

Goya's Fantastic Vision of Madness

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Abstract:

Francisco de Goya artistically recorded evolving definitions of madness that preoccupied the eighteenth-century. Questions arise regarding the origin and nature of madness, what to do with those that society deemed insane, and how to philosophically differentiate delusion from reason and imagination. In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, twentieth-century philosopher and art critic Michel Foucault traces a history of madness. He singles out Goya as an instrumental figure in influencing Western thought on the subject (Foucault 285). Goya's interest in themes of madness, imagination, and reason is apparent in his published and private artwork, particularly *Citadel on a Rock* (Gudiol 10-16) (Figure 1), and the murals formerly in the Quinto del Sordo, his country house during the last few years of his life (Junquera 18, 28). Employing Foucault's discourse to these specific works reveals Goya's ability to represent visually the fundamental tension between Romantic and Classical ideas, especially the ambiguous line between reason and madness.

Introduction

Romanticism developed during a revolutionary time as an antithesis to classical values. Opposites such as: liberalism versus conservatism, tradition versus progress, monarchy versus democracy, and reason versus madness exemplify the tensions of the era. In contrast to the earlier Classical period, Romanticism's less rigid definitions, especially of beauty, surfaced in the arts. The value of art as self-expression of a unique individual also arose during the late eighteenth century due to the increasing parallel cultural value placed on passions (Jensen 45). Foucault says, "were it not for passion, madness would not be possible, because through passion, madness entered the realm of classical reason during the eighteenth-century." Therefore, a causal relationship exists between passion and madness (Foucault 88-99).

Art critic Charles Baudelaire bases Romanticism on feeling (Athanasoglou 18). Goya reveals his ability to encapsulate pure intensity of feeling, a hallmark of Romanticism, in his painting, *The Third of May* (1808) (Figure 7) (Krauss 152), which is seen partly in the depiction of imminent violence, the tenebristic handling of the paint, and the central figure's gesticulation and facial expression. Romanticism links the artist and the insane, bridging the gap between normalcy and anomaly and blurring the line of distinction between the two. The Romantic emphasis on feeling thrusts both artist and madman into the same camp since both experience a more intense dose of feeling than the average person (Miller 161).

In this environment, Goya asserts his own creative genius by focusing on the internal workings, illusions, and dreams of his own mind rather than upon the external world. Goya's oeuvre communicates an unusual level of self, a break with academic styles of painting. His art reflects more of madness since one of the initial signals of it, according to Michel Foucault, is an excessive attention to one's self (Foucault 25-26). For example, Goya did not intend the *Quinto*

del Sordo murals to be viewed by the public; they were created at his whim for his own private consumption. Fifty years after Goya's death (1828), the French publicly exhibited the *Black Paintings* in Paris before giving them back to the Prado Museum (Moffit 186). Goya also displays self-attachment through his numerous self-portraits. Almost sixteen different self-portraits from different periods in Goya's life can be found on artstor.org.

Goya is not impervious to the stereotype of a crazy genius. It is unclear whether Goya's illnesses caused delusions of madness or whether this is a myth created by historians and scholars. In Foucault's estimation, unreason gets closer to illness via the realm of the fantastic (Foucault 205). Goya suffered several prolonged illnesses of unknown origin, the first occurring in 1792, and leaving him completely deaf by 1793 (Park 1475). After successfully treating another bout of Goya's illness, Dr. Arrieta was memorialized in one of Goya's self-portraits (Figure 3) in 1820.

Many of Goya's paintings and prints deal explicitly with madness and insanity, including etchings and drawings from: *Album G* (1824-28), *Asylum* (1794), *Interior of a Prison* (1793-94), *A Man Mocked (Disparates)* (Figure 8), and *Plague Hospital* (Figure 6). Goya's French contemporary, Théodore Géricault, also attempted to express ideas about insanity. His portrait of an insane woman (Figure 5) bears testimony to the Romantic fascination with madness and emotion ("Romanticism..." 19). The art of Henry Fuseli is an English counterpart to Goya, also highlights the influence of the Romantic era (Myrone 289). Fuseli's painting of *Odysseus Between Scylla and Charybdis* (1794-96) (Figure 9), demonstrates a break with Classical artistic techniques and themes as he delves into the grotesque, shown in the depiction of the strange monsters assailing Odysseus.

Goya masters the depiction of the crossover between grotesque and fantastic, a further division within the Romantic period's dueling themes of reason and insanity. The grotesque is a shocking or bizarre combination of subject matter and a congruent medium. An ideal example is Goya's *Saturn Devouring One of His Children* (Figure 13), from the *Quinto del Sordo* (Fingesten 419-426). The realm of the fantastic contains more palatable versions of the grotesque. The vacillation between grotesque and fantastic is akin to the quandary between reason and madness. Foucault asserts that a "quasi-resemblance" exists between reason and unreason (Foucault 201). Likewise, the scholar Fingesten calls the "quasi-grotesque" a blend of grotesque and fantastic (Fingesten 420).

Goya absorbed Romanticism and sought to apply imagination and reason in producing art as a way of transcending the ordinary and entering the realm of the fantastic. In this respect, he was a visionary. Goya's artistic clairvoyance is not something novel to Spanish history. A Spanish literary example is Miguel Cervantes' half-crazed character, Don Quixote (Ciofalo 421-436). In the 1830s, Bartolomé José Gallardo reported for the periodical, *El Crítico*, that Goya's intention had been to make a set of *Caprichos*, or whimsical drawings, entitled "Don Quixote's Visions," since he wanted to reinterpret artistically the mad knight's fantasies (Glendinning 67). Because images impact more viscerally and immediately than words, art is a more expressive medium than literature (Sandblom 17). Through his prints and paintings, Goya conveyed ideas of reason and madness in a similar way to Cervantes, but perhaps more effectively.

Citadel on the Rock

In his *Citadel on a Rock* (Figure 1), where three white-winged creatures soar beside a citted cliff, Goya illustrates the fantastic and may have been expanding on the etching, *Modo de volar* (Hughes 18) from the *Disparates* series (1816-23), that contains a total of five human

figures experimenting with winged apparatuses. The visual elements of *Citadel on a Rock* (Figure 1) are charged with signifying power, implying several ideas: first, man's ability to transcend nature, next the conflation of confinement and refuge, and finally, the blending of the imaginary with reality.

Goya employs his imagination to transcend reality and explore new possibilities through the medium of art. Naturally, man does not have wings, nor can he fly, but in the realm of imagination it is possible, as seen in the three flying figures soaring beside the cliff in *Citadel on a Rock* (Figure 1). In Goya's own words, "Imagination forsaken by reason begets monsters: united with reason, she is the mother of all art and the source of its wonders (Churchill 4)." The iconography of the winged creatures alludes to the supernatural or metaphysical. The color of the figures' wings suggest the purity of the endeavor; white is associated with both the pure and the divine. The number of winged creatures reflects the religious idea of the trinity.

By juxtaposing real objects and settings with unnatural and imaginative ones, Goya alludes to societal uncertainty about how to treat the insane and how to distinguish reality from imagination. Foucault maintains that a deep-seated anxiety existed during the eighteenth century because of the fuzzy line between imagination and reality, between madness and genius (Foucault 28-29). *Fantastic Vision* (Figure 4), depicts two large floating human figures in the middle foreground of the mural. In the background looms the city-crowned mountain. Ichnographically, Goya equates the fantastical figures with the imaginary, as he suspends the two figures unnaturally in midair. He conflates them with reality since the setting for the painting is a believable landscape filled with French soldiers. As elements of fantasy, the figures are concerned about the reasonable confinement of madness, as symbolized by the fortress to which the first figure points. The proportions of the two floating figures emphasize their focal position

within the painting by the color employed in their classical garb (Bozal 56). Collectively, the two figures symmetrically balance the composition by being similar in scale to the entire mountain. One wild-eyed, gaping-mouthed figure points in the direction of the city. The other, wrapped in an eye-catching red cloak, glances furtively behind them. The large cliff and fortified city allude to confinement and refuge simultaneously. City boundaries demarcate the citizen's existence. At the same time the city provides a haven from whatever evils threaten outside. Similarly, reasonable society confined the madman as a way of differentiating him from the sane. Foucault's discourse concludes that society confined the madman as a means of segregating themselves and purifying an identifiable norm. In effect, by setting aside the insane and ill in the same places and providing the general public with visual access to them, they entrenched the mixing of the insane and sane (Foucault 209).

The combining of insane with normal people analogizes the blending of reality with the imaginary in another of Goya's paintings. *Fantastic Vision* (Figure 4), one of the murals from the *Quinto del Sordo*, is thematically similar to *Citadel on a Rock* (Figure 1). Both images have fortified cities on top of steep mountains along with the presence of human beings, allusions to violence, and fantastical creatures. Many of Goya's paintings in the *Quinta del Sordo* are bequeathed to his grandson Mariano in 1823 (Bozal 61), contain visual references to mountains and fortresses, consistently implying an underlying theme of reason versus madness. Other imagery within *Fantastic Vision* (Figure 4), points to the violent effects of the Romantic confusion between madness and reason. In the right foreground with his back to the viewer, a uniformed soldier aims a musket at a group of distant, mounted travelers; next to him crouches a second soldier. The red feather in the soldier's hat arrests the viewer's eye and foreshadows the violence, since red is the color of blood. It also serves to unify the painting; the hue of the feather

is identical to the cloak color of the second floating figure. This unifying design element implies Goya's association of violence with the fantastical and entrenches the blending of fantasy and reality.

According to Foucault, Goya is the artist who transmitted to the Western world the idea that violence results from madness as an alternative way to exceed reason's limitations (Foucault 19). The dialectic between reason and unreason ushers in violence. The soldiers in *Fantastic Vision* (Figure 4), are remarkably similar to the firing, faceless ones in *The Third of May* (Figure 7). The visual tie between the two paintings helps substantiate Goya's Romantic emphasis on the expression of feeling, even though both show it in a negative light.

Goya also refers to violence in *Citadel on a Rock* (Figure 1). Groups of marauders loiter, as licking flames besiege the mountain's base. Foucault indicates that the confinement of madness led to a burgeoning of the fantastical, the desire to transcend reality. This obsession fed into baser desires to see horror (Foucault 210). Violence a component of horror, is often associated with a mob mentality. Mobs often form in reaction to tyranny. When a group of people have perceived and become passionate about restrictions placed on them by a higher authority, a mob may be produced. The restriction is the reality, which mobs attempt to transcend, often through violence. Goya presents, this theory and process, to the viewer through the imagery in *Citadel on a Rock* (Figure 1).

Collective madness, or the irrationality of larger groups of people, is manifest in other Goya paintings. No artist prior to Goya had projected corporate madness (Hughes 18). On the first floor of the Quinto del Sordo, *The St. Isidore Pilgrimage* (Figure 14), provides one example. The human figures, replete with contorted, facial expressions painted in a rough way (Hughes 17-18), stand in stark opposition to the controlled, academic style of Classical painting

associated with reason. It may be that the people in this painting are a close-up of the groups in *Citadel on a Rock* (Figure 1), and *Fantastic Vision* (Figure 4).

Paintings of the Quinto del Sordo

Paintings in the Quinto del Sordo also take up the theme of violence. In 1819, Goya purchased this house and property near the River Manzanares on the outskirts of Madrid (Bozal 5). The groups of murals on the ground-floor and second-story are collectively referred to as the *Black Paintings*, though the title was given during the twentieth century (Bozal 5). Rooms containing the paintings were approximately 33 by 15 feet in size (Hughes 379). Immediately after Goya's death in 1828 Antonio Brugada inventoried the murals (Bozal 8). On the first floor, *Saturn* (Figure 13), devours a child. The second story has a mural of two men fighting with clubs (Figure 12) (Bozal 9-11). One of the men is bleeding.

The spatial context of *Fantastic Vision* (Figure 4), helps confirm Goya's intent to convey themes of reason and madness. The mural would have been on the second floor on the long wall, to the right of the entrance door. Today, the *Black Paintings* hang in the Prado museum in Madrid (Hughes 15). On the smaller wall, right beside *Fantastic Vision* (Figure 4), hung an image of the head of a small dog peering over a low wall, engulfed by negative space. The proximity of *Half-submerged Dog* (Figure 10), to *Fantastic Vision* (Figure 4), is significant. Together, the images provide a more holistic vision of the effects of madness.

Foucault explains that the classical period transitioned madness into a state of non-being (Foucault 115). The dog is alone in the painting. His eyes stare vacantly towards a void. However, the X-ray version (Junquera 70) of the dog painting in Figure 11, reveals a large ochre-colored shadow that is nearly identical in shape of the mountain in *Fantastic Vision* in Figure 4. Conceiving the brown shadow to be a mountain looming over the dog produces an

instant visual link to *Citadel on a Rock* in Figure 1, *Fantastic Vision* in Figure 4, and several other Quinto del Sordo paintings. *Duel with Cudgels* in Figure 12 has the base of a mountain in the background, as does *The St. Isidore Pilgrimage* (Figure 14), and *The Holy Office* (Figure 15).

Nigel Glendinning, a renowned Goya researcher, also considers the brown shape in *Half-submerged Dog* in Figure 10, to resemble a large cliff. However, he and other scholars have been unable to definitively identify the mass (Heckes 380-381). An extant early photograph of the image, taken before the *Black Paintings* were removed from the Quinto del Sordo, has not helped solve the mystery (Heckes 380-381). By repeating the cliff image, Goya emphasizes ideas of reason and madness. He enjoyed making unified groupings of subjects (Glendinning 20). The proximity of *Fantastic Vision* (Figure 4), to *Half-submerged Dog* (Figure 10), along with the visual similarities existent in several other *Black Paintings* imply that Goya deliberately intended to create a program of images serving as a discourse on reason and madness.

Conclusion

Goya's unique vision, as seen in his prints and private paintings, demonstrates his ability to convey the fantastical and the grotesque of normality and madness, which represent and transcend his era of Romanticism, particularly seen in the Quinto del Sordo paintings and *Citadel on a Rock* (Figure 1). Foucault traces a history of the insane, seeking to give a voice to the previously marginalized (Foucault ix). Goya presents uncommon themes, artistic styles, and ideas, linking him to the moderns and to madness. While twentieth-century art critic George Bataille reckons impressionist Edward Manet as the initiator of the modern era in art, he grants Goya status as the forerunner (Krauss 151-152). Goya's seemingly deliberate rejection of classical reason and its accompanying artistic style are evidence of his modern artistic tendencies (Stafford 333-334).

Goya grasped the ambiguity surrounding the Romantically infused notions of reason and madness. Foucault's history helps explain how Goya defied and defined them through his artwork. Through his artistic self-expression Goya was able to rise above the tension between Classical and Romantic values and reveal the underlying insecurity of his age about the absolute line between the delusion and the fantasy.

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Figure 1. Francisco de Goya., *Citadel on a Rock*, oil on canvas, unknown date.



Figure 2. Goya, *Modo de Volar (Disparates)*, Spanish Airmail Stamp, 1930

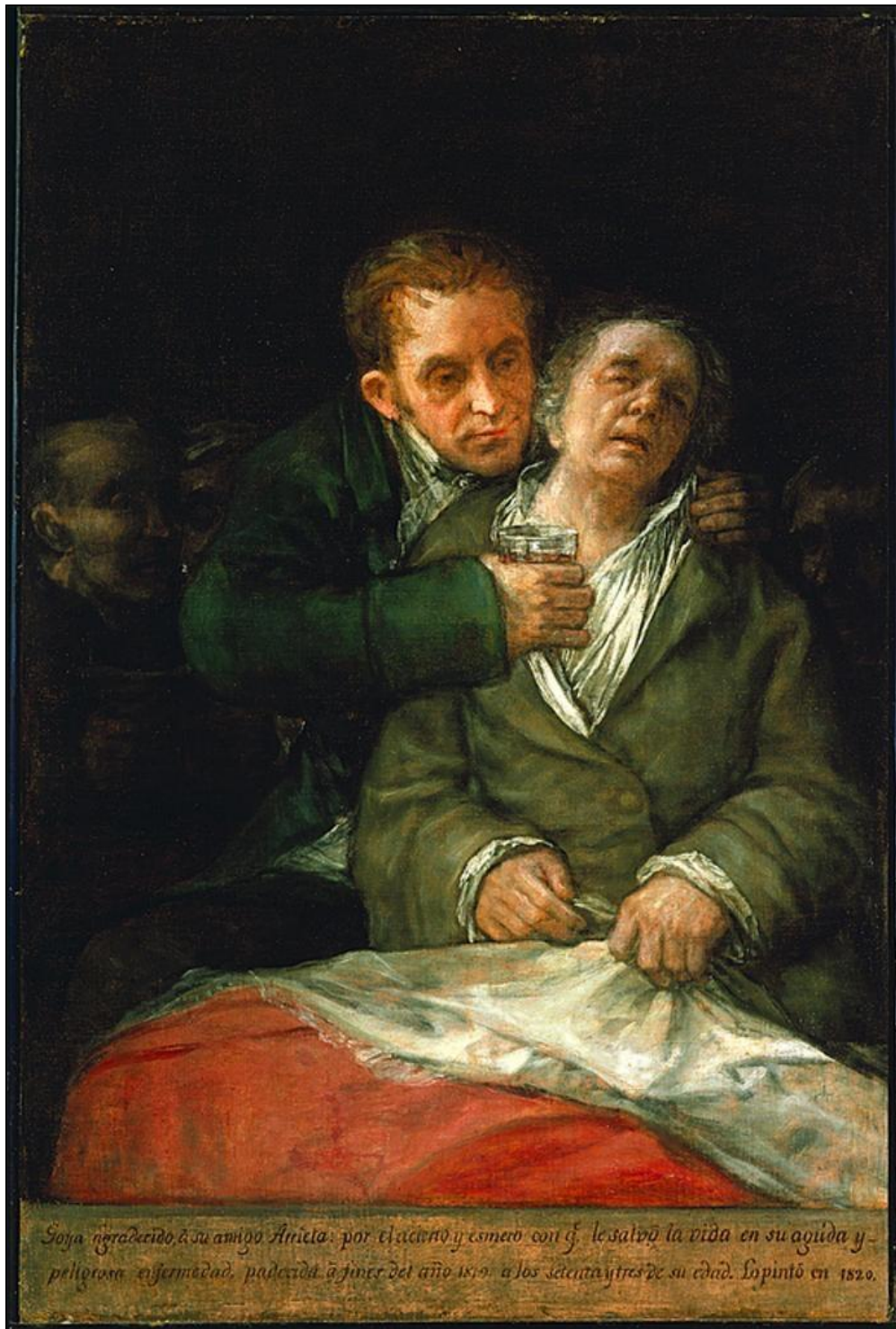


Figure 3. Francisco de Goya, *Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta*, painting, 1820



Figure 4. Goya. *Fantastic Vision*. Oil. 1819-23.

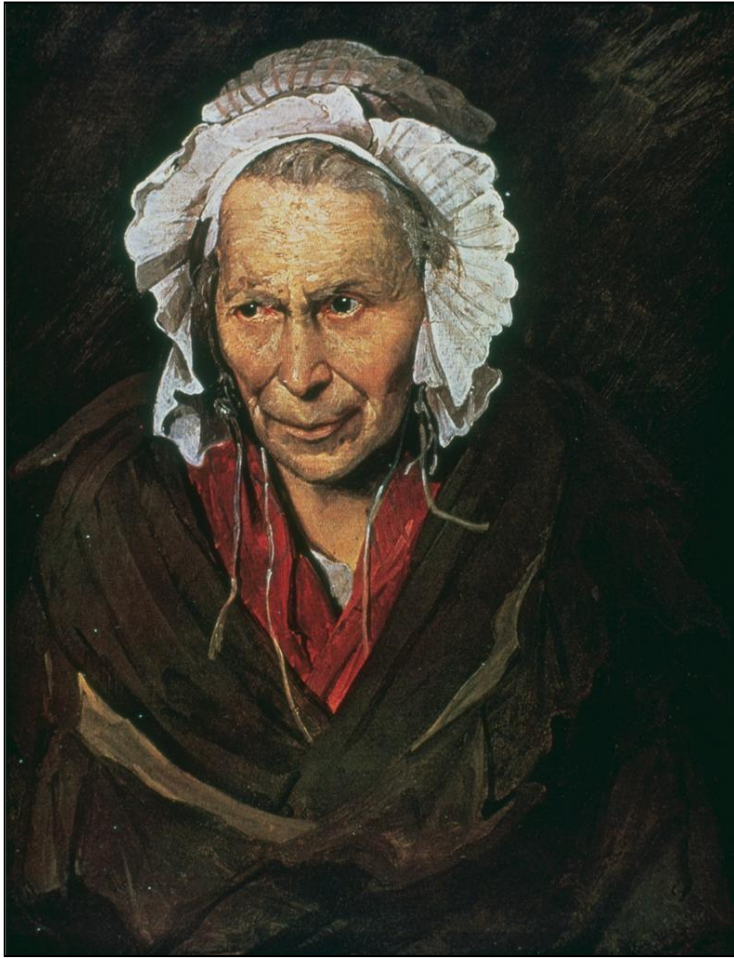


Figure 5. Théodore Géricault. *Portrait of an Insane Woman*. Oil on canvas. 1822.



Figure 6. Goya, *Plague Hospital*, oil on canvas, 1798-1800.



Figure 7. Goya, *The Third of May*, oil on canvas, 1814



Figure 8. Goya, *A Man Mocked (Disparates)*, etching, 1815-1817



Figure 9. Henry Fuseli, *Odysseus Between Scylla and Charybdis*, oil on canvas, 1794-96



Figure 10. Goya, *Half-Submerged Dog (Quinto del Sordo)*, painting, 1819-1823



Figure 11. X-Ray view of *Half-Submerged Dog*



Figure 12. Goya, *Duel with Cudgels (Quinto del Sordo)*, painting, 1819-1823

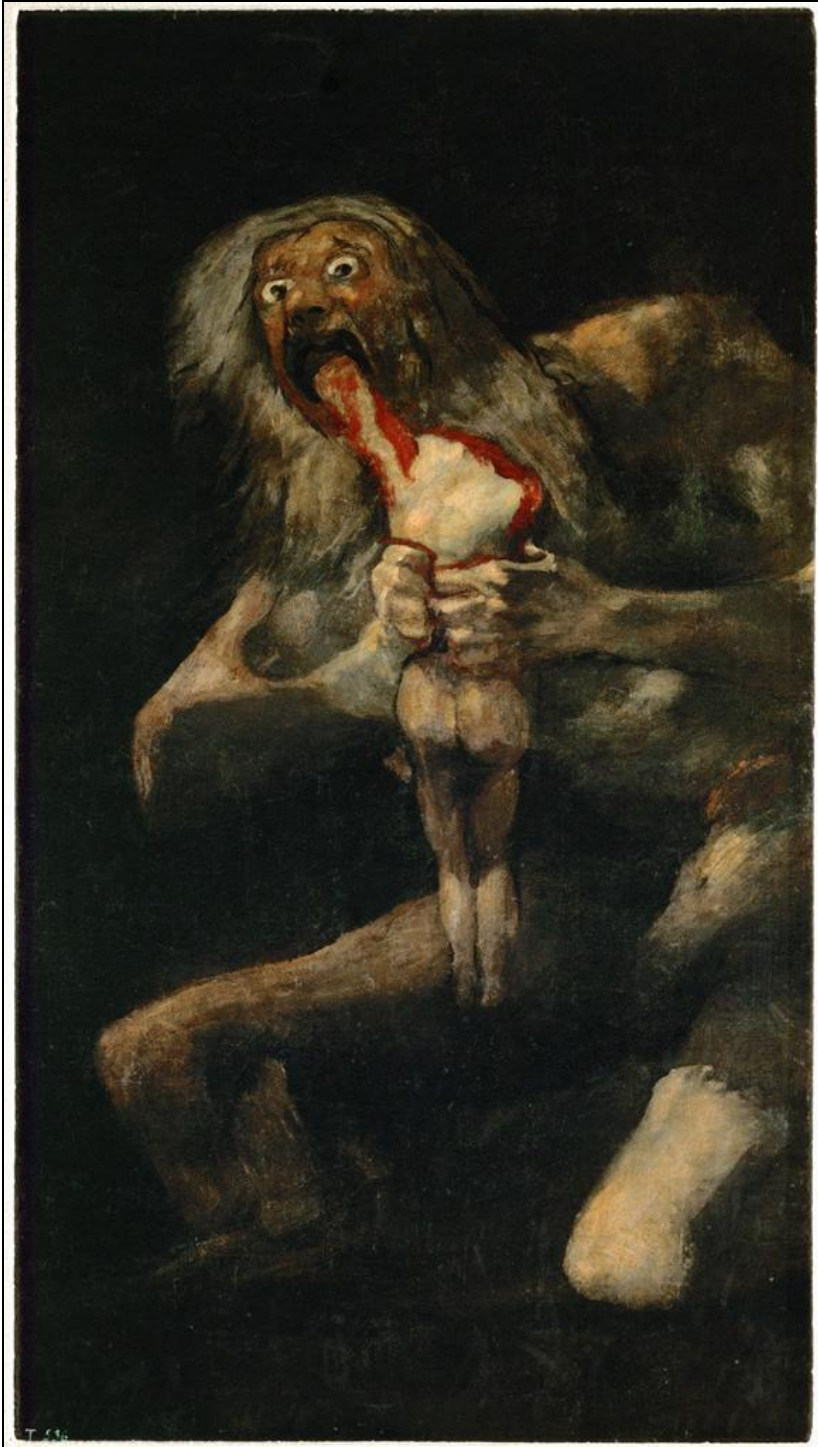


Figure 13. Francisco de Goya, *Saturn Devouring One of His Children (Quinto del Sordo)*, painting, 1820-23



Figure 14. Goya, *The St. Isidore Pilgrimage (Quinto del Sordo)*, painting, 1820-1823



Figure 15. Goya, *The Holy Office (Quinto del Sordo)*, painting, 1820-1823