

The New Marianism of Dolores Ibárruri's *El único camino*

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Armed with the gift of fiery speech and an indomitable will to struggle against the inhumane conditions of her native Basque mining region, Dolores Ibárruri was, arguably, the most famous Spanish woman of the twentieth century. Ibárruri, more well known as “Pasionaria,” joined the Spanish Communist Party in 1921, and rose to become its General Secretary from 1942 to 1959. In the early days of the Spanish Civil War, she made famous the slogan “¡No pasarán!” in an address to rally the people of Madrid to defend their city against the advancing Francoist forces. The war solidified her reputation as a great orator.

Throughout much of her public life, Pasionaria enjoyed the status of a legendary or mythical figure. Perhaps paradoxically, this Communist woman was worshipped by large sectors of the Spanish population as a saint (Low 8, 70). In his book *Pasionaria y los siete enanitos*, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán cites the following poem by Jorge Semprún:

Es Pasionaria la madre
de todos los guerrilleros.
Es Pasionaria mi madre
y como madre la quiero.
¡Guerrilleros! ¡Camaradas!
Un abrazo a nuestra madre.
Nos despedimos gritando:
¡Muera el fascismo cobarde! (202)¹

That others have seen Ibárruri as a holy mother is perhaps unsettling. Given the polarization of Spanish politics over the last century, a saintly Communist is a jarring contradiction in terms. In this paper, however, I will argue that not only did others see her in this way, but that Ibárruri constructed herself as a modern, socialist version of the “original” saintly mother, the Virgin Mary.

In her most significant writing, the 1962 autobiography *El único camino*, Ibárruri depicts her early life as a process whereby she replaces her fervently held Catholic beliefs with even stronger Communist ones. She describes the ideology of the working class before the dawn of socialism:

Se temía a brujas, fantasmas y aparecidos y se confiaba en el poder de los Evangelios o de San Pedro Zariquete contra el mal de ojo sobre las personas o el ganado. Se creía en las virtudes milagrosas de los cordones de San Blas o de San Antón o en el laurel bendito el Domingo de Ramos para curar males y laceras de los hombres o del ganado, para ahuyentar los nublados y alejar el rayo del hogar o del rebaño. (17-18)

Ibárruri was not immune from Catholic superstition. Writing about the church in her hometown, she declares, “En aquel altar se concentraba mi fe. La madre dolerosa y el hijo muerto me emocionaban hasta el llanto” (71). But her faith, as she tells it, becomes unraveled. A key moment in this process took place when she observed two nuns changing the clothes of her favorite figure of the Virgin Mary:

Lo que vi me dejó sin aliento. Dos hermanas de la Caridad junto al altar

del Calvario manejaban sin ninguna consideración una especie de maniquí, parecido a un gran ‘diabolo’ relleno de serrín.

Donde debieran nacer las piernas, surgían dos triángulos hechos con listones de madera, cuyas bases constituían el asiento de aquel pelele. [...] y en la parte superior...¡madre mía!...en la parte superior, aparecía la cabeza de la Virgen, cuya caballera, deshechos los rubios bucles, le caía por el rostro y sobre los hombros, como si acabase de levantarse de la cama. (72)

Realizing that “the empress wears no clothes,” she begins to ask impertinent questions. For example, she asks her mother if we are all children of God, and her mother, a stout Catholic, answers yes without reservation. The young Dolores replies:

—Entonces si somos hermanos de [...] los más ricos del pueblo, ¿por qué padre tiene que ir todos los días a trabajar, aunque llueva, y los señoritos no trabajan y viven mejor que nosotros? (73)

Her mother’s response: “¡A callar! Los chiquillos no deben preguntar esas cosas” (73). With Catholicism silent on this issue, the young Dolores looks for answers elsewhere and finds them in Marxism, to which she converts and pronounces: “Mi nueva fe era más justa y sólida que la fe religiosa” (93).

As Gina Herrmann writes in her excellent essay on Ibárruri, she is unable to reconcile the “misery and destitute poverty” in which she lives with the existence of a benevolent God and “replaces her bible with *The Communist Manifesto*” (190). There is further evidence in *El único camino* to support this claim:

[...] la transformación de una simple mujer del pueblo en combatiente revolucionaria, en comunista, no se produjo de una manera sencilla [...], sino a través de un proceso en el cual actuaba de freno [...] la influencia de educación religiosa recibida en la escuela, en la iglesia y en el hogar. (64)

I disagree with Ibárruri's rhetoric of replacement, however. In my view, she did not merely replace one faith with the other but effected a synthesis between the two. In Hegelian fashion, Ibárruri fused the antithetical terms Virgin Mary and Communist into a powerful new construct, a New Marianism, which became the basis of her identity. This identity, a Mary whose moral authority as a mother is transferred from the private sphere to the public sphere, represents an important shift in Western gender rhetoric. Unlike Mary, who suffered for Jesus alone, this New Mary leaves the family behind (as indeed Ibárruri did in her life) and engages, as a mother, in the world of politics. Ibárruri, as Herrmann writes, performed the role of mother, not a private mother, but the "mother of the earth and all the people who worked it" (196). This powerful self-image was fashioned over a period of years and predates Ibárruri's autobiographical writing. Thus the identity both informs the writing of and is constructed through Ibárruri's autobiography.

The association between the Virgin Mary and Dolores Ibárruri began at Ibárruri's birth. Dolores—sorrows—is, after all, a Marian name. But Ibárruri's first public self-positioning as a religious figure coincided with one of her early interventions in the public sphere. In 1918 she published an article in the newspaper *El Minero Vizcaíno* and sought a pseud-

onym in order to avoid reprisals. Since it was Holy Week, she came up with *Pasionaria* or Passionflower, which is popularly believed to open at that time of year to show the Passion and death of Christ (Low 23).² As Gina Herrmann observes, the poets Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Rafael Alberti, Pablo Neruda, Manuel Vicent, Francisco Umbral, Blas de Otero, Jorge Semprún, Vicente Huidobro and Miguel Hernández have cloaked Ibárruri with reverence, describing her as:

La gran madre ibérica; Madre Coraje:
 la entraña]
 del pueblo minero; la madre tierra; la
 reina]
 madre, esposa de algún roble; la
 madre de]
 madre; el rostro de Dolores; siempre
 hilando]
 patria; nuestra nunca muerta España.
 (194)

Many of these epithets came from the Civil War and the post-war period, as Ibárruri's definition of self continued to be forged.

In his 1902 *Human Nature and the Social Order*, Charles Horton Cooley proposed the theory of the "looking-glass-self," which postulates that the self is a social construction, involving the incorporation of the attitudes of significant others: you are what you think other people think you are. According to Susan Harter, Cooley's ideas are still current among psychologists who study issues of self and identity development (356-57). This pattern of development is evident in Ibárruri's life. After using the name *Pasionaria* in her article, there was a sort of "snowball effect," whereby others began to see her as a sacred figure, which led to her incor-

porating these views into her self-image. As Doris Sommer observes:

[...] autobiography has been read as a self-reconstitution from memory, one that translates disparate experiences into a story of development and a more or less pleasing coherence. (119)

If both Cooley and Sommer are correct, then Marianism should play an important role in Ibárruri's autobiography.

Ibárruri's father, a miner, was illiterate. When she learned to read in school, she often read newspapers and books aloud to her father at night (Low 12). Because she was accustomed to "la literatura católica del tipo de 'Fabiola' o del 'Quo Vadis?'" Marxist literature seemed difficult and coarse (Ibárruri 94). Although she nearly memorized *The Communist Manifesto* and struggled with *Capital*, "la prensa obrera se caía de las manos de puro aburrida" (94). In my opinion, she turned to the literary models of her early years. The language of Catholicism dominates *El único camino* from the start.

As Herrmann observes, *El único camino* begins with "nearly sixty pages dedicated to the socioeconomic history of the Basque mining region" (186-87), "a developmental trajectory" within a "Marxist context" (187). The goal of this section, according to Robert Low, is to depict Ibárruri as being entirely shaped by the class struggle (16). Kevin Larsen, in his study on the literary background of Ibárruri's autobiography, compares the text with Realist and Naturalist writings by Zola and Galdós (133-36). While these readings are accurate, another aspect of this section, and the book in general, has escaped scholars. The title of the first section, "En el principio estaba el mineral..."

bears some resemblance to Genesis. The text then engages in a paradise-lost discourse, as the Edenic, virgin Basque mining country is divided up, measured, made scientific and spoiled by foreign mining interests (11-14). By this time, the Basque Country had been sold into slavery: "Dejaron de oirse zortzicos y vascas canciones que hablaban de añoranzas milenarias, de guerras, de héroes legendarios, de libertad" (14). Socialism, however, offers the promise of restoring the Basques to freedom, and in this sense, Facundo Perezagua, the first socialist organizer to arrive in Ibárruri's hometown of Gallarta, is like an Old Testament Prophet (23-31).

Just as the structure of the book may owe something to the Bible, so may its language. Manichaeistic vocabulary pervades the text. Admirable people in the text are referred to as "santo" or "santa" (85, 168) and enemies like Segismundo Casado, who led the coup against the Republic in the final days of the war, are referred to as "Judas" (565) "con el signo de Caín en la frente" (576). Even the title of the book seems to have been inspired by Christian language. Ibárruri first uses the title in the text one page after her encounter with a group of pious women who try to persuade her to renounce her sinful ways: "Abandona ese camino que has emprendido. Vuelve a la fe" (117), to which she responds:

Yo no sé lo que la vida me reserva. Pero sé que el camino de la lucha por el socialismo, que he emprendido, es el único camino que existe para nosotros. (118)

In his 1973 book, *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes successfully argued that

myths, long associated with the ancient Greeks and African tribes, are a part of everyday modern life in the West. The cultural makeover of Ibárruri into a latter-day Mary entails a consistent process of mythification. In *El único camino* and elsewhere, this mythification is a dual procedure which takes place through addition as well as subtraction. As Barthes writes, myth “abolishes the complexity of human acts [...] it organizes a world that is without contradictions” (143). Like autobiography itself, myth creation is a highly selective (re)telling of a story.

In her autobiography, Ibárruri makes herself into a mythological figure through a variety of textual strategies, subtracting some key events in her life while emphasizing others. Before I examine what is to be found in Ibárruri's autobiography, what has been emphasized, I will look at what is missing, what has been subtracted.

Comrade Mater

Since Paul de Man's *Allegories of Reading*, published in 1979, we know that an autobiographical text is not just a representation. Autobiographers try to do things with their texts; they seek self-knowledge and they make excuses for their behavior. In this process, one of the autobiographer's primary tools is silence. Gaps, fissures, and displacements play an especially important role in *El único camino*. While many of these textual discontinuities can be attributed to political and ideological factors, others contribute directly to the subject's self-construction as the New Virgin Mary. Through her writing Ibárruri binds herself to what are considered the three fun-

damental dogmas of traditional Mariology, “her Immaculate Conception, her divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity” (Balasuriya 146).³

Ibárruri was, above all, a partisan. She remained faithful to the Spanish Communist Party until her death in 1989, two days after the fall of the Berlin Wall. *El único camino* is a highly politicized account of Ibárruri's life that leaves out any details that may incriminate the Spanish Communist Party. Thus there is no mention of the Communist repression of the anarchists and the POUM during the Civil War, a repression whose brutality has been thoroughly documented by historian Burnett Bolloten (498-515, 601-06). These silences in the text, which undoubtedly served political ends, also had the effect of reinforcing her image as a universal, rather than a divisive, public figure.

At first glance, other silences in the text may seem trivial, even petty. For example, Ibárruri fails to mention the name of her husband, Julián Ruiz, from whom she was estranged during most of their long marriage. Neither does she acknowledge the existence of her long-time lover, Francisco Antón, who was twenty years her junior (Herrmann 190). And despite her having given birth to six children, she glosses over her own pregnancies.⁴ As Estelle Jelinek has written, neither male nor female autobiographers “are likely to explore or to reveal painful and intimate memories” (10). Even so, I believe that these silences constitute important pieces of the overall strategy Ibárruri used in her autobiography to occupy a cultural space akin to that of the Mother of Christ.

I rely strongly on Julia Kristeva's essay “Stabat Mater” in order to conceptualize the moments of absence—discursive

silences, displacements, and glosses—in *El único camino* which have the function of positioning Ibárruri as a Marian figure. Kristeva traces the “virgin” attribute of Mary from its origin as a translation error from Hebrew to Greek (236) to its status as “one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilizations” (237). As Kristeva argues, the virginal quality of the Mother of Christ has led to a near-total prohibition on her body, denying her not only sex, but also the bodily facts of birth and death—recall that the Virgin Mary does not die but is simply transported to heaven through the miracle of the Assumption. Thus, Ibárruri downplays her libidinal and reproductive sexuality not only by ignoring her partners, but also by performing the role of widow (Herrmann 196). She always wore the traditional black, long before she was actually widowed in the late 1970s.⁵

The prohibition on the body in the Marian myth that Kristeva identifies leads Ibárruri to gloss over most of her own experience of pregnancy and childbirth in her autobiography. While many autobiographers begin their stories with their own births, she de-emphasizes hers by displacing it until page 62. Although she describes her daughter Esther as her only comfort, she does not recount Esther’s birth. Instead, Esther makes her first appearance in the text already safely in Ibárruri’s arms: “Tenía entonces veintinueve años y a mi pequeña Esther en los brazos” (92). Neither does she narrate the birth of Rubén, her only son. Instead, he emerges in a cursory fashion when he is a few months old:

Entretenida en la cocina con mi pequeño Rubén, que tenía unos meses,

no sentí que un lujoso automóvil había parado en la carretera enfrente de nuestra casa. (115)

According to Kristeva, the deification of Mary is completed when she avoids bodily death through the Assumption (242-43).⁶ In her text, Ibárruri carefully avoids associating herself with death, although it was all around her. The 1920 death of her first-born child, Esther, is not related to the reader directly. We only learn about it as she tells the story to another interlocutor, doña Sebastiana, three months after Esther’s death (116). An exception to this is the death of her son Rubén, who perishes while fighting the fascists in the defense of Stalingrad in World War II. This death is brought into relief because it is told in the second half of the book, which is more political than personal. We learn of Rubén’s death after not having heard anything about Ibárruri’s family for hundreds of pages. The telling of Rubén’s death has a powerful effect, and it is no wonder that poets like Jorge Semprún and others compared Rubén’s death with the death of Christ (Low 149).

Death is generally downplayed in the autobiography but where it appears most strongly, it is dealt with in a manner consistent with the Virgin iconography. Four pages after we learn indirectly of Esther’s death, Ibárruri finally addresses the death of three of her children. As she writes, she breaks down in tears:

Estoy escribiendo y estoy llorando al evocar todo el dolor de nuestra vida.

Es difícil medir las penas que caben en el corazón de una madre y la capacidad de resistencia al dolor que hay en cada corazón maternal. (120)

This outpouring of anguish, natural to any real-life mother, is also a rhetorical strategy consistent with the idealized Catholic mother since, according to Kristeva, the exceptions to the prohibition on corporality in the Virgin Mary myth are precisely lactation and tears. *Mater Dolorosa* is depicted with only the breast and the face showing, often filled with tears. Ibárruri mentions directly her breast-feeding of her daughter, Esther (92). In Kristeva's scheme, these two bodily functions represent the return of the repressed, the primary processes associated with the female body (249-50).

If sin, sex and death are interrelated in Marian ideology through their suppression of the body, it stands to reason that *El único camino* would take a negative view of bodily pleasures. The denial or suppression of the body is also behind the text's occasional moralizing. Ibárruri shows her distrust of sinful pleasure as she denounces prostitutes and bars (19, 38).⁷ While Ibárruri denies herself a body in the text, she is quick to point out the corporality of others, especially her political enemies. She rails against certain Republican generals by criticizing their visits to brothels (458) and depicts those who surrendered the Republic to the fascist forces as being diseased "pygmies" with yellow teeth (542-43). Likewise the soulless director of a maternity ward is described as "un señor grandote como un buey" (290).⁸

As we have seen, Ibárruri uses omission as a tool in the text's positioning of her as a new Mary. But the text also accomplishes Ibárruri's mythification through what Herrmann calls its anecdotal structure (186). These are the many tales of Ibárruri's brave grassroots direct action told in *El único camino*, anecdotes which,

I will argue, strongly resemble those of European Marian legends of the Middle Ages.

The Miracles of Our General Secretary

Spanish culture has a rich Marian tradition of celestial advocacy, which Gonzalo de Berceo recorded in his thirteenth-century *Los milagros de Nuestra Señora*. Berceo's collection of Marian legends is a key intertext of Ibárruri's autobiography. As Juan Manuel Cacho Bleuca observes, Berceo presents us with a humanized Virgin Mary, an accessible and dynamic woman who cannot only comfort the faithful, but also punish the infidels (29). This reachable Mary was well received throughout Europe. According to Kristeva, when Mary was humanized during the Middle Ages, popular participation in the church grew and cathedrals like Notre Dame were built (248). Since Berceo seeks to make a goddess human and Ibárruri seeks to make a woman divine, their texts have much in common.

Although Berceo writes in verse, the structure of his book is remarkably similar to Ibárruri's. Both works are divided into short sections of anecdotes, each with an individual title that reflects the content of the particular story. Compare Berceo's "El labrador avaro," "El pobre caritativo," and "El clérigo simple" with Ibárruri's "Un director de Maternidad sin alma," "Colaboración generosa," and "Diputados combatientes." The language of both texts is popular, designed to appeal to a broad public. *Los milagros de Nuestra Señora* was written to be read, recited, or even acted out to pilgrims along

the road to Santiago (Mount and Cash 9). Ibárruri also uses an oral register. Berceo's introduction records the numerous epithets by which the Blessed Virgin was known in the Old Testament: "vellocino que fue de Gedeón"; "fonda de David"; "fuent de qui todos bevemos"; "puerta en sí bien encerrada"; "Sión"; "trono del rey Salomón"; "vid, [...] uva, almendra, malgranada"; "oliva, cedro, bálsamo, palma bien ajumada"; "fust que Moisés enna mano portava"; and "bastón" of Aaron (54-55). These, of course, recall the names poets have given Pasionaria and interestingly, Berceo refers to all of these names as flowers that adorn the meadow, making it beautiful: "las flores son los nomnes que li da el dictado / a la Virgo María, madre del buen Criado" (53).

There are numerous parallels in the content of each author's tales. In Berceo's story, "El clérigo y la flor," a man devoted to Mary dies and is buried in a non-Christian section of the cemetery. His body remained there for thirty days until Mary appeared to the local cleric and commanded him to move the cadaver. Despite the time elapsed, his corpse was still fresh, with a flower issuing from his mouth (71). This miracle is similar to Ibárruri's "Fanatismo," which tells the story of a worker whose 15-year-old girl dies of tuberculosis. The grief-stricken father wants to bury his daughter in a civil, not Catholic, ceremony. As the funeral procession advances to the cemetery, a horde of Catholic fanatics attacks with boiling water and stones. They steal the girl's body and bury her in accordance with church rites. The father, and the workers who helped him, lose the battle, but as a result of the conflict, a civil section of the cemetery is created (48).

The extremists who make off with the cadaver, Ibárruri's *beatas*, are much like Berceo's *demonios*, who snatch souls. In Berceo's "El sacristán impúdico," for example, a great crowd of demons comes for the soul of a sinning sexton and takes it off to Hell (65). In Ibárruri's "Catequistas," a group of catechists descends on Ibárruri's house after the death of Ibárruri's daughter Esther. They are not after Esther's soul, however, but Ibárruri's. They want to purchase her capitulation to the prevailing social order: "¿No te gustaría a ti, tener una casa cómoda, tierra, ganado, y a tu marido bien colocado?" (117). Ibárruri, offended by the offer, suggests that they give those comforts to the family next door, whose seven children are barely surviving (117-18). Thwarted, the group responds, "Rezaremos por ti" (118). The battle for her soul, they seem to suggest, is not over.

The profanation and destruction of churches is an important theme in Berceo. In "La iglesia profanada," three men commit murder in a church and Mary acquiesces in God's punishment of the perpetrators. He castigates them severely by casting an "infernal fire," upon them, which burns them inside until their bodies are completely deformed (131). In *El único camino*, the story is rehashed to reflect the internecine political struggle of the Republican forces during the Civil War. Although Ibárruri, unlike Berceo's Mary, has no divine fire at her disposal, she does have her inflammatory rhetoric. This is how she portrays one of her political enemies, an anarchist named Escorza: "[...] físicamente era una ruina: jorobado y paralítico, sólo vivía en él la llama de su odio a los hombres normales" (366). What sins of the anarchists warranted such tex-

tual deformation? They destroyed churches and convents (389-90).

By and large Ibárruri takes a dim view of the anarchists in her book:

Bajo los pliegues de la bandera rojinegra que ondeaba sobre los maravillosos monumentos y edificios toledanos, Toledo había sido convertido por los faístas en una especie de [...] Sodoma y Gomorra. (382)

Again the theme of the profaned church surfaces; Toledo's "monuments and buildings" are, by and large, churches. Unlike the God of the Old Testament, Ibárruri lacks the divine fire to destroy this new Sodom and Gomorrah. Upon taking it, the fascists did the job for her: "Toledo vivió días de horror y de sangre, en los cuales la ferocidad humana no tuvo límites ni freno" (383).

Anti-Semitism is a prominent feature in three of Berceo's legends. One takes place in Toledo, another in Byzantium and the third in France. In "Los judíos de Toledo," the faithful are gathered for mass. The Virgin appears, telling them that her Son is again being crucified by the Jews. The multitude descends on the Jewish quarter and finds in one house a rabbi crucifying a large body of wax shaped like a man. A fierce pogrom ensues.

In "El niño judío," a Jewish child in Bourges takes holy communion with his playmates. Enraged, his father throws the boy into a great oven but Mary miraculously protects him from the flames. When the Christians find out what happened, they bind the Jew's hands and throw him into the fire. "La deuda pagada" is the tale of a burgher, whose house's gates were perpetually opened to others, comes to his ruin through generosity.⁹ He borrows

money from a rich Jewish merchant, using a wooden Mary and Jesus at the Cross as collateral. The burgher then travels to France and Flanders to sell merchandise, and he grows rich again. Meanwhile, the day for repayment passes. The burgher, realizing he has missed the deadline, puts the money in a chest and places it in the sea. The chest miraculously floats to Byzantium and is delivered to the Jewish merchant, who does not know how the money got there. He hides the chest under his bed and claims he was unpaid. But the wooden Jesus speaks, revealing the origin of the chest of money. The Jew converts to Christianity.

As those who have studied the history of the Spanish Civil War know, Ibárruri did not do quite as well as Berceo's burgher on her own trip to France. Ibárruri's "En París," might well have been called the "judíos de París." Her sense of the French betrayal of the Spanish Republic cannot be exaggerated. She rebukes the French for not selling arms to the Republic: "no a entregar, ni a prestar, ni a ayudar, sino a ¡vender!" (347). She travels to Paris in an attempt to reverse this policy of non-intervention and meets with Leon Blum, a Jewish socialist who, as head of the Popular Front, was President of the French government. Ibárruri describes her first impression, tinged with anti-Semitism:

No he tenido nunca una sensación tan rara, como la que sentía ante Blum, el hombre más destacado del Partido Socialista Francés.

Era un sentimiento de repugnancia física, de rechazo moral, de instinto de clase, sublevado ante el pensamiento de que a aquel hombre se le considerase el representante del proletariado francés. (374)

The meeting ends in failure:

Del bolsillo izquierdo de su americana
asomaba un elegante pañuelo de seda.
Con él se enjugó una lágrima que no
tenía. Nos levantamos. Nada podíamos
esperar de los socialistas franceses
ni del gobierno. (374-75)

She condemns both French and Belgian socialists for their elegant hypocrisy (375, 376). Years later, she still laughs because the Spanish delegation mistook the Belgian socialist leader's wife, 40 years his junior, for his daughter, and his mother-in-law for his wife (376).

The strongest connection between the two texts is how *El único camino* posits Ibárruri as an advocate, a *Deus ex machina* figure who intercedes on behalf of her loyal followers, much like Mary in Berceo. The narrative abounds with such incidents, which are both proof of and occasion for Ibárruri's developing sense of self.¹⁰ As the text develops, Ibárruri's personhood coalesces around a theatricalized character, Pasionaria, a quasi-divine advocate of the poor and downtrodden.

The emergence of Ibárruri's public persona in the text follows a discernible pattern. A curious feature of Ibárruri's autobiography is the author's own belated entry into the text. While the conventional autobiography uses the first person singular "I" at the very beginning of the text, here it is delayed, not employed until page 55. Even then, "we" is preferred to "I" well into the story, dramatizing the need for collective action in the class-warfare of Ibárruri's native Basque region. As the narration builds toward the Civil War, however, the "we" is de-emphasized in favor of a distinguished "I," and the figure of Pasionaria—active, decisive and heroic—surfaces.

Once her identity is settled in the figure of Pasionaria, she takes on many qualities of a superhero as she shows her uncanny ability to engage in grassroots action effectively. In one such situation, she helps a group of evicted families return to their homes. As a crowd gathers to see her off, she yells:

¡Constituid comités de vecinos, para
defender vuestros intereses! Uníos en
la lucha contra las compañías sangui-
juelas. Y no olvidéis que la unión hace
la fuerza. (288)

In another scene, she rescues a group of nuns from some over-enthusiastic anti-clerical Republicans, telling them: "[...] supongo que habrán oído hablar de mí, [...]. Yo soy Pasionaria" (391). Without question Ibárruri revels in these dramatic moments where Pasionaria comes to the rescue. As her reputation grows, the text's emphasis on self-formulation threatens to spill over into narcissism. She loves to hear what people say about her before she reveals her identity, as when she gently goads a group of Nationalist prisoners:

—¿Cómo se figuran Vds. a La Pasionaria?
—No nos la imaginamos muy bien. Según dicen no es una mujer, es una fiera.
—¿Así como yo?—les dije sonriendo.
—¡Qué ocurrencias tiene Vd.! Usted es una mujer española. La Pasionaria dicen que no es española; y que es una marimacho. (490)¹¹

The final act of personal intervention described in the text is especially telling of how these vignettes function in the creation of the Marian myth which characterizes public perceptions of Ibárruri.

In the section titled “Un director de maternidad sin alma,” Ibárruri recounts how a left-wing unemployed bricklayer seeks her assistance. His wife is about to give birth and has just been expelled from the maternity ward because she refuses to pray. Before the man even speaks to Ibárruri, his appearance as a pauper is duly noted: “a la legua se advertía que era un hombre con el que la miseria se había ensañado particularmente” (289). The man approaches her: “¿Vd. es Pasionaria?—Sí, yo soy Pasionaria” (289). He then explains his story. Poverty has led him to pawn all of his possessions, and if his wife, who is waiting on a park bench, is not allowed back into the maternity ward, their baby will be born on the ground. Ibárruri agrees to help and they take a taxi to the maternity ward. After an unproductive meeting with the director, the woman is showing clear signs of advanced labor. Ibárruri leaves the building to round up a few members of the Socialist Youth:

¡Ayudadme! ¡Vamos a entrarla y a colocarla en una cama! Haciendo con las manos la silla de la reina, levantamos a la mujer y la entramos en la Maternidad. (292)

Safely inside, the woman gives birth to a baby girl, and the bricklayer pays homage to Ibárruri by naming the baby Dolores.

The story is remarkable for its deeply Christian, and especially Catholic, resonances. Although the woman is expelled for her refusal to participate in the rite of prayer, the person without a soul, Ibárruri notes, is the director of the maternity ward. The husband and wife recall an impoverished Mary and Joseph searching for a place to give birth. The association

of the birthing mother and Mary is strengthened when the group led by Ibárruri carries the woman in their hand-formed “seat of the queen,” a spectacle which resembles a Holy Week procession. Finally, the fact that the couple named their daughter after Ibárruri—which re-enacts the naming of countless women, including Ibárruri herself, after the Mother of Christ—signals Ibárruri’s positioning as the Virgin Mary. The Blessed Virgin as celestial midwife is an important motif in Berceo. In “Un parto maravilloso,” a pregnant woman is trapped by a raging sea. The sea inexplicably parts and the woman walks up to the beach with her baby in hand; she had a pain-free delivery with Mary as midwife. In “La abadesa encinta,” a sinful abess becomes pregnant. Mary delivers her baby, again without pain, and then removes all signs of pregnancy from the abbess’s body.

The maternity episode is the key scene of *El único camino*, a veritable house of mirrors in which Ibárruri executes the Hegelian synthesis, not only of Catholicism and socialism, but of Jesus and Mary. There are three Mary figures in the scene: Ibárruri, the birthing mother and the baby, Dolores. Ibárruri helps “Mary and Joseph” give birth. But instead of Jesus, Dolores is born.¹² In her autobiography, Ibárruri aids in the birth of herself. This reading is reinforced in the book by its first photograph, a “Madonna with child” where Pasionaria holds her granddaughter Dolores (4). Ibárruri’s New Mary is a female Jesus, or a male Mary. It is a Mary who speaks.¹³ Thus Ibárruri’s voice is an important part of the text and the paratext. Six photographs in the book show her in the act of public speaking, often in front of a microphone. She confesses how she became a great public ora-

tor by soaking up rhetoric at rallies for diverse political groups from Socialist to Carlist (136-37) and in “Una visita al gobernador,” she relates the tale of how she led a group of women to the governor’s office to demand the release of their jailed husbands. Rebuffed, she rallies the group, “Vamos a gritar hasta que nos oigan las piedras, a ver si el gobernador puede o no puede hacer nada” (131). Here she appears to suggest that whether or not you are successful, using your voice is worthwhile.

The position of “Un director de maternidad sin alma” within the text is particularly meaningful. Herrmann, following Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Teresa Pàmies, observed how *El único camino* is divided into two sections, the first personal and the second political (186). As Herrmann puts it:

What starts out as an engaging page-turner about this legendary woman eventually slows down into a seemingly impersonal and distorted manifesto. (185)¹⁴

Following this characterization of the work, I would suggest that the first part deals with the personal because it seeks to construct the self as a New Virgin Mary. Only after this self is constructed can it then enter into the public sphere, and participate in the great historical events which brought Pasionaria her renown. The dividing line between the two sections, as others have pointed out, is the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. This last story of personal intervention functions as a coronation of the new Marian-self, and it is strategically positioned just before the outbreak of the war. It is the very last personal anecdote before the text assumes its

“didactic, political and apologetic” character (Herrmann 185).

“From the beginnings of Christianity,” write Mount and Grant Cash, “the teachings of the church have stressed that the coming of Christ represents the fulfillment of the Old Testament law” (8). One of Berceo’s nicknames for the Virgin Mary is “fonda de David,” the sling of David (54). Mount and Grant Cash explain:

The sling of David in the well-known story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) prefigures her in that she launched the stone, her son, into the world to strike down evil and bring salvation. (11)

Reading Ibárruri backwards now, like Old Testament exegetes, we can see how “La palabra socialista” prefigures the birth of the Mary who speaks. This story, whether or not the visit of socialist organizer Facundo Perezagua to the workers ever took place, is a literary creation of Ibárruri. She assumes the voice of a fictional narrator, rendering the dialogue between Perezagua and the workers in perfect detail. Tellingly, although there are a number of workers, only one is named: Tomás Chico, who recalls Thomas, the only one of Jesus’s twelve apostles to doubt the Resurrection of Christ. The conversation is a productive one for the organizer; the workers’ consciousness is raised. “Vuelva Vd.” one of the miners says to Perezagua, “Volveré,” he replies (31).

This incident, which takes place before Ibárruri’s textual birth and her real birth, seems to presage Pasionaria’s coming. The birthing mother of the maternity story is the sling which launches the stone, Pasionaria, into the world. The Old

Testament portion of *El único camino* finishes with the birth of Pasionaria. The New Testament portion, Pasionaria as Savior of the Spanish Republic, now begins.

Restoring Dolores Ibárruri to History

Dolores Ibárruri was an unusually strong and outspoken Basque woman who fought for social justice throughout most of her life. She, and countless others, were both the products of and the makers of contemporary Spanish history. In “Stabat Mater,” Kristeva argues that the mother Goddess is weakened by her position in Western discourse. She is not part of history, but rather is a “baroque over-saturation” which is part of “an overabundance of discourse” (251-53). In this essay, I have attempted a deconstruction of the Pasionaria myth, of the self that Ibárruri forged in her autobiography and in her life—a powerful synthesis of Mary and Jesus, Catholicism and socialism, private and public, female and male. This self has become, in Herrmann’s words, “an epic and impenetrable castle,” “a static cultural object” (182). Pasionaria, in other words, is a transcendental figure, an “invariable presence” as Derrida would say (*Writing* 279).

Not even the Virgin Mary herself is a fixed entity. She has been written and rewritten over the last two millennia. In the Gospels, according to Mount and Grant Cash, Mary plays a minor role except in the two nativity narratives (9). By the Middle Ages, her role is much more significant and in Berceo, she’s a dynamic *Virgin engagée*, who performs miracles much like the Biblical Jesus did. In contrast, Kristeva’s *Stabat Mater*, related to the

emergence of women’s suffrage, is a reactionary depiction of the Virgin. Passive and suffering for her Son at the foot of the cross, she is nailed to the private sphere.

Ibárruri’s Pasionaria is yet another version of the textual Mary. Pasionaria is Ibárruri’s public persona, but is there a private Ibárruri underneath? Herrmann begins her reading of *El único camino* “with the intention of finding her ‘human’ side, her private self” (183). Herrmann cites an interesting anecdote from Manuel Vicent’s 1996 novel, *Jardín de Villa Valeria*. After the death of Franco, the legendary Pasionaria returns to Spain and attends a gathering of leftist intellectuals. She begins to speak: “Mi abuelo fue minero, mi padre fue minero, mi marido fue minero” (Vicent 28). She goes on to tell the tale of her life, delivering a long autobiographical monologue until she needs to use the toilet: “‘Necesito hacer un pis,’ exclamó ella con toda claridad” (38). She uses the next door neighbor’s bathroom, and the neighbor, who cannot believe she is Pasionaria, declares: “Tendremos que poner una lápida conmemorativa en el lavabo” (41-42). Herrmann reads this story as emblematic of the problem with Ibárruri’s autobiography and concludes in her article that this search for the private self, which is part of the “implicit contract between autobiographer and reader” (184), is impossible with *El único camino*. This text demands that the reader “relinquish the embedded conviction that there is something called the private that is quite different from the public” (202-03). Ibárruri, Herrmann concludes, is a uniquely political person (203).

I agree with Herrmann’s conclusion that the private self is absent from Ibárruri’s text. But I would like to supplement Herrmann’s reading with some theo-

retical assertions by Derrida. I do not think that the fact that there is no private self is a problem of *El único camino* alone. It is the central problem of all autobiography. Post-structuralist theory, of course, has questioned the idea that such a thing as the private self—the humanist subject—even exists. Theoretical writings by Paul de Man and Derrida apply particularly well to Manuel Vicent's anecdote and the problems of Ibárruri's autobiography. Three post-structuralist notions—logocentrism, *différance*, and autobiography as epitaphic writing or thanatography—can further our understanding of Ibárruri.

In his essay "Writing Before the Letter," Derrida explains that metaphysics privileges the spoken word by making writing subject to speech; writing is a form of debased speech (*Grammatology* 3). Vicent's leftist intellectuals are anxious to hear what Pasionaria, a woman they have only read about, has to say. They will learn the truth about this legendary woman because she is going to speak. What do they hear? A shortened version of her autobiography: her grandfather was a miner, her father was a miner, her husband was a miner. This is a reformulation of Ibárruri's chapter, "Hijos de mineros," where she writes, "Soy, pues, de pura cepa minera. Nieta, hija, mujer y hermana de mineros" (62). Instead of a revelation of the private self through speech, instead of "presence," there are just more words.

What is the ultimate meaning of these words? The meanings of Derrida's term *différance*, appropriately enough, are too multiple to be discussed here. In part the word refers to a process whereby meaning itself is endlessly deferred (*Positions* 8). This process of endless deferral is described by Vicent. Who is Pasionaria? She is the daughter of a miner, who was the

son of a miner, and so on and so on. We never get to the bottom of Pasionaria's true self.

The final post-structuralist notion brought to life by this scene is the idea that autobiography is "epitaphic" (de Man, *Autobiography* 928) or a form of "thanatography" (Derrida, *Ear* 49). Writing an autobiography is similar to writing your own tombstone. But again, instead of a private self, all we have at the end are words. In Vicent, Pasionaria goes to urinate; we expect this private moment to yield the private self. What does the moment yield? "Una lápida conmemorativa en el lavabo;" a plaque in the washroom ("lápida" can also designate tombstone in Spanish). There is only writing.

So it is impossible to know the private Ibárruri, if it even exists. What we can do, however, is return Pasionaria to the text of history. Ibárruri crafted her New Marian self from materials that were readily at hand. Starting with her assertion that she is of "pure mining stock," we can reinsert her in the mining tradition. Ibárruri surely derived some of her strength from the combativeness of miners. But she was also a Basque, and a woman. Euzkadi, of course, is known for its staunch Catholicism. But it is less known for its centuries-long tradition of women's participation in politics, unique in all of Europe. In her article, "Etxeko-Andrea," Roslyn Frank shows how "within the framework of traditional Basque law, women were granted complete equality with men" (152). Frank explains how the high status of women is related to Basque inheritance laws: the first-born child, male or female, inherited the *etxe-ondo*, the family house. If female, the inheritor got the house and the dower of her husband, who moved in to her house and took her last

name, as did their children. Furthermore, she could divorce or separate, and was the representative of the *etxe-ondo* in church and in local political assemblies. She could hold higher offices such as judge, mayor, or representative to larger assemblies. If she were not an inheritor, she could be delegated votes by her husband, who, given the Basque whaling tradition, might be absent for long periods of time. For all of these reasons,

In the Spanish Basque provinces, women were active at all levels of government, including serving as *procuradores*, or delegates to the General Assemblies. (145)

This system of inheritance was practiced at all socioeconomic levels and, according to Frank, lasted until the twentieth century (139). Ibárruri, although she did not speak Basque, was undoubtedly the beneficiary of these practices.¹⁵

As extraordinary as Ibárruri was as a woman, she was not unique. Herrmann compares her with India's Indira Gandhi, who also played the part of widow to access political power. I would like to propose another woman for membership in this select group: Mary "Mother" Jones, the famous Irish-American labor organizer of the early twentieth century. Jones was called "labor's Joan of Arc" and the "miners' angel" (Gorn 3). The similarities between Pasionaria and Mother Jones are far too numerous to fully elaborate here.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, two days before Dolores Ibárruri's death, made some declare that history was at its end. Pasionaria and to some extent, the 1930s generation—especially members of the International Brigades—have been el-

evated to sainthood and made part of the heroic past. We must remember, however, that Dolores Ibárruri was an ordinary person who became extraordinary through determined and spirited engagement with her times. The least of us could do the same. By taking Pasionaria and her generation out of the realm of myth and restoring her to history, perhaps we can put history in motion again.

Notes

¹ Semprún later changed his attitude in his *Autobiografía de Federico Sánchez*:

No ha vuelto a España para hablar, para decir las verdades sangrientas y miserables del pasado. Ha vuelto a España para morir. Morirá sin decir nada. Al fin y al cabo, ningún creyente espera de la Virgen de Fátima que pronuncie largos parlamentos. Basta con que la imagen sea paseada en angarillas ante la muchedumbre postergada. (qtd. in Vázquez Montalbán: 278)

Of interest to this essay is how Semprún takes Ibárruri's voice away and makes her a traditional, speechless, Virgin figure.

² Ibárruri does not confess the origin of her nickname in *El único camino*. This silence, one of many in the text, implicitly asks the reader to take her nickname for granted. According to Roland Barthes, mythmaking is a naturalizing process, which presents historically determined circumstances as "what goes without saying" (11). If Ibárruri's public positioning transforms her into an "hermetic goddess" in Herrmann's words, failing to disclose the origins of her nickname keeps the divine inscrutable.

³ The Catholic Church raised the Immaculate Conception to the level of dogma only in 1854, when women's suffrage became a political threat (Kristeva 242).

⁴ The only direct reference to the birth of her own children that I have found in the text is a

memorable one. In “Sufrí los dolores más hondos,” she narrates the painful birth of her triplets, Amaya, Amagoya and Azucena, all of whom would later die. She writes poignantly:

Estuve diez y ocho días en la cama atendida por las vecinas, cada una de las cuales apartaba de su miseria lo que podía para ayudarme: una taza de caldo, un par de huevos, unas manzanas, una jarra de leche. (119)

⁵ She even shares an amusing anecdote with us on the subject: she once evaded the police by putting on a clever disguise, a white dress (254). All of the photographs in the biography show Ibárruri in her trademark black. A more confessional autobiography might include a photo of the subject as a child—when Ibárruri’s wardrobe varied more—but the reader is disappointed here. For such images, see Vázquez Montalbán (19, 41).

⁶ In its desire to declare that the spirit of Pasionaria lives on, the Spanish Communist Party similarly denied Ibárruri’s bodily death when she passed away in 1989. While Ibárruri lie moribund in the hospital, the Party printed 800,000 posters with the slogan “Dolores Vive” emblazoned over a larger than life size photograph in preparation for her death. Unfortunately, some of the posters were actually pasted up before her death.

⁷ This is also due, in part, to the iron discipline of Ibárruri’s communism. Republican posters during the war suggest that sex and alcohol were problems for the Loyalist forces. One poster decries drunkenness and another warns against venereal diseases (W.W. Norton 110, 111). Republican posters were another arena in which the discourses of Catholicism and socialism were fused. See Nelson.

⁸ These “body politics” were part of real life too. Just as she was endeavoring to become more like the Virgin Mary, to deny her own flesh, the right wing attempted to give that corporality back to her. In 1936, the French fascist newspaper *Le Gringoire* ran a completely apocryphal story in which La Pasionaria jumps on a priest from behind and bites his jugular vein (Ibárruri 393). As further evidence of this dynamic, fascist soldiers at the front called their Republican counterparts,

“Hijos de Pasionaria” instead of “hijos de puta,” the traditional Spanish insult (Low 77).

⁹ Remember that Berceo’s Mary is a “closed gate,” that is open to her followers “pora nos es abierta / pora darnos entrada” (54). See Herrmann for an informative analysis of the metaphors of incarceration in Ibárruri. In “Mi primera actuación como diputada,” Ibárruri narrates one of her most famous exploits. After the elections of 1936, she braves the threat of machine guns and manages to open the gates of a jail holding workers imprisoned for their part in the Asturian uprising of 1934. The workers are triumphantly reunited with their families (279-80). Ibárruri also gains the release of common criminals held there, which recalls Berceo’s “El ladrón devoto,” in which Mary comes to the aid of a hanged thief by supporting his feet while he hanged for three days. Unharmful, the thief’s family cut him down.

¹⁰ Angel Loureiro argues for a conception of autobiography based on the idea of self in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Loureiro writes:

[...] for Levinas, the self is not an autonomous, self-positing entity, but it originates as a response to, and thus as a responsibility toward, the other. This responsibility that initially constitutes the subject is the core of the ethical domain. (xi)

¹¹ Berceo’s Mary too belatedly reveals her identity at times. See “El clérigo embriagado.”

¹² Sommer describes autobiography as a heroic narrative, in which there is a transformation from “we” to “I,” from follower to leader, from faithful to Christ (108).

¹³ Berceo writes of Jesus that there was never a child with such gifted speech ever born, “ni nació nunca niño / de tan donosa boca” (187).

¹⁴ According to Low, the chapters describing her childhood and upbringing “are easily the freshest and most vivid of a book that thereafter is little more than a crude defense of Communist Party tactics before and during the Spanish Civil War” (11).

¹⁵ Ibárruri did not speak Basque but identifies with the Basque country throughout the text. She uses the term Euzkadi, and even “Euzkalerría,”

the traditional name for the Basque country written today as "Euskal Herria" (5) and she cites a traditional Basque song (315).

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