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## WAR OF AGGRESSION IN THE EUROPEAN VISUAL ARTS UNTIL THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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**Abstract:** *From ancient time on, war has been a common subject in European art. Led from the need for commemoration, celebration and glory, rulers or state authorities appreciated art works that represented their power, recalling victories, war successes, or patriotically motivated sacrifices during important historic moments. The Greco-Roman mythology had been a great source of inspiration in the war-motive art during the several centuries throughout the Modern Age, but the Christian church was also interested in the representation of some war conflicts initiated from religious reasons, that were crucial for defending its status on the continent.*

*The intention of this article is to look closely at artists, who had been interested in the portrayal of human suffering, as the consequence of war. They are the ones that had made the realistic approach to the disasters of the war, by using different art language than the personification, which is present in Dürer's famous print "The Four Riders of Apocalypse". This group of authors had produced timeless scenes of the aggression of war, which represents death and a lot of suffering amongst both soldiers and civilians. Famous European artists, such as Bruegel the Elder, Jacques Callot, and Francisco de Goya, react in their artworks as if they, themselves, have had witnessed the horrible war scenes, and are passing on their judgement at the same time. They have made a special contribution to the war-genre in art, that still moves the public, but also thanks to its comic approach, as an important component. Their anti-war attitude, on an intimate and community level, recalls humanity to respond, by not allowing history to be repeated.*

**Key words:** War, Aggression, European Art, Painting, Printmaking

“Of all deeds which win praise, isn’t war the seed and source? But what is more foolish than to embark on a struggle of this kind for some reason or other when it does more harm than good to either side?”

—*Erasmus, In Praise of Folly (1511)*

War as an artistic motive is permanently present in European art, from antiquity to the present days. Throughout history, artists were mostly encouraged to represent famous battles, as significant contemporary or historical events. In order to answer the need for commemoration, or glorifying the sovereigns, heroes, or patriotic feelings, they celebrated victories on the battlefield with their artworks. Painted and printed examples of battle confrontations range from the famous Trojan war, and its protagonists, and episodes, to the battle scenes by Renaissance painters, including the Crusades and Constantine’s battle at Milvian bridge. There are also many allegorical works of art that treat the war motif, like Dürer’s well known print “The Four Riders of Apocalypse”, or Rubens’s painting “Consequences of War”, and others, with a political and propagandistic character.

It is not incidental, that from the ocean of works of art with war themes made in the Modern Era, I decided to extract one significant group, standing out for its realistic approach, that implicates not only artistic and sociological, but also moral effects. Three excellent artists, each in his own century, represented war almost as eyewitnesses, notifying the cruelty of war, its suffering, death and terror, all happening during their lifetime. Throughout their art, using their original artistic manner and technique, they showed an anti-war stance, empathy for the war victims, and humanity. All of them reacted towards the aggression of war, which they might have directly experienced as well. The three artistic colossuses, who with a segment of their work creatively followed their consciousness in the periods of war of aggression, are: Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c.1525-1569), Jacques Callot (1592-1635) and Francisco de Goya (1742-1828). Coincidentally, they are some of the best etchers in art history.

The artistic work of Pieter Bruegel the Elder is well known, yet today there are many misconceptions regarding his education, personal concerns, philosophical, or religious beliefs. However, his various and complicated artworks show not only a great artistic talent, but also a lucid observer of the beauty found in the Dutch landscape, his homeland, the life of the people of his era, and also of human nature in general. Although close to Bosch at the beginning of his career, Bruegel left the Middle Age’s way of understanding the world, and without pretentious goals entered the depth of the Renaissance humanism.<sup>1</sup> He loved and appreciated ordinary people, shown though his art, full with sympathy for the ‘simple folk’. Many of his pictures and prints proved that Bruegel

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<sup>1</sup> B. Klasens, Ž. Ruso, *Brojgel, naš savremenik*, Jugoslovenska revija, Beograd, Vuk Karadžić, Beograd, 1977, 221-222.

could not stand, nor tolerate injustice. He was contemporary to the revolutionary aspirations of the Dutch under the Spanish government. People reacted to the political, economic and religious repressions, especially when faced with the bloody governance of the Duke from Alba. The last few years of his life, Pieter Bruegel the Elder witnessed the suffering of his people under the cruelty of the Spanish army, an army led by a duke that went to Brussels, with the orders to suppress the Dutch revolt.<sup>2</sup> It is understandable that he rendered his last works within the historical context of his time. It is recognized that he, both, reflects and alludes to the intense conflict between the Netherlandish Protestants and the forces of Catholic Spain, during a period when religious motives and nationalist interests were barely discernible from each other.<sup>3</sup> From that reason, certain Bruegel's works were specific political commentaries, pointed and potentially dangerous to their creator.

Trying to hide the proper subjects of this specific group of paintings, Bruegel used common religious titles. Nevertheless, according to the public of his time; history, the tribulations of everyday life and the Bible, are all inextricably mingled. One such work is "The Massacre of Innocents" (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna); dated in 1566, according to a companion piece "The Numbering in Bethlehem" (Musées Royaux des Beaux -Arts, Brussels).<sup>4</sup> (Figs. 1 and 2) The viewer can recognize a snow-covered Lowlands village on the picture. The depicted adults and children, chased and massacred by armored knights and soldiers, have expressions of fear, disbelief and grief on their faces. Although there can be no precise identification of the armed riders, the one wearing a black costume, with a long, gray beard, can lead to a guess, that the person is Ferdinand Alvares, the Duke of Alba, as Feber has pointed, comparing to his contemporary portraits.<sup>5</sup>

Duke of Alba was sent to the Lowlands by Filip II to replace Margaret of Parma as regent, with the task of crushing the various heretic movements flourishing in the Netherlands.<sup>6</sup> The same year when he reached the destination,

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>3</sup> S. Ferber, "Peter Bruegel and the Duke of Alba", in *Renaissance News*, Autumn, 1966, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp.205-219, Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Renaissance Society of America, 205-206.

Stable URL:<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2858528> (Accessed on 11. 01.2023)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 206. The first suggestion that the Duke of Alba might be present in "The Massacre of Innocents" was offered by Belgian scholar Henry Hymans in 1891, but the same was almost completely disregarded by subsequent scholarship.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 208, 211.

<sup>6</sup> Kaschek, Bertram; Müller, Jürgen; Buskirk, Jessica (Hrsgg.), *Pieter Bruegel the Elder and religion*, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden 2018, S. 1-34, 1-2. Antwerp, the town where Pieter Bruegel started his artistic career in the early 1550's, was a hotspot of religious diversity, with a broad range of deviant positions from Erasmianism, Lutheranism, Zwinglianism, and Calvinism, to several branches of Anabaptism and Spiritualism.

[https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/7863/1/Kaschek\\_Pieter\\_Bruegel\\_the\\_Elder\\_and\\_religion\\_2018.pdf](https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/7863/1/Kaschek_Pieter_Bruegel_the_Elder_and_religion_2018.pdf).

in 1567, Bruegel painted his “Conversion of St Paul” (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). Here is another of Bruegel’s religious works in which the subject is barely visible. (**Fig. 3**) What you see first is a magnificent landscape in which the trees and mountains are elongated, while amidst the rocks a cavalcade of travellers, on foot and on horseback, take their way. Following the eye-catching serpentine-like continuous procession, the viewer has to look carefully to notice the figure of St Paul, fallen from his horse, as in the Bible.

Perhaps Bruegel was making a parallel between the story for St Paul and the Duke of Alba, crossing the Alps with his army to reach the Lowlands. In fact, both men had reputations of being the defenders of the orthodoxy, and against the incursions of any heretic beliefs. Such positive comparisons of the Duke of Alba with the biblical figure of St Paul, vanished soon after the duke constituted his so-called “Inner Council”, also known as “The Reign of Blood”. The snowless Alps on the picture suggest an early summer, which match the arrival time of the duke at his destination. The rider in black, depicted from the back on the white horse, in the center of the painting seems to be the duke himself, portrayed again later in the “Massacre of the Innocents”. It is also possible that the main idea of the painter was to depict the high altitudes of the mountains, as an intransitive rung for the occupying army. According to this theory, there is a possibility that Bruegel hoped that, while on his way, the Duke of Alba would have had a vision, as the one St Paul once had.

The understanding of Bruegel’s political-religious commitment as strictly anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic, is too one-sided. Scholars are still arguing about the artist’s religious and political statements, but it is most likely that Bruegel took neither side in the conflict: all the evidence from this and other paintings is that, like Erasmus, he disapproved of any violence committed in the name of Christianity – whether by Calvinists or Catholics.<sup>7</sup> He also wasn’t just an observer of daily events, but an independent intellectual, who, through his art, presented his moral and humanistic values. Paintings such as “Conversion of St Paul”, “The Massacre of the Innocents”, and some others, are infused with a sense of all wars’ tragic futility.

Though such interpretations are disputed, there surely is some significance in the artist’s choice to paint Biblical stories that all Christians would have known and understood. The painting seems to mirror the preoccupations of Bruegel’s contemporaries.<sup>8</sup> Another painting that belongs to this group is “The Procession to Calvary” (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), eventually Bruegel’s most crowded painted scene (**Fig. 4**). With everything happening in the painting, the incident involving Jesus does not carry any more weight than its surroundings. Almost all figures, including the thieves, their confessors and

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> <https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2015/07/04/bruegel-in-vienna-part-2-religion-politics-and-war/>

(Accessed on 11.01.2023)



the crowds of spectators – are present in contemporary robes, with the exception of Jesus and the sacred figures in the foreground. Regiment of red-jacketed Spanish militiamen, armed with pikes, patrol the crowd and accompany the procession to the Calvary. If these soldiers, organising the crucifixion, are those that his countrymen might have recognised as the ones occupying their land, Bruegel's painting seems to pose the question: Who is being crucified? As the crowds make their way up the hill, they pass through a landscape dotted with gallows, from which corpses still hang, and breaking wheels to which broken bodies, pecked by crows, still cling.

“The Triumph of Death” (c. 1562), is one of Bruegel's *Wimmelbilder* ‘busy’ pictures. (Fig. 5) This scene is influenced by both the medieval tradition of the *Dance of Death* and by depictions of the *Triumph of Death* in Italian painting.<sup>9</sup> The profusion of scenes and the moralizing sense, applied by the artists, are part of Hieronymous Bosch's influence on this work.

The large composition is tensing with countless figures seen from above, depicting a vast, almost bird's eye view: an apocalyptic landscape where there are burning fires, black plumes of smoke, bones, and bodies, and a natural environment overturned into chaos. The elevated viewpoint allows us to see all the events and activities taking place simultaneously within the vast landscape, showing many details. The prevailing feeling is suffering, accompanied with destruction, and merciless murder. Scattered throughout the composition are groups of skeletons, all part of this deathly army that has come to destroy all life and usher the living to their death. There are seemingly countless scenes in the painting. The way skeletons are organized and acting, as a well-prepared, well-equipped occupying army, is suggesting the horrified effect of the war, and its deadly consequences. There is a big difference from this painting and the traditional iconography of either, the *Triumph* or *Dance of Death*.<sup>10</sup>

All details testify to the sharp eye and fertile imagination of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Many situations are recognizable as a characteristic for the aggression of war. This is death's violent representation. Furthermore, the torturing and killing of people, in groups or individually, presented as these ‘human-like’ activities, can add a sort of dark humor and almost satire to their portrayal. The moral dimension of the painting is, also, unquestionable.<sup>11</sup> All kinds of brutalities are committed and justified under the cross of ‘true’ religion. These considerations would indicate that “The Triumph of Death” was probably painted in the late 1560's, perhaps around 1568, when Bruegel's artistic interests

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<sup>9</sup> P. Thon, “Bruegel's The Triumph of Death Reconsidered”, in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Autumn, 1968, vol. 21, No. 3 (Autumn, 1968), pp. 289-299, Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Renaissance Society of America, p. 290-291. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2859416> (accessed on 12 Jan 2023)

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 296.

shifted from landscapes and other neutral subjects of 1564-65, to more socially and politically influenced works.<sup>12</sup>

At the heart of political tensions, new socio-economic relationships, religious unrest and, cultural richness followed by a proliferation of ideas specific to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Bruegel seems to be an innovative artist, attentively observing the world around him. While his opinions remain unclear to historians due to the lack of sources, the painter, nevertheless, offers us a testament to his great awareness of the time in which he lived, and of which he provides a valuable overview.

Jacques Callot was one of the greatest of all etchers and one of the first major creative artists to work exclusively in the graphic arts. Being born in a family of minor nobility in Nancy, the duchy of Lorraine, he established his reputation, as a printmaker, at the Medici court, in Florence, in service of Cosimo II de Medici. After the death of prince Cosimo in 1621, Callot moved back in his homeland, continuing his work between Nancy and Paris, traveling occasionally in Spain and the Netherlands. The artist learned to combine the sophisticated techniques and exaggerations of late Mannerism, with witty and acute observation, into a brilliantly expressive idiom. His style was widely recognizable, especially within the many -figured compositions. Making thematic series in various printing techniques was usual practice in the Modern Era, and can be traced in the Callot's printing corpus too.

In the context of war, there is his last important series *Les Grandes Misères et Malheurs de la Guerre*, issued in 1633, during the course of the pan-European conflict known as the Thirty Years War, with the royal privilege from Louis XIII. Rather than being a commissioned work, it is thought that the subject matter in his *Miseries of War* was chosen by Callot himself, under the influence of the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), and related events.<sup>13</sup> Scholars mostly defer on issues, like the choosing the subjects and their interpretation.<sup>14</sup> What takes precedence in the eighteen images that comprise the series is not a polemic in favor of a particular nation, religion, or class. Rather, there is an insistent focus on the relationships that diverse groups of people have towards the violence that accompanies war: those who endure it, those who observe it, and those who actively partake in it.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 294-295.

<sup>13</sup> D. Wolfthal, "Jacques Callot's Miseries of War", in the *Art Bulletin* 59 (2): 222-233, Jun, 1977, Published by CAA, 222. The previous series from c.1632 has only six plates in small format and its title is *Small Miseries of War*. The plates were usually treated as preliminary sketches for the later *Grand Miseries* and the first series is probably abandoned after the artist changed the format and the concept of the complete series with eighteenth plates.

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3049634.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aef8fd1ed76edda7cf5abb786b2d9f8a&ab\\_segments=&origin=](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3049634.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aef8fd1ed76edda7cf5abb786b2d9f8a&ab_segments=&origin=) (Accessed on 17.01.2023)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> K. Hornstein, "Just Violence: Jacques Callot's *Grandes Misères et Malheurs de la Guerre*", in *Bulletin*, the University Michigan Museums of Art and Archeology, vol.16, 2005,

At first glance, Callot's *Grand Miseries of the War*, is hard to understand. The Seventeenth century artist's biographers had not uncovered much about the iconographical significance of the work, so there are still opposing opinions.<sup>16</sup> Thematically, the eighteen plates divide in three parts. After the depictions of soldiers enlisting in the military and engaging in battle, the series turns to scenes of soldiers raping, pillaging, and plundering. The last nine plates in the series, horrifically, picture the capture and punishment of renegade soldiers by different groups of people, including officers and revenge-seeking peasants. The wide range of violent events enacted by soldiers, officers, and civilians represent martial violence, and not simply as a series of acts, committed by one clearly debauched party against another, but as encounters, lacking distinction between foe and victim. The visual motif of hanging occurs within each of these three narrative sections in very different contexts, highlighting Callot's interest in depicting violent action, yet not just for the sake of condemning any one party. In all three sections, Callot calls into question the morality that underpins conventional assumptions about heroic action and victimization in wartime relations amongst a range of human subjects.

Except for the title page, these prints have inscribed verses, attributed to Michell de Marolles, Abbe de Villeloin. (**Fig. 6**) Even though Callot did not compose these verses, he was certainly responsible for the title of the series and, for the approval of the verses for each print. This provides understanding of the artist's statement and the context in which he represented the horrifying experience of war in his time. The fact that Callot was trying to balance his avoidance to partake in the conquering of his native Lorraine from Louis XIII, with his royal patronage, he managed to sprout many doubts in his intentions behind the execution of these prints.

The series of *Grandes Misères de la Guerre* is Jacques Callot's most famous work, however, there is still little information regarding its origins. For instance, it is not known whether a patron commissioned it. The title on the frontispiece, *LES MISERES ET LES MAL-HEURS DE LA GUERRE*, is confusing: it seems to disapprove of war, whereas the careful scrutiny of the plates, their

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pp. 29-48, 30. [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/just-violence-jacques-callots-grandes-miseres-et-malheurs-de%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/just-violence-jacques-callots-grandes-miseres-et-malheurs-de%20(1).pdf)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 Félibien consistently portrays Callot as a fearless and autonomous master of etching, biographical characteristics that later scholars have relied upon when interpreting Callot's work. While Félibien does not explicitly mention the *Misères*, he does offer a narrative of Callot's refusal to engrave a maplike account of the siege of Lorraine. Just a few years prior to making the *Misères*, Callot had engraved two large-scale, multi-plate representations of Louis XIII's military victories in La Rochelle and the Ile de Ré, and it therefore would seem plausible that the artist might do the same for the conquest of Lorraine. Félibien's account privileges Callot's allegiance to his native land over Louis XIII's French kingdom and describes the conflict between the head of state and the artist in extensive detail; Félibien, A. 1967. *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellens peintres anciens et modernes*, ed. A. F. Blunt. Farnborough, UK : Gregg Press Limited.

texts and their sequence goes against such simplistic reading. Far from criticising wars or casting doubt on their legitimacy, the *Misères* actually deals with the soldiers' discipline during time of war: "Callot's œuvre is calculated to demonstrate how much the discipline of soldiers and respect for occupied or conquered territories should be the constant concern of those whose mission it is to command armies."<sup>17</sup> The art historian Filippo Baldinucci (1625-1697) describes each plate praising Callot's technical mastery and creativity, reminds us that *Les Grandes Misères* first came to be known under the title *La Vita del Soldato*.<sup>18</sup> The title of the *Misères* series in the inventory of the engraver's estate after his death is, in fact, *La Vie des soldats* [The Life of Soldiers]. The sequence of plates in the series casts light on Callot's approach. "The engraved scenes are ordered according to rigorous logic which is required in any educational purpose."<sup>19</sup>

After the title plate, the series opens with the soldier enlisting, and this first maxim: *Il faut que sa vertu s'arme contre le vice* [He needs to arm his virtue against vice]. The next plate presents a sample of battles during which *l'invincible courage des soldats peut se manifester* [soldiers have the opportunity to reveal their invincible courage]. Plates 4 to 8, however, denounce the cruel abuses perpetrated by soldiers in wartime, as enemies of civil peace, at the expense of certain categories who are in theory protected by law: merchants and travelers, women and children, the clergy, the poor. (Figs. 7, 8 and 9) Plate 9 depicts rogue soldiers captured by the regular army and marched back to camp. Plates 10 to 14 answer plates 4 to 8, which described the soldiers' abuses, by representing the soldiers' punishments for these excesses: tortures like strappado, hanging, harquebus shooting, burning at the stake, breaking on the wheel. (Fig. 10) It is to be noted though that the *Misères* do not focus only on rogue soldiers and their punishments: the next three plates depict the various fortunes of soldiers both good and bad. Some end their days in a hospice, on the side of the road, or even perish under the blows of peasants getting their revenge. (Fig. 11) Finally, "the conclusion glorifies the severity and the appreciation of a just and wise commander" who *punit les méchants et les bons recompance* [punishes the evil and rewards the good]. That bad soldiers are punished and good soldiers are rewarded seems to be "the most obvious lesson of the *Misères*".<sup>20</sup>

Paulette Choné places this work by Callot in the context of the debate that began again in 1618, as a result of the Thirty Years War: "The *Misères* closely adhere to contemporary concerns about how armies are recruited, disciplined

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<sup>17</sup> M. Richard, *Jacques Callot, Une œuvre en son temps, Les Misères et les Mal-heurs de la guerre, 1633*, Nantes, 1992., pp. 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> F. Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno*, Firenze, 1681-1728, iv, pp. 383-84; Cited in D. Wolfthal, *op. cit.*, 222.

<sup>19</sup> M. Richard, *op. cit.*, 72.

<sup>20</sup> P. Choné, « Les misères de la guerre, ou « la vie du soldat » : la force et le droit », in *Jacques Callot*, exhibition catalog, Musée historique lorrain, Nancy, 13 June-14 September 1992, 409.

and punished.”<sup>21</sup> Callot’s series could thus be seen as a contribution to “the legal foundation of modern States.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite many various, similar or contrary understanding of the series’ content, it is necessary to have in mind Callot’s previous artistic experience, as well as the prevalent public acceptance of war in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as an inherent part of life and society. Realistic elements are noticeable throughout the plates, but Callot’s scenes are not clear documentation of the actual war. The earliest interpretation contends, that Callot etched the series to protest Louis XIII’s invasion, in 1635, of his native Lorraine that had been an autonomous duchy, until conquered by the French. According to this interpretation, the atrocities, seen as perpetrated by the French troops in each image, towards the undeserving citizens of Lorraine, create a dichotomy between good and evil, presented with innocent victims pitted against barbaric victimizers. There are no overt references to a specific geography or troop allegiance in any of the plates, but it is a historical fact that the series date back to around the same time Louis XIII’s troops entered Lorraine and subsequently conquered the region.<sup>23</sup> Being depicted as both abhorrent and noble, the soldiers, as protagonists of the series, pose a particularly difficult interpretive problem. Since these main characters are presented as neither completely evil nor virtuous, scholars have characterized the *Misères* as “ambivalent” or “impartial”.

There is a clearly constructed story that keeps the episodes together. Callot’s concern with the concept of “just” war is only one of the elements of the *Miseries*. He was also satisfying his affiliations towards scenes of violence and low types-themes, which persisted throughout his career. In addition, Callot depicted large crowds in a small format in order to display his technical virtuosity. We cannot know whether the artist felt pity or outrage, but if he was indifferent to the suffering, why did he choose subject emphasizing, or to use the words of the title page, “les misères et les malheurs de la guerre”? Many authors neglect the moral component of the series, but no one can deny that Callot showed reasonable concern about “justice” in war.<sup>24</sup> If war can’t be avoided, then it must be conducted with respect to certain moral rules. In time of war, human suffering must be bore to a minimum (Geneva convention).

The inhumanity, the victories, and the restoration of peace, both by the looting soldiers [“immoral thieves”] and by their punishers (military or others), can be more telling of the *misère* of war and the viewer’s paradoxical responses of compassion and indignation (at the sight of such war consequences), then

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>24</sup> D. Wolfthal, *op.cit.*, 233; also M. Levine, W. Taylor, War as Catastrophe: Jacques Callot’s “Miseries of War” as Moral Meditation, 160. Accessible on <https://koreascience.kr/article/JAKO201216837990995.pdf>

any other morally didactic purposes the series might have.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the miseries of war, shown in all their variety, are to highlight humanity's beastly potential, along with man's own brutality towards his fellow man. Callot's series of "Miseries" tells of finding hope in the restoration of "peace", once the committed war atrocities punished, and just rewards concluded.<sup>26</sup>

Although he stripped war of its glory and romance, by showing, with a merciless eye, the distress of common people, Callot's view of war and its miseries, remains arguably conservative and didactic, subordinate to the accompanying Aristotelian narrative sequence and the *subscriptio* verses. Such an interpretation may seem foreign to a modern viewer, who might approach Callot from a Goyaesque point of view.

At the beginning of the XIX century, from 1810 to 1820, Francisco Goya created the series of etchings, focused on the guerrilla war, waged by the Spanish against Napoleon's soldiers and characterized by an outburst of hatred and cruelty on a scale unprecedented in the history of European warfare. He filled the pages of his sketchbook with scenes of murder, torture, rape, and transferred these to etchings. Rather than depicting heroic soldiers and scenes of glorious battle, Goya produced stark, sobering images of brutality, slaughter and misery. (Figs. 12, 13) His images exposed the horror of war, from the ferocity of village fighting to the terrible famine that ravaged Madrid in 1811-12, claiming 20,000 lives. (Figs. 14, 15) In the "caprichos emphaticos" (plates 65-80) the artist comments on the war's political, religious, and ideological aspects and ramifications. With a stark intensity unprecedented in the history of art, these prints convey the barbarity and futility of war. No man remains spared from the inhumanity of another, and no death is glorious.

Goya's cycle "Los Desastres de la Guerra" was not published during Goya's lifetime, possibly because the artist feared some of the prints were politically dangerous or, perhaps, because he knew that the war exhausted nation would be too passive in response. The prints finally appeared in 1863, revealing a theme that would continue to reappear in twentieth century art: the suffering of people with war no longer confined only to the battlefield and amongst soldiers.<sup>27</sup>

The title and motif inspiration are obviously taken from the Callot's series "The Miseries of War", and there had been many scholars that have made a parallel between the two printed cycles. Some mutual components remain present, but it is necessary to bear in mind the time span of 200 years and the different projections of war and its particular atrocities, presented by the two artists. Concerning the similarities, Goya's images don't demonstrate a one -

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<sup>25</sup> C. Cornew, From "Misery" to "Disaster": perceptions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century warfare in the etchings of Jacques Callot and Francisco Goya, 82. Accessible on [https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/14626/Cornew\\_From%281998%29.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/14626/Cornew_From%281998%29.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>27</sup> The series is completely represented in [http://www.gasl.org/refbib/Goya\\_\\_Guerra.pdf](http://www.gasl.org/refbib/Goya__Guerra.pdf)

sided support, neither for the ideals of the French Revolution nor for the Spanish people fighting against the aggression from the superior French army.<sup>28</sup> It is almost as if, it is irrelevant on which side do the people, doing the killing or dying, belong. Nobody is a victor in the scenes of the chaos of war, which turns peaceful citizens into brutal beasts. Just as Callot's series, Goya's etchings from the "Desastres" were not commissioned.

Like Callot, he emphasizes the central axis in the scene, but unlike Callot, who represents death from the distance, Goya places it in front of a viewer.<sup>29</sup> Nor does he create a three-dimensional setting for placing the figures; rather, he offers only a few figures in fragments of a landscape. Everything looks placeless and meaningless in Goya's prints, which is not only the stylistic difference and individual artistic manner, but also the question of different sensibility and reaction. Goya unmistakably communicates his condemnation of war. Callot's "Miseries", although analogous in subject, are very different in style and spirit. Clear daylight, a wide-angle perspective, meticulous drawing, and figures who display little emotion characterize Callot's prints.<sup>30</sup> Goya's early nineteenth century etchings of war stand in sharp contrast to the seventeenth-century perception of war; immediately discerned from each artist's title, in regards to their respective series of etchings. Callot's "Les miseres et fes malheurs de fa guerre" emphasizes the "misery and misfortune of war" as his focus of attention; Goya's "Los desastres de la Guerra" stresses the "disaster" of war, a more disquieting view.<sup>31</sup>

For this series, Goya drifted away from traditional, painterly compositions to instead focus on narrative. He used realistic expressions, outfits, and settings to depict moments of torture, tragedy, and suffering. The 82 etchings are often categorized into three groups—war, famine, and political allegory. The first 47 plates focus on the consequences of the bloody conflicts between the French and Spanish. Goya is unapologetic with his imagery, showing mutilated bodies, tortured captives, and violence perpetrated by soldiers against civilians. Some of the titles indicate he witnessed the depicted atrocities firsthand—plate 44, for example, is called "I saw it."<sup>32</sup> The next portray the famine that plagued Spain following the end of the French rule. The imagery focuses on the tragedies that occurred in Madrid, showing the dead and the dying and the carrying of the corpses. The final 17 show the demoralization of the Spanish citizens, having realized they fought to reinstate a monarchy that refuses to change. The plates express critiques of post-war politics as well as skepticism toward religious idolatry. Goya characterized each of his "Disasters of War" etchings

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<sup>28</sup> R. M. and R. Hagen, *Francisco Goya, 1746-1828*, Taschen, Köln, 2005, 56.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>30</sup> D. Wolfthal, *op. cit.*, 222.

<sup>31</sup> C. Cornew, *op. cit.*, 84

<sup>32</sup> R. M. and R. Hagen, *op. cit.*, 58. At his age of 62, and in weak health condition, it is questionable if the plates from the series are authentic record of the war. It is more convincing that Goya rather illustrated the products of his imagination.

with brief phrases, together with the author's bitter, sarcastic commentary on every choking representation.

Goya's series, which focuses on humanity's irrationality and inhumaneness, shows no moral guidance to light the way, no moralizing verse to accompany his illustrations, and no fixed hope in whatever should come after. The honor for loyalty and the dignity in loss could be borne with a greater sense of relief and compassion in the seventeenth century, something considered denied to the victim of wars from Modernity onwards. This gulf separates Callot from Goya (and post Goya artists such as Manet, Picasso, Dix, Grosz, and Bacon).<sup>33</sup> Despite its age, "The Disasters of War" remains one of the boldest anti-war statements ever made, reminding all of us that war can bring out the worst of humanity. From this point Picasso's painting "Guernica" can be seen not only in continuity with but also in contrast to Francisco Goya's series of etchings "Los desastros de la Guerra". (Fig. 16) Although Goya was one of several artists to respond to the gruesome Napoleonic Wars, his etchings focus on the horrors of war in general. They are not a political protest, as "Guernica" is, but a human one.<sup>34</sup>

In two of his monumental paintings from 1814, Goya presented a more politically charged perspective. He was commissioned by the governing council of Spain to make paintings created for a public audience, the two companion canvases—"The Second of May, 1808" and "The Third of May, 1808" (*Museo del Prado*)—that commemorate events from the beginning of the war. (Figs. 17, 18) The first image represents a bloody encounter that took place between the French army and the people of Madrid who rose up against them. The second depicts the execution of rebels by the French on the following day.

With "The Third of May, 1808", Goya has made an image of actual historical events, but enhanced them for maximum dramatic effect. During the night over Madrid, the condemned men stand before a firing squad on the hill Principe Pío, one of several locations where such executions took place. The recognizable architecture of the city in the background lends immediacy to the scene. Yet, it is the figures left of the composition that demand the viewer's attention. The main figure, dressed in white, practically glows. Holding out his arms in an unmistakable reference to the crucified Christ, he appears as a heroic martyr. While the faceless French soldiers on the opposite side appear almost inhuman, the ill-fated Spanish rebels elicit both sympathy for their suffering and respect for their sacrifice. Goya's modern, Romantic approach in this representation resulted with a very powerful iconographic solution, which became timeless, but also influenced the art of the next century. (Fig. 19)

<sup>33</sup> C. Cornew, *op. cit.*, 87.

<sup>34</sup> M. Bal, "Response: Ariel Dorfman's Quest for Responsibility", in *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 91, No. 1, (Mar., 2009), pp. 44-50, CAA, 44. Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20619655> (accessed on 20 January 2023)



Nevertheless, the bridge that links Bruegel and Callot to Goya (and to all war art) is that violence and cruelty remain universal by whoever commits such deeds, in whatever era, and in whatever circumstance, and it cannot really be glorified as "moral" and "just" since war's very premise will always be grounded on being immoral and unjust. There is also something else that connects the mentioned artist's war motifs, and no matter how absurd that sounds, it is a noticeable comic element. Graphic imagery is endemic to warfare. Comic "documentarians of wartime atrocity," Chute says (Chute, 41), turn the immediacy and intimacy of war reportage into opportunities for inhabitation. Concerning the representative war-works of Pieter Bruegel, Jacques Callot and Francisco Goya, reader-viewers might feel urged to encounter "the *act* of looking and witnessing".<sup>35</sup> Comics make up a tradition of showing forth what otherwise might not be seen or heard, blending reality with fantasy and humor with humorlessness. The comic's record of war is less about coverage or description than it is about documentation. Comics provide artful depictions of events. They also issue vivid, even explicit displays from which judgments can be drawn. War comics bear witness as much as they *bare* witness. And they do so by toeing the not-so-subtle line between glory and grief. Comical artistic execution thus pronounced the nonfictional, expressive documentation of evidence *within* the bodies of survivors (as psychical or physical sufferance) and in *outward appearances* like corporeal disfigurements and even geographical destruction. Plainly, "graphic violence" has become the literal and figurativemarkers for expressing heroic (and unheroic) military activities (Chute, 126) and for materializing the stresses and strains of combat.<sup>36</sup>

In *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus writes that there is nothing more lofty or heroic than war, and yet nothing more foolish. War, in Erasmus's view, is the touchstone for an eternally recurring comedy of human error.<sup>37</sup> Where some might see a situation in which generations after generations end up laughing at such folly, Erasmus sees many war councils spoiling for a fight everyone will always lose in the end. There is no doubt that Erasmus preferred the ostensive disadvantages of peace to the false justices of war. War art thrive on this

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<sup>35</sup> Cited in Review by: Christopher J. Gilbert, *Review: War Comics*,  
Reviewed Work(s): Comics and Conflict: Patriotism and Propaganda from WWII  
through

Operation Iraqi Freedom by Cord A. Scott: The Comic Art of War: A Critical Study of  
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1. February 2023)

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

quandary, adding “falsities” to true-to-life wartime circumstances, as a means of accounting for the absurdity, madness, and evil that urge artists.

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**Fig. 1.** Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Census in Bethlehem*, oil on wood panel, 1566, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.



**Fig. 2.** Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Massacre of the Innocents*, oil on wood panel, c. 1565-1567, British Royal Collection in Windsor.





Fig. 3. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Conversion of St Paul the Apostle*, 1567, oil on wood panel, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien.



Fig. 4. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Procession to Calvary*, 1564, oil on wood panel, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien.





**Fig. 5.** Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death*, c. 1562, oil on wood panel, Museo del Prado, Madrid.



**Fig. 6.** Title page, from the suite *The Miseries and Misfortunes of War* by Jacques Callot.





**Fig. 7.** Jacques Callot, Plate 4, *La Maraud, The Raid*, 1633, etching from „Les Grandes Misères et les malheurs de la guerre“, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



**Fig. 8.** Jacques Callot, Plate 6, *Dévastation d'un monastère, Looting a Monastery*, 1633, etching from „Les Grandes Misères et les malheurs de la guerre“, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



**Fig. 9.** Jacques Callot, Plate 7, *Pillage et incendie d'un village, Looting and burning a village*, 1633, etching from „Les Grandes Misères et les malheurs de la guerre“, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.





**Fig. 10.** Jacques Callot, Plate 11, *La Pendaion, The Hanging*, 1633, etching from „Les Grandes Misères et les malheurs de la guerre“, British Museum.



**Fig. 11.** Jacques Callot, Plate 16, *La revanche des paysans, The peasants fight back*, 1633, etching from „Les Grandes Misères et les malheurs de la guerre“, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.





**Fig. 12.** Francisco de Goya, Plate 3, *Lo mismo*, *The same*, 1863, etching from „Los Desastres de la Guerra“, Museo del Prado, Madrid.



**Fig. 13.** Francisco de Goya, Plate 9, *No quieren*, *They do not want to*, 1863, etching from „Los Desastres de la Guerra“, Museo del Prado, Madrid.





**Fig. 14.** Francisco de Goya, Plate 18, *Enterrar y callar*, *Bury them and keep quiet*, 1863, etching from „Los Desastres de la Guerra“, Museo del Prado, Madrid.



**Fig. 15.** Francisco de Goya, Plate 37, *Esto es peor*, *This is worse*, 1863, etching from „Los Desastres de la Guerra“, Museo del Prado, Madrid.





**Fig. 16.** Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid.



**Fig. 17.** Francisco de Goya, *The Second of May 1808*, 1814, oil on canvas, Museo del Prado, Madrid.





**Fig. 18.** Francisco de Goya, *The Third of May 1808*, 1814, oil on canvas, Museo del Prado, Madrid.



**Fig. 19.** Pablo Picasso, *Massacre in Korea*, 1951, oil on canvas, Musée National Picasso Museum, Paris.