LOS CAPRICHOS: ALLÁ VÁ ESO AND ITS SUPERNATURAL CONNECTION TO OUR PHYSICAL WORLD

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Abstract
In this essay, I examine Los Caprichos, a series of engravings by the late-18th century Spanish Romantic artist Francisco de Goya. By focusing mainly on Plate 66 from the series, Allá vá eso, I examine the ways in which Goya’s creation reflects the social, political, and moral tides of the period. Beginning with an extensive formal analysis, I explore how the work’s supernatural figures and overarching demonic theme are representative of the dark and twisted artistic methods which Goya often employed in his works. Furthermore, I evaluate Allá vá eso in the context of somatic deformation, a term set forth by Andrew Schulz in his publication, Goya’s Caprichos: Aesthetics, Perception, and the Body. The term means “distortion of the body,” and I argue its prevalence in Goya’s artistic technique. Moreover, I explore the social implications of the Enlightenment on 18th century Spain; specifically, its production of a heightened interest in rationality and the natural world. I argue that Allá vá eso, when viewed in this context, provides a fantastical narrative that critiques humanity’s reliance on faith and religion as it appeared in daily life and in art produced prior to Goya’s time.
To best understand Francisco de Goya’s series, *Los Caprichos*, it is first important to understand the wider context in which it was produced. The Enlightenment was arguably one of the most historically influential eras, both in terms of artistic production and intellectual movements. Though specific publications, thought movements, and values of the Enlightenment are characterized differently depending on region, the so-called “Age of Reason” can be best defined as a widespread interest in rational thought. The European Enlightenment not only affected the minds of the Western world, but influenced social, political, and moral climates on a global scale. Since the 18th century was characterized by rapid evolutions in artistic styles and philosophical movements, the world drew from Europe for innovative modes of thought.

In Spain, the Enlightenment began around 1700 as the death of Charles II brought about a new political era, the Bourbon Dynasty. Under Bourbon rule, the Spanish government encouraged a widespread interest in scientific thinking. At the same time, the Roman Catholic Church was experiencing severe international pushback in many political arenas. The combination of an increased interest in science and a decreased reliance on religion resulted in an unprecedented emphasis on rational thought.

In art, this new tradition brought about a shift in subject matter portraying human and non-emotionalized figures. Major Enlightenment artists such as Goya began to produce depictions of mortal figures in “normalized” environments (e.g. simplified settings with little to no biblical or mythological references). Moreover, artists of this period became more confident in using their art to socially critique the world in which they lived. Goya, for example, produced his *Disasters of War* during this period, a series of prints which grotesquely depicted the horrors and atrocities of wartime occurrences as a means of protesting against the Peninsular War in the early 19th century. Art’s invigorated function as a means of social criticism, in the context of this essay, is the most important idea that resulted from the Spanish Enlightenment. Furthermore, it is important to understand why Francisco de Goya is one of the names most associated with the artistic Enlightenment, and how his style and innovative approach had a lasting impact on art’s function as a vehicle for social critique.
Francisco de Goya’s *Los Caprichos* series consists of 80 exaggerated images posing a plethora of social, political, and moral critiques of the 18th century to an audience influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment. For purposes of this essay, I will examine Plate 66 from *Los Caprichos, Allá vá eso* (Figure 1; "There they go"). I will argue my interpretation of the etching by analyzing relevant academic texts and examining the image within the context of the series, the 18th century, and Goya’s artistic and critical style.

Created in 1799, the printed image measures 7 1/4 in. long and 4 3/4 in. wide. Goya created the print through the etching process using aquatint and drypoint printed in black on laid paper. The scene depicts a nude, somewhat deformed or perhaps emaciated male figure positioned in what could best be described as a harsh take on the “figura serpentinata” technique. The twisted form takes on an “S”-like shape that creates a sense of drama and leads the viewer’s gaze in an intentional pattern. The devilish figure’s knees project sharply leftward as his elbows stretch in either direction. With his right hand, the figure appears to be grabbing hold of what seems to be a snake while his left is placed on what appears as a stick or broom. His left forearm covers the face of a voluptuous and more concealed female figure who is reaching above her head with both arms to grab the same object. Wings projecting from the woman’s back stretch outward to dominate the image. The male figure gazes toward the top right corner to an aggressive cat, which is standing on the end of the snake’s body and is biting the far edge of the object. The etching process results in an unrelenting gray hue that permeates the image. The centralized figures fly in front of a dynamic sky background that is created by layers of various saturated shading levels. The bottom third of the image shows an aerial view of a mountaintop in the foreground, with more recessed mountains and a civilization retreating further into the background. The image is rectangular, and the sheet behind it creates a border surrounding the image on all four sides. The top right of the border reads “66” to reference the plate’s number within the series, while “Allá vá eso” is printed on the center of the bottom border.

To understand *Allá vá eso*, we must first understand *Los Caprichos* as a whole. The overarching theme of *Los Caprichos* is social satire. Goya promotes the rationality of Enlightenment
Figure 1. Goya, Los Caprichos: Allá vá eso, 1799.
thinking in another plate, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, and he depicts the vain qualities of the upper class in *Until Death*. However, what sets Goya apart from other international artists of the 18th century, such as Hogarth and Gillray (who strove to make similar judgments about their immediate political climate), is his dark interpretation of the unnatural world. In his book, *Goya's Caprichos: Aesthetics, Perception, and the Body*, Andrew Schulz writes, “The central perceptual tension in *Los Caprichos* is the dialectic between two types of vision—observation and fantasy” (p. 11, Schulz, 2005). Instead of creating works that directly critique what is observable in the physical world, Goya incorporates unsettling depictions of witches, demons, and unnatural forms to emphasize the moral implications of the actions he is criticizing (e.g., vanity, political control, marriage). Moreover, Schulz proposes two additional techniques that Goya utilizes to suggest the horror and imagination of the human psyche: somatic deformation and concepts of the grotesque.

Somatic deformation is an especially prominent component of Goya's works. The term is defined as a “distortion of the body” and applies mainly to works of caricature (Schulz traces Goya’s subject matter for *Los Caprichos* to the arrival of political satire in newspapers in England and France; Schulz, 2005). In the context of caricature, Schulz argues that somatic deformation is a useful tool for hyperbolizing one’s expression or appearance to distort the central subject matter of a piece and makes it appear more salient and severe to the viewer. In support of his point, Schulz refers to a set of Goya’s private albums, in which Goya explored various artistic techniques, including figure. The images in *Album A*, Schulz claims, have much to do with the female figure and “encounters between the sexes” (p. 58, Schulz, 2005). However, Schulz claims that the images in *Album B* “mark a turn in Goya’s representation of the body from a concern with capturing the mutable and transient qualities of expression to an interest in portraying the inherent qualities of disposition” (p. 11, Schulz, 2005). In other words, Goya’s prior studies, when examined alongside *Los Caprichos*, provide an explanation for the emergence of Goya’s artistic approaches involving exaggerated form and expression in his *Los Caprichos* prints.

Schulz also explores the emergence of several “concepts of the grotesque” in *Los Caprichos*, including monsters and impossibilities,
Figure 2. Goya, *Los Caprichos: Los Chinchillas*, 1799.

Figure 3. Goya, *Los Caprichos: Ni así la distingue*, 1799.
seeing the unseen, and Goya’s use of freakish images to solidify himself as a Romantic artist working to maximize the emotional intensity provoked by his works. Each of these concepts emphasizes the subjectivity and irrationality of Goya’s prints in Los Caprichos. His incorporation of “monsters and impossibilities” and “seeing the unseen” go hand in hand; although these depicted elements are fantastical, they tie themes together across the series that the viewer can connect with regardless of the particular social issue Goya has set out to criticize. There is perhaps not enough extant scholarship for a singular, concrete interpretation of the meaning or intent of Allá vá eso, but Goya’s incorporation of monstrous figures flying above the expanse of humanity in such a twisting, contorted grouping creates a sense of ambiguity that leaves the viewer wondering what sort of evil lurks beyond our control. I suggest that, in this case, Goya’s social critique is built upon the limitations of man. Though the Spanish Enlightenment created a notion that man could do nearly anything with science and rationality on his side, Goya may be expressing some degree of skepticism about this ideal by using freakish images to create an unsettling feeling in the viewer.

In addition to the artistic theories above, Goya relies heavily on depictions of the senses, or sensationalism, as defined by Schulz (2000). In the context of Los Caprichos, Schulz emphasizes Goya’s attention to the senses to evoke emotion and invite the viewer into a fantastical composition that is dynamic and compelling. He argues that sight is a recurring theme throughout the series, referencing Los Chinchillas (Figure 2; "The Chinchillas") for its literal interpretation of blindness, and Ní así la distingue (Figure 3; "Even thus he he cannot make her out") for its more ambiguous critique of cognitive blindness (pp. 159-160, Schulz, 2000).

Allá vá eso is situated about three-fourths of the way through the series, after Plate 65, ¿Dónde va mamá? (Figure 4; "Where is mommy going?"). Plate 65 depicts unnatural, flying figures picking up a woman and beginning to lift her off the ground. The flying figures can be connected to the one presented in Allá vá eso, and the dynamic sky and aerial view of the mountains and landscape in each of the prints almost exactly mirror one another. It is also important to note that the series has alluded to both flying and immortal human-like figures several times up to this point.
Figure 4. Goya, Los Caprichos: ¿Dónde va mamá? 1799.

Figure 5. Goya, Los Caprichos: El sueño de la razon produce monstrous, 1799.
There are few scholarly sources which attempt to explain the iconography or overall meaning of *Allá vá eso*. Having examined how *Allá vá eso* is situated in terms of Goya’s artistic theories and other prints within the series, however, I will present and explain my interpretation of the image. The title suggests that the subject, “it,” or the devil-like male figure, is being helplessly carried off by the winged female figure—and there is not much anyone can do to bring him back. I interpret the female figure as a witch, since witchcraft is a common theme throughout the series. Finally, I recognize a connection between the aggressive cat biting the tip of the object and the looming cat in *El sueño de la razon produce monstruos* (Figure 5; "The sleep of reason produces monsters"). An analysis by Frank I. Heckes (1978) dives deeper into this connection and argues that cats are representative of witchcraft or the devil, bolstering an interpretation of the male figure in *Allá vá eso* as devil-like. Thus, I argue that the plate depicts a witch whisking away a demon while the cat, iconographic of the demonic, attempts to free the devilish figure.

One can also observe the artistic techniques outlined by Schulz in *Allá vá eso*. The demon’s distorted body emphasizes his role as an unnatural being, and his twisted figure directs the viewer’s attention toward the witch. Goya’s application of grotesque concepts is apparent in his inclusion of the supernatural, which harkens back to the idea of “seeing the unseen,” and the use of sensationalism to elicit emotion is evident in the male figure’s pleading look upward and the overtly aggressive cat. All this is to say that by utilizing several of these artistic approaches, Goya emphasized the already dreary nature of *Allá vá eso*.

The Spanish Enlightenment of the late-18th century produced a heightened interest in rationality and, therefore, reduced the centrality of religion and Christian iconographic references in art. It is my interpretation that Goya is making a critique against religious traditions that claim that God, angels, or other deities will protect mankind from demons like the one he depicts. Instead, Goya shows a witch, often paired with devilish thematic elements, sweeping away the demon. Goya is making the statement that religion is not the most powerful force at hand, and religion does not ensure complete protection from the darkness of life. It is important too to note the negative criticism Goya received by those who rejected the ideas of the
Enlightenment. The magnitude of artistic pushback that Goya faced is likely what makes him one of the most revered artists from not only the Spanish Enlightenment, but from the 18th century in general. I argue that Goya’s satirical response to his critics is present in this engraving as well. In support of this point, I look to The Book of Caprichos, which has, for decades, belonged to the Museo del Prado in Madrid, Spain—also home to the complete Los Caprichos series. The book contains a chronological set of interpretations and copies of each image from this series, and the Museo del Prado relies heavily on the book to gain an understanding of these ambiguous works. Regarding Allá vá eso specifically, the book refers to a handwritten note by Valentín Carderera, an Enlightenment painter and scholar, at the bottom of the print which reads, “There goes a witch, riding on a mischievous devil. This poor devil whom everyone mocks is still useful at times” (p. 21, Blas et al., 1999). Such evidence bolsters the claim that Goya may indeed have been depicting himself as “the poor devil whom everyone mocks,” and thus may have been arguing that his work and artistic innovation were a “useful” societal tool.

In this article, I applied concepts set forth in literature from Schulz, Heckes, and others to one of Goya’s most abstruse works to better understand the critique he aimed to make of social and religious issues in 18th century Spain. Through a combination of fantasy and reality, somatic deformation, concepts of the grotesque, and sensationalism, Goya produced an image that challenged society’s reliance on divinity for salvation. Although produced over two centuries ago, the techniques used in Allá vá eso are still relevant in modern caricature, satire, and other mediums of art that aim to serve a critical purpose.

Goya’s artistic contribution to the Spanish Enlightenment and to the history of art cannot be satisfied with the analysis of this single work or series. However, Los Caprichos serves as a concrete example of the depth, intricacy, and sheer creativity vital to Goya’s style. In the context of his other works, this series—situated in the middle of his artistic career—provides substantial insight into the power that his works carried. A fantastical or grotesque narrative, as clearly seen in Allá vá eso, appears frequently in Goya’s paintings, engravings, and sketches. In the context of the Spanish Enlightenment, Allá vá eso succeeded in characterizing the social and critical role of “the
artist." Goya was one of the most significant creators of the period to employ an overwhelmingly dramatic sense of satire to openly critique old ideas that were being newly rejected. Goya devoted his life to making meaning of the world he lived in, as was apparent in the lead-up to and context of his death in 1828: Four years prior to his passing, Goya willingly exiled himself outside of Spain to Bordeaux, France, because of the political tension in the 19th century. Perhaps it was Goya's unwillingness to waver from what he believed needed to be said through art that makes him a relevant artist even today; perhaps it was his sheer artistic talent. Either way, one cannot ignore the complexity, emotion, and force of Francisco de Goya's contributions to art history.

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References


