois we find pictorial portraits of the main figures in the Spanish revolution, along with a small satirical biography. In the case of Sor Patrocinio, she is described in the following manner: “she ate ONE OUNCE of bread per day! It was the beginning of her glory. To pass herself off as a holy; she declared herself stigmatized and pretended that the wounds in her hands, feet and side bled every Friday.”39 As we can see, by then Sor Patrocinio’s fame as a dubious stigmatic and royal nun was transnational. Two more telling examples are found in an 1870 British book entitled Spanish Pictures, in which there is an engraving depicting “Sor Patrocinio, the bleeding nun,” described as one of the Queen’s “councillors”;40 and in an 1880 French treatise of graphology, Sor Patrocinio’s signature is used to represent traders, exemplifying their skill and cunning in business.41 Again, these are not favourable portraits of the nun, but rather clear statements of her fame as a manipulative person and political mystic.

In 1876, with the Bourbon Restoration and the coronation of Alfonso XII, the son of Isabel II, Sor Patrocinio was allowed to return to a convent in Guadalajara (Castilla La-Mancha). Isabel II was largely responsible for her return to Spain, despite resistance from political parties and the clergy. In a telegram addressed to the Council of Ministers, Isabel II had insisted that the nun had never been involved in politics, and that she was the only émigré who had not yet returned.42 Some letters from Sor Patrocinio to Isabel II from the period of the French exile and after the Restoration have been

37. Statement by Queen Isabel II, 18 January 1904, Procesos de Beatificación, Sor Patrocinio, Fol. 659–684, Archivo Diocesano de Toledo, Toledo.
38. For an analysis of the causes and the social context of the 1868 Glorious Revolution, see, for example; G. L. de la Fuente Monge, Los revolucionarios de 1868. Elites y poder en la España liberal (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2000); G. L. de la Fuente Monge, “La revolución de 1868 y la continuidad del personal político,” Ayer 29 (1998): 161–85; Smith, 787–810.
39. L. Estor, “La révolution espagnole,” Le Gaulois 1 (1868): 1. Emphasis in the original.
40. S. Manning, Spanish Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1870), 83.
41. J.-H. Michon, Système de graphologie: l’art de connaître les hommes d’après leur écriture (Paris: Bureau du Journal de la Graphologie, 1880), 290.
42. On Sor Patrocinio’s return to Spain, see “Correspondencia sobre los cargos de Losa y de Quiroga y la conveniencia de la vuelta de la Sor Patrocinio,” Reinados, Alfonso XIII, caja 25014, exp. 15, Archivo General de Palacio, Madrid.
preserved. In most of them, the nun writes to congratulate Isabel II and her family on birthdays, holy feasts, or the New Year. In some, she complained about the economic difficulties faced by her convent in Guadalajara; although, on her return to Spain, she was successful in once again obtaining financial support from the monarchy.43 Apart from her letters, Sor Patrocinio’s writings mainly consist of Novenas and other devotional writings.44 She died in 1891 with a dubious reputation. Her Cause for Beatification was opened in 1907 and is still under examination.45

Wonder Nuns

Sor Patrocinio is the paradigmatic example of what I am calling a “wonder nun:” a type of nineteenth or twentieth-century ultra-charismatic, celebrity-like, supposedly supernaturally gifted religious woman who had or was attributed a certain influence over the political agenda of her country. Wonder nuns were allegedly blessed with all kinds of supernatural gifts at the same time: stigmata, bilocation, clairvoyance, Marian apparitions, mystical marriage, levitation, and miraculous healing, among others. Extraordinary phenomena seemed to be of no mystery to them at all. It was this “all-in-one” manifestation of the supernatural that defined their charisma, both in the sense of their divine power and with regard to their attractiveness to the public. Rumours of their wonders circulated in the press or by word of mouth, building a reputation for sanctity and attaining what can be seen as celebrity status. Even when proven a fraud, as in Sor Patrocinio’s case, their celebrity status kept them at the heart of public debate.46 Such popularity helped them to acquire a rare privilege for religious women: ecclesiastical authority; becoming female spiritual leaders and a public face of the Church — for good and for bad. We can speculate that none of this would have happened had their lives not been enriched with the supernatural, which became their driving force.

Wonder nuns were directly linked to politics. It is not surprising that their most epic mystical episodes coincided with unfavourable political turns or with times of national crisis. Their cases are linked to a longer tradition of political prophecy and religious women in Europe. In Kagan’s words: “Beginning with Deborah and Judith in the Old Testament, Christianity recognised a long line of female seers and religious women who had

43. Cartas y documentos cruzados entre la Reina Isabel II y Sor Patrocinio, 9/6962, Legajo XXIII, Archivo Isabel II, Biblioteca Digital, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid.
44. Her devotional writings are preserved at the Monastery of the Barefoot Conceptionists in Guadalajara. For an inventory and a transcription of some of these writings, see Paredes, Annex.
45. The dossier for Sor Patrocinio’s Cause for Beatification can be consulted at: Procesos de Beatificación, Sor Patrocinio, Archivo Diocesano de Toledo, Toledo.
46. On the parallels between celebrity culture and religion, see D. Giles, Illusions of Immortality. A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity (London, New York: Palgrave, 2000), chap. 8; A. Graus, “A Visit to Remember. Stigmata and Celebrity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” Cultural and Social History 14, no. 1 (2017): 55–72; J. F. Hopgood, ed., The Making of Saints: Contesting Sacred Ground (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); C. Rojek, Celebrity (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), chap. 2.
achieved a state of spiritual grace and were able to receive divine messages, usually in the form of visions.47 During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, female prophets helped to advance the interests of the Church and endorse the social order; for instance, through visions of the “divine approval” of a monarch, as in the case of Sor Patrocinio and Don Carlos. In sixteenth-century Spain, Lucrecia de León began to have prophetic dreams about the decadence and fall of the kingdom.48 Other “holy women” received visions concerning topics such as the persecution of Muslims and heretics, thus helping the Holy See and the Inquisition mobilise their agenda.49 As scholars have shown, the lives of these holy women, including renowned saints such as Catherine of Siena and Hildegard of Bingen, cannot be removed from their political contexts, nor can their mystical writings and experiences be understood in isolation.50 Supposed manifestations of the supernatural, especially when they become public events, such as Marian apparitions, are rarely disinterested.51 Just as for medieval holy women, or for seers at sites of Marian apparitions, for wonder nuns, claiming supernatural gifts was a source of power through which they obtained a recognition that they could not have gained otherwise within the enduring “Christian patriarchy.”52

Traditionally, the place of women in the Roman Catholic Church has been acknowledged through sainthood; leading a mystical life, or becoming a martyr or a prophetess were ways of obtaining such recognition.53 In many cases, mysticism has bestowed on women some sort of spiritual autonomy and leadership.54 Scholars such as Caroline Bynum have noted a flowering of “female mysticism” from the thirteenth century, when more women began to speak or write about their religious experiences.55 According to Jesse Njus, in medieval times “women could hold positions of religious importance on account of their charismatic gifts even if the paths of preaching and clerical training

47. R. L. Kagan, Lucrecia’s Dreams. Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-century Spain (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 4.
48. Kagan, esp. chap. 5.
49. R. E. Surtz, “Iberian Holy Women: A Survey,” in Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c. 1500, ed. A. Minnis and R. Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 499–528, esp., 505–6.
50. F. T. Luongo, The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); A. Sweeney, “Political Agendas in the Letters of Hildegard of Bingen,” Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato 8 (2008): Article 14; L. E. Talley, “Visions of Power and Influence: Hildegard of Bingen and the Politics of Mysticism,” The Student Historical Journal 28 (1996): 1–11.
51. W. A. Christian, Las visiones de Ezkioga. La Segunda República y el reino de Cristo (Barcelona: Ariel, 1997).
52. On Christian patriarchy and female mysticism, see especially G. M. Jantzen, Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
53. T. Pirri-Simonian, “Prophetesses, Martyrs, Saints – Roles of Women in the Church Through the Ages,” The Ecumenical Review 60, no. 1–2 (2008): 59–70.
54. On a similar note, scholars working on the history of modern spiritualism have shown that mediumship became an empowering tool for women — usually unmarried or widowed — struggling to take control of their lives. See A. Owen, The Darkened Room. Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England (London: Virago, 1989).
55. C. W. Bynum, Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), chap. 5.
Charismatic women have inspired new devotions and have been behind the foundation of religious institutions. In 1936, the French stigmatized mystic Marthe Robin (1902–1981) founded a laymen’s Catholic association named *Foyers de Charité*, which today has seventy-eight communities around the world.57 In Italy, the “wonder nun” Blessed Madre Speranza58 (1893–1983) founded a sanctuary and several congregations to promote the devotion of Merciful Love. Exemplifying Madre Speranza’s power and the popularity of her devotion, Pope John Paul II visited the sanctuary after surviving a homicide attempt in May 1981 — his first trip after the attack.59 As for Sor Patrocinio, she was responsible for the devotion of “Our Lady of Forgetfulness, Triumph and Mercy”60 and, as noted above, she received money from the monarchy for her numerous foundations. An 1865 caricature depicts Sor Patrocinio building convents with the help of Father Claret and King Francisco de Asís (Fig. 3).

I do not have enough space to go into detail, but I do want to refer to a few other examples of wonder nuns and their links to politics. The case of the Augustinian Yvonne-Aimée de Jésus (1901–1951) is especially telling. A historian of the supernatural, Joachim Boufl et, states that he does not know of a single mystical phenomenon that Yvonne-Aimée did not experience.61 During the Second World War, this wonder nun hid members of the French *Résistance* from the Germans in the convent where she lived.62 In February 1943, she was arrested and allegedly tortured by the Gestapo. Apparently, she was able to escape using the miraculous power of bilocation. She appeared covered in blood in the room of her spiritual son.63 After the war, she was received into the *Légion d’honneur*, the highest French distinction for civil or military merits.64 During the ceremony, Charles de Gaulle told Yvonne-Aimée that he was aware of her reputation. A famous photograph depicts the moment when De Gaulle pinned the insignia of the *Légion d’honneur* onto Yvonne-Aimée’s habit.65 As Sandra La Rocca has shown, Yvonne-Aimée was transformed into a national heroine and a redemptive

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56. J. Njus, “The Politics of Mysticism: Elisabeth of Spalbeek in Context,” *Church History* 77, no. 77 (2008): 285–317, p. 291.
57. O. Landron, *Les communautés nouvelles: nouveaux visages du catholicisme français* (Paris: Cerf, 2004), 123–26.
58. Madre Speranza experienced all kinds of supernatural phenomena, including ecstasy, levitation, bilocation, food multiplication, diabolical attacks, cardiology, and miraculous healing.
59. A. -M. Valli, *Jesús me ha dicho: Madre Esperanza, testigo de Amor Misericordioso* (Barcelona: Mercy Press, 2014).
60. Paredes, 120.
61. Boufl et, cited in Xavier Ternisien, “Les enquêteurs du surnaturel,” *Le Monde*, 7 January 2005.
62. She disguised the combatants with religious habits when the Germans took over the convent. See A. Oriol-Maloire, *Les femmes en guerre. Les oublies de l’histoire*, 1939–1945 (Amiens: Martelle, 1995), 58.
63. Her spiritual son, Father Paul Labutte, wrote several books about Yvonne-Aimée. See, for example, P. Labutte, *Yvonne-Aimée: Ma mère selon l’Esprit* (Paris: F.-X. de Guibert, 1997).
64. Administrative document for Yvonne-Aimée’s *Légion d’honneur*, 19800035/2/230, Archives Nationales de France, Fontainebleau.
65. A. Oriol-Maloire, *Hommes et combats en Bretagne: le Morbihan*, 1939–1945 (Amiens: Martelle, 1991), 119.

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victim in atonement for the sins of a secularised France; thus becoming a symbolic politico-religious figure working for the salvation of the country. The devotion that she created, “Petit Roi d’Amour” — inspired by both the cult of the Infant Jesus and of the Sacred Heart — allegedly protected French Catholics during the war.\textsuperscript{66} Many miracles have been attributed to this wonder nun since her death in 1951. In 1960, overwhelmed and sceptical of the wave of miracles and the multiple charismata ascribed to Yvonne-Aimée, the Holy See stopped her Cause for Beatification and interdicted publications about the nun; this ban was partially revoked in 1985.\textsuperscript{67}

Apart from Sor Patrocinio, several other ultra-charismatic religious Spanish women fit the category of wonder nun. Like Yvonne-Aimée, Spanish wonder nuns also helped soldiers in times of conflict; however, they did so in even more mysterious ways. During the Hispano-Moroccan War (1859–1860), Augustinian nun Madre Cándida (1804–1861) bilocated to the front to protect combatants. A 1930s sculpture depicts her holding an injured soldier in front of a cannon. In the sky, angels surround the infant Jesus who

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.jpg}
\caption{Una monja que trata de hacer la felicidad en España llenándola de conventos (“A nun who tries to bring happiness to Spain by filling it with convents”) Gil Blas, 2 (1865): 3. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional de España.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{66} S. La Rocca, “Le Petit Roi d’Amour: entre dévotion privée et politique,” \textit{Archives de sciences sociales des religions} 113, no. 1 (2001): 5–26.
\textsuperscript{67} Father René Laurentin was authorised to publish a biography of Yvonne-Aimée: R. Laurentin, \textit{Yvonne-Aimée de Malestroit: Un Amour Extraordinaire} (Clamecy: F.-X. de Guibert, 1985).
allegedly joined Madre Cándida during her spiritual travels to the African front. In a similar manner, the venerable Mónica de Jesús (1889–1964) bilocated to the front several times during the Rif War (Morocco) in the early 1920s. At a time when Spanish forces were being defeated, Mónica de Jesús encouraged soldiers and fought with them, to such a point that she was supposedly wounded in the leg. In the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), she allegedly appeared during firing squad executions to comfort condemned priests and Catholics. Another wonder nun who played a role during the Civil War was Ramona Llimargás Soler (1892–1940), the founder of a religious institution in Barcelona. She had many charismata, including bilocation and stigmata. According to her biographers, she appeared several times to the Spanish military general and future dictator Francisco Franco. She also communicated with some of the leaders of the Republican front. Ramona informed Franco of the outcome of battles and he allegedly called her “Ramona, the Catalan.” Finally, another Spanish case that deserves mention is that of Blessed María Pilar Izquierdo (1906–1944). After a strange illness that left her paralysed, blind, and almost deaf in 1929, Pilar obtained “living saint” status by receiving people in her attic. Using the charisma of divination, she gave them news of their loved ones at the front during the Civil War, or spoke of their future. Pilar was allegedly miraculously cured at the end of the war in 1939 in order to establish her own congregation. This miraculous healing was suspiciously timely; Franco’s National Catholicism had returned the hegemony of the Catholic Church and there could not have been a better time to establish a religious foundation. The miraculous healing was initially dismissed by the Curia, and Pilar’s reputation suffered for it. However, after her death in 1945, her fama sanctitatis and congregations continued to grow. She was beatified in 2001 and today a painting of her hangs in the Almudena Cathedral in Madrid. These cases might seem anecdotal; however, it is clear that the supernatural life of these nuns was intimately linked to their nations’ histories. As we can see, wondrous phenomena particularly seem to occur during times of war and political crisis, when concerns regarding salvation and the afterlife typically arise. Bilocation to and visions of the front, spiritual communication with political and military chiefs, apparitions and new devotions to protect the faithful in the midst of battle: all such extraordinary phenomena acquired an ideological meaning. This reinforces the idea that the

68. Eustaquio Esteban, *La sierva de Dios Sor María Cándida de San Agustín* (Madrid: Imp. Helénica, 1918).
69. T. del Carmen, *Camino de Santidad* (Madrid: Augustinus, 1975).
70. P. Fernández Rodríguez, *Ramona María del Remedio Llimargás Soler* (L’Hospitalet: Hermanas de Jesús Paciente, 2001).
71. The painting is by sister Isabel Guerra. For a hagiography of María Pilar Izquierdo, see M. Santiago, *Sufrir y amar, amar y sufrir* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).
72. A non-Catholic example would be the rise of spiritualism and spiritism during the First World War. See S. Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural: From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metapsychics in France, 1853–1931* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press).
manifestation of the supernatural can be used, or at least interpreted, as a political weapon. Moments of social crisis also bring opportunities for change, and extraordinary phenomena related to such crises can influence the way in which change unfolds. Sor Patrocinio’s case is especially revealing. As previously mentioned, her stigmatization coincided with times of national transformation, when the transition from an absolutist to a constitutional monarchy opened the way for a liberal regime and threatened the status quo of the clergy. To many, Sor Patrocinio became a symbol of the Church’s attempt to control the throne. A very popular satirical sonnet of the time expressed this fear:

I fear that the sceptre will become a crosier […]
I venerate God, I venerate the tabernacle;
But not a hypocrite Sister who with emetic tartar,
Mimics the [holy] wounds […]
If this cynical farce continues,
All masks will fall
And all Spain will burn like a match.74

This politicised image of Sor Patrocinio continued during her lifetime and after her death in 1891. Although hagiographies tried to restore the nun’s image,75 popular texts continued to depict her as political and as a dubious mystic. Important examples by renowned authors include the novel revolving around the reign of Isabel II, La Corte de los Milagros (1927) (“The Court of Miracles”) by Ramón del Valle-Inclán, and the series of historical novels entitled Episodios nacionales (“National Episodes”) written by Benito Pérez Galdós between 1872 and 1912.76 Apart from texts, political caricature also contributed to spread Sor Patrocinio’s impoverished reputation.

Sor Patrocinio’s Image in the Making
Mockery and gossip were a staple of nineteenth-century Spain. This quote from the Madrid correspondent of the London-based newspaper The Times gives us a sense of the social environment that Sor Patrocinio and the monarchy were confronted with:

In a profligate, frivolous, and gossiping capital like Madrid, where everyone seems intent upon political plotting, debauchery, and idleness, there is no scandal, no invention of malice too gross and improbable for acceptance, provided those attacked are well known. The higher his or her rank, the greater is the cynical

73. See, for example, Kagan, esp. chap. 4.
74. The sonnet is attributed to Manuel Bretón de los Herreros (1796–1873). Cited in Dos Amigos Filósofos, 143.
75. M. -I. de Jesús, Notas de las épocas más principales de la vida de nuestra amadísima venerada y reverenda Madre abadesa y fundadora Sor María de los Dolores y Patrocinio (Madrid: Librería Religiosa de Enrique Hernández, 1899).
76. M. -D. Troncoso Durán, “Galdós y Valle-Inclán ante sor Patrocinio,” Anales de literatura española contemporánea 39, no. 3 (2014): 621–40.

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satisfaction with which the tale of depravity is retailed by newsmongers in café, tertúlia, and club.77

As Jorge Vilches has shown, Spanish republicans used Isabel II’s image to create “the myth of the Throne against the people; that is, an image of a Monarchy and of royals whose ideas, habits, feelings and values were contrary to those of the people.”78 Emphasising Isabel II’s “immoral” sexual behaviour, attacking the conservative, clerical, and allegedly corrupt royal entourage — also referred to as the “courtly clique” (camarilla)79 — and showing that executive power was in the hands of the clique, were all ways of denigrating the monarchy and presenting the republic as the rational legitimate system that would serve common people.80 From the 1850s on, with the reduction of printing costs and the development of mass media, the press became a powerful weapon for republicans, anticlericals, and liberals throughout Europe.81 Pictorial political caricature was a useful medium through which to provoke the masses to revolt. In Spain, this visual form of transmission was combined with coplas, a poetic form used in popular and sometimes politicised songs, usually transmitted orally, such as that cited above about Sor Patrocinio and the fear “that the sceptre will become a crosier.”82 Being part of the Queen’s clique, Sor Patrocinio became the enemy of the republican and liberal cause, and was depicted in mocking caricatures. The nun had been the target of the press as early as 1835, when she was taken to court for allegedly faking stigmata and trying to subvert the state.83 However, no caricatures of Sor Patrocinio from that time are available, because pictorial caricature only developed in Spain during the mid 1860s, with the evolution of printing techniques.84

The history of cartoons of Sor Patrocinio is linked to the history of anticlerical caricature. Religion has historically been a topic of mockery. Graffiti depicting Christians as donkeys in antiquity, or drawings mocking the protestant reformation during the early modern era, coexisted with the Christian faith. The figure of God, it seems, was not a target until the end of the

77. Cited in J. Patron, *Caricature and Other Comic Art in All Times and Many Lands* (New York: Harper, 1877), 198. Emphasis in the original.
78. J. Vilches, “La propaganda republicana: la monarquía contra el pueblo. El caso de Isabel II (1854–1931),” *Historia y Política* 18, no. 2 (2007): 231–53, esp. 232.
79. Concerning the different high society cliques that formed in and around the court during Isabel’s reign, see I. Burdiel, *Isabel II: No se puede reinar inocentemente* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2004), 355–79.
80. R. Villena Espinosa, “El espejo invertido: los republicanos e Isabel II,” in *Isabel II: los espejos de la reina*, ed. J.-S. Pérez Garzón (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2004), 159–76.
81. W. Kaiser, “Clericalism – That is Our Enemy!: European Anticlericalism and the Culture Wars,” in *Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-century Europe*, ed. C. Clark and W. Kaiser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 47–76.
82. Cited in Dos Amigos Filósofos, 143.
83. There were hundreds of articles written about Sor Patrocinio during her arrest. See, for example, “Ha sido objeto de las conversaciones...” *El Eco del Comercio*, 10 November 1835, 4; “Siguen las noticias relativas a Sor Patrocinio,” *Revista española*, 16 November 1835, 440; “Fuga intentada por Sor Patrocinio,” *El Español*, 22 November 1835, 4.
84. J.-A. Llera Ruiz, “Una historia abreviada de la prensa satírica en España: desde El Duende Crítico de Madrid hasta Gedeón,” *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico* 9 (2003): 203–14.

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eighteenth century.85 Anticlericalism — especially anti-Catholicism — became a transnational phenomenon in nineteenth-century Europe.86 In Spain, anticlericalism emerged as an ideological substratum of republicanism. During the Bourbon Restoration, in particular, republican politicians and journalists used anticlericalism to fight against the national-Catholic vision of Spain.87 In Europe, regional anticlerical groups, such as freethinkers, Freemasons, republicans, and later, anarchists and socialists, were often connected through international networks. Their periodicals translated articles by foreign authors and they banded together in opposition to events such as the Vatican Council (1869–1870).88 Anticlerical iconography, as expressed through caricature, transcended national borders, engaging peasants and workers in the fight for a common ideal. A central notion of anticlericalism was that the hierarchical authoritarian organisation of the Church hindered individual autonomy.89 Anticlerical cartoons became especially virulent during and after the French Revolution. With new evolutionary and secular ideas on the rise, and with the Church opposing them, radical anticlericalism took over Europe. By the end of the nineteenth century, a new wave of liberalism fostered press freedom. Coinciding with the proclamation of the Paris Commune, which saw the execution of clergymen in the city streets, dozens of satirical journals emerged.90 In Spain, many republican and anticlerical journals appeared at the time of the 1868 revolution, incorporating caricature as one of their main features.91

In Sor Patrocinio’s case, caricatures did more than transform the nun’s image: they built it.92 Despite her celebrity status, most people did not know what Sor Patrocinio looked like. Being a cloistered nun, she was not supposed to leave the convent and only aristocrats and other distinguished people were allowed to visit her. Coinciding with the interest the royal family

85. F. Boespflug, “Brève histoire de la caricature des figures majeures du christianisme,” Théologiques 17, no. 2 (2009): 85–110; G. Doizy, “De la caricature anticléricale à la farce biblique,” Archives de sciences sociales des religions 134 (2006): 63–91.
86. T. Verhoeven, ed., “Special Issue: Transnational Approaches to the History of Anti-Catholicism in the Modern Era,” Journal of Religious History 39, no. 2 (2015): 175–81; Y. -M. Werner and J. Harvard, eds., European Anti-Catholicism in Comparative and Transnational Perspective (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013). For the case of anti-Catholicism in the US, see J. Nordstrom, Danger of the Doorstep. Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).
87. J. Cueva Merino and J. Montero García, eds., La secularización conflictiva. España (1898–1931) (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2007); E. Sanabria, Republicanism and Anticlerical Nationalism in Spain (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
88. L. Dittrich, “European Connections, Obstacle, and the Search for a New Concept of Religion: The Freethought Movement as an Example of Transnational Anti-Catholicism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” Journal of Religious History 39, no. 2 (2015): 261–79; M. Thomas, “The Faith and the Fury: The Construction of Anticlerical Collective Identities in Spain, 1874–1931,” European History Quarterly 43, no. 1 (2013): 73–95.
89. Kaiser, 47–76.
90. On anticlerical caricature in France, see M. Dixmier, J. Lalouette, and D. Pasamonik, La République et l’Eglise. Images d’une querelle (Paris: La Martinière, 2005); G. Doizy and J. -B. Lalaux, À bas la calotte! La caricature anticléricale et la séparation des Églises et de l’État (Paris: Éd. Alternatives, 2005).
91. Llera Ruiz, 203–14.
92. Most caricatures of Sor Patrocinio were published around 1868 by republican and satirical journals, such as Gil Blas, El Motín, La Flaca, and La Avispa.
showed in photography during the 1860s, a few portraits of Sor Patrocinio were taken by court photographers, such as in figure 1 showing her next to Isabel II. Nevertheless, such portraits did not enter the public realm until the beginning of the twentieth century, when they were reproduced by anticlerical and republican journals in commemoration of the 1868 revolution, emphasising the novelty of disseminating such pictures for the first time. In the light of this, it does not seem too adventurous to claim that the cartoons of Sor Patrocinio were the first public depictions of the nun, even when the caricaturist had no idea of her physical appearance. In fact, the first caricature of Sor Patrocinio ever published bears very little resemblance to her (Fig. 3). In it, the nun appears to be thin with sharp features, while she was quite ample with a round face. It was published in 1865 in Gil Blas, a satirical periodical founded in 1864 and the inauguratior of graphic humour in Spain, and signed by Francisco Ortego (1833–1881), who would become one of Spain’s most reputed caricaturists. It is more than likely that Ortego did not know what Sor Patrocinio looked like, but that did not prevent him from drawing her. Interestingly, caricatures dating from after the 1868 revolution more closely resemble Sor Patrocinio — probably a result of the clandestine circulation of photographs found in the Royal Palace.

In most of the caricatures, Sor Patrocinio’s name was not mentioned. It mattered not; she was “The Nun” in Spain and it was sufficient to draw a woman in a habit for all to realise that it was her — especially if she was depicted with the royals and their clique. Just like celebrities, she had that “something” that made her easy to recognise. She became iconic, but not for the reasons she may have hoped. Most caricatures depicted her as a symbol of neo-Catholicism, understood as a Spanish politico-religious movement that aimed to restore Catholic traditions within society and government. This ideology arose during the 1850s in opposition to universal suffrage and the liberal regime, and in defence of the peremptory power of the Catholic Church and the monarchy. An 1865 caricature depicts Father Claret, the royal court confessor, as the “new” Don Quixote and Sor Patrocinio as Sancho Panza, the knight’s squire (Fig. 4). Their field is labelled as “neos,” which stands for neo-Catholics, while a train named “progress” approaches from behind. To portray progress as a machine is typical of modernity, when technological advance was perceived as a sign of human development. In the

93. Anonymous, See especially “Fotografía para la historia,” El motín 38, no. 19 (1918): 3–4.
94. On icons and celebrity, see J.-C. Alexander, “The Celebrity-Icon,” Cultural Sociology 4, no. 3 (2010): 323–36; C. Hackley and R.-A. Hackley, “The Iconicity of Celebrity and the Spiritual Impulse,” Consumption Markets & Culture 19, no. 3 (2016): 269–74.
95. J.-A. Inarejos Muñoz, “Sotanas, escaños y sufragios. Práctica política y soportes sociales del neo-católicismo en las provincias castellano-manchegas (1854–1868),” Hispania Sacra 60 (2008): 297–329; B. Urigüen, Orígenes y evolución de la derecha española: el neo-católicismo (Madrid: CSIC, 1986). On European New Catholicism see: C. Clark, “The New Catholicism and the European Culture Wars,” in Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-century Europe, ed. C. Clark and W. Kaiser (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11–46.
illustration, it seems that the train of progress will sweep away this new Don Quixote and his squire, who, just like the original would-be knight, live in a phantasmagoria, making fools of themselves. This caricature clearly anticipated the 1868 clash between the progressive ideals of liberalism and the

Figure 4 “The new Don Quixote.” Source: *Gil Blas*, II (1865): 3. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional de España.
republic, and the retrograde policies of neo-Catholicism at the end of Isabel II’s reign.

We have so far seen Sor Patrocinio’s image through the lens of the republican and anticlerical press. But not all representations were published. During the nineteenth century, a new type of clandestine circuit emerged. Cheap reproductions of scandalous pictures entered the public arena, together with pamphlets and periodicals from organised clandestine groups. The collection of watercolours entitled *Los Borbones en pelota* is a good example of this. In 1986, the National Library of Spain acquired a set of these paintings from a private collector in Barcelona. Over the years, other illustrations have been added to the collection, forming a series of some ninety pictures, dating from around 1868. Just as with the pornographic caricatures depicting Marie-Antoinette, Isabel II and all of the powerful figures who surrounded her are either portrayed engaged in sexual intercourse, or using recurrent mocking themes of the time, such as the circus and the animal kingdom. Again, as in the case of Marie-Antoinette, the depiction of Isabel II’s lustful body symbolised the social and political perversions that republican values stood in opposition to; hence, pornography was used to delegitimise the monarchy. Scholars initially attributed the authorship of *Los Borbones en pelota* to the Bécquer brothers; however, it is now generally agreed that it was the product of a collective of artists who signed with the pseudonym SEM or SEMEN. Although the set of watercolours constitutes a single book or collection, reproductions of single pictures in *cartes de visite* or postcard format circulated clandestinely.

*Sor Patrocinio* appears in nineteen watercolours and is one of the five most depicted people in the collection. The most represented person, of course, is Isabel II, who is portrayed as a nymphomaniac ready to fall into everyone’s arms, including Sor Patrocinio’s, as we see in figure 2.

Isabel II had many known lovers, who were depicted in several cartoons. However, representing Sor Patrocinio and the Queen as lovers was extremely degrading for both women. *Los Borbones en pelota* was not the only instance the two were presented in this manner. A famous Italian caricature of Isabel II that dates from around 1868 and circulated clandestinely in Spain captures all of the Queen’s inglorious immoralities (Fig. 5). At her sides, two men are courting her. She wears a skeleton collar as a reminder of the deaths in the lost battles. Her forehead, perhaps her mind, is occupied by her confessor, Father Claret. On top of the crown, each letter recalls the initials of her lovers. In the middle, mixed with her lovers, is Sor Patrocinio. In the case of both Sor Patrocinio and Isabel II, the verbal and visual violence used to attack them was

96. Vilches, *Isabel II*, 164–6.
97. There have been several reprints of *Los Borbones en pelota*, the most recent in 2012 (Zaragoza: Instituto “Fernando el Católico”) with a brilliant introduction by Isabel Burdiel.
98. I. Burdiel, “El descenso de los reyes y la nación moral. A propósito de *Los Borbones en pelota*,” in *Los Borbones en pelota*, ed. I. Burdiel (Zaragoza: Instituto “Fernando el Católico,” 2012), 7–74; L. Hunt, “The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution,” in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. L. Hunt (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 117–38.

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exacerbated because of their gender. They were two women with power in two patriarchal institutions: the monarchy and the Catholic Church. Portraying them as lustful lovers was a way of showing failure of their respective vows — of chastity in one case and of marital fidelity in the other — supposing a general inability on their part to keep their oaths. In the end, they were transformed into evil examples of womanhood via such devaluating portraits of women with power. Together, they ended up representing the worst clichés associated with their gender. While Isabel II remained a childish and capricious queen, unable to leave her feelings and her penchant for the marvellous out of state decisions, Sor Patrocinio became a “neo-Catholic witch,” allegedly ready to play with people’s faith and superstition to get what she supposedly wanted.

Conclusions
Sor Patrocinio was a religious celebrity of a special kind. As a paradigmatic example of a “wonder nun,” her mystical life was linked to the politics of her

99. For the case of Isabel II, see Burdiel, El descenso de los reyes, 7–74; L. Charnon-Deutsch, Fictions of the Feminine in the Nineteenth-century Spanish Press (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). On the characteristics and roles attributed to women in Spain, see M. Nash, Mujer, familia y trabajo en España, 1875–1936 (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1983).
time. Almost certainly against her will, she became a symbol of ecclesiastical intervention in political affairs, hindering the separation between Church and state sought by liberalism. During the 1830s, Carlism and the clergy used her reputation as a stigmatic to advance the cause of Don Carlos and the return of absolutism. In the 1850s, when Sor Patrocinio became part of the monarchic clique, the republicans transformed her into an icon of neo-Catholicism, hoping to cash in on the idea of the throne acting against the interests of the people. Then, with the new wave of anticlericalism that swept across Europe during the late 1860s, Sor Patrocinio’s fame as a political mystic and conservative advisor to Isabel II became transnational. Anticlerical and republican caricature used her image to warn of the dangers of the clergy ruling the state. She became a living reminder of the menace of going back to the ancien régime. In the end, she became an icon of absolutism and the struggles the liberal regime had to face. In Jarnés’s words: “those good men named liberals were pursuing a symbol. That is, a phantom, a vague alkaloid of fanaticism. Sor Patrocinio was to them, perhaps, all the nuns, all the obscure, traditional mechanism, that always ruled over the people?”

Sor Patrocinio’s case demonstrates the ways in which religious women obtained, or at least were attributed, political power through their mystical experiences during modernity. In the examples mentioned here of “wonder nuns,” the manifestation of the supernatural became an ideological manifestation. Although the nuns experiencing such phenomena may not have given them a political meaning, the common people and the Church interpreted them in these terms. In this way, the uses and interpretations of the supernatural played a crucial role in ascribing power to these women. We can speculate that promoting political change through mystical experiences was essentially a female business. Scholars working on the medieval and the early modern periods have shown that female seers and religious women gained authority from their capacity for mystical union and visions, rather than from holding office. It is well known that women do not have a strong voice within the hierarchic and patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church. Supernatural phenomena can be a way of influencing the political agenda without openly subscribing to such an agenda. For instance, Sor Patrocinio had (Carlist) visions of the dangers of crowning Isabel II; but of course, a vision is something given: a revelation, which in theory does not represent one’s own wishes or aims. In this sense, the supernatural acted as both a sword and a shield: attacking the enemy and protecting oneself at the same time. During Isabel II’s reign, Sor Patrocinio continued to exercise her political influence through mystical experiences. Alarmist letters from Spanish politicians warned that the Queen based some state decisions on “the nun’s

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visions. It is clear that Sor Patrocinio’s life was marred by many scandals. Today, two Catholic scholars are attempting to restore her reputation, probably to refloat her Cause for Beatification. They are ready to reassess her image, and see her evolve from an example of absolutism and ecclesiastical control to a victim of liberal, republican, and anticlerical persecution. It seems, then, that Sor Patrocinio continues to act as a symbol for ideological causes, arousing passion even from the afterlife.

103. Letter from Pedro Egaña to the Duke of Riánsares, Diversos, Títulos y familias, 3557, leg. 21, exp. 21, doc. 7, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid.
104. Professor Javier Paredes (Universidad de Alcalá) and Professor Eudaldeo Forment (Universidad de Barcelona).