

## **The Eighteenth Century Worker: Goya's Tapestry Cartoons and the Influence of the Enlightenment**

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**Abstract:**

This analysis covers the influences of royal patronage and liberal ideas on the artwork of celebrated Spanish artist, Francisco de Goya y Lucientes in the context of the eighteenth-century Spanish, socio-political evolution, society including the Bourbon Reforms and the influx of Enlightenment philosophy. We argue that under the patronage of the Royal Tapestry Factory, Francisco de Goya showed a romanticized depiction of the working class in the Tapestry Cartoons while criticizing class relations in his personal artwork. The analysis will first examine Goya's idealized depiction of workers in the Tapestry Cartoons in relation to the visual tradition. Then discuss Goya's association with Enlightenment liberals as evidence for his empathy with the working class. Lastly, the analysis covers Marxist and semiotic analysis to examine Goya's depictions, in his personal artwork, of struggles in the working class and the wrongdoing of the nobility.

## Introduction

Between 1775 and 1791, Spanish painter, Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828), painted a series of Tapestry Cartoons for the Royal Tapestry Factory at Santa Barbara. This analysis suggests that under the patronage of the Royal Tapestry Factory, Francisco de Goya employed a romanticized depiction of the working class in the Tapestry Cartoons, whereas he expressed criticism of class relations in his personal artwork. We will first analyze how Goya depicted the workers and the working class in an idealized manner in the Tapestry Cartoons. Then, we will discuss Goya's association with Enlightenment liberals as evidence for his empathy with the working class. Lastly, the analysis employs Marxist and semiotic analysis to examine Goya's depiction of the struggles of the working class and the wrongdoing of the nobility in his works completed after the completion of the Tapestry Cartoons.

## Eighteenth Century Spain

An understanding of Goya's work requires familiarity with eighteenth-century Spain. The Bourbon Dynasty, which ruled Spain during Goya's early career, began with the succession in 1700 of Philip V (1683-1746), grandson of Louis XIV of France. Most of the other nations of western and central Europe opposed the creation of a large bloc of Bourbon control, and they allied to begin the War of Spanish Succession (1702-1714) (Payne Ch.16). At the same time, the candidate for succession from the Hapsburg Dynasty, which had ruled Spain for two centuries, created a peasant revolt in Aragón. War with both foreign powers and local peasants took a heavy toll on the Spanish treasury, and a complete reform of the government and taxes was necessary (Payne Ch.16).

The rise of French influence through the dynastic change brought Enlightenment ideas into Spain. Young Spanish men were often sent to be educated in France, while French teachers

and craftsmen immigrated to Spain (Goodman 331). Spaniards could now read the works of Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Locke. This led to the rise of a group of liberal aristocrats known as the *illustrados* who promoted social reform. Key figures in this group were Andrés Piquer, Gregori Mayans, and Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (Payne Ch.16).

Philip V instituted large-scale governmental restructuring, but it was his son, Charles III (1716-1788), who began the most enlightened domestic reforms. Charles III, or his ministers, instituted economic reforms favoring the merchant and professional class, and agricultural reforms aimed at promoting the ownership by the peasantry. In addition, they increased the appointment of educated non-aristocrats to government positions and improved the efficiency and equity of taxation (Payne Ch.16). However, it is important to note that Charles III still strongly believed in an absolute monarchy and did not favor representational government. His reforms were meant to glorify Spain and the monarchy by creating a strong and enlightened kingdom.

### **Idealized Depiction of Workers in the Tapestry Cartoons**

The Royal Tapestry Factory of Santa Barbara founded in 1720 in Madrid by King Philip V, was a very early example of the Bourbon reforms of Spanish industries. The factory was created for the sole purpose of supplying the court with luxurious tapestries, keeping the Spanish monarchs from having to order tapestries from other European nations. J. van der Goten immigrated to Spain to become the Royal Tapestry Factory's first expert craftsman in charge of the factory. He was followed by his son, Cornelius van der Goten (Klingender 55). In June 1776, Francisco de Goya received his first commission from the factory. Over a fifteen-year period, Goya completed thirty cartoons that displayed various scenes of the Spanish people of Spain,

meant to decorate the apartments of the Prince of Asturias in the Pardo Palace (Klingender 56-57). The Spanish tapestry factory was modeled on the French Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory. In the late seventeenth century Louis XIV took over the Gobelins Factory in Paris. The factory, renamed *Manufacture des meubles de la Couronne*, or Royal Factory of Furniture to the Crown, made everything used in interior decorating exclusively for the crown. The tapestries displayed historical, mythological, and biblical scenes.

The tapestries made for the crown by the Gobelins in the eighteenth-century were more decorative and frivolous than the tapestries Goya would later create. The *Venus at the Forge of Vulcan* (Figure 1), (1775-1778), is an example of one of the Gobelins tapestries, woven after the painting by Francois Boucher (1703-1770), the former head of the Royal Gobelins Manufactory (1755), and First Painter to the King (1765). Garlands of flowers, bows, birds, and other ornamental details adorn the border. Despite the amount of decoration, the image of the goddess Venus approaching her husband Vulcan sits in an oval medallion meant to dominate the composition (Standen 97-100). Unlike the Royal Tapestry Factory of Santa Barbara in Madrid, the Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory reflected Louis XIV's imperialist rhetoric and did not produce tapestries for the crown with scenes of workers and the working class.

Goya's tapestries produced at the Royal Tapestry Factory shared a similar purpose to those of the French Gobelins, but differed greatly in style and content. The tapestries were not nearly as decorative as those produced by Gobelins. They consisted of scenes painted by Goya, surrounded by elaborate borders and frames, as seen in *Tapestry with Hunter and Hunting Dog* (Figure 2). Like the French tapestries, those created for King Carlos III of Spain glorified the monarchy. Unlike those created for Louis XIV, they did so through promoting the king's

economic and social reforms by depicting scenes of daily life, including many representations of workers and the working class.

Goya's scenes of workers and the working class were romanticized through the contrived depiction of their labor in an idyllic setting. An example is shown in Figure 3, *Lenadores*. In this scene, three men chop branches from a tree. The men appear to be posing as workers rather than working at all, holding their axes in the air, appearing stiff and unnatural, as if Goya had directed models to pose. The man in front directly faces the viewer. His eyes gaze without focus off into the distance as if he is lost in thought. The positioning of the men makes it look as if their work were a leisurely activity.

In another Tapestry Cartoon titled *Laundresses* (Figure 4), Goya presents a group of women washing clothes in a stream. They appear to be relaxing on the banks of a stream while attending their duties. The women are smiling and one sleeps against another's knee, as if they are enjoying a day in the country instead of working. The warm lighting contributes to the serene atmosphere of the painting. The women wear fine clothing inappropriate for work and too expensive for a laundress. Some of the dresses appear silky, gleaming in the afternoon sunlight. Although the women are supposed to be working, none of their dresses are soiled or worn.

Goya's romanticizing of the working class in his tapestry cartoons differed from depictions of workers by his contemporaries. Most eighteenth-century artists did not create programs depicting utopian views of the working class. Instead, they created nostalgic genre scenes intended for private display. One of the artists who painted working class genre scenes was Giuseppe Maria Crespi (1665-1747). His painting titled *The Scullery Maid* (Figure 5) depicts a maid washing dishes at the far end of a kitchen. The artist employed tenebrism in this

painting, creating deep shadows that dominate the scene while contrasting light from a single source illuminates the maid. The evening shadows create a sentimental ambience.

Unlike the figures in Goya's tapestries, Crespi's *Scullery Maid* is not displayed for an audience. The figure stands with her back to the viewer, absorbed in her task. The placement of the figure and the dramatic lighting create a sense of separation between the viewer and the subject, as opposed to Goya's figures who appear to invite one into the scene. Goya's Tapestry Cartoons present staged tableaux that advertise a contented working class and the triumph of the reforms of Charles III; the *Scullery Maid* is an individual work for personal viewing.

In his painting titled *The Laundresses* (Figure 6), Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806) presents a group of figures working in a murky room. Like the *Scullery Maid*, Fragonard's *Laundresses* is a single genre scene intended for a private home. It does not, however, share the sentimental ambience. Steam wafts up through light that shines from a single source. The main subject of the painting is a woman hanging her laundry to dry. The laundress does not appear to be enjoying her task, nor does she pose or acknowledge the viewer. The colors Fragonard uses create an oppressive atmosphere as opposed to the appealing environment of Goya's *Laundresses*.

### **Goya's Association with Enlightenment Liberals**

Whereas the tapestries revealed the king's agenda, other works by Goya presented his personal view of the working class. During his time at the court in Madrid, Francisco de Goya was exposed to the ideas of the Enlightenment through his association with *ilustrados* who criticized the condition of the peasant class (Lopez 21). The intent of the Spanish Enlightenment reformists was to establish a society based on reason rather than superstition. They criticized the Spanish monarchy and the present order. The Bourbon Reforms improved the overall standard of



living of the peasants, but they were far from well off. Approximately 80% of the Spanish populations were peasants at the end of the eighteenth-century. Land was still the primary form of wealth in Spain and nearly half of the peasants were landless (Payne Ch. 17). In many areas, the transformation of agricultural economics towards a capitalistic model led to increasingly higher rents. In the worst case, in Galicia, rents were raised significantly, while land was subdivided into smaller and smaller plots making it impossible for the area of land to sustain the peasants. Wanting to encourage land ownership by the peasantry, King Charles III opened portions of town council land and made unused land available for sale and direct cultivation (Payne Ch. 16). Town council land was formerly collective property, often farmed by particularly poor peasants whose owned or rented plots were too small to sustain them (Payne Ch. 17). However, much of this land was purchased instead by aristocrats, wealthy merchants, and professionals. At the same time, the education of the general population was not addressed by the governmental reforms. Slightly over 10% of children received any education (Klingender 5). The Catholic Church essentially monopolized education, but there were less than half as many elementary schools as parishes during that time.

One of the *illustrados* who criticized the living conditions of the peasant class was a man whom Goya befriended, the statesman, Don Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744-1811). Goya immediately favored his political beliefs and opinions regarding education (Lopez 23-24). Jovellanos believed that learning Latin was essential for those wanting to follow an ecclesiastic career or study at a scholarly level (Fuentes 213). He also sought to abolish torture and end the immorality and injustices caused by the Spanish Inquisition. Most notably, Jovellanos was sympathetic to the exploitation of the working class (Mansbach 341). He believed that economic policy should improve the lives of the poor and increase the overall happiness of the nation (Polt

16), and he promoted representative government in the style of the British Parliament (Fuentes 217). Goya's admiration for Jovellanos is expressed in his portrait of him, (Figure 7).

In the portrait of Jovellanos, Goya portrays his subject as an inspirational leader of the *ilustrados*. Sitting at his desk, Jovellanos rests his head on one hand while looking at the viewer, in the other hand, he holds a piece of folded paper. His body is turned away from the immense amount of paperwork stacked on his desk. The literature displays Jovellanos as an educated intellectual. Standing on the desk is a statue of an armed Minerva. Minerva, a symbol of wisdom, looks down upon Jovellanos and appears to be reaching towards him. This implies that Goya meant to represent Jovellanos as a deliverer of wisdom, a philosophic thinker, and an embodiment of knowledge.

In 1786, Goya was appointed to the position of Painter to the King. Not long after his promotion, Goya developed a friendship with the Osuna family (Crow 82), and in 1788 he painted *The Family of the Duque de Osuna* (Figure 8). The Osunas, an enlightened and aristocratic Spanish family, were advocates of the arts and sciences. Like Jovellanos and Goya, the Osunas stressed the importance of education (Crow 82). It is clear that the Osunas were both supporters and followers of the liberal reformist cause, having purchased four sets of Goya's *Caprichos* in January 1799 (Williams 35).

In *The Family of the Duque de Osuna*, Goya paints a family portrait of the Duque and Duquesa, posing casually with their four children. The Duque is shown setting one hand on the back of his wife's chair, while his other hand is holding the hand of a daughter. The Duquesa is seated; one hand is holding a paper, while the other hand is wrapped around another daughter's shoulders. The two sons are playing with toys at their mother's feet. Two pet dogs sit at the bottom right; one suggests a sense of protectiveness, while the other looks playful. The family's

love for one another is shown through their close physical connection. The Osuna family exhibits affection, care, and closeness towards one another. The boys in the Osuna family portrait are at play indicating the family's enlightened interests in childhood innocence and the importance of their children's education (Crow 82). A particularly striking feature of this painting is that the Duque holds the hand of his eldest daughter. This may be the only aristocratic family portrait from eighteenth-century Spain in which a father holds his daughter's hand. This very unusual choice emphasizes the family's liberal beliefs upholding the value of women.

The analysis shows that Goya was sympathetic to the cause of liberal reformists and the charge to improve the plight of the working class. Over time, he began to find the creative limits placed on his work for the Royal Tapestry Factory claustrophobic. He wrote of this feeling to his friend, Zapater, for the first time in July 1788, telling him of his yearning for the liberty to create something more personal, to make a statement (Williams 73). After several years he began to create images with the darker subject matter and aesthetic that would characterize the majority of his later work. Though the pastels and sunshine of the Tapestry Cartoons could still be found in his commissioned works, those created from his own inspiration explored the baser aspects of human nature and the injustice in Spanish society.

Because of his Enlightenment ideas, Goya's portrayal of the underprivileged, as seen in the Tapestry Cartoons, greatly differs in his later personal artwork. Several of his personal endeavors are clear social commentary condemning the disparity between rich and poor. These qualities are embodied in the following three examples (though others exist throughout his *Caprichos*, drawing albums, cabinet paintings, and so-called Black Paintings): "Tú que no puede," plate 42 of *Los Caprichos*; a drawing from *Album C* with the caption, "Así suelen acabar los hombres útiles," and *Sueño 16*, "Crecer después de morir."

### Portrayals of Struggles of the Working Class

*Los Caprichos* is a series of prints published in 1799. In the advertisement before its release, it was stated that the work would critique the injustices, cruelty and immorality of the era (Licht 92-93). In this, Goya was following, to a lesser extent, the somewhat earlier trend of satirical print series in England and France such as William Hogarth's (1697-1764) *A Rake's Progress*, published in 1735. *Los Caprichos* has been widely viewed as satirizing members of clergy, the nobility, and other powerful institutions (Schultz 109). Though Goya presumably believed there was a market for these prints when he advertised them, profit does not seem to have been his primary motivation in their creation. Many of the subjects and themes depicted in the *Caprichos* were explored in private sets of drawings: the *Sueños* (Tomlinson 125), and the so-called *Album B* or *Madrid Album* (Sayre 22). According to Pierre Gassier the word *capricho* connoted fantasy and freedom to Goya; it was the expression of his true thoughts and feelings beyond the limits of his patrons' desires (Hauch 113).

Within the *Caprichos*, "Tú que no puede," (Figure 9) or "You who cannot" depicts a pair of donkeys riding on the backs of two working-class men. The donkeys gaze at the viewer while the men's half-closed eyes stare downward. The man on the right seems to gasp or grimace at the weight of his burden—his mouth a wide oval—while the other's complacent expression appears to mark resignation to his lot. A semiotic analysis of this print reveals Goya to be denouncing the subjugation of the working class by the nobility. Enlightenment artists and writers often used donkeys to criticize the aristocracy (Ciofalo 430), and here they literally ride the backs of the working class, weighing them down. The low horizon line marked by the sudden transition in the background from the dark upper space to the light ground puts the viewer at eye-level with the men: viewers are the downtrodden. The donkeys gaze down at us from their perch. Goya is

following the tradition of representing those with power above the viewer and other subjects in an artwork such as Christ in Michelangelo's fresco, *Last Judgement*, or Apollo in Anton Raphael Mengs' *Parnassus* of 1761.

This critique of the lot given to the working class is further exemplified in a later work, "Así suelen acabar los hombres útiles," (Figure 10) or "So are useful men likely to end." Here, Goya portrays a hunched and disheveled elderly man with stringy white hair, grasping crutches in what appears to be a very arduous attempt to walk across an otherwise empty page. He stares at the ground with a pained look on his face. This depiction is designed to create a feeling of sympathy in the viewer for the struggle this man must go through each day. This image comes from Album C, a collection of ink drawings created circa 1808-1814 and never published in Goya's lifetime. The drawings in this album explore fate and the winners and losers in life (Wilson 79). Due to its private nature, one can safely assume that it represents his personal views on the relationship between the classes and the plight of the working class. When patronage was not a factor, the artist chose to depict the hardship of the poor rather than a sunny, pastoral image of their lives.

The caption itself, "So are useful men likely to end," speaks to Goya's perception of class. If men whose life-long toil leaves them in this decrepit state are useful, then those who live more comfortably are not. This idea is further illustrated in Sueño no. 16, "Crecer después de morir" (Figure 11) or, "To grow after one is dead." Here, a tall man with the garb of a wealthy gentleman and the face of a corpse falls backwards onto a large group of small people who struggle to support him. They are only about half his height and are dressed much more humbly. Eleanor Sayre relates this image of a toppling nobleman who dwarfs the men and women supporting him to objections by Spanish intellectuals of the time to the tax widen placed on the

working classes while the land-rich aristocracy and the church paid none (*The Changing Image: Prints by Francisco Goya* 119). The nobility's wealth was furthermore preserved after death through Spanish inheritance laws. Goya's ties to Enlightenment reformists such as Jovellanos are again echoed here.

The *Sueños* series, from which this drawing comes, was a group of twenty-seven pen and ink drawings created shortly before *Los Caprichos*. They have a linear quality and are numbered, indicating that they were intended to be etched (Tomlinson 125). Many of these are inscribed, "sueño," ("dream") and bear captions that explain the images. They begin with an author or artist sleeping at his desk: the forerunner to the well-known *Capricho* image, "El sueño de la razón produce monstruos." The *Sueños* embody Goya's dreams and nightmares; they explore themes later seen in *Los Caprichos*, such as witches and goblins, social satire, and criticism of the aristocracy.

### Conclusion

The period of Francisco de Goya's early career was one of significant social and economic reforms in Spain under the Bourbon king, Charles III. Goya's work in the Royal Tapestry Factory promoted the reforms of his patron by depicting romanticized visions of workers. Workers are portrayed as if their lives were now carefree, having been improved by King Charles III. As an artist with ambition, Goya worked to please his patrons. However, through his association with *illustrados* such as Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, Goya became aware of criticisms of the exploitation of the peasantry in the economic system, and began to depict these ideas in his personal work. Social satire, including criticism of the aristocracy, became one of several perpetual themes seen in his notebooks as well as in one of his most

famous works, *Los Caprichos*. Though he created picturesque scenes of workers for King Charles III, in his private work, Goya expressed the social criticisms of the Enlightenment.

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Figure 1. Woven at Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory; after painting by Francois Boucher, painter; designs by Maurice Jacques, designer. *Venus at the Forge of Vulcan*, wool and silk, 12 ft. 6 in. x 16 ft., 1775-1778.





Figure 2. Cartoon by Francisco Goya; executed under the direction of Francisco Bayeu; woven in Madrid by Manufacture Royale de Santa Barbara. *Tapestry with Hunter and Hunting Dog*, linen and silk.





Figure 3. Francisco Goya, *Lenadores*, oil on canvas, 141 x 114, 1780.



Figure 4. Francisco Goya, *Laundresses*, oil on canvas, 86.5 x 59cm, 1780.





Figure 5. Giuseppe Maria Crespi, *The Scullery Maid*, oil on canvas, 1710-15.



Figure 6. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Laundresses*, oil on canvas, 73 x 61.5cm, c. 1756-61.





Figure 7. Francisco Goya, *Don Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos*, oil on canvas, 204 x 133 cm, 1798.





Figure 8. Francisco Goya, *The Family of the Duke of Osuna*, oil on canvas, 225 x 174 cm, 1788.

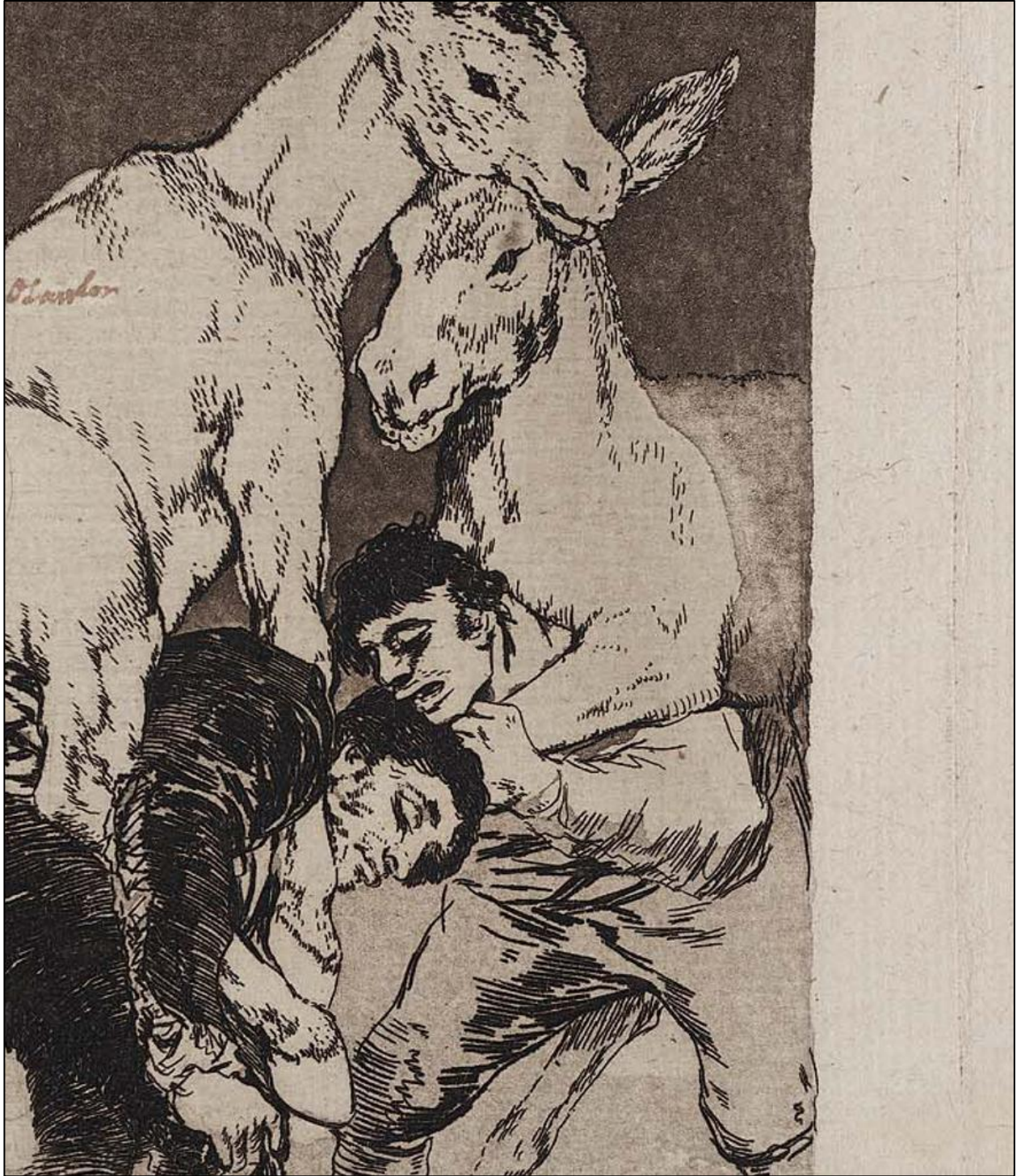
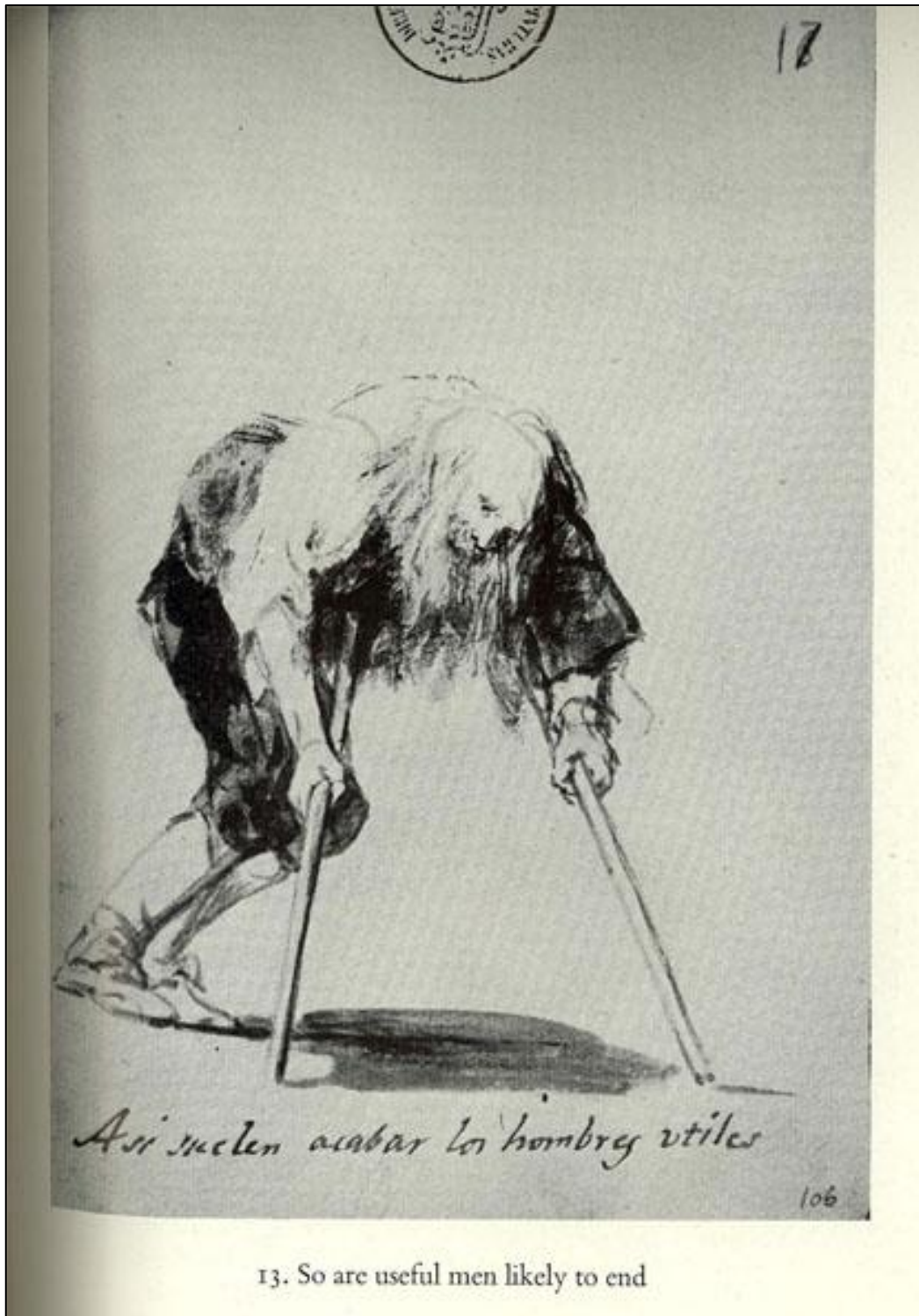


Figure 9. "Tú que no puede" Plate 42 of *Los Caprichos*, etching and burnished aquatint, 21.8 x 15.2 cm, 1797-1798.





13. So are useful men likely to end

Figure 10. *Album C: Así suelen acabar los hombres útiles*, gouache and ink on paper, 20.5 x 14.2 cm, c. 1803-1824.



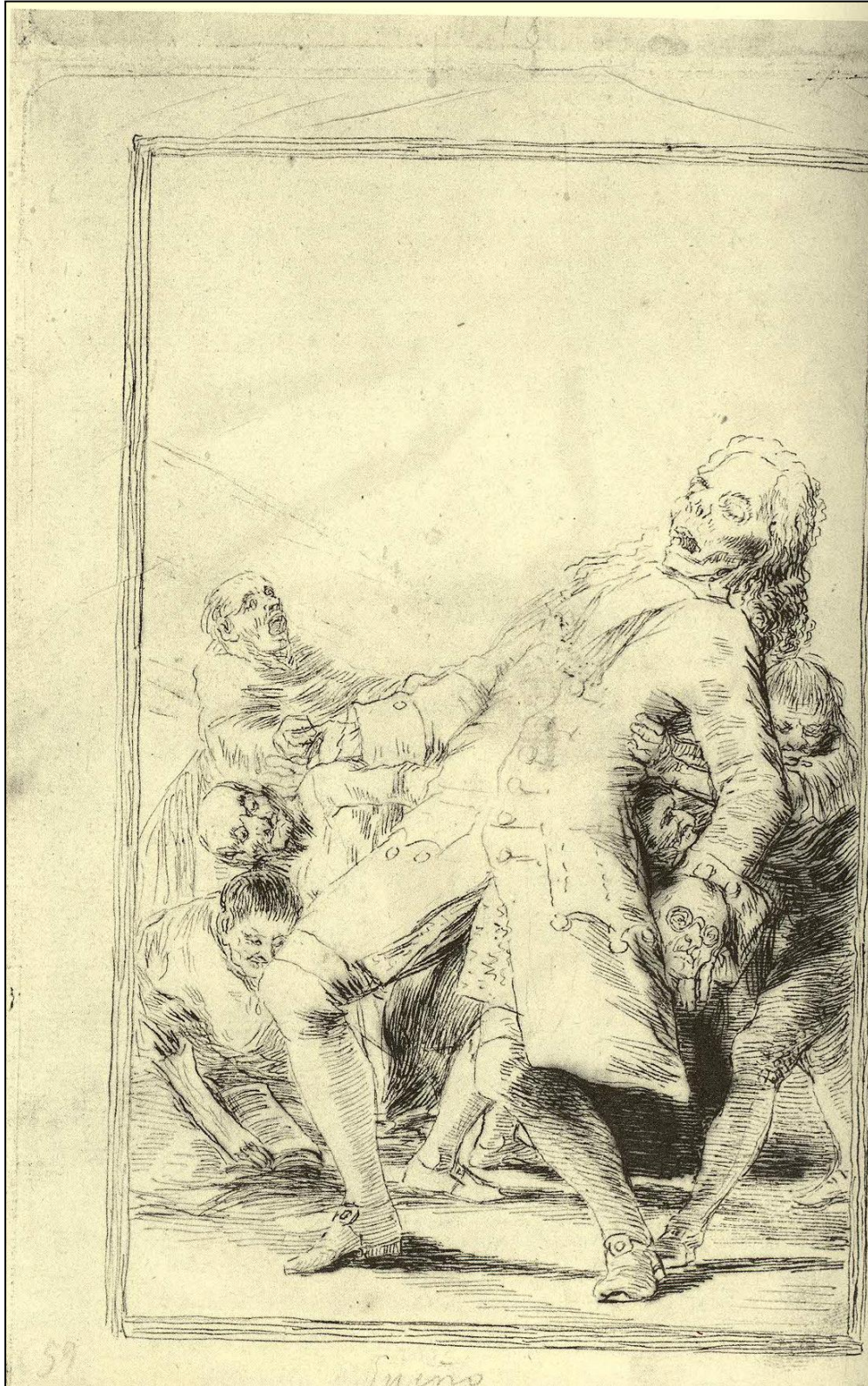


Figure 11. *Sueño 16*, "Crecer después de morir", sepia ink on paper, 23.7 x 16.6 cm, 1797-1798.