

A New Anthology of Heathen Practices | Ellen Sleeman-Taylor

The Black Paintings

The Black Paintings, or *Pinturas Negras*, are a series of images by Francisco de Goya that were found posthumously in the home in which he spent the final years of his life. They were frescos, painted directly onto the walls and filled with dark and disturbing scenes of satanic ritual, drowning animals and infanticide. The shocking content of these paintings, paired with the fact that they shared the residence of their artist, have lent these works an undeniable air of intrigue that has both fascinated and frightened viewers for centuries. What could have turned a man famed for his skills in portraiture, who received notoriety and success within his lifetime, into the creator of such foul spectres?

Goya purchased the property he was set to defile after a bout of illness had left him almost completely deaf. The home was known to the surrounding occupants as *Quinta Del Sordo* (Deaf Man's Villa), the lineage of Deaf Men owning the place beginning with the man Goya purchased the home from. It lay on the outskirts of Madrid, it afforded its owner a life of quiet contemplation.

The Black Paintings are arguably the most recognisable of Goya's, but they were never intended to be viewed by the public. His life was spent in service to the crown and to the craft of painting, until illness and war sent him to a life of exile. The tortured and sickly Goya expunged his demons by rendering them straight onto the walls of his living space. Perhaps the purge gave Goya a sense of relief, as though an exorcism had taken place. But in reality he had created himself a home in which his fear of insanity and misanthropy inescapably surrounded him. He lived his final hours alongside the shadowy figures from the recesses of his mind that had found form in his painting. At the peak of his skill but with a demented mind, he himself rendered the beasts that were to devour him. Peace found him only when he finally succumbed to the product of his own creation.

Or that's one theory.

This telling of events is certainly the most romantic. It is the story of the tortured artist, a tale with enormous commercial appeal so exhaustingly played-out that the trope itself is the stuff of cinematic meta-commentary (see Velvet Buzzsaw, 2019).

If Goya was tortured in isolation than surely he would have been traumatised by his experiences in war also. His series *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (The Disasters of War) must be read in a similar way, but this series documented events observed by the artist instead of imagined. This series was also kept from the public eye, an indication of the work's dangerous political content. Although The Disasters of War showed images of real-world and observed violence and were politically charged, they were not sacrilegious.

But to what purpose do we examine the motivations of a long-dead man other than to build the credence of a historical figure who left commodities for us to trade in? One may just as well make the assumption that Goya was having a fabulous time, away from society, living in a home with a younger woman. And in this joyful independence he lined the walls of his home with transgressive images of Satanic practices, an act of autonomous rebellion. It is worth examining why our first assumption is that he must have lost some degree of reasonable faculty to create these works.

Let us not forget *Quinta del Sordo*

Aristotle argued more than two thousand years ago that language separated humans from animals. This belief helped lay the groundwork in Western traditions for language to be regarded philosophically and scientifically both as a uniquely human characteristic and as central to what it means to be human.

*Aristotle also held that hearing was necessary for speech, which in turn he believed was central to thinking, allowing him to suggest that deaf people lacked thought and intelligence. – **Sunura Taylor***

Would we consider these works of any interest if they were painted by the much younger woman who lived with Goya in Quinta del Sordo? Or as some theorise, his son after Goya's death, who replicated the style taught by his father and made his fortune from the results. Or perhaps a disabled man entertaining himself, exploring the depths of depravity with his much younger consort.

It seems logically we can deduce that Goya was a Satanist. A child of Loki, the god of mischief. A troll.

You don't need to hear well to fuck or to laugh or to line your walls with heathenry. Did Goya and ___ make love under the mangled gaze of the witches sabbath? From their vantage the witches observe the couples sacrifice of spit, salt and spunk and they find it to be good.

The Sims Online

A twelve-year-old punched in her login details. It was 2003 and the MMORPG *The Sims Online* had been released an entire year earlier. It was May, and after the most disappointing Christmas of her life, Ellen had finally saved up enough to buy the game for herself. The final struggle had been convincing her older brother to go into the store for her. The game had a M15+ rating and she was afraid to attempt to buy it herself. Josh wasn't fifteen yet either but he wasn't afraid to face down the clerk at EB Games. He was only just fourteen and he had always worked in opposition to the rules. She knew he and his friends snuck out at night, she knew it was them who had squished eggs and avocados over a neighbour's car and cut up the hose from down the street. She supposed everyone else must know it too. It was a kind of magic, he would do something flagrant and troublesome, everyone would make a big fuss, the whole lot of them would do a bunch of shouting, and then nobody would mention it again.

Ellen would sneak out at night too. She would stay in her dark room for hours, waiting until the house had moved through what Ellen thought of as the first stage of silence. It was a tense silence, too fragile to withstand a scuffle from Ellen's room without alerting the household. She would lay in wait for the slow hum of activity to begin. It was a more active silence and it reassured her that the house was truly at rest. It was the sound of cats running up and down the corridor, the drone of the extraction fan in the bathroom left on by a midnight visitor, her mother's soft snore and the front door clicking shut as her brother left or returned. This was her invisibility cloak. This was the time that Ellen would slip out her window and onto the street, the sound of her squeezing through the window joining the silent din.

Sometimes she'd take her friend from down the road and sometimes she'd go by herself. At night in Watson the streets were yours to play with. There was rarely anyone else around. When there was, they'd wanted as little to do with Ellen as she'd wanted with them, sometimes even less. On one occasion a teenage boy had run away when he'd seen there was someone else approaching the playground he had made his own. Ellen would spend the nights on the streets rearranging the letters on signs or using the change found from around the house to buy lollies from the service station. Mostly she would just walk. Nobody could ever know how easy it was for her to slide through her

window and out onto the street. She'd been warned of her vulnerability and the predatory nature of strange men, how they were waiting for her under the cover of night. She knew how much it would hurt and worry her mother if she ever found out. So, there must be no chance of discovery for Ellen in her mischief. A few years prior a lock had been fitted to her window with a crank that you would turn to open and shut it. The crank would only open the window a sliver, but it was just large enough for Ellen to slip through. The lock was a bar you could push in and out from the inside; she feared if she were discovered the lock would be replaced with something more confining.

The joint effort of Ellen and Josh to covertly purchase The Sims Online was not appreciated but it was accepted. Her parents even agreed to pay the subscription fee. All but shaking with excitement, Ellen's game was finally ready to be played. As the load screen finished, she entered Create-a-Sim and began looking through the pages upon pages of options for heads and bodies. As she put the finishing touches on her creation Ellen imagined that she'd slipped away, in her stead is Pamala Anderson (an accidental misspelling of Pamela Anderson). She had an incredible blow-out and her blond hair sat stiffly around her head, her breasts were full and slightly pointed, she had no trouble filling out her spangly gold dress. Ellen looked on as Pamala and scanned the properties in Crater Falls. Several homes seemed to be bustling with other sims, one place in particular looked promising. The home had a red tile roof, pale sand-coloured rendered walls and the L shaped building wrapped around a large pool. She noted that there were several heart-beds, a hot tub and a male sim who had her favourite of the heads. Grey spikey hair with a soul patch. The conditions looked right, Pamala was ready to party.

Pamala walked up to The Grey-Haired Man and effortlessly began to perform a sexy gymnastics routine with every strand of her blond hair staying perfectly in place. She could see she had got his attention and she didn't waste time. She clicked on The Grey-Haired Man and selected "Hot Kiss", the selection popped up into the action bar and The Grey Haired Man accepted the kiss. Pamala embraced the man and kissed him deeply, romantic music began to swell and their jaws worked hard up and down upon each other. They slowly untangled and she asked him if he would like to woohoo with her. The man led her to the hot tub and the two created a violent mess of bubbles that obscured them from the others. On the public house chat, Pamala yelled and moaned.

Pamala Anderson: Yes! Oh YES! OOOOOOoooooh!

Grey-hair_soul-p4tch: Uh UhnntnnH! Oh yeah BABY YEAH!!!!

KimmiZoAWR: Guys if you don't get off the public chat I'm gonna kick you out of my house

...

"Hey" grey-hair messaged her privately. "Would u liek to cyber?"

Pamala continued to moan in the public chat.

"Yes" she replied in PM "But I think you should know that I play Pamala for a bit of fun, I'm actually 45/M"

Pamala's hot-tub partner logged off without another word. Pamala continued to moan. A scantily clad gorilla put a large foam cheese-hat on and began dancing the Charleston.

the self-evidence of the corporeal can no longer be assumed. Human tissue incorporates a complex weave of dacron, silicon and metal; edible chemistries of hybrid derivation routinely join the rhythms of biological dialogue; pig, human, baboon, tomato are blended in strange recipes; electronic circuitries measure out the delicate pulse and possibility of life. This creole of technocultures has significantly refigured corporeal possibility in a way that extends to the larger and not unrelated question of what it means to be human. The constitution of the very stuff of the body has become

strangely uncertain even as the code, or program, of humanness is cracked, reinvented and marketed
– **Vicki Kirby**

After Pamala had been kicked from KimmiZoAWR's home Ellen was left once again to scan the neighbourhood. As she eyed off an almost-full property with several young looking male-sims, a new message popped up in her mailbox.

"Hey, u just messed with my friend, u freak"

It had been sent from a female sim with a cute bob-cut, wearing a nurse's outfit. She was very sexy, as sexy as Pamala Anderson. Maybe even sexier.

She is The Grey-Haired Man's friend IRL and she's just finished comforting him, she told Ellen (or Pamala or 45/m). She told her that The Grey-Haired Man was only seventeen and had been having a hard time at school. He'd been through a lot and was dealing with his girlfriend breaking up with him and the last thing TGHM needed was some old creep harassing him.

"Does doing this make u feel liek a big man or something?" The sexy nurse demanded.

"Yeah, it kinda does" 45/m replied. Ellen noted that the nurse misspelt "like" the same way as The Grey-Haired Man had done, she wondered if it was a coincidence or if he and the nurse were the really the same person.

"He told me he liked that I was a man, that it turned him on even more than Pamala Anderson ever could."

Ellen sat silently with her family that night at dinner, she was eating quickly so that she could return to the computer before the 8:30 pm tech embargo.

"I hope you're not talking to anyone strange on that game of yours" Her mother said to Ellen reproachfully as she got up from the table. "Don't tell anyone on there where you live or that you're only twelve!"

"I won't Mum" Ellen replied.