AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE TRAGEDY OF THE GROTESQUE: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART, THE HUMAN PSYCHE, MORTALITY, AND TIME

by
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To my family and friends, thank you for your constant support, understanding, and belief in me, your encouragement is what led me to complete my thesis.

Admittedly, this thesis exceeded my expectations. It is (in my opinion) informative, artistic, whimsical at times, mythological, and reflective, all which I hoped it would be.

ABSTRACT

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The fascinating and complex nature of the grotesque has garnered a substantial body of literature throughout the years. The grotesque is an aesthetic paradox, existing at margins of beauty and horror, order and chaos, fascination and revulsion. It is a state of perpetual transformation, resisting fixed definitions and conventional boundaries. From its origins in the rediscovered frescoes of Emperor Nero's buried *Domus Aurea* to its nineteenth-century manifestation, the grotesque has been a site of tension between the known and the unknown, the rational and the irrational. It unsettles and distorts forcing the viewer into an unrealized confrontation.

This thesis explores the complex relationship that the grotesque has with tragedy, the subconscious, the body, the art world, and time itself. Through these lenses, the grotesque emerges not merely as an ornamental style but as a profound aesthetic and existential mode – one that compels us to confront our fears and desires, our mortality, and the limits of representation. By tracing its evolution from Renaissance ornamentation to Romantic horror, this thesis situates the grotesque within a broader discourse on art, philosophy, and human psychology.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I first came across the Goya's *Saturn Devouring his Child* in an art history class in my first year of university. Until that moment, we had been looking at some of the most famous artworks in history, the most revered and celebrated. In the midst of works such as Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper,* Michelangelo's *David*, Diego Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, and Claude Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*, Saturn was a slap to the face, a wake-up call in an early morning class, a sure-fire visual to snap any tired, unfocused, and half-asleep student awake and catch their attention. I distinctly recall my first thought being "what am I looking at?" having not truly grasped the image in front of me. Intrigued, I drank in all the details the painting could offer me through the projector's image, making connections with the myths and stories I knew of the character. *Saturn* had been a passing visual in that class, but little did I know it would become a lingering thought in the back of my head that would become dormant until my graduate degree and I could finally pinpoint why I had always found myself fascinated by Saturn, Medusa, and the like. Once the grotesque had a name within my sphere, it became apparent as the most logical course of action to pursue researching the genre.

Can the morbid be beautiful? Can fear be pleasurable? Can each of these parameters exist without one another?

The grotesque is an aesthetic paradox, firmly lying in the 'para', existing at margins of beauty and horror, order and chaos, fascination and revulsion. It is a state of perpetual transformation, resisting fixed definitions and conventional boundaries. From

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This thesis explores the complex relationship that the grotesque has with tragedy, the subconscious, the body, the art world, and time itself. Through these lenses, the grotesque emerges not merely as an ornamental style but as a profound aesthetic and existential mode – one that compels us to confront our fears and desires, our mortality, and the limits of representation. By tracing its evolution from Renaissance ornamentation to Romantic horror, this thesis situates the grotesque within a broader discourse on art, philosophy, and human psychology.

The fascinating and complex nature of the grotesque has garnered a substantial body of literature throughout the years. Authors such as Wolfgang Kayser in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957) and Geoffrey Harpham in *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (1982) have provided readers with a good starting point, a holistic view over the grotesque as a genre in art and literature following its origins, rediscovery, development and evolution over time.[1] Kayser's work is a pioneer in the genre, exploring the grotesque as a mode of alienation, in which it offers no resolution to the audience. Harpham delves deeper, examining the grotesque as an interplay of contradictions, existing in a liminal space, provoking both fascination and discomfort. However, such surveys fail to dig deeper into the nuances of the genre, its gritty details, its effects and relationship with the human psyche. These books

[1] Wolfgang Johannes Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

present a long history of the grotesque noting its rising prominence and then recession within the western tradition. They frequently reference psychoanalytic theories, but they largely historical and untheorized. In particular they have not accounted for the role of the grotesque within the academic artworld. There is also an enormous quantity of more focused studies in articles and chapter.[2]

A brief note about the various uses of the term 'grotesque'. In modern general usage it is an adjective used to describe a wide range of things, that are jarringly at odds with expectations — uncanny, as Freud might say. However, it also refers to particular, and quite diverse styles, within the history of art (see Chapter 1 below). It is also a 'genre' in the sense that, certainly by the mid-nineteenth century, there is an established range of subjects and iconographies that are conventionally called 'grotesque'.

The grotesque employs many methods in order to be effective, one of which is the grotesque body discussed in Mikhael Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (1965).[3] Bakhtin argues that the grotesque body is in constant transformation, representing renewal and resistance against fixed meanings. Bakhtin's work focuses more on literature, his work having a profound impact on literary theory, less so art or visual culture. However, it can be applied fruitfully to visual art too and this thesis has adopted some of these ideas.

Sigmund Freud's work *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914) explores narcissism as a psychological concept, arguing that it plays a role in ego development,

[2] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982).

[3] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

self-esteem, and libido distribution, influencing love, creativity, and neurosis.[4] His work *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) explores mourning as a natural response to loss that leads to emotional recovery while the prolonged state of melancholia causes psychological suffering due to an absence of resolution and not processing one's loss.[5] In *On Dreams* (1900), Freud explains how dreams are expressions of unconscious desires, repressed thoughts, and unresolved conflicts, essentially being the visual manifestation of the subconscious mind.[6] Finally, his 1919 work *The Uncanny* explores the psychological experience of eeriness and unease when something familiar becomes strangely unfamiliar, arguing that what disturbs the viewer is not the unknown but the recognition of the known and how it pertains to us.[7] All these works have been influential in the study and practice of art and are employed in this thesis to explore the psychological aspects of the grotesque.

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[4] Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)," in *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey et al., vol. Volume XIV, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of SIgmund Freud (Toronto: The Hogarth Press Limited, 1955), 67–81.

[5] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey et al., vol. Volume XIV, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of SIgmund Freud (Toronto: The Hogarth Press Limited, 1955), 243–58.

[6] Sigmund Freud, "Chapter V: The Material Source of Dreams," in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. Brill (Vienna, n.d. 1900), 51–120.

[7] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny (1919)," in *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey et al., vol. Volume XVII, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of SIgmund Freud (Toronto: The Hogarth Press Limited, 1955), 217–56.

Aristotle's *Poetics* (335 BCE) introduces the notion of 'catharsis' in relationship to pity and fear, and most importantly, tragedy.[8] He defines tragedy as a mimesis of actions that can evoke pity and fear to achieve emotional purification (catharsis). His work focuses on what has been deemed, at various points in history, to be one of the highest forms of art, Greek tragedy. Centuries later, Friedrich Nietzsche revisited this subject in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872).[9] Nietzsche argued that tragedy emerges from the interplay between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, and the balance between these two forces is what creates profound artistic experiences that embraced both human suffering and transcendence. Notably the transcendence is found in the Dionysian, in the chaotic dissolution, rather than the well-regulated harmony of Apollo. In this sense it offers an opportunity to consider the grotesque anew, as this dyad is another example of contraries that the grotesque exists is, but more on that later.

Many of these works do not use the term 'the grotesque' directly, but can be used as methodologies to explore it. This thesis aims to augment the role of the grotesque, positioning it not as a marginal or passive aesthetic but instead as having a central, institutional role within the history of art since the Renaissance. To achieve this, we must explore the past, tracing its evolution from its ornamental origins to its transformation into a powerful and expressive tool in art. Then, we explore the relationship between the grotesque and the sublime, beauty and ugliness, in detail, understanding how they co-exist within art. Additionally, we will analyze the methods

[8] Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by Samuel H. Butcher. Orlando, Florida: n,p., 2022.

[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. Ronald Speirs, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

and visual strategies employed by the grotesque – its distortions, its exaggerations, and its juxtapositions – to understand how it challenges traditional artistic norms and disrupts aesthetic expectations. Beyond formal analysis, this thesis will examine the psychological dimensions of the grotesque, investigating the ways in which it captivates, unsettles, and compels the viewer through a psychoanalytic approach through a detailed exploration of Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring his Child* (1819). It will explore why the grotesque might hold such an emotional power, provoking mixed reactions that swing between fascination and repulsion, captivation and horror, pleasure and catharsis.

Finally, by employing Nietzsche's Apollo-Dionysus dichotomy in which the grotesque becomes Dionysus while the Academy turns to Apollo, this thesis will explore tension between the two, between structure and chaos, rationality and absurdity, control and excess, arguing for its essential role in a conflicted art world. Essentially, I argue that, although not exactly alike, the grotesque is a visual equivalent of Nietzsche's conception of ancient Greek tragedy. It is the product of opposed forces within the academic artworld, bound in a particular set of historical circumstances, that produces a flourishing of the imagery in the early nineteenth century. Its development from the Renaissance onwards tracks the development of the academies, and its virtual elimination from the artworld in the late nineteenth century tracks the increasing marginalisation of the academies. Like Ancient tragedy, the grotesque offers the viewer glimpses of a chaotic dissolution that troubles the surface the academic artworld.

Although the Grotesque was never recognised by the Academies of art, as we will see, it has an important place within them. All these uses of the term will be employed in this thesis.

CHAPTER II

PAST AND PRESENT

To begin, it is necessary to address the Grotesque under the concepts of paradox and metamorphosis, for the grotesque in nature is paradoxical and remains in a constant state of metamorphosis. The grotesque relies heavily on the unnatural mixture of figures, body parts, features, to create a large contrast and subsequently employ a great impression on the viewer. As we will see it shares features with the 'uncanny'.[10] Within its properties, the grotesque gives the illusion of constant change and metamorphosis, the change from one state to another, one mode of being to another and perhaps this is what makes the grotesque so alluring yet unsettling.

This is also precisely what makes the grotesque a paradox: the state in which it can exist in both the beautiful and the horrifying.

It is widely agreed that the etymology of the word "grotesque" comes from the Latin word 'grottesche' which had gained its meaning from the word: 'grotto', meaning 'cave'. This is not to be confused with the pre-historic cave paintings in which primitive depictions of flora and fauna were drawn on the walls of literal caves. The term *grottesche* was coined following the rediscovery of the artworks in a buried sun palace underneath the streets of Rome. In the fifteenth century, Emperor Nero's *Domus Aurea* Golden Palace) was discovered, eliciting fascination from the artists and connoisseurs

[10] Freud, "The Uncanny (1919)."

of the time. The discovery garnered an interest with the frescoes that decorated the walls and depicted peculiar forms and figures, unnatural to the art of the time.[11]

The *Domus Aurea* provided artists of the time with new styles and methods to explore and show their prowess in. The grotesque now became a style, one that revolutionized ornamental displays and allowed a playful relationship to manifest between fantasy and faithful representation. 'The Greek division of art into fantasia and mimesis was ingeniously overturned by the new ornamental style, which provided artists with a scene for the exhibition of pure technique, an occasion for the display of taste, in which the methods of representation and the principles of design could be judged on their open terms, liberated from their secondary status as implements of imitation.'[12]

Truthfully, the *grottesche* at the time was not a new art style, per se, in fact, this was dominant in the days of classical antiquity for they represented pagan myths and characters popular at the time. Nero had insisted on decorating his golden palace with stories of old, surrounding himself with the myths and divinity he envisioned himself to be a part of. The grotesques were not to be feared at the time, for they symbolized the divine, the interesting, the fun and even the ridiculous, unknown to the public yet humorous enough. The definition of the grotesque the audience is familiar with today would take several centuries to become what one would envision grotesques would be in this day and age.

[11] Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, 30.

[12] Harpham, 30.

Returning to the term 'grotto', the etymology lies beyond the mere explanation of underground passages. Looking further back in time to its proper Latin form, one finds the word packed with meaning: 'This naming is pregnant with truth, for although the designs were never intended to be underground, nor Nero's palace a grotto, the word is perfect. The Latin form of *grotta* is probably *crupta*, which in turn derives from the Greek [krýpti] (root): a vault; […], to hide. Grotesque, then, gathers into itself suggestions of the underground, of burial, and of secrecy.'[13] The grotesque lends itself here to a hidden world, which to the Renaissance viewer might as well have been true. The forms of the grotesque, as mentioned above, painted in the first century by Fabullus in the *Domus Aurea* were, in his time at least, not regarded in the fascination and interest they have garnered a millennium later. 'It does not seem as if this Fabullus brought any notable novelties to the style of his time, nor does he seem to have felt the grandioseness and the new form of the rooms he was to decorate.'[14] According to history, the *Domus Aurea* had to be buried, for successors of Nero were too ashamed of his legacy to proudly flaunt it, as a self-proclaimed sun god. Nero would eventually face his own mortality by taking his own life, mere months after the completion of his golden sanctuary. The *Domus Aurea* faced a similar fate, in which succeeding monarchs would tear down the walls of the construct and strip them of valuables. The sanctuary of Nero's divinity would eventually become a symbol of embarrassment to his successors and people, who had resented Nero's reign and what it stood for.

[13] Harpham. P. 27.

[14] Ibid, p. 25.

One could argue that perhaps the Renaissance artists' eagerness to embrace the grotesque is due to the metamorphic nature of the grotesque. The style contributed to the renaissance development of mythic representations and mythic thought, less in the manner of religion as it had previously manifested in the time when people believed in the gods of antiquity, but more so in the manner which brought a sense of wonder and excitement to a world beyond mimesis. 'Perpetual metamorphosis is the central premise of mythic thought, which operates on the principle of the cosmic continuum. According to this principle, no realm of being, visible or invisible, past or present, is absolutely discontinuous with any other, but all equally accessible and mutually interdependent.'[15] The grotesque in this sense, transcended temporal boundaries, existed in the past and present simultaneously, and had even metamorphosized into a new form in the Renaissance.

The grotesque continued to metamorphosize and take on new shapes and meanings as is evident by the change of its definition through the centuries. Kayser has argued that this is possible because the grotesque contains a spirit within as evident by its etymology: 'Like the Italian -esco (comparable to the German -isch) it expresses origin and is often used in connection with proper names and places names. However, it not only expresses geographical provenience but also participation in spiritual essences.'[16] Over the years, its essence has proved to be too compelling, garnering more and more explanations to its meaning for one of the earliest meanings of grotesque, derived from the Old French word *crotesque*, coined in 1611 by Randle Cotgrave in *A*

[15] Harpham, p. 51.

[16] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 26.

Dictionnaire of the French and English Tongues: 'Grotesques: Pictures wherein (as please the Painter) all kinds of odde things are represented without anie particular sence, or meaning, but only to feed the eye.'[17]

Figure 1. Grotesque paintings from the Vatican Loggias, 1517-1519

[17] Randle Cotgrave, *"Cotgrave''s 1611 French-English Dictionary."* Cotgrave's 1611 dictionary search. https://www.pbm.com/~lindhal/cotgrave/search/search.cgi.

This definition intrinsically grants the grotesque a purely decorative meaning as the Renaissance artists seem to have used it. The grotesque would be understood at the time as a form of Renaissance decoration which featured hybrid creatures bestowed with an amalgamation of human and beastly features among leafy patterns and vegetation. Raphael particularly pioneered its implementation in influential artworks, choosing to boldly apply this style in some of his biggest projects. Raphael and his apprentice Giovanni da Udine would implement the newly-discovered style on, most famously, the walls of the Vatican Loggias, covering white surfaces with flowing vegetation and moving animals. Taking a look at Figure 1, the viewer is immediately struck by the slightly intimidating face of a man whose facial hair appears to be made of feathers and leaves, as well as the hair on his head. The lower half appears normal enough, as it features a woman, with no otherworldly features upon her, holding a pot above her head overflowing with foliage. Out of the foliage sprouts two animals, pegasi as indicated by the combination of their horse features and wings. Above the man in the middle float wo women, chests exposed, lower bodies curving into sea-creature-esque tails, flapping wings sprouted from their backs.

It was understood generally that Raphael and his students, as evident by the type of work they had produced as shown above, were eager to explore the possibilities of this new style in their artwork. 'The Renaissance itself can be characterized by the fusion of antiquity and Christianity under amalgamative pressures of its master spirits.'[18] The renaissance embrace of pagan imagery is undertaken under the assumption that the pagan, however heretical, immoral or otherwise unchristian, was still part of the world that god had made for man, and the art and writing still had valuable lessons for the

[18] Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 29.

present day. This required that they accept a strangely contradictory and complex view that the pagan was really coded Christianity, and the fallen corrupt earth revealed a heavenly goodness. In general, renaissance art assumes a neo-platonic allegorical view: the material world is dimly reflective of a divine plan, and artworks are themselves symbolic and represent the material world itself as symbolic. The grotesque, as a style and set of motifs, allows for complex and weird layerings and juxtapositions.

In 1598, the term grotesque was introduced into the English language by John Florio in *A World of Wordes* as crotesca, a kind of unpolished painters worke, anticke work,[19] as he took it upon himself to translate Michel de Montaigne's essays from French to English, where the French author had used the term to denote a new literary genre in 1580 as he described his essays as "grotesque and monstrous bodies, pieced together of the most diverse members, without distinct form, in which order and proportion are left to chance."[20] Thomas Browne went on in 1642 to elaborate in his *Religio Medici* that "there is no *Grotesca* in nature," marking the generalization that the grotesque indicates a world different from the familiar.[21]

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the term grotesque had begun to acquire more meaning as evident by the 1680 entry by Richelet in the *Dictionnaire Francais:* 'Grotesque, adj.: Pleasant; that which has something pleasantly ridiculous. A grotesque person. A grotesque girl. Grotesque manner. Grotesque face. Grotesque

[19] Lawson, Lewis A. *The Modern Language Journal* 49, no. 2 (1965): 122–23, https://doi.org/10.2307/322234, p. 122.

[20] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 24.

[21] Lawson. *The Modern Language Journal* 49, p. 122.

action,'[22] and the younger definition presented by the *Dictionary of the French Academy* in 1694: 'Figuratively speaking it signifies silly, bizarre, extravagant. A grotesque costume; this speech is rather grotesque; a grotesque facial expression. – Grotesquely (adverb): In a silly or extravagant manner. Dressed grotesquely; dancing grotesquely. – Bizarre, fantastic, extravagant, capricious.' John Dryden goes on to emphasize the unfamiliar nature of the grotesque in his essay "A Parallel of Poetry and Painting" in 1695 in one of the earliest attempts to impose the grotesque as a critical term in art: "The persons and actions of a farce are all unnatural and the manners false, that is inconsisting with the characters of mankind. Grotesque painting is the just resemblance of this; …"[23].

The grotesque here still lacks the ominous and menacing undertones the audience understands it to have today. However, a large effort has been made to emphasize the extraordinary character of the genre, distinguishing the art from the accepted norm. Figure 2 represents one of Manufacture de Beauvais' famous tapestries woven during the reign of King Louis XIV. The tapestry certainly follows the definitions of its period, as presented above, it features extravagant decorations and pleasantly bright colors. It spares no details as shown by the excessive decoration of ribbons and florals and hybrid ornamental creatures woven in the surrounding border. It shows an amalgamation of cultures, as evident by the golden sphinxes on either side of the tapestry native to Ancient Egypt, as well as the prominent and heavily draped elephant native to Africa. Jesters are taken to the foreground in which they are shown

[22] *French Dictionary*, ed. Volume 1 vols. (1680), s.v. "Grotesque,", p. 386.

[23] John Dryden, "Preface," in *De Arte Graphica: The Art of Painting*, trans. John Dryden (London: J. Hepinstall, 1695), p. xxvi.

mid-dance, caught in the act of entertaining. The combination of elements and the story attempting to be told in this tapestry could even be described as ridiculous rather than grotesque. 'More frequently than with this fairly heavy emphasis on its unusual aspect the term is defined in a shallower manner, namely as a synonym of ridicule, comique and – preferably – burlesque.'[24]

Figure 2. Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer and Philippe Behagle, *The Elephant from a Set of Five Grotesques*, 1688-1711, Wool and Silk, 294.6 x 459.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In 1771, during the European Enlightenment, a shift in the meaning can begin to be observed for Schmidlin defines the grotesque in the *Dictionnaire Universel de la Langue Francaise* as 'Figuratively speaking, grotesque means odd, unnatural, bizarre, strange, funny, ridiculous, caricatural, etc.' Here, the grotesque still differs from the meaning attached to it today, however an emphasis on its bizarre and particularly

[24] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 26.

unnatural nature is referenced for truthfully the grotesque relies on the combination of forms that do not mix homogeneously. 'Grotesque forms place an enormous strain on the marriage of form and content by foregrounding them both, so that they appear not as a partnership, but as warfare, a struggle.'[25] The Enlightenment had rejected an allegorical worldview and instead embraced a view that was more empirical, more material and more observational. Now the style and its motifs began to be interpreted differently.

However, this struggle of form is incidentally exactly what attracts artists to the grotesque: 'Grotesque figures test us in a similar way, for they seem to be singular events, appearing in the world by virtue of illegitimate act of creation, manifesting no coherent, and certainly no divine intention. This is why the grotesque is embraced by "aesthetic" artists who insist on the non-mimetic characteristic of artistic creation.'[26]

What makes the artists interested in such a manner on the grotesque? In his book, Harpham argues: 'our views have been significantly shaped by the history of the interpretation of exodus 20:4, which explicitly forbids the making of "any carved image, or any likeness or anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."'[27] This notion is intriguing for it is widely agreed that the grotesque and the Islamic moresque and arabesque go hand in hand in their formation, some even use the words synonymously (an interesting path to explore, but this goes beyond the scope of this thesis). 'In discussing the sources of his

[25] Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 7.

[26] Ibid, p. 5.

[27] Ibid, p. 32.

latter type, modern scholarship stresses the fact that its origin is by no means Arabic (as the name would seem to indicate), since the Greeks and romans consistently used it for ornamental purposes. Yet it can hardly be denied that the Renaissance arabesque were stimulated and influenced by Islamic art.'[28] The grotesque would take a life of its own among these combinations, finding energy between geometrical shapes and floral tendrils, and what renders the grotesque a true hybrid with its own life is the manner in which it can exist despite opposing thoughts for in Christianity the depiction of all that is essentially non-human and not familiar is preferably deterred from, while in Islamic thought the depiction of all that *is* human is prohibited as to deter man from the dependency on the material world, both encouraging spiritual contemplation instead.

It is also said that the prohibition also comes from the notion of creation, for faithful mimesis is an attempt at creation, an act reserved solely for God. The Prophet is also reported to have said [among his teachings or *hadith:* "Whoever makes an image will have to breathe life into it and he will be punished since he will not be able to breathe life into it."[29] Interestingly, the grotesque translates to the word *ghareeb* in Arabic, which while it contains much like its Romantic counterparts notions of absurdity and bizarre, the word *ghareeb* possesses connotations of 'foreign' (or foreigner), 'intruder', and 'outlandish'. *Ghareeb* comes from the root *gha-ra-ba*, which is the past tense of the verb meaning to disappear, or no longer visible. Therefore, *al-ghareeb* is that in whose origins or roots are unfamiliar, and that in which is hidden. The emphasis on the invasive quality of the meaning of the grotesque essentially echoes the

[28] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 26.

[29] Sahih Al Bukhari, Book 72, Hadith 846, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Darussalam, 1997).

Islamic teachings in which it is believed that God had created everything as intended in its best picture, and anything otherwise is fundamentally wrong.

The grotesque now lies precisely in-between two modes of thought, choosing elements from both and building a character of its own. Christoph Martin Wieland argued that 'the very essence of the grotesque to lie in the complete detachment from reality. In his opinion, grotesques are not imitations but products of a "wild imagination". […] the grotesque is "supernatural" and "absurd," that is, it contradicts the very laws which rule our familiar world.'[30] This is precisely the case because the grotesque is fundamentally based on mythic thought, particularly pagan mythic thought in which the mode of thinking differs completely. While religious thought rejects all that is 'unholy', 'the mythic mind rejects nothing, especially "experience."'[31] Anything is accepted here as mythic thought, on the other hand, protests "against the idea that anything can be meaningless.'[32] And in this sense, any form and any aspect has justified its existence by merely existing, providing itself whether to entertain or to unease. This goes back to the paradoxical nature of the grotesque:

> If the grotesque can be compared to anything, it is to paradox. […] Pursued for its own sake, paradox can seem vulgar or meaningless; it is extremely fatiguing to the mind. But pursued for the sake of wordless truth, it can rend veils and even, like the grotesque approach the holy. Because it breaks the rules, paradox

[30] Christoph Martin Wieland, *Unterredungen mit dem Pfaffer von…,* in Sämmtliche Werke: Vermischte Aufsätze, vol. 30 (Liepzig: Goschen, 1797).

[31] Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 54.

[32] Ibid.

> can penetrate to new and unexpected realms of experience, discovering relationships syntax generally obscures.[33]

'Para' references the margin in which much can exist, like the grotesque, teetering on the edge on opposing and clashing thoughts. The grotesque is intriguing precisely because it lies on the margin, somehow opposing and agreeing with much prominent artist styles and religious thoughts. The grotesque is argued to be both eerie yet pleasant, horrifying yet ridiculous, uncomfortable yet extravagant. Following the definitions of the word paradox, it seems as if the grotesque had no choice but to manifest in this manner for the explanations for paradox themselves are paradoxical. 'Paradox, n.: an apparently absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true.'[34] 'Paradox, n.: a statement or proposition which, despite sound (or apparently sound) reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to a conclusion that seems logically unacceptable or self-contradictory.'[35]

Here, the paradox is seemingly both true and illogical, correct and self-contradictory, exactly how the grotesque manifests itself. The grotesque generally implements elements which on their own stand correct and familiar, however, upon their combination create a new visual language and code for our minds to decipher. Its true intent lies hidden within, echoing the statements of the 'crypt' it has descended from. Thus, it is in some sense an anti-realist style, one that aligns well with

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[33] Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 20.

[34] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "paradox" accessed September 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9078965559.

[35] Ibid.

Renaissance and Baroque allegory, but resists and challenges the observational eye of the Enlightenment.

> The grotesque is a structure. Its nature could be summed up in a phrase that has repeatedly suggested itself to us: the grotesque is the estranged world. But some additional explanation is required. For viewed from the outside, the world of the fairy tale could also be regarded as strange and alien. Yet its world is not estranged, that is to say, the elements in it which are familiar and natural to us do not suddenly turn out to be strange and ominous. It is our world which had to be transformed. Suddenness and surprise are essential elements of the grotesque.[36]

Reiterating the above, Thomas Browne has insisted that the grotesque does not exist in nature which largely contradicts with the popular saying "la nature aime les entrecroisements"; nature loves mixtures.[37] Browne's views align with the ideals of the Enlightenment in which science and positivism was the new dominating methodology. Science, in fact, does not take to mixtures and therefore falls into Browne's definition in 1642, while older definitions might echo the statement of the French. That is, nature functions on the basis of interconnectedness and interdependence within its elements, which has been a recurring theme in different philosophies. Harpham sides with the French for he elaborates that nature loves mixtures for nature loves all: "Nature loves mixtures: "la nature aime les entrecroisements." But in fact, nature loves everything: purity, impurity, tenderness, cruelty, ugliness, beauty, rest, energy: all."[38] This

[36] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 184.

[37] Geoffrey Hartman, "The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature," *The Review of Metaphysics* 23, no. 2 (1969): 240–58, p. 242.

[38] Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 53.

therefore, re-echoes the notion of the paradoxical nature of the grotesque, in which the Grotesque depends on the mixture of natural elements. However, its existence is all but natural, depending on the intense clash of features and the unease the viewer senses upon becoming exposed to it. As Una D'Elia has argued: "Chimerical grotesques derive ultimately from nature, mediated so many times that Nature herself cannot understand them."[39]

To illustrate the point better, let us take Giuseppe Arcimboldo's *Four Seasons in One Head* (Figure 3) as an example, no matter how literal it is. The painting features the portrait of a human composed entirely of a variety of flora and natural elements. The grotesque in this painting thrives on the tension between life and death as evident by the ripe summer fruits and blooming spring flowers contrasted with the yellowing autumn leaves and the gnarled winter branches. The painting is uncanny and unsettling: while the portrait is identifiable as a face, it lacks the smoothness and liveliness of human skin and flesh. Instead, it appears fragmented, jagged, and textured, natural elements patched up together unnaturally creating an irony. It is not grotesque in the sense that it is horrific and frightening, but instead in the sense that it brings unease with how unfamiliar and surprising it is.

Kayser has argued for the fundamentality of surprise for the grotesque to be considered grotesque, for its contradictory nature proves hard to follow: 'One of the ways we normally avoid contradiction is by assigning hierarchies of meaning. We do this in a multitude of ways, depending upon the situation: the most meaningful can be "the nearest," "that which is apparent to the senses," "that which we cannot see," or

[39] Una Roman D'Elia, "Grotesque Painting and Painting as Grotesque in the Renaissance," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 33, no. 2 (2014): 5–12, p. 10.

"that which corresponds to the teachings of –."'[40] Psychologically, the mind becomes affronted with forms that are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, presenting a unique challenge. It is different than having solely unfamiliar elements, for then it is easier on the mind to accept that it will not understand the picture in front. However, with the grotesque, the mind falls into trap with understanding the familiar parts, yet feeling attacked as they do not perform the way they are intended to, leading to a sense of cognitive unease.

Figure 3. Giuseppe Acrimboldo, *Four Seasons in One Head*, c. 1590, Oil on Canvas, 62 x 48 cm, Kunsthisorisches Museum, Vienna

Victor Hugo raises a problematic in his writing: "Can a single, isolated figure (such as a dwarf) or object (such as a gargoyle) be clearly regarded as grotesque? Are

[40] Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 54.

physical ugliness and deformity sufficient enough to render things grotesque?"[41] The short answer would be no. However, why is that the case? To explain further, an isolated element cannot be considered grotesque art within the modern definition of the grotesque as it had progressed through the years as shown above. Peter Fingesten explains this phenomenon: "Before modern artists looked at primitive art as art, it was generally considered aesthetically grotesque because neither its purposes, its forms, nor its symbolism were understood. Employed in this sense, "grotesque" is a term of derision if not rejection."[42] Rejection of unfamiliar forms is not sufficient enough to dub an artwork as Grotesque. The 'distorted' face of the dwarf servant on the left side of *Las Meninas* is not sufficient enough to classify the painting as a grotesque. The grotesque relies on the harmony of both subject and style or form:

> If the form alone is so exaggerated, distorted, or violent as to call for the descriptive term "grotesque," but the subject is not, or, if the subject is grotesque, but the form is not related to it (academic, for instance), then we are not dealing with, in the opinion of this writer, with fully realized works of art in this symbolic genre, but with almost or quasi-grotesques.[43]

That is not to say that all elements in the artwork must be inherently grotesque and distorted, in fact some details may be inherently beautiful, but they must contribute to the overall subject and contribute to the general mood of the artwork.[44] They must

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[41] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 26.

[42] Peter Fingesten, "Delimitating the Concept of the Grotesque," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42, no. 4 (1984): 419–26, https://doi.org/10.2307/430215, p. 419.

[43] Fingesten, p. 420.

[44] Ibid, p. 423.

purposefully serve the grotesque, used as a means to highlight the intensity of the grotesque against their aesthetically pleasing features (or what is considered natural, as a socially and historically conditioned notion, and what it represents accurately), wherein the juxtaposition between both elements jars the viewer further, creating a co-dependent relationship between them. Much of this classification can be attributed to the general state of the world: "After the tragedies and horrors of the twentieth century we see the grotesque genre differently and with deeper undertones. We expect more of it in terms of mood, subject and form than in the past when a grotesque subject alone sufficed."[45] There is an inclination to agree with this notion, for Goya's Grotesques, his Black Paintings, which has significantly shaped our idea of grotesque art today, were spawned as a response to the deteriorating safety and living conditions, and with war in Europe. This is not to say that the artists of the Renaissance have not experienced horrors and tragedies as well. However, the worldview of pre-Reformation Europe had a well-defined place for the chaotic and ugly and characterised the material sublunary world as fallen and corrupt, a necessary part of a divine plan that encompassed its apocalyptic destruction and the advent of a perfect world after this one. In that sense they fully expected this world to be deformed or hideous in some way and such things were manifest — not hidden. Arguably it is only when these ideas are sidelined and a new rationalism, empiricism and optimism about the natural world emerges in the Enlightenment that an interest in the now-hidden horrors can function as a 'grotesque' in the modern sense.

Strong emotions are intrinsically tied to the grotesque. The grotesque, in order to be truly considered as such is dependent on these encompassing emotions; emotions and

[45] Ibid, p. 426.

feelings so strong threatening to burst out of the artwork itself. This contributes to the unease the grotesque elicits, as the viewer shies away from the raw emotions almost tangible from the artwork in front him.

Etymologically, the grotesque has proven to be entirely complex, composed of layers one must peel one by one to understanding its origins and the path in which it has metamorphosized through time. Psychologically, the grotesque plays an even more complex game, in which it challenges the established relationship between the viewer and the artwork, crossing boundaries and tip-toeing, as mentioned above, on the para.

CHAPTER III

THE SUBLIME WITHIN

It might pose as a challenge to understand the relation between the sublime and the grotesque for both are so visually different, almost the opposite of each other. Victor Hugo proposed that the grotesque and the sublime were opposites, finding them to be intrinsically connected to each other. "[Hugo] even goes beyond the grotesque as an entity by assigning to it a function within a whole. He takes it to be one pole of a tension whose opposite pole is constituted by the sublime. He thus ceases to think of the grotesque as the only characteristic feature of modernity and comes to look at it as a contrasting device. He defines art as a means of creating harmonious relation between them."[46]

In the first century C.E., Longinus first described the sublime as a stunning burst of passion. Later on in the eighteenth century, his followers re-conceptualized his view to mean the paradoxical combination of pain and pleasure or terror and delight.[47] There is a misconception today that the sublime only incites positive feelings of awe and wonder, but in fact, the sublime encompasses any and all strong and passionate emotions: "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*;

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[46] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 58.

[47] Shun-liang Chao, "The Grotesque Sublime: Play with Terror," *FORUM: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture & the Arts*, no. 02 (June 5, 2006), https://doi.org/10.2218/forum.02.553, p. 1.

that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[48] Edmund Burke claimed that the feeling of sublime was the anticipation of pain that was withheld and that, though short of actual pain, is nevertheless overwhelming.

Previously, we have traced the origin of the word 'grotesque' coming from the Greek for 'crypt' meaning hidden or an area beneath the surface, and the latin for 'cave'. The word sublime can be traced to the Latin: the preposition 'sub' (under) and the noun 'limen' (threshold)[49], literally 'beneath the threshold'. However, as a prefix 'sub' takes on new meanings. In 'sub-jecta' (thrown before), the meaning is almost reversed, while a word like 'subduco' (pull up) imply an action that begins from below, and 'subeo' (climb) similarly assumes a starting point that is low. The adjective 'sublimis', which literally means beneath the threshold, designates an object that is elevated, and implies an experience of that thing from below. Semantically, the grotesque and the sublime prove to be complete opposites in that one is to raise to the skies while the other is to bury in the earth. However, both are related to the low and the hidden, and although meaning the elevated and the divine, the sublime is derived from the chthonic. This is implicitly recognised in the psychoanalytic term 'sublimate', which is used to mean the process by which 'low' erotic and other psychic energies are redirected to 'higher' things: art, literature etc.[50] This connection would feel forced if not for the fact that both the grotesque and the sublime rely on the use of subliminal

[48] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful,* ed. James Boulton (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 39.

[49] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "sublime (adj. & n.)," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1040109669.

[50] Freud,' On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)', p. 94.

thoughts and feelings to be effective, the shift from the overt to the covert by the prefix 'sub' demonstrates the movement between the conscious and the subconscious mind where supposedly rawer emotions and perceptions are found.

Hugo explores this relation for he was a firm believer that the grotesque and sublime are complementary to each other rather than complete contraries and upon their convergence, 'le moderne genie' (the modern genius) is created. "Let us resume, therefore, and try to prove that it is of the fruitful union of the grotesque and the sublime types that modern genius is born – so complex, so diverse in its forms, so inexhaustible in its creations; and therein directly opposed to the uniform simplicity of the genius of the ancients."[51]

Hugo was adamant that this is characteristic solely within the modern genius, for the ancient genius with his emphasis on the beautiful and perfect had no room to contemplate the 'ugly' or the beyond. The creative spirit, according to him, will eventually evolve to understand better what actually pertains to the aesthetic pleasure of both the viewer and the artist:

> It will realize that everything in creation is not humanly *beautiful,* that the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the unshapely beside the graceful, the grotesque on the reverse of the sublime, evil with good, darkness with light. It will ask itself if the narrow and relative sense of the artist should prevail over the infinite, absolute sense of the Creator; if it is for man to correct God; if a mutilated nature will be the more beautiful for the mutilation; if art has the right to duplicate, so to speak, man, life, creation; if things will progress better when their muscles and their vigour have been taken from them; if, in short, to be incomplete is the best way to be harmonious.[52]

[51] Victor Hugo, "Preface," in *Cromwell* (New York: Athenaeum Society, 1909), 1–81, p. 17.

[52] Hugo. "Preface," p. 15.

The emphasis on the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is necessary. “The beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, apart from any interest [but] the sublime, to esteem something even *against* our (sensible) interest.”[53] Immanuel Kant uses the word ‘interest’ in the sense that we might say ‘advantage’. The beautiful is associated in this passage with a sense of harmonious contemplation in which the viewer loves the object of their attention. While the sublime involves a dynamic emotional response that encompasses both attraction and repulsion, in which one is simultaneously interested, fascinated, and yet potentially disadvantaged by it. This, Guyer explains, is due to “private interests [being] overridden by some *higher* interest, […] in which personal interests are supposed to be simply disengaged without being overridden by any other interest, higher or not.”[54] The sublime experience, then, challenges not only the sense but one’s moral interest and reflection. This is because, according to Kant, “the sublime cannot occur without the unresolved conflict between reason and the imagination, the ability to conceive and the ability to present a phenomenal totality equal to the concept”[55], for the resolution, the *completeness,* of this issue makes the artwork infinitely more comprehendible within the realm of human understanding, and ceases to provide the viewer with the awe and terror of the unknown.

[53] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Pr, 1978), p. 242.

[54] Paul Guyer, “Kant’s Distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 35, no. 4 (1982): 753–83, p. 779.

[55] Chao, “The Grotesque Sublime: Play with Terror,” p. 11.

The grotesque, much like the sublime, employs an incompleteness which makes it a crucial element in the sublime due to its constant state of metamorphosis as Shun-Liang as explained: "The grotesque object, so to speak, is one without any defining form. And the idea of deformity […] and incompleteness lies at the very center of the sublime."[56] What connects the sublime and the grotesque further is the notion of terror embedded in both, for it is through terror that the sublime's true essence can be understood yet, paradoxically, reveal the capacity for transcending mortal limits.

> If the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person […], they are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror; which as it belongs to self-preservation is one of the strongest of all emotions. Its object is the sublime.[57]

This marriage, in Hugo's words, between the grotesque and the sublime prompts a re-examination of the boundaries between beauty and terror, between the well-known and the unknown, returning to the para. The grotesque's capacity to disturb and distort reality becomes a method pushing the viewer to confront the vastness and depth of the sublime. Kayser has argued for this as well: "The true depth of the grotesque is revealed only by its confrontation with its opposite, the sublime. For just as the sublime (in contrast with the beautiful) guides our view toward a loftier, supernatural world, the

[56] Chao, "The Grotesque Sublime: Play with Terror," p. 2.

[57] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. James Boulton (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 136.

ridiculously distorted and monstrously horrible ingredients of the grotesque point to an inhuman, nocturnal, and abysmal realm."[58]

Henry's Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (Figure 4) is a great example to demonstrate this notion. This painting is a story of vulnerability and intrusion, in which the demon intrudes onto the unsuspecting woman as she peacefully sleeps unaware of her surroundings. The woman is adorned in a white gown which provides no contrast against her skin, but instead emphasizes the fairness of her skin. The pale complexion of the woman along with her sprawled position suggest no sign of life coming from her. In fact, if it was not for the rosy blush on her cheeks, there are no markers to suggest that the woman is even alive, given her position with her head almost falling off the bedding and her hand hanging limply. In fact, the gown she wears bears a resemblance (at least in the bottom half) to the white shroud people wrap the dead with to be buried, as per Islamic traditions whether this was intentional by the artist or not. Most of the painting employs darker muted colors, the red providing a sharp contrast against paleness of the central figure, with the highlight being the 'whiteness' of the woman, the semi-highlighted face of the demon perched on top of her, and the blank pupils of the horse peeking from the back. He employs the use of chiaroscuro to create a sharp contrast in order to elevate the sense of unease and mystery, where the agreed upon 'beauty' is highlighted while the unusual figures are shrouded in darkness.

[58] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 58.

Figure 4. Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare,* 1781, Oil on Canvas, 101.6 x 127 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

In folklore, the demon is believed to prey on sleeping women. The grotesque elements in this painting are obvious with the unsettling face of the incubus staring directly at the viewer as if to say that the viewer will be next. Though apparently unable to help herself the woman levitates off the mattress, perhaps convulsed, under the power of these gargoyle-like intruders. and the demonic horse appearing as a faithful companion to the demon, both introducing an element of horror and malevolence. Fuseli navigates the delicate balance of attraction and repulsion in this painting. The woman is conventionally beautiful prompting the viewer to approach the picture and look at her, but the demon on top of her repulses the viewer and creates unease and fear within the viewer's mind. The audience here is forced to experience the ambivalence

that is central to the grotesque. And while the sublime is not so obvious, it is precisely in that moment that the sublime is invoked, through the powerful emotional effect, the balancing on the para, and the exploration of supernatural themes that go beyond human comprehension. Fuseli's choice of subject matter – *the incubus*, a demon of sexual nature believed in folklore to sit on the chests of sleepers, inducing nightmares – delves into the subconscious fears of the audience. The audience cannot know what nightmare the woman is experiencing in her sleep, however the seated figure on top of her gives enough indication of the nightmarish implication the demon is bestowing upon her as Freud explains it: "elements of the unconscious pierce into consciousness, we become aware of a distinct feeling of repulsion."[59] The terror induced by the painting is not just a matter of horror; it is instead indeed a sublime terror, one that fascinates as much as it can repel. The beautiful woman is laid out in a convulsive swoon easily read as a sexual climax that the viewer is invited by the painting and the visual tradition of nudes to enjoy. However, the malevolent demon and its weird steed unsettle, accuse, and repulse the customary male gaze.

The sublime here is employed as a function of the grotesque. The viewer feels fear from the grotesque elements of the demon and horse while also feeling *for* the woman as she becomes preyed upon in such a vulnerable state. Beauty in itself has often been believed to be elevated and elevating. It is therefore related to the sublime in some sense. However, the sublime is also dangerous. Here, the woman is sublime because she is beautiful but her situation is dangerous and we, through the challenging look of the demon are also implicated in that danger. It is simultaneously grotesque, the monsters are grotesque in conventional ways. However, it is grotesque because it

[59] Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 11.

reveals the hidden, the sexual desires of the viewer are revealed in the attraction to the women at the same time that they are repulsed by the events. The viewer is accused by their own desire, since having sex with the incapacitated is immoral! It is important to raise the question however: if the woman was not beautiful, would the audience feel any compassion towards her at all?

The contrast between the beautiful, the sublime and the grotesque is necessary to invoke emotion. As Hugo, criticising the ancients for their constant emphasis on beauty, explained in his Preface to *Cromwell:*

> The universal beauty which the ancients solemnly laid upon everything, is not without monotony; the same impression repeated again and again may prove fatiguing at last. Sublime upon sublime scarcely presents a contrast, and we need a little rest from everything, even the beautiful. On the other hand, the grotesque seems to be a halting-place, a mean term, a starting-point whence one rises toward the beautiful with a fresher and keener perception.[60]

In this passage, Hugo seems to identify, that the grotesque can be a new starting point of recognizing the beautiful and the sublime. The grotesque is the dark and hidden, and grotesque imagery is always revealing the dark and otherwise hidden. However, the sublime is the elevation of the grotesque.

Historically, the interplay between the grotesque and the sublime has manifested across various cultural and artistic epochs, from the Romantic poet's, such as William Blake, fascination with ruins and decay as sites of sublime beauty, to modernist literature's exploration of alienation and dislocation of the individual within the industrial cityscape such as Franz Kafka. The grotesque-sublime challenges the viewer to accept the coexistence of beauty and terror and to recognize and reimagine the

[60] Hugo, "Preface", p. 21.

aesthetic experience as an encounter with the limits of the self and the world. The Romantic period in particular with its emphasis on emotions and the importance of individual experience finds the grotesque as a means to articulate the unexplainable aspects of human reality, and by consideration then articulating the depths of the sublime, explaining the contradictory elements sometimes found in the sublime.

The grotesque and the sublime can exist together as seen above within ratios. While in Fuseli's *Nightmare* the grotesque is more evident than the sublime, Arnold Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead* (Figure 5) presents an opposite case. Commissioned in 1880, the painting features a shrouded figure standing on a small rowboat as he and the other seated passengers approach the gates of a lonely island in the middle of still waters. The island features what seems to be rock tombs with tall and dark cypress trees (long associated with cemeteries). The boat also carries a white box-like structure, that many have interpreted to be a coffin most likely aided by the title of the painting. The white shrouded figure then becomes a reference to the Charon, the boatman in Greek mythology who ferried the dead to the underworld, suggesting a crossing from life to death. Unlike the harsh lighting of Fuseli's *The Nightmare,* this painting is veiled a soft diffused light where the light source seems to be coming from behind the island.

There is an incredible stillness to the painting that even Böcklin himself had described as "a dream picture: it must produce such a stillness that one would be awed by a knock on the door."[61] The water beyond the perimeter of the boats appears to be unmoving, the trees barely swaying in the air, even the cloudy sky appears slow instead of turbulent, almost as if nature was paying respects to the ferried dead. Böcklin's meticulous attention to these details serves to add depth to the brooding atmosphere.

[61] John Culshaw, *Rachmaninov, the Man and His Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 73.

The contrast between the stillness of the island and the motion of the boat arriving to the island creates a dynamic relationship further suggesting the transition from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead. The main character is obvious, cloaked in pure white matching the color of the coffin and yet, the signs of life in the painting seem incredible small and insignificant compared to the looming trees and the isolated fortress.

Figure 5. Arnold Böcklin, *Isle of the Dead,* 1880, Oil on Canvas, 80 x 150 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland

The painting invites the viewer to explore and contemplate the boundary of mortality, of the known and the unknown. The island represents the ultimate unknown, for no one knows for certain what lies beyond the final rest, while the boat represents the departure from the familiar with no return. Böcklin presents the viewer with incredibly heavy feelings to contemplate. The thought of no return, of venturing into the unknown is enough to provoke the viewer into unease and even panic, unable to process his thoughts or feelings quick enough. The sense of isolation and the unattainable nature

of the island give the painting its sublime quality. That and the grandeur of the island compared to the humanoid figures in the foreground truly classify this painting as sublime, confronting the audience with feelings of awe and dread that is simultaneously unsettling yet profoundly moving. This is the calm before the storm and as Burke explains: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[62] There is nothing that appears to be actively attacking the audience for even the ferryman has his back towards the viewer. This is what Kant has called "dynamical sublime" in his *Critique of Judgement* which according to him "takes place when the might – in the form of terror or awe – of nature is so modified as not to be hazardous."[63]

The sublime in this painting is, as explored above, evident in many aspects. The grotesque is not for after all, there are no hybrid figures, no otherwordly aspects, and no distorted characters that either unsettle or terrify. The scenery could even be somewhat classified as beautiful, although we have learned that sublime and beautiful are not interchangeable, but may coincide. The shrouded figure is haunting but not disturbing in the physical sense. In fact, beyond the title of the painting, there is nothing that would allow its classification into the grotesque. But here is where it indeed lies. The physical aspect of the painting is not grotesque but the subject matter itself is grotesque – the transition from life to death, the implication of death itself – thus rendering the painting a proper grotesque. The visual references to tombs, coffins, cypress trees and Charon is

[62] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 39.

[63] Chao, "The Grotesque Sublime: Play with Terror," p. 7.

what gives it away and cements it into the genre. What we see is that the grotesqueness of death is distorted, and manifests as sublime. The latent image is of worms and rot and decay in the soft soil of the grave just beyond what the picture represents. While the picture itself represents only the surface, the outward appearance of the tombs, the manifest representation is sublime. There is a sense here of masking the unpleasantness and instead dignifying and solemnizing the grotesque.

> "The sublime represents the soul as it is, […] the grotesque plays the part of the human beast. The former type, delivered of all impure alloy, has as its attributes all the charms, all the graces, all the beauties; […]. The latter assumes all the absurdities, all the infirmities, all the blemishes. In this partition of mankind and of creation, to it fall the passions, vices, crimes; it is sensuous, fawning, greedy, miserly, false, incoherent, hypocritical."[64]

In this sense, the grotesque not only acts as a mirror reflecting the fragmented and chaotic parts of reality, but also acts as a lens to the sublime's overwhelming nature. This references back to the incomplete nature of the grotesque as Hugo has explained it. *Isle of the Dead* is a good example for the grotesque is only in the subject matter but not in the imagery itself. The representation of the grotesque particularly when it is repressed, we could say 'sublimated', ties closely to the sublime as it evokes a sense of mystery, uncertainty, and, with it, terror as it prompts curiosity from the viewer and with it, fear. The sublime and the grotesque become interdependent of both their true potential to be fully showcased.

Much as how the grotesque derives from nature (albeit the chimerical aspect of it, nature in its most overwhelming and terrifying aspects is also a common source of the sublime. Patrick Murphy explores the relationship between humans and the natural

[64] Hugo, "Preface", p. 22

world in the context of the sublime emphasizing that the sublime does not separate humans from nature, but in fact classifies it as a process that acknowledges the interdependence of all life forms and the value of the natural world. This comes in contrast to the dominating idea and attitude that the rest of nature exists for solely the pleasure and needs of humans[65] which is why when nature 'rebels' or exhibits uncontrollable patterns it is considered terrifying. Murphy in his writings was critical of previous thinkers of the sublime, Kant and Burke in particular, for their views on the relationship between humans and nature: "Sublime pleasure, then, comes from the *post facto* relief of having experienced threat or danger, felt fear, awe, and horror, and survived the experience, eliciting a sense of triumph or domination, both of which [Burke] mistook for positive attitudes toward the rest of nature."[66]

To better illustrate the proper relationship between humans and nature through the sublime and the grotesque together it is important to look at *The Slave Ship* by J.M.W. Turner (Figure 6). First exhibited in 1840, Turner's painting is considered a classic example of Romantic paintings that dealt with maritime themes of the time inspired by true events in which a British slave ship, the Zong, threw enslaved people overboard during a storm and then sought to make an insurance claim for the 'lost cargo'. Nonetheless, it is a good example to drive a point. Incredibly impressionistic in style, the painting's foreground blurs with its background but the subject is nonetheless

[65] Patrick D. Murphy, "Sublime," in *Keywords for Environmental Studies*, ed. Joni Adamson, William A. Gleason, and David N. Pellow, vol. 3 (NYU Press, 2016), 183–85, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15zc5kw.62, p. 184.

[66] Murphy, *Sublime*, p. 183.

visible. In the background, the painting features a ship, fighting intensely against the harsh waves of the sea. In the foreground, among the tides, chained limbs struggle to stay afloat as they are preyed upon by creatures of the sea. The colors in this painting are striking; the contrast between the warm, fiery tones of the sky with cool, dark tones of the sea creates a visual tension elevating the drama.

The grotesque and the sublime exist in equal ratio here with the sublime being represented by the beautiful and fiery sunset in the background as well as the implication of the sheer power Neptune's domain exhibits. The grotesque is illustrated obviously by the seemingly dismembered body parts in the foreground, as well as the implication of destruction and death by the power of nature. The boat being blurred in the background allows the audience to focus on the grotesque scene directly in front of them, emphasizing the brutality of those on the ship, and the abandonment and isolation of those drowning. This depiction of nature's fury, both beautiful and terrifying, draws the viewer into a confrontation with the sublime's overwhelming power and the viewer's insignificance against her forces, simultaneously drawing pity and heartbreak from the depiction of the tragedy unfolding. The grotesque element here serves as a stark contrast to the painting's sublime qualities, grounding the sublime's abstract terror in concrete terror shown by the human cruelty highlighted in this painting.

Figure 6. J. M. W. Turner, *The Slave Ship,* 1840, Oil on Canvas, 90.8 x 122.6 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The painting as discussed above has an emphasis on nature as only the sky is exhibited with such vibrant colors while the rest tend to blend within the canvas. The dismembered body parts seem to have no real contour or outline, the ship only evident by the few lines that indicate its sails. The body of the ship is not there. The faces of the fallen are not visible. The indistinct shapes and the pervasiveness of the sunset's blood-red colour serve to illustrate the idea that nature is superior to man.[67] The haziness of the atmosphere trumps over all details.

In the era where the common mentality is that humans can tame nature and bend it to their will as with the constant developments in landscape design and architecture,

[67] Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: A Global History*, vol. Volume II (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2008), p. 795.

the confrontation through the sublime and the grotesque with the possibility that this is in fact not the case, and even can lead to deadly consequences and tragedies proves to be jarring to the viewer even prompting existential crises. In his writings, Murphy advocates for an understanding of the sublime that instead emphasizes a different relationship with the unknown: "Other terms might be worth consideration, such as "luminescence" (a sense of in-betweenness), "transport" (being carried beyond the threshold of ego-identity), or "attendance" (a sense of engagement without a sense of distance)."[68] These terms, aiming to describe the deep emotional and physical engagement with nature, reflect a shift towards a less hierarchical experience of the sublime, where a deep understanding blooms towards aspects that should not be controlled, and encourages a reciprocal relationship with the environment.

To be clear, while this relationship and the confrontation that both the grotesque and the sublime provide humanity with are sometimes fantastical and absolutely frightening, they are thought to be necessary, as seen above, for the creative spirit to evolve and become more aware of its existence and surroundings. "[The spirit] will set about doing as nature does, mingling in its creations – but without confounding them – darkness and light, the grotesque and the sublime; in other words, the body and the soul, the beast and the intellect; […] All things are connected."[69] A deeper understanding of the soul is required to move forward and this unfortunately requires the human existence to step out of its comfort zone, the option to remain stagnant not applicable anymore, to face the ugly in the face of beauty and most importantly to acknowledge and respecting powers beyond human understanding and capabilities. The exploration

[68] Murphy, *Sublime,* p. 185.

[69] Hugo, "Preface", p. 16.

of complementing contrasts, where awe meets terror, fosters a broader and more enlightened perspective on the human condition and psyche, where one explores the limits of coming to terms with his own mortality and fragile state, feeling so strong ideally yet so weak in the face of reality.

CHAPTER IV

THE BODY

> There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion. A man cannot tell whether Apelles or Albert Dürer were the more trifler; whereof the one would make a personage by geometrical proportions: the other, by taking the best parts out of divers faces, to make one excellent. Such personages, I think, would please nobody but the painter that made them.[70]

In his essay *Of Beauty,* Francis Bacon had proposed this notion of strangeness or uniqueness being intrinsic to true beauty. In contrast, in his essay *Of Deformity,* he proposes another notion: "Deformed persons are commonly even with nature; for as nature hath done ill by them, so do they by nature; being for the most (as the Scripture saith) *void of natural affection;* and so they have their revenge of nature."[71] The ideas presented here are quite contradictory. True beauty must contain some strangeness but the slightest deformity signifies a tumultuous relationship between one's body and nature. Then, what is it exactly that Bacon had meant by strangeness? What aligns within the acceptable margins of oddity that would classify as beautiful rather than deformed?

Thankfully, for this thesis, the question of beauty does not concern the reader. Or to clarify, the question of traditional and true beauty as many philosophers such as Kant

[70] Francis Bacon, "Of Beauty," Wikisource, The Free Online Library, June 12, 2015, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Works_of_Francis_Bacon/Volume_1/Essays/Of_Beauty.

[71] Francis Bacon, "Of Deformity," Wikisource, The Free Online Library, June 12, 2015, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Works_of_Francis_Bacon/Volume_1/Essays/Of_Beauty.

and Hegel had explored does not satisfy the purpose of this thesis. The question of deformity, however, lies in the essence of the grotesque. “Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style.”[72] It is, as stated, characteristic of the grotesque to have some sort of exaggerated or unfamiliar form that renders the viewer uncomfortable in his own skin. The body (particularly the human body) proves to be a site in which the grotesque resides and flourishes in, relishing the boundaries that can be pushed and contorted in unprecedented and unfathomable ways. The human body proves to be a vessel for the grotesque to send a message.

“We find at the basis of the grotesque imagery a special concept of the body as a whole and of the limits of this whole. The confines between the body and the world and between separate bodies are drawn in the grotesque genre quite differently than in the classic and naturalist images.”[73] Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the concept of the grotesque body, in which the grotesque body acts as reflection to its societal circumstances. He explained that each feature served a specific purpose. The eyes, the mouth, the flesh, the limbs; each must be rendered in a unique manner in order to satisfy the grotesque body, which in of itself is a unique phenomenon. “The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body: blood, bowels, heart and other organs. The outward and inward features are often merged into one.”[74]

[72] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 303.

[73] Ibid, p. 315.

[74] Ibid, p. 318.

The intricacies of the grotesque body can be better explained through examples beginning with the most important features of the grotesque in the face before moving to the body, and then from the outside to the inside. *Medusa* by Peter Paul Rubens (Figure 7) is a striking and dramatic representation of the Greek mythological figure of the same name. The central focus of the painting is Medusa's head, lying on the ground while her snakes writhe around the decapitated head of their master. The color palette is dominated by earthy and muted tones, browns and greens that only serve to contrast further against the unnaturalness and cursed nature of her monstruous amputated head, raining bright red blood against the ground. Rubens was master of the academic style, a fact supported by the manner in which he painted her face. Medusa's skin is pale and lifeless, and yet highlights his excellent brushwork and technical skill with how he meticulously highlighted her skin's texture and the many planes of her face. The high degree of realism only serves to further perturb and disturb the viewer.

Medusa's portrayal showcases both the outside and the inside of her body as showcased by the spilling blood and suggestively snake-like veins coming out of her neck, the site of the murder. The ruby redness of her blood is only reflected in one other area: her eyes. Medusa's eyes protrude as she is confronted by the horrified realization that she had met her demise and would take her final breath against the sword of her slayer. "The grotesque is interested only in protruding eyes. […] It is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to the other bodies or the world outside. Moreover, the bulging eyes manifest a purely bodily tension."[75] One can understand the story from her eyes. They bulge

[75] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* p. 316.

excessively, uncomfortably, frozen in a glassy state, never to blink or flutter again. They reflect a psychological state, a state of realisation and of horror as the feared monster becomes a victim in unforeseen circumstances. Rubens has chosen to emphasize the eyes. “Rubens emphasizes the moment of Medusa’s suffering and death. Enraged and horror-stricken, Medusa furrows her brows as death strikes. Her bloodshot eyes bulge out and turn downwards aghast. They are frozen and show forever her expression at the moment when she notices that she is beheaded.”[76]

Figure 7. Peter Paul Rubens, *Medusa,* c. 1617-1618, Oil on Panel, 68 x 118 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

The mouth here offers no valuable information to the viewer. That is not to say that the mouth is not valuable to the grotesque. In fact, Bakhtin refutes this statement entirely: for “the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. It

[76] Ulrich Heinen. “Huygens, Rubens and Medusa: Reflecting the Passions in Paintings, with Some Considerations of Neuroscience in Art History.” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek (NKJ) / Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 60 (2010): 150–77. Culshaw, *Rachmaninov,* p. 157.

dominates all else. The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame from encasing this wide-open abyss."[77] Hieronymus Bosch's painting *Christ's Descent into Limbo* (Figure 8) best illustrates this notion.

Figure 8. Hieronymus Bosch, *Christ's Descent into Limbo,* c. 1575-1580, Oil on Panel, Museo de Arte de Sao Paulo, Brazil.

The painting depicts the event known as the Harrowing of Hell where Christ, after his crucifixion and before his resurrection, descends into hell to save the righteous

[77] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 317.

souls who had died before his sacrifice. The figure of Christ is clearly depicted, the only one in bright red robes holding a banner, reaching his hand for the damned souls, surrounded by monstruous creatures. The background and surrounding planes are tumultuous and dark, depicting the infernal landscape of hell. The sky is an intimidating green hue, while the red is mirrored in the blazing fires in the top right half of the painting. All these elements serve to aid in the overall grotesqueness of the painting, but the one element that truly renders this painting as grotesque is the cavernous mouth the souls are desperately trying to escape from being swallowed again. "The gaping mouth is related to the image of swallowing, this most ancient symbol of death and destruction."[78] This is taken quite literally in this painting, for the gaping is the damnation the souls are desperately clinging to Christ to save them from. Their swallowing would signify their eternal death into the hellish domain. The mouth extends beyond its natural confines, exaggerated and stretched. It is a peak to the inside of the body. Beyond the mouth, all other features of the human face are rendered unimportant and obsolete as it dominates the view of the audience. The focus is on the mouth and what is happening within the mouth. Bosch highlights this well as the darkness of the inside of the mouth contrasts against the brightly lit terrain in the foreground, and the shape of the mouth is a carefully carved-out dome among the rocky landscape. The mouth creates a sense of doom and suffocation, the souls desperately attempting to leave the claustrophobic area.

Bakhtin stresses the importance of the eyes and mouth concerning the face of the grotesque body. All other features, in his opinion, serve to aid the purpose of the bulging eyes or the gaping mouth. The gaping mouth is like the gaping wound, and the

[78] Ibid, p. 325.

snakes of the head are echoed by the veins in the wound/mouth. This is suggestive. It is like there's a lot of visual emphasis on the fungible body, emphasis on interior and exterior found in wounds and mouths. A central concern of most of us is to see ourselves as unitary, as having clear borders and being complete in ourselves. When these are punctured we die, but there are vulnerable gaps. Wounds and mouths are gaps, dangerous ones in our sense of ourselves as unitary and self-sufficient. But just as these two features are important, the flesh of the grotesque body also plays an important role and the proper manner in which to explore it is by studying Titian's work. *The Flaying of Marsyas* by Titian (Figure 9) depicts the story of the satyr Marsyas who had challenged the god of music Apollo to a contest to see who is the better musician. Apollo wins the contest and decrees that Marsyas must be punished for his hubris. The painting shows the act of the punishment, in which it was decided that the satyr would be tied to a tree and publicly flayed alive. The painting is dominated by dark, earthy colors particularly in the surroundings of the central figure. In the center, Marsyas hangs upside down, while Apollo kneels by his head, focused on the task of inflicting the punishment on the satyr. Marsyas face is contorted in agony and terror, contrasting Apollo's face and his serene demeanor, very calm for being the one inflicting pain on another.

"At the center of the composition, the fleshy torso of Marsyas hangs. Layers of semi-transparent scumbles of paint play against glazes of color to form a body of throbbing presence. The indeterminacy of the drawing of the chest and abdomen create a sense of breathing, even twitching flesh."[79] The exposed torso of Marsyas is striking,

[79] Anthony Apesos, "Titian's 'Flaying of Marsyas': 'Colorito' Triumphant," *Artibus et Historiae* 39, no. 77 (2018): 111–43, p. 133.

nauseating, because of the manner in which Titian has decided to treat it. Rather than take the flesh of a being as a solid object, a different method of thought is applied:

> Flesh, as opposed to membranes and skin, is a fluid. According to the linguist Carl Buck, Russian, Lithuanian, and Lettish (Latvian) words for "flesh" all derive "from the notion of a filmy, 'floating' covering." […] In those languages, as in Indo-European, flesh is something that floats, a liquid rather than a solid such as the bones. […] Greek terms for the body also partake of these liquid metaphors: Greek *thumos* can mean "spirit" or "anger," but it can also be a liquid that "boils and swells in the innards.[80]

Figure 9. Titian, *The Flaying of Marsyas,* c. 1570-1576, Oil on Canvas, 212 x 207 cm, Archbishop's Palace, Kroměříž, Czech Republic.

[80] James Elkins, *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 115.

Understanding that concept that flesh is a fluid is key to understanding the grotesque body. Bakhtin supports this notion: "The grotesque image of walls turned into flesh is introduced. It is prepared by the conceit that the strongest walls are made of the bones of soldiers. The human body as building material. The limits between the body and the world are weakened."[81] The fluidity is what renders the body to possibility of distortion and exaggeration. The flesh moves, contorts, melts, stretches, compresses fluidly beyond its limits just as liquid can take the shape of the container it is in. That is not to say, the flesh is completely liquid; it does not slip through the fingers and does not evaporate into thin air. "The surface of flesh may take dull fire, but the flesh is not consumed; draperies may phosphoresce, but they lose none of their density or opulence of texture; atmosphere may glow or be invaded by a fitful darkness, but it remains palpable."[82] In Titian's painting, the flesh of Marsyas exposes everything: the solid bones underneath, the trail of his veins shown by the blue and green hues, the movement of his blood, the muscles flex and stretch as he writhed in pain because of Apollo's actions.

In the first chapter, the grotesque's relationship with the 'para' has been discussed. We find ourselves continuously returning to this relationship for the grotesque body exists within the 'para': "The grotesque body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the

[81] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 313.

[82] S.J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy: 1500-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 512.

world and is itself swallowed by the world."[83] The grotesque body has the uncanny ability to show, as Titian had done, both the inside and the outside and often simultaneously. It is different than the body in conventional academic painting, with its emphasis on smooth planes, uniform color, and perfection:

> The new bodily canon, in all its historic variations and different genres, presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is eliminated, hidden, or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed. The basis of the image is the individual, strictly limited mass, the impenetrable façade. The opaque surface and the body's "valleys" acquire an essential meaning as the border of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world. All attributes of the unfinished world are carefully removed, as well as all the signs of its inner life.[84]

In contrast, the artistic logic of the grotesque chooses to focus on the body's excrescences and orfices, choosing to ignore its limits and venture beyond into its depths.[85] In the beginning of this chapter, it theorized that the grotesque body represents the world itself. This notion cannot be true if the body is rendered in such a manner where it stands individually, untouched and uncaring for its surroundings. The grotesque body integrates itself within its environments, settings, atmospheres, such that it reflects the story. "We do not see bodies as motionless statues, but as moving, changing images, and I would add that the bodies we see in pictures and mirrors are visually intricate and

[83] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 317.

[84] Bakhtin, p. 320.

[85] Ibid, p. 318.

specific – each a very different formula of identity."[86] Titian understood this in his work. "In the *Marsyas* the surfaces of bodies make a silvered incandescence and the atmosphere, almost unbreathably dense, is like dulled fire. The image seems both palpable and limitless, depicting existences in landscape space but denoting that what we see here is a fraction of the cosmos."[87]

The notion of exposing the inside to the outside renders the audience uncomfortable. "We all hide the insides of our bodies: we patch and bandage wounds, and we hide the moments when the inside has to come out,"[88] Elkins explains. It is a natural instinct for the human being to strive to keep the inside within its margins, to prevent it from doing what the grotesque essentially does: expose, flow out, gush out, expand, endlessly and excessively. The grotesque blurs this line for in order for the body to become a grotesque body, it must be acknowledged that man is incomplete, man is not flawless as the academics strive to achieve, man is open uncompleted.[89] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola explains why this is in his public lecture: "We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer."[90] To imply that man is perfect is to imply that man and his

[86] Elkins, *Pictures of the Body,* p. 164.

[87] Freedberg, *Painting in Italy: 1500-1600,* p. 516.

[88] Elkins, *Pictures of the Body,* p. 111.

[89] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 364.

[90] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. A. Robert Caponigri (Washington, D.C: Gateway Editions, 2017), p. 7.

body are static, a stone-like object without the ability to change, move, breathe. Man in that instance becomes soul-less. The death of medusa, who turned men to stone, is also the death of the stone men, of the fiction of bodily perfection.

Painters of the academy strived constantly for perfection within the human body and while realism has flourished under their brush, so has unrealistic ideals and heights that were unreachable. Subjects of the academy do not breathe. They are rendered soul-less as to be unmarred by the realities and complications of the human being which poses a problem. Bakhtin emphasizes that the soul cannot be separated from the body for it is the body that creates, individualizes, and characterizes it. Once it is separated, the soul is rendered empty.[91]

Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 10) is a famous example that illustrates this point well. The painting portrays an idealized and flawless female nude, devoid of any imperfections and complexities of a regular human body. However, Venus looks soulless as the entourage around her look at her and marvel at her beauty. Her eyes are devoid of emotion, her face impassive, as if she is pondering her very existence despite being the literal personification of beauty. She exists as a symbol of perfection rather than a living and breathing human (or goddess in this case).

[91] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 362.

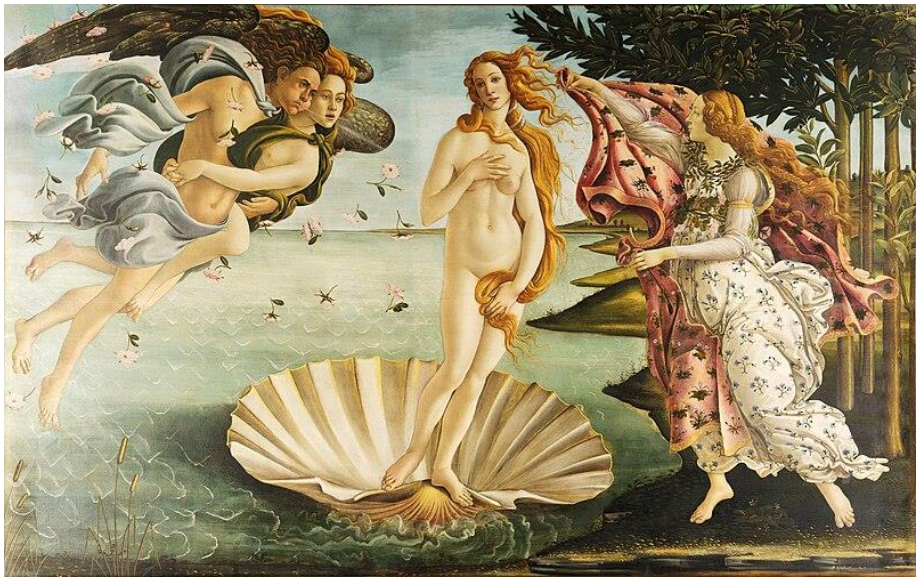

Figure 10. Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, 1485-1486, Tempera on Canvas, 172.5 x 278.9 cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

It is an attempt to bring man closer to divinity, to separate his form from all that surrounds him. It is proof how the concept of divinity has changed over time, from the gods worshipped being otherworldly, crossed with other animals and beings, combinations that are knowingly unattainable without a higher force. Gradually, divinity had lost its animalistic and grotesque features, had adopted more and more human features as antiquity had explored, as divinity had been assimilated from outside to within. The monotheistic religions had certainly reinforced this, as the bible states: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth,"[92] and in the Quran as well: "We created man in the best design."[93] But with the constant

[92] Genesis 1:26 (KJV).

[93] Quran 95:4 (Sahih International) "وقد خلقنا الإنسان في أحسن تقويم"

emphasis on being perfect, being flawless, being unmarred, a fear of violence, a fear of the inside is naturally fostered. This all builds up to a fear of the ultimate act that this violence and turnover brings which is the fear of death.

This is essentially why the grotesque proves to be much too terrifying and morbid: “Pictures of opened bodies conjure states that edge from pain toward shock, unconsciousness, coma, and death.”[94] And so, humans as a species race to fix the broken, sew the torn, patch the open, for it is the way to postpone the inevitable, to cling onto youth and health for as long as possible. “To keep the inside hidden is to stave off death. When a body is opened accidentally, we do everything possible to keep it closed.”[95] Painters of the grotesque challenge this concept for they understand a notion many had tried to forget: “The human body is not just the object of desire, but the site of suffering, pain and death, a lesson that scholars of older art, with its insistent iconography of martyrs and victims, of the damned suffering in hell and the blessed suffering on earth, can never ignore.”[96]

It is one thing to imply the proximity of death through symbolism but another matter entirely to display it in its raw form, open and exposed for the audience to see. “The consequences of not avoiding the viscera are dire: to really see the inside of the body is to risk falling in love with the heady proximity of death, with the incomprehensible tangle of unnamable vessels and chunks of fat, and with the seductive

[94] Elkins, *Pictures of the Body,* p. 115.

[95] Ibid, p. 112.

[96] Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), p. 18.

textures of the smooth, sensitive membranes – more delicate than ordinary skin, more sensitive and vulnerable, and above all more redolent of the most intense pain."[97]

And so, the grotesque body is the act of metamorphosis shown, the moment the soul leaves the body is the act of becoming, of changing from one form to the other, the very act of transformation from the tangible to the intangible. "Death may not be a final end, but instead just one more transformation – perhaps the most dramatic one – that thereby demonstrates the continuity of all the significant implications of the words 'life 'and 'related'."[98] The marker of this, is the very marker that the academy avoids, but the grotesque body showcases: decay. The decaying body is the defining marker between the living and the dead, the transformative phase between one and the other which might even support the notion that death can be survived.[99] With this the 'para' is introduced again, for within death and decay there is also life:

> The three main acts in the life of the grotesque body: sexual intercourse, death throes […], and the act of birth. Frequently these three acts are transformed or merged into each other insofar as their exterior symptoms and expressions coincide (spasms, tensions popping eyes, sweat, convulsions of arms and legs). This is a peculiar mimicking of death-resurrection; the same body that tumbles into the grave rises again, incessantly moving from the lower to the upper level.[100]

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[97] Elkins, *Pictures of the Body*, p. 149.

[98] Graham Harvey, 'Death', in *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (London: Hurst and Company, 2006), 115–18, p. 117.

[99] Harvey, 'Death', p. 117.

[100] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 353.

The concept of death meets life, or death creating life is not new. “The first death (according to the Bible, Abel was the first man to die) renewed the earth’s fertility. Here we have the combination of killing and birth with which we are familiar.[101] Death, the dead body, blood as a seed buried in the earth, rising for another life – this is one of the oldest and most wide-spread themes.”[102] Rubens’ *Medusa* is a good example: the stump of Medusa’s neck gushes blood, nerves, and arteries. Her eyes are blood-shot, her face void of any life or color. “Fresh blood ripples out from the stump of her neck. In accordance with Ovid’s report about the origin of the snakes in the Libyan desert, her blood is turned into snakes just at the moment when it touches the ground. One snake is just hatching from an egg.”[103] In the myth, her corpse famously births two well-known mythological characters: when Perseus cut off her head, both Pegasus, the father of pegasi, and Chrysaor.[104] Abel, Medusa, Uranus (of whose remains Aphrodite was born[105]), the list goes on. “In the endless chain of bodily life [grotesque imagery] retains

[101] Sabina Spielrein. ‘Destruction as the Cause of Becoming (1912)’, in *The Essential Writings of Sabina Spielrein: Pioneer of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Ruth I. Cape and Raymond Burt, 97–134 (London and New York: Routledge, 2019) p. 98.

[102] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 327.

[103] Heinen, 'Huygens, Rubens and Medusa’, p. 153.

[104] Hesoid, “The Theogony of Hesiod,” trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Sacred Texts, accessed July 2, 2024, https://sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm.

[105] In some accounts such as *The Illiad* by Homer, Aphrodite is stated to be the daughter of Zeus and Dione. In other accounts such as *Theogeny* by Hesoid, Aphrodite is thought to be the product of Uranos’ cut off genitals being thrown into the sea.

the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one."[106] One must be careful when breaching such a topic.

"To take lives demands care."[107] It is a transformative process, whether to complete annihilation or not is something humans as species will never know for sure. "In these last moments and in the language of the expiring organism, death becomes a moment of life, receiving an expressive reality and speaking with the tongue of the body itself; thus, death is entirely drawn into the cycle of life. The burning up of all bodily moisture, the concentration of warmth in the lethal parts, its evaporation, the departure of the soul with bile and phlegm through the apertures of the head – all these images demonstrate the grotesque open character of the body and the cosmic elements moving within it."[108]

A soulless body is wholly uninteresting. The grotesque body proves to be full of soul, even as it is depicted as fractured, decapitated, distorted, decomposed. It is that which gives it character, for the nature of man is incomplete, unstable, volatile, unpredictable. "Such a body, composed of fertile depths and procreative convexities is never clearly differentiated from the world but is transferred, merged, and fused with it. It contains […] new unknown spheres. It acquires cosmic dimensions, while the cosmos acquires a bodily nature."[109] The rendering of the body changes in the grotesque, to

[106] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 318.

[107] Harvey, 'Death', p. 116.

[108] Bakhtin, p. 359.

[109] Bakhtin, p. 339.

capture the ‘para’ and the metamorphosis. The concepts of the body are thought of differently, just as flesh becomes fluid, the inside becomes outside. “The grotesque conception of the body is interwoven not only with the cosmic but also with the social, utopian, and historic theme, and above all with the theme of the change of epochs and the renewal of culture.”[110]

[110] Ibid, p. 322.

CHAPTER V

SATURN

In the first chapter, we explored in depth the word grotesque and its origin stemming from the word ‘crypt’. While understanding that crypt signifies a buried, underground place or area away from view, what of the inhabitants of the crypt if any? Jacques Derrida has answered that question as he wrote: 'The inhabitant of a crypt is always a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep, as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way save as living.'[111] In a review of his work, Elissa Marder explains further: 'the crypt not only disrupts the concept of the self and, with it, conventional ways of thinking about place, but also radically undermines any possible clear distinction between the living and the dead.'[112] As they both suggest, the inhabitants of the crypt blur the lines between the realms of the living and the dead, constantly teetering on the edge of both, belonging truly to neither. A state of limbo, a negative liminal space in which one’s identity comes into question as one becomes more prone to losing themselves steadily within the haze of the in-between-ness. Derrida suggests the crypt exists within the Self, a mechanism to store and repress the deepest of traumas. The inhabitants of the crypt influence the individual’s behavior and psyche in profound yet unconscious ways. The inhabitants of the crypt are characterized by their secrecy for they represent simultaneously the known

[111] Jacques Derrida and Barbara Johnson, “FORS,” *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 1 (1977): 64–116, p. 78.

[112] Elissa Marder, “Mourning, Magic and Telepathy,” *Oxford Literary Review* 30, no. 2 (2008): 181–200, p. 184.

and the unknown, existing in a liminal space between conscious awareness and unconscious repression. 'The crypt is always an internalization, an inclusion intended as a compromise, but since it is a parasitic inclusion, an inside heterogeneous to the inside of the Self. […] The cryptic safe can only maintain in a state of repetition the mortal conflict it is impotent to resolve.'[113]

The redefinition of the crypt allows the incorporation of the crypt from the outside to the inside, from surrounding to within and this in turn redefines the parameters of the grotesque, and affirms its paradoxical nature as pre-discussed. Therefore, the question presents itself again: who are the inhabitants of the crypt? The subjects of the grotesque.

The answer will come to define itself in the form of Saturn. Goya's *Saturn Devouring One of his Children* (Figure 11) (one of the many variations of its name) is arguably the 'face' of the grotesque as an art genre. The painting stands as one of the most disturbing and psychologically intense paintings in the history of Western art. Part of the 'Black Paintings' series, Goya's *Saturn* and the rest of the series reflect the period of political instability and mental turmoil they were created in.

[113] Derrida and Johnson, 'FORS', p. 70.

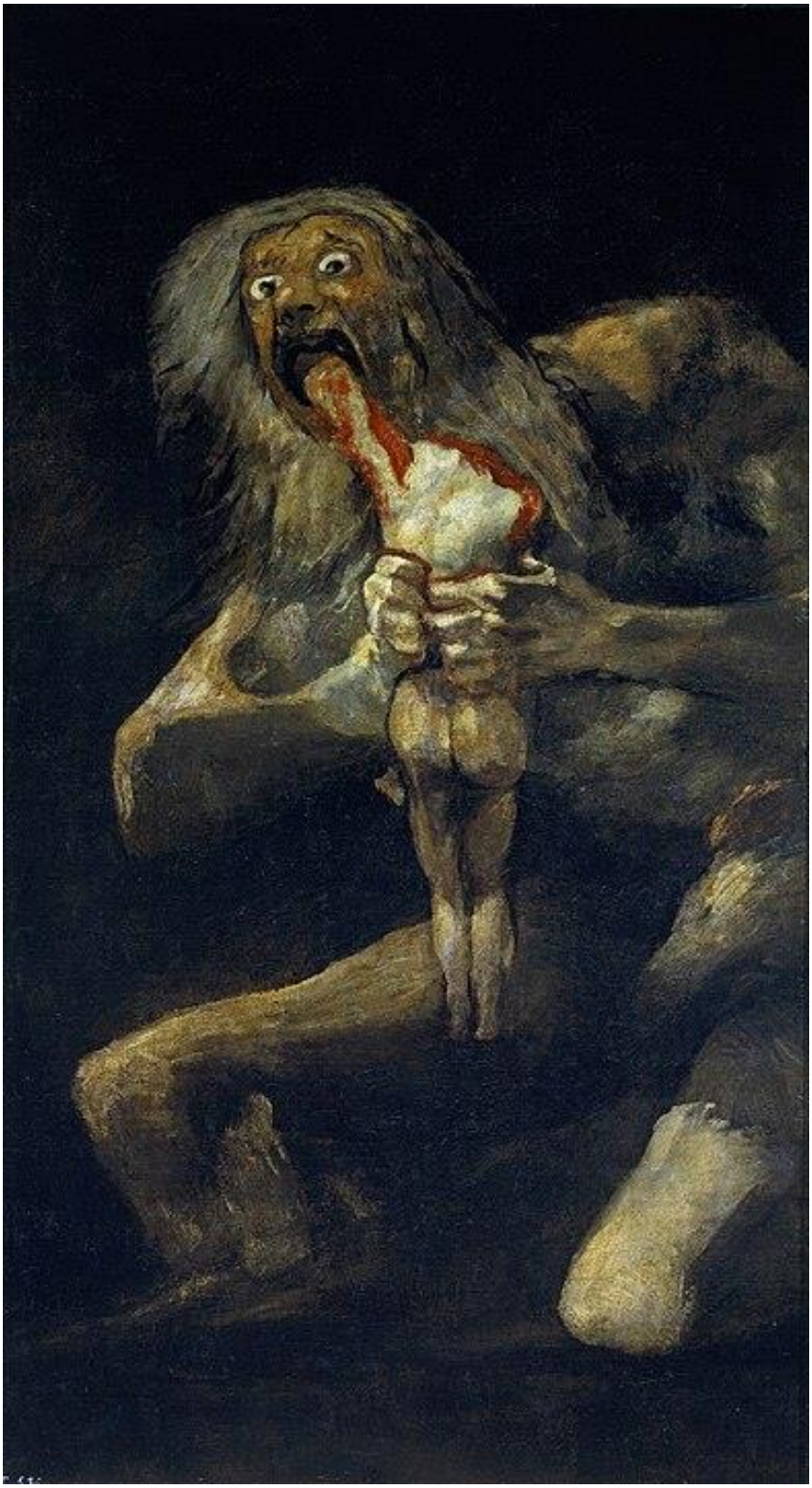

Figure 11. *Francisco Goya, Saturn Devouring One of His Children,* 1820-23, Oil on Plaster Later Transferred to Canvas, 143.5 x 81.4 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

The painting features the titan Saturn, centrally positioned, engaged in the act of devouring one of his children. Saturn's body fills the canvas, creating an overwhelming sense of power and horror as the vertical composition emphasizes the stark, towering presence of Saturn as he leans forward, he is jagged, angular and unstable, tightly clutching the decapitated body of his child who hangs straight and true in the center like a truncated Christ at the Crucifixion. The color palette is limited, featuring muted shades of blacks, browns, greys, and yellows. The background is almost entirely black, a deliberate decision to bring the focus towards Saturn and the animalistic and daunting task he is committing. The black envelops the figure, blurring his edges and creating an oppressive and claustrophobic atmosphere.

The dark background forms a spotlight effect of the main figures of the painting as it creates a harsh contrast in lighting between the highlights and the shadows of the painting. Compared to his surroundings, Saturn's figure appears sickly and ghastly, while the figure he holds shines pale and bright comparingly, an emphasis on the victim enduring its gruesome fate. The victim's body, its raw and pale flesh, provides a tragic focal point amidst the darkness. The limp body is clutched tightly in-between its father's unyielding grip and since it is in the center we have to look past it to see the monstrous figure of Saturn. The head and arm are already consumed, while the rest of the body Saturn avidly inhales. Saturn is depicted as a gaunt, wild-eyed figure, his expression a mixture of horror, madness, and desperation. His mouth is wide open, his teeth bared as he bites into the body of his child. The hair on his head and beard is disheveled and an unhealthy shade of grey. His body contradicts itself, for it appears as muscular and trained yet brawny simultaneously, his limbs exaggerated in their length

and thinness. Overall, he appears exaggerated and distorted, which serves to emphasize the unnatural, horrifying, and grotesque nature of this scene.

There are two important notions the viewer must focus on while dissecting this painting. First, is the stark bright red of the cascading blood dripping from Saturn's mouth and coating the mutilated body of the child. In the midst of all the muted shades of the color palette, the red appears jarring, creating another focal point. The sudden red accentuates the gruesomeness of the act of cannibalism.

The second and more important notion is the eyes. They say the eyes are the window to the soul. Saturn's eyes betray him. His eyes show the madness, insanity, and helplessness he feels as he is consumed by uncontrollable frenzy and terror. The mad king's eyes display a desperate cry for help as he commits the unthinkable in what appears to be a dark secluded area, afraid to be caught at any moment. The whiteness of his eyes displays a stark contrast against the sickly yellowed hue of his skin, his pupils as dark as the darkness swallowing him.

> Cover the right side of the face, and we see a Titan caught in the act, defying anyone to stop him, the bulging left eye staring wildly at some unseen witness to his savagery, his piratical coarseness heightened by the sharp vertical lines of the eyebrow, crossed like the stitches of a scar. Cover his left eye, and we are confronted by a being in pain, the dark pupil gazing down in horror at his own uncontrolled murderousness, the eyebrow curved upwards like an inverted question mark, as if he were asking, 'Why am I compelled to do this?'[114]

The painting has the uncanny ability of arresting the viewer immediately and leaving a deep impression on them:

[114] Jay Scott Morgan, "The Mystery of Goya's 'Saturn,'" *New England Review (1990-)* 22, no. 3 (2001): 39–43, p. 42-43.

> The image is ineffaceable: the cannibal god on bended knees, engulfed in darkness; the mad haunted eyes and black-blooded mouth; the rending fingers, threaded with blood, and the ravaged figure in their grasp – a work of such indelible power, it seems to have existed before it was created, like some deep-rooted, banished memory, inescapable as nightmare.[115]

It is unknown whether it was Goya's intention to strike such awe-inspiring fear and unease into others for the Black Paintings were a deeply personal project for him, coating the walls of his home for his viewing. It is said that before the creation of the final painting, Goya produced a chalk drawing of Saturn most likely influenced by Rubens' painting,[116] and yet the final outcomes of both paintings were vastly different.

[115] Morgan, 'The Mystery of Goya's "Saturn"', p. 39.

[116] Ibid, p. 40.

Figure 12. Peter Paul Rubens, *Saturn Devouring His Son,* 1636-1638, Oil on Canvas, 180 x 87 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid

Painted a couple of centuries earlier, Peter Paul Rubens' *Saturn Devouring His Son* (Figure 12) is a vivid and dynamic depiction of the myth of Saturn consuming his son in a signature Flemish Baroque style characterized by movement and dynamism. Saturn is the central figure again, caught mid-action as he actively consumes his own child. Rubens employs a brighter color palette, the colors significantly brighter and cleaner than Goya's. The background is a cluster of turbulent clouds in movement, swirling around the subject of the painting in a cohesive manner. The lighting is dramatic, with strong contrasts between light and shadow, much like Goya's strong contrast, however, here the contrast serves the purpose of enhancing the three-dimensionality of the figures. The painting is a quasi-grotesque, having the subject-matter grotesque, but the rendering of the figures remain pristine and perfect.

Saturn, here, is depicted as a powerful elderly man with a long flowing beard and wild, unkempt hair. He is engaged intently with the task at hand as shown by the intense expression of focus on his face as he bites into the flesh of his child. His physique here appears healthy and muscular, with bulging muscles and veins, emphasizing his godly strength. His body language is aggressive and imposing, as presented by his tight and unyielding grip on his helpless child. Saturn also grips his scythe, his symbol of power, firmly in his right hand.

The child in Rubens' painting is depicted as an actual child, a baby no older than a couple of years, as opposed to the grown adult Goya's Saturn mutilated. The child's flesh is rendered with a delicate, almost tender quality, emphasizing the innocent nature of a child just brought into life, skin untouched and unmarred by external forces as one barrels through life. The focal point here is much like what has been discussed with Goya's painting: the ruby redness of the blood as the child's flesh is torn apart by their

father's teeth, which is again the only point in which the brightest color of the painting is introduced as to allow the viewer to focus on the act of consumption, or of raw cannibalism.

Here, Saturn is in control. He is fully aware of his actions and what he is committing, confident in his actions. The child is completely helpless in the face of the horror his father is committing, and Saturn's grip does not allow the child to escape. The child here is portrayed in movement which can be interpreted as both contorting in pain and attempting to escape their assailant to no avail as opposed to the limp body Goya's Saturn ravaged and rendered lifeless. This child is still alive as Saturn takes what seems to be the first bite, and wails in pain.

There are similarities as both paintings tell the same story with the same subjects, and yet the differences are significant. The interpretations both have for the undying Titan of Time are interesting. Rubens' Saturn is a powerful, healthy, strong, older man with clear intent. Goya's Saturn is a deteriorating being, caught helplessly in the action. His hair is a disgusting yellowing grey, (much like a chronic smoker's grey for modern reference) while Rubens' Saturn sports a healthy shine in his grey hair, evident it has been taken care of properly. The latter's body appears unmarred, with a healthy flush in the correct places while the former's body contorts weirdly to make room for unproportioned limbs on a sickly yellowed body. Goya's Saturn is a decaying man clinging on the last bits of hope he can manage to salvage.

Based on the definitions explored previously, Rubens' painting is a quasi-grotesque for the subject of the painting is in itself grotesque, but the form is not. Saturn is a compelling, powerful man, assured of himself. The child is a supple baby, with a luscious head of curly blond hair, soft skin, and rosy cheeks. The figures themselves do

not strike fear and unease into the viewers' hearts and minds; it is only the act Saturn is committing that suggests a 'grotesque-ness' to the picture displayed. Goya's painting on the other hand is a true grotesque. Both the subject and the form are indeed grotesque. Saturn's gangly and monstrous figure and the child's mutilated body already shock and disturb the viewer, in addition to the blatant cannibalism the father is committing against his child.

So, who is the victim of the grotesque? In Rubens' painting, it is the child whose eyes bulge in fear and terror at his father's actions, too weak against his unbending will. In Goya's Saturn, it is Saturn himself the victim, evident by the loss of his sanity and the terror in his own swollen eyes. As Jay Scott Morgan has said, Saturn appears both in pain and out of control, while allowing no space for anyone to approach or stop what he is doing. Goya's Saturn is a man tormented by his mind, forced to do the unthinkable.

Those unfamiliar with the background of the story, unrelating to the title of the painting will still feel the horror and terror emitting from the painting. But for the sake of analysis, the subject is worth exploring. What has led Saturn (sometimes called Cronos) to this point? Hesiod has explained the story in his *Theogeny*. His father's cruelty has driven his mother to implore her children to do the unthinkable, to which only Saturn has volunteered to free her and his family from the abuse: "But great Cronus the wily tool courage and answered his dear mother: 'Mother, I will undertake to do this deed, for I reverence not our father of evil name, for he first thought of doing shameful things."[117] And so with the weapon his mother fashioned, he fearlessly did what he promised he would do: "Then [Cronus] from his ambush stretched forth his left hand and in his right took the great long sickle with jagged teeth, and swiftly lopped off

[117] Hesiod. Theogony.

his own father's members and cast them away to fall behind him."[118] His father curses him to the same fate, in which Cronus would find himself cut up by his own son:

> But Rhea was subject in love to Cronos and bare splendid children, Hestia, Demeter, and gold-shod Hera and strong Hades, pitiless in heart, who dwells under the earth, and the loud-crashing Earth-Shaker, and wise Zeus, father of gods and men, by whose thunder the wide earth is shaken. These great Cronos swallowed as each came forth from the womb to his mother's knees with this intent, that no other of the proud sons of Heaven should hold the kingly office amongst the deathless gods. For he learned from Earth and starry Heaven that he was destined to be overcome by his own son, strong though he was, through the contriving of great Zeus. Therefore he kept no blind outlook, but watched and swallowed down his children.[119]

Much of Saturn's story is based on opaque and partial accounts of ancient writings such as the referenced *Theogony* and Homer's writings. Some people have wondered whether Goya's Saturn may not actually be merely a random monster created from the woes of his declining mental state. For the sake of this thesis, it is assumed that the traditionally ascribed subject is indeed Saturn and his tragic story.[120]

Both the painting and story are rich in symbolism. Saturn, an immortal being of great power, has succumbed to his traumas and been driven to madness by his own father's decree to destroy his own children, a story of generational trauma unfolding as the main character tries to desperately defy and break the cycle. There is no running from fate, goes the popular saying, for the prophecy eventually comes true and Zeus and his brothers kill their father in a manner similar to how Saturn killed his own father.

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[118] Ibid,

[119] Ibid.

[120] Identified as Saturn by accounts of Antonio Brugada who was a friend of Goya's and was instrumental in identifying and cataloguing the figures of Goya's *Black Paintings*.

This sees the beginnings of a reverse Oedipal complex, in which instead of the son feeling threatened by the father, the father feels threatened by his unborn sons.

"[Oedipus'] fate moves us only because it might have been our own, because the oracle laid upon before our birth the very curse which rested upon him. It may be that we were all destined to direct our first sexual impulses towards our mothers, and our first impulses of hatred and violence toward our fathers."[121] Here, Freud illustrates in his work *The Interpretation of Dreams* the framework for the complex highlighting the pre-destination humans as a species have towards the relationship with one's parents. Focusing on the son and father portion however, Freud and his followers tend to agree to the presence of a certain violence between the two, usually from the son to the unknowing father. In the myth of Father Time, the same and the opposite is true: Saturn possesses a blinding rage towards his abusive father and, with the will of his mother, has avenged her successfully, while he also possesses uncontrolled fury and anxiety towards his unknowing children, whom he had devoured a few moments after their birth. Unfortunately for him, his actions (unexplainable actions if he had not been aware of the prophecy) is precisely what led to his downfall, for it is these actions which cause his wife enough grief and strife that she seeks revenge. Her thinking would lead to the rebirth of his children, and the cycle would repeat wherein his youngest son would cut him up and castrate him just as he did with his own father, and destroy him beyond repair.

From the moment he had destroyed his father, Saturn has been burdened by the promises of a future in which he is to suffer the same fate and so the titan has had to

[121] Freud, "Chapter V: The Material Source of Dreams", p. 110.

come to terms with the possibility of his own death. Except, notably, he has not come to terms with it:

> Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside – in so far as it does not recall him – the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him.[122]

Saturn had instead a state of permanent mourning, mourning himself, reacting to the loss of himself and his position in the world and losing the capacity to adopt new objects of love, in this case his children, for that would mean his children would replace him. Perhaps being an immortal and specifically the embodiment of time which inevitably both produces and destroys everything he is bound to a cycle of creation and destruction that he cannot escape. Sabina Spielman sums this up nicely: 'To be fruitful — equals self-destruction; for with the rise of the next generation, the previous one has passed its high point. IN this way, our descendants become our most dangerous enemies whom we cannot overcome, since they will outlive us and take the power from our enfeebled hands.'[123] This makes his personal grief more palpable, as there is a familiar element of denial and holding onto what exists already. He destroys, mourns and yet denies death is possible, stretching himself thin between two opposing ideas. He is tormented by fear of his own destruction, by the terrible things he must do, and by the

[122] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", p. 244.

[123] Sabina Spielrein, 'Destruction as the Cause of Becoming (1912)', In *The Essential Writings of Sabina Spielrein: Pioneer of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Ruth I. Cape and Raymond Burt, 97–134 (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 98.

inevitability of his actions. The crazied look in his eyes is the look of a person cursed with knowledge. Knowledge of both creation, destruction and inevitability, the unresolvable presence of both in his mind is madness. Inevitability also implies pointlessness. It is pointless to act, pointless to not act. It robs Saturn of agency, despite his power, and reduces him to a mechanistic process unable to affect the outcome, all he can do is watch in horror as he goes through the motions of repeating his trauma. Freud believes that the individual carries a twofold existence: one that serves his own purposes and one that he is bound to serve against his will.[124] Saturn's existence finds itself in the words of Freud, serving his own purposes, and yet acting against his will. In Goya's painting, his actions are depicted as completely removed from himself as if someone else has imposed the act of cannibalism on him and he, by an unknown influence, is being forced against his will to comply and do so. In Rubens' Saturn, his actions are completely his own, properly executed within vigor and clear purpose. His actions are heinous yet psychoanalysis would argue that they are completely logical, at least in the mind of a narcissist: "Narcissism in this sense would not be a perversion, but the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may be justifiably be attributed to every living creature."[125] This is exactly what Saturn is basing his actions and thoughts on, the instinct to preserve himself, to keep his power and his throne, to dissolve the prophecy, and to stay one and whole. "A person's love can be directed only toward himself. Insofar as he loves an object, he adopts it as a part of his Self." In Saturn's case, the object and the self are one.

[124] Freud, "On Narcissism", p. 78.

[125] Ibid, p. 73-74.

This narcissism was not random, but in fact triggered into the form in which it manifests. “A unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed. The auto-erotic instincts, however, are there from the very first; so there must be something added to auto-erotism – a new psychical action – in order to bring about narcissism.”[126] To explain, the tendencies for narcissism were already present within Saturn which is perhaps exactly what gave him the confidence to take up his mother’s offer despite being the youngest and commit to the act of slaying his father, which no doubt required incredible bravery, self-assuredness, and courage on his part. What shifted the confidence into narcissism was the trigger: in this case his father’s prophecy. Here, Saturn’s psychic states had been re-wired, shifted, and caved onto themselves in order to process what he was told. Unfortunately for him, he had not been able to properly process, and had found himself stuck in a perpetual cycle that had eventually harmed him and those around him.

By understanding these factors, the decline of his mental state becomes clear as to why that might have happened: Saturn lives in a state of incredible repression of traumas and denial. The repression manifest into him literally ingesting the cause of his fear in an attempt to change his cemented fate. While he attempts to deny the future of his death, he simultaneously mourns himself as a dead man for the entirety of his existence, unable to love or allow himself to be loved by anyone outside himself. All his actions are done in the name of preserving himself, to keep himself alive and well, in power, to save himself from the total annihilation he was promised. Saturn is overwhelmed by his own fears and impulses. He had lost the ability to become a just and loved ruler as the mantle of kingship had been bestowed on him. He had lost the

[126] Ibid, p. 77.

ability to prove himself as a kind husband to his wife who had instead of cared for him, harbored grievances and bitterness against him. Lastly, he had lost the chance at fatherhood, having children who cared for him as much as he would have cared for them. Lacan explains this well:

> The double, retaining the object, also immediately introduces the death drive. The original function of the double (as the shadow and the mirror image) was "an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death' … and probably the 'immortal soul' was the first 'double' of the body. Yet what was designed as a defense against death, as a protection of narcissism – one's mortality is that *Ananke* which most immediately contradicts and limits the narcissistic wholeness – turns into its harbringer: when the double appears, the time is up. One could say that the double inaugurates the dimension of the real precisely as the protection against "real" death. It introduces the death drive, that is, the drive in its fundamental sense, as a defense against biological death.[127]

Goya's Saturn, represents the fearsome, all-consuming force of time that devours and spares no one, including, it seems, Saturn himself. It is an irony. Saturn runs from his own domain, a domain which he supposedly controls and understands better than anyone else and therefore should have more respect towards it and yet all he has done is attempt to defy and run away from his own domain, before the golden years announce themselves present and forcefully reap what was sowed. When encountered with the chance of death, his death drive awakens and renders him into an obsessive, desperate, and terrified monster.

Returning to the opening statement, one can re-iterate: Saturn is an inhabitant of the crypt. He is simultaneously a living and dead man, unable to confine himself to either plane, he's caught in an eternal cycle of both. "I pretend to keep the dead alive,

[127] Dolar, Mladen. "'I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night': Lacan and the Uncanny." *October* 58 (1991): 5–23. https://doi.org/10.2307/778795., p. 23.

intact, *safe (save), inside me,* but it is only in order to refuse, in a necessarily equivocal way, to love the dead as a living part of me, dead *save in me.*"[128] He is quite a literal depiction of many of the traumas, fears, and anxieties the human species might possess: cannibalism, castration, generational trauma, and insanity amongst other issues. Instead of being symbolic words, these actions manifest in the story such as the act of castration as he had quite actually cut apart and castrated his own father, for example. He represents all the repressed feelings of anger, paranoia and trauma within the Self. He attempts to live in a fantasy where all goes according to his own wishes for "a fantasy *does not coerce,* it does not impose, as Reality does."[129]

Saturn is perhaps the most prominent subjects of the grotesque as a mode of art. Saturn is an inhabitant of the crypt; and the subjects of the grotesques are, I think, all in a manner inhabitants of the crypt for they are a reflection of the human psyche. Traumas being projected visually to the viewers, instead of remaining purely theoretical, in a manner that is so jarring and profound to the viewer. The grotesque proves true to its etymology and returns to its roots: the crypt. There are conditions to identify the crypt, however: "The crypt must always incorporate *more than one* and behave toward it in *more than one way. More than one:* the secret of the cryptophore must be shared, at least with a "third"; that is what makes a secret a secret. *More than one way:* the incorporated third is held *in* so as to be crossed *out*, kept alive so as to be left for dead."[130] It can be assumed that the 'third' here is the viewer for the grotesque artwork

[128] Derrida and Johnson, "FORS", p. 71.

[129] Ibid, p. 73.

[130] Derrida and Johnson, "FORS", p. 71.

possesses a secret it would like the audience to decode. It is a slippery slope, however, for while attempting to understand the secret of the subject depicted or even some might go further and attempt to pin it to the artist, the viewer finds himself unveiling his own secrets, reflecting on what is essentially his own psyche portrayed in brushstrokes. This creates a turmoil: the viewer becomes torn between feeling sympathy for the victim of the grotesque or combatting his own feelings of unease and uncertainty.

In the grotesque, what is within is unapologetically pushed outwards and hung on the walls for the world to see. This provides a unique experience for the audience, for everyone looking at the same artwork may feel the same emotions of terror and anxiety, even disgust sometimes, towards what is in front of them yet find themselves in a completely personal experience going no further than the distance between the viewer and the artwork, reflecting on their own traumas and fears that differ from person to person. The underground, buried crypt is dug out and unearthed from beneath the surface, fossilized and preserved in a public affair. Saturn could not escape his fate and was annihilated, and yet, he is now immortal in Goya’s brushstrokes.

CHAPTER VI

CATHARSIS

In the previous chapter, we discussed Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring his Child*. It was part of his *Black Paintings* series, which were produced towards the end of his life, when Goya, plagued by his declining mental health, had decided to surround himself and coat the walls of his very home with the horrors of war that had traumatized him. Each wall had its own subject with its own brand of terror. And yet, by admission of his son after his death, Goya had experienced pleasure, "in viewing daily in his house those pictures he had painted for himself with freedom in accordance with his own *genio*."[131]

That is catharsis, the complicated and much debated word that Aristotle used in his *Poetics* and left for scholars to decipher.

> A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious, and also as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work: in dramatic not narrative form, with incidents arousing pity and fear wherewith to accomplish its *catharsis* of such emotions.[132]

Etymologically, the word *catharsis* has somewhat stayed true to itself. Catharsis comes from the Greek word *katharsis* meaning "purgation" which is derived "from the medical context of healing and curing through expulsion and evacuation of harmful elements; it means getting rid of substances by removing their causes."[133] *Katharsis* is

[131] Morgan, "The Mystery of Goya's 'Saturn'", p. 43.

[132] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b24.

[133] Eva Schaper, "Aristotle's Catharsis and Aesthetic Pleasure," *The Philosophical Quarterly (1950-)* 18, no. 71 (1968): 131–43, https://doi.org/10.2307/2217511, p. 132.

derived from the verb *kathairein* which in turn means 'to cleanse' deriving from "a religious context of cleansing the spirit and sublimating the emotions in order to prepare for or achieve a state of exaltation."[134] A notion of purity attaches itself to the word, demanding to be achieved in whatever shape or form the process may manifest itself. It is here that Aristotelian catharsis becomes a mystery, for what are the implications behind his catharsis? How does one achieve tragic catharsis? What does aesthetic catharsis bring to the viewer?

Aristotle mostly focused on catharsis as a product of a Greek tragic drama, however, tragic catharsis rings true in other contexts too. This chapter aims to explore the relationship between the grotesque and catharsis, for the grotesque celebrates the tragedies of life and chooses to showcase them explicitly in its art forms and therefore, by Aristotelian logic, catharsis follows and becomes an intrinsic feature of the grotesque which renders it as a profound and moving, if not disturbing, art form.

The first understanding of catharsis highlights catharsis as a process of clarification or enlightenment. "Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune."[135] According to Aristotle there is a certain pleasure gained from understanding or learning something, particularly through the process of recognition when the viewer finally connects the pieces of the puzzle which seemed to be haphazardly thrown in front of him only to realize that the parts have been meticulously placed just as the artist had intended. "In tragedy," O.B. Hardison claims,

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[134] Schaper, "Aristotle's Catharsis and Aesthetic Pleasure," p. 132.

[135] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1452a29.

"this enlightenment is associated with both our discovery of how the relationship between incidents and universals and with our ascertainment of how things come about."[136] The big picture finally comes into view when the dots connect and the viewer is overcome with a sense of satisfaction and wonder as he combs through the information made available to him. It is equal parts wonder as the viewer considers how is it possible for him to overlook details that are revealed to be crucial, realization as the information finally makes sense, satisfaction as the viewer finally understands where the plot seems to be gravitating towards, and finally dread as understanding dawns on viewers of the tragedy about what fate will present them as part of the tragedy. This interpretation of catharsis focuses on the pleasurable aspect of it, rendering it one-dimensional. By this interpretation, catharsis is a delightful experience, not particular to tragedy; a mental challenge to compete and beat.

The second understanding of catharsis offers a darker interpretation: "The second point of view, catharsis as emotional purgation or therapeutic relief, assumes that pity and fear are, in many respects, disturbing and uncomfortable emotions. Therefore, they should be eliminated."[137] In this context catharsis is the process in which the viewer processes the disturbing emotions of pity and fear and by exposing themselves to an artwork that elicits such emotions, they are able to understand and remove such emotions from themselves allowing for feelings of relief and rejuvenation to take place. This seems closer to the sense of *katharsis* used by Aristotle, for it is seen as a process of purgation and expulsion of harmful substances (emotions) in order for

[136] Quoted in Kruse, Noreen W. "The Process of Aristotelian Catharsis: A Reidentification." *Theatre Journal* 31, no. 2 (1979): 162–71. https://doi.org/10.2307/3219373, p. 164.

[137] Kruse, "The Process of Aristotelian Catharsis," p. 164.

the body to resume its proper functioning. It implies the undergoing of a sort of cleansing of the spirit, mind, soul, and eventually body, for the consensus is that once the mind is cleansed and purified, the body can be too. This definition limits catharsis within the confines of a single process. It could be considered too narrow, but it certainly has the problem of seemingly producing people who no longer feel pity—which would not be a good thing. We are looking for a deeper interpretation of catharsis, one that aligns with the complexities of the grotesque.

The third understanding of catharsis defines catharsis as a product of mimesis. Aristotle himself has advocated for the importance of mimesis:

> Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies. The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general; whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited. Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he.'[138]

The process of purgation and expulsion is very much involved in catharsis as well as the pleasure the viewer experiences from recognition courtesy of mimesis. To Aristotle this is a natural connection for: "First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated."[139] It is a instinctual matter; the

[138] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448b10.

[139] Ibid, 1448b5.

child learns their mannerisms by observing and imitating those around them, learns their speech by imitating the mouth movements and sounds of those teaching them, develops their identity by imitating what or who resonates most within them.

Plato had his reservations about mimesis. "Plato condemned mimetic art because he saw in it an emotional display which called for, and usually achieved, imitative audience reactions."[140] For Plato, mimesis generated artificial emotions prompted by the display in front of the audience. He believed the emotions displayed in a work of art directly affected the emotional make-up of the viewer who would allow themselves to be infected with them.[141] Aristotle vehemently disagreed. "For Aristotle the emotions which are undoubtedly felt are emotions created. According to him we do not simply take over or copy the emotions which are fictionally presented to us; we respond to the total structure of fictional events with emotions of our own, not with emotions caught by infection."[142] Experiencing tragic emotions is healthy for Aristotle for it allows the viewer to cleanse himself, and a constituent part of that is mimesis which enables the viewer to learn how to deal with emotive responses to real situations.[143] It is a learning experience, though that might seem paradoxical. Viewers understand that what is presented to them is not necessarily true, they can still choose to be affected by it. Like Edmund Burke's view of the sublime, it can be understood as a taste of the actual

[140] Schaper. "Aristotle's Catharsis and Aesthetic Pleasure," p. 142.

[141] Ibid, p. 142.

[142] Ibid, p. 142.

[143] Sarah E. Worth, "Aristotle, Thought, and Mimesis: Our Responses to Fiction," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 4 (2000): 333–39, https://doi.org/10.2307/432179, p. 335.

experience but from a safe distance. It is the same experience when one chooses to play a sad movie with the intention of shedding a few tears for emotional release. It is paradoxical because emotions such as sadness, pity, and fear, are considered negative and generally one tends to escape them and yet, one chooses to willingly expose oneself to the possibility of experiencing such emotions.

"Emotionally, we can be moved by mimetic events, knowing them to be mimetic, but our strong emotions do not preclude – and indeed they often enhance – our enjoyment of tragedy, and, more generally, of fiction. […] We usually try to avoid negative emotions is our "real lives" […], but these emotions generally enhance our enjoyment of tragedy."[144] Plato would have refuted this. To him, mimesis is an empty imitation the artist conjures up while the truth is the matter of philosophers.[145] Worth agrees with Aristotle's reasoning: "*Mimesis* is not an imitation of reality but a direct reference to it, in which we can come to understand reality more clearly. That we come to understand through *mimesis* is the basis of our pleasure in learning."[146]

The relationship between art and mimesis comes into play here. "The poet being an imitator just like a painter or other maker of likeness, he must necessarily in all instances represent things in one or another of three aspects, either as they are, or as they are said to be, or as they ought to be."[147] In this, Aristotle stresses the role of

[144] Worth. "Aristotle, Thought, and Mimesis: Our Responses to Fiction", p. 333.

[145] Plato, *Ion*, 532d.

[146] Worth, p. 335.

[147] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1460b.

imitation or mimesis into the different states an artwork can manifest, which he then confirms it further in *Metaphysics:* "All art is concerned with coming into being, with contriving and constructing how something may come into being."[148] So then, what is the role of tragic art?

"The distinct function of the tragic imitation… is the imitation of actions arousing pity and fear."[149] Aristotle has stressed these two emotions throughout his writings in relation to catharsis, therefore let us take a moment to properly understand them. Pity is evoked when, presented in the artwork, the audience feels compassion and empathy for the character's plight. Pity is evoked when the audience feels connected to the character and believes that their suffering is undeserved. Fear is more complex. Fear is evoked when the audience recognizes that the suffering and misfortune that the relevant character is plagued with could very much happen to oneself.

Taking *The Last Day of Pompeii* (Figure 13) as a case study, the painting offers a visual insight into the nuances of catharsis. The painting portrays the catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD burying the city of Pompeii in its wake. The artwork features a great deal of movement between the swirling and menacing orange skies with suffocating black clouds of soot and ashes in the background, the crumbling buildings in the middle ground, as well as the movement of people in the foreground attempting to run away from their doom. There are three phases of the impending doom shown: the first phase of fear and denial shown by figures such as the man and wife running away with their child. The couple is consumed by fear: fear of the eruption, fear

[148] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1025b25.

[149] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1452b30.

of nature, and more importantly, fear of death, as shown by the way they are actively attempting to escape their fate. The second phase of reluctant acceptance shown by the mother hugging her children close to her as they watch the destruction. The mother had realized the gravity of the situation as she huddles close to her children rather than attempting to run away. She had realized that death was near, and had decided to prioritize being near her family as they all meet their fate together. Finally, the third and final phase is depicted by the dead woman in the center of the painting whose child is right next to her. The mother has met her fate. The sublime and the grotesque are working hand in hand here: the subject of the painting being grotesque as it references the doom of an entire population and the destruction of an entire city, while the sublime is clear by the cause of such doom where the overwhelming force of nature ultimately dwarfs human strength and civilization. At the level of the viewer, the painting becomes a conduit for pity towards the helpless victims, as well as a conduit for fear towards nature's unstoppable power.

Figure 13. Karl Bryullov, *The Last Day of Pompeii,* 1830-1833, Oil on Canvas, 485 x 787 cm, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

"As the image of misfortune detaches itself from others and moves nearer to us, we begin to feel fear. In other words, Aristotelian pity is a less intense degree of personal fear. Actually, we only fear for ourselves, even though fear and pity are both egotistically grounded in the human instinct for self-preservation."[150] And so, the audience unconsciously mirrors the actions presented on themselves, they identify with the character and absorb their experience, returning to the previous point in which the emotions presented are copied, internalized, and felt in various degrees. "For Aristotle emotions *require* a body. They are not purely cognitive nor do they exist only as

[150] Kruse, "The Process of Aristotelian Catharsis: A Reidentification," p. 167.

affections of the soul. They do not exist separately from the soul. One can get angrier if one's body is already in an agitated state."[151]

It all goes back to the viewer for catharsis begins and ends with them.

> We might say that when emotions are aroused towards that which is fully transparent, they are transformed through seeing how it all hangs together. Such a response is no longer purely emotional, nor is it purely intellectual. It is an aesthetic response, and it is in this sense that 'aesthetic emotion' and 'aesthetic understanding' indicate the same phenomenon. Catharsis can only happen to someone who in the presence of a work of art accepts the role of an aesthetic spectator.[152]

To experience catharsis, the viewer must already come in accepting their role. The artwork can give rise to feelings within the audience; however, the feelings must already be present within the viewer. "The audience is, as it were, the ultimate source or definition of pity and fear. Pity and fear exist as pity and fear only insofar as the pathetic and fearful are such to mankind, just as the ridiculous is ridiculous only by virtue of what is ridiculous to mankind."[153] Catharsis acts as a function of mankind then.

In the previous chapter, we have seen the effect Goya's *Saturn* suggests. Morgan's testimony confirms this: "The painting still evokes in me an interior terror, a sense of isolation, loneliness, grief – this god on his knees, tearing apart his own child, enshrouded in a blackness that is like a psychic tar, clinging to me, clinging me to him,

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[151] Worth, "Aristotle, Thought, and Mimesis: Our Responses to Fiction", p. 336.

[152] Schaper, "Aristotle's Catharsis and Aesthetic Pleasure," p. 140.

[153] Harvey D. Goldstein, "Mimesis and Catharsis Reëxamined," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 4 (1966): 567–77, https://doi.org/10.2307/428782, p. 573.

to a drama of primal murderousness, so that now that I seem to be participant as well as viewer. I look upon him, and I am implicated in the crime."[154] Morgan is then aligned within the same sphere as Saturn, even going as far as seeing himself in the place of Saturn. Suddenly, he is the one committing the heinous act just as he is the one observing the heinous act being committed.

And while authors and interpreters fight over which emotions trump all, whether it be fear, pity, pleasure, satisfaction, Kenneth Burke provides (opinionatedly) the most interesting understanding of the emotions behind catharsis: "We take it, then, that tragic catharsis through fear and pity operates as a *substitute* for catharsis through love."[155]

Why love? The grotesque is concerned with love, or rather, heartbreak caused by the removal of love. They are two sides of the same coin, just as how in chapter two we have discussed the relationship between the sublime and the grotesque, and how they both exist within each other, tragedy and happiness do so as well. Aristotle has stressed how emotions require a body for they must have an outlet to manifest, and these two emotions happen to manifest in the same manner: "They differ in one notable respect: tears are a secretion, but laughter is not. To be perfectly symmetrical, we should match "laughter" not with "tears," but with "weeping." This alignment reminds us that *both* laughter and weeping can terminate in tears – but whereas mild weeping can cause tears, the same effect is produced only by intense, hysterical laughter."[156] Love, then, manifests in a different manner, not sufficient by mere tears.

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[154] Morgan, "The Mystery of Goya's 'Saturn.'", p. 39.

[155] Kenneth Burke, "Catharsis—Second View," *The Centennial Review* 5, no. 2 (1961): 107–32, p. 108.

[156] Burke, p. 108.

> Perfect catharsis would arise from a sense of universal love. Insofar as such a condition is not attained, the next best thing is a sense of radical pity that lies on the slope of tearful release. Fear is not directly cathartic; but it is cathartic indirectly, insofar as it sets up the conditions for the feeling of pity. Wonder is cathartic in that, whereas it is in the same spectrum with fear, it is on the other edge of the spectrum, being itself kind of "cleansed fear," like reverence.[157]

It is an emotion that transcends and combines other emotions. The feeling of pity and fear is rewarding because it is driven by sympathy (compassion or empathy), and love for our companions. And so, what happens when that love is ripped away? "Heartbreak *hurts* and rips open an otherwise ordered existence. Such gut-wrenching pain is here powerfully revealed as *neither* useless nor the dark fruit of simple failure. Rather the agony of heartbreak is a call to *wake up,* evolve, learn, and grow."[158]

Within the grotesque, the viewer is intentionally putting themselves in the position of heartbreak. Heartbreak is argued to be integral to the soul's wellbeing,[159] for it gives the individual a chance to evolve and mature. It is intentionally placing oneself in a place of discomfort, unease, tragedy, and pain in order to come out a better person. That is not to say heartbreak is limited to matters of romantic love; heartbreak extends beyond that. Just as it is the pain of losing a loved relationship, it is also the pain of losing a loved one, the pain of leaving a home, the pain of watching destruction and doom come upon one's reality, helpless and unable to do anything to prevent it. "Heartbreak is about psychic death, and the psyche will continue to die unless it

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[157] Ibid, p. 109.

[158] Susan Rowland, "Heart-Healing Heartbreak," ed. Ph.D. Ginette Paris, *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* 6, no. 3 (2012): 92–94, https://doi.org/10.1525/jung.2012.6.3.92, p. 92.

[159] Rowland, "Heart-Healing Heartbreak", p. 92.

responds to the two governing metaphors: to get educated and to evolve new patterns, new stories on being."[160] It is a painful process but an enlightening one at that for the emotions that cloud one's judgement as they are bottled and as they swirl in one's mind are purged through cathartic release allowing clarity to shine through.

What tragedy and the grotesque allow is the opportunity for the viewer to experience this heartbreak from a safe distance, and to involve oneself in a social community defined by care, by empathy and compassion. Also, the viewer gets to join that community in their position as wronged or pitiable, and thus a position that demands justice or help. These are position of moral weight, placing a duty of obligation on others. As the artwork hangs on the wall, the viewer can slowly undergo and process their feelings from a few steps away, without actually experiencing the tragedy first hand. Every individual has a unique manner in which they do so. Sometimes it is observed physically, in the way one's eyes might widen as they recoil backwards, or how one's hand might reach to rub one's neck uncomfortably, but it can also be the parting of one's lips as they stare in fascination. This all depends on the viewer and the manner in which they process information given to them. By willingly experiencing heartbreak, the viewer gives themselves a chance to grow, become enlightened, and formulate a deeper understanding and connection to the world around him. The safety bubble of familiarity is burst. This requires strength. Heartbreak comes suddenly most of the time, which does not give the individual experiencing it the time to accept or prepare for it and so it is not common to voluntarily aim to experience it. And so, this fits within another definition of catharsis explained by Norman Dewitt:

[160] Rowland, p. 94.

"Catharsis comes from the verb *kathaira* which refers to the pruning of trees and vines. […] Pruning is both a taking-away and a shaping, a way of making material usable."[161]

And while it is more common to experience heartbreak suddenly, it can also come slowly and deliberately in the way one realizes slowly their cherished partner is falling out of love with them, or the resigned acceptance of a terminal diagnosis of a loved one, or possibly, the slow awareness of losing your childhood features, your innocence, your childlike wonder, your naivety, your spirit. However, just as the pruning of trees, this is essential for the individual to grow and mature, become hardened as life throws obstacles in his way that he must learn to navigate without a safety net. In a way, we are all destined for heartbreak. That is the inevitability of it.

[161] Goldstein, "Mimesis and Catharsis Reëxamined", p. 575.

CHAPTER VII

APOLLO & DIONYSUS

We begin by returning to Nero's *Domus Aurea*, where the grotesque was rediscovered, and where Nero had a statue of himself, over thirty meters tall in bronze with a sun halo around his head, deifying himself into one of the most respected and revered gods of the pantheon — Apollo.

The god was Apollo, the symbol of order, harmony, and eternal youth. This is important to note if only to highlight how ironic the entire situation is. Nietzsche had many thoughts on Apollo:

> He is the 'luminous one' through and through; at his deepest root he is a god of the sun and light who reveals himself in brilliance. 'Beauty' is his element, eternal youth his companion. But the lovely semblance of the world of dreams is his realm too; the higher truth, the perfection of these dream-states in contrast to the only partially intelligible reality of the daylight world, raise him to the status of a prophetic god, but equally certainly to that of an artistic god.[162]

To put it simply: Apollo is structured, orderly, rational, clear, and idealized. Apollo is guidance, a shining light through the dark, a manner in which to impose clarity upon the chaos of existence. Apollo is the light at the end of the tunnel, the answers to the questions. He is black and white in contrast to Dionysus who is grey.

Apollo is the guiding spirit behind the Academies of Fine Arts whose aim was to impose an idealized style and version of art that profits the dominant ideology its patrons wanted to promote. This claim is not difficult to prove from the statements of leading figures in the academies such as Friedrich Anton von Heinitz's while

[162] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, p. 120.

addressing the academy in Berlin: "We pursue no other aim than to enhance national industry. Just as France and England in the Western and Italy in the Southern provinces of Europe have made art an important source of income, so we intend to make Berlin and the Prussian State fit to become a store-house of art for the Northerly parts of our continent,"[163] in which he has made it clear they would plan funding as they viewed the academy as a source of national income, another industry to profit from. The serene landscapes, heroic narratives, and idealized depictions of human figures served to reinforce the values of stability, progress, and power.

On the other end of the spectrum lies Apollo's brother, Dionysus. Dionysus is unrestrained, distorted, intense, and ambiguous. Dionysus is chaos, ecstasy and transformation, visceral. If Apollo is the light, Dionysus is the darkness. If Apollo is the answers, Dionysus is the questions. That is the dichotomy Nietzsche presents as a paradigm to understand forms of art: "In the realm of art [Apollo and Dionysos] represent stylistic opposites which exist side by side and in almost perpetual conflict with one another, and which only once, at the moment when the Hellenic 'Will' blossomed, appeared fused together in the work of art that is Attic tragedy."[164] In Nietzsche's writings, Apollo and Dionysus are in conflict: "Bacchus' art displeases Apollo because it has no form, no beauty, and offends by its grotesque excessiveness."[165]

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[163] Nikolaus Pevsner, "Classical Revival, Mercantilism, and Academies of Art," in *Academies of Art Past and Present* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 140–89, p. 154.

[164] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 119.

[165] Alice Fiola Berry, "Apollo versus Bacchus: The Dynamics of Inspiration (Rabelais's Prologues to Gargantua and to the Tiers Livre)," *PMLA* 90, no. 1 (1975): 88–95, https://doi.org/10.2307/461351, p. 93.

This is obvious when examining the paintings of Saturn we have explored in previous chapters (Figures 11 and 12). Rubens' Saturn sits constrained within the frame of the image. The proportions are balanced with Saturn's figure being the clear focal point. The anatomy of his figure is idealized: his muscles are those of a healthy and classically athletic man, taut with tension and restraint as he holds his victim firmly, despite his obvious aging indicated by his graying hair. The bodies of both figures are fully depicted, instead of bleeding out from the sides. Saturn is calculating, determined, and in control. Goya's Saturn sits on the other end of the spectrum.

In Goya's painting there is an imbalance. Saturn stands set back from the frame, half of his body disappearing from the painting's boundary, the other half obscured within the shadows as Saturn attempts to hide himself in the darkness to escape his crime. The figures of him and his child are distorted and decaying. By understanding both of these modes, it becomes clear where to categorize these paintings. But perhaps what cements their classification the most is their expressive mood. Rubens' Saturn is truly Apollonian because it allows the viewer to maintain a distance emotionally and gives him the room to intellectualize and conceptualise the colourful and perspectival scene depicted in front of him. Goya's Saturn is Dionysian through and through because it resists knowledge of form, space and colour, it works through its intensity, allowing the exploration of madness, destruction, and despair. Rubens resonates with the mind while Goya resonates with the heart. "As a philosophical attitude, the Apollonian is negative, skeptical, and ironic. As an aesthetic attitude, it demands "choses belles, eleguantes et perfaictes" […]. The art that Bacchus produces is uncontrolled, unrestrained – what Apollo terms the, "ridiculous and the monstrous.""[166] Rubens'

[166] Berry, p. 92. "ridicules et monstreuses"

Saturn would look at Goya's with disgust and pity, wondering how a titan could fall into such a state.

But why? Why such a harsh distinction? Unfortunately, such are the rules that govern the art world whose pretentiousness and superiority had come to define it:

> It is only in a literary and artistic field which has achieved a high degree of autonomy […] that all those who mean to assert themselves as fully fledged members of the world of art, and above all those who claim to occupy the dominant positions in it, will feel the need to manifest their independence with respect to external powers, political or economic. Then, and only then, will indifference with respect to power and honours […] and distance with respect to the powerful and their values be immediately understood, and even respected, and therefore rewarded.[167]

Academic art, as Karl Marx might suggest, becomes a means of perpetuating ideology,[168] melting the solidity of tradition into the air of fleeting fashions and shallow meanings.[169] It is up to the viewer to look beyond Apollo's blinding light and golden tint to understand.

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[167] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Conquest of Autonomy: The Critical Phase in the Emergence of the Field," in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 47–112, p. 61.

[168] Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 'The Ruling Class and The Ruling Ideas. How the Hegelian Conception of the Domination of The Spirit in History Arose'. In *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels Collected Works*, translated by Richard Dixon, Vol. 5. Marx and Engels, 1845-47, 59-62. New York: International Publishers, 1976. [1845]

[169] Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," Communist Manifesto (Chapter 1), accessed December 23, 2024, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#:~:text=All%20that%20is%20solid%20melts,entire%20surface%20of%20the%20globe.

The Dionysiac and Saturnian temperament aim to challenge these notions. Goya's choice of Saturn as a figure in itself is a thought-provoking one. In chapter 4, we have discussed the psychological nuances the figure of Saturn presents which make him such a complex character. With his dual nature, Saturn had managed to pseudomorph into a character invested in meaning. "Like melancholy, Saturn, that demon of the opposites, endowed the soul both with slowness and stupidity and with the power of intelligence and contemplation. Like melancholy, Saturn menaced those in his power, illustrious though they might be, with depression, or even madness."[170] Perhaps Goya had seen himself whether consciously or unconsciously within the Saturnian temperament. His *Black Paintings,* including *Saturn*, were never supposed to see the light of day having been painted within the intimacy of the walls of his house, and in fact were only exhibited to the public after his death. This suggests that the artist never strived for approval of these works, choosing to reject the ideological propaganda his state was trying to impose, especially in a time of war and unrest, and instead reinvent his traumas in a raw and visceral manner. Unlike the serene and celebratory narratives of academic art, Goya's paintings offering no comforting illusions. They expose the monstrous nature of artistic production, which, like Saturn, consumes its own past in an endless cycle of re-invention.

If Goya were to exhibit his work during his time, would it have been received with open arms? That is up for debate. Would this work have been as revered as it is today? In a time where a specific ideology was rampant and an imposed style was

[170] Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, "Part II: Saturn, Star of Melancholy," in *Saturn and Melancholy* (Netherlands: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1979), 127–214, p. 159.

encouraged, Goya's work may have been scorned, due to its haunting pessimism and radically style. "Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different lifestyles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes."[171] Bourdieu explains this further as a matter of classes, social constructs, and hierarchy: "At stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of living, that is the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness."[172] The vicious intolerance towards other tastes and the adamant negation of what is different creates this superiority complex and a need for conformity in order to be respected:

> The artist agrees with the 'bourgeois' in one respect: he prefers naivety to 'pretentiousness'. The essential merit of the 'common people' is that they have none of the pretentions to art (or power) which inspire the ambitions of the 'petit bourgeois'. Their indifference tacitly acknowledges the monopoly. That is why, in the mythology of artists and intellectuals, whose outflanking and double-negating strategies sometimes lead them back to 'popular' tastes and opinions, the 'people' so often play a role not unlike that of the peasantry in the conservative ideologies of the declining aristocracies.[173]
> The normal human being (those of non-'noble' or non-'aristocratic' status) will not find himself urgently or naturally gravitating towards the grand masters.[174]

In this thesis, we take the grotesque artist to be the Dionysian artist. His job is to make the Grotesque grotesque enough to be compelling, fascinating, and repulsive

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[171] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 56.

[172] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 57

[173] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 62

[174] Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in *Art and Culture*, 3–33 (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 18.

simultaneously. By doing so, he must liberate himself from the rigid rules and careful guidance of academic training, Apollonian training, where perfection and immortality are intensely sought after. Instead, he accepts dissolving of known boundaries, the murkiness of the horizon, and the dissolution of a black-and-white world-view. "Finally, just as dissolution of identity is both horrible and pleasurable, so equally knowledge that our identity is an illusion doomed imminently to be dissolved is both attractive - which explains partly the appeal of tragedy – and repulsive."[175]

If that is the case, then can the immortal brothers cooperate? As we have seen constantly in previous chapters, there is always a duality. Apollo and Dionysus can co-exist, just as the grotesque and the sublime do, and pleasure and tragedy do: "Although these two impulses are in some sense opposed to each other, they generally coexist in any given human soul, institution, work of art, etc. (although one will usually also be dominant). It is precisely the tension between the two of them that is particularly creative."[176] Just as works of art can be Apollonian or Dionysian, Academic or Grotesque, they can also be both. Thus it is no surprise that the grotesque does find a place, a somewhat marginal place, within the academic tradition.

The Raft of Medusa (Figure 14) by Theodore Gericault is a great example. The painting depicts a scene in a stormy sea in which men struggle to stay alive and afloat aboard a makeshift raft. The painting is dramatic, the lighting is harsh, the stark contrast of light and shadow illuminating key figures such as the man at the top waving a cloth for help. The painting is layered, with the background showing the cloudy skies and turbulent seas as a fast-approaching wave seems to be making its way to the barely

[175] Raymond Geuss, "Introduction" In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings,* p. xix.

[176] Geuss, "Introduction" In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings,* p. xi.

afloat raft. The middle ground and foreground of the painting is where one must focus. The painting is a visual of the relationship between life and death. The foreground is strewn with corpses, sprawled over the edge of the raft, despair and grief are rampant as suggested by the grieving man, in the traditional pose of the melancholic, who holds tightly onto a lifeless body lest it fall into the waters, never to be properly buried or seen again. The middle ground of the painting is where life seems to have a chance to be re-born, figures huddling close to each other, raising each other, cooperating, with the hopes that the distant ship would finally see them and rescue them after what felt like a lifetime at sea. Here, hope and desperation overtake the individuals who decide to huddle into a collective for the greater good of everyone. Despite such an intense and dark scene, Gericault executed this painting with the precision and technicality of an academic master. Such is how the Apollonian image is manifested: the technical mastery is seen in the rendering of the bodies with Gericault's meticulous attention to anatomy and detail. The lifeless corpses in the foreground are pale and greying, limbs stiff and contorted in ways uncomfortable for the living man, with the utmost realism. The painting is strictly structured with the subjects of the painting confined to two carefully mapped out pyramids, in which the progression of emotions from despair at the base to hope at the apex, a visual manifestation of how hope rises within the individual, which confirms the Apollonian need for intellectual coherence and narrative clarity. The Dionysian spirit is manifested in the emotional intensity and the energy the painting presents. The painting captures raw and visceral emotions through the faces and expressions of the individuals – despair, hope, desperation, grief – that have the ability to shake humans to their very core. The themes of death and decay are apparent so are the themes of instinct and survival. The energy is tumultuous with the frantic

energy of the survivors on the raft and the wild, turbulent forces of nature, awe-inspiring and fear inducing sublime, reducing their chances of survival. Overall, the Apollonian seems dominant, partly because the stable composition and meticulous technique force it that way, and partly because of the bright distant skies and the just visible hope of rescue on the horizon.

Figure 14. Theodore Gericault, *The Raft of Medusa,* 1819-1819, Oil on Canvas, 491 x 716 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris.

Re-birth can only happen after death, life after decay. Dionysus embraces this as does the grotesque. “This world... eternally changing, eternally flooding back… a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this my Dionysian world of

the eternally self-creating and eternally self-destroying."[177] In *The Raft of Medusa*, the sacrifice and death of the many men shown was needed in order for the rest to have a chance at survival. Such is the harsh reality presented, in which sacrifices are sometimes necessary and unavoidable.

But the Dionysian does not stop there. It is not limited to only works of art. Nietzsche's philosophy extends beyond:

> There is thus a series of things referred to as "Dionysian" for a variety of reasons. The *state* is Dionysian because it enables the perception of Dionysus; the *art* is Dionysian because it is a product of this state, or because it produces *representations of* Dionysus; the reality, however, is called Dionysian because it is the reality which is *represented by* Dionysus. The Dionysian state and the Dionysian art are very far from the Dionysian reality, as it is visible from the fact that when the satyr chorus projects the presence of Dionysus "himself" we are already in the realm of "Apollonian" image.[178]

Under his patronage, the grotesque flutters its wings, or bares its fangs. The Dionysian artist understands these sacrifices. The Dionysian artist will willingly put himself into harsh situations despite the backlash he might receive. "The Dionysiac artist presents the essence of everything that appears in a way that is immediately intelligible, for he has command over the chaos of the Will before it has assumed individual shape, and from it he can bring a new world into being at each creative moment, but *also the old world* with which we are already familiar as phenomenon."[179]

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[177] Yelena Mazour-Matusevich, "Nietzsche's Influence on Bakhtin's Aesthetics of Grotesque Realism," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* Volume 11, no. 2 (2009), https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1472, p. 2.

[178] Henry Staten, "'The Birth of Tragedy' Reconstructed," *Studies in Romanticism* 29, no. 1 (1990): 9–37, https://doi.org/10.2307/25600820, p. 16.

[179] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 122.

The goal is not to present art that is perfect and polished, but art that has more room for interpretation and development. Therefore, the grotesque is not in a state of *complete*. "Whatever is, does not *become*; whatever becomes *is* not… Now they all believe, even to the point of desperation, in being."[180] We have seen this notion previously with Bakhtin and the grotesque body, and while explaining the metamorphic nature of the grotesque in the first chapter. It cannot be confined if it is constantly transforming. "[The Grotesque] stand at a margin of consciousness between the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, calling into question the adequacy of our ways of organizing the world, of dividing the continuum of experience into knowable particles."[181]

But that is the main point, isn't it? The fear of death, the rapid descent into the obsolete. There is an unhealthy obsession with the concept of immortality, particularly within those of the academy as they pushed for the use of the Grand Manner which was associated with dignity and pride.[182] The subjects of the paintings would be mainly mythological figures, religious figures, or anyone deemed important at some point in time, attempted to arrest them in a prime and perfect state (case in point: Rubens'

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[180] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 16.

[181] Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 3.

[182] Gill Perry, "'Mere Face Painters"? Hogarth, Reynolds and Ideas about Academic Art in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *Academies, Museums and Canons of Art*, edited by Gill Perry and Colin Cunningham, 124–68. Art and Its Histories (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with The Open University, 1999), p. 127.

Saturn). Old men are strangely athletic, victims are strangely beautiful. That is all to distract from the overwhelming fact that looms overhead: "The natural condition of art is not to live on but to perish – usually sooner, almost inevitably later. We deceive ourselves in claiming that art is an undying repository of memory, that it comes to us intact from the past, and that it is in our power to preserve it for posterity."[183] It is a notion supported by the society we live in, one that is obsessed with beauty and eternal youth, much as what Apollo represented. But decay is rampant, if not sooner then later, and the decay will give light to the shallowness and emptiness of such perfect forms, in which the foundations will crumble and fall. They are not meant to withstand time. Dionysus knew this. Saturn was a victim of this. Goya, in his instability, understood this.

The dichotomy between Apollo and Dionysus, between academic precision and grotesque chaos, between the immortalized perfection of Rubens and the visceral decay of Goya, lies at the heart of artistic creation. The grotesque, with its Dionysian temperament, does not exist to oppose the Apollonian per say, but instead to challenge its dominance and acknowledge the relationship between creation and destruction. The polished perfection of Apollo may be blinding, but it is often the rawness of Dionysus that resonates most deeply because it embraces impermanence and transformation. The grotesque artist navigates the boundaries of beauty and monstrosity, order and chaos, and chooses the ratio in which to employ them. By refusing to submit entirely to the demands of the ideological imperatives that dominate, artists like Goya become timely in their specific critique of contemporary modes and timeless in their appeal to subliminal desire for the hidden and their ability to provoke, challenge, and inspire. It is

[183] Gary Schwartz, "Ars Moriendi: The Mortality of Art," *Art in America,* November 1996, 72–75, p. 72.

a nod to the inevitability of things: to the deteriorating objects we hold dear: a blanket our grandmother has woven that becomes torn with use, the teddy bear we hugged as children that begins falling apart at the seams, the notes we exchanged with friends that become crumpled and smudged with time, the photographs we store in albums and boxes that become folded at the edges, delicate to the touch. To the crumbling empires that thought they were immortal: the destruction of the buildings, the demolishing of the gardens, the burying of neighborhoods underneath layers of ground. Most importantly, however; is the acknowledging of our aging bodies: the cracking of our joints with each movement, the soreness of our backs and necks, the fading of the color of our hair with each passing day.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

To this day, I have not had the privilege of seeing Goya's *Saturn* in person. It makes me wonder, what kind of feeling and emotions would it elicit within me? Would I re-experience the same feelings I had upon seeing it through a screen for the first time? Would I experience something entirely different? Would it elicit a response so foreign to my being that I would only belatedly recognize my reaction? Or, through a second-hand view and sufficient research, have I been successfully exposed to it that I wouldn't react at all?

When asked if life was worth living Nietzsche replied that no it wasn't, but in tragic culture one can learn to tolerate the knowledge that it is not.[184] And so, one learns to cope with tragedy, learns to navigate it, live with it, express it. The grotesque here becomes the visual counterpart of tragedy, in which the grotesque artist evokes emotions with his art through violations of form, expectation, and order. It is a paradox, existing in the margins of representation where beauty and horror, fascination and repulsion, structure and chaos co-exist. Whereas Apollo's Academy operates within constraints, leading the audience towards resolution and a defined meaning, the grotesque refuses closure, lingering instead in ambiguity and the para. It thrives in liminality, disrupting boundaries between life and death, the human and the monstrous, the real and the unreal. In doing so, it forces the viewer to engage with tragic reality of the instability of existence itself. It becomes a mirror, reflecting back human fragility and the inevitable.

[184] Geuss, "Introduction" In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, p. xi.

Understanding the grotesque means shifting perspectives, as this thesis has shown. It is about understanding that beauty and ugliness are not necessarily enemies, but instead are intertwined elements of a greater whole. The grotesque reminds us that the world is not structured around symmetry and rigidity, instead it is also shaped by distortion, disruption, and contradiction.

Understanding the grotesque is to acknowledge that even pain and pleasure go hand in hand when leading to clarity. It is about recognizing that clarity sometimes through discomfort, that one must reflect on themselves and their complexities – the fears we suppress, the desires we hesitate to voice, the emotions that we avoid.

It requires courage realizing that one must sometimes face their own heartbreak despite the possibility of feeling sorrow and sadness, and that one must sometimes step out of the defined and safe constraints to discover what exists beyond the structured world into the unknown and uncertain, all in the name of growth. It was a shock, when writing this thesis, it went from theoretical and beyond reach to something that hit a little too close to home, what with witnessing the destruction of my own city in late 2024. Suddenly, a grotesque visual that was merely a painting, became a true reflection to a reality I was living prompting both heartbreak and catharsis.

In the grotesque's distortions we find truth; in its chaos, we find meaning. In its madness, we find clarity. In Dionysus, we find Apollo.

Understanding the grotesque gives us insights into other subjects as well, such as Art.

Art exists precisely in the tension between permanence and decay, preservation and erasure. Much like the grotesque, Art itself exists on a delicate balance of paradoxical forces pulling it from opposing sides. Preservation then becomes an act of

defiance, a courageous or perhaps foolish attempt to stand in the face of time. In doing so, we alter its essence, creating a paradox where preservation itself becomes a form of transformation. A restored fresco is never quite the same as the artist's original creation; a manuscript, once buried and rediscovered, carries both the weight of history and the loss of its original context. Not everything is saved; erasure is unfortunately unavoidable. Some works vanish deliberately, while others vanish more quietly, their relevance receding as new narratives take their place. Art is both a relic and a living entity shaped by those who encounter it, engage with it, and even re-interpret it.

"Tragedy consoles us and seduces us to continue to live, but the synthesis it represents is a fragile one."[185] The tragedy of it all remains that art is a mortal medium, created on a mortal plane, by mortal people, who deem themselves immortal to escape and deny the harsh reality: nothing is meant to last. Or perhaps, we can retract that statement and correct it: nothing well-loved can last. It would be forever marked by our touches of wear and tear, love, and, appreciation and therefore will breakdown over time. Such is the reality we live in: we cannot pause time; ichor does not run through our veins. We are too sentimental, too loving, too greedy, too volatile, too destructive, too attached. We cling desperately to the idea that something will last forever, that it *should* last forever lest it becomes forgotten, losing its essence in the process. It lasts; therefore, we last. Our very existence becomes tied to the object; our self-worth becomes measured by the amount of love and appreciation people show the object.

To create art is to embrace contradiction, to bring life to something that is both delicate yet enduring, transient yet timeless, in the hope that it lasts in memory for the end of time.

[185] Geuss, "Introduction" In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, p. xi.

But memory, like art, is fragile.

And just like Saturn, we desperately attempt to stop the inevitable, reaching for the gods only to fall.

And time moves on.

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