

This is the Hour: *A Novel About Goya* Lion Feuchtwanger

BEGGAR

united them in a mystically fervid belief in Throne and Altar. And this hardness, this unity, had endured.

At the end of the eighteenth century the Iberian tradition was frozen into a rigidity both tragic and absurd. Even two hundred years before, the country's greatest writer had drawn his material from this sinister and grotesque persistence. In the tale of the knight who could not abandon the ancient now meaningless customs of chivalry, he had created an eternally valid analogy, and his lovable hero, touching and ridiculous, had become famous all over the globe.

The Spaniards had laughed over Don Quixote, but had not given up their obsession with tradition. The chivalry of the Middle Ages had lasted longer in the peninsula than anywhere else in Europe. Prowess in arms, heroism carried to the point of madness, an exaggerated gallantry deriving from the veneration of the Virgin Mary—these characteristics remained the ideals of Spain. Chivalrous practices, long since obsolete, still persisted.

Bound up with this warlike habit was something of contempt for learning and reason; similarly, a monstrous pride, known and notorious throughout the world, general pride of country, individual pride of caste. Christianity itself lost in Spain its cheerful simplicity and assumed a fierce, gloomy, autocratic mien. The Church became arrogant, aggressive, masculine, and cruel.

Thus, at the turn of the century, the country was the most back-

I Towards the end of the eighteenth century, almost everywhere in Western Europe, the Middle Ages had been rooted out. But on the Iberian peninsula, cut off on three sides by the sea and on the fourth by mountains, they persisted.

To drive the Arabs from the peninsula, Monarchy and Church had centuries before been forced to enter into an indissoluble alliance. Victory was possible only if kings and prelates succeeded in welding together by the strictest discipline the peoples of Spain. They had succeeded. They had

ward in Europe. Yet on the other side of the mountains to the north, cut off from Spain by these mountains alone, lay the most lucid, most rational country in the world: France.

At that time foreign kings ruled over Spain, rulers of French origin, Bourbons. The Spaniards could well force the Bourbons to adapt themselves, as earlier they had forced the Hapsburgs. But the Spanish nobility learned the foreign customs from the French kings and their entourages, and many came to like them.

The people, however, while the aristocracy was slowly changing, stuck stubbornly to their old ways. Solemnly, zealously, they took over the rights and duties their masters were relinquishing. The noblest sport had always been the bullfight, preserve of the high aristocracy. Only the nobility could take part, only the nobility look on. Now, when the *grandees* no longer concerned themselves with bullfighting, the people practised the savage custom with greater passion. And as the *grandees* relaxed somewhat in their manners, the etiquette of the folk became correspondingly stricter. Shoemakers and tailors addressed one another with cumbersome titles. Don Quixote had abdicated, Don Quixote had transformed himself into an elegant gentleman from Versailles; now the people took over his shield and his ramshackle war horse. Sancho Panza became Don Quixote, heroic and ridiculous.

Over on the other side of the Pyrenees the French beheaded their king and chased their nobility out of the country. Here in Spain the people deified their monarchs, French though they were in origin and highly unkingly. To the people, king was king, *grandee grandee*, and while these exalted ones, more and more committed to French customs, had even resigned themselves to the idea of a pact with a republican France, the Spanish people fought enthusiastically on against the godless French and let themselves be slain for their king, their nobles, and their priests.

True, in Spain existed Spaniards
 Who perceived the contradiction
 In themselves, and these would struggle
 In their breasts to fight the fight out
 'Twixt the old and modern usage,
 'Twixt their feelings and their reason,
 Oft with pain and oft with passion,
 Winning sometimes, yet not always.

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2 Doña Cayetana, thirteenth Duchess of Alba, was giving a theatrical evening for her friends in her palace in Madrid. A troop of royalist Parisian actors who had fled over the Pyrenees were putting on a piece by the dramatist Berthelin, *The Martyrdom of Marie Antoinette*, a drama which, in spite of its contemporary subject matter, was executed in the classical style.

WOMAN RESTING

The audience—not numerous, made up chiefly of ladies and gentlemen of the high nobility—was swallowed up by the large hall, which was only dimly lighted to show up more clearly the action on the stage. Noble and monotonous, the six-foot iambs rang out, their elegant French not always wholly understandable to Spanish ears. The hall was warm, and gradually a pensive, agreeable somnolence crept over the listeners in their comfortable armchairs.

The royal martyr on the stage was imparting noble precepts to her children, the fourteen-year-old Madame Royale and the nine-year-old King Louis the Seventeenth. Then, turning to her sister-in-law, Princess Elizabeth, she swore that whatever might come to pass, she would bear herself in a manner worthy of her murdered spouse, Louis the Sixteenth.

The Duchess of Alba herself had not yet put in an appearance, but in the first row sat her husband, the Marqués de Villabranca, who, following the usual custom, had added her title to the many others he already possessed. The quiet, elegant man, almost slight in build though full in the face, gazed thoughtfully with his fine dark eyes at the haggard actress up on the stage declaiming sentimental, pathetic verses and purporting to be the deceased Marie Antoinette. The Duke of Alba was fastidious about artistic performances not of the very highest class, and in this case had had his doubts from the first. But his dear Duchess had declared that life in Madrid had become mortally boring in consequence of the mourning ordained by the Court after the horrible death of Queen Marie Antoinette, and that she really must do something. A performance such as *The Martyrdom* would bring life into the house and at the same time express

sympathy over the eclipse of the monarchy in France. The Duke could well understand that his wife, who was famous for her caprices in all the courts of Europe, might be bored in the spacious isolation of her Madrid palace; he had agreed without more ado and now, patient and skeptical, allowed the performance to wash over him.

His mother, widow of the tenth Marqués of Villabranca, sat next to him and listened indifferently. This Hapsburger on the stage, how loud and lachrymose she was! No, Marie Antoinette had not been like that. The Marquesa de Villabranca had seen and spoken to her in her time at Versailles. She had been a delightful woman, Marie Antoinette of Hapsburg and Bourbon, gay and lovable, a little showy perhaps, and loud. But when all was said and done she was only a Hapsburg and had nothing of the unobtrusive nobility of a Villabranca. The relationship of Marie Antoinette to her silent unassertive Louis, did it not somehow resemble that of Cayetana de Alba to her Don José? She stole a glance at her son; in his delicacy and weakness he was her favourite; what she saw and experienced was seen and experienced wholly in relationship to him. He loved his wife, as anyone could understand who had once seen her, but there was no question but that he stood in her shadow; to the world he was the husband of the Duchess of Alba. Ah, but few really knew her son José! They saw and commended his aristocratic poise, but of his inner musicality, the wonderfully balanced rhythm of his being, few were aware; even his wife knew too little of it.

Up on the stage the President of the Revolutionary Tribunal, a brutal man, now appeared to inform the Queen of the verdict. First of all he accused her once more of all her atrocities and read aloud a list of crimes as senseless as it was shocking.

Lost in his great armchair sat Monsieur de Havré, meagre and fragile in his splendid diplomatic dress. He represented the heir to the French throne, who was governing France from Verona in place of the little king held prisoner by the republicans. It was not easy to govern a country of which one possessed not a single square metre, and even harder to be the ambassador of such a regent. Monsieur de Havré was an old diplomat. For decades he had represented the brilliance of Versailles and was adapting himself only with difficulty to his wretched new role. The missions he had to convey at the behest of his master, the Regent, to the Court in Madrid, sometimes very grandiose ones, came oddly from the mouth of a man whose diplomatic dress was growing threadbare and who could not have paid for his meals without the help of the Spanish Court. There sat Monsieur de Havré, holding his hat so as to hide the shabbiest places on his coat,

and beside him his sister Geneviève. She too could have had the advantage of France and the world! One had invited one to her house.

Up on the stage the Queen was sentenced to the guillotine. She was united with her husband for her as all that; the guillotine was the radiation for her. Marie Antoinette on the stage, all the times she had brought France to the will of the people that she had brought to the place of execution.

The audience had received something new. They were titillated; they shook off their ennui amid general interest.

The curtain fell. They were glad to stretch their legs in the hall.

More candles were lit.

One man stood out. He was not who in spite of his meagreness had a certain clumsiness. He had heavy lids, his underlip was thick and fleshy, grew a little thing of a leonine quality. He was everyone recognized.

"A pleasure to see you,"

Don Francisco de Sotomayor had invited him to the play. He had respect shown him. It was not Don Fuendetodos to this point, but here he was, in his *cámara*, and when he spoke to the ladies and gentlemen it was with a certain honour.

He bowed low before the Queen. He did the play and its part. He asked. "I can't think, I can't think," he spoke like that, and i

monarchy in France. The Duke who was famous for her caprices bored in the spacious isolation of without more ado and now, patient to wash over him.

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Monsieur de Havré, meagre and thin. He represented the heir to France from Verona in place of republicans. It was not easy to find not a single square metre, of such a regent. Monsieur de Havré he had represented the brilliant himself only with difficulty to had to convey at the behest of the King in Madrid, sometimes very in the mouth of a man whose diploma who could not have paid for his Court. There sat Monsieur de Havré the shabbiest places on his coat,

and beside him his slim, pale, pretty, sixteen-year-old daughter Geneviève. She too could have done with some new clothes to the advantage of France and herself as well. Ah, how one had come down in the world! One had to be grateful when the Duchess of Alba invited one to her house.

Up on the stage the man from the Tribunal had conveyed the death sentence to the Queen and she had replied that she longed to be reunited with her husband. But dying was not going to be made as easy for her as all that; the godless scoundrels had conceived a final degradation for her. Marie Antoinette, thus declaimed the horrible man on the stage, all the time in verse, had with her unbridled licentiousness brought France low in the eyes of the world; therefore it was the will of the people that she, this time herself brought low, should go to the place of execution stripped to the navel.

The audience had read many reports of the horrible event, but this was something new. They pricked up their ears, shuddering and titillated; they shook off their drowsiness, and the play drew to a close amid general interest.

The curtain fell. There was polite applause. The guests stood up, glad to stretch their limbs. They began to move about through the hall.

More candles were lighted. It was possible to see who was there.

One man stood out among these polished men and women, a man who in spite of his meticulous, even costly dress was distinguished by a certain clumsiness. He was not tall, his eyes were deep-set beneath heavy lids, his underlip was full and forcibly thrust out, his nose, thick and fleshy, grew straight out of his forehead, his head had something of a leonine quality. As he strolled through the hall almost everyone recognized him and returned his greeting with respect. "A pleasure to see you, Don Francisco," he heard again and again.

Don Francisco de Goya was pleased that the Duchess of Alba had invited him to this select company; he was pleased by the respect shown him. It was a long way from the peasant village of Fuentetodos to this palace of Alba. The road had not been an easy one, but here he was, little Franchito, a Court Painter now, *Pintor de cámara*, and when he painted the portraits of these great ladies and gentlemen it was a question who was doing whom the greater honour.

He bowed low before the old Marquesa de Villabranca. "How did the play and its performance strike you, Don Francisco?" she asked. "I can't think," he answered, "that Marie Antoinette really spoke like that, and if she had, then I should regret her death the

less." The Marquesa smiled. "Nevertheless it is a pity," she said, "that Their Majesties weren't here." There was a trace of mischief in her tone. She looked at him with her beautiful, untroubled eyes, her wide, thin-lipped mouth just slightly awry. And he smiled too and shared the Marquesa's unspoken thought, that the Spanish Bourbons would have felt disagreeable titillation had they had to listen all evening to what had happened to the necks of their French relations.

"When are you finally going to paint me, Don Francisco?" the Marquesa went on. "I know—I am an old woman and you have something better to do." He denied it, passionately and with conviction. For the Marquesa at fifty-five was still beautiful and had about her the aura of a rich life not long since past. Goya looked at the wise, benignant face, the simple, dark, costly gown, the delicate white scarf from which a rose peeped out. She was exactly what in his youthful dreams he had imagined a great lady to be, and he looked forward to painting her.

The major-domo invited the company into the great reception hall, where the Duchess was awaiting them. Goya escorted the Marquesa. They went slowly through the picture galleries which led from the theatre into the reception hall. Choice paintings by old Spanish, Flemish, and Italian masters hung there. It was difficult not to stop in front of this one or that, so vividly, in the flickering candlelight, did the life shine forth from them.

"I can't help it," said the Marquesa to Goya. "I do love my Raphael. Of all the pictures here, 'The Holy Family' is my favourite." Goya, in opposition to the general opinion, was no admirer of Raphael—he was about to make some pleasant noncommittal reply.

But now they had reached the turn of the gallery, and through the double doors of the great reception room they saw Cayetana de Alba. She was sitting, following the old custom, on a low dais spread with rugs and shut off from the rest of the room by a small grille with a wide opening. And she was not wearing a modern gown like the other ladies, but a Spanish one of old-fashioned cut. The Marquesa smiled. That was Doña Cayetana for you. From France she took what good France had to offer, but she did not wish to conceal that she was a Spaniard. It was her evening, the invitations had gone out in her name alone, not those of herself and her husband together, and no one could take it amiss if she chose to conclude in Spanish an evening she had begun in French. But to show herself in her own house in the middle of an evening

party in Spanish costume effect was a bit conspicuous. Doña Cayetana," the Marquesa went on in French.

Goya did not answer foolishly at the Duchess's black lace; the warm white with a tone of black hair crowned by shoes, her feet peeped out from a small, woolly white dog under her gloved left hand. She was a little plump, lay half on her side, her fingers slightly spread downwards.

The Marquesa, as Goya stood the French word for a tabby cat." But Don Francisco, the Duchess often, had preference; nor had it any use of the face of the Duchess well to prattle, in the tapestries in the room had never seen her before.

His knees shook. He arched eyebrows, the Duchess aroused in him unbounded interest.

The Marquesa's words were taken in their mean sense. She was refreshingly independent. She was still standing in the room. She raised her head and she look unseeingly at the little dog with her fan and opened her mouth—a singer sending her words spread it out again.

Joyful surprise to the language by which they themselves understood to be in the taverns; and a definite encouragement.

Nevertheless it is a pity," she said, "There was a trace of mischief in her beautiful, untroubled eyes, slightly awry. And he smiled too, taken thought, that the Spanish pleasurable titillation had they had to be turned to the necks of their French

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of the gallery, and through the room they saw Cayetana in the old custom, on a low dais, the rest of the room by a small table was not wearing a modern dress, but one of old-fashioned cut. Goya had painted Cayetana for you. From the table he did not offer, but she did not refuse. It was her evening, the table alone, not those of herself. Goya could take it amiss if she had begun in French. In the middle of an evening

party in Spanish costume, almost as if she were a *maja*, such an effect was a bit conspicuous. "She is always having new ideas, our Doña Cayetana," the Marquesa told the painter. "*Elle est chatoyante*," she went on in French.

Goya did not answer. He stood there without a word and stared foolishly at the Duchess. Over a silver-grey gown she was wearing black lace; the warm pallor of her unpainted oval face gleamed white with a tone of brown; it was luxuriantly framed in wavy black hair crowned by a tall comb. Tiny, dainty in their pointed shoes, her feet peeped out under the voluminous skirt. An absurdly small, woolly white dog sat in her lap, and she was stroking it with her gloved left hand. But the right one, ungloved, narrow, childishly plump, lay half on the arm of the chair, and with the tapering fingers slightly spread held her fan, almost closed and pointing downwards.

The Marquesa, as Goya did not speak, thought he had not understood the French words and translated. "She is changeable as a tabby cat." But Don Francisco went on staring. He had met the Duchess often, had painted a portrait of her, with complete indifference; nor had it amounted to much. He had even playfully made use of the face of this great lady, about whom Madrid loved so well to prattle, in the showy stylized cartoons he had made for the tapestries in the royal castles. But now he did not recognize her, had never seen her before, and was this really the Duchess of Alba?

His knees shook. Every hair, every pore of her skin, the thick arched eyebrows, the breasts half exposed under the black lace, aroused in him unbounded desire.

The Marquesa's words echoed in his ears but he had not fully taken in their meaning; mechanically he answered, "Yes, she is refreshingly independent, Doña Cayetana, utterly Spanish." He was still standing in the doorway, his eyes on the woman. But now she raised her head and looked towards him. Did she see him? Did she look unseeingly past him? She went on talking, went on petting the little dog with her left hand. Meanwhile the right hand raised the fan and opened it wide so that the picture on it was visible—a singer sending his song up to a balcony—shut it up and spread it out again.

Joyful surprise took Francisco's breath away. There was a fan language by which the *majas*, the girls from the people, made themselves understood to strangers in church, at public festivals, and in the taverns; and the signal which came from the dais was a definite encouragement.