

FATAL CONSEQUENCES:
Callot, Goya, and the Horrors of War



HOOD MUSEUM OF ART

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Onlooker, Witness and Judge in Goya's Disasters of War: fig. 1:
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Præsentiments de ce qui doit arriver

I. *Sad presentiments of what must come to pass*
(Plate 1, *Disasters of War*)

ONLOOKER, WITNESS, AND JUDGE IN GOYA'S DISASTERS OF WAR

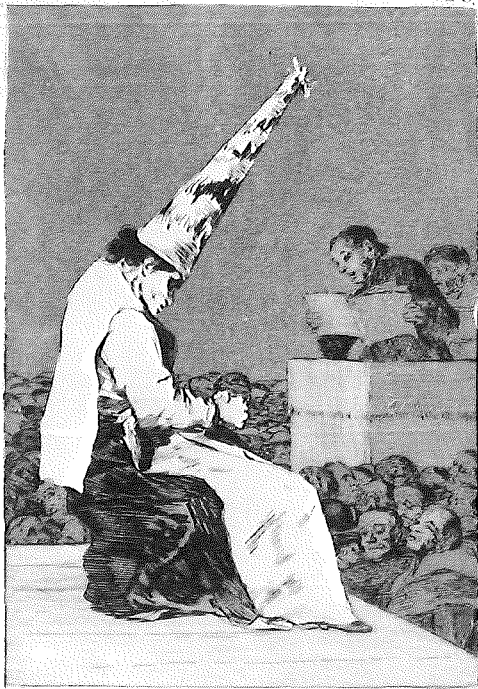
To look, both as act and as concept, was a life-long fascination of Francisco Goya (1746-1828). Onlookers, who had long functioned as conventional motifs in religious and decorative painting, already played important parts in setting the mood of a scene in his early work, as for example the figures who stare at the couple in the tapestry cartoon *Stroll in Andalusia* of 1777 (Madrid, Museo del Prado). By the 1790s, Goya had begun to use this device more inventively, as can be seen in the print series the *Caprichos* of 1797-98 (*fig. 1*) and the cupola at the Church of San Antonio de la Florida in Madrid, painted in 1798, in which the spectators assume a dominant role. In his album drawings, the voyeur occasionally even takes center stage, as in the comical work of around 1810-20 captioned "*tuti li mundi*" (a term for peep shows), in which a woman gazes at the backside of a man who in turn peers into the ocular opening of a viewing box (New York, Hispanic Society of America). Yet never did Goya examine the nature of looking with more force and depth than when the subject was war.

In his print series the *Disasters of War*, produced between approximately 1810 and 1820, and published only posthumously in 1863, Goya explored most compellingly the gnawing question, for which no adequate answer can be found, of what it means to witness extremes of cruelty, destruction and suffering. What does it say about human-

kind that a crowd gathers to watch a garroting (Plate 34, *pl. XV*), or to witness a man being brutally dragged across the ground (Plate 29, *pl. XII*)? And how is it that soldiers are able to gaze with utter concentration as they assist in sadistic forms of execution, such as strangulation or castration (Plates 32, 33; *pls. XIII, XIV*)?

The disturbing imagery of the *Disasters of War* leaves no room for doubting that Goya asked himself these and other similar questions as events unfolded following the Napoleonic invasion of Spain in May 1808: the siege of one town after another; disease, famine, and rape; and violence for its own sake rather than for the gains of war. Goya himself managed to avoid harm. Like many of the figures in these prints, he remained an observer. He also understood the complex psychological and sociological implications of being in the position of witness. His ability to articulate this complexity in his art contributes in large measure to its power.

Goya's situation is summed up in an often-cited account of the genesis of the *Disasters of War*, written in the 1870s by the novelist Antonio de Trueba.¹ Trueba tells as fact what is most likely a fictitious recollection (one that was perhaps prompted by having seen the series of prints) by Goya's gardener, a man named Isidro. According to Isidro, whom Trueba quotes at length, on May



Aquellos polvos.

Fig. 1. Francisco Goya, *Aquellos polvos* (Those specks of dust), *Los Caprichos*, Plate 23, 1797-98, etching, burnished aquatint and burin (The Art Institute of Chicago, Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1948.110/23)

3, 1808, the artist witnessed from his Madrid home the execution of several Spanish civilians who had been condemned for their attempt to defend the city against the Napoleonic invaders (the event commemorated by Goya in the famous 1814 painting *The Third of May 1808*). That same night, Isidro accompanied Goya to the site of the executions. The artist approached the dead bodies, sat down on a ridge just above them, and “calmly” looked for his sketchbook and pencil while his gardener shook with terror at the sight of the dead bodies, pools of blood, and dogs preying on the corpses. Goya sketched everything, Isidro recalled, and the following morning showed him the first print of the “*The War*,” which the gardener “viewed with terror”:

“Sir,” I asked him, “why is it that you depict such human barbarities?” And he responded, “To have the satisfaction of saying to men, forevermore, that they should not be savages.”²

The value of this story is not in what it may or

may not tell us about the facts of Goya’s activities on May 3, 1808, but rather that it echoes a dilemma found in the prints themselves. As Isidro observed, it is most disturbing to think that an individual would be capable of gaining the emotional distance required to portray such graphic scenes of brutality, regardless of whether he drew them on the spot. On the other hand, it was only by confronting the hellish world in which he found himself that Goya was able to penetrate its nature in his work.

The complex psychology of observing the brutal consequences of war is brought to the foreground in one of the most chilling images in the *Disasters of War* (Plate 36, pl. XVII). The caption, “Nor in this case,” refers back to that of the previous print in the series, “One cannot know why,” which was Goya’s answer to both the cause of the hangings (or garrotings, in the case of Plate 35) and the soldier’s ability to contemplate the hanged man in front of him. In Goya’s print, the single soldier, viewed close up and individualized, in combination with the technical subtlety of the etched lines and aquatint tone, seduces us to become as transfixed as the soldier; we are simultaneously fascinated and repulsed.

However “modern” Goya’s analysis of viewing atrocity might seem in its penetration of human psychology or its relationship to the voyeurism inherent to the medium of photography (although obviously predating both Freud and the invention of the camera³), it was deeply rooted in eighteenth-century thought. The human attraction to the repulsive and horrific was already clearly articulated in the British thinker and politician Edmund Burke’s seminal work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757. In Burke’s definition, the “pity” and “terror” produced by actual as well as artistic representations of tragedy are causes of the “sublime.” Burke further noted that accounts of suffering and catastrophe, be they factual or fictitious, cause more pleasure than their opposites. He was also aware of the moral dilemma posed by this observation, for he justified the appeal of watching or reading about atrocity by claiming that it was motivated by a sympathetic pity based on love.⁴

Burke even went so far as to suggest that a public execution would prove to be a more attractive spectacle than the finest production of a tragedy in the theater. If it were announced to the audience of such a production, he argued, “that a state



DIA DOS DE MAYO DE 1808. EN MADRID.
Asesinan los franceses á los Patriotas en el Prado.

Fig. 2. Tomás López Enguídanos, *Día Dos de Mayo de 1808. En Madrid. Asesinan los franceses á los Patriotas en el Prado.* (May 2, 1808. In Madrid. The French murder the patriots in the Prado.), n.d., engraving (Museo Municipal, Madrid, no. IN1540)

criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would... proclaim the triumph of real sympathy.”⁵

With a perversely uncanny sense of timing, a Spanish translation of the *Philosophical Enquiry* appeared in 1807, on the eve of the Spanish War of Independence.⁶ A theatrical production about the violence that resulted from the French entry into Madrid on May 2, 1808 was even described as “a spectacle filled with grief and horror,” the terminology of Burke’s sublime.⁷ The event itself, along with numerous others, was repeatedly characterized as a “horrificing spectacle,” as for example on the inscription to Tomás López Enguídanos’s print *May 2, 1808... in the Prado* (fig. 2). Burke’s treatise was already fairly well known in Spain by the last decade of the eighteenth century through translations of popularized versions such as the Scottish rhetorician James

Beattie’s “Illustrations on Sublimity,” which was published in 1783 and appeared in Spanish six years later.⁸ Echoing Burke, Beattie observed that “It may seem strange, that horror of any kind should give pleasure. But the fact is certain. Why do people run to see battles, executions, and shipwrecks?”⁹ His answer to this question, however, differed from Burke’s. We are not compelled to witness disaster by our sympathy for the victims, Beattie argued, since we are unable to be of aid in such a situation. Rather, we are attracted to it because it produces in us “a sort of gloomy satisfaction, or terriffick pleasure.”¹⁰ Certainly both his and Burke’s explanations apply to human nature, as Goya was well aware.

Goya used a number of devices in the *Disasters of War* to probe the psychology of witnessing the consequences of war. Most conspicuous among these is the caption to Plate 44 (*pl. XIX*), “I saw it,” which accompanies a scene of Spaniards flee-

ing a town. As has often been pointed out, the caption is used to underscore the fact that what is depicted actually did occur.

As is characteristic of Goya's work, the relationship of word to image is rich in associations. The man on the left points to, and with eyes wide open looks in horror at something beyond the right margin of the image, presumably the approaching enemy.¹¹ He, just as much as Goya, might be the speaker of "I saw it," yet whatever he sees is left to the viewer's imagination; the focus is on the perception of the horror rather than on the horror itself.

If we assume, on the other hand, that the artist himself is the speaker of "I saw it," what he sees is more complex than innocent victims fleeing before the advance of savage Napoleonic troops. The pointing man seems to be the town idiot; he accompanies the town priest—a subtle addition to the artist's obvious mockery of the paunchy cleric, who flees embracing a money bag as round as his stomach and so heavy that to carry it requires the strength of both arms.¹² (In the red chalk drawing for this print, the priest holds his rotund stomach instead of a money bag. The gesture, along with his expression of pain, indicates that to flee town is indeed a burden.¹³)

The priest's avarice is further emphasized by the contrast of his bundle to the baby carried by the woman in the foreground. Compositionally, these respective tokens of the corrupt and the innocent are set against each other through the positioning of the priest's and the woman's bodies in opposite directions. This print makes clear that Goya's understanding of the consequences of the Napoleonic invasion of Spain was far from a simplistic, patriotic scenario of one side versus another.¹⁴

The idea of the eyewitness was one of a number of artistic and literary conventions that Goya twisted to suit his purposes. "I saw it" was a standard rhetorical device of Spanish poetry, as has been noted.¹⁵ In the field of printmaking, the practice of stating in an inscription on the plate that the artist had witnessed the scene portrayed, an outgrowth of the development of empiricism during the eighteenth century, also seems to have become a convention. The inscription on Charles Benezec's print of 1789 depicting the storming of the Bastille, for instance, claims that the image presents an eyewitness account even though the artist apparently was not in Paris when the event

occurred.¹⁶ It was the *idea* of having been there that mattered.

Nonetheless, artists in Spain, as elsewhere, often did accompany troops to the site of a battle in order to sketch it for later use in paintings or prints. The British artist R.K. Porter went to Spain in 1808 to sketch the activities of his compatriots' participation in the War of Independence.¹⁷ Goya himself was called to Zaragoza in the fall of 1808 by General José de Palafox to portray the defense of the besieged city.¹⁸

On the enemy side, General Baron Louis-François Le Jeune, who was stationed in Spain twice during the war, pursued military and artistic careers simultaneously, sketching and painting the very same battles in which he fought. After the downfall of Napoleon, he was able to present in his painting of the Battle of Guisando (Versailles, Musée National), exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1817, the hellish sights that the Napoleonic government had tried to keep from public view.¹⁹

The critical response to Le Jeune's rendering of the atrocities of war provides a useful lesson for the viewer of the *Disasters of War*. The painting illustrates Le Jeune's 1811 capture by Spanish *guerrillas*: he is stripped of his clothes in the midst of the cadavers of French soldiers who, having died at the site some weeks earlier, are now the prey of dogs and vultures. Describing the gruesome details of the scene, one critic supposed that the "accumulation of elements reaches the point of improbability," while another stated that the "variety of the incidents surpasses the imagination, and all the scenes are of a frightful truthfulness."²⁰ These opposing opinions alternately pass through the mind of the viewer of the *Disasters of War*, especially when looking at Plates 32 through 39 in sequence. One message of Goya's graphic depictions of heartless mutilation and execution is that the horrors of war are indeed so far beyond reason that they are "unimaginable."

The testimonial "I saw it" first emerged as a concept in Goya's work during the mid-1790s, when the artist made a series of small paintings while recovering from the illness that left him deaf. In early 1794, he discussed one of these, *Yard with Lunatics* (Dallas, Meadows Museum), in a letter to the Vice-Protector of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid. After describing the various figures in the picture—two nude men fighting while the caretaker beats them, and others who wear sacks—Goya explained that "it is a subject that

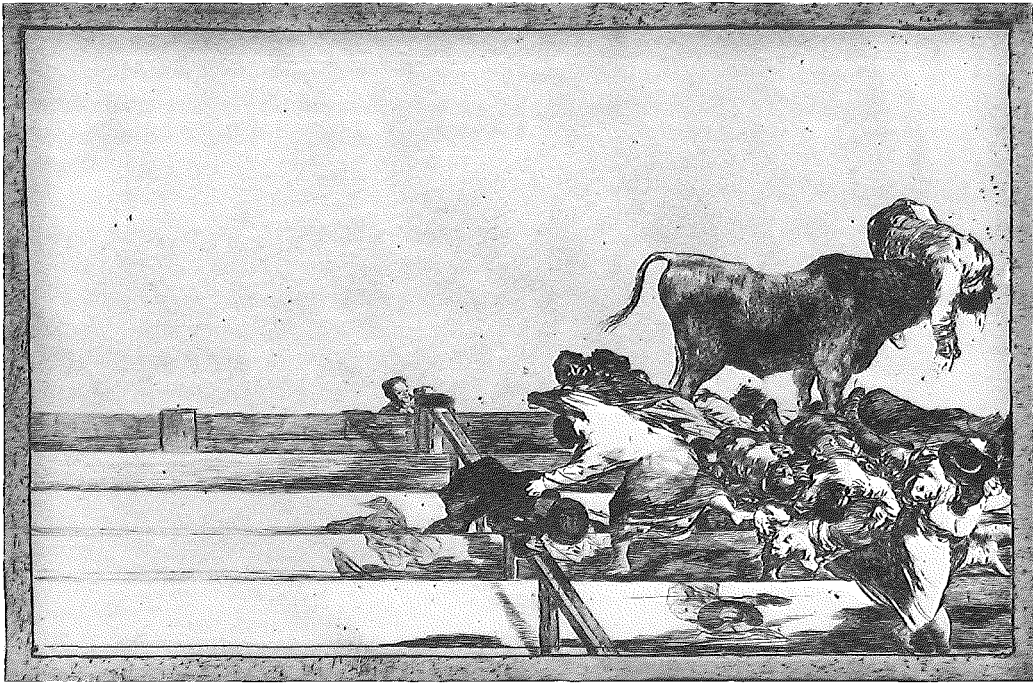


Fig. 3. Francisco Goya, *Salto el toro al tendido, y mato à dos. Yo lo vi.* (The bull burst into the bleachers and killed two. I saw it.), *Tauromaquia*, Plate 21, 1815-16, etching, burnished aquatint, lavis, drypoint and burin (courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department, Gift of Albert H. Wiggin)

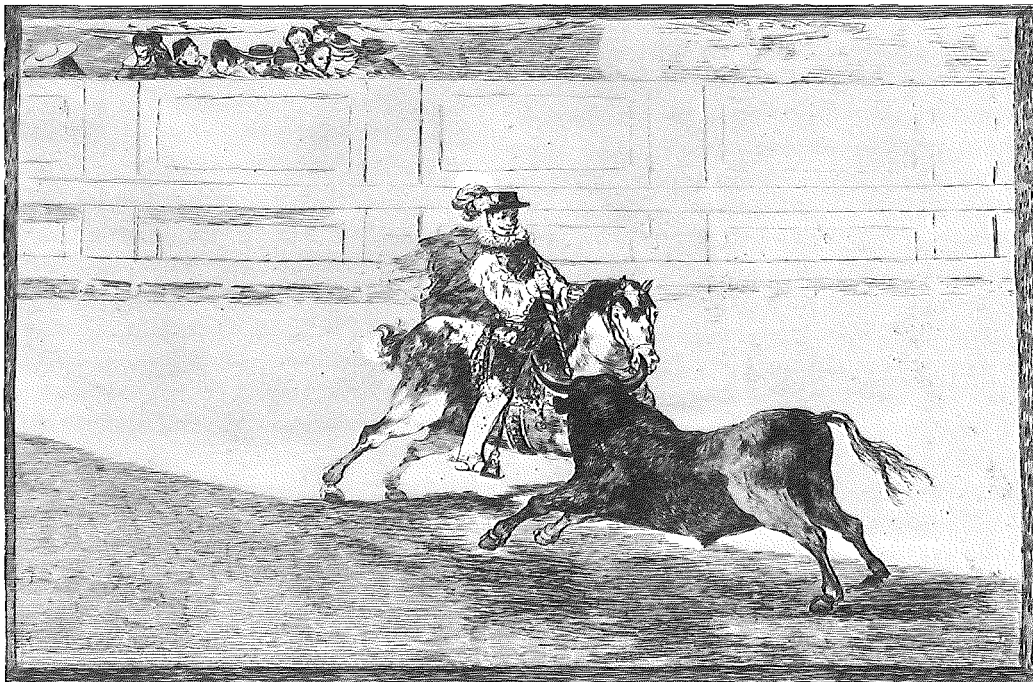


Fig. 4. Francisco Goya, *Quebrar rejones* (Breaking *rejones*), *Tauromaquia*, Plate 13, 1815-16, etching, burnished aquatint, drypoint and burin (courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department, Gift of Albert H. Wiggin)



Fig. 5. Francisco Goya, *Le pusieron mordaza p' qe hablaba ... Yo la vi en Zaragoza...* (They put a gag on her because she talked... I saw her in Zaragoza...), Album C.87, sepia wash (Museo del Prado, Madrid)

I witnessed in Zaragoza.”²¹ The idea, as also implied in the caption “I saw it” used in the *Disasters of War*, is that regardless of the improbability of the scene, it did indeed occur.

In another letter to the Vice-Protector of the Royal Academy, written just a few days earlier, Goya had characterized this same group of small paintings in quite opposite terms. Because they were uncommissioned, he explained, he was free to rely on “*capricho*” and “invention” in their conception;²² in other words, he could paint imagined subjects of his own choice. From this point on, the actual and the invented, the seen and the imagined, develop simultaneously and interdependently in Goya’s work. The interplay between the two, even in a print with the words “I saw it,” reflects what for Goya was a fundamental reality.

Goya generally noted that he had seen what he depicted when the subject in one way or another concerned human folly, as in the priest and village idiot in Plate 44 of the *Disasters*. However ludicrous the behavior or event, he seems to say, such is the way of the world. In one plate of the artist’s

bullfight series the *Tauromaquia*, published in 1816 while he was probably still working on the *Disasters*, the game goes awry when, as Goya’s handwritten caption on one impression reads, “The bull burst into the bleachers and killed two. I saw it” (fig. 3).²³ The spectators, who in other scenes of the *Tauromaquia* are witnesses of violence (fig. 4), like those in several plates of the *Disasters of War* (28, 29, 34, 76), have here become unfortunate participants in the action. The line that divides the audience and the performance, as in the war prints (see, for example, Plates 32, 33, 74, 75), can be unstable, unclear, or nonexistent. In both print series, Goya emphasized the dark human impulses—his, as the caption “I saw it” implies, as well as those of the depicted spectators—that lead us to watch brutal acts.²⁴

The same dark impulses led crowds to gather routinely in the public squares where the punishments of the Inquisition were carried out, another particularly Spanish form of violence that Goya repeatedly portrayed. Here, too, he used words to indicate that he had been an eyewitness. In a drawing in Album C of a woman being put to shame by the Tribunal of the Inquisition (fig. 5), “I saw her” is written on her *sanbenito* (the vest worn by those judged guilty), along with an explanation of her preposterous crime: “Because she knew how to make mice,” as if such a deed were possible.

This and other Inquisition punishment drawings in the same album are closely related to Plate 34 of the *Disasters of War* (pl. XV). In the print, the crime is written on a sign on the garroted man’s chest (of which we can only make out the first word), and also serves as the caption inscribed below the image: “Because of a knife.”²⁵ Like the woman in the Album C drawing, the man sits on a platform, behind which a crowd looks on at the pathetic sight. Here the prosecutor is not the Inquisition Tribunal, which Napoleon Bonaparte’s older brother Joseph, who ruled Spain between 1808 and 1813, had abolished and replaced with his own legal code: this included the punishment by death of Spanish civilians who were caught bearing arms.²⁶ The victim wears a black robe, suggesting that he is a priest—a representative, that is, of the institution that only a few years earlier had administered such punishments. The implication, then, is that the roles of victim and victimizer are interchangeable. By the same token, through the verbal and visual similarities in his depictions of the castigations of the Inquisition and those of Bonaparte, Goya seemed to have equated

them; one form of cruelty is simply replaced by another. In the *Disasters of War* he used the device of transposition in any number of ways, as will become clear, to make this sorry point.

A counterpart to "I saw it" is "One cannot look," which again appears as a caption among both the Inquisition drawings of Album C²⁷ and in the *Disasters* (Plate 26, *pl. XI*). As in "I saw it," the enemy is outside of the picture, but is here signaled by the row of bayonets at the far right. A figure on the left covers his (?) eyes in terror as the executions are about to begin.

The man who kneels in supplication in the foreground is more finely dressed than most of the civilians in the set of prints; this overt reference to his social status is an indication that the war drew no class lines. But the point may very well have been given an ironic twist in the implied demotion from a position of power to one of weakness. The oppressor is now the oppressed; he plays the same role, then, as the cleric in "I saw it" and probably also in "Because of a knife."

The captions "I saw it" and "One cannot look" have visual equivalents in the onlookers and figures who hide their faces, in several plates of the *Disasters*. Among those who shield themselves from devastating sights are a woman who turns away to avoid looking at the soldier about to rape her (Plate 9, *pl. V*); another who covers her (?) eyes as she sits alongside the dead and wounded (Plate 21, *pl. X*); and a man who does the same as he stands, his legs more bone than flesh, among the victims of famine who lie on the ground (Plate 60, *pl. XX*). In each case, the gesture is used to express the figure's painful acknowledgement of his or her inevitable fate.

The onlookers, by contrast, observe tragedy as it is experienced by others. Through them, Goya explores various psychological responses to the witnessing of suffering. The spectator in "Nor in this case" (Plate 36, *pl. XVII*) looks on with gruesome fascination. Of the two men who drag a third across the ground in "He deserved it" (Plate 29, *pl. XII*), one looks straight ahead, as if determined not to witness his ugly deed, and serves as a most powerful contrast to the other, who seems to look back in deep pity for his own victim. In the crowd of onlookers in "Because of a knife," a whole range of expressions can be made out in the sketchily but carefully drawn faces in the crowd (which are examples of Goya's profound knowledge of Rembrandt's religious prints²⁸): a

head cast down in despair; eyes wide open with fear, glancing sideways with suspicion, or looking up with sadness but also curiosity; and, finally, a set of eyes stares out at us as a warning that the fate of the garroted man might also be ours.²⁹

In the following plate of the *Disasters of War*, ironically captioned "One cannot know why" (Plate 35, *pl. XVI*), the platform, which we view from above in "Because of a knife," is now at our eye level, so that we see the beams that support it. We are now put in the position of the onlookers.³⁰ This extraordinary technique for associating the viewer of the print with the onlookers in the depicted event, like many devices in the *Disasters of War*, can be traced to Goya's earlier print series, the *Caprichos*. The positioning of the onlookers in relation to the person being publicly humiliated in Plates 23 (*fig. 1*) and 24 of the *Caprichos* produces a similar shift in viewpoint whereby in the second plate we again become implied members of the crowd. In the *Disasters*, Goya was able to strengthen the viewer-image relationship in part through the use of a horizontal rather than vertical compositional format.

The spectators depicted in the *Disasters of War* witness not only cruel punishments and torture, but also the culprits who write the laws and pass the judgments that lead to such barbarities. For example, in Plate 65, "What tumult is this?," the witnesses cover their ears as a man jots down his verdict. In "Against the common good" (Plate 71, *pl. XXIII*), they kneel down and spread their arms in supplication to the vampire-ecclesiastic who, with the care of a professional scribe, records his judgments in a book. (He is a relative of William Blake's devil-pope on whose lap an open book also rests in the illuminated book of 1794 entitled *Europe: a Prophecy*. Both images probably derive from anti-papal satirical prints.)

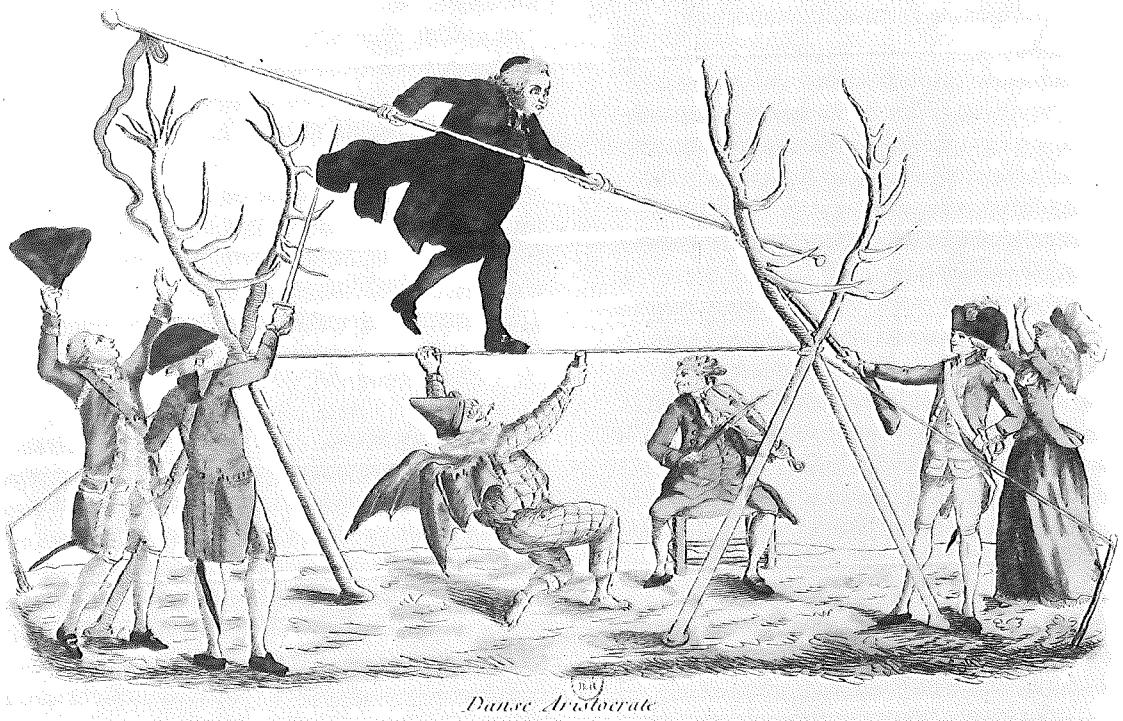
In "This is the worst!" (Plate 74, *pl. XXIV*), only a cleric kneels in supplication, while the remaining onlookers watch with horror, disdain, or pain as a wolf writes on a sheet of parchment the words "Miserable humanity, the blame is on you."³¹ One onlooker, whose hands are bound, is clearly also a victim, as if to say that the roles of viewer and victim can fluctuate with the political tides. In "The carnivorous vulture" and "The rope is breaking" (Plates 76, 77, *pls. XXV, XXVI*), the crowds witness the downfalls of two repressive lawgivers, a vulture and the pope. Finally, they watch as a female allegory of Truth dies (Plate 79, *pl. XXVII*).



En reviendra-t-elle ?

Fig. 6. Anonymous French, *En reviendra-t-elle?* (Will she revive?), 1790-91, etching with hand coloring (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

Il ne sait sur quel pied Danser



Danse Aristocrate

Fig. 7. Anonymous French, *Danse aristocrate* (Aristocrat dance), 1790, etching with hand coloring on blue paper (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

The last fifteen plates of the *Disasters of War*, the group to which these prints belong, are believed to be the “emphatic *caprichos*” that are mentioned in the second half of what is probably Goya’s own title to the series, *Fatal consequences of the bloody war in Spain with Bonaparte. And other emphatic “caprichos.”* These symbolical prints are, of course, related to the previous sixty-five images in their focus on cruelty and suffering. Indeed, in the context of the title, the term “emphatic *caprichos*” seems to refer to the depictions of the “fatal consequences” of the war—the scenes of civilians fighting the Napoleonic forces, and of torture, famine, and rape—as well as to the symbolical prints clustered at the end of the volume. Thus, the plates that depict the “fatal consequences of the bloody war” should be understood as “emphatic *caprichos*,” the remaining prints, then, are additional “emphatic *caprichos*.”³²

The artist’s conception of the entire group of prints, once he decided to bring them together in one set, as “emphatic *caprichos*,” is corroborated by the title “Goya’s *Capricho*” (“*Capricho de Goya*”) on the binding of the mock-up volume of the *Disasters* that also includes Goya’s title page.³³ The observation that the *Disasters* are a “second installment” of the *Caprichos* would therefore seem to be correct.³⁴ The imagery in this second series is more brutal, reflecting the extreme manifestations of human bestiality brought on by the war; hence the adjective “emphatic.”

Events of the war are the immediate subject of most of the prints up to Plate 65. It is generally believed that the imagery of the remaining prints concerns the return to the throne of Ferdinand VII in 1814 (he had become king just prior to the French invasion, after a power struggle with the prime minister Manuel Godoy led to the abdication of his father, Charles IV) and the repressions that followed: the reinstatement of the Tribunal of the Inquisition, the punishment of the *afrancesados* (those Spaniards who had supported the government of Joseph Bonaparte), and the suppression of the Constitution of 1812. Yet whether the images of the “emphatic *caprichos*” refer to any specific person, incident, or decree is difficult to determine. For instance, “The carnivorous vulture” has been interpreted variously as the Napoleonic eagle, as Joseph Bonaparte, and as a symbol of renewed bonds between the Church and State that occurred with Ferdinand’s return to power.³⁵

The image of a lion attacking an eagle as a symbol of Napoleon’s defeat and Ferdinand’s return to

power appeared in many popular prints of the period.³⁶ Goya’s “vulture” was probably derived from these prints. However, by repeating certain details from one composition to the next in the *Disasters of War*, Goya equated all symbols of power. On a fundamental level, then, specific identification is irrelevant.

Judges and onlookers, for instance, are equated through the use in a number of images in the series (Plates 14, 71, 76, 77, 79, 82) of the gesture of benediction, in which the palm faces out, the thumb is extended sideways and the index finger (and in one case, index and middle finger) points up. Propaganda prints of the French Revolution may have suggested the use of this gesture. The bishop who offers the blessing in “Truth died” echoes the ecclesiastic on the far left of the French print *Will she revive?* (fig. 6), a title close to the caption of the following plate of the *Disasters*, “If she revives?” (Plate 80, pl. XXVIII).³⁷ The relationship of another revolutionary print, *Aristocrat dance* (fig. 7), in which an abbot walks a tightrope, to Goya’s “The rope is breaking,” in which the pope walks the tightrope, further suggests such borrowings. In “The rope is breaking,” an anonymous onlooker performs the benediction while at the same time using it, ironically, to point to the spot where the tightrope has begun to fray.

Through its repeated transposition, Goya exposes, or “deconstructs,” the hypocritical terms in which the sacred blessing is administered. It is an attribute of the cleric who blesses a man about to be hanged (Plate 14, pl. VII); of the ecclesiastical vampire whose claw-like nails provide a sardonic detail of extraordinary subtlety (Plate 71, pl. XXIII); and of the cleric in the midst of the onlookers who jeer as a peasant solemnly takes his pitchfork to “The carnivorous vulture.” A bishop blesses rather than attempting to save Truth in Plate 79 (pl. XXVII); but in Plate 82 (fig. 11) it is Truth, revived perhaps as a mockery who wears the bishop’s cape, who now gives the benediction. Just as the repetition of the brutal acts in the war is emphasized through, for example, the repeated mounds of corpses seen in plates 21 through 23 of the war prints and in the accompanying captions—“It will be the same,” “As many and more,” “The same elsewhere”—so the repetition of the benediction implies that religion is inevitably accompanied by its abuse.

In those prints that include the sign of the benediction, Goya subverts the meaning of traditional

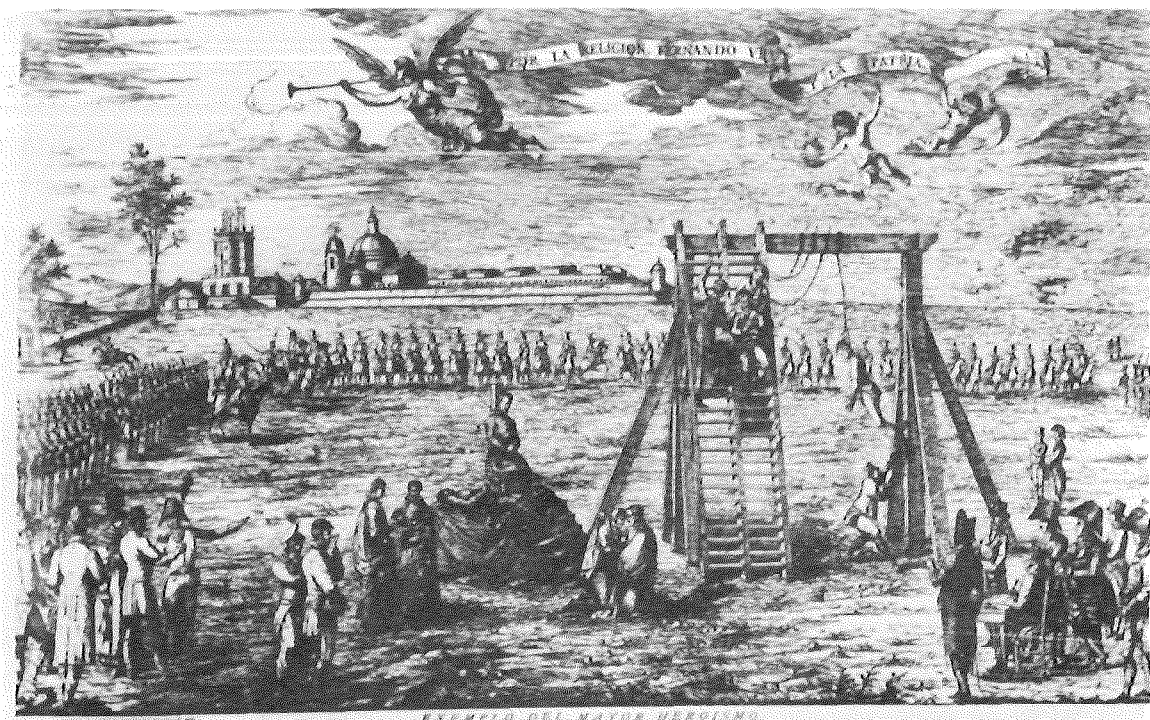


Fig. 8. Buenaventura Planella, *Exemplo del mayor heroismo* (Example of the greatest heroism), n.d., etching, (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, no. 43.564)

Christian iconography in other ways. The most obvious example of this is Plate 14 (*pl. VII*), “The way is hard!,” in which both the caption and composition allude to the Crucifixion of Christ.³⁸ Goya’s association of the prisoner of war with Christ (also evident in his painting *The Third of May 1808*, as has often been noted) echoes the rhetoric of the endless stream of propagandistic texts that characterized the struggle against the French as a holy war in order to urge Spanish citizens, in the face of brutal torture and death, not to give up the fight.³⁹

The same idea was expressed in popular prints, also propagandistic in intent, such as *Example of the Greatest Heroism* (*fig. 8*), which depicts the hanging of several Spaniards, including clerics, that took place in Barcelona in 1809. As in “The way is hard!” a victim is dragged up a ladder, while another (in Goya’s print, there are two), just hanged, sways back and forth in his noose. Inscribed on a banner above the scene are the words “For Religion, Ferdinand VII, and the Country.”

In contrast to its propagandistic counterpart, Goya’s print seems to call into question the assumption that the defense of religious beliefs justifies brutality and human sacrifice. This same questioning of the use of religion is evident in a wash drawing of a garroting, Album C.91 of around 1810-20, incisively captioned “Many have been finished with in this way,” in which a cleric again gives the benediction to a man about to be executed.⁴⁰ The expression on the face of the cleric in Plate 14 of the *Disasters* reveals if nothing else his impotence, and at most that he is a sham. The caption “The way is hard!,” then, has an ironic turn, like those of the Album C drawing and of numerous others in the *Disasters of War*, such as “Charity,” “Great deed. With corpses,” and perhaps even “What courage!”⁴¹

Another Christian subject that was manipulated both by the war propagandists and by Goya is the martyr. In their graphic rendering of pain and brutality, some of the most gruesome depictions of torture in the *Disasters* (Plates 29,32,33) seem to have been derived more from representations

of the martyrdoms of saints—those of the seventeenth-century Spanish painter José de Ribera (which during the late eighteenth century were cited as examples of Burke’s “sublime”⁴²) immediately come to mind—than from anything in the history of war imagery.

The inscriptions on numerous Spanish propaganda prints of the time characterize the accompanying images in terms of martyrdom. The text on an anonymous woodcut in which cherub-like bodies are piled up described the victims as “Innocent Spanish Martyrs,” while among the couplets in an anonymous engraving of the funeral procession of two famous heroes of the war is the exclamation “Oh Innocent Martyrs!”⁴³ The civilians who died in Madrid on May 2, 1808 were “martyrs of Spanish liberty” whose “innocent blood” profaned the Buen Suceso Church, the text of Tomás López Enguïdanos’s *May 2, 1808... in the Puerta del Sol* tells us.⁴⁴ In another print from López Enguïdanos’s series, *May 2, 1808... in the Prado* (fig. 2), we learn that on the night of May 2nd “hundreds of innocent victims were treacherously sacrificed.”

Yet the stiff, panoramic scenes that accompany such descriptions hardly convey the idea of innocent sacrifice expressed in the texts. By appropriating conventional religious imagery, Goya, on the other hand, was able to translate more effectively the idea of the sacrificed martyr into visual terms, just as artists in France, from the Revolution onward, turned the king and revolutionaries alike into martyrs.⁴⁵ More importantly, Goya also seems to have understood a profound implication of this fill-in-the-blank iconography: power is inevitably accompanied by abuse; governments change, but human nature remains steadfast. The association of contemporary events with religious history was deeply embedded in Spanish rhetoric of the time; Goya used this rhetoric only to expose it for what it was.

In Plate 67 (*pl. XXII*), “This is no less so,” the men who carry a statue of the Virgin on their backs wear the clothing of an earlier era.⁴⁶ If we turn to Goya’s drawings of roughly the same period as the prints of the *Disasters* (the drawings are not securely datable), the extent to which he associated past and present to make the sad point that things stay the same is remarkable. In Album C.87 (*fig. 5*), a drawing of a woman being punished by the Tribunal of the Inquisition, the words “I saw her” suggest that the artist himself witnessed the event; but as we move through the



Fig. 9. Francisco Goya, Album F.11, [duel], sepia wash (Museo del Prado, Madrid)



Fig. 10. Francisco Goya, Album F.13, [duel], sepia wash (Museo del Prado, Madrid)

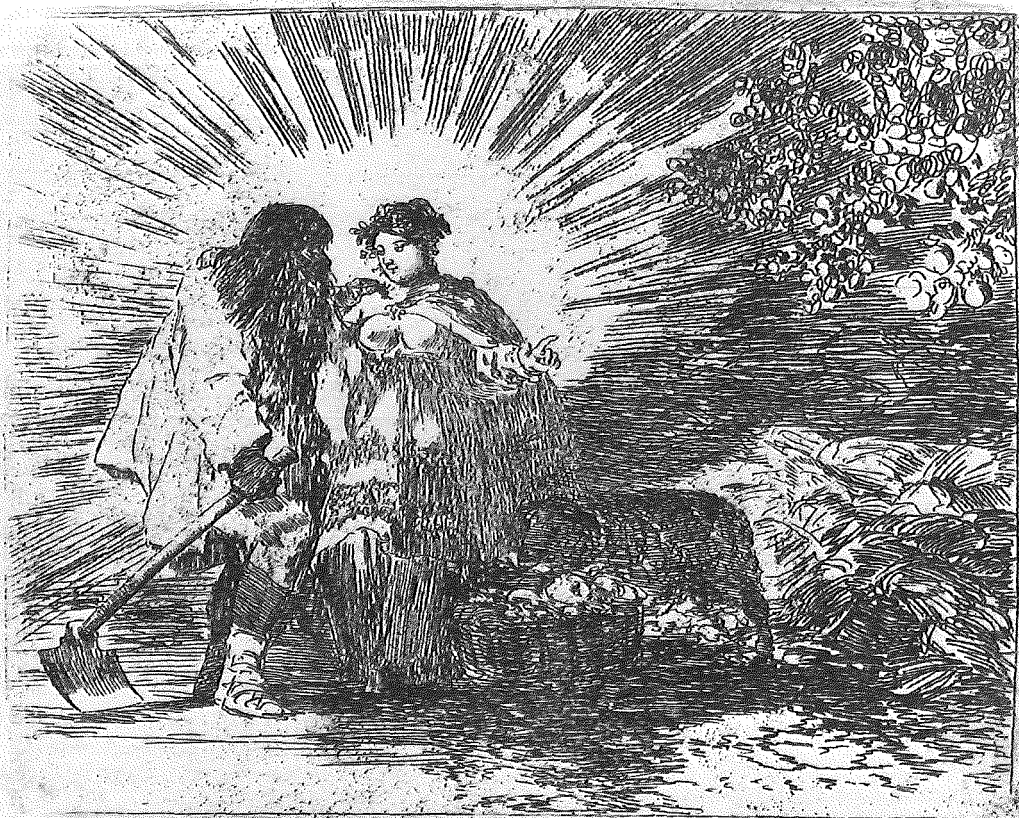


Fig. 11. Francisco Goya, *Esto es lo verdadero* (This is the true), *Disasters of War*, Plate 82, etching (courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

series of punishments depicted in the album, we also encounter famous cases in the history of the Inquisition.⁴⁷ In six consecutive pages of Album F, duels of various time periods are placed side by side (figs. 9,10).⁴⁸ In the prints of the *Tauromaquia*, too, modern day and historical bullfights are interspersed (figs. 3,4).⁴⁹ In each case, then, Goya recorded the history of a particular genre of violence and concluded that humanity, however enlightened, was unable to rid itself of bestiality.

In the *Disasters of War*, the introductory and concluding plates serve to underline this message. In Plate 1 (pl. I), a kneeling man who opens his arms and looks up in supplication recalls the suffering Christ of the Agony in the Garden. (As has often been pointed out, the print is close to Goya's own 1819 painting of *Christ on the Mount of Olives* in the collection of the Escuelas Pías de San Antón in Madrid.) The caption, "Sad presentiments of what must come to pass," links Christ's vision of his fate with the fate of present-day Spain, thereby

emphasizing the inevitability of the violent scenes that directly follow. As with the motif of the martyr, the caption echoes propaganda of the time, such as the description of the French brutality in the Prado on May 2, 1808 as "a sad prelude of the bloody scene... of that night" inscribed below Tomás López Enguñados's print of the event (fig. 2). Yet Goya, characteristically, makes a more general statement, based on his own responses to a specific and devastating moment in history, about human nature.

Plate 82 (fig. 11), the final symbolical print, and one of five in the mock-up set that were not included in the 1863 edition, is apparently set in a primitive Garden of Eden, predating Christian history.⁵⁰ The bundles of hay, fruit tree, sheep and basket filled to the brim denote abundance and lend credence to the usual interpretation of this print as a hopeful sign of Truth's victory over the animal instincts within us. Yet there is reason to question whether Goya, who in 1820 was seventy-

four years old and had witnessed decades of corruption and violence, gave so incontrovertibly optimistic a conclusion to his series of prints.

The caption to Plate 82 reads “This is the true” (*verdadero*) as opposed to the “Truth” (*verdad*) of Plates 79 and 80. Perhaps she is not “Truth” at all, but rather a mockery of the belief that there is such a thing as a “Truth” that can conquer human nature, for she seems to be wearing the cape of the bishop in Plate 79 and like him gestures in benediction, concentrating her gaze on the hireling, ape-like man standing next to her. Just as she might be a sham “Truth,” he might be a mockery of Rousseau’s vision of “primitive man” as an innocent being. If nothing else, this was probably Goya’s initial conception for the print, as is suggested by the caricatured face of “Truth” and the devious smile of the sheep in the red chalk preparatory drawing.⁵¹ The fact that three small

prints of prisoners were placed at the end of the mock-up set of the *Disasters of War* made during Goya’s lifetime also implies a less than positive concluding note.

As we turn back the clock, Goya seems to be saying, we reach a time when humans were motivated by base instincts, whether in acts of violence or in the romantic passion that is alluded to in “This is the true” – appropriate to a Garden of Eden, and as if to say, “this is how it all began.” As we then move through the centuries and trace the history of religious sacrifice, Inquisition punishment, dueling, or the bullfight, we discover that these instincts remain unchanged, and also produce the “fatal consequences” of war. This is the fundamental meaning of Goya’s “I saw it.”

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