OPTICAL ENTERTAINMENTS IN MADRID IN THE TIME OF GOYA

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1. Goya, Viejo paseando entre fantasmas *(Old Man Wandering Among ghosts), 1810–25*

FRANCISCO GOYA (1746–1828), one of the greatest Spanish painters, enjoyed a long and extremely varied career. His work ranged from the formal and conventional (from 1786 he was the Court Painter to King Carlos IV of Spain, producing portraits of the great and good), through satirical etchings to bizarre and disturbing images of madness, poverty, witchcraft and the supernatural, which came to dominate his later work. He lived through turbulent times in Spain's history, including war and political turmoil, and spent his last few years in exile in Bordeaux, where he died. For many modern observers the climax of his work was the series of murals now known as the *Black Paintings* (so called for their mood, as well as their dominant colouring), but equally remarkable are the eight albums of his drawings – freestanding sketches as well as studies for larger works — which demonstrate an astonishing range of interests stretching from the carnivalesque to the scientific.[1]

Amongst Goya's drawings are two images of *tutilimundi* (peepshows). This was not an unusual theme for an artist of the eighteenth century, but Goya's treatment of it was characteristically personal and will be discussed a little later in this article. It may well be that magic lantern shows and the phantasmagoria also provided Goya with source material. His interest in all forms of theatre and popular entertainment is amply demonstrated by the frequent appearance of such themes in his work.

In Spain, as in most of Europe, peepshows and magic lanterns were originally presented by itinerant showmen, often Italians, in the open air or in private houses. However by the 1780s, when Goya was living in Madrid, they had come to form part of the repertoire of *teatrillos* (little theatres). They were often referred to as *máquinas ópticas* (optical devices) and would be presented along with 'physics and hydraulics experiments', magic tricks, song and dance, acrobatics or the exhibition of 'natural curiosities'. Phantasmagoria shows were performed in the same places.

The phantasmagoria, presented by Philipsthal in Paris in 1793 and later taken abroad, made use of magic lanterns to project images onto the rear of a translucent screen. Apparitions and spectres were made to appear to advance and recede by means of moving lanterns. According to a description from 1802:

> *figures which retired with the freshness of life came back in the form of skeletons, and the retiring skeletons returned in the drapery of flesh and blood. The exhibition of these transmutations was followed by spectres, skeletons, and terrific figures which ... suddenly advanced upon the spectators, becoming larger as they approached them, and finally vanished by appearing to sink into the ground.*[2]

Impressed spectators later commented that they felt they could have actually touched these phantoms.

The famous *Fantasmagorie; Apparitions, évocation de Spectres & Fantomes; expériences sur le Galvanism* ... (Apparitions, evocation of spectres and phantoms; experiments with galvanism)[3] of Etienne-Gaspard Robertson was performed for the first time in Paris in 1798

NOTES

1. Goya's drawings were published in a collected edition in the 1970s. See Pierre Gassier, *The Drawings of Goya: The Complete Albums*, 2 vols, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973–5).
2. Quoted in J.E. Varey, *Robertson's Phantasmagoria in Madrid*, 1821 (Part I), *Theatre Notebook* Vol. 9 No. 4 (July–September 1955), pp. 89–95. This quotation is from pp. 90–91.
3. Varey, *Robertson's Phantasmagoria* (Part I), pp. 91–92.

and then travelled to other European cities. In October 1820 Robertson presented his *fantasmagorie* at the Teatro de la Cruz in Madrid,[4] and an advertisement of January 1821 informed the public that he had already performed before the Spanish Royal Family.[5] Goya, by then a retired member of the Royal Court, may have been present.

In 1957 the art historian C. Ferment proposed Robertson's phantasmagoria as a source for *Viejo paseando entre fantasmas* (Old Man Wandering Among Ghosts; see fig.1), one of Goya's *Los disparates* (Follies) prints of 1810–25, and also for the *Black Paintings* (1820–3) which Goya executed on the walls of his house Quinta del Sordo (House of the Deaf Man) on the outskirts of Madrid.[6] Ferment suggested that Robertson's ballooning exploits would have attracted the artist's attention, given that there are two drawings from 1808 and a painting from between 1810 and 1816 of hot-air balloons attributed to Goya. Although there is no evidence to prove that the artist did have the phantasmagoria in mind, the presence of 'floating' images in *Old Man Wandering Among Ghosts* does suggest lantern projections through the darkness.

The fact that most of the *disparates* prints are based on popular festivities lends weight to the possibility that this print owes something to the phantasmagoria.[7] Throughout this series appear flying figures, fairground freaks, a circus act and an elephant, perhaps the 'strange new spectacle of the wise elephant' which was shown at the Spanish Royal Court in l807.[8] This type of show, often advertised in connection with the phantasmagoria, provided Goya with some of the source material which appears throughout his albums of drawings and series of prints.

In fact Robertson was not the first person to present a phantasmagoria in Madrid. In January and April 1806 M. Martin was 'continuing with great success his very entertaining experiments of Physics and Phantasmagoria'.[9] Martin had performed in Valladolid the year before with 'various physical, mechanical and optical experiments'[10] and had entertained the young people of Barcelona with 'experiments in physics' in 1802, the year of the visit of the Royal Court and Captain Lunardi's balloon flight.[11] Martin sold a number of 'physical', mechanical and electrical machines before leaving Madrid in May 1806. His phantasmagoria was bought by B. Rueda, who advertised it in March 1807 as 'the illusions of the Phantasmagoria … following without the slightest variation the entertainment presented last year by Mr Marten [*sic*]'.[12] The same apparatus was re-sold and advertised by different presenters until 1826.

By December 1816 the popularity of this phantasmagoria was causing unease amongst those concerned with public order, and their arguments are revealing. Now in the hands of J. Mantilla, who described it as a machine 'of lawful recreation and honest diversion', it was seen by those who tentatively granted him permission as presenting a danger of leading people astray:

> *I have based my decision on the fact that these entertainments are merely pastimes and although they may well be tolerated during this season, so that the public might add a little more fun to their honest recreation, they would be very harmful if they were extended for more time than that granted, this arrangement provides more than enough time for the people to satisfy their curiosity with the recurrent entrances available every day, and any prolongation can only serve to support the laziness of those who dedicate themselves to these devices, of whom there are not few, and to give occasion for the distraction of youths, servants, artisans, and other common people, that without contemplating the usefulness or uselessness of the entertainment, they prefer it to the carrying out of their obligations, and it causes many people to trick their parents, their masters and families, for such a flippant pastime that is not even capable of distracting them from the taverns or other places which do them no favours …*[13]

A permit was granted 'without it serving as a precedent' for the performances to continue until Carnival, but in 1829 permission was denied because

> *The sessions of catoptrics or the so-called phantasmagoria cannot be presented without a gradual attenuation of light which ends in complete darkness, and since this circumstance takes place precisely in a wretchedly small room, normally full of people without any kind of separation of the sexes, it is not necessary to be a fortune-teller in order to recognise the powerful stimuli that this causes and that very same impunity is available to all types of excesses and liberties, neither is there a policeman in sight who can impose respect nor correct the obstreperous. And it is to be pointed out that as the seeds of revolutions of the past have fertilised so prodigiously, where there is greater attendance there is more likelihood of opening the dykes to brazenness and loss of control, which is exactly what can be seen in Mantilla's spectacle, since without such incentives there would be few who would pay their money for such a puerile and insignificant pastime.*[14]

In 1984 the art historian Priscilla Muller suggested a scene from Robertson's repertoire as a source for one of Goya's drawings (Album C No. 31, c.1814–23), with the inscribed title *No lo encontrarás* (You Won't Find It; see fig. 2).[15] This represents a well-known anecdote of the cynic philosopher Diogenes, who was said to have gone out into the street with a lamp in broad daylight searching for a 'real' man. Robertson's Diogenes was represented by one of his *fantômes ambulants* – a wax mask illuminated from within and moved around the theatre by an assistant who wrote, in letters of fire, *'Je cherche un homme!'* (I am looking for a man!).[16]

2. Goya, No lo encontrarás *(You Won't Find It), Album C No. 31 (c.1814–23)*

4. J.E. Varey, *Los titeres y otras diversiones populares de Madrid 1758–1840: Estudio y documentos* (London, 1972), p. 88.
5. Varey, *Robertson's Phantasmagoria* (Part I), p. 93.
6. C. Ferment, 'Goya et la fantasmagorie,' *Gazette des Beaux Art*, Vol. 49 No. 6 (April 1957), pp. 223–6.
7. Wendy Bird, *The Carnivalesque in the Work of Goya,* unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Reading, 1999. See also N. Glendinning, *Los Disparates* (Madrid, 1992).
8. Varey, *Los titeres* …Fig. 6: 'elefante sabio, expectaculo nuevo y extraño'.
9. Varey, *Robertson's Phantasmagoria* (Part I), p. 93. For more on Martin see the entry by Mervyn Heard in David Robinson, Stephen Herbert and Richard Crangle (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern* (London: Magic Lantern Society, 2001), p. 188.
10. N.A. Cortés, *El teatro en Valladolid* (Madrid, 1923), p. 255.
11. J. Coroleu, *Memorias de un menestral de Barcelona* (Barcelona, 1888), p. 25.
12. Varey, *Robertson's Phantasmagoria* (Part I), pp. 94–5.
13. Quoted in Varey, *Los titeres* …, Document 119, pp.211–12.
14. Quoted in Varey, *Los titeres* …, Document 173, p. 245.
15. Priscilla E. Muller, *Goya's 'Black Paintings': Truth and Reason in Light and Liberty* (New York, 1984), p. 224 and fig. 110.

Robertson published a print on the theme, giving it a comical culmination in which Diogenes finds not a man, but a monkey.[17] Muller's suggestion must have been largely based on the print, because the *fantômes ambulants* seem not to have been used during Robertson's performances in Madrid and Diogenes does not appear in any of the surviving accounts of these shows.[18] Moreover, Diogenes' futile search for the true man was a familiar motif and Goya's possible sources were many.[19]

Robertson presented two types of imagery in Madrid: 'heroes of the nation, Ministers and other celebrities' and 'scenes appertaining to history, poetry, morality, etc.,' all of which corresponded to contemporary taste, though some were traditional.[20] Similar themes appear in Goya's work, transformed by satire and invested with significance, but Robertson's intention was more likely to have been to entertain. His special effects catered for dramatic Romantic taste: storms and floods, gloomy castles, graveyard melancholy, sentimental love, and ancient mysteries.

In 1821 a booklet, *Noticias curiosas sobre el espectáculo de Mr Robertson* (Curious Notes on the Spectacle of Mr Robertson), possibly even written by Robertson himself and translated into Spanish, was published in Madrid after the performance of his fantasmagorie for the royal family at the Royal Palace.[21] The first part begins with a number of anecdotal references to acrobatic and illusionist feats of the past, extolling the superior ability of the Indian conjuror Coussol, who performed alongside Robertson in the Teatro de la Cruz, a theatre frequented by Goya, who lived nearby. The second part deals with automata. In the third part, the author, who describes himself as an 'enthusiast of white magic', seeks to expose the fraudulent techniques of charlatans, presenting Robertson's phantasmagoria as an inoffensive, amusing and instructive form of entertainment. It was no doubt important not to insult the intelligence of the cultured members of court by publicising the show as a form of *séance*. Robertson could not expect to impress and deceive his public as he had done twenty years before.

If Goya did attend one of Robertson's performances in Madrid, he is more likely to have been influenced by the general atmosphere rather than the content. The scenario of *Old Man Wandering Among Ghosts* is certainly reminiscent of contemporary accounts of the phantasmagoria, though not necessarily Robertson's. Since phantasmagoria and magic lantern shows formed an important part of the urban scene during Goya's lifetime the possible sources are many.

Ferment's 1957 article also related the *Black Paintings* to Robertson's phantasmagoria because of the pervading darkness, floating figures and images merging with the shadows. The subject matter of these paintings is varied and has still not been satisfactorily interpreted. The gruesome image of what is believed to be Saturn devouring his sons is the most dramatic; it has been related to popular representations of the mouth of hell in Spanish street theatre. Its counterpart on the opposite wall of Goya's house was *Judith* (see fig. 3).[22] The biblical figure of Judith was popular in Spanish theatre at the time of Goya and the actress Rita Luna, (whose portrait Goya painted around 1814–18) became famous in this role. Judith was represented even more frequently in the *teatrillos*. Goya's 'black painting' of the biblical heroine brandishing a knife in the dark is highly theatrical.

Even if his work bore no testimony it would have been unlikely for Goya *not* to have seen a magic lantern show. The earliest known documented reference to a magic lantern in Spain is an advertisement by F. Callejo in May 1759, but the apparatus was probably already well known in Spain by that time. Ada Coe mentions an advertisement for a theatrical interlude called *La linterna mágica* (The Magic Lantern) in 1734 and a magic lantern was listed amongst other stage props in 1777,[23] so it appears that Goya would have grown up aware of this form of entertainment. Around 1785 the Royal Porcelain Factory in Madrid produced a magic lantern sideshow as part of a series of figurines of 'popular types'.

Despite their popularity, the magic lantern and what was later termed the *máquina pintoresco mecánico* (picturesque mechanical device) were often viewed with disapproval. In 1826 M. Saudinos was denied permission to show his 'newly invented moving optical machine, made by himself …' because

> *this type of spectacle, although innocent and simple, offers no other advantage than that of satisfying the curiosity of a few idlers and distracting the industrious from their occupations, putting them in danger of losing time and money, which these days of poverty are more than ever sensitive to seeing it passing into the hands of foreign charlatans and speculators. There is another drawback, in my opinion not unimportant given the circumstances, and it is that many of these are sheltering amongst us and travelling through Spain in the shadow of an industry, which disregarding its interest could very well cover other more sinister and far-reaching purposes ...*[24]

The enlightened poet and politician G.M. Jovellanos, a friend of Goya (who painted his portrait in 1798), was of the opinion that popular sideshows had no educational value or other positive influence on the people, and desired to eliminate 'puppets and grotesque figures, clowns, harlequins and tightrope dancers, magic lanterns and peepshows' because he believed that the healthy thing for the common people was to make their own amusement. He felt that if people were given freedom and protection they would invent their own forms of entertainment: 'People need to have fun, but not shows. It is not necessary for the government to provide entertainments for them, but it must allow them to enjoy themselves.'[25] Although considered by many to have a negative effect on the common people, and perhaps because of that, the magic lantern was sometimes advertised as a form of scientific advance, though more commonly it was the dramatic representations of natural disasters

3. Goya, Judith, *one of the* Black Paintings *(1821–2)*

16. J.E.Varey. *Robertson's Phantasmagoria in Madrid, 1821* (Part II), *Theatre Notebook*, Vol. 11 No. 3 (April–June 1957), pp. 82–91. This quotation is from p. 83.
17. Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, *Mémoires récréatifs, scientifiques, et anecdotiques du physicien-aéronaute, E.G. Robertson*, Vol. I (Paris, 1831–3), p. 331.
18. Varey, *Robertson's Phantasmagoria* (Part II), p. 85.
19. R. Alcala Flecha, 'En torno al "Diogenes" de Goya,' *Goya* 227 (1992), pp. 281–94.
20. Françoise Levie, *Etienne-Gaspard Robertson: La Vie d'un Fantasmagore* (Brussels, 1990), pp. 306–8.
21. *Noticias Curiosas sobre el espectáculo de Mr Robertson, los juegos de los indios, las maquinas parlantes, la fantasmagoria y otras brugerias de esta naturaleza. Por un aficionado a la magia blanca* (Madrid, 1821). The text of this pamphlet will be published in an English translation by Wendy Bird in the next issue of the *New Magic Lantern Journal – Ed.*
22. The popularity of the Judith figure is discussed in Bird, *op. cit.*, pp. 327–39.
23. A.M. Coe, *Entertainments in the Little Theatres of Madrid (1759–1819)* (New York, 1947), p. 19.
24. Quoted in Varey, *Los titeres …*, Document 162, pp.239–40.

4. Goya, Tutilimundi, *Album C No. 71 (1814-23)*

5. Goya, Miran lo que no ben *(They Are Looking at What They Cannot See), Album G No. 2 (1824–8)*

which brought in the spectators: 'A storm at sea which shows the fire in the sky, thunderclaps, lightning and rains lashing a ship which finishes up sinking into the waters.'[26]

The *tutilimundi* peepshows mentioned at the beginning of this article were a simpler form of optical device which transformed static images using lenses and mirrors. Peepshows were often represented by artists as simple genre subject-matter, but in the case of Goya the image served him as social satire. One of his drawings (Album C No. 71, inscribed *Tutilimundi*, 1814–23; see fig. 4), shows a grinning woman peering into the naked backside of a man, exposed by his ragged trousers, as he bends over to look into a fairground peepshow. This is highly reminiscent of comical medieval scato-logical carnival imagery (such as a misericord in the cathedral of Zamora representing a spinner-woman looking into a monkey's backside, symbolising the carnal sin of lust). *Tutilimundi* means 'all the world' or 'everyone', and Goya, who was fond of puns, may have intended some reference to the theme of universal folly in this choice of title.

A later drawing done in exile in Bordeaux (Album G No. 2, inscribed *Miran lo que no ben* (They Are Looking at What They Cannot See), 1824–8; see fig. 5) also contains a strong element of the humorously obscene. From the top of the peepshow box protrudes the head of a man wearing a hat. The men who stare through the peepholes, one of them a monk, could well be scrutinising some fascinating or peculiar aspect of the man's body, and the women are tittering whilst awaiting their turn in the queue. The appeal of fairground entertainments was said to appeal to the 'lower' or 'base' elements of the people, and Goya may well have had this in mind. The theme of 'looking without seeing' is implicit in the title.

Goya no doubt shared Jovellanos' belief that peepshows were unhealthy. However, the local authorities, though critical of such sideshows, were generally tolerant of them. Representatives of the Church were less so, as suggested by this complaint lodged against a street showman:

> *The day before yesterday a nun reported to me that a one-armed man who stands in the street of Alcalá in the afternoons with an optical device which is commonly called a peepshow [titilimundi] or new world [mundo nuevo], in order to ingratiate himself with the people who listen to him uses blasphemous expressions inducive to obscenity; and with the intention of correcting his shameful behaviour as he deserves you ought to warn him, and if necessary punish him, to avoid the scandal he causes to his listeners.*

It was not the images shown by the *titiritero* that gave cause for offence, but his street *patois*. No doubt he was aware of the scandal he had caused because he seems to have modified his behaviour in time to save his business:

> *the officials charged by me with this assignment informed me the very last night that in all the time they watched the one-armed man's show they were able to assure me that through the jargon or patter with which he livened up his performance they did not hear any notoriously blasphemous expressions, though coarse ones yes ...*[27]

Goya's *tutilimundi* are shown as the focus of foolish behaviour. It would be a healthy sign if these people, pushing and shoving to get a good view, were interested in optical instruments designed to aid scientific progress, but on the contrary, motivated by ignorance, their curiosity appears badly directed. Elsewhere, Goya's drawings suggest an interest in the more scientific aspects of optical instruments – for instance in Album E No. 9? (c.1806–12) he drew a man in Arab dress looking upwards whilst holding a telescope (such an instrument was listed amongst the artist's possessions in an inventory of 1812).[28] The inscription *Aprende a ver* (He is Learning to See; see fig. 6) suggests that the telescope not only provides the means to observe heavenly bodies, but is also symbolic of discovery, knowledge, progress and civilisation. The Arabs, former rulers of Spain, developed scientific methods of astronomical observation whose results were largely suppressed since they collided with the Aristotelian vision of the universe. No doubt Goya was aware of this. However, during his lifetime, in spite of the instructive 'astronomical machines' which could be seen in the *teatrillos*, the common people still interpreted astronomical phenomena through superstitious beliefs. The impact of optical devices on popular culture during the eighteenth century, in relation to the ideas of scientific progress and Enlightenment thought, was always somewhat ambiguous.

6. Goya, Aprende a ver *(He is Learning to See), Album E No. 9[?] (c.1806-12)*

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25. G.M. de Jovellanos, *Espectáculos y diversiones pablicas. Informe sobre la ley agraria* (Madrid, 1790), edited by J. Lage (Madrid, 1986), p. 32.
26. F. Guzmán, *La España de Goya* (Madrid, 1981), p. 27.
27. Quoted in Varey, *Los titeres* ..., Document 171, p. 245.
28. Gassier, *The Drawings of Goya*,Vol. 1, p. 212.