Burn It, Hide It, Flaunt It

Goya's Majas *and the Censorial Mind*

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Style suggests that it was during the later 1790s that Francisco Goya painted a nude that has become known as the *Naked Maja*, or *Maja desnuda*, a painting first documented in the collection of Manuel Godoy in November 1800. I would here like to consider this painting *(fig. 1)* in relation to a more general interest in things sexual that manifests itself in a variety of ways in late-eighteenth-century Spain. These trends blossomed in opposition to attempts made by both the monarchy and the church to repress certain themes—efforts that, not surprisingly, had the opposite effect of making these themes more appealing.[1] The structure of my argument has been anticipated by Richard Terdiman's book, *Discourse/Counter Discourse*, in which the author examines works of nineteenth-century French literature and art created to attack the hegemonic discourse of an increasingly bourgeois society, showing the extent to which such "counter-discourses" in fact participate in the dominant discourse.[2] I shall examine Goya's *Maja desnuda* and her clothed counterpart, the *Maja vestida (fig. 2)*, as an attempt to counter a dominant discourse that, in late-eighteenth-century Spain, protected itself through censorship. Coinciding with Terdiman, I will also illustrate the extent to which Goya's imagery was in fact influenced by the official censorial stance toward the female nude.

A context for the *Maja desnuda* is provided by social, literary, and visual manifestations in late-eighteenth-century Spain of a will to challenge traditional sexual taboos. The most frequently mentioned indication of this is the rise and dissemination among the upper classes of the custom of the *cortejo*, a single man who served as the escort to a married woman.[3] Contemporary opinion seems to have been divided between those who regarded the relationship as an innocent diversion and those who branded it outright adultery. The *cortejo* nevertheless became a stock character in the one-act comic interludes known as *sainetes*, and also inspired a wave of satiric literature. Despite the immorality that the custom potentially encouraged, those who wished to appear enlightened (*ilustrado*) would acquiesce in it, or so opines a character in the satirical theatrical interlude (qualified in its title as a "*saynete crítico*"), *The Good Temper of a Husband, and Enlightenment of These Times*:

> *Don Pedro [i.e., the* cortejo*] enters:*
> *They do whatever they please,*
> *but what does it matter to me?*
> *Isn't it all the rage to live like this?*
> *Well, I swear by fashion,*
> *for if I didn't*
> *I wouldn't be an* ilustrado *of the times.*[4]

Texts concerning the *cortejo* and his lady are circumspect about the actual nature of the relationship; here we learn only that "they do whatever they please," a statement that offers an implicit appeal to read between the lines of these very general descriptions. This circumspection is hardly surprising, since the *cortejo* was an accessory of the upper and upper middle classes, whose sexual activities were rarely acknowledged or discussed.

More graphic description of sexual practices would of necessity lead us away from the polite classes to the marginal society that inspired Moratín the Elder's *Art of Whoring* (*Arte de las putas*), perhaps the best known of several erotic verses penned (and circulated in manuscript) in Spain in the late eighteenth century. The earliest notice we have of this work is its inquisitional censure of 1777, in which it is "prohibited entirely, even for those who have the license to read prohibited books, because it is full of false and scandalous propositions, provocations to falsehoods injurious to all states of Christianity. . . ."[5] Moratín explains procedures ranging from bargaining for prices to protection against venereal disease in a work that pays tribute to Ovid's *Art of Love* as well as to the original ancient Greek definition of pornography as writing about prostitutes.[6]

By 1770, around the time that Moratín wrote the *Arte*, the poet was well established at the Madrid court; his circle of readers undoubtedly came from the upper and more educated classes. One might suggest that it was for a similar audience that Goya painted canvases that show women lounging, chatting, or sleeping, illustrated by *Gossiping Women (fig. 3)*. The dimensions of this and other, more explicitly erotic figures, such as *Sleeping Woman* (Madrid, McCrohan Collection) of about 1791, suggest that these or similar paintings may have belonged to a group of three overdoors documented

FIG. 1 Francisco Goya, *Maja desnuda*, ca. 1796, oil on canvas, 37⅜ × 74¾ inches. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

FIG. 2 Francisco Goya, *Maja vestida*, ca. 1805, oil on canvas, 37⅜ × 74¾ inches. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

in the collection of the Cadiz merchant Sebastián Martínez. Such a provenance would suggest the taste of at least one of Goya's patrons for sexually suggestive subjects.[7]

Yet lascivious women—particularly those without clothes—were not a subject universally favored by Goya's patrons. In 1762 King Carlos III ordered the First Court Painter, Anton Rafael Mengs, to assemble all the paintings in the royal collection that showed "too much nudity" so that they might be burned.[8] Since these included five paintings by Titian—a *Sleeping Venus* (now lost), two versions of *Venus and the Organ Player*, *Venus and Adonis*, and *Danae*—as well as works by Veronese, Annibale Carracci, Guido, and Rubens, we may be thankful that Mengs suggested an alternative solution of moving the paintings to his studio in the Casa del Reveque, where they were seen by Antonio Ponz in 1776.[9] The incendiary passion seems to have been hereditary, for in 1792 Carlos IV sought once again to burn the paintings. The reason for this reiteration of his father's threat has never been clarified, but given its suddenness and the date of 1792, one might wonder if Carlos IV intended these unholy pictures as an ex-voto, offered in response to the worsening situation of his Bourbon cousin, Louis XVI. This time it was the Marqués de Santa Cruz who intervened, suggesting that the works be moved to the Royal Academy, where they could be seen only by those with sufficient knowledge to appreciate their artistic merits.[10] During the reign of the intruder king Joseph Bonaparte, they were displayed in the Academy; but upon the restoration of the Spanish king in 1814 they were again sequestered. In 1827 they were transferred to what later became the Prado Museum.[11]

This censorship of the nude by Carlos III and Carlos IV was in no way functional, or motivated by a concern for the public good, since these paintings could easily be hidden from public view (a solution Carlos III had adopted as king of Naples, when confronted with a Roman statuette of a satyr fornicating with a goat that had been entrusted to the royal sculptor).[12] Instead, the censorship of both Spanish kings appears to have been motivated by a view of the world that confused image and reality, and in this coincided with the censorial rationale of the Inquisition.[13] To this way of thinking, naked women, whether painted or real, who displayed themselves to male eyes offended a divinely ordained cosmology. What saved the paintings was a rationalization of this view: in anticipation of nineteenth-century arguments against censorship, Mengs (and, we may suppose, the Marqués de Santa Cruz) asserted that between a real naked woman and a painting of one there *was* a difference, grounded in the painting's aesthetic qualities. Thus, if the paintings were placed under the care of the First Court Painter (or, subsequently, in the Royal Academy), to be seen only by those able to appreciate their higher qualities, their subject matter would become secondary and the threat they posed be mitigated. The need for censorship was apparently determined by the prospective audience; and perhaps it is not coincidental that the Spanish kings became concerned with the issue as the royal collections were opened to preferred visitors to Madrid.[14]

As paintings of female nudes were being escorted to the Royal Academy in the 1790s, another figure well known in political circles was busy assembling his own collection. This was Manuel Godoy, the royal favorite, First Minister and protector of the Royal Academy, and reputedly the lover of the queen. The earliest known reference to Goya's *Maja desnuda* is dated November 12, 1800, in a description of Godoy's collection by the academician Pedro González de Sepúlveda, who mentions it in a "room or cabinet in which hung various paintings of Venus."[15] Among other paintings mentioned were Velázquez's *Venus (fig. 4*; today known as the *Rokeby Venus*), its pendant (then attributed to Luca Giordano and recently identified with a painting, now lost, of the Venetian

FIG. 3 Francisco Goya, *Gossiping Women*, ca. 1785, oil on canvas, 23¼ × 57¼ inches. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection.

school),[16] and a copy of a *Sleeping Venus* by Titian, the original of which had been moved to the Royal Academy but is today lost. That no reference is made to the clothed *Maja* (that is, the *Maja vestida*) suggests that she had not yet been painted.

Godoy's cabinet reflects a preoccupation with those themes that were the targets of traditional censorship. The use of a private cabinet to exhibit paintings with nude figures was in itself not new: the Duke of Alba had such a *gabinete reservada* and Wilhelm Humboldt remarks in his Spanish diary that fine paintings by Rubens and Guido Reni were often relegated to darkened rooms.[17] But Godoy went further. The newly appointed grandee and promulgator of enlightened reforms flaunted his defiance of censorial attitudes by forming a gallery that isolated and objectified the female nude, scrutinizing her representation through the centuries. To complete the tradition, he apparently commissioned copies of well-known works, and enlisted the services of Madrid's foremost painter, Goya. What is more, the paintings in this room were not simply paintings with nudes; they were works that removed the nude from any narrative context. The nude was transformed into icon, enshrined and sequestered for private adoration in an obsessive manner that implicitly acknowledges the prohibitions Godoy sought to deny. If the discourse of sexuality was in fact defined in the West by the tradition of religious confession, as Michel Foucault has argued, Godoy's cabinet might be seen as an enlightened alternative to the confessional, where the male viewer obsesses about female sexuality behind closed doors, albeit without the benefit of priestly absolution.[18]

Given the highly controversial nature of its subject, it is likely that Godoy commissioned the *Maja desnuda*, for the royal favorite alone would have the power to challenge the taboos of his era. In so doing, he called upon Goya not only to respond to tradition, but also to pander to his compulsive scrutiny of the female nude. Isolated from narrative, the *Maja* is also removed from nature: the painting is not a response to external reality, but to the tradition of representing the unclothed female. For Goya, tradition and commission were equally loaded: for if one who contemplates such images risks damnation, what of one who paints such pictures? Scholars of seventeenth-century Spanish painting have long been aware of the controversial status of the nude in the aftermath of the Council of Trent. Velázquez's father-in-law, the theorist Pacheco, so abhorred the nude that he recommended that even the Christ Child appear dressed.[19] These prohibitive attitudes did not vanish with the (admittedly tempered) advent of the Enlightenment in Spain: during the annual awards ceremony of the Royal Academy in 1790, Joseph Manuel Quintana delivered a poem condemning the painter Lucidio, who had strayed from his call to commemorate great events and abandoned his sublime talent in order to paint effeminate works such as "Julia uncovering her breast, and Cupid sleeping in her arms."[20] Although Quintana formulates this as a criticism of effeminate tastes (implicitly contrasted with the commendable virility of historical subjects), it betrays a moralistic attitude toward the nude similar to that voiced by seventeenth-century writers.

Can we be certain that Goya and his contemporaries cast off the magical view that equated a painting of a nude with an evil reality? To answer this question with a definite yes would be to deny the religious tradition that was undoubtedly their heritage. And the *Maja* hardly suggests that Goya was at ease with his subject. This stilted representation of the attributes of female sexuality imposed on a Rococo doll intimates an inability to transcend the dogmatic relationship of sin and female flesh. It might also be noted, in defense of the hypothesis of Goya's discomfort with his subject, that it was never repeated: all his other representations of nudes are small-scale, private works—drawings, miniatures, or preliminary oil sketches.[21] That Goya did not hesitate to paint equally seductive women clothed (as in the overdoors mentioned above) suggests his adherence to the prevailing proscription not of lascivious females, but of nudes: even Carlos III had in his bedchamber a painting by Titian showing a clothed Venus looking at herself in a mirror supported by a single cupid (today lost).[22]

It is now generally accepted that the *Maja vestida (see fig. 2)* was painted several years—perhaps as much as a decade—after the *Maja desnuda*.[23] We recall that no mention of the *Maja vestida* is made in Sepúlveda's 1800 account of Godoy's collection; it is first recorded, with its pendant, in an 1808 inventory of Frédéric Quilliet as "Goya: Gitana nue/ Gitana habillée/tous deux couchées" (Goya: nude gypsy/ clothed gypsy/both lying down). The manner in which the paintings were related within the chamber remains a matter of speculation. According to Charles Yriarte, who credits his information to *quelques vieillards*, the *Maja desnuda* once hung on the verso of the *Vestida*, and the paintings were exhibited back to back, in the middle of the room. In 1914 Beroquí related the tradition that by means of a mechanism the *Maja vestida* could be lifted to reveal the *Maja desnuda*.[24]

Differences between the paintings support the hypothesis that these works were not intended to be seen side by side, but in succession. Although the poses of both figures are similar, the *Maja vestida* is brought forward to dominate the pictorial surface. Her multiple charms receive new emphasis: golden brocade slippers set off her delicate feet, a dark shadow calls attention to her pubis, her waist curves deeply inward to enhance the protrusion of her breast, her formerly blasé expression becomes more immediately intelligible as a slyly provocative smirk, set off against her raised elbow, now defined not as flesh, but as the intersection of two curves, in seeming anticipation of Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*.

The palette chosen for the *Maja vestida* corroborates her forthright character. Examining the canvas, one detects a mustard-tone underpainting (in contrast to the sepia tone

used for the *Maja desnuda*) to suggest that Goya's intent was from the outset to key up the tonality of the entire work. While in the *Maja desnuda* highlights are light gray, those of the *Maja vestida* are a far more strident yellow. In her costume, the warm tones of her mustard-colored jacket and rose sash dominate; even the green of the couch is now liberally tinged with yellow. These colors reinforce the presence of the figure against the pictorial surface, in contrast to the recessive and, comparatively speaking, timid presence of her nude counterpart.

The *Maja vestida* flaunts her sexuality, which becomes a masklike shell that perhaps originally opened to reveal the *Maja desnuda*—who would have been seen as innocent by comparison. In other words, by identifying female sexuality with gaudy artifice, the *Maja vestida* leaves the nude comparatively bereft of sexual power. In the context of such hyperbole, the nude is no longer threatening: her sexuality, which in comparison to the *Rokeby Venus* had seemed so blatant, has now been travestied by her flamboyant, costumed counterpart.

Paired with the *Maja vestida*, Goya's nude is removed from the traditions of Titian and Velázquez that engendered her; and her significance is altered as she becomes inseparable from her clothed pendant. When seen together with the *Maja vestida*, the nude, who had formerly seemed so flat, is perceived as set back into space, with the result not only that her timidity is emphasized, but also that the staged space essential to voyeurism is reinstated. In short, juxtaposition to the confrontational *Maja vestida* puts the *Maja desnuda* back in her place.

What, then, might we say about the *Maja vestida*? Doesn't she now become a threatening force, by assuming the role once assigned the *Maja desnuda*? I would argue not. The *Maja vestida* doesn't seem to be a real person: if the nude is taken as a standard, she is larger than life and the palette used suggests an artificiality that may well have been identified with masquerade. As mask, she invites dis-covery; an invitation that her owner might take up if he could unveil her at the pull of a rope. The second factor undermining her power is the identity that Goya gives her by dressing her. We recall that in 1808 she was inventoried as a gypsy, a member of a powerless and marginalized class: Goya returns to a ploy that he had used frequently in his tapestry cartoons, identifying female sexuality with a stereotypical character of the lower classes.[25] The implication is clear: sexuality is no longer a threat but a potential commodity.

What induced Goya to take the nude through the permutations here witnessed? I would suggest that the artist participated to some degree in the magical view of the world that underlay the censorial attitudes of late-eighteenth-century Spain. Accordingly, image and reality became confused, making it impossible for Goya to treat the female nude on a purely aesthetic level. This very contemporary nude, who so clearly addresses the viewer, becomes an embodi-

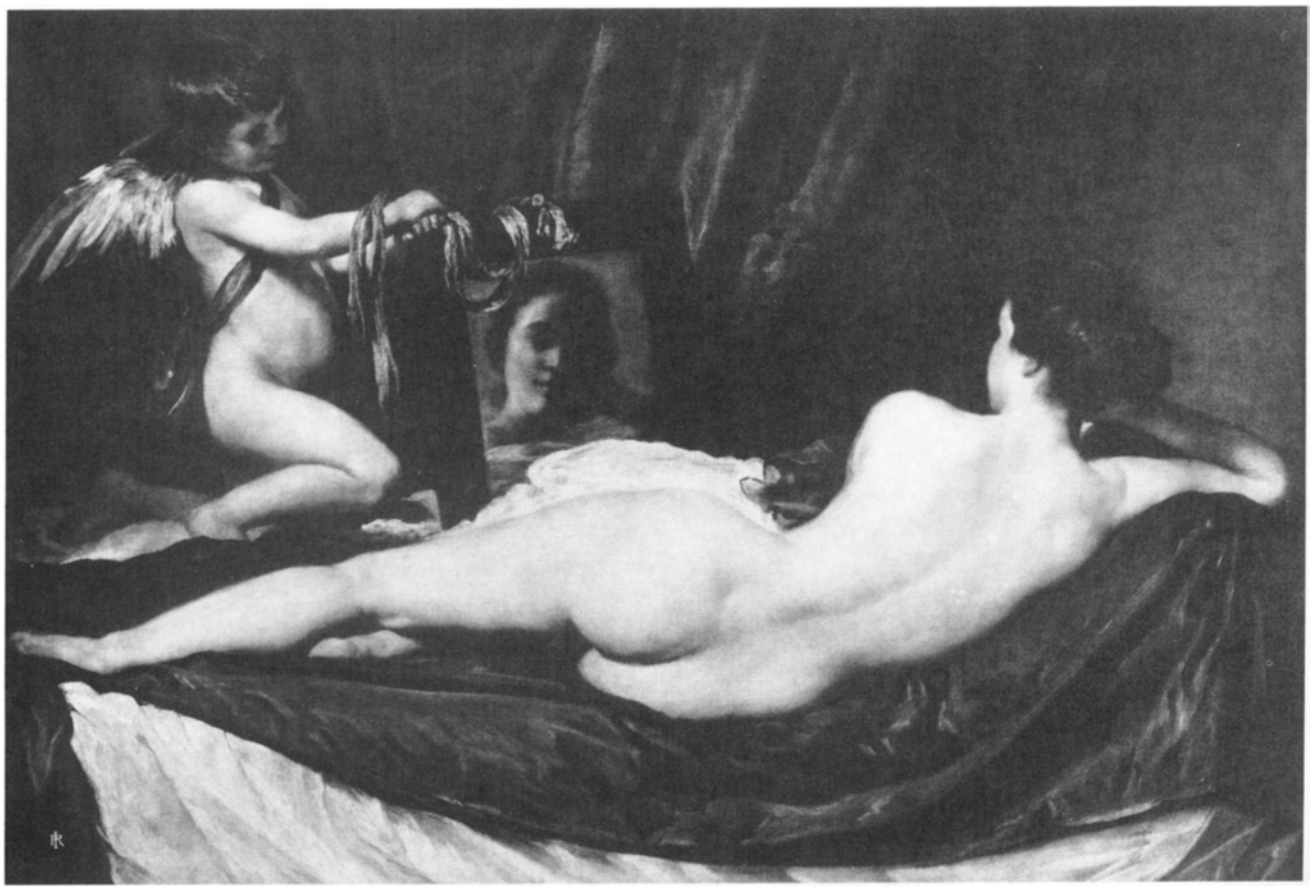

FIG. 4 Diego Velázquez, *The Toilet of Venus (Rokeby Venus)*, ca. 1650, oil on canvas, 48¼ × 69¾ inches. National Gallery, London.

ment of perversion somehow to be contained; as we have seen, Goya's solution is to dress her in a manner that identifies her sexuality with commodity and masquerade, thus divorcing it from the female form, which in turn is emptied of the sexual.

The subsequent history of the *Majas* attests to a demise of the magical view and a consequential transformation in the nature of censorship. The paintings were taken from Godoy's collection and in 1814 were found in storage with other goods sequestered during the Napoleonic War. Although it was not then known who had painted them, they were reported to the Inquisition and soon passed into its hands. About a month and a half passed before it was discovered that the painting of a "nude woman on a bed," was by Goya, as was "the woman dressed as a *maja* on a bed." (This is, notably, the earliest identification of the subject as a *maja*, an identification that implies the figure's lowly social class, forthright character, and contemporaneity.) Goya was ordered to appear before the tribunal to explain his motivation in painting these works; his testimony does not survive, and it is possible that the painter, still salaried at court, was able to circumvent an appearance.[26]

The Inquisitional intervention of 1814 illustrates a new form of censorship, now placed in the service of the state. The censor's main target was no longer the subject of the work, but rather the intentions of its creator. For in Restoration Spain, moral subversion was identified with treason, with the French, and with the fallen Godoy (who became, in effect, the scapegoat of the old order). This identification is illustrated by the initial denunciation of Goya's *Majas*. Its author opens by condemning the general collapse of morals under the government of the intruder king, Joseph Bonaparte:

These modern Attilas, not content with infusing the religious Spanish people with the venom of heresy that they held in their hearts, and that had produced as many ills as disgrace in the kingdom, to carry forth their execrable mission, tried to corrupt our customs with dishonest books, prints, and the most provocative and obscene paintings. . . .[27]

In all likelihood, the author of this statement had little idea that his investigation of "provocative and obscene paintings" would lead him to Spain's most senior court painter. To a more objective judgment, this in itself might have made him reconsider the ostensible correlation of sexual imagery and subversive politics; but this was a thought not to be entertained by the censorial mind.

Notes

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1. Scott Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking, 1987), 29.
2. Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteeth Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).
3. On the custom of the *cortejo*, see Carmen Martín Gaite, *Usos amorosos del dieciocho en España* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1972), chapter 1. On the appearance of the *cortejo* in Goya's tapestry cartoons, see Janis A. Tomlinson, *Francisco Goya: The Tapestry Cartoons and Early Career at the Court of Madrid* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 82–4.
4. Anonymous, *El Buen genio de un Marido, e Ilustración de estos tiempos/Saynete Crítico*, Ms. 14496, no. 39, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.
5. Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, *Arte de las Putas*, ed. by Manuel Fernández Nieto (Madrid: Ediciones Siroe, 1977), 13–14.
6. Kendrick, *Secret Museum*, 1.
7. Pierre Gassier and Juliet Wilson, *The Life and Work of Francisco Goya* (New York: William Morrow, 1971), cat. nos. 307, 308; Sarah Symmons, *Goya in Pursuit of Patronage* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1988), 142.
8. Narciso Sentenach, "Cuadros selectos condenados al fuego," *Boletín de la Real Academia de San Fernando*, 2d ser., 4, no. 57 (1921): 50.
9. Antonio Ponz, *Viaje de España* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1947), 6:533. Other works included were Veronese's *Venus, Adonis and Cupid*; Carracci's larger version of the same subject; *Hippomenes and Atalanta* by Guido Reni; *The Rape of the Sabines, Diana at Her Bath*, and *Bacchanal* by Rubens; and *Perseus and Andromeda, Juno, Palas and Venus*, and the *Judgment of Paris*, said by Ponz to be after designs by Rubens.
10. Sentenach, "Cuadros selectos," 46–48.
11. Pedro Beroquí, *Tiziano en el Museo del Prado* (Madrid, 1946), 153.
12. Kendrick, *Secret Museum*, 6.
13. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Censorship and the Creation of Heroes in the Discourse of Literary History," in *The Institutionalization of Literature in Spain*, ed. by Wlad Godzich and Nicholas Spadaccini (Minneapolis: Prism Institute, 1987), 239–40.
14. One result of the opening up of the royal collections was the publication of guides such as Richard Cumberland's *An accurate and descriptive catalogue of the several paintings in the King of Spain's palace at Madrid* (London: Dilly, 1787).
15. E. Pardo Canalis, "Una Visita a la galería del Principe de la Paz," *Goya*, 148–50 (1979): 308.
16. Duncan Bull and Enriqueta Harris, "The Companion of Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* and a Source for Goya's *Naked Maja*," *Burlington Magazine* 128 (September 1986): 648.
17. Isadora Joan Rose Wagner, *Manuel Godoy: Patrón de las artes y coleccionista* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1983), 317–18.
18. "On the face of it at least, our civilization possesses no *ars erotica*. In return, it is undoubtedly the only civilization to practice a *scientia sexualis*; or rather, the only civilization to have developed over the centuries procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret: I have in mind the confession." Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, Trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 58.
19. Julián Gallego, *Visión y símbolos en la pintura española del siglo de oro* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1987), 68–70.
20. "Lucidio, aquel Pintor cuyo gran Genio/Frutos tan excelentes prometia,/Y que á inmortalizar los hechos grandes/Solo parece que nacido habia/De algunos Sibaritas corrompidos/Por adular el gusto afeminado,/Su talento sublime ha abandonado,/Su robusto pincel y sus ideas./Y en vez de dedicarse a las acciones/De los antiguos ínclitos Varones,/Se encuentra enteramente embebecido,/Pintando á Julia descubierto el seno,/Y al Amor en sus brazos adormido. . . ." Joseph Manuel Quintana, "Epístola," in *Distribución de los Premios* (Madrid: Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, 1790), 87.
21. Cf. Gassier and Wilson, *Life and Work of Francisco Goya*, cat. nos. 366, 375, 696, 1682, 1688.
22. Harold Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian* (London: Phaidon, 1975), cat. no. L-27.
23. Relevant scholarship is summarized by Wagner, in *Manuel Godoy*, vol. 2, cat. nos. 246, 247. She proposes a date for the *Maja desnuda* of 1792–95 and for the *Maja vestida* of 1803–6. I am indebted to her research for the factual information on the paintings cited in this paragraph.
24. Charles Yriarte, *Goya* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1867), 89; Pedro Beroquí, "Adiciones y correcciones al catálogo del Museo del Prado," *Boletín de la Sociedad Castellana de Excursiones* 6 (1913–4), 502.
25. Tomlinson, *Tapestry Cartoons*, 102–3.
26. *Inquisición*, legajo 4499, no. 3, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid. The case is summarized by A. Paz y Melia, *Catálogo abreviado de la Inquisición* (Madrid: Archivo Histórico Nacional, 1947), 85.
27. Letter signed *Doctor Don Valentin Zorrilla de Velasco y Ollauri*, dated November 18, 1814, in *Inquisición*, legajo 4499, no. 3, Archivo Histórico National, Madrid.

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