

Francisco goya and the eighteenth century spanish church essay



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Following a century or more of gestation, Spain experienced a period of enlightenment in literature, art, religion, commerce, and agriculture, especially during the reign of Carlos III (1759-1788). Spain moved cautiously away from Counter-Reformation ideology and into the secular light of eighteenth-century Europe. Spain was producing liberated thinkers; innovators with new and non-traditional ideas.

For the first time in history religious dogma was dangerously questioned.

For example, many innovators of that time period were preoccupied with the problem of entailed estates and the economic consequences of unproductive land and property held by the church (Dowling, 1985, pp. 331, 333).

Francisco de Goya touched on this issue and many more.

He was one of the greatest artists of his time and his 1799 print series “ Los Caprichos” expose the greed and corruption of the Church during the Spanish enlightenment. “ Los Caprichos” is like a modern day newspaper comic parody of the president. Goya lampoons Spanish society through satirical commentary.

Some plates illustrate Goya’s disillusionment with certain crises during the Enlightenment, while other prints portray the unambiguous position of prostitution in Spanish high society, but Goya’s main focus is that of the Church and the blind faith of its congregation (Burnham, 2008, p.

1). It is my purpose to provide examples of the issues and criticisms aimed at the Church during the Enlightenment through studying three plates from “ Los Caprichos” that I believe best describe the situation between the Church

and its followers: “ What a Tailor Can Do! , “ They’re Hot”, and “ Why Hide Them? ” By creating a print series Goya was able to make many copies of “ Los Caprichos” and distribute his message to a vast percentage of the public in an inexpensive way. However, the fact that “ Los Caprichos” would be so readily available created the risk that it would fall into the wrong hands. In order to protect himself from persecution he ingeniously disguised the true meaning of his satirical work.

At the time Goya finished “ Los Caprichos” the Spanish Inquisition was still censoring art and seeking out and torturing heretics.

Goya had to be insidious when allegorizing negative commentary towards the Church. He is careful not to reference specific individuals, although if his viewers look through unbiased eyes they can identify who the figures represent within his art. Once one deciphers Goya’s artistic code they can understand “ that the plates did not depict goblins and spirits but the abbes of Spain, a priest, and a number of monks” (Sayre, 1974, p. 56).

Through his clever symbolism, Goya successfully escapes the wrath of the Spanish Inquisition while maintaining the integrity of his art.

Many etchings in “ Los Caprichos” correlates the Seven Deadly Sins, particularly lust, sloth, greed and gluttony with pious men and the clergy (Burnham, 2008, p. 1). The sin of greed, gluttony, and lust can be seen in plate thirteen titled “ They’re Hot. ” At first glance this appears to be a dinner scene of some monks enjoying their meal. They are identified as monks by the robes they wear.

The dark contrasts create a murky suspicion that there is something depraved about this illustration.

Once you look past the facade that protected Goya from the Spanish Inquisition so long ago, strange details begin to emerge. There is not a single piece of food on the table, not on the plates, and not on their forks. The symbolism behind this may conclude that no matter how much food these monks consume, they will not be satisfied. This represents the greed of the Spanish Church in the eighteenth century.

As I mentioned before the Spanish Church owned more than enough property and land and this created problems for enterprising farmers looking to buy (Burnham, 2008, p. 2). "They're Hot" was Goya's comment on the issue of the clergy indulging in this unfair practice. Perhaps the title insinuates that these monks' throats are on fire and no amount of food will cool their desire. Or maybe it refers to the fact that they ate their food before it had time to cool, and even after finishing their meals they still continue to practice the ritual of eating, like a drug addict hitting an empty pipe. Hunger can be interpreted as a need for physical gratification and lust so this image could also represent the complete loss of control over their sexual appetite.

The gluttony of these characters suggests that sex is their main concern and that their work for the religious institution is last on their list of priorities. It has been read that "his open mouth is also an anus" (Wolf, 1991, p. 39) and the entering spoon which can be read as a phallic symbol accentuates this interpretation. These monks are supposed to be men of God, so portraying

them without any willpower as they yield to their temptations suggests that they are like dogs in heat, which also ties into the title of this plate. Goya gave the monks heavily lidded eyes “ which indicates a diminishment of cognition” (Schulz, 2000, p. 137).

These men are the leaders of society during the Spanish Enlightenment and Goya suggests that they are barely awake to the world around them. “ Why Hide Them? ” portrays the greed of the Church in a different light. The subject matter of plate 13 from “ Los Caprichos” is a monk sitting in the foreground holding two moneybags and in the background four men hover behind him. The moneybags insinuate his greed and narcissism and reveal the monk as a whore monger abusing his power to profit from prostitution. Perhaps the men in the background are customers of the panderly monk and have come to fill his moneybags for the services he provides.

The position in which the monk holds the two moneybags conveys a clear likeness to testicles, which divulges the sexual implication of this image and renders prostitution the intrinsic meaning of “ Why Hide Them? ” (Wolf, 1991, p.

80). The sexual symbology that Goya used to convey prostitution can be seen in the men standing in the background. The man with the clenched fists can be associated with the act of masturbation. Clenched fists can also symbolize testicles.

His closed eyes and open mouth suggests an erotic experience.

The monk himself portrays the idea of sexual overindulgence; the way in which he is bent over and bowlegged suggests sexual excess. The monk's open mouth represents the sexual gratification awaiting the men who have made payment, not from the monk, but from the prostitutes that he represents. " He symbolizes this because he appears to be the one facilitating the transactions" (Burnham, 2008, p. 3). The open mouth and its perverse references continually connect back to the sins of gluttony, lust, and sloth, which extend to prostitution, and are a recurring theme of Los Caprichos (Wolf, 1991, p.

6). The monks face is twisted and sagging to show the moral ugliness of his actions (Sayre, 1974, p. 79). The title, " Why Hide Them? " is referring to the monks money bags and denotes that he is proud of his prostitution business and is pleased to profit from the sexual appetites of his customers.

With this piece, Goya chastises the Church's preeminent role in organizing a sex trade. Goya is making a mockery of the religious institution and sarcastically implying that they should just be open about commending these acts, since they are no good about reprimanding them.

This reinforces how plate 13 from " Los Caprichos" earned its title, " Why Hide Them? ". There is no alternative meaning to this scene like in " They're Hot", the clergy was actually profiting off of the sins which they punished the congregations for committing. The illustration that best describes the hypocritical and greedy clergy of the eighteenth century is Goya's 52 plate from " Los Caprichos," " What a Tailor Can Do! " (Burnham, 2008, p.

3). In this plate a church devoted woman is portrayed among other members of her congregation.

She kneels down in front of what appears to be a religious figure; however once you look closer it reveals itself as a tree stump covered by a monk-styled cloak. The “ tailor” reference in the title obviously comes from the cloak. This etching illustrates the issues related to religion during the Spanish Enlightenment.

The integrity of the Church is once again being called into question. This piece accuses the monks of faking miracles. It also points the finger at the blind faith of the Church’s followers. The Church has so much power that it prevents its followers from questioning the religious worship icons (Burnham, 2008, p.

). The plate demonstrates the blind faith that is paralyzing the followers from actually seeing the truth about their leaders, even though that truth is right in front of them, hiding behind a monk’s cloak. The woman that kneels in front of the cloaked tree represents the idea that even with the truth right in front of her, her ability to think critically is corrupted by her faith of the Church. This woman is unable to see beneath the cloak to “ the true, arboreal identity of the object of her reverence” (Schulz, 2000, p.

134). This plate displays another deadly sin, that of sloth.

These people are supposed to be so devoted to God that they would sacrifice their own lives in his name, yet they do not bother to notice that they are worshipping a dead tree wrapped in a cloak. This mistake is just lazy and

therefore they have committed the sin of sloth. Goya is also trying to convey how superstitious people were during this time. They have been conditioned to recognize cloaks as religiously significant, so all one has to do is throw a cloak over any random object and these people would most likely fall to their knees and pray to it.

Their unwillingness to question or take care of their religious practice exposes their fraud” (Burnham, 2008, p. 4). There is one exception to this fraudulence and that is the child in this scene. She is the only one who can see the log beneath the cloak, and she knows it is not a miracle or a religious figure.

The reason the child can see the truth is because she is still innocent and untainted by sin and other worldly experiences that would tarnish her judgment, unlike the kneeling woman whose “ cognitive faculties have been rendered inoperative by religious ecstasy- or superstition” (Wolf, 1991, p. 34) The child looks so terrified because she doesn’t understand why her adult counterparts are worshipping a tree, and being so young she is unable to do anything about it. Witches are shown hovering above the people in order to convey the fear that no one is safe from the evil and witchcraft that lurks in the dark, even if you are the most pious person on earth. During this time period many people believed that miracles were real and could happen anywhere.

Consequently, the Church would create false miracles in order to profit from these people (Burnham, 2008). Perhaps they would carve the face of Jesus on a stone and make the people pay to see the unmanned phenomenon, the

“ miracle. ” In this etching, Goya criticizes this practice while also commenting on the stupidity of the Church’s followers for being so gullible and placing so much faith into anything the Church proclaimed was a miracle. This once again represents the greed of the Spanish Church and the sloth of those who so easily fell for their tricks.

Through the examination of these three plates from Francisco Goya’s print series, “ Los Caprichos” we are able to see the intimate relationship between him and the Spanish Church during the Enlightenment.

These etchings represent how the Church, however high and mighty it tried to seem, was not immune from the deadly sins of greed, gluttony, lust, and sloth. Through Goya’s art we are offered a new perspective on the religious issues of eighteenth century Spain.