Summary

Critics have often regarded Goya’s etchings and black paintings as satirical observations on the social and political conditions of the times. In a study of Goya first published in 1950, which seldom receives the attention it merits, the French author and art theorist, André Malraux, contends that these works have a significance of a much deeper kind. The etchings and black paintings, Malraux argues, represent a fundamental challenge to the European artistic tradition that began with the Renaissance, an essentially humanist tradition founded on the pursuit of a transcendent world of nobility, harmony and beauty – an ideal world outside of which, as Malraux writes, ‘man did not fully merit the name man’. Following the illness that left him deaf for life – an encounter with ‘the irremediable’ to borrow Malraux’s term – Goya developed an art of a fundamentally different kind – an art, Malraux writes, ruled by ‘the unity of the prison house’, which replaced transcendence with a pervasive ‘feeling of dependence’, and from which all trace of humanism has been erased. Foreshadowing modern art’s abandonment of the Renaissance ideal, and created semi-clandestinely, the etchings and black paintings, are an early announcement of the death of beauty in Western art.

Keywords: Goya; Malraux; beauty; art; Renaissance; humanism.
The Death of Beauty: Goya’s Etchings and Black Paintings through the Eyes of André Malraux

‘If the words art and beauty had the same meaning, Goya would not be an artist.’
Malraux, 1945

In the course of a television program about Goya’s art broadcast in the mid-1970s, André Malraux commented that ‘[Goya] is a huge phenomenon in the history of painting. His genius is one thing, but then there is the Goya phenomenon, and that is something else again.’ Goya’s genius, for Malraux, is beyond question. He describes the portraiture as ‘one of the richest and subtlest the West has ever known’. But there is also the ‘Goya phenomenon’ which, for Malraux, is embodied in the collections of etchings entitled the Caprichos, the Disasters of War and the Disparates, in the ‘black paintings’ as they are usually called (such as Saturn devouring his children), and in certain related works such as The Madhouse and the celebrated Third of May 1808. Critics have often viewed these works, especially the etchings, as satirical observations on the social and political conditions of the times but, for Malraux, something much more significant is at stake. These works, he argues, were the first to challenge the powerful ideal on which all European art had rested since the Renaissance – the ideal of a transcendent world of nobility, harmony and beauty that underlies the works of artists as various as Botticelli, Raphael, Titian, Poussin, Rubens and Watteau. Goya’s etchings and black paintings, in Malraux’s view, constitute a rejection of this ideal and of the humanist aspirations it implies. In effect, Malraux argues, Goya invents an art – not just a style – of a fundamentally different kind. He is not simply a gifted artist among other gifted artists – although he is certainly that too; he is a ‘phenomenon’ in the sense that he shatters the mould of the tradition into which he was born and challenges the assumptions of European art and culture in a profound and unprecedented way.

Malraux’s views on Goya are principally contained in a book entitled Saturn: An Essay in Goya, first published in 1950 which is the principal focus of the present essay.  

Malraux’s study has seldom received the critical attention it merits and to understand his interpretation fully, one needs to look first at his account of the Renaissance and its decisive consequences for European art, which are important themes in his principal works on the theory of art, *The Voices of Silence* and *The Metamorphosis of the Gods*. Malraux rejects the view, once common among historians of art, that the major stylistic changes in painting and sculpture that accompanied the Renaissance were the manifestation of a newfound concern for ‘realism’ or ‘naturalism’. The birth of ‘art’ in the new sense conferred on the word by the Renaissance was the consequence, Malraux argues, not of any sudden urge to represent the world naturalistically but of something more profound: a transformation in the nature of Christian faith. Byzantine Christianity, like that of medieval Western Europe, had been intensely dualistic, its strong Augustinian flavour stressing God’s radical otherness. Hence the unmistakable aspirations of Byzantine and medieval religious images to evoke a supramundane, sacred realm different in kind from the everyday world here below. Renaissance art, Malraux argues, sprang essentially from a rapprochement between man and God – the gradual replacement of a strongly dualistic faith with the belief that, even in this earthly life, men and women might share in aspects of the divine, and perhaps, as Renaissance Platonists sometimes suggested, experience a form of communion with the Godhead. In painting, Malraux contends, the first clear signs of this rapprochement emerged with Giotto. Byzantine representations of biblical scenes, Malraux writes, did not depict ‘events that once took place on earth, but episodes of the sacred’; but Giotto’s murals at Assisi and in the Arena Chapel in Padua express something different. Here the gap between God and man is closing. For the first time, sacred images ‘are becoming scenes in the life of Jesus’ – events that once took place on earth and among men.\(^4\)

This development triggered a change in the very function of painting and sculpture. While in no sense setting out to challenge Christian faith, Giotto had nonetheless given birth to visual forms whose representations of the divine no longer depended solely on evocations of a supramundane world but owed their sense of transcendence to the nature of the painting itself. Giotto, Malraux writes, had discovered ‘a power of painting previously unknown in Christian art: the power of locating without sacrilege a sacred scene in a world resembling

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that of everyday life.’ An increased degree of naturalism was an inevitable ancillary development because painter and sculptor now strove, as Malraux writes, to depict scenes that ‘related no less to the world of God’s creatures than to the world of God’.\(^5\) The essential, and unprecedented, objective however was not simply to imitate the world of appearances – to paint or sculpt ‘naturalistically’ – but to infuse figures from this familiar ‘world of God’s creatures’ with a measure of the divine.

This was a turning point in the history of Western art. It is as if a new humanity is born – the privileged inhabitants of a brave new world of nobility, harmony and beauty. From Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, to Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling, to Titian’s *Pieta*, to Veronese’s *Venus and Adonis*, to Poussin’s serene, classical landscapes, men and women, even in their moments of struggle and tragedy, seem to have crossed a threshold into a more exalted universe in which they themselves partake of elements of the divine. The term enlisted to describe this radiant new world, with connotations going well beyond its previous meaning of skill and expertise, was ‘art’,\(^6\) and, in effect, art provided a new absolute, rivalling that of a slowly waning Christian faith. Art was the manifestation of an imaginary transcendent world outside of which, as Malraux writes, ‘man did not fully merit the name man’.\(^7\) Again, it was no mere question of naturalism. As Sir Philip Sidney explained in a well-known comment, ‘Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done … Her world is brazen, and the poets only deliver a golden.’\(^8\) And the same was true of painters. The goal was not mere mimicry of appearances – nature’s world of brass. Art strove to create a ‘golden world’, an ideal realm of nobility, harmony and beauty – a human world still, but one in which humanity possessed its share of the divine. Renaissance artists, Malraux writes, had discovered that ‘art is one of the most powerful rectifications of the world, a kingly domain where man escapes from the human condition to attain another where

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\(^5\) Malraux, *La Métamorphose des dieux: Le Surnaturel, Ecrits sur l’art (II)*, 318. Malraux’s emphasis.

\(^6\) Cf: ‘In medieval texts we find no term to denote what we today call artists…The term was occasionally used to denote a person who studied or practised the liberal arts [and from the thirteenth century] for a person who possessed a particular technical ability’. Jacques Le Goff, *L’Homme médiéval* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989), 237.


\(^8\) Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, 3rd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 85. The precise date of composition of the essay is not known. 1580 is thought to be reasonably accurate.
he is at one with the gods’. Here we approach the deeper meaning of the phrase ‘Renaissance humanism’: it is not simply an affirmation of the powers of man; it is also an annexation of the powers of the gods.

Needless to say, the situation was not static. As religious belief continued to weaken, European civilization’s sense of the divine weakened with it. By the eighteenth century – the century in which Goya began work – the ‘golden world’ had changed considerably. The ideal of transcendent beauty remained in place, but it was brought closer to the earth, so to speak, where it donned the less imposing costumes of charm and delight. Which is why the visual art of the eighteenth century often reminds us of the theatre. From Watteau’s fêtes galantes, to costume dramas such as Tiepolo’s Banquet of Cleopatra, to Fragonard’s idyllic Progress of Love, painting now begins to resemble a make-believe world ‘across the footlights’, a world of fantasy, elegance and volupté. If one were to choose Michelangelo’s superb figures in the Sistine Chapel as symbols of the previous dispensation, the elegant company in Watteau’s Embarkation for Cythera might be apt symbols of the new. By the eighteenth century, Malraux writes, art had taken the form of ‘an ornate image man was making of himself’.

An ornate image which did not, however, lose contact with its Renaissance origins. The Renaissance vision, as noted, had been profoundly humanist. In place of the medieval image of man as ‘fallen creature’, temporary wayfarer here below, it had substituted a vision of man as inheritor of a ‘kingly domain’ revealed by art, where he is ‘at one with the gods’. The relentlessly empirical spirit of the eighteenth century reined in these lofty aspirations and settled for the less heroic ideal of a refined, ‘civilized’ man of taste – the man of the ‘ornate image’ to which Malraux refers, but the underlying confidence in man, the underlying humanist impulse, was not affected. The semi-theatrical worlds of Watteau and Tiepolo certainly suggest a form of transcendence markedly less ambitious than those of Michelangelo and Titian but it is still an affirmation of man – a celebration of his capacities and possibilities, and something very different from the humble medieval acknowledgment that without God’s grace and mercy, man is as nothing. From the Renaissance onwards, this

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9 Malraux, *Saturne*, 93. There is, of course, no question of artistic ‘progress’ here. Malraux is not suggesting that Renaissance art was superior to its predecessors.

10 Malraux, *Saturne*, 152.
humanist vision was the *sine qua non* of art, and no post-Renaissance artist – no Titian, no Poussin, Rubens, Watteau or David\(^{11}\) – ever conceived the idea of challenging it.

Until Goya – setting aside the early Goya. The Goya of the first three decades of his career belongs wholly to the baroque school of the ‘ornate image’, his paintings and tapestry cartoons imbued with the same spirit of amiable make-believe one finds in countless works of the times across the length and breadth of Europe. He was not a leading figure and as Malraux rightly says, he ‘counts for relatively little beside Fragonard or Watteau’,\(^{12}\) but he was, nevertheless, a baroque painter of talent who established a solid reputation in Spain and who, by 1789, had risen to the rank of Court Painter to Charles IV. In late 1792, however, a life-changing event occurred. Goya fell gravely ill and when he recovered he was left with a bitter legacy: he was stone deaf and would remain so permanently. Malraux is in no doubt about the importance of this episode in Goya’s artistic career. The first chapter of *Saturn* is devoted to the early Goya – ‘the decorative baroque artist’, as Malraux terms him – but the chapter concludes:

1792. Illness sweeps away all these dreams, just as the [French] Revolution, a little later, will sweep away their models. Goya recovers but his health is badly affected. According to his friends, he blames himself. Deaf now, he also fears going blind. He has entered the realm of the irremediable. One of the charming artists of the eighteenth century has just died.\(^{13}\)

The effects of this encounter with the ‘irremediable’ would soon become evident. Goya resumed work as Court Painter, gradually refined his skills and eventually became the consummate portraitist Malraux describes. But alongside this ‘public’ Goya, there was now, as well, a semi-clandestine artist whose work would only be seen by a limited number of people and which was quite unlike anything he had attempted before.

The change appears first in a series of drawings he worked on during his convalescence. Some resemble caricatures – characters with elongated noses and a man with

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\(^{11}\) Malraux writes: ‘Where the Italian-French forms that had conquered Europe were concerned, the “enlightened” ideas of the *philosophes* were in no sense in conflict with those of the Jesuits, who had been their teachers. The French revolutionaries revered David. All art at the time was a hierarchy’. Malraux, *Saturne*, 152.


\(^{13}\) Malraux, *Saturne*, 21.
an impossibly wide, grinning mouth; some wear masks (one labelled ‘Masks – cruel masks’); one is a strange semi-human creature – half-man, half ass; another depicts ‘Witches about to fly’. And then there are scenes of cruelty – a man beating a young woman, a woman about to be tortured, two men sawing an old woman in half. Some are only partly finished as if Goya were working rapidly, searching for something just out of his reach, but the general trend is clear: the decorative baroque artist who painted damsels in idyllic rustic scenes and peasant rough-and-tumbles is yielding place to an artist who is exploring something decidedly less benign.

What followed over the subsequent decades, until his death in 1828, was a series of etchings and paintings that replace the golden world of post-Renaissance art with a sinister domain Malraux aptly describes as a universe lit by a ‘black sun’.14 In the public mind today, Goya’s etchings are often associated with the frequently reproduced *Caprichos* 43, *The sleep of reason produces monsters*, which depicts a young man slumped forward on a desk, apparently asleep, while a mysterious throng of owls and bats gathers behind him. The image is often interpreted as an expression of the conventional Enlightenment view that if mankind listens to the voice of reason and banishes foolish superstitions, a better, kinder world is possible; and this often leads to the broader claim that *Caprichos* 43 encapsulates the general message of the etchings, if not the black paintings as well, and demonstrates that Goya was a firm disciple of Enlightenment ideals.15 We shall have a little more to say about this issue at a later stage, but it is important to make the point here that, despite the impression often created by critics, *Caprichos* 43 is not, in fact, typical of the *Caprichos* as a whole. Pursuing themes adumbrated in the sketches mentioned above, the series is principally devoted to scenes of cruelty, suffering, and the shadowy world of witches, demons and monsters, and the overall significance, as distinct from the interpretation one might place on a single image in isolation, seems to have very little to do with prospects for a better world, or the calm, benevolent voice of reason.

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14 Malraux, *Saturne*, 76.

15 Janis Tomlinson writes that ‘it is the Goya of the *Caprichos* … that still dominates popular perception of the artist.’ Janis Tomlinson, *Francisco Goya y Lucientes* (London: Phaidon, 1994), 123. One could go further and argue that *Caprichos* 43 in particular, and the interpretation placed on it mentioned here, has shaped popular perceptions more than any of the other etchings or the black paintings. As argued in the present essay, those perceptions are open to serious question.
This same is true, and even more obviously so, of the *Disasters of War*, the *Disparates* and the black paintings. Critics sometimes suggest that the *Disasters* are a vehicle for an Enlightenment message because they document the consequences of the political blunders that led to the French occupation of Spain in the early 1800s – the consequences, once again, of not listening to the voices of reason. But again the argument is questionable. As one leafs through the eighty or so etchings, the political context and its ramifications quickly fade into the background, overwhelmed by the sheer force of the images and the relentless variations on the themes of human savagery and suffering – murder, rape, torture, starvation, atrocity, epidemic and mass burials. Indeed, the subject, as Malraux points out, is less a specific war than *all* war, from time immemorial, and above all, man’s seemingly limitless capacity for inhumanity. He writes:

[Goya] maintains the link between atrocity and the timeless. The man impaled and the man whose severed arms hang from the branches, both of whom evoke age-old torture and the passage of the Assyrian armies described in the Bible, are naked – outside time. The uniforms of his French soldiers are barely French; what fascinates [Goya] is not the courage of the Spanish patriot but the man blinded, dismembered, or the victim of torture: the accusation of God.

In the *Disparates*, Goya’s final series of etchings, this sense of inhumanity and desolation goes a disturbing stage further. The *Caprichos* had taken much of their subject

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16 There is also a powerful series of etchings of bullfights, entitled the *Tauromaquia*, that Goya completed between 1814 and 1816. Where the etchings are concerned, however, the present essay focuses on the *Caprichos*, the *Disasters of War* and the *Disparates*. My own view on this matter is similar to Aldous Huxley’s who writes that, despite many admirable plates, ‘by and large it is not to the *Tauromaquia* that we turn for the very best specimens of Goya’s work in black and white, or for the most characteristic expressions of his mature personality’. Aldous Huxley, ‘Variations on Goya,’ in *Themes and Variations* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1950), 219-234, 227. André Malraux has less to say about the *Tauromaquia* than the other etchings but nevertheless holds them in high esteem. He writes: ‘The *Tauromaquia* was an admirable collection. In spite of an apparent repetition where genius seemed to be fading, each composition, with the exception of a few documentary plates (and even there his recognisable style was not missing), saw his masterful manner reappear’. Malraux, *Saturne*, 172.

17 The precise number is somewhat uncertain. Goya etched three additional images which he may or may not have intended to include if the *Disasters* had been published during his lifetime but which are sometimes included in present day editions.

matter from social ills; ‘the accusation of God’ in the Disasters is framed in the language of violence and atrocity; the Disparates often minimise ‘narrative’ elements and formulate their indictment in images that seems intrinsically inhuman. Gone, as Malraux says, are

the drolleries and old women looking at themselves in mirrors, to be replaced by looming apparitions, the spectre of War, murder, monsters, men sewn up in sacks, and the figure with three legs and two heads who symbolises marriage, and perhaps love.19

The Caprichos and the Disasters had both contained enigmatic elements but now these become even more pronounced. Who, we wonder, are the strange Men in Sacks (Disparates 8), in what Stygian gloom do they find themselves, and why does their bizarre form of captivity seem not to trouble them unduly? Perhaps they are kinsmen of the nameless shades who surround the Man wandering amongst phantoms (Disparates 18), and like them, denizens of some desolate underworld? And then there are mysterious scenes such as Strange Folly (Disparates 3) which, Malraux writes, is ‘the subtlest of [the series]’ and ‘plays on the precariousness of life’;20 or Loyalty (Disparates 17) with its toad-like central figure, his grotesque attendants, and the shadowy mounted figure in the background; or Carnival folly (Disparates 14) so very unlike any carnival ever imagined by Tiepolo or Canaletto; or the almost unbearable Matrimonial nightmare (Disparates 7), with its two central figures trapped in their monstrous union. Critics who regard Goya as a spokesman for Enlightenment ideals prefer to see the etchings and black paintings as social commentary21 – often, it is said, social satire – but here, surely, we are a thousand miles from anything so straightforward or salutary. (One has only to compare the Disparates mentioned here with any of the scenes in Hogarth’s A Rake’s Progress to see how large the disparity is.) Malraux calls the Goya of the Disparates ‘the greatest interpreter of anguish the West has ever known’22 and if one sets aside one or two possible contenders in literature, such as Dostoyevsky and Kafka, it is difficult not to agree.

19 Malraux, Saturne, 133.
20 Malraux, Saturne, 149.
21 Critics who view the etchings and black paintings in this light often rely on aspects of Goya’s biography, especially the fact that he is said to have had a number of friends among the ilustrados, as the Spanish supporters of Enlightenment ideals were called. Much of this argument rests on surmise and in any case raises the thorny question of the relationship between an artist’s social and political views and his art. There is no space to examine this question in detail here. See also note 18.
22 Malraux, Saturne, 133.
The black paintings might be described as *Disparates* in paint and, once again, any suggestion that Goya’s purpose is limited to social and political critique seems out of the question. Executed relatively late in Goya’s life, (‘He will wait twenty years before giving his ghosts their tyrannical accent in paint’, writes Malraux) they include some of his most powerful and disturbing works. *Saturn devouring his children* is doubtless the best known, its ragged brushstrokes and bitter palette (which makes Rubens’ painting of the same subject look almost congenial) depicting a figure who might well be the crazed tyrant of a world lit by a black sun. And the same sense of desolation pervades (for example) the extraordinary *Witches Sabbath* with its tangle of contorted visages, half-way between mask and human face, *Old People Eating*, its two semi-human figures with heads reminiscent of skulls; *Pilgrimage of Saint Isidore* with its press of macabre faces like visions from a nightmare (‘a gallimaufry of idiotic and ghoulish faces with gibbering mouths’, as Wyndham Lewis writes); and the haunting *Judith and Holofernes*, a detail of which Malraux chose for the cover of the second edition of *Saturn*. These works, which Goya painted on the walls of his house on the outskirts of Madrid, have no parallel in the painting of the times or anywhere in the post-Renaissance tradition, and one is not in the least surprised that Goya made no attempt to place them on public display.

The essential feature of all these works – the etchings and black paintings, and similar works such as *The Madhouse* and *Third of May 1808* – is not the occasional ingredient of social commentary but their radical departure from the established artistic tradition – the ruling ideal of nobility, harmony and beauty. Not that the golden world had been averse to representations of suffering. The works of painters such as Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese and Rubens abound in crucifixions, martyrdoms and entombments, and in tragic events drawn from classical mythology. And, although it recast the Renaissance ideal in the forms of charm and civilized good taste, even eighteenth century painting did not entirely lose its fondness for scenes of this kind, especially in religious art. But as artists of the time well knew, suffering did not necessarily negate the ideal they served and could even act as a powerful

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23 Malraux, *Saturne*, 76.


25 Malraux writes: ‘People sometimes say that [Goya] invented the depiction of torture. But baroque piety was full of it. Ribera depicted St. Bartholomew being flayed alive six times. But St. Bartholomew died to bear witness to his faith while Goya, by contrast, writes under one of his most harrowing victims: “For having been born in another country”’. Malraux, *Saturne*, 122.
ally. Suitably portrayed, suffering and tragedy can readily furnish visions of human grandeur – images of man’s power to defy obstacles, including the threat of death itself, again revealing his ‘spark of the divine’. Thus, Titian’s *Entombment* transforms a humble burial into a prodigious event and Tintoretto’s San Rocco *Crucifixion* converts a humiliating execution into a cosmic drama. And later, when transcendence depended more heavily on spectacle, there are works such as Tiepolo’s *St. Agatha* who, despite her bleeding, amputated breasts, becomes the heroine of a magnificent stage-play, eyes cast piteously to Heaven; and David’s *Death of Marat* which, despite its more sober register, is not without its intimations of nobility and revolutionary grandeur.

Goya’s relentless litany of suffering and cruelty is, however, a very different matter. Malraux lists some of his subject matter, the catalogue including:

the sick, the insane, victims of hangings, the skeleton-man, the half-man half-chicken, men sawn in two, flagellants, the courts of the Inquisition, nightmares, flying men and bulls, brigands, rapes, tortures, the stake, murders, executions, children abandoned, human sacrifice, cannibals, foetuses... 26

And in this tormented world, he writes,

There is no love, nor above all motherhood. In the *Disasters* [Goya] only draws children snatched from their mothers; and there are no women among the weeping onlookers of the *Third of May*. His patriots vanquish or die almost alone, and his crowds are only ever there as onlookers.27

A world such as this contains no trace of nobility, harmony and beauty, and still less of the Enlightenment faith in reason. The regions Goya is exploring are unlike anything post-Renaissance art had ever known: in place of nobility there is nothing but ignominy, in place of harmony endless discord, and the word ‘beauty’ could only be pronounced with a sneer. The cumulative effect is like an indictment of the human race, as if man were a mere pestilence on the face of the earth, a creature who can only ever be victim or executioner. ‘If

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26 Malraux, *Saturne*, 137.
Bosch introduces mankind into his infernal world,’ Malraux writes, ‘Goya introduces the infernal into the human world.’

All this becomes even clearer once one examines the stylistic characteristics of the etchings and black paintings – a matter about which, strangely enough, art historians and critics have said surprisingly little, but which Malraux analyses in considerable depth. Space permits only a fairly rapid coverage of Malraux’s comments, but the following discussion highlights his major points.

A key issue to bear in mind in this context is that, as mentioned earlier, the Renaissance ideal was never simply a matter of the naturalistic depiction of beautiful objects. Indeed, if it had been, the paintings of Leonardo, Titian, Poussin and Watteau, for example, would be comprehensively outshone today by the works of nineteenth-century Salon painters such as Cabanel and Bouguereau whose transitory fame depended essentially on their capacity to paint conventionally beautiful subjects in a ‘lifelike’, semi-photographic manner. Beauty in the post-Renaissance tradition was always beauty in a specific sense: it was the beauty, as we have seen, of a certain kind of ‘golden world’ and therefore dependent as much on style as on subject matter. Veronese’s Venus and Adonis and Poussin’s classical scenes are not merely tableaux vivants featuring beautiful men and women as figurants; they are triumphs of certain kinds of styles – styles capable of evoking a certain kind of nobility, harmony and beauty.

For the same reason, the dark universe Goya sought to portray in his etchings and black paintings called for much more than naturalistic portrayals of people or objects conventionally regarded as menacing or ugly. And, indeed, if nothing more than this had been involved, these works would doubtless be comprehensively outclassed today by photographs of horrific war injuries or perhaps some of Hollywood’s digitally-created science-fiction monsters. If Goya’s desolate underworld were to achieve the quality and power of art – and his ambitions in that respect never wavered – it could no more be a catalogue of ‘true-to-life’ horrors than the styles of his predecessors could simply be naturalistic renditions of beautiful things. Goya, in other words, required his equivalent of the styles of the golden world, but something very different – in a sense, the reverse. Goya became Goya, Malraux argues, only when he challenged the Renaissance tradition not with

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28 Malraux, Saturne, 115.
bare ‘reality’, but with a radically different style, a style of equal power but of a fundamentally different kind – when

against that [post-Renaissance] fiction he set up, not reality, but another supreme fiction: when to a dressed-up world he opposed a world in rags; when to a world ordered in terms of its flowers [he opposed], a world ordered in terms of its roots.29

Malraux illustrates the point through a comparison with Henry Fuseli, one of Goya’s contemporaries. Fuseli’s subject matter, Malraux observes, was sometimes similar to Goya’s, his works including paintings such as *The Three Witches* and *The Nightmare*, the latter proving particular popular at the time. Once one looks beyond subject matter, however, any similarity with Goya becomes marginal. Fuseli, Malraux comments, perhaps a little wryly, merely shows us that ‘one can paint witches in Louis XVI or Empire style’ – that is, in the late baroque and neo-classical styles fashionable at the time, both very much within the familiar post-Renaissance tradition. But these styles and the cultural assumptions they reflect belong wholly to ‘a world ordered in terms of its flowers’, in Malraux’s phrase, and a world of that kind is precisely what Goya no longer accepts. Goya, Malraux writes, ‘was no less determined than Fuseli that his strange, imaginary world should have the quality of a work of art, but to achieve that end he refused to settle [as Fuseli had] for witches looking like Greek Pythian priestesses.’ In short, Fuseli’s subject matter was sometimes similar to Goya’s but there the resemblance ends.30

Malraux drives the point home through another comparison, this time with the Italian baroque painter Alessandro Magnasco.31 Like Fuseli, Magnasco sometimes had a fondness for subject matter akin to Goya’s, his taste occasionally running to scenes of torture. But again, Malraux points out, the resemblance with Goya is only superficial. In keeping with contemporary baroque taste, Magnasco was drawn to spectacle and fantasy, and even his scenes of violence, Malraux writes, were infused ‘with the Carnival music of Venice and so wholly transmuted into poetry that one could forget the suffering’. Comparing Magnasco’s

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29 Malraux, *Saturne*, 90.


31 Although a relatively little-known name today, Magnasco was quite famous during his lifetime (he lived from 1667 to 1749) and Goya may have seen his works during his stay in Italy in 1770.
Interrogation, depicting Inquisitors at work in a dungeon, with Goya’s The Madhouse, Malraux comments:

Magnasco shows us a prisoner who eyes are being burnt out; but he depicts it with such verve that the torture becomes a kind of ballet. The Italian style isolates the viewer from the torment he is witnessing. Goya maintains the distinction between a work of art and a mere spectacle of horror but, like the Gothic artist, he becomes involved in it and involves the viewer in it.32

Malraux imagines Goya looking at an Inquisition scene by Magnasco and saying to himself, ‘How fine that would be, if only it were true…’33 Truth for the Goya of the etchings and black paintings is something very different from a dazzling ‘ballet’ that separates the viewer from the torment he is shown. ‘In Italian painting,’ Malraux writes, ‘torment and suffering stopped short of anything that might make the décor collapse. Goya does away with the décor. Within his naked, sinister walls, the madman no longer belongs to a world of make-believe; he has become an accuser’.34

Doing away with the décor, however, does not mean resorting to a form of naturalism. As discussed, it means replacing the golden world with ‘a world in rags’ and Malraux highlights a number of specific stylistic measures Goya adopts to achieve that end, prominent among which is an abandonment of the arabesque. In its many manifestations, the arabesque, Malraux writes, is ‘the secret curve of a world that seeks to be voluptuous or ornate’, a stylistic form that, for several centuries, had ‘allowed the artist to transform the severest object into something decorative’. The ‘very symbol of harmony’, it had signalled a decisive break with the art of the Middle Ages:

The fluted draperies of late mediaeval art, far from being a ‘way of seeing the world’, were, like the dark, scimitar-like strokes in Byzantine painting, a means of transposing the profane into a sacred world. However mechanical the medieval line

32 Malraux, Saturne, 12, 90. ‘Gothic’ here is, of course, used in the sense of ‘medieval’.
33 Malraux, Saturne, 12.
34 Malraux, Saturne, 90. Some critics liken Goya’s etchings to Piranesi’s Carceri and to Tiepolo’s Vari Capricci and Scherzi di Fantasia, all of which Goya probably knew. But again this places too much emphasis on subject matter. In stylistic terms, both Piranesi and Tiepolo, like Magnasco, belong very much to the post-Renaissance tradition.
eventually became, it still sought to express the separation between man and the divine. The arabesque expressed their union.35

Rejecting the Renaissance reconciliation, the Goya of the etchings and black paintings also rejects the arabesque. In its place, he invents an abrasive, angular line, similar in some respects to Rembrandt’s – whom, interestingly, he acknowledged as one of his masters.36 ‘Just compare the lips of Fragonard’s women with Goya’s!’ writes Malraux. ‘Fragonard expresses the values of his times, Goya destroys them’. The new departure is already plainly visible in the Caprichos, and when we reach the Disasters of War, the Disparates and the black paintings all trace of the arabesque has vanished, replaced, Malraux writes, by ‘a tense, broken line that makes all the drawing of his time look decorative’.37 The genius of the etchings and black paintings only emerges, Malraux comments, when Goya ‘dares to cease aiming to please’.38 And the arabesque had been essential to that aim.

Extending his analysis of stylistic features, Malraux draws attention to the limited, severe palette of the black paintings, which contrasts strongly with the use of colour favoured by near contemporaries such as Watteau, Tiepolo, Boucher and David (and Goya himself earlier in his career). To place a Tiepolo or one of Watteau’s fêtes galantes beside paintings such as Witches Sabbath or Pilgrimage of St Isidore is to juxtapose regimes of colour of profoundly different significance – one suggestive of refinement, warmth, pleasure and life, the other built up of bitter reds, browns and blacks that seem to drain away everything suggestive of human gladness or vitality. As with the rejection of the arabesque, the aim is a repudiation of harmony and beauty – the world ‘ordered according to its flowers’. In the black paintings, Malraux writes, Goya ‘transforms into discords each of the essential harmonies on which the order of the world was founded’.39

35 Malraux, Saturne, 53, 54.
36 Goya said he had three masters: Velasquez, Rembrandt and nature. It is noteworthy that the use of the arabesque in both Velasquez and Rembrandt is typically more restrained than in the works of their contemporaries. Malraux argues that Rembrandt ‘invented a new kind of drawing’ but ‘even so, did not always free himself from the arabesque’. Goya, he writes, ‘took up the process where Rembrandt left off’. Malraux, Saturne, 12, 54, 55.
37 Malraux, Saturne, 54, 130.
38 Malraux, Saturne, 23. Malraux’s emphasis.
39 Malraux, Saturne, 147, 148.
The same impulse explains Goya’s fascination for that most austere of mediums, engraving – a fascination that lasted some twenty-five years (and even longer if one adds his work in lithography, a new but not dissimilar medium he mastered late in life). Engraving was, of course, far from uncommon in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe. Artists produced and sold their own albums – Tiepolo’s *Capricci* and Piranesi’s *Carceri* are well-known examples – and there was a steady demand for reproductions of paintings and for satirical illustrations for popular broadsheets and pamphlets. Goya’s commitment to the medium, which required long hours of patient labour, is nevertheless remarkable, especially given that his work, as he knew, was likely to have a very limited audience. Critics have said relatively little about Goya’s fascination for etching but Malraux offers an interesting explanation that links up directly with the ideas we have been discussing. The etched line, he writes, does not necessarily evoke an atmosphere of mystery but ‘no technique lends itself to mystery more readily than it does’. In Goya’s case, it made possible drawing that expresses reality without imitating it, drawing that takes on a value of its own from its texture, from its thick or scratched line, from the breaking of its arabesque, from everything that makes it an *engraved line*.

The result is a world ‘at once imaginary and abstract: the other world’. Thus, the dark backgrounds of many of the etchings (*Men in sacks* for example) are far less imitations of night skies than something analogous to the abstract, gold backdrops of Byzantine art, with the crucial difference that Goya’s backgrounds replace God with the devil:

> They remove the scene from reality and place it immediately, like Byzantine scenes, in a universe that does not belong to man. This darkness is the demon’s gold; and it expresses the fantastic as strictly as the gold background had expressed the sacred. It is seldom found in the preparatory drawings, even those in ink. It is this darkness that so often gives the engraving its accent of foreboding and creates an atmosphere of the supernatural.40

Like the severe, uncompromising palettes of the black paintings, in other words, etching offered Goya access to another world – a world suggestive, Malraux writes interestingly, of what Hell depicted by Rembrandt might have resembled.41 Like the breaking of the curve of

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40 Malraux, *Saturne*, 60. Malraux’s emphasis.
41 Malraux, *Saturne*, 152.
the arabesque, it was another means of severing links with the tradition he had inherited, and replacing harmony and beauty with darkness and the demonic. Malraux sums up the point well:

What did etching bring Goya? An end to illusion and seduction. The discovery that man can be taken out of himself by means other than beauty; that the supernatural achieves its ends not through its representation but through its style; the certainty that the supernatural first, then the human, can be expressed less by specific techniques in the supposed service of representation, than by representation in the service of a style and of these techniques.42

Space prevents more than a brief summary of Malraux’s comments on other aspects of Goya’s stylistic method. He discusses: the restrained use of gesture – so unlike the art of the period in which the geste démonstratif played an important role; a reduced reliance on facial expression (‘The faces of his terrified women barely show their fear.’); a distinctive use of the mask (‘The mask, for Goya, is not what hides the face but what immobilizes it’); and a compositional technique which, as Malraux writes, rejects ‘composition in the Italian sense of the word’ and replaces it with human bodies that are often tangled and fused, ‘inextricable, like a knot’.43 Each of these measures contributes to the same goal. In effect, Goya invents a new artistic language, systematically demolishing the stylistic foundations on which European art had rested for some three hundred years. In a very real sense, indeed, the etchings and black paintings are an ‘anti-Renaissance’ art, not simply because Goya often depicts witches, monsters and scenes of suffering, but because, by combining subject matter of this kind with a radically new style, he creates a world devoid of all trace of nobility, harmony and beauty, and of the humanistic impulse at the heart of the Renaissance tradition. Logically, one might think, such a step could lead to a nullification of art – to a non-art: the etchings and black paintings, after all, deny everything that ‘art’ then stood for, discarding elements as fundamental as the ubiquitous arabesque. Logic and art, however, do not necessarily obey the same imperatives and the consequence of Goya’s rejection of art as he knew it – and as all Europe had known it for centuries – was not artistic bankruptcy but an art based on different values, an art of a different kind. Goya, Malraux writes, in a key sentence

42 Malraux, Saturne, 85.
43 Malraux, Saturne, 41, 45, 102.
in *Saturn*, ‘transforms the function of painting, which is no longer to charm the art-lover or to annex its imaginary world by rendering it ornate’. In a word, Goya reinvents art.45

Here we approach the heart of what Malraux terms ‘the Goya phenomenon’. The trajectory of European art since Giotto is suddenly and dramatically interrupted. The Renaissance had given birth to numerous styles but they had all been fruit of the same bountiful tree: Botticelli, Raphael, Titian, Tintoretto, and Tiepolo, to mention just a few, had all painted in markedly different ways but they all fall unmistakably within the ambit of the notion of art that emerged with the Renaissance – a concept, an ideal, that would go on bearing fruit as late as Delacroix and Turner. But Goya’s etchings and black paintings reject that ideal, all-powerful though it was. Here, in Goya’s semi-clandestine works, was an art that, for the first time for some three centuries, owed nothing to nobility, harmony or beauty, and which, despite the eighteenth century’s firmly established belief that the essential purpose of art was to please, dared to do otherwise.

The situation is quite extraordinary and, Malraux aside, Goya’s commentators have rarely, if ever, made clear just how extraordinary it is. In the Europe of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in the heyday of the late baroque and neo-classical styles, Goya had invented an art that flew in the face of everything those styles, and the Renaissance tradition as a whole, represented. It was an act that no artist since the Renaissance had ever remotely contemplated. Emerging from his illness, and ‘trailing the mists of a netherworld’ (to borrow Malraux’s words46) into which illness had plunged him, Goya invents images with more in common with the leering devils on medieval cathedrals (which, along with all things ‘Gothic’, the eighteenth century viewed with disdain) than with anything belonging to the art of his times or of his predecessors. Hence the jolt one experiences even today when one places a work such as Titian’s *Venus d’Urbino* or Watteau’s *Embarkation for Cythera* beside Goya’s *Old People Eating* or *Saturn devouring his children*. And hence too (though there is

44 Malraux, *Saturne*, 95.

45 Contemporary caricature may have been a catalyst in the process. Malraux argues, however, that what most impressed Goya in caricature was not the technique as such (as critics sometimes suggest) but the fact that it had invented an imaginary world of an entirely new kind that enjoyed an unprecedented degree of freedom and gave glimpses of stylistic possibilities different from anything he had previously known. ‘Although he adapted some of them,’ Malraux writes, ‘it was not their style that impressed him but the very existence of caricature, a world which, by its very nature, escaped from the “laws of art”’. Malraux, *Saturne: Le destin, l’art et Goya*, 30, 32.

Goya’s affinity with modern art and the fascination he held for painters such as Manet, Picasso, Ensor and Redon for whom the Renaissance ideal of beauty had also become a thing of the past. Goya was a determined, conscientious artist, devoted to his calling, and he doubtless intended his etchings and black paintings to be at least equal in power and quality to anything in the glorious tradition in which he had been nurtured. But these were no longer works of art in that tradition. As Malraux says, Goya had transformed the function of painting.

What is the fundamental significance of this ‘art of a different kind’? If it is not an art of nobility, harmony and beauty, an expression of a rapprochement between man and God, what is it based on? What is its source? Despite the relentless focus on malevolence and suffering, the dispatch Goya brings from his netherworld cannot simply be that human existence is never without its quota of cruelty and pain. Art in its traditional sense, as we have noted, was by no means heedless of those realities. For much of its history, Renaissance and post-Renaissance art, whether visual art, literature or music, had often revolved around narratives of sorrow and distress, whether one is thinking of (to choose random examples) Masaccio’s austere *Trinity* centred on the Crucifixion, Tintoretto’s *Massacre of the Innocents*, or (moving to the other arts) Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the tragic heroes and heroines of Corneille and Racine, Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*, or Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. In all these cases and many more, nobility, harmony and beauty are inseparable from suffering and a determination to defy fate – to resist the ‘sorry scheme of things’ – even at the price of life itself. At its deepest level, art in this form implies a refusal to accept a human condition understood as mere capitulation and servitude. Something else is affirmed – fidelity or the strength of human love, for example – and this affirmation discloses a higher power – an affinity with the divine, in effect – that triumphs over the blind forces of destiny, not by annulling them but by conferring a significance on human actions and human lives. In this guise, art is, to repeat Malraux’s excellent formulation, ‘one of the most powerful rectifications of the world, a kingly domain where man escapes from the human condition to attain another where he is at one with the gods’. Central to Goya’s etchings and black paintings is a rejection of all such ambitions. Throughout these works, as this discussion has sought to show, all the resources of subject matter and style are marshalled to create a universe from which all affinity with the divine has been eradicated. Love and fidelity are replaced by violence and exploitation, self-sacrifice by the urge to rob, rape, torture and murder, and any suggestion of a power to rise above tribulation by an omnipresent sense of
subjugation and despair. In effect – and this proposition is at the heart of the argument Malraux advances in *Saturn* – Goya depicts a world in which the Renaissance dispensation has been reversed, a world in which the forces that would crush man and deny his significance have triumphed. No longer a creature ‘at one with the gods’, capable of challenging fate despite suffering and death, humanity is now in a state of permanent bondage – fate’s eternal slave. Hence the absence of the least suggestion of human grandeur in the works concerned, and also (a point seldom remarked by critics) the disturbing impression left by many of them that the beings who inhabit this ignoble world somehow belong there – that they are not citizens of some higher, better world who, Dante-like, have stumbled by mischance into an infernal region, but that they are somehow part of this netherworld, connive at it, and know nothing better. In stark contrast with images of suffering in the Renaissance tradition – Tintoretto’s *Crucifixion of Christ*, for instance, with its restless, portentous sky, or Titian’s *Sisyphus*, heroic in his futile labours – they signify not transcendence but servitude, not escape from the human condition but surrender to it. Varied as Goya’s etchings and black paintings are, Malraux writes, all are ruled by ‘the unity of the prison house’ – not a capacity to transcend the sorry scheme of things but a pervasive ‘feeling of dependence’.47

Now one can see clearly why, in Malraux’s eyes, Goya is not only a major European artist but also a ‘phenomenon’ in the history of European culture. For the first time, there had emerged a form of art that denies the significance of man and leaves nothing in its place. The grandeur of Michelangelo, Titian, Tintoretto and Poussin has died, and the ‘ornate image’ of man pursued by eighteenth century art has vanished. Which is why Malraux is able to assert, without reservation, that ‘there is no system of man in Goya’.48 Nowhere in European art is there anything of the kind. Nowhere, whether it be in the Last Judgments on medieval tympana, in Mantegna’s martyrdoms, Magnasco’s Inquisition scenes, Piranesi’s fantasy dungeons, or anywhere else, is there anything equal to this total negation. For the first time, we encounter an art built not on man’s powers and possibilities but on his insignificance and wretchedness. It is a vision of the human race simply as scourge and corruption, capable of nothing but oppression, ignorance, cruelty and destruction. Pre-Renaissance religious painting and sculpture had sometimes shown men and women whom sin had brought low – who had ‘fallen’; but the miseries of the damned were counterbalanced by God’s love and the

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47 Malraux, *Saturne*, 76. Malraux’s emphasis.
48 Malraux, *Saturne*, 156.
eternal bliss awaiting those who were saved. But there is no hope of salvation in Goya and no love – divine or human. This universe lit by a ‘black sun’ is a place of everlasting desolation.

Seen in this perspective, other elements of Malraux’s analysis fall readily into place. One can now see the logic of his proposition that the new direction in Goya’s art was triggered by the illness that nearly took his life and left him permanently deaf. The suggestion is not that the etchings and black paintings were simply an expression of personal bitterness – a pouring out of ‘bile’ as one critic suggests. Doubtless Goya was shocked and perhaps embittered by the experience; but Malraux’s proposition, as we saw earlier, is that illness and deafness introduced Goya to ‘the realm of the irremediable’ – that is, a realm in which man is without hope, where the blind, merciless workings of fate have won a definitive victory and human existence is reduced to nothing but suffering and humiliation. Goya the person seems to have borne this glimpse of Hell with fortitude: he managed to live with his deafness and continue his career as a successful painter to the Spanish court. But Goya the painter was faced with a choice: he could continue to work solely within the glorious tradition he knew so well, the tradition in which man, even in his darkest hours – even when hanging on a cross – can be transfigured and partake of a world of transcendent beauty; or he could acknowledge that the desperate world into which he had descended during his illness was equally real – perhaps more so – and that, seen in this light, the glorious tradition was a hollow deception, a lie. Certainly, this tradition had been the well-spring of countless splendid artistic achievements, and in his role as Court painter and portraitist, Goya never forgot them or renounced them; but it had nothing at all to say about the world into which he had stumbled, in which man is simply victim, in which dreams of transcendence seem like childish delusions, and human existence crosses over into the realm of the inhuman. Goya could choose to ignore this sinister netherworld or he could admit its existence and attempt to discover if art – and he was, after all, an artist with an immense respect for his calling – was capable of exploring it, discerning its shape and form, and translating it into the language of painting and etching. Doing so meant embarking on something utterly new, something that would call into question everything he had learnt since he began work as an apprentice painter at age fourteen; but as Malraux writes, the netherworld he had glimpsed ‘troubles and

intrigues him more than it terrifies him’, and beginning with the drawings completed during his convalescence, he launched out on his unprecedented adventure.

Was Goya fully conscious of the implications what he was doing? Malraux comments:

We have no idea whether he was going about this [the etchings and black paintings] with a clear purpose in mind because everything we know about him suggests he was not fully aware of the completely unprecedented nature of what he was doing. If this is so, it would help explain Goya’s somewhat uncertain attitude towards this aspect of his œuvre and his readiness, at least where the Caprichos were concerned, to suggest that his purpose was simply social commentary. There is, for example, the familiar Caprichos 43, mentioned earlier, with its well-known inscription in apparent praise of reason. There is also the public notice for the Caprichos (which were briefly placed on sale) announcing that the artist had chosen ‘suitable material for satire’ drawing on ‘common prejudice and deceitful practices which custom, ignorance and self-interest have hallowed. Critics have often taken these remarks at face value and concluded that not just the Caprichos but also the Disasters, the Disparates and the black paintings are intended as social commentary and reflect the humanist values of the Enlightenment – an interpretation that would effectively place them in the same general category as Hogarth’s satirical sketches or even the broadsheet political caricatures of the times, which imply similar values. Such conclusions are very questionable. First, Caprichos 43, as we have noted, is scarcely representative of the Caprichos as a whole (and, interestingly enough, originally carried a different inscription containing no reference to a ‘sleep of reason’ but simply reading ‘A universal language drawn and engraved by Francisco de Goya in the year 1797’). Second, evidence suggests that the public notice was at least partly the work of Goya’s friends who were conscious of the ever-watchful Inquisition and anxious for his welfare (a motivation that may also explain the change of wording to Caprichos 43). Third, the public notice tells us, at best, about the Caprichos; we know

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50 Malraux, Saturne, 45.
51 Malraux, Promenades en Espagne avec Goya.
52 Quoted in Tomlinson, Francisco Goya y Lucientes, 140.
53 Gassier and Wilson comment that ‘The announcement was no doubt written with the help of his friends…’ Gassier and Wilson, Goya, His Life and Work, 129. Another critic writes: ‘The announcement is thought to be the work of the art critic and historian Ceán Bermúdez, a friend of Goya… It is reserved and discreet, suggesting an attempt to blunt the force of the accusations that
nothing of substance about Goya’s views concerning the Disasters, the Disparates and the black paintings, many of which were created much later. Fourth, and most importantly, when we examine the etchings and black paintings themselves – as distinct from the brief comments on the Caprichos mentioned above – the suggestion that Goya is, in effect, the equivalent of a Spanish Hogarth and a humanist at heart, is, as earlier analysis has sought to show, open to serious question, especially when one takes account of their radically different stylistic characteristics. Social commentary generally, and satire in particular, is scarcely conceivable without an implied system of values – an underlying concept of what is humanly and socially worthwhile, offering a vantage-point from which critique is made; and as we have seen, Malraux offers strong evidence for the view that ‘there is no system of man in Goya’. There is no space here to examine these matters in greater depth, but the truth may ultimately be, as Malraux suggests, that Goya himself was unsure about the exact nature of his achievement – a not altogether surprising situation given how far he was straying from the beaten tracks of post-Renaissance art. Malraux also offers the interesting suggestion that, in addition to a fear of attracting the unwelcome attention of the Inquisition, Goya may have been troubled by misgivings of a deeper, if less tangible, kind. ‘He was uncertain how far he was entitled to his phantoms’, writes Malraux, ‘and still more uncertain how far his phantoms were entitled to enter the world of art’. Given, in other words, that the fundamental ambition of art as it had been known for centuries was to embody a world of nobility, harmony and beauty, Goya may well have asked himself whether the universe he had created could claim a rightful and comprehensible place in the world of art. He may, that is, have asked himself not only if a painter to the royal court should be associated with works of this kind but, more fundamentally, whether they might not be an unacceptable affront to art itself.

would almost inevitably be made…’. Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez and Julián Gállego, eds., Goya: The Complete Etchings and Lithographs, vol. Munich (Prestel, 1994), 32. It is worth adding that the meaning of the replacement inscription in Caprichos 43 is less certain than it is usually taken to be and may not have been intended to carry the ‘philosophical’, pro-Enlightenment, message so often ascribed to it. It may simply be making the straightforward point that dreams can give birth to the irrational world of monsters – a point doubtless familiar to Goya given that so many of his etchings seem reminiscent of dreams. Tristan Todorov suggests another possibility. Noting that sueño in Spanish can mean ‘dream’ as well as ‘sleep’, he argues that if the former meaning is intended, ‘then it is reason itself, in its nocturnal mode, that produces monsters.’ Thus, ‘reason generates clear ideas but it can also produce nightmares’. Tzvetan Todorov, Goya, A L’Ombre des Lumières (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), 84.

54 Malraux, Saturne, 76.
Ultimately, Goya’s attitude towards his strange new creations may have been quite complex: in part concerns about the response they might receive from the Spanish public, in part apprehension about the reaction of the Inquisition, in part the kind of self-doubt Malraux describes – and yet in part a secret, even defiant, pride in what he may well have sensed was a revolutionary artistic achievement. Complex and conflicting feelings of this kind would help explain why he continued to work patiently and resolutely on his etchings for so many years despite knowing how little chance he would ever have of exhibiting or selling them. It would also explain why the black paintings were semi-clandestine and why, as if doubting his ‘entitlement’ – to borrow Malraux’s word – to an art of this kind, he waited until he was in his seventies before painting them. Such determination suggests a powerful and profound motivation – something rather more substantial, one cannot help but feel, than a desire to produce satirical commentary on contemporary Spanish mores, especially commentary that, as he knew, very few people in his own lifetime were likely to see. It suggests an awareness, however vaguely formulated in his own mind, that there was something in the very nature of the works he was creating that was of major artistic significance even if it implied a redefinition of the very meaning of art and the death of the ideal of beauty that had reigned unchallenged for so long.
References


Illustrations (deleted in this version for copyright reasons)

Fig. 1  Goya. Caprichos 59. And still they will not go............Error! Bookmark not defined.
Fig. 2  Goya. Disasters of War 39. A heroic feat! With dead men! ........Error! Bookmark not defined.
Fig. 3  Goya. Disparates 8. Men in sacks ..............................Error! Bookmark not defined.
Fig. 4  Goya. Old People Eating............................................Error! Bookmark not defined.