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INTRODUCTION

RE-VIEWING *LOS CAPRICHOS*

On 6 February 1799, an advertisement on the front page of the *Diario de Madrid* (Figure 1) announced the publication of "a collection of prints of imaginary subjects, invented and etched by Don Francisco Goya."[1] *Los Caprichos* (The Caprices), as this series of eighty aquatint etchings came to be known, is one of the central monuments in the history of European art. In undertaking these works, Goya became part of the tradition of painter–etchers that began in the Renaissance with Mantegna, Dürer, and Parmigianino and continued in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with Rembrandt, Ribera, and Tiepolo, among many others. Looking forward, Goya's prints were to exercise a decisive influence on generations of subsequent artists, writers, and musicians, including the Romantics, the Symbolists, the Expressionists, and the Surrealists. Moreover, in the two centuries since *Los Caprichos* first appeared, they have been the subject of constant critical and scholarly attention, spawning a range of interpretations that celebrate their scathing indictment of late-eighteenth-century Spanish society, investigate the imaginative character of their subject matter, and analyze Goya's innovative use of the techniques and materials of printmaking.[2]

In spite of this, *Los Caprichos* have not lodged themselves in the consciousness of the modern era to the same degree as have other works by Goya. True, plate 43 in the series, captioned *El sueño de la razon produce monstruos* (The sleep of reason produces monsters; Figure 2), often appears in survey textbooks of western art; however, it defies easy analysis. Moreover, this etching is not nearly as familiar to nonspecialists as are paintings by Goya such as *The Family of Charles IV* (1800), *The Third of May 1808* (1814), and the unforgettable *Saturn Devouring His Children* (c. 1821–3).[3] Turning to the artist's practice as a printmaker, *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (The Disasters of War, 1810–20) seem to speak more directly to our age. That series, which depicts

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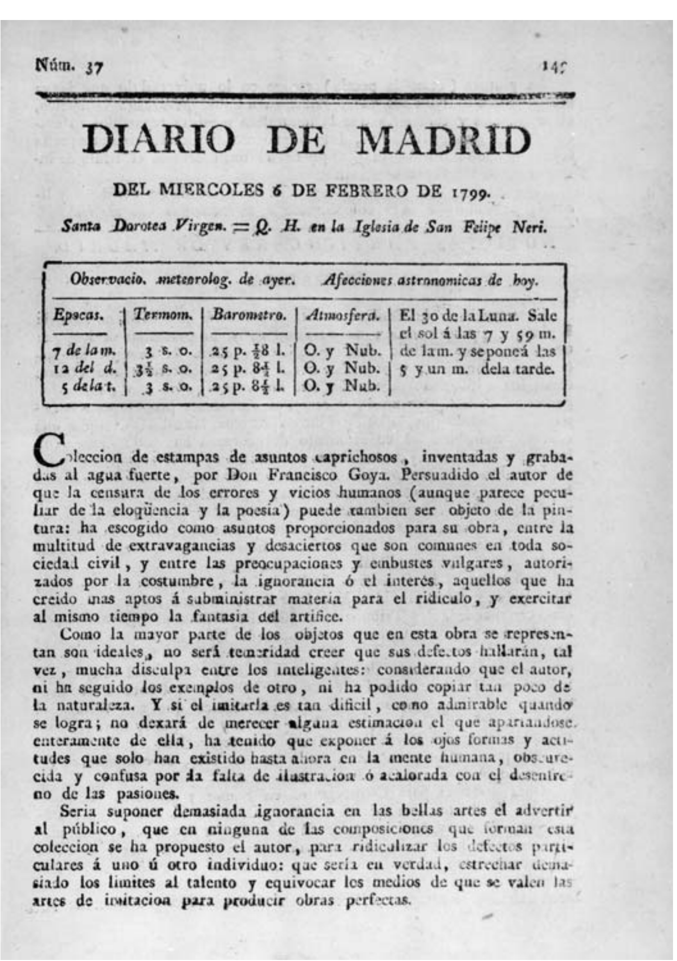

Núm. 37 14[illegible]

DIARIO DE MADRID

DEL MIERCOLES 6 DE FEBRERO DE 1799.

Santa Dorotea Virgen. = *Q. H. en la Iglesia de San Felipe Neri.*

Observacio. meteorolog. de ayer.				*Afecciones astronomicas de hoy.*
Epocas.	*Termom.*	*Barometro.*	*Atmosfera.*	El 30 de la Luna. Sale el sol á las 7 y 59 m. de la m. y se poneá las 5 y un m. de la tarde.
7 de la m.	3 s. o.	25 p. ½8 l.	O. y Nub.	
12 del d.	3½ s. o.	25 p. 8¼ l.	O. y Nub.	
5 de la t.	3 s. o.	25 p. 8½ l.	O. y Nub.	

Coleccion de estampas de asuntos caprichosos, inventadas y grabadas al agua fuerte, por Don Francisco Goya. Persuadido el autor de que la censura de los errores y vicios humanos (aunque parece peculiar de la eloqüencia y la poesía) puede tambien ser objeto de la pintura: ha escogido como asuntos proporcionados para su obra, entre la multitud de extravagancias y desaciertos que son comunes en toda sociedad civil, y entre las preocupaciones y embustes vulgares, autorizados por la costumbre, la ignorancia ó el interés, aquellos que ha creido mas aptos á subministrar materia para el ridiculo, y exercitar al mismo tiempo la fantasia del artifice.

Como la mayor parte de los objetos que en esta obra se representan son ideales, no será temeridad creer que sus defectos hallarán, tal vez, mucha disculpa entre los inteligentes: considerando que el autor, ni ha seguido los exemplos de otro, ni ha podido copiar tan poco de la naturaleza. Y si el imitarla es tan dificil, como admirable quando se logra; no dexará de merecer alguna estimacion el que apartandose enteramente de ella, ha tenido que exponer á los ojos formas y actitudes que solo han existido hasta ahora en la mente humana, obscurecida y confusa por la falta de ilustracion ó acalorada con el desenfreno de las pasiones.

Seria suponer demasiada ignorancia en las bellas artes el advertir al público, que en ninguna de las composiciones que forman esta coleccion se ha propuesto el autor, para ridiculizar los defectos particulares á uno ú otro individuo: que sería en verdad, estrechar demasiado los limites al talento y equivocar los medios de que se valen las artes de imitacion para producir obras perfectas.

1. *Diario de Madrid* advertisement for *Los Caprichos,* 6 February 1799. Image © Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.

unflinchingly the horrors and consequences of the Napoleonic occupation of 1808 to 1814 and the repressive regime of Ferdinand VII that followed, resonates all too well in light of any number of more recent atrocities. In their brutal frankness – seen most memorably in plate 39, *Grande hazaña! Con muertos!* (Great deeds – Against the dead; Figure 3) – *Los Desastres de la Guerra* have come to represent a key episode in the depiction of warfare, and as such they have become an important point of reference for contemporary artists and cultural critics. As a 2003 article in *The New York Times* stated, these prints "have long been hailed as the ultimate antiwar statement in art."[4]

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In looking at *Los Caprichos*, by contrast, one senses that layers of meaning have slipped away and are no longer recoverable. Interestingly, this sentiment appears in appraisals of the prints written in the years immediately following Goya's death in 1828, which intimate that the satiric content of *Los Caprichos* derives from a cultural and social specificity that the passage of time had rendered inaccessible, particularly for non-Spaniards. For example, an article on Goya published in *Le magasin pittoresque* in 1834 suggests that "although his hatred of prejudices and abuses, as well

2. Francisco Goya, *El sueño de la razon produce monstruos, Los Caprichos*, plate 43, 1799, etching and aquatint. Image © Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.

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as his patriotism, are but lightly veiled, these prints are not easy for foreigners to understand."[5] Twenty-three years later, in one of the best-known meditations on *Los Caprichos*, Charles Baudelaire imagines the extraordinary effect of the series on a viewer who "does not know the first thing about Godoy, or King Charles, or the Queen . . . ,"[6] implying that this knowledge would be essential for a full understanding of the prints. Even so, Baudelaire writes, such an observer "will experience a sharp shock at the core of his brain, as a result of the artist's original manner, the fullness and sureness of his means, and also of that atmosphere of fantasy in which all his subjects are steeped."[7]

Spaniards with ties to the artist also sensed that Goya's etchings reflected the concerns of an age that had vanished. Consider, for example, the short biography composed by the artist's son, Javier, which was delivered at the 1832 prize-giving ceremony of the Royal Academy of San Fernando in Madrid, the first such ceremony to be held since the artist's death four years earlier. In this text Javier speaks of *Los Caprichos* as "that by which he is known in the principal capitals of Europe; he has won praise for their artistic merit and satiric thoughts, which do honor to the enlightenment of the Spaniards *at that time* [my emphasis]."[8] Similarly, in an appreciation published in 1835 in the short-lived Romantic journal *El Artista* the important early collector of Goya's work, Valentín Carderera, praised the artist for "his satirical spirit, his clear understanding, his enlightenment, and also a certain grandness of spirit with which he knew how to ridicule and criticize the vices and confusion of people who were very powerful *at that time* [my emphasis]."[9]

Since the middle of the twentieth century, efforts to recapture the cultural specificity alluded to by these writers have been a principal component of investigations of *Los Caprichos*.[10] In the 1940s scholars writing from a variety of ideological positions began to place both the artist and the prints within the context of contemporary intellectual, social, and political circumstances. Among the first to do so was José López-Rey, who asserted that Goya was an active participant in the Spanish Enlightenment.[11] In attempting to reconstruct what he referred to as the artist's "spiritual environment," López-Rey suggested that Goya attended fashionable *tertulias* (salons), was aware of important artistic treatises (such as those by Antonio Palomino and Esteban de Arteaga) and of recent aesthetic developments (such as the picturesque), read French, owned a library of several hundred volumes, took an interest in music as well as in architecture, and (as suggested by the artist's portrait practice) moved in the same circles as the leading writers of his day. In addition, López-Rey argued that the artist shared his enlightened contemporaries'

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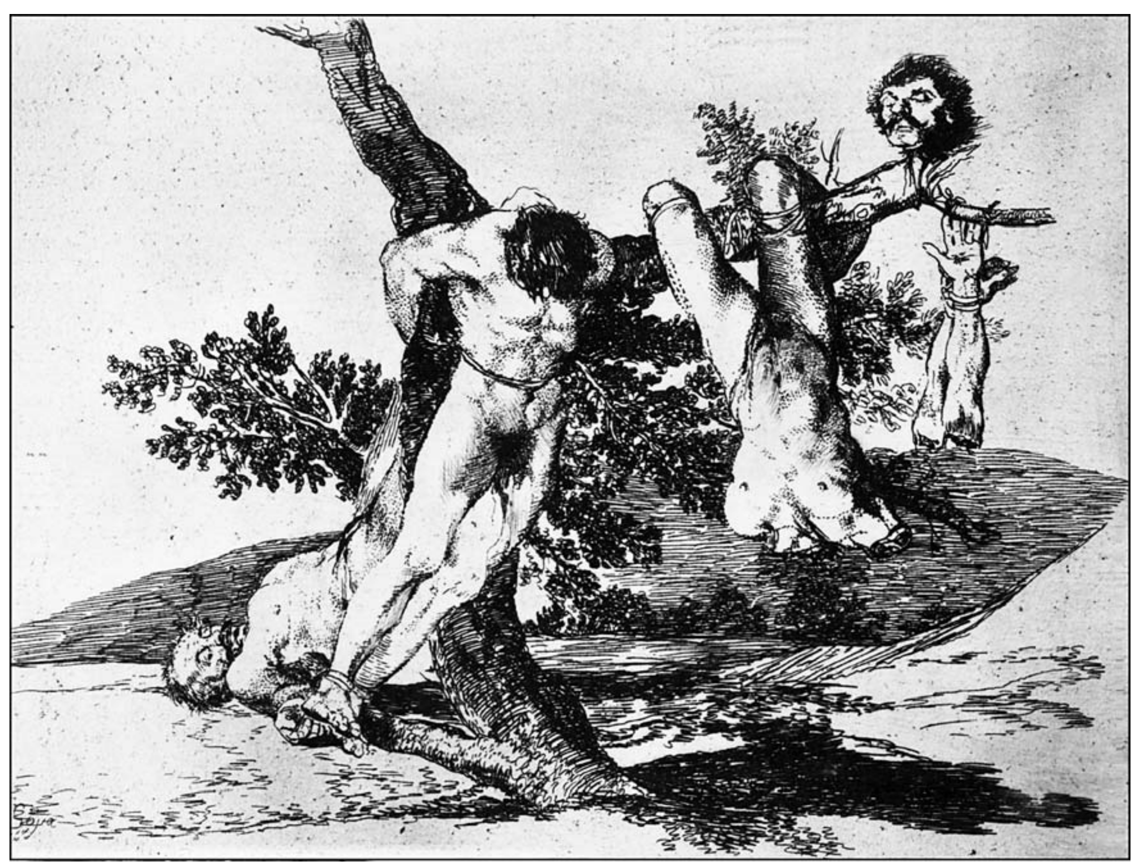

3. Francisco Goya, *Grande hazaña! Con muertos! Los Desastres de la Guerra,* plate 39, 1810–20. Rosenwald Collection, Image © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

faith in reason and sense of optimism. "Goya's trust in the supremacy of reason," López-Rey asserts, "never deserted him."[12] Elsewhere he argues that "[confidence] in the ability of education to cure man's errors is expressed frequently enough to suggest that the artist was sharing in the ideas of the Enlightenment then current among his friends," among whom López-Rey singles out the writer Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744–1811; Figure 4).[13]

The affinities detected by López-Rey between *Los Caprichos* and literary production in the final quarter of the eighteenth century have proven to be an especially fruitful and persistent strain of Goya scholarship over the last half-century. Establishing such ties provided the basis for the ground-breaking work of Edith Helman.[14] Drawing on her broad knowledge of Spanish literature, Helman located themes that the series shared with contemporary writing, including the effects of

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4. Francisco Goya, *Portrait of Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos*, 1798, oil on canvas. All rights reserved © Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

bad education, the abuses of the Inquisition, the foolishness of superstitious beliefs, the problems of arranged marriages and prostitution, the idleness of the nobility, and the depravity of the religious orders. In addition to parallels and connections with such major late-eighteenth-century authors as Juan Antonio Meléndez Valdés, Nicolás and Leandro Fernández de Moratín, José de Cadalso, and Padre Isla, Helman uncovered specific textual allusions in the captions of *Los Caprichos*. She demonstrated, for example, that the caption for plate 2, *El si pronuncian y la mano alargan*

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Al primero que llega (They say yes and give their hand To the first comer; Figure 5) is borrowed directly from a poem by Jovellanos entitled "A Arnesto," which satirizes contemporary relations between the sexes.[15] Since many of these authors were leading advocates of the Spanish Enlightenment, Helman used her findings to situate Goya as a conscious participant in calls for reform in the final years of the century. Her position is summed up by these remarks on the subjects of *Los Caprichos*: "... they are all conceived from the same enlightened point of view – that of [the periodical] *El Censor* and of the satirical poems of Meléndez and Jovellanos,

5. Francisco Goya, *El si pronuncian y la mano alargan Al primer que llega*, *Los Caprichos*, plate 2, 1799, etching and aquatint. Rosenwald Collection, Image © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

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and that of the pamphlets and articles of numerous contemporaries – that is, as aberrations, as sicknesses of human reason that can and should be corrected or banished."[16]

Over the past several decades other scholars have amplified and refined the Enlightenment interpretations of *Los Caprichos* and have extended these accounts to include subsequent works and Goya's alleged sympathies with Liberalism in Spain during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.[17] Such readings occupy an important place in Pierre Gassier and Juliet Wilson's *The Life and Complete Work of Francisco Goya*.[18] As the standard catalogue raisonné, this book has disseminated an image of the artist that highlights his ties with progressively minded contemporaries, connections that the authors discern in portraits of the *ilustrados* (adherents to Enlightenment principles) painted by Goya during the final two decades of the eighteenth century. For example, during the late 1790s, the artist executed portraits of Jovellanos (Figure 4), Meléndez Valdés, Leandro Fernández de Moratín, and Francisco de Saavedra, all of whom briefly held governmental posts during the progressive interlude of those years, during which time Goya was at work on *Los Caprichos*.[19]

Two exhibitions organized by Eleanore A. Sayre, longtime curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, presented Enlightenment interpretations of Goya's art to the museum-going public. In the first of these exhibitions, which focused on the artist's working methods as a printmaker, Sayre examined drawings, proofs, and early impressions of *Los Caprichos* to suggest Goya's ties to the principles and leading figures of the Spanish Enlightenment and nascent Liberalism.[20] In her essay on the series, Sayre argued that the universalizing tone of the *Diario de Madrid* advertisement (Figure 1; more about this in Chapter 2) was a conscious attempt to disguise the "true" political meanings of the prints, thereby providing the artist with cover from the wrath of powerful individuals and institutions that purportedly are lampooned in the images.[21] To support this reading, Sayre utilized the contemporary manuscript commentaries, contending that these texts indicate ". . . to what extent an intelligent amateur was able to understand Goya's imagery even when it was partially veiled."[22] In addition, she emphasized the textual nature of the series, remarking that "it is those scholars who are knowledgeable about the social and political conditions of the eighteenth century, particularly in Spain, and who have read the diaries, journals, and literature of the day who will have the clearest understanding of these satires."[23]

Attempts to locate Goya within the intellectual milieu of his literary and political contemporaries culminated with the second of Sayre's exhibitions, entitled *Goya and*

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the Spirit of Enlightenment and co-curated with Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, then director of the Museo del Prado.[24] Under the guise of a retrospective, this exhibition presented a highly selective assortment of paintings, drawings, and prints with the intention of demonstrating that Goya's art offers evidence of a deeply felt affinity with the ideals of the Spanish Enlightenment and that this reform-minded outlook and faith in reason act as unifying principles for the artist's entire career. *Los Caprichos* operated as the centerpiece for the curators' arguments, and in the accompanying catalogue, Sayre argued that these prints "are not titillating, but serious works whose wellspring is to be found in Goya's passionate interest in reform."[25]

Situating Goya within the orbit of the Spanish Enlightenment has been invaluable in rescuing the artist from the conventions of Romantic biography. In place of the mid-nineteenth-century myth of Goya as an untutored and isolated genius who painted with his fingers and fought bulls in public squares, advocates of the "enlightened Goya" have provided both the artist and his work with a much-needed historical context.[26] In the wake of *Goya and the Spirit of Enlightenment*, however, some scholars began to reexamine the nature of the connection between Goya's art and the intellectual and political environment in which he lived and worked.[27] The most thorough questioning of the Enlightenment-centered scholarship of the past half-century is contained in Janis A. Tomlinson's monograph, *Goya in the Twilight of Enlightenment*.[28] In it, Tomlinson examines an assortment of paintings commissioned from the artist between 1789 and 1816 and contends that Goya's relationship to the political and social conditions of these turbulent years is more complex, ambiguous, and variable than usually is acknowledged. Moreover, Tomlinson raises questions about the exact character and scope of the Enlightenment in Spain, indicating that this historical context is itself multifaceted and contradictory.[29]

Interpretations of *Los Caprichos* within the framework of the Spanish Enlightenment have had important methodological implications, leading to the favoring of certain hermeneutic approaches over others. In particular, the series has been examined predominantly from thematic and literary perspectives, as scholars have sought to match the subjects of Goya's prints with actual individuals and events, or with topics that occur in the work of contemporary writers.[30] The result has been not only to establish a context for these works, but also to "textualize" them, privileging written evidence – particularly the captions and the contemporary commentaries – over the close examination of visual issues.[31] Fashioning the series into a statement of enlightened ideals often has led to the creation of linguistic equivalents for Goya's images, thereby reducing their ambiguity and complexity

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to a monologic narrative. The visual richness of the etchings becomes a shroud that must be lifted to reveal the "true" nature of the prints, which are meaningful (according to this line of thinking) only in relation to contemporary texts, or within the matrix of late-eighteenth-century social and political conditions. The corollary of these emphases is that the vast majority of post-War scholarship has revolved around the issue of artistic intention, with writers seeking to establish Goya's engagement with the precepts adhered to by the proponents of reason and reform.

During the last decade, many scholars have sought to rethink the logocentric and Enlightenment patterns of interpretation that had governed most post-War scholarship on *Los Caprichos*. While references to such efforts will appear often in the pages that follow, it will be useful to briefly enumerate a few of them here as a way of framing my own concerns. One recent project that sought a new understanding of Goya's relationship to the Spanish Enlightenment is the catalogue for the exhibition *Goya's Realism*.[32] While still interested in placing Goya within the parameters of the Enlightenment, Vibeke Vibolt Knudsen and her collaborators did so by favoring pictorial questions over textual ones. Visual issues also have been addressed in the work of Juliet Wilson Bareau, such as *Goya. La década de los Caprichos. Dibujos y aguafuertes*, which provided a detailed and highly nuanced analysis of the working processes that led to the creation of the final prints.[33] Moreover, the exhibition *"Ydioma universal:" Goya en la Biblioteca Nacional*, curated by Bareau and Elena Santiago, considered Goya's career as a printmaker within the context of the print culture in Madrid during his lifetime.[34] Additional insight into the methods used to produce the series was offered by *Francisco de Goya, grabador: Instantáneas. Los Caprichos*, which juxtaposes details of the copper etching plates with the prints themselves.[35] One of the contributors, Juan Carrete Parrondo, former director of the Calcografía Nacional, has done more than anyone to investigate the relationship between printmaking and the Spanish Enlightenment.[36] Exploring the technical aspects of Goya's prints within the historical context of eighteenth-century Spain has been a principal focus of the work of Jesusa Vega.[37] Also seminal is the book-length study by Valeriano Bozal, *Goya y el gusto moderno*, which considers in very broad terms the connections between Goya's art and the aesthetic theories of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through the key concepts of the popular, realism, and the grotesque.[38] Nigel Glendinning has greatly expanded our understanding of the dissemination and reception of *Los Caprichos* during the nineteenth century, in addition to many other contributions to Goya studies.[39] Finally, *Goya: The Last Carnival*, coauthored by

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