

# **“Truth has Died”; Goya’s Women**

## ***Background notes***

**Dr Jacqueline Cockburn — 20 October 2021**



**Goya, *The Wedding*, 1791/2, The Prado Museum, Madrid**



Women beneath their parasols, elegant and coy, resplendent in their silks, have truth. Others shyly look out from their balconies as if the railings would save them from temptation and marauding men. Bred to marry, if they were 'protected' in their youth, kept pure and unsullied, they could look forward to an arranged marriage with a much older man. Goya's changing representation of women affords us an insight into his times. Like Watteau, Greuze and Hogarth, Goya's view on marriage is spelt out loud and clear. Women are lambs to the slaughter and altar, that is also true.

His own wife Josefa bore him nine children of which just one survived: Javier. She lurks soundlessly, invisibly in his life and art, appearing perhaps just the once. Constant but not worthy of paint or tapestry. Women from the popular class of Madrid are just as present in Goya's early work, as the affluent women who slavishly follow French fashion. Veiled 'majas' from the lower echelons of society parade their beauty disdainfully and insouciantly. Hiding behind a fan they become the stereotype of the truly Spanish Woman.

Women are feisty and daring as they toss a puppet man into the air, a comment perhaps on the useless reign of the queen's minister and lover Manuel Godoy. Goya is a gossip like the very women he portrays. The women who talk behind their hands or fans. No one is safe from their endlessly disparaging gaze and Goya understands them in his early works and seems to giggle with them.





**Goya, *The Straw Mannequin*, 1791/2, The Prado Museum, Madrid**

Goya enters court in 1786 via a brief sojourn in the small palace in Arenas where the king's wayward brother is exiled. He sits painting, crouched down, apparently servile, painfully twisted, forever on the periphery of the family, highlighting as ever that Don Luis de Bourbon's young wife had a beauty which outshone his own bulbous nose and reddened cheeks. A little child



peers out of the canvas. She will become The Countess of Chinchón for her sins, unloved and derided by the very same Godoy who seems to be a constant thorn in so many sides.



**Goya, *The Family of Don Luis de Borbón*, 1784. Fundación Magnani Rocco, Parma**

Soon, all Goya's gossip will disappear from the canvas as he plumbs his own silent world of profound deafness. When did he meet the Queen Maria Luisa? In her fine clothes, on occasion given to her by Napoleon himself, displaying her arms because she was proud of them and wearing gold-flecked shoes which cock a snook to the sumptuary laws of the time, Goya skittishly unveils her coquetry. A queen is surely above all that? But not above jealously guarding her lover from the wiles of the gorgeous Duchess of Alba. Maybe she didn't even see Goya moving in on her, but we do,



especially in the San Lúcar albums where Goya sketches her fearlessly sensual body as she hitches up her skirt for him. He sees it all from the voyeuristic intimacy of the painter seeking a truthful instant. Daringly he paints her in mourning pointing her imperious hand down at the sand where he has proprietorially traced his own name. Daringly creating truth where he wants to find it.

By the time the Duchess is fully and blatantly naked, Maria Luisa, the Queen, will call Goya back to court to represent the stable Spanish family; aware, of course, of the plight of the French Royal Family as the eighteenth century begins to wane. Warts and all they stare out of the canvas like frightened rabbits on a sharp horizon line. Goya glances back at us with a withering glance. What are we supposed to believe?



**Goya, *The Family of Charles IV* , 1800, The Prado Museum, Madrid**



But during the age of Enlightenment there were opportunities for some intellectual women and Goya portrays them with their powdered hair, intelligent faces and sharp enquiring eyes. The Countess of Osuna, for example, was Patron of the Arts. She had permission from the Inquisition to read Rousseau and Voltaire, was admitted to Economic Society of Madrid and was President of the Women's National Society for Progress. No mean feat.

Beauty dies with war. The Peninsular Wars put a stop to all the gossip. The bald facts of a gruesome period of Spanish history are laid bare powerfully for us to judge. The political backdrop and the terrible sights Goya claims to have seen first-hand during these vicious wars, provide a different image of women; capricious witches, incarcerated victims, ruthless heroines, women struggling to stay alive. His world view was indeed darkened by famine, cruelty, poverty and a denial of a new enlightened country under King Ferdinand VII. The brutal realism records the tumultuous history of his era and the demise of the old regime. By 1814 'Truth has died'. Goya's personal protest comes in the form of a series of etchings called the Disasters of War. Through the lens of Goya's women, we see his cynical dissent, his loneliness and his decision that truth has indeed died. 'Yo lo vi' ( I saw it) Goya writes and witnessing such horrors he revises his notion of Woman as the incarnation of Beauty. Augustina of Aragon, during the siege of Zaragoza fired a twenty-four-pounder cannon and became famous for her bravery. Women rarely fought in the war but spent most of their time protecting their children or their own integrity. But she, Augustina, can rise to the occasion, murderous, she will take revenge on those who profit from war to defile her sisters. In the raw images of rape and brutality, Goya forces the viewer to confront the horror. One of the added etchings called Emphatic Caprichos which refers to the authoritarian restoration



of Ferdinand the Seventh and Goya's decision to leave court claims 'Truth has Died and Will She Rise Again?' in the form of a woman lying dead on the ground surrounded by staring faces of disbelief who try to bury her. Surely Goya's question leaves us with a glimmer of hope?



**Goya, *Truth Has Died and Will She Rise Again?* 1810-14,**  
etching in The Prado Museum, Madrid



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