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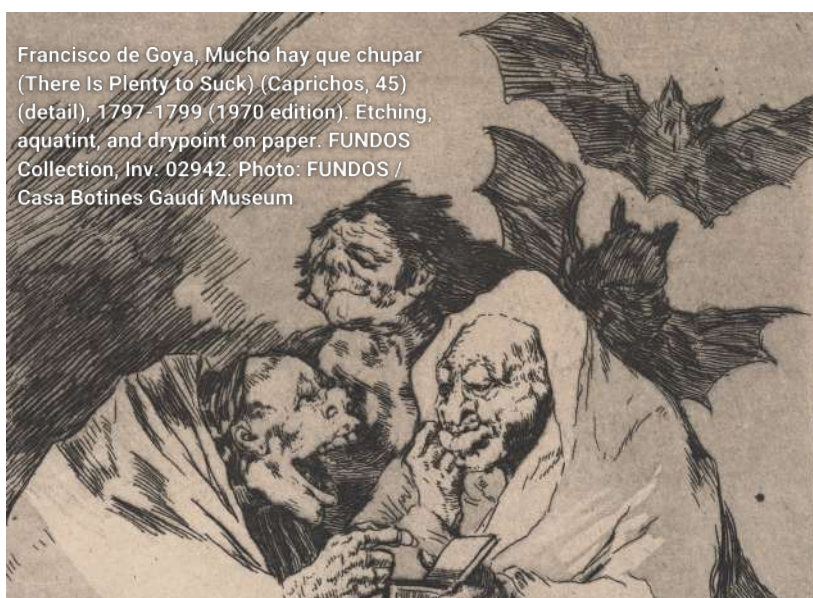
MUSEO  
CASA BOTINES  
GAUDÍ

## WITCHCRAFT, MAGIC, AND SUPERSTITION IN GOYA'S *CAPRICHOS*

Temporary exhibition. December 2023 - December 2024  
Casa Botines Gaudí Museum, Art Gallery, Hall II



Goya's *Caprichos* are a satirical ode to the defects of 18th-century European society. In them, Goya criticises the ignorance, superstition, and vulgarity of the working classes, the clergy, and the nobility, and deals with subjects such as religion, abortion, education, and political corruption. Special mention should be made of the prints dedicated to witches, very famous figures in Spanish intellectual life in the 18th century.



Francisco de Goya, *Mucho hay que chupar* (There Is Plenty to Suck) (*Caprichos*, 45) (detail), 1797-1799 (1970 edition). Etching, aquatint, and drypoint on paper. FUNDOS Collection, Inv. 02942. Photo: FUNDOS / Casa Botines Gaudí Museum

### Witches: myth and satire

Although practically forgotten in Spain today, witchcraft was one of the great subjects of study and conversation in our country from the 16th century onwards. A common theme in literary, musical, and artistic compositions, and also in scholarly gatherings and in tavern and pilgrimage talks, witches and their world were, until the 20th century, a phenomenon of enormous interest to intellectuals and of widespread belief among the people. Although today it may seem curious and even ridiculous, belief in witches and all that surrounded them (covens, demonic possessions, goblins, and fantastic infernal animals or their magical powers, such as their supposed ability to fly) was widespread among the working classes.

### Superstition and magic among the working classes

One of the omnipresent themes in the *Caprichos* is the ignorance of the people, which leads to irrational behaviour such as belief in all kinds of superstitions, magicians, and healers. Goya exemplifies this clearly in two prints: *Capricho 12, A caza de dientes* (*Out hunting for teeth*), reflects a widespread belief in Spain at the time that the teeth of hanged men helped young women to become pregnant. On the other hand, in *Capricho 33, Al Conde Palatino* (*To the Count Palatine*), he portrays the quacks who travelled around towns and villages promising miracles and magical cures in exchange for considerable sums of money. Here, rather than ridiculing the swindler - who smiles, triumphant and satisfied - Goya makes a mockery of the poor ignorant people who entrust their health to such sinister characters.

The rationalist eighteenth century could not but question all these beliefs at first and mock them later. This was the line taken by Goya in his *Caprichos* dedicated to witchcraft: as Julio Caro Baroja has pointed out, Goya dealt with this theme "not to satirise and condemn witches and warlocks, but those who believed they existed". This is evidenced by the ironic, veiled jocular tone of the titles of some of these prints: *Quien lo creyera* (*Who would*

have thought it!), *Miren que grabes!* (Look how solemn they are!), *Allá va eso* (There it goes), *Buen viage* (Bon voyage)... All these titles show an ironic Goya who seems to laugh, behind the burin and the metal plate, at the fantastic stories that have been invented about witches, and at those who still believe in their existence.

The Spanish intellectual milieu of the 18th century, and especially the circle frequented by Goya, was very fond of these stories of witches and enchantments. The Duke and Duchess of Osuna - Goya's friends and protectors - were great fans of English Gothic literature and witchcraft, a subject on which they maintained a large library; Goya himself produced several works inspired by witchcraft to decorate his palace. His great friend, the writer Leandro Fernández de Moratín, wrote a famous work on the subject, although it was published well after the *Caprichos*, so its influence on Goya's work must be questioned. Other intellectuals such as Feijoo, Jovellanos, and Voltaire dealt extensively with the subject. Even so, the taste for this world of witches and wizards, covens, enchantments, fantastic animals and dreamlike delusions already foreshadowed, as is well known, the Romantic aesthetic that was to prevail in Europe from the first third of the 19th century onwards.

**Text: Carlos Varela Fernández. Collections and Exhibitions Department.**

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*Room II of the Art Gallery is renewed annually due to the fragility of the works on display. Periodic renovations of this room help us not only to conserve our collection, but also to offer different readings of it.*

*For conservation reasons, we are obliged to keep a dim light in this room. We thank you for your understanding.*