

*The Third of May, 1808, At
Madrid: The Shootings On Principe
Pio Mountain, Oil on Canvas, 1814*

RAVI SHANKAR

"It is not easy to retrain the instantaneous and transitory design that issues from the imagination."—Francisco De Goya Y Lucientes

When they come for you, Cossack-capped,
in lockstep, carrying the black eye of death
against their shoulders, how will you react?
Bending low, earthwards, hands interlaced
in supplication, eyes pleading for mercy
from the uniforms striding towards you,
or brandishing a fist, jaw clenched,
resolute with bright inflections of hatred?
With your face deep in your hands, blinded,
telling yourself this can't be happening,
no, my life was not meant to end like this,
or hiding behind someone, anyone, hoping
that somehow you're missed, that they run
out of ammo, that your neighbor will take
the bullet meant for you and you'll escape?
Or will you fling out your arms like a father
receiving his son home from traveling abroad,
elated to know an end to all journeying?