

THE COMICS GRID

About Digital First Meta Grid Contribute Donate Links Banner

Enter keywords here Search

Georgian projections of French Revolutionary madness

BY JAMES BAKER ON JANUARY 9TH, 2012 NO COMMENTS



During the 1790s London's graphic artists used madness as a tool (among many) with which to explain away the purported rationality of the French revolutionary agenda (Porter, 'Reason, Madness, and the French Revolution', 1991).[1] By erecting counter-spectacles which confirmed Edmund Burke's reading of the French Revolution as a false-sublime,[2] these designs allowed ideological engagement to be efficiently sidestepped in favour of exaggerated and ridiculous expressions of displeasure.[3]



Gillray J., Petit souper, a la Parisienne; -or- a family of sans-culotts refreshing, after the fatigues of the day (20 September 1792, Hannah Humphrey) BM 8122 250 x 352" © The Trustees of the British Museum.

It was James Gillray (1756-1815) who engraved the classic image of revolutionary madness. Indeed his gruesome *Une petit Souper a la Parisienne* or *A Family of Sans Culotts refreshing after the fatigues of the day* was still being printed into the 1830s. Here French revolutionaries, male and female, young and old, gorge upon human limbs, organs and entrails. They degrade humanity and property alike by using them for seating and warmth. They preach liberty and equality as a barbarous creed.

Madness of course was embedded in Georgian visual culture. Popular classics such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* depicted the madness of consumerism in *Vanity Fair*; Gulliver's encounters with Laputian scientific mania in Book III of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* were well known; and Shakespeare's construction of madness in *Hamlet* and through the weird sisters in *Macbeth* played across the nation. Yet these traditions never reached the level of cannibalistic mania Gillray explores. Rather cannibalism was a novelty 'discovered' by Captain Cook during his first South Sea Voyage (from 1768 to 1771) if only described as socially dangerous by the third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1788-1797).

The Comics Grid
Journal of Comics Scholarship
ISSN 2048-0792



Contact us.
Subscribe to our newsletter.

Subscribe to our feed
Sponsor The Comics Grid and Your Logos
and Links Go Here.



The Comics Grid is archived by
Provided by:



This is The Comics Grid's QR code or 2D-barcode. It contains the address of our mobile site. If your mobile phone, computer or tablet has a barcode reader, simply snap this bar code with the camera and launch the site.

Articles by Contributor


























Jeff Albertson (1)




Cruikshank I., A republican beau. A picture of Paris for 1794 (10 March 1794, S. W. Fores) BM 8435 303 x 198" © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Cruikshank I., A republican belle. A picture of Paris for 1794 (10 March 1794, S. W. Fores) BM 8436 289 x 196" © The Trustees of the British

-  James Baker (4)
-  Roberto Bartual (7)
-  Casey Brienza (1)
-  Tiago Canário (1)
-  Esther Claudio (6)
-  Jason Dittmer (1)
-  Christophe Dony (1)
-  Kathleen Dunley (9)
-  Jonathan Evans (1)
-  Emily Goodhand (1)
-  The Grid (17)
-  Michael Hill (7)
-  Nicolas Labarre (6)
-  Gabriela Meján (1)
-  Nina Mickwitz (3)
-  Renata Pascoal (1)
-  Nicolas Pillai (1)
-  Jesse Prevoo (1)
-  Ernesto Priego (13)
-  Pepo Pérez (1)
-  Jacques Samson (1)
-  Greice Schneider (6)
-  Janine Utell (2)
-  Tony Venezia (7)
-  Peter Wilkins (1)

On Mendeley



My profile
on Mendeley

On Twitter

 The Comics Grid
ComicsGrid

ComicsGrid Have you seen? #OA ebook: @ComicsGrid Year One- direct link to ePub download: db.tt/9a05jvba more info: goo.gl/KwF1W #Grid1 # 3 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite

ComicsGrid @Robgog Hi! Good morning. We hope you are well and haven't given up on our interview! ;-) Cheers! 6 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite

jafurtado Print Book and E-Book Sales Feed Into Each Other, Says Lulu.com (DBW) digitalbookworld.com/2012/print-boo... 15 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite



Join the conversation

Museum.

This same edition also described cannibalism as a disease peculiar to feminine physiology. Thus while **Isaac Cruikshank's** *A Republican Beau* [BM 8435, 10 March 1794] indulges in infanticidal and cannibalistic tendencies (see the infant foot marked "for stew"), it is his partner, *A Republican Belle* [BM 8436, 10 March 1794], who represents a more striking exploration of cannibalistic madness. She stands, her clothes ragged and torn, her shoes worn through, as Liberty – indeed she is not dissimilar to [the statue bequeathed by the French to New York City in 1886](#).

Despite her appearance, she walks proudly, baring her gruesome animalistic teeth and worn features. Unlike her male counterpart, she carries the symbol of the Terror around her neck and as an earring. She wears three daggers as a crest, *en aigrette*, the band of her makeshift crown inscribed 'War War Eternal War'. And she holds a dagger in her left hand whilst with her other she carelessly fires a pistol at a passing man.

Madness is thus personified in the Belle in a multitude of ways. First, in an aesthetic sense, she is a barbarous but calm murderer, who has replaced the cross with the chop. Second, in a metaphorical sense, she exemplifies the perversion of power caused by the revolution. She strolls the streets, openly parading her politicisation and her power over men – her latest homicidal act a direct affront to accepted notions of patriarchy. And third, in an allegorical sense, she is Liberty (ironically here the anti-thesis of Britannia), the ruler of a society built around her which, if we look to the background of the image, delights in playing boules with skulls, leaving their dead to openly rot, and using images of regicidal decapitation to demarcate places of pleasure.

In short, much like the revolution which made her, she cannibalises reason, structure and morality.

NOTES

- [1] Porter's essay offers a classic account of revolutionary madness.
 [2] An argument central to his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).
 [3] Steve Poole has recently argued that extreme and unrealistic caricature is more politically ambiguous than the overt ambiguity generally attributed to the designs of James Gillray. He argues that these former images were so ridiculous that they were mostly likely to have courted ridicule of those propagating reactionary counter-revolutionary rhetoric. See Poole 2011.

REFERENCES

- Burke, E. (1790, Project Gutenberg edition 2005). *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, Vol. 03 (of 12) <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/15679>>. Accessed 6 January 2012.>
- Poole, S. (2011). 'Gillray, Cruikshank & Thelwall: Visual Satire, Physiognomy and the Jacobin Body', John Thelwall: Critical Reassessments, *Praxis*. <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/thelwall/HTML/praxis.2011.poole.html>>. Accessed 6 January 2012.
- Porter, R. (1991). 'Reason, Madness, and the French Revolution', *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 20, pp. 55-79.

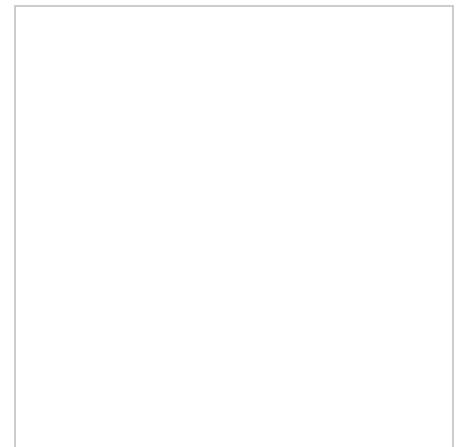


About the author

James Baker has published 4 articles on this journal. I am an Associate Lecturer in School of History at the University of Kent, Canterbury, Project Manager of the ESRC funded 'City and Region, 1400-1914' project, collaborator with the British Cartoon Archive, and lead investigator of 'Cradled in Caricature' (symposium June 2011; conference Spring 2012). In September 2010 I completed a PhD in Cartoons and Caricature at the University of Kent, Canterbury, the title of which was 'Isaac Cruikshank and the notion of British Liberty, 1783-1811'. My thesis explored liberty through fashion, gender and custom, and sought to apply economic and technological exigencies to our understanding of the processes of print production. My interests include Georgian visual satire, the Covent Garden old price riots of September 1809 to January 1810, diachronic themes with respect to the construction and communication of humour in graphic discourses between the seventeenth and late-nineteenth centuries, and the digital humanities. In what spare time is left I moonlight as a neurohumanities skeptic.

[Blog](#) | [Twitter](#)

On Facebook



Academic Diary

- April 11, 2012** – PCA/ACA National Conference, 11-12 April 2012, Boston
- April 13, 2012** – The 9th University of Florida Comics Conference, "Monsters in the Margins" 13-15 April 2012, Florida
- April 27, 2012** – Cradled in Caricature 2012, 27 April 2012, University of Kent, UK
- May 10, 2012** – 2nd Annual Conference of the Popular Culture Association of Canada, May 10th-12th, 2012, Niagara Falls, Ontario
- May 12, 2012** – Twenty-First Century British Fiction – A Symposium Saturday 12 May 2012, Birkbeck, University of London
- May 17, 2012** – Contemporary Screen Narratives: Storytelling's Digital and Industrial Contexts, 17 May 2012, University of Nottingham, UK
- May 19, 2012** – Symposium: Popular Media Cultures - Writing in the Margins and Reading Between the Lines, 19 May 2012, London
- June 15, 2012** – Rocky Mountain Conference on Comics and Graphic Novels, 15-16 June 2012, Denver, Colorado
- June 28, 2012** – The Third International Comics Conference: Comics Rock, 28-29 June 2012, Bournemouth University, UK
- July 3, 2012** – 6th Global Conference Visual Literacies 2012 Conference, 3-5 July 2012, Mansfield College, Oxford, UK
- July 11, 2012** – EUPOP 2012, 11-13 July 2012, University of the Arts, London, UK
- July 16, 2012** – Digital Humanities 2012, 16-22 July 2012, University of Hamburg, Germany
- July 22, 2012** – Comics & Medicine: Navigating the Margins 22-24 July 2012 Toronto, Canada
- September 7, 2012** – The Graphic Novel. An At the Interface Project, 7-9 September 2012, Mansfield College, Oxford, UK
- September 26, 2012** – Segundo Congreso Internacional Viñetas Serias, 26-19 Septiembre 2012, Biblioteca Nacional –

- [Post to Twitter](#)
- [Add to Tumblr](#)

Related posts:

David Boring - Daniel Clowes	Pascal Blanchet's White Rapids and the Sense of History	Gaston Lagaffe: The Archivist as Architect
------------------------------	---	--

Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Argentina

November 15, 2012 – 2º Colóquio Internacional Filosofia e Quadrinhos. 15-18 November 2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

June 24, 2013 – Joint International Graphic Novel and International Bande Dessinée Conferences, 24-28 June 2013, Universities of Glasgow and Dundee, UK

Back Issues

Select Month



Translate to:

English



Translate

Powered by Google Translate.

Leave a Reply

NAME (REQUIRED)

MAIL (WILL NOT BE PUBLISHED) (REQUIRED)

WEBSITE

XHTML: The following tags are allowed: <abbr title=""> <acronym title=""> <blockquote cite=""> <code> <del datetime=""> <i> <q cite=""> <strike>

Submit Comment

[Switch to our mobile site](#)

Flattr this! (Code is Poetry).

Except where otherwise noted, The Comics Grid is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#).