

Le Pillage; Les Misères et Malheur de la Guerre

Victoria Antonucci



Plate Five in Jacques Callot's *Les Grandes Misères at Malheurs de la Guerre* (The Large Miseries)

Art is a powerful tool used to influence and express the opinions of a society. Emotions, ranging from anger to pride, can be evoked through imagery and affect an entire nation. For hundreds of years governments relied on this idea to garner support for the country's exploits, using propaganda to control the nation. Then, in 1633 Jacques Callot produced his print series, *Les Misères et Malheur de la Guerre*, and gave the people, not the government, a voice. In eighteen images he depicted the desolation caused by the Thirty Years' War such as in the graphic fifth print entitled *La Pillage*, bringing attention to the plight of the civilians. Depictions of soldiers razing villages and commoners being tormented shifted the focus away from France's gallant soldiers in battle to the darker, more gruesome aftermath they left in their wake. For the first time in history, anti-war imagery allowed the laypeople to express their opinions of war. Due to advancements in printmaking, *Les Misères et Malheur de la Guerre* changed the way war was represented, highlighting the country's victories but more importantly it exposed the suffering of the people. Jacques Callot's series responded to the needs of the people, expressing their side of the battle.

Jacques Callot was born in Lorraine, France; a small but well-placed village that gave him access to the great cities of the world such as Paris, Vienna, Antwerp and Amsterdam.ⁱⁱ He traveled to Italy as a young adult but ultimately returned to his birthplace and watched as his homeland was ravaged in the Thirty Years' War, memories of which are reflected in his prints such as *Le Pillage*.ⁱⁱⁱ The success of his career, however, came from the innovations he made in printmaking while in Florence. Callot discovered that using the tough varnish of mastic and linseed oil

used by lute-makers was superior to the etcher's ground that often flaked and had foul biting.^{iv} Thanks to Callot, printmaking was considered more prestigious and artists dedicated more time into detailing their plates knowing that they would last longer. It was this increase of quality and production helped Callot to become the most prominent printmaker in the seventeenth century.

Throughout much of his early career Callot worked for the aristocracy and royalty of Northern Europe. After all, these were the men supporting the Thirty Years' War and for the first decade of it, Callot sketched, printed and engraved large-scale images of battles, highlighting the glories of France.^v His work is breathtaking, but ignores the other side entirely; the French people who watched their lives destroyed by the very army that was supposed to protect them. When his hometown, Nancy, was devastated he chose to finance and produce a print series that would recognize the suffering of the laypeople. Interestingly enough, *Les Misères et Malheur de la Guerre* had royal privilege. Though Callot financed the series himself, the King, or at least the King's court, had given permission for these very anti-war images to be produced.^{vi} The beginning of the series recognized the French King and praised the country's war efforts, but a few prints in and the attitude changed dramatically. Had it been known that these prints would come to be known as the first anti-war propaganda by which the commoners of France found unity against their government, the images would have been censored, limiting the amount of graphic imagery included.^{vii}

Le Pillage is the fifth print in the series. As in the other seventeen plates, Callot divided the horizontal image into different sections both in a foreground and

background and from left to right. In this one frame he includes scenes such as a scared child fleeing, a woman being assaulted by a soldier, men being burned alive as others watch on, and the village as a whole being ransacked by the French army. What is most noteworthy are the figures' faces, hidden in shadows or turned away from the audience. No figures in *Le Pillage* look directly out at the viewer, the closest Callot gets is having shadows obscure their faces or their heads turned at an awkward angle. Despite this, the emotions the common people are experiencing are conveyed easily through the over dramatization of their poses and gestures. In the center background, for example, two men are pinning a woman down to a bed. The soldiers are turned away from the viewer and though the woman is in profile even with a quick glance at the scene one can assume what Callot was intending. His graphic depiction of this pillaging is not to turn civilians against the soldiers, but against the war. In doing this Callot acknowledges the gallantry and trepidation of both the military and laypeople.^{viii} Their facelessness prevents viewers from personalizing the imagery, and focus on its use as anti-war propaganda instead, helping the common people express their disfavor of the war.

These images were exaggerated but reflected the feelings citizens had on the war because they were the ones suffering the most. Although he grew up in a well-off family, Jacques Callot was connected to the civilians, the real victims of war. His images did not procure pity for them, but validated their struggles.^{ix} On the same note, Jacques Callot did not fault the soldiers for the miseries caused by war. Clearly he is not in favor of the destruction being caused, but he is insulting the nation's agenda rather than the men who are simply carrying out orders.^x Had he given the

men faces the audience would have personalized the soldiers, instead of focusing on the army as a whole. Even with his purposeful ambiguity, what Callot printed was all too familiar for many Europeans. Seeing images such as *Le Pillage*, would have brought about sentiments of disdain towards the fighting. As the prints became more popular, they were reproduced and sold to more people, spreading with them the horrors of the Thirty Years' War.

What set the Thirty Years' War apart from other wars in history is that this one was fought with gunpowder. Ideas of the brave soldier rushing into battle with his sword raised were put aside "as gunpowder made individual bravado virtually useless."^{xi} What started as a conflict over religious differences soon became one of the bloodiest and most gruesome wars in history centering on France's battle with the Hasburg powers.^{xii} As France was Callot's homeland he saw the aftermath from the worst parts of it. After his own town was damaged, Callot never again created works that popularized warfare. Instead, he drew attention to the reality of the battle, the despair and anguish it leaves behind.^{xiii} *Le Pillage*, for example, is a shocking image of cruelty but Callot hides the faces of soldiers from the audience. To keep it from becoming too personal Instead of individuals committing the crimes, the men become symbolic for the crimes themselves.^{xiv}

The idea of generating posters, newspaper articles, advertisements, and various other forms of public media to raise support for war had existed for hundreds of years before Callot produced *Les Misères et Malheur de la Guerre*.^{xv} Only after 1633 did the idea of anti-war propaganda come into being. Before Jacques Callot's images, anti-war propaganda, if there was any, had no resounding impact.

The fact that the series was splayed out over eighteen reusable plates meant the prints could be reproduced and spread very easily. Their popularity only increased as the public demanded that more attention be brought to the aftermath of war.^{xvi}

Jacques Callot died two years after his most prolific prints were published. He never lived to see the war end or how his art changed the way the public openly responded to war. In a time of tyrannical leaders, Callot knew there was little that could change the course of events, instead he observed the lives of the French, from the mighty princes to the suffering beggars, and recorded their stories in prints for the world to remember them by.^{xvii} Media was forever altered by his efforts as the public gained the right to speak out against their governments.

ⁱ Jameson, Fredric. "War and Representation." *PMLA*. no. 5 (2009): 1532-1547.

ⁱⁱ A. Hyatt Mayor, and Baskin Leonord , "The Etchings of Jacques Callot," *The Massachusetts Review*, 3, no. 1 (1961): 121-132, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25086781>

ⁱⁱⁱ A. Hyatt Mayor, and Baskin Leonord , "The Etchings of Jacques Callot," *The Massachusetts Review*, 3, no. 1 (1961): 121-132, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25086781>

^{iv} A. Hyatt Mayor, and Baskin Leonord , "The Etchings of Jacques Callot," *The Massachusetts Review*, 3, no. 1 (1961): 121-132, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25086781>

^v Rabb, Theodore K. "Artists and Warfare: A Study of Changing Values in Seventeenth-Century Europe." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*. no. 6 (1985): 79-106. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20486642>

^{vi} Hornstein, Katie. The University of Michigan , "Bulletin." Last modified 2005. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/bulletinfront/0054307.0016.102/--just-violence-jacques-callots-grandes-Misères-et-malheurs-de?rgn=main;view=fulltext>.

^{vii} Graham, Sarah. "Reflections on the Thirty Years War and the Origins of Propaganda." *Home*. N.p., 11 Nov. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2014. <<http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/reflections-thirty-years-war-and-origins-propaganda>>.

^{viii} Roworth Wendy. "The Evolution of Painting: Masaniello's Revolt and Other Disasters in Seventeenth Century Naples." *The Art Bulletin*, 75, no. 2 (June, 1993) 219-234 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3045946> .

^{ix} Roworth Wendy. "The Evolution of Painting: Masaniello's Revolt and Other Disasters in Seventeenth Century Naples." *The Art Bulletin*, 75, no. 2 (June, 1993) 219-234
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3045946> .

^x Roworth Wendy. "The Evolution of Painting: Masaniello's Revolt and Other Disasters in Seventeenth Century Naples." *The Art Bulletin*, 75, no. 2 (June, 1993) 219-234
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3045946> .

^{xi} Rabb, Theodore K. "Artists and Warfare: A Study of Changing Values in Seventeenth-Century Europe." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*. no. 6 (1985): 79-106.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20486642>

^{xii} Jameson, Fredric. "War and Representation." *PMLA*. no. 5 (2009): 1532-1547.

^{xiii} Wolfthal, Diane. "Jacques Callot's Miseries of War." *The Art Bulletin*. no. 2 (1977): 222-233.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3049634>

^{xiv} Graham, Sarah. "Reflections on the Thirty Years War and the Origins of Propaganda." *Home*. N.p., 11 Nov. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2014. <<http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/reflections-thirty-years-war-and-origins-propaganda>>.

^{xv} Jameson, Fredric. "War and Representation." *PMLA*. no. 5 (2009): 1532-1547.

^{xvi} Graham, Sarah. "Reflections on the Thirty Years War and the Origins of Propaganda." *Home*. N.p., 11 Nov. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2014. <<http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/reflections-thirty-years-war-and-origins-propaganda>>.

^{xvii} A. Hyatt Mayor, and Baskin Leonord , "The Etchings of Jacques Callot," *The Massachusetts Review*, 3, no. 1 (1961): 121-132, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25086781>

Works Cited

A. Hyatt Mayor, and Baskin Leonord , "The Etchings of Jacques Callot," *The Massachusetts Review*, 3, no. 1 (1961): 121-132,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25086781>

[Graham, Sarah. "Reflections on the Thirty Years War and the Origins of Propaganda." *Home*. N.p., 11 Nov. 2011. Web. 15 Apr. 2014. <<http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/reflections-thirty-years-war-and-origins-propaganda>>.](#)

Hornstein, Katie. The University of Michigan , "Bulletin." Last modified 2005.
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/bulletinfront/0054307.0016.102/--just-violence-jacques-callots-grandes-Misères-et-malheurs-de?rgn=main;view=fulltext>.

Jameson, Fredric. "War and Representation." *PMLA*. no. 5 (2009): 1532-1547.

Rabb, Theodore K. "Artists and Warfare: A Study of Changing Values in Seventeenth-Century Europe." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*. no. 6 (1985): 79-106. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20486642>

Roworth Wendy. "The Evolution of Painting: Masaniello's Revolt and Other Disasters in Seventeenth Century Naples." *The Art Bulletin*, 75, no. 2 (June, 1993) 219-234 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3045946> .

Wolfthal, Diane. "Jacques Callot's Miseries of War." *The Art Bulletin*. no. 2 (1977): 222-233. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3049634>