

Goya's *Los Caprichos*: An Enlightened Bestiary

Author: Julie Thompson

Faculty Mentor: Kelly Donahue-Wallace, Associate Professor, Department of Art Education and Art History, College of Visual Arts and Design

College and Affiliation: Department of Art Education and Art History, College of Visual Arts and Design

Bio:

Julie Thompson graduated from the College of Visual Arts and Design at the University of North Texas (UNT) in December 2010, with a bachelor's degree in Art History and a minor in French. From 2006-2008 she studied Art History and French literature at the American University of Paris. In April of 2011, she presented her research at University Scholars Day at UNT and at the 6th Annual Art History Symposium at the University of Texas at Arlington. She also received the 2010-2011 Outstanding Undergraduate Art History Student award at UNT's Honors Day. She plans to pursue post-baccalaureate studies in either the history of medieval art or the history of printed images.

Abstract:

Sinful behavior was ubiquitous despite the religious fervor of the Middle Ages and the Inquisition in eighteenth century Spain. To simplify church doctrine the medieval clergy employed the bestiary, a manuscript that categorizes animals and fantastic creatures by traits that symbolize moral behavior. This analysis argues that the iconography and allegories found within medieval bestiaries influenced prints depicting human, animal, and hybrid figures within Francisco de Goya's (1746-1838) series *Los Caprichos*. However, in contrast to the medieval bestiary which employs animal symbolism for morally didactic purposes, Goya reworks the composition of bestial allegories in order to enlighten the viewer on the immorality that is innate, universal, and destructive to humanity. Accordingly, a semiotic analysis of Francisco de Goya's prints *Todos Caeran* and *Devota Profesion* examines how Goya modifies the medieval iconography of the siren, the owl, and the ass to embody immoral aspects of contemporary Spanish society.

Introduction

This analysis argues that the iconography and allegories found within medieval bestiaries influenced certain prints depicting human, animal, and hybrid figures within Francisco de Goya's (1746-1838) series *Los Caprichos*. However, in contrast to the medieval bestiary, which employs animal symbolism for morally didactic purposes, Goya reworks the composition of bestial allegories in order to enlighten the viewer on the immorality that is innate, universal, and destructive to humanity. Within the context of religious concepts of vice and virtue, the first section discusses the history, purpose, and audience of medieval bestiaries from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Then, a semiotic analysis interprets the religious and secular allegories of vice found within the typical bestiary's iconography of sirens, owls, and donkeys. The following section addresses the religious and social ideologies of eighteenth-century Europe and the Spanish Enlightenment. Accordingly, the analyst employs semiotics to analyze symbols of vice within two of Francisco de Goya's prints, *Todos Caeran* and *Devota Profesion*. This analysis consequently examines how Goya modifies the medieval iconography of the siren, the owl, and the donkey to embody immoral aspects of contemporary Spanish society. The analysis concludes with a comparison of the function of bestial allegories within medieval bestiaries and within the extent of Goya's *Los Caprichos*.

With the spread of Christianity in the Middle Ages, religious authority placed eternal salvation with God over temporal sinful pleasure. The Catholic Church, led by the clerical hierarchy, controlled medieval Europe. This control eventually resulted in an almost completely Christian Europe, with the exception of Jews and Muslims, where most Christians faithfully observed the moral practices of the church (Keller 11). Catholicism requires participation in the sacraments, confession, and the repentance of one's sins in order to be granted Christ's salvation.

Salvation results in eternal life with God in heaven, is the ultimate goal of a practicing Catholic. The church also viewed morality as integral and vital to living a spiritual Christian life, instructing that sensuality, lust, greed, and deceit were lures of the Devil, and that the lack of atonement for these sins would result in condemnation (Baxter 45-47).

Regardless of the prevalence of church authority, the medieval world, even the clergy, was full of sinful activity. Prostitution was widespread in university towns, near monasteries, and on crusade journeys (Hassig 110-112). Although the Church scorned prostitution, it was viewed in a better light than unnatural sexual acts such as sodomy or homosexuality, and the clergy was encouraged to reform prostitutes (Hassig 81). Other moral views taught within the medieval church include the virtue of celibacy, the sexual dangers of women, and the allowance of sex only for conception (Hassig 29). Not adhering to these moral tenets would lead to distraction by worldly desires and thus denial of salvation. In order to inspire repentance or prevent people from sinning, the clergy frequently used allegories, as with animal symbolism found within the Bestiary, to convey didactic messages about vice and virtue (Hassig 54-55).

History, Purpose, and Audience of Medieval Bestiaries

Medieval bestiaries employ real and fantastic animal iconography in order to convey allegories of vice, and to instruct clerical and secular audiences on leading a life worthy of salvation. The earliest known bestiary dates to the tenth century. The majority of traditional bestiaries were produced in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Production declined in the fourteenth century when Books of Hours and Psalters became popular. Bestiaries are derived from the Latin B text of the *Physiologus* and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, both organized real and fantastic animals into chapters concerning their symbolic characteristics and Christian morality. The *Physiologus* was generally devoid of illustration but used descriptions of animals

as spiritual guidance for Christian behavior and typological references to Christ and His salvation (Baxter 29-33). For example, the description of a lamb would be a reference to Christ as a sacrifice of Himself in the crucifixion. The Bestiary emerges as an extension to the theological *Physiologus* and the taxonomical *Etymologiae* in the development of the moral iconography into a didactic visual representation of vice and virtue (Clark 3). This was achieved by adding illustrations of the animals and enriching their symbolism to include a multiplicity of moral undertones.

Such animals and creatures as owls, sirens, cats, and goats represented, in the traditional bestiary, the descriptions and moral lessons in the text. They are rendered stylistically, unnaturalistically in form and behavior, and are usually devoid of identifiable backgrounds. Similar illustration techniques and their accompaniment of the bestiary text may indicate the emergence of an iconographic tradition among the bestiaries; there is even evidence of at least one model text. Characteristics of certain moral qualities were thus attributed to an animal for ideological and symbolic meaning, rather than taxonomical purposes (Hassig 3, 8, 10). Associating a wide range of allegorical meanings pertaining to behaviors related to lust, avarice, marriage, and spiritual ignorance to irrational or fantastic animals is a useful instructional tool as it allows the viewer to recognize humanity's ability to visualize sins or social issues and inspire the aversion or repentance of them (Brown 54).

Although the bestiary's allegorical images accompany a written text they are also identifiable independently from it, which would have allowed illiterates familiar with the moral stories to take advantage of the lessons. The viewer may have recognized them from biblical stories using metaphorical beasts such as the ones in the book of Revelation or a sermon given by the clergy or the laymen that had been inspired by bestiaries. The Fourth Lateran Council of

1215 emphasized the didactic capabilities of sermons, and a significant percentage of bestiaries are combined with sermons as *exempla* (Hassig 171,175). Allegorizing certain sins or virtues through the iconography of familiar animals and creatures simplified the preaching and understanding of church doctrines, such as chastity and the virgin birth, and aided in the dissemination of moral lessons and religious belief to not only a monastic, but also a secular audience (Hassig 171). Symbols of virtues, such as the beaver representing chastity, offered the hope of repentance and salvation to viewers. Others, discussed in the following section will discuss symbols of vice.

A common allegory for the sin of lust, sexual promiscuity, and the dangers of carnal pleasures that lead to spiritual death, is the siren. Within the medieval bestiary the siren is usually depicted in groups of three females, human from the head to the waist and as either a bird or some type of fish from the waist to the feet. The detail of the dancing and music-playing sirens (Figure 1) from the Douce Bestiary (circa 1300) is an example of three representations of bird-like sirens. They represent lust, prostitution, and the dangers of worldly pleasures. Sometimes the iconographic program includes a narrative image of the sirens lulling the sailors to their drowning as in the details of the margin of folio 138 recto (Figure 2), which is also from the Douce Bestiary. The relationship between sirens and sailors is derived from Greek mythology in which sailors were warned of the sirens' beautiful songs. Sirens would use music and nudity to distract sailors so that their boats would crash on the sirens' island. The sirens would then rip apart the shipwrecked sailors. Although the highly stylized use of line outlines the sirens' breasts are from an angle, as if the viewer were looking at the sirens from above, clearly the central focus of the image is on the nudity of the upper body and the exposure of the breasts. The nipples are even drawn in small black dots or circular patterns.

The nudity and anatomical detail of the sirens associates them with the iconography of lust and prostitution. The rendering of the torsos and heads as human indicates that even with the capability of thought, they exercise and embody animal and carnal, rather than spiritual, desires (Brown 60). The allusion to prostitution was sometimes heightened by the contemporary dress seen in certain images of sirens (Hassig 79). Figure 2 depicts the act of lulling the sailors to their destruction by juxtaposing the boat and the dancing sirens implying both the dangers of female sexuality and desire, and the destruction of the human soul trapped by temporal, worldly desires. Other animals that are associated with allegories of lust are hircus, or he-goats, as seen in Figure 3. The large genitals, sideways glance, and downward curving horns allude to sexual urges and evil. Simia, apes, and cats are also representations of female sexuality.

In bestiaries the allegory of sinners, spiritual ignorance, blindness and the consequence of these vices are represented by various iconographical depictions of the owl. The owl is portrayed with feathers created by stylized curvilinear lines, easily discernable hooked beak, round eyes, and sometimes horn-like ears. The medieval bestiary associates the owl with impurity, since it nests with its droppings, and darkness because of its nocturnal habits (Syme 172). Depictions of the owl being attacked by other birds, as in Figure 5, represent the hostility of the virtuous against the immoral. The birds attacking and swarming the unresponsive owl in a detail from the Bodley 764 Bestiary (Figure 5) are representations of the scorn that is awaiting sinners after death and the eventual destruction of their soul. The idyllic nature of the owl is exemplified in another detail of the Bodley 764 bestiary, *Noctua* (Figure 4), as it rests on its perch, and its proximity to evil is shown in its dark brown feathers that also represent extreme carnal desire (Miyazaki 34). The use of the night sky to represent the owl's nocturnal nature also exemplifies

spiritual ignorance and blindness, which is usually used in relation to superstition (Miyazaki 33). Other bestial examples of superstition and witchcraft are cats and bats.

Medieval interpretations of the ass describe it as a beast that is useful in labor; but its ignorance, slowness, and stubborn nature make it difficult to control (Payne 16). In a detail of the ass from the Bodley 764 bestiary (Figure 6), a man is depicted in the process of prodding the beast with a hot stick in an effort to force him inside a building. The device moving water inside suggests the beast is intended for work, but its position outside of the door suggests the difficulty in encouraging its labor. The representation of the ass within the bestiary thus functions as a moral lesson against idleness and stupidity.

The iconography and allegories of the medieval bestiary influenced the marginalia of late Gothic medieval texts. They were also appropriated into the representation of courtly love in the *Bestiary d'Amour*, and may have been influential in the iconography of emblems. Bestial iconography is found within the margins of several Psalters, such as the Queen Mary Psalter and the Lambeth Apocalypse (Hassig 178). Rather than exemplify an allegory or a moral lesson on a vice or virtue, the bestial activities ridicule human desires. For example, farting or naked beasts next to a sacred text may appear crude and comical, but they delineate the contrast between the spiritual and corporeal (Bovey 45). Influenced by the moral instruction of the bestiary illustrations, the crude actions of the marginal beasts further the condemnation of worldly desires through derision.

The Bestiary was given new meaning in the fourteenth-century with Richard de Fournival's *Bestiary d'Amour*. This meaning was achieved through the appropriation of bestial allegorical figures and their adaptation as symbols of carnal pleasure in courtly love (Hassig 63). The secularization and entertainment value of marginalia and literature influenced by courtly

love signifies the declining use of allegorical beasts to moralize sin and the importance of repentance.

The medieval bestiary had a profound impact on the emblem books of the Renaissance, as the animal symbolism was incorporated into the emblems' visual representation of abstract concepts. Cesare Ripa's sixteenth century *Iconologia* and its representations of vices and virtues demonstrate this influence. The emblem for ignobleness shown in Figure 7 depicts a woman sweeping, an owl atop her head, and ears that resemble those of an ass in order to signify her low class. Ripa asserts that the ass represents the unwillingness to be instructed which follows the bestiary lesson that the ass is difficult to move (Ripa 76). He explains that the owl symbolizes bad luck and inability to behave virtuously (Ripa 81). The owl is again used in the emblem of superstition (Figure 8), signifying bad luck and spiritual blindness. Lust is also signified in Figure 9 by the he-goat rising up the seated lady's leg.

Religious and Social Ideologies of 18th Century Europe and the Spanish Enlightenment

Ripa's emblem books were commonly circulated for artistic reference throughout the eighteenth century. The sexual immorality, superstition, and the impoverished and uneducated population within late eighteenth-century Spanish society would have allowed Goya to draw correlations between the emblems and societal problems (Tomlinson 4). Although Charles III partially resuscitated Spain from economic and social ruin with the Spanish Enlightenment, eighteenth-century Spain inherited great economic debt accrued by the Hapsburg King Charles. The country was also split by the extensive monetary wealth of the church and the poverty of the lower nobility and peasants (Klingender 4-14). Combined with the enlightened absolutist monarchy of Charles III, the Catholic Church remained a prominent authority and economic force. The Spanish people maintained intense religious fervor even though society was marked

by degradation, vice, and superstition (Klingender 69). For example, prostitution was prevalent in eighteenth-century Spanish society, and uneducated rural populations also combined Christian tenets with superstitions and witchcraft which were forbidden by the Inquisition (Goya 11).

Unlike the Enlightenment experienced in England and France, Spain's Enlightenment was a nationalist agenda that adopted reason through a Christian lens. Although much reduced in power, the Inquisition still exercised censorship of art and literature as well as intolerance towards Jews and Muslims. Their efforts to reform by Enlightenment thinkers were not approved by the monarchy (Tomlinson 18-19). Spanish reformers were interested in education, injustice, and the hypocrisy of the church, but Spain's former debts, the number of reform agendas, and the absolutist regime created obstacles and prevented reforms within the century. Charles IV's reign, which began after Charles III's death in 1788, was characterized by sexual scandals, political injustice, and intellectual repression (Dowling 344-345). His reign marked the end of the Spanish Enlightenment. Goya's connections to notable enlightened reformers, such as Jovellanos, Zapater, and Moratin, suggests he was aware of and interested in nuances of enlightenment ideals. His employment as court painter also implies he bore witness to the declining moralities of Spain.

Bestial Allegory in *Los Caprichos*

Through the employment of bestial allegory in the series *Los Caprichos* (1797-99), Francisco de Goya interpreted various social vices prominent in Spain from 1790-1799. The series consists of etchings and aquatints that engage human and bestial creatures in contemporary settings to reflect and reveal the immorality and injustice of the eighteenth century. Goya's advertisement in the *Diario de Madrid* indicates the intention of the prints to criticize "human errors and vices...chosen...from the multitude of follies and wrong-doings which are common to

all societies, of prejudices and lies countenanced by custom, ignorance, or self-interest (Goya 32).” The prints were not widely distributed and, despite Goya’s efforts, were removed from sale rather quickly.

Animals and fantastic beasts appear in many of the Caprichos images. Among these prints are various depictions of creatures such as jackasses, foxes, and demonic creatures that are interacting with or menacing humans. Goya’s portrayal of the allegory of the siren, owl, and jackass in plates are most relevant to this paper. The analysis argues that the interaction of beasts and humans in various social transactions would have been familiar to contemporary viewers from the visual tradition of bestiaries, manuscript marginalia, and emblem books.

The print *Todos Caeran* in Figure 10 represents the allegory of the siren which symbolizes lust and the dangers of seduction and warns that no one can escape the destructive lures of worldly desires. Two young women and an old woman whose hands are raised in a gesture of prayer or begging are seated at the bottom of the composition. The youthful females smile as they pluck and tear at the feathers of a man-bird hybrid which is beginning to vomit. Perched at the top of a scraggly branch is a creature that is female from the head to the breasts and a bird to the feet which bear discernable talons. This female hybrid wears a contemporary Spanish bonnet, and the diagonal lines that form her prominent breasts also clothe her torso in fabric. Flocks of birds with male heads fly toward the perched female figure, some wearing fashionable hats, contemporary hairstyles, and even a clerical cloak. The iconography of this print implies that the perched woman represents a siren: she is acting as a lure to trap noblemen, peasants, and even the clergy into moral destruction. These men are unaware, or do not care, about the fallen man meeting his death, while the caption suggests, all will fall (Goya 19). The eighteenth-century clothing worn by the women and the hat and hairstyles of the men allow the

viewer to relate the figures to prostitutes, suggesting the sin of lust (Hassig 110). Reading the image from the siren to the fallen man symbolizes the fall of man to immoral action, such as in the decline of the Spanish Enlightenment in the scandalous acts of Charles IV's court.

Todos Caeran recalls the image of the siren in the medieval bestiary. Although Goya's print depicts one siren similar in composition to that of the bestiary, the association with an emblematic siren allows the three women, plucking at their prey, to exemplify sirens within eighteenth-century Spanish society. The prominent cleavage of the perched siren, as well as that of two of the other sirens, parallels the nudity of the outlined breasts in the bestiary image. The juxtaposition of two scenes, such as the men-bird hybrids flocking to the siren and the attack of the man below may be influenced by the placement of the sailors and sirens in bestiary depictions of the allegory of the siren.

In a similar manner, scholars interpret the women portrayed in *Todos Caeran* as siren-like prostitutes and decoys to lure the flying men to their deaths (Goya 87). Scholars suggest that this is a warning against the deceptions of women and failed romances (Goya 53). These scholarly discussions support the analysis argument that *Todos Caeran* adopts the iconography of the siren in order to criticize the sexual immorality and prostitution prevalent in eighteenth-century Spanish society.

Goya uses the ears of an ass, a bishop's miter, and an owl in *Devota profesion* (Figure 11) as an allegory of the ignorance and evil nature of superstition. It may even be interpreted that not even the clergy can escape hypocrisy and sin. The print shows a male-jackass hybrid hoisting a female with the ears of an ass. She is reading a document held by two men in clerical robes and headgear, out of which asinine ears are protruding, as a large flying owl supports them on its broad wings. The woman and flying men have their eyes shut and their mouths open in chant.

The hooked-pointed beak, round eyes, and use of line to delineate the feathers of the owl in Goya's *Devota profesion* show the bestiary's composition of the owl in Figure 4 and Figure 5, and the compositions found in Ripa's emblems in Figure 8 and Figure 9 influenced their form and meaning. The owl, as a symbol of not only superstition but also of ignorance and blindness, indicates that the men blindly leading the service, be it religious or pagan, are spiritually ignorant and that the woman is following them out of sightlessness and with ill-informed faith. In *Devota Profesion*, the owl can also symbolize the future destruction awaiting those who practice witchcraft. This symbolism is heightened by the ass-like ears, which follow the bestiary's allegory for obstinacy (Figure 8) and the Ripa's emblem of ignorance and low birth in Figure 8. Superstition and sorcery were widespread in rural eighteenth-century Spain and a target of not only the Inquisition, but of enlightened intellectuals; it is not surprising then that Goya chooses to reveal the depravity of those who practice it (Goya 11). The clerical cloaks and headgear, which resemble miters, may reveal the hypocrisy and corruption of the clerical authority, such as the Inquisition.

Based on the combination of bestial and clerical iconography, scholars interpret *Devota profesion* as a condemnation of sorcery and from the Catholic clergy. The two floating figures are compared to bishops because of their mitre-like hats, and the large book they hold is described as a book of spells (Goya 23). Rachel Schmidt and Francis Klingender suggest a reference to the Spanish clergy's heretical use of religious texts and note the use of a large bird and ass-like ears as symbols of superstition and blind faith (Schmidt 83). Oto Bihalji-Merin's translation of the phrase *Devota profesion* to devout vows indicates how the text can suggest the blind faith of inductees by heretical clergy into Catholicism or by sorcerers into witchcraft (Goya 23). Scholarly interpretation of *Devota Profesion* therefore supports the semiotic analysis that

Goya is criticizing the blind faith, heretical clergymen, and superstition witnessed in Spanish society.

Like the moralizing intent of medieval bestiaries, Goya's allegories throughout *Los Caprichos*, especially in *Todos Caeran* and *Devota Profesion*, are socially specific and, therefore, would have been recognizable to a contemporary audience. Viewers may have been familiar with the iconographic tradition established by bestiaries, books of hours, Ripa's emblems, or by instruction within the church. The allegories may have recalled ideologies within enlightenment reform, such as education, religious dogma, and social injustice (Goya 54-55). Goya incorporates these creatures in a manner similar to that of the *Bestiare d'Amour* which implies the easy appropriation of familiar symbols to represent secular issues.

Unlike the allegories in medieval bestiaries that warn against vice and promise salvation through repentance, the absence of virtuous symbols illustrates that the moral criticisms in Goya's *Los Caprichos* expose the vulnerability of the eventual downfall of anyone and everyone to moral depravity. The prints progress in an increasingly negative manner and depict victims and attackers as equally culpable of immorality (Schulz 15). The influence of the bestiary tradition on Goya's prints is exemplified in his bestial allegories. However, the progressive darkness of *Los Caprichos* reveals that Goya is not reforming the human soul, but instead is focusing on the immorality within every social rank and human interaction.

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Figure 1. Detail of *Sirens Dancing and Playing Music*, vellum, 1300. MS Douce 88, f.138v.



Figure 2. Detail of *Sirens and Men in Ship on the Sea Charmed by the Song of the Sirens*. Vellum, c. 1300, MS Douce 88, f.138r.



Figure 3. Detail of *Hircus*, the He-Goat, parchment, 13th century, MS Bodley 764, f.036v.



Figure 4. Detail of *Noctua*, parchment, 13th century, MS Bodley 764, f.073r.



Figure. 5. Detail of *Owl Being Attacked by Other Birds*, parchment, 13th century, MS Bodley 764, f.073v.



Figure 6. Ass with Drover Carries Sack to Mill, parchment, 13th century, MS Bodley 764, f.044r.



Figure 7. Ripa, Cesare, *Ignobleness*, from *Iconologia*, engraving, 1603.



Figure 8. Ripa, Cesare, *Superstition*, from *Iconologia*, engraving, 1603.



Figure 9. Ripa, Cesare, *Lust*, from *Iconologia*, engraving, 1603.



Figure 10. Goya, Francisco, *Todos Caeran* (All will Fall), *Los Caprichos*, pl. 19, etching and aquatint, 1797-98.



Figure 11. Goya, Francisco, *Devota Profesion* (Devout Profession), *Los Caprichos*, pl. 70, etching and aquatint, 1797-98.