

Painting the Catholic Narrative (a Socio-Political Interpretation): Comparing Baroque and Romantic Theistic Works of Caravaggio and Goya

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Abstract

Beginning in 1517, the Protestant Church began a reformation within the Roman Church. This call for revival acted as a way of renewing Protestant values while criticizing those of the Catholic Church. Under the heavy judgment of European society, the Catholic Church implemented a Counter-Reformation by starting the Council of Trent in 1545. Various doctrines and propositions during the twenty-fifth and final meeting of the Council shifted how not only the Church, but the public were to view art. Art gained a new purpose as the Catholic Church intended for visual representations to glorify and spread Catholic teachings. Similarly to this change was that which came as a result of the Spanish Inquisition lasting from 1478 to 1834. The significance and influence of the Inquisition are seen in Early Romantic art along with themes from the Age of Enlightenment. The wide-scale movement aimed to further the understanding of science, social constructs, and politics. The symbolism of these changes is embedded into the work of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ* (1602-1604) and Francisco Jose de Goya's *Witches' Sabbath* (1797-1798). An in-depth analysis of each work will be used to decipher how art and society were affected. The research includes a brief history of Italy and Spain to provide additional background knowledge on the respective artists. This history helps outline the symbiotic relationship between art and the change in political, religious, and societal attitudes during the Baroque and early Romantic periods.

1. Body of Paper

The dramatic portrayal of biblical scenes during the Baroque era and the vicious criticisms of society in the artwork of the Early Romantic period highlight the relationship between the artist and their environment. The artistic climate of Europe from the early seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century proved to be a time of significant religious and socio-political change. During this time, artwork served as a vessel of communication and expression more than ever. The Baroque era sparked an artistic and cultural revolution that sought to find a balance between religious and secular aspects of society. The intention behind creating imagery during this period revolved around the changing interpretation of the Church's authority and a progression towards critical views of society that would continue on into the Early Romantic period.¹

Biblical narratives, lighting techniques, and religious symbolism work to enhance the connection between artistic expression and the agenda of the Catholic church. The physical and metaphorical interplay between light and shadow emphasizes techniques such as tenebrism and chiaroscuro. Similarly, the use of styles like realism and naturalism are vehicles for artists like Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and Francisco Jose de Goya who push the limits of socially and religiously acceptable representations. To best examine the historical implications and evolving significance of art during these times this paper will analyze Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ* (1602-1604) (Fig. 1) and Goya's *Witches' Sabbath* (1797-1798) (Fig. 2).



Figure 1. Caravaggio, Michelangelo de Merisi. *The Entombment of Christ*. 1596. Oil on canvas, 120 in x 80 in. Uffizi, Florence. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Caravaggio - La Deposizione di Cristo.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg)



Figure 2. Goya, Francisco Jose de. *Witches' Sabbath*. 1797-1798. Oil on canvas, 17 in x 12 in. Museo Lazaro Galdiano, Madrid.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes - Witches Sabbath - Google Art Project.jpg#/media/File:Francisco de Goya y Lucientes - Witches Sabbath - Google Art Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg#/media/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

Deciphering this iconography is necessary as it holds great significance in not only an artistic context but a religious and political one as well. Through visual analysis, a deeper understanding of Catholic influences on Italian Baroque and Spanish Romantic art will be gained. In order to extract this evidence, historical and religious context will be provided. The manner in which technique, religious influence, and aesthetic choices of the artists enhance the visual representation will be compared and contrasted as a means of interpretation.

The abundance of emotional expression in Baroque art created a connection to the Roman-Catholic Church, while simultaneously expressing socio-cultural and political perspectives outside of the Christian realm. In order to represent the art accurately in analysis, the historical background of these pieces must be observed. Furthermore, the religious and socio-political environment of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe requires context. Such knowledge is presented through the examination of change within influential religions such as Catholicism and Protestantism and their relationship with European leaders. The philosophical ideas around human worth, beauty, and individual purpose from the Renaissance soon developed into depictions of disharmony, tension, and exuberant emotions and movements during the Baroque.²

Many biblical paintings during this period used the harshness of tenebrism and the relationship between light and dark as symbols of Europe's evolving religious landscape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The presence of such representation is due to the influences of the Protestant Reformation and eventually, the Counter-Reformation from the Roman Catholic church. A purposeful translation of social concepts into artwork is seen once more from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries during the early Romantic period. During this time, Europe experienced intellectual development through the Age of Enlightenment. The wide scale movement aimed to further the understanding of science, social constructs, and politics. Enlightenment thinking encouraged education and criticism of the government as well as promoting philosophical expression. These concepts extended into multiple subjects such as art, literature, music, and philosophy. Instead of a singular focus on religious change, this artistic

change was sparked by a mixture of ideas from the Age of Enlightenment, socio-political change in Europe's respective countries, leading up to the Industrial Revolution.³

2. The Reformation, the Counter Reformation, and the Baroque Era

The Protestant Reformation began in 1517 as a renewal within the Roman Church that began to establish confessional churches based on the idea that one could receive the grace of God through personal faith alone.⁴ This founding ideal provided a way to justify Holy Scripture as the only method in which truth and faith could be obtained. Instead of relying on the Church and figure heads such as the Pope, one could find salvation by simply exercising faith in the word of the Lord. The Catholic Church felt threatened by this shift since they believed that salvation was derived through acts of penance and purposeful devotion to all aspects of the church. Influential figures of the Church feared that if patrons acted on the idea of *sola gratia*,⁵ the need for, and power of, the Catholic church would diminish.

In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church decided to convene the Council of Trent, which reassembled three times from 1545 to 1563 and held twenty-five sessions in total.⁶ From the council's continuous efforts came revised ideas concerning the canon of the Bible, the importance of how the word of Christ was translated into scripture, Original Sin, and the justification of sacraments of both a personal and communicative nature.⁷ Additionally, numerous ordinances were passed regarding internal reform within the church. These decrees caused the governing offices of the Catholic church to become more systematic in nature. Many of the more domestic changes were tasked specifically with opposing the Protestant reformist ideas.⁸ The social implications of the reform became more prevalent throughout Europe during this time; for example, concepts related to religious interaction such as marriage, kinship, birth, and death were affected.⁹

The Catholic Church's strong reply to the Protestant Reformation through the act of counter-reform sparked a sense of unrest on a social level that is later seen translated into art and iconography. The cultural tension from this movement is symbolized in artwork by dynamic movement, emphasized use of chiaroscuro, and theatrical arrangements of figures. Evidence of this conflict becomes more concrete during the twenty-fifth and final session of the Council of Trent (1563). This meeting is arguably the most important in regards to the significance of art in the Catholic church. During this session, the focus was based on imagery and artistic representation, specifically, on what was appropriate to paint and where it could be displayed. While this section of doctrines was not the most important in the grand scheme of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the evolution of art in response to these orders shows its significance for the Baroque era.

The topic of art and imagery likely arose in last minute discussions as a response to the Protestant iconoclasts who were making an effort to rid areas of Northern Europe of religious imagery. Art had been banned by the Calvinists and played a very minor role for the Lutherans, whereas the Catholics viewed art as a means of spreading biblical narratives. Artwork became an especially important way to reach followers of the Church who were illiterate and within a lower socioeconomic status. While the Catholic Church leaned into the use of imagery, Protestants focused on religious texts translated into the vernacular rather than personalized interpretations through artwork. The Protestant Church focused on educating the lower working class and utilized the printing press for mass distribution of their teachings. For Catholics, art served as a way of inspiring faith in God and the Catholic Church. New Catholic doctrines pushed artists to incorporate intense detail into their biblically focused works. By using the dramatic contrast of heavy shadow and highlight, artists would help the Church create a visual sensory experience within religious spaces. Techniques revolving around this idea were utilized as a way of conveying a grandiose interpretation of the Bible and Catholic principles. Clear representations and strict guidelines were necessary in order to appropriately emphasize the importance of Catholic scripture and the word of the Lord.¹⁰

The Baroque era would soon become viewed as a sort of cultural revolution, one that was sparked by Catholic ideology but simultaneously ran parallel to it. These new doctrines would establish an innovative new power in art and a responsibility to carry in the next stage of an evolving religious agenda. Artists were encouraged to focus on realistic renderings of biblical characters that the Catholic Church would deem appropriate such as saints, the Virgin Mary, Christ, and martyr figures. For many artists, this meant moving away from elongated limbs and stylized facial features that were popular during the period of Mannerism. The Church also shied away from nudity and any portrayals that could be interpreted as too promiscuous or characterize the figures within the artwork as sinful. There needed to be a balance between the dramatic biblical depictions and realistic elements to create an engaging piece from a religious perspective. The balance in subject matter contributes to both the religious iconography of the Catholic Church while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of these emotional depictions.¹¹

3. Background on Caravaggio and the Church

One of the most notable artists during this time was Michelangelo da Merisi, who was later called Caravaggio after his place of birth. The Northern Italian artist was born in 1571 in the small town of Caravaggio, within the Lombardy region of Italy.¹² Caravaggio spent most of his early life in Lombardy and Milan where he would gain experience as an artist during the early stages of the Baroque era, which were fueled by the Roman-Catholic Counter-Reformation spreading throughout Italy. The Church's influence and demand for more sacred imagery would undoubtedly motivate and inspire Caravaggio's famous religious commissions. Caravaggio began painting at a young age while apprenticing under Simone Peterzano in Milan before moving to Rome around 1592. Once in Rome, he began working as a specialist in still life paintings in the workshop of Cavaliere d'Arpino.¹³

The young artist was quickly discovered after one of his early works, *The Cardsharps* (c. 1594), was purchased by Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte (Fig. 3).¹⁴



Figure 3. Caravaggio, Michelangelo de Merisi. *The Cardsharps*. 1595. Oil on canvas, 37 in x 51. 5 in. Fort Worth, Texas. Kimbell Art Museum.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caravaggio_\(Michelangelo_Merisi\)_-The_Cardsharps_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg#/media/File:Caravaggio_\(Michelangelo_Merisi\)_-The_Cardsharps_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caravaggio_(Michelangelo_Merisi)_-The_Cardsharps_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg#/media/File:Caravaggio_(Michelangelo_Merisi)_-The_Cardsharps_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

Eager to expand his social and professional circle, Caravaggio moved into del Monte's lavish home and worked for both the Cardinal and his extended group of religiously influential friends. After being introduced to this new grand lifestyle, Caravaggio began working on a series of supposed homoerotic paintings commissioned by del Monte and his associates. The artworks featured attractive young men surrounded by ripe fruit, flowers, and musical instruments. These sensual and arguably sexually provocative paintings have been used as evidence of Caravaggio's ambiguous sexuality.¹⁵

There is great controversy to be found when examining Caravaggio's early life and works since many early biographers held a strong bias against the artist, usually due to his reputation of being violent. When examining evidence in regards to his career, these scholars prominently focused on his personal life, which seems to overpower the importance of his artwork.¹⁶ The generalized focus seen in research concerning Caravaggio's life is often centered on his tendencies towards violence, his ambiguous sexual orientation, or his relationships with his live models.¹⁷ While all of these aspects of his life are important in their own right, they take away from the artist's revolutionary technique and artistic principles.

Caravaggio brought the practice of using live models from his hometown in Lombardy to the evolving artistic environments in Milan and Rome. Before this time, it was rare to see an artist utilize live posed models rather than simply sketching a model in advanced preparation for a painting. The model would pose for a moment, long enough for the artist to sketch the position of the body and then use the sketch later while actually painting. Caravaggio would insist on the presence of live models who usually consisted of male and female prostitutes as well as high-ranking nobility. This technique was used not just in still life portraits, but in religious and mythological depictions as well. When an artist brought in human figures, they were primarily used to capture accurate motions, provide a means of deeper engagement with the viewer, and enhance the artist's ability to imagine the ideal body position.¹⁸

Caravaggio is quite often referred to as the founder of naturalism in relation to Italian painting. Evidence of his artistic mastery of naturalism is usually found in his religious works.¹⁹ These artworks were commissioned as altarpieces and personal biblical imagery for the European elite. His focus on theistic representation is particularly due to the high demand for these images because of the favoritism placed upon them by the Roman-Catholic Church. The religious community favored these works not only because they were aesthetically pleasing depictions of biblical narratives, but also because the use of naturalism was an appropriate way to create the most "accurate" representations.

Caravaggio applied this artistic concept of naturalism early in his career and later intertwined it with tenebrism. This technique affects the composition of the piece by isolating the subject matter in a completely black background. The

main figures are illuminated and thus pulled forward to highlight the narrative being portrayed.²⁰ Often mistaken to be a synonym for tenebrism is chiaroscuro, which utilized similar principles of light and dark contrast, but with one major difference. Instead of a figure emerging from a solid black scape, the subject is showcased in light from a dim shaded background where objects in the environment can still be seen. Both of these concepts are applied in all genres of artwork such as still life, religious and historical paintings, and portraits. The terms are famously known for being used in the Baroque period for the dramatic and moody qualities the technique brings to an art piece. The use of harshly contrasted light and dark shadows puts these biblical themes into a theatrical context making them even more engaging to the viewer. The drama and emotions that these pieces seek to evoke are distinctly brought out through the use of these techniques of tenebrism and naturalism.²¹

While these were highly sought-after works, not all of Caravaggio's religiously charged paintings were approved by the Roman Catholic Church. His clientele was not limited to strictly religious patrons.²² Caravaggio attracted a lot of attention from a variety of people after San Luigi dei Francesi Church refused his original altarpiece *St Matthew and the Angel* (1602) (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Caravaggio, Michelangelo de Merisi. *Saint Matthew and the Angel*. 1602. Oil on canvas, 116 in x 77 in. Destroyed in 1945, Berlin, Germany.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caravaggio_MatthewAndTheAngel_byMikeyAngels.jpg#/media/File:Caravaggio_MatthewAndTheAngel_byMikeyAngels.jpg

The Roman Catholic Church, located in Rome, planned on featuring the altarpiece in the Contarelli Chapel yet ended up rejecting the first version due to the sexual nature of the piece. It seemed Caravaggio's depiction of Saint Matthew, sharing a personal religious intimacy with an effeminate-looking angel, was considered blasphemous. The denial of the artwork furthered the conversation around censorship from the Catholic Church and the fine line between artistic integrity and religious responsibility.

While the original artwork may have been deemed inappropriate by the Church, the controversy around the piece caused Caravaggio to gain favor from prestigious art lovers. These new elite patrons enjoyed the painting's subtle display of emotions through the figure's posture, facial expressions, and physical representations of limbs. For example, the rejection of *St Matthew and the Angel* prompted the Vittrici family to commission one of Caravaggio's greatest altarpieces of his career, *The Entombment of Christ* (1602-1604). Caravaggio glorifies Christ in his most vulnerable after his body is removed from crucifixion. The artist not only depicts Christ, but other biblical characters as well including John the Evangelist, Nicodemus, Mary of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary, Christ's mother.²³ Mary of Clopas is often identified in scripture as Mary the mother of James and Joseph, while John the Evangelist is often labeled as Saint John or John the Apostle.²⁴ The sensibility and range of emotions captured in the altarpiece provide the perfect example of favorable artistic elements from the Baroque period.²⁵ *The Entombment of Christ* grants a better understanding of qualities within Baroque art by showcasing the use of naturalistic emotions, movement, tension, drama, and contrast in shadows through tenebrism.

4. An Analysis of Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ* (1602-1604)

The altarpiece including *The Entombment of Christ* by Caravaggio was created around 1602 to 1604 and commissioned by the Vittrici family for the side chapel of the Santa Maria in Vallicella. Presently, a copy of the artwork occupies the chapel while the original work is housed in the Pinacoteca Vaticana.²⁶

Caravaggio reflects social change within this work by pushing the limits of acceptable physical representation of the biblical figures. In the *Entombment of Christ*, Christ's body is extremely exposed and thus vulnerable, which adds to the drama of the work, but poses a moral issue regarding the way he is shown. It is not uncommon for Christ to be

depicted as partially nude, wounded, or in the act of dying, however in this instance, his right buttock is almost completely revealed (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Caravaggio, Michelangelo de Merisi. *The Entombment of Christ*. 1596. Oil on canvas, 120 in x 80 in. Uffizi, Florence. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City (Detail of Christ's exposed thigh and buttock.) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Caravaggio - La Deposizione di Cristo.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg)

The act of portraying Christ showing so much skin in such an intimate area often considered sexual or sensual could be seen as bordering on indecency, which was deemed prohibited by the Council of Trent during their final meeting.²⁷

Caravaggio was not morally above breaking the rules of decorum set in place by the Church, especially for the sake of realism. He strove to portray the human form as realistically as possible even within a biblical context. As earlier stated, his goal towards naturalism in a religious context had already begun to be questioned by the Church.²⁸ Caravaggio operates very carefully within the realm of realism and what is to be expected of him as an artist who would ultimately be censored by the Catholic Church. During the twenty-fifth and final meeting of the Council of Trent on the 4th of December, 1563, the use of sacred images and relics along with the expectation of artists and clergy members were discussed. In 1848, J. Waterworth published an edited and translated copy of the manuscripts from all twenty-five meetings of the Council. The document serves as a way of differentiating between enjoying art and holy relics for the purpose of education and the sinful act of idol worship. Starting on page 235 and extending onto page 236 of the originally published document, it states:

And if any abuses have crept in amongst these holy and salutary observances, the holy Synod ardently desires that they be utterly abolished; in such wise that no images of false doctrine, and furnishing occasion of dangerous error to the uneducated, be set up... Moreover, in the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and the sacred use of images, every superstition shall be removed, all filthy lucre be abolished; finally, all lasciviousness be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust.²⁹

The manuscript clearly condemns any false teachings through the manipulation of sacred images and the subject matters within them as they pertain to the stories in the Bible. By using language such as "the uneducated," the text references the use of sacred images as a form of propaganda and religious teaching to the illiterate masses. Additionally, the Church is careful to establish a boundary that prohibits the representation of saints, biblical characters, and naturally, Christ depicted as too lustful or revealing. Caravaggio's pursuit of naturalism and the realistic portrayal of the entombment narrative border on unacceptable and sexualized due to Christ's exposed buttock as discussed early.³⁰

I suggest that *The Entombment of Christ* did not meet the same fate of rejection as *St. Matthew and the Angel* due to the physical representation that the artist gives Christ's body. Caravaggio's religiously focused works from later in his career such as *The Entombment of Christ* embody humanistic principles that evoke emotion and force the viewer to not only gather religious context from the piece but to be moved towards empathy.³¹ Caravaggio portrays Christ as physically healthy and, even after suffering death from crucifixion, his muscles still hold definition. The wounds are very minimal and represented only by a few brushstrokes on the top of the right hand and foot. (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. Caravaggio, Michelangelo de Merisi. *The Entombment of Christ*. 1596. Oil on canvas, 120 in x 80 in. Uffizi, Florence. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City (Detail of Christ's wounds.)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg)

These wounds are present to symbolize where the nails would have entered Jesus's body during the crucifixion and further the intention of educating the public of Christ's sacrifice. Saint John, often depicted with his crimson red cloak, calls attention to the wound on the right side of Christ's rib cage by ever so slightly grasping the flesh with his fingertips while holding his body.³² Christ is both glorified through his sacrifice, while also being portrayed realistically as a human. Caravaggio shows the mortality of Christ's physical form through wounds, the symbolism of his bodily suffering, and the stiffness in his hands which reference the process of rigor mortis.

The severity of the situation is amplified by the brilliant use of tenebrism. This technique pulls the main figures out of the darkness which provides a metaphor for the biblical ideas of light and dark or good and evil. The harsh shadow and methodically placed highlights guides the viewer to the important aspects of the piece. In some ways, Caravaggio creates a sense of illusion through the use of tenebrism and chiaroscuro, one that forms a window into the biblical story that links the patron to the subject matter of the piece. Connecting to the viewer in a setting of worship is one of the many important purposes of Caravaggio's religious works. The dim and obstructed lighting within the piece might mimic that which is experienced in the chapel where it is presented. Thus, a meditative state of reflection is encouraged by interacting with the artwork and the religious aesthetic of the space in which it is placed.³³

In addition to this effect, the clearly defined characters can be viewed as confrontational in the sense that they seem to loom over the viewer who is looking up at the altarpiece. Not only are the saintly and holy figures furthering the portrayal of religious text, but they are also acting as a reminder of their importance. Caravaggio paints the environment in which the narrative takes place using simple forms such as the corner of a slab of rock, a few additional rocks of a more abstract nature, and a darkly colored plant in the foreground. He condenses symbols of nature to only a small plant in order to avoid distracting from the interaction of the figures. The inclusion of the plant seems to show that even within the darkness of Christ's death, life is present and thriving (Fig. 7).³⁴



Figure 7. Caravaggio, Michelangelo de Merisi. *The Entombment of Christ*. 1596. Oil on canvas, 120 in x 80 in. Uffizi, Florence. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City (Detail of a plant next to Christ's deceased body and stiff hands.)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg)

The void-like darkness of the background highlights the six figures that Caravaggio methodically places in a pyramid-like configuration.³⁵ The stacked placement of the characters elevates the drama of the scene and serves as a technique to guide the audience's gaze. Christ is positioned closest to the viewer as Nicodemus and Saint John carry his body. Nicodemus's inclusion in the scene, due his role during Christ's burial, is found in multiple scripture

passages. He gathers Christ's legs in his arms and embraces him just above the knees. Specifically, the look on Nicodemus's face would have the power to pull the attention of the patrons of the Church into the piece (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. Caravaggio, Michelangelo de Merisi. *The Entombment of Christ*. 1596. Oil on canvas, 120 in x 80 in. Uffizi, Florence. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City (Detail of Saint John in red next to Nicodemus gazing outward.) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg)

Caravaggio deliberately positioned Nicodemus holding Jesus and turning slightly, staring directly out towards worshippers. Spectators looking up at the altarpiece would have felt a sense of unity or invitation to participate in this sacred event.³⁶

The women in the artwork are slightly more difficult to identify. Arguably the most important of the three female figures is the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ who stands behind Saint John in the back corner of the space. She is identified by the nun habit she wears which frames her aged face as she looks down with a sorrowful expression. Typically, she is depicted as a younger woman wearing a white or light pink tunic underneath a blue mantle. Caravaggio's choice to depict the Virgin as an elderly woman is unique and a tribute to his dedication to realism. Her right hand extended outward and occupied the space above Christ's head in the background. Her left hand seems to be hidden from view and clutching the cloak of Saint John. Wright suggests that the Virgin Mary's hovering hand was thought to be an artistic choice made later in the painting process as a way of drawing attention to her (Fig. 9).



Figure 9. Caravaggio, Michelangelo de Merisi. *The Entombment of Christ*. 1596. Oil on canvas, 120 in x 80 in. Uffizi, Florence. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City (Detail of the Virgin Mary standing behind Saint John with her hand extended towards the left.) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg)

If the Virgin was improperly depicted or failed to be glorified, the painting may have been rejected.³⁷ Without the defined placement of the hand, she may have faded into the background in contrast to the more youthful female figures closer to the foreground. Her head is low and her gaze is downward as she stares at her son's suffering body. Her hand acts as a device to connect to her son through this mourning gesture.³⁸

In contrast to the reserved nature of the Virgin Mary, the arms of an unidentified figure erupt above the collection of figures and help guide the viewer's attention throughout the piece. The woman who extends her arms upward is thought to be Mary of Cleopas and sometimes speculated to be Mary Magdalene. Due to the uncertainty around identifying these two figures, it is possible that either could be the Magdalene (Fig. 10).³⁹



Figure 10. Caravaggio, Michelangelo de Merisi. *The Entombment of Christ*. 1596. Oil on canvas, 120 in x 80 in. Uffizi, Florence. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City (Detail of the three Marys together behind Saint John, Nicodemus, and Jesus. The Virgin Mary is left, Mary Magdalene is assumed to be in the middle, and Mary of Cleopas is thought to be on the right.)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entombment_of_Christ_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Caravaggio_-_La_Deposizione_di_Cristo.jpg)

This theory is supported by the type of dress the woman in the middle is wearing as well as the way her hair is styled. The loose face framing curls and whimsical pinned up braids is a common hairstyle worn by Caravaggio's interpretation of Mary the Magdalene.⁴⁰

5. The Catholic-Reformation and Spanish Inquisition

In Spain, the beginning of the Baroque period took form with Spanish bishops leading the reform party in the Council of Trent. While at the Council, these bishops voiced their opinions on a direct method of reform and were critical of Roman Catholic members. Spanish bishops claimed that the reform doctrines functioned as a way of invoking privilege amongst the Roman Catholic Church government rather than actually amending the papacy. The Spanish Church believed their view towards enacting reform was superior and had been validated through the strengthened connection of the Inquisition and Catholicism during the latter half of the sixteenth century.⁴¹ The Inquisition was created through the papacy and founded by King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I. Lasting from 1478 to 1834, the Inquisition acted as a religiously influenced military collective tasked with purging Spain of Jews, Muslims, and Protestants.⁴² During 1492, a wave of repression towards Judaism provided a more concentrated goal for the Inquisition to find, prosecute, convert, or possibly execute Spanish Jews.⁴³ The Inquisition caused a feeling of fear and darkness, especially for those in rural areas. Artists during the Romantic period conveyed this sense of looming danger by using bold and heavy brushstrokes in their work as well as dark colors.

The Inquisition worked on a local level to enforce Catholic principles within the different rural regions of Spain. Utilizing the Inquisition in this way proved to be effective and efficient for the Spanish monarchy and kept the number of persecuted heretics rising. The amount of Jewish and Muslim people being maltreated began to level off in the 1530s, however, the Inquisition continued to stay relevant through the increased oppression of Protestants in the 1540s.⁴⁴ In many ways, the Catholic Counter-Reformation provided the Spanish Inquisition with a unique opportunity to remain applicable during the religious and governmental reform of Spain. Since the Inquisition's power was used in concentrated and controllable areas throughout Spain, the monarchy and the Church were able to effectively prosecute Protestants while enforcing Catholicism. After discovering Protestant "cells" within the royal capital of Valladolid in the 1550s, King Philip II had no issue combining the renewed Tridentine doctrines passed during the Council of Trent with Old Christian policies. This alarming discovery caused the King and the Spanish Church to become riddled with fear of further Protestant influence in the country. The revised doctrines served as statements made by the Catholic Church regarding marriage, purgatory, the role of Saints, iconography, and transubstantiation.⁴⁵

The Spanish Catholic Church was already deeply suspicious of printed material due to the Protestant's main method of propaganda. Vernacular texts were accessible to a wider range of classes, specifically commoners who made up the majority of the monarchy's subjects. Due to the fear of widespread Protestant conversion, the bulk of religious texts were available only to religious personnel such as clergy members, bishops, and priests through censorship laws in 1558. While some vernacular texts were only limited, others were banned or heavily censored with the approval of the Church and monarchy.⁴⁶ In 1559, Spanish students were prohibited from studying at foreign universities out of fear they would become indoctrinated into Protestant ideas and practices. Additionally, the King ordered the Inquisition to increase its efforts towards identifying Protestants within the country. In 1564, King Phillip II ordered

the merging of Tridentine doctrines into his lands in order to support the reforms made during the Council and provide a more solid foundation for the Inquisition's motives.⁴⁷

The number of books produced in Spain can be contrasted with those seen in Venice, Italy, the center of Italian printing. The overall production of books experienced only a sixteen percent increase in the 1550s and continued to thirty-five percent during 1605 to 1607. This increase, while small compared to that of Spain during the time, was a considerable amount for Italy. The Roman Catholic Church spread propaganda through showcasing relics and sacred images in religiously controlled and centered spaces such as altars, chapels, and churches. Due to the Catholic Reformation's need for iconographic representation, guilds, and workshops, there was an increase in artistic production during the height of the renewal period from 1586 to 1680.⁴⁸

6. Francisco Jose de Goya and the Development of Grotesque Forms

Royal tapestry workshops played an important role in Spain during the Age of Enlightenment. This movement came to fruition in the early 1700s through the centralization of power and reformation within the government with the intent to spread reform downwards into the lower class systems. The leadership of King Carlos (Charles) III criticized the intention of various power structures such as guilds, monopolies, and the Church. Additionally, the Spanish economy was experiencing recovery at a steadily increased rate.⁴⁹

Francisco Joseph Goya y Lucientes, who would later be known as Francisco Jose de Goya, was born on March 30, 1746, in the middle of a period of radical social change during the Enlightenment. Goya was born a few miles outside of Zaragoza in the town of Fuendetodos in northeast Spain. Goya's father, Braulio Jose Benito Goya, was a gilder and the son of a royal notary, Pedro Goya (his grandfather), who died and passed down three lower-class properties to his son Braulio. Goya's father sold two of the three properties in 1739 and used the profits to build a comfortable life for him and his bride, Gracia Lucientes, who he married in 1736. Due to the family's modest wealth and middle-class status, Goya grew up comfortably and was able to form important connections in his early life. His father's work as a gilder normalized artistic spaces and society for the young artist; that is, he grew used to seeing apprentices, meeting his father's clients, and watching his father and older brother work. Most of the gilding done by his father and a brother were for church facades and altars, which were very common tasks for gilders during such a religious time.⁵⁰

Francisco Jose de Goya was thirteen years old when he first started studying the principles of drawing under the painter José Luzán Martínez after moving with his parents to Zaragoza. His career began to take off when he formed a connection with Francisco Bayeu y Subias, a well-regarded painter in Madrid who opened a tapestry workshop in the mid-1760s. In the early 1770s, Goya painted a series of religious mural paintings inside the church of the Charterhouse of Aula Dei in Saragossa. *The Circumcision of Christ* (1774) is one of Goya's early mural pieces done for the Charterhouse of Aula Dei (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. Goya, Francisco Jose de. *The Circumcision of Christ*. 1774. Oil on plaster, 120 in x 403 in. Saragossa, Charterhouse of Aula Dei.

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/francisco-goya/circumcision>

The scene that depicts Christ as an infant in the arms of a priest about to be circumcised is one of a series to show the life of the Virgin Mary. The praise he gained from the commission, as well as his connection to Francisco Bayeu, provided the professional reputation needed to support his move to Madrid.⁵¹

Once he moved to Madrid in 1774, Goya worked at a royal tapestry workshop of Bayeu and quickly gained greater influence while progressing his artistic skill. His marriage to Maria Josefa, Francisco Bayeu y Subias' sister, in 1773 solidified his position with Bayeu and contributed towards enhancing his regard among the famous painters and clientele he would come across in Madrid. Tapestry painting was not the highest ranking of artistic professions and the commission pay was nothing sustainable, however, it provided a wonderful opportunity for young artists to make a name for themselves in such an influential city.⁵² By 1777, Goya had earned the title of director of royal tapestry production. This higher title would grant him direct access to a wider range of royal clients.⁵³

Between the years 1776 and 1778, the Spanish government considered it to be in the country's best interest to allow their artists and artisans to branch outward throughout Europe and copy the masters of the Western world. The inspiration for recreating various masterpieces came from a Spanish artistic movement during the Age of Enlightenment which drew artists to capture the beauty of Spain. Artists and artisans used their talents to recreate past artworks with different mediums and rework architecture iconic to Spain.⁵⁴ This initiative led many Spanish artists to either expand their realm of knowledge by studying masters from elsewhere in Europe or to look inward towards Spanish masters. By copying the masters and exploring other art techniques in Europe, artists such as Goya were exposed to new outlooks on society and art.⁵⁵

These recreations were crucial for Goya, who eventually developed them into interpretations rather than exact copies. By copying a highly respected master artist, Goya continued to make a name for himself in the royal community. Additionally, Goya furthered his artistic style and developed techniques that would later be featured in his most notable series of etchings, *Los Caprichos* (1797-1798).⁵⁶ Goya began working on *Los Caprichos* around the same time as *Witches' Sabbath* (1798), a complex artwork that captures Goya's reflection of society through form, technique, and shadow. A connection can be made between the two projects based on themes such as societal constructs and the role of the government in past Spanish history. Similar, if not identical, subject matters are featured throughout *Los Caprichos* which use satire as a way of expressing Goya's personal criticisms towards multiple areas of society. The artist used both etching and aquatinting to complete a series of eighty works. Arguably, one of the most notable aspects of this series are the nature of the creatures and the human forms depicted throughout. It appears Goya uses a blend of the realistic and imaginative in order to portray those he wished to condemn. The grotesque motifs found within *Los Caprichos* can be viewed as an artistic expression that runs parallel to the subject matter in *Witches' Sabbath*. The painting can be viewed as a manifestation of the symbolism embedded within Goya's past works such as *Los Caprichos* along with some of his earlier works.⁵⁷

Many scholars connect Goya's disillusionment apparent in his depiction of grotesque figures with his illness, specifically, the deafness that resulted from it. It would be inadequate to draw such a conclusion since it cannot be decisively proven.⁵⁸ By looking at a letter regarding Goya's deafness in the royal court, it can be inferred that the artist was still of sound mind after becoming deaf. The letter is from an unidentified royal court official and intended for French scientist and director of the Royal Chemistry Laboratory, Pierre Franois Chavaneau. Its contents discuss an electrical machine prescribed to Goya per his request that would administer a form of shock therapy with the hope being that it would cure Goya's deafness. It becomes clear that the monarchy was in close contact with Goya, originally through court paintings, but now by providing medical care. There had been an issue with the machine and in the letter, the court official explains to Chavaneau how His Majesty has approved the laboratory to fix the machine at Goya's personal expense. It is unclear how often he used electroshock therapy before the device broke and if he continued to use it after repairs were made.⁵⁹ Due to this lack of information, it is also unclear whether the electroshock therapy had any lasting effects on Goya's mental state or later mental health issues that are often linked to the dark subject matter of paintings such as *Witches' Sabbath*.

Based on wicked and or gruesome depictions alone, *Los Caprichos* were not revolutionary to Goya's career and certainly not a new-found concept due to his illness. Scholar Andrew Schulz argues that Goya had been using visual representations of the sinister and sinful before *Los Caprichos*. Schulz uses the artwork, *Saint Francis Borgia at the Deathbed of an Impenitent* (Fig. 12),



Figure 12. Goya, Francisco Jose de. *St. Francis Borgia Helping a Dying Impenitent*. 1788. Oil on canvas, 11.4 in x 14.9 in. Valencia Cathedral, Valencia, Spain.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St. Francis Borgia Helping a Dying Impenitent by Goya.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St._Francis_Borgia_Helping_a_Dying_Impenitent_by_Goya.jpg)

painted by Goya in 1788, as an example of the artist's use of gruesome figures in a rather mainstream subject matter.⁶⁰ The painting was commissioned by the Duke and Duchess of Osuna for the Cathedral of Valencia. The duke and duchess would become Goya's most famous patrons, later commissioning him to do *Witches' Sabbath* in 1798.⁶¹

The painting was created along with an additional piece to be hung on the side walls of the chapel with the purpose of honoring Saint Francis of the sixteenth century who was a famous relative of the Duchess of Osana.⁶² Previously,

scholars believed that the man in the bed was a part of an exorcism, instead he is cursed with eternal damnation as he passes from this world to the next.⁶³

In this painting, Saint Francis stands to the left and extends a crucifix detailed with a miniature deceased Christ facing towards the dying sinner in the right side of the painting. The saint's eyes are wide, but not necessarily in horror; rather he displays amazement which is contrasted by his otherwise stoic facial expression. Swarming around the right side of the unfortunate sinner is a cluster of four demons all varying in form. It seems that Goya has painted them in a way that individualized the creatures as seen in their distinct facial expressions. The monstrous figures all feature different traits such as lizard skin, long sharp fangs, sinister expressions, claws, and/or canine features.

7. An Analysis of Goya's *Witches' Sabbath* (1797-1798)

Goya's *Saint Francis Borgia at the Deathbed of an Impenitent* displays similar artistic concepts and demonic themes found in *Witches' Sabbath* (1797-1798). This painting should not be confused with Goya's *Witches' Sabbath (The Great He-Goat)* painted in 1821-1823 on the walls of his home in Madrid. *The Great He-Goat*, as some scholars refer to the painting, is considered one of Goya's famous "Black Paintings." These were a series of fourteen oil on plaster paintings done on the walls of his house, Quinta del Sordo.⁶⁴ These Black Paintings, along with *Witches' Sabbath*, can be viewed not only as a physical progression of Goya's artistic skill set, but also a reflection of his continuation of the criticism of society seen most notably in *Los Caprichos*.

That being said, many scholars have debated the exact nature of this earlier piece and the symbolism that Goya was using. Carmen Fernández-Salvador, a professor of art history at Universidad San Francisco de Quito reflects on the differences of scholarly opinion regarding the meaning of *Witches' Sabbath*. In her article "The Witches of Goya," she points out how Edith Helman views the piece as a personal critique by Goya of the Spanish Inquisition. Contrary to this theory, scholar Nigel Glendinning interprets the work as a product of fascination revolving around the aristocracy and their engagement with society during the Age of Enlightenment. To argue this idea, Glendinning references symbolism to point out the superstition and myth thought to originate during the time of Dark Spain.⁶⁵

Glendinning's interpretation is challenged by Guy Tal and best discussed in his article "An Enlightened View of Witches Melancholy and Delusionary Experience in Goya's 'Spell'" where Tal explains how, after and somewhat during the Age of Enlightenment, the belief of witches in everyday life was not nearly as prevalent in late eighteenth century Spain as it was in Medieval Spain, if at all.⁶⁶ Carmen Fernández-Salvador interjects her own theory by claiming that the Goya is addressing female sexuality and the role of women in late eighteenth century Spain through the symbolism of the witch, the role of the mother, and the innocence of children.⁶⁷

These three theories will be referenced through an in-depth visual analysis of *Witches' Sabbath* along with key points of symbolism. The purpose of this examination is not to prove or disprove these theories but to put them in context with the various symbolic elements that may or not contribute to these scholarly ideas. By looking at aspects of the artwork such as subject matter, narrative, symbolism, and references to later works, the piece expresses meaning to societal influences and religious influences alike.

Upon first glance, the most noticeable feature of the piece is the large goat seated in a quarter perspective in the center of the painting. The goat sits like that of a human, on his behind with his legs pushed outward and curved slightly. His arms are positioned awkwardly in comparison to the other figures surrounding him. The left arm extends towards the infant being held on the viewer's right side of the work while the goat's right arm bends and occupies space far closer to the body in the center of the piece (Fig. 13).



Figure 13. Goya, Francisco Jose de. *Witches' Sabbath*. 1797-1798. Oil on canvas, 17 in x 12 in. Museo Lazaro Galdiano, Madrid. (Detail of goat.)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg#/media/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

This positioning is technically inverted, yet not uncommon for paintings or woodblock prints dealing with themes of witchcraft or wickedness. The large creature stares blankly and in somewhat opposite directions with his most frontal eye on the viewer and the other barely out of view. The red eyes and emotionless glare are intimidating and confrontational paired with the sheer size of the goat. By looking around at the human female figures surrounding him, it becomes clear that this is not an ordinary goat and suggests something supernatural is afoot.

To further this implication, Goya arranges the female figures around the goat in a circle that extends into a small grouping or line situated in the background. By doing this, Goya evokes the sense that something premeditated and intentional is happening. There are multiple symbols that support this idea, the first would be the oakleaf garland that the goat wears around its horns as a crown (Fig. 14).



Figure 14. Goya, Francisco Jose de. *Witches' Sabbath*. 1797-1798. Oil on canvas, 17 in x 12 in. Museo Lazaro Galdiano, Madrid. (Detail of goat horns.)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg#/media/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

The horns extend upwards and seem to be far larger than is realistically expected in order to emphasize the importance. Additionally, the women seem to be providing the goat with sacrificial children in a particular order shown from left to right. A ghostly pale child skeleton lays on its back on the left side of the scene. At the right, we see a small pair of infant legs stuffed under the yellow cloak of a woman laying over the body on her side. She faces towards the goat with her back closed off to the viewer similar to how the child's upper body has been hidden. Next to her is an older woman who wears a hood and loose fitting black dress that is fashioned in a way that exposes the left side of her breast (Fig. 15).



Figure 15. Goya, Francisco Jose de. *Witches' Sabbath*. 1797-1798. Oil on canvas, 17 in x 12 in. Museo Lazaro Galdiano, Madrid. (Detail of skeletal child remains and partially exposed women.)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg#/media/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

This older woman's partial nudity can be compared to that of the topless woman holding the stick of hanging babies on the left. This imagery is often linked to the sexual presence that was thought to be apparent at pagan sabbath gatherings.⁶⁸ The woman in the black dress holds the skeletal structure of another child whose demise seems more recent compared to that of the child on the ground. To show the progression of sacrifice, Goya includes a baby who is unharmed by the goat while being held in the arms of a woman standing on the far right. She is depicted in profile and appears to be in motion as she cries out towards the goat with her mouth open and facial expression strained.

Goya creates a narrative along with displaying such a sinister scene by including children of various stages in health. It appears the children are being offered to the goat as a form of sacrifice in ritual participation (Fig. 16).



Figure 16. Goya, Francisco Jose de. *Witches' Sabbath*. 1797-1798. Oil on canvas, 17 in x 12 in. Museo Lazaro Galdiano, Madrid. (Detail of healthy child sacrifice, child in the process of dying, and women of various ages.)

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg#/media/File:Francisco_de_Goya_y_Lucientes_-_Witches_Sabbath_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

The tan-skinned women are dressed in rural garments indicating their lower position within the social hierarchy. Color and shadow play an important part in this work. To highlight the interplay between the goat and the various women, Goya painted a muted neutral-toned landscape as the background. The hues throughout the painting all remain within a similar earth tone range with the exception of the night sky. A dark blue and black sky could impose a sense of danger or looming evil that is displayed in the scene below. Goya uses a bold technique to add drama to the piece, but doesn't shy away from adding detailed brushstrokes on the faces of some of the women and on the fur of the goat.⁶⁹ The scenery is somewhat picturesque with large mountains creating a horizon line with the pale sky in the distance. The viewer can assume that this is taking place in the far-off countryside, but it is not specified exactly where the meeting is taking place. Rural setting and "peasant" attire contribute to putting the subject matter of the artwork in perspective and provide possible avenues for connections between the symbolism and theories of Helman and Glendinning.⁷⁰

Helman's idea that the piece is an embodiment of critiques directed towards the Spanish Inquisition could be supported by the desperate nature of the women, the pagan ritual being depicted, and the rural location.⁷¹ The

countryside setting references the purposeful expansion of the Inquisition and their goal to find heretics. The violence shown through the recently dead and dying children along with the hanging infants could symbolize the violent outcome of prosecution from the Spanish Inquisition. Perhaps the subject matter of the piece could be a display of an anti-Christian ritual in the countryside to show the wicked interactions that occur within a pagan ritual.⁷²

Glendinning's theory, which references the aristocracy during the Age of Enlightenment, can be tied to the ideas of professor Fernández-Salvador who regards the work as a reflection of female gender roles in late seventeenth century Spanish society.⁷³ These two notions share overlapping themes of female roles and social implications which are equally represented in the piece. As previously stated, the women who exposed their breasts and shoulders create a strong connection to female sexuality often examined in the context of witchcraft rituals. Additionally, Avigdor W. G. Posèq described the goat's pose as "erect" which could possibly imply some sort of phallic symbolism.⁷⁴

It is made clear that the goat is male due to his abnormally large horns, another feature that could be referencing hyper-masculinity. The importance of this plays into understanding Fernández-Salvador's explanation for the artwork as metaphor for the female role.⁷⁵ She points out how the witch stereotype has been viewed as a means of neutralizing female power and shifting their representation into something negative. The overpowering presence of the masculine goat fixed at the center of the circle of women furthers the portrayal of patriarchal eighteenth century Spain.

Whether it be the Spanish Inquisition, the aristocracy, or evolving gender roles, the exact meaning of *Witches' Sabbath* remains a mystery that it left up to personal interpretation. Nevertheless, Goya's masterful bold brushstrokes and methodical technique leaves audiences captivated by both skill and subject matter. The sinister narrative of the painting is reinforced by dark colors, shading, and gruesome characters. Regardless of if the painting was commissioned or painted in his free time, these figures provide the public with a small glimpse into the outwardly critical mind of the artist.

8. Conclusion

While Goya uses a circular configuration to display the figures in *Witches Sabbath*, Caravaggio uses a similar method of positioning to situate the characters in a way that highlights the focus of the work. The individuals in *The Entombment of Christ* are stacked in a stair step-like presentation which works to elongate the piece and add depth to the artistic illusion Caravaggio has created. A progression of characters is used in *Witches Sabbath* for the similar purpose of showcasing the narrative while also adding a sense of disillusionment through intense subject matter. Furthermore, both artists utilize the techniques of their respective art periods to bring forth a work that is bold with emotions, depth, and tension both physically and metaphorically. Heavy shadow and brushstrokes in *Witches Sabbath* help differentiate the figures and draw attention to important parts of the interaction being displayed.

Although one piece is meant for a chapel and the other for a private residence, each piece is designed to visually transport the viewer into a realm unlike their own. *The Entombment of Christ* welcomes the patrons of the Church to mentally take part in the receiving of Christ, however, the dark background leaves the audience without an environment to connect to. In contrast to this interplay between space and subject, Goya paints a somewhat familiar environment in *Witches Sabbath* that urges the viewers to place themselves within the narrative. In turn, his criticism of society through grotesque figures creates a disconnect between any closeness the viewer may have felt and the scene that is laid out before them.

Both Caravaggio and Goya push the boundaries of what is socially acceptable during their time in regards to their work and personal lives. The relationship between artist, environment, and their respective works can be seen as a web of influence in which all aspects are equally affected. The physical representation of biblical figures seen in Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ* both satisfied and challenged the public during his time. The boundaries he pushed by utilizing naturalism show his dedication to representing the human body before his moral obligations to the Catholic Church. While *Witches' Sabbath* might have been made for a private residence, the horrendous actions in which Goya showcases were not kept from the world. The artists pushed the limits of societal criticism by not only including these nightmarish themes within *Witches' Sabbath*, but throughout his career as well. The painting can be seen as a form of breaking social restrictions and artistically showcasing judgment towards Spanish aristocratic institutions.

Caravaggio used tenebrism and realistic portrayals to capture a religious audience while Goya highlighted dark mannered characters as a means of showcasing his criticism of the world around him. The metaphorical and physical symbolism of light and dark can be seen as a representation of these respective relationships. The techniques of individual craftsmanship from each artist enhance the link between expression and environmental expectations. When compared, the two artists can be seen as the embodiment of artistic progress both visually and culturally. Through

aesthetic choices by the artists, the religious, figurative, and critical properties of the artwork are brought out to aid in a deeper interpretation of the work.

9. Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge their appreciation to Cynthia Canejo who has been an outstanding professor, mentor, and inspirational figure throughout the writing process and during their time at the University of North Carolina at Asheville.

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56. Vega and Glendinning, "Goya's Etchings after Velázquez," 145.
57. An example along with a more extensive analysis of these works will be provided in the following paragraphs.
58. Dowling, "The Crisis of the Spanish Enlightenment: Capricho 43 and Goya's Second Portrait of Jovellanos," 345-346.
59. Janis A. Tomlinson, *Goya: A Portrait of the Artist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 136-137.

60. Andrew Schulz, "The Expressive Body in Goya's Saint Francis Borgia at the Deathbed of an Impenitent," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 4 (1998): 668.
61. It is largely debated between scholars whether the *Witches' Sabbath* (1798) was purchased by the Duke and Duchess of Osana as an already painted piece or rather commissioned along with five other pieces all referencing witchcraft.
62. The other painting Goya completed for the commission, *Saint Francis Borgia Taking Leave of His Family* (1788) shows an emotional and personal side of Saint Francis as he says his goodbyes to various family members before setting off to join the Jesuits. In comparison to *Saint Francis Borgia at the Deathbed of an Impenitent*, the work is realistic and somewhat sobering as it depicts an intimate family moment rather than a religious and mystical interaction.
63. Schulz, "The Expressive Body in Goya's Saint Francis Borgia at the Deathbed of an Impenitent," 666.
64. Avigdor W.G. Posèq, "The Goat in Goya's 'Witches' Sabbaths," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 18, no. 4 (1999): 31.
65. In this context, "Dark Spain" refers to Medieval Spain from 500 CE to 1500 CE when it was a common belief, along with other European countries, that witches were real and often affiliated with various religious groups. Witches were often depicted as an older woman or "crone", an elderly woman thought to act with malicious intent and in a sinister manner.
66. Guy Tal, "An Enlightened View of Witches Melancholy and Delusionary Experiences in Goya's 'Spell'" *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 75, no. 1 (2012): 33-34.
67. Carmen Fernández-Salvador, "The Witches of Goya," *Athanor* 16 (2018): 23-24.
68. Carlo Ginzburg, "Jews, Heretics, Witches," *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 75.
69. Goya utilizes the techniques of the Romantic era by featuring impasto or bold brushstrokes in *Witches Sabbath*. Heavily applied paint and contrasting areas of more detail were signature methods of painting during the Romantic movement.
70. Carmen Fernández-Salvador, "The Witches of Goya," *Athanor* 16 (2018): 23-24.
71. Anne Llewellyn Barstow, "On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History: A Historiography of the European Witch Persecutions," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4, no. 2 (1988): 8.
72. Richard A. Horsley, "Further Reflections on Witchcraft and European Folk Religion," *History of Religions* 19, no. 1 (1979): 73-74.
73. María Victoria López-Cordón Cortezo, "Situating Women in the Society of the Old Regime: The Other Spanish Enlightenment," in *A New History of Iberian Feminisms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 28-31.
74. Posèq, "The Goat in Goya's 'Witches' Sabbaths," 34.
75. Fernández-Salvador, "The Witches of Goya," 23.