

# Analysis of Francisco Goya's 'The Third of May 1808'

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Francisco Goya's *The Third of May 1808* is a responsive painting that was intended to honor those who suffered from the occupation of Napoleon's army during the Peninsula War in Spain. This large oil on canvas painting is used to represent the art of Goya, and depict the valor of Spanish revolutionary war. The influences on this piece, as well as its characteristics and influence on later work will be examined. The painting reflects the turmoil during the time period, and contains many aesthetic and emotional qualities that make it relevant in art history; the painting is one of the finest displays of Goya's abilities.

Goya who lived from (1746 - 1828) was regarded as one of the most (if not the important Romantic artist. He underwent a major transition in his life that reflected on his work. During his early career he was much more optimistic toward humanity. This optimism is evident in his early artwork that consisted of bright pastel colors.

In his later work (including the time when *The Third of May* was being painted) his subject matter became much darker and dejected. This dark subject matter reflected Goya's physical and mental ailments, his disappointment in the French brutality against the Spanish, and his "diminished hope for human progress"

The story behind *The Third of May* is one of brutality and malice. After Napoleon invaded Spain, he set his brother in place of the Spanish Monarch. The Spanish people believed the royal family was going to be murdered. In response to these rumors, on May 2, 1808 a rebellion against the French

army took place. The French retaliated by rounding up civilians the next day and opening fire

After the Spanish regained control in 1814, Goya was motivated to ask the provisional government of Spain to commission The Third of May. He requested to, "perpetuate by means of his brush the most notable and heroic actions of our glorious insurrection against the Tyrant of Europe"

The painting is in the romantic style. Key characteristics that define this piece as romantic are, "The sensational current event, loose brushwork, the poses based on reality, the off balance composition, and the dramatic lighting".

The fact that it is a raging scene is also characteristic of a painting in the romantic style. Other influences can be noticed in the painting as well. His work is reminiscent of Diego Velasquez because of the rough brush strokes that seem to humanize and revitalize the still figures of the painting. There are many characteristics that contribute to the significance of this painting. The placement of the characters is an important feature to notice. The French soldiers are giving the viewer their backs as they fire away in a uniform line.

This uniformity portrays the soldiers as intimidating and an organized row that are in control of the scenario. In contrast the civilians are an unrecognized crowd backed up against a hill. This provides the viewer with a sense of their defenseless and hopeless entrapment. The scale is grand; prior to romanticism such grandiosity was reserved for religious subject matter. The large scale gave meaning to the murdered just as religious

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figures were given importance in previous years. The choice of color and lighting perfectly highlights the heroic, while darkness falls on the wicked.

The later works that were influenced y him contained a theme of heroism in martyrs, a placement of good facing evil, and numerous other elements. The painting is of great historic significance as well as aesthetic importance. The painting is not merely a historical record but a moment in time in which the viewer can truly feel like they are a part of. Features that make this feeling possible are Goya's placement of the characters, the high contrast between light and dark (or good and evil), and the uncensored death and terror staring at the viewer. This completely defines a hopeless situation.