

# G O Y A ' S B O D I E S

T H E L I V I N G , T H E D E A D , A N D T H E G H O S T L Y



S I R I H U S T V E D T

Since the Greeks, representations of the human body in Western art have been as various and contradictory as our notions of the body itself. The body is central to the history of art for the simple reason that every spectator of a painting or drawing is also a person, which means that pictures of human bodies inevitably produce a mirroring effect. We are always looking at ourselves. It is also true that every body that appears on canvas or paper is imaginary – a trace left by another body, the artist's, and what we see in front of us is the ghostly product of that absent being. In the work Francisco José de Goya produced after his illness in 1792, he was repeatedly drawn to depictions of the body in crisis. Not only did he feel close to death during his own sickness, but after his recovery he lived through years of turmoil, widespread suffering, and war in Spain. The etchings in *Disasters of War* are perhaps the most horrifying pictures of combat and its brutality on record. Among them are images I find nearly unbearable to look at. One of Goya's most famous paintings, *The Third of May*, also includes portraits of slain bodies. The canvas tells the story of the execution of Spanish citizens who had rebelled against Napoleon's invading army in 1808. Painted six years after the event, it has been gener-

ally recognized as a turning point in the genre known as history painting, a startlingly modern work that exploded the conventions of the form. But *The Third of May* can also be read as a further development of Goya's vision of the body in art. The vulnerable anatomies in irrational space that he created in the eighty aquatint plates of *Los Caprichos* are not anomalies in his work or limited to particular genres. They are also present in this historical canvas. And Goya chose to implicate himself in the story he was telling – becoming simultaneously artist, witness, and subject of the historical event he took it upon himself to record.

For hundreds of years, there were only a few stories possible in Western art. Didactic medieval painting relied on multiple panels that depicted the life of Christ, the life of the Virgin, and the lives of the saints, or else on the visual conventions that allowed the spectator to identify the part of the narrative he or she happened to be looking at: the Annunciation, the Crucifixion, the Deposition, and so on. Later, mythological subjects were added to the canon, so that the viewer could recognize the stories of the ancient gods and heroes. Although considerable freedom in the depiction of these stories was possible, there was general agreement about which stories should be told and how they should be interpreted. The seventeenth-century Dutch painters broke with these narratives and created new subjects grounded in daily life, but the idea of coded images remained strong in their allegories, which carried within them moral and spiritual messages that contemporary viewers could usually understand without difficulty. It was only during the Enlightenment that the old notions of what and how to paint suddenly were open to question. The narratives in William Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress* (1735), for example, were a radical departure in his day, but his message about vice and virtue is unambiguous. In the more optimistic corners of Enlightenment thinking, reason filled in for God. Order and light now belonged to the realm of human thought.

Before he fell ill in 1792, Goya gave an address to the Royal Academy of San Fernando about methods of teaching the visual arts. In it he vehemently advocated the importance of working from nature and not from other paintings, sculptures, or casts, which was the common practice in art academies all over Europe at the time. "I will give a proof to demonstrate with facts that *there*

*are no rules in painting*, and that oppression or servile obligation of making all study or follow the same path, is a great impediment for the young who profess this very difficult art.” He then added, “He who wishes to distance himself, to correct [nature] without seeking the best of it, can he help but fall into a reprehensible and monotonous manner?” Goya was still working as a tapestry painter at the time, making cartoons for the royal factory of Santa Barbara, a job he disliked and resented, but while he was employed there he allowed himself the liberty of expanding its narratives. As Janis Tomlinson points out in her book *From El Greco to Goya*, he used scenes from contemporary life rather than limiting himself to the codified stories of myth or history. Ironically, it was illness that liberated him from commissions for a time, and in a letter written to Don Bernardo de Iriarte, vice protector of the academy in 1794, he reiterated his desire to be free from the tedium of prescribed genres. He tells Iriarte that he is sending “a set of cabinet pictures in which I have managed to make observations for which there is normally no opportunity in commissioned works, which give no scope for fantasy and invention.” Clearly balking at all constraints on his imagination, the artist pursued his own projects in which he alone was master. In his book on Goya, Robert Hughes writes that Goya *asked* for a commission to paint *The Second of May* and *The Third of May*. In other words, he hoped to use the system to his advantage – to be funded for works he knew he wanted to paint. No one knows exactly where Goya was on 3 May 1808, and what he saw or didn’t see remains an open question, but I doubt he executed the painting from memory because, despite its documentary feeling, the canvas is both ideological and symbolic.

The same year Goya gave his address to the Royal Academy in Spain, Jacques-Louis David addressed the National Convention in France to propose the commission of a funerary monument as well as a medallion to honor the Revolution’s heroic dead. “I wish,” he said, “that my proposal to strike medallions be realized for all the glorious and auspicious events of the Republic that have already taken place and will take place; this in imitation of the Greeks and Romans, who through their series of medallions, have not only given us knowledge of remarkable events, knowledge of the

*grands hommes*, but also of the progress of their arts.” Like Goya, David was interested in telling a contemporary story – the narrative of the French Revolution. In sharp contrast to his Spanish contemporary, however, David developed a style that is heavily codified by neoclassical ideas. He took his cues from Leon Battista Alberti, the Renaissance painter, sculptor, architect, and theorist, who encouraged painting from nature but also argued that copying nature didn’t guarantee beauty. Beauty required that nature be enhanced. This is precisely the position Goya objected to so strenuously in his academy address when he insisted that that nature needed no correction.

David’s neoclassicism, with its dramatic improvements on nature, did not produce “a monotonous and reprehensible manner,” however. Out of his methods came an extraordinary painting: *Marat Assassinated* (1793). The murdered revolutionary slumped in his bathtub has a wondrous body – smooth, pale skin illuminated from above by what seems to be an almost divine light. The drapery of the cloth beneath his arm, echoed by the folds of his turban, connotes high Renaissance canvases, but without their opulent color; and the tragic expression of the dead martyr, with its hint of resignation, recalls the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. David wasn’t interested in simple imitation; he used past forms to re-invent the present. His Marat floats in a fantastic ethereal nowhere. The absence of any identifiable background, even the limits of an empty room, lifts the sublimely rendered corpse into the arena of heroic transcendence and universality.

It is safe to say that Jean-Paul Marat never looked like this. After Charlotte Corday stabbed him, he couldn’t have been a lovely sight, and it’s unlikely that he slumped over so gracefully with the page of his manuscript still in his hand. David visited Marat the day before he was murdered. He had a conversation with that “hero of the people” while he was in the bath writing an article, and the memory of the exchange no doubt influenced how the painter chose to portray his subject. What fascinates me, however, is that after Marat was killed, David wasn’t only assigned the task of commemorating him in a painting: he was also involved in arranging the funeral and exhibiting the body to the public. In his address to the convention on that occasion, David explained: “We cannot uncover certain parts of his body because you know he was

leprous and that his blood was diseased. But I thought it would be interesting to offer him in the pose I found him in, writing for the happiness of the people.” As it turned out, the convention decided not to prop up the already embalmed corpse in a bathtub or wrench its hands into a position that would allow them to hold a pen and paper, but David’s proposal is nothing short of astounding as an aesthetic idea. His plan was to turn the corpse itself into statuary – to metamorphose what once was a man into a work of art. It may be argued that all embalming, all viewing of the dead stretched out on tables or in coffins, dressed in their Sunday clothes with rouge on their cheeks, partakes of artistic manipulation, but David wasn’t intent on prettifying a dead husband for a widow’s eyes. He was on an official and public mission, which required that a corpse be suffused with the idea of heroism, and this demanded disguise at another level.

Marat spent innumerable hours in his bathtub because it was the only place he could find relief from a terrible skin disease he had contracted while hiding in the Paris sewers. David knew that showing the weals and welts on his subject’s skin, whether on the corpse itself or on canvas, would not only be unpalatable to the viewer, it would interfere with the Greek ideal of the human body he wanted to project: Marat must be viewed as a *grand homme*, not an ordinary man. Therefore the representation of Marat necessitated the suppression of the real body with its scabrous, oozing skin disease. David’s canvas is a form of exalted propaganda, one that entailed ferocious editing of the corpse the artist actually saw. In cruder hands, similar manipulations would result in the absurdities of Soviet socialist realism and the hideous bombast of Nazi art. *Marat Assassinated* is a rare modern example of great art in the service of established power. The political ironies at work in the differences between David’s *Marat* and Goya’s *Third of May* are obvious: revolutionary France produced David; repressive, monarchical Spain produced Goya.

David’s canvas acts as the perfect counterpoint to Goya’s because each picture takes a different approach to what is essentially the same problem – depicting a martyr to a cause. That they were painted in roughly the same period underscores their striking separateness. The emotional heart of *The Third of May* is the face of the kneeling man with his arms in the air. His face, with its



THIRD OF MAY, 1808 (1814). *Museo del Prado, Spain*

expression of terror in the moment before he is about to be shot, is illuminated by the light from a lantern, which sits on the ground in front of his executioners – the line of uniformed French soldiers who have their backs to the viewer. Nearly every commentary I have read makes much of the contrast between the anonymous line of soldiers and the recognizable faces of the victims. Napoleon's troops are portrayed as a single entity in the canvas – an inhuman killing machine rather than a group of individuals, an early depiction of modern warfare and mechanized murder. Had Goya chosen to show the soldiers' faces, the painting's effect would have been entirely altered. Each man would have to have been somebody. As it is, the soldiers are nobodies, and this serves the painting's cause, which is unambiguous. It commemorates and mourns the mass slaughter of the *madrilenos* on 3 May 1808 and turns them into martyrs for Spain. But the viewer doesn't need to know a thing about Spanish history to read the painting's story correctly. The line of rifles and the three corpses lying on the ground tell all. The blood that runs profusely from their wounds

has mingled and stained the ground beneath them. Goya's rendering of these corpses is essential to the broader meanings of the canvas and the idea of martyrdom.

To be a martyr, one's body must be wounded or injured. This idea can be traced back to early Christian thinkers, who were victims of persecution and for whom the possibility of being mutilated and murdered for their faith was a constant and real threat. Early in the third century, Tertullian of Carthage focused tremendous intellectual energy on the problem of the dead martyr's tortured and broken body and worried about how salvation through corporeal resurrection would actually work. As he pointed out in a direct and passionate way – "For what dead man is entire, though he dies entire? Who is without hurt, that is without life? What body is uninjured when it is dead, when it is cold, when it is ghastly, when it is stiff, when it is a corpse?" Both David and Goya painted scenes of secular martyrdom – dying not for God but for a political cause. Yet Tertullian's graphic description of the dead body is far closer to Goya's representation of corpses than it is to David's. Goya's dead are not abstract or aesthetic; they are truly ghastly.

The depictions of Christ's wounds in Western art are countless, and they range from the gruesome to the nearly invisible. Although the Passion story is bloody and horrible, it ends with the Resurrection, and the portrayals of the Crucifixion required that the idea of the restored body somehow be incorporated into the image. When Fyodor Dostoyevsky saw Matthias Grünewald's *Dead Christ* (1512–16), the painting horrified him because its realism seemed to preclude the possibility of resurrection. Christ's wounds often had a double purpose; they were part depiction and part sign, and eventually it became enough to suggest his suffering rather than re-create the realities of anatomical damage. David gave his Marat the sign of a fatal injury – an exquisite knife wound that produces a single line of blood. It runs down the dead man's torso to the sheet that covers the edge of the bath. The injury harks directly back to Renaissance pictures of narrow streams of red blood that trickle down the pale torso of Christ on the cross. One example among many is Fra Angelico's *Deposition* (1433–34), in which a similar ribbon of red runs from a tiny, precise cut in the

Savior's side to the cloth wrapped around his hips. Like many Renaissance painters, David includes an idea of resurrection in his canvas through the physical wholeness of his corpse. The body of his Marat will be redeemed, not by God, but by history literally *transfigured* in art. David's message of immortality is communicated not only through the Greek splendor of Marat's body but by the delicate character of the wound, which inevitably conjures up resonances with the history of religious painting. The cut is a tiny opening in an otherwise perfect, whole, closed body. It is impossible to imagine this body decomposing, because we are not meant to be deluded about what it is: a work of art, a corpse as gorgeous statue, a thing preserved forever in paint.

In fact, David's technique defies the possibility of a mortal wound because it doesn't admit to the truth that a real corpse is waste, which must be quickly embalmed or buried before decay sets in. The margins of Marat's body and every object in the canvas appear absolute, unyielding, frozen. A border of exact definition divides the canvas above its middle and runs from the drapery to the turban, over Marat's shoulder and arm to the hand and the page it holds and finally across the green cloth that covers the bath. The effect of looking at the actual canvas – which is large – was for me like suddenly having fantastically good vision. The body and its small cut, the folds in the cloth, the quills, the inkpot, the paper, and the knife have a heightened clarity even when in shadow, which signifies an order of clean separations among all visible things, a world in which blur, doubt, and ambiguity have been banished and truth is knowable. The intense pleasure the painting evokes in me is, I think, due to its confidence in the essential order of things and to the fact that although it proposes itself as a narrative canvas, the depiction of an actual historical event, it doesn't tell a story. The essential element of all stories is motion – change – and *Marat Assassinated* is a canvas that includes a tacit acknowledgment of its own stasis as an art object.

Despite its allusions to Greek statuary and Renaissance religious painting, *Marat* is an Enlightenment canvas – one might even argue an Encyclopédist painting – a work in which the world may be divided, classified, and thereby conquered. David managed to portray the aftermath of a violent murder committed by a

deranged woman as an eminently rational image, to render the slain body of a man with a skin disease and every one of the few objects around it as gloriously distinct and stable.

To turn from David's *Marat* to Goya's *Third of May* is to move from the beauty of clarity to the misery of chaos. Goya's dead may be poignant, but they are also ugly. The head wound of the corpse in the foreground is a hideous gash of destroyed bone and flesh. When I stood several feet away from the image in the Prado, the opening in the dead man's head struck me as intensely realistic. I had to move very close to see that it is composed of several rough brushstrokes that nevertheless, at a distance, suggest an intimate knowledge with the appearance of actual head injuries. The dead man has collapsed on top of another corpse, but the legs that belong to the body underneath him are difficult to locate. When I examined the canvas, it became clear that Goya didn't bother to raise the position of the uppermost corpse to make it look as if the body beneath it had legs. The two corpses merge with each other and also with a third, and the mangled bodies appear to run together and become an indifferent heap of limbs, torsos, and heads. No longer individuals, they are war's refuse – a contaminated seeping mass – in which the distinctions between one body and another have lost their meaning. Goya's hectic, almost crude brushstrokes and ragged edges enhance the painting's atmosphere of blended, opened bodies, a technique as remote from David as one can possibly imagine. The style of the canvas is deliberately anti-aesthetic. It refuses to make slaughter beautiful, and that refusal separates Goya not only from David but from all his predecessors. Neither beauty nor refinement plays a role in the canvas, which may be read through Goya's declaration: *There are no rules in painting.*

The "rules" of the past that Goya resisted are systems of meaning that include not only the illusion of perspective but also the enhancement of nature and modes of representing certain subjects. They are nothing less than codes for seeing the world and interpreting it. Had Goya abandoned all the rules, we wouldn't be able to *read* the painting as a story at all, but he defied enough of them to create a highly unconventional work that forces the viewer to look again. Goya's irritation with conventional academic methods didn't begin with his speech in 1792. The commission he

was granted in 1776 to paint frescos in the cupola of El Pilar and its four pendentives was executed in 1780, but the *Queen of the Martyrs* did not please the building committee because the powers-that-were regarded Goya's work as unfinished. The artist fumed at the injustice. In a letter to Martin Zapater, he wrote that he was trying to forget "those vile men who had so little faith in my merit." Goya accepted a compromise for El Pilar, but it's interesting to consider what the building committee wanted. For them, finishing the image meant greater clarity and definition, which would enhance the borders of every figure and object in the frescos.

In the context of his ongoing rebellion against inherited conventions, it is pertinent to note that Goya chose to give his central figure, the man with opened arms, clearly visible stigmata on his right hand – a direct reference to Christ and the saints, a reference even more symbolic and obvious than the one David makes with Marat's side wound. Unlike every other injury in the canvas, this one is not gushing blood. The small, round indentation in the man's splayed hand functions as a symbolic link to the many religious martyrdom paintings of the past. Fred Licht draws attention to the stigmata, the position of the man's arms that echo the Crucifixion, and to the colors the man is wearing, yellow and white – the colors of the church – but he argues passionately and convincingly that the man "never achieves the sanctity of or the meaning of Christ or of a lesser martyr." For Licht, and indeed for most modern commentators on the painting, the man is not even a hero but a victim of senseless warfare. Nevertheless, Goya made the decision to give the man the symbolic mark of the Crucifixion, and the imprint on his hand must be regarded at the very least as a sign of his innocence. There is nothing in the canvas that suggests that this man will suffer a fate different from his compatriots. He will fall like them and die and rot with them, but the mark on his hand is a message to the viewer that his fate is undeserved, as was Christ's and the saints who suffered for their faith. But Licht is right. In Goya's canvas there is no possibility of a redeemed body because there is nothing whole about his vision of death – it is a fragmented state. His corpses are going to pieces.

That Goya chose to illuminte his martyr or anti-martyr with a light source within the painting rather than outside it also affects

the work's meaning. The lantern is the only illumination on a dark night. Its purpose is practical – lighting the victims so that they can be killed. Everything the spectator views in the canvas is seen because of this light. His vision dims at the periphery, where the lantern no longer shines so brightly. In other words, the lamp's location creates varying degrees of definition in the scene. The sharpest border in the canvas runs along the soldier's knee, which partially blocks our view of the lantern itself. The relative clarity of this corporeal margin in relation to the victims' fuzzier outlines functions as a trope within the story being told. The soldiers will remain whole and alive; the Spanish citizens will be broken and die. As they recede from the lamplight, the cornered victims blend more and more into background and become increasingly difficult to see. The man on the left side of the painting, who has covered his face with his hands, is painted in a palette similar to the hill, and the huddled figure at the edge of the canvas, who seems to be a woman draped in a cloak, is more shadow than person, a dark ghost of the landscape, a being whose borders can't be made out. Below her is another darker and even more vague person whose sex can't even be guessed at. Through their lack of definition and their colors that match the earth around them, Goya employs a visual language to describe a process that is already under way – the decay of corpses returning to the ground. Goya has chosen to paint time, not timelessness. He throws his spectator into a terrible moment seen in a transient light, a moment from which there is no escape and of which there is no perfect or clear view but rather one that dims and fogs beyond the immediate radiance of the lantern's light.

In David's painting, the viewer is granted the happiness of distance. His hero is nothing less than a monument that has been theatrically lit and stopped in time. The peaceful corpse awes me, but when I look at it, I am barred entrance into the space it inhabits. Despite the large size of the canvas, I can't even fantasize about stepping into that abstract space. Looking at Goya's painting, however, I am drawn close to the murders, and this is at least partly because there is something unusual about my perspective. Similar to the crazy space in *Los Caprichos*, but on a far grander scale, *The Third of May* creates subtly shifting perspectives. For example, I feel that I am looking down on the corpses but up at the

soldiers. The effect is that I lose a secure angle of vision, a definite sense of how to interpret the space. Indeed, the only flat ground in the painting is under the feet of the French soldiers. The victims have no such foothold. They are all kneeling, crouching, or climbing as the earth beneath them undulates and dips. Where, for example, are the rest of the legs of the pugilistic monk? With the single exception of the boots that belong to corpses, we cannot see the feet of a single Spaniard. In fact, the spectator is presented with a view in which not one body among the madrilenos can be seen whole. The tipping perspective, the lack of visible ground beneath the victims, and the merging of figures, in which legs, feet, and parts of bodies seem to vanish or blend into one another disorients the viewer and mirrors the confusion and violence of the bloodshed being portrayed. Again, Goya has chosen an emotional perspective over a rational one. The perspective is cinematic before the invention of movies. By refusing to give its spectator a single point of view, the canvas creates narrative action through the illusion of movement and tips the onlooker into the horror itself.

As Robert Hughes points out, *The Third of May* “has lived on for almost two centuries as the undiminished and unrivaled archetype of images of suffering and brutality in war.” When compared to earlier pictures, Hughes insists that it is better “because the truth offered by previous paintings of war is not raw but manifestly cooked; while Goya’s extraordinary image is not raw either, but cooked in a different and startlingly unprecedented way, so that it looks raw.” I would argue that this “cooking” or illusion of rawness acts so powerfully on the viewer because Goya’s techniques – his staging of the scene with its faceless killers and illuminated victims who have no visible feet, his tilting perspective, and his rough brushstrokes that merge corpses in the dirt and blend figures into the hill – not only create a closeness to this particular scene of murder but also reverberate with the reality of traumatic experience.

In her book *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva describes abjection as a debilitating “narcissistic crisis” of someone who witnesses “the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders.” Abjection is that which disturbs “identity, system, order.” In war,

this disturbance is triggered by seeing the unspeakable, by facing non-existence, the imminent danger of the “I” becoming “it” – a corpse, human waste. In battle, all rituals for the dead, the elaborate cultural procedures that separate the living from the bodies of the dead, are suspended. Soldiers wade in the gore of their comrades, and for the survivors, the memory of this often takes the form of returning hallucinations, seeing or re-living the same moment over and over again. In *History Beyond Trauma*, Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière tell of their therapeutic work with people badly damaged by experiences of war. “Subject and object are confused: here and there, inside and outside. The past is present. The dead return. It is a child’s voice that is speaking in a session, through the mouth of the adult he has become, in the name of an entire society threatened with disappearance.” The truth is it is normal to break down when faced with horror, and the resulting psychic confusion for those who live has been given many names: shell shock, war neuroses, post-traumatic stress disorder. Whatever it’s called, ordinary human beings who have seen too much suffer from a host of symptoms that include nightmares and visions, hypersensitivity or a lack of feeling, and a powerful sense that they are not part of the world, that they live outside ordinary time.

In *The Third of May*, Goya subtly and deftly mirrors the breakdown and confusion of trauma by blurring the visual borders in the canvas and creating with his brush a feeling of borders collapsing as well as their imminent collapse. The terrified protagonist is kneeling in the blood of his compatriots; red lines of blood run on the ground between his legs and along the edge of his yellow trousers. The narrative force of the picture is such that we know this threshold between the living and the dead can’t hold. At the same time, this is a painting, and however much we feel the moment to come, what we see is a frozen image of a single instant in hell, just before the rifles fire and a man’s body, bleeding and ripped by bullets, drops to the ground. I, the viewer, focus on this brilliantly lit man, am drawn to him in his final seconds, and my identification with him is made stronger by the angle of my vision that destabilizes me, puts me on that undulating ground with him. In effect, Goya has turned his spectator into a witness, a witness who, like those traumatized by war, must look again and again at a

single catastrophic moment when real time is paralyzed and replaced by a returning hallucination. Then is now. The past is present. In the series of plates now known as *The Disasters of War* that Goya worked on between 1810 and 1815, plate 19, an image that depicts rape and murder, has been given the caption, "There is no more time." In etching after etching, we are given images that make us want to turn away. "I saw it," Goya inscribes under plate 44. In Goya's pictorial testimony to war, there becomes here, and all meaning is in crisis. In the second plate of the series we see an image that echoes or more likely prefigures *The Third of May*. Several French soldiers with their backs to the viewer and muskets raised are aiming at two men. One is bleeding and holds a knife. The other aims a lance at the uniformed men. The text reads "With or without reason." Looking at the eighty-three pictures of the *Disasters of War* and at *The Third of May*, every ideological justification for war is turned into cant. My father was a soldier during World War II in New Guinea and the Philippines. He fought in the battle of Luzon. Although he spoke of other aspects of the war and his experiences, he never talked about the actual fighting. Once, however, when I asked him about it, he gave me no descriptions of warfare, but he said, "I just kept saying to myself, 'This is insane. This is insane.'"

In June 2003 I went to look at *The Third of May* in the Prado. Before that, I had seen it reproduced in a number of books I own about Goya, but even in reproduction there was a part of the painting I found both mysterious and bothersome – the left side of the canvas above the corpse whose face can't be seen, just below the two phantom figures. In all the commentaries I've read about the painting, those two figures are never mentioned. It's as if they've been left out of the story altogether. When I looked at the reproductions, I always puzzled over that mottled space. I spent about an hour and a half in front of *The Third of May* in the museum. I knew the painting was large, but it was considerably bigger than I had imagined. There was a lot to see. I sat in a chair for a while and then walked back and forth examining parts of the canvas. Near the end of my viewing, I stood in front of the shadowy space and began to study it. What had Goya intended to convey with these shadows? Who are the two draped figures? Two

female mourners who represent the grieving mothers of the dying men? That made sense, I thought, and then I looked at the area below them and began to imagine that something was there. I stepped backward and forward, altering my position only by inches, and then suddenly, I saw a face – Goya’s face – emerging from the shadows. To be honest, I thought I had looked too long. Like children who begin to see animals and people in the clouds overhead, I assumed I had fantasized his image. I left the canvas, visited the Black Paintings, and then returned to my spot. I saw him again. Despite its dimness, the image is unmistakable once you’ve seen it. The features are rendered very simply. Goya has a round face, large frightened eyes, a flat nose, an open mouth, and that signature hair with its leonine bushiness coming out from around the jawline. I can’t overstate my astonishment. How could it be that I had never read about this self-portrait hidden in the canvas? I walked backward, lost the face, moved forward, and there he was again. In a fit of excitement, I ran to find my husband, my daughter, and a friend who were waiting for me in the museum café. I dragged the three of them upstairs to the canvas, placed them in position, and demanded that they look at the shadowy area. All three of them saw the face immediately, and without the slightest hesitation, my husband identified the face as Goya’s.

Nevertheless, I wasn’t absolutely certain that no one had written about that image before. After I returned to New York, I told two friends about the discovery. One of them, Nicole Krauss, a young novelist and art writer, was about to go off on a tour for art critics and historians to view Édouard Manet’s seascapes and the sites in France where he had painted them. When she returned, she told me that Juliet Wilson-Bareau, an expert on Goya, had also been on the trip. She mentioned my little revelation to her and asked whether anyone had written about it before. Wilson-Bareau said no. Given her intimate knowledge of Goya scholarship, I accepted her statement as true. Nevertheless, some time later, when I was invited to do a public conversation at Hunter College about Goya with Robert Hughes just after his book on Goya had been published, I asked him if he had ever read anything about a hidden self-portrait in the canvas. He also stated without hesi-

tation that there was no scholarship on it at all, either in Spanish or in English.

I published two short articles on the find, one in *The London Observer* and one in *Modern Painters*. A friend of mine, Jean Frémont, a novelist and one of the directors of the Galerie Lelong in Paris and New York, read the piece in *Modern Painters* and, when he was in Madrid a couple of months later, visited the Prado and quickly found the disembodied head.

In light of my theory that the artist had also disguised himself as various characters in *Los Caprichos*, the discovery of his face in *The Third of May* made perfect sense to me. But what does it mean that Goya painted himself into the canvas? The suspended head beneath the cloaked figures suggests that the artist chose to enter the story he was telling as a phantom presence – a being in harmony with the two ghostly mourners above him. The expression he gave himself – startled and open-mouthed, as if he is crying out – makes it clear that there is nothing coy about this representation of himself. It is more than a portrait as signature. The tormented features resonate strongly with those that appear on the heads that rise from the sleeping Goya in the first extant drawing for plate 43 in *Los Caprichos*, with the agonized face of the man in plate 57, and with the uppermost figure in 69, who appears to be beseeching the sky. Again, Goya is a head only – a head made of shadows, bleary and difficult to see, that hovers at the edge of a bloody scene.

Six years after he painted *The Third of May*, Goya suffered another near-fatal illness. When he recovered, he painted a portrait of himself with his physician, Dr. Arrieta, and offered the canvas to the doctor as a gift. The work mimics the form of an ex-voto – the little paintings donated to holy places as a token of thanks for a miraculous occurrence by believers throughout the Catholic world. Lenz Kriss-Rettenbeck, a German scholar, has outlined the necessary elements in an ex-voto: the heavenly operative, divine being, saint, or holy place; the figure who turns to the heavenly domain (the person with the problem); the event or condition that was the cause of the communication between the earthly personage and the divine person or symbol (the problem); and finally, the

inscription that records the condition, event, or hope. Goya's inscription reads: "Goya thankful to his friend Arrieta: for the skill and care with which he saved his life during this short and dangerous illness, endured at the end of 1819, at seventy-three years of age. He painted it in 1820." In the canvas, Goya used the ex-voto form but secularized it, replacing the heavenly operative with a human one – the doctor. Arrieta would have read the gift through the lens of the ex-voto and understood that he was being thanked for what Goya regarded as a miracle – his survival. The painting includes three mysterious figures behind Goya and Arrieta that seem to emerge from the solid black background of the canvas.

When I saw the painting in the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, I asked the curator, Evan Maurer, "Who are those people?" He answered, "Nobody knows." The person to the far left is holding a chalice, a fact that caused art historian Janis Tomlinson to identify him as a priest and the two others as the cleric's attendants. Fred Licht suggests that they are hallucinatory fever images, a much better guess to my mind. When you look at the painting in Minneapolis, the palette of the three dim faces is quite distinct from that of the two main figures, and their height – the tops of their heads reach the doctor's shoulder – becomes even more mysterious. Where would these strange people be standing or sitting in relation to the bed? Two of the figures are visible only as heads, and the one farthest to the right isn't a complete head but a mysteriously lit partial countenance floating in the blackness. Although the face of the third man in the Arrieta canvas is far more visible and realistic than the hidden face of Goya in *The Third of May*, the technique used to create the emerging but also veiled features is similar.

It is interesting to me that there are two cups in the picture – the medicinal glass the doctor offers his patient and a ghostly chalice – one mundane, the other sacramental. The doctor's cup offers life; the chalice held by the strange man to the left may be the drink of the last supper, of final rites, of death. My guess is that these mysterious people are the dead, figures in an ex-voto painting created by a man who had felt death in his body, almost touched it, and that the image is a vision of Goya literally being pulled out of blackness – the world of the dead – and forward into the light of this world by his able physician. Similarly, in

*The Third of May*, Goya takes a known form – the martyrdom painting – and secularizes it. The central character's position, his stigmata, and his imminent death may be read through martyrdom conventions just as the Arrieta painting may be read through those for an ex-voto, but with a turn – God has been banished from this bloody landscape and there is nothing to fill in the blank: no system, no logic, nothing. All that can be done is to bear witness to the anonymous dead, not through a monument that offers up war as glory, but in a work of art that refuses to make the dead glamorous, a canvas that breaks the rules. By hiding himself as if he were a ghost hovering over the corpses below, Goya mirrors the role he has also given to his viewer. He becomes an imaginary witness of slaughter, and not a sanguine, distant one: he is a man screaming. At the same time, he acknowledges his role as the hidden author of the painting, which has set out to re-create an actual event. Goya has used his own head before in *Los Caprichos* as a metaphor for imagination and dreaming, and its reappearance in *The Third of May* reasserts the trope. For Goya, the distinction critics have made between the grotesque and supernatural qualities of *Los Caprichos* versus the so-called naturalism of *The Third of May* wouldn't have been terribly important. He was always portraying the world he knew, and for him that included the role of the imagination. The veiled mourners on the hillside, Goya's hidden face, and the phantoms in the Arrieta painting are all imaginary creatures projected onto the canvas as beings of the artist's fertile brain. As Charles Baudelaire argued, Goya's supernaturalism is essentially a form of naturalism.

The monsters and transformations of *Los Caprichos*, the three ghosts in the Arrieta canvas, and the phantom self-portrait in *The Third of May* are all images that seem to portend the so-called Black Paintings, which scholars have long thought were painted soon after Goya's self-portrait with his doctor. The connections between these earlier works and the Black Paintings are so apparent that I was astonished when I discovered that the authorship of the latter paintings has been called into question. An article in an issue of *The New York Times Magazine* reported that the Spanish art historian Juan José Junquera has determined that Goya could not have painted the fourteen works that were taken off the walls

of his house outside Madrid, the Quinta del Sordo. Through an analysis of the bill of sale for the house Goya bought in 1819, which describes two one-story buildings and a later document written after the artist's death that lists Goya's renovations to the house but that does not include the addition of another floor, Junquera has concluded that if there were no second story when Goya lived there, he couldn't have painted the Black Paintings because some of them were on those second-story walls.

I can't help feeling that such a conclusion makes a fetish of documentation. Documents can be in error. Because an official record omits mention of a second story doesn't mean it wasn't there. Building inspection, like every other human activity, is subject to imperfection. If Junquera is right in his assumption, I am forced to ask myself how it is that the Black Paintings repeat Goya's deeply private obsessions – with heads and decapitation, for example. Saturn eats his son – a headless corpse. Judith decapitates Holofernes, the head of a small dog protrudes from a quagmire, a gruesome monk with a gaping mouth has a hand but no visible body in *Two Monks*. *The Pilgrimage to San Isidro* includes piles of heads, one on top of the other, as if they were boulders in the landscape, bizarre outcroppings with howling faces. Behind the figures in the foreground of *Witches Sabbath* is another sea of heads. This theme is repeated in another disputed work owned by Stanley Moss of New York City, *Capricho with Five Heads*. In that picture, completed around the same time as the Black Paintings, five heads appear in the lower right-hand corner of the canvas with a mountain behind them. Who else but Goya would even have considered such a composition? Not only that, Goya's vertiginous perspective, similar to the one he used both in *Los Caprichos* and in *The Third of May*, is also present in this canvas. It is impossible to reconstruct the missing bodies beyond the picture frame. If the men are standing, they are not resting on level ground, and they aren't in a ditch because the two top heads would have disappeared from view. This is an illogical space typical of Goya, one that is both unique and subtle.

Beneath the figures in the Black Painting called *The Readers* are vague phantom shadows very much like the ones in *The Third of May*, also ignored by art historians but which I find significant, because the forms hint at more ghosts emerging from the dark-

ness. Goya and his doctor Arrieta, painted in 1820 with its explicit message of gratitude, is not a canvas in dispute. Its three ghostly characters may be linked to those in the Black Paintings, not only because they are beings of darkness and death, but because they are painted in a palette similar to many of the figures from the walls of Quinta del Sordo.

Who could have duplicated this radical and utterly personal style of painting, and what crazy person would have placed the images on the walls of a house if he planned to make money from claiming those works were by Goya? Wouldn't it be much easier to turn out fake canvases for instant cash? The only person the debunkers have come up with is Javier, the artist's son, who didn't live with his father and who, by all accounts, was rather greedy for money. Evidence for his role as forger is slim. In 1805, Javier listed his profession as "painter" on his marriage certificate, and much later, after Javier died, Iriarte mentioned that a painting removed from the house was believed to be by Javier, not his father. Junquera suggests that Javier may have painted the walls to raise the value of the house that had been deeded to Goya's grandson, Mariano. As great as the Black Paintings are, what buyer would want to face them day in and day out? What kind of a person could bear to be greeted by Saturn's cannibalism on waking in the morning or, worse, on going to bed at night? Also, underneath the paintings, X-rays have revealed other murals, done in a sunny, pastel palette, which show light-hearted pastoral scenes. Why paint terrifying pictures over pretty works that are easy to live with if you hoped to increase your profit on a sale? It doesn't make any sense. If Javier were the artist of the Black Paintings, it would mean that the son took on the inner life of the father – including decapitation obsession and vertigo – that he essentially *became* his father and stole the contents of that famous head. From a psychological point of view, this is preposterous, but then psychology doesn't enter the argument. It is an argument founded on a few pieces of official paper.

To my mind, the connections among the uncommissioned works Goya made after his illness in 1792 are too strong to go unseen. The art I've discussed, in depth or in passing – *Los Caprichos*, *The Third of May*, *The Disasters of War*, the self-portrait with Arrieta, the Black Paintings, and *Capricho with Five Heads* – are bound by

one man's singular vision, an artist with a radical and courageous imagination who had a profound emotional stake in the ruin, destruction, and bloodshed he had witnessed in his country, as well as an artist with extraordinary access to his own inner life – to the monsters and ghosts of dreams and hallucinations. In these works by Goya, the inside can't be separated from the outside. The horror exists both outside the artist in the world and inside his own head. Perception is also emotional. We are not in David's world of clean borders and sharp edges that delineate difference, order, and wholeness. There are no beautiful corpses here. They spill open. They gush blood. Some have been hacked to pieces. We are in a world haunted by traumatic visions of the monstrously human. "I saw it," he wrote. Perhaps he had seen too much. Even when terrible events are over and peace has returned, the memory of them is not erased. We don't know what Goya saw during the war, only that he was prompted to work for years on etchings that treated its carnage. We know that illness brought him close to death twice. The insanity of war and the delirium of sickness merge in this work as a loss of borders and of secure ground. Goya is perhaps the greatest artist of nonsense – that nonsense we feel within us and recognize in the world around us as frighteningly and brutally, sometimes unbearably real.

*Last October, accompanied by Karen Wright, the editor of Modern Painters, I showed Manuela Mena, one of the head curators at the Prado, the hidden image in The Third of May. She saw the face, but commented that she thought the eyes were too big for Goya. She also speculated that the image could have been added to the painting at some point later in its history. I cannot say whether some mischievous restorer tampered with the painting or not. It does seem like a strange thing to do. Before we said goodbye to Manuela Mena, she agreed to X-ray the canvas, a procedure that would confirm whether the face is original to the painting or a later addition. As far as I know, this has yet to be done.*