

# El Tío Paquete: Goya's Prefiguration of Esperpento

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With reality before him Velázquez sees what his eyes really see, El Greco sees what his eyes do not see, Goya sees what no eye sees... Velázquez presents human reality; El Greco, celestial reality; Goya, demoniac reality... And while Velázquez offers serenity and El Greco anxiety, Goya creates unease.<sup>1</sup>

On my first visit to the impressive collections of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, I was struck by a strange painting in the gallery devoted to the nineteenth century. Surrounded by German Romantic landscapes, and sharing a wall with the French artists Géricault and Delacroix, Goya's *El Tío Paquete* attracted my attention. More than that, it fascinated me. It had nothing to do with the other portraits by the master hanging alongside it (an intimate portrait of his friend Asencio Julià and an official portrait of Ferdinand VII). Crudely brushed-in and granular of surface, the face of a laughing blind man looming out of a dark background and filling the picture surface presents an uncompromising display of the accidents of nature.

Painted sometime around 1820, the picture bears comparison to the *Black Paintings* in the Prado, which are typical of Goya's final style. And just as the *Black Paintings* may create an odd sensation, so too does *El Tío Paquete* unsettle the spectator, disturbing as much as fascinating him. The painting is compelling, depending on the circumstances and the individual; it gives rise to attraction or repulsion but leaves no one indifferent.

It's all the more compelling if one is acquainted with Goya as a court painter and the creator of tapestry designs on more frivolous subjects. Ortega y Gasset tackles this issue head on: "The man and the artist who paints *The Crockery Vendor*," which is the fantasy of the best of all possible worlds, "are the same man and the same artist who assassinated the walls of his own house by covering them with the frightening daubs of his 'black paintings.' Everything that is not speaking of this is not speaking of Goya but precisely avoiding the conversation about him."<sup>2</sup> Starobinski reworks this paradox, one which is intrinsic to the artist himself: "Here, the extreme independence of expression is here the achievement of a man who has experienced the most extreme dependence."<sup>3</sup>

No commission is involved in this instance, it seems. Goya is evidently interested in this figure in its own right.

In consonance with the non-academic reading of Malraux,<sup>4</sup> who links the genius of Goya to his refusal to seduce, we will see how *El Tío Paquete*, the image of a harmless, infirm old man, seems emblematic of the break made by Goya with classical aesthetic codes during the 1820s.

It has to be remembered, as well, that at the time Goya was stone deaf (following his serious illness in 1792) and that there is something ironic about the fact that he paints a blind man singing. Ironic, yes, but



Fig. 1  
Francisco de Goya  
*El Tío Paquete*, ca. 1820  
Oil on canvas  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza  
[\[+ info\]](#)



Fig. 2  
Francisco de Goya  
*Portrait of Padre José de Lacanal*, c. 1826  
Oil on canvas  
Museo Lázaro Galdiano



Fig. 3  
Francisco de Goya  
*Lazarillo de Tormes*, 1808-12  
Oil on canvas  
Private collection

certainly not gratuitous. This is a popular figure that recurs in his work, one which testifies to his attraction to the faces of the unfortunate.

Alongside other works by the artist, *El Tío Paquete* provides eloquent testimony, therefore, to Goya's incessant search for an ever-greater artistic freedom that makes a definitive break with classical constraints: "1792: illness is to sweep aside all these dreams. [...] He is beyond recall. One of the most alluring artists of the eighteenth century has just died."<sup>5</sup> Henceforth, and thanks to Goya, something decisive and fundamentally new would come to pass: modern art. "Modern art was no doubt born the day the idea of art and the idea of beauty found themselves at odds. Maybe because of Goya."<sup>6</sup>

#### "The famous blind man"

This inscription, discernible on the back of the painting prior to its relining in 1887, has permitted the figure to be identified as Tío Paquete (*Paquete*, Packet or Bundle in English, is a play on *Paquito*, a diminutive of Francisco), a blind man famed for his gifts as a singer and guitarist who used to sit on the steps of the church of San Felipe el Real.

José Gudiol<sup>7</sup> dates the painting to the years 1823-24: "Two portraits may likewise date from this period: they are both expressionist, the first moderately so, the other to that point of caricature and horrendous distortion that constituted one of the essential poles of Goya's aesthetic, counterbalancing and offsetting the refinements of beauty." The more measured is the one of Padre José de Canal and "the more deformed portrait – in which the painter manages to almost entirely eliminate the eyes by depicting his model in a gale of dark laughter – is Tío Paquete's: his resemblance to the figures in the *Black Paintings* is total, but with greater, not to say overweening, intensity due to the isolated nature of the portrait and the absence of any allegorical or literary meaning."

Following Gudiol in his commentary, it is already a question of an "expressionist" quality, of "caricature and horrendous distortion," and of "dark laughter" (which we will come back to). What strikes him, in the meantime, is the fact that the face is particularly isolated and devoid of any reference to an iconographic motif. This blind man is a person with a disability whom Goya "obliges" us to contemplate. He has nothing to do with any literary character, as was the case with the figures representing an episode from *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes* in 1808-12, the literary illustration of which added refinement to the triviality of the scene represented.

Our protagonist, in head-and-shoulders format, his puffy face thrown back, is seemingly shaken by joyous laughter. He stands out against the dark background, loosely painted in thick paint. His large head is surrounded by concentric brushstrokes that accentuate the



Fig. 4  
Detail of fig. 1

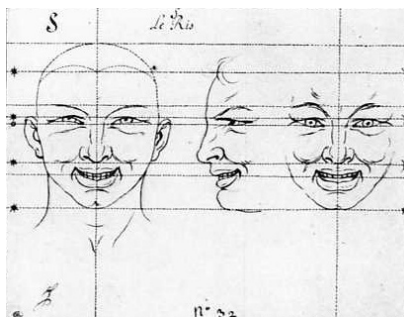


Fig. 5  
Charles Le Brun  
*Mirth*, 1690  
Drawing. 200 x 256 mm  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Fig. 6  
Charles Le Brun  
*Mirth, Expressions of the Passions of the Soul*, 1727  
Engraved by Gérard Audran

bust's impression of vivacity. His coarse physiognomy is reinforced by the lightness of touch and the impasto (above all on the forehead), typical of Goya's much more relaxed final manner. The infirmity of the personage is painted in all its crudity: the eyes with their sealed eyelids are swollen, the flat nose presents two flaring nostrils, while the toothless open mouth with its thick lips causes his expression to waver between smile and rictus. The loaded brushstrokes at mouth level accentuate the obscenity of the gap teeth. We are a long way from Charles Le Brun's subtle theorization of the passions (see, in particular, "Mirth" in his *Expressions of the Passions of the Soul* of 1727, engraved by Gérard Audran). The uncertainty of expression is what gives the face its strange quality, somewhere between bonhomie and a grimace: we hesitate between laughing with him or turning away from such a repulsive physiognomy.

### The refusal to seduce

What strikes one in this portrait is Goya's refusal to embellish his model. On the contrary, he accentuates its monstrous traits via a particularly crude handling of the anatomy (ravaged eyes, flattened nose, gaping mouth). This deliberate bias places him radically at odds with an entire classical tradition of pictorial representation.

It has to be remembered, however, that Goya has an ambiguous relationship to academic tradition. The man who was admitted to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in 1780, then named Court Painter to Charles IV in 1788, begins, and for a time pursues, his career in the very bosom of officialdom, occupying different posts of the most prestigious kind. All the same, the artist soon takes exception to this form of institutional discipline, which is liable to curb the imagination and even the talent of an artist in the making. He chooses, by degrees, to break with decorum and the cult of Ideal Beauty that was prevailing at the time in every aesthetic conception. In that respect Malraux considers him "one decorator among many [...] who discovers his genius the day he dares to stop pleasing people."<sup>8</sup>

And so little by little he defines his own rules and "claims he has had but three masters: nature, Velázquez, and Rembrandt."<sup>9</sup> He rapidly becomes part of a naturalist tendency and seeks to draw inspiration from what is before his eyes: "My brush ought not to see better than I."<sup>10</sup>

He demands ever greater artistic freedom, which depends on the promulgation of caprice (*capricho*) and invention (*invención*). He paints non-commissioned cabinet pictures, some of the subjects of which haunt him during his illness. In 1794 he sends the Academy a series of small paintings, about which he says, "I have managed to make observations that are not usually allowed in the case of commissioned works, in which caprice and invention are not given free rein."<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 7  
Francisco de Goya  
*Yard with Lunatics*, 1794  
Oil on tinplate  
Meadows Museum, Dallas

Henceforth, “caprice” and “invention” will become two basic concepts in his work. In 1797 he retires from his position as Director of Painting at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando. And he gives ever greater prominence to printmaking, which becomes the medium of choice for a more intimate vision: the declaration prior to the publishing of *Los Caprichos*, which appeared in *El Diario de Madrid* on Wednesday, 6 February 1799, is a veritable profession of faith.<sup>12</sup> We may also follow Malraux in his analysis of the artistic change wrought by Goya with *Los Caprichos*: he “transforms the function of painting, which is no longer meant to seduce the art lover, nor to annex his imaginary world by adorning it. He proclaims a new declaration of the rights of the painter.”<sup>13</sup> And Malraux elects to present the new Goya (after the tapestry cartoons) as “the first *metteur en scène* of the absurd and the greatest performer of anguish the West has ever known.” This evolution in the direction of deliberate subjectivity – which calls on the blackness of printing ink – seems to culminate, then, in the murals that go to form the *Black Paintings*, before lingering on in his exile in Bordeaux.

In a nutshell Goya firmly pursues the greater advocacy of the power of the free imagination in his work.

### An iconography of the ugly

In *The Fascination of Ugliness*<sup>14</sup> Murielle Gagnebin studies Goya’s oeuvre as being the precursor of an art which uses ugliness as an aesthetic category in its own right. If the first chapter of her book is called “The Emergence of Ugliness in the Work of Goya,” it has to be remembered that the manifestations of ugliness in the artist do not appear *ex nihilo*, out of the blue, but are part and parcel of a history of representation: of the twisted and disproportionate body to begin with,<sup>15</sup> of witchcraft, Satanism and sadism, and of the taste for cruelty.<sup>16</sup> Of the emotions too (melancholy, madness, furor).<sup>17</sup> And in the artistic tradition of the painting of Northern Europe in the sixteenth century, of Bosch, Grünewald, Dürer, Brueghel, Teniers, Callot (*The Miseries and Misfortunes of War*), Ribera, and of course Velázquez.

Ugliness in Goya is not a potential ugliness, it is an active one. It is genuinely actualized. Rather than hiding the overwhelmingly human ugliness omnipresent in reality, Goya shows it. How does Goya depict the common people? “The fleshy, derisive faces of the carnival, dwarfs, hunchbacks, old hags: outlines are fractured everywhere, hands and legs are twisted by rheumatism and hard work, smiles are toothless. In the public squares drunks and potbellied monks rub shoulders with jaundiced, gaunt procuresses and bawds. [...] Generally speaking, the people is not an attractive proposition in Goya. Worn down by the daily grind, deformed by the vagaries of life, their bodies and faces are ugly. What’s more, Goya seems to be fond of contrasts:



Fig. 8  
José de Ribera  
*Democritus*, ca. 1630  
Oil on canvas  
Private collection



Fig. 9  
José de Ribera  
*The Sense of Touch* (detail), 1632  
Oil on canvas, 125 x 98 cm  
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid



Fig. 10  
Francisco de Goya,  
*Aesop*, copy of  
Velázquez, 1778,  
etching, Museo  
del Prado

he freely juxtaposes young *majas* full of sap and old women huddled over their woes and failures in the same scene. In his painting the conflict between beauty and ugliness attains a degree of fascination never attained before then.<sup>18</sup> On that score, rather than the refusal of seduction that we referred to above, and which we have taken to be specific to the new artistic attitude of Goya, the latter “seems to have been particularly interested in the degradation of Beauty, conceived of as an archetype.”<sup>19</sup>

The concern with ugliness is by no means an anachronism in Goya's time. Admitted to the Royal of Fine Arts of San Fernando in June 1780, Jovellanos presents a “Eulogy to the Fine Arts” in which he traces the history of Spanish painting. He considered the chief traits of a number of painters, including Ribera, in whom he admires the fervor of his brushwork, the vigor of his chiaroscuro, and his incomparable skill in intensely expressing “the effects of agitated humanity, now wizened with age, now steeped in penitence, now broken, and moribund in the agony of its torment.”<sup>20</sup> In Velázquez he sees the painter who rejects “the *duende* known as ideal beauty.” And let us not forget that Moratín had, with his friends, formed a cod society of *acalophiles*, or lovers of ugliness, of which Goya may have been a member.<sup>21</sup> One source of influence could also have been the appearance in 1789 of Arteaga's *Philosophical Investigations into Ideal Beauty Considered as an Object of the Arts of Imitation*, in which numerous disagreeable and even horrible objects drawn from nature acquire “luster” and beauty on the canvas.

### A taste for the “lower orders”

We know how much Goya admired Velázquez, some of whose buffoons he reproduced in an etching. He could also have been influenced by the paintings of Bosch in the Royal Collections, whose monstrous figures and whose denunciation of the vices may have struck him (the link between Bosch and Goya remains to be studied). In his refusal of appearances and his immersion in the semi-darkness of existential truths, Goya sets in motion the social spectacle of illusions. He inverts the moral codes and their traditional visual treatment (aesthetic ugliness being associated with moral ugliness). And he effects a complete change of perspective.

As Velázquez was rehabilitating the mendicant, in the shape of exemplary figures of wisdom like Aesop and Menippus, Goya (who copies these figures in his prints) takes an interest in the beggars that painting had disdained until then, endowing them with a special kind of dignity. Furthermore, it was said of Aesop that “the main defect he had, apart from his ugliness, was his inability to speak; moreover he was toothless and couldn't articulate properly.”<sup>22</sup> Is not the mute



Fig. 11  
Francisco de Goya  
*The Blind Guitarist, and detail, 1778*  
Oil on canvas  
Museo del Prado



Fig. 12  
Francisco de Goya  
*Majo with a Guitar, 1779*  
Oil on canvas  
Museo del Prado



Fig. 13  
Diego Velázquez  
*The Buffoon Calabacillas, 1637-39*  
Oil on canvas  
Museo del Prado



Fig. 14  
Francisco de Goya  
*The Pilgrimage of St Isidore, and detail, 1820-23*  
Oil on canvas  
Museo del Prado



Fig. 15  
Francisco de Goya  
*Blind Singer, 1624-28*  
Etching with aquatint  
Museo Lázaro Galdiano

the finest guardian of the truth? Just as, paradoxically, the blind man is the most farsighted of all.

Among the many popular figures Goya presents (the *majo*, the *maja*, and the *alcahueta*, for example), the guitarist-singer appears time and again in his work. Likewise part of the picaresque tradition of Spain, he is a public entertainer, a modern clown of sorts, like the dwarves of Velázquez who amuse the rich and famous. In his denunciation of appearances, this figure serves as a mirror, as a revealer of the truths masked by the social comedy. Is not the buffoon the only one can get away with anything under the pretext that laughter excuses all? In that respect Goya appears to have learned the lesson of Velázquez.<sup>23</sup>

As for the figure of the guitarist-singer: this is a motif Goya develops from his first tapestry cartoons onwards, and is one he reworks throughout *Los Caprichos*. Whether he be part of a crowd and stands out from it – the motif of the *muchedumbre* (throng) or *masa sin persona* (faceless mass) also recurs in his oeuvre – or whether he appears alone, the manner in which his depiction evolves is significant. Like the general run of Goya's work, which becomes increasingly "black," the artist causes this figure to evolve into something ever more disturbing. The song changes into a lament. The features are transformed into something more and more contorted. And what is there to say about the totally deformed countenance of the person in the foreground of *The Pilgrimage of St Isidore*, who opens his gaping mouth and rolls his eyes? He appears to be the guide of a crowd of deformed human beings who are literally sticking closely to one another.

*El Tío Paquete* is apparently in keeping with the increasingly somber vision described during the course of Goya's oeuvre. One of his last *Caprichos* presents the figure of *The Blind Singer*, his physiognomy sketched in crudely. Inasmuch as it reworks an already utilized motif and offers an exaggerated version of it, the painting of *El Tío Paquete* examines the question of Goya's "aged style," "how (not via which decision) an artist completes his work [...], such a decision is not precisely that of organizing the *real* (history, "life itself") more efficiently, it is a paradoxical enterprise that consists of starting over. Of convening the actors, the old subjects, so as to have them perform once more without costumes."<sup>24</sup> For Goethe, growing old involves "the gradual withdrawal from the world of appearances."

### From gaping mouth to cruel laughter

One of the forms of the veritable destruction of the ideal implemented by Goya in *El Tío Paquete*, over and above the actual infirmity of the blind man (and his desperately closed eyes), appears to us to be personified by the extreme gape of his mouth. It is this exaggerated



Fig. 16  
Agesandro,  
Polidoro y  
Atenodoro  
*Laocoön and His  
Sons* (detail)  
50 BCE  
Vatican Museum



Fig. 17  
Caravaggio  
*Medusa*, 1597  
Oil on canvas  
Uffizi Gallery



Fig. 18  
José de Ribera  
*Titius* (detail), 1632  
Oil on canvas  
Museo del Prado



Fig. 19  
Francisco de Goya  
*Disparates, 4, Simpleton's Folly*, 1815–19  
Etching, aquatint, drypoint and burnisher  
Museo del Prado

rictus that makes him monstrous. For it must be remembered that the representation of an open mouth in pictorial tradition is profoundly improper: the torments and disorders of the soul which deform the countenance being prohibited and the expression of the passions needing to be measured.

Fichte, in his *Foundations of Natural Right*, draws attention to three characteristics that distinguish man from the animals, one of which is the human mouth and the snout of the beast. Also the mouth “which nature destined to the lowest and most egotistical office, alimentation, becomes, thanks to culture, the instrument of all social sentiments, just as it is the organ of communication. The more the individual or the more the race, since in fact stable elements are what are involved here, reveal themselves to be animal-like and egotistical, the more their mouths have the look of prominent jaws. On the other hand, the more the individual grows in moral stature, the more his mouth is effaced beneath the arch of his meditative forehead.”<sup>25</sup> Judging by the protruding chins and all the open jaws in Goya, we see how his figures are closer to the animal than to the human, and are far from conveying the least “moral grandeur.”

Besides, more than open or prominent mouths, Goya has knowingly depicted vociferous mouths. For Winckelmann (*Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*), in classical representation the act of crying out is incompatible with greatness of soul, the criteria of propriety and plausibility. And the gaping mouth cannot be depicted because of the incompatibility of vehement expression with the beauty of the countenance. According to Lessing in the *Laocoön*, a cavernous, gaping mouth gives the face a repulsive look. For him, the cry is one of the first motifs of the non-representable in art. This is the reason why Laocoön, despite his suffering, controls himself and does not cry out.

To this canon of classical representation, which prohibits the open mouth, the painting of Caravaggio responds with an initial break by opting for the depiction of the disagreeable, the disgusting. Ribera steps into this new breach and makes himself the representative of a veritable “aesthetic of horror,” in Giambattista Marino words.<sup>26</sup>

Goya is inscribed, therefore, within the advance in picture-making initiated by Caravaggio and Ribera, among others, an advance which shakes up the categories of the beautiful and the ugly. He introduces the monstrous, the deformed, the grotesque through character types that will become recurrent in his artwork. As non-exhaustive examples, we may cite the gnomes and *duendes* (elves) that proliferate in *Los Caprichos*, above all; the madman, be he mirthful or ferocious; and the fool or idiot (*el bobo*). All the figures in this imaginary “bestiary” have deformed countenances, due in large part to their disturbing rictuses.



Fig. 20  
Francisco de Goya  
*Phantom Dancing with  
Castanets*, c. 1825–28  
Black pencil and  
lithographic pencil  
Museo del Prado

Fig. 21  
Francisco de Goya  
*The Threshing Ground  
or Summer*, and detail, 1786  
Oil on canvas  
Museo del Prado



Fig. 22  
Francisco de Goya  
*Los Caprichos*, 30,  
*Why Hide Them?*, 1797–99  
Etching, burnished aquatint  
and drypoint  
Museo del Prado

Fig. 23  
Francisco de Goya  
*Los Caprichos*, 26, *They  
Already Have a Seat*, 1797–99  
Etching, burnished aquatint  
and drypoint  
Museo del Prado



Fig. 24  
Francisco de Goya  
*Two Women and a Man*,  
1820–23  
Oil on canvas  
Museo del Prado

So it is with No. 4 of *Los Disparates*, *Simpleton's Folly*: the giant idiot “who was dancing licentiously to the sound of the castanets at carnival time” has a terrifying smile; enormous in size, he is accompanied by ghastly heads and appears before two smaller figures who recoil in horror. The engraving reworks the drawing entitled *Phantom Dancing with Castanets* in which a mocking figure, half-smiling, half-grimacing, dancing to the sound of the castanets, presents the same simpleton's face with his big flat nose, his beady eyes, and his wide smiling mouth.

Speaking of the male figures Goya paints, Murielle Gagnebin also arrives at the conclusion that “More often than not they have their mouths open, and they either smile beatifically, which gives their faces a smarmy, soft look, or they yell and gesticulate like puppets moved by some invisible string. Their countenance is never seductive.”<sup>27</sup>

A tremendous violence suffuses all of Goya's work, and this as early as the tapestry cartoons in which the faces of the figures can express great cruelty beneath the outer appearance of joyful amusement.

*Los Caprichos* abound in the most disturbing of worlds, the laughter of the figures represented in them being intended, more often than not, to underline the corrosive critique that is under way.

And the mocking laughter of the woman in the background of *Two Women and a Man*, one of Goya's *Black Paintings*? The scene was described for the first time, along with the remaining scenes, in Charles Yriarte's 1867 monographic study of the artist by, under the title *Two Women Laughing Their Heads Off*. At the same time the expression of the man in the foreground is indefinable: is he opening his mouth in pleasure or in pain? Also called *The Onanist*, his face seems to indicate the spasms of a solitary pleasure.

Light-hearted or solemn? We can never grasp the real nature of the laughter of the figures depicted by Goya. For the artist creates a new world, a universe of men with animal traits and of anthropomorphized animals, a mélange of genres which converts all farce into ferocious satire. The accusation Goya levels is striking in its radicalism, and fascinates the spectator just as much as it disturbs him.

This is because Goya stems from a tradition for which *caricare* means to exaggerate something in the service of a didactic process. But Goya goes much further than the kind of caricature that strives to be corrective and which remains bounded by characterization. His personal indictment is taken to its most extreme point. The comic aspect, which mitigates the cruelest caricature, is gradually effaced in his work, becoming no more than the actual expression of violence, of human perversion. This is why Baudelaire will say of Goya that he is an “artistic caricaturist” due to the universality and the atemporality of his critique, which means that his caricature is not uniquely subject to the politico-social context. But while the caricaturist aims to provoke





Fig. 25  
Francisco de Goya  
*Group of Caricatured  
Heads, 1797–98*  
Private collection, Paris



Fig. 26  
Francisco de Goya  
*An Entertainment with  
Masks (The Burial of the  
Sardine), 1814–16*  
Museo del Prado



Fig. 27  
Francisco de Goya  
*The Burial of the Sardine,*  
detail, 1808–12  
Museo de la Real Academia  
de Bellas Artes de San  
Fernando



Fig. 28  
Francisco de Goya  
*The Blind Guitarist* ca. 1778  
Etching  
Biblioteca Nacional Española

laughter, for his part the expressionist seeks to provoke dread, revolt, horror. Goya is both of these.

Regenerative exorcism, beneficent catharsis: in Gracián–Goya (the *descifrador*) the contemplation of ugliness begins, or rather ends, in redemptive laughter. Even if the period of calm is generally short-lived, once the laughter dies down the anguish returns. “The abandonment of seduction does not give Goya his new style, to be sure, but it allows him to find it. And a whole crowd of new figures, whose description [*écriture*] is a description in two dimensions, is proliferating before his eyes: caricatures.”<sup>28</sup>

It is also particularly appropriate to read the oeuvre of Goya through the prism of Carnival, as Victor I. Stoichita has done.<sup>29</sup> With its excesses and its absurdities, Carnival, a moment of absolute freedom in which all is permitted, would show us the somber and nebulous landscape of the Spain or the world of his time. In many of Goya’s works particular value is placed on the generalized system of inversion (the world upside-down). An inversion in the deeply revealing sense because in turning representation into “the hyperbole of the lie” a new illumination and a new meaning are given to reality.

If we compare the preparatory drawing for *The Burial of the Sardine* with the final painting, we see just how much laughter always ends up winning the day. The preparatory drawing was supposed to illustrate the expression of joy of what seems to be a group of nuns and monks, and therefore the return to civil and religious norms on Ash Wednesday (the word *mortus* features on the banner). There is a radical change in the final painting: the inscription on the banner has given way to a face at once jovial and grimacing, the crowd is jubilant, the masks and disguises worn by the figures have replaced the soutanes.

### “Goya was the one who invented esperpentismo”

This is how, through the character of Max, Valle-Inclán puts it in his *Bohemian Lights*.<sup>30</sup> In his view, only a systematically deformed aesthetic can give an account of the tragic meaning of Spanish life. When Valle-Inclán formalizes the conceptual contours of this category, which combines the grotesque, the absurd and the tragicomic, it is manifestly clear just how much he is indebted to Goya.

The laughing, even mirthful, figures of the painter conceal a degree of depravity and pain that renders them disturbing and pitiful. From laughter to tears, Goya proposes a sort of dialectic of sadness and derision. This dialectic had already found expression in the ideas of Heraclitus and Democritus. In Goya it seems to come together in this grotesque face worthy of tragicomic Greek masks.

Laughter would be at once the symptom of, and the remedy for, melancholy. It is the manifestation of the close, paradoxical relationship



Fig. 29  
Copy of Francisco de Goya y Lucientes  
*The Guitarist*  
Gouache on white paper  
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

between farce and horror (later on, the words *astracanada*, buffoonery, and *esperpento* will be used),<sup>31</sup> between sarcasm and pathos. It is the means par excellence for the expression of the grotesque peculiar to Goya. By grotesque we mean all kinds of deformation that reveal an intimate, more authentic state of things, the expression of hybridity, and the place where contraries are in confrontation. It is the ambiguity of expression, somewhere between smile and grimace, pleasure and suffering, which prefigures the intuition that “everything in creation is not humanly *beautiful*, that the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the unshapely beside the graceful, the grotesque on the reverse of the sublime” (Victor Hugo in the preface to *Cromwell*).

Faced with the cynical facts of the world depicted by Goya – he is the “disenchanted disenchanter” – is there a glimmer of hope? At least the deaf painter appears to attribute to song – the inaccessibility of which must fascinate him – a prophylactic virtue. A copy of a Goya etching of *The Blind Guitarist*, centered on the figure of the singer, is accompanied by this refrain from *Don Quixote* (Part I, Chapter 22): “He who sings scares away his woes.”

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## Notes

- 1 Martínez Ruiz, José. “Con Goya un momento.” *ABC* (29 March 1945).
- 2 José Ortega y Gasset, *Velázquez, Goya, and the Dehumanization of Art*, tr. Alexis Brown (New York: Norton, 1972).
- 3 Jean Starobinski, 1789, *Les emblèmes de la raison* (Paris: Flammarion, 1973), p. 144.
- 4 André Malraux, *Saturne: Le destin, l’art et Goya*, in *Oeuvres Complètes IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989–96).
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 André Malraux, note to the preface to *Saturne: Le destin, l’art et Goya*, *op. cit.* This was expressed in 1945, in the preface to the catalogue of Fautrier’s *Otages* exhibited at the Galerie Drouin, Paris.
- 7 José Gudiol, *Goya, 1746-1828. Biographie, analyse critique et catalogue des peintures* (Paris: Weber, 1970).
- 8 Malraux, *op. cit.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Letter to Bernardo de Iriarte, 4 January 1794.
- 12 “A collection of prints of imaginary subjects, invented and etched by Don Francisco Goya. The author is convinced that it is as proper for painting to criticize human error and vice as for poetry and prose to do so, although criticism is usually taken to be exclusively the province of literature. He has selected from amongst the innumerable foibles and follies to be found in any civilized society, and from the common prejudices and deceitful practices which custom, ignorance or self-interest have hallowed, those subjects which he feels to be the more suitable material for satire, and which, at the same time, stimulate the artist’s imagination. [...] The author has not followed the precedents of any other artist, nor has he been able to copy Nature herself. It is very difficult to imitate Nature, and a successful imitation is worthy of admiration. [...] Painting (like poetry) chooses from universals what is most apposite. It brings together in a single imaginary being, circumstances and characteristics which occur in nature in many different persons. With such an ingeniously arranged combination of properties the artist produces a faithful likeness, but also earns

## Notes

- the title of inventor rather than of servile copyist." Translated in *Nigel Glendinning, Goya and His Critics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 49.
- 13 Malraux, *op. cit.*, pp. 100–1.
- 14 Murielle Gagnebin, *Fascination de la laideur. L'en-deçà psychanalytique du laid* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1994).
- 15 For the phenomenology of torture see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1977); Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Edward Peters, *Torture* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985).
- 16 See Umberto Eco, *On Ugliness* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), Ch. VIII, "Witchcraft, Satanism, Sadism." Also see Lucienne Domergue, *Goya: des délits et des peines* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000) who considers Goya a pioneer in Spain for his systematic exploration of "all forms of legal violence" in the context of the increasing critique of the prison system, as in Beccaria's *Dei delitti e pene* (1764) and John Howard's *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales: With Preliminary Observations, and An Account of Some Foreign Prisons* (1777). See, lastly, Daniel Arasse and his analyses of pictorial scenes of execution in *La Guillotine et l'imaginaire de la Terreur* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987).
- 17 See Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen, *L'invention du corps* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), notably the chapter entitled "The Body, Mirror of the Emotions."
- 18 Gagnebin, *op. cit.*
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 20 Edith Helman, *Trasmundo de Goya* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1963), p.103.
- 21 Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, quoting Helman, *op. cit.*, p. VIII: Helman, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
- 22 "Vida de Esopo," in *Fábulas de Esopo. Vida de Esopo. Fábulas de Babrio* (Madrid: Gredos, 1978), p. 189.
- 23 "With his six or seven freaks Velázquez is offering up a mirror and a lesson to kings and courtiers, since they have finer apparel but are as limp, freakish and ugly as their 'men of pleasure,' that is to say men of wit, laughter, fun, and grotesque vacation. The nobles need buffoons, dwarves and *meninas* at hand, the better to constantly contrast with their own arrogance, (relative) perfection, and flamboyance. But Velázquez paints a dwarf with the same solemnity, majesty and intention as if he were painting a princess or a prince. He is indirectly degrading his 'noble' painting style. (Goya would be more daring, later, and directly paint real freaks). The 'other' Velázquez, in short, wreaks his revenge and gets his own back for his Court painting by exalting the buffoon, and this is buffoonery indeed. In *Las Meninas* he manages to mix the two; all the more reason for this being his finest picture. As for modernity, for there are still those who dispute this, Velázquez flings the aesthetic of the ugly, *feísmo*, in our faces, and out of this there would come Goya, Solana, Picasso, Nonell, and many another. [...] Painting dwarves and buffoons evades the commission and unmasks ignoble nobles, finger-snapping ladies. The decadence of Spain, which begins in its painting." (Francisco Umbral, *Mis placeres y mis días* (Barcelona: Espasa Calpe, 1994).
- 24 Jean-Louis Schefer, *Goya, la dernière hypothèse* (Montrouge: Maeght, 1998).
- 25 J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Baur (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 26 See the catalogue of the exhibition curated by Miguel Falomir, *Las Furias. Alegoría política y desafío artístico*, Museo del Prado, 21 January–4 May 2014.
- 27 Gagnebin, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
- 28 Malraux, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- 29 Victor I. Stoichita and Anna Maria Coderch, *El último carnaval. Un ensayo sobre Goya* (Madrid: Siruela, 2000).
- 30 Ramón del Valle-Inclán, *Luces de bohemia. Esperpento* (Barcelona: Austral, 2010), p. 168.
- 31 See Alonso Zamora Vicente, *La realidad esperpéntica* (Madrid: Gredos, 1969) and Valle-Inclán, *op. cit.*